

HI-FI CHOICE

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WELSH WONDERS

THE BEST FOR LESS: LEEMA STRIKES SONIC GOLD



THE ULTIMATE GROUP TEST



CD PLAYERS £750-£1,600



ARCAM MS250 Audiophile CD player/server



NAD C355BEE Sensational sound



SPENDOR S5/3R The classic returns!

techradar.com



MAY 2008 £3.99 05 > 9 770955 111090

Electra S



When Focal wanted to follow the success of the Electra Be range with a speaker line with similar attributes but at a substantially lower price, the challenge seemed at first very difficult.

After all, the Be has proved to be the perfect speaker for many music lovers - and altering a classic recipe does not always guarantee savoury results.

In the end, the answer proved very simple. Change very little.

A new tweeter; an AL/Mg alloy unit in place of the exotic beryllium dome, and a simpler finish choice of Classic (left) or Macassar Ebony.

And that's about it - apart from the smaller price tag of course.

Simple.

Electra Be



Accept no compromise....

Electra 1037 Be

"A phenomenal balance of musical virtues".....

"Somewhere in the design process, someone wound the fun control round towards its end-stop".....

"The results are astounding".....

Hi-Fi + July 2007

"The Focal Electra 1037Be offers superb measured performance.... That on-room response, one of the best I have encountered. Wow!"

"Transients were faster than sharp, approaching the ease, physicality and true speed that lets you know, even from down the block or round the corner, that you're hearing live music, not a recording".

Stereophile July 2007

Electra 1027 Be

"A beautifully sweet and sparkling top end, suffused with the finest and most delicate detail".....

"There's no shortage of deep bass weight or gravitas here"...

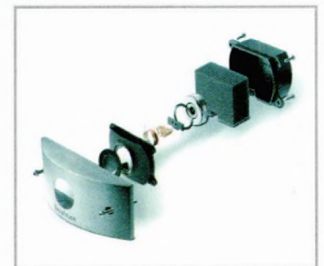
"It's a remarkable speaker for the money"...

Hi-Fi Choice Feb 2006 – Editor's choice award

Hi-Fi Choice July 2006 – Best buy

Hi-Fi Choice Sept 2006 – Component of the year < £5,000

HiFi Critic Dec 2006 – Speaker of choice < £6000



For full reviews please visit our website : www.focal-uk.com

exposure



Those who appreciate good sound will prefer the tighter "S."

New 3010S series:

Tighter bottom-end, livelier sound, more drive...same price

CD player £1200

- Brand-new "CD solution" – custom-made transport mechanism, servo units and control mechanisms
- Twin Burr-Brown PCM 1704 mono DACs and a discrete output stage
- Low jitter clock and a large toroidal transformer with separate windings for the transport mechanism and audio stages.

Integrated Amplifier £1000

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- 6 line inputs, bi-wiring and bi-amping compatible
- Option to fit a MC or MM phono cartridge
- Remote control

Power Amplifier £800

- Larger power supply
- 110 watts RMS (as compared to 100W for the previous model)
- Capable of driving sophisticated speaker systems, in bi-amping mode or monoblock mode
- Clean and extended low frequency response

Welcome to the issue...

HI-FI CHOICE MAY 2008 ISSUE 306

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



With a few notable exceptions, the main review pages in this month's issue have something of a home-grown bias. With the increasing (and let's be honest, necessary) shift towards Far Eastern manufacture for certain products, it's important to recognise and champion the hi-fi that is still made entirely in Britain, such as our cover stars the Leema Acoustics' Pulse and Stream. This extremely capable duo is some of the finest hi-fi product to leave the valleys in living memory and is truly special.

Elsewhere in the issue, we're delighted to bring you the first-ever review of Arcam's long-awaited MS250 music server, which tantalises with the promise of audiophile-quality CD replay (based on Arcam's FMJ playback levels) and the convenience of mass storage. HFC's Richard Black has taken quite a shine to it, in fact, and his full account is reported on p44.

Two quite different British speaker brands also appear in the magazine this month. You'll no doubt be familiar with PMC's award-winning GB1 floorstander, which makes a welcome return this month in its new 'i' Series guise, with Paul Messenger explaining how this sublime speaker is even better than before. At the opposite end of the scale, Alan Sircom takes a look at the latest incarnation of Spendor's 'classic' S3/5R standmount, which he rather boldly concludes may be the last speaker you ever need to buy – praise indeed!

Well, that's it for our Brit-fest this month. However, if this issue whets your appetite, look in next month for more home-grown delights from the likes of Townshend, Naim, Roksan, B&W, Tannoy and KEF. In fact, why not take advantage of our cracking one-month-only subscription offer on p78? That way, you won't miss a trick.

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 a special edition, *The Hi-Fi Awards* – the most important annual awards in the hi-fi calendar. We also produce *The Collection*, a separate stand-alone special edition for the newsstand, dedicated to the finest hi-fi on the planet.
- 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



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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.



DOMINIC TODD
A highly experienced journalist, Dominic's sharp ears and retail experience are a valuable mix for *HFC*. Each month, Dom dispenses priceless second-hand buying advice that always comes in handy.

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



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● Cambridge Audio



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

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MULTITASKER

TEAC's DR-H300 DAB.

DVD/DAB Receiver - HDMI output with upscaling to 1080i and a USB input for MP3.

This **little box of magic** is a real multi-tasker! HDMI interface delivers superb digital quality pictures to your TV with matching sound quality. It also delivers music from almost any source: CD, DVD, Hybrid CD or DiVX Disc, MP3 files on a USB memory stick plus crystal clear DAB radio. Another winner from TEAC, it's all you'll ever need to go beyond your audio **and** visual expectations.

Don't just take our word for it:



"...it sounds better than everything else. And we're not talking 'slightly' here: we're talking 'lots'." Sept 2007 ★★★★★



"Involving, weighty and detailed sound with CDs and radio; comprehensive specification." May 2007 ★★★★★



"Unbeatable value for money. Quality." Oct 2007 ★★★★★



MERIDIAN REFERENCE 808.2

Meridian's top-of-the-range CD player just got better

Three years ago in *HFC 272*, Meridian stunned our reviewers with the performance levels of its Reference 808i CD player and preamplifier. This came closer than any other CD player tested to hit that goal of "perfect sound, forever" as touted by Philips at the launch of CD, some 25 years ago. Well, with the 808.2 and 808.2i, perfection has been improved upon once again.

Although it sits in a similar body to the previous model, the refinements between 808 and 808.2 are so substantial that the player is virtually an entirely new design project. The 808.2 is the first commercial product to sport 'apodizing' filters – timing perfect designs with minimum phase, no ripple effects and no pre-echo. This is a digital filter design from Meridian's own research team and is claimed to correct errors in the recording and mastering process, as well as in the disc replay stage. Put simply, this means that music played on the 808.2 should sound better than it did in the studio in which it was recorded!

The 808.2 also features improved clocking and data buffering systems, which are said to virtually eliminate jitter errors, or at least, reduce them to rates lower than ever seen on any other domestic CD player. It also comes with a vastly improved analogue stage, which naturally comes supplied with the best possible components, including a 150MIPS main

processor. The player is also Meridian's first product to support SpeakerLink, a full digital interface connection that runs along RJ45 (also known as CAT-5 or 'Ethernet') cable architecture.

As before, the product features an over-engineered power supply and a pro-grade CD-ROM mechanism, with resolution enhancement processing to upsample a CD to 176.4kHz, with 24-bit (48-bit internal) precision. Also as before, the 808.2 Signature Reference is available in two versions – the standard player with digital and analogue outputs and the 808.2i, which adds a digital and analogue preamplifier to the basic player.

Finally, to go with the best CD player Meridian has ever made, the company has introduced a new high-end digital active loudspeaker, designed to take advantage of the RJ45-based SpeakerLink interface found in the 808.2. Priced at £17,495 per pair, the DSP7200 floorstanding loudspeaker features extensively redesigned electronics, new software and revised drivers. The four built-in 100-watt amplifiers are driven by state-of-the-art digital signal processing and feed a pair of 200mm bass units, a 165mm midrange and a 25mm tweeter, all set in an elegant multi-layer curved 'sandwich' of wood and metal.

Price £7,195 (808.2); £8,250 (808.2i) **Due now** ☎ 01480 445678
🌐 www.adam-audio.com





“This is one of the most impressive hi-fi products I’ve heard this year”

KETAN BHARADIA, TECHNICAL EDITOR WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION, AWARDS 2007



THE ANTILA CD PLAYER WITH ITS UNIQUE MD² ACTIVE DIFFERENTIAL MULTI-DAC CONVERTER TECHNOLOGY PROVIDES BREATHTAKING REALISM AND A TACTILE PANORAMIC IMAGE.

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BEAUTIFULLY ENGINEERED SOUND

ADAM AUDIO RANGE

New 'prosumer' loudspeaker range with an enviable track record

➤ If you are a pro musician or studio engineer – or you've been to a hi-fi show anywhere outside of the UK – chances are you'll have heard of Adam Audio. The German loudspeaker company has a commanding reputation in pro audio and is not too unpopular with audiophiles either, especially in Europe.

The company has a huge – almost bewildering – span of products, divided into four main ranges for the domestic market. In the process, the Adam Audio portfolio begins at 'humble' and rises to 'stratospheric'.

Adam Audio in the home begins with the HM Home Series speakers. Derived from the company's S Series pro speakers, this trio of passive two- and three-way standmount monitors feature the 177mm HexaCone driver (a proprietary Kevlar/Nomex sandwich arrangement) and the custom-built large diaphragm ART (short for Accelerated Ribbon Technology) tweeter used in every Adam Audio speaker. Next in line comes the Classic series, an elegant range to include a two-way standmount and two floorstanders, available in active or passive versions. A centre channel speaker and subwoofer are also available in this series.

The true high-end consumer will be taken with the Tensor Series of semi and fully active loudspeakers. The three models – four-way Gamma and the five-way Beta and Alpha – sport increasingly larger cabinets and more and more drive units (culminating in the pair of 330mm and pair of 200mm drive units in each 154kg speaker). All the Tensor speakers feature a second, rear firing subwoofer drive unit and the fully active models feature amplifiers that can deliver upwards of 500 watts to key drive units.

Finally, the OSS (Olympus Sound System... named after the mountain, not the camera company) is a multi-cabinet, five-way fully active sound system. OSS has more drive units than most demonstration rooms, with two 460mm sub-bass HexaCone units (in their own cabinet), eight 330mm HexaCone bass units (also in their own cabinet), 12 (six to the front, six to the rear) ART midrange tweeters (on their own stand) and eight (four to the front, four to the rear) ART tweeters. Add in four 500-watt and two 1kW amplifiers per side and a DSP unit to drive it, and the OSS makes a 2.1m tall OTT statement to be proud of.

Whether you choose a pair of the smallest or the largest Adam Audio loudspeakers, these come with a heavy heritage in the professional music business world. Like UK acronyms such as ATC, B&W and PMC, the company has a strong following among those who engineer today's music. All of which means that it's nice to know that you are sharing your living room with a speaker that graces the studio setups of the likes of Giles and George Martin, Danny Elfman and The Chemical Brothers.

Price from £500 (HM1) to £211,500 (OSS) Due now
☎ 01440 785843 🌐 www.adam-audio.com



NEWS

PMC EB1

Hot on the heels of the 'i' series reissue of products comes the revised and improved version of the large, three-way EB1 floorstanding loudspeaker. Despite being just over a year old, the EB1 – itself a development from the popular IB1 pro monitor transmission line speaker – has been upgraded with a new tweeter, crossover, plus an improved cabinet and finish.

Like all the 'i' series models, the new 25mm precision-built 'Sonolex' tweeter is a collaborative association between driver builder SEAS and PMC, and is said to improve extended high-end detail and off-axis response. The change in tweeter has meant the crossover has been extensively modified and the new compact 31-element, 24dB per octave network has been reworked accordingly. The new crossover changes are said to deliver a more seamless integration between the drivers.

The EB1 is now finished in a deeper and more lustrous lacquer, while the hand-finished cabinet now features a solid metal badge. Badge aside, the improvements to the cabinet are more than skin-deep, with more dense Medite and better joinery producing a cabinet said to be both more stable and less coloured.

Price £5,950 per pair **Due now** ☎ 0870 4441044

☎ www.pmc-speakers.com



PRO-JECT RPM GENIE 2

The king of the budget turntable package shows no sign of handing on its crown just yet. Instead, alongside its popular Debut and Expression turntables, Pro-Ject has just announced the new 'Genie 2' deck, the cheapest model in the successful 'back-to-basics' RPM line. With the plinth stripped back to just a platter support and outriggers for arm and the fully-decoupled motor housing, the matt black deck features a belt running along the outside of the resonance-controlling MDF platter. Despite the low cost, the RPM 2 includes niceties like an external power supply and a sintered bronze inverted bearing. It comes supplied with the S-shaped, Pro-Ject 9c tonearm that allows for cable upgrades and VTA adjustment, and is also fitted with the popular Ortofon OM 3E moving magnet cartridge, supplied as standard.

Price £125 **Due now** ☎ 01235 511166

☎ www.project-audio.com



ICON AUDIO STEREO 40 MKII

Built back in the golden age of hi-fi, Harold Leak's legendary valve power amplifiers are still considered some of the best designs ever produced. The basic architecture is recreated in the Leicester-designed, Chinese-built Icon Audio Stereo 40MKII, but this time 6SN7 and 6SL7 driver valves from the 1940s combine with Mullard EL34 power valves from the 1950s. This delivers an integrated amplifier capable of 20 watts per channel in pure triode mode, or 40 watts in ultralinear (or pentode) mode. With three line inputs and a tape monitor circuit (but no remote control), the Icon Audio design has much of the functionality of modern designs (including the Icon Stereo 60 Mk II tested last issue). However, the design sports point-to-point wiring, a Class A all-triode front end and a soft start to keep those valves in tip-top condition for longer.

Price £899 **Due now** ☎ 0116 244 0593 ☎ www.iconaudio.com



ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES-1

Roksan has been quietly upgrading all of its popular Caspian range over the last few months. The latest updates have been to the Caspian M Series – 1 integrated amplifier and stereo power amplifier designs. Both models now feature a split power supply module, first seen in the Caspian Mono amplifiers. Both models also have improved isolation between modules, with the integrated separating input stage from output and the stereo amp powering each channel independently. Both models have improved airflow ventilation from the new cover, improved output protection circuitry and improved components for extended dynamic range. Both also provide a 20 per cent power boost over previous versions, delivering 85 watts per channel into eight ohms and 120 watts into four. They can be easily recognised over previous versions from the front, too; the front panel is now silver and the indicator lights now glow red!

Price £1,150 (integrated); £950 (power amp)

Due now ☎ 01235 511166 ☎ www.roksan.co.uk





SYSTEM FIDELITY RANGE

⊕ The budget-conscious, Chinese-built, Euro-designed System Fidelity brand has finally reached the UK. Among the first products to be distributed around the country is the SF-5050 floorstanding loudspeaker. The 90dB efficient speaker is said to deliver bass down to 35Hz and treble to 30kHz (both ± 3 dB) and has a simple four-ohm load. Finished in cherry wood veneer, the SF-5050 is also available in a special piano black lacquer for a £50 premium.

On the electronics side, it's joined by the 35-watt SA-300SE integrated amplifier. This wide bandwidth design sports five line-level inputs, a Class A power supply (and the ability to handle peaks of up to 80 watts, or 135 watts at four ohms), A+B speaker switching and an output for an active subwoofer. An elegant and funky-looking machined remote control and a blue-glowing dial seal the deal.

The 'ultrabudget' Series 250 range, comprising CD player, integrated amplifier and AM/FM tuner, comes next. The £179 40-watt SA-250 and £149 40-preset ST-250 tuner partner up with the £179 CD-250, to form a direct challenge to the budget end of the market so far 'owned' by NAD and Cambridge Audio. How these products will fare against the competition... only time (and a *Hi-Fi Choice* review) will tell.

Price £549 (SF-5050); £449 (SA-300SE) **Due** spring ☎ 01785 887824 🌐 www.systemfidelity.com

MORDAUNT-SHORT PERFORMANCE 6 LIMITED EDITION

⊕ To celebrate Mordaunt-Short's 40th birthday, the company has polished up its best loudspeaker. The new Performance 6 Limited Edition, retains the shiny black finish and alloy drive units and features subtle variations on the original theme, with a reworking of the crossover and cabinet to wring even more out of the popular flagship floorstander. Mordaunt-Short has conducted an extensive search to discover the right type and blend of dual value capacitor values. The polymer used to form the cleverly shaped cabinet has been reformulated, too and this has meant the cabinet shape has been subtly modified to make the internal volume more efficient and increase the bass response performance, too.



Price £4,000 per pair **Due** now ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

NAIM SUPERLINE

⊕ Naim Audio has a long and illustrious relationship with vinyl replay. The company's new Superline now delivers a high-end external phono stage worthy of accompanying the 500 Series top-of-the-range CD, preamp and power amplifiers. The Superline's unique three-stage 'phono engine' (which includes a five-transistor 'quiet room', apparently) drives a Class A amplifier stage and is said to be accurate to within an unprecedented 0.1dB of the RIAA equalisation curve. Added to a claimed gain of up to 64dB, an 82dB signal to noise ratio, distortion said to be less than 0.005 per cent, plus a frequency response from 10Hz up to more than 200kHz, this offers world-class phono replay. Thanks to four resistive and three capacitive load plugs and the Superline's internal input load, the phono stage can support 20 standard cartridge loads. The Superline must be driven from one of Naim's power supplies or the new Supernait integrated.

Price: £1,650 **Due** now ☎ 01722 426000 🌐 www.naim-audio.com



FUNK SAFFIRE

⊕ The Funk Firm's new top-end turntable has been shown at several hi-fi shows in its long development. Now, it's finally ready. The Saffire is Funk's definitive standalone turntable statement (the company also makes high-end upgrades for Linn LP12 and Pink Triangle turntables; see *HFC* 299). Building upon the strengths of the Funk Vector (winner of the Best Turntable £500-£1,000 category in the 2007 *Hi-Fi Choice* awards), the Saffire retains the three-pulley drive system, but this time replaces the DC motor with a special 'K-Drive' motor and power supply. The deck also supports a higher inertia platter thanks to an improved bearing (a modern variation of the bearing used in the Pink Triangle Anniversary) and a combination 'achromat' and acrylic platter. It has a wider choice of arm options, too; including the company's forthcoming light, rigid ANTI tonearm, shown in prototype form at the Bristol Sound & Vision Show.

Price £1,900 **Due** now ☎ 020 8697 2705 🌐 www.thefunkfirm.co.uk



Soundbites

SUNFIRE the American subwoofer specialist, has launched a new range of tiny, deceptively powerful subwoofers, designed by audio legend Bob Carver. The smallest – the £650 HRS8, is a cube less than 250mm across, yet it sports a 1kW Class A/B amplifier. The other four subwoofers all reach 105dB THX output levels but even the largest – the £2,195 True Sub Eq Signature, with a 2.7kW amplifier – is just 343mm across. ☎ 0845 262 2882



VITA AUDIO'S new R4 DAB radio now has a slot-loading CD, USB port and a top-loading iPod dock. Retaining and refining the company's stereo DAB chassis seen in the Vita R3, the R4 sports the company's innovative RotoDial remote/fixed control handset. Expect to pay £200 for the complete system. ☎ 01702 601410



NAIM didn't just launch a phono stage recently. The company has also announced a £395 mains lead called the Power-Line. Unlike most high-end cables, the plug and socket are custom-tooled for Naim and feature floating pins and clamped cables. The die-cast connectors are said to reduce eddy currents, too. ☎ 01722 426000

ATACAMA'S Aurora 6 speaker stands are designed to be different. From the teardrop-shaped base-plate, to the hollow single column, the speaker stand is mostly glass, but with a heavy top-plate. The stand uses special Atacama Sonic Isolation System Technology (ASIST) gaskets to reduce resonance and ringing. Expect to pay £155 per pair. ☎ 01455 283 251

vdH has a new interconnect called The Waterfall Hybrid that features a layer of Linear Structured Carbon and the new 'fusion' amorphous alloy metal (we think that's the same stuff the shape-shifting T-1000 was built from in *Terminator 2*). Expect to pay £140 for a stereo phono metre pair. ☎ 01235 511166



ERRATA: In *HFC* 305, we praised the Cairn Tornado CD player and awarded it a Best Buy badge accordingly. But, due to gremlins in the system, the well deserved accolade seemed to slip off the page (well, it was the April issue!) Our apologies to Cairn and to anyone for the confusion caused. The Tornado is a worthy winner of our Best Buy badge.

Hi-Fi Diary

APRIL

4-6 Festival Son & Image
Sheraton Center, Montreal
www.fsexpo.com

10-13 HDI Show 2008
IEC Crocus Expo, Moscow, Russia
www.hdi.ru

24-27 High End 2008
M.O.C. Munich
www.highendsociety.de

JUNE

24-26 CEDIA Expo 2008
ExCeL London
www.cedia-expo.com
(trade only)

AUGUST

29-03 September
Internationale Funkausstellung
Messe, Berlin
www.ifa-berlin.com

SEPTEMBER

3-7 CEDIA Expo 2008
Colorado Convention Centre,
Denver CO, USA
www.cedia.net/expo
(trade only)

18-21 Top Audio Video Show
Atahotel Quark, Milan, Italy
www.topaudio.it

19-21 London Sound & Vision Show
Park Inn, Heathrow
www.chestergroup.org

24-27 Hi-Fi Show 2008
Hotel Holiday Inn, São Paulo, Brazil
www.clubedoaudio.com.br

OCTOBER

3-5 High End 2008 Show
Iris Congress Hotel, Moscow, Russia
www.hifishow.ru

10-12 Rocky Mountain Audio Fest
Marriott Denver/Hyatt Regency Tech
Center, Denver CO, USA
www.audiofest.net

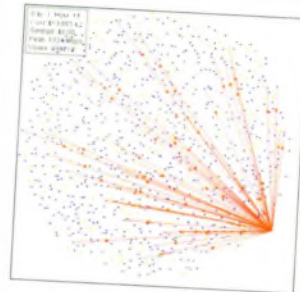
20-02 November
DreamHouse Sound & Vision Show
KyivExpoPlaza, Kiev, Ukraine
www.dreamhouse.ua

31-02 November
Stuff Live/What Hi-Fi Show
ExCeL London
www.bestofstuff.co.uk

Filesharers three and out

Peer to peer filesharers are panicking because of a threatened 'three strikes and you're out' law being suggested as a means of reducing illegal music file sharing. The epidemic of music sharing through P2P sites has finally got so bad that the Government is threatening to step in and force ISPs (internet service providers) to cut off repeat offenders. A petition has appeared on the Downing Street website asking "We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to not force internet service providers to act as legal representatives for the RIAA and be treated like a common courier."

The way it will work is that the rights holding body, BPI, MPAA etc will provide ISPs with evidence of copyright infringing bittorrent swarms and the ISP will then have to warn filesharers, effectively putting them on probation. If the sharer continues his/her activity the ISP can disconnect



MJ denies Beatles

Recent stories suggesting that The Beatles' back catalogue will soon be available on iTunes would seem to be ungrounded, according to the company that owns the rights to the material. A spokeswoman for Sony/ATV, which is jointly owned by Sony and Michael Jackson, has said that reports of the fab four's music being imminently available for legal download are "untrue". The recording rights to the material is owned by EMI, but the vast majority of the publishing rights are part of the Sony/ATV catalogue and it would have been informed if Steve Jobs had managed to negotiate a deal to offer the songs online, as has been reported.



Rumours of such a deal have been circulating for some time, but recent newspaper reports suggesting that something had been finalised look to be optimistic. Industry insiders do, however, expect an agreement of some sort in 2008.

Norman Smith 1923-2008

Recording engineer Norman Smith who worked with The Beatles and Pink Floyd has passed away. Smith joined EMI in 1959 as a recording technician, but worked his way up to become a balance engineer – a job that found him working with George Martin on The Beatles' albums up to *Revolver* in 1965. He is credited with capturing the band's distinctive sound and with realising that Ringo Starr was the right man to replace Pete Best. Apparently he was dubbed 'Normal' by another Beatle, prompting the title of his autobiography: *John Lennon Called Me Normal*. As a senior producer, Smith signed Pink Floyd to EMI and produced their first three albums. He also had several hits under his own name Hurricane Smith.



Ground up

Rountree Acoustics is taking its own approach to loudspeaker design with the OmniMon system. Rountree has combined a downward-facing omnidirectional mid/bass drive unit with a ribbon tweeter that has what Rountree calls, "mono-polar operation" – in other words, it faces the listener as is usually the case. This combination of omni and mono polar radiation patterns, according to the company, is said to produce a more realistic result than systems that are solely one or the other.

What's unusual about the design is that the cabinet is very lightweight and hangs down from a central pole. The idea being that it stores very little energy and thus has less of a boxy sound. The central support, on the other hand, is very high mass and forms a rigid connection from the drive units to the ground in order to dissipate unwanted energy.



Planet Rock for sale



⊕ DAB radio stations Planet Rock and theJazz look likely to be closed down pending a last minute reprieve, while XFM could either be shut down or sold. Global Radio is attempting to takeover GCap Media which owns all three stations and has asked for the decision regarding XFM to be held back pending the outcome of negotiations. The company's stake in the Digital One consortium would also be sold if the station sale goes ahead. The situation for classic rock station Planet Rock and smooth jazz station theJazz looks less happy, as GCap boss Fru Hazlitt said in February that both these digital stations will be closed by the end of March in a cost cutting exercise (see Alan Sircorn's *Dispatches* on p16).

Superfi

⊕ High-end car maker Pagani has dipped its toe into the high-end audio market with the first hi-fi system to be produced by a supercar brand. Pagani, who makes the Zonda supercar, has used its expertise in carbon fibre to fashion the ultimate stack system. It combines preamp, CD player and turntable in one elaborate chassis that sits atop a 150-watt power amp. The turntable is isolated on springs and is said to be single-speed only. Matching speakers with reflex ports that resemble exhaust pipes are also available.



JIMMY'S TWEAKS #59

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



Everything matters!

In recent years, open-mindedness has become a rare commodity, while 'healthy doses of skepticism' became industrial-sized, artery-busting portions of cynicism. This is a shame because one of the joys of tweaking your system is that your perceptions can be changed by surprisingly small things, totally unconnected to your hi-fi.

Back in the 1980s, *The Absolute Sound* contributor Enid Lumley promulgated tweaks that went way beyond left field. If she left the breadknife out of its block or fed the cats Felix instead of Whiskas, she would be able to hear the difference. It was the audiophile equivalent of the butterfly effect.

Was she right? Who knows... but she believed she heard the differences and who are we to challenge that? Hers is an extreme position, granted, but many reject some tweaks out of hand as nonsensical while others seem perfectly reasonable; it's just a question of degree. Perhaps, instead, the real question should be 'why?'. Why do we treat some tweaks as acceptable, others as 'totally daft'. It's worth thinking about, especially when your system sounds particularly good or bad. Who knows – maybe your key to audiophile nirvana is putting a kink in the third – not the fourth – coat hanger from the right in your wardrobe?

The Insider

THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...



DAVID GRAHAM
Job Title: Director
Company: Grahams Hi-Fi

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

Increasingly, hi-fi is becoming a 'niche' product for the music enthusiast, but we have to show the mass market that high-quality solutions do exist for everyone.

What's the best innovation you've encountered recently?

The Meridian F80 table-top radio, for its fresh innovative approach, which will open more doors to specialist products.

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

Yes, we can provide the ease of use of an iPod, but with the performance of good CD, as long as we can show people how it can be done.

Apple's iPod - blessing or curse, and why?

A blessing: it's done more to re-kindle interest in listening to music than anything else over the past decade.

Will downloading kill the CD player?

Eventually, but many people, myself included, still want to own, touch and feel their music collection.

Are audio servers the future?

Audio servers have been the 'future' for the past ten years at Grahams and certainly for the next few years this will be a good solution. But ultimately, the storage of our media will reside externally. This transition will not be overnight and I see both solutions living side-by-side for a period.

Are active speakers the future?

Active speaker systems have been around for a long time and are a great solution. They will still play a part in the future, but I see no reason why this should exclude regular passive designs.

Do valve amps have a future?

Maybe as an alternative heating solution for the home!

What type of products really excite you?

Innovative, great-sounding, sexy-looking products that make people want to own them.

What's your all-time favourite hi-fi component?

It has to be the iconic LP12, for its sheer musicality and its ability to withstand the test of time.

What's your all-time favourite record?

Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* for the track *Money*.

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

The content will most certainly be supplied externally, so our job will be to get the best from these sources by supplying great-sounding amplifiers, speakers and quality distribution systems with good control.



Glossy Hi-Fi Ads

Upmarket hi-fi advertising

Like many young lads, I grew up with a fascination for cars. Along with the requisite posters of a Porsche 959 and Ferrari Testarossa, this meant that I spent much of my youth harmlessly whiling away the hours leafing through the pages of car magazines. I still have many of those early 1980s magazines today and, looking back through them now, it's striking to see just what a presence hi-fi adverts had. What's more, adverts from companies like Naim, for instance, were fun and witty, if a little groan inducing: "not two Nait Josephine!" Then of course there was the unforgettable Maxell ad with a seated rocker's hair blown back; presumably by the dynamic impact of a Maxell Metal cassette.

I also remember being on a tube journey in London and being struck by an advertisement for Linn. It was a picture of a typical middle-aged male, under which was written, "His life revolves around the city. And a cottage in Kent. He's far too busy to listen to a Linn Hi-Fi. He's the most boring old fart you'll ever meet!" The

"Aston Martin fit Linn and Lexus chose Mark Levinson. I was pleased to see the very prominent promotion of B&W speakers used in the new XF Jaguar."

point being that to be a really interesting person one had to have an appreciation of music and, better still, a Linn hi-fi system on which to enjoy it on.

Moving forward to the present day and I can't help but feel that hi-fi doesn't have the exposure outside of the specialist confines that it once did. Flick through a contemporary car magazine and you're hard pressed to find any advert for a hi-fi company apart from, of course, the occasional style-based one.

Yet the presence of real hi-fi is starting to make its way back into the conscious (or even sub-conscious) of the general public and, once again, it's the car industry we have to thank. This time it's not the motoring press and ad agencies, but the automotive manufacturers themselves. It all started around ten years ago with the car manufacturers realising they could charge substantially more for an ICE system with 'BOSE' stamped on the speaker grill.

Fortunately, other hi-fi manufacturers took note and the number of tie-ups have blossomed. Aston Martin fit Linn and Lexus chose Mark Levinson. Just recently I was pleased to see the very prominent promotion of B&W speakers used in the new XF Jaguar. At the extreme end of the scale, Naim have a tie-in with Bentley. Of course, most of these affiliations are with premium brands, but this is exactly the market the hi-fi industry needs to

cultivate. They are, after all, the big spenders, trend setters and the most influential among their peers. In short, the knowledge of quality hi-fi companies, other than Bose and B&O, will soon filter down. Let's hope so, anyway. In the meantime, I await the 'Saisho for Kia' tie-in with great anticipation!

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



Let's (not) Rock!

Planet Rock drops out of orbit

In February this year, two of the DAB stations run by GCap Media – best known for stations like Capitol 95.8 in London – closed. The company pulled the plug on the Planet Rock and theJazz stations and sold its majority share in the digital radio license,

Digital One. Were DAB a commercial success, this could have meant the radio company was out of the radio business. Instead, GCap's move proves there's still life in FM radio.

GCap moved away from DAB, citing the service as economically unviable (the company has also pulled the plug on XFM's analogue broadcasts outside of London for the same reasons). Presumably, the downturn in advertising spend that seems to have beset everything except online media added insult to injury. For now, at least, XFM's place on the digital airwaves is assured and an online petition has been formed to stop the closure of Planet Rock.

Small audiences have been cited for the closures, but this rings hollow; theJazz was pulling in more than 400,000 listeners and won awards for its rapid development.

The closures have sparked the usual debates about the nature and future of DAB, albeit this time without the furore surrounding bit rates and sound quality that often blight digital radio debates. However, I suspect Planet Rock and theJazz will not be the only casualties in this particular skirmish.

Thus far, the model for DAB has been touted as near identical to that of cable or satellite TV – a diversity of stations is fine because people will channel surf, hunting for something on TV that isn't re-runs. Radio audiences traditionally listen predominantly to one or two main stations and flip between them. It's only when these primary stations come up with material that the listener cannot stomach, that they begin to channel surf.

Planet Rock and theJazz were trying to appeal to a combination of a hardcore of rock and jazz listeners and catching passing listeners. Except they mostly passed by. And, unlike relatively successful independent DAB stations like Yarr, the output of these two defunct stations was not the kind to engender a loyal following of converts.

Does this really mark a change for DAB. Very probably – commercial DAB needs to find new methods of making money; methods that potentially take advantage of the metadata that comes with DAB. For example, if you like a recording while listening on the road, press a button and the music files are automatically downloaded back home with a small cut from the proceeds of that download going to the station itself. This would suddenly make stations like theJazz and Planet Rock far more profitable than they would ever be scabbling round for new blood and advertisers.

Alan Sircom began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He has since become one of the hi-fi and AV industry's most respected scribes 🍷

R

RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

QUAD AMPLIFIER



Back in 1936, a young electronics engineer called Peter Walker founded the Acoustical Manufacturing Company Ltd in

London. The original location was bombed during World War II and Walker moved his operation to Huntingdon in 1941. With the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge a centre of excellence for electronic engineering and with companies like Pye in the surrounding area, this was an ideal place for developing a technologically-based company (this goes some way to explaining why even today Huntingdon has a disproportionately high number of hi-fi manufacturers per square mile).

Acoustical's early designs were in public-address systems, but after the Second World War the company branched out to supply products to take advantage of the new interest in high-fidelity music, especially as the first 45-minute Long Player system was launched in 1948. Its first domestic products were the QA12 and QA12/P amplifiers launched the same year (a corner ribbon loudspeaker and AM radio followed in 1949). Short lived by today's Quad standards (they were discontinued in 1951), these 12W amplifiers (the only difference was the 'P' model included a preamplifier) nevertheless had a reputation for high quality sound and stunning build that made them popular with both audiophiles and the BBC alike. They made the company's reputation, setting a trend for no-compromise service and a repairs department that was at once little used and the envy of the free world.

The product that followed not only made the brand, it made the brandname. The 'QA' in QA12 stood for 'Quality Amplifier' (or 'Quality Audio' depending on which version of Quad's history you subscribe to). Its replacement also had an acronym as a name – Quality Unit Amplifier (Domestic) – and naturally became known as the Quad 1 power amplifier, which alongside the QC1 preamplifier, was launched around 1951. This too proved successful, reliable and comparatively short-lived, being effectively replaced by the legendary Quad II preamp and power amp in 1953, then the Quad 22 stereo preamp launched in 1958.



“...no-compromise service and a repairs department that was little used and the envy of the free world.”

The Quad 1 power amplifier has a lot in common with the later classic Quad II. Both rely on a pair of KT88 pentode valves as output devices and the basic circuit of both amplifiers is essentially similar. The big difference (aside from layout of the amplifier itself) is in the choice of input/phase splitter valve; with the Quad II relying on the now more common EF86 against the older and larger EF36 used in the Quad I.

As you might expect, there are those who have replaced the EF86 with the earlier valve (which requires a new valve seat and changes to several component values – not exactly a two-minute switch-over) and report the sound of the Quad I/II hybrid sounds even better than the standard Quad II design. Which goes to show that for as long as there has been hi-fi, there have been hi-fi tweekers.

Although hard to find today, especially compared to later Quad components, the little QA12 and Quad 1 amplifiers (and to a lesser extent, the original preamplifier and tuner) are notable as they form the one of the foundation stones for UK hi-fi. Our reputation for fine sound quality, excellent build and first-rate after-sales service all began here. Despite years of excellent innovation and development, most modern British hi-fi is often little more than a series of footnotes to Quad. [HFC](#)

Alan Sircom



Hi-fi on the move

The perils and pitfalls of moving day

To the uninitiated, any true aficionado can look more like a neurotic than merely a dedicated follower of their chosen field. Take allotment growers for example – go within 15ft of the uber-pumpkin they’ve carefully nurtured until it’s the size of a two-storey Wendy house, and they’ll take your legs off with a swipe of their Ninja lawn rake. Woe betide too, the foolhardy gardener, who might catch with the edge of his wheelbarrow the stem of a leak large enough to found a small Balkan republic. Allotmenters are not alone in their protective instinct, and sometimes for good reason.

Moving house can be a pretty traumatic experience at the best of times, especially if you have a pair of panel speakers and a hefty turntable to relocate. Friends called me

“The removal men escaped with their lives – the thought of a 40-year stretch for multiple homicide did nothing to ease the pain...”

paranoid, but I was uneasy about trusting the removal men with my beloved Magneplanar MG12QRs and heavyweight Trio L-07D direct drive when they called one fateful day a couple of years ago. It’s only now, after months of therapy and the support of fellow members of Audiophiles Anonymous that I can bring myself to speak about what took place that day.

As the packing boxes drained from the house into the back of the pantechnic, I congratulated myself on sending all of my expendable possessions (basically everything other than my hi-fi) in the large lorry, while coddling the precious stuff in the back of a Transit. I made one fatal error though – I took my eyes off the van for no more than 30 seconds (probably because the removal men had just dropped something that didn’t appreciate a close encounter with the ground), and somehow a four-foot plant stand sneaked in along with the turntable *et al.* I only found this out after we’d reached our destination, when the doors of the van creaked open to reveal said plant stand lying across the deck,

where it had decapitated an SME V (remarkable as it may seem, the headshell was snapped right off the arm tube) and dented the top of the L-07D’s plinth. Friends and family attempted to console me with the fact that the Maggies were a much larger target that had managed to get away unscathed, but it wasn’t enough to keep my blood pressure below 5,000psi and tears of impotent rage flowing down my face.

The removal men escaped with their lives – the thought of a 40-year stretch for multiple homicide did nothing to ease the pain of the loss; the Model V met its maker (at least, metaphorically speaking). And me? I returned the Trio’s original arm to its rightful place, unable to face the memories a replacement Model V would stir up. The next time friends or family accuse you of an audio-related personality disorder, remember that you have good reason to keep up your guard – this hi-fi world is a dangerous place.

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



The collecting bug

Wife and 20,000 CDs to support, guv!

Collecting music recordings (whether vinyl, CD or download) is a bit like having a circle of friends and acquaintances. The more time you spend together, the better you get to know them – and the deeper and more intimate the relationship becomes.

Most of us probably start with those pieces that hold up to repeated listening. But, as your interest increases and, unless your preferences are very narrow, you'll soon find yourself embracing a wide variety of musical styles

At some point, however, the voyage of discovery seems to stop. You suddenly find yourself listening to pretty much the same stuff by the same people, time and time again. It's like going to the same restaurant and ordering the same meal – reliable, but boring.

Or is it? Of course it's exciting to hear new and unfamiliar music that opens up uncharted territory. But I also believe it's only by spending time with music, and getting to know it well, that you fully plumb its depths.

The best music demands time and patience – you can't hope to appreciate every facet on first acquaintance. That's where having good hi-fi comes in, allowing you to listen until the music fully penetrates your being.

Some listeners do carry on exploring new and unfamiliar music, eagerly embracing the latest performers or composers. The late John Peel was probably the best example of this – someone who constantly sought out the new and hardly ever looked back.

I really admired Peel for this, but could never emulate his approach. For me, music was always about going back and digging deeper – trying to find new depths and subtleties in pieces that I knew well.

Making comparisons is also a fascinating business; it can be quite startling to hear how different a piece of music can sound when played on another hi-fi system. Even a piece that you think you know well, can seem like a totally different performance.

Some hi-fi enthusiasts have limited music collections. They listen to a small pool of recordings they know very well, comparing cables or speaker stands. Their meagre outlay on music is dwarfed by vast expenditure on equipment. ▶

M

MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

MY AIM IS TRUE
ELVIS COSTELLO



Watching the chubby, balding, polite, if conversationally awkward figure that is Elvis Costello today, it requires some stretch of the imagination to recall the spiky, controversial 'geek from hell' who emerged in the midst of the punk holocaust in 1977.

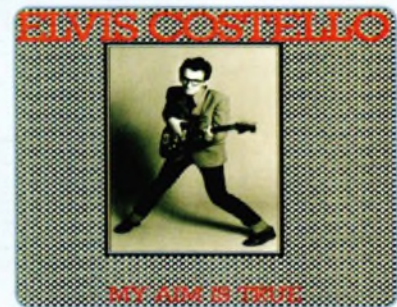
In the intervening years he's run the gamut from new wave maverick to soul troubadour, country flagwaver, classical composer and many points in-between. What he's always been, however, is a lover of pop music and his first album set out his stall with aplomb.

The look, all big glasses, spindly, twisted body and guitar, echoed Buddy Holly. But the attitude was totally devoid of Holly's eagerness to please. Costello's pop instincts were purely in his music, and his abrasive personality would gain him many enemies, just as his performances made myriad friends.

Declan MacManus was a budding singer songwriter of 22 summers, already married with a child and working in computer programming for Elizabeth Arden cosmetics in west London when he first came to the attention of Stiff Records supremo Nick Rivera. He's the larger than life character generally credited with the creation of Elvis's stage name. It was certainly some twisted kind of luck that the original famous carrier of the name was fated to die within a few weeks of the release of the new Elvis's debut album, ensuring instant attention for this specky upstart with the brass balls to put the words "Elvis is king" into the checkered pattern on his album's cover.

My Aim Is True bristles with energy as the would-be king raced out of the stocks. The 13 songs were allegedly written in all of two weeks, and the recording took 16 hours (plus five for mixing) at London's Pathway Studios, with Nick Lowe keeping a tight, no-frills hand on the production tiller.

The album predates his lengthy association with the Attractions and for the recording sessions, Stiff put him with a visiting Californian country rock band of their acquaintance, Clover, usually fronted at that time by one Huey Lewis.



“...he's run the gamut from new wave maverick to soul troubadour, and many points in-between.”

The Attractions would later imbue Elvis's songs with more spark and verve, but the songs are strong and many of Elvis's future calling cards are already in evidence. The soul strut of *Sneaky Feelings*, which he's described as his attempt at a Four Tops song, combines Motown-inspired chord changes with country slide guitar. He also tries reggae (*Watching The Detectives*), rock 'n' roll (*Mystery Dance*), fifties pastiche (*No Dancing*) and lots of taugt, angular pop rock. It's an audaciously confident debut, with some of his best songs.

After the original vinyl and CD releases, the album has been re-released several times. The 1993 version included some extra demos, while a double-CD package from Rhino in 2001 included contemporary out-takes and copious notes from Costello himself. The latest is the 2007 double-CD Deluxe Edition from Universal, which includes additional unreleased out-takes and demos and a rough-as-you-like 1977 live recording from London punk hangout the Nashville Rooms. The latter accurately captures Elvis's raging, alcohol-fuelled persona, though the band sound like they're still trying to get a handle on the songs.

It wouldn't take them long, however, and they soon became the ideal vehicle for one of this country's finest ever songwriters. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

☑ To the purist music lover, this is clearly wrong. But, really, it depends on whether your aim is to explore the vast ocean that is music, or simply find a pleasant little bay in which to swim and relax.

I used to do a lot of comparing – far more than I do now. Being a journalist, it came with the territory. But these days I hardly compare things at all. I simply try to listen to the music I love in order to understand and appreciate it more deeply.

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



Malcolm Steward

The Big Heat

Turning up the power

Up until recently, I thought that it was only Naim amplifiers that did not enjoy being powered down. Indeed, not one of the Naim boxes I own has been switched off in the past seven years (and then they were only disconnected from the mains because I was moving house). Experience had taught me that switching off a Naim box – even for a relatively short time – was something to be avoided. That won't sit well with the 'let's rattle our tambourines' and 'hug a whale' trendies, to whom I apologise if running my system constantly means I have a carbon footprint the size of Scotland. It's just that anything is better than listening to my system when it has lost the magic it exhibits when it's nicely warmed up. For what it's worth, by the way, the government's online calculator deems my carbon footprint (and what a truly horrendous term that is) to be merely 'average'.

I'm sure my four-litre car contributes more to global warming than my NAP250s do. However, the CO₂ from my engine barely registers when compared to the emissions created by jets taking families off on holiday twice a year, so please don't start writing to the editor to complain about my being a planet murderer. Out of respect for ecology – and her bank balance – my wife drives a one-litre car, which, I'm sure, must partially compensate for my gas-guzzler. And please note that we never take winter ski-breaks nor summer holidays on the Costa del Rave!



“Experience had taught me that switching off a Naim box – even for a relatively short time – was something to be avoided.”

As well as not enjoying any time spent away from the mains, Naim amplifiers are also very sensitive to the type of electrical supply on which they're fed. They appreciate separate spurs, but do not respond well to fancy mains filters, purifiers, plugs or conditioners and they're not too keen on trick leads either. The cables that are supplied with Naim components work the best. Swap one for some highfaluting super cable and you'll hear a difference. Whether that difference constitutes a genuine improvement will always provoke arguments. It makes no odds if that cable brings about demonstrable improvements to the sound of any other component: Naim seems to be a law unto itself in this respect.

Anyway, getting back to my original point, I've just been listening to a collection of amplifiers and, to my surprise, some of them showed a similar disdain to the Naims when they were not left permanently powered up. It looks like bad news for the ecologically over-sensitive if increasing numbers of people are going to be leaving their systems on permanently to enjoy the best, most consistent performance. At least, however, I guess it means those people will be reducing their CO₂ emissions by staying at home listening to music rather than driving anywhere. So it's not all bad news. And if they care about the planet, they might cancel those flights to Valencia and Val d'Isère, too.

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



Paul Messenger

Showtime

Hi-fi get togethers

I wouldn't say I'm a huge fan of hi-fi shows. For a decade, between the mid-1980s and the mid '90s I barely attended them, until I was commissioned to produce monthly UK news updates for US magazine *Stereophile*. I still don't regard hi-fi shows as particularly useful for assessing sound quality, but they are invaluable for newsgathering. And as a freelancer scratching a solitary living from a garret somewhere in East Kent, they're a great opportunity to catch up with others in the hi-fi business. However, over the last eighteen months I've been going to all manner of

different hi-fi shows. The biggest and the best, by a long chalk, being the four-day annual German show, organised by the High End Society. It puts every British event to shame, in both scale and organisation, and invariably opens to the trade on Ascension Day, followed by three public days. It moved from Frankfurt to Munich a few years back, which doesn't help my carbon footprint or bank balance.

If Munich is too German or too far to go, then how about Bristol. The annual Sound & Vision show, organised by dealers Audio Excellence and Audio T, is now 21 years old, although this late February three-dayer invariably clashes with my birthday and a crucial Six Nations rugby weekend. But it's worth the sacrifice, being the biggest and most successful current British show. One might cavil at the presence of home cinema and the associated subwoofery, but the show is very well-organised. Fortunately, for this show at least, there home cinema demonstrations were not as commonplace this year.

The tradition of Autumn hi-fi shows goes back to the central London Audio Fairs of the 1960s, with Harrogate and Heathrow taking over in the '70s and '80s. Recent years have seen a significant decline. After 20 years, *Hi-Fi News* abandoned its late September Heathrow event last year, leaving just the simultaneous Chesterfield Communications Park Inn show. While it wasn't enormous, it was still probably second only to Bristol in the UK scheme of things, and certainly worth the journey.

The same organisers promote the much smaller two-day Park Inn Heathrow show at the end of March. What it lacks in scale, it makes up for in interest (for the stereo hi-fi enthusiast) and features smaller and more interesting brands and distributors. Another two-day Chesterfield event is held at Manchester Airport in January and, while it too is small, I found it a very pleasant and friendly event.

Another major Manchester show is Practical Hi-Fi's Sound & Vision event in the city centre in October, which I have yet to visit, while a *Stuff/What Hi-Fi* sponsored event in Hammersmith in November combines technogizmos of all kinds with mainstream hi-fi and home cinema.

In total contrast, John Howes' Audiojumbles, held twice yearly (February and September) in Tonbridge, Kent are great fun. These one-day events gather together an extraordinary and fascinating collection of vintage hi-fi, radio and associated electronics, and are also great for finding good quality secondhand vinyl at realistic prices too.

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

THE RESISTOR



A few issues ago we looked at one of the most complicated electronic components, the transformer. Let's now consider just about the simplest, the resistor.

Most analogue electronics circuits end up with more resistors than any other type of component. They typically cost a penny or so each and their job is to resist the flow of electric current. If you ever did physics at school you were probably told that electric current is analogous to water flow, in which case a resistor is analogous to a restriction in the pipe. More pressure (voltage) will force more flow (current) past the restriction (resistor). On its own a resistor can't achieve much, but when put into a circuit it can turn voltages into currents and vice versa, divide voltages and currents into proportional parts, and even discriminate between frequencies.

That's all circuit theory and very interesting, but what's more puzzling, and very pertinent to this publication, is how different resistors can do different things to the sound. A resistor has one major parameter, its 'resistance', which defines how much voltage is needed to force a given current through it: it's measured in 'ohms' and its value in typical audio circuits can vary from about a tenth of an ohm to a million or so. Secondary parameters include power rating (how much power the resistor can dissipate without failing), voltage rating (how much voltage is safe to apply without risk of sparking over), tolerance (accuracy of the notional resistance) and temperature coefficient (how much the resistance varies with temperature). Assuming power and voltage ratings are duly noted, it would appear that two resistors of identical resistance should do exactly the same job.

The earliest resistors were made of carbon granules, mixed with something non-conductive in order to get the right resistance value. Later ones used a film of much finer carbon granules painted on the outside of a ceramic cylinder and often cut into a spiral to increase the effective length and decrease width. Modern resistors mostly use metal film instead of carbon film, the metal being



"I've spent ages swapping valves when the problem was a noisy resistor."

something like nickel alloy. With the migration from carbon granules to carbon film to metal film, each of the problems of resistors has got better but has not entirely disappeared.

The most significant of those problems are temperature coefficient (as mentioned above), and 'excess noise', which is the noise the resistor produces when a current passes through it. Noise is familiar enough, and in most circuits the excess noise of modern resistors is effectively negligible, but it can sometimes be an issue. It's most problematic in valve circuits, where the high voltages and high resistor values used compound it and can make resistor noise a real pain – I've spent ages swapping valves when the problem was a slightly noisy resistor. At high voltages, 'corona discharge' seems to be part of the issue.

As for temperature coefficient, the real problem with this is that resistors heat up as they pass current and this makes their value change in sympathy with the audio signal. This can generate both harmonic distortion and a form of jitter. Bigger resistors which heat up less for a given current and resistors with a lower temperature coefficient, help reduce it but the fact remains that this simple component is capable of doing surprisingly malicious things inside audio kit. Is it any wonder that audio design, taken to extremes, is such an arcane art? **HFC**

Richard Black

Everybody loves the iPod, yet its ability to play back music to audiophile standards has never been one of its strengths. As the dominant music carrier of the 21st Century, it's ripe for upgrading - but you won't access the iPod's magic with the cheap docks or headphones that have proliferated in its wake. They simply cripple the sound of music.

Absolute Sounds, established for 30 years as the reference importer of the highest quality audio equipment, presents the ElectroKID system to iPod users everywhere. It has been assembled from components manufactured by two of the greatest names in high-end audio.

Fortunately for music lovers around the world, Krell recognised the iPod's potential and created a suitable platform to enable true music lovers to enjoy its performance at a level never before achieved. The KID is Krell's take on what an iPod dock should do: retrieve the musical signal, handle it with respect and reproduce it with levels of sound quality that will delight the most critical listener.

But that's not all: Martin Logan - purveyors of the prettiest electrostatic loudspeakers on the market today - were thinking along similar lines, eager to create a turnkey system that would deliver all the joys of high-end audio without the pain. The Purity is the first-ever Martin Logan with built-in amplification. Bye-bye speaker wires!

Take one KID and a pair of Purity speakers, and all-of-a-sudden: 1+1 equals a million dollars! The 'ElectroKID' is the world's simplest, most accessible entry into high-end musical bliss: functional, compact, stylish, affordable. Connect the KID to the Purity, slip in your iPod. No adjustments, no headaches, no weeks with owner's manuals.

A simple system delivering superb sound. Kid's stuff, really.

ElectroKID

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audiofile

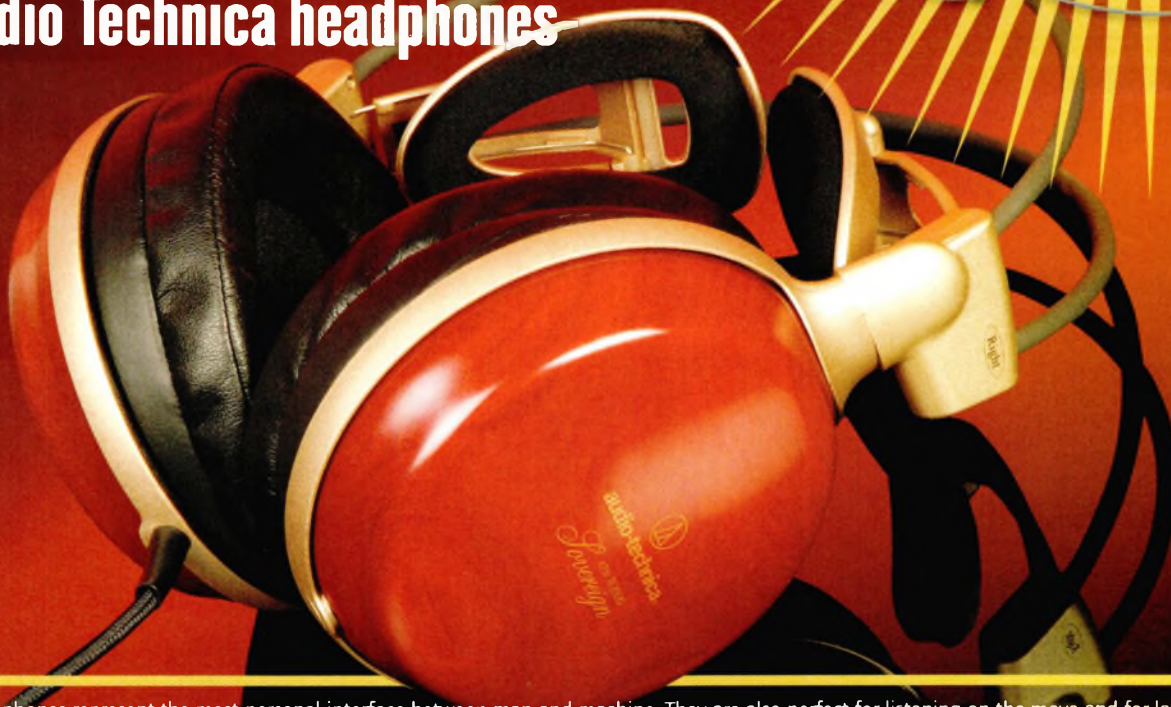
COMPETITION

WIN!

One of three pairs of superb Audio Technica headphones

SPECIAL BONUS OFFER!

We have secured a magnificent special offer from those jolly nice people over at Audio Technica. If you use the special promotional code **HFC0508** when buying a pair of Audio Technica headphones from the www.ateadphones.com website, you will receive a whopping great 20 per cent discount. This offer is for any headphones on the site, not just the excellent ATH-W1000 and ATH-EW9. And the promotional deal is open to all *Hi-Fi Choice* readers, not just those who enter the competition.



Headphones represent the most personal interface between man and machine. They are also perfect for listening on the move and for late night or discreet listening. Japanese headphone specialist Audio Technica (www.ateadphones.com) is the manufacturer of the stunning new £400 ATH-W1000 headphones, which we raved about in our review a couple of months back in *HFC* 304.

These remarkable closed-back headphones combine comfort and stunning appearance (thanks in part to the real Hokkaido cherry earcups) with sensational sound quality. And you can now judge for yourself how sensational that sound actually is. For, in conjunction with our friends at Audio Technica, we can offer a pair of these fabulous headphones as a first prize.

But that's not all. Alongside the full-sized headphones, the rich red cherry finish also extends to the Audio Technica ATH-EW9 clip-on earphones. These lightweight earphones feature a unique sliding ear-fitting mechanism to allow the EW9's to fit comfortably and snugly, while the soft rubber supports and large ear hangers mean you can listen for long periods without fatigue. Normally costing £130 per pair, we have two pairs of these elegant and great-sounding earphones to give away as runner-up prizes.

For your chance to win, either: (a) call **0906 5852159** and follow the instructions, leaving your selected answer (**A, B or C**) and your details where prompted, or (b) send the letter of your selected answer (**A, B or C**) by email, including your name, address and a daytime telephone contact number to hificomp@futurenet.co.uk

QUESTION:

Where does the cherry-wood used in Audio Technica headphones come from?

A: Honolulu B: Hokkaido C: Hounslow

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Answers must be received between 3 April 2008 and 30 April 2008. The first prize winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received between the relevant dates and will receive a pair of Audio Technica ATH-W1000 headphones free of charge. The two second prize winners will be selected at random from all correct entries received between the relevant dates and will each receive a pair of Audio Technica ATH-EW9 headphones free of charge. Each winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date and will be required to give details of a delivery address in the UK to which the headphones should be sent. Telephone calls will be charged at 60p per minute.

By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules, which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitionrules.asp. Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households. By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.



Bristol 2008

Celebrating its 21st anniversary, the UK's most prestigious sound and vision show brings together some of the world's biggest names in hi-fi and consumer electronics

Coming as it does, hot on the heels of the world's largest sound and vision event; the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Bristol is actually well attended by the trade and is widely recognised as the UK's best-supported hi-fi event.

Which shows what stalwart types we audiophiles are, as the weather was doing its utmost to dampen our spirits. It's the same each and every year, as manufacturers brave the elements to set up an impressive array of hi-fi demonstrations. Just why the February weather can't pick-up for a couple of days during the show remains a mystery worthy of

Hercule Poirot. Watching the hi-fi enthusiasts braving the windswept alleyways between the NCP car park and the hotel reminds us of the Bard's immortal line from King Lear; 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!'

Despite the brutal weather and brutal town planning, Bristol remains the most important event on the hi-fi show calendar and in many ways, is the only show you really need to attend. That said, key brands such as Cambridge Audio never exhibit there and the high-end big guns, such as Krell, Ayre and MartinLogan also eschew the event.

As always, the City Centre Marriott Hotel provided an interesting backdrop for the launch of a wide range of interesting new kit.

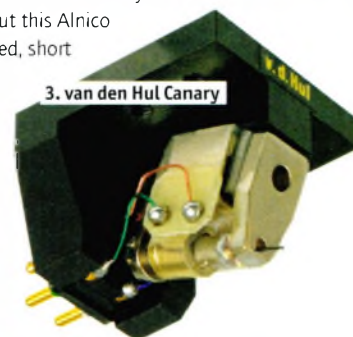
1 Neat put us fully into nostalgia mode by launching a revised version of a loudspeaker that we first saw back in 1991, the wonderful Petite. Since hearing that big-sounding, but prosaic-looking little speaker all those years ago, we have never heard a disappointing performance from any subsequent Neat model. Maybe there's something to be said for the company's 'let's-not-bother-with-computer-analysis-and-just-listen-to-music-instead' approach. The 'new' Petite certainly suggested so. Even in not quite completed guise, in the unhelpful acoustics of a packed hotel bedroom, the 2008 Petite looked and sounded stupendous and we cannot wait to hear the final version.

2 Arcam was demonstrating the Solo Mini, the baby brother of its Solo one-box hi-fi system. Okay, neither is pretending to be the last word in high-end audio, or a genuine rival to top-notch separates, but the Solo Mini sits decidedly high in the "that's cute" ratings and with its 25 watts per channel rating it should drive the sort of loudspeakers, with which it will be partnered. Arcam says that internally, the Mini is broadly identical internally to the Solo, albeit with slightly less in the power stakes. On demonstration it sounded rather pleasant, which for a 'one-box' hi-fi system, you can consider high praise.



2. Arcam's Solo Mini joins the original one-box hi-fi system

3 Henley Designs had even more delights in store for the turntable addict including the revised Roksan Radius 5 – along with the "New Generation" Caspian M Series-1 integrated amplifier and M Series-1 stereo power amplifier, a standard-setting new design by all accounts – and a new iteration of the inexpensive Pro-Ject Genie turntable. Expected to sell for a little more than the Roksans, with a retail price of £2,500 there was the van den Hul Canary cartridge. The Canary comes in just one version – with gold wire and a nylon body – but customer-specific tonal adjustments are available free of charge to special order. We only have one query about this Alnico magnet-powered, short cantilevered design: why, if it's called the Canary, is its body not yellow?!



3. van den Hul Canary



1. The '2008' Neat Petite



4. PMC's 'i' Series loudspeakers
Bryston BCD-1 CD player (top right)

4 PMC not only had its new *i* series of loudspeakers on demonstration in both of its rooms – and making very enjoyable and substantial, firm-footed sounds, they too – but the systems driving them were being fronted by Bryston BCD-1 CD players. Now that nomenclature is telling because Bryston has decided, 25 years after Compact Disc was introduced, that there might just be something worthwhile about this 'new' format and was showing its first-ever CD player, which is, of course, a Best Buy player and firm *Hi-Fi Choice* favourite (*HFC 300*).

which included the very new £1,400 ANTI tonearm – A Neutral Transcribing Instrument. The arm features many patent-pending technologies, which is why the model at the show had elements removed because the patents had not yet been granted. The new features include dynamic VTA adjustment and a gyroscope-grade iridium and sapphire uni-pivot bearing.

Various demonstrations were provided so that interested parties could validate Khoubessarian's theories about tonearm design and very effective they were, once one had been instructed how to carry out the tests properly. One reviewer was seen trying to bend arm-tube sections that he ought to have been striking in order to encourage them to resonate. Such pitiful ignorance!

5 Sticking with vinyl, the iconoclastic Arthur Khoubessarian of The Funk Firm was in undiluted acronym frenzy with his new products and patents,

5. The Funk Firm's Saffire, coming to *HFC* exclusively soon



6 In the Slim Devices or (more correctly) Logitech room, the company was showing off its latest networked music system, the Squeezebox Duet. The player comes with an iPod-style handset and connects to your music storage in much the same way that the £1,399 Transporter did. Our only hope is that it sounds somewhere near as good – although one can only hope for so much, given that it costs £279 – because our reaction to the Transporter when we played with it was that we really didn't want to give it back. It was an inordinately brilliant device – Slim Device's audio designers clearly knew which way was up.

7 Monitor Audio joined the list of companies exhibiting extremely attractive-looking loudspeakers with its new flagship Platinum range. These sounded – and we're always wary about judging sound quality at shows – very respectable and looked absolutely superb with their exotically shaped, veneered and lacquered cabinets with baffles hand-upholstered in luxurious Strathspey leather. In a departure from the traditional metal dome



6. Logitech's Squeezebox Duet

tweeter found on MA designs, the Platinum models use a ribbon-style high frequency unit to provide an ultra-fast response and extremely low coloration and distortion. Three models in the range will become available in June with the two-way PL100, which we heard, selling for £2,300 with matching floor stands. The PL300 floorstander was reviewed in *HFC* 301.

The Bristol show remains the best event on the calendar, despite some significant no-shows from the high end's elite, who tend to prefer the London-based events. However, Heathrow is just around the corner... **HFC**

Malcolm Steward

8 At the Quadraspire stand we did ask a question or two for the benefit of you, dear reader: we enquired, for example, about the unusual name of Quadraspire's latest-generation Q4-style equipment stand, the Sunoko Vent. Apparently, it is called Sunoko out of respect to the company's Japanese market, which cannot get enough container loads each month of these elegant supports; and Vent simply indicates that each shelf has ventilation slots cut into it! The shelves are far more substantial than those of the Reference table, which are more appealing to the Japanese buyer's aesthetic tastes and conveniently, deliver enhanced performance.



8. Quadraspire's Sunoko Vent



7. Monitor Audio's new Platinum PL100

F80

BOOTHROYD STUART
MERIDIAN

The Meridian F80. Simply beautiful sound.

In 2005, Meridian Audio began a unique collaboration with Ferrari to develop a range of products that would reflect the qualities of both companies: performance, innovation and bold product design.

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For more information and to find your nearest retailer, visit www.thef80.com

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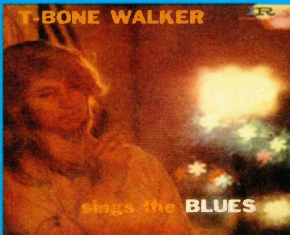
CHOICE CUTS



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman and Nigel Williamson

AUDIOPHILE VINYL



T-BONE WALKER Sings The Blues

Imperial/Pure Pleasure 180g vinyl
Music: T-Bone Walker is important because he was the first artist to play electric blues in 1940 and establish the importance of lead guitar in the genre. This album was cut between 1950 and '52 but could have been made at any time in the following 20 years because his Texas style was so influential on characters like BB King. What distinguishes it is the excellent quality of the singing and playing.
Sound: It's a mono recording, but a remarkable example of what the format is capable of. **JK**

Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★



LEADBELLY Huddie Ledbetter's Best...

Capitol/Pure Pleasure 180g vinyl
Music: Leadbelly was a profoundly influential folk musician whose work affected the likes of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. He's famous for songs like *Rock Island Line* and *Goodnight, Irene*, but all 12 titles on this – his last album (1944) – are great examples. He plays guitar and piano and evokes a bygone, pre-blues era of which few recordings exist.
Sound: Given its age this is a spectacular-sounding mono album. By today's standards it's crude, but its limitations are clearly outshone by the material. **JK**

Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★

These LPs were supplied by Pure Pleasure.
 www.purepleasurerecords.com

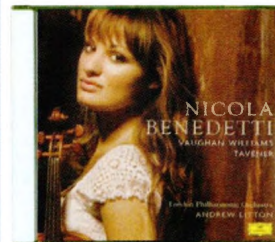
COMPACT DISC & VINYL



SHELBY LYNNE

Just A Little Lovin' Lost Highway
Music: Although she initially made her name as a country singer, on this collection of Dusty Springfield covers Lynne sounds like Dusty's natural heir as our greatest contemporary white female soul vocalist. She takes her time to warm up with a bossa nova take on *I Only Want To Be With You*, but by the time she hits the great *Breakfast In Bed* she's in magnificent voice, her sultry tone lurking just behind the beat and conveying that effortless sense of timing all the great singers exude.
Sound: Spare and soulful, her band cook with an understated southern funk that allows plenty of space for Lynne's sublimely sensuous voice, which is full of charm. **NW**

Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Lark Ascending (Nicola Benedetti violin, London Phil) DGG 476 619-9
Music: This recording of English music by the young, virtuoso violinist contains two new works by Tavener and Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*, a deservedly popular pot boiler. Nicola herself is more than routinely competent, but the Vaughan Williams is surprisingly unengaged, which suggests that she may be partly responsible for the blandness of the Tavener, too.
Sound: Recorded at the Henry Wood hall, this is a clean, vivid recording, though some might find the violin balanced a little close, which is a shame as the LPO under the baton of Andrew Litton provides a compelling backdrop to the soloist. **AG**

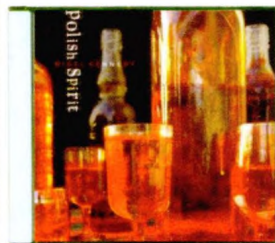
Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★



LED ZEPPELIN

The Song Remains The Same OST Swan Song/Warner
Music: Originally this 1976 double album was accused of excess because of the OTT film featuring the Zep dressed up as knights and Gandalf. But Jimmy Page has gone back to the soundtrack tapes and resurrected six new tracks from those glorious July evenings of 1973 when Zeppelin rocked New York to its foundations. Freshly minted is the ultimate Zep track, a 30 minute *Dazed & Confused*, all riffs and violin bows.
Sound: Page has produced a sound like quicksilver, the guitars are so sweet, the bass so fat and those drums just whoosh. The best-sounding Zeppelin disc ever. **MP**

Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★



EMIL MLYNARSKI

Violin Concerto No 2 Nigel Kennedy, Polish Chamber Orch
 EMI 0946 3 79934 2 2
Music: By happenstance, Nigel Kennedy was given an old recording of a long neglected work by Mlynarski, and fell in love with it.
Sound: This is an excellent disc, which incidentally, is also available in an extended programme on DVD-Video. Recorded at the Filharmonia Pomorska in Bydgoszcz, Poland, this recording is good, though not as distinguished as the performances. **AG**

Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★



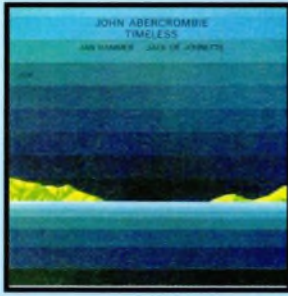
JOE JACKSON

Rain Rykodisc
Music: Joe Jackson has never really received his due from the music press. But he's actually produced an impressively varied body of work, ranging from the sharp-suited pop of his late seventies hits to blues, cool jazz, Cole Porter-style balladeering, film soundtracks, classical pieces and much more besides. His latest finds him in (broadly) pop mood once again and featuring quite possibly some of the best tunes of his career.
Sound: The arrangements are stripped back to piano, bass and drums and

the results, much like a jazz trio playing intelligent pop, are recorded with a crisp, spare precision reminiscent of Rudy Van Gelder's productions for Blue Note. **DO**

Music ★★★★★
 Sound ★★★★★





THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC

"...effects are subtle and the result clean and precise."

JOHN ABERCROMBIE Timeless ECM

Music: This classic disc from 1975 features guitarist Abercrombie with keyboard maestro Jan Hammer and drummer Jack De Johnette, who has been a member of Keith Jarrett's trio almost ever since. In places this could almost be the Mahavishnu Trio, they play with the same skill, intensity and

range as the kings of jazz rock, but the results are tighter. The combination of Hammer's analogue synths and the electric guitar is particularly sweet and the title track is quintessential - the phrases that Abercrombie delivers shine with a beauty that even John McLaughlin rarely found.

Sound: Even though this is quite an early ECM it has much of the precision that one associates with the label, effects are subtle and the result clean and precise without being bright. *JK*



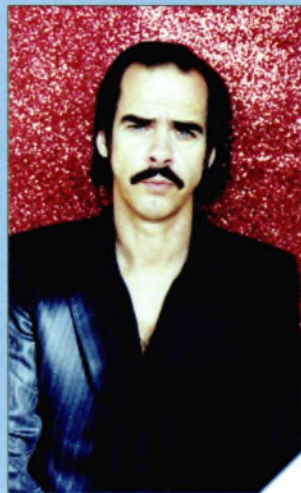
NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS

Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!! Mute

Music: Fears that the prolific Cave might be spreading himself a little thin these days are swiftly allayed by a return to core duties on his first Bad Seeds album since 2004. Despite a plethora of classic rock influences (Velvets, Doors etc) he's been doing this far too long to sound like anybody but Nick Cave. But having spent his youth oozing stentorian gravity, at 50 it sounds like he's learned to have fun, particularly on *We Call Upon The Author* and *Albert Goes West*.

Sound: Those who think Cave always

sounds best with the Bad Seeds will find further evidence in the band's moody atmospheric and magnificently mutant nu-blues tropes. *NW*



COMPAY SEGUNDO

Cien Años

Rhino

Music: As you might expect, the veteran Cuban musicians involved in Ry Cooder's Buena Vista Social Club project had quite a bit of experience behind them long before the international spotlight turned their way. None more so than singer Compay Segundo, who didn't quite make the century that this four-disc set commemorates, clocking out at the still extremely ripe age of 95 in 2003.

Sound: Almost all of the material is from the albums of his post 1990-fame years and, as such, the recordings are all good quality, with Segundo's guitar and caramel-smooth voice well to the fore. *DO*



GUESSMEN

Back From The Bins Co-Lab

Music: This Geordie trio blend singing, beats, samples and real instruments into a bizarre but beguiling blend. Their so-called 'contra-pop sound' means that one track (*Animal Man Robot*) sounds a bit like a particularly edgy remake of Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit In The Sky*, the next like something off an ultra-imaginative trance or film-core album. The lyrics that can be made out are as different as this CD's own unique direction but it's the overall atmospheric mood that counts.

Sound: Considering the amount of recording, re-recording and remixing, it's surprisingly good - bass freaks will love it. *PS*



HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

ENRICO RAVA, STEFANO BOLLANI

The Third Man

ECM

CD

Music: These two musicians represent two very different generations of Italian jazz performers - trumpet player Enrico Rava worked with Gato Barbieri and Chet Baker in the sixties, while pianist Stefano Bollani contributed to pop hits in Italy during the nineties, but came over to jazz a decade ago. Together they make a clean and clear sound that avoids complexity but explores new terrain in a down-tempo manner that rewards attention, but doesn't demand it. Bollani is the more adventurous and occasionally challenging, but as a duo their styles are entirely complementary.

Sound: As usual with ECM studio recordings, the sound is pristine with plenty of dynamic range and excellent imaging. But because both players prefer the upper registers it requires a well balanced system to avoid sounding thin. *JK*



SANTIAGO DE MURCIA: VARIOUS WORKS

William Carter

SACD (stereo/ multichannel hybrid plus stereo CD)

Linn Records CKD288

Music: The music on this disc is written for baroque lute, by Santiago de Murcia (1682-1732) which in the words of the cover notes 'achieved a synthesis of popular and art music that eluded his predecessors, and who is widely regarded as 'the real giant of the Spanish baroque guitar'. Many of the works are fragmentary in nature, some only a few bars long, and are fleshed out here in a manner that is idiomatic, and is played here with energy and passion.

Sound: The recording is as good as the performances. The SACD sound is vivid, punchy and open, with a real bloom and dimensionality that is clearly a better representation of the acoustic guitar than you will normally hear on disc. *AG*



TCHAIKOVSKY: NUTCRACKER FAVOURITE SELECTIONS

Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, Erich Kunzel (cond)

SACD (stereo/ multichannel hybrid plus stereo CD)

Music: While Erich Kunzel's Cincinnati Pops Orchestra may not be the favourite of classical aficionados, they have proved to be immensely prolific, with 83 recordings on Telarc since their inception in 1977. One of the most popular works by arguably the world's most popular composer is, of course, not wanting for recorded versions, but this album works as a sort of 'best of', playing all of the best-known themes (and quite a few more) with enthusiasm and no little panache.

Sound: Nothing unusual in the arrangement and presentation, but the dynamic range, particularly in SACD, is breathtaking, with full attention given to the strings, piccolos and the ethereal celeste. *DO*



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Chord DAC 64 MKII D/A Converter (£2495)	£1495
Krell KPS 20 i/L (£12500)	£2495
McIntosh MCD201, CD/SACD (£3400)	£2695
Musical Fidelity KW 2505 (£4999)	£2995
Musical Fidelity DM25 DAC and Transport (£4000)	£2895
Resolution Audio Opus 21, 2 box cd (£2950)	£2395
Stello CDA 220 dac + CDT 200 cd transport	£1495

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Anatek CM 0.5 pre amp (£1400)	£795
Arcam FMJ P7 Multichannel Power Amplifier	£1495
Arcam FMJ AV8 Processor	£1395
Audio Zone AMP 1 dual mono integrated (£1595)	£1295
Audionet SAM V2 Integrated (£2400)	£1295
Bel Canto S300i Integrated (£1799)	£1495
Bel Canto e One S300 stereo poweramp (£1199)	£899
Bryston 4B SST Power Amp (£2750)	£2249
Cairn 4810 Integrated (£2700)	£1295
DK Design VS-1 MKIII Reference Int (£2500)	£1795
EAR Yoshino 834T Hybrid Integrated (£2800)	£2250
Eastern Electric Minimax Power Amp (£995)	£649
Flying Mole PA-S1 Digital Pre (£999)	£595
Graaf GMS0 Integrated (£4000)	£3250
Jungson JA-88D Class A Integrated (£1099)	£599
KR Audio Products VA320 Power Amplifier	£1495
Krell Pam 1 dual mono preamp	£295
Manley Labs Snapper monoblock power amps (£2995)	£2250
McIntosh MC501 Monoblocks (£9190)	£7495
Musical Fidelity A5 Pre (£1499)	£795
Musical Fidelity 550K Supercharger (£2998)	£1995
Musical Fidelity KW 500 int amplifier (£4000)	£2495
Papworth TVA-B Class A integrated (£2000)	£1195
Qinpu A1.0x Integrated (£300)	£230
Qinpu A-8000 MK II Integrated (£1295)	£795

LOUDSPEAKERS

Acoustic Zen Adagio Loudspeakers (£3995)	£2795
ART Emotion Monitor (£4000)	£3250
AVI Pro Nine Plus Standmount Speakers (£890)	£695
Dali Helicon 400 (£2995)	£2250
JAS Audio - Plato Reference (£13995)	£9995
JAS Audio - Orion (£2300)	£1495
JAS Audio - Orsa (£1399)	£1095
JAS Audio - Supertweeters, Pair (£649)	£449
Leema Acoustics Xone (£2245)	£1695
Monitor Audio GR20 (£1500)	£795
Soundlab Millennium M3 Electrostatics (£8995)	£2795
Wilson Benesch Arc, silver stands+side cheeks (£2600)	£1695

ANALOGUE

Origin Live Aurora Mk1 T Table + Origin Live Silver tonearm	£995
Pro-Ject Experience "X-Pack" (£750)	£495
SME 20/2A (£6300)	£4495
Wilson Benesch Full Circle (£2150)	£1695

MISC

Hovland Reference Speaker Cable (£1200)	£795
Isotek Nova (£1750)	£1295
Isotek Gil Minisub (£545)	£399
Nordost Blue Heaven Speaker Cable (£695)	£349
Nordost Thor Mains Conditioner (£1650)	£1095

A1 - The return of a legend (MF Combo)

Models: A1 Integrated Amp / A1 CD Player
In the mid 1980s into the early 1990s, the original A1 was generally regarded as the ultimate in musicality. Over the past 16 or 17 years, it has been sorely missed by the musically inclined audio enthusiast.

Now it is back and looking as fresh as ever! The new A1 has all the sonic virtues of the original, but it has been brought up to date.

Joining the A1 Amplifier will be a matching CD Player and the performance of this combination is really going to give the competition something to worry about!



(NEW) Marantz Premier Series Combo

Models: SA-11S2 CD Player / SC-11S1 Pre-amplifier / SM-11S1 Power Amplifier
The Premier Series is based on the awesome Legendary Series, but costs incredibly, half the price!

Consisting of a Pre-amplifier, Power-amplifier and CD/SACD Player, each is beautifully built and delivers a sonic performance that is simply astounding.

Marantz is really raising the performance bar with the Premier Series - competition take note!

Cables are important. Call us and we will be happy to advise you on the best one, ensuring you get the most out of your system!



Chord



JAS-Audio



Nordost

Pathos Combo

Models: Classic One MK III Int Amp / Digit CD Player
Seeing this combination together, it is hard not to be bowled over by the beautiful Italian styling. Just wait until you hear this combination play music! Add a second Classic One Amp (amps become bridged monos) for the ultimate in power and finesse. Exceptional value for money. We love them!



McIntosh Combo

Models: MA7000 Int Amp / MCD301 CD Player
Designed to deliver a continuous 250 watts per channel, the MA7000 Integrated Amplifier is the most powerful integrated amplifier McIntosh has ever offered. The MCD301 is the replacement for the popular MCD201. Way to many improvements to list here so we will just say that this combination verges on the magical. Has to be heard to be believed!



Eastern Electric Combo

Models: MiniMax Integrated Amp / CD Player
We love Eastern Electric and it proves that truly great things can indeed come in small packages. The CD Player has been a long-time love of Hi-Fi World and recently Hi-Fi+ wrote how impressed they were with the integrated. Serious performance from seriously underpriced products!

CHOICE MAIL



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

TO WE, OR NOT TO WE...

I have been reading *HFC* for years, but it now seems 'dumbed down'. Your letters pages demonstrates this; you stipulate that any letter must be limited to 150 words.

You have some great writers and the quality of the photography is excellent. However, a product's bad points are glossed over, while your journalists have been asked to write using the proverbial 'we'. One example is your reviewer Malcolm Steward. In the past, he would always write in the first person singular and was never concerned at calling a spade a spade.

I appreciate that the quality of hi-fi equipment has improved enormously over the years, but I cannot believe that all hi-fi product is beyond criticism. Without being

too cynical, the only products that have been criticised in any way seem to be those from manufacturers or distributors that do not advertise with you.

John Paul Diamond Herts

HFC How a magazine chooses to dish out its pronouns does not influence the integrity of the reviews. It simply means the journalist's individual voice is entailed within the greater voice of the magazine.

We also stand by our reviews; in an increasingly contended market, second-rate products simply don't make the grade and, as a consequence, few even get to the product review stage. A product stands or falls on its performance,

"I cannot believe that all hi-fi equipment is beyond criticism."

never the company's advertiser status – last year for example, the anti-advertising Rega picked up four *HFC* Awards (including the Gold Award for its Saturn player) while regular advertisers have received so-so reviews and glowing reviews depending on the product itself. Finally, it is a challenge to present all one's salient points in 150 words or less, but – as evidenced by the editing used to cut your letter to length – it's not impossible. ▣



Above: Rega's award-winning Saturn CD player – no adverts required

LETTER OF THE MONTH



DIGITAL LIFE

The short life expectancy of digital formats makes me worried for the future. HD DVD is now officially reported as dead, while both SACD and DVD-Audio are missing in action. None of these formats is more than a decade old. The same thing happened with Digital Compact Cassette and (although it had a longer shelf life) MiniDisc. I don't remember analogue formats disappearing at the same pace. Am I missing something or does the pace of digital mean we have to replace our music every couple of years now?

Greg Wagstaffe via email

HFC The history of music carriers is littered with short-lived formats. Quadraphonic, Elcassette and 8-track all flourished and vanished within a decade and dbx-encoded records now look as kitsch and 80s as powder blue blouson jackets and big hair. Patently, there's no guarantee that any data carrier format will survive. But Digits are digits, irrespective of the format used to carry them. In theory at least, any digital data can be decoded using the right program, so even if a format has bitten the dust, the data can still be used.



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

TWEAK ON

Having just read the excellent *Jimmy's Top 50 Tweaks* supplement, I would like to suggest another tweak that – together with a pair of Townshend Maximum Supertweeters (Tweak 2) – has transformed the sound of my system (Musical Fidelity A5 CD player/integrated/power amps, Monitor Audio GR60 speakers)

My amp's volume control had suffered from a very limited usable range. Shortly after fitting the supertweeters, I solved the problem by adding a pair of Russ Andrews – 22dB inline attenuators between CD player and amp. The resulting improvement in musicality has been remarkable.

I'm now convinced that major upgrades are not essential to achieve substantial improvements in sound quality and, in future I'll avoid making assumptions about the compatibility of components from one manufacturer.

John Griffin via email

HFC Major upgrades are not necessarily a guarantee of good sound. However, you need to have a good set of building blocks in place to wrest a potential great sound out of them. The old saying – you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear – has a lot of resonance here. You already have a good set of components and those attenuators and the supertweeters help bring those components together perfectly. Well done!

THE WATER MARGIN

While I was mourning the loss of my Marantz CD63 SE at the weekend (my daughter put some water transfers in the drawer), I decided to have a good look through your back issues hoping to find a suitable replacement at a price I can currently afford.

I quickly realized that I wanted a Leema Antila and would have to wait a few months to get it. So, I was faced with having to use a DVD recorder to spin my discs in the mean

“When I open *Hi-Fi Choice*, I am greeted by a bunch of grumpy-looking old men!”

time and a minute or two of *Secret Machines* confirmed my worst fears – it sounded awful.

Just as I was about to plug my MP3 player into my amp, I remembered something someone on a forum had told me a while back. I have a Sony MDS-JE980 Minidisc deck I bought a few years ago, I used it for copying CDs for use in my portable minidisc player and recording radio shows. If you attach your transport to it with an optical cable and hit record (with NO minidisc in) the deck acts as a DAC, just set your amp to whatever input your minidisc deck is on and your away.

It doesn't sound quite as good as my CD63 but it is in a different league to my no name DVD player!

Mark Raeburn Kent

HFC Good idea, and great use of what is now – some say sadly – an old technology. Of course, when you get that Leema Antila (or the new Stream, saving you a few bob in the process), you'll also get to discover just how good a dedicated CD player can really be. In the meantime, the player and MD recorder will more than suffice.

DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF UNFASHION

With regard to Don Chisholm's letter, printed in *HFC* 304, while it's true that there are many iPods in use, there can't be many users who are interested in quality reproduction.

I've read that it is possible to get good quality from iPods and other digital devices, but the amount of data stored on the devices is then greatly reduced, thus taking away the whole reason for their existence, portability of lots of music.

I don't think that hi-fi should be subjected to the winds of fashion, simply so that thousands of hours of music can be held in a

small box. And what happens if the supplier decides to pull the plug, or ups the charges which it makes for the supply of music?

I prefer to continue with collecting CDs and LPs, which will still be playable long after the trendies have sold their iPods to buy the latest fashion must haves.

Cliff Millward via email

HFC LP and CD have stood the test of time, but don't discount the iPod out of hand. Many companies have demonstrated its audiophile potential and with up to 160GB on board, even if you stored your discs in bit-for-bit form, you'd be able to keep more than 100 CDs on a single iPod. Also, if hi-fi steps out of the fashion stream, will anyone new be interested in hi-fi?

GRUMPY OLD HI-FI

I'm a regular hi-fi tragic and when I open most magazines, I see a bunch of smiling faces that look as if they enjoy what they do. But when I open *Hi-Fi Choice*, I am greeted by a bunch of grumpy-looking old men!

This is not a complaint about content or the excellent people on your team, but a request you consider taking some nice happy looking photos of your worthy journos, so that we readers can open the mag and say “look at all those happy guys busting a gut to tell us the good news”

Brett Sower Australia

HFC It's our version of the 'deadpan aesthetic', Brett. In fact, it's a Future Publishing thing – if you look at any Future title, everyone looks like a bulldog chewing a wasp. Or maybe it's because we only have seven teeth between the lot of us, and three of those teeth are broken. We'll leave it for you to decide.



Above: Leema Antila CD player

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HI FI CLUBE / JOSÉ VICTOR HENRIQUES / CREMONA ELIPSA

Sonus Faber's introductions in the early "Naughties" of the floor-standing Cremona and the smaller Cremona Auditor were hailed as milestones in the industry's long standing quest to achieve the highly-desired marriage of both aesthetics and sound quality. Such a marriage would please both ends of the consumer spectrum, the audiophile as well as the cineaste.

Indeed, it seemed incredible that the legendary, exquisite craftsmanship of the original Cremona and the Cremona Auditor could have been surpassed.

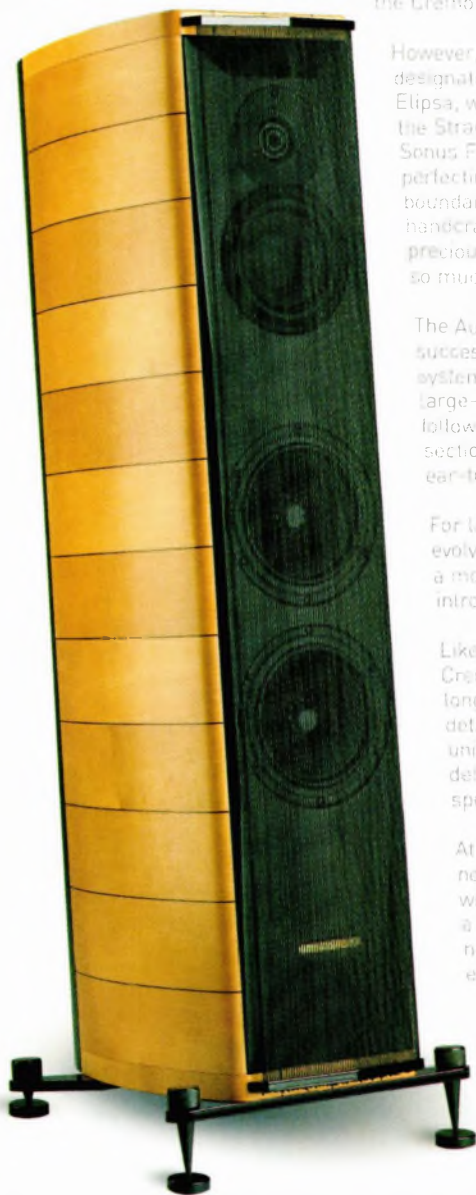
However, the recent launch of two new models with 'M' designations, along with a flagship speaker, the Cremona Elipsa, were inspired by that most astounding of transducers, the Stradivari. Thus, they are testaments to the fact that Sonus Faber's designers are in a constant process of perfecting the art of music reproduction, and of pushing the boundaries in the creation and engineering of awe-inspiring handcrafted works of art. These speakers are all the more precious because of their rarity, in a world characterised by so much automation and mechanisation.

The Auditor M, the smallest of the new Cremonas and the successor of the original Auditor, is a versatile two-way system ideally suited for smaller environments craving a large-scale musical picture. Its natural maple enclosure follows the Sonus Faber signature form of a lute in cross-section, while its components and final sound have been ear-tuned by the Sonus Faber team.

For larger rooms, the original floor-standing Cremona has evolved into the new superior Cremona M, which displays a more elegant, stylish finish and benefits from the introduction of new components.

Like their Homage siblings, both the Auditor M and Cremona M reflect the findings of Sonus Faber team's longstanding research, with attention paid to every detail, from small components, to wiring, to the drive units themselves. Equally, the aesthetics and external details have been refined to indicate a new stage in the speakers' evolution.

At the top of the new Cremona range lies the brand-new Cremona Elipsa, designed for the connoisseur with both the means and the environment to exploit a larger system. The Cremona Elipsa provides near-Stradivari performance in a more compact, economical package. Its sound is room-filling, open and natural, while its form is as beautiful as the speaker that inspired it. The Elipsa is, without question, another Sonus Faber masterpiece.



Sonus Faber CREMONA M



Sonus Faber CREMONA ELIPSA

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Sonus faber.

Understanding: Bass Part One

Get ready to rumble with our guide to the best in bass-ics!

Bass. The heavy industry of sound. Done properly it's hi-fi's most glittering prize, the key to ultimate believability. Get it wrong – the depressingly familiar amorphous, boomy, overpowering thump is, if anything, more heinous than a conspicuous absence – and the all-too-obvious distortion of the musical truth is impossible to get past.

It's hard to overstate the significance of the lowest three octaves when putting together a system or aiming to get the best from an existing one. Understanding the difference between fanciful notions and what's actually achievable is a good place to start. Lifelike bass that reaches for the ocean floor, for instance, simply isn't going to happen in a small listening room, however big the speakers or powerful the amplifier. Which isn't to say the compromises implicit with a smaller room have to ruin your enjoyment, but it is important to accept the limitations of what you have to work with.

A system with the power and bandwidth to reach down to 20Hz or so, can be an awesome thing in a suitably spacious room, but don't automatically assume that larger speakers will always deliver a superior bottom end. As ever, the end result is a team effort and quality should always come before quantity. Of course, some teams are more talented than others.

A well thought-through expensive system in a sympathetic listening environment will always outperform a similarly well-considered and sited budget combo. But the status quo can be quickly reversed if the expensive kit is poorly set up. The aim of this feature is to explain why good (but not necessarily deep) bass is worth striving for, even if your listening room is less than ideal and (in Part Two next month) to show you how to optimise the bass quality of your system, whatever its size, whatever its price.

1. PREPARATION

Not all speakers are born equal, and this is never truer than when it comes to bass. As a rule of thumb, a sealed box is likely to have a well-controlled, dry and articulate bass while reflex ported designs will go lower for a given enclosure volume, but with more colouration and less control. Unless they're very large,

electrostatic panels struggle to move enough air to deliver convincing bass weight and extension but hybrids, which combine a membrane panel with a dynamic bass driver, can work extremely well. System matching, though, is crucial. It's no good connecting your current-devouring studio monitors to a tiny, flea-powered valve amp and expect to hear

“Lifelike bass that reaches for the ocean floor, for instance, simply isn't going to happen in a small listening room...”

Below: Wilson Benesch Torus





Above: REL T1
Below: B&W PV1

anything much at all, let alone fast, fluent, visceral bass. An extreme example, granted, but valve amps, as a breed, don't have fit-and-forget bass; they need to have huge synergy with the partnering speakers – as a rule, the more sensitive the better – to show what they can do.

And that's just the start. You'll need to work out the ideal speaker positioning in your listening room (sometimes, but not always a case of following the manufacturer's recommendations); choose the correct kind of support if it's a standmount design and coupling to the floor if it's a floorstander; even consider the amount and type of furnishings sharing the room. Address all of this and not only will your bass be more convincing, you'll also find that everything above it tends to fall into place to create a more satisfying, well-integrated whole.

2. WHAT BASS IS AND WHAT IT ISN'T

The audio bandwidth of human hearing is commonly, and rather arbitrarily by the

inventors of Compact Disc, set at 20Hz to 20kHz. Within these limits, the lowest three octaves constitute bass: upper bass is the 80-160Hz octave, mid-bass the 40-80Hz octave and low bass the 20-40Hz octave. Low bass is felt as much as it is heard and anything below 20 cycles per second is purely felt. Anything above 20kHz is dismissed as irrelevant by some and vital to resolving the harmonic structure of sounds in the audible band, even right down to the lowest bass, by others.



Hence the claim of supertweeter makers, that reproducing inaudible sound up to 50kHz, and even higher, makes everything sound more natural, from piccolo to double bass. Measuring such claims is a daunting task but, subjectively, things are even less straight-forward. As a hi-fi magazine reader, you'll have

been unavoidably conditioned by descriptions of bass that range from "loose and flabby" to "taut and fast" via "slow and muddy" and "articulate and tuneful". This, in turn, feeds the idea that bass is a singular

entity with a fixed set of criteria targets that are either met or, to varying degrees, missed.

As a consequence, it's tempting – especially for rock fans – to reduce the assessment of bass performance to how a system deals with bass guitar and kick drum. If it's loud, hard and visceral it passes the litmus test. It's a common pitfall. A hi-fi system isn't a disco PA that has to get the drum 'n' bass message across at all costs and, as its sometimes seems, at the expense of everything else.

The ideal is to keep a natural sense of proportion from top to bottom, with no special emphasis given to any part of the audio band. What can seem like a paradox is that true wide bandwidth speakers often appear to have less bass than smaller designs. This is because they have a smoother, more accurate and more extended bass response with no artificial upper-mid bass 'hump' to hype the impression of weight and power in the region where most bass instruments play.

3. THE LOW ROAD

Accurate low frequency reproduction is about a lot more than bass instruments, drums and cathedral organs. The male voice falls within its remit and, many octaves below that, the reverberant ambient cues that can give a live recording a spine-tingling sense of realism.

When you're in the presence of live music, of course, you don't experience any bandwidth limitation. What makes it so engaging and enveloping is the contribution of the performance space itself; its size, shape and acoustic character. Much of this is contained in very low frequency information, along with the harmonics of some instruments, and not just those employed in the lower registers. The brutal truth is that while a system that rolls off above the lowest octaves can sound well balanced, pitch accurate and musical – and given the limitations of budget may be performing perfectly within its envelope – the effect of introducing the missing information can be dramatic, adding immeasurably to

SUB-BASS IN MUSIC

A number of recordings have 'hidden' sub-bass notes in them – the kind that you'll only hear with the right system. *Orbital's Dwr Budr* from the album *In Sides* and *Massive Attack's Unfinished Sympathy* from the classic disc *Blue Lines* are both great examples.

Do you know of any great tracks for ludicrously low bass? Email us with your favourite sub-bass tracks at hifimail@futurenet.co.uk. The best suggestions will win a copy of Russ Andrews' *Sound Solutions* book.

[Feature] Understanding: Bass Part One

☞ the feeling of 'being there'. If you think bass is just the heavyweight ballast that underpins music, your system isn't doing it right. If a high fidelity system is to be true to its name, it must do more than merely play tunes in the bass. Every part of every note – the fundamental, the harmonics – must be reproduced not in glorious isolation, but along with the acoustic signature of the recording space. For that, you need low frequency extension of a large floorstanding speaker or a sub-bass system to extend downward the output of the system's main speakers.

4. BRING ON THE SUBS

Sub-bass is the very low bass in the 16Hz to 40Hz region that's hits you in the stomach rather than between your ears (legend has it Grace Jones' *Slave To The Rhythm* contains a synth sweep that dives all the way down to a truly seismic eight Hertz) and sub-bass systems, more commonly called subwoofers, are the most cost-effective way to get there.

Subwoofers remove the burden of generating deep bass from the system's main speakers and amplifier by placing a bigger bass driver than would be practical in all, but the most gargantuan of multiple-driver floorstanding speaker in its own enclosure (moving air and plenty of it is the name of the game at these thunder-aping wavelengths) and controlling it with an optimised built-in power amplifier.

Most good subwoofers can be fine-tuned to any system, whether it uses towering floorstanders or tiny satellites and, perhaps



Above: Velodyne SPL-800R

“Many subwoofers can be fine-tuned to any system, whether it uses towering floorstanders or tiny satellites...”

even more usefully than augmenting the system's bass output, they tend to iron out any lumpiness arising out of less than perfect room acoustics. British sub-bass system pioneer REL, puts this down to a subwoofer's ability to pressure drive any room below its lowest eigentone (resonance peak), ensuring

a smooth, extended bass response free from emphasis or boom. Using two subwoofers develops the smoothing effect further. The imaging of the main system is preserved down to its existing limits, but a surprising bonus is that when correctly integrated, imaging and depth appear to improve. There are also spin-off benefits to the way the sense of 'air' around instruments and the feeling of acoustic depth in a recording are perceived. **HFC**

Next month: Part Two

David Vivian



Above: Eclipse 725SW

THE 'BROWN NOTE'

According to (urban) legend, there's a subsonic frequency that – if played with sufficient intensity – can play havoc with listeners bowel control. Rumours abound about Nazi death ray sound generators (often accompanied with images of RADAR prototypes) and eye-popping experimental US military systems.

The word 'legend' should give the game away. The concept of the 'Brown Note' was categorically debunked by hit US television show *MythBusters* where – despite using a dozen Meyer Sound PA subwoofers – nothing 'brown' happened.

Totem Arro

It's our slimmest floor standing speaker, with a 4.5" sandwich cone woofer with dual magnet, and a soft dome tweeter tuned for low resonant frequency. Although this design is very slim, it produces an amazing - never expected - deep bass. The Arro can perform comfortably even near walls. As with other Totem models, the Arro's small lateral dimensions are a virtue, not a compromise. Its very smallness allows it to project a completely believable stereo image most large speakers are unable to replicate.

The Arro brings Totem quality to smaller rooms and smaller budgets. Yet it performs like a champion, as its narrow cabinet has the rigidity of an expensive stand. It has the firm monocoque chassis you expect from Totem, with interlocked mitred joints, and unique borosilicate damping. It also has a hard-wired crossover network with bypassed oil capacitors, and it can be bi-wired.



Five different finishes are available-four types of veneer: cherry, mahogany, maple and black ash and the fifth being a sublime white satin lacquer.

The standard added plinth with four spikes can be mounted by our specialists, although optional, using the unique Totem "Claw" with ball bearing to floor system will give even better results.

The name is evocative of the arrow, which echoes the tribal theme suggested by our name, Totem.

The shape of this stand also mirrors an arrow, long and slim. Like a fine quality arrow, it is, at once, noticeably light and extremely rigid. And it reaches its target...the heart of the music. Listen to it, and you'll conclude that Totem has hit another bullseye with the Arro.

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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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- 44** Arcam MS250 music server
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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Some items with our ratings: £800 player, the 17 MkII M, which has excellent build and is a very good impression in HFC 243. At same price there's also the Cyrus 7, a ring all-rounder in a compact case. After trying the Heart with the standard we switched over to the Siemens grade, a comparison somewhat muddled by the fact that it was a cold for hot swap – the device had been on for several days with the

Our overall conclusion

after a leveler tubes shone through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that is with dense material with remarkable confidence and ease. It even seems to be

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

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	
The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that is with dense material with remarkable confidence and ease. It even seems to be	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	

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 four stars 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...



Dream Leemas

Leema's new affordable CD player and amp are the stuff of legend

PRODUCT Leema Stream/Leema Pulse

TYPE CD player and integrated amplifier

PRICE (Stream) £1,095, (Pulse) £1,195

KEY FEATURES Stream) Size (WxHxD): 43.5x9x33.3cm
● Weight: 10kg ● Digital outputs: RCA phono
● Analogue outputs: RCA phono, LIPS system integration
● 8x 24-bit/192kHz stereo DACs
● (Stream) Size (WxHxD): 43.5x9x37.5cm
● Weight: 12kg ● Rated power: 80 watts
● Inputs: five RCA phono, minijack ● Phono inputs: MM, MC ● Outputs: tape, pre-out, LIPS system integration

CONTACT ☎ 01938 811900 ● www.leema-acoustics.com

Last year we got rather excited about the multi-DAC Leema Antila (HFC 291), a CD player – from a loudspeaker specialist – with an odd name that really delivered the ‘sonic’ goods. So when we saw the new Stream CD player at less than half the price, being demonstrated at the Heathrow show last September, we made the request for first dibs. Although it’s felt like a long wait,

a four-and-a-half-month gap between pre-production and finished unit is quite normal when you pay as much attention to detail as the guys at Leema seem to do.

To accompany the Stream, Leema has built a more affordable version of its Tucana integrated amplifier. Called ‘Pulse’, it produces 80 watts, rather than the 150 offered by the Tucana, but the build comparison is to the same standard (albeit, without the fancy logo perforations on the top or the heat sinking down the flanks). There are also blue lights that indicate coarse and fine volume; those under the knob representing small increments and those around it, large ones.

Features are also pretty comprehensive with a phono stage that accepts moving coil and MM cartridges separately, a tape loop and preamp out. Next to these are more contemporary facilities, like a minijack for your MP3 player and another for headphones.

Those who need to integrate both stereo and home cinema set ups, will be pleased to see the AV direct sockets that allow the power amp section of the Pulse to be driven with an external multichannel processor. This means that the stereo speakers can be integrated into a surround system without compromising two channel performance.

The Stream is an unusually clean-looking CD player, thanks to the compact size of the display and the fact that there is only one knob and one power button. Leema calls this knob L-Drive, with the distinct possibility that ‘L’ stands for learner, because that’s what you are until you can work out how to use it! We thought that the Cairn players were a little challenging to operate, but the Stream takes things further. Opening the drawer requires a three second push, while getting it to play only requires one. The tendency for the novice, however, is to press it again, once the



“Stream and Pulse are equipped with LIPS (Leema intelligent protocol system), which allows components to talk to one another.”

drawer closes and this instigates 'pause'. The two-digit display doesn't help either, because it has to resort to abbreviations to tell you what it's doing – it's no BMW!

Inside the box, Stream follows the theme established by the Antila, with multiple DACs. This time there are eight, rather than ten pairs, but this is still more than the majority of players. These are top notch 24-bit/192kHz delta-sigma devices, whose output is fully balanced thanks to the differential arrangement that having two or more pairs per channel allows.

The actual output on the player is only single ended – one way in which Leema could reduce costs without too much compromise. It also makes sense in the context of like-priced amplifiers, which rarely have balanced inputs.

The other differences to the Antila include conventional casework. The front is billet aluminium, but the rest is steel rather than stainless aluminium. The L-Drive is also a cost saver because it removes the need for numerous buttons and LEDs. What Leema has

seemingly succeeded in doing is retaining the key elements of the Antila, while reducing the cost of the surrounding architecture.

Both Stream and Pulse are equipped with LIPS (Leema Intelligent Protocol System), which allows components to talk to one another and significantly increases ease of use. The CD players are able to act as a master through LIPS, which means that the amp can be out of site and you can command it completely through the player, the display showing input selection and volume level. Another neat feature is the way the amp always drops the volume to a low preset level with an input change, so that there's no danger of damaging loudspeakers when switching between sources.

SOUND QUALITY

In order to get an idea of their individual characteristics, we tried these two components on their own prior to combining them. First up was the Stream, which we played through a Classé pre/power combo and Bowers & Wilkins 802D loudspeakers. Far from suffering

from the exposure that this set up undoubtedly offers, the Stream seems to revel in the resolution, delivering one of the most toe-tapping results we've encountered in a CD player for quite a while. It gets straight into the groove in such a convincing manner that you wonder if it's cheating by leaving something out. Although, to be honest, we couldn't find anything missing on well-played discs like the legendary Eva Taylor on the *Opus 3* label.

The Keith Jarrett Trio's *Live at Montreux* is also highly revealing in this respect, but the Stream has no trouble getting to grips with the less than obvious rhythm of *Green Dolphin Street*, a tune that can often seem to meander with other players, but which really picks up its feet with the Stream treatment. A comparison with the less expensive, but reigning sub-thousand pound champ (Cambridge's Azur 840C) reveals nothing amiss in terms of detail. The Cambridge is laid back by comparison, the soundstage literally moving backwards when it takes over, which makes the Leema relatively forward, but not so that it's in your face. The Cairn Tornado, for instance, is a more forward and edge-of-the-seat player, which puts the Stream in the middle-ground.

Perhaps the most striking comparison, came with Barb Jung's *Trouble in Mind*, which has a full-bodied double bass providing the beat, ▶

Q&A

We talked to Mallory Nicholls co-founder of Leema Acoustics about these two components.



HFC How do you see your approach to amplifier design?

MS Fundamentally all the tech specs are important to us, but we're really about loudspeaker drive and current. Tucana is a high-output, high-current device and what we've tried to do with the Pulse is to draw on those parts. The complete voltage and driver stages are identical, albeit it's not a dual mono design so it's got a single transformer, but it's a very high-spec transformer so we've got good output current with similar distortion figures, but with reduced output power. The preamp section is very similar to Tucana. It has passive switching using gold palladium relays and we use a Burr Brown digital attenuator, which we use on all of our amplifiers because it does not degrade over time, unlike a motorised pot which will gradually get noisy.

It's unusual to have an MM/MC phono stage on an amp at this price as it presumably increases costs, why include it?

We thought it was an important feature to do, we wanted it to be a unique product at this price point and we wanted to give as good a bunch of features as we could, including the headphone out and the MP3 input. Having the separate inputs [MM, MC] means that you can run two arms and cartridges.

What about repeat and programme as options?

We don't currently have repeat in the software, but we will do by the end of this week, like the Antila it's a two-button function. There will also be 'drawer open' on the final Stream remote.

How do you get the player to time so well?

The thing that we concentrated on was timing in the filters that we use. We maintain very low jitter in both players, we then use DACs [Crystal 454X] that are very good from the timing perspective and we maintain that by not hurting it in the filters. The filters are optimised for timing performance in the square wave domain and we've found that the whole combination gives us good musicality.



which the Stream delivers in timely fashion, making the 840C seem leaden and ploddy. It's not just a tempo thing either, dynamics are also well catered for, which means that if there is life on the disc it will be sent to the amplifier in no uncertain terms. Even with relatively restrained discs like José Gonzalez's *Veneer*, where there's rarely more than a voice and a guitar, the Stream finds the energy and vitality that was laid down in the studio.

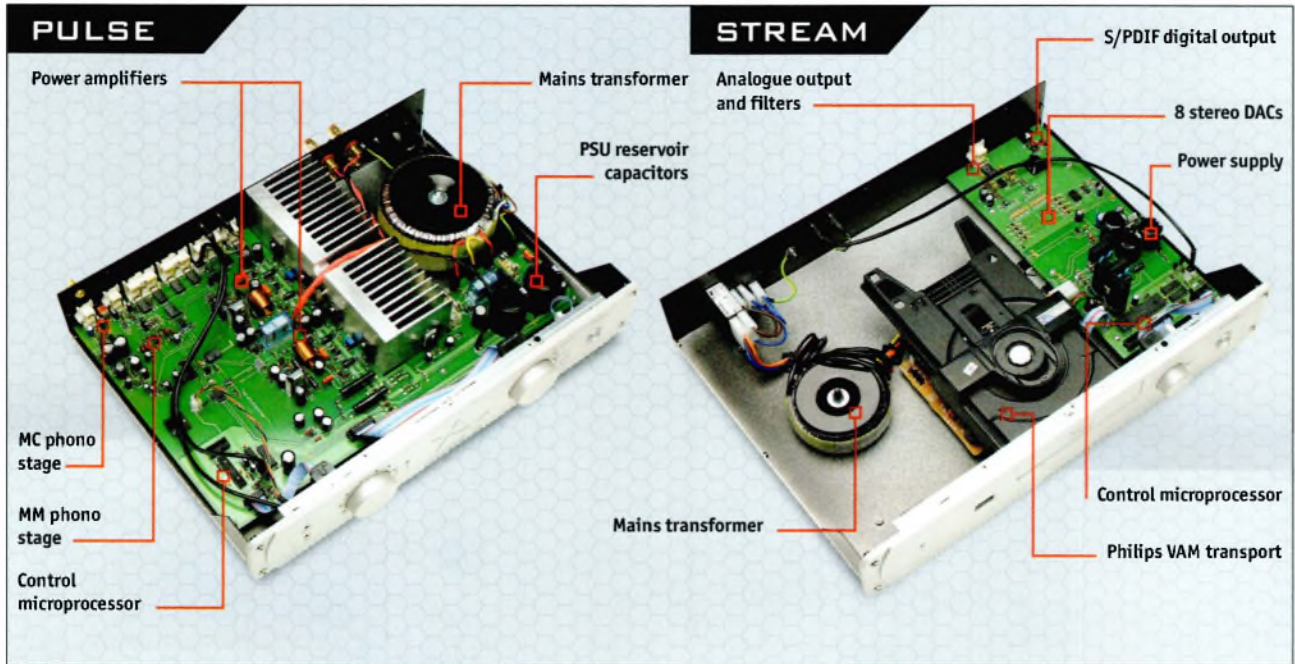
Stream's timing talents with the Pulse amplifier are not quite as revealing as nine grand's worth of pre/power, but we think that this can be forgiven under the circumstances. What is most impressive about it, is that it doesn't make us keep thinking 'I wonder what this album would sound like through the bigger amps?' Imaging could, perhaps, be more precise and voices, though centrally placed, are not always as clear as they might be. But, the inflections and subtleties on display can still be appreciated.

With Keith Jarrett for instance, it reveals the tape hiss and an awful lot of the incidental foot-tapping, alongside a very real and solid sounding piano. It can deliver something very close to palpable realism with the aid of the Bowers & Wilkins' 802D loudspeakers, which is very impressive given the asking price. We've heard plenty of more expensive amps struggle with the load offered by this speaker, let alone deliver top musical results through them.

And, while it may not be quite so transparent to timing, it lets enough through for you to know that the source is delivering the rhythmical goods. Tunes do indeed chug when the material calls for it – the Blues number; *When The Levee Breaks*, for instance. The degree of tangibility it brings to well-recorded pieces does a lot to help suspend the disbelief that is the *raison d'être* of a sound system.

As with the Stream, we used a Cambridge Azur component as a reference for the Pulse, this time the 840A amplifier. A design that has





“...the Pulse produces a wideband, dynamic result that is more than a match for the charms of any digital source.”

significantly more features, but costs £400 less. You'd expect the Pulse to cream it and you'd be right, but the 840A has upset previous pretenders, so this is not an easy task. Essentially the Leema amplifier delivers more detail and you can hear the resonance of the double bass strings and the timbre or tonal depth of voices rather more clearly, too. The difference is great enough to warrant an upgrade from Cambridge to Leema which, given that you usually have to

spend a bit more to make it worthwhile, is a good sign.

The Leema has one feature not to be found on the Cambridge, a phono stage. When connected to the output of a van den Hul Frog MC, sited in an SME IV arm on a DPS2 turntable, the Pulse produces a wideband, dynamic result that is more than a match for the charms of any digital source. The bass is particularly tuneful, with good depth to boot, continuing the tactile theme encountered

with the Stream and doing so in a highly engaging fashion.

Leema has managed to deliver a confident and inspiring sound from its latest and most affordable components. The Stream times like few other CD players can, while the Pulse has power and transparency that should have the likes of Arcam and Cyrus more than a little concerned. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT - LEEMA STREAM

SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION Despite setting the bar rather high with Antia, we're bowled over by the result delivered by the Stream. It must rank as the most timely disc player at its price point.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★	

VERDICT - LEEMA PULSE

SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION The Pulse is also a stunner with an organic and revealing sound alongside good power reserves and great features. Could have been cheaper without the phono stage.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★	



Worth the wait

Arcam's long-awaited CD player/music server sets the standard for the audiophile

PRODUCT Arcam MS250

TYPE Music server

PRICE £2,995

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.5x8x35cm

• Weight: 5kg • 400GB hard disk • Audio outputs: four independent stereo analogue, one digital
• Audio inputs: two analogue, video, composite, S-video, VGA • Control and networking: Ethernet, RS232, infra-red, USB, remote in/out, trigger out

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

The first servers to hit the market came from names previously unfamiliar to audiophiles – some of them have bitten the dust, some (Imerge, for one) have become familiar. But it was only a matter of time before the big names of audio decided to join the fun.

After some four years in development, Arcam has added the MS250 to its 'FMJ' range of hi-fi separates. By no means the cheapest act available, it nevertheless promises audiophile sound quality based on Arcam's CD player expertise and offers a handy capacity of 400GB – equivalent to well over 500 hours of uncompressed audio. Lossless compression would have made that over 1,000 hours, but 500 should last most people a few years.

In many respects, the specification is familiar, with multiple independent audio outputs fed from a hard drive, internal CD reader/writer, internet radio or line inputs, plus Ethernet, USB and video connections and a few other control

sockets besides. Arcam has upped the ante by offering four outputs (most servers seem to have three), but of these only one has a digital alternative to the analogue phono sockets. Is that a problem? Possibly not: for one thing, if the sound quality via analogue outputs lives up to Arcam's claims an external DAC is unlikely to do much to enhance it, while the really dedicated owner could still add something very fancy (think Chord, dCS etc.) in the principal listening zone to gild the lily. Then again, digital interconnects have advantages on long runs and can also be connected via a wireless interface of some sort....



Last month (*HFC 305*), we reviewed the Systemline Music Server and our memories of that device were fresh enough for the back panel of the MS250 to ring bells. Inside, we found not just similar, but identical control and power supply sections and a closely related CD transport, too. The audio board

unlike that of good current CD players. The power supply is a switch-mode package – traditionally a no-no in high-quality audio, but we're not alone in accepting that many recent hi-fi components using such a supply have demonstrated a perfectly acceptable, not to say impressive, performance. The Meridian 808

features a lot of really obscure CDs, you may have to enter some details yourself, but it's not too tiresome and you can add a PC keyboard to speed things up.

A TV or VGA display is, as usual with servers, more a requirement than a luxury for setting up, but simple selection and playing functions are perfectly possible using only the front-panel display. The remote control is nice to use and the front panel buttons duplicate all frequently-used functions. In addition to playing music from the hard disk or CD drive, you can listen to Internet radio stations (assuming you have broadband), some of which are starting to put out better sound than was the case a year ago. Line inputs also allow recording from vinyl, cassette and other analogue formats. iPod and similar devices can interface via USB and you can build a network of MS250s and connect to home computers to share music as well.

“...both bass and treble have the kind of clean, detailed and confident extension that one expects from high-end kit...”

is completely different, though, so in a sense this is no more surprising than finding that two CD players share a transport and a handful of control chips. And since we thought the Systemline was pretty well equipped on the control interface front, we're bound to say the same of this machine, with all the connections we can easily imagine needing for typical application. Actually it has rather more inputs for remote control, giving extra flexibility in the implementation of a multi-room installation.

The audio board, all Arcam's own work (the rest is clearly all bought in), carries high specification DACs chips of recent vintage from Cirrus/Crystal, followed by good-quality op-amps, resulting in a signal path not entirely

Signature CD player, for instance. If switch-mode is good enough for that epitome of digital excellence, we're certainly not going to discount it in applications like this.

We're still hunting for a server that can 'store' (they all seem to use that term – i.e. rip a CD to hard disk) really quickly. This one has two settings – Fast and Quiet, but while Fast seems to run at only about eight times normal speed (and is anything but quiet), Quiet runs at a rather tedious four times speed and is far from silent. Still, it's always entertaining to see track details etc. and even cover artwork pop up automatically, thanks to a seamless connection to an online database. If your collection

SOUND QUALITY

Once again, we are forced to issue a warning that having this server in the same room as your loudspeakers places a distinct limit on sound quality, simply because of the volume of sound it emits. The hard drive isn't the half of it: there are two internal fans and the CD drive is far from silent when used to play discs. ▶

Q&A

We recently spoke with Geoff Meads, Brand Manager at Arcam, about the role of the music server in the CD universe.



HFC Is this the beginning of the end for CD as we know it?

GM Absolutely not! CD still remains the easiest way to buy full resolution music. Where servers excel is in expedient access to your music: the convenience of a server is undeniable. Making one that sounds like a really good CD player is a different matter and that's where Arcam's expertise comes in.

Does server design present any audio challenges that don't exist in CD player design?

Absolutely. RF interference control presents much tougher challenges due to the high speed electronics within a server. Heat management is also more tricky, as is the buffering of audio data across internal data busses.

Why was the decision taken not to support FLAC compression?

With a 400GB internal hard drive within the MS250 and the ease of expansion via USB drives, compression of music is not really an issue. On portable devices compression methods are much more important. But with MP3, WMA and AAC capabilities, the MS250 can play back most existing libraries while storing hundreds of CDs at full resolution for audiophile-quality playback.

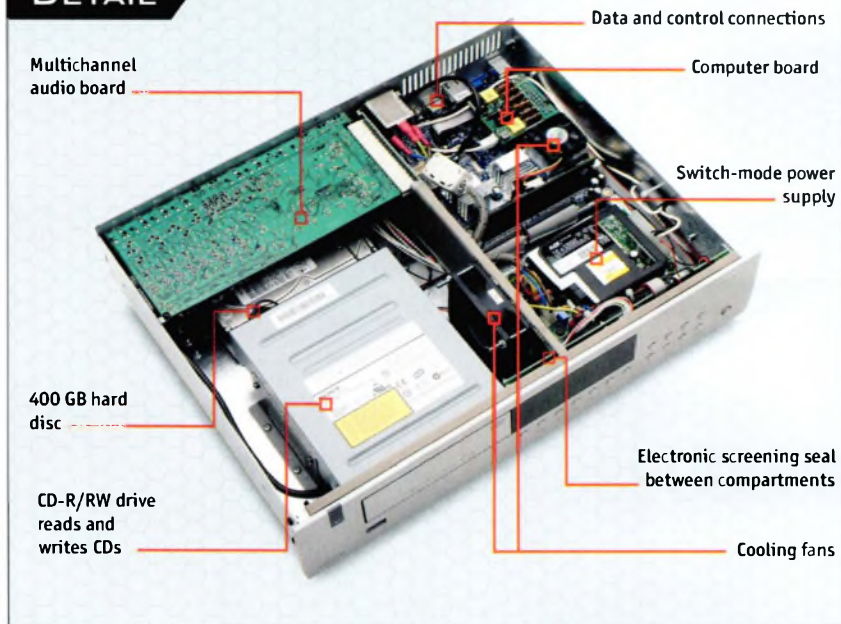
Do you get any feeling that such products sell mostly into multi-room or traditional hi-fi service?

The feature set of the MS250, with four independent outputs, RS232 control and outstanding sound quality, is balanced between the needs of the audiophile and the custom installer. I suspect we'll see a mix of customers for this unit, but for me it's the sound quality and convenience on offer that make it so attractive.

Despite the 'audiophile' claims, we find the fan and hard drive noise a drawback. Any chance of a silent version?

Noise control has been an important factor in the development of the MS250. In general, music servers generate more mechanical noise than a stand alone CD player due to the larger number of noise generating components and the need for greater heat management. In comparison with other music servers the MS250 is pretty quiet. Compared with many set-top boxes and game stations it's just about silent!

DETAIL



which you can't be bothered to store.

To our mind, cooling a server without the aid of fans is an absolutely essential first step towards making it truly audiophile and it's certainly possible: just look up 'Hush Technologies' on the Internet, for instance.

An ugly 1980s-style glass-fronted hi-fi cabinet didn't make enough difference to noise levels, so we took the MS250 out of our room and introduced the long interconnects. This set-up quickly brings impressive results.

What surprises us more than anything is the very high degree of insight into even very complex recordings that this server affords us. We aren't entirely astonished to find that its tonal balance is good, nor that the sound is basically clean, but the degree to which it emulates a very fine CD player is frankly rather a pleasant shock.

In addition, over and above the general balance, both bass and treble have the kind of clean, detailed and above all, confident extension that one expects in high-end kit and hopes for, though sometimes in vain, in decent mid-price equipment. If we have any criticism of the bass it's that it can sometimes be a little indistinct in pitch, but it is firmly extended and times very well, giving great drive and energy in rock and other strongly rhythmic music. The treble is open and airy and high sounds decay into silence very naturally.

The line inputs seem more than just decent, too and were admirably up to the task of storing tracks from some treasured LPs. So is this server the perfect embodiment of the new digital experience?

Not entirely. We're undeniably full of admiration for Arcam's achievements on the sound front, but we are still beset by doubts as to whether we could live with it as part of a hi-fi system, pretty much entirely because of that wretched noise it – and all of its peer group that we can recall – makes. All the same, put it in the cupboard under the stairs as part of a multi-room installation and in audio terms, it is currently the model by which to measure the rest. It seems qualified congratulations are in order. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



CONCLUSION

There is much to admire here and in many ways this is a mature and highly capable product. However, we feel that a few tricks have been missed and, despite the good basic sound, we can't suppress a slight disappointment.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE



PLATINUM



Sprezzatura

Famous for his 'Il Libro Del Cortegiano' (The Book of the Courtier, 1528), Renaissance humanist Baldesar Castiglione coined the word 'sprezzatura' to describe the ideal for courtly behaviour. He insisted that in order to be worthy, exceptional virtuosity should be conveyed with an unaffected, effortless dignity. In essence, sprezzatura is the art of making something difficult look easy.

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 **MONITOR AUDIO®**

GB1 gets i'd up

Popular super-compact floorstander has undergone numerous significant improvements

PRODUCT PMC GB1i

TYPE Loudspeaker

PRICE £1,275 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 15.5x87x23.4cms

● Weight: 10.5kg ● Advanced Transmission Line (ATL) loading ● 140mm cast frame bass/mid driver ● 27mm Solonex tweeter

CONTACT ☎ 08704 441044 # www.pmc-speakers.com



Founded in the late 1980s, PMC is one of the few British hi-fi companies to have survived... and thrived. It's also one of the few speaker companies to have enjoyed similar success in both hi-fi and ProAudio industries (albeit with various model ranges).

The company is different from its competitors in a number of ways. The most obvious is that bass and bass/mid drive units are invariably loaded by transmission lines – a much more complex solution than the almost ubiquitous reflex port loading that is found elsewhere. While the efficacy, or otherwise, of transmission line-loading has been a topic of debate and controversy since the 1960s, the physical act of creating a folded line within the enclosure does have the associated benefit of creating an extremely stiff and solid structure.

Another distinguishing factor, is that PMC tends to create one model at a time, gradually building up its range and keeping individual models in the line-up for a great many years. That said, development of existing models continues behind the scenes unabated and 2008 sees the introduction of a number of improvements to no fewer than five models simultaneously.

It's less than four years since *HFC* first encountered the GB1. Unlike the other models in the lower reaches of the PMC line-up, which grew '+' suffixes around the time that the GB1 was launched, the latter never got a '+' sign, presumably because it had effectively already been 'plused' prior to its introduction. Instead, this cute little floorstander goes straight to 'i' status, having just undergone the same comprehensive series of improvements throughout the other '+' models (and the larger OB1). Whereas those 2004 '+' improvements were retro-fittable to earlier models, the changes this time are more comprehensive and extend to the cabinetwork. Regrettably, therefore, upgrading earlier models to the latest spec is not possible.

PMC mentions three major changes between the GB1 and GB1i. Chief amongst them is a brand new Solonex soft

dome tweeter, co-developed with Norwegian driver specialist SEAS. To keep pace with the improved top-end detail and resolution, has required improvements in the bass/mid driver and adjustments in the crossover network. The enclosure has also been beefed up and given a superior surface sheen. A fourth, and possibly more significant change, is that the price has increased from 2004's £995 to £1,275 per pair in its latest guise. Part of the increase is doubtless due to the natural inflationary order of things, though hopefully the improvements elsewhere serve to justify the price hike.

In essence the GB1i fills an obvious gap between the tiny standmount DB1i, and the significantly larger floorstanding FB1i. The smaller 140mm main driver used in the DB1i, loaded by a full-length (2.4m) transmission line similar to that found in the FB1i, is only possible with a floorstanding design. However, what sounds logical enough in concept apparently proved quite recalcitrant to execute in practice, especially in terms of damping the line and locating the termination.

That small main driver results in a very neat 'super-slim' floorstander, which now features an enclosure made from tougher, more dense MDF than before, with a better quality real wood veneer (cherry, oak and maple as standard) and a deeper surface sheen. The whole thing sits on a reassuringly chunky shaped plinth, ensuring secure spike accommodation and excellent physical stability.

The main driver uses a cast frame and a 95mm paper cone, while the new tweeter has a 28mm soft fabric dome. A high-quality crossover network is fed via twin terminal pairs, permitting bi-wiring or amping options.

SOUND QUALITY

The tiny main driver used here inevitably limits the low frequency output, but the generous transmission line (tuned to 40Hz) helps a stereo pair deliver decent output down to 30Hz (-6dB) under far-field in-room conditions. Output throughout the bass region is somewhat dry and restrained, so although the smoothest and most even bass delivery is found when the speakers are positioned well clear of walls, the overall tonal balance might well be preferred with the extra bass available from some close-to-wall reinforcement.



“Certainly the first and overwhelming impression was of an open, engaging and communicative sound quality...”

But take care not to overdo this, as the overall evenness is also adversely affected.

Sensitivity is rated at a relatively modest 87dB, but that’s partly because the load seen by the amplifier never falls below six-ohms, ensuring that this loudspeaker is easy-to-drive. The pair matching was pretty good for our samples, though some minor resonance ripples are visible especially around 170Hz.

Although it wasn’t possible to compare the GB1i directly and subjectively with its GB1 predecessor, comparison of the measurements proved very interesting. Apparently the on-axis responses of the two versions are very similar indeed, but the integrated, averaged far-field response of the new version is altogether superior to its predecessor, indicating that the off-axis behaviour is now significantly better than before. The improvements are visible with both drive units, the bass/mid looking significantly smoother towards the top of its operating range, 700Hz – 1.5kHz. While the lower treble, 2.5 – 4kHz, is much better filled than before, so the treble as a whole is smoother and less isolated.

Certainly the first and overwhelming impression was of an open, engaging and communicative sound quality, notably free from boxy effects and with fine focus and spacious imaging. Not too surprisingly, the

second impression is that a bit more bass weight and welly would have been welcome too, but that’s pretty well inevitable when trying to fill a good size (4.3x2,6x5.5m) room with just a pair of 140mm drivers. And if the bass does err a little on the dry side, it does at least have good agility and plenty of instrumental discrimination, so the whole experience remains thoroughly enjoyable.

While we wouldn’t suggest that this speaker is likely to be the right choice for listeners who favour heavy rock or techno material – we didn’t even bother to dig out the System of a Down or Chemical Brothers – it really came into its own with subtle acoustic and vocal material. The Be Good Tanyas *Hello Love* is a pure delight, on either vinyl or CD, and Frazey Ford’s sometimes almost indecipherable vocal lines are unusually clear and easy to make out.

The overall character is on the bright and light side of neutral and although the top end does sound a little obvious, it always sounds sweet and detailed, too, adding convincing air and spaciousness. But it’s in the midband that this speaker really shines, showing the inherent advantage that a small main driver usually has over larger examples, especially when reproducing voices and speech.

Speaker design invariably involves some form of swings’n’roundabouts compromise, and here

it’s undoubtedly the midband that is the winner, with all that it means in terms of superior vocal expression and subtlety. Speech sounds particularly realistic, helped as much by the narrow cabinet, which mimics the width of a human head, as by the small driver **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO The 'i' improvements are clearly positive, delivering an obviously smoother and more open sound than its predecessor, while retaining the fine imaging and freedom from boxiness.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	CON The small bass/mid drive unit does limit the bass weight, which means that this speaker is best suited to smaller rooms
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION This attractively compact and pretty floorstander lacks a little weight and welly, and is therefore best suited to smaller rooms, but it shows great class with its fine delicacy and openness, sweet detailing and freedom from boxiness.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	



Beeb buster

Spendor's reworked Classic proves there's plenty of life after LS3/5a

PRODUCT Spendor S3/5R
TYPE Standmount loudspeaker
PRICE £725 per pair
KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 16.5x30.5x19cm
• Weight: 4.6kg • Two-way, sealed box design
• 20mm ferrofluid-cooled soft dome tweeter
• 140mm polypropylene cone, 25mm voice coil
• Impedance: eight ohms nominal (six ohms minimum)
• Sensitivity: 84dB
CONTACT ☎ 01323 843474 🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

Surprisingly, Spendor's 'Classic' S3/5 loudspeaker has been around for more than a decade, quietly filling the gap made when the evergreen BBC-designed LS3/5a speaker became hard to pin down. Why 'surprisingly'? Because the UK company hardly

sold any of these small standmount monitors in the home country. With the newly revised S3/5R, the company is hoping to return to the UK once more, placing their products in Blighty's dealers for the first time in years. Spendor puts these speakers in its 'Classic' range; at a little over a decade old, the S3/5 is almost too fresh-faced to deserve Classic status in Spendorland. If anything deserves the 'classic' title though, it's the S3/5R. It's a quintessentially British two-way sealed thin-walled, heavy-damped box speaker design, cut to the same cloth as the BBC LS3/5a design. The speaker cabinet retains the same basic dimensions of the previous S3/5 model and is,

more or less, the same size as speakers like the LS3/5a and original Linn Kan small box speakers. The principle differences between the S3/5R and its predecessor, are a different form of damping material (on the inside) and the move from bi-wire back to single-wired speaker connection. The move back to single wire connection is to ensure consistency; use different grades of cable for the treble and bass end and you can – *in extremis* – create an unbalanced sound. The rubberised internal damping pads are said to be stable across a wider temperature range than their bitumenised predecessors, which is also claimed to make the speaker more consistent.



“The speaker’s portrayal of voices is bettered by none and matched by only a few rival speakers, irrespective of price.”

The big changes are to the drivers, with a new Spendor-built 140mm homopolymer polypropylene bass driver with a 25mm voice coil and focusing magnet motor pole extension (that bullet-shaped phase plug), which helps to make the speaker driver more consistent sounding. This is better ventilated than previous Spendor drive units, too, which means it can take power more readily than before.

Spendor doesn’t make its own tweeters, handing the task on to Vifa, but there’s a change here, too. The S3/5R’s bass unit necessitated a move to a new 20mm soft dome tweeter. In the process, the new unit has less spurious output than the previous tweeter, which is said to keep the tweeter sweeter and cleaner in the high frequencies.

With the move to single wired input and new drivers throughout, the crossover had to be completely redesigned. Board mounted, the new crossover circuit has been completely redesigned and re-laid out to minimise magnetic interaction between the inductors. It also required new filters and higher-saturation inductors to help the new drivers fit the S3/5R profile. The crossover layout is said to improve phase alignment and helps Spendor’s well-known goal of pair-matching the speakers to within a single dB.

In other words, this is not a revoicing, more a series of refinements. Owners of the original S3/5 speakers would have no need to ‘upgrade’ whatsoever. The advantages of a decade’s worth of materials, science developments and technological updates, makes for a far better on-paper speaker and a slightly sonically improved model. This also leaves the S3/5se (based upon the original S3/5) ripe for upgrade (for the record, the S3/5se is basically the S3/5 with improved components, that some think is more ‘upbeat’ in the process).

SOUND QUALITY

The Spendor S3/5R’s target audience is not readily swayed by glib sales pitches; nor is the speaker intended for those who still scan the charts for the next Big Thing. Instead, this is a monitoring device for those who love their music (especially if that music is acoustic, or lightly amplified) and require a device that can reproduce that as accurately as possible. This sounds obvious, but is a surprisingly difficult and demanding task to achieve.

In fact, the first draft of the review missed this completely, but we were falling into the classic audiophile trap; picking out ‘highlights’ instead of listening to whole passages of music. That changed over the course of a

dinner party, as the sound produced from the S3/5R wasn’t just ‘relaxing’, it was insightful and possessed of a rare integrity regardless of the music playing. That alone made it worthy of a substantial rethink.

Sitting afresh with the speaker, listening to whole tracks (even whole discs) instead of snippets produced a major about face. What was hitherto ‘boring’ was unforced and tonally bang on. The S3/5R didn’t draw attention to itself in any way, and this soon became a wholly positive experience. Other speakers may prove more immediate and more directly alluring, turning into ‘tweaked’ presentations in comparison to the S3/5R.

Perhaps the biggest revelation is the human voice. The speaker’s portrayal of voices is bettered by none and matched by only a few rival speakers, irrespective of price. Tune into Radio 4’s *Gardener’s Question Time* on a Sunday afternoon and suddenly Bob Flowerdew and John Cushnie start arguing over radishes in your living room, without any intermediaries... they just sound like living, breathing embodied beings in the room.

There’s a ‘but’ coming. Some don’t need or want to be matured. Some are ripe enough as is, and those people will find this speaker dynamically flat sounding on a lot of music. This doesn’t need to be guitar shredding metal or techno at 250 bpm; the S3/5R doesn’t sound as free with Stevie Ray Vaughan’s version of *Texas Flood* as we’d like, either. This isn’t a major problem – the music’s time signature is kept intact, it goes louder than you would expect from a small LS3/5a derived ▶

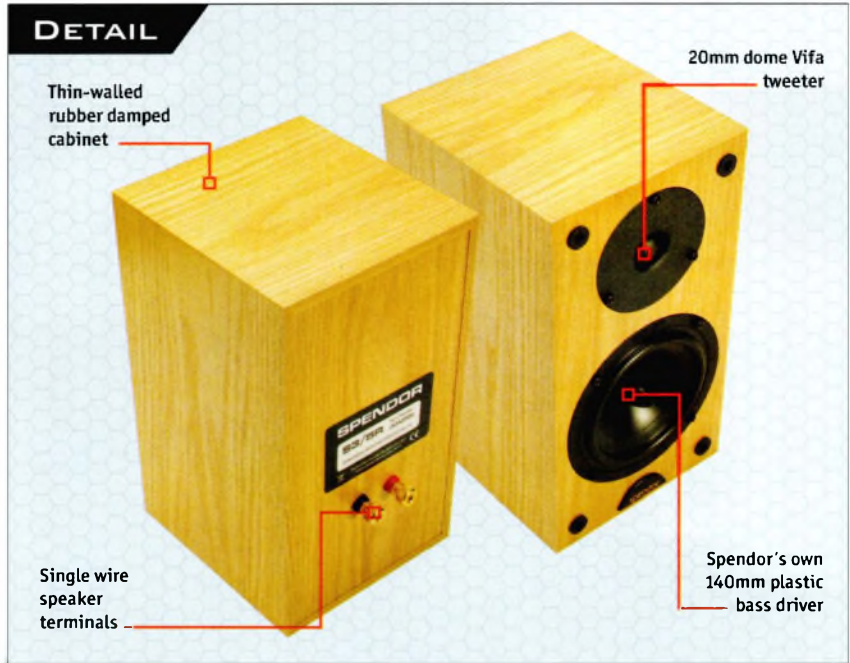


POSITIONING

Designed for free-space use, the sealed-box S3/5R is one of the most unfussy speakers with regard to its placement. In an ideal world, the loudspeakers work best about a metre from the rear and side walls, on stands tall enough to align the tweeter with the ears of the listener and with a strong toe-in (so that from the listening position, all you can see of the loudspeakers is the front baffle). These are speakers that can work pretty far from that ideal, though, and as long as you keep the speakers off the floor or out of the corners of the room, the chances of you actually ruining the sound is remote. As befits a speaker so beautifully intoned toward speech reproduction, Spendor suggests using speech to test the position of the loudspeakers.

SYSTEM MATCHING

Spendor has not forgotten the LS3/5a roots with this speaker. Just as the BBC design was an easy load and very amplifier friendly, the S3/5R follows the same path. The specs suggest any amplifier between 25 and 100 watts will be a comfortable partner with the S3/5R and we see nothing to argue about here. Aside from avoiding the very cheap (too brittle sounding), there's not much to add. The Spondors do not seem to need or get a marked improvement out of expensive audiophile esoterica, though, so the difference between, say, a £1,000 and a £10,000 power amplifier will not be so huge as with some speakers. Anecdotally at least, Spendor recommends wooden speaker stands, such as the Sanus NF24. Failing this, a good open-frame light, rigid speaker stand will do.



box and the sounds of the individual instruments are tonally as accurate as you could imagine. And the sound is certainly free from the boxes. However, it lacks some of the cut-loose easy dynamic range needed to play the blues with alacrity. How big an issue is this? Well, the LS3/5a was far less dynamic than this speaker and it sold by the truckload for nigh on three decades. And not all of those went to classical, opera, folk and spoken word fans. So, unless you dream of playing power chords at lose-your-hearing levels, this minor limitation will not bother you. So maybe this dynamic 'freedom' of other speakers is another form of deviation from correct sound.

There's also a physical limitation, but this is far less of an issue in the real world. This is a small loudspeaker, with no port to slow it down, make it less tonally precise or artificially lower the bass. As such, deep bass is not an option – but this is clearly stated in the accompanying literature. In the context of the sort of small to medium-sized room the S3/5R is intended for, the gentle bass roll-off prevents the speaker from sounding boomy by 'setting off' the room. This does

mean the speaker doesn't 'scale' well, though; the overall presentation is wholly right-sized for smaller rooms, but move it into a bigger room and the sound stays small-room sized.

Consider the S3/5R as your final exam in hi-fi. If you have the right room and the maturity to look past the flashy presentation of many speakers, this could be the last loudspeaker you ever buy. Even if you 'fail' this exam and choose more immediately exciting speakers, remember that S3/5R's will still be waiting for you to grow up. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



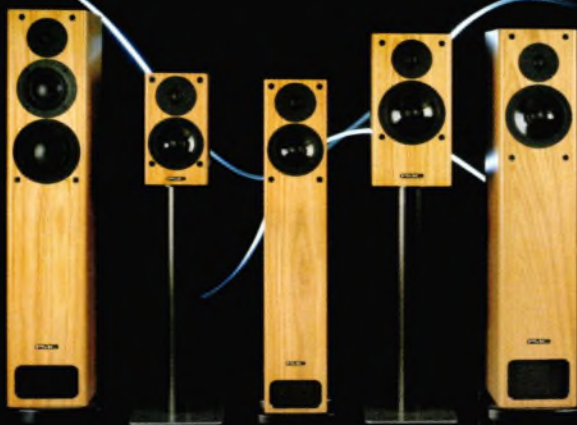
VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Strikingly natural monitor that's forgiving of placement and the rest of the system. Voices and acoustic instruments are portrayed with stunning accuracy.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	CON Always sounds small in larger rooms, thanks to bass and scaling limitations. Mature and accurate sound is not for immature tastes.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION An honest musical transducer; for many this will mark the end of the loudspeaker quest. In a small room, the S3/5R has a passion for accuracy and music that's wonderfully un-hi-fi in approach, but it's not the first choice for Nine Inch Nails fans.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	

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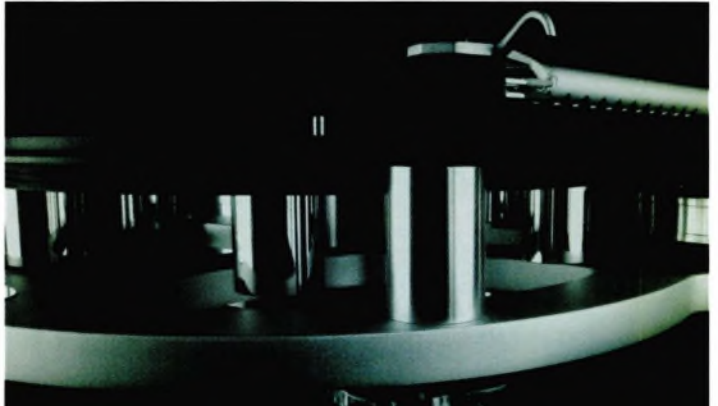
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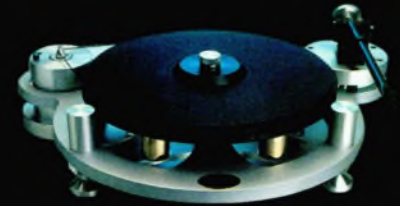
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Instant classic

NAD's new 80-watt integrated is a wise choice for affordable hi-fi systems

PRODUCT NAD C355BEE

TYPE Integrated amplifier

PRICE £400

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.5x11.6x29.2 cm

● Weight: 8.5 kg ● Rated power: 80-watts
● Inputs: seven line-level ● Outputs: two tape, two preamp outs ● Power amp input ● RS232

CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 ● www.nadelectronics.com

NAD's amplifiers have, in recent years, fulfilled most peoples' expectations as good, honest, no-nonsense workhorses, with a good and reliable performance record. And there's no reason why the new C355BEE should be any different, retaining, as it does, some of the best ingredients of the company's well-loved C352 model.

That, at least, is the impression we get from the publicity for the C355. It is derived from the 352, but adds some spit'n'polish from the

work NAD put into the upmarket Master Series M3 amp. As for the 'BEE' suffix, it honours the contribution of NAD's resident designer Bjorn Eric Edvardsen, along with his 'Distortion Cancelling Circuit' and 'BEE Clamp'.

Now it's tempting to get all cynical and belittle the fact that they've added two resistors and a capacitor, changed the specific type of transistor in one place and upped the price. But there are surprisingly few generic transistor amplifier circuits in common use and sometimes there are only small differences between two models of completely different make. What's more, infuriatingly minor details within a circuit can really make or break a fine performance, so even if the overall layout is very similar to a 352, we're certainly interested in this new amp.

On paper, the 355's specification is nothing unusual. Seven line inputs, 80-watt output,

defeatable tone controls, two switchable sets of speaker terminals, a headphone socket and a remote control (the RS232 socket on the back is a little less familiar and reflects the growing interest in multi-room installations). NAD has also included two preamp outputs, one normally linked to the power amp input, but the pair facilitating upgrades to bi-amped operation.

Inside the case, the relatively heavy grade of steel used for the top cover is impressive, making for a more rigid assembly than some models in this price range. Under the cover, the biggest surprise is the mains transformer, which seems a little small for 80 watts. It's adequate for the rated power, however, and indeed a little more (about 90 watts continuous, both channels), but the large power supply capacitors give a decent dynamic headroom which holds up long enough to be

useful for real-life transients, allowing NAD to quote an honest dynamic power figure of 140 watts into eight ohms. A mains transformer capable of supporting that on a continuous basis would have put the cost of the amp up quite considerably.

NAD tends to like discrete transistors in its circuits rather than op-amps: we found three of the latter in this amp and though two appear to be doing housekeeping duty outside the main signal path the other seems to be an input buffer, sitting between the relay-switched inputs and the volume control, which is a motorised mechanical type. This is a sensible arrangement, making the amp capable of handling the highest-output source components on the market, while maintaining a high input impedance that doesn't appreciably load even such touchy sources as valve FM tuners. Further down the chain, discrete transistors rule the day, some of them



when the bass line was entirely, or largely, the product of synthesisers, rather than normal instruments.

“Some hi-fi components, even on first hearing, seem to be determined to turn around our ideas of how audio should sound.”

mounted on a tiny surface-mount daughterboard while the rest are old-style through-hole mounted. The heatsink is completely enclosed within the case.

SOUND QUALITY

Some hi-fi components, even on first hearing, seem to be determined to turn around our ideas of how audio kit should sound. This one, by contrast, adopts an altogether more laid-back approach, but one we thoroughly enjoy. Interestingly with this new BEE amplifier – and credit goes to Bjorn here – far from subverting ideas it confirms them: and in the process shows itself to be an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, product.

That said, it does seem to be awfully good at its job. There are limits to its performance envelope, but limits that seem to us generous in the context of sub-£500 amplification. In familiar NAD style, it has a very extended bass which, perhaps, tunes slightly better than it times, but does both pretty convincingly. There's a tangible resonance to really low instruments which is highly persuasive and does a lot to compensate for the occasional slight lack of rhythmic precision in the same frequency band. About the only time we wished for significantly more 'kick' to the sound was

A similar tale could be told about the treble, in as much as it's not true high-end stuff and lacks a little of the 'air' that marks out hi-fi esoterica. On the other hand, it's very clear and precise, and is also admirably free of grain and veiling – it can also be very sweet when required, for instance with a well recorded solo violin. In this case, synthesised sounds seem no problem at all, indeed we were significantly impressed with how well this amp played some very treble-rich modern productions.

It's hard to find an amp that never shows any sign of midrange coloration and this one seemed just a shade rich in the low mid. As colorations go, that's a harmless – often pleasant – one and we were very taken with the all-important presence band which seems about as neutral as we've heard among other amps of this class. It's also very detailed, presenting a meticulously layered sound and preserving imaging cues very well.

In fact, it was with respect to imaging that we found this amp to be most strongly differentiated from its peers. To begin with, we found detail good (but not outstanding) and, as a result, were not particularly surprised by this. As listening progressed though, we slowly came to realise that we were being presented

with an unusually specific and precise layout

of musicians in familiar recordings (a few treasured orchestral and operatic discs, in particular, each outstanding for its natural spaciousness). And, unusually, for such an amp as this: something we'd normally expect from £1,500-worth of upmarket integrated or pre/power units.

But there's also a certain fragility to all this, for when we listened specifically for imaging the picture collapsed (very slightly) towards the centre. Clearly, then, this isn't the full high-end monty, but it's one of the best approaches to it we've ever encountered in such an amp. In particular, it makes the C355 a very good choice, if you aren't the sort of listener who habitually listens very intently. If, however, you like a sound that makes no fuss, but subtly and irresistibly gets under your skin, this might be for you. A very well-rounded amp, which we like a great deal. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Good basics built on a sensibly generous specification, but the cherry on top is the subtly persuasive level of detail, which never obtrudes, but makes for highly informative, relaxed, listening.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Treble isn't quite as open as the very best out there, while bass lacks a little of the kick that some amps can offer.
VALUE ★★★★★	

CONCLUSION
From the outset, there's a comfortably solid air of rightness to this amp's sound, which only improves on longer acquaintance. It ticks more boxes than most and makes its own case in a strong marketplace.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

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PRODUCT Russ Andrews PH-1
TYPE MC phono stage
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Russ Andrews has made 'tweaking' both respectable and profitable, as well as providing a huge range of accessories that, when carefully applied, can turn a ho-hum system into something extra special. So rather than build components from the ground up, his favoured approach is to take a promising design and see how much he can run with it.

He did a remarkable job of this with the Stello DAC and pre-/power amps that he revamped as the Russ Andrews DA-1, HP-1 and PA-1, and now he has turned his attention to a modest little phono stage from the Rega range simply called the Fono. In its original form (costing £165), this is an aluminium-boxed stage for both moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges, which is powered by a wall-wart style mains transformer. In Russ's hands it has been transformed into a compact unit with wood fascia, that's dedicated to either MM or MC (the former version costing £200 less than the MC stage we have here).

So what has been done to warrant the substantial price hike that occurred between the Rega and RA badges? The most obvious things include a walnut front panel (for MC), one of RA's Powermax mains cables (£30) and a new version of his Powerpak switched mode

power supply, which is similar to the Powerpak III for Naim preamps (£170). Internally the "very best quality" components have been used to replace the standard ones and the circuit itself has been modified.

While this is a dedicated MC stage, it does offer adjustment to gain, impedance/loading and capacitance via tiny dipswitches on the circuit board. Accessing them means undoing two screws and using some instructions to achieve specific levels of gain, a process that is usually rather more straight forward.

SOUND QUALITY

We had a bit of a kerfuffle getting a Phono-PH1 that worked as advertised, the first sample had a hum problem and the second a channel issue, but third time around we got lucky. The stage was in a pre-production state and hopefully glitches like these will have been ironed out by the time we go to print.

With an Ortofon Rondo Red cartridge, the Phono-PH1 proved to be a subtle and revealing device that allowed us to fully enjoy the combination of double and fretless basses on, for example, Tom Waits' *Swordfish Trombones*. It is characterised by an appealingly open midband and an ability to disentangle complex material. Next to our reference mid-price phono stage, the Trichord Dino+ (£550), it's a very close call, but the RA has the edge when it comes to low-level resolution and the ability to work with dense material. The first sample of the stage also offered superior timing, but these were less apparent with the unit under consideration.

Moving over to a van den Hul Frog cartridge reveals the Phono-PH1's bass as both nimble and solid, which helps a fair degree to provide a well-timed musical result. Detail is likewise well served here.

This seems rather an expensive revamp of the Fono and without the original stage on hand to compare, it's impossible to say what has changed. Yet, when it comes to resolving what's coming out of the cartridge it has some clear advantages over our reference and, therefore, clearly warrants attention. It does have that musical 'get up and go' that makes you want to keep listening, and if build quality were higher it would also warrant a recommendation. Let's hope final production delivers on this front. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND



PRO

High level of resolution and coherence with great openness. Also benefits from variable gain and loading, which is a bonus.

FEATURES



CON

Build quality is a little basic for the price and the variables (accessed by some complex tweaking and reliance on an instructions manual) are tricky to get at.

BUILD



VALUE



CONCLUSION

This is a sonic success, but it's hard to tally the price with the quality of finish and construction in the context of the competition. If it were built to the standard of the HP-1 it would be a winner.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



All-round appeal

Pioneer's new universal disc player has plenty to offer for its modest price

PRODUCT Pioneer DV-LX50

TYPE Universal disc player

PRICE £450

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 42x10.2x31.4cm

• Weight: 5.3kg • Audio outputs: 5.1 analogue, stereo, digital coax & Toslink • Video outputs: HDMI (1.3), component, S-video, composite, SCART • 1080p video upscaler, 216MHz/12-bit video DAC (component) • 192kHz/24-bit audio DAC • WMV and DivX compatible

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

During the battle between the hi-def disc formats (Blu-ray and HD DVD), the big brands began reigning in their top-of-the-range DVD players and piling on the features. After all, it takes a lot to distract the videophile from the promise of high resolution pictures. In practice this means that a nominally £450 player like the DV-LX50 offers the sort of features previously only seen on players costing a third as much again.

This superbly finished player can cope with a huge variety of formats, just look at the compatibility list (opposite) and that doesn't include WMV and DivX Ultra for movies downloaded on a PC. However, it's always questionable whether a jack of all trades can deliver the goods when it comes to music, keeping all that video processing quiet so that the audio processors can do a good job.

Pioneer has taken a number of steps to provide a "smooth, stable performance", among them is a double-layered chassis that is designed to minimise resonance in the player. This is an approach that the company takes to a somewhat greater length in its hi-fi separates, such as the PD-D9 CD player (*HFC* 304) and it's good to see that Pioneer appreciates the importance of this factor in video-oriented products. Another video factor is the presence of an HDMI connector (of the

latest v1.3 variety), this is bit like a SCART connection for digital signals, in that it carries both video and audio signals and can cope with the high bit rates produced by both hi-def video and hi-res audio (SACD and DVD-A). Mind you, not all processor and amplifiers with HDMI inputs can accept SACD's DSD signal. But for those that do, it represents a potential advantage, assuming that the conversion in the processor/amplifier is of the same, or higher standard. Keeping the signal in the digital domain should ensure that it arrives in a healthier state than if it were going the old fashioned analogue route, but we've found in the past that things are not always so straightforward.

For a start, digital connections can introduce jitter if not carefully clocked at the receiving end and, in a predominantly engineered audio system, it is often better to convert inside the

player. HDMI is useful with multichannel set ups, because you save on an awful lot of cabling and the chances are that a processor/amp will have better multichannel conversion than a player.

Functionally, the DV-LX50 is pretty challenging, even by the majority of DVD player standards. Functions like 'repeat' can only be accessed via the GUI (graphical user interface) once the disc is playing, while the 'Pure Audio' facility has to be set as 'accessible on screen' before pressing the front panel button will stimulate a response. You can change the SACD mode between two channel and multichannel on the player, while DVD-A layer selection is entirely via the GUI. It's also possible to select the layer of your choice by pressing stop and then the layer number, but some discs are less helpful than others in their choice of layer numbering. Ultimately, life is a lot easier with a screen, but it's not essential.



and scale alongside average timing. Dynamic range doesn't seem as good as the dedicated CD players at the price, but there will always

AV amp as a preamp provides a pretty good result for a cable that does multichannel sound and vision. But the sound is still a bit vague and even a little slow when compared to the analogue outputs via the same amp. And this a unit that seems to take things into the digital domain as a matter of course. We had hoped to hear greater things from SACD via this link, but the result (while an improvement on CD) is undermined by the processing in the AV amp. We will need an audio-oriented preamp with HDMI, to establish whether the connection has what it takes to warrant attention.

This is clearly a very capable machine for the money. It does nearly everything and does so with considerable finesse. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

“Where the DV-LX50 scores over most CD players, is its ability to play both hi-res audio formats. The advantages are plain to hear.”

In its favour it does access SACD discs very quickly, something that has taken several seconds with earlier generations of both universal and dedicated machines. But we were a little surprised at how keen it is to shut down once left inactive, it will remain on for 20 minutes at most and then it completely switches off.

SOUND QUALITY

The DV-LX50's sonic character is marked by a smoothness and a generosity in the bass that could be called big-boned, but the less charitable might dub fat. We prefer fulsome, because while limited in tightness, the bass is still tuneful and it brings a warmth to the whole sound that is not unappealing on lesser recordings. Grace Jones' *Warm Leatherette*, for instance, has plenty of kick from the bass drum and decent weight to go with it. However, the recording's top end is shown in a less than glamorous light.

Next to a Rotel RCD06 CD player the Pioneer does sound a little overly smooth, the former revealing more life and energy. The degree to which the Pioneer warms things up depends on the material, of course, Gillian Welch's voice and guitars have minimal bass content and come through with good openness

be a cost for the universal factor.

Switching on Pure Audio isn't straightforward, but is rewarding, with all formats giving up more detail and depth, which makes for a richer and cleaner sound. DVD-A seems to benefit the most, perhaps because it has video content that is no longer processed.

Where the DV-LX50 scores over most CD players, is its ability to play both hi-res audio formats. The advantages are plain to hear. It smoothes out Barb Jung's *Who Do You Love*, but delivers a very clean and precisely placed image alongside beautifully tactile double bass. Sony's old XA-333ES SACD player also sounds a bit dry and sharp by comparison, but has better attack and a more vital sound that makes the Pioneer seem distinctly fruity and forgiving. In a high resolution system, the Sony is less easy going and if you like to listen 'in anger', so to speak, then the Pioneer's easier going balance is quite appealing.

We did a bit of the opposite too, playing stuff quietly for a change and were pleasantly surprised by the way it keeps things interesting so long as the material – in this case a bit of Yo Miles on SACD – has what it takes to merit the attention.

Listening via a length of Wireworld Starlight HDMI and using a Pioneer VSX-LX60



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

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

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO High-value universal disc player from a brand with strong expertise in the area. Produces a clean, refined sound with all formats and delivers tasty video to boot.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Set-up and operation are a bit too much like hard work and the speed of auto shut down is a little too rapid, if eco-friendly.
VALUE ★★★★★	

CONCLUSION
Pioneer has a good track record for universal players and this maintains its position. But if you want to play more than CDs, and value finesse over speed and energy, it's a no-brainer.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

Audio Destination

Tiverton, Devon
01884 243 584

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Flimwell, East Sussex
01580 878 101

Divine Audio

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01858 432999

Doug Brady Hi-fi

Warrington, Cheshire
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Loud & Clear

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0131 555 3963

Loud & Clear

Finnieston, Glasgow
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AWARDS



INTERCONNECTS
Atlas Equator • August 2002
Atlas Explorer • July 2002
Atlas Voyager • April 2002
SPEAKER CABLE
Atlas Accent • October 2003
Atlas Hyper 3D • July 2005
DIGITAL INTERCONNECT
Atlas Compass • August 2002



Atlas Equator
HiFi Interconnects 2002 & 2003
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Editor's Choice Jan 2005



SPEAKER CABLE
Atlas T 25 • December 2002
HI-FI CHOICE
★★★★★
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Atlas Element • May 2004

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- Banbury:**
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- Guildford:** P.J. Hi Fi,
Tel: 01483 504801
info@pjhifi.co.uk
- Ashford:** Soundcraft Hi Fi,
Tel: 01233 624441
sales@soundcrafthifi.com
- Stratford:** Music matters
Tel 01789 414533
Stratford@Musicmatters.co.uk

Mezzo in the middle

Mordaunt-Short's brand new Mezzo range packs some classy features at a very sharp price

PRODUCT Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 2

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £450 per pair

CONTACT 020 7940 2200 • www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

Since Audio Partnership (AP) bought Mordaunt-Short a decade ago, most of its efforts have concentrated on developing and refining the budget price Avant models, but it also found time to create the hi-tech Performance models with several advanced features. Now some Performance initiatives have 'trickled down' in rather more affordable form in a new Mezzo range.

Those with long memories might recall that a Mezzo was the middle of three models in Goodmans' famous M-series back in the 1960s (sandwiched between Maxim and Magnum). I suspect Mordaunt-Short's marketing team hadn't even been thought of when that Mezzo bestrode the pages of the contemporary hi-fi magazines, and should stress that this new Mezzo collection has absolutely no connection with its illustrious historic namesake.

Mordaunt-Short's Mezzo range comprises three stereo pairs, plus partnering centre channel speaker and subwoofer, and this £450 per pair Mezzo 2 sits in the middle of the stereo pairs. It's a compact two-way stand-mount, port-loaded at the front and using a 165mm bass/mid driver mounted in an enclosure with an estimated volume of around 11 litres. Either side of this particular model is a somewhat smaller Mezzo 1 stand-mount, with an appropriately smaller 135mm main driver, and a 2.5-way Mezzo 6 with an extra bass-only 165mm driver and floorstanding enclosure.

The most interesting feature justifying the Mezzo's premium price is the rear-aspirated 25mm metal dome tweeter. This is mounted in a large conical lossy rubber mounting nacelle, a third of which protrudes from the top of the enclosure; nine small holes in the top surface terminate different length loading tubes that deliver some decorrelated output from the rear of the tweeter diaphragm. The main driver has a dish-shaped metal diaphragm 118mm in diameter, with radial rib reinforcement.

The enclosure, finished in a very convincing vinyl woodprint (since no mention is made of real wood), has curved sides and a very narrow back, which will both increase the overall stiffness and defocus internal standing waves.

However, some vibration could be felt in the flat top surface. Connection is made via twin terminal pairs, and the black front panel uses invisible (magnetic) retention for the optional grille.

SOUND QUALITY

The claimed 89dB sensitivity seems a shade optimistic, as our far-field averaged technique could only just muster 88dB. There's little bass extension below 40Hz either, but the impedance is reasonably benign, only falling below 5 ohms around 8-10kHz.

Mounted on 60cm stands well clear of walls, the in-room tonal balance did tend to favour the midband, 200Hz – 1.3kHz, and showed very gentle rolloffs above and below this band. The broad bass region is consequently a little dry, indicating that some closer-to-wall reinforcement might be preferred, but if this is adopted the ample output from the c48Hz tuned port tends to be exaggerated at the expense of upper bass output. Although higher frequencies start to tail off gently and progressively above 1.3kHz, a distinct recovery of around 3dB is visible at 5kHz.

Finding the best siting for these speakers did prove a little tricky. After some experiment, a gap of about 30cms between speakers and wall seemed to give best overall results.

The Mezzo 2 sounds crisp, clean, spacious, free from obvious boxiness and fundamentally

well balanced, especially through the broad midrange. It delivers plenty of detail with fine coherence, respectable agility and a decent dynamic range. The sound remains clear and impressively explicit, but increasing the volume seems to bring an accompanying increase in hardness that is mildly off-putting. Although this is a likeable speaker, it does seem happiest when not being pushed too hard. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



CONCLUSION

Good looking standmount incorporates several advanced features at a very realistic price, including curved sides and a clever rear-aspirated tweeter. The sound is clear and spacious, especially at low levels but becomes harder at higher levels.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE



Ixos Xen XHA716

TYPE Analogue interconnects

PRICE £100 (1m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01844 219000 # www.ixos.co.uk

Ixos has generated some good mileage out of its 'Gamma Geometry,' but it's definitely a step in the right direction to put an overall round sheath on it – it makes it look a lot less 'cottage industry'! With an overall diameter of some 10mm this is one of the chunkier cables on the market, but it's usefully flexible and fitted with some very nice phono plugs that grip well. Gamma Geometry is, itself, a cunning strategy for intertwining conductors without actually twisting them: we've never been convinced that it's substantially better than twisting, but it's certainly no worse and this cable, like its siblings, seems pretty resistant to noise pickup.

In terms of the usual sound quality criteria, it seems just a shade bass-heavy, a balance shift that's really only a problem if you have a rather bassy system in the first place. If, by contrast, you have slightly lean speakers, this could immediately take your fancy and it's quite likely to hold on to it, thanks to its combination of good detail and neutral

midrange. It's particularly good with voices, maintaining their natural timbre and differentiating them convincingly when there are several. There is just the occasional touch of high treble grain, probably the hardest cable trait to eliminate, but it's not enough to interfere under most conditions. Only with the most delicate high-frequency sounds did we wish for a little more transparency. Despite the rich bass, rhythm is good – not quite excellent – and if there's any musical preference, it's for rock'n'roll. **HFC**



VERDICT With a tonal balance slightly skewed towards the lower octaves, this cable nevertheless does good things for rhythmic musical styles.	
	HI-FI CHOICE ★★★★☆

Supra EFF-IX

TYPE Analogue interconnect

PRICE £77 (1m)

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

We've reviewed – and greatly liked – EFF-ISL in the past. The IX is the same thing, but with cheaper, non-locking, phono plugs. The 'thing' in question is a pseudo-balanced (Supra prefers 'semi-balanced') interconnect (two identical conductors with a screen connected at one end only). However, where similar cables have two conductors under one screen, Supra prefers a separate screen for each conductor. In addition, each conductor is tubular, made up of stranded silver-plated copper wound over a plastic core, so as to minimise skin effect. The importance of that in audio is debatable, but there are plenty of other reasons why this construction may make a difference in practice. The cable is medium size, quite pliable and immediately recognisable in Supra's house colour. The phono plugs may not lock in place but they're very nice, grippy and robust.

Little if anything in the sound gives away that this is cheaper than EFF-ISL. The basic character is still agile, neutral and – for the

price – astonishingly detailed. The degree of detail loss, associated with all but the most inferior analogue interconnects, is not vast in the great scheme of things. But sometimes, one finds a cable that just seems to wipe a previously unnoticed level of smear off the metaphorical window, and this is just such a one. If there's a downside it's in a very slight leanness of balance, but the midrange and treble are beautifully neutral and natural. In addition, timing is particularly precise and as a result, one is seldom aware that there's even the slightest curtailment of very low frequencies. **HFC**



VERDICT An unusually lively-sounding cable which, at the same time, maintains a high level of detail and in all but the lowest reaches. A great all-rounder.	
	HI-FI CHOICE ★★★★★

TCl Viper SE

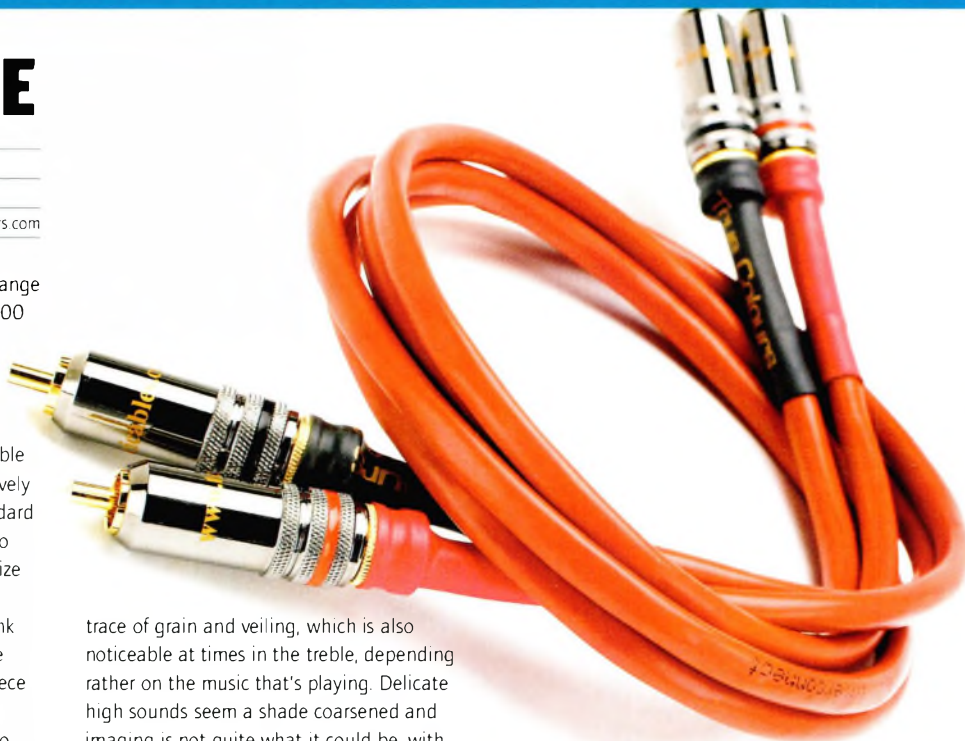
TYPE Analogue interconnect

PRICE £80 (1m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 028 9267 3024 🌐 www.true-colours.com

This is an old favourite from the TCl range and we first reviewed it more than 100 issues ago, making a revisit well overdue. It's a pseudo-balanced design of the usual kind – two connectors twisted together beneath a screen connected at one end – but it's also available balanced with XLR connectors, or alternatively with DIN plugs for Naim owners. The standard version is actually fitted with locking phono plugs, ensuring reliable contact. Medium-size and moderately flexible, its practicality is slightly compromised by the long heatshrink tails fitted behind each plug, which require a full four inches clearance behind each piece of equipment.

Although the performance is still good, to some extent this cable is showing its age: new models have arrived over the years which can rival it at lower prices. Its chief strength is in the bass, where it is both strong and precise, with good tunefulness on sustained notes and punchy attack on short ones and percussion sounds. In the midrange, though, there's just a



trace of grain and veiling, which is also noticeable at times in the treble, depending rather on the music that's playing. Delicate high sounds seem a shade coarsened and imaging is not quite what it could be, with some lack of depth and slightly less side-to-side precision than some. On the other hand, the sound does seem to suit certain 'types' of music very well and we had some fantastic results with punk tracks! For more subtle sounds, however, look elsewhere, not excluding the rest of TCl's extensive range. **HFC**

VERDICT

The slight lack of mid/treble transparency makes this cable less of an all-rounder, but its 'rhythmic punch' makes it exciting with 'driven' music.



vdH Integration Hybrid

TYPE Analogue interconnect

PRICE £125 (0.8m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.vandenhul.com

Most cables use copper conductors, plain or silver-plated: a few use other metals, but as far as we can recall vdH is still unique in using non-metallic conductor materials, specifically carbon. Carbon is a so-so conductor, but if you use enough you can get sensible resistance figures, and its advantage, vdH claims, is that it doesn't suffer from problems that plague metal, specifically 'diode effects' at crystal boundaries. In this particular cable, Linear Structure Carbon is combined with another vdH exclusive, 'Fusion' conductors made of an amorphous alloy containing copper, silver and zinc. These provide adequate resistance at a lower price than pure copper, while preserving much of the latter's advantages. A 'star-quad' balanced assembly of four wires is used under a screen connected at one end in classic pseudo-balanced manner.

Because so much about this cable is unlike most of the others we've seen, it's near impossible to ascribe the sound to any one

cause, but we enjoyed it so much that we didn't really feel in the mood to over-analyse. The sound is exceptionally clear and open, especially in the treble. In fact, it's almost unsettling at first, as the lack of grain and spit makes it seem a little understated, lacking brilliance compared with most cables. Then some sound comes along that's naturally rich in high harmonics and you realise that what's missing is not treble, but distortion. Further down the spectrum the sound is similarly clear, extending well into the bass with a good balance between tune and rhythm: the latter is good though not quite as snappy as some. Detail and imaging are first-rate, too. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

Bass may be par for the course, but mid and treble are open and clear, setting a high standard of transparency for others to aspire to.



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

CD PLAYERS

Anyone who thinks CD players all sound the same should take a look at this sextet

ON TEST



Cambridge Audio Azur 840C
£750



Consonance Reference 2.2 Linear
£1,495



Cyrus CD-8x/PSX-R
£1,400



Denon DCD-2000AE
£1,200



Edgar CD-1
£1,350



Shanling CD-T1000se
£1,600

With a notional target of about £1,000-£1,200, give or take a little, we've ended up with an unusually disparate group of CD players. Not so much disparate in price, but more in terms of aims, philosophies and internal construction.

Take the Cambridge Audio model, for instance. It's one of the most advanced pieces of consumer digital audio available with its 384kHz upsampling and additional function as a DAC, which is unusual, though eminently sensible. Now compare it with the Consonance, in many ways a throwback to the early 1990s in digital terms with its valve output stage harking back further still. On the other hand, Cyrus has pretty much entirely skipped the tricks and buzzwords, doing a largely standard job but doing it carefully with, in this case, an extra-special power supply tacked on as a simple, but effective upgrade.

There have always been a few CD players that stand out for features, technology or outward design, but with the maturing of the system there seem to be more of them and less of the 'middle path' epitomised by Cyrus, and Denon (if you ignore the SACD functionality). It seems to us that this is all to the good. It's been a long while since we came across a bad player and manufacturers clearly realised some time ago that they need to cast around a bit to find the features that will differentiate their products from the rest. Just offering decent performance is no longer enough to stand out.

Hence the variants we have here, from Cambridge's über-technology to

Consonance's overt disavowal of technical excellence. What this means in practice is, that after a period in which it was difficult to tell many players apart, there is once again some variation in the market.

In the following reviews we've tried to concentrate on what each player brings to the table, what it can do well – and where it is less well equipped to impress. We offer our findings, to be taken in conjunction with your own musical and sonic tastes. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- Ⓧ Exposure 3010 integrated stereo amplifier
- Ⓧ EAR802 preamp/519 monoblocks
- Ⓧ Living Voice Auditorium loudspeakers
- Ⓧ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- Ⓧ Kimber Furukawa and custom cables

MUSIC USED

- Ⓧ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- Ⓧ Ian Dury *The Bus Driver's Prayer and Other Stories*
- Ⓧ Penguin Café Orchestra *Concert Programme*
- Ⓧ Benedetto Pallavicino *Madrigals*
- Ⓧ Igor Raykhelson *Jazz Suite*

EARS USED

Many thanks once again to our ever-helpful expert listeners, stalwarts of the industry who freely give their time to listen and comment: Phil Hansen (Red Sheep Marketing) Steve Reichert (Armour Home Electronics) Ed Selley (Audio Partnership)

LISTENING TESTS

Each of the players in the group was subjected to a rigorous programme of listening and laboratory tests. Measurements were made using a combination of custom-made CDRs, devised specifically for these tests, and a potent combination of 'traditional' lab instruments with a high quality ADC which converted the analogue output of each player back to digital for analysis on a PC, using principally Cool Edit Pro and Mathcad. Our methodology provides a searching analysis of a multitude of aspects, the most important of which are summarised in the bar graphs (with other significant findings mentioned in the text). Not all measurements are reported for all players – for instance absolute speed accuracy, which was fine for all of them.

LAB TESTS

Our comprehensive listening tests were no less rigorous, conducted under blind, level matched (to 0.05dB) conditions with some of the industry's most experienced hi-fi panellists. In addition, there were extended sighted listening tests by the author, using a wider variety of equipment and music and under a varied range of volume levels to attempt to determine real-world performance.

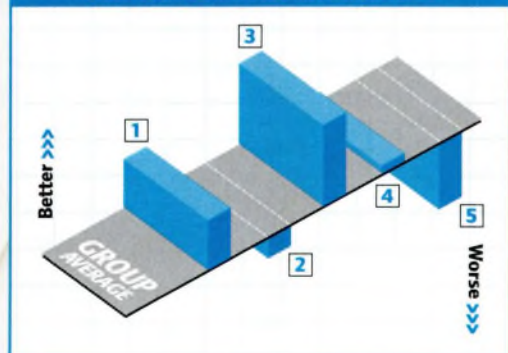
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five key technical measurements. A percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five measurements are:

- 1) Total harmonic distortion:** The classic distortion criterion, measured as the purity of a single sine wave at various frequencies and levels.
- 2) Jitter:** A measure of how stable the timing clock is. Measured at the analogue output, this distortion shows up as increased noise and/or low-level interfering frequencies which can contribute to sonic 'grunge'.
- 3) Linearity:** How accurately the output behaves at very low levels. Poor figures can lead to distortion rising considerably in quiet musical passages.
- 4) Dynamic range:** This is effectively the same as the signal-to-noise ratio; the difference between full output and the practical noise floor of each player.
- 5) Digital filtering:** Frequencies above half the sampling frequency should be efficiently filtered off. The filter is tested by playing tones at various frequencies and looking for ultrasonic spurious signals that accompany it.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





£750 ☎ 0870 900 1000 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 840C

Excellent upsampler, but does it have a performance to match?

When Cambridge released the 840C just over a year ago, it effectively upped the ante in terms of upsampling. Very high upsampling frequencies had been seen before in a few esoteric products, but this was the first – and at the time of writing remains the only – player at a real-world price to offer 384kHz, 24-bit upsampling. It achieves this thanks to some clever software from Anagram Technologies, running on an Analog Devices 'Black Fin' digital signal processor chip.

There's nothing magic about upsampling, it's just one approach to digital filtering. But if one is going to do it then the higher the output frequency the better, as it leaves less for the analogue filtering to do afterwards – or rather, it relaxes the transition-band requirements for the analogue filter, giving it a nearer-ideal performance. Cambridge has also added digital inputs to the 840C, making it function as a DAC with the potential to upgrade anything from a MiniDisc player to a PC.

As you'd expect with all this technology on tap, there's plenty going on inside the case. A full-width circuit board some 10cm deep carries most of the audio, digital and power supply circuitry and includes a pair of Analog Devices DAC chips (among the few compatible with the high upsampling frequency). The power supply features a generous toroidal transformer and a bank of electrolytic capacitors, while the audio-only transport is controlled by Cambridge's own servo system which is claimed to have particularly good error correction (it certainly loads a disc gratifyingly fast). The large and slightly plain front-panel display gives plenty of detail as to what's going on – CD replay or digital input, upsampling settings and so on.

SOUND QUALITY

If we had to sum up this player in a single word it would probably be 'civilised'. That may sound like damning with faint praise, but the



fact is, some folks like a civilised sound and some look for something that's a little more raw and primeval.

One of our listeners thought it refined, detailed and smooth, with well-balanced bass and good imaging. Another was less impressed and progressed to active dislike by the fourth track he heard.

It certainly seems that the 840C adds little or nothing to the sound, but the question is whether it takes anything away. In terms of tonality it is blameless enough, with extended bass and treble and no obvious coloration in the midband.

What seems most lacking, though, is control and 'speed' in the bass and this is what our most disappointed listener missed above all else. There were a few other criticisms, mostly of a slight lack of insight into very dense textures and some occasional harshness, but bass attack is clearly the main issue here.

We've come across similar dichotomies before, although this is an unusually striking example, with a sound that's simply too polite for some tastes. That apart, it seems to be good for the price – bearing in mind this was by a noticeable margin the cheapest player in the group – and is certainly the most extensively featured. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆	Ultra-smooth and civilised sound is not to every taste: if you value rhythm and timing you may find this player frustrating. However, it is highly featured (for the price) and technologically very sophisticated.
FEATURES	★★★★★	
BUILD	★★★★★	
VALUE	★★★★★	



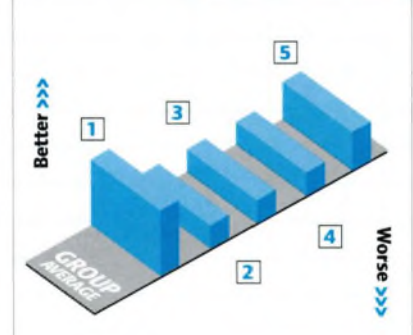
LAB REPORT

As we found before, this is one of the most technically assured pieces of digital hardware we know of. The distortion figure is close to the limits of what is directly measurable and the same is true of jitter. The interesting part, of course, is the 384kHz upsampling filter and, although this is better than most, we have to admit to a slight disappointment that it is not even better still. Its response to 20kHz is ruler-flat, while above 24kHz it has very high attenuation.

But in the critical transition band from 20kHz to 24kHz it has only slightly more rapid attenuation than the usual, still allowing some aliasing to occur. The impulse response is the usual symmetric shape, extending rather longer than most (1.5ms against a more typical 1ms).

Noise is very low and is actually just a touch lower when tested through the balanced output, while linearity is beyond reproach.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Distortion >> +40%
- 2) Jitter >> +10%
- 3) Linearity >> +10%
- 4) Dynamic range >> +10%
- 5) Digital filter >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	–	2.1V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0008%	0.0007%
Signal-to-noise ratio	113dB	106dB



£1,495 ☎ 01273 608332 🌐 www.aliumaudio.com

CONSONANCE REF 2.2 LINEAR

The latest player from Consonance has a few surprises up its sleeve

Plenty of manufacturers use the word 'Reference' in relation to their product names. But what about 'Linear'? Well, it turns out that this appellation is Consonance's way of indicating that the player uses no oversampling or upsampling. In other words, there's no digital filtering of any kind and not much in the way of analogue filtering either. This approach has been used by only a few manufacturers in recent years (perhaps most notably by Audio Note) and is claimed to sound more natural despite measuring considerably worse.

In this case, you do actually get the option of upsampling to 88.2kHz, but Consonance's preference seems to be for non-upsampling. Conversion from digital to analogue is done by a quartet of rather antique DAC chips, which are followed by passive current-to-voltage conversion, some very simple filtering and a lone valve for the output stage. Construction is neat and surprisingly modern – a bit of a turn-up finding 1990s DAC chips, valves and surface-mount components all on one board!

As well as the all-black finish shown in the photo, silver front and natural wood top is an option. The Ref Linear, also shares the unusual control feature that we first experienced with the Ref 2.2 (tested back in *HFC* 270). These controls are actually joysticks which 'wobble' up, down and sideways and which are great fun to operate.

SOUND QUALITY

Suggesting that Consonance may be on to something in its abandonment of technical perfection, this player was one of the best-liked players of the group. It conveyed to our listeners a consistently good impression of musical life and excitement, with a full-bodied bass that's always under control, plus lively and energetic upper frequencies. It has a slightly more 'broad brush' approach than some, but despite that manages to keep a good grip on detail.



That is nowhere more evident than in stereo imaging, which was felt to be the best of the bunch in terms of overall spread and reach. It's not the most precise, but not the least so either and it is generally very persuasive. One might say the same of midband tonality, which is not always absolutely neutral but nevertheless has a convincing ring to it. There's a little boost, it seems, in the presence band which just occasionally can make the sound a touch strident, but despite that the quality of each individual instrument shines through, giving highly believable character to sax, violin and Hammond organ alike.

Voices are particularly favoured, with natural timbre and good diction, thanks to a high degree of precision in the treble. A pleasantly 'airy' quality to the very high frequencies helps voices to sound distinct and completely clear of the instrumental backing.

We did feel that the sound can sometimes be a bit larger than life, but there is always enough of a rein kept on proceedings to prevent this sonic footprint from being oppressive. The lively quality to the sound seems equally apt across a wide range of musical styles and, perhaps most significantly, this is never a boring player. **HFC**

VERDICT

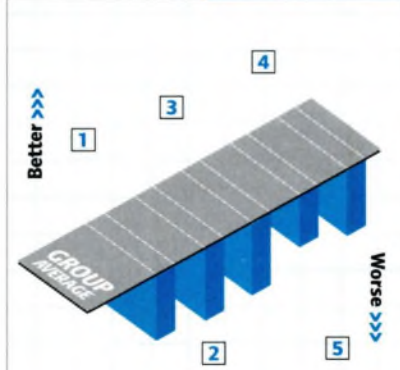
SOUND ★★★★★	Despite (or because of) 'unusual' measured performance, this player has a lively, enthusiastic manner which gets stuck right in to the music. Never boring, it may prove a little boisterous for some.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	



LAB REPORT

In almost every measured respect this player is a maverick. Output level is typical, though sourced from a rather high impedance. Distortion, as specified by the raw number below, is not alarmingly high and similar in upsampled and 44kHz modes, but its spectrum is very 'busy' with harmonics and hum modulation extending beyond 20kHz. It's hard to be sure about the jitter figure because the output spectrum, when playing the 20kHz test tone, is so full of spurious signals as to make their interpretation questionable: suffice to say that the figure given on the conclusions page is an estimate reflecting a lot of spurious output. It varies somewhat between the two sampling rates, as does linearity: the 2dB figure is at 88kHz and is better than the 4dB we obtained at 44kHz. Meanwhile the frequency response in 44kHz mode is distinctly shy in the high treble, -3dB at 20kHz. It seems we can enjoy a little imperfection!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -40%
- 2] Jitter >> -50%
- 3] Linearity >> -50%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -30%
- 5] Digital filter >> -40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.35V	2.28V
Total harmonic distortion	0.12%	0.025%
Signal-to-noise ratio	100dB	101dB

Award winning musical sound
Lifetime warranty
Sexy design



The Densen B-150 Integrated Amp

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

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Discover why we say:
LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BORING HI-FI



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CYRUS CD-8X/PSX-R

Separates combine into one satisfying whole with this hi-fi duo

This is approaching the status of an old favourite, having been in the Cyrus catalogue for several years. We've enjoyed its company in the past, but we hoped the exciting new Servo Evolution transport upgrades would have been ready in time. The CD-8X is built into the usual Cyrus die-cast case, it is quite a shoe-horn job with two circuit boards carefully mounted above and below the rear extension of the CD transport and two toroidal transformers squeezed in too.

Despite that, space has been found at the rear for twin outputs, control bus sockets, both flavours of digital output and a socket for the PSX-R power supply, which we decided to employ in this review. Effectively a big transformer in a box, but with some intelligent housekeeping circuitry to make it a complete no-brainer of an upgrade, the PSX-R is compatible with many of Cyrus's more upmarket products. It comes with a flying lead terminated in a plug which fits into the appropriate socket and operation is completely automatic. It powers key parts of the circuit and, while its effects are more appreciable with power amps than CD players, it is still claimed to give worthwhile improvements in general sonic clarity and precision.

The display on the 8x is basic, but the player is nice to use, with rapid disc handling. We particularly appreciate the way everything can be easily controlled from the front panel: players which make key functions exclusive to the remote can quickly lose their appeal when the remote has temporarily vanished.

SOUND QUALITY

If the 8x didn't seem to our listeners to excel in any particular area, its performance was nevertheless considered good in each department and there was relatively little specific criticism. About the strongest expression against the player came from our 'rhythm and timing' enthusiast, who found the presentation a touch bland, most noticeably so



in the Penguin Café Orchestra track. Even he, however, conceded that the bass can be punchy on at least some occasions, especially in the Rachmaninov, which features some quite energetic work from the double basses and the percussion, but then separation of instruments is very clear in small ensembles.

Multiple voices seemed to fare very well indeed, with some very positive comments greeting the Pallavicino track. Here, the space in which the recording was made seemed even bigger than usual, while each voice was still clearly defined and projected.

To the extent this player has limitations they seem more to do with the frequency extremes than the midband. The bass is quite well extended, but not quite as deep as some. Some instruments can catch it out and end up sounding slightly boomy. Treble is extended but can sometimes be a little dry, especially with very treble-rich sounds. But at neither extreme is there anything that seems likely to induce listener fatigue or discomfort. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND



A good all-rounder which doesn't show off in any way and may seem unimpressive at first: but, on longer acquaintance, sound is precise and believably energetic. Bass perhaps a touch shy.

FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



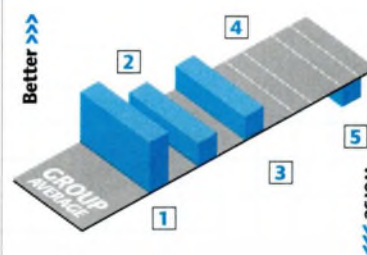
LAB REPORT

We're accustomed to finding Cyrus CD players more than adequate in all technical parameters and this one is no exception. While it isn't the best in any one measurement, its performance still largely qualifies as beyond reproach as any improvement over its figures is likely to be academic.

The one area where we might ideally look for better performance is, as usual, the anti-alias filter, which allows noticeable aliasing just above 22kHz. Still, it's no worse than most CD players across the price spectrum. Distortion is excellent at all frequencies and levels and jitter is to all intents and purposes unmeasurable.

Given the comments on bass performance from the listening test results, we made a special point of looking carefully at low frequencies, but without any clear results. The response there is absolutely typical, flat to below 5Hz, while the treble is also flat to fractions of a dB up to 20kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +30%
- 2] Jitter >> +10%
- 3] Linearity >> +10%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 0%
- 5] Digital filter >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

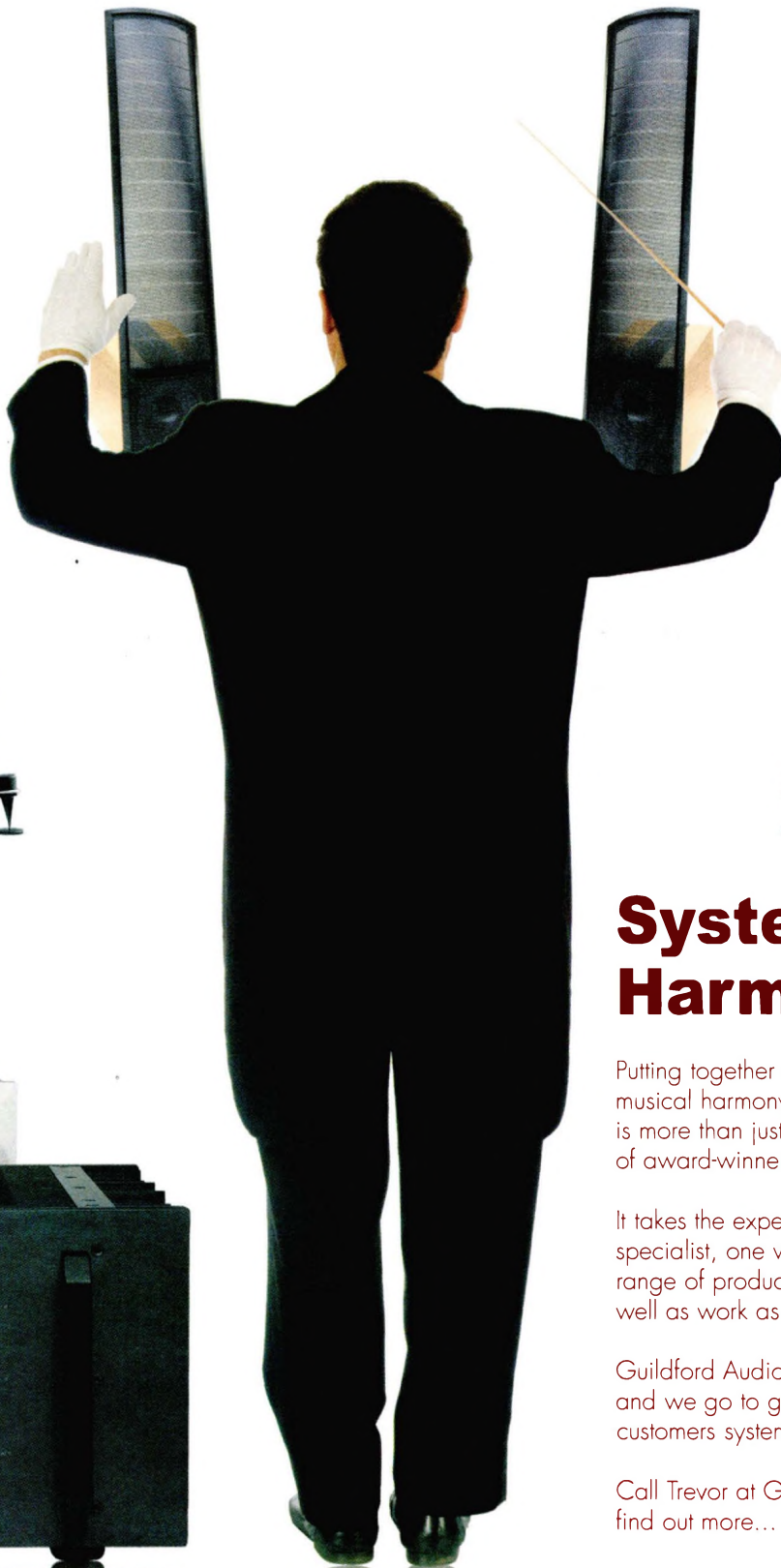
Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.1V	2.1V
Total harmonic distortion	0.005%	0.0011%
Signal-to-noise ratio	110dB	105dB

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DENON DCD-2000AE

Geared to playing SACD, just how will this Denon fare with CD?

Denon's devotion to SACD is unwavering, but (over the years that this particular model has been in their catalogue) the format's popularity has not boomed in the way many hoped it would. As the only SACD-capable machine in this group, the comparison was always going to be on CD grounds, but lovers at least of stereo high-res (there's no multichannel output or option) will be relieved to know that support is still strong.

A physically imposing machine, the player is exceptionally heavy due to the extensive mechanical damping that has been applied to the case. The base is bolstered with substantial extra steel, leaving the aluminium side panels as the only parts with any detectable resonance in them – and precious little there, too. But this is still the smartest looking player in the group.

The one drawback of SACD compatibility is that it takes an age to load a disc (10 seconds plus, depending on length) and overlooking the oddity that SACD text – not CD text – is displayed, the features basically equal those of CD-only machines. 'AL24 Processing' is Denon's version of upsampling, implemented on some fearsomely multi-legged integrated circuit, while the rest of the technical business is looked after by high specification integrated circuits. Other components are commercial grade rather than tweaky, but Denon has gone so far as to include separate mains transformers for analogue and digital.

SOUND QUALITY

This is another player which doesn't leap out and grab the listener, but relies instead on subtler persuasion. Both our unsighted listeners and our subsequent sighted sessions, suggested that its virtues become more apparent the longer one listens. It clearly has a good basis to the sound, with a neutral midband and nicely balanced detail, but it can seem a little thin. In fact to be brutally honest it probably is a little thin by the average



standards of the group, but this is something one soon gets used to.

It's worth the brief acclimatisation, anyway, as despite its seeming reticence the bass is very well controlled and articulated. Once again, it doesn't have quite the attack of some, but it is reasonably punchy and times well with rock and other rhythmic styles. Up in the treble (and upper midrange) there's a hint of hardness, which is probably the aspect of this player we would be most cautious about. If for no other reason than some listeners may find it unsettling. We only found it an intermittent distraction, most noticeable with violins and choral voices where it put something of a veil between music and listeners.

Imaging is better laterally than in terms of depth, though it's still pretty good at the latter. Images extend quite convincingly beyond the loudspeakers and are both precise and stable. There's also good integration between the various instruments and voices within a mix, with no unnatural spotlighting. All who heard this player felt its sense of drive and commitment is greater in classical and jazz music – acoustically recorded stuff, basically – than studio productions, but it's an informative and mostly well-rounded performer. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	Mild lack of bass weight takes a little getting used to, but there's some very good detail and articulation across the board. Happiest with naturally-miked recordings, it lacks a bit of grunt on rock and pop.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

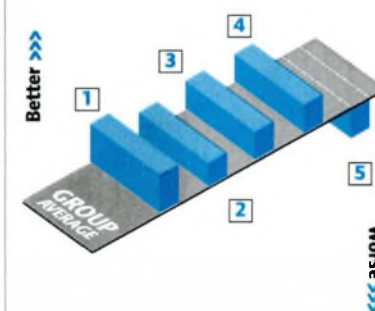


LAB REPORT

Distortion hasn't vanished altogether, but it's pretty close and doesn't vary much with frequency. Noise is very low, to take advantage of SACD's enhanced noise floor, but we noticed a peculiarity with this player: it mutes the output when there is no digital signal (as a few do) and when it comes out of mute there is a small amount of offset somewhere which causes a mild electronic 'plop'. Many CDs have no digital silence anywhere, but those that do may cause this behaviour.

In truth, we hadn't noticed it subjectively until the tests flagged it up. The AL24 anti-alias filter is a little unusual, with just a little attenuation at the top of the audio band (less than 0.1 dB down at 16kHz, about 1.7dB down at 20kHz) and slower rolloff above 22kHz than most. Ultimately, this means it allows more aliasing through than most filters will and this is likely to add a little flavour to the sound in many circumstances.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +25%
- 2] Jitter >> +10%
- 3] Linearity >> +10%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +15%
- 5] Digital filter >> -15%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.1V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0017%	0.0015%
Signal to noise ratio	119dB	107dB

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EDGAR CD-1

Beneath its polished exterior, this player has some hidden surprises

If you recognise Internet national suffixes you may already have spotted that this manufacturer is based in Slovakia. Not necessarily the first country one thinks of in the hi-fi roll-call, though if you're a valve nerd you'll know that one valve manufacturer ('JJ' – used to be called 'Tesla') is based there. And not surprisingly, this CD player uses valves, five of them including one valve rectifier. The audio output board combines valves and op-amps, while digital-to-analogue conversion is performed right beside the transport.

For sure, the most striking aspect of this player is its solid wood front, polished to a very fine finish. The CD loading tray has a wood trim added too, which on the review sample didn't quite match the rest of the front, and even the power switch is wood-faced. That much we like, but we're less keen on the display, a frankly 1980s-looking affair that is bordering on naff. Still, it conveys all the information you need.

The control buttons are another black mark as they are noisy and sometimes unpredictable in operation. The transport, in typical Philips manner, is brisk and efficient though and the remote control is rather classy with its wood sides and heavy construction. A generously-sized toroidal transformer looks after the basic power requirement. In terms of features, basically there aren't any – analogue output and the most basic programming, being two! A digital output is about the only thing we'd bother adding. Case construction is very robust, if a little industrial, and felt feet are fitted which can allow the player to slide away if buttons are pressed hard.

SOUND QUALITY

With only the gentlest of criticisms levelled at it, its performance came across as one of the strongest. It has a big-hearted, big-scale presentation which rapidly convinces the listener that everything is just so, but in addition it pays due attention to the little



details that keep one interested and alert. It may be a touch over-enthusiastic on the bass but, in general, low frequencies are well extended, well controlled, well timed and above all tuneful. From this firm foundation rises a neutral midrange, topped off with a natural airy treble that never seems to become harsh or edgy, even with notably difficult sounds like violin or oboe.

We said the midrange is neutral: once or twice it seemed a little over-keen on the presence region, slightly accentuating voices and higher melody instruments. That's very much the exception, though, and most of the time the player is very even-handed. It has good detail right across the spectrum and very good imaging too, with nicely extended depth and a good lateral spread.

The one time it seemed slightly less in control of things was in the Ian Dury track. This can be a tricky test because the voice is placed significantly forward of the rest of mix, and we felt the Edgar fell into the trap of separating it further rather than making its relation of the backing clearer. Overall, though, the sound is enjoyable, believable and involving, with plenty of impact and drive, and in addition seems very even-handed in its musical taste. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	Tonally, the balance slightly favours bass and presence regions. This makes for a sound that's often highly danceable and fun, but not always as well integrated as some. Despite that, detail and imaging are good.
FEATURES ★★★☆☆	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★☆☆	



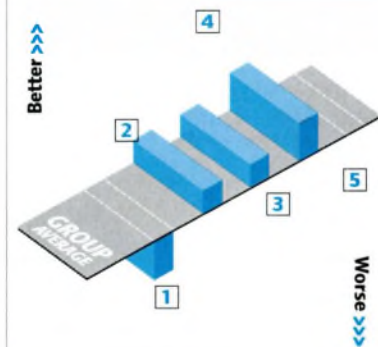
LAB REPORT

In this instance, valves only give slightly higher distortion than is typical from solid-state output circuits: the one area where their signature is apparent is some unusually high subsonic noise (still plenty low enough not to be any kind of practical problem though).

Noise within the audio band is actually particularly good and although the figure would look worse if we included hum, we can't regard -95dB hum levels as in any sense a problem. The output level is unusually high and just might cause harshness with some electronic-volume-control amps: it shouldn't actually overload them and it will help keep noise at bay.

The anti-alias filter is pretty much par for the course, allowing a little more near-22kHz aliasing than some, but with a typical dead-flat response to 20kHz. Jitter is practically unmeasurable, as we've become used to these days.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -25%
- 2] Jitter >> +10%
- 3] Linearity >> +10%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +20%
- 5] Digital filter >> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	-	2.79V
Total harmonic distortion	0.006%	0.02%
Signal to noise ratio	100dB	108dB

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SHANLING CD-T1000SE

Stylish, with a performance to match. Is this the ideal CD player?

We thought we'd seen this one before, but as it turns out that was the 100, not the 1000, which is a new model though evidently sharing a few mechanical components. It's based on a Philips loading mechanism, but instead of the usual loading tray it has a flip-up lid. This allows direct loading of the disc and makes for exceptionally fast access since the transport is very quick to read a disc. There's a lot more to this model than just the convenience of top-loading, though. For a start there are the valves, obvious at once in their attractive protective surrounds (the word 'cage' hardly seems appropriate here).

You get the best of both worlds in a sense, thanks to Shanling's provision of two sets of outputs at the rear, one 'Tube' and one 'Direct'. In other words, if you find the idea of adding valves to a digital signal chain suspect, you can listen without them and simply enjoy their attention-grabbing appearance. You can't forego valves if you choose to use the headphone socket, though, as one pair is dedicated to driving that.

Inside the very shallow chassis is a well-filled circuit board equipped with high quality DACs, an unusually generous provision of upmarket op-amps and an upsampling chip. Shanling has made upsampling a switchable option, so you have unusual opportunities to tune this player to taste. There's even a digital volume control. Build quality is high, with plenty of little extras such as the ferrite interference stopper on the leads to the output sockets.

SOUND QUALITY

With so many options to choose from we plumped for oversampled operation via the 'tube' output, as it seems likely that this is how most units of this model will be used. Shanling will have no cause to argue with our choice as the results are among the best in the group in all areas. In fact, one listener declared this firmly his favourite of the day, while the



sentiments expressed by the others were hardly less enthusiastic.

It seems the single most impressive aspect of the sound is the extent to which it gets 'out of the box' in every sense – images which extend beyond the loudspeakers in all directions and, perhaps even more important, instruments that seem less constrained by the realities of sound reproduction.

There is copious detail on offer, never unnaturally emphasised but gratifyingly easy to follow and allowing highly analytical listening if one cares to try. The frequency extremes are well-balanced and integrated with the midband – being picky, there's an occasional lack of complete control in the bass but it's by no means enough to cause headaches. That's the basics covered.

Where this player really excels, though, is in sheer musical communication and involvement. There is a cohesion to the sound and the listener is treated to an unusually convincing musical rendition as a result. Whether the music be hard-driven bebop, the slow movement of a classical string quartet or synth-based pop, it is presented with complete conviction and that, surely, is what one looks for in any hi-fi component. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	A commendably committed player which gets right to the heart of a variety of musical styles, thanks to a blend of bass extension and control. Enthusiasm and good manners – what more could one ask?
PRACTICALITY ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	



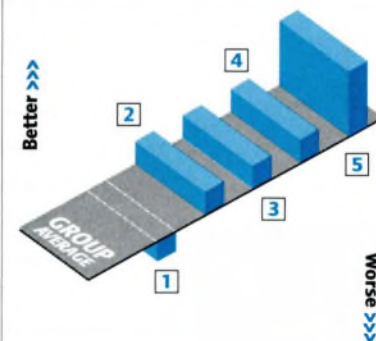
LAB REPORT

As one might expect, the tube output has rather higher distortion than the direct one, something like 0.2% against 0.009%. It's questionable how audible that will be, though, especially as it drops off quite rapidly with level and below about -30% there is little enough between the two connections.

Noise is similar and so are most other measurements, including jitter, while the difference between oversampling and non is evident only in the near-20kHz frequency response: oversampling gives a slightly better rolloff characteristic with a little less aliasing.

We also checked the digital volume control and found its side-effects to be negligible. Beware of hasty comparisons of tube and direct connections though, as the output level via the two differs by enough to be audible – the figure we quote is for tube, direct is a little higher. Usually, we tend to like a slightly higher volume in demonstration.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -10%
- 2] Jitter >> +10%
- 3] Linearity >> +10%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +10%
- 5] Digital filter >> +40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.2V	1.92V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0025%	0.009%
Signal-to-noise ratio	110dB	106dB

CONCLUSIONS

So how did these half-dozen silver disc spinners fare in the final analysis?

Of the six CD players in this month's group test, it's no coincidence that were most enthusiastic about the three with valves. Yet why is it that, during the listening test, the most electronically sophisticated player in the group came out worst? It's hard to avoid a sneaking suspicion that it has something to do with human hearing; could it be that we all prefer a hint of 'imperfection' in the sound?

After our blind listening panel had left and we had read through their comments, we listened hard to each player, trying to pin down

some of the observations that surprised or puzzled us (there are always a few of those!).

As a result, although the main review page on each product is predominantly informed by the blind listening sessions, we feel inclined to add a couple of riders.

First, the Cambridge 840C is by any measure a very detailed player and on the whole, we feel its blandness is the result of a lack of added colour. It really depends on what you're looking for. As both CD player and DAC it seemed to give an unusually honest rendition of recordings with which we've

been closely involved, but pluck a CD (of unknown provenance) off the shelf and the Cambridge's version is unlikely to be the most gripping, at least on the first listen. That said, it's a very impressive amount of technology for the money and all things considered is badge-worthy, especially in the face of the (expensive) competition.

Cyrus and Denon have noticeably different ideas on how to implement a CD player, but the results are similar in many ways. Both the CD-8x and the DCD-2000AE are good players and are, therefore, unlikely to

disappoint listeners in any way. Neither sets the world on fire, but they combine insight and musicality in a rewarding fashion.

It's to the Consonance, Edgar and, above all, Shanling players that we bow down to in absolute terms, though. The Consonance is a lot of fun, the Edgar beautiful to behold (from the front!), and all three offer good and enthralling sounds. But the Shanling seems to be the one that really ticks all the boxes. It looks suitably aspirational too and is good to use, so we're happy to acclaim it the top scorer of this fascinating group. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

- » If your CD player has switchable oversampling, don't automatically assume that it sounds better on one setting for all discs
- » Many CD players emit a just-audible whistle. The easiest 'cure' is not to place it too close to your listening seat.

- » While most players aren't microphonic as such, resonances in their casework can be minimised with suitable feet and/or damping material.
- » Buy a CD lens cleaner and use it every month or so. A little preventive maintenance never hurt anyone.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	Consonance Reference 2.2 Linear	Cyrus CD-8x/PSX-R	Denon DCD-2000AE	Edgar CD-1	Shanling CD-T1000se
PRICE	£750	£1,495	£1,400	£1,200	£1,350	£1,600
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Ultra-civilised sound is not to every taste, but overall, this £750 player remains a solid proposition.	Its manner is lively and enthusiastic, gets stuck right in to the music. Poor measurements seem no bar to enjoyment.	A good all-rounder which doesn't show off - may seem unimpressive at first, but sound is precise and energetic.	Mild lack of bass weight and lacks a bit of grunt on rock and pop. Very good detail and articulation.	Balance slightly favours bass and presence regions. Danceable and fun, detail and imaging good too.	Commendably committed player which gets right to the heart of a wide variety of musical styles.

KEY FEATURES

	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	Consonance Reference 2.2 Linear	Cyrus CD-8x/PSX-R	Denon DCD-2000AE	Edgar CD-1	Shanling CD-T1000se
ELEC DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
OPT DIG O/P	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
CD R-W	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
CD TEXT	No	No	No	No	No	No
BALANCED O/P	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
OTHER FORMATS	-	-	-	SACD	-	-

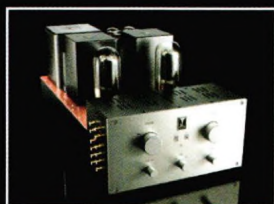
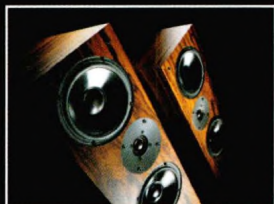
LAB CONCLUSIONS

	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	Consonance Reference 2.2 Linear	Cyrus CD-8x/PSX-R	Denon DCD-2000AE	Edgar CD-1	Shanling CD-T1000se
DISTORTION	0.0007% E	0.025% A	0.001% G	0.0015% G	0.02% A	0.009% G
JITTER	<0.1ns E	1.3ns P	<0.1ns E	<0.1ns E	<0.1ns E	<0.1ns E
LINEARITY	<0.1dB E	2dB P	<0.1dB E	<0.1dB E	<0.1dB E	<0.1dB E
S/N RATIO	106dB G	101dB A	105dB G	107dB E	108dB E	106dB G
STOPBAND REJECTION	100dB E	30dB P	80dB G	70dB G	70dB G	80dB G

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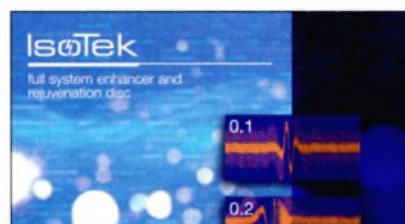
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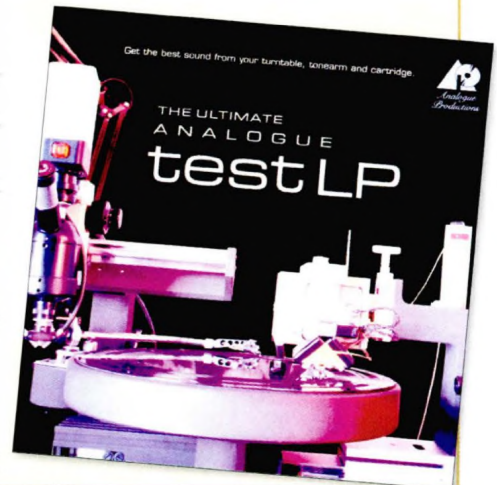
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Spendor S8e Speakers	£1,429.00
Yamaha MCX1000 MusicCAST Server	£1,169.00
Yamaha MCXA10 MusicCAST Client	£389.00
Yamaha RXN600D AV Receiver	£369.00

NOTTINGHAM 0115 911 2121

Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£844.00
Harman Kardon HS500 AV Speaker Package	£499.00
KEF KIT100 DVD System (Inc Stands)	£599.00
M&K LCR750 / II Speakers	£299.00
M&K Surround 55 Surround Speakers	£399.00
Musical Fidelity X-Ray / XT100 System	£1,104.00
Sim2 D10 DLP Projector	£1,234.00
Yamaha DVD51700 DVD Player	£199.00
Yamaha MCXA10 MusicCAST Client	£299.00
Yamaha MCX1000 MusicCAST Server	£799.00

OXFORD 01865 241773

Artcoustic Diabolo Surround Speakers	£454.00
Epox M15.2 Speakers	£454.00
Loewe Xelos A37 LCD TV	£1,399.00
Loewe Centras 1102 DVD Recorder	£224.00
Loewe Centras 2102 DVD/HDD Recorder	£324.00
Metz 30" LCD TV	£899.00
Musical Fidelity X-System	£1,104.00
Pioneer PDP5000EX Plasma Monitor	£2,999.00
Yamaha DVD2700 DVD Player	£84.00
Yamaha YSP1100 Sound Projector	£584.00

POOLE 01202 671677

Arcam DVA AVR280 AV Receiver	£584.00
Arcam DVA DV135 DVD Player	£454.00
Cyrus iV52 Amplifier	£549.00
Cyrus CD8X CD Player	£649.00

Philips LG5131 LCD Projector	£299.00
Pioneer DV989 DVD Player	£499.00
Pioneer DVR490HXS DVD / HDD Recorder	£699.00
Sunfire D12 Sub Woofer	£99.00

SOUTHAMPTON 023 8033 7770

B&W XT4 Speakers	£1,269.00
KEF KHT Two Model 111 Surround Speakers	£709.00
Marantz SR5002 AV Receiver	£309.00
Marantz ST15 S1 DAB Tuner	£454.00
Marantz VP111 S1 DLP Projector	£6,499.00
Sim2 C3x T2L Link DLP Projector	£5,999.00
Yamaha DSAX861SE AV Amplifier	£449.00
Yamaha DVD51700 DVD Player	£259.00
Yamaha MCX1000 MusicCAST Server	£699.00
Yamaha TX761DAB Tuner	£249.00

SWINDON 01793 610992

Arcam DVA AVR300 AV Receiver	£1,499.00
Fujitsu 42HT551 Plasma Monitor	£1,499.00
KEF KIT100 DVD System	£1,999.00
KEF PSW3500 Sub Woofer	£389.00
Marantz SR7001 AV Receiver	£999.00
Quad L-Centre Speakers	£584.00
Toshiba 37WL768 LCD TV	£179.00
Yamaha DSP29 AV Amplifier	£714.00
Yamaha RXN600D AV Receiver	£259.00
Yamaha YSP1000 Sound Projector	£1,649.00

TUNBRIDGE WELLS 01892 531543

Denon AVR4306 AV Receiver	£899.00
In Focus SP7205 DLP Projector	£599.00
Imerge S2002-160 Sound Server	£549.00
Dnkyo TXDS989 (ver 2.0) AV Receiver	£499.00
Pioneer DVR940HXS DVD / HDD Recorder	£699.00
Pioneer PDP5000EX-T Plasma Monitor	£2,599.00
Pioneer PDP607XD Plasma TV	£3,749.00
Philips 42PF9731D LCD TV	£999.00
Samsung LE40F71BX LCD TV	£639.00
Samsung LE46F71BX LCD TV	£959.00

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HiFi BASE
Equinox 2

INFORMATION

Combining high performance with practicality and good looks, the Equinox Series offers a flexible approach to Hi-Fi equipment rack design. The Equinox has the unique ability to grow with your Hi-Fi system by allowing you to begin with a 2 shelf base module, you then simply stack on top individual single shelf modules to create a 3, 4 or even a 5 shelf rack.

Pro-ject

CHECK ONLINE



TURNTABLE
RPM1 Genie

INFORMATION

The Pro-ject Genie turntable offers exceptional sound and exceptional quality. This award winning manual turntable is fitted with a Ortofon OM 3E cartridge and with its stunning design will without a doubt be the envy of your friends.

Planar

£ CALL NOW



HOME THEATER
PROJECTOR
PD7130

INFORMATION

With a 4500:1 contrast ratio, 900 lumens, and native 720p HD resolution, this projector will make your eyes dilate and your heart race. Especially when you factor in the integrator-friendly features, such as horizontal and vertical lens shift, DLP's DarkChip technology, ample connectivity, and menus that don't require an engineering degree. Up until this projector, the wow factor had never officially been located.

> Products, technology and irresistible prices

FREE DELIVERY

HD 7.1 AV AMP

Exceeding even the highest expectations, the TX-SR875 AV surround sound receiver deserves all the accolades it gets. The foundations of the TX-SR875 are its isolated power amplifier block (which supports a dual push-pull amplification design) and preamplifier. You'll also find a blend of onboard technologies to prime your home theatre for high definition playback. You're looking at the first HDMI equipped Onkyo receiver to take up to four components with 1080p video and master-quality audio capabilities.

Also available in black

TX-SR875

Onkyo

A FUSION OF ROCK-SOLID POWER AND HI-DEF PRECISION

BUY NOW-PAY
AUTUMN
2008



CHECK ONLINE



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The new L.III Kandy integrated benefits from totally revised amplifier internals. The mains transformer and the AC circuitry are now moved to one side away from the amplifier main circuits thus dramatically reducing AC noise interference. After rectification circuitry, the power supply layout, distribution and tracking to different sections of the amplifier have been greatly improved.

Kandy L.III Integrated Amplifier MkIII

Roksan

5.1 HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE M-Cube 5.1

£ CALL FOR PRICE



BUY NOW-PAY
2008



INFORMATION

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

IKON AV SPEAKER PACKAGE Ikon AV Speaker Package

£ CALL FOR PRICE



INFORMATION

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

AV PACKAGE CS SYSTEM 3

£ CALL FOR PRICE



Audica

INFORMATION

The Audica range of speakers sound as good as they look. Each speaker is constructed from extruded high grade aluminium. Its section is shaped in such a way as to cancel rearward fringing waves from the driver, thus increasing driver efficiency and decreasing cabinet resonance.

5.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM Xeno

£ CALL FOR PRICE



MJ Acoustics

INFORMATION

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.

CHECK ONLINE FOR MORE PRODUCTS & PRICES

Pioneer

Creeks
AUDIO LIMITED

MONITOR AUDIO

polkaudio
The speaker specialists

Wharfedale

audio pro

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WWW.HiFiBitz.CO.UK 08700 276 888

£ CALL FOR PRICE

CHECK ONLINE



AVR 7.1 SURROUND RECEIVER

The AVR-1508 packs the power to drive seven speakers and all the surround decoding you'll need to turn every source in your audio/video system into convincing surround sound. 75 full-bandwidth-rated watts x 7 channels of high-current Denon amplification ensure powerful home theatre thrills.

AVR-1508

Denon



STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

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

8000P

Audiolab



CD PLAYER

Continuing with Denon's multi-bit philosophy, the DCD-700AE features the latest version of its renowned LAMBDA converter which virtually eliminates zero cross distortion and incorporates the latest AL24 processing. This circuitry delivers a fast dynamic sound, with a very low noise floor and excellent low level linearity.

DCD-700AE

Denon



7.1 AV AMPLIFIER

With the TX-SR505E HDMI transport enabling pass-thru sources up to 1080p and component video supporting 720p and 1080 sources, this A/V receiver is a fine investment for those who want the best of what is available today and tomorrow.

TX-SR505

Onkyo

Q Acoustics

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AVAILABLE AS A 5.1 OR A 3.1 SYSTEM

5.1 SYSTEM QAV

The QAV LCR Speaker system is available as a 5.1 or a 3.1 system, the main LCR Speaker is extendable catering for the different size screens from 37 inches to 50 inches. The 5.1 system comes with wall mountable rear speakers, which can be located along skirting boards or along ceiling to conveniently hide unsightly wires. Also available in white.

FOR MORE 5 STAR DEALS VISIT WWW.HiFiBitz.CO.UK

Shure

CHECK ONLINE

IN-EAR HEADPHONES SE420



INFORMATION

Shure's SE420 sound isolating earphones feature Dual TriAcoustic MicroSpeakers and a sound isolating design. They use dedicated tweeters and woofers to provide a detailed sound stage that's free from outside noise. Lows, mids and highs are distinct and defined for accurate reproduction for all the details of your music. A Premium Fit Kit offers portability, connectivity and a comfortable customised fit.

Pioneer

£ CALL FOR PRICE

BLU-RAY PLAYER BDP-LX70A



INFORMATION

The BDP-LX70A gets the best out of high definition media. It delivers master quality audio and video exactly as the film-makers intended, perfectly played back at 1080p and 24Hz. That is, at exactly the same speed and using the same 24 frames per second as the film was shot, stored, mastered and screened at the cinema.

Fatman

VALVE AMPLIFIER ITUBE



INFORMATION

The Carbon Edition is unique to the Fatman range in that it uses a one piece formfactor and is finished in a stylish black. The amplifier and dock elements are built into a single piece chassis, thereby providing an elegant and high impact design. The specification has been updated to include 2 source inputs plus the iPod dock, a remote control which handles volume and tonal changes for all three sources and a huge increase in power to 25w per channel.

InFocus

TEAC



MISSION



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Get the best

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

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

Music - the real aim

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



What and Where to buy

The system you think you want may not be right for you. – So where do you start? Here's an important tip...don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE.

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

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Hi-Fi for your money....

Buying or being sold to?

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

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

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

Getting the best deal

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

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



... Ask our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

LONDON

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

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

SOUTH

Aldermaston, Berkshire
HIFICINEMA
Mars House, Calleva Park.
0118 982 0402

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

Brighton
THE POWERPLANT
40 Church Road, Hove.
01273 775542

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street.
01245 265245

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUTH WEST

Bath
AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
01225 333310

MIDLANDS

Banbury
OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
01295 272158

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

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

Coventry
FRANK HARVEY
163 Spon Street.
024 7652 5200

Leicester
CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel Street.
0116 262 3754

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

Stafford
ACOUSTICA
114 Wolverhampton Road.
01785 258216

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

Chester
ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road.
01244 344227

Sheffield
MOORGATE ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam St.
0114 275 6048

York
SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
Gateshead
LINTONE AUDIO
7-11 Park Lane, Gateshead.
0191 477 4167

SCOTLAND

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

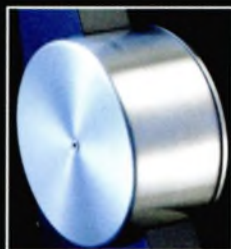
Glasgow
LOUD & CLEAR
520 St Vincent St, Finnieston.
0141 221 0221

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

The new Reference 3 with CDT II™ Tweeter Technology

Anthony Gallo isn't one to follow the crowd, a characteristic he shares with the people who buy his loudspeakers.

His latest speaker design, the Reference 3, is rewriting the price versus performance equation. So much so in fact that influential U.S. publication *The Absolute Sound* have bestowed on it their ultimate honour - product of the year.



"Gallo's Reference 3's are rewriting the book on value in high-end loudspeakers, making accessible a level of performance that might previously have been far beyond the reach of most of us."
The Absolute Sound

For further information or to locate your nearest dealer, please visit our website

www.anthonygallo.co.uk

tel. 0870 350 1348

nonconformist

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

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 four stars overall are automatically considered for inclusion in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

SOURCE COMPONENTS

- 90 CD PLAYERS
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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 EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000											
BEST BUY	Arcam DIVA CD73	450	Neatly built and well presented player that's especially good at bass and timing, with detail hardly less assured	●	●	●	●	●			301
	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 underdemonstrative, 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
	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 CD6002	280	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw: performance is class-leading in most areas		●	●	●	●		●	301
	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											
	Bryston BCD-1	2,050	Not as open as some but rather more timely than most, it sounds a lot more gripping than it looks		●	●				●	300
	Cairn Fog 3	1,995	Ergonomically challenged, high energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board		●	●				●	302
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Chord Red Reference CD	13,345	The definitive statement in Red Book CD playing, this player's look and sound places it at the top of the tree		●	●	●		●		299
	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced		●	●	●	●	●	●	286
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	EMM Labs CDSA	6,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks	●	●	●	●		●		302
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Garnut CD3	3,500	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music	●	●	●	●		●		289
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Krell Evolution 505 SACD	8,777	Brilliant replacement for SACD Standard, superb musical discrimination. No high-res digital output	●	●	●	●		●		289
	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best		●	●	●			●	291
	Linn Majik	1,950	Compact and capable of most CD formats, it's musically communicative with fine pace and enthusiasm		●	●					283
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Marantz SA-11S2	2,500	Superb value for money, this well-balanced player features various filter settings to customise performance	●	●	●	●				304
	Meridian G06	1,695	Highly refined player with a combination of analysis and self-effacing response to musical demands		●	●	●	●			295
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
	Rega Saturn	1,298	Good detail, lively natural bass, and good integration of musical strands without losing their individual character		●	●	●				295
	Unison Research Unico CD	1,495	Strong timing and rhythm, this player is well equipped for more melodic music, with good detail resolution		●	●	●	●			295

SIZES 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



Although players featuring both DVD-Audio and DVD-Video are thin on the ground, the universal disc player (that also supports SACD and CD alongside the DVD formats) continues to dominate the worlds of audio and video alike. In fact, it's rare to find a DVD player that doesn't support DVD-Audio and SACD these days.

So, what advantages do universal disc players hold over traditional CD players?

Put simply... choice. A DVD player or universal offer the listener the chance to use far more than just your CDs and build up a wider collection of music and video, all played through one device. The technology has matured now, and the performance of all formats played through these devices gets surprisingly close to dedicated players these days. The same cannot be said of Blu-ray or HD DVD players, many of which are not yet good enough to play CD well.



DVD-AUDIO, HD DVD AND BLU-RAY

DVD-Audio is a high-resolution music format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs.



The discs can be played on any DVD player, but can only be appreciated at their best with a DVD-A or universal disc player. In fairness, the DVD-Audio format has not proved to be a resounding success, and SACD discs are more readily available.

The two new kids on the block are HD DVD and Blu-ray. Both the same physical size as the CD and DVD disc, these formats offer even more data storage capacity than DVD (up to 50GB instead of DVD's 8.5GB). However, these formats are the exclusive domain of home cinema and gaming fans. Sadly, the possibility of super-high-resolution music-only Blu-ray or HD DVD discs remains distant at best.

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 HDMI, then component video, followed by RGB Scart. All these are 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.

WHAT IS 1080P?

HDTV is defined by the number of lines the picture creates and whether it's interlaced (like old TV) or progressive scan (like a PC monitor).

CONNECTIONS



HDMI LINK: A flat, multi-pin socket that carries digital audio and video, like a digital SCART lead. Arguably the best choice for HDTV pictures.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow socket is composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component; the small black multipin socket is S-Video; the big one is SCART.

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					SCALE NUMBER
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DiVA DV135	900	Unchanged looks and stereo-only DVD-A/SACD, but the overall performance is great across all formats. Stunning picture, too	●	●	●	●	●	296
	Denon DVD-1920	250	Respectable (if unexciting) and flexible audio player, but something of a star from its HDMI equipped upsampling video subsystem	●	●	●	●	●	276
	Marantz DV7001	600	Enhanced model based on DV6001, but with various improvements, including superior CD replay capabilities	●	●	●	●	●	296
	Marantz DV7600	600	A mid-market cracker, with sound and picture quality that generally exceeds expectation	●	●	●	●	●	274
	NAD T585	800	Easy to live with universal player that shows clear signs of rejuvenation of the Classic range	●	●	●	●	●	294
	Onkyo DV-SP503E	300	Budget Onkyo universal player is a straightforward Pioneer based implementation, which performs well with audio and video	●	●	●	●	●	275
	Philips DVP9000S	400	Philips proves it hasn't lost its touch with mid market DVD players. Includes SACD and HDMI for quality video, and it's a star	●	●	●	●	●	274
	Yamaha DVD-S2500	700	Universal player, slightly stronger with video than audio, but well turned out with a wide range of analogue and digital in and outputs	●	●	●	●	●	280
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Acoustic Arts Surr Player 1	4,495	A very high-quality Pioneer-based machine, excellent sound from both hi-res and regular formats	●	●	●	●	●	299
	Arcam DiVA DV137	1,250	Good overall audio performance and excellent upscaling HDMI DVD-Video player, but stereo-only SACD playback at time of writing	●	●	●	●	●	285
	Denon DVD-3930	1,100	Well engineered universal player, with useful bypass facilities for pure audio, and unusually powerful video image processing	●	●	●	●	●	287
EC	Linn Akurate CD	3,985	This highly engaging multiformat non-video player doesn't have huge transparency or a fancy box, but is musically addictive	●	●	●	●	●	299
	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 DiVA DV135 £900
Stereo-only SACD and DVD-A, but excellent performance with audio and video.



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

ONE CATALOGUE . . .

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Sevenoaks Hi-Fi began life in 1972 as a small, specialist independent hi-fi retailer based in Sevenoaks, Kent growing strongly with a host of new shops throughout the next two decades. In 1995 the company name was changed to Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, reflecting our changing range of products as well as growing consumer interest in home cinema. Today, Sevenoaks has over 40 retail stores nationwide and has recently launched a new national network of Custom Installation Centres. Fuelled by the stratospheric rise of interest in flatscreen TVs, these CICs specialise in the creation and installation of bespoke home entertainment systems, across a wide range of budgets.



Mr R of Surbiton Lounge AV System
 "Many thanks to you, Ed and the team for all the help you have given with me purchasing my TV and Home Entertainment system. The service was very good indeed"
 Paul Epsom Store

Sevenoaks philosophy

The philosophy behind Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is simple, customer-focused and hasn't changed since the day the company started. When you shop at Sevenoaks we guarantee you:-

- ▶ Superb customer service, including after-sales care and attention to detail.
- ▶ An unrivalled product range, with every leading manufacturer in stock and impartial advice on offer.
- ▶ Knowledgeable staff that are highly trained, dedicated to customer service and have a genuine passion for home entertainment.
- ▶ Demonstration facilities in every store, offering pleasant and comfortable surroundings. Sevenoaks demonstration rooms are soundproofed and acoustically designed so that visiting a store is the closest you can get to sampling the products in your own home.
- ▶ Competitive prices across the whole range of products stocked.
- ▶ Leading edge expertise in Custom Installation via our associated network of nationwide Sevenoaks Custom Installation Centres.

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Arcam Solo New

Separates performance from these award-winning systems. Available as Solo Music, Movie 5.1 or Movie 2.1 and new Mini.

B&W Zeppelin New

Hear just how good your iPod can sound. This new iPod docking station ticks all the boxes: it's beautiful, solid as a rock and sounds amazing!



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Music, when conveyed through a well-sorted, high-quality audio system, has the power to move the human soul like nothing else. Choosing components/systems that will 'gel' together correctly in your home is no easy task but our vastly experienced staff do it day in, day out so let us help...



Pro-Ject Turntables

Revive your irreplaceable records with Pro-ject turntables. The range includes the award-winning RPM1 Genie which comes complete with cartridge.

Rotel & B&W RA04, RCD06, 685

B&W's 685 speakers complement Rotel's acclaimed CD and amplifier combination.



Marantz CD6002 & PM6002

This CD and amplifier package gives excellent performance and offers exceptional value for money.

Cyrus

Representing a quality of sound that is rare at any price. Come and hear Cyrus' new CD players - CD6 SE, CDB SE & CDX 1 SE



Primare

High quality performance coupled with excellent build quality and sophisticated Scandinavian design.



Roksan Kandy L.III

Sets a new standard for affordable hi-end amplifiers in its class.

KEF IQ Series

KEF's IQ series speakers includes bookshelf and floorstanding models.



Spendor New S3/SR

A substantial revision of Spendor's multi-award winning S3/S mini-monitor. These versatile speakers, available in 5 real wood finishes, perform with a wide range of systems and separates.



Award-winning Bronze BR2



Monitor Audio

With a choice of sizes and finishes, there's a Monitor Audio speaker to complement any system.



Multi-Room Audio

This multi-room digital music system from Sonos 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.



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.

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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



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.

increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well 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	
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
	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Smart, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45				268
	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
	The Funk Firm Funk	450	You won't find another turntable at the price that can touch the Funk for dynamics, tone colour or detail	33/45			opt	279
	The Funk Firm Funk V	750	Vector drive brings a refinement to the standard Funk that increases resolution. For high-class analogue sound, it's a killer	33/45			opt	284
	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45				266
	Micelli Tecnodec	767	Simple and smartly understated, performs above expectations – full-bodied and highly detailed	33/45				268
EB	Micelli Orbe SE	2,015	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45				235
	Pro-Ject 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
	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
	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
	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,000	A gorgeous turntable that sounds as good as it looks – vital and transparent! Price includes carbon-fibre arm	33/45				268
	Rega P3-24	398	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply	33/45		opt		298
	Rega P5/RB700	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			opt	257
	Rega P7/RB700	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			opt	257
EC	Rega P9/RB1000	2,498	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45				228
	Roksan Radius 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 V/309 hybrid arm	33/45				195
EC	SME 20/12A	11,133	Brings a calmness and precision to vinyl replay that we have rarely encountered, build quality is second to none	33/45/78				293
EC	Townshend Rock Anniversary	4,900	If you want to get to the meat and bones of the music this is a great tool for the job (price inc. Excalibur arm)	33/45				259

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUO GAIN	AUO IMPEDANCE	
EC	Cambridge Audio 640P	60	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades before and after in the chain					305
	Creek OBH15	220	Practical and highly compatible unit offering fine detail and pleasing, mellow balance					305
	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money					245
	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!					234
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP					201
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility					234

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

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



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- MP3, WMA and JPEG playback
- 30 hours playback with built-in rechargeable battery
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- Budget, audiophile bargain
- CD/R-RW, MP3 and WMA playback
- Graphite or titanium finish

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- CD/MP3/WMA Player
- DAB/FM/AM tuner
- 2 x 22 watt amplifier

WAS: £299.95
SAVE: £70

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FEBRUARY 2005

DAB/WI-FI/FM RADIO
REVO BLIK RADIOSTATION

- At last, the best of digital, analogue and internet radio, in one
- Also streams music from local computers

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£149.95

DAB/ALARM RADIO
PURE TEMPUS 1XT

- DAB/FM reception
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SAVE: £40

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BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS
EPOS M5

- Compact design with exceptional imaging
- Dark cherry real wood veneer

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WHAT HI-FI SOUND & VISION

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SAVE: £100

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FEBRUARY 2005

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PROJECT GENIE

- Includes factory-fitted Ortofon cartridge
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- Space-saving design

DELIGHTFUL VINYL SPINNER

£124.95

"AS FINE A DECK AS YOU'LL GET FOR THIS MONEY"
WHAT HI-FI SOUND & VISION

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IPOD DOCK AND AMP
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- Striking design, stunning performance
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SAVE: £100

£199.95

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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	FRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Creek T50	550	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,M,L	128					251
	Cyrus FM-X	500	A classic no-nonsense FM tuner that achieves gratifying sonic results. Upgradable with PSX-R power supply	FM	7					283
	Denon TU-1500AE	130	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound with plenty of gusto	FM,M,L	100					281
	Denon TU-1800DAB	250	There's a little grain on FM, but the decent performance on both bands makes this a great dual-band choice	DAB,FM,M	200					283
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt			257
	Marantz ST7001	300	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight. DAB is fine, but near-identical Denon 1800 is cheaper!	200						283
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30					250
	Primare T21	600	A very fine tuner – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM. 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB,FM,M	99					283
	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20					283
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30					242
	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too	FM	100					283
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DIVA DT91	450	Some grain at low levels, but sound is lively, large in scale and tonally very natural. Very smart!	DAB,FM	16					299
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10					248
	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
	Marantz ST7001	250	Midband detailed and precise: treble can be thick but bass is extended, and sound generally energetic	DAB,FM,M	200					299
	NAD C445	300	FM is laid-back despite bright balance, but has good detail. DAB slightly livelier than most	DAB,FM	30					299
	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.

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 trannies can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use trannies; 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 'singshoebox' from Cyrus is an absolute peach! Strong rhythmic flow, tunefully extended bass and excellent stereo imaging are among the highlights.



Primare I30 £1,500

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



Copland CTA405 £2,498

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DIVA A70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM	RC	HS	60	289
BB	Adv. Acoustic MAP305DA II	600	A lot of amplifier for the money and capable of revealing and exciting sound in the right company. Includes 4 digital inputs	5	MM	RC	HS	100	300
BB	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Practical, affordable and impressively flexible amp with a laid-back approach but plenty of insight too	7	opt	RC	HS	100	303
BB	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		RC	HS	75	279
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	500	Ticks all the boxes for bass, clarity, imaging etc. and invites the listener into the music with uncommon grace	6		RC	HS	100	294
BB	Cambridge Audio 840A v2	750	The biggest differences between this and most amps at twice its price are in looks and show-off factor. Powerful and detailed	8		RC	HS	120	299
BB	Creek Evo	500	Not the most accurate, strictly, but it's lively, energetic musical presentation is entirely lovable	5	opt	RC	HS	85	283
BB	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7		RC	HS	40	293
BB	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	RC	HS	50	284
BB	Marantz PM7001 Ki	550	A self-effacing amplifier which serves the music admirably with fine bass, sweet treble and unforced detail	5	MM	RC	HS	70	289
BB	Muscal Fidelity X-T100	899	By separating amp and TRIPLE-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical	3		RC	HS	70	288
BB	Naim Nait 5i	725	More versatile than previous Nait's, the 5i is a great all-round amplifier that offers vivid insights into all manner of music	4		RC	HS	50	305
BB	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5		RC	HS	80	278
BB	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		RC	HS	80	296
BB	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM	RC	HS	50	293
BB	Vincent SV-236	999	Valve hybrid whose sound is as idiosyncratic as its styling, short on neutrality but high on sparkle	6		RC	HS	100	295
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	AMR AM-77	4,400	A thrilling amplifier that brings you the dynamics of valves with the power of transistors in a substantial but well featured design	6		RC	HS	180	299
BB	Ayon Spirit	1,745	Pentode or triode operation is available at the flick of a switch with this muscular integrated	4		RC	HS	50	303
EC	Boulder 865	7,750	Extremely transparent to detail but less revealing of energy, high power, superb build but only balanced inputs	4		RC	HS	150	303
BB	Copland CTA405	2,498	A musical and involving amplifier, which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards	5	MM	RC	HS	50	305
BB	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6		RC	HS	100	286
BB	Densen Beat B110	1,200	Great bass provides firm underpinning for involving and enjoyable listening - real 'smile factor'	6	opt	RC	HS	60	292
EC	Lyngdorf TDA 2200	3,875	Sophisticated modular all-digital amp with room EQ, capable of adapting to the listening environment	4		RC	HS	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		RC	HS	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		RC	HS	250	295
BB	Mystère ia11	1,250	Small, deceptively powerful integrated valve amp with a crisp, pacy sound	4		RC	HS	40	302
BB	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7		RC	HS	180	285
EC	Naim SuperNait	2,350	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6		RC	HS	80	294
BB	Pathos Classic One MK3	1,535	An attractive amp offering a beautiful musical presentation with good tonality and detail	5		RC	HS	70	305
BB	Primare i30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6		RC	HS	100	267
BB	Pure Sound A30	1,100	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though	3		RC	HS	30	298
BB	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,299	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor	5	opt	RC	HS	21	296
BB	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	RC	HS	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		RC	HS	40	287
EC	Unison Research P70	3,495	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power	4		RC	HS	70	302

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
BB	Arcam FMJ C31	1,200	Professionally presented, beautifully built and exceptionally revealing, this preamp achieves much by doing little			5	opt		273	
BB	Croft Precession I/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer			6			25	290
BB	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	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design			6	opt		50	287
BB	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with a strong, engaging sound and just a little veiling			5			136	256
BB	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value			5			70	285
BB	Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1	1,198	Simply featured, but sounds appealingly realistic and solid. Highly capable in all areas design			2			50	303
ABOVE £2,000										
BB	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around			5	opt			277

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL		POWER OUTPUT (W)
EC	Bryston BP26 DA/2B SST	5,550	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and delivers serious grunt	●	●	6	opt	●	100	278
EC	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269
EC	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too	●	●	6	opt	●	400	293
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturality and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz	●	●	2		●		266
EC	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8	opt	●	80	276
EC	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	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●	●			●	180	253
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound	●	●	5	opt	●		265
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●			●	200	247
EC	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt	●	125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●			●	700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4		●		238
EC	Marantz SC11S1/SM-11S1	5,000	Preamp and power amp duo delivers high resolution and is consistent with different loudspeaker loads	●	●	6		●	220	304
EC	Naim NAP 500	11,875	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●			●	140	208
EC	Naim NAC 552	12,100	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6		●		233
EC	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 ProLogic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are



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

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

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

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

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

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

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

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

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

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

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

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

TOP BUYS



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



Arcam
DiVA AVR350 £1,500
Arcam's latest receiver offers a good helping of processing and connection options, with exceptionally musical sound.



Denon
AVC-A11XVA £2,500
A splendid 7.1-channel amp that packs in the latest digital links and processing formats without sacrificing sound quality.



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

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	PRICE	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS								
	Arcam DiVA AVR350	1,500	Sets the standard for music and movie performance at the price, although features count low and HDMI limited	●	7	●	100	284
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640R	600	Simple and elegant receiver. Attributes that reflect in good sound quality without the distracting toys you'll find elsewhere	●	7	●	100	292
EC	Denon AVC-A11XV	2,500	Sensible, real world derivative of AVC-A1XV, but still immensely flexible, and well endowed with digital i/o		11	●	140	273
EC	Denon AVC-A1XV	4,000	Inelegant, but powerful and effective tool with excellent auto set-up and capable of driving two 5.1 systems simultaneously		●	●	170	266
EC	Lexicon RV-8	5,000	Classy multi-zone receiver lacks high tech digital attributes (HDMI etc) but majors on very effective audio engineering	●	10	●	140	267
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmicky	●	3	●	160	255
EC	Pathos Cinema-X	4,750	No processing, just sexy Italian style, a sextet of valves and the chance of 450 watts in stereo! Cultured sound, too		5	●	110	270
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai	3,000	State of the art one-box amplifier with enhanced sound quality, auto set-up and other enhancements		10	●	150	260
	Sony STR-DB798	250	Cheap but effective, and passably good with pure audio sources, but control system messy		7	●	100	273
	Sony STR-DB795	300	A superb value little amplifier, well appointed technically and successfully tuned for UK ears		7	●	100	260
	Yamaha DSP-AX759SE	500	More a stereo amp with basic multichannel thrown in, but a great performer with music at this price	●	6	●	100	287
MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
	Arcam A90+7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got superb purist 5.1		8	●	90	250
	Arcam AVP700/P1000	3,000	Cutting-edge processor/tuner with HDMI sounds great, but the matching Class H power amp lacks finesse to match its power	●	8	●	135	275
EC	Arcam FMJ AV8/P7	5,750	High-quality preamp/processor (£3,150) and seven-channel power amp (£2,600). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	●	180	235
EC	Classé SSP-600/CA-5200	11,900	Subtle, exacting sound, tremendous flexibility and high power audiophile standard amplifier - lacks hi-tech digital interfaces		11	●	200	278
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	Linn Exotik	1,750	Is hi-fi ready to make the jump to multichannel music? Linn think so with this musical preamplifier		4			260
EC	Linn Exotik + DA	3,245	Good analogue preamplifier with multichannel in/out up to 7.1 and a home cinema processor of quality combine to make a tempting package		8	●		291
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Naim AV2/NAP175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	7,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
	Primare SP31 7/A30 5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238

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



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

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

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

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Dino Phono Amplifier



STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



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

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

Positioning

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

Going multichannel

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



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Tannoy
Mercury F4 £350

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



DALI
Ikon 6 £899

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



B&W
805S £1,600

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



Mordaunt-Short
Performance 6 £3,500

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

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

HI-FI CHOICE
BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SPEAK. NUMBER
	UP TO £1,000									
	Acoustic Energy Linear 1	250	Not at its best with classical but a well integrated, involving, timed aligned speaker nevertheless	19,36,26		A+	50			277
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	370	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24		A	24			294
	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	750	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass	20,103,39		A	22			292
	Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	845	Sharply priced classic replica has a beautifully balanced midband, wide dynamic range and little boxiness	18,29,5,25,5		A-	45			283
	ALR Jordan Entry L	500	Not the most pretty speaker but a sonic triumph, with a beautifully judged balance and impressive transparency	20,86,29		A	23			279
	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
	Aurousal A1	450	Single-driver system is coloured but wonderfully coherent and very effective at communicating emotions	20,5,36,27		A	40			299
	AVI Neutron IV	499	A great example of what can be done with a genuinely small speaker, but the warts-and-all balance won't suit all	15,27,21		A-	65			260
	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	30,33,23		A	23			226
	B&W CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28		A-	40			279
	B&W 683	899	A fine all-round performer with high-class drivers at a very realistic price	20,99,34		P	20			304
	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29		A	35			253
	DALI Ikon 6	899	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and almost obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33		A	37			271
	DALI Ikon 7	999	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior coherence, delicacy and transparency	20,114,34		A+	22			275
	DALI Monitor 1	1,000	Beautiful miniature with advanced drivers sounds marvellously coherent with fine vocal expression	16,32,24		A	40			296
	Dynaudio DM 2/10	775	Unfashionably bulky standmount has fine dynamics, grip, bass and headroom and is delicate and well mannered	27,5,45,35		A	22			299
	Epos ELS 303	399	Midband is impressively smooth, even and coherent, but the sound lacks some dynamic grip and top end detail	18,85,20		A-	28			273
	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21		A-	40			269
	Epos M12.2	449	A true classic stand-mount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25		A-	40			265
	Epos M22	949	Very classy floorstander has a tricky bass and an edgy top, but a very smooth and even midband	20,88,25		A-	25			275
	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,000	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics, and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37,5		A+	20			288
	Heco Celan 300	595	Does tone colour, dynamics and detail with aplomb and communicates superbly in its +20dB mode. Sensitive, too	23,36,33		A+	40			301
	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch. Could be more transparent	22,99,37		A	25			275
	KEF iQ3	280	Snapely, vinyl-covered stand mount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33		A+	40			284
	KEF iQ9	800	Snapely and solid floorstander has wide bandwidth and dynamic range with superior neutrality and sensitivity	22,94,33		A	25			273
	Mission elan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacey, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34		A+	48			298
	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband line-clarity is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25		A+	28			271
	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25		A-	30			294
	Monitor Audio BR5	400	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold sounding, good value and an easy electrical load	17,85,25		A-	36			293
	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. Quality stereo design which take's up little room and is easy to drive	20,36,27		A-	40			284
	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	800	Bold, dynamic sound marks it out from the crowd, and it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27		A	33			276
	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906i	350	The generous, well balanced sound shows good enclosure control, could do with more grip and better spikes!	16,5,85,29,5		A	40			281

SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

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- WHF? S&V magazine

Usual Price £269.95

AMPLIFIER

Marantz PM6002

"The PM6002 leans towards excitement and intimacy... clearly excellent."
- WHF? S&V magazine

Usual Price £269.95

FLOORSTANDERS

Mordaunt-Short 914i (Pair)

"The versatile 914is have no problem adapting to anything thrown their way... Crisp and exciting"
- WHF? S&V magazine

Usual Price £299.95

SYSTEM USUALLY £839.85

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"Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative." - Hi-Fi Choice magazine

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Cambridge Audio Azur 740A

"Excellent treble, very good imaging and a real sense of musical involvement are all well above the class average." - Hi-Fi Choice magazine

Usual Price £499.95

FLOORSTANDERS

KEF IQ7 (Pair)

KEF speakers are world renowned for their quality and innovation and, with speakers like the IQ7, it's easy to see why

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In honour of April being National Poetry month...

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Of biggest brands, good advice and value that's the best,
Has never stopped and so this month like always as before
Here's a taster of the stunning deals that reside on our shop floor
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Come in-store and ask our staff who'll always help you out
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MS SPEAKERS

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AVANT 902i BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS FOR ONLY £119.95
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HI-FI CHOICE Magazine

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MODEL: RPM1 GENIE

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MODEL: BDP-S300

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MS SPEAKERS

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Many of Performance's most significant features have now trickled down to the company's new range - Mezzo. All this means that true hi-fi bliss is available to a wider audience, most notably you and all at a phenomenally affordable price.
Comprising a full loudspeaker series and a blend of scintillating sound and truly graceful aesthetics, Mezzo affords you the opportunity to experience music and movies as those involved intended, and what can be better than that?

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KEF FLOORSTANDERS

MODEL: iQ5

"The KEFs are among the tidiest floorstanding designs we've seen... The standard of build and finish is well up to KEF levels and the Uni-Q tweeter arrangement makes for intriguing looks... these perform in spades."
- WHF? S&V magazine.
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ONKYO AV RECEIVER

MODEL: TXSR605

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AZUR 640A v.2 AMPLIFIER FOR ONLY £299.95
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Rather than just taking our word for how great the Azur range of electronics is, take the words of some experienced, independent experts. You'll find, just as they did, that the new line-up is the best we have ever stocked.
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"POWERFUL, LIVELY AND MUSICAL, TOO."

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"A BIG, BOLD AND ENTERTAINING SOUND; GOOD LEVEL OF CLARITY... PLENTY TO WORRY THE CLASS-LEADERS"

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Our favourite **STEREO SPEAKERS**

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD)	FLOORSTANDER	BASE OR CHOC	BASS FROM HQ	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ESSE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,97,5,30		A+	28			284
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26		A-	30			292
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy Mercury F4	350	Floorstander has an engrossing sound with good dynamics and a warm, restrained output	20,5,97,29		A+	24			294
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Triangle Comete ES	500	Bulky standmount lacks style but delivers engrossing musical coherence and vivid dynamics	20,42,34		A	40			265
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wharfedale Opus2-M1	1,000	Elegant mid to compact three way, a new direction in recent years for Wharfedale	23,51,36		A-	42			302
ABOVE £1,000										
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Amphion Prio 520	1,600	Gorgeous styling and a lively sound with good voice band integrity and a sweet top end	16,104,22		A	40			302
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC SCM16A	2,203	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Good value, including built-in amps, and hiss-free	27,45,33		ACT	42			300
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AVI ADM9	1,000	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic, and they give good iPod, too	20,30,26		ACT	60			301
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free FS1	3,000	An elegant active design for anyone after the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express	16,87,27		ACT	35			301
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut Phi5	2,550	Lovely and discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches	17,100,24		P	20			305
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KEF Reference Model 212	3,500	Very classy but costly three-way stand-mount with much improved Uni-Q; could be more transparent	25,42,41		A	30			298
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kudos Cardea C1	1,450	A very pretty compact standmount with a delightfully subtle and delicate sound quality	20,35,27		A	40			304
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MartinLogan Source	1,599	Careful install needed, but capable of remarkable transparency at an extremely competitive price	24,120,37		A	42			303
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monopulse 42A	1,495	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics, and superb voice coherence, but untidy treble	26,110,25		A	25			302
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE (WxHxD)	FLOORSTANDER	BASE OR CHOC	BASS FROM HQ	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ESSE NUMBER
20,40,30		A	28			275
15,27,23		A+	40			267
15,21,5,19,5		A	48			286
19,5,97,5,30		A+	28			284
19,34,26		A-	30			292
15,32,24		A	50			269
25,108,36		A	22			296
20,33,5,27		A-	50			289
20,5,97,29		A+	24			294
17,35,5,23		A	25			291
20,108,34		A	20			288
18,37,30		A-	40			269
20,42,34		A	40			265
23,51,36		A-	42			302

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Hi-Fi Choice, The Hi-Fi Accessories Handbook, July 2006



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

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
EC	Monitor Audio PL300	5,000	Completely new level of sophistication from a brand best known for mainstream, cost effective designs	41,111,47	●	A-	28	●	301
EC	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6	3,500	Revolutionary enclosure design and aspirated tweeter make for a fast hi-res ride	24,121,37	●	A-	35	●	264
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Neat Momentum 3i	1,745	Sounds a lot bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range	22,38,27	●	A-	23	●	302
EC	Opera Seconda	1,295	Classy cabinetwork plus beautifully judged neutrality with crisp, clean and deep bass	24,102.5,31.5	●	A-	20	●	297
EC	PMC Wafer 2	1,650	Clever 'hang-on-wall' speaker has minimal sonic compromises. Smooth midband delivers impressive stereo imaging	33.5,57.5,10	●	A+	45	●	285
EC	PMC FB1+	1,695	Nicely proportioned floorstander has a sweet top and a beautifully natural, open and restrained midband	20,100,30	●	A	20	●	260
EC	PMC EB1	5,950	The best argument for large speakers that we've heard in a long time	29,120,46.5	●	A-	19	●	292
EC	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	●	A+	20	●	254
EC	Quad ESL 2805	4,500	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38.5	●	A-	45	●	294
EC	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
EC	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	25	●	271
EC	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	20	●	256
EC	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	●	A-	48	●	274
EC	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
EC	Ruark Talisman II	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●	259
EC	Sonus Faber Cremona Audit.	2,690	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass... this is 'The Little Speaker That Could' (stands £575 extra)	20,35,37	●	A	50	●	305
EC	Sonus Faber Grand Piano D.	2,498	The Grand Piano Domus has a fabulous physical appearance and delivers a clean, refined sound	21,106,31	●	A-	32	●	283
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	●	A-	25	●	240
EC	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
EC	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	●	A	35	●	277
EC	Triangle Genese Quartet	1,895	Great material value and a solid all round sonic performance with great loudness potential	23,117,37	●	A	25	●	302
EC	Triangle Celiux Esw	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	●	A	22	●	277
EC	Triangle Magellan Concerto	14,750	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it's easier to live with and remains highly entertaining	60,160,45	●	A-	32	●	290
EC	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build	35,127,65	●	A	20	●	270
EC	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	●	A-	40	●	261
EC	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,36	●	A	20	●	252
EC	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	●	A	28	●	254
EC	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
EC	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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
EC	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
EC	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
EC	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
EC	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
EC	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
EC	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
EC	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
EC	MartinLogan Dynamo	449	Refined, compact sub brings established MartinLogan virtues to a new price and size point	29,35,32	200	25	301
EC	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
EC	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pie 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	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material						270	230
EC	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only						270	244
	Audio Technica ATH-W1000	400	Superbly comfortable and very revealing. Long listening sessions are a pleasure with new musical insights						250	304
	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
	Beyerdynamic DT880	200	Informative, neutral and surprisingly close to good loudspeakers. Good for occasional and long-term listening alike						205	300
	Grado SR225	180	Tonally shows the way to Grado's amazing GS1000 flagship, but detail and soundstage are not truly class-leading						200	300
EC	Grado SR325i	310	Highly sophisticated and detailed sound with great extension: check for comfort						200	270
EC	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for						250	288
	Sennheiser HD485	65	A great all-round headphone for occasional or even heavy use, refined in sound and comfortable, too						220	296
	Sennheiser HD595	150	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable						270	266
EC	Sennheiser HD650	300	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience						260	252
	Sennheiser PXC450	299	Noise-cancelling model: as good as it gets for making the most of listening in planes, trains and automobiles						240	302
	Shure SE420	240	Expensive and no replacement for top conventional 'phones, but streets ahead of most in-ears with real refinement						15	295
	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff						20	285
	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity						280	268
EC	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way						205	295

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing cables is not quite as straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances electrical varieties sound better than optical, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

		SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER			
BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STRANDED	SOLID CORE		COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Atlas Oquestor	70	Very open and informative at high and mid frequencies, with slightly dry bass. Imaging particularly fine						295
	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A lively and detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm. Slight added upper-bass warmth does little to detract						297
	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit						293
	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass and excellently neutral and detailed midrange, treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction						299
EC	Black Rhodium Concert	255	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise						270
	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price, especially adept in the treble with no trace of dryness						296
	Clearer Audio Copper-Line Alpha	50	Sounding like something a good deal dearer, this cable offers near high-end detail and seems highly compatible too						295
	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!						279
EC	CrystalCable Piccolo	260	Thin cable, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid core type generically – notably resolution, focus and articulation						294
	Ixos Ixotica IX1	200	Notable for its relaxing sound, this cable still presents plenty of analytical detail						283
	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too						281
BB	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere						284
	Nordost WyreWizard Dream	95	Slight lack of precision in extreme treble, otherwise detailed and neutral with authoritative bass						303
	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble						281
	Profigoid PGA3000	60	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good						299
EC	Supra Sword-ISL	379	Unusual inductance-free design, beautifully built, with bold, finely detailed and outgoing sound quality and excellent discipline						292
	Townshend Isolda DCT100	99	Silky-smooth treble, with remarkably good detail too, midrange and bass also very fine						303
EC	Van den Hul MC Silver IT MkIII	2,250	Incredibly resolute and low distortion cable that makes the alternatives sound crude, pity about the price						289
	Wireworld Luna 5	30	Authoritative bass and clear treble outperform many cables at twice the price						273
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
	Atlas Compass	50	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble, make this fine value					E	289
EC	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	125	Very satisfying performance with finely-etched detail and sweet treble					E	278
	Supra AnCo	80	This cable can give a useful fillip to a good transport/DAC combination, even in a high-end context					E	304
EC	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths, good value and near-high-end performance					E	279
SPEAKER CABLES (PRICE PER METRE)									
BB	Atlas Hyper 1.5	10	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but its performance at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price						299
	Atlas Ascent 2.0	55	A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board						294
	Chord Epic Twin	40	Good all-rounder, which generally sounds relaxed and musical, and a full bass that stops the right side of sounding blowsy						287
EC	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,480	Tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some of the qualities of a solid core type generically – notably resolution, focus and articulation						302
	Kimber BPR	12	A cable that really enjoys the music, also admirable for the levels of analytical detail it allows through. Excellent value						299
	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble						280
EC	Nordost Hemdail	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low colouration, hi-res and suitable for exacting systems						278
	QED Silver Anniversary XT	5.50	Full bass and nicely detailed treble combine with good imaging – a budget bargain						276
	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well-controlled sounding cable that's cost-effective for mid-priced systems						234
EC	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical						287
EC	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added, great sound all-round						241
BB	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times						291
	Wireworld Luna 16/4	5	Budget bwire cable offering tuneful and extended bass, good treble, and midrange with just a little lack of detail						292

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		4	Glass	217
 	Audiophile Base Std Suppt	900	Not cheap and quite bulky, but it's all worth it as sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35		3	MDF	302
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail but is nicely lively	75	56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless	65	60,42		4	Glass	293
 	Custom Design Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57, 41		5	Glass	263
 	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £300)	74	48,40		4	Metal	247
	Custom Design Milan	449	Respect is due to any stand that looks this good with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57	48,39		4	Glass	302
 	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	420	Adds its own character to the benefit of rock most particularly, but slightly to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37		5	Glass	302
	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
 	RA Torlyte Platform	130	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound	8	48,36		1	Torlyte	302
 	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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise	50	20,17			1	293
 	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack coloration and ringing makes suits it to high resolution systems, at a tempting price	56	16.5,18			1	281
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More a range than a model, capable of fine results especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16.5			2	299
 	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16.3			4	283
 	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15			4	232
 	Partington Dreadnought BS	249	The Dreadnought Broadside is a superb stand for high-class standmount speakers – and it looks great too!	61	17,15			5	261
 	Partington Heavi II	399	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very taut, precise bass and detailed upper frequencies	53	31,22			6	287
 	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3	280

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of. **SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY** HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates. **FILLABLE** The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.

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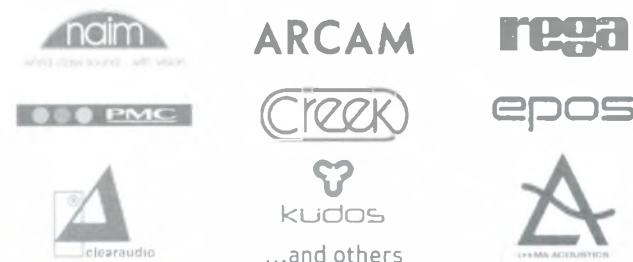
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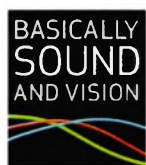


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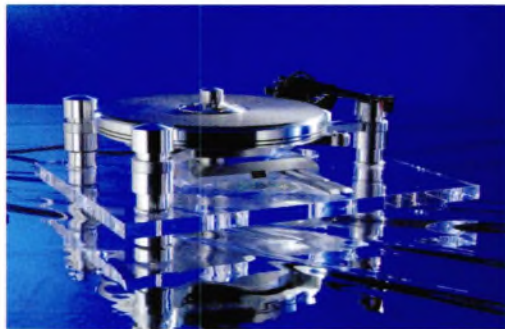


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2nd-hand shootout

How to get big bass muscle without the steroid-enhanced prices

Not all of us are fortunate to have the space, or the money, to spend on separate hi-fi and home cinema systems. Therefore, there comes a time when a subwoofer is contemplated, even in hi-fi. Here are four second-hand subs that bring a combination of bottom-end grunt with a sense of timing – so as not to ruin the rhythm and pace of your existing speakers.

Kicking things off is the Paradigm Servo 15. This Canadian subwoofer was popular around the early 2000s and manages to combine the ideal balance of power with finesse. With a 380mm bass driver it certainly doesn't lack bass depth. Considering the woofer's size, the sub actually integrates well with most speaker systems. This is further helped by the separate X-30 control box. With controls for filtering and phase, this little box helps get the best from a Servo 15. In fact, don't consider buying a Servo 15 without one. Although immensely popular, sadly the Paradigm range is no longer distributed within the UK. This shouldn't cause too much concern, as the Servo 15 is exceptionally reliable and, should the worst happen, then parts are still available direct from the factory in Canada – just don't expect the postage to be cheap on a 15" (380mm) woofer! Selling for around £800 new, this under-rated sub can now be had for as little as £200 and represents superb value for money.

One of the downsides with the Paradigm is that in order to extract the best from it, you'll need to have a fairly large room. This isn't the case with our next choice, the MartinLogan Grotto. Launched in 2003, this compact, infinite baffle design is designed to keep pace with electrostatic speakers. The servo controlled, 250mm aluminium cone still gives a surprisingly powerful bass, although you won't find it quite as window rattling as the

others. As with all the subwoofers here, any fault will tend to emanate from an over-enthusiastic owner, rather than an inherent reliability issue. The recent launch of an 'i' version,



Above: MartinLogan Grotto

with improved woofer and amplifier modules, has meant that prices for the original model have softened a little. Although costing £1,000 new, around half that is now enough to secure one of the most tuneful subs available.

Our third contender comes from a less well-known stable but, as is sometimes the case, shouldn't be dismissed for this reason. Audio Physic is a German company with a wide range of speakers that are distributed by Aanvil Audio in the UK. Launched around five years ago, the Luna 2 subwoofer has already acquired something of a cult following. Rather like the Grotto, the Luna 2's appeal lies in the manner in which it matches visual discretion with impressive sonic presence. Unusually, the Audio Physic positions a 250mm aluminium active cone back-to-back with a 300mm passive radiator. Despite being mounted on

“There's also the real possibility of structural damage to your home before the sub gives in.”

the sides of the sub, the total cabinet width is just 26cm – making the Luna 2 easy to place in small rooms. In typical German fashion, the Luna 2 is beautifully built and has proved to be reliable. As a testament to the latter, Aanvil Audio told us that they've never yet had to replace a bass unit. Although between £1,600 and £1,900 new (depending upon finish), £700-£900 might be all that's needed for an excellent example, which is just a couple of years old. If you've yet to find a sub that will convincingly integrate with your main speakers, then the Luna 2 could just be the sub that changes that.

No subwoofer comparison would be complete without a representation from REL and, by all accounts, their Studio model is seen by many as one of the finest subwoofers in existence. There have been three versions of the Studio with the best second-hand value most definitely represented by the Series II version. This offered a great improvement over

Below: The 'slightly superior' REL Studio Series III



the original Studio, yet is significantly cheaper than the only slightly superior Series III. Put simply, the Studio II is all about presence – both physical and sonic. Just take a look at the figures: weight 93kg, width 68cm and let's not forget the twin 250mm bass

cones powered by a 500watt MOSFET amplifier. Needless to say, the Studio II needs a large room and there's also the real possibility of structural damage to your home before the sub gives in – cracked plaster board joints and loose floorboards are not unknown!

Of all the subs here, the Studio II is the one that truly requires a home demonstration. For this reason, it's probably worth paying a little more to buy one retail rather than privately. That way you'll probably get a guarantee that the twin woofers (over £100 each to replace) will work and that if it's not right for the room a refund or exchange will be given. Privately, a Studio II could be bought for as little as £1,000 now, but for peace of mind the £1,400 to £1,500 asked by most retailers is worth the extra. Bearing in mind that this sub was £3,500 new, even the top second-hand price is something of a bargain. **HFC**

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EAR 534 50W EL34 / EAR 864	£2750	£4800

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ACCUPHASE T108 tuner, one of the best around, excellent condition, boxed 01332 843758 (Derbys).

ARCAM AVR 300 AV Receiver, silver, brand new, boxed, unopened, £750 no offers. Val 01908 661094 (Milton Keynes).

ARCAM DV79 DVD player, HDMI interface, black, mint, boxed, £495. Ixos 105 digital interconnect, custom made, 6m, WBT locking RCA plugs, £45 01772 745553 (Lancs)

ATACAMA R724 speaker stands, £80. High-quality Nordost Blue Heaven interconnect, excellent, £65. Andrew 01484 427426 (W Yorks)

AUDIOLAB 8000A integrated amplifier, good working order, boxed, £100. Ted, 020 8449 9648 (N London).

AUDIOLAB 8000S amp, £250. Rotel RQ970BX phono,

BORDER PATROL 300B SE power amplifier, £1,700. Border Patrol Control Unit line stage pre-amplifier, £1,400. Both items boxed and in superb condition. 0141 6411371 (Glasgow).

CYRUS DVD8-Q plus PSX-R Quartz Silver Cyrus DVD8 Q with silver PSX-R. Upgraded QDAC fitted. Immaculate condition and will include spare DAC. £600 07734 325260 (Glasgow).

DENON PMA-700AE integrated amp, £120. Denon DCD-700AE CD player, £120, both boxed, manuals (mint). Castle Richmond 3i standmount speakers, (£320) £150. Boxed, oak, excellent condition, will post. 01772 468116 (Lancs).

DALI IKON 6 loudspeakers, new and unused, £375. 01634 233137 after 7pm (Kent).

EPOS M12.2 black, mint condition £275ono. Arcam CD192 CD player, £475 ono,

EXPOSURE XVII preamp and XVIII mono amps, recently overhauled and updated by Exposure, £600. Bryston BP20 preamp with MM/MC phono, £600. All boxed and in very good condition. 0151 334 1964 (Merseyside).

JEFF ROWLAND CONCERTO & 501s. Lovely, compact pre-power 500-watt combo – superb sounding with tremendous build. Compact and beautiful, in excellent condition, £5,700 ono. j_rooprah2001@yahoo.co.uk (Middx)

KEF IQ9 floorstanders, maple. boxed, unused, still under warranty, (£800) £480. 020 8529 6764 or 07920 124288 (London)

KEF Q35 speakers, UniQ technology and performance at a bargain price. Wonderful imagery, depth and coherence. Totally reliable. Good condition.

WANTED

CAN ANYONE HELP? Wanted Small handheld CB transceiver with flexible aerial 07833 751800 (Lancs)

CELESTION SL6, 600 or 100 loudspeakers, good condition, unmarked preferred, good price paid, private buyer, will collect 01946 862815 (Cumbria)

GRAHAM 2.2 ceramic armwand wanted, in good condition. Contact irvose@yahoo.com.

MERIDIAN 502 or similar preamp wanted. Must have remote control. Also want Quad 405. 01277 219639 (Essex).

PIONEER A300R precision amplifier. 1970's Sugden A21a. Onyx OA21, Naim Nait amp. Inca Tech Claymore Sonneteer Champion amp 07810 103908 (West Yorkshire).

WANTED tonearm lead with straight DIN plug. Cardas, Transparent, Nordost or similar Quality headphones; AKG, Beyer, Grado etc. 07973 220663 (Leics)

WANTED top-quality separates and complete systems – Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, etc. Fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash. Please call John on: 0781 5892458



Above: Exposure 2010S

£40. Soundstyle hi-fi separates stand, £100. All in very good condition, buyer to collect. 01603 483274 (Norfolk)

AUDIO PHYSIC TEMPO speakers, mint condition, boxed, cherry finish, (£2,195) £1,300. 01491 614325 (Oxon).

AUROUSAL A1 loudspeakers, piano black, as new condition, boxed. Bargain at £275. 01903 774255 (Sussex).

DT91 tuner, £325ono, A90 amp, incl phono £575ono, P90 power amp, £350ono, all black, mint condition and boxed. Philip 020 8923 9757 (London).

EPOS M5 speakers in dark cherry, boxed as new, (£350) £225. Lee, 01384 412234 lee@lycos.co.uk. (West Midlands).

EXPOSURE 2010S integrated amp, five hours only, as new, £300. 01226 211234 (S Yorks)

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

Black ash finish floorstanders. £90. 01395 264868 (Devon)

KUDOS S50 loudspeaker stands, 24-inch-high single-column design with triangular base plate, black finish, rated a Best Buy, £40. 0161 432 3852 (Cheshire).

LINN GENKI CD player, grey case, excellent condition with Linn interconnects and original packaging, £550 ono.

0114 2507866 (Sheffield)

LINN KANS MK 1 £150. Rega EL8, £125. Marantz CD62SE, £75. Also, Cambridge CD4SE CD player wanted. 07810 103908 (E. Yorks)

LOWTHER PM 6 pair of drive units. Buyer arranges collection or delivery. 0191 214 0473 (Newcastle upon Tyne).

MANA SOUND BASES for Naim SBLs or similar size, £100. Musicworks six-way mains megablock + 3 IEC equipment leads, 1.5m each, £200. All boxed. 01722 334694 (Wilts)

MARANTZ CD17 black, £450. Musical Fidelity amp with separate power supply, £350. Nordost Solar Wind interconnect, £45. Owned from new, excellent. 07787 166713 (London)

MARANTZ DV6001 upscaling DVD player 1080p, boxed, unopened, cost £350, selling for £250. 01323 461432 (East Sussex)

MARANTZ SIGNATURE CD player CD17, PM17 amp, ST17 tuner, Tannoy R3 speakers, five-tier Sound Organisation stand, van de Hul interconnects, Quad Profile speaker wire,

£1,000. evening only 07872 334814 (W. Yorkshire).

MERIDIAN 507 CD player in mint condition, MSR remote, original packaging. £600 delivered to anywhere in Europe or £570 local pick-up near Paris. jonathan.kenyon@free.fr or Tel: +33 607 270 871 (France).

MICHELL QC power supply (for Gyrodec or Orbe with AC motor). £100. Robert 07900 320318 (London/Kent).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A308CR pre and power, excellent condition, boxed, manuals etc. Fantastic sound. £3,900 new, sell for £1,950ono including interconnects. Andy 0115 912 6424 (Notts)

NAIM NAP 250 power amplifier, olive case in original packaging, excellent condition with Russ Andrews Power Kord but no interconnects, £750 ono. 0114 2507866 (Sheffield).

OPERA PLATEA floorstanders, SEAS drivers, marble plates, one year old, like new, original boxes. (£1,100) £750. Contact (+40) 743 943 994, atlas_and_axis@yahoo.com (Romania).

PASS LABS X-350 stereo amplifier £2,950. Apogee Duetta Signature speakers £1,950. Both vgc 01926 653421 (West Midlands)

PURE SOUND A30 valve amplifier, as new, boxed (£1,195) £760. Weight 20kg, so buyer collects. 01491 614325 (Oxon).

PRIMARE 30.1 amplifier, excellent cond. boxed with instructions, £450. KEF 104/2 Reference Loudspeakers, v.g.c.,

with Kube and instructions, £100. (01255) 675115. (Essex)

QUAD ESL 63 electrostatic loudspeakers for sale, tub radiators gone in each, offers around £200 for pair, buyer collects. 01634 631322 (Devon).

QUAD 405-2 amplifier, upgrade by Lucid Designs, mint, £350. PMC TB-2 speakers with stands, as new, boxed, £450. AVC amp, KT88s, as new, £395. 01487 814015 (Cambs).

QUAD CDP CD player, 15 months old, excellent condition, demo if required £525 07779 615774 (Derby).

REVOX G36 valve quarter track 10.5in cap tape recorder. Replacement capstan assembly, hand book etc. fine example of machine £300. Leak valve Troughline 3 FM stereo tuner £50. 01782 256087 or mobile 07791 048621 (Stoke-on-Trent).

ROTEL RA-05 amplifier, Rotel RCD-06 CD player, (£700) £400. Both items 14 months old, boxed and mint. Wharfedale Diamond 9.1 speakers, rosewood, one month old, boxed as new with receipt (£150) £90. Kimber Timbre interconnect 0.5m boxed as new (£76) £45, QED XT speaker cable 2m pair with aircloc plugs, (£62) £40, brand new and mint with receipt. lee-t@lycos.co.uk 01384 412234 (W. Mids)

SOMETHING SOLID speaker stands. Fully welded construction, black, 63cm height, mass filled, spiked feet, photo available. Ring for other dimensions.

Quality stands. VGC, £80 01582 423791 (Beds)

SONY DAT RECORDER DTC-60ES, ES Range, £195. Musical Fidelity CDPre24, CD player/pre-amp/multi input DAC, (£2,000) £595. JVC HM-HDS4EK, 80Gb HDD/S-VHS video recorder, New and unused (£700) £95. 01424 442802 (Sussex).

SONY SCD-55SES Super Audio CD player, excellent condition, boxed, £250 ono. Bryan 07866 3670060 or 01302 327513 (Doncaster).

SONY SCD-XA3000 ES, Super Audio CD player, black, excellent condition, 2005, £350, any trial 01302 538027 (Doncaster)

SOFTER OUTPUT transformers 9593, 9066t, 9508, 9521 (mains). Two of each and one mains. High-spec. Excellent bass extension. Suitable for parallel push-pull. Simon 07895 197571. saselec2000@yahoo.co.uk (Cambridge).

SPENDOR CLASSIC Series SP2/3E speakers, rosewood, (£2,000) £650 ono. Suitable Acoustic Energy mass-loaded stands available, (£600) £200. QED Genesis Silver Spiral speaker cable 5m+7m lengths (£400) £150, 023 8073 8935 (Hants)

TEAC A450 cassette deck. Very rare, never used, boxed. Battleship build quality. Offers over £250. 0161 865 9607 (Manchester)

THETA INTREPID five-channel amp, rarely available, £3,000. Martin 0207 845 1193 (SW London)

THORENS 160BC MK II turntable, Hadcock 228 unipivot super arm, Ortofon M20S cartridge. Boxed, one owner, £225. Marantz CD60SE, £70, Rotel RCD-965BX discrete CD player, £85. All excellent condition. 01722 334694 (Wilts)

TRICHORD DINO phono stage and Dino+ power supply, both black, like new with instructions, no box. £250 the pair. Mark, 07976 406313 (London).

YAMAHA RXV630 RDS A/V amp, excellent, boxed, £100. 01323 461432 (East Sussex).

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MAY 2008 ISSUE 306

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 Prices: UK £5.95 per issue, Europe €6.95 per issue, rest of the world £7.95 per issue

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT, Tel: 020 7429 4000

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR) @ www.futureplc.com

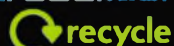
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