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Funk Get the best from your vinyl with this superb LP12 mod-kit



Linn Why the Akurate universal player is a musical masterpiece

future
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NOVEMBER 2007

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Audio Pro Avanti A.10 DC • Aurousal A1 • Bowers & Wilkins 685
Dynaudio DM 2/10 • Opera Mezza • Revel Concerta M12



▶ BUYER'S BIBLE

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





Taste it before you judge it!

because music matters

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

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE NOVEMBER 2007 ISSUE 299

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



Welcome to issue 299, just one magazine away from the big 300th issue. Not only will next month's edition be a special celebratory issue with a surprise new contributor, it will also mark our 2007 Awards as voted for by the *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewing panel. It is truly an essential guide to the best hi-fi your hard-earned money can buy, covering everything from budget beauties to high-end exotica.

As if that wasn't enough, our very own Richard Black has been busy raiding the *Hi-Fi Choice* archives to compile a special free supplement, defining the top 50 key hi-fi components of the last 300 issues. Next month's mag really will be a bit special. So, whatever you do... don't miss out on a copy!

Back to this month's issue and we've been down to the beautiful Kent countryside to visit Chord Electronics and interview its founder, John Franks. While there, we made sure we didn't leave empty-handed, and so we're delighted to be able to bring you the world's first review of Chord's stunning new Red Reference CD player. Turn straight to p40 to find out more.

Finally, don't forget to keep an eye out for our annual high-end issue, *The Collection*, with glorious back-to-back reviews of the finest hi-fi in the world, lovingly written by *HFC*'s world-renowned reviewing team. You'll find it in all good newsagents now.



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 VYVIAN
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.

SUBSCRIBE TO HI-FI CHOICE... THIS MONTH AND YOU'LL RECEIVE A FREE CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR INTERCONNECT WORTH £50! CALL 0870 837 4722 OR TURN TO P84 NOW.



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It's show time again!

the coffee break



loudspeakers

valve hi-fi

solid-state hi-fi

cd players

phono stages

cd transports

turntables

dac's

cables

mains conditioners

demagnetisers

equipment supports



your opportunity to discover the finest blend of hi-fi!

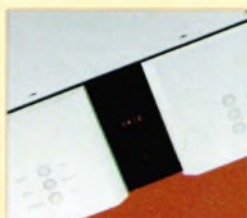


BOULDER They make the kind of products we all hope to one day aspire to. After many a request, Boulder has finally launched a more affordable range, allowing so many more to finally enjoy a Boulder unit in their system. The stunning new Boulder Integrated is **amazing!**

 WWW.BOULDERAMP.COM

HOVLAND Dedication and research has resulted in world-class components of truly enduring value. Each Hoyland design contains original circuits, numerous proprietary parts, and custom wire. Perfect ingredients make for a feast for the ears!

 WWW.HOVLANDCOMPANY.COM



LSA AMPLIFIERS Available in three different versions: Standard, Signature and Statement. This fabulous range has have taken reviewers and customers by storm. Reproducing the finest aspects of two technologies: valve and solid-state, every LSA model is a class leader.

 WWW.THELSAGROUP.COM

VITUS Reluctant to compromise in any way, shape or form can be very expensive, but the results far outweigh the cost and the Vitus range is proof of this. Using only the finest materials, Vitus is for those who want the finest system without any of the all too common pitfalls and shortcomings found elsewhere. State-of-the-art fulfilled!

 WWW.VITUSAUDIO.COM

Metropolis Music has searched the globe for the most exciting brands available today...

LUMLEY

What better person is there for the job of creating a state-of-the-art turntable, than a passionate music lover who has sold some of the finest hi-fi products available, to customers all over the UK for years? Think about it... The Stratosphere turntable just runs circles around the competition!



WWW.METROPOLIS-MUSIC.CO.UK

KHARMA

Listening to a Kharma is an indescribable experience. You have to feel Kharma to experience it. No matter how large your room, or how large your budget, the Exquisite, Ceramique and Matrix series will deliver your wildest expectations from the first moment you hear them.



WWW.KHARMA.COM

CODA

Any Product wearing the Coda emblem is born from the philosophies of innovative design, artistic expression, and no compromise engineering. Not surprisingly, Coda has a large and loyal customer base worldwide - testament to the quality and value of every product.



WWW.CODA-CONTINUUM.COM

AYON

These components combine premium design, new construction principles, advanced technologies, explosive dynamics, purity of tone, neutrality, finesse, emotional realism and stable sound stage projection... You could not ask for more realistic reproduction of music as a real live event.



WWW.AYONAUDIO.COM

ASCENDO

Key design features of Ascendo loudspeakers are: modular design, mechanical and electrical decoupling, variable Time-Alignment and three-way SASB-Technology (dynamic current-amped Woofer/semisymmetrical Band pass). You don't need to fully understand them, you only need to listen to realise just how special these speakers are!



WWW.ASCENDO.DE

FURUTECH

New to MM is one of the most innovative and respected cable and accessory companies in the world. Their cables are double shielded, multi-stranded, 2 stage Cryogenic-Super Alpha-OCC etc etc. Actually, they just sound pretty good. And their De-magnetiser and De-stat are truly revolutionary. Improvements beyond belief? You'd better believe it!



WWW.FURUTECH.COM

LSA SPEAKERS

These speakers may look quite ordinary at first glance, but the finest things in life can often be very deceptive. Designed more by the human ear and long listening sessions than just computer measurements, LSA speakers are almost organic in the way they reproduce music. Exceptional.



WWW.THELSAGROUP.COM

AUDIENCE

When Audience develops a product, no consideration is given to the end price until the product is finished. Focus is placed on developing the very best product possible, regardless of price. Sounds like a winning formula and all the Cables have an unconditional lifetime warranty. They have the best mains conditioners too!



WWW.AUDIENCE-AV.COM

EDGAR

Many would argue that introducing an affordable range of valve products into an overcrowded UK market is a little crazy. BUT every time a customer auditions Edgar, they ask us if we have made a mistake on the price and surely it costs twice as much? Need we say more?



WWW.EDGAR.SK

HANSEN

Truly innovative in their approach to loudspeaker design, the final result is nothing short of breathtaking. Hansen recently launched a more affordable model aptly named 'The Knight' and it has already become a runaway success. When you audition a Hansen, be sure to ask about the 'Cloaking Device'!



WWW.HANSENAUDIO.COM

BAT

The name Balanced Audio Technology refers to more than just their use of balanced circuits. It reflects the commitment to overall excellence. BAT bring the same uncompromising standards to every aspect of engineering, from circuit conception to vibration control and parts placement - as well as to visual design, customer service, and long-term support.



WWW.BALANCED.COM

MUSICTOOLS

With so many stands on the market, you are right to ask what makes Musictools different from the others? We think it's the approach, care, attention, design, value for money and most of all, total neutrality. Many a satisfied customer agrees as well...



WWW.MUSICTOOLS.EU

MASTERSOUND

Valve amplifiers that with every note of music precisely reflect the emotions of the composer and the performer. Beautiful soundstage, focus and dynamics will flood into your listening room and captivate you long into the night...



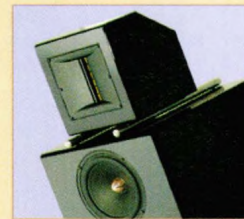
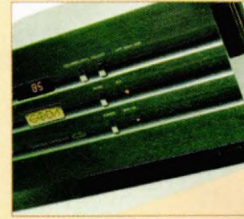
WWW.MASTERSOUNDSAS.IT

COPULARE

The intention to create the ultimate custom-made sound furniture, will always entail the commitment to supreme quality. No other range of stands look as beautiful or perform like a Copulare - period. Their support feet are outstanding too!



WWW.COPULARE.DE



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FOCAL
the Spirit of Sound

ATC SCM16A ACTIVE LOUDSPEAKER

▶ There's a new trick in town – the small, active monitor, with the accent firmly on sound quality. Borrowing heavily from the company's legendary pro-audio skills, ATC's new SCM16A active standmount loudspeaker is a desktop-sized two-way with a built-in 50 watt amplifier driving the tweeter and a 200 watt amp powering the bass driver.

ATC's reputation is built on the quality of its custom-made drive units, and that reputation will only be enhanced by the 25mm soft-dome tweeter and the 150mm bass unit with ATC's proprietary Constrained Layer Damping technology, which improves the amount of damping without increasing the mass of the driver itself.

All of this is housed in a distinctive-looking, 16-litre, cast aluminium cabinet that makes the speaker look stylish and purposeful. The SCM16A is compact enough for both hi-fi and desk-top systems, but why waste something this good on a computer?

To find out more, see our exclusive review in the Awards 2007 issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT ATC SCM16A

TYPE Active standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £2,200

KEY FEATURES 25mm soft dome tweeter

● 150mm CLD bass unit ● Built-in 50W HF amplifier and 200W LF amplifier ● XLR connections

CONTACT ☎ 01285 760561

🌐 www.atc.gb.net

'One of the best value for money mains leads we've heard.'

What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision



May '04

Eight hyper-pure copper conductors separately insulated with Teflon®, Kimber's unique cable weave and a **NEW cryogenically treated Wattgate 320i IEC connector** combine to give a low-resistance, interference-cancelling mains cable that's in a class of its own. The Russ Andrews Classic PowerKord™ improves your CD player or amp's connection to the mains supply, helping your music sound dynamic, detailed and musical.



The Classic PowerKord™ with Wattgate™ 320i IEC £80 for 1m



Hi-Fi World Aug '02

'Wow! What a difference. Unbelievably deep powerful bass (it was already fast and tight). Bass which I now believe that almost 100% of the population have never experienced.'

Mr Capon, Devon

'I've just attached a Classic PowerKord to my Marantz CD6000 and rather than bore you with superlatives about the improvements, I would simply like to say that I won't be upgrading to a newer CD player for some time. Well done nice product.'

Mr C Donnelly, London

'Impressively detailed and crisp, improving imaging and reducing high-frequency hash. Rhythmic portrayal was excellent, and so too was clarity.' HiFi Choice magazine



Sept '01

With over 30 years in the Hi-Fi industry, we know a thing or two about sound quality. Russ pioneered research into the effect of the mains on Hi-Fi systems and today is regarded as one of the world's experts in the field. Our product range includes cables, filters and accessories that help reduce mains interference and allow a sound that's more like 'being there'.

For more information and to **request our free catalogue** packed with tips and advice on getting the best sound quality from your Hi-Fi or Home Cinema, go to www.russandrews.com/catalogue or call us on **0845 345 1550**.



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BRYSTON BCD-1 CD PLAYER

Canadian manufacturer Bryston has finally launched a source component to match its range of integrated and pre/power amplifiers. Staying resolutely with the tried and true Red Book CD and CD-R format, the hand-assembled Bryston player is called the BCD-1 and promises much... not least the bomb-proof build quality common to the Bryston range.

Bryston has taken the one-box CD route (even though the company also makes DAC modules for its integrated and preamp models) because an integrated player helps to keep jitter at bay. The BCD-1 is said to take this jitter-lowering process to its logical conclusion, thanks to use of a master clock

across both digital and analogue stages that's synchronised to the drive mechanism.

It ticks all the right boxes with a 24-bit/192kHz Crystal chip, driven by a top-quality power supply and feeding a discrete Class A output stage. We reveal all next month.

To find out more, see our exclusive review in the Awards 2007 issue of Hi-Fi Choice

PRODUCT Bryston BCD-1

TYPE CD player

PRICE £2,450

KEY FEATURES One box CD/CD-R player

Hand-assembled design Crystal CS4398

24-bit/192kHz DAC Low-jitter design

Discrete Bryston Class A output stage

CONTACT 08704 441044 www.bryston.ca

NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



LEEMA ACOUSTICS XERO

⊕ Dubbed 'Son of Xen' the new Leema Acoustics Xero standmount speaker takes the uncompromising construction and performance of the Xen speaker and makes it more affordable and domestically acceptable. Closely based on the popular Xen mini-monitor, but with a larger steel-walled enclosure strengthened by truss rods, the two-way Xero comes in five real-wood veneers. It sports the company's ferrofluid-damped Tymphany 25mm fabric dome tweeter (used in the Xen) and the 100mm Leema P12 bass unit first seen in the company's Xone speaker. With a claimed sensitivity of 85.5dB and a six ohm impedance, the diminutive Xero demands a powerful amp to drive it, but as it can handle up to 200 watts of amplifier power, the compact newcomer is said to manage an impressive 55Hz.

Price £670 **Due** now

☎ 01938 811900 # www.leema-acoustics.com

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1 LIMITED EDITION

⊕ To celebrate its 75th birthday, Wharfedale has announced a limited-run, custom-made version of its ever-popular Diamond 9.1 loudspeaker.

The award-winning two-way standmount speaker retains the same design, drive units and crossover, but features the distinctive 'wax-oil' finish and heritage grille from the range-topping Airedale speaker (see HFC 296 for a review), and a decorative champagne surround finish. Wharfedale has made just 2,000 pairs of the limited edition speaker and will sell them until the 31st of December this year.

Price £180 **Due** now

☎ 0845 4580011
www.wharfedale.co.uk



FATMAN MOTHERSHIP

⊕ Fatman – the company behind the innovative, valve-driven iPod docks – has finally made the move into full-sized hi-fi with its new high-end Mothership valve pre/power system. Comprising an iTube Controlroom preamp coupled to a pair of iTube Engineroom monoblocks, the 200-watt flagship combo features six valves in the preamp and nine in each channel of the power amplifier. The three line input preamplifier also features a moving magnet phono stage and has two stereo outputs; enough to fill the room with Enginerooms. There's no iPod dock built into the preamp, but Fatman believes an iPod running Apple Lossless will be good enough to feed the Mothership combo.

Price £5,000 **Due** now

☎ 01189 880300 # www.fat-man.co.uk



AUDIO TECHNICA RANGE

⊕ Determined to retake the headphone market by storm, Japan's Audio Technica has announced a new range that includes the ultra-lightweight (38g) ATH-ON3 headphones, alongside the ES3 models in iPod Nano colours. The new range also includes the ATH-ANC7 'QuietPoint' noise-cancelling headphones, plus clip-on ear, in-ear and on-ear devices, as well as some distinctly audiophile 'phones, such as the A500 and AD1000 models. Topping the range are the ATH-EW9 on-ear (pictured) and ATH-W1000 models with cherry-wood housings.

Price from £20 to £350 **Due** now

☎ 0113 277 1441 # www.athheadphones.com





RUSS ANDREWS PH-1

Building on the strengths of its recent compact DAC and pre/power amps, Russ Andrews has announced the new PH-1 phono stage. Designed as two separate versions (for moving magnet and moving coil cartridges), the new PH-1 is based on the popular Terry Bateman designed Rega Fono, but with heavily upgraded components throughout. The upgrades have facilitated a minor redesign to the circuit itself and the PH-1 is driven by one of Russ Andrews' PowerPak modules. The PH-1 (both MM and MC varieties) is finished in a black extruded aluminium case with an oak front panel and nickel phono plugs.

Price £399 (PH-1 MM); £599 (PH-1 MC) **Due** now

☎ 0845 345 1550 # www.russandrews.com

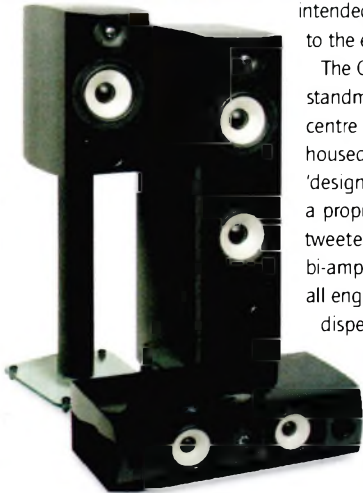
PSB G-DESIGN

Canadian speaker giant PSB has launched a trio of 'designer-friendly' speakers that are intended to be equally as pleasing to the eye as they are to the ear.

The GT1 floorstander, GB1 standmount and the GC1 centre channel speaker are all housed in domestically friendly 'designer' cabinets and feature a proprietary aluminium dome tweeter. Bi-wireable and bi-ampable, the G-Design trio are all engineered with broad dispersion and dynamic range in mind, as well as style.

Price £450 (GC1); £600 (GB1); £1,200 (GT1) **Due** now

☎ 01279 501111 # www.psbSpeakers.com



ROTH AUDIO ALFIE

Roth Audio has gone from one iPod extreme to the other. The company's ALFIE is an iPod dock with built-in AM/FM radio, a slot-fed CD/DVD player and a 2x10 watts per channel amplifier (plus a 20-watt amplifier output for a subwoofer). On the other hand, Roth has also announced the Music Cocoon MC8 integrated vacuum tube amplifier, complete with iPod dock on the top plate. Featuring a pair of 845 power valves and four preamp valves all running in pure Class A, the 35 watt per channel MC8 has four additional line inputs, comes with a remote control and can even charge your iPod.

Price £400 (ALFIE); £2,000 (MC8) **Due** now

☎ 01189 880300 # www.rothaudio.co.uk



Soundbites

SONNETEER has developed a high-end phono stage with a USB connection for transferring precious vinyl to your PC. The SedleyUSB has the standard phono input and output connections for a record deck and amplifier, plus a USB link for computer coupling. Capable of working with MM and MC cartridges, the SedleyUSB costs £650.

☎ 01483 566990



DENON is aiming firmly at the high end of the headphone market with its Mahogany £500 AH D5000 closed back hi fi headphones. Featuring real mahogany capsule housings and soft ear pads, coupled with a frequency response from 5Hz-45kHz, the headphone is expected to sound as good as it looks.

☎ 01753 680568



ROBERTS' new £100

Gemini 55 portable DAB digital radio recorder follows the latest trend of including an SD card slot, allowing the listener to record programmes off air and transfer and play MP2 or MP3 files through the radio.

☎ 01709 571722



ATLAS Equator interconnect cables have been upgraded with higher purity copper conductors and now feature Atlas' own high-performance phono plugs. The Equator remains an asymmetrical unbalanced design with multi-stranded OFC copper conductors. Cost is £45 for a one metre pair.

☎ 01563 572666



PURE has revolutionised snoozing with the £100 Tempus 1 S. Including the OLED screen first seen on the Evoke 1 S, the new Tempus features natural sounds like birdsong and rain that will quietly lull you to sleep.

☎ 01923 27488



ERRATA Last issue, we inadvertently printed the wrong telephone number for Audio Pro. The correct number is 01423 359054. Also, the money gremlins mistakenly overpriced the Onkyo I-4555 DAB tuner: the correct price is £300, not £410. Naturally, the product's 'Best Buy' status remains unchanged, in fact, it's even more worthy of the coveted badge at £300!



MARANTZ CD6002

The new budget CD6002 CD player from Marantz is claimed to feature technology taken from the company's award-winning £1,000 SA-15S1. Marantz uses the same audio output section in both and partners this with a Cirrus Logic 24-bit/192kHz digital convertor to deliver what is suggested to be class-leading playback of CD, MP3 and WMA music files. The player also bristles with high-quality devices like Shottky diodes and the unique Marantz HDAM amplifier module, used in key regions of the player. A PM6002 amplifier partner will follow soon.

Price £280 **Due** now

☎ 01753 680868 # www.marantz.com

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

ANDREW STACEY

Job Title: Partner and designer

Company: True Colours Industries



What is your most exciting product currently in development?

The Powerblock – our new mains block that has been designed to give the best sound quality. It will be available next year in two forms and will be part of our upgradeable mains powerlead and powerblock range. Watch this space!

What's your all-time favourite record?

Bob Dylan's *Street Legal*

Can 'Generation iPod' be turned on to hi-fi?

Nearly 30 years ago the same question was being asked about 'Generation Walkman'. By using the right cables and connecting an iPod up to a quality hi-fi system, it's easy to show what they are missing and what is achievable. Once they've got their new system, sell them a decent CD or DVD and show them how much better the iPod can sound with quality source material.

Are online sales killing hi-fi separates?

No. Customers still want to hear separates before buying. If specialist hi-fi dealers are good at their job and put the work in, then the customers will remain loyal to them.

What's your favourite hi-fi component?

No question – Michell GyroDec. It's the only piece of hi-fi that I know that you can have as much enjoyment watching as listening to. It is so beautifully engineered.

Hi-Fi Diary

SEPTEMBER

21-23 **The London Sound and Vision Show '07**
Park Inn, Heathrow
www.chestergroup.org
London's finest hi-fi show

29 Musicmania

Olympia Two, London
www.vip-24.com
One of the UK's largest CD, DVD and vinyl fairs

OCTOBER

13-14 **Home Entertainment Show 2007**
Renaissance Hotel, Manchester
www.home-entertainment-show.co.uk
The North's premier hi-fi show

Blue downloads

Blue Note records, the label famous for jazz music from the 1950s and 1960s, is planning to start selling digital downloads direct to its customer base rather than letting the business go to iTunes. Given that its fanbase is made up of a generation that is not traditionally targeted by download sites, it hopes to tap into a relatively fresh vein of music enthusiasts who may have purchased the same music on vinyl and CD already. According to Blue Note's Zach Hochkeppel, older music enthusiasts "need to be brought into the fold. No marketing and no attention is usually paid to an older demographic. They're sort of ignored and neglected by media in general. Youth is always the first and foremost target, which sends the message to the older consumer that, 'This isn't for you!'"

Given that surveys have shown that music enthusiasts over the age of 34 are more likely to pay for downloads and less likely to use peer-to-peer networks than younger fans, he could be onto a good thing.



Stairway to prison

"One of Europe's most notorious music pirates" is the way that Robert Langley was described by a Glasgow court when he pleaded guilty to selling bootleg recordings of Led Zeppelin



from a stall at a Scottish record fair. Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page testified that he had not authorised what he described as poor-quality recordings, telling the Scotsman, "There are some recordings where it is just a whirring and you cannot hear the music." He went on to seemingly advocate peer-to-peer music sharing by saying that "The legitimate part is where fans trade music, but once you start packaging it up and you do not know what you are getting, you are breaking the rules – legally, and morally". Mr Langley sold albums on his own Silver Rarities and Langley Masters labels, which also contained material by The Rolling Stones and The Beatles.

Universal non protection

Universal, the world's largest record company, has decided to trial selling music downloads without DRM copy protection. Universal will not be offering its music via Apple's iTunes, but will make them available from a limited number of sites in the US. If the US trial proves a success, then it is expected to be extended to the UK. Some commentators, including *Music Week's* Adam Benzine have even gone so far as to predict that DRM will disappear altogether "within two years".

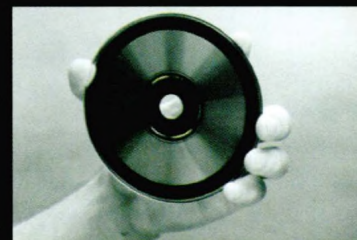
Artists under the Universal banner that will have DRM-free material for download include Dirty Pretty Things, Klaxons, The Killers and Razorlight.



Compact disc is 25

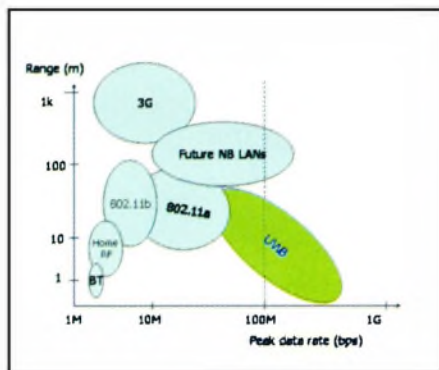
Philips is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the compact disc. The first disc produced for commercial purposes was pressed on August 17th 1982, the album being Abba's *The Visitors*. CDs first went on sale to the general public in Japan in November 1982, with a back catalogue of around 150 titles to choose from. The format was introduced to Europe and the US in March 1983. Those with a good memory might recall the feature that the BBC's *Tomorrow's World* ran on the new format at the time, whereby the disc's primary attraction was a supposed tolerance of honey and coffee. The presenter even demonstrated this by liberally coating a disc in said foodstuffs, before casually wiping it off and putting it into a player. As many eager salesmen were to discover, this really wasn't a very good idea at all...

CDs were originally planned to be 115mm in diameter (rather than the 120mm that we now have) because that offered an hour's music storage, this was extended to 74 minutes to allow a complete performance of Beethoven's *9th Symphony*.



The new wi-fi?

⊗ A format that looks like replacing wi-fi as the wireless technology of the future could also be used to send signals between audio and video components. Ultra Wideband (UWB) has been described as 'Bluetooth on steroids' in some quarters, because of its huge capacity for data transmission (two gigabytes per second) over distances of up to 30 metres. UWB has recently been cleared for unlicensed use by Ofcom, which means that manufacturers who are already developing UWB products for Japan and the US can include UK when it comes to market. While it's more likely that early applications will replace existing wi-fi products, the potential to send audio and video signals around the house could spell the end of our long-distance wiring woes.



JIMMY'S TWEAKS #54

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



Align your mains-plug screws!

Here's a slightly wacky tweak for those of you with standard-type mains plugs with slot-screw cable fixings. Detach the mains plug from the wall socket or distribution board, and remove the plug top so you can see the wires. Hold the plug so the ground pin is at the top with the negative and positive to the left and right respectively.

Now, align the slots on the screws so that negative and ground are horizontal and the positive is vertical. Replace the plug top and align its fixing screw, so that it is horizontal. If you have a screw-fixing cable grip, align these screws so they are horizontal too. Having done this, you should find things sound a wee bit sharper and better focused. Repeat the procedure for other mains plugs, including plugs on non hi-fi items, and the improvement should be quite noticeable!

TOP 10 THINGS WE'D RATHER NOT SEE IN HI-FI

1. Radium CD paint
2. Linn Kondoms
3. KFC lemon-fresh interconnect wipes
4. Wind-up SACD players
5. Steam-powered valves
6. Superdupertweeters
7. Quarter-wave horn headphones
8. Graphic equalisers
9. Naim SNOT power supply
10. Another James Blunt album



New Music

IN THE STUDIO

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



U2

Title: *tbc*

Release date: 2008

U2 have been working in Fez, Morocco, with long-time producers Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, who have also been roped in as co-writers for the first time. As to the exact release date of the follow-up to 2004's *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*, Bono says cryptically: "We're just going to make it until we can't not put it out."

DURAN DURAN

Title: *Red Carpet Massacre*

Release date: 29 October

It probably depends on your age just how keenly you've been awaiting the reunion album from 1980s new romantic pin-up Simon LeBon and his mates. That it was originally due in May but wasn't fit for purpose doesn't necessarily bode well. The presence of the world's most in-demand producer, Timbaland, on several tracks, however, makes for an intriguing prospect.

JOHN FOGERTY

Title: *Revival*

Release date: October

Albums from Fogerty since Creedence Clearwater Revival split-up in the early seventies have been about as rare as hen's teeth. Having just played his first British concert since 1972, he follows a recent Creedence/solo greatest hits package and live DVD with a welcome album of new compositions. Titles include: *River Is Waiting*, *Broken Down Cowboy*, *Creedence Song* and *Gunslinger*.

ALICIA KEYS

Title: *As I Am*

Release date: 22 October

Her status suitably enhanced by being name-checked last year on Bob Dylan's *Modern Times*, Keys' third album is said to sport a more rock and funk-edged vibe



to her customary soul and R&B grooves. Three songs were co-written with former 4 Non Blondes singer Linda Perry, writer of hits for the likes of Gwen Stefani, Pink and Christina Aguilera.

THE CURE

Title: *tba*

Release date: October

No title yet but frontman Robert Smith has announced that the Cure's 13th official studio album will be two-disc set. In addition to new songs such as *Lusting Here In Your Mind* and *Christmas Without You*, he's been rummaging through his massive archive of old demos and has resurrected three songs from the 1980s, which the band have revamped 2007 style.

ALSO COMING SOON

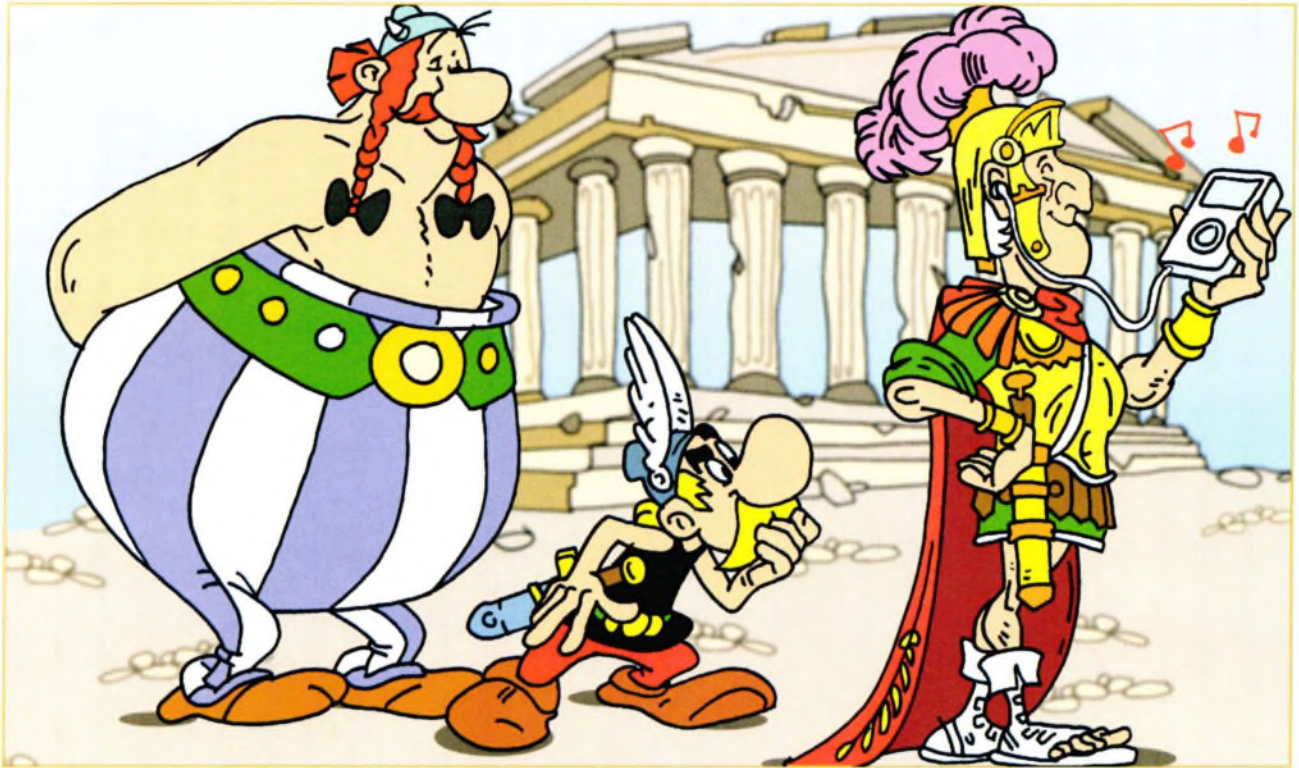
JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Leon Botstein/ BBC Symphony Dukas: *Ariane et Barbe Bleue* (Sep). **John O'Connor** Beethoven: *Piano Sonatas Vol2* (Sep). **John Coltrane** Coltrane *At Newport* (Sep). **James Brown** *Jazz* (Sep)

SACD/ DVD-AUDIO

MDR Rundfunkchor Leipzig and Radio Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart Mahler: *Symphony No2* (SACD, Sep). **McCoy Tyner** Quartet *New York Reunion* (SACD, Sep). **Paul Mann** Paul von Klenau: *Die Weisse von Liebe und Tod* (SACD, Sep) **Ray Charles** Ray Sings *Basie Swings* (SACD, Sep). **Nordic Voices** Reges Terrae: *Music From The Time Of Charles V* (SACD, Sep)

DISPATCHES



Jon Marks

LO-FI

High fidelity is low priority today

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, as I tell today's young whippersnappers while I queue for the bar of chocolate I still refer to as a 'Marathon', while fondly dwelling on middle-aged memories of 'KP Outer Spacers' and 'Spangles', and a time before the depressing reality of a receding hairline hove into view.

However, what really brings a tear to my audiophile eyes these days, is the realisation that truly mainstream high-fidelity is, in a word, deceased. Looking back over the last decade or so, hard-core analogue curmudgeons will point to the 'unholy alliance' of digital recordings and the birth of the internet, and mouth one of their favourite phrases, "Told you so..." Of course, to say the combination of CD and the worldwide web would inevitably write the death sentence for top-notch audio is not to tell the whole truth – after all, the ascendance of the mobile phone and a myriad

"Throw in the ease and convenience of digital data transmission, and, as the Romans are always saying in Asterix, "Alea iacta est" – the die is cast."

other miniaturised marvels all contributed to the marginalisation of quality separates in homes across the land. On top of this, even an LP crusty like me would have to admit that CD can sound excellent on the right equipment.

There's no doubt about it, though – the advent of digital and ever-greater storage capacities crammed into ever-tinier spaces was bound to lead to more music on the move. Throw in the ease and convenience of digital data transmission, and, as the Romans are always saying in Asterix, "Alea iacta est" – the die is cast. Portable music players that are able to store thousands of songs have helped to hammer the nails into the coffin of finely reproduced music, especially given that the low speeds of early broadband connections forced many music providers and downloaders to opt for a quality-crushing level of compression that has, somehow, now become almost the *de facto* standard.

Adding to the mix was yet another format war, DVD-A and SACD vying for supremacy for control of a market that proved to be of approximately no interest to most music listeners who decided to buy neither. Despite the fact that both formats represent a real

advance over CD, their higher data rates meant they were never going to make it onto iPods and internet connections the world over.

Pondering this as I reach the last, consoling mouthful of a combination of chocolate, caramel and peanuts, I realise that the inevitable decline in CD sales will lead to no next-generation, newer-is-better format. When the turn of the millennium was still fresh in my mind, I naively believed the audible superiority of SACD and DVD-A would win over buyers everywhere, despite the repeat of every pointless, will-sapping format battle. I thought we'd enter a new, halcyon age of hi-fi. Instead, I taste only the bitterness of a distinctly average microwave curry as the future metamorphoses into an era when low-grade audio is the sole audio widely available. A still, small voice inside me continues to hope that high sampling-rate digital will make a comeback as broadband speeds continue to rise, but it is a frail sound, a bit like the discarded wrapper of a packet of honey-roast cashews hitting the bottom of an empty bin.

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



Dominic Todd

Those were the days

When men were men and hi-fis were broken

They don't make 'em like they used to. I must admit it's been a while since I've heard that phrase and the reasons, I reckon, are two-fold. The first is that we've moved on to being more concerned about issues of where something is made, in what conditions and how far it has to travel to get to us. The second is that build quality has actually improved in recent years. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, products used to undergo reliability tests and, as those involved in retail would tell you, different brands varied widely in terms of reliability. I shall not specifically name the bad eggs here, but I can recall a certain brand of CD player with a ten per cent return rate. A typical Sony, Technics or Onkyo player was more like one per cent, if that. Then there was the budget speaker that while 'blowing away the opposition around the £100 mark', also had the unfortunate habit of detaching its plastic baffle from the chipboard cabinet.

These days, thanks to information sharing on the internet and more consumer based magazines and TV programmes, we've become more demanding – and quite rightly so. If you were to buy a new car today, you wouldn't think it exceptional to be able to drive it for two years without a single major fault or, for that matter, a service either. It's very much the same with consumer electronics, hi-fi included. CD players have improved greatly in terms of reliability and consistency. You'd be very unlucky to have a fault with a modern CD player within the first five years of ownership, whatever the brand. This is down to several factors. The main improvement is probably due to products being manufactured in the cheaper labour markets of the Far East. Cheaper labour rates mean that more can be spent on modern factories and machinery. Quality control standards have also risen over the past couple of decades, as has the consistency of component quality, such as transport mechanisms. I'm also constantly surprised as to just how well-finished most modern hi-fi

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

TAG MCLAREN 250MR MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER



As you will know, TAG McLaren Audio has long ceased to be what it once was. Indeed, it's been some years since the company existed as an independent enterprise and since 2004, it has been part of the International Audio Group. Prior to to being absorbed into IAG, TMA came and went in a blaze of ambition, with some fabulous (and less than fabulous) products, of which the 250MR was one of the final examples.

The 250MR was essentially a monoblock power amplifier, housed in a compact and very pretty half-width case, which was designed off the back of the 250x3R and 250x2R three- and two-channel power amplifiers that were introduced to power a range of TAG McLaren multichannel systems. The difference was that, as a monoblock, the 250MR was intended to be slightly superior to the multichannel versions. It was essentially the same amplifier under the skin, but benefited from the fact that each channel was fully separated from its neighbour. Even the power-input leads and the casework were entirely separate, so there was no interaction between channels at all, and in an ideal layout each power amplifier module could be positioned adjacent to its loudspeaker and connected by the shortest possible speaker lead. There was plenty of power on tap – 250 watts into eight ohms, 400 watts into four ohms and, for a limited time, 1,000 watts into two ohms from the bipolar circuit that featured low levels of global negative feedback, Vishay metal film resistors and Cascode Stabilisation.

Each amplifier was equipped with single-ended and balanced mode inputs and a power LED. Thanks to a soft-start feature, several 250MR monoblocks could be daisy-chained together in a single system using the TAGtronics bus. A small remote control was even supplied with each power amplifier sold.

The 250MR was a serious amplifier, and well engineered with an eye to reducing microphony, and independence between channels. It was (and still is) an excellent product, that's fully up to the task when paired with a quality stereo or multichannel home theatre system. I have used a pair of McLaren 250MRs with a number of systems in the past, with very impressive results



“The 250MR was capable of fine detail and more than routine levels of power. It was an impressive beast.”

on the whole. The amplifier was capable of fine detail and more than routine levels of power, plus a well-extended response at both ends of the frequency spectrum and awesome reserves by multichannel standards. The treble was open and clean, the midband neutral and wide, while the bass benefited from the prodigious quantity of power on tap. As far as multichannel system amplifiers went, it was an impressive beast.

But there were limitations. Certainly the bass was deep and muscular by any normal standards, and again my recollection was that the single channel 250MR was clearly superior to the two- and three-channel versions. But, notwithstanding the high-grade engineering, the monoblock ended up giving the impression of a slightly clinical feel, which didn't sit well with the B&W DM800 I used them with for a while. Though in fairness, the 800 was almost in a class of its own when it came to the demands it made for system euphony. Certainly the combination lacked the grace and smoothness that this demanding loudspeaker so clearly needed, and the raw edge of power and physicality that would have taken the 250MR beyond being just another powerful and capable amplifier. It was an excellent performer with many other loudspeakers, but at the end of the day, I was never entirely convinced that it really had star quality. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

is. Not only do sub-£100 speakers not fall apart anymore, they're also finished to a standard that would have been the norm for a £1,000 speaker not so very long ago.

Recently I came across a pair of £80 miniature speakers from a respected budget brand. Yet, despite the price, they had a piano gloss finish that wouldn't disgrace the Acoustic Energy AE1. Of course they don't sound anything like as good, but they're not bad for £80 and, unlike cheapies of yesteryear, look likely to stand up to life's knocks and bumps. Likewise, electronics no longer use metal cases so thin that they flex with plastic front panels that splinter. Today, an aluminium front panel is no big deal, and neither is a casing that doesn't sag when you place another unit on top of it. While there may be concerns with regard as to how green it is to make and then ship electronics half way around the world, we can no longer complain of poor build quality. Hi-fi is no longer built like it used to be: it's built better than that.

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



Imperfection rules, okay?

Perfection might not be the ultimate goal

Hi-fi has progressed enormously in the past fifty or so years. From the late 1940s onwards, a steady stream of innovations and advances has delivered better, truer, more realistic sound. Each step forward rendered older technologies obsolete. There was never any thought of going back. The ultimate goal was the reproduction of music without distortion or background noise: pure sound – clean and true to life.

CD finally realised that dream. But, human nature's a funny thing. Once we had pure clean sound from CD, suddenly a bit of dirt and grunge no longer seemed such a bad thing. It was said that it sounded too clean, too clinical, lacking character and personality. Some record producers actually started to add LP surface noise and roughness to some tracks to dirty them up and make them sound more like vinyl.

There's a parallel here with digital photography. I recently blew £50 on a computer program



“Human nature’s a funny thing. Once we had pure clean sound from CD, suddenly a bit of dirt and grunge no longer seemed such a bad thing.”

that simulates the grain and colour/contrast characteristics of dozens of different emulsions for that authentic film look. Great! Yet, back in the days before digital when I used 35mm film, I used to hate grain. Now, perhaps because digital always gives you impeccably smooth grainless images, suddenly a bit of grain seems quite attractive. Reality is boring, so it would seem. It's fun to take a squeaky-clean, natural-looking digital image and add grain while shifting colour and altering contrast. It often makes a picture appear more interesting, more characterful, and can create a nice stylised 'dated' look, as though the image were taken thirty or forty years ago, rather than last week.

Hold on a moment... Speaking as someone who lived through the bad old days of LPs with their maddening mix of virtues and faults, I don't remember anyone ever saying how much the presence of LP surface noise increased their enjoyment of the music. And I can't recall anybody remarking on the way end-of-side distortion enhanced their appreciation of Beethoven's *Ninth symphony* either. Quite the opposite, actually. Distortion, clicks and pops were something you reluctantly put up with. Hopefully, such disturbances

would be small enough for your enjoyment of the music not to be marred.

Other limitations – mono sound for example – were simply frustrating. Once you'd experienced the spatial breadth and width of good stereo, mono was like listening to music coming through a narrow slit. But that was then. Now, it seems, little of this matters. Most people enjoy a broad range of material without caring overly about whether it's mono or stereo, analogue or digital, recent or old, LP or CD. It's the music and performance that count. Imperfections? Older recording technologies? They add individuality and character – an authentic reflection of the period in which the recording was made. As a result, recorded music has become democratised. The various technical barriers that led to discrimination and compartmentalisation seem to have melted away. We're all a lot less judgemental about earlier recordings that fail to meet squeaky-clean hi-fi criteria. Perhaps because 'perfection' is so easily attained, imperfections are more readily tolerated.

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



Broadband boost

Faster connection, better sound quality?

I just upgraded my internet connection. When the new hardware arrives I should be able to receive data about 2500 times faster than my first modem, some 14 years ago allowed – and indeed faster than I could get information off my own hard disc in those days. It's quite a thought. And with optical fibre internet connections already on the market in some countries the upgrades have clearly not run out of steam.

There's absolutely no question that the internet will play a part in the future of music distribution. A physical disc with notes printed on paper is undoubtedly a present, permanent artefact but you've got to go to a shop and buy it, or order online and enjoy the vagaries of delivery and then storage is a nuisance, too. Currently, some hard discs can store the contents of 2,000 CDs, assuming lossless compression, in a package the size of a paperback Harry Potter novel.

I remain optimistic that audio quality online will improve beyond MP3, and part of the reason for my optimism is that broadband vendors need reasons to persuade us to upgrade. Sooner or later, higher quality audio will become one of those reasons. My new 6MB connection will allow me to download an album as MP3 files in under two minutes, but I could also have full CD-format audio in ten minutes or less.

Once a track or album has been downloaded the obvious thing seems to be to store it on a hard disc. There are plenty of music servers around already, such as the familiar models from Imerge and Cambridge Audio, that do this. The same machines, of course, can store recordings you already own as CDs, saving hunting among the shelves. But there's a problem with servers that really bugs me. Hard discs make a noise. It's not a loud noise, but it's enough to get annoying when one is trying to listen carefully in an otherwise quiet environment. We spend hundreds and thousands of pounds buying hi-fi kit with carefully optimised performance, then introduce a background whine that's a lot louder than the -93dB noise floor of a well-recorded CD. The audio electronics in servers can be the equal of that in a good



Sly and the Family Stone is a name commonly associated with excess – blizzards of cocaine and PCP, outlandish stage costumes, madness, bad vibes, no-shows, ego and acrimony. But it didn't start out that way. San Francisco DJ and club singer Sylvester Stewart had the idea for a unique band that crossed boundaries of gender, race and musical styles since the mid-1960s. And he was already well on his way to establishing his musical credentials having cut his teeth as the producer on Bobby Freeman's *C'mon and Swim* dance-craze hit when he was barely into his twenties and for Beatles' response groups like the Beau Brummels and the Mojo Men.

He was no street-wise hipster, but a well brought up, lower-middle-class kid from a musical family. His talent, however, was already prodigious and he had a vision of a band that would combine boys and girls, and white and black, with soul, funk, rock and the psychedelic sounds of the city where he lived.

He actively sought out the members of his new band, hand-picking them from the local scene, and a buzz began to develop in the clubs around the Bay Area as they developed their legendarily powerful all-night shows.

As the new group's reputation grew, they took on a lengthy residency at the Pussycat à Go Go in Las Vegas, where they played to celebrities like James Brown and Bobby Darin (one of their biggest fans at the time). It was during this time that they recorded their first album in LA. They had Mondays off and would fly down to record tracks in marathon 24-hour stints. They eventually had to leave town in a hurry after Sly's relationship with a white girl upset the club owner and attracted death threats.

A Whole New Thing is brimming with ideas in virtually every area – melodically, rhythmically, with the innovative production and with the genre-leaping arrangements. And at this stage it sounds like anything's possible. This is pre-funk Sly, but many of the elements that would define the Family Stone's signature sound are already in place: the consciousness-raising social commentary of *Underdog*, the interlocking lead vocals on *Run, Run, Run*,

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE A WHOLE NEW THING



“This is pre-funk Sly, but many of the elements that would define his signature sound are already in place.”

the super-tight rhythm section of drummer Gregg Errico and finger-popping bass pioneer Larry Graha, Graham's guitarist brother Freddy Stone, and the fizzing horn section of saxophonist Greg Martini and trumpeter Cynthia Robinson. And running through it all like a pop visionary stick of rock is Sly, writing and arranging all the songs, singing and playing keyboards, and touching almost every element with his then effervescent personality.

Surprising as it seems now, the mix of ideas and styles was way too rich for the public's blood when it was originally released in late 1967, though it won many fans among other artists from Miles Davis to Mose Allison to Tony Bennett! Yet *A Whole New Thing* proved to be just too 'new' to sell in any sizeable quantities.

Undeterred, Sly honed his vision and came back the following year with *Dance To The Music*, which streamlined the approach and set the pattern for his future hits and the freak show that he became, as the Beatle-mopped Family man descended into superfly Sly, caught up in his own ego and effectively lost to the world, culminating in the dark masterpiece *There's A Riot Goin' On* in 1971.

Listening to the energy, life, experimental brio, gleeful kicking down of doors and the sheer fun that constitutes *A Whole New Thing*, it could all have been so very different. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

CD player, but what's the point?

Imerge's servers, like some others, are targeted mainly at multi-room installations and are expected to be hidden away in a cupboard under the stairs. Great: but lots of us, me included, live in old dwellings fundamentally unsuited to multi-room installation and with no such cupboard available. Better mechanical construction could cut noise, but what I'd like is an audiophile server which reads an album into solid-state memory and then shuts down the disc drive. Why not? Even high-speed DRAM is only about £30 per gigabyte and flash memory (slower) about a tenth of that at best. Ultimately, we may even get used to play-on-demand with no local storage, which will also be silent. We have the technology to enjoy high-quality internet music right now. Let's encourage manufacturers and service providers to support it!

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



Malcom Stewart

Audiofaux

Danger: Audiophile discs at work

The audiophile pressing and its CD equivalent have one worthwhile purpose in life: to warn us to evacuate any room in which we find them. And that includes their most obvious hang out, the hi-fi show.

I should have heeded that warning at a hi-fi show last year, where one demonstration appeared to have been structured entirely around these discs full of wonderful sounds with little or no musical merit. I should have headed for the door immediately, but the performance of the system was so execrable and the sales patter justifying its astronomical price so mind-boggling, that I felt perversely compelled to stay. Who on earth, I wondered, would spend the cost of his'n'ers Ferraris on this musically inept mountain of – to my eyes – pig-ugly iron and timber that gave the impression that it couldn't find a tune or rhythm without divine intervention?

Now, you should never jump to conclusions – good or bad – about systems you hear at shows for a whole host of reasons, but given the truly enormous price tag this system carried, I felt that its catastrophically poor



“The audiophile pressing and its CD equivalent have one worthwhile purpose: to warn us to evacuate any room in which we find them.”

performance really couldn't be excused. In hi-fi terms it seemed spot-on, but judged musically it couldn't even struggle out of the starting blocks.

Then a sobering thought struck me: perhaps this was as good as it got. After all, the rep was quite happy to continue demonstrating it and was singing its praises effusively. At that point the realisation hit me: this was a hi-fi system in the pejorative sense of the term: it could make impressive noises but playing music didn't figure on its agenda. That started me wondering about the people selling this equipment: were they hard-nosed cynics fleecing gullible hi-fi enthusiasts or were they perhaps newcomers to the industry who had never heard a system that could play music? For example, the system developed bass that could only be described as stygian. Detailed, deep and inordinately powerful, it would have been truly impressive had it seemed even remotely connected to the rest of the instruments that were playing.

When I looked around the room, I was even more surprised. While my colleagues and I were surreptitiously exchanging pass-the-sick-bag grimaces, many listening to the demonstration looked suitably impressed and several were even nodding reverently with appreciative smiles spreading across their faces. What, I wondered, was there to smile about with a system that had not the most remote concept of music's foundations? I asked the demonstrator to play a track off one of my favourite, non-audiophile, CDs. I was permitted all of about 20 seconds' worth before the disc

was stopped, handed back to me and I was told that it was 'a lousy recording'. I said I thought it strange how I'd owned that disc for 15 years, played it on countless systems and had never before realised how bad it was until I heard it on this megabucks system. That rather invited the question of who on earth would want a system that cost as much as a house yet only allowed them to play a handful of audiophile recordings? Not me, thank you.

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



Paul Messenger

The road less travelled?

Familiarity is a good thing

As Spring was allegedly turning into Summer, I decided to drive to Munich for the German High End hi-fi show, and then on to Siena for a wedding. With 150,000 miles on the clock, my old car looked too knackered

to be sure of making the trip reliably, so I bought a second-hand replacement with less miles on the clock. Two thousand miles later and the new motor had performed impeccably, yet I still hadn't made up my mind whether it was actually 'better' than the older one. Soon after returning I popped over to my local farm shop, seven miles from where I live. I had barely reached halfway before I knew unequivocally that the new car was a considerable improvement over the old. And the reason I knew was simply that I was travelling on a road I knew well. Two thousand miles travelling across unfamiliar surfaces and territory had only told me it was a good car; three miles on a road that I knew intimately was all I needed to get a grip on just how much better it really was.

What's all that got to do with hi-fi? Quite a lot, actually. If I'm going to judge a piece of hi-fi equipment reliably, I have to do it on my own home ground, in my own familiar listening room and with my own source material and system components. That's particularly true for loudspeakers, which occupy the lion's share of my attention, of course. One reason is that the sound of a pair of speakers is always substantially modified by the acoustic characteristics of the listening room, especially at low frequencies. Another key factor is that the speakers are slaves to the quality and characteristics of the signals they are fed. Even a change in cables can shift perspectives and upset judgements.

In this job it's common to have to sit through a listening session at a hi-fi company's HQ, or at a press event. Judgements from these rarely have any real value because the context is entirely alien. Some years back, I visited Focal for the launch of its beryllium tweeter technology. The gigantic Grande Utopia Bes sounded very good in the company's large listening room, so a review was scheduled for the US magazine, *Stereophile*. A team arrived to install these monsters, even bringing along a three-box DCS CD player, a three-box Halcro amp and some very fancy cables to drive them. However, neither the visiting components nor my own system could disguise the fact that these enormous speakers were simply too large to work well in my room, even though 4.3x2.6x5.5m is a decent enough size by normal UK standards. The bass end simply didn't work well here, with too much low down and not enough upper bass. Ironically, when I tried the Alto Utopia Be, two steps down the size ladder, this smaller variation on the same theme proved to be an excellent room match.

The most obvious conclusion is that anyone contemplating 'extreme' speakers ought to try them at home before making a firm commitment.

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

TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

FILTERS



Finding myself immersed in a tediously repetitive bit of work measuring and analysing filters for a purpose related to recording

enhancement, I realised that while several previous Techno columns had mentioned filters of various kinds none had actually defined what they do in basic terms. Better late than never!

By close analogy with optical filters, which selectively allow certain colours of light to pass through, audio filters allow some frequencies to pass while blocking others to a greater or lesser extent. Filters have all sorts of uses: in recording studios they are used to 'colour' the sound by slightly boosting or cutting a range of frequencies; in digital recording and replay they prevent aliasing distortion; in LP replay they correct for the 'pre-emphasis' (another filter) applied when the disc was cut.

How does an electronic circuit know which frequencies are passing through, and what to do with them? A signal contains not only 'instantaneous' amplitude – voltage, usually – but also 'rate of change' of amplitude, and this can be very easily detected by circuits containing capacitors and/or inductors – so-called 'reactive components'. High frequencies are characterised by a greater rate of change of amplitude. Depending on how they are connected, reactive components either favour or reject high rates of change of voltage. To use the mathematically correct terms, they integrate or differentiate the incoming voltage signal.

That sounds a bit abstruse but integration is nothing more than maintaining a running average, with differentiation being the opposite. Analogous things happen in mechanics with springs, and the net effect is that higher frequencies are selectively curtailed (integration) or boosted (differentiation) at '6dB per octave' – half or double the output level at twice the frequency. Combine enough filtering stages and you can make the filter do almost anything you want, such as cutting off very rapidly with increasing or decreasing frequency, removing or boosting a narrow band of frequencies, and so on.

The main characteristic of a filter is its amplitude response – how much level it allows



“Audio filters allow some frequencies to pass while blocking others to a greater or lesser extent.”

through at each frequency. Every filter also has a phase response, which describes how much phase shift (time delay) is applied at each frequency, and this can be very different between two filters with the same amplitude response. Phase is not as audible a characteristic as amplitude, but it can have subtle sonic effects, as can incidental features of filters such as noise and distortion. This is a major reason why manufacturers moved away from providing tone controls on amplifiers, for instance – the extra circuitry contributed in unwanted ways even when everything was set to 'flat'.

Simple filters with gentle 'slopes' (the rate at which increasing/decreasing frequencies are rolled off) are nice predictable things, but sharper response demands more complex circuits or, in the case of digital filters, algorithms. This can lead to all sorts of problems, not least of which is 'ringing'. Sharp filters must 'look at' a longer portion of the signal to see what's going on and as a result ringing can happen when a signal contains energetic transients. Whether this is audible depends on the frequencies involved. Some digital audio processes in the recording studio can, however, make it very audible in unfortunate ways. Digital signal processing allows us to do things undreamed-of in analogue but can be a two-edged sword! **HFC**

Richard Black

The world according to...

Chord Electronics

This month, *Hi-Fi Choice* talks to **John Franks** about his journey from black boxes to Red CD players. Interview: *Malcolm Steward*

John Franks seems a very contented man. He builds esoteric hi-fi primarily because he can, and because doing so gives him great pleasure. He also gives the impression that despite having turned Chord Electronics into a very successful business, he regards it more as a hobby than a 'proper' job.

At one point he even speaks of his desire, years ago, to forsake what many perceive as the glamour of big business in order to adopt a simpler, more 'local' lifestyle. That element of his personality, alongside an appreciation of fine architecture, is perhaps best demonstrated by The Pumphouse; the 1870s building that he restored and turned into Chord's impressive riverside headquarters in beautiful Kent. While assembly work is carried out here, only the

most desperately uncultured Philistine would ever refer to this magnificent edifice as 'Chord's factory'.

HFC: How did you find your way into hi-fi and how did Chord begin?

JF: In 1982 I was employed as an avionics engineer, working on black boxes for fighter aircraft. We were regularly given a space the size of a chicken's wing at the back of the box into which we had to shoehorn perhaps half a kilowatt of power. Invariably, that meant we were forced to push the limits of power supply technology and design to accomplish the task. So, I had that knowledge and I was also keen on making amplifiers, which I did for myself, my friends and anyone I could sell them to,

just as a hobby. I was keen to make amps that sounded better than those that were commercially available.

It occurred to me that an amplifier is effectively suspended between its power supply rails. There's a plus rail, a minus rail and a zero point. That zero point is the ground reference at the back of the amplifier and, of course, it tends to get pulled away from zero volts. The problem is that it's shared: it's also the reference point at the front of the amplifier. So, effectively, if the loudspeaker pulls it, it introduces a time-lagged distortion component into the amplifier's input. This is one reason why many amplifiers can burst into oscillation if you connect them to a highly capacitive load. The normal way of solving this problem is to make the front-end stages of the amplifier have a more sluggish response – reduce the loop response around the first stage, then open it up a little for the intermediate stages, then open it further for the final stage. That's the conventional way to keep an amplifier stable.

I thought that I could negate this distortion component getting back into the amplifier and open up the loop responses by using two amplifiers in bridged mode – where you don't actually connect the output through the load to a ground point. It worked, but was complicated and incurred additional cost, so I rejected the idea. That led to me wondering if I could draw power from both the positive and negative supply rails simultaneously, which ought to reduce the pulling effect on the ground reference point.

I did this by using a cross-coupled magnetic device, a bifilar-wound choke, that acts rather like a gyroscope: it likes to be in balance, and when it sees a current demand on, say, the positive rail, that will upset its equilibrium – it automatically acts like a transformer and pulls more current from the negative rail. It worked and I found that I could open up the loop responses throughout the amplifier, making it sound far more agile and stable. Not

“You have to design an amplifier to be unstable to a degree, so that it can perform all the necessary rapid manoeuvres.”



unconditionally stable... but conditional upon the power supply. I like to think of it being like a fighter plane compared to a freighter aircraft. The fighter is extremely manoeuvrable, because its design puts it on the verge of instability. It relies on its air-data computers to keep it in the sky. The freighter, rather like some big American amplifiers, is inherently stable, but is also lumbering and can't manoeuvre like the fighter can.

HFC: You're saying that Chord amplifiers are inherently unstable?

JF: Good heavens, no! They're stable because of the way the power supply works with them. They are that way because they're designed as a total system. A lot of people design an amplifier and think about the power supply at the end. I don't design that way. I design things together.

You have to design an amplifier to be unstable to a degree, so that it can perform all the necessary rapid manoeuvres. If you design something that's too stable, you'll often find that it can't follow the music. Large, very stable amplifiers aren't particularly good at revealing minutiae and harmonic detailing, because they've been 'slugged down' so much.

Some of the amplifiers we make are very, very powerful, but they can start and stop on a dime – sorry, poor analogy. Let's say 'within microseconds', because a lot of the leading-edge information – the part of the note that, for example, lets the ear distinguish a guitar from a piano – doesn't even last milliseconds. That's why I believe we need circuitry that can react within microseconds if you want an accurate sound. Although we're only meant to be able to hear to 20kHz, I'm sure the information that gives us depth perception can be 200kHz and above. Our brains are very clever and must be working with some type of fuzzy logic, because they can perceive positions of instruments that can only be determined within microseconds in sound-space. We have a lot to learn about how the brain works and its capabilities, especially in an industry where we're all striving for perfection in our own way.

Now, I had this amplifier concept working in 1982, but I couldn't put it into production, because the power devices with which I'd been experimenting were new and very expensive: the aerospace industry was using them, but they hadn't migrated into the commercial sector. So, essentially, I put my designs in a drawer and forgot about them. I joined a Hong Kong power supply company that wound up producing millions of power supplies for Steve Jobs of Apple. The company had about





“We’ve been rather successful on the pro side, with Abbey Road, Sony and THX being some of the operations using our amps.”

32,000 employees and I became a director and was doing very well financially, but I really hankered after a simple, local life. During the eight years I was with that company, I kept looking at those designs I'd put in that drawer and I eventually realised that on top of everything else I was really missing engineering.

By 1989 the price of the power devices I needed to make the power supply work had fallen significantly and that made me think that I could maybe put a product out and see how it was accepted. So I made a little amplifier – literally, it was housed in a case not much bigger than a shoe box – called the SPM900. It was a simple design using my power-amplifier and power supply concepts. I didn't realise at the time that I was making a mistake: because I could make it small, I did, and that was a big mistake, because of the way the public perceived its value. Because it was small it wasn't valued as highly as less powerful amplifiers that were perhaps ten times its volume and 20 times its weight. So it was back to the drawing board and that amplifier emerged in 1990 as the original SPM-1200. While the business was establishing itself, I accepted two short-term contracts with AT&T and Raytheon. I went full-time with Chord in 1992.

HFC: So you didn't make your debut during the best of times for this industry?

JF: I've never really known this industry while it was having great times, and I think that's probably a good thing, because it taught me that to survive you have to be prepared to work harder. I was quite lucky, though, in the early days, because I heard through a contact at Spondor that the BBC was looking for a new amplifier for the LS5/8 broadcast monitor. We supplied them with a sample, they loved it and ordered several. That gave us a great start in the professional world: once the BBC bought our amplifiers, other studios soon started to call us. We've been rather successful on the pro side, with Abbey Road, Sony and THX being just some of the well-known operations using our amps.

Also, the pro side helps keep the company grounded, because it forces you to produce rigorously engineered products – studios won't accept anything less. I often look at competing products and think that while they might sound wonderful, I wouldn't want to have to ship them round the world, because they're

not what I would class as being reliably or well-engineered. Being able to build components that will satisfy the demands of the pro market benefits all our customers no matter where in the world they might be.

HFC: You recently launched the groundbreaking Red Reference CD player. Could you tell us a little about what makes that so special?

JF: It's based upon two of our products that have already been well-received, the Blu transport and the DAC64. The DAC64 originated about six years ago and came about through a collaboration with Robert Watts, a digital genius who's spent the last 25 years developing DAC technology. He had an ultra high-performance design using Field Programmable Gate Array technology with chips that had an extremely high gate count to drive a large pulse array ladder. The design was on a board about a foot square, and I asked if we could push the chips closer together and reduce the size of the package to about four inches by five. It wasn't easy, but we managed it, and the DAC64 was born. I still believe there's little out there that can touch its performance. And that's because most people producing DACs use the same chips from manufacturers such as Analog Devices or

Burr-Brown, fabricated from a piece of silicon that's maybe three millimetres square, and the pulse array is constructed over maybe 100 or 200 microns. That pulse array contains the same components as ours, but ours is about two or three inches in size. I believe that, because of that 10,000-times size difference, our board doesn't suffer from the same sort of problems that afflict the others – leakage, capacitance, inductance and so on within the chip that can't be overcome. Other manufacturers are limited by the performance of the DAC chip, whereas we're not. The DAC64 is far more accurate, especially at lower signal levels, than others. I'm very proud that a tiny company such as ours can produce a DAC that can take on all-comers, beat them and sell in the large quantities it has done.

The other part of the equation was the transport, and there we added a very high performance upsampler – with about one million logic gates – to reduce the workload of the DAC. That takes the 16-bit data, transposes it up to 80-bits, then dithers it down to 24- or 16-bits again. By this time it's clocked out at either 88 or 176kHz. At 176kHz you have to go into dual-data mode, because you can't put those frequencies down a single-core cable, so the data is split left and right and then passed down two cables.

HFC: Aside from everything else, the Red certainly looks an impressive machine.

JF: I always like to make equipment look visually arresting and try to come up with something that hasn't been done before. When I'm at hi-fi shows I try not to go around looking at other people's designs, I try to avoid being contaminated – and I'm not trying to sound snobbish by saying that – by other people's ideas. I draw my design influences from aerospace and from architecture, and I truly love great architecture. In this quirky little industry you need to make your products stand out and be different, but you also need some sort of consistency – people need clues to tell them that, although it's different from the last models, it's still a Chord product.

HFC: Familiar indicators?

JF: Indeed – but unfortunately that can work against you. I know that in China there are a lot of 'familial indicators' that are popping up on other people's products. But I suppose that's okay; imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, as they say. The enjoyable things about Chord are that we're here because we want to be here, we don't have anything to prove, and I have no wish for the company to become a great empire. I'm happy being able to make good products that allow me to explore my design concepts and bring them to market. It pleases me incredibly when they're appreciated, especially when I can say that no one has ever done whatever we've done that way before.

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London Sound & Vision 2007

Dan George, editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*, says: "The London Sound & Vision show is the best place to check out the latest in hi-fi, from top-notch budget hi-fi systems to the world's finest high-end audio esoterica. Inside, you'll find out why vinyl is still king, why everyone loves CD, how to make the best of your downloaded music, why SACD and DVD-Audio rock, and more besides.

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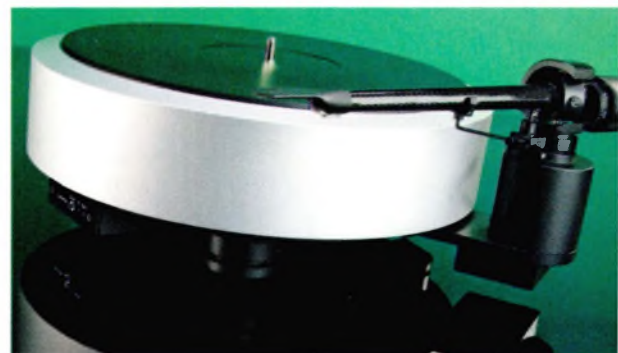
Steve May, editor of *Home Cinema Choice*, says:

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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

GIL EVANS

New Bottle Old Wine

World Pacific/Pure Pleasure
180g vinyl



Music: Gil Evans might be best remembered for his collaborations with Miles Davis, but he was also a brilliant arranger and musician in his time. This 1956 recording finds Evans interpreting the work of his predecessors in the jazz arena, including *St Louis Blues* by WC Handy, *Lester Leaps In* (Lester Young), *Round About Midnight* (Monk) and *Bird Feathers* (Charlie Parker). Being all big band productions these interpretations are often very different to the originals but still retain the true feel of each. ★★★

Sound: Given the vintage, this "Strobophonic High Fidelity" recording does a better job of capturing real stereo than many others, albeit through a strangely distant perspective. It's well balanced though, and has plenty of controlled energy. ★★★★★ JK

THE ONLY ONES

The Only Ones

CBS/Pure Pleasure
180g vinyl



Music: Their debut from 1978 serves as a fantastic reminder of the new wave era, when bands that had spent the first half of the 1970s listening

to the Velvet Underground found major labels willing to release their work. Peter Perrett does his best Lou Reed vocal on ten tracks including the hit *Another Girl Another Planet*, while the band seem to have more of the Television about them, thanks largely to the guitar work of John Perry. Given that the band has recently reformed this entertaining debut is a timely reminder of why they could well find favour once more. ★★★
Sound: As was the fashion at the time this is a raw, energetic sounding album with less bass power than one might hope for but plenty of detail and easily followed individual lines. ★★★★★ JK

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

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



ROBERT FRIPP

At The End Of Time

DGM

Music: The idea that music is somehow a sacred activity has featured prominently in the thinking of leading prog-rock egg-heads Robert Fripp and Brian Eno ever since the early 1970s. Subtitled *Churchscopes - Live In England & Estonia 2006*, this CD is just Fripp with his Gibson guitar emanating ambient washes of sound inside various churches. Despite the gobbledeygook of the sleeve notes the music here is fabulous, reaching a zenith on track seven where Fripp appears to duet in the ether with a celestial glockenspiel. ★★★★★

Sound: Often sharp when he's bending those high notes, Fripp's guitar really comes into its own when he hits those creamy low tones. Though recorded in splashy surroundings the results are often exceptional. ★★★ MP



KATE RUSBY

Awkward Annie

Pure Records

Music: The original 'folk babe' has come a long way from her early days when she adhered to the formula of voice, acoustic guitar and trad ballad. Her sixth studio album finds her adding brass and strings, although the real leap forward is in her songwriting. In the past her compositions have far too self-consciously attempted to ape the trad folk tradition. Here, songs such as the title track, *The Bitter Bcy* and the heartbreaking *Daughter Of Heaven* sound like mature, honestly crafted and genuinely timeless classics. Rusby has finally come of age it seems. ★★★

Sound: Despite the fuller instrumentation, Rusby's debut as a producer is hardly Phil Spector-esque. It's still uncluttered enough to hear the proverbial pin drop and the arrangements never threaten her down-to-earth charm. ★★★★★ NW



ORCHESTRE BAOBAB

Made In Dakar

World Circuit

Music: The house band of Dakar's exclusive Baobab nightclub first debuted their unique sound way back in 1970. They paved the way for a revolution in Senegalese and west African pop but disbanded 15 years later, making way for young guns like Youssou N'dour. Persuaded out of retirement in 2001, these now aged gentlemen have pretty much picked up where they left off, continuing a blissful amalgamation of styles rich in rhythmic interplay and positively charged melodies. ★★★

Sound: There's a welcome lack of production sheen on this second album since their reformation, though the instruments are all distinct, especially Barthelemy Atisso's luminescent guitar. It's the sound of old friends thoroughly enjoying themselves. ★★★ DO



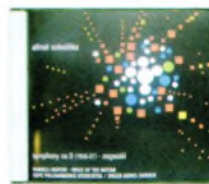
KT TUNSTALL

Drastic Fantastic

Relentless

Music: *Little Favours*, the opening track on the follow-up to Tunstall's million-selling debut *Eye To The Telescope*, is so insanely catchy with its jangling guitars and pumped-up, multi-tracked girl-pop choruses, it sounds like Sheryl Crow at her finest. Yet with the hit single front-loaded and guaranteed, Tunstall then proceeds to unveil an album that gets progressively more satisfying as it goes on, from the haunting nu-folk of *White Bird* to the starkly sung *Beauty Of Uncertainty* and *Paper Aeroplane*. Some have bracketed Tunstall as a simperingly bland songstress in the Dido/Katie Melua mould. In fact, she's several classes above such dullness, as just about every song on *Drastic Fantastic* proves. ★★★★★

Sound: Steve Osbourne's clever, state-of-the-art production creates an intricately layered soundstage that still sounds totally organic. ★★★ NW



ALFRED SCHNITTKE

Symphony No 9, Oratorio Nagasaki

Owen Arwell Hughes (cond), Cape

Philharmonic Orchestra

BIS CD 1647

Music: Schnittke's orchestral music bears a striking resemblance to Shostakovich and also to Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. What is truly surprising, however, is the maturity and sophistication of these works. Both were composed when Schnittke was still a student at the Moscow Conservatory, the *Oratorio Nagasaki* being his graduation piece. This symphony is one of his finest works, especially the later movements. ★★★★★

Sound: This is another brilliant BIS recording, which handles the scale and dynamics of the music without a hint of discomfort. The orchestra and choir sound polished and well on top of the music, and the Cape Town Symphony Hall has a lively, fresh quality, too. ★★★★★ AG



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "The crazy world of a genuine rock legend."

FRANK ZAPPA *Sleep Dirt* Rykodisc

Music: The period between 1974 and 1976 was when Zappa's band morphed from the near jazz-funk outfit of *One Size Fits All* to the pioneering rock band that produced *Zoot Allures et al*. There are some extremely strong performances, particularly on the phenomenal *The Ocean Is The Ultimate Solution* with its double and electric basses and Zappa's weird guitar sound. Some tracks are marred by the only female vocals in the

Zappa oeuvre but there are three minutes of sheer beauty in the title track alone. Sit back and enter the crazy world of a genuine rock legend. ★★★★★
Sound: The Ryko remastering of this album is distinctly more beefy than the vinyl version, and it also has drum overdubs on two tracks. All of which make it a dense and rich album which requires refined replay at proper volume levels. ★★☆☆☆ **JK**



BETTYE LAVETTE
The Scene Of The Crime

Anti-Records

Music: Sixties soul veteran LaVette has been making a comeback since she came roaring out of the traps with *I've Got My Own Hell To Raise* in 2005. While popular on the Northern Soul circuit, she never quite had the hits: a victim of bad luck and music biz politics. Now into her sixties she sounds like she's making up for lost time, still brimming with fire and pain, her blistering voice still gloriously intact. Backed by southern rock revivalists, Drive By Truckers, there's more than a whiff of country on these old-style southern soul grooves. ★★★★★

Sound: Recorded in Alabama's legendary Muscle Shoals Fame studio (with local keyboard legend Spooner Oldham) this fine recording manages to combine modern production values without detracting from the period flavour. ★★★★★ **DO**



JEWLS VERSE

Taking It Easy

Olimpus Music

Music: There aren't that many Australian-Maltese singer-songwriters out there – more's the pity if this is anything to go by, the second album by a man who doubles as the frontman for indie-rockers The Monitors. Here, *sans band*, he goes for melody and poignant atmosphere while exploring the bizarre Bermuda triangle that lies between Coldplay, George Michael and Neil Young on a soul tip. And if that all sounds convoluted then, believe me, the music doesn't – effortless songs such as *Firefly*, *Sorry* and *Help Me* are all supremely catchy as well as being works of real quality. A strong, at times brilliant, set of songs. ★★☆☆☆

Sound: Clear and timeless production from Verse (and Kathy Goodman of Mandala). ★★☆☆☆ **PS**



NORDIC SHOWCASE

Christian Lindberg (cond), Nordic Chamber Orch, Richard Tognetti (violin)
BIS CD-1538

Music: This disc is designed to showcase Scandinavian orchestral music though six short works; two from Sweden and one each from Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. They are scored primarily for string orchestra and are an eclectic bunch, though in one way or another, each of the works nods to the bleak and direct feel associated with Scandinavian music. The individual compositions are excellent, the youthful Carl Nielson *Suite*, and the Jón Leifs *Variationi Pastorali Op 8* being particularly striking. ★★☆☆☆

Sound: Like most BIS recordings, this one is beautifully recorded. The sound is detailed and firm, with strong dynamics, and the articulation of the smallish orchestra (about 30 musicians appear to be involved) is first rate. ★★☆☆☆ **AG**

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

ANDY MILNE

Dreams And False Alarms

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Sonelines

Music: This is the solo debut from the US-based Canadian pianist, and with a title taken from a Joni Mitchell song it is no surprise to find two of the legendary singer-songwriter's tunes in the tracklist. Milne interprets several well-known songs including *Message In A Bottle*, *The Times They Are A Changin'* and *After The Goldrush*. Only three of these 11 pieces are originals, but they're definitely the more challenging. Teetering on the brink of atonality they have good rhythm but less obvious melody. However, this is worth it for the covers, some of which are inspired. ★★☆☆☆

Sound: Recorded in a recital hall you can easily hear the scale of the place on a good system, this is a solid, even recording with excellent resolution. ★★☆☆☆ **JK**



ARVO PÄRT BERLINER MESSE ETC

Noel Edison (cond), Elora Festival Singers & Orchestra

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

Naxos 6.110052

Music: Naxos has been adept at spinning themes into its Arvo Pärt disc programmes, and here the unifying theme is the St John's Passion, Pärt's largest scale work to date. No, it is not on this disc, but the ones that are (*Berliner Messe*, *De Profundis*, *Summa*, *The Beatitudes*, *Magnificat*) were composed just before and just after this period, and provides a good overview of his mature idiom. As the sleeve notes point out, a gradual expressive opening out and harmonic enrichment of the composer's musical vocabulary is apparent. ★★★★★

Sound: What makes this recording special is the broad richness of tonality, and as always its austerity. The singing is beautiful throughout, and the recording is little less than superb, the SACD layer adding a complexity and richness that is not accessible from the stereo CD layer. ★★☆☆☆ **AG**



EARTH, WIND AND FIRE

That's The Way Of The World

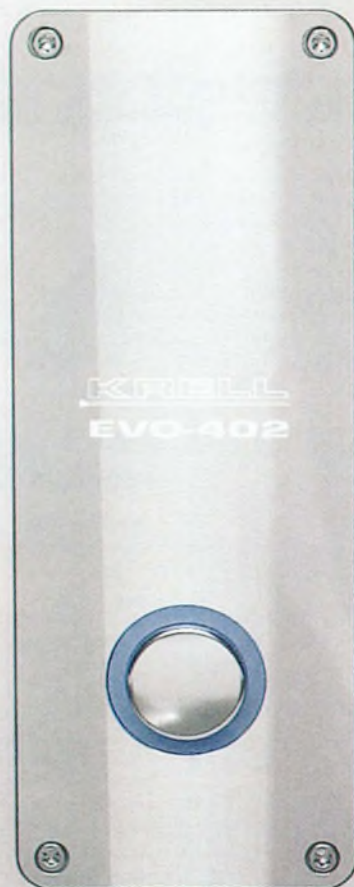
SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD)

MFSL

Music: One-time Chess records session drummer Maurice White formed his high-concept jazz-funk outfit in 1970 and took it to the pinnacle of artistic and commercial success in the mid 1970s. Having built a steady following through the first half of the decade, they broke big with this movie soundtrack (their second, after cult classic *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*). The film flopped, but the 1975 Grammy Award-winning *Shining Star*, the title track and show-stopping ballad *Reasons* propelled their smooth-sounding, but rhythmically complex and melodic soul funk, distinguished by Phil Bailey's soaring voice, to the top. The album went double platinum, and the group went on to superstardom with a string of peerless hits that segued into the disco explosion. ★★★★★

Sound: Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab makes a speciality of remastering key albums for hi-res, surround sound treatment and this is another top-notch transition. ★★★★★ **DO**





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.

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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 505



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The pick of this month's best letters

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



ACOUSTIC ROCK

In Malcolm Steward's column *School of Rock* (*Dispatches*, HFC 296) you ask the question "who needs classical to judge hi-fi properly?"

Well, I do. And a lot of other people do, too. Why? Not because classical music is 'superior' or supposedly less 'processed and manipulated', that is absolute nonsense, and I agree with Malcolm on that one. The real reason for me to judge hi-fi by the reproduction of classical music is that classical music is played on acoustic instruments. Not only classical, but also other music like traditional bluegrass, folk and 'unplugged' recordings are also equally suitable to judge hi-fi – just so long as it is acoustic.

Acoustic instruments are 'real world' instruments. If you know what an acoustic

instrument sounds like in real life, you can judge the way it is reproduced by your hi-fi system. Electronic instruments don't necessarily have that quality. Electronic instruments can produce whatever sound you like, so they don't have a 'fixed' sound of their own.

J A Boonstra via email

HFC While we agree that acoustic music is a fine arbiter of defining how a hi-fi performs, it's at best an academic standard if the bulk of your music happens to be electric. Someone who listens to nothing but, say, techno may build a system to best reproduce that musical genre, but in the process create a sound that's utterly dreadful for playing acoustic music. Is this 'wrong' and if so, should our notional

"Your cover has asked 'The World's Best?' about a new digital disc player."

techno-fan opt for a system that makes good acoustic sounds at the expense of techno?

BEST AIN'T GOOD ENOUGH

C'mon guys. For the fourth time in little over a year your front cover has proudly asked "The World's Best?" about a new digital disc player. It started with Meridian's 808, ended with the new Marantz, with the Krell and Classé players somewhere in the middle.

Why can't you, the manufacturers and/or the importers be brave enough to pit one against the other. Add in the Naim 555 if you like, or any other exotic devices. Play them through third-party amps of impeccable pedigree (Audio Research? Chord? McIntosh?) then pipe it all through some B&W 802Ds.

Plaster that lot on your front cover and you won't be able to print them fast enough.

What about it? I know we live in a politically correct world, but why not be bold for once? I look forward to it.

Steve Lawsontra via email



Above: Krell's Evolution 505 CD/SACD player

Letter of the month



O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?

If Thomas Rockwell thinks that managing a hi-fi system with his wife breathing down his neck is tough, try doing it with younger siblings. Every time I put on some music, it's never to their liking! I can't play their stuff all the time either, especially when I'm busy finishing my college work on top of taking care of them. The other day I was forced to play a Steps song... I can't buy them all iPod's. Do any of you guys have any other suggestions you can think of? My sanity is at stake!

Dan Brown via email

HFC We sympathise, but there's no simple solution. Whenever they get out of hand, why not give them 10 minutes on the naughty step with a portable CD player and a scratched, skipping disc of Napalm Death.

Make a chart of entertainment time and enforce it with an iron hand. Factor in rewards and punishments; sticking to the rules gets them an extra five minutes, while breaking them gets five minutes less. Remember the rules apply to you, too. Or, just get cheap CD portables and get used to the 'tzzz-tzzz-tzzz' sound.



WIN CRYSTAL CABLE PICCOLO INTERCONNECTS!
☎ 020 8971 3909 @WWW.CRYSTALCABLE.COM

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: Marantz SA-7S1 CD/SACD player



“Having auditioned this player, I was distinctly underwhelmed.”

❑ **HFC** It would be a fantastic idea, Steve. Unfortunately, such things prove impossible to sort in reality. Top-end hi-fi products are rare beasts – even getting two of the best under the same roof at the same time is unlikely. Then there's the thorny issue of defining 'impeccable pedigree' as regards the other components: no two manufacturers will ever agree. Perhaps more important still, there's an ethos running through the high-end of pretty much everything that says comparisons are odious. Which is why you are unlikely to see a group test pitting a Bugatti Veyron, Ferrari FXX and Pagani Zonda against each other, or one containing Patek Philippe, Vacheron Constantin and A. Lange & Söhne watches for that matter.

WADIA KNOW?

In the June issue (*HFC* 294) I saw the hatchet job done on Legato Link by Richard Black. It would be a bit more creditable if your magazine had not consistently waxed poetic on Wadia CD players. Wadia's Digimaster does almost the same job (reduced pre/post ringing but rolled-off upper frequencies with some excess ultrasonic noise) with the same pros and cons, but at a much higher price.

I recently bought the Pioneer PD 6 SACD/CD player to replace my aging but perfectly reliable Sony XB930E that got a 'Best Buy' in these pages long ago. It was the first CD player (on

filter setting 1 – similar to Legato Link) that I could listen for a long time without getting a headache. The Pioneer sounds better with the Legato Link on, and it sounded better than all the other CD players I compared it to, some of which costed more than twice the price.

I challenge Mr Black to compare the Pioneer to the Wadia and other very expensive CD players under double-blind conditions to see if he can even identify it as being a cheaper machine at all. And, why are you showing amplifier power out at clipping in volts, rather than watts during your group tests?

Dr. K. Fonseca via email

Richard Black replies:

"I'm glad Dr Fonseca is happy with his new purchase. I never doubted that some listeners must prefer the Legato Link setting, or why would Pioneer's designers have bothered? Personally, I've never reviewed a Wadia, so I can't comment on the company's products.

"As for voltage/wattage output, we quote figures in watts (into eight ohms) at the foot of each review as well as in volts in the summary page of each *Ultimate Group Test*. It's useful for those who want to estimate output into non-standard impedances."

OVERPRICED OVER HERE?

The Marantz SA-7S1 has no high-resolution

sound! Why would anyone want to buy this overpriced player, available for less than £3,000 in the US? The colour is not acceptable either – it should be in black or silver and I regret to note that *HFC* does not give any lab test results. Having auditioned this player, I was decidedly underwhelmed.

Greg Stanley via email

HFC We beg to differ on a number of counts. First, the player does have SACD replay (in stereo). As the bulk of the surviving interest in genuine audiophile SACD is stereo-only, this seems to be no big compromise. In value terms, currently the SA-7S1 is nearer to £3,500 in a direct exchange rate comparison. If you then add in the VAT, it comes in at over £4,100. Unfortunately, many products – from hi-fi to houses – are more expensive in the individual nations of the EU than in the US, so why single Marantz out here?

As to the colour scheme, a black and silver option would be nice, but surely it's how it sounds that counts, not how it blends into your colour scheme? *HFC* doesn't publish lab results, except for group tests and finally – although you didn't like the sound of the Marantz player – there are many SA-7S1 owners who would disagree with you. It's proving to be the high-end disc player of choice today... even if it leaves you cold.

Onlineforum

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



Equalisation is the most cost-effective way to get over room-limitations that colour the sound. Obviously you can't get brass out of muck. However, if you have blemished brass, which most systems are, then you can make it look like gold with a decent EQ system.

I think at least some hi-fi buffs are missing out on the benefits of equalisation due to outdated bias. Dare I say, hi-fi snootiness.

Nash

In the 60's Della Reece sang "if it feels good – do it" So, in my book I say "if it sounds good – do

it!" Too many snobs out there who are not really music lovers. I use an MF X-Tone to good effect, but it is only a tone control and nothing as sophisticated as EQing

Puffin

Equalization? Not for me, thanks! I set (tune) my system properly so I

get maximum performance from my investment. No room treatment is needed, just proper setting up of – mainly – the speakers... Then I just enjoy the music.

arthurk74

...A discerning hi-fi should show up a poor recording

with ease – if it does it proves it's transparent and that's one of the main points (in my opinion) with real hi-fi – also of course to play musically

Conversely, it's a real treat when one buys a CD and discovers a really good recording...

Filterlab

MEGALINE
EUPHONIA
HELICON
• MENTOR | 2
IKON
CONCEPT
SUBWOOFER

SOMETIMES GREAT SOUND
COMES IN SMALL PACKAGES

DALI MENTOR [2]

Hybrid tweeter module | 6.5" driver
Bi-wiring terminal | 39-34.000 Hz
H440 x W200 x D350 mm | 10.0 kg



"This is the first MENTOR speaker we've heard, and it's a stormer."

| What HiFi

"They deliver outstanding musical performance, and are remarkable for their dynamic agility, bottom-end weight and impact, grain-free reproduction of timbre, and, particularly, for their clarity and resolution."

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AUDIO AÉRO PRESTIGE CD/SACD PLAYER | ARTEMIS LABS LA-1 PREAMP
AUDIO AÉRO PRESTIGE POWER AMPLIFIERS | BC ACOUSTIQUE ACT A4 SPEAKERS | £27,990

The big issue

Mix the latest in audiophile high technology with the best in 1930's radio valves and the result is huge... in every sense

British understatement is a terrible thing sometimes. "It's a bit big," says the distributor. "The speakers are a little large," admits the photographer. "The crates are quite heavy," announces the courier. Truth is, the speaker boxes are coffin-sized and the crates weigh as much as a small car engine. Each To paraphrase scouse philosopher Jim Royale, "Quite heavy... my arse!"

The system was put together by the audio industry's main consumer of Lapsang Souchong tea and all-round tall guy, Ron Tabor of The Audiophile Club. Ron's height is important, because he drives a big car (for its headroom) and even that was stumped by the size of the system when packed up.

It's remarkable, when confronted by mighty valve monoblocks and loudspeakers that stand nearly two jockeys tall, the vast 15kg flight deck that is the Audio Aéro Prestige CD/SACD player seems almost miniscule by comparison. Of course, in reality it's one of the biggest players money can buy. Built around a centre-mounted Philips transport, encased within a thick aluminium shell and resting on a trio of Black Diamond Racing Pyramid Cones, this valve-sporting two-channel player can double up as a digital and analogue preamp, too. It includes a single-ended and XLR balanced pair of line inputs as well as BNC, coax and XLR balanced digital inputs, and ST and Toslink optical inputs. In other words, it's stacked. We'll come back to the French Audio Aéro, later.

HUNTING THE PREAMP GODDESS

Before we do, the Artemis Labs LA-1 from Pasadena in California squeezes into the preamp role. This deceptively basic, strangely dated-looking ('strangely' because it doesn't look dated, it just seems like it looks dated...

perhaps it's the graphics) line preamp has just five line inputs and two outputs. Named after the Greek maiden goddess of the hunt, Artemis Labs make just the one preamp, a high and low gain phono stage and two power amps, all of which are no stranger to sporting valves.

In the case of the LA-1 preamp, it features a 5687 double triode tube per channel in what Artemis calls 'Cool-Swap' configuration. This means each side only uses one part of each double-triode valve and when they begin to fail, swapping the valves from one side to the other doubles the life of the valves. This also means they run half as hot as usual, extending their working life further still.

The exposed valves sit mid way along the chassis, hidden from view in a trench. The LA-1 also uses a 24-position stepped attenuator for a volume control, just 4dB of feedback and choke loading, all of which is the audiophile preamp equivalent of Angelina Jolie in a bikini made of dental floss and baby oil. Pure audiophile porn.

FRENCH PRESTIGE

We return to Audio Aéro again for the power amplification. And once more we are at the top of the French company's tree. The Prestige monoblocks are giant single-ended triode valve amps. Most SET designs churn out a measly handful of watts; the Prestige pumps out a healthy 40 watts per size. This is because each side uses a giant 211/VT-4C triode and a scary high voltage 813 pentode (both from the golden age of valve radio transmitters). A couple of 6SN7EH units complete the valve complement and all four are sat in a steel slat cage. Good thing too; that push-on top connector on the 813 has nigh on 500 volts running through it. The amp's not new, but is the stuff of legend to all who hear it. ☑

"Ron's height is important, because he drives a big car (for its headroom) and even that was stumped by the size of the system when packed up."



Audio Aéro Prestige CD/SACD player

£7,950

Futuristic-looking disc spinner that really does sound as good as it looks.



Artemis Labs LA-1 preamp

£2,195

Beautifully made valve line preamp with slightly dated look but state-of-the-art performance. A cult classic for valve-loving audiophiles.



Audio Aéro Prestige mono amplifiers

£12,995 per pair

With 40 of the smoothest, most unobtrusive watts around, these are a slice of hi-fi heaven.



BC Acoustique ACT A4 speakers

£4,850 per pair

Tall, mightily efficient speakers that are great for big rooms and valve amps.



One of Audio Aéro's key features on these stunning monoblocks is the company's TRAC system. Short for 'Tube Relay Amplification Concept', TRAC means the amplifier has all the driving force of pentodes with all the smoothness of single-ended triodes. Like the CD/SACD player, each 30kg monoblock sits on three Black Diamond Racing Pyramid cones and, as most of that weight comes from the transformers at the rear, it bodes well for producing a good, deep bass sound.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

Staying with the Gallic charm, BC Acoustique's ACT speaker range is no stranger to *Hi-Fi Choice*. The company picked up a 'Best Buy' in an *Ultimate Group Test* back in September 2004 (HFC 257) for its ACT A1 floorstander. We weren't prepared for the audiophile onslaught that is the ACT A4, however. Top of the BC Acoustique line, this tall, slim and deep loudspeaker is claimed to reach right down to 25Hz and right up to 50kHz. Armed as it is with BC Acoustique's own BC100 horn tweeter, a pair of 180mm midrange units and a side-firing 300mm bass unit, all housed in a 40mm-thick MDF cabinet and standing more than 130cm tall, it's little wonder the speaker is delivered to

achieve such an extended frequency response. The downside to the big MDF box is the weight; you are looking at 80kg of loudspeaker-builder's art.

BC Acoustique is rare among high-end speaker makers in that it allows some tailoring of the tweeter's output, with little jumper pins on each speaker to set the high frequency in line with the room size and reverb. Whatever setting you select, it does not change the efficiency of the speakers, which is a ruthless 94dB (ruthless efficiency? Bring on the soft cushions, Cardinal Biggles).

Big speakers and even specs mean you need a huge space to give them breathing room, although if you point the bass drivers at one another, the room requirements get a smidgeon smaller. Bed-sit owners need not apply.

SUFFER FOR YOUR ART

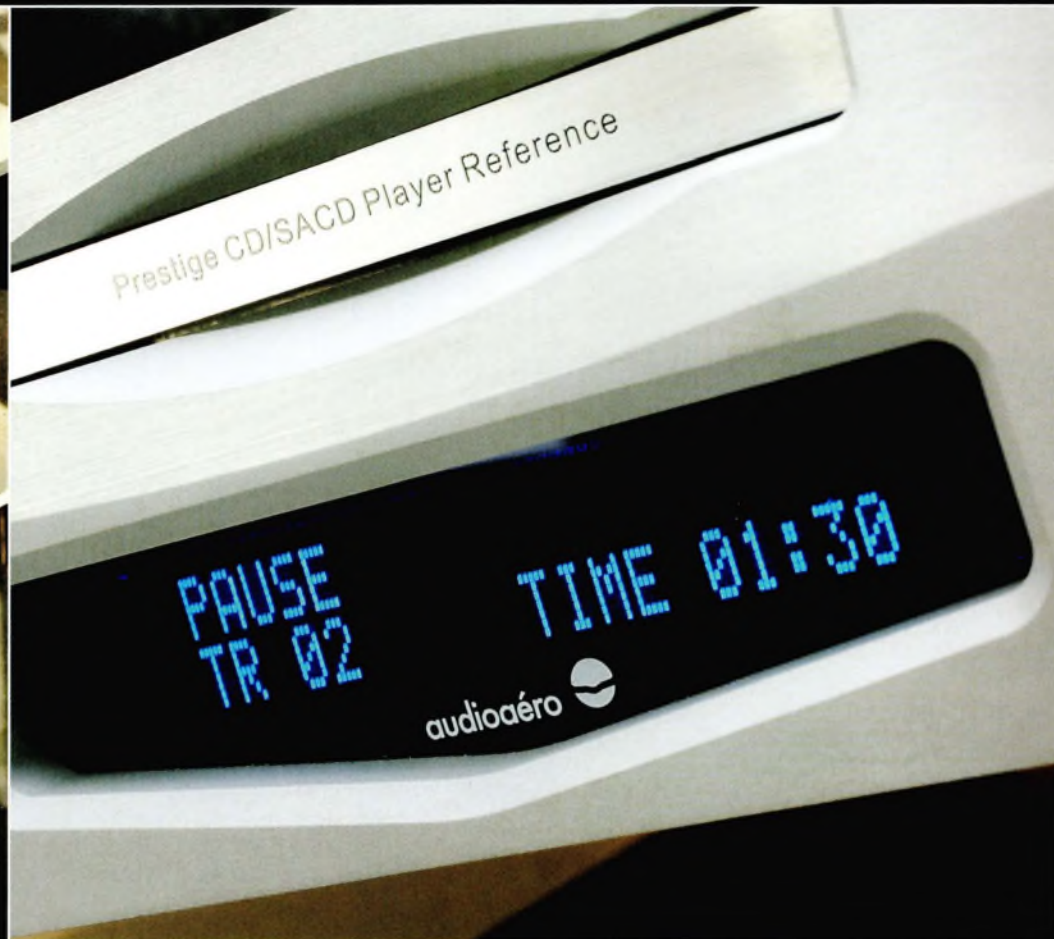
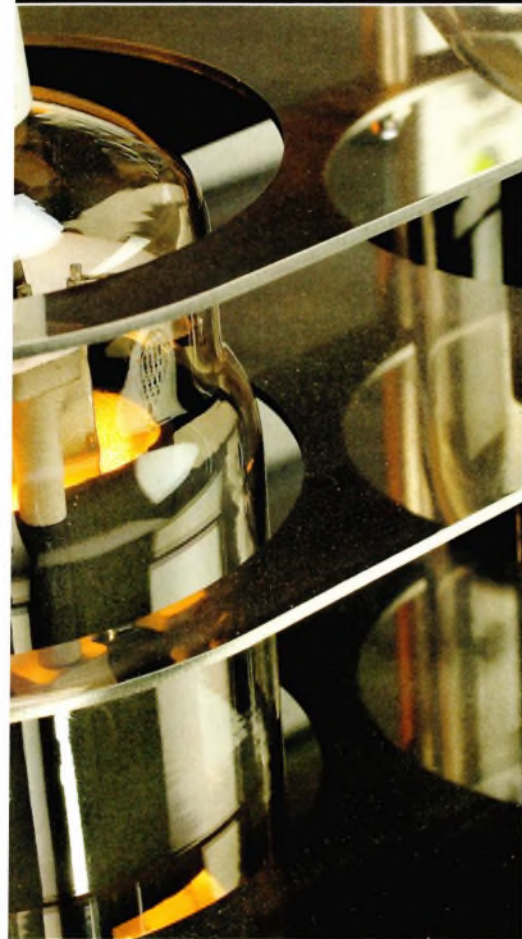
There are more convenient systems. Those ones that are less of a pain to move, unpack or set-up. Or those systems that don't turn your living room into a sauna and make your 'leccy bill read like Paris Hilton's Amex statement. There are even products that have a better level of fit and finish than the Audio Aéro/Artemis/BC Acoustique line-up. Who cares? Those systems miss out on what this offers.

So, what exactly does it offer? Well, there's a sense of 'thereness' that's uncanny and not that far removed from the sort of sound made by that long-standing audiophile super-reference point, the Audio Note Ongaku. It must have something to do with the ultra minimalism of the amplifier stages (just half a valve in the preamp and four in the power amp), or maybe the magic kicks in whenever you get power valves that are about the size of a small marrow. Whatever it is, this system has 'thereness' in spades.

'Thereness' is easy to define, and yet somehow impossible to explain cogently. Go someplace where (preferably unamplified) live music is taking place and listen. Then go back to your normal hi-fi system and play something similar. Feel the disappointment? Now, do the same on this system and you'll feel more like you are 'there' at the live event. You'll also feel the disappointment lift.

Nope, it doesn't vanish entirely; this is a hi-fi system, not a TARDIS. But therein lies the real joy of this kit. The next big upgrade on this system isn't a new disc player or bigger speakers... it's a time machine. To get a considerably better replay of the Count Basie orchestra in full swing involves nipping back to the 1950s and sitting in on a recording.





“The individual components are all of the absolute first water and they all contribute to a sound so utterly right, you’d be forgiven for thinking someone slipped LSD in your Horlicks.”

The live event keeps getting mentioned here, because this system is remarkably good at reproducing all those subtle cues that make us distinguish the live gig from a recording. If you take this to mean that studio cuts are somehow lacking, think again. This makes a studio recording sound like you are listening in from the comfort of the engineer’s chair. It’s like all the artificial intermediaries between you and the music get cast aside. This is very different from the civilised, huge PA sound or the genteel musical refinement programme that seems common to most audiophile kit.

BIG AND BAD

The speakers are handy in a fight. First, there’s the tweeter tailoring. We tried it at a number of levels before settling on the best sitting in the room, and can confirm it’s a gentle change and has no deleterious sonic effects when switching from level to level.

Then there’s the side-firing bass units. Point them inwards if you listen from

within a typical British living room, point them outwards if you have more than a metre either side of the speakers and two or three metres between them and at least the same between them and you.

For all their size, these speakers don’t sound big and slow; they sound big and fast, with bass that kicks in powerfully, but only when required. It’s probably too bright for solid-state electronics, but the ACT-A4 takes to valves like Pete Doherty takes to recreational pharmaceuticals.

THE ACID TEST

Ultimately, it’s pointless to single out an individual component in this system. They are all of the absolute first water and they all contribute to a sound so utterly right, you’d be forgiven for thinking someone slipped LSD in your Horlicks. If you were either to substitute one of these products in another system – or replace one of these products in this system – you’d quickly see how good every part is. So don’t bother looking for weak links; there aren’t any.

If you were to sit in front of this system for 30 seconds, you’d be wowed by the dynamics. That’s the immediate rush out of the way. After that, the long-term listening shows there’s much, much more than just top-notch dynamics. It has the grace and charm to make the system come to life whatever you plonk in the player. It has the sort of 3D imaging that seems so natural that if you were to play a recording made at a festival, you’ll be able to smell the veggie burgers. It has the detail that will allow Clapton obsessives to spot that he changed to a heavier gauge of strings for a particular solo. And yet, for all this, the whole system remains fundamentally musical.

It’s hard not to be impressed at each new round of *Beautiful Systems*. Each one different from the last, but each one capable of delivering so much good sound. And yet, even among such lofty peers, some systems shine as being a notch above the rest. This is one such system. The only word is ‘wow!’ **HFC**

Alan Sircom





P S A U D I O

Come and meet Paul McGowan - designer of the PS Audio Power Plant.

Endeavour Room - London Sound and Vision Show. Park Inn Heathrow 21 - 23 September 2007.



Rack mount version shown (standard version without side cheeks)



POWER PLANT PREMIER

AC Power Regenerator

Everything you hear and see through your Hi-Fi or Home Cinema system begins its journey at the wall socket. AC Mains quality can and does impact the audio performance of your system.

PS Audio is a recognised leader in power quality and power protection products. If you want to protect the investment in your system, and enjoy a dramatic improvement in your existing components at the same time, try the new **Power Plant Premier**.

The **Power Plant Premier** is the world's only true AC regenerator that offers the full power of the wall, low distortion even with difficult loads, **MultiWave**, **CleanWave**, remote control, true surge protection, front panel harmonic power analyzer, AC volt meter, and outstanding AC isolation. All this for just £1,799 represents unbeatable value.

The Premier Power Plant is now available in the UK with US and UK plug outlets. Please call for more information.

Digital Link III DAC £799



"The Crowning Jewel... is the Digital Link III."
Absolute Sound, March 2007

GCHA Headphone Amplifier £799



"Brilliant. Loads of power and detail."
ImageXperience, March 2007

GCPH Phono Stage £799



"The Reference Phono."
"The PS Audio is an outstanding design. It gets more from LP than anything I've heard to date."
Christopher Breunig, Hi-Fi News
May 2007 (Score: 20 / 20)

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REVIEWS

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



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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

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

VERDICT

SOUND 83%

FEATURES 85%

BUILD 85%

VALUE 85%

OVERALL SCORE 84%

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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



Big Red

Chord's awesome Red Reference CD player resets the bar for CD sound quality

PRODUCT Chord Red Reference CD

TYPE CD player

PRICE £13,345

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 42x14x32.5cm

⊕ Weight: 14kg ⊕ Analogue outputs: two RCA phono, two balanced XLR, two AES balanced XLR ⊕ Digital outputs: BNC coaxial, optical (TOSLINK) ⊕ Sample frequencies: 32 to 176.4 kHz

CONTACT ☎ 01622 721444

🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

Few modern hi-fi components create an impact that reverberates around the globe, but in 2001, a compact yet satisfyingly weighty lozenge of aluminum finished with an attractively ribbed top and bubble glass porthole that was softly backlit to show off the circuitry within, did just that. All the more remarkably, it was a stand-alone DAC – the kind of product hitherto confined to the unglamorous backwaters of the accessory market.

The DAC64, as it was called, changed all that. Made by Kent-based British high-end specialist Chord Electronics, it combined in an entirely unprecedented way, killer aesthetics, innovative 64-bit conversion and filter technologies, plus the sublime build quality for which Chord had already carved itself a much-envied reputation with its amplifiers. It made add-on DACs sexy and, more importantly, offered the opportunity for owners of aging, mid-market CD players to experience true high-end sound quality.

When Chord produced the dedicated Blu transport a few years later, many felt that the combo raised the bar for digital replay to new heights. In any case, the DAC64 and Blu now form the cornerstone of the entry-level Choral range. Back then, if you wanted to build a full-fat, no-holds-barred Chord-based system (quite something if you're into XXL statement hardware) it had to be fronted by the dinky duo. The end result of this approach, while undoubtedly intriguing, formed a pretty spectacular visual mismatch to say the least.

What Chord's customers were crying out for, understandably, was a 'Big Daddy' CD spinner – something that combined the technical and sonic excellence of the Blu/DAC64 in one full-size and memorably impressive chassis. A player, moreover, that

would score a very definite line in the sand for Red Book standard digital replay. In other words, Chord's best game, with cost more or less no object. The best CD player ever? That's the general idea and given Chord's customary confidence in these matters, it's interesting to note that the word "probably" doesn't get a

that's an inadequate description. It feels rigid enough for a police hit squad to use it as battering ram to attack the front doors of slumbering villains. And, believe me, the doors would come off worse. Naturally, this makes it an ideal support structure for the CD mechanism beneath that distinctive and

“Unmistakably a design from the house of Chord, the Red Reference is a stunningly solid and exquisitely finished piece of work.”

look in. So here it is, the Red Reference CD, Chord's unique take on state of the (digital) art. In essence, it marries enhanced elements of the Blu transport with a supercharged version of the DAC64 to, in the company's own, rather dry, words, “give the most accurate reproduction of CD that can be obtained”. Talking to Chord's managing director, John Franks, while he's in a more candid mood, it's clear that were the statement directed at the likes of Naim or Krell, or anyone else with designs on owning the coveted “World's Best” tag, it would be rather more concise. To wit, “Eat this”.

Unmistakably a design from the house of Chord, the Red Reference is a stunningly solid and exquisitely finished piece of work. Apart from the signature bubble glass porthole, the casework is manufactured entirely from solid aluminium and feels immensely rigid. Perhaps

sturdy clamshell clamp that's reminiscent of the Blu's.

And here's the really neat bit (on paper, at least). Uniquely, the area allocated to the CD mechanism cuts back into otherwise four-square-with-pillars casework at 45 degrees, the idea being to allow front access to what would otherwise be a top-loading mechanism, even if the player is placed on the shelf of a rack. This seems thoughtful. An equally nice touch is the solenoid controlled fluid-damped door, a simply beautiful piece of precision engineering completely worthy of the asking price. The trouble begins – and we might as well get this gripe out of the way now – when you go to place a CD in the transport or, indeed, remove it. There just doesn't seem to be an elegant way to perform either task thanks to the absence of any appreciable finger room around the disc.



Q&A

John Franks, managing director of Chord Electronics, discusses why the time is still right for a reference-grade CD player.



HFC Why a CD player and not SACD?

JF I decided during the development of our Blu original CD transport that the original Red Book standard formats were the right ones to back. I've travelled around the world and taken a straw poll of the largest record and CD stores in all the major cities I've visited. Fortunately, the managers of these stores were happy to answer a few questions about what is selling now and what is likely to be selling in the coming years. All replied that CD is outselling any other format by a considerable margin. Usually about 200:1 and this can be clearly illustrated by the racks in the store. If for instance you wanted a piece of music such as Debussy or Ravel or Chopin, you could have your choice of a whole rack in standard CD, or one or two SACDs by an unknown artist or orchestra, often Japanese. For me, the choice was obvious.

How much better than the DAC64 is the DAC in the Red Reference?

The electronics within the DAC64 and the DAC in the Red Reference is primarily held within four large-scale, field-programmable gate array chips. The internal circuit design algorithms for the digital taps and flow-paths have undergone significant improvements from earlier DAC64s. These were good from the outset and are now performing unbelievably well. With the Red Reference, we have increased the tap lengths by a factor of four. It is rather like having a PC with updated software.

Why did you choose to angle the CD transport?

We use the excellent Philips Pro2 mechanism which can operate on the rotational axis of 360 degrees from the horizontal because the shaft of the laser head positioning is still parallel to the floor if the mech is tilted through the other axis – i.e. left to right – it would not work, so technically there is no problem, the unit would work upside down if needed. In terms of design styling I chose 45 degrees because it's easy to see the disk and additionally no one else had done it like that and I like original design rather than borrowing from the conventional.



It's just plain fiddly and, after a while, makes you long for a slide-out drawer.

Thankfully, it's the only real ergonomic foible and, in all other respects, the Red Reference is a delight to use. The front panel design incorporates ball-bearing push buttons for the commonly used functions and a dual display showing CD status on one side and input, buffer and frequency information on the other. At the rear, connections are made via gold-plated phono or BNC coax, plastic optical fibre, or balanced XLR-style connections.

The transport is a Philips CD Pro 2 powered by a switch-mode power supply that has its own AC filter. It's re-clocked using what Chord calls "a highly accurate crystal oscillator" before the data is fed to the upsampling and filtering electronics. This is where the Red Reference begins to show some serious

processing muscle. The latest evolution of the Watts Time Alignment (WTA) filter, which has a 4096 tap length, is used to put the squeeze on transient timing errors – something Franks reckons we humans have evolved to become especially sensitive to – and reconstruct the digital data to either 44.1, 88.2 or 176.4KHz (the default setting) sampling frequencies.

The digital signal is converted from 176.4KHz to analogue audio using 1024 tap filtering and a 64-bit digital signal processing core. This is followed by 64-bit seventh order noise shaping, 2048 times oversampling rates and improved pulse width modulated elements. The upshot, according to Chord, is unprecedented low level detail resolution.

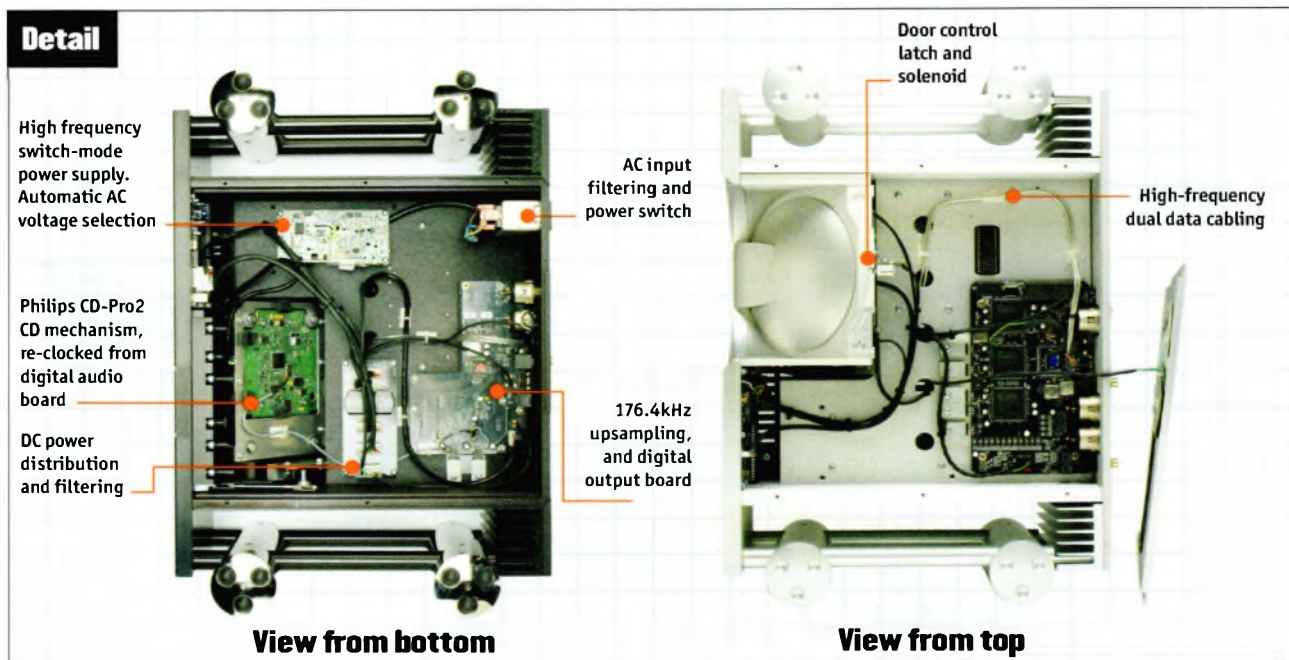
The DAC also features selectable RAM buffer technology that sequentially takes in all the data, re-times it and then sends it out giving jitter-free operation. Digital data from other sources can also be fed into the

Red via the optical or AES balanced XLR connections. But Chord know that today's cutting-edge is tomorrow's blunt instrument.

The Red Reference uses Field Programmable Gate Arrays that can be reprogrammed by simply changing the EPROM memory chip. Future-proofing is thus assured, as is flexibility. The

provision of digital inputs and outputs means the Red Reference can be both a CD transport and a DAC for other components.





SOUND QUALITY

We were fortunate enough to be given the luxury of testing the Red Reference over an extended period of several weeks. During that time, it was slotted into a couple of visiting *Beautiful Systems*, as well as performing front-end duties in this reviewer's regular reference set-up, partnering a Musical Fidelity kW500 integrated amp and Monitor Audio GS20 speakers. The results were as consistent as they were extraordinary. In the case of the *Beautiful Systems* – with electronics from Leema and Ayre respectively, both of which tote highly regarded "giant killing" CD players – the Red Reference effect was far from subtle. And it wasn't what we were expecting. Both the Leema Atila and Ayre are wonderfully grown up-sounding CD players – clean, smooth, detailed and effortlessly musical with a generous dose of the analogue-like warmth that has become a hallmark of high-end digital replay. Yet, returning to them after listening to the Chord, each sounded curiously dull and listless, as if the lifeblood and vitality had been sapped from the music.

In fact, it didn't matter which system the Red Reference was plumbed into, its contribution was always the same: not necessarily a big improvement in refinement and smoothness, but a huge leap in the sense of space, physicality, energy, drive, dynamics and 'life'. Systems simply sounded more powerful and authoritative with the Chord in situ, as if a more muscular, transparent and expensive amp had been drafted into the mix, as well as the superior source. And here's the most remarkable thing. The Red Reference, unlike some five-figure CD spinners, doesn't try to sound as if it possesses the more superficial attractions of an expensive turntable: the silky, finely textured top-end, and an alluringly

"It puts forward the case for CD like little else we've heard – perhaps, for the first time, as a sonic equal in the things that really matter."

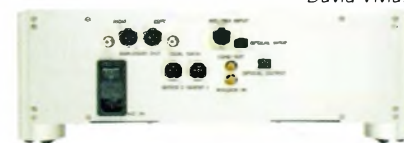
organic character. There is no obvious 'analogue flavouring'. Rather, it puts forward the case for CD like little else we've ever heard – perhaps, for the first time, as a sonic equal in the things that really matter such as the sense of 'performance', and the feeling of 'being there'.

Drum kits, for example, assume a palpable presence in the listening room, taking on a startling power and intelligibility. Bass instruments are presented in a new light too, displaying hitherto unsuspected layers of subtlety and harmonic shading that elevates their usual underpinning role, too often blandly executed, to that of a major contribution. The frankly amazing resolving power of the Chord has huge benefits in conveying the character of the performance space as well as the performers – not just the subtle reverberations and reflections, but, you'd swear, the localised fluctuations in air pressure. If the best hi-fi is about the suspension of disbelief, the Red Reference's attention to this particular detail is second to none.

The Red Reference's intoxicating sense of energy and musical conviction is, understandably, most compelling with exceptional recordings – Elvis Costello's version of *Edith* and *The Kingpin* from the album *A Tribute To Joni Mitchell* is especially scalp-prickling – but, to varying degrees, the Red Reference seems to raise the game of any CD regardless of the style of music and production values. No, it doesn't sound like

a turntable. In truth, it doesn't sound like any other CD player in our experience, either. It simply gets you closer to the music. Hot-breath-down-collared close, in fact. In this respect alone, the Red Reference, it seems to us, is worth every penny of its considerable asking price. The stunning design and bullet-proof build complete the seduction, but it's the sound we really fell in love with. We were blown away by it, but you've probably guessed that already. **HFC**

David Vivian



VERDICT

SOUND >>> 97%



FEATURES >>> 92%



BUILD >>> 97%



VALUE >>> 80%



PRO

A true *tour de force* in design, technology, engineering, build and sound quality. Brings an unprecedented degree of life, and vitality to CD replay. Plays to CD's strengths rather than mimicking turntable sound.

CON

Angled transport mechanism makes removing CDs fiddly, and it's hard not to finger the playing side. Very expensive.

CONCLUSION

A stunning statement CD player where the statement appears to be that Red Book CD isn't just alive and well, but able to hold its head high in the battle of formats – vinyl included. An extraordinary achievement and achingly desirable.

HI-FI CHOICE >>> **92%**
OVERALL SCORE



EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Hybrid fidelity

Newcomer Abbingdon Music Research has a refreshing take on the integrated amplifier

PRODUCT AMR AM-77

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £4,399

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 46x16x47cm

• Weight: 41kg • Inputs: 5x RCA, 1x balanced XLR

• Motion-sensitive remote • 'Class X' architecture

• Output power: 180 watts per channel (8 ohms)

CONTACT ☎ 0870 909 6777 🌐 www.amr-audio.co.uk

You wouldn't guess from looking at AMR's products that the company was started by a bunch of guys who were smitten by the sound of single-ended triode amplifiers, specifically those running 300B output valves. There are two valves on the AM-77 amplifier, but they're a far cry from those that inform the company's sonic ethos. This is, therefore, a real-world company that understands you're never going to be able to start a serious

business building amplifiers which have single-figure power outputs and radiate more heat than some electric fires.

AMR stands for Abbingdon Music Research, a name chosen because Abingdon (with one 'b') is where the British Motor Corporation took the humble Mini and turned it into a rally car that took on and beat the world; an inspirational name indeed. The company isn't actually based in Abingdon; rather, its HQ is sited in London, while its manufacturing facility is located in China. Among its founders is occasional internet reviewer and hi-fi nut extraordinaire Thorsten Loesch, a man renowned for his knowledge of valve amplifiers and the guy who persuaded Stevens & Billington to build the Music First passive preamplifier with a transformer volume control (TVC).

To date, AMR has produced a CD player (reviewed in this year's high-end special edition *The Collection*, on sale now) and an amplifier, and the company is in the process of finalising a loudspeaker to match – its aluminium casework meaning it'll match more literally than usual. The AM-77 is a hybrid design using a valve gain stage (NOS 5687) to control a bi-polar output stage that runs in Class A and is specified as delivering 180 watts. This is the Fair Trade Commission (FTC) power rating, which is said to equate to the commonly quoted RMS spec used by most companies, but AMR also supplies an IHF peak rating of 270 watts to indicate the model's capabilities with a dynamic signal such as music. The 180-watt figure applies whether the load is eight or four ohms, which will reveal to aficionados how



“It handles speed and dynamics without any edginess or glare to such an extent that one is left in no doubt about the valve factor.”

similar this is to a valve amplifier; it operates just like a valve circuit, according to Loesch, but doesn't need an output transformer. AMR calls the whole circuit 'Class X', because it's neither pure Class A, nor AB throughout.

For an aspirational integrated amplifier, the AM-77 is unusually highly featured – for instance, it has both regular binding post and Speakon speaker cable terminals, plus both USB and mini-jack sockets on the side of the front panel. Around the back are some mysterious switches marked 'mode' for which the manual must be consulted. These are included so you can bi-amp or bridge with more than one AM-77, or use it as solely as a power amp. The final mystery switch is marked 'hi-fi/pro' and affects the way the XLR inputs are set up. With all hi-fi equipment and most pro equipment, the 'hi-fi' position is fine, but when you have a true floating transformer balanced output, you need to switch to the 'pro' position, because this requires a different connection.

Build quality appears to be exemplary, far

higher than we've seen with Chinese-built kit so far – probably because most of the components are sourced elsewhere. The mains transformer, for instance, is an enormous double C-core type that's hand-wound using grain-oriented silicon steel; this accounts for maybe 40 per cent of the mass. The existence of choke-regulation transformers explains another 10 per cent, and the rest is more or less accounted for by the 6mm-thick aluminium case and copper inner case. There are PCBs in there too – quite a few of them, in fact – as our internal shot overleaf shows, and they have rounded corners to diffuse any resonance that manages to get that far.

With the model featuring touch-sensitive front buttons and a motion-sensitive remote handset, AMR seems to have thought of everything – even the RCA phono sockets are extremely high-quality. And we haven't even mentioned the chunky mains lead, high-quality interconnect (matching the internal wiring), flight case and two free CDs. A couple of other

useful features are 27 input options, including Home Theatre Direct, which has unity gain, and a +/- 6dB gain offset, so that different sources can be level-matched.

SOUND QUALITY

The AM-77 does indeed possess many of the attributes one would associate with a valve amplifier; and the music it produces certainly has that vitality and energy which only glass audio can deliver. It handles speed and dynamics without any edginess or glare, to such an extent that one is left in no doubt about the valve factor. However, it also does something that valve amps can't unless they're partnered with a substantial, high-sensitivity loudspeaker: it delivers power. The AM-77 can drive a pair of B&W 802Ds to truly entertaining levels, and do it across the full bandwidth without bending the response too obviously. In other words, that 180-watt figure is borne out in practice. The 802D isn't the easiest load – its impedance drops to 3.5 ohms and it has some nasty phase angles – yet the AM-77 can induce it to deliver some fabulously strong and timely bass lines. Those produced by Robbie Shakespeare for Grace Jones' finest works, for instance, are delivered with a tunefulness and articulation rarely enjoyed outside of the studio.

A pure solid-state 180-watt amplifier ▶

Q&A

We talked to AMR's director of technology, Thorsten Loesch, about the AM-77.



HFC Why is this heavyweight an integrated design?

TL Multiple boxes represent significant inconveniences in setting up; also, with every additional box you've got an additional cable, an additional junction point where you have to manage impedances. Then there's always the temptation for someone to take apart a system that's designed together and stick something else in, and that may be a very bad match.

Why does it weigh so much?

Because it has to. In order to control resonances to a degree that they can no longer materially influence the components that are microphonically sensitive, be it tubes or capacitors, you need to have a level of rigidity that's quite extreme. Rigidity automatically means thick panels and, unfortunately, weight.

Given your involvement with the transformer volume control (TVC), it's surprising that the amp doesn't have one of these. Why is that?

The TVC was meant as a solution for the passive preamp in a standalone device and in more complex systems. Here we wouldn't be drawing much benefit from using a TVC, because we don't need low impedance in the output of our preamp section. And we don't need the insulation either. So all the things that the transformer does in a separate preamp are much less of a benefit once you build them in.

How would you describe the volume system you do use?

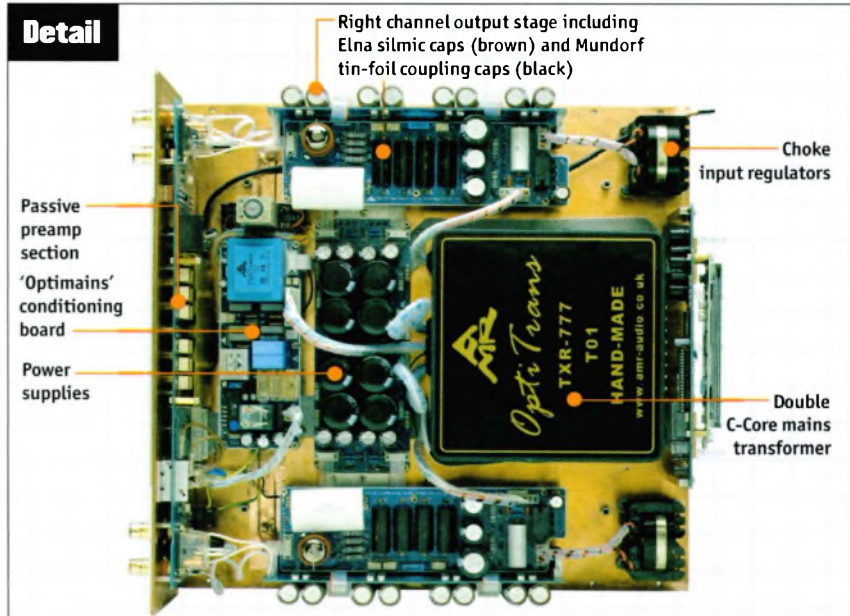
We use a resistor matrix which gives us 72 steps of 1dB and uses the minimum number of relay contacts and resistors to achieve that. On average, we've got between three resistors and one contact for normal volume settings and up to two contacts and five resistors for very low settings.

What benefits do the valves bring to this amplifier?

We've always found that valves have something I don't think anybody has yet been able to identify that gives a sound quality that most people find relaxing, interesting. It just sounds better empirically; we have built circuits that attempted to produce the same THD spectrums as valves, but they then sound nothing like them.

Maybe you do have to run electrons through a vacuum – I don't know

Detail



Right channel output stage including Elna silmic caps (brown) and Mundorf tin-foil coupling caps (black)
Choke input regulators
Passive preamp section
'Optimains' conditioning board
Power supplies
Double C-Core mains transformer

can produce a weightier sound than this model, and if it's a good one, it might be able to do the rhythm and timing bit too, but only the best can deliver the timbre of each note along with it. The AM-77 isn't designed to be a powerhouse; it's designed to give as much valve sound quality as its makers can achieve within the context of useful power output, and it does a superb job of judging this balance.

It's only when you try to use the AM-77 in PA mode that its limitations become apparent; there's a degree of forwardness in the midrange that also relates to the valve factor. So while it's perhaps not the best high-end choice for the Metallica fan, it would suit the Led Zeppelin enthusiast who owns reasonably efficient speakers and has a love of spacious soundstages. The degree to which this spaciousness manifests itself depends on the source and recording, but if there's acoustic space in the signal, the AM-77 will be sure to make the most of it. Led Zep's *How The West Was Won* demonstrates this to full effect, with tremendous 'being there' atmosphere which, when combined with the dynamic capabilities of the amp, makes for an inspiring sound.

Timing is also a strong point, thanks to tremendous speed that means notes stop and start with pinpoint precision, be they high, mid or low-frequency. This is why the bass lines are so remarkably nimble and why all forms of music have a life force that's often obscured. It'll be interesting to hear the AM-77 partnered

with AMR's ribbon-tweeter-equipped speakers when they're finished – usually such drive units bring a finesse to the treble which domes struggle to emulate, and this would smooth the amp's balance when played hard. Some recordings can get a little uncomfortable at high levels, but this does come back to AMR's tenet that this isn't supposed to be a powerhouse. It's just that the sound is so enticing, one can't help but wind it up. We guess that's why there are a variety of ways to use two AM-77s – a tasty prospect.

As it stands, this is a very exciting amplifier from a company that leaves no stone unturned in its quest for sonic revelation. Furthermore, AMR has managed to reconcile this quest with designing a well-thought-out product that should work well with a range of speakers – something that's much rarer indeed. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 93%

PRO

Offers a dynamic and revealing sound with decent power reserves, high build quality, input labelling and gain adjust, and decent ancillaries.

FEATURES >> 90%

BUILD >> 92%

CON
It's inconveniently heavy, there's no preamp output and volume change is slow – a rotary control would have been nicer to use.

VALUE >> 88%

CONCLUSION

AMR is a company with capability and vision and this shows in the design and performance of the AM-77 – it's a thrilling amplifier that brings you the dynamics of valves with the power of transistors in a substantial but well-featured design.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%



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

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

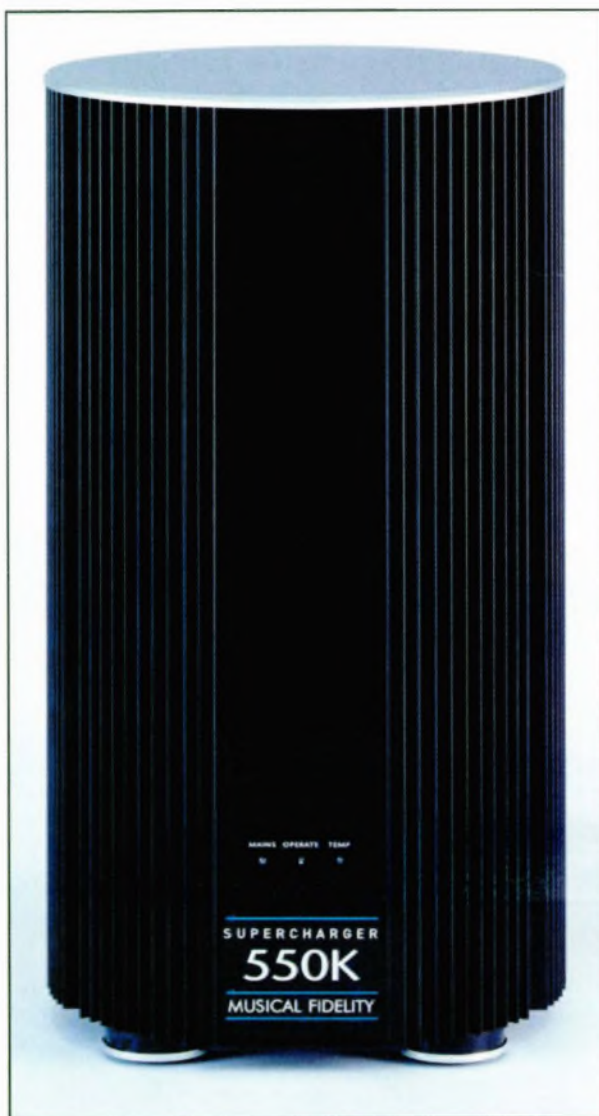
Used in a system with an amp rated between 50 and 200 watts, it will increase its power to 550 watts, and improve the system almost beyond recognition.

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

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

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

Visit musicalfidelity.com to find out more about the 550K Supercharger, or contact your audio dealer for an audition.



MUSICAL FIDELITY

Hearing is believing.



Danish beauty

Impressive reworking of DALI compact classic

PRODUCT DALI Helicon 300 Mk2

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £2,100 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 21x43.5x40.2cm

• Weight: 10.5kg • 10x50mm ribbon tweeter

• 25mm silk dome tweeter • 165mm pulp cone

bass/mid driver • Sensitivity: 86dB • Impedance:

four ohms (nominal)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 644 3537 @ www.dali-uk.co.uk

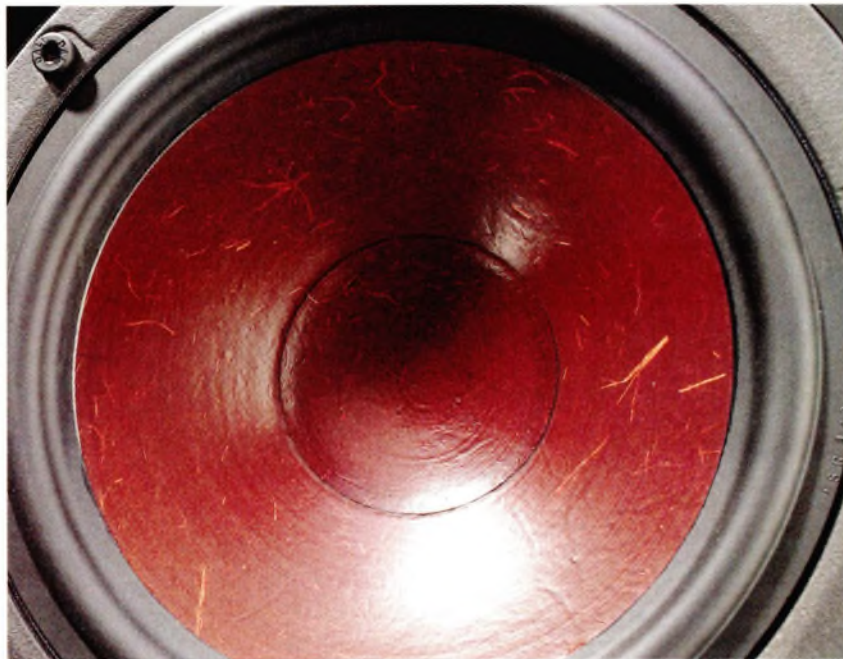
There are no longer many really important pan-European loudspeaker brands, but of the handful that there are left, Danish specialist DALI is one of the most significant, with an enormous range of models covering a wide range of prices.

This model is from the second generation Helicon range, one of the more upmarket DALI ranges, which has been re-engineered and subtly re-voiced from its immediate predecessor, the Mk1 Helicon, and leavened with technology from the go-for-broke Euphonia series. There have been further developments to some of the drive units, the crossover and enclosures have been changed, and the impressive-looking terminals on the rear panel are all-new.

The Helicon 300 Mk2 is a two-way design, similar in size and intent to the original Mk1. Of the various models in the new Helicon Mk2 range the 300 is, according to DALI, the most versatile, being voiced to suit small and largish rooms alike, more so than its direct counterpart in the Mk1 Helicon range.

Changes specified for the Mk2 300 did not need to be too extensive as the design had already achieved considerable success, but there has been a carefully considered range of improvements with some functional, the others cosmetic. The enclosure is made from a dual-layer sandwich construction of wood-veneered MDF, with resonance-damping glue between the layers, and the baffle has been changed to black, with a deep piano gloss finish. Another key visible change is the new bi-wire terminal, which is a proprietary design that holds the cable more tightly than before.

The two-way hybrid tweeter design features a time-aligned combination of a 25mm coated silk dome tweeter with a 10x50mm ribbon. The unit gives an unusually extended response and



“Overall balance is impressive. The midband is especially clean and vivid, and the mid to treble balance unusually well judged.”

a broader than usual dispersion. The bass driver remains a small-ish unit, with a stiff, lightweight paper pulp cone with a coated surface treatment. A second magnet has been added, which provides a degree of – but not complete – magnetic shielding. Other changes include a new softer rubber surround, and a new impregnated linen spider, in both cases optimised for longer excursions and therefore higher maximum SPLs. The changes result in a somewhat better, more precisely controlled bass, though still with a touch of the bloom that characterised the original model.

The Helicon 300 Mk2 was supplied for test with a pair of purpose-designed pedestal stands, the Helicon 300 Stand (£799), which is an extremely heavy unit, finished in the same way as the loudspeaker itself, offset here with a black-painted base plate. The stand and the speaker are best coupled to each other using beads of Blu-tac in the time honoured way.

SOUND QUALITY

The unusual configuration of this speaker, and in particular, the use of the hybrid tweeter module, means that special care needs to be taken over fine tuning and positioning. With a reflex port on the rear panel, the speaker needs some room to breathe, and should be positioned about 30cm or so clear of the back wall, though this distance is not critical. If you're using the dedicated DALI 300 stand, the tweeter will be broadly at ear level anyway, otherwise this is what you should aim for.

The DALI departs from convention in that it's

best used facing directly forward, rather than being toed-in. This is DALI's recommendation, but there is some leeway here as the system is not particularly directional in the lateral plane.

During the course of this test, we were able to use the speaker in a smaller listening room before transferring it to a larger one. The larger room meant a listening range of in excess of four meters and a requirement for more power and drive, which could not be met with mainstream amplifiers from Denon and Arcam, as they sounded a little weaker and lacking in vitality. But the DALI worked beautifully with a big pre./power amp combination from Moon Audio restoring the required discipline and gravitas.

Even in this combination, however, the DALI 300 Mk2 remains smooth and slightly warm, even at times 'woofy', with an attractive, open balance with strong detail and resolution, but ultimately, a lack of definition in the mid-bass registers which sound slightly warm and wooden. Low frequency extension is not overly impressive – not that this should be expected from a speaker this size – but the overall balance is still very impressive. The midband is especially clean and vivid and the mid to treble balance unusually well judged, with a balance that errs on the right side of the line on any reasonable listening axis. In the smaller test room, the sound had greater immediacy than in the larger one and overall, this is a speaker that works best in small and medium-sized rooms, up to say, four by five metres, though it remains an extremely attractive-sounding speaker even when used in rooms that ought

to be out of its compass. The rooms never completely got the better of the DALI, which is just too classy to be put down.

This is a particularly finely judged loudspeaker, albeit one that may prefer rooms of a particular size, and which is not necessarily easy to drive. It likes a good quality source and definitely comes on song when coupled with powerful and well-controlled amplification. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

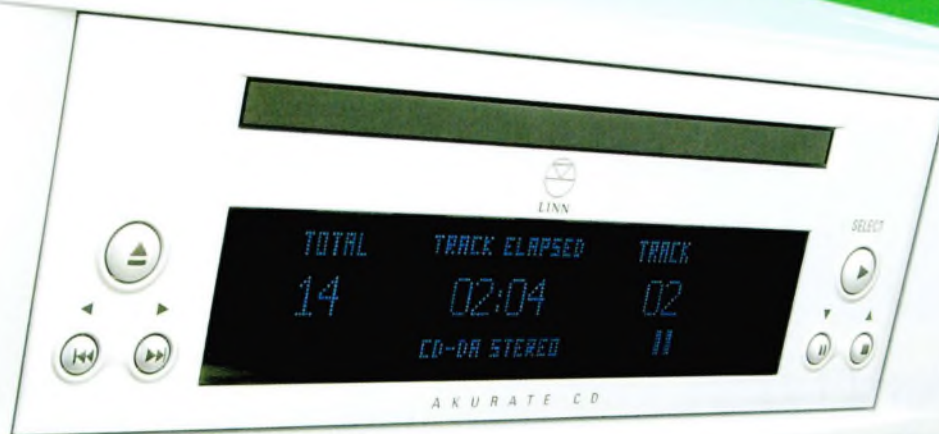
SOUND >> 87% [Progress bar]	PRO Smooth, detailed and relaxed speaker, with moderately extended bass. Prefers quality amplification, but is flexible about room requirements, and can be happily used in largish rooms.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 78% [Progress bar]	CON Can sound a little lacking in definition and coloured through the mid-bass region, prefers lots of power, too.
BUILD >> 90% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 83% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
Sophisticated compact, with the appeal of a slightly grown-up version of the BBC LS3/5. Offers moderate bass extension and is flexible about room dimensions, but demands quality system amplification. An attractive speaker in every sense.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Akurate by name...

Linn's new Akurate CD player is, in fact, a music-only universal disc player. Confused? Read on...

PRODUCT Linn Akurate CD

TYPE Universal disc player (audio only)

PRICE £3,985

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 38.1x8x36cm • Weight: 4.5kg • Analogue outputs: balanced XLR (stereo only), 5.1 RCA (Front L and R are double connectors) • Digital outputs: coaxial (BNC), optical • Linn interconnect

CONTACT ☎ 0500 888909 ☎ www.linn.co.uk

When we put together our list of kit for *The Collection 2007* (on sale now), one of the products that came to the fore was the Linn Exotik+DA, a preamplifier and processor we originally reviewed in the March 2007 issue of *HFC*.

As that was the Exotik+DA's first published review, we were surprised to learn from Linn that it has already been replaced with a component called the Akurate Kontrol. The Kontrol forms part of a new range from Linn that includes the Kontrol preamp, 2200 power amplifier (2x 200 watts), Tuner and existing 242 loudspeakers (reviewed in *HFC* 253). However, the most interesting product from this surprise new range is this disc player, rather confusingly dubbed the Akurate CD. In fact, it's so much more than that, as it plays both the high-resolution formats – SACD and DVD-Audio, as well as DTS, in stereo and multichannel. Also, if you look at Linn's current range, the Akurate is now the flagship music-

only disc player that Linn produces – the three more expensive Unidisk machines offer video playback in addition to audio.

The range of formats the Akurate plays is, as far as we're aware, unique; there are no other DVD-A players that don't do video. This is a multichannel player too, with outputs for centre, surround and subwoofer channels alongside two sets of stereo/front left/right connections. There's even a pair of XLR sockets to get the stereo signal in balanced form, as well as optical and coaxial digital outputs. For some reason the output here is limited to what can be had from a CD; it won't deliver the 24/96 data rate from DVD-A that other machines do. It will, however, upsample CD's



“Its ability to communicate emotion is quite extraordinary, and more than makes up for its shortcomings in pure fidelity terms.”

44.1 kHz, to 96kHz for a digital connection to the Kontrol preamplifier.


The Akurate CD is built around Linn’s Silver Disk Engine – about the only SACD drive developed in this part of the world – and a component with a build quality that’s echoed in the machined disc drawer that flows out of the player with a purr. It’s a very slick operator, albeit one that takes a little while to come to terms with SACD. If you discount the drawer, the Akurate is a rather plain-looking player for its price, and a small one at that. This is because Linn uses ‘silent power’ switch-mode power supplies that don’t require large transformers. Linn clearly believes we should be buying with our ears, not our eyes. This could be a dangerous policy if the rest of the high-end is anything to go by. Linn’s angle is that the Silver Disk Engine

reconfigures the player for each disc format in order to produce the highest performance level that each can offer and presumably this is why it takes its time.

Other features include track titling for SACD-only – we’re not sure why this should be limited to SACD, as CD Text is available on a number of CDs too. Still, you can have titles scroll once or continually, or turn them off for a bit of visual peace. Set-up is via the front-panel display, as there’s no video output, which could make navigating DVD-A discs tricky. The key here is to do what the Akurate does automatically: go straight into play on insertion. For similar reasons, level setting for multichannel set-ups will have to be done with an accompanying multichannel preamp or processor.

SOUND QUALITY

The Akurate’s sonic character, while ostensibly neutral in balance terms, has a strong tendency to produce a large-scale sound regardless of what you put in its drawer. So, with live Led Zeppelin the atmosphere and scale of the event is quite stunning and significantly greater than with most players. With Gillian Welch’s studio creations you get a real sense of her being in the room with you in captivating fashion. There’s also a slight thickening of the bass and smoothing through the midrange and high frequencies that undermines absolute clarity, but makes harder recordings more palatable when played in anger. This quality is both good and bad: good because it’s hard to get an edgy sound out of the player, but bad because there’s a degree of veiling that ultimately seems to undermine depth of image. This seems a little at odds with the general ‘bigness’ of sound, but most of that scale is two-dimensional; it doesn’t seem to extend behind the speakers very well. In fact, there’s more of a tendency to place the musicians in front of the speakers, which is an unusual effect, but not an unattractive one. It’s this that gives the Gillian Welch tracks and others such a tremendous sense of presence in the room. But whether it’s truly accurate is hard to say.

Compared to the Accustic Arts universal also tested this month (see p58), it can sound a little too forward, as the Accustic Arts is significantly more relaxed and seemingly refined, albeit without actually adding any more detail to the picture. The Linn has a rich and densely detailed sound, but one that seems intrinsically loud, which is something that’ll work better in some systems than in others and which will favour some types of material over others. In our Audio Zone Pre-T1 /Gamut D200/B&W 802D 

[Review] Linn Akurate CD universal disc player

Q&A

We spoke to Linn's principle design engineer for electronics and software, Jim Robinson, about the Akurate CD



HFC Why no CD Text on the Akurate?

JR Basically because it's a bit more gimmicky and detracts from the audio. The reason why SACD has it is that there's more information on the disc. This player was derived from the Unidisk, and on that we had a lot of features for SACD that we decided to keep on the Akurate.

Why is it that CD upsampled to 24/96 is available from the digital output but not the same bit rate from DVD-A?

It's the DVD-A specification, there's legislation which prevents you from doing any digital output from DVD-A. Pioneer used to do this but the legislation actually changed a couple of years ago, so old players are able to do it, but now we're not. They won't actually allow anything above 48kHz and 16-bit on digital, unfortunately.

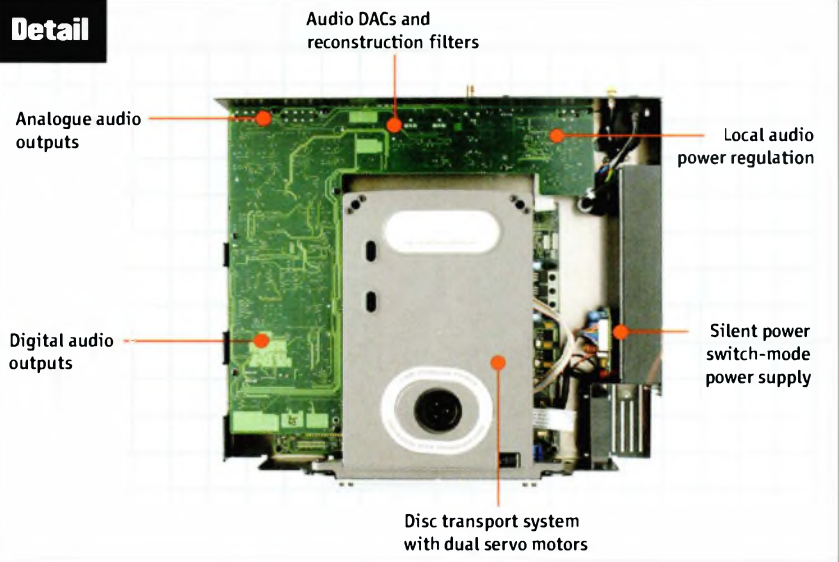
Did you consider including a FireWire connection so that hi-res multichannel could be sent to a processor?

We could have done FireWire for SACD, however, the main market this is targeted for will use the DACs in the Akurate CD because they're very high quality DACs, you get a better result using analogue outputs into the preamp. The Akurate Kontrol has DACs onboard, but if you use the analogue inputs, it feeds straight through to the volume control so there's a pure path.

When the Silver Disk Engine reconfigures the player for each disc format what is it actually doing?

There are separate audio paths for each of the different formats: CD comes straight from the front-end completely unadulterated and gets fed through to the DACs in the purest form. So you have 16-bits straight off the disc that's all clocked smoothly through. SACD comes straight from the Sony DSD processor in a pure DSD stream to the DACs which support the DSD. It never goes through PCM. DVD-Audio takes the DVD route through the MPEG decoder and gets clocked using our high precision clocks. Each format has its own specific best quality route rather than compromising on converting everything to PCM and going through the same route.

Detail



system, it complements Frank Zappa's slightly dirty-sounding *Sleep Dirt* album, but does fewer favours for better recordings such as Linn's own Barb Jung's SACD, *Walking In The Sun*. The latter, however, is definitely improved by the Akurate's sense of pace, a quality that Linn's turntable has always been prized for, but not one that's often found in silver-disc players. This is also apparent with Helge Sunde's *Denada* disc, another SACD with music that literally jumps and wriggles in the Akurate's hands, the brass instrumentation delivering thrilling power and dynamic range without threatening to wear you down.

The Accoustic Arts player delivers significantly more space and depth with SACD, regardless of whether you compare the two machines using the same interconnects or give the Linn the benefit of the Linn lead supplied. The AA is, of course, a more expensive model, but when you consider the quality of casework and the video facility it offers, the difference isn't so great.

However – and this is the key point – what the Akurate does that very few other disc spinners do is play music in a fashion that's grin-inducingly gripping. We don't think that high musicality and high transparency should be mutually exclusive, but if you listen to the LP12 you'll hear the same sort of result – it's not the most revealing and precise turntable around (although the new LP12 SE may have changed that), but its ability to turn vinyl into music is among the best you can get. The Akurate performs the same trick; it makes

musicality its first priority. Its ability to communicate emotion is extraordinary, and more than makes up for its shortcomings in pure fidelity terms.

It took us a while to figure out what this player is about, which is probably more of a reflection on the reviewing process than

anything else, but we got there and have been getting into our tunes ever since. It may not look particularly special, but like a Q-plate car, the Akurate delivers what you want. What's more, it does so with the finest formats that the music industry has provided for us, not perhaps in the numbers we would have hoped for, but there are a fair few SACDs available today. The Akurate makes a great case for putting the music first, and anyone with an ear for a tune will have difficulty resisting. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 94%

>> SUB RATINGS
CD 95% SACD 92% DVD-A 92%

BUILD >> 86%

FEATURES >> 88%

VALUE >> 89%

PRO

The Akurate achieves superb musicality, thanks to great timing and smooth balance. The drawer mechanism is lovely, too.

CON

The player is slow to identify some disc types, has conservative casework and isn't the most neutral or revealing of detail.

CONCLUSION

This engaging universal player is remarkably musical, making it well worth the money. It doesn't have the transparency of its finest competitors, but if you're into hi-fi for the right reasons, then it's in a league of its own.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **89%**

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Mira mains filter for TV and home cinema

Improved picture quality and an extended product lifespan are two of the key benefits delivered by IsoTek's amazing new Mira mains filter. Whether it is used in a full-blown home cinema system or as a simple upgrade for an LCD or plasma TV, Mira's advanced circuitry delivers immediate and significant improvements to the on-screen performance – crisper and more stable images, deeper blacks and more vibrant, natural colours. And it doesn't just work with LCD and plasma screens – it brings the same improvements to video projectors and traditional CRT televisions too. Picture quality isn't the only thing that Mira improves. Plug in a DVD player or set-top box, and sound is brought into focus, improving definition and detail. This isn't surprising as IsoTek's track record is second to none for designing and manufacturing world-class audio power management systems.



How it Works

The IsoTek Mira is simple to use – first, plug the power cable from your TV or projector into the appropriate socket on the Mira, instead of into the wall socket. Next, if you have a DVD player or set-top box, plug that into MIRA's second socket. If you're using a roof aerial or satellite dish, plug that in too. Finally, plug the Mira into a wall socket using a suitable mains cable... and you're ready to roll!

Key features:

- Improves picture quality and extends the life of all televisions (LCD, plasma or CRT) and projectors.
- 22,500A of instantaneous current absorption; essential for removing high-voltage spikes.
- Massive surge protection (700 Joules – five times greater than that achieved by typical devices)
- Eliminates mains noise including RFI and EMI which degrade sound and picture quality.

More about IsoTek

IsoTek is a UK-based company that specialises in power management systems for hi-fi and home cinema applications. Formed in 2001, the company has rapidly become a world leader in mains conditioning and filtration, developing a wide range of innovative, award-winning products that form complete solutions to suit every pocket. Thanks to IsoTek's painstaking attention to detail, its products significantly improve sound and picture quality, while offering protection from spikes and surges.

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Reborn Ultimum

Can Neat's new isobaric standmount offer Ultimum MFS performance at half the price?

PRODUCT Neat Momentum 3i

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,745 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 22x38x27cm

⊖ Weight: 15kg ⊕ Concave 25mm alloy dome tweeter

⊖ 2 x 120mm isobaric-loaded bass/mid drivers

⊖ Sensitivity: 88dB ⊕ Impedance: 4 ohms (minimum)

CONTACT ☎ 01833 631021 # www.neat.co.uk

Neat Acoustics has been designing interesting hi-fi loudspeakers from its base in County Durham for over two decades now. The company established its reputation with a small two-way standmount called the Petite, and has slowly but surely expanded its portfolio since then. A decade ago Neat introduced the Gravitas, an isobaric-loaded passive subwoofer to partner the Petite, which was followed a few years later by the Ultimum range that featured built-in isobaric bass loading. The smallest of these, the MFS, was reviewed in *Hi-Fi Choice* back in 2003, and is very much the inspiration for the new, simpler and much less expensive Momentum 3i.

Though still quite costly for a standmount at £1,745 per pair, this speaker is only a little more than half the price of the MFS, and while it lacks the planar supertweeters used in the

Ultimum model, it does include the isobaric bass-loading and a high-quality wood-veneered enclosure. The term 'isobaric' requires some explanation as it's an uncommon approach, even though its actual *modus operandi* is still a matter of some debate. In essence, it involves mounting a second bass/mid driver on a separate baffle inside the enclosure, separated by a cavity from the driver mounted on the front, and operating in acoustic series and electrical parallel. Exactly how this operates isn't entirely clear. Neat glues its drivers in place, for superior mechanical integrity, so internal examination isn't possible, though a diagram on the company's website suggests that the cavity between the drivers is quite small. Assuming the cavity intimately couples the two diaphragms together, it effectively doubles the moving mass of the diaphragm (lowering its fundamental resonance), and also doubles the electromotive 'shove'. The actual benefit here probably has as much to do with delivering good extension from a relatively compact enclosure as with any other factor. However,

an alternative way of looking at the system is to see the internal driver as removing much of the effect of the enclosure from the driver on the front, cutting the build-up of pressure as well as reducing internal reflections from reaching the back of that driver. Isobaric or not, this is essentially a two-way design. The main driver (and presumably its internal partner, though that can't be confirmed) is Neat's familiar high-class 168mm unit with a 120mm diameter doped and flared paper cone, now with a metal 'bullet' pole-piece extension.

For many years, Neat used to buy in its tweeters from French manufacturer Focal, who, unusually, make designs with inverted (concave) domes. However, a few years back, Focal decided to concentrate on its complete speaker systems and (almost) stop supplying raw drivers to other manufacturers. Neat, therefore, chose to create its own tweeters. Because these use concave 25mm alloy dome diaphragms, they look rather like Focals, but they are in fact different.

A medium-size standmount with an internal volume of around 14 litres, the Momentum 3i comes in a choice of four smart matt-finished real-wood veneers – oak, maple, cherry and 'rosenut' being the standard options. The

drivers are nicely rebated, and, as with other Neat speakers, there's no grille available.

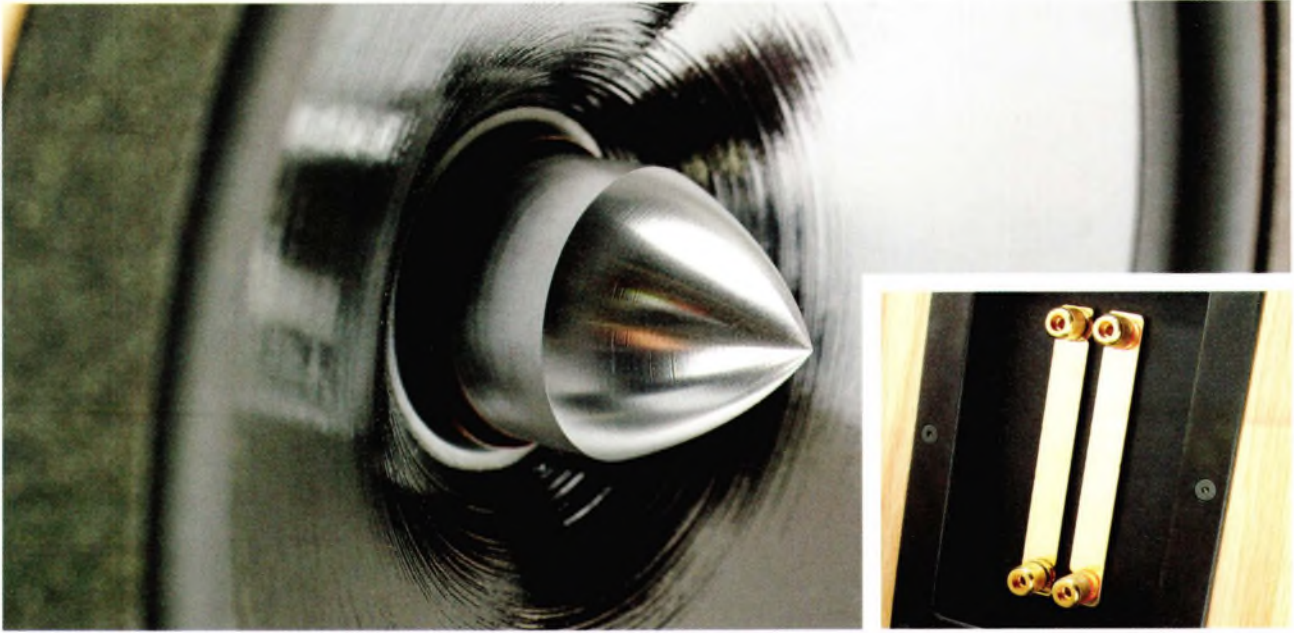
The whole thing feels very solid, helped no doubt by the extra rigidity imparted by the internal partitioning and a total weight of 15kg – the same as for the Ultimum MFS. A generous rear port shares the back panel with two terminal pairs that are spaced well apart and linked by brass strips.

SOUND QUALITY

The effect of the isobaric bass-loading is clearly visible in bass extension, which is unusually good for a standmount design. Part of this is down to the port being tuned to a relatively low 40Hz, but there's genuinely deep in-room bass here down to a low 25Hz.

It is often said that there's no such thing as a free lunch, and one of the likely consequences of extracting unusually low bass from a relatively small enclosure





“Although the Momentum 3i takes no prisoners with the sources it’s fed, it always sounds sweet, inviting and informative.”

is relatively modest sensitivity. Although Neat claims 88dB here, using our normal in-room far-field averaged technique, a significantly lower 86dB looks closer to reality. Furthermore, because of the twin bass units, the load is a quite demanding four ohms through much of the bass region. Pair-matching is adequate but not exceptional.

The overall in-room tonal balance is rather impressive, especially for such a compact speaker. Although punctuated by some unevenness, it stays within +/-3dB limits from 100Hz up to beyond the limits of audibility, while the sub-100Hz bass is just a shade on the strong side – subjectively nice, but also indicating that this speaker should definitely be sited well clear of walls. Across the band, the most distinguishing features are a dip around 1.2kHz, a modicum of presence restraint (2-3.5kHz) and a top end that’s rather strong and a little uneven.

The sound of the Momentum 3i does reflect its measured tonal balance to some extent, but it also goes quite a lot further than one might expect (especially after you replace those brass terminal bridges with some wire links). As with the Ultimatum MFS, the sense of weight and scale is more like that of a floorstander than a standmount, yet at the same time it possesses the agility, spaciousness, lightness of touch and low box colorations associated with a high-quality bookshelf speaker.

The relatively small and exceedingly stiff enclosure, probably helped by the isobaric loading, is presumably responsible for the quite exceptional dynamic range. The bright

and slightly too sparkly treble probably contributes as well, but the net result is a speaker that’s brilliant at delivering all manner of delicate and subtle details deep down into the mix, making music much more human and believable.

Mild presence restraint notwithstanding, the Momentum 3i is quite forthright in how it projects voices, with a beguiling directness in the way midband information comes through. Frazey Ford (lead singer of The Be Good Tanyas) has a voice and accent that makes lyrics quite difficult to understand, especially with more laid-back speakers, but with the Neats on the end of the chain, it’s easy to make out every word, with no ambiguity. Although the top end is undoubtedly strong, and also arguably a shade exposed, it’s in no way detached. Rather, it sounds remarkably clean and coherent, considerably aiding diction by appropriately crispening the consonants, defining the sibilants and rendering audience applause with impressive realism.

Another clue to the inherently high quality of this speaker is the way it lays bare the differences in character between the various sources at the listener’s disposal. FM radio sounds soft and gentle, just like FM radio should, vinyl’s delicacy and transparency are immediately apparent, as is CD’s solid, matter-of-fact digital precision. And, of course, TV sounds as exasperatingly compromised as we all know it should.

Although the Momentum 3i takes no prisoners with the sources it’s fed, it always

sounds sweet, inviting and exceptionally informative, provided the driving system is good enough. The bass is clean, powerful, weighty and well timed, without ever becoming oppressive, while imaging is spacious and well focused, with convincing portrayal of real or synthetic ambience.

This exceptionally revealing and involving loudspeaker offers much of the performance of Neat’s flagship Ultimatum MFS loudspeaker at little more than half the price. Clearly it delivers superior value for money, our only reservation (and a minor one at that) is that the rather bright top end might sound too exposed in some systems. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 80%



BUILD >> 87%



VALUE >> 88%



PRO

A superbly informative and dynamic design with all the virtues of a high-class standmount, that also delivers the bass weight and authority of a floorstander.

CON

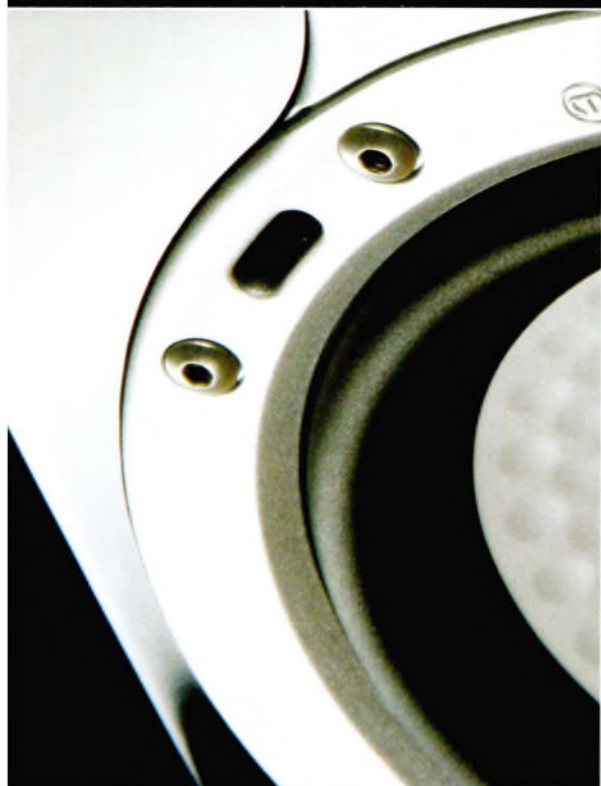
The top end is a bit bright and exposed, while the supplied brass terminal links don’t do the sound quality any favours either.

CONCLUSION

This is a brilliant standmount that sounds a lot bigger than it looks, boasting exceptional coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range. It’s a great musical communicator at a very realistic price, though the top end may not suit all systems.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 88%

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HI-FI CHOICE
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Linn gets the Funk

The Funk Firm's Linn Sondek LP12 upgrade kit takes the classic turntable to the next level

PRODUCT Funk Vector Link

TYPE Turntable upgrade kit (for Linn LP12)

PRICE £1,519

CONTACT ☎ 020 8697 2705

🌐 www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

The Funk Vector Link kit is a truly radical modification to the venerable Linn Sondek LP12 turntable. A fully 'funkt-up' LP12 must undergo major surgery before acquiring its racy, carbon fibre-topped exterior. This includes the fitting of a combined subchassis and armboard made of carbon fibre and balsa wood, called the Charm. This can be ordered to suit the tonearm of your choice and can be fitted on its own if you're not going the whole way with the Funk modifications. Opt for the full package, though, and you'll also receive a carbon fibre top-plate, an Achromat to replace the Linn's felt mat and the intriguing K-Drive motor system (including vectoring pulleys).

The K-Drive kit employs a DC motor, optimised for mounting on the deck's subchassis, from where it drives the sub-platter through a belt supported by three pulleys. Its power comes from a small external box, housing a Class A, single-ended, low-distortion output stage, with circuits that provide frictional compensation, reduced mains interference and current-derived servo operation. This delivers a smoother and

more stable performance from the drive system, which, in turn, enhances the music.

SOUND QUALITY

Testing with a selection of piano recordings shows that the platter does indeed rotate at the correct speed and with formidable stability. Notes have rock-solid, secure pitch and a delightfully exposed envelope shape that imparts a convincing sense of realism. Left-hand passages also reveal a total absence of the upper-midbass coloration for which the Linn was once criticised by its detractors.

An acknowledged strength of the LP12 is its ability to 'follow the tune', and the Vector not only preserves but also enhances this. It displays an amazing aptitude for tracking the melodic and harmonic development of music, no matter how subtle that may be. It's particularly adroit at following delicate harmonies and making abundantly obvious the relationships between different instrumental lines. Aiding it in this respect, is the LP12's inherent dexterity with timing and rhythmic information, which the overt 'clarity' of the Vector seems to amplify.

The modified turntable's lack of clutter and background 'noise' lays bare every note, rendering the music with close to the lucidity of a master tape. The same qualities also enable the deck to provide genuinely realistic dynamic contrasts; this is especially noticeable when the

music drops rapidly to silence – the abrupt absence of sound is little short of startling. The beauty of the Vector is that it manages this type of high resolution performance without ever sounding sterile or clinical. Its portrayal is always musically coherent and engaging. And therein lies the appeal of this modification: it truly seems to make the LP12 more LP12-like, bringing its positive qualities fully to the fore, while suppressing those that its detractors chose to focus upon. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward

VERDICT

SOUND >> 90%



FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 85%



VALUE >> 88%



PRO

This kit meets its objectives by making the LP12's performance much more LP12-like. It's very much a 'music first' presentation whose clarity will also satisfy the hi-fi enthusiast.

CON

It's not an 'official' Linn factory-supported modification, if that sort of thing concerns you.

CONCLUSION

Those dogmatic types who still view tweaking the LP12 as heresy will miss out on hearing just how dramatically the amazing Funk Vector kit can enhance one's enjoyment of music.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>>> **89%**



Universal excellence

Accustic Arts' universal player is a jack-of-all-trades that's also surprisingly masterful

PRODUCT Accustic Arts Surround-Player 1

TYPE Universal disc player

PRICE £4,495

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 48.2x11x37.5cm
● Weight: 16kg ● Analogue outputs: 5.1 RCA, stereo RCA, balanced XLR ● Digital outputs: coaxial (RCA), optical ● Video outputs: 2x S-Video, 2x component, HDMI, 2x composite

CONTACT ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.accusticarts.com

These days, there's an expectation that high-end, expensive players should be all things to all people. So a £4,500

German-engineered universal disc player, should, therefore, give a startling performance.

Accustic Arts builds its range of players, amplifiers and loudspeakers at its facility in Lauffen am Neckar near Stuttgart in Germany and has been doing so for over ten years.

The company behind Accustic Arts, Schunk Audio Engineering (SAE), got its start in the professional recording world, where it made near-field monitors, going on to establish the Accustic Arts brand in order to produce high-end components that delivered, in the

company's own words, "maximum sound authenticity". It's a admirable goal by any standards, but does this latest unit deliver?

The Surround-Player 1 is Accustic Arts' answer to the format ferment that rages on and on – it plays CD, SACD, DVD-Audio and DVD-Video, in a top-loading case that boasts all the bells and whistles when it comes to audio and video outputs. It's also a multichannel machine with 5.1 channel outputs, with on-board processing for Dolby Digital and DTS.

It's been a while since we ran anything on the Townshend TA565, but it's still one of our staple reference players, and, like the Accustic Arts, a universal machine. The longer we used the Surround-Player 1, the more Townshend-like, or rather, Pioneer-like, it became. Right down to the irritating tendency to go into standby when left idle for more than half an hour. Another giveaway is the remote handset, which has been made in the rather hardcore Accustic Arts style, but which features the same button arrangement as a Pioneer. For all this, though, it should be stressed that Townshend has made a

fabulously unique player out of a Pioneer chassis, and there's no reason why someone else shouldn't do the same – after all, most CD players are based on a small pool of key components such as disc drives and digital-to-analogue chipsets. In this instance, Accustic Arts has chosen a Burr-Brown 192kHz/24-bit DAC for all six channels and included an HDMI video output for digital connection to a screen or projector, backed up with progressive scan for both PAL and NTSC. There are two versions of the player, differentiated by the existence (or otherwise) of a balanced output; if you opt for the version with a straight RCA single-ended output, there's a £170 saving on the price we've stated.

Build quality is as exemplary as one would hope for from a German high-end component – the top-loading tray in particular is a delight to use, because you can operate the machine almost like a turntable. Just slide back the lid, remove the puck and change discs, turning the right-hand rotary dial to instigate play again. You will, of course, need an open shelf though.

Accustic Arts has applied a number of



“There’s both a good sense of dynamics and a high degree of finesse, so you get all the key details and the fine ones in between.”

techniques to enhance the sound of the Surround-Player I – namely, a video-off mode that also kills the front-panel display when the disc is spinning, a 75VA magnetically shielded mains transformer, and ‘jitter-minimising technology’. There’s no indication as to what this technology consists of, though. Other highlights include aluminum casework and shielding of the various sections within the player to reduce the effect of stray fields.

Set-up is via Pioneer’s standard on-screen display, something we’re a little too familiar with to take an objective view on, though to be honest, it’s pretty straightforward so long as you have a screen to hand.

SOUND QUALITY

The similarities between this model and the Townshend don’t stop at the internals, they’re also reflected in a remarkably similar and highly revealing sound across all formats. The Surround-Player I has both a good sense of dynamics and a high degree of finesse, so you get all the key details and the fine ones in between. Players that focus on doing the fundamental leading edges well can often sound more dramatic and contrasty, but listen through a resolute system and a machine that does low-level resolution well, such as this, makes for a more convincing experience, and a more relaxed one at that.

Inevitably, it can’t beat dedicated CD players at this price point, there are very strong competitors from the likes of Resolution Audio and Gamut that outplay it in the transparency stakes, presumably because their circuitry can be that much simpler due to the single format. Having said that, the AA gives an awful lot of the detail, producing full-scale images and decent image depth with plenty of low-end grunt. Timing is also good – very good, in fact, it’s only a little short of that of the one-trick players. There is, if anything, a slight

emphasis through the midrange, around the frequency of ride cymbals and the like, that gives the timing a bit more edge. When playing at high volume this can get a little obvious with the wrong recording, but it does give the sound a bit of extra definition at more sensible levels.

In *The Real Slim Shady*, for example, the snare on the drum is slightly spotlighted, which gives the track real snap and creates a punchy, full-on presentation that suits the genre admirably. Eminem may not be the most sophisticated of fellows, but in this tune he delivers a masterpiece.

The player’s performance with SACD reflects the extra degree of resolution that the medium offers in the form of greater refinement and lower perceived distortion. In practice, this means higher-level replay without discomfort and a degree of transparency that would put it in the front league of regular CD players. We particularly enjoy the degree of precision without edginess it can extract from SACDs, and can imagine owners obsessively searching for releases in the format.

Switching to DVD-A, the Surround-Player I achieves notably greater transparency with this medium than the competition. It manages to produce excellent depth of image with classical music, separating out the various musicians in an orchestra and revealing more of the timbre in their instruments. On a Teldec recording of Barenboim, the delicacy of woodwind is exploited to enchanting effect.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

Having no HDMI-equipped screen to hand, this reviewer was unable to test the popular connection, but to be frank, we’ve found that results on LCDs in particular, pleasingly smooth with just a component connection. The picture proves to be clean and strong with excellent

colour saturation, so that subtle differences in shade are well differentiated, and even colours without a red basis have plenty of depth. Detail levels are also good – finer than with our admittedly more affordable reference player and with even blacker blacks when viewing on a projector. The progressive signal reveals horizontal lines rather dramatically on the big screen, and we found the smoothed result of the interlaced signal to be preferable. Operationally, Pioneer’s control system is a doddle to use, the fast-forward feature being particularly smooth in operation.

The Surround-Player I is proof that one disc spinner can do justice to multiple formats if the manufacturer does its homework. It’s nearly up to the standards of dedicated players of the same price, and offers a striking degree of transparency across the board **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 93%
>> SUB RATINGS
 CD 90% SACD 95% DVD-A 95%

VISION >> 88%

FEATURES >> 94%

VALUE >> 83%

PRO
 A very well-made machine that offers the full range of connections and boasts superb performance across the board.

CON
 The remote handset is a little uncomfortable to handle, the auto switch-off is a minor pain and the display could be easier to read.

CONCLUSION
 Accoustic Arts has taken the best bits of Pioneer’s universal player and built a very high-quality machine around it, so you get excellent sound from both hi-res and CD formats. It remains a fine example of a high-end universal disc player.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%

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'Azured' performer

Cambridge's classy Class XD stunner goes from strength to strength

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 840A V2

TYPE Integrated stereo amplifier

PRICE £750

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000
 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

It seems like only yesterday that we first encountered the 840A, but in fact it was 18 issues ago, and that's evidently been time enough for the designers at Cambridge Audio to develop a few tweaks and circuit improvements for it, resulting in the new 'V2'.

Just to recap, the most exciting thing about the 840A was its employment of a new class of output stage, 'Class XD', which is claimed to offer Class A performance without the daunting power and heat implications of pure Class A. With the V2, Cambridge has revised the details of XD's implementation, at the same time refining the balanced input for lower noise and distortion. The amp still looks much the same, though: a package of moderate bulk but considerable weight, with a vast mains transformer, generous heat sinks and multiple circuit boards ingeniously packed into a minimum amount of space. The transformer and heat sinks are accounted for by the rating of 120 watts, while the circuit boards manage not just the basic amplifying task, but also comprehensive remote-control functionality, protection from just about every imaginable fault condition and a real audiophile touch in the shape of relay-switched step attenuation for the volume control. That last feature has plenty going for

it, but for us it remains an annoyance, with its unavoidable chatter of relays every time the volume control is touched. Relays also handle switching between the eight inputs, all of which except 'tape monitor' can be renamed. The single balanced input is selected by means of a rear-panel switch. Build and component quality aren't super-audiophile level, but that apart, the basic spec of this unit goes way beyond its price tag.

SOUND QUALITY

We actually reviewed the 840A twice, once alone (*HFC 281*) and once in a group test (*HFC 286*). We don't have either model for comparison, but we do have a couple of reference amps that have been around since those reviews, and it's clear that the similarities between the original 840A and the V2 outweigh the differences. In fact, we've ended up coming to many of the same – and mostly favourable – conclusions.

As before, we found tonality excellent, with very good extension in both bass and treble, combined with really superb grip of the bottom octaves. It doesn't actually extend the bass response of small loudspeakers, but controls them so well that it appears to do just that, making bass not only powerful, but also tuneful. This is a very useful attribute in an amplifier as improving bass by upgrading your speakers is an expensive (and often stressful) exercise.

One area where the V2 has improved over the original 840A is imaging. This was already good, but is especially impressive with the new model, which seems to have just the qualities to maximise both side-to-side precision and

depth. The latter is sadly rare in recordings, but when dealing with one that does it well, this amp makes the point very clearly, and some familiar renderings of operatic and symphonic scores stretch away behind the speakers most impressively and believably. If your tastes run to rock, pop or jazz, there may be less need for that, but the 840A's detail, control and sheer slam will be no less welcome – and with any music it's always highly listenable, even at low volume, where some muscular amps become insipid. Put it up against true high-end amps and you might become aware of a trace of hardness in the sound, but really, this is a cracking piece of kit at a great price. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%



FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 87%



VALUE >> 93%



PRO

A highly tempting combination of power, control, subtlety and, yes, musicality. The V2 also offers excellent flexibility of use and practicality.

CON

We continue to find the rattling of relays in the volume control annoying, but apart from that, there's nothing to complain about at this price.

CONCLUSION

Honestly, the biggest difference between this and most amps costing twice as much is in the looks/show-off factor. It's more than competent sonically, and comes attractively specified too – we love it.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 92%

Wireworld Orbit

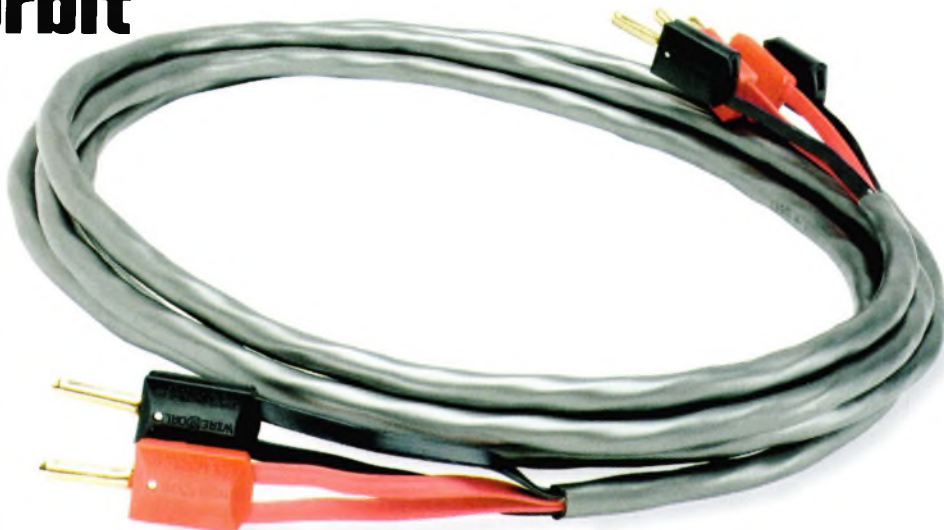
TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £14 per metre

CONTACT ☎ 020 8991 9200 # www.wireworldcable.com

The Wireworld Orbit differs from the other cables reviewed here in that it's intended principally for installation use. Still, apart from having a slightly more slippery jacket that's suitable for being pulled into conduits, mechanically it is very similar to the Atlas Hyper 1.5, and would undoubtedly work well in many conventional hi-fi systems. It's a bi-wire design with four flat-stranded conductors stacked under the overall jacket in such a way as to give not only quite high capacitance, but also a degree of screening. It was supplied for review with Wireworld's own 'Insta-Wire' banana plugs, designed for rapid fitting by installation personnel. They may not look all that impressive, but they do work well.

We took an instant shine to this cable and continued to enjoy its performance even while coming to recognise that in many specific areas it is not particularly outstanding. The main reason for that was its cheerful, bouncy, rhythmic nature that complements a wide variety of music and keeps the listener involved. Against that, we'd



have to concede that detail is not the best here and bass, while extended, is only moderately well controlled. Treble is good, with plenty of extension and natural spatial qualities, while through most of the midrange there's decent detail and imaging that, unusually, seems sometimes better at depth than width. All those things matter when one listens analytically, but we found Orbit at its best

when we simply turned the wick up and sat there grinning – it's that sort of product. **HFC**
Richard Black

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION The musical involvement is excellent, and helps this cable to transcend a few minor technical blemishes.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 85%

Atlas Hyper 1.5

TYPE Loudspeaker cable

PRICE £10 per metre

CONTACT ☎ 0800 731 1140 # www.hifiorg.uk


By a short head the cheapest cable in this Round Up, Hyper 1.5, sits within a larger family of cables, with the 1.5 denoting the cross-sectional area in square millimetres. That's not actually a vast amount of copper by speaker cable standards, but over normal-length runs, resistance doesn't add up to anything too alarming and the materials used are high-quality. The copper is 'oxygen free' (99.9997% pure in this case) and is insulated directly with Teflon and sheathed overall in soft PVC with cotton filler. It's a friendly, flexible cable and is available off-the-reel or terminated in hollow 'O-Z' banana plugs, for an extra £5.10 each. With the terminated set, you even get a cable burn-in CD thrown in.

Although this isn't by any means the ultimate speaker cable, it has a significant and appealing strength in its portrayal of detail and tonality in the midrange, and at least most of the treble. The very highest frequencies are a touch dry, as often happens with cheaper cables, and



bass is not remarkably extended, though it is certainly clean and free of overhang. Voices and most melody instruments are beautifully clear and precisely defined, with good imaging accuracy too. This means that familiar discs really come alive all over again and one hears new insights in them. It may be that the slight bass leanness is at least responsible: if so, it's a trade-off many will be happy to make. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION This cable won't beef up low frequencies, but its performance at higher frequencies is revelatory.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 86%

Kimber 8PR

TYPE Loudspeaker cable
PRICE £9 per metre
CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 # www.russandrews.com

The price per metre is nominal as this cable is not available off-the-reel, which is just as well – would you want to cut and strip 16 individual strands at each end of each cable? Between them, those multiple conductors add up to a lot of copper, however, that's not their only point. Kimber claims its woven construction rejects radio frequency interference (RFI), and the more conductors that are used the better. Loudspeakers aren't sensitive to RFI, but amplifier outputs certainly can be, so it's not an irrelevance. Possibly just as important, in our experience, is the relatively high capacitance/low inductance this construction offers. Copper is unspecified 'high purity' and the insulation, polythene.

We've long admired Kimber's speaker cables for the solidity and authority of the sound they produce from a wide variety of amps and speakers. In keeping with that, 8PR has great bass – by some margin, we felt, the deepest and clearest of the group – and an effortless command of wide dynamic swings. Its detail is



good and imaging highly credible, while high treble is very open. Acoustic spaces are clearly portrayed, too. If anything, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and we found this Kimber cable the most involving, enjoyable and musical here. Combining good tonality, detail and long-term listenability at this price is a smart trick that's not to be missed. **HFC**
Richard Black

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION This cable makes great music, and allows admirable levels of analytical detail through. Excellent value.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 90%

van den Hul CS122

TYPE Loudspeaker cable
PRICE £12.50 per metre
CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 # www.vanden Hul.com

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

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



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

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

quite naturally, with wholly believable orchestral string tone and vocal quality and perhaps best of all, a suitably percussive piano reproduction.

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

VERDICT	
CONCLUSION A refined and detailed cable, with good handling of frequency extremes and a laid-back tonal balance.	HI-FI CHOICE >>> 84%

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

LOUDSPEAKERS

As you move upmarket, designs become more idiosyncratic... as these six show

Covering a price range from £350 up to £800, this Ultimate Group Test looks at the 'popularly priced' sector of the speaker market.

Uniquely, and very surprisingly, unlike the usual mix of standmounts and floorstanders, this group is entirely made up of the former. A few years back, it looked as though the standmount might be an endangered species, as the trend was moving firmly in favour of the floorstander. One can understand the aesthetic appeal of the floorstander, not only because it looks all-of-a-piece and avoids the need for a separate metal stand, but also because it appears to offer superior material value for money. However, the standmount has several distinct sonic performance advantages, especially for two-way designs when used on decent quality stands.

Indeed, among budget two-ways, floorstanding enclosures are usually too large to load the main driver optimally, so a substantial portion of the total volume may be blocked off and effectively act as a stand. Although there's usually the option

to add mass loading in the lower compartment, this is far less effective than a proper stand in other respects because it blocks the acoustic path beneath the speaker, almost doubles the ratio of enclosure panel to driver diaphragm area, and often has far less effective physical stability and floor-coupling.

There are still plenty of inexpensive floorstanders around, and according to trade sources these are still proving to be the popular choice on the sales floor. However, this group is proof positive that standmounts are alive and well, and able to demonstrate their innate strengths.

Our multi-national group has two British brands, a couple of Scandinavians, and one each from the US and Italy. Although four of the names are familiar enough, Aurosal and Audio Pro will probably be new to most readers.

Aurosal is a newcomer from Milton Keynes, but the A1's simple, tried and trusted approach, based on a single full-range Jordan drive unit, goes back decades. Swedish company Audio Pro began in 1978, with an active subwoofer

that was highly rated by *Hi-Fi Choice* at the time. After a long absence, it's back in the UK with an extensive range. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Naim CDS 3 CD player
- ⊕ Burmester 001 CD player
- ⊕ Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- ⊕ Rega RB1000 turntable and tonearm
- ⊕ Rega Apheta cartridge
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner
- ⊕ Naim NAC552 preamplifier
- ⊕ Naim NAP500 power amplifier
- ⊕ Yamaha MX-D1 power amplifier
- ⊕ Cables from Vertex AQ, Chord Company and Naim

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Rodrigo Y Gabriela *Live in Manchester and Dublin*
- ⊕ Cesaria Evora *La Diva aux Pieds Nus*
- ⊕ Laurie Anderson *Strange Angels*
- ⊕ Tom Waits *Orphans*
- ⊕ Laurie Anderson *Life on a String*
- ⊕ BPO *Wagner Tannhauser Overture*
- ⊕ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used throughout the test.

ON TEST



Audio Pro Avanti A.10 DC
£450



Aurosal A1
£450



Bowers & Wilkins 685
£380



Dynaudio DM 2/10
£775



Opera Mezza
£595



Revel Concerta M12
£400



LISTENING TESTS

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

LAB TESTS

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

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

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

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

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

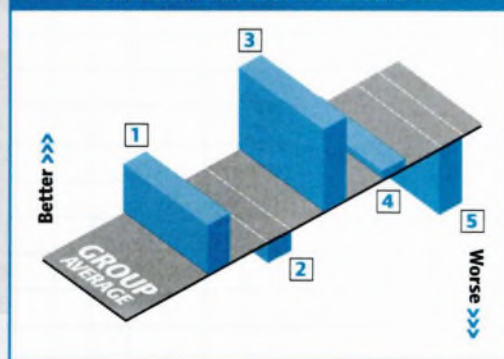
2] Bass extension: A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

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

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

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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AUDIO PRO AVANTI A.10 DC

Can this established Swedish brand make its mark on the UK?

Some time around the end of the 1970s, when *Hi-Fi Choice* was a small intermittent publication and each issue was devoted to a specific component, an edition dedicated to loudspeakers featured a subwoofer from a Swedish company called Audio Pro. In those pre home cinema days, a subwoofer was something new, and Audio Pro's B2.50 ACE-Bass device turned out to be a very effective unit indeed.

Audio Pro is still very much in the subwoofer business, and even though its products were not distributed in the UK for many years, it certainly doesn't seem to have done the company any harm. Indeed, Audio Pro has clearly prospered, as its website currently lists ten separate ranges of speaker, while new UK importer CSE Solutions lists fifty different models from the brand, even though a number of those represent variations on similar themes. That's certainly true of this Avanti A.10 DC, where the 'DC' postscript stands for Design Collection.

The DC variation on the standard Avanti A10 costs £450 per pair, whereas its non-DC equivalent is a much less painful £320 per pair. The specifications for both versions of this little two-way design are identical, apart from the surface finish. Instead of the Italian or graphite walnut used in the standard version of the loudspeaker, the DC variant has an eight-layer, high-gloss painted/lacquered finish, in white or black.

It's an attractive little speaker, with dramatically curved sides that almost eliminate the back

panel, giving a boat-shaped plan view. This has the triple advantage of increasing stiffness, avoiding rear-panel reflections and spreading the frequencies of internal standing waves. The narrow back is just wide enough to accommodate a tiny port, and the single terminal pair are set vertically. The main driver is a small 130mm cast frame unit, with a 95mm paper cone and twin voice-coil arrangement. The neodymium magnet tweeter is a little unusual in that it employs a 19mm fabric diaphragm (hence a lower inductance voice coil), with bandwidth claims of up to 40kHz.

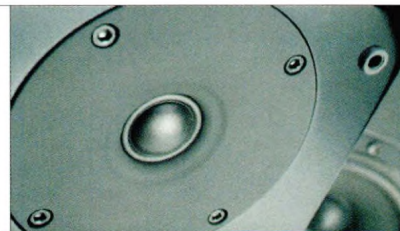
SOUND QUALITY

First impressions of the Avanti A.10 DC were very positive, as its lively character made it very easy to engage with. It might be small, with the limited bass power and weight that follows as a matter of course, but it boasts the sort of lively agility and delicacy that makes it a very good communicator of musical messages.

A major contributing factor is certainly the excellent acoustic behaviour of that tough little enclosure, which ensures freedom from boxiness. Add in some rather fine time coherence between the two drivers and you are left with superior stereo imaging with fine focus, air, space and transparency.

Excellent detail projection is undoubtedly an attractive feature, but is also almost certainly an exaggeration and a departure from neutrality arising from the upper-mid peak seen in the measurements. The overall tonal balance is a trifle bright – not because there's too much treble, but because the bottom end could do with a bit more weight, warmth and punch low down.

Is that fancy high gloss lacquer finish really worth an extra £130 though? At £450 this DC version of the A.10 is a trifle costly in view of its measured response limitations. Overall, though, it remains an exceedingly entertaining and communicative little speaker, which, at £320 without the fancy finish, would rate a 'Best Buy'. **HFC**



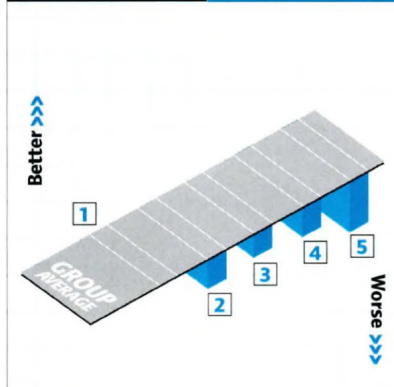
LAB REPORT

The A.10 DC just about achieves the specified 87dB sensitivity, though only in the midband, as the overall frequency response, measured under far-field in-room conditions, is distinctly lean through the upper bass and lower midband (60-250Hz), lacking 4-7dB. That said, it's still probably best to keep this design clear of walls to avoid generating excessive midbass.

The midband peaks up a little at around 1kHz, prior to a broad, shallow depression from 1.5-4kHz, beyond which the treble proper looks to be very well judged.

The impedance is not unduly difficult to drive, though it does dip to around four ohms at high frequencies, and five ohms in the midband. The ports are tuned to 41Hz and 44Hz for the two samples, indicating that pair-matching might have been closer, and a resonance at 380Hz is also clearly visible.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 0%
- 2] Bass extension >> -20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -20%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	4/ns ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	48Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 81%



PRACTICALITY >> 80%



BUILD >> 83%



VALUE >> 82%



Curved sides and a lacquer finish make for an attractive, tough and effective enclosure. Though a trifle lightweight and lacking in punch, it has a lively, coherent and musically informative sound, even if detail is slightly hyped.

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



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AUROUSAL A1

Newcomer offers full-range driver and wood veneer at a sharp price

A brand new name on the scene, Milton Keynes-based Aurousal caused quite a stir with its debut at the Heathrow hi-fi show in March, seducing many visitors by effectively demonstrating the strengths and virtues of the single full-range driver approach in a relatively inexpensive system context.

Simplicity is, of course, one of the keynotes of the A1. It has just a single driver, albeit of a rather special kind, a single terminal pair, no crossover and, of course, an enclosure to ensure that the sound radiation from the front of the cone is kept separate from the out-of-phase sound originating from the back of the cone. There's also a port, which is energised by some of that rearward output in order to reinforce the bass region.

Despite the modest price, the enclosure is finished in a real wood veneer. True, it's not the classiest or most attractive example of the type, and doesn't have much in the way of figuring, but at least it's the real thing.

The core component is, of course, the solitary drive unit, which is one of Ted Jordan's small but legendary metal diaphragm affairs. It has a cast frame affair with a 90mm diameter 'double cone' diaphragm, with the main cone being concave and the small central dust-dome section convex. Interestingly, the same driver was used in an unusual transmission line from MJ Acoustics, which we reviewed in *HFC 277*.

Crucially, that speaker cost £2,000 per pair, more than four times the cost of this Aurousal with its much simpler front-ported enclosure. There's only one driver, and no crossover, so naturally there's just a single terminal pair.

SOUND QUALITY

Given the rather wayward frequency response described in the Lab Report, it's inevitable that the sound of the A1 is far from any ideal of neutrality. That elevated midband inevitably leads to quite substantial coloration, which is particularly obvious when reproducing speech. The effect is slightly megaphonic, almost as though the speech was being reproduced through cupped hands, adding a slightly 'shouty' quality to proceedings.

If that's the bad news, then it's surprising just how quickly the ear/brain adjusts to, and compensates for, this coloration. It's a bit like the way we easily (and indeed instantly) adjust to the change in a familiar family member's voice when we hear them in the lounge, the bathroom, or even outdoors.

One of the best things about the A1 is its brilliant coherence and freedom from time-smear, which for some listeners will be more than fair compensation. In this group at least, the Aurousal's superior communication skills are especially effective in the way it gets the emotions across. It might sound coloured, but it also sounds more 'real'.

The A1's broad bass region is decidedly lean here, and one could try boosting it by siting it close to a wall. However, under our conditions the extra weight was accompanied by less

overall evenness. Free-space siting was preferred, in part because the restraint in the bass balances out similar restraint at the top end of the audio band. There's certainly some lack of air and sparkle with this speaker, so it's best to orient them so that one sits directly on the main axis. This will provide maximum treble and also the best stereo focus. **HFC**



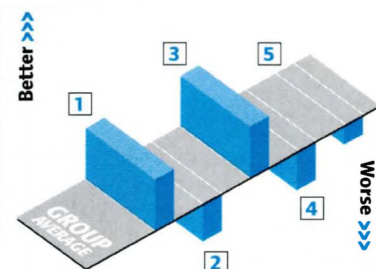
LAB REPORT

Systems using single, full-range drivers invariably show limitations under measurement, usually because they tend to work best through the midband region, while performance falls away towards the upper and lower ends of the audio band.

The A1 is no exception. Although it didn't quite reach the promised 90dB sensitivity, it did achieve 89dB through most of the midband decade, though output below 200Hz and above 2kHz measured about 5dB less under our averaged far-field in-room technique.

Even given that rather strong trend, output isn't particularly smooth, but at least the overall pattern is quite symmetric either side of the midband. The 40Hz port tuning delivers decent in-room bass extension down to below 40Hz with the speakers clear of walls. As expected, the impedance is very easy to drive, staying above six ohms throughout, though the pair match was disappointing at low frequencies.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	ns ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (6dB)	39Hz	37Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%



PRACTICALITY >> 80%



BUILD >> 84%



VALUE >> 84%



The A1's elevated midband ensures significant 'cupped hands' coloration of speech, however its magical coherence and freedom from time-smear is particularly effective in communicating emotions.

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



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Marantz SA15-S1 (£1100)	£795
McIntosh MCD201, CD/SACD (£3400)	£2795
Micromega CD132 (£849)	£595
Musical Fidelity KW 250S (£4999)	£3795
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC and Transport (£4000)	£3395
Sony SCD-1 SACD player (£5000)	£1995
Theta Chroma DAC	£295
Unison Research Unico CD (£1250)	£895
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AMPLIFIERS

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Bel Canto S300i Integrated (£1799)	£1495
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EAR Yoshino 834T (£2800)	£1995

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Icon Audio MC34 (£650)	£399
Jungson JA1/JA99 pre power combination (£1000)	£599
Jungson JA2 pre-amp and JA50 (£3000)	£2250
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BOWERS & WILKINS 685

The latest budget range features revised styling and engineering

Global market leader in hi-fi speakers, Worthing-based Bowers & Wilkins (now reverting to its original name in place of the familiar B&W acronym) recently revised its long-standing budget price 600 Series models. The previous S3 generation first appeared nearly six years ago, so a number of engineering developments have been included in the new series, alongside revised styling and pricing, and an opportunity to restructure the whole range to take account of changing market conditions.

This fourth generation 600 Series includes just four stereo pairs at present – two floorstanders and two standmounts – and it's the larger of the latter, the 685, that is the subject of this review. In terms of past B&W ranges, the 685 is most closely related to the 601 S3, which sat in the middle of three standmounts in the 600 S3 range. The 601 S3 was based on a 14-litre enclosure and 165mm main driver. Sadly, there's no direct replacement for the larger 20-litre/180mm 602 S3, which just happened to be this reviewer's favourite.

The new range is considerably more costly than its predecessors, this 685 sells for £380 per pair, whereas the 601 S3 cost £249 per pair back in 2001. However, improvements to the new model include a solid fixed central 'bullet' for the main driver, closer spacing of the two drivers, and a new tweeter surround that allows a simpler, first-order crossover.

Though smaller in frontal area, the enclosure is somewhat larger than the 601 S3, due to

much increased depth. It's quite a lightweight affair, at just 7kg, and the box combines a ported black front with vinyl woodprint on the other five, in a choice of four finishes – black ash, light oak, red cherry and Wengé. The main driver is equipped with a 120mm Kevlar cone, while the tube-loaded tweeter has an unprotected and rather vulnerable looking 25mm aluminium dome. A bracket is fitted to the rear to facilitate wall mounting, and a clever two-part foam bung allows the port to be blocked or re-tuned. Twin terminal pairs provide a bi-wire/-amp option.

SOUND QUALITY

This is an exceptionally competent loudspeaker, sonically speaking, that demands one's respect, at least in part for the way it avoids the pitfalls that trap many of its rivals. At the same time, one can fairly accuse it of some lack of ambition in its determination to try and be all things to all men, with the first priority being to avoid causing offence, regardless of the system it's paired with. Given Bowers & Wilkins' market leadership, it's an approach that's both obvious and logical, though it doesn't necessarily lead to the most exciting or involving sound around. That said, the 685 has a beautifully judged tonal balance, with a cleverly chosen (and usefully flexible) bass alignment that deftly avoids the energy loss through the upper bass and lower mid that is so widespread among compact two-ways.

Barring slight chestiness on male voices, coloration is impressively low and the dynamic range unusually wide for this class of speaker. However, dynamics themselves do seem a trifle muted (possibly because our test pair were still running in), and the slightly 'shut in' presence does impair diction a little, which might not suit every taste. The top end does lack a little sweetness too. This is not a loudspeaker that will excite passionate allegiance, or cut through to the emotional core of a musical performance. But it is a very safe bet that will do a fine all-round job. **HFC**



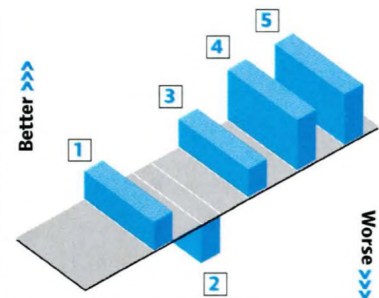
LAB REPORT

The 685 is rated at 88dB sensitivity, and comfortably met that figure on test. This is accompanied by a relatively easy load which stays above six ohms throughout most of the range, just falling a little below that above 10kHz. A good pair match was shown.

The port is tuned to 48Hz when left open; adding the hollow bung re-tunes this to 35Hz, giving useful flexibility. The filled bung converts the system to sealed-box operation with resonance at around 78Hz – useful if the speaker is close to (or hung on) a wall.

Port re-tuning didn't prove necessary under our conditions, however. With the speakers mounted on stands in free space, the far-field in-room traces showed a good overall balance, avoiding the lower mid leanness that plagues many small speakers, but showing a rather obvious crossover notch centred on 2.8kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +15%
- 2] Bass extension >> -20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/3.7 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	42Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 81%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BUILD >> 79%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VALUE >> 81%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Classy cosmetics and advanced drivers deliver a smooth, even-handed sound. This 'budget' two-way is very cleverly voiced to suit any likely application – it doesn't have the most exciting sound, but it's a very safe bet.

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



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DYNAUDIO DM 2/10

This speaker's 240mm bass/mid driver is a rarity in the modern era

Danish speaker specialist Dynaudio has always followed its own unique path in drive-unit engineering, and is also unusual in enjoying success right across the speaker spectrum – from hi-fi to professional audio, via the in-car sector. The company's hi-fi speakers have always been relatively upmarket affairs, with an approach that has tended to be essentially sober and conservative, so the arrival of this very substantial £775 per pair DM 2/10 came as quite a shock.

Loudspeakers often looked like this forty or fifty years ago, but 240mm diameter bass/mid drive units (and the enclosures necessary to accommodate such a large device) virtually disappeared back in the 1960s, as mono gave way to stereo and customers started demanding smaller, less intrusive loudspeakers. The 200mm driver became the norm during the 1970s before gradually giving way to the 165mm size that has dominated since. The DM 2/10 doesn't fit into Dynaudio's standard range of speakers, rather it's listed under 'Special Models', alongside a somewhat less bulky DM 2/8 (with a 200mm main driver). The number of two-way models with 240mm drivers to have come this reviewer's way over the past two decades can be counted on the fingers of one hand, so what are the implications? The visual impact is undeniably intrusive, and there's no denying this speaker looks as fashionable as a pair of loon pants.

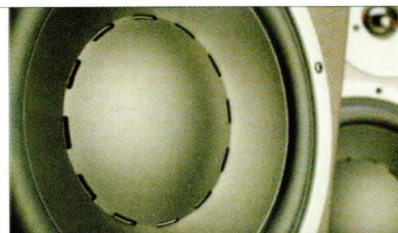


The downside of a large diameter driver is that it involves a greater dispersion discontinuity than a smaller one when crossing over to the tweeter. On the plus side, a 240mm unit has more than twice the cone area of a 165mm driver, so cone excursion is much reduced, improving headroom and more closely mimicking the way acoustic instruments work.

In the Dynaudio tradition, the main driver has a 155mm plastic cone/dome diaphragm with a large diameter, high-power-handling voice coil. This is loaded by a large (28-litre) rear-ported enclosure, with a chamfered 25mm black front and rosewood laminate elsewhere – a bit uninspiring but smart enough. The tweeter has a 28mm soft fabric dome, and signal is applied via a single terminal pair. Care should be taken to choose stands with a suitably large top-plate and footprint.

SOUND QUALITY

On audition, the advantage of the 2/10's large main driver was immediately apparent in its superior dynamic realism and tension, and also in conveying the unmistakable impression that this is a speaker that doesn't have to work hard for its living. It has serious headroom, and seems to relish reproducing complex music with busy textures, such as full-scale orchestral material, which it handles convincingly with ease, tension and a perhaps surprising transparency. More delicate acoustic material was dealt with just as effectively, and a Radio 3 performance of Schumann's *Quartet in E flat for piano and strings* (Op44), with Hugh Tinney and the Vanbrugh String Quartet found this listener quite entranced by utterly unfamiliar music. That said, this is certainly a speaker that really knows how to rock and roll, and if the bass alignment didn't match our listening room particularly well, this factor didn't seem all that obvious or important subjectively. Furthermore, it was good to hear full, deep bass alongside a smooth and open midband. **HFC**

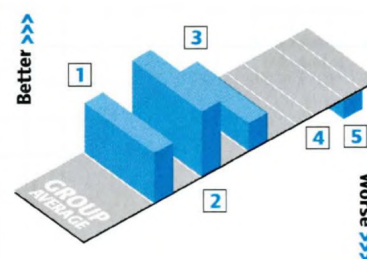


LAB REPORT

The very sparse specification includes a sensitivity rating of 89dB, which is comfortably met on our measurements, alongside a four ohm impedance, which actually seems rather conservative. In fact, the impedance stays above five ohms throughout, so this is quite an easy loudspeaker to drive. Pair matching looks pretty good too.

The far-field in-room response was very impressive through the midrange and treble, from 300Hz upwards, with a virtually seamless crossover transition. The port is tuned to a low 35Hz, ensuring impressive extension into the low bass, but the low frequency region was rather uneven under our conditions – a little too heavy in the low bass, and a little too lean in the upper bass and lower midband, so it may be worth experimenting further with the supplied bungs and room positioning.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +30%
- 2] Bass extension >> +40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> 0%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	4/ns ohms	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	ns	22Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%



PRACTICALITY >> 78%



BUILD >> 79%



VALUE >> 78%



Aside from the aesthetics, the large main driver offers invigorating dynamic expression, grip, bass extension and headroom. Overall, this is an impressively delicate, open and well-mannered speaker.

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

P R I M A R E



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OPERA MEZZA

This Italian mini boasts an attractive shape and luxurious finish

Opera is a well-established Italian speaker brand, operating alongside Unison Research in the north east of the country, just outside Treviso. In true Italian tradition it makes speakers with particularly attractive cabinetwork.

This Mezza is the latest, smallest and least costly member of the Linea Classica range, which also happens to be the least expensive of Opera's three speaker ranges. In the Linea Classica hierarchy, it's a new 'entry-level' model that sits below the Prima and Seconda, both of which have recently been reviewed in *Hi-Fi Choice* (issues 279 and 297 respectively).

Like its range-mates it's an attractive little speaker, though the emphasis here is firmly on the word 'little'. It shares similar styling cues to the larger Linea Classica models, with an overall shape that tapers slightly from front to back, curved sides that are beautifully veneered with thick horizontal real wood strips, and thick top and base sections covered in leather. The enclosure is immensely stiff, thanks to its small size and thick panels, while the shape also helps to de-focus internal standing waves.

The SEAS-sourced main driver here has a 125mm frame and a small transparent polypropylene diaphragm just 90mm in diameter. This is reflex-loaded by a front port – though it's worth noting that the manufacturer recommends the speaker should be sited a minimum of 300mm from rear or side walls, which concurs with our own

findings (see Lab Report).

The tweeter, again from SEAS, has a 25mm silk fabric dome diaphragm, ferrofluid cooling, plus a back chamber to reduce pressure behind the dome. Signal is applied via a single pair of high-quality gold-plated multi-way terminals that feed a PCB crossover network operating around 2.8kHz, with 12dB/octave filtering on the bass driver, and an 18dB/octave filter feeding the tweeter.

SOUND QUALITY

If achieving a flat and neutral frequency balance was the only factor in obtaining a top-quality sound, this little Mezzo would undoubtedly be a winner. Although it doesn't pack a lot of bass power or drive, it does deliver weight and scale that's truly surprising considering its small size and free-space siting, and does so with an overall smoothness and evenness that many rivals might envy.

The standard of overall neutrality and smoothness is, if anything, more impressive still, with just enough restraint in the presence zone to avoid any unwanted aggressive tendencies. Perhaps the top end might be just a little too strong for some tastes and systems, especially as the bass end is just a little on the lean side overall, but it is at least clean and sweet, even if the sound as a whole lacks some air and transparency.

No doubt aided by the small, tough and irregular shaped enclosure, there's no obvious boxiness here and the stereo soundstage is well formed with no tendency to cluster around the boxes. That said, focus could be tighter, and some lack of overall coherence seems to let the Mezzo down, both in image sharpness and precision but more significantly, also in its dynamic expression.

That lack of dynamic excitement and brio is really the core of this speaker's limitations. Its delivery is all rather matter-of-fact; it lacks any real get-up-and-go, so the end result always seems a little detached, and this didn't make it easy for listeners to get involved in the music. **HFC**



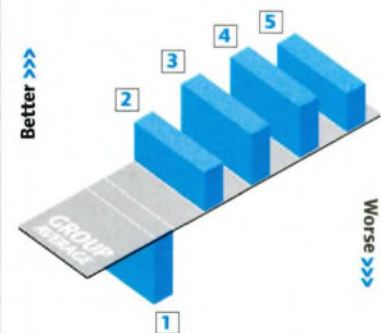
LAB REPORT

A modest 86dB sensitivity is claimed for this little loudspeaker, an inconsequential 1dB stronger than the figure arrived at using our measurement technique.

While this figure is relatively low, it should be seen in the context of an easy amplifier load, which stays comfortably above seven ohms throughout, a bass alignment best suited to free-space siting, plus surprisingly good ultimate bass extension from such a small enclosure. The latter reaches below 30Hz under in-room conditions, thanks to a low port tuning frequency of 38Hz.

The in-room far-field response is beautifully flat and smooth, holding within remarkably tight ± 2 dB limits above 150Hz, with just a mild notch around 1.7kHz. That said, the top end is perhaps a shade too strong, as it really ought to be rolled off a little more under these measurement conditions.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -40%
- 2] Bass extension >> +20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +30%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +30%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	85dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/6.2 ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	40Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 77%



PRACTICALITY >> 80%



BUILD >> 86%



VALUE >> 77%



Beautifully finished in wood and leather, the Mezza has superior neutrality and smoothness, and surprising bass weight, too. Dynamic expression is very limited though, and the overall sound lacks excitement.

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



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REVEL CONCERTA M12

Does Revel's budget standmount live up to its F12 big brother?

An American brand that began operations in the mid-1990s, Revel, like JBL, is part of the Harman group. It draws on the resources of the group's elaborate research facility in Northridge, California, so there's some family resemblance between the two brands, though Revel's headquarters is in Massachusetts, and this speaker is actually manufactured in Mexico.

Revel's budget Concerta range is essentially a surround sound package that includes two stereo pairs – the large F12 floorstander reviewed in *HFC* 269 and rated as a 'Best Buy', plus this £400 per pair M12 standmount, which, presumably, is intended primarily for surround sound duties.

Naturally enough it's a two-way design, loaded by a flared rear port. Although quite compact, it boasts an attractively chunky shape and feels quite hefty for the size, turning the scales to nearly 9kg. However, it has to be said that the overall effect is somewhat marred by a rather prosaic vinyl woodprint surface finish, and with this in mind the price does seem a little high.

A 165mm cast-frame driver with a 115mm cone handles bass and midrange duties, before handing over to a 25mm dome tweeter, loaded by a short horn flare and protected by a phase compensator. All these drivers use what Revel calls Organic Ceramic Composite (OCC) diaphragm material. This is actually created by deep-anodising aluminium, creating a stiffening oxide skin on the surface, which sounds entirely inorganic.



Both drivers are neatly mounted on a black-painted front panel, while the vinyl woodprint is available in cherry, maple or black. Leaving the grille off is an option, of course, though if this is done the picture-frame front edge is punctuated by eight black mounting lugs that don't look at all attractive. Steep-slope filters are used in the crossover between the drivers, fed from a single terminal pair.

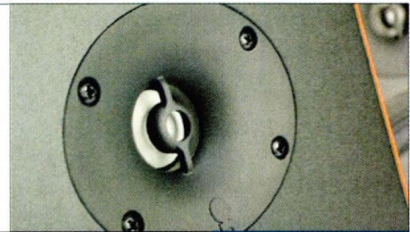
SOUND QUALITY

Despite our recent fondness for the F12, and the fact that this smaller Concerta shares some of that model's winning ingredients, we were unable to raise the same degree of enthusiasm for the M12.

While it's certainly best kept clear of walls, and the bass has an appealingly firm character, it also has a tendency to make bass guitars sound rather thumpy. There's also some lack of richness through the cello register, so that the left hand of a piano, for example, sounds a little weak and lacking in tonal warmth. No less serious perhaps, is a degree of midband coloration that is quite evident when reproducing the human voice, especially on speech. Not only do they sound a little 'thin', but there's a pinched character too, with more than a hint of nasality.

Dynamic range is pretty good here, indicating that the enclosure is under pretty good control, while dynamic expression is certainly par for the course amongst its peers, and rather better than some. But the top end is less happy. It lacks sweetness, smoothness, sounds a little too obvious and sometimes a bit scratchy too. Without meaning to sound overly harsh, it's inclined to sound a touch crude.

There is much that is competent here, but at the same time there's nothing really to distinguish this speaker from the average. It's simply not special enough in view of the price, and the cosmetic presentation is rather lacking in imagination. **HFC**

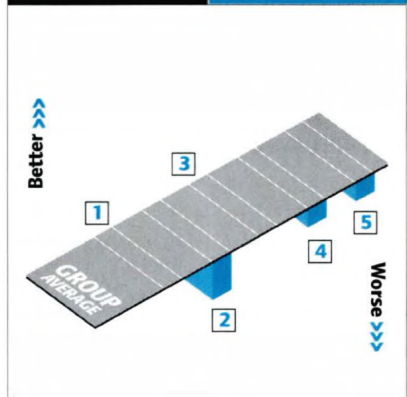


LAB REPORT

One surprise with the M12 is that the port here is tuned to around 57Hz, a significantly higher figure than the average for this group. This should ensure little bass extension below 40Hz, even with in-room reinforcement, as the spec confirms. In fact the port output is sufficiently strong and showed some excess at our 52Hz room mode to provide some compensation, but it does mean that this speaker should be kept well clear of walls.

The quoted 87dB sensitivity seems about right, and the load stays above six ohms, though it does look quite complex. Measured under far-field in-room conditions, the frequency balance is a little uneven through the low frequency decade, due to room interaction effects; smooth, restrained and laid-back through the broad midband; and slightly prominent and rather uneven through the treble, with visible peaks around 4.3kHz, 7.4kHz and 10kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/16 ohms	8/5.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (6dB)	48Hz	37Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 77%

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

BUILD >> 79%

VALUE >> 79%

This punchy little standmount boasts good basic drive and some drama, but the laid-back midband has some colorations, while the treble sounds a bit coarse. The price seems a little high given the basic presentation too.

HI-FI CHOICE **78%**
OVERALL SCORE

CONCLUSIONS

Weird and wonderful, or just plain weird? This group has elements of both

This is an unusual group of speakers, on at least three counts. All of them are standmounts; all but one have just a single terminal pair; and all are intended for free-space siting.

The overall price span ranges from a highly affordable £350 to £800, though the majority are down towards the lower end of this price range.

Given that these are all standmounts, the size range is quite large: two are miniatures (around seven-litres total internal volume); three are more or less the standard 14-litre standmount

size; the Dynaudio is a relative giant at three times that volume.

While it would be somewhat misleading to describe any of the loudspeakers in this month's *Ultimate Group Test* as representing exceptional value for money in the current market context, two models are awarded HFC's coveted Best Buy rating. Each of these offers exceptional performance, albeit in its own rather extreme way.

The thing that distinguishes the £450 Aurousal A1 is its use of a single full-range (Jordan) drive unit. While this inevitably introduces

some balance anomalies, it's arguably a fair price to pay for the sheer realism created by the speaker's wonderful coherence and directness.

Equally unusual is the £775 per pair Dynaudio DM 2/10. A veritable giant amongst two-way stand-mounts, it boasts a much larger main driver than most two-ways and this confers superior dynamic expression, bass extension and headroom.

Of the other four, the Bowers & Wilkins 685 (£380 per pair) is an impressive all-rounder that does everything very competently and

would be a safe choice for any system.

The attractive £450 per pair, lacquer-finish Audio Pro Avanti A.10 DC isn't perfect, but it does sound very engaging and involving, and is also available in a wood-finish for £130 less.

The £400 per pair Revel Concerta M12 is a solid enough performer, but it didn't push the buttons as effectively as its much larger F12 range-mate. And while the £595 per pair Opera Mezza is the prettiest, smoothest and most neutral in the group, its dynamic performance was weak. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

>> Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads

>> Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important, so take the necessary time and trouble experimenting.

>> Moving a speaker from a free-space location until it's close to a wall will substantially boost the mid-bass.

>> Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.

>> Use decent speaker cable, if you want your system to perform at its best.

LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Audio Pro Avanti A.10 DC	Aurousal A1	Bowers & Wilkins 685	Dynaudio DM 2/10	Opera Mezza	Revel Concerta M12
PRICE	£450	£450	£380	£775	£595	£400
SOUND						
PRACTICALITY						
BUILD						
VALUE						
OVERALL						
CONCLUSION	Curved sides, lacquer finish and an engraving sound. However, balance and neutrality are both suspect.	Wood-veneered single system driver has magical coherence, but elevated midband gives some coloration.	Classy cosmetics and drivers offer smooth, even-handed sound. May be a little too cautious and laid back for some.	Not pretty but well-mannered, while the large main driver gives invigorating dynamic expression and grip.	Beautifully styled and finished miniature with superior neutrality but limited dynamic expression.	Punchy standmount has a laid-back midband and some coloration. However, the treble is a bit rough.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE (WxHxD)	20x34x33cm	20.5x36x27cm	23x42x34cm	27.5x45x34.5cm	17x29x31.5cm	22.5x35x29.5cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	1-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x130mm	1x130mm	1x165mm	1x250mm	1x130mm	1x165mm
STAND/ FLOOR?	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand
CABINET FINISH	Lacquer	Real wood	Vinyl	Vinyl	Real wood/leather	Vinyl
BI-WIRE?	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	87dB A	89dB G	88dB A	89dB G	95dB P	87dB A
EST. BASS EXTENSION	40Hz A	37Hz A	40Hz A	22Hz G	28Hz G	37Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	6/4 ohms A	8/6 ohms G	7/5 ohms A	7/5 ohms A	10/8 ohms G	8/5.5 ohms G
OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE	-220% A	-20% A	+20% G	0% A	+30% G	-10% A
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	-30% P	-10% A	+30% A	-10% G	+30% A	-10% P

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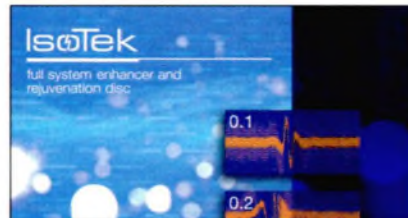
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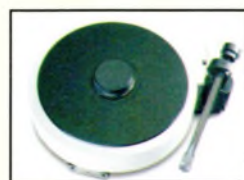
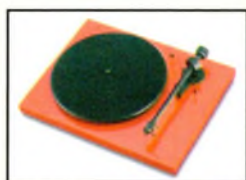
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Lucy just couldn't understand Tom's sudden lack of interest in an early night

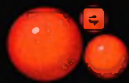


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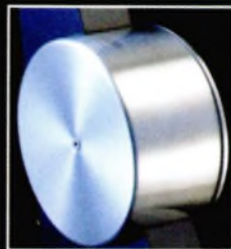


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nonconformist

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

Reference 3 - Stainless Steel
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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 BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000												
	Audio Analogue Rossini	850	Valve-sporting player delivers a warm, engaging sound, but mediocre remote and no optical out may limit appeal									299
	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
	Ayre CX-7e	2,195	If you want a clean-sounding, revealing and entertaining player with fabulous build this is a strong contender									281
	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced									286
EC	Classé CDP-202	4,750	CD/DVD-A player with brilliant sound, if sophistication is your bag. Includes S-video and composite outputs									284
	Copland CDA823	1,750	Don't let the laid-back character fool you - this player has plenty of insight too									280
	Cyrus CD8x/PSX-R	1,400	Lightness of touch is the key here, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer too									295
EC	Esoteric X-03SE	4,995	Resolution and musicality close to the top of the game. For out and out transparency and build quality it's hard to beat									285
EC	Gamut CD3	3,500	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music									289
EC	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output									289
	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best									291
	Linn Majk	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm									283
EC	Marantz SA-7S1	5,000	Something of a bargain even at this price, the SA-7S1 sets the benchmark for CD/SACD players of its ilk									297
	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-RAY v8	1,098	Accurate, yet musical performer. £799, but requires £299 TRIPLE-X power supply outside of X-T100 system									288
	Naim CD5x	1,450	Unique design nicely complements a sophisticated and highly capable performance									280
	Pathos Digit	1,995	Great looks and very good tonality are plus points. Imaging and musical communication slightly less assured									299
	Rega Saturn	1,298	Good detail, lively natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character									295
EC	Unison Research Unico CD	1,495	Strong timing and rhythm, this player is well equipped for more melodic music, with good detail resolution									295

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



Copland CDA823 £1,750

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



Esoteric X-03SE £4,995

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

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



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

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



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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

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

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

DVD-AUDIO

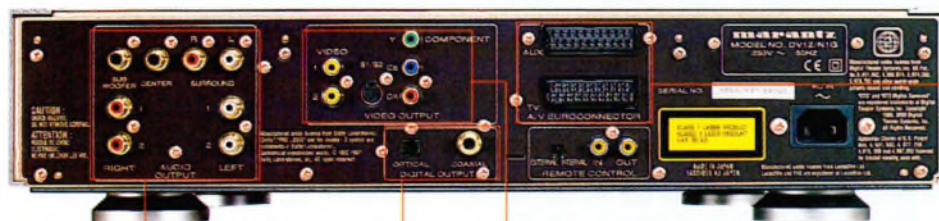
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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

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



CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELECTRIC OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET		
UP TO £1,000										
	Arcam DVA 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 DVA 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
EC	Denon DVD-A1XV	2,500	Sophisticated universal player with state of the art video processing, high class disc replay, especially SACD	●	●	●	●	●	●	266
EC	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi	●	●	●	●	●	●	259
	Marantz DV9600	1,500	With excellent, next-generation picture and impressive sound quality on CD and SACD, this sets a very high standard to beat	●	●	●	●	●	●	280
EC	Meridian G98AH	3,625	Meridian's most widely compatible G-Series DVD player – groundbreaking DVD-Audio replay and a fine CD player too	●	●	●	●	●	●	265
EC	Naim DVD5	2,565	Naim's first DVD player is a real success, notable for its class-leading sound with CD and (optional) multichannel DVD-Audio	●	●	●	●	●	●	263
	T+A SACD 1245 R	2,000	Dedicated stereo only/SACD/CD player avoids the usual compromises. It does a limited job, but it does it with fine fidelity	●	●	●	●	●	●	279
EC	Townshend TA 565 CD	3,000	A universal machine that excels with music and is quite exceptional with good ol' stereo CD	●	●	●	●	●	●	270

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

TOP BUYS



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 DVA 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

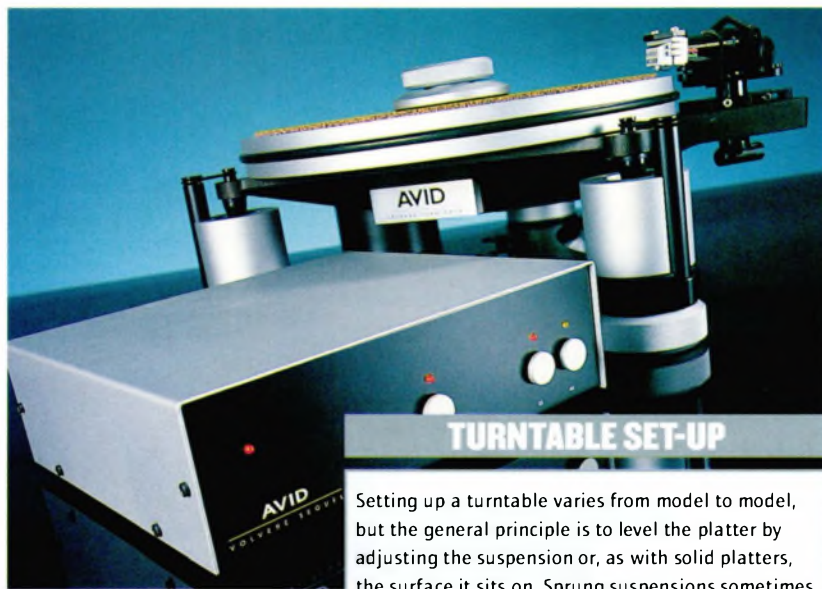


Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, 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 EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP. SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	
EC	Avid Volvere	2,750	A combination of a heavy platter with a sprung suspension that makes the vinyl it spins sound powerful and solid	33/45					298
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45					229
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45					268
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Performance	1,670	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance. Good arm and cartridge	33/45					295
EC	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45					271
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78				opt	276
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Funk Firm Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45				opt	279
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45				opt	284
<input type="checkbox"/>	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45					266
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Technodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45					268
EC	Michell Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45					235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject Expression II	250	A smooth and engaging turntable with the ability to revel in the glory of vinyl, with upgradable arm cable	33/45					289
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 5	400	Great looks plus an on the ball, engaging sound that puts it in the serious league, needs good isolation for best results	33/45					279
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 6 1	550	With its minimal chassis and huge platter this is a steady design that's capable of fine results with a decent cartridge	33/45/78					294
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,000	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon-fibre arm	33/45					268
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P3-24	398	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply	33/45			opt		298
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45				opt	257
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45				opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45					228
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45					248
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series W/309 hybrid arm	33/45					195
EC	SME 20/12A	11,133	Brings a calmness and precision to vinyl replay that we have rarely encountered, build quality is second to none	33/45/78					293
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45					259

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cartridge Man MM III	625	The MM III challenges MCs at twice the price, it produces detail, space and energy and has stunning resolve in the right arm				266
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around				285
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss				235
EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality				215
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ortofon Salsa	200	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean, agile sound				290
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo II	239	High output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound				270
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light				235
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for				265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money				253

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

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

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

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

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

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

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Model 10A



Model 20/2A



Model 20/12A



Model 30/2A



Series M2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



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

DAB or FM?

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

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

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



Denon TU-1800DAB £250

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



Creek T50 £550

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



T+A T1210R £1,000

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



Magnum Dynalab MD 90T £1,195

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

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128					251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7					283
<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	FM,M,L	100					281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, but the decent performance on both bands makes this a great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200					283
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves – but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt			257
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST7001	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!		200					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30					250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB,FM,M	99					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30					242
<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	FM	100					283
DAB TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA DT91	450	Some grain at low levels, but sound is lively, large in scale and tonally very natural. Very smart!	DAB,FM	16					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10					248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon TU-1800DAB	200	Very good detail and a highly believable impression of real musicians playing. Imaging can be a little constricted	DAB,FM,M	200					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST7001	250	Midband detailed and precise: treble can be thick but bass is extended, and sound generally energetic	DAB,FM,M	200					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C445	300	FM is laid-back despite bright balance, but has good detail. DAB slightly livelier than most	DAB,FM	30					299
<input type="checkbox"/>	Onkyo T-4555DAB	350	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard in all areas on	DAB,FM	40					299

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.

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-Radds 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 DIGITAL RECORDERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

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

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

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



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

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

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

How to choose an amp

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



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

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

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

Q&A

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

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

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

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

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

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

HOME CINEMA STEREO

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

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

TOP BUYS



Marantz PM7001 £350

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



Cyrus 6vs2 £600

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



Primare 130 £1,500

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



Copland CTA405 £2,498

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £1,000								
EC	Arcam DIVA A70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM		60	289
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Well-featured amp with little character of its own - highly informative sound	6	opt		90	286
	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6			75	279
EC	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
EC	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7			40	293
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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								
EC	Audia Flight TWO	2,500	Quirky, but musically highly effective model which is expressive and analytical, with some minor operational quirks	8			100	280
EC	Bryston B100-SST DAC	3,850	A remarkable amplifier which is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of an impressive onboard DAC	6			100	275
EC	Chapter Précis	3,995	Tight, nimble and dynamic across the board and unusually articulate in the bass, but the ergonomics could be refined	6			130	281
	Copland CTA405	2,498	Avoids pratfalls 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
EC	Densen Beat B150	3,000	Gorgeous bass: slight treble dryness detracts only a little. Good sense of scale and rock-steady rhythms appeal too!	6	opt	opt	100	277
EC	Gamut DI 150	5,700	Serious contender for the best integrated amp ever. The DI 150 takes on pre/power combos on their own terms	6			180	275
EC	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4			200	289
EC	Moon Evolution i-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5			150	288
EC	Musical Fidelity A1008	2,999	With DAC, phono stage and built-in valve buffer, this powerhouse amp can really grab hold of a loudspeaker	4			250	295
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7			180	285
EC	Naim SuperNat	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
	Pure Sound A30	1,100	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though	3			30	298
EC	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
EC	Sugden A21SE	1,995	Hot-running Class A amplifier that sounds more delicious than most. A definite step up from the classic A21a	4			40	268
	Unison Res. Unico Secondo	1,200	Very good detail and coherence. Tonality is natural, imaging precise and deep, and dynamics are wide and unforced	6	opt		110	297
EC	Unison Res. Performance	5,500	Massive and bulky valve amp sounds brilliant, with good power for a single-ended design, wide bandwidth and fine neutrality	5			40	287

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PREAMP/FEED	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET
UP TO £2,000									
	Croft Precession I/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer			6		25	290
	Cyrus Pre Vs2/6 Power	1,000	Pre offers stunning resolution and feature count for the money and power is subtle, open and musical					50	290
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz			2		266	
EC	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6		125	270
EC	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
EC	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	A highly enjoyable pre/power combination with fine levels of detail, good rhythm, stable and precise imaging			2		50	297

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

Our favourite STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ESSE NUMBER	
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	●	●	5	opt	●	273		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●	●	5	opt	●	277		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt	●	●	6	opt	●	100	278	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too	●	●	6	opt	●	400	293	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8		opt	80	276	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●				180	253	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●	●	5	opt	●		265	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●				200	247	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	●	125	250	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●				700	234	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4				238	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●				140	208	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6				233	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	●	●	7			128	256	

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 is where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have built-in amplification and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as their movie

DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo. There

are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Yamaha
DSP-AX759SE £550
 If you're looking for an affordable multichannel amp that's good with music as well as home cinema, this is 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.



Classe
SSP-600/CA-5200 £11,900
 Anyone seeking a high-end multichannel solution that's equally adept with music and movies should park their ears here.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ESLIE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS							
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A11XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital I/O	11	140	273	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon AVC-A11XV	4,000	Inlegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously	170	266		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmickry	3	160	255	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy	7	100	273	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears	7	100	260	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1	8	90	250	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	8	135	275	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Classe 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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier	4		260	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	6		230	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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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Dino Phono Amplifier



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

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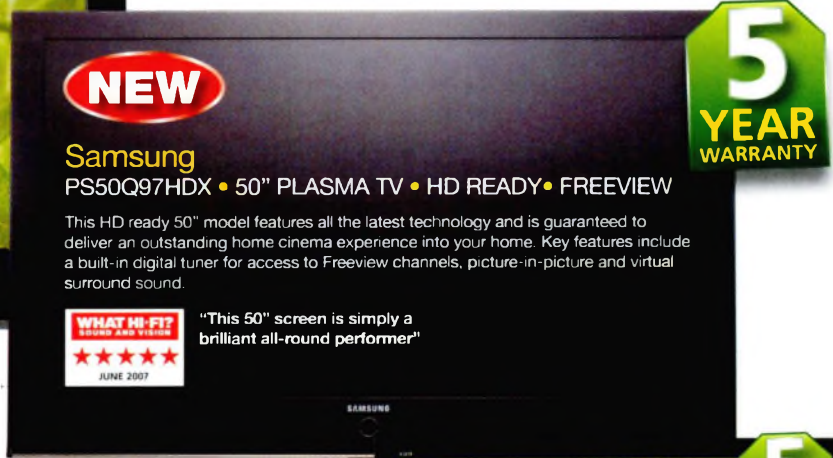
HOME CINEMA PLASMA AND LCD TV



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.



NEW

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"



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WITH A 26 INCH SCREEN OR LARGER

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

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.



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



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.



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 D80 1080P FULL HD READY

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

"Beautiful colour reproduction with superb detail and dynamics allied to Full HD spec."



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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 iDock 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 KHT3005SE • 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

This revised version of KEF's EISA award-winning KHT3005 backs-up its impressive looks with superb surround-sound. Powerful enough to fill even the largest of rooms, this SE version is a must audition speaker package.

"The new KHT3005SE is sensational"



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.

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GRADO
QED

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

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
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- Uniquely broad upgrade options
- Luxuriously high quality of manufacturer



Arcam SOLO MUSIC SYSTEM Monitor Audio RS1 SPEAKERS

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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.



iQ5SE

"These SEs are far more entertaining than the originals, yet leave the old speakers' fuss-free nature in tact."

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

"A new class-leader: a true all-rounder"

MARANTZ CD6002 • WHAT HI-FI OCTOBER 2007



NEW Marantz

Marantz products range from high-end hi-fi to HD-ready DVD players and A/V receivers. Its hi-fi range includes the CD5001QSE and new CD6002 CD players and the PM4001QSE amplifier, offering a taste of high-end audio at an incredibly competitive price.



Primare

With class-leading build quality, and a unique blend of sophisticated Scandinavian design, Primare build elegant, reliable, easy-to-use systems that promise years of high quality performance.



Rotel 06 Series

Rotel's 06 Series will give you years of enjoyment and offers excellent value for money. This range of separates creates a sound that, the more you hear it, the better it gets.



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.

NEW Bowers & Wilkins 685 SPEAKERS

Part of B&W's new 600 series, the 685 bookshelf speaker features technology developed for its flagship 800 series. The 6.5-inch woofer features a new fixed phase plug and rubber surround for a smoother midrange response and a copper-clad pole piece for better tweeter integration. B&W claims the tweeter is the most technologically advanced the company has ever offered in an entry-level product.



MULTI-ROOM AUDIO



Sonos

This wireless, multi-room digital music system, lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house - and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.

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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

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25% off original RRP on all end-of-line* hi-fi and A/V amps, receivers, CD and DVD players

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SAVE
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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. (NICWAOO)

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£899

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INCLUDES 1 YEAR WARRANTY

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Claim £200 towards the projection screen of your choice with selected Sim2 and InFocus projectors

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5 YEAR

Claim a five year warranty on all plasma and LCD TVs when purchased at our normal selling price (SRP)*

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EXETER 28 Cowick St 01392 218895	SOUTHAMPTON 33 London Rd 023 8033 7770
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HOLBORN 144-148 Grays Inn Rd 020 7837 7540	SWINDON 8-9 Commercial Rd 01793 610992
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Spectral

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HI-FI STAND
HE-684

INFORMATION

The Spectral High End HE-684 hi-fi stand is the ultimate experience in design and engineering. With striking sturdy ground aluminium columns and low vibration, extra thick safety glass panels, this hi-fi stand really is the ultimate audiophile support.

Pro-ject

CHECK ONLINE



HI-FI TURNTABLE
Debut USB

INFORMATION

The fantastic New Debut USB Hi-Fi Turntable features a fitted Ortofon OM 5E cartridge, Pro-ject Tonearm, Nominal speeds 33/45 RPM, Perspex Dust cover. Complete with USB and RCA phono cables.

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.

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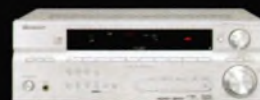


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ELS1 5.1

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PRO 50 MK2

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YAMAHA

INFORMATION

This Yamaha home theater package produces exceptional sound quality, superior reliability and easy to use features. In addition to this it offers flexible configurations, automatic system calibration and advanced video capabilities.



DALL

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 Dall 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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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
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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.

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Features High quality Gold Plated RCA input/output sockets, 10k ohms or input impedance, auto standby and signal detection, high quality power supply and signal capacitors and 120 watts into 8 ohms output power.

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MJ Acoustics XENO



MULTI AWARD WINNING SPEAKER PACKAGE

5.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM

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This amazing new XENO system features High Grade crossover, ability to be fed with a full range signal, Bass driver technology, Tweeter employing

soft dome technology and Boundary effect rear ports to enhance the refraction effects from the lower frequencies.

Sennheiser

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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 Talk Through function for the best possible attenuation of ambient noise (as featured in the Bristol Show 2007).

Onkyo

£ CALL FOR PRICE

5.1-CHANNEL RECEIVER HT-S590



INFORMATION

The Onkyo HT-S590 is a first class receiver speaker package that is guaranteed to fulfil your home cinema pleasure with a combined 660 watts power output the unit is HDTV compatible and features a range of input and output devices including all the latest sound specifications.

YAMAHA

CHECK ONLINE

CD PLAYER/DAB RADIO RECEIVER WITH SPEAKERS M170



INFORMATION

CD player with DAB digital radio receiver, plus two speakers, in one stylish and compact unit, finished in a luxurious high gloss finish. The M170 system has a 11cm cone woofer and 2.5cm dome tweeter, and can handle 110W of power.

InFocus

TEAC



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STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



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 (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SCALE 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
<input type="checkbox"/>	AcousticEnergyAegis Neo 3	370	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	A	24				294
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	750	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass	20,103,39	A	22				292
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5	A-	45				283
<input type="checkbox"/>	ALR Jordan Entry L	500	Not the most pretty speaker but a sonic triumph, with a beautifully judged balance and impressive transparency	20,86,29	A	23				279
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,350	Costly but clever; adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount	24,5,37,31,5	A	26				288
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21	A-	65				260
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23				226
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29	A	25				234
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28	A-	40				279
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 683	899	We have not come across this level of transparency in a sub-£1,000 speaker before, killer bass is sublime	19,8,98,34	A	38				297
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29	A	35				253
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	A	37				271
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34	A+	22				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	DALI Monitor 1	1,000	Beautiful miniature with advanced drivers sounds marvellously coherent with fine vocal expression	16,32,24	A	40				296
	Dynaudio Focus 110	850	Luxury real wood miniature with tapered enclosure sounds punchy, sweet and avoids boxiness	17,30,28	A-	38				279
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20	A-	28				273
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21	A-	40				269
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25	A-	40				265
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25	A-	25				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,000	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics, and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37,5	A+	20				288
<input type="checkbox"/>	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37	A	25				275
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF iQ3	280	Shapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33	A+	40				284
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF iQ9	800	Shapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33	A	25				273
	Mission élan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacey, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34	A+	48				298
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time-coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	A+	28				271
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25	A-	30				294
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which take's up little room and is easy to drive	20,36,27	A-	40				284
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	A	33				276
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	16,5,85,29,5	A	40				281

SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from walls! **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM HZ	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	PMC DB1+	625	Now with sweeter treble, this fun-size tiny lacks some weight and authority, but is beautifully balanced	16,29,24	A	50		261	
	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	20,5,97,29	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	
	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	
	Dali Helicon 400	2,999	Advanced drivers and enclosure give a generous sound with wide dynamic range and no boxiness	22,103,46	A	20		264	
	Dynaudio Focus 220	1,850	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble. Could be more dynamic	20,5,98,29,5	A-	<20		281	
	Eclipse TD510	1,200	Replacement for the TD512 does astonishing things with musical timing. £600 floor stands also recommended	24,36,26	A	45		277	
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up.	28,104,37,5	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	
	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35	A-	25		276	
	Focal Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	A+	30		255	
	Focal Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53	A-	20		248	
	Gamut L5	5,900	Impressive build and sophisticated driver design make the L5 a stunning speaker with rare transparency levels	20,116,43	A-	32		271	
	Jamo Reference R909	7,500	Top model (in a class of one) is open, full and easy on the ear, and surely a classic in the making	48,127,54	A-	25		280	
	KEF Reference Model 2012	3,500	Very classy but costly three-way stand-mount with much improved Uni-Q; could be more transparent	25x42x41	A	30		298	
	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	
	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	
	Opera Seconda	1,295	Classy cabinetwork plus beautifully judged neutrality with crisp, clean and deep bass	24,102,5,31,5	A-	20		297	
	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	

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICESTEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxD) (CM)	POSITIONING	FREQ. RANGE (Hz)	FREI. SWAGE	CLOSE TO WALL	ESSE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	335,57,5,10	A+	45			285
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38,5	A-	45			294
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	A	30			265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	A-	48			274
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	A	35			277
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	opt	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27			241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	A	5	22			224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28			224
	Dynaudio Audience 42 package	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53			241
	Final Sound Electrostatic system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20			251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50			232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18			253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30			232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28			241
	Mordaunt-Short Genie	800	A price among sub/sat packages – good integration and impressively little compromise compared to full-size models	A-	6	38			262
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25			210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim n-SAT/n-CENT/n-SUB	3,385	Priced here as a 5.1 package, Naim's neat n-SATs and matching sub/centre make an exceptional compact ensemble	A	6	20			268
	Tannoy Arena	1,200	Fabulously stylish sub/sats with Dual Concentric drivers. Unusually revealing for the breed, but sub lacks refinement	A	6	29			269

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus. **NUMBER OF SPEAKERS** The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	45,33,45	1,000	10	290

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers. **BASS FROM** How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being

best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not

quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack						250	245
	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
	Grado SR-60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	194
	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200	270
	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250	288
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	219
	Sennheiser LX90	35	Brings recognisably hi-fi sound to in-ear transducers, with surprisingly good resolution						35	290
	Sennheiser 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
	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
	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. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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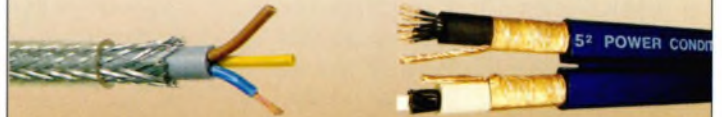


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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
<input type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Questor	70	Very open and informative at high and mid frequencies, with slightly dry bass. Imaging particularly fine					295
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audiocue Sidewinder	45	A lively and detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm. Slight added upper-bass warmth does little to detract					297
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit					293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass and excellently neutral and detailed midrange: treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction					299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Black Rhodium Concerto	225	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise					270
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!					279
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail					283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too					281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere					284
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	370	Micro-monofilament cable, silver plated more affordable alternative to Valhalla, sounds transparent, detailed and neutral					278
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ohnbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble					281
<input type="checkbox"/>	Profigold PGA3000	60	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good					299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Sword-ISL	379	Unusual inductance-free design, beautifully built, with bold, finely detailed and outgoing sound quality and excellent discipline					292
<input type="checkbox"/>	TCI Tiger	30	Not the most detailed interconnect around, but performance belies its modest price, especially in the bass					285
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Van den Hul MCSilver IT MkII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price					289
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price					273
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
<input type="checkbox"/>	Atlas Compass	50	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble, make this fine value					E 289
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble					E 278
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Select KS2020	629	Provides a subtle but rewarding lift in musicality with any DAC, justifying the price					E 260
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex Signature 75	80	First-rate balance and imaging – ever so nearly as good as it gets at any price					E 265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance					E 279
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
	Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	A high degree of musical communication: detail is not perfect but one is seldom aware of the shortfall					290
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board					227
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble					280
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, hi-res and suitable for exacting systems					278
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging – a budget bargain					276
<input type="checkbox"/>	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems					234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical					287
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round					241
<input type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times					291
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wireworld Luna 16/4	5	Budget biwire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail					292
<input type="checkbox"/>	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 **STRAINED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal.

COPPER Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical.

Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isosshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearlight Audio Aspekt	650	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively	75	56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless	65	60,42		4	Glass	293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57,41		5	Glass	263
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design Vantige	449	'Acoustic Aluminium' shelves plus steel supports equal practicality plus musical satisfaction: just a shade bright	62	49,44		4	Metal	271
	Partington Minim	389	Looks good, sounds good and is impressively flexible to boot	75	45,36		5	Glass	261
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise	50	20,17	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	293
<input type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16.5,18	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	281
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More a range than a model, capable of fine results especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16.5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2	299
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16.3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	283
<input type="checkbox"/>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	261
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies	53	31,22	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		6	287
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3	280

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.

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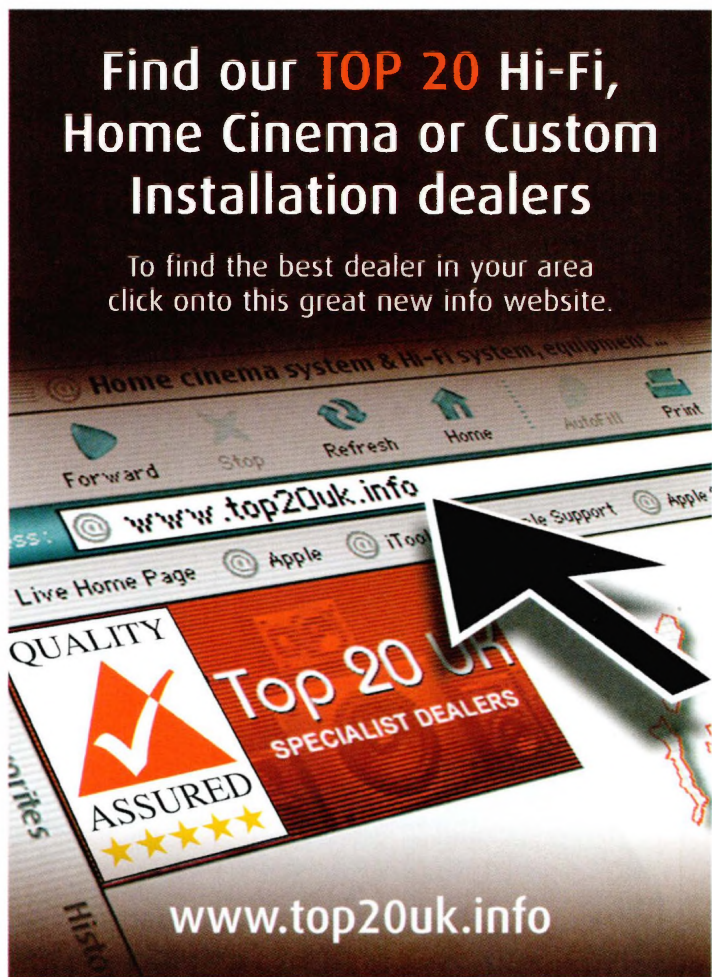
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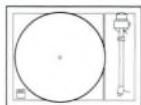
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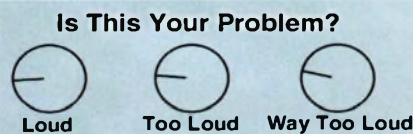
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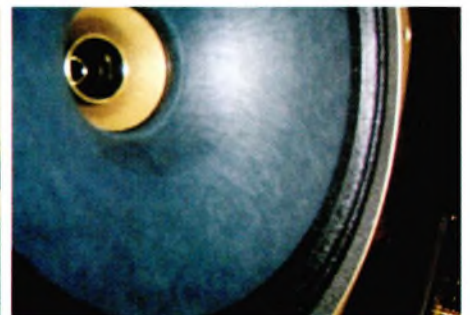
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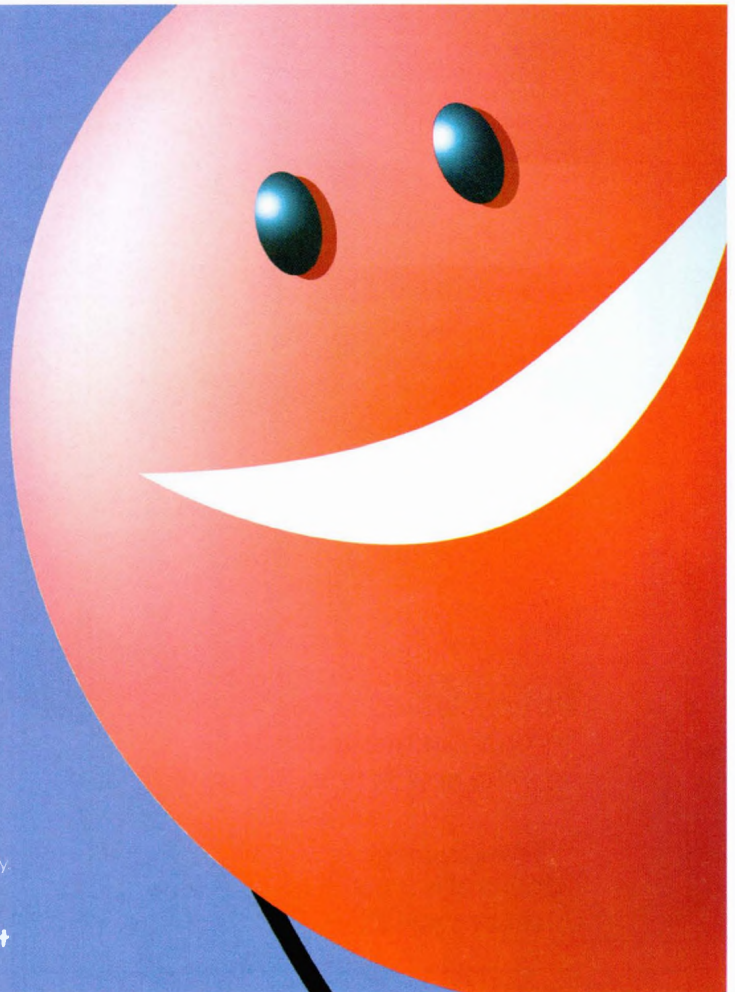
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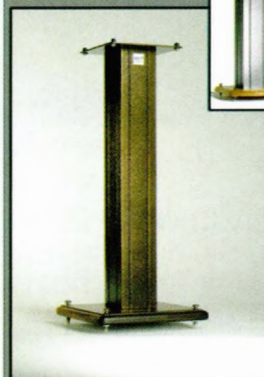
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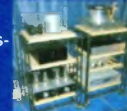
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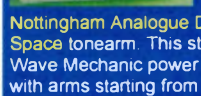


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2nd-hand shootout

Looking for a second-hand amplifier? Here are our top four recommendations at £500

Our first of four second-hand £500 amplifiers is the Arcam FMJ A32. Still a current model, it's hard to believe that this upmarket integrated amplifier first saw the light of day at the tail end of 2001. Priced at £1,100 when launched, the FMJ A32 was very much new territory for Arcam – at least in terms of integrated amplification. The FMJ (Full Metal Jacket) casing was far more substantial than the previous Alpha 10, yet the class-leading range of features remained. If it's flexibility in an amplifier you're after, then there are few better: remote control, speaker switching, headphone socket, and the ability to trim input and tone levels on individual sources are all standard. Sound quality is composed, musical and, thanks to a 100 watts power output, powerful enough for most.

Although it's nearly six years old now, there have been remarkably few changes. There was a small software change early in its life to change the power-up conditions for custom install, but other than that there's been nothing of consequence. Reliability and durability are both excellent, which makes even the oldest example a sound buy. Our £500 should easily be enough for an early 2002 or 2003 model.

Launched around a year later, Exposure's 3010 offered a different take on the £1,000 integrated amplifier model. Like the Arcam, it too offered 100 watts and solid build quality. Unlike the A32, though, features were kept to a minimum. A volume control and input selector are about your lot with the 3010, but then many will like it that way. The sound quality is distinctly different to the Arcam, too. It may be slightly rougher around the edges, especially with strings, but there is little doubting its punchy bass, rhythmic integrity and depth of sound.

As our budget should be enough for a

three- or four-year-old model, you shouldn't really come across any issues with reliability. If you're planning on keeping the amp for some time, it's good to know that Exposure usually keep spares for at least 10 years after a product has been discontinued. They are also happy for units to be returned to the factory for service, or even a complete overhaul.

If it's the 'nearly new' option you seek, then you won't do much better than the Cambridge Audio Azur 840A. With this award-winning amp having been on sale for around 18 months, we are already starting to see models on the market around our price range. Although £750 new, the 840A has characteristics – such as excellent midrange/treble transparency and speaker driving abilities – that wouldn't be out of place in an amplifier costing twice as much.

Despite brazening a new Class XD technology, the Azur 840A has proved to be generally reliable; something that

“Even at this price, there are still some fine pre/power combinations available.”

couldn't always be taken for granted with earlier Cambridge Audio amps. As this amplifier is only available new – in the UK at least – from Richer Sounds stores, you'll also find them to be the exclusive service agents. With around 46 stores in the UK, it shouldn't prove too hard to service an Azur 840A. One second-hand buying tip is to seek a model with a three-year guarantee. From new, they only came with a year's warranty, but an extra two years' was available for a small charge. This guarantee is also transferable. Keep an eye on condition, too. That anodised front panel may look smart, but it does scuff

Above: Cambridge Audio Azur 840A



easily – especially if finished in silver.

Of course, amplification doesn't always have to be integrated and even at this price, there are still some fine pre/power combinations available. Most designs are going to be older than the integrated ones here so, with this in mind, it's worth going for a brand with a solid reputation for longevity. Reputations within the hi-fi industry come little better than Quad. For around £500, you should be able to buy a late-1980s or early-1990s Quad 66/606 pre/power combination. For this you'll get an amp combo with superb build quality, contemporary good looks and enough grunt to drive awkward speakers. Sound quality is

typically Quad in that it tends to suit classical and acoustic music more than pop or rock. Still, if it's control, smoothness and a long-term, low fatigue listen you're after, the 66/606 are more than capable.

Although now owned by Chinese conglomerate IAG, Quad service is legendary. Quad will happily deal with the public directly and offer a fixed labour charge of around £50 per unit. If you don't have the original box, Quad will even supply that too! Other than the usual component deterioration, very little goes wrong with these amps and provided they're well serviced, even a 20-year-old example should be good for another couple of decades.

What we have here, then, are four great options that prove that £500 is ample for a second-hand amp that will really kick butt. Match this with promised reliability, and all four make a sound buy. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

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Below: Arcam FMJ A32 integrated amp



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Quad 33/303, vgc for year fully serviced
Quad 99 Poweramp, as new boxed
Quad 909 Power, excellent boxed
Radford STA25 Renaissance and SC25 Pre/Power, excellent
Roksan Caspan Integrated, ex remote
Rotei RB991, ex boxed
Sonic Frontiers Anthem Pre IL & Power 1, Reduced to only
TACT/Lyngdorf Audio SDA2175, great press, as new
Tube Technology Prophet and matching pis vgc boxed
Tube Technology Signature Integrated, ex boxed
Unison Research S8, 845 madness, a real treat

Speakers

Audiovector M3 Sg, active crossovers, new £4k+, amazing
AVI ADM9 in Walnut
AVI Pro Nine Plus Actives, less than 6 months old
Castle Richmond 3, excellent boxed
Dynaudio 110 with matching stands
Dynaudio Audience 42, excellent mini
Dynaudio Audience 42, excellent mini
Dynaudio Contour 1.8 mk2 ex boxed
Epos ES14, vgc
Kef IQ5, as new boxed
Linn Tukon, excellent boxed
Linn Sara, excellent boxed with Sara stands
Linn Kan, excellent, boxed with stands
Living Voice Auditorium 2, ex boxed
Martin Logan Aeries (boxed bargain)
Mission Freedom 5, excellent
Monitor Audio S8, ex boxed
Monitor Audio, mint boxed GS20 in Piano Black, ex dem
Monitor Audio, mint boxed RSW1 2 Subwoofer
NAIM Credo in cherry, vgc boxed
Neat Acoustics Petite 3 SE c/w Ultimatum bass drivers NOW
NHT V2, fantastic large floorstander
Opera Duo, superb little standmount
Quad ESL989, excellent boxed BARGAIN!
PMC TB2 in cherry, reduced again
Ref Strata, Mk1, as new!
Revel M20, scruffly with stands
JM Reynaud Offrande, boxed superb c/w matching stands
Revolver R33 ex dem, well reviewed bargain
Rogers LS3/5a, need we say more
Roid Minstrel, ex back
Ruark Taisman 2, vgc in walnut
Ruark Crusader 2, excellent in black
Ruark Sabre, vgc, nice mid sized standmount
Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor, amazing mini monitor
Sonus Faber Concerto c/w SF Stands
Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home
Spendor S5e, cherry nr mint boxed
Tandberg Studio Monitor Large!
Triangle T1us 202, c/w Tristans
Usher Audio S525 and SW103 Sub - 51 system

Accessories/Systems

Chord Signature 1m interconnect
Cyrus PSXR, ex boxed
H. Kardon AVR635 - was 9999
Linn Classic K with onboard tuner, as new boxed
Linn Isobank Active Xover box
Musical Fidelity X-PSU v3 excellent
Tara Labs Ref 6 Spkr cable
TEAC 500 series 51 system: Amp, DVD, Tuner, Spkrs all for only

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Speakers:

Tannoy Mini Autographs (ex demo) £695
Mordaunt Short Avant 902 speakers with stands £125
B & W 801 Mark 1 speakers £695
Dynaudio Audience 7 speakers & stands £395
Hales Transcendence 5 Loudspeakers £2900
New Acoustic Zen Adagio speakers £3995
New Almarro Mk 3 speakers £2695

Pre-amps:

Mark Levinson ML 26S Balanced pre-amp £2495
Proceed FAV pre-amp £995
Audionote Zero pre-amp with remote control (new) £595
Audionote M8 pre-amp with phono stage (£19,500) £9995

Amplifiers:

ASR Emitter 1 Exclusive amplifier Boxed/Mint £5995
Audionote Neiro mono-blocks £5495
Classe CA201 amp £1595
Conrad Johnson Premier 8 mono blocks £5995
Harman Kardon FA2200 power amp £195
Kora Triode 100SB £3500
Lumley Stereo 70 Amp with passive pre-amp £1595
Musical Fidelity A1 integrated amp £120
Nakamichi Amp 1 with Cassette Deck 2 and CD Player 3 £795
Audionote Kegan mono amps, mint (£28,000) £11995
Pathos "Twin Towers" integrated amp £1695

CD Players, Transports and DACs:

Denon DCD 590 CD player £60
Marantz CD873 CD player £65
Sony CDP M41 CD player £60
Sonic Frontiers SFD1 DAC £795
Wadia 850 CD player (superb/Boxed/Book) £2995

Miscellaneous:

Isotek Substation £595
Sony ST-SE570 tuner £60
Nakamichi 682 Cassette Deck £395
Winds stylus gauge £425
Sony FM/AM ST-SE370 Tuner £75
Transparent Music Link Plus 1 mtr. Interconnect £125
Moth Mains conditioner £150

Turntables, Cartridges and Tonearms:

Audio Tekne cartridge with step-up transformer £2495
My Sonic Eminent cartridge (new) £2750
Blue Pearl turntable with Graham Phantom arm £POA
Audio Innovations 1000 MC step up transformer £150
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ITEM DESCRIPTION	SALE	NEW
Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items		
Esoteric P03 / D03 CD player - boxed - unused - owned 1 week - whoops!	£14000	£20000
Audio Research Reference 3 line pre-amp - with Jorma 1SA mains lead	£6000	£9500
VPI/TNT Junior record player	£1500	£4500
Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace with LV mat - 15 months old - perfect	£1400	£2450
Lyra Helicon Mono - only very light use	£600	£1200
Sheu Premier MkII turntable with upgraded platter	£500	
Schroeder DPS 9" tonearm - Barocle wood - hens' teeth	£2000	£3000
Jan Allaerts Finish - light use	£1500	£4000
VDH Various MC cartridges - Frogs, Grasshoppers, Colibris - 10 - 150 hrs use		please call
Jorma Prime Interconnect 1m XLR - XLR	£1000	£3200
Jorma Prime Interconnect 2m XLR - XLR	£1400	£4200
Jorma Prime Interconnect 1.5m phono - phono	£1200	£3600
Kuzma Airline tonearm - Kondo silver internal and external lead - ouch	£3500	£7500
Kuzma Stogi 'S' unipivot tonearm - new - lovely sound - giveaway	£350	£650
Rogue Audio Zeus stereo power amplifier - very big and very heavy	£3000	£7500
Naim NAC 72 & NAP 140	£650	
Mactone MA300B 20 watts power amp - as new - 2 months old	£3000	£6500
Mactone XX330 line pre-amp - as new - 2months old - boxed	£2500	£8000
Avalon Arcus loudspeaker - Maple - very tidy	£2500	£7000
Unison Research Smart 300B class A monos - 12 months use - giveaway	£1800	£4500
Lavardin PE Reference line pre-amplifier - 1 lady driver - perfect	£1500	£2400
Lavardin AP power amplifier - spotless as above	£2100	£3400
Exposure 3010 CD player - as new - boxed - 100 hours use	£850	£1400
Audio Aero Capitele CD24 / 192 - factory serviced - vgc	£1700	£4000
Audionet Ari V2 CD player - perfect, as new - 6 months old	£1500	£2500
Audionet Ari V2 CD player - perfect, as new - 18 months old	£1300	£2500
Audionet SAM integrated amplifier - perfect, as new - 6 months old	£1500	£2500
Cairn 480B integrated amplifier with remote - 10 months old - boxed - mint	£550	£1200
Esoteric X03 CD player - perfect - boxed - 200 hours max use	£3750	£5000
Placette passive line stage - 3 inputs - 120v - remote control - 6 months old	£700	£1600
Cardas Golden Reference speaker cable - 3m single set - very light use	£1250	£2250
Border Patrol 300B SE - Western Electronics	£1900	
Canary 601 line pre-amplifier - very smart - Living Voice upgrades - lovely	£1500	£3000
Nottingham Analogue Mentor - SME 345 tonearm - old timer - much loved	£1250	
Canary 303 monos - 22 watts 300B power with Living Voice upgrades	£3500	£7500
Canary 608 integrated amp - standard unit	£1000	
Canary 300B monos - 10 watts - excellent condition - giveaway	£800	
Horning Agathon - Silver Oak - excellent condition - no packaging - giveaway	£1000	£4000

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VINYL

FORSSELL AIR FORCE REFERENCE	BOXED	£6995
MICHELL ORBE & QC PSU	MINT/BOXED	£1595
ORACLE DELPHI V (E4000)	NEW/DIS	£2995
ORACLE DELPHI IV		TBA
ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE SAMBA MK II & ARM	NEW	£1595
QUASAR LE SKELETAL BRASS/ACRYLIC TURNTABLE SUPERB	EXCLT	£1150
TRANSCRIBERS & SKELETAL ARM (COLLECTORS ITEM)	EXCLT	£750
LINN LP12 & ITTDCX LVII	EXCLT	£650
LINN LP12 (VARIOUS)		RING
SME V TONEARM	MINT/BOXED	£995
GRAHAM 2 TONEARM	MINT/BOXED	£995
NVA TWO BOX MC PHONO STAGE	EXCLT	£395
ANTIQUE SOUNDLABS MINI PHONO STAGE 2-BOX	EX.DEM	£299
MEIXING MING DA MC767 RD MM/MC PHONO STAGE	MINT/BOXED	£299
BILL BEARD MM/MC PHONO STAGE	EXCLT	£375
McCORMACK MINI PHONO DRIVE	EX DEM	£349
ASR MINI BASIS PHONO STAGE	NEW/BOXED	£495
GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD & ELEVATOR	MINT	£675

TRANSPORTS/DACS/CD

DCS P-81 SACD/CD/VOLUME (8 WEEKS OLD) E7000	AS NEW	£3995
McKINTOSH MCD-201 SACD/CD/VOLUME	NEW/BOXED	£2995
EINSTEIN THE CD PLAYER	EXCLT	£1500
CONSONANCE LINEAR CD PLAYER	NEW/BOXED	£650
PERPETUAL TECH. P1-A/P3-A/P3B MODWRIGHT SIG-2	BRAND NEW	£1995
PEERPETUAL TECHNOLOGIES P-3A 24/96 DAC	BRAND NEW	£995
LECTOR DIGIDRIVE-TL & PSU	MINT/BOXED	£1295
ACUPHASE DP-90 TRANSPORT	EXCLT	£2750
THETA CARMEN CD/DVD TRANSPORT	MINT/BOXED	£1295
THETA DATA II TRANSPORT (SILVER)	MINT/BOXED	£795
THETA DATA TRANSPORT	VCC	£495
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDS III CD/TRANSPORT	N.O.S	£395
MSB LINK DAC 24/96kHz MODULE	MINT/BOXED	£375
Z SYSTEMS Z-3src UPSAMPLER (E1450 NEW)	MINT/BOXED	£450
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.III HDCC DAC	N.O.S	£350
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.1.2 HDCC DAC	N.O.S	£275
AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V.1.1 HDCC DAC	N.O.S	£250
MARANTZ CD63 KI-SIG MKII	MINT/BOXED	£295
DENON 2800 MKII GOLD (HDCC)	MINT/BOXED	£299
PRIMARE V-25 CD/DVD PLAYER (E1000 NEW)	NEW/BOXED	£475
MUSICAL FIDELITY X-10V3 TUBE BUFFER	MINT/BOXED	£250
ARCAM CD 82 (72 UPGRADE)	MINT/BOXED	£295

SOLID STATE

MUSICAL FIDELITY AS INTEGRATED	BRAND NEW	£1195
MUSIC FIRST PASSIVE MAGNETIC (SILVER WIRED E2750)	DISPLAY	£2250
MUSIC FIRST PASSIVE MAGNETIC (COPPER WIRED E1600)	DISPLAY	£1295
MOON AUDIO I5 INTEGRATED	MINT/BOXED	£1350
ADVANTAGE I200 INTEGRATED AMP	EXCLT/BOXED	£995
MARANTZ PM66 KI SIG AMP	MINT/BOXED	£275
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AUDIO RESEARCH LS-3B PRE AMP	MINT/BOXED	£995
KRELL FPB-200 POWER AMP	EXCLT	£2750
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MAGNUM DYNALAB MD-208 RECEIVER (SUPERB)	MINT/BOXED	£1795
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LUXMAN M-105 DUAL MONO CLASS A POWER AMP	MINT/BOXED	£1795
FLINLIS SB-300 (RETAIL £4650)	EX.DEM/DIS	£2995
PLINIUS SA-201 (RETAIL £3600)	EX.DIS	£2395
CONRAD JOHNSON PF-1 PRE & PHONO STAGE	EXCLT	£895
BEL CANTO PRE-1 PREAMP & EVO 200.2 POWER AMP	SALE!!	£2295
SONY TA9000-ES PRE & TAN-ES POWER AMPS	SALE!!	£1250
CONRAD JOHNSON PFR PRY/MF-2500A POWER AMPS	MINT/BOXED	£3450
PASS LABS X-350 POWER AMP	MINT	£3750
ACUPHASE P-1000 POWER AMP	MINT/BOXED	£3750
ATC SCA-2 PRE AMP	MINT/BOXED	£1795

LOUDSPEAKERS

AURUM CANTUS SUPREME (AWESOME! £10,000)	BRAND NEW	£6995
EGGLESTONWORKS ANDRA II	NEW	£9995
EGGLESTONWORKS ROSA	NEW	£4795
EGGLESTONWORKS FONTAINE II	EX.DEM	£2495
MONITOR AUDIO STUDIO 50 (ROSEWOOD) E4400	MINT/BOXED	£1250
A.L.R. JORDAN NOTE 5 FLOORSTANDERS (E2500)	EX.DEM	£1195
CURA CA-30 FLOORSTANDERS (MAPLE)	MINT	£995
AUDIO PHYSIC CALDERA II (10K NEW?)	MINT/BOXED	£2995
TANNOY GRF MEMORY T.W.	MINT	£3750
CELESTION A-3 (SANTOS RWOOD)	MINT/BOXED	£1250
MARTEN MILES II CHERRY (8k+ NEW)	BRAND NEW	£995
MIRAGE M1s BI POLAR LOUDSPEAKERS	EXCLT/BOXED	£3750
FAB AUDIO MODEL-ONE (RETAIL £7500)	EXCELLENT	£2750
FAB AUDIO BRAT (E700)	EX.DEM	£4750
AURUM CANTUS VOLLA (RETAIL E2500)	EX.DISPLAY	£395
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 3SE (E1250)	EX.DISPLAY	£1750
AURUM CANTUS LEISURE 2SE	EX.DIS	£795
AURUM CANTUS BLACK ORCHID (E1200)	EX.DIS	£695
PROAC STUDIO 150 CHERRYWOOD	EXCLT	£795
MONITOR AUDIO GOLD STANDARD 10 & STANDS	MINT	£595
BKS 128 RIBBON HYBRID (STAR GRANITE)	MINT/BOXED	£1395
APOGEE CALIPERS	NICE	£850

VALVE AMPS

ROGUE AUDIO METIS PRE/ATLAS POWER AMPS	EX.DEM	£1495
ROGUE AUDIO METIS PRE AMP (REMOTE)	EX.DEM	£695
UNISON RESEARCH FEATHER PRE/35 POWER	MINT/BOXED	£1495
AUDIO RESEARCH SP-9	MINT/BOXED	£995
TUBE TECHNOLOGY SYNERGY INT.AMP	MINT	£2999
GAMMA REF. 211 MONOBLDCS	EXCLT	£1295
AUDIO RESEARCH SP-9 PRE AMP/PHONO STAGE	MINT/BOXED	£995
ROGUE AUDIO 66 MAGNUM REMOTE PREAMP	MINT/BOXED	£1195
AUDIO RESEARCH VT-200 POWER AMP	EXCLT	£3995

MAINS CABLES/BLOCKS/CONDITIONERS ETC

TARA LABS RSC AIR2 6FT POWER CORDS	BRAND NEW	£199
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MANGER 107s[new]	£4,995	PASS LABS X350	£2,995
JM LAB MEZO UTOPIA	£2,995	ACCUPHASE P1000	£3,750
QUAD 57s STACKED	£995	ACCUPHASE 77 CD/SACD	£2,500
APOGEE DUETTA SIGNATURE'S	£1,500	DCS ELGAR	£1,500
MARTIN LOGAN ACSENT I	£2,200	DCS VERDI	£2,500
BOW WIZARD CD PLAYER+ WAND	£1,500	DCS P8i [NEW]	£4,500
MARK LEVINSON 335	£2,995	PURIST AUDIO DOMINUS	£2,500
ORACLE MK4 SME V	£2,850	KRELL FPB200	£2,000
PLINIUS SA201	£1,900	KRELL 300i AMP	£850
GRYPHON SONATA ALLEGRO PRE	£4,250	MICHELL ALECTO'S MK2	£900

WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING TO PURCHASE QUALITY USED EQUIPMENT SO PLEASE CALL.

Is this the future?



I have previously referred to the Nola range of speakers, and if you can afford them, it's something you really should hear, but the world according to AVI is changing, and although they manufacture a superb CD player and matching Integrated amp, they have recently produced a small pair of active speakers, including built in DAC (ADM9's), to be driven by the digital output from a computer such as the Mac mini, and controlled via an IR handset (see www.avihifi.co.uk). With the trend towards minimalistic designs, this is certain to catch on, and I can see why AVI are so keen on it, even if it does restrict the sale of their other electronics!. So I will be trying to determine just how wonderful such a system can be, especially as I have customers who are going in this direction. So if of interest, give us a call - I will be reporting on it further in a later issue!

For effective marketing of your second-hand kit

please contact
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james.rhodes-baxter@futurenet.co.uk

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FOR SALE

ACOUSTIC ENERGY LINEAR 1

speakers, mint, boxed, £80.

Two pairs of Rothwell Attenuators, boxed, £18 per pair. 07941 174804 (Berks).

ARCAM A85/ P8S amplifiers, silver, pristine. Original packaging, remotes, leads etc. £650 ono. As featured in April issue. Will 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, manual, remote, (£1,000) offers. 01772 745553 (Lancs).

ARCAM FMJ A32 integrated amp, boxed, mint, (£1,200), sell for £650. 01491 614325 (Oxon).

AUDION SILVER NIGHT

Premier valve preamplifiers (x2), Audion Sterling valve amplifiers (x2). TEAC P30 CD transport. All very good condition, boxed, can be heard, £2,500. 01252 614055 (Hants)

AUDIO PHYSIC LUNA 2

subwoofer, cherrywood veneer, mint condition, boxed, (£1,650) £850. 07776 143890 (Southampton).

AUDIO RESEARCH L5S

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)

AUDIOLAB 8000S amplifier, (£750) £250, Audiolab 8000CD player (£1,000) £290. Both items purchased new 1998, boxed, mint, with instructions.

Call Peter 07882 791040 or email plapham@mac.com (Highland).

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 speaker cable 3.5m pair, Naim termination, £50. 02893 369169 (N Ireland)

CHORD SIGNATURE 2 x 1m interconnects £240 (each), 7m stereo pair single wired speaker cable £650. Only 200 hours use. Mint with boxes and receipt. Steve 0113 2743221 (Leeds)

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)

CYRUS 8VS amplifier plus PSX-R power supply, both black, in excellent condition,

£650. 01394 274350 (Suffolk)

DENON 2900 DVD player.

Gold finish, boxed, manual, excellent condition. multi-region, £350 ono. Call James 07977 135995 or 01442 234062 (Herts).

DENON TU1800DAB

DAB/FM tuner with remote, boxed, one month old, (£250) £100. 01274 598818 (Bradford)

DYNAUDIO CONFIDENCE S

speakers, black ash, perfect condition, £2,950 ono, 0151 727 3763 (Liverpool).

ELTAX SYMPHONY 6.2

stereo speakers, beech floorstanders. Mint condition, £50. 07852 132840 (Hull)

ELECTROCOMPANET ECI I

integrated amplifier, 100 watts of Class A superb sound. Good condition. Boxed with instructions, willing to dem, £800, buyer collects. Call Rob 01614 303577 after 6pm or email rob1902@hotmail.com (Cheshire)

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) ▶

WANTED

AUDIO TECHNICA AT1100 tonearm, will pay £50. 01462 456006 (Herts).

ARCAM DELTA 100 cassette deck. Must be in very good condition. 020 8509 0238 or 07900 076096 (London).

CELESTION SL6, 600 or 100 loudspeakers, working, good condition, unmarked preferred, good price paid, private buyer, will collect. 01946 862815 (Cumbria)

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 Champion amp. 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

REL / MJ ACOUSTICS subwoofer with remote. Possible part ex for my Quad L-Series sub. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

STAX OMEGA 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

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).

LINN LP12 turntable in black finish, with Ittok LVII tonearm, K9 cartridge and box. Purchased new in and all in excellent condition, £700. Call Alex 0118 9834894 or mobile 0777 4057549 (Berks).

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).

MARANTZ PM400 amplifier, one month from new, perfect, £100. 01205 724191 (Lincs).

MILLER & KREISEL subwoofer, black. Immaculate condition, four years old, (£700) £295. Call Peter 01443 813109 (Mid Glam)

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).

MUSICAL FIDELITY KW 500 Integrated amplifier. 15 months old. Only 200 hours use. Excellent condition. Boxed with manuals and receipt. See HFN issue Jan 2006, £1,900. Steve 0113 2743221 (Leeds).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X SERIES XPU power supply, X-DAC converter, X-10D tube buffer, X-LP phono stage. Power supply will run up to four units. Collectable, £425. 07813 666686, 01494 766034 (South Bucks).

NAIM 112 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 CDI CD player. Mint, one owner from new, boxed with cables and manuals, £595 including delivery to your door. 07899 808918 (Kent).

NAIM CDSi CD player, under guarantee, new, upgraded remote

control, as new, boxed, hardly used, £500. Call Chris 01395 513529 (East Devon).

NAIM CDX CD player, £900. Naim NAC82 preamp incl. NAP SC power supply, £900. Shahinian Compass speaker, cherry, £1,200. Isoblue five tier stand, £100. Linn Ittok VII arm with armboard, £150. All vgc. Andrew 01509 260537 (Leics)

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).

PRO-JECT RM4 turntable with Ortofon 510 Mk II cartridge. As new, hardly used. Hi-Fi News best buy, £150. 01268 415017 (Essex)

QUAD 34 preamp, DIN. Boxed £100. 01732 882530 Clive (Kent).

QUAD ESL 2905 speakers. Factory sealed cartons. Why wait three months? £4,950. 01903 261931 (W. Sussex)

REGA ELA 2000 model loudspeakers. Maple. Good condition. Original boxes. Fantastic with acoustic music and vocals. Highly regarded, £350. Guy 01392 215112 (Devon)

VERTEX AQ components, only three months use, as new condition: Silver Jaya mains filter (£545) £390; Roirama 1.5m mains lead (£345) £195. Call 01543 358617 or 07967 695790 (Staffs)

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 8.1 award winning bookshelf loudspeakers. Boxed, as new, 18 months old, (£120) £50. Atlas Questor interconnect cables, one metre length. Boxed, as new, (£70) £30. Call Lee 01384 412234 (W. Mids)

YAMAHA 759SE home cinema amplifier, 7x 100 watts, HFC recommended, absolutely mint, cost £450 accept £225. 020 8951 3178 (London)



Above: Naim CDSi CD player



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