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The new 'mini SUPERNAIT' amp



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Jamo R 907 High-end speaker gets out of its box



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Size is not important. Make beautiful music.....



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# WELCOME...

HI-FI CHOICE MARCH 2009 ISSUE 317

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It's that time of the year when *Hi-Fi Choice* gets ready for the UK's finest hi-fi show – Bristol Sound & Vision. This year's show, we feel, is more significant than it's ever been, as it's an opportunity to indulge in and celebrate the wonderful world of audio at a time when there's little cause for either indulgence or celebration!

The chance to hear so many brands under one roof, even with the well-known compromise of hotel-room set-ups, is a great thing, and we sincerely hope that you can find the time to take the trip west.

Until then, there's plenty of great kit in the issue to whet your appetite, including Unison Research's Unico Primo amplifier, which is a top performer at a great price – perfect for a cash-strapped 2009.

*Dan*  
Dan George Editor

## WHY WE ARE NO.1 FOR HI-FI...

- Since 1975, *Hi-Fi Choice* has delivered the world's most thorough, most reliable no-nonsense guide to buying high-performance hi-fi.
- Every issue contains a potent mix of the latest hi-fi news, views, music, reviews and in-depth tests, brought to you by a prestigious team of expert writers who are the best audio journalists in the UK.
- Our test regime is the most rigorous in the business and we are the only hi-fi magazine to offer 'blind' listening sessions, along with user-friendly laboratory tests in our six-way *Ultimate Group Test*.
- That's why *Hi-Fi Choice* is...

The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home



## THE MOST RESPECTED NAMES IN HI-FI JOURNALISM...



### PAUL MESSENGER

A former *Hi-Fi Choice* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for more than 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected scribes, and he is undoubtedly 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 and 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 *Hi-Fi Choice*.



### 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* and also writes exclusively for *Hi-Fi Choice*.



### ALVIN GOLD

Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 25 years. In that time he has contributed his encyclopedic knowledge to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides). He is widely regarded as one of Britain's finest hi-fi reviewers.



### ALAN SIRCOM

Alan began his journalistic career in the early 1990s. He brings a deep bath of hi-fi knowledge to *Hi-Fi Choice* in his role as Operations Editor and is always on hand to help with your questions and hi-fi-related queries in our *Ask Alan* feature.



### JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice* and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now a freelance hi-fi journalist with a system that'll blow your socks off, he remains a key player in keeping *Hi-Fi Choice* great.



### DOMINIC TODD

A highly experienced journalist, Dominic's sharp ears and retail experience are a valuable mix for *Hi-Fi Choice*. Each month, Dom dispenses priceless second-hand buying advice that will save you time, money and a lot of legwork.

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.





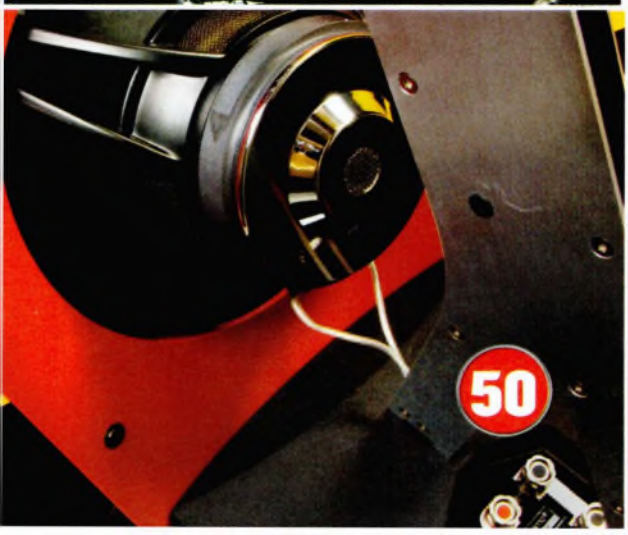
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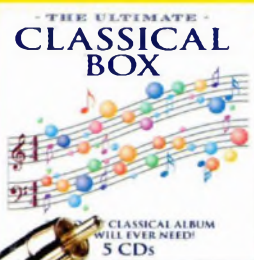


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# LEEMA Agena

## Reference Series



Agena is *the* reference RIAA phono stage for high-end turntable enthusiasts.

Extended-headroom MC and MM amplifiers, high-resolution analogue equalisation stages and precision filters combine to deliver a sublimely transparent listening experience.

Offering real-time control of resistive and capacitive loading, input gain and filters from the front panel, Agena offers unparalleled flexibility and precise matching for any cartridge.

Agena offers two freely assignable inputs, one option input (ultra-low output / low impedance transformer balanced input for example) plus multiple headshell / arm combinations for maximum flexibility.

Connectivity includes unbalanced RCA and balanced XLR outputs, USB port for archiving or restoration and RCA outputs for record monitoring.

Available in black or silver.

## Agena specifications

I/P resistance	: 20 ohms to 1k MC, 47k & 100k MM
I/P capacitance	: 100, 250, 430, 580, 1100, 1250, 1430, 1580 pF
I/P sensitivity	: 135uV-4mV option 50uV(1 ohm load)
RIAA error	: +/- 0.25dB 20Hz-100kHz
Dims in mm	: 440 x 110 x 320 (w)x(h)x(d)
Weight	: 10kg



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## PMC PB1i

*Fresh from redesigning the EB1i, PMC releases its new skyscraper*

PMC has been busy revising its existing range to 'i' status over the last year. However, the PB1i isn't simply a makeover of an older model, but an entirely new design. It's a tall, slim floorstander that combines the elegant visual appeal of the OB1i with the dynamic range of the EB1i.

The new speaker sports a 27mm Sonolex ferrofluid-cooled soft-dome tweeter, developed by PMC in partnership with driver expert SEAS and found throughout the revised 'i' series. This is joined by a 75mm soft-dome midrange, which is successfully used in the EB1i. Newly developed by PMC, a pair of doped and stiffened 170mm long-throw woofers with cast magnesium chassis bring up the bass. Coupled to these drivers is a newly developed variant of the company's four-section, effectively 3.5m-long Advanced Transmission Line, which reaches down to a claimed 24Hz (like all the other speakers in PMC's range, the PB1i extends the treble to 25kHz). This brings the PB1i very close to the performance of the EB1i, but in a slimmer, more domestically chummy cabinet.

PMC has designed the speaker to be an easy-to-drive load, despite being a three-way, four-driver design. It's said to have an undemanding impedance of six ohms and relatively high 87dB sensitivity. Partly this is due to the hand-built, 31-element, 24dB-per-octave Linkwitz-Riley crossover. This also bestows wide dispersion on the design, meaning less of a 'sweet spot', and that means more listeners get to experience good stereo performance.

Weighing in at an impressive 26kg and standing 1,084mm tall, the elegant PB1i comes with tri-wire/tri-amp terminals and a stabilising plinth, and comes finished in the standard quartet of PMC veneers: black ash, cherry, walnut and oak. PMC claims the PB1i "excels in medium-to-large rooms with modest or highly exotic source equipment", but we doubt many will choose to use a £5,500 speaker with a £150 amplifier, so realistically we think this is intended to be a perfect transducer for those with £10,000-plus worth of electronics.

If that's not enough, there's also a centre channel (the CB6i) and the TLE1 active subwoofer, designed to accompany the PB1i for multichannel or home cinema use. Given there's no rear speaker listed in the same line-up, it's expected that home cinema users will insist on another pair of PB1i towers in that role.

**Price** £5,500 per pair **Due now** ☎ 0870 444 1044

🌐 [www.pmc-speakers.com](http://www.pmc-speakers.com)





# LEEMA Pyxis & Altair

## Reference Series

Pyxis is the most advanced stereo pre-amplifier currently available.

Using a fully balanced topology, Pyxis offers a truly symmetrical signal path from input to output. Even the audiophile quality equalisation (tone control) circuitry remains in the balanced domain.



- Optional MM & MC phono-stage
- Tuner, Aux (MP3), SPDIF, USB and Tape inputs
- AV Direct input for AV system integration
- Each input adjustable for gain, bass and treble
- Separate record/monitor selection for all inputs
- Balance, Mono, Equalisation defeat and Phase invert
- Balanced/single-ended analogue outputs
- Tape, USB, SPDIF and Headphone outputs

When used with Leema power amplifiers such as Altair or Hydra, Pyxis may be set to provide a fixed high-level output, enabling volume control at the power amplifier using LIPS.

This provides maximum resolution, dynamics and enhanced low-level detail at all listening levels.

Offering the ultimate in no-limits audio amplification, Altair monoblocks are *the* reference for high-end stereo and multi-channel audiophile applications.

Presentation is highly-refined and delicate even though massive power is on hand to ensure dynamics stay true to the most demanding recordings.

As with all Leema amplifiers, Altair takes absolute control of the loudspeakers to achieve a level of realism and musicality previously unheard.

The design uses a fully balanced 'bridge' topology to give minimum distortion and maximum headroom. Each amplifier offers two sets of WBT™ Next Gen™ gold-over-copper binding posts for bi-wiring.

Altair is fully LIPS™ compliant using Leema's new LIPS2 system and may be controlled from Pyxis or home automation systems. For installers, remote trigger facilities are available.



## Altair specifications

Response	: 10Hz-100kHz $\pm 0.0/-3$ dB
Power 8 ohms	: 550 watts RMS
Power 4 ohms	: 1000 watts RMS
Power 2 ohms	: 1300 watts RMS (Short term)
Current 20mS	: $\pm 100$ Amps
THD 1kHz	: $< 0.005\%$ (200 watts 4 ohms)
Residual noise	: $-96$ dB ("A" weighted)
SNR	: 135dB
Damping factor	: $> 250$
Dims in mm	: 440 x 390 x 335 (w)x(h)x(d)
Weight	: 45kg each



To locate your nearest dealer  
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## NAD C165BEE AND C275BEE



*More future classics from NAD – this time a “budget reference” pre-power combo*

NAD's Classic Series has hitherto included CD players, tuners and integrated amplifiers – all the things a good budget range should feature. With the C165BEE preamp and C275BEE power amplifier, the company has utilised the skills learned through designing the Masters Series to create a pre/power combination with both performance and value to the fore.

The C165BEE preamp shares a good deal of DNA with the Masters Series M3 integrated amplifier. As such, it features a substantial steel chassis, six line-level inputs and a phono stage with more flexibility than is usual for the money. This MC/MM equaliser includes a three-position resistance-and-capacitance-loading device to match the cartridge to the phono stage precisely. The preamp also boasts an upgraded headphone amplifier, and custom installers will like the 12V trigger output, infrared inputs and outputs, a subwoofer output for 2.1-channel use and a second line-level output that can be varied between 0dB and -12dB.

This is joined by the C275BEE, a 2x150-watt power amp that can be driven as a bridged dual-mono amplifier to deliver a whopping great 400 watts. It features NAD's own PowerDrive circuit topology, which senses and adjusts to the loudspeaker's impedance-loading. This is said

to make the amplifier more powerful and dynamic-sounding than its peers, a claim given added weight by NAD's use of four pairs of 220-watt output transistors per channel, compared to the single pair per channel used by similarly priced rivals. NAD also claims this amplifier design has the lowest total harmonic and intermodulation distortion measurements (as low as 0.005 per cent) of any model in its class.

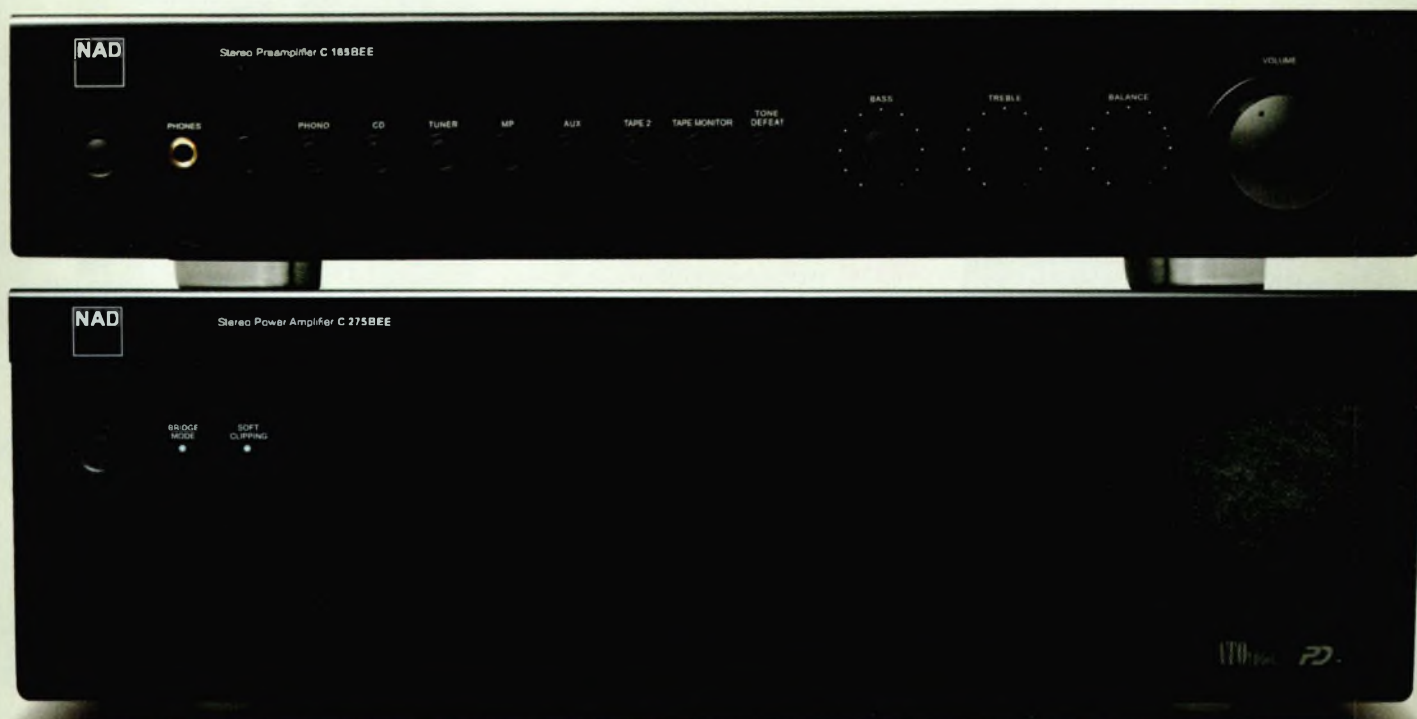
As ever with NAD, the C275BEE has been measured under 'real world' conditions, with both channels driven simultaneously, and IHF dynamic measurements are given. These tests rate the amplifier as delivering 250 watts into eight ohms, 410 watts into four ohms and an impressive 600 watts into a punishing two-ohm speaker load. In bridged mode, the amp delivers up to a whopping 1.2kW into four ohms. In short, the model is claimed to drive almost every speaker ever made.

Once again, custom installers will praise the NAD for its use of a 12V trigger on the rear panel, although some might suggest the omission of balanced connections is a compromise.

Finally, both the pre and power achieve plenty of green street cred by drawing less than one watt apiece when in standby mode.

**Price** £600 (C165BEE); £750 (C275BEE) **Due now**

☎ 01279 501111 @ [www.nadelectronics.com](http://www.nadelectronics.com)





# audiofile

SHOW REPORT



A quieter than usual Consumer Electronics Show in a subdued Las Vegas... if there can be such a thing. *Alan Sircom* spills the beans (but not his martini) for Hi-Fi Choice

The second week of the year is CES week. Technology companies, buyers, developers and tech journalists gather in Las Vegas, Nevada to witness the latest, flattest, fastest and smallest (or largest) gadgets and gizmos. The vast, trade-only convention centre plays home to the big names in consumer electronics such as Intel, LG, Panasonic, Samsung and Sony, while the 'nearby' Venetian towers showcase the best in Specialty Audio (CES-speak for hi-fi). There was also a morgue of a rival hi-fi expo – The Home Entertainment Show – across town.

As you might expect given current economic difficulties in many countries, the numbers of attendees, companies showing and new products were all significantly down compared to last year. But, despite such financial woes, there were a range of gorgeous new hi-fi products on show, many of which were pitched at the sort of stratospherically high prices that might make you think the credit crunch had never happened.



Although still well-attended, the numbers visiting the Las Vegas CES were down



2. Pro-Ject's Xtension flagship turntable with 12" carbon-fibre Pro-Ject tonearm

1 Until now, Crystal Cables was best known for its, er, cables. This year's CES changed all that thanks to the Arabesque loudspeaker. Made from thick, natural facet-cut glass while sporting a ribbon tweeter and a brace of mid and bass drivers, the speaker has a distinctive comma shape when viewed from the top and sounds smooth and elegant. The price? A cool \$45,000 per pair.

2 Pro-Ject's latest Xtension turntable boasts extremely advanced features, such as magnetic repulsion systems for the platter and even the suspension. Armed with a built-in Speed Box (capable of playing 33 and 45 rpm, or 78 rpm with a change of belt pulley) and a 12" carbon-fibre arm, this \$6,000 deck represents a new benchmark for the German turntable experts.

3 Simaudio's new Moon \$1,200 CD.5 CD player and i5 integrated amplifier represent the Canadian company's new entry point. Delivering 40 watts into eight ohms and 80 watts into four, the amp certainly lives up to Moon's reputation for top-class performance. With eight stages of regulation and a PCM1793 DAC, we'd expect no less from the CD player, too.



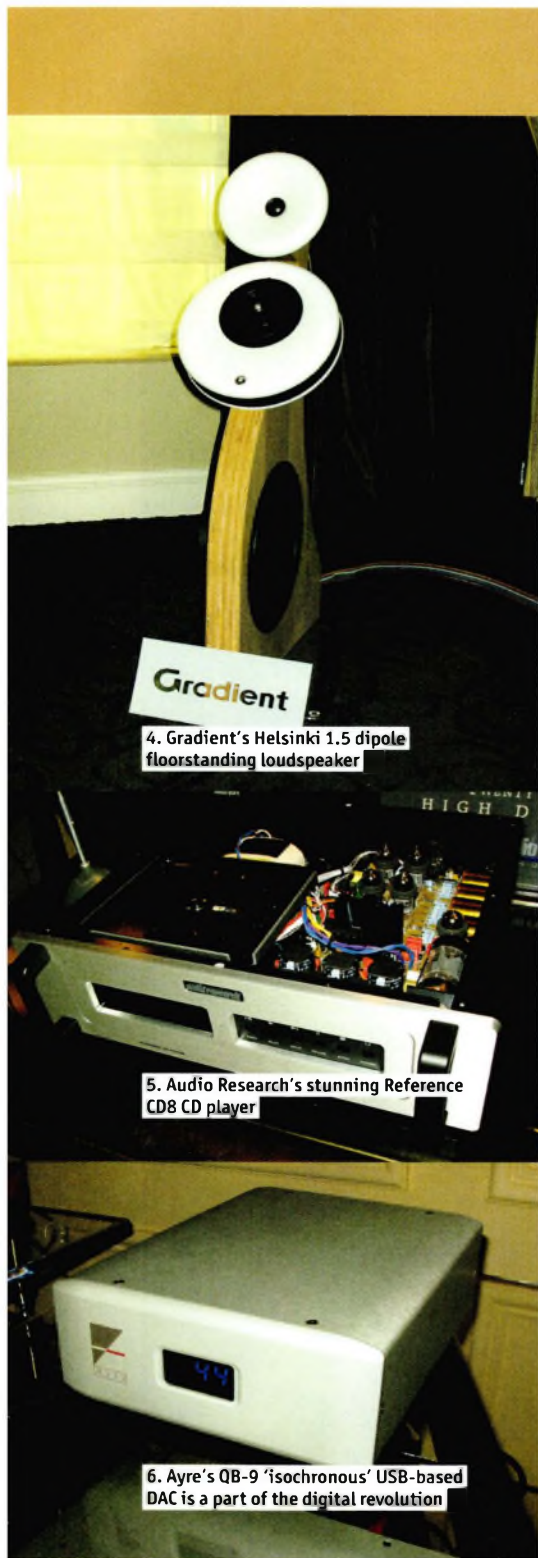
3. Moon's entry-level CD.5 player and i.5 integrated amplifier

4 The Finnish Gradient brand is, perhaps, best known round here as the manufacturer of subwoofers for Quad Electrostatics. Now, the company's distinctive Helsinki 1.5 loudspeaker changes all that; the three-way dipole loudspeaker uses conventional drivers in an unconventional manner to make what's claimed to be the least room-dependent loudspeaker ever made. The price in Europe starts from €5,000.



1. Crystal Cables' Arabesque loudspeaker. Each speaker is 100kg of class glass





**Gradient**

**4. Gradient's Helsinki 1.5 dipole floorstanding loudspeaker**

**5. Audio Research's stunning Reference CD8 CD player**

**6. Ayre's QB-9 'isochronous' USB-based DAC is a part of the digital revolution**

**5** Many of those still spinning CDs at the show were doing so on an Audio Research player. The Minnesota company also showed off its \$10,000 Reference CD8 player, which retains the Philips Pro2R CD transport but now features a new 24-bit/192kHz DAC and uses the sort of uncompromising power supply regulation found in the Reference 3 preamplifier. The Reference CD7 was already considered one of the best CD players ever, but Audio Research just raised the bar once more.



**7. Arcam's impressive – if as yet unnamed Blu-ray disc player**

**6** If CES 2009 is remembered for anything (aside from the downturn), it will be as the year the high end adopted the computer as a source component. Ayre, with its QB-9 DAC utilising technology developed by Wavelength Audio, was one of the trailblazers. This striking advanced prototype uses 'isochronous' technology, which places the master clock right next to the D/A chip, and connects to the USB output of any passing PC or Mac through the company's 'Streamlength' software. This means that the potential for computer systems to introduce jitter in the digital signal is greatly reduced.

**7** Shown in advanced-prototype form, Arcam's upcoming Blu-ray player promises much and looks set to deliver, too. The company claims that the impending Blu-ray project has taken almost as much R&D time as the new, ten-man-years-in-the-making, designed-from-scratch AVR600 flagship receiver the player was demonstrated with. Instead of going for the easy off-the-shelf option, Arcam has chosen to develop the Linux-based Blu-ray technology from the ground up, making a player that loads faster and plays better than the competition. At least, that was our initial impression of the player when viewed in Las Vegas. Production samples, a formal product name and a price tag are all expected in the summer of 2009.



**8. Wilson Audio's impressively large and powerful MAXX Mk 3 speakers**

**8** Like many high-end companies Wilson Audio went 'off-piste', preferring to hold a private showing of its products on the 32nd floor of the luxurious Mirage resort hotel. The Utah-based speaker expert demonstrated its new £70,000 MAXX Mk III loudspeaker, although ultimately similarities between this model and previous MAXX designs are almost accidental. These new floorstanding speaker systems have been specifically designed to eliminate propagation delay, which is called time-alignment this side of the Atlantic. This involved a complete redesign of the speaker, with rotational and front-to-back adjustable elements in the two upper modules of the 172cm tall loudspeaker. The new MAXX was so popular it also appeared in the Boulder and LAMM rooms, to show what these companies' electronics could do.

**9** Chord Electronics has either gone bonkers or has realised something the rest of the world has missed. We suspect it's the latter. The company's recent Chordette DAC (using Bluetooth to wirelessly connect devices to the audio system) has worked wonders; now it takes portable audio fully into the hi-fi realm thanks to the new Indigo. Part iPod dock, part 'Advanced' DAC, part preamp, part Wi-Fi hub, the £8,000 Indigo extracts the digital data from a suitably modified iPod and allows it to beam the digital datastream direct to the processor. There's a Bluetooth option for unmodified iPods.



**9. Chord Electronics' Indigo digital-iPod-connecting nerve centre**



**10** It's not every day that a classic gets updated. Kimber's 4TC and 8TC speaker cables count as classics in their own right. The company has now added a cable with 12 send and 12 return copper wires per side and called it – you guessed it – 12TC. The new cable features a clear Teflon and white Teflon dielectric to give the cable a sassy sheen. Prices start from \$320 for a 4ft pair.

**11** PS Audio's new PerfectWave is notionally a two-box CD player, but that's like saying a Ferrari is a 'motor'. The transport rips files from a CD or DVD into a huge buffer (using Exact Audio Copy) and the resultant jitter-free music is passed via the I<sup>2</sup>S interface to a 24-bit/192kHz DAC. This is one of the first players to support the new ultra-high-definition HRx bit-for-bit format developed by Reference Recordings. Expect to pay about £4,000 for the PerfectWave system.



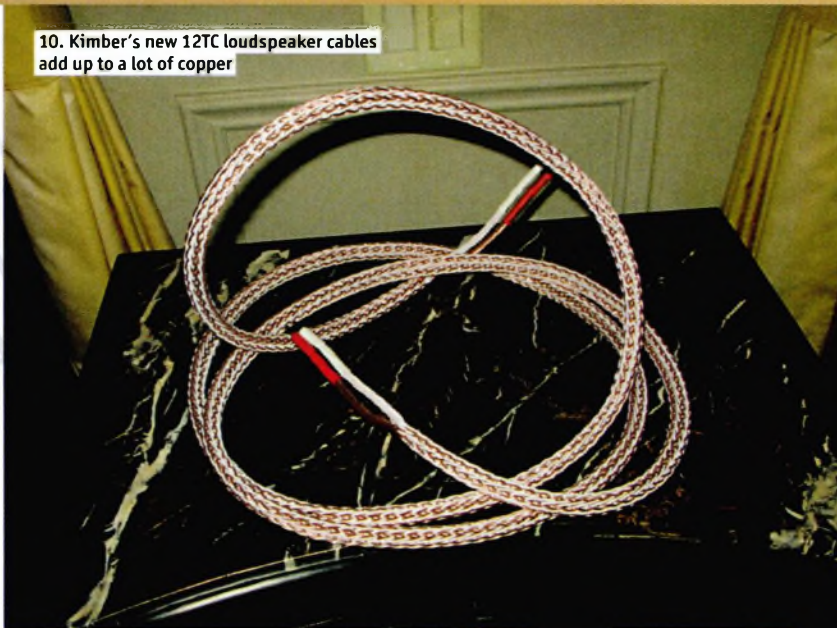
**11. PS Audio's PerfectWave sets a new standard in disc replay**

**12** In many respects the talk of the show, Magico was almost universally considered to be making the best sound of the expo. The company's new M5 flagship speaker may cost a jaw-dropping \$89,000 and weigh a titanic 165kg, but with its no-compromise approach to loudspeaker design, it left those who heard it truly humbled by the experience.

**13** Sonus faber announced the Livto range; a \$6,000 three-way floorstanding Tower, a \$3,000 standmount Monitor and the Smart, a home cinema LCR speaker that can be used as a stereo speaker too. All use a silk dome tweeter and carbon-fibre composite bass drivers.

**14** Music servers are busy replacing CD players in many systems. Brands such as Qsonix are beginning to attract the attention of hi-fi

**10. Kimber's new 12TC loudspeaker cables add up to a lot of copper**



traditionalists. The company's Q110 Digital Music Server sounds good and provides a sleek, touchscreen interface that allows the user to build playlists and select songs and albums so

**12. Magico's no-compromise M5 flagship floorstander wowed all**



**13. Sonus faber's new leather-wrapped Livto Monitor standmount speaker**

effortlessly, it makes iTunes and even most CD players seem hard to drive. Prices range from \$6,000 to \$8,000 depending on storage size.

**15** It wasn't all high-end gear from American exotics on show. Southend's Finest – Rega Research – showed off its brace of new RS loudspeakers, at a stroke replacing all the existing speakers in the company's portfolio. The company's RS1 standmount, middle-of-the-





14. Qsonix Q110 music server. Is this what your next CD player will look like?



15. Rega has revised its loudspeaker range with a wholly new RS line

road RS3 and RS5 floorstanders were on show, with the promise of an RS7 flagship tower and the RS Vox centre speaker to follow. Prices start from £398 for the RS1s.

**16** Unison Research may be best known for its valve amplifiers, but the Italian brand has branched out into turntables. The new Giro turntable (not a Giro deck, of course) is made for the company by vinyl expert Clearaudio and is expected to cost about £3,000 complete with arm and cartridge.

**17** Wadia's 170i iPod 'transport' has revolutionised the company. By breaking the digital datastream of the iPod, it opens up the portable player to audiophile-grade decoding. Wadia has taken advantage of that by introducing a new 121 'Decoding Computer' (that's a DAC to non-Wadia speakers) and a 151 digital amplifier, both designed to match the iPod transport device. Prices are still to be confirmed. The company also launched an update for existing 'Decoding Computers' to support USB devices, with an additional

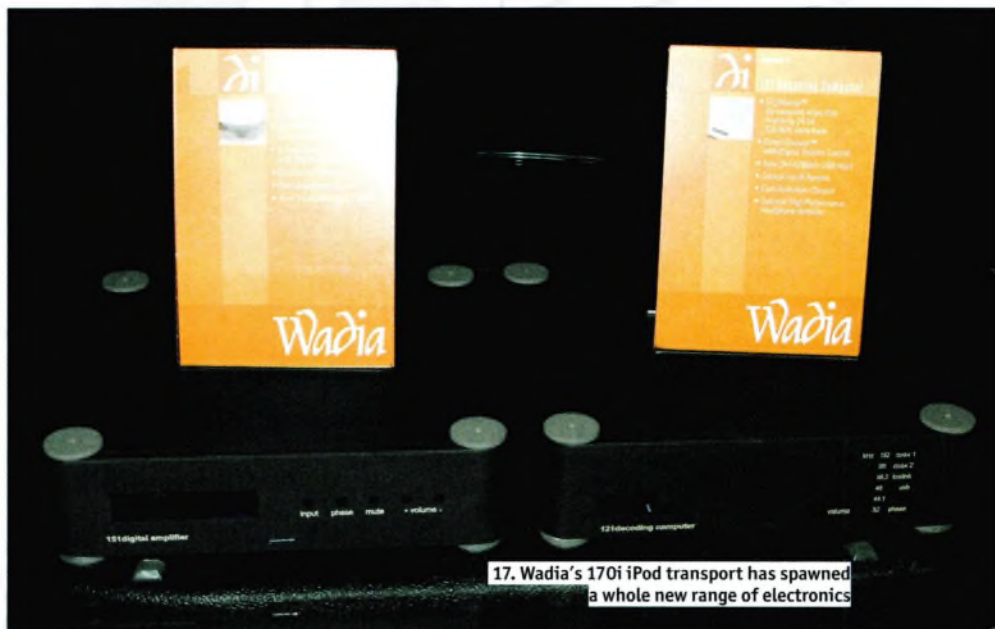


16. Unison Research has got its first turntable – the Giro

ClockLink to improve data transfer. Finally, Wadia also launched the 381, a new \$6,950 integrated CD player, a \$7,950 CD transport called the 571 and a flagship 922 Decoding Computer, a snip at a mere \$33,450.

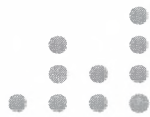
This only scratches the surface of what was on offer in Las Vegas in January. There's no space to cover Krell's exciting Duo Modulare loudspeaker or its hi-fi-meets-home-cinema modular amplifier designs. Nor is there room left to cover the best product with the worst name – the stunning \$89 HRT (short for High Resolution Technologies) USB DAC. There's no space to do justice to the new Scarlatti upsampler or the one-box Puccini player from

dCS, the distinctive new Avalon Acoustics Aspect, the excellent battery-oriented Edge electronics range or the remarkable Benchmark DAC driving the stunning Studio Electric hybrid amp and three-way 'eyeball on a stick' speakers. We don't even have enough space to cover Quad's new Platinum pre/power amp or 9L active speaker system, or ProAc's new Response D1 mini monitor. And there's certainly not enough room to begin to discuss the implications of Cisco's \$299 Media Hub and matching Wireless Home Audio system. Or any of the hundreds of striking new products worthy of inclusion in any CES show report. All of which goes to prove that, even in a recession, there's still a lot of audio to talk about. **HFC**



17. Wadia's 170i iPod transport has spawned a whole new range of electronics





Words by Jason Kennedy

## Classic Album

By 1973, Genesis were beginning to make an impression on the music world, with three albums that developed both a visual and sonic style. This had been achieved by constant touring, rather than as a result of record sales, which did not really start to pick up until *Foxtrot* came along and made it to number 12 in the charts. Led by front man Peter Gabriel, with Phil Collins on drums, Mike Rutherford on bass, Tony Banks on keyboards and Steve Hackett on guitar, Genesis were a formidably accomplished band from both a technical and songwriting perspective.

There are six tracks on the album, but the fifth, the solo-guitar piece *Horizons*, is quite short. This is because the epic *Supper's Ready* is a 23-minute magnum opus that takes up most of the second side. It's a remarkable work that culminates in a finale of emotional exhilaration that has rarely been surpassed.

Interviewed for the new boxset of albums from the period, Gabriel says that their success had given them a confidence "that gave us the mental platform on which to build *Supper's Ready*". Banks thinks that "the latter part of the work from *Apocalypse In 9/8* onwards produced our best piece of composition during the time".

As a story, *Supper's Ready* isn't the most straightforward of songs, and there's no shortage of interpretations out there, including one of Gabriel's own which talks about his girlfriend becoming possessed in a purple-and-turquoise room! The basic premise seems to be the struggle between good and evil, but even though fans memorise the words, it's the music that makes it so compelling. Sections such as the aforementioned *Apocalypse In 9/8*, with its drum and bass-pedal rhythm line, mellotron organ and electric guitar, represent Genesis at their darkest and most dramatic.

Part of the album's appeal comes from it being so quintessentially English. The track *Get 'Em Out by Friday* is about greedy developers pushing the poor out of their terraces into high-rise flats in Harlow New Town, but it sounds positively Dickensian, thanks to characters such as the Winkler (a theme that Gabriel would warm to in the album that followed, *Selling England By The Pound*). Unlike most rock music of the era, however, there's no suggestion of a blues influence – in fact, it's hard to hear where their ideas came from. One suspects that Bach played a part, especially with regard to Tony Banks's keyboard contributions. It also turns out that the same composer was responsible for the acoustic-guitar piece *Horizons*, according to Hackett, a piece that he was surprised to find on the album.

If the album has a weak link then it's *Time Table*, which follows the opener on side one, but this is more than made up for by the rest of the material. Not least *Can-Utility And The Coastliners*, a slightly bizarre title for a song about King Canute that shows off Phil Collins's spectacular drumming skills, alongside the undisputed talents of his cohorts.

In audio terms this is a dynamic and taut recording for its time, something that's more readily apparent in its recent boxset form, as the band's producer Nick Davis sat down with the original multitracks and remixed them for SACD (stereo and 5.1) and 180g vinyl release.

*Foxtrot* was the album that put Genesis on the map. Its musicianship and composition makes it the finest work that the band have ever created. *Selling England...* may be the popular favourite, but it never quite managed the breadth and depth of this earlier recording. **HFC**

**GENESIS**  
*Foxtrot*  
Atlantic Records

"It's a remarkable work that culminates in a finale of emotional exhilaration that has rarely been surpassed."



Words by *Richard Black*

# Technology

**N**ot for the first time, the subject of this month's *Technology* column was suggested by a debate on our ever-lively web forum. What is the point, someone asked, of external power supplies?

One of the first things that became apparent from the replies that followed was that there is confusion over the respective roles of amplifier, CD player and turntable power supplies. OK, they all supply power (doh!), but in general they work in different ways and with different aims.

All mains-powered electronics have a power supply of some form that converts the 240V AC to DC at a voltage suitable for the equipment – typically a few different voltages up to  $\pm 15V$  for CD players and solid-state preamps,  $\pm 50V$  or so for solid-state power amps and around 450V for a typical valve amp. In the vast majority of cases, the power supply is built into the main chassis. Sometimes, though, an external power supply is either included as standard or available as an accessory.

With small items such as phono stages and DACs, an external power supply is, as much as anything, a convenience for the manufacturer. It saves half the safety-testing on the main chassis and provides easy conversion to different mains voltages – just throw in a different power supply for each export territory.

The main point of such supplies is that they include a large transformer and also large amounts of smoothing capacitance. But larger transformers and capacitors both tend to give more stable supply voltages with less mains ripple and less tendency to 'dip' under load.

Another advantage of a physically remote supply is that radiated interference from the transformer, the rectifier diodes and the wiring is kept at bay more efficiently. In fact, larger transformers and capacitors often

produce larger amounts of switching noise, but this kind of noise is mostly radiated as magnetic fields which decrease very rapidly as one moves away from the source, while a power supply at the end of a metre or so of cable isn't going to cause many problems. So basically, outboard power supplies for amplifiers and CD players are all about providing purer, less noisy, DC to the electronic circuits.

Turntable power supplies, on the other hand, are there to power an electric motor, and this often requires an AC signal. In fact, a great many turntables use a motor which is designed to be fed directly from the mains, via (at most) a resistor and capacitor or two. In that case, the motor speed depends on the frequency of the mains, and it's therefore common practice in high-end circles to use a quartz-reference oscillator to generate a very stable 50Hz frequency for the motor. The end result is beneficial in two ways: first, the motor speed (long and short term) is considerably improved, and second, the vibration from the motor is reduced, often very markedly.

Some modern turntables use a DC motor, which requires a power supply like those for amplifiers, etc. In this case it's often fitted remotely for practical reasons, and similar arguments apply to those for amps – although the power supply is probably a little less critical in this case.

The one thing that external power supplies for electronics and for turntables have in common is that they aren't necessarily vastly cost-effective upgrades: they're more like the last degree of spit 'n' polish. That said, in a well-set-up and familiar system their effect can be quite marked, and we wouldn't like to downplay their potential. **HFC**



Turntables use a motor which is designed to be fed directly from the mains

"All mains-powered electronics have a power supply that converts the 240V AC to DC at a voltage suitable for the equipment."

Ayre

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# Jason Kennedy

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

## HRx recording

High-quality recording technology competes with SACD

“Rarely have we heard such natural and expansive results, or encountered the amount of acoustic space that these files reveal.”

A couple of months ago in *HFC* 314, we ran a review of The Hot Club of San Francisco's album *Yerba Buena Bounce*. To say it sounds impressive is an understatement, while the five stars available to rate its sound quality were definitely insufficient. This album isn't an SACD or DVD-A. It is, in fact, an HRx recording on a DVD-R data disc containing WAV files produced by San Francisco-based Reference Recordings, the record company that put HDCD on the map. HRx is RR's method for making its 24-bit/176.4kHz recordings available directly to enthusiasts like you and I.

HRx discs can't be played in a DVD player, but need to be spun on a PC, which you use to download the information prior to playback. Effectively, HRx is a means of getting very large music files onto your computer – 4.7GB files that would otherwise take hours to download unless you're one of the few with an optical broadband connection. To give you an idea of the amount of data in these files, while a track that has been ripped from a CD to iTunes using Apple Lossless comes through at around 800kbps, an HRx WAV file from the *Yerba Buena Bounce* disc has a bit rate of 8,460kbps – a 10x increase. The difference is clearly audible, even if you don't have the finest audio card or DAC.

Reference Recordings has been making digital recordings at 24-bit/176.4kHz for many years, but the majority of its catalogue is only available on HDCD CDs. The only problem from the traditional audiophile's point of view is how to get this quality out of the computer and into the system. We downloaded the tracks onto a G5 Mac and are able to play them through the optical digital output that the machine has as standard. By using a long optical lead it's possible to connect this up to a DAC (the Russ Andrews DA-1) and then to the system. This isn't the best way of doing the job, but at least it doesn't require outlay on extra hardware such as

a high-resolution sound card. RR recommends the Weiss Minerva DAC (\$6,000) with a FireWire input and a Lynx AES 16e PCI card (\$600), as this set-up would overcome the slight softness you get with accessories such as Toslink optical connections.

However, the result with the optical-out approach is so good that one can easily appreciate the quality of the format. Rarely have we heard such natural and expansive results from a system, or encountered the amount of acoustic space that these files reveal, even from audiophile-label SACDs played back on top-notch hardware. The format makes all disc-based systems seem compressed and, well, digital.

It has always been the case that you hear more in the studio than with the resulting disc or vinyl, but this is the first time that a label has literally cut the 'hard' out of the software. It's a process that has removed the mechanical from the music and left behind a remarkably real and effortless sound.

At present there are only three HRx titles available: the aforementioned Hot Club, Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* and Jerry Junkin's *Crown Imperial*. The last is particularly impressive, thanks to the presence of organ and timpani delivering bass quality that you just don't get with other formats. The Rachmaninoff is also an old favourite, but we've not heard it breathe like this before, except in the concert hall.

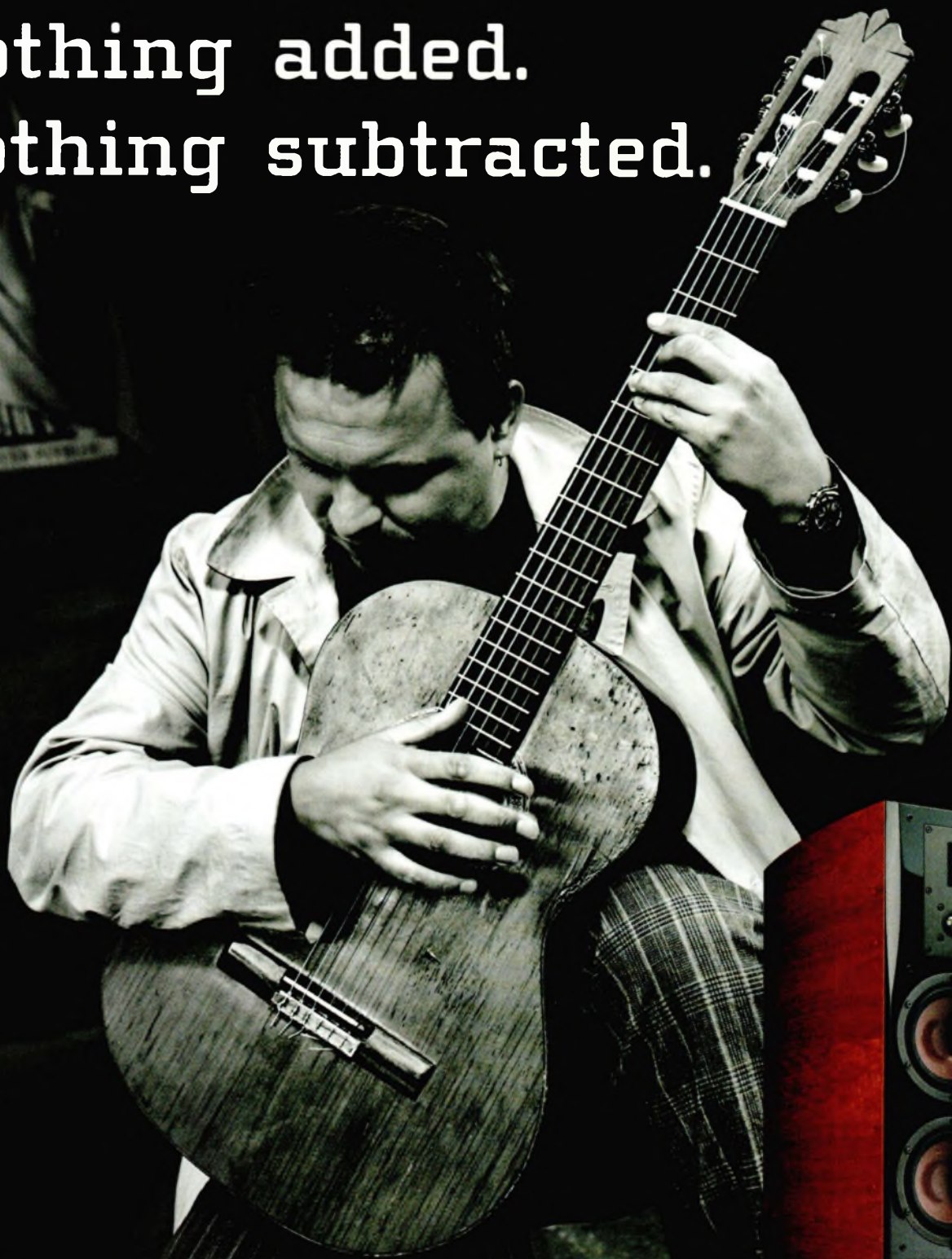
What's exciting about RR's approach is that it could be used with any music. There might be a concern about letting the studio masters out into the world, but in practice music piracy is all about compression and MP3 file-sharers don't want huge files such as these.

Whether EMI would consider offering *Dark Side of the Moon* in this format, however, is open to debate, but we can dream. **HFC**



The Hot Club of San Francisco

# Nothing added. Nothing subtracted.



Piotr Tomaszewski - Piazzale Degli Uffizi, Florence - Sunday afternoon

Music is a reflection of life.  
A never-ending dance between your joys  
and sorrows, ups and downs and that all  
consuming can't-live-without-each-other love.  
Music is our reality.

Nothing added. Nothing subtracted.



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

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# Paul Messenger

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

## A tribute

Remembering hi-fi veteran John Crabbe (1929-2008)

"...he had worked on radar in Decca's electronics division and in a university phonetics department, before moving into journalism."

With all due respect to pre-war pioneers such as Paul Voigt, specialist hi-fi (as we know it) was born in the years following the Second World War. Its history here in Britain is closely linked to a relatively small number of gifted engineers, most of whom were polymaths with a variety of useful talents.

Few are still around today, and the purpose of this column is to mourn the passing as well as celebrate the achievements of one of the last of those key individuals, magazine editor John Crabbe – or JC, as we invariably referred to him in the office (in order to avoid confusion with then-Editor John Atkinson). When I joined *Hi-Fi News* in 1976, JC had already been there for 14 years, 12 of them as Editor, and it was very clear that his steady hand, especially through the turbulent 1960s, had contributed substantially to the respect that was accorded to British hi-fi around the world.

JC was already in his 30s when he joined the magazine full-time as Technical Editor. Prior to that he had worked on radar in Decca's electronics division and in a university phonetics department, before moving into journalism on the electrical-industry trade journal *ERT*.

He'd also, by then, written a number of articles for the more engineering-oriented *Wireless World* and had already firmly established his hi-fi credibility during 1960-1 with a series in *Hi-Fi News* that described the construction of the legendary architectural "Crabbe horns", built into the fabric of his house.

Another example of John's creative side was an article he wrote discussing the implications of pickup-arm geometry, specifically the inward bias force generated as a result of the offset angle and overhang of the conventional pivoted arm, and the drag between stylus and groove. His solution to the problem was a simple thread-and-weight mechanism to oppose this bias. This straightforward but effective idea was almost

immediately and universally taken up by tonearm manufacturers around the world, but John lost out on any royalties because it had first appeared in a magazine article and therefore couldn't be patented.

While JC's writings did much to advance the hi-fi art, especially in the 'DIY era' from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, his basic editing skills were also an object lesson to anyone who worked alongside him. When I joined *Hi-Fi News* in the mid-1970s I'd had no formal training in journalism, yet the regime and standards JC had put in place soon got me trained up to a decent standard. However, I could never match the Master for consistency and correctness: I could almost see the wry smile on his face just two years ago, when he put together a depressingly long letter detailing all the editing mistakes I'd made in my first issue of *HIFICRITIC*.

The *Hi-Fi News* office was always a hotbed of friendly but fierce debate, and John invariably delivered a well-reasoned case. His interest in hi-fi was very much a means to the end, as was his passion for classical music, and I well recall the difficulty in trying to persuade him that popular music forms had any cultural validity.

We met only rarely after he left the Editor's chair and subsequently moved up to Yorkshire, but it's clear he remained active until the end, writing a regular thought-provoking column for *Hi-Fi News* until quite recently and keeping in contact with old friends on the hi-fi and musical scenes.

A column such as this can do scant justice to the life of such a complex and strong personality. John and I didn't necessarily agree on all issues, but I always respected the opinion of someone of great integrity and intellect, who left an indelible mark on the British – indeed the English language-speaking – hi-fi scene. **HFC**



Hi-fi veteran John Crabbe



# CYRUS

## Servo Evolution - the world's most advanced CD technology

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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**AWARDS 2008**  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
CD PLAYERS  
CYRUS CD6SE

The new CD players from Cyrus with their unique "made for hi-end audio" servo evolution engine provide the highest levels of performance. The world's hi-fi press have heaped praise and class leading awards on all three models, however you should hear them yourself. One of our retailers will be happy to compare your old CD player and demonstrate just how far Cyrus CD technology has advanced.

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Edinburgh	James Morrow	0131 229 8777	james-morrow.com
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Gateshead	Lintone Audio	0191 477 4167	lintone.co.uk
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Southport	Southport Hi-Fi	01704 536 901	southporthifi.com
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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
**AWARDS 2008**  
CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER £1000 - £1500  
CYRUS CD6SE

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
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SOUND AND VISION  
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**WHAT HI-FI?** "It's a revelation. Quite simply this player is astonishing. Not astonishing for the price you understand, but astonishing - full stop." What Hi-Fi Sept 2008 CD6 SE

**HI-FI CHOICE** "A stunning product for the money, offering performance startlingly close to what one would expect for a player three or four times as much." - Hi-Fi Choice Sept 2008 CD8 SE

**WHAT HI-FI?** "A stunning new arrival (well, new in that it's the latest version of an incredibly successful and popular series of CD players from Cyrus) that slaughters all of the opposition totally without effort. It's certain proof that there's still plenty of reason to keep stocked with CD's". CD 6 SE WHF High-End Ultimate Guide 2008

**WHAT HI-FI?** "Timing, a traditional Cyrus strong suit, is immaculate here - each strum, pluck or hit starts and stops with great precision and easy fluidity, making light work of testing tempos or sudden changes of emphasis. There's an eye for detail the most nightmarish Sergeant-Major would be proud of, and the ability to lay the minutiae of a performance bare without ever losing sight of the performance as a whole. What Hi-Fi.com Sept 2008 CDXT SE



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## Alvin Gold

*Alvin Gold began writing about hi-fi more than 25 years ago and has since become one of the UK's most internationally renowned reviewers*

# Viva Las Vegas

Is CES still the best consumer-electronics show in town?

**“There was also a preponderance of poor-quality lounge jazz, which did nothing but demonstrate the lack of musical taste of those responsible.”**

I've just returned from my umpteenth Consumer Electronics Show (CES), which is held each year in Las Vegas. Not for the first time, when taking my seat aboard the non-stop Virgin flight from Gatwick (the preferred method of getting there for virtually the entire British hi-fi industry) I was suddenly struck by the thought that if anything untoward should happen to the plane, the whole shape of the British hi-fi scene would be changed forever.

However, arriving safely in Sin City, I noticed that CES was perceptibly quieter than in previous years, clearly a side effect of the financial gloom that has settled on the market. Being quieter made it easier to cope. I could get around quicker and speak to those I wanted to speak to while incurring fewer delays.

There were also some fun highlights. Monster Cable had its usual concert – a CES tradition – on the Friday night with the legendary Diana Ross. I didn't see it, but by all accounts she put on a great show. Not wanting to endure the interminable dealer prize-giving that precedes the gig, I chose instead to attend the much smaller Crystal Cable event on the other side of the road.

This year, CES was a notable affair in many ways. Many of the demonstrations were very impressive and, given the lack of confidence in the retail sector, included some highly expensive products. Curiously, though, and for various reasons too numerous to list here, these products often underperform at shows such as this.

I was particularly gratified, however, to encounter a number of truly stunning high-end Israeli loudspeaker brands – Magico, Morel and YG Acoustics, to name but three. Admittedly, some of these are American-based and some were names I'd never heard of, but having spent some years living in Israel, I'm always interested in what's going on there. Israel is an inherently musical country, probably with more performing musicians per capita than any other.

This year most of the audio exhibits at CES were ensconced in the 30-storey-plus main tower of the Venetian hotel, which could only be reached by taking the specially designated lifts. Predictably, these were extremely busy during peak times, and it could take you up to half an hour to get from the reception to the top floor and back down again. Locating a refreshment trolley on each floor would be a cheap, simple way of improving traffic flow, as well as better enforcement of the trade-only attendance rules, which at times appear to be deliberately flouted to improve attendance numbers. On the plus side, there are many world-class restaurants in the Venetian complex (Kobe beef tacos, anyone?), often with very reasonable prices. Best of all, though, is the cheap valet service and the sometimes free self-parking for those with cars.

My final comments on CES concern the music played in demonstrations. Many of the people attending the show took their own discs to audition the equipment, and as a result a large percentage were nothing short of terrible. There was also a preponderance of poor-quality lounge jazz, which did nothing but demonstrate the lack of musical taste of those responsible. Yes, I know that music is subjective, but there are limits.

Often the fault rests with the hardware manufacturers themselves, some of whom used rubbish mainstream music. In one particular case, I tackled the manufacturer concerned and suggested they tried a more challenging repertoire. “But if we do that then the room will empty,” they argued. Not giving in so easily, I finally persuaded them to play some compositions by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, which are truly gripping musically – and guess what? The room emptied within about four minutes. Did I feel suitably chastened? Well, perhaps I should have, but I didn't. **HFC**



Las Vegas consumer show 2009





# 'arc angels'

**"A WINNER AND HIGHLY RECOMMENDED ESPECIALLY AS ITS PRICE TAG IS MUCH LOWER THAN MANY 'HIGH END' COMPETITORS"**  
HI FI CRITIC / APRIL '07 / MARTIN COLLOMS / REF 3

AUDIO RESEARCH VS115 VACUUM TUBE STEREO AMPLIFIER

**"SOLID, FAST AND ROBUST, YET TRANSPARENT AND DELICATE; ONE COULD WANT FOR NOTHING MORE"**  
HI FI NEWS / OCT '08 / KEN KESSLER / VS115

AUDIO RESEARCH VS115 VACUUM TUBE STEREO AMPLIFIER

**"YOU COULD LIVE VERY HAPPILY EVER - AFTER WITH A CD PLAYER OF CD 5'S CALIBER. IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THIS"**  
HI FI CHOICE / NOV '08 / JIMMY HUGHES / CD5

AUDIO RESEARCH CD5 CD PLAYER

For Audio Research, the knowledge gained through the design process of their Reference series components must benefit every model in their range. Phono stages and digital sources, pre-amplifiers, power amps - Audio Research believes, like Formula 1 car designers, that benefits gained at the cutting edge should be shared.

While the existing Reference 3 pre-amplifier and the REF110, REF210 and REF610t power amplifiers reign supreme for 2009, a host of new, highly-affordable models will deliver a taste of "REF" sonics to a wider audience. For the best value in high performance pre-amplifiers, the fully-featured and supremely functional SP17, with or without phono stage, is a dream match for the VS115 stereo power amplifier.

For Absolute Sounds, the VS115 is one of the most astonishing entry-level Audio Research power amps ever introduced. Its technology has now inspired a new 'baby' stereo power amp, the VS60, and for those who prefer a one-box solution, the VS60 integrated amplifier. Both the VS60 and the amplifier section of the VS160 have new input stages and more robust valves to sound better and last longer. Like their larger siblings, both use classic 6550 output tubes.

For analogue supporters, the all-tube Ref PH7 phono stage is probably the best phono section available. Audio Research still believes in CD, too: not one but three new digital products have joined the family. So commanding was the CD3 Mk II that replacing it required something monumental: enter the CD5 Player/Transport, with balanced and single-ended inputs and outputs. At Reference level, the CD7 has led to the magnificent REF CD8, with new valve line-up, superior chipset and user-dimmable display. And the stand-alone DAC7 digital processor delivers conversion magic to stand-alone transports as well as computers: it offers a front panel USB input.

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# WIN!

## A Primare DVDi10 system worth £1,500!

Primare has a good reputation for building the best in hi-fi and home cinema systems. The DVDi10 brings the two together in one box. This new all-in-one system improves upon the *Hi-Fi Choice* Award-winning CDi10 by adding a DVD player with HD video output, but is still fundamentally designed as an audio product. Like the CDi10 it features two of Primare's own 75-watt Class D amplifiers and has a DAB/FM tuner, and it also boasts an upscaler to serve up DVD pictures at 1080p picture quality. And all of this in an elegant and solidly built integrated alloy case of the sort that made the CDi10 so hard to beat. You can win one by simply answering the question below:

### HOW TO ENTER:

For your chance to win, text **PRIMARE A, B or C** to **87474** or visit [www.futurecomps.co.uk/primaredvd](http://www.futurecomps.co.uk/primaredvd) and follow the instructions, leaving your selected answer and details where prompted:

### QUESTION:

**What kind of amplifiers does Primare use in the DVDi10?**

**A:** Kid A **B:** Special K **C:** Class D

### TERMS AND CONDITIONS

To enter the Primare DVDi10 competition, you can either (a) text your answer to 87474 at any time between February 5, 2009 and March 4, 2009, or (b) enter online at [www.futurecomps.co.uk/primaredvd](http://www.futurecomps.co.uk/primaredvd) with your entry being received between February 5, 2009 and March 4, 2009. By sending your entry you agree to these competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word STOP at the end of your text message or at the end of your postal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network tariff rate.

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](http://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.





# 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



### STEVIE WONDER

Songs In The Key Of Life

Matown 180g vinyl

**Music:** This 1976 double album and seven-inch EP was something of a magnum opus for Wonder's peak of creativity. It's a transitional album, with both the funky protestations of *Have A Talk With God* and sublime melodies such as *Ordinary Pain*. The hits were *Isn't She Lovely* and *Sir Duke*, but the highlights are *Pastime Paradise*, *I Wish* and *Joy Inside My Tears*. In fact, there isn't a weak moment in all 21 tracks.

**Sound:** Phat analogue synths and (for its time) top-quality recording make this a delicious-sounding album. **JK**



### MILES DAVIS

Round About Midnight

Columbia/Speaker's Corner 180g vinyl

**Music:** Davis's 1955 Columbia debut found him in the company of John Coltrane, Red Garland, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones. It also finds him in impressive form on the title track where he reveals more than the cooler style that made his later work so successful. Charlie Parker's *Ah-Leu-Cha* is a standout with a typically upbeat vibe, and *Bye Bye Blackbird* shows the extraordinary bond shared by the two horn players.

**Sound:** A mono recording in "360 degree Hemispheric Sound", it's a little thin, but highly communicative. **JK**



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

## COMPACT DISC & VINYL

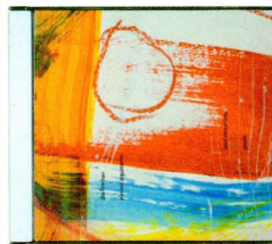


### M WARD

Hold Time 4AD

**Music:** Portland's Matt Ward has quite an enviable roster of celebrity fans, including Cat Power and Beth Orton. His sixth studio album, a richly diverse and less lugubrious affair than past outings, should see the rest of the world catching up. Ward's stripped-down folk origins are here augmented with dazzling bursts of pop savvy, while his rueful lyrics and dreamy, melodic flair mark him out as one of the most original talents in American music today.

**Sound:** The haunting, cracked version of Don Gibson's *Oh Lonesome Me* – a duet with Lucinda Williams – is pure magic. **NW**



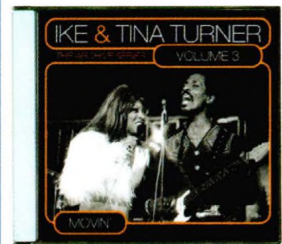
### THE FIREMAN

Electric Arguments

MPL/ATO One Little Indian

**Music:** With 13 tracks recorded in 13 days, this is a glorious return to form for Macca – blistering Zeppelin blues up against bucolic folk; mellotron psychedelia veering into mutant rock. Moreover, the other half of The Fireman is production wizard Youth of The Orb, and what a palette of sounds he brings to the table. Songs dovetail into Youth's trademark ambient house style, and every track is full of surprises.

**Sound:** Modern-day psychedelia at its very best. The glorious electronic uilleann pipes of *Is This Love?* are but one many sonic highlights. **MP**



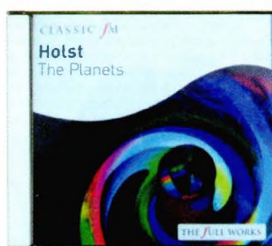
### IKE & TINA TURNER

Movin': The Archive Series Vol 3

Yellow Label/SPV

**Music:** Those who thought Ike 'n' Tina's musical contribution to the world began and ended with *River Deep*, *Mountain High* will be surprised by the depth and power of this 18-track set. Mostly recorded between the late sixties and mid-seventies, *Movin'* – the third of SPV's six releases – has quite a few gems nestling amid the digital grooves. It's a great party album for those bored with the usual 'singalonga80s'...

**Sound:** The brass blares, rasping vocals and squealing synths are well recorded, designed for radio impact and full of energy and brio. **PS**



### GUSTAV HOLST

The Planets

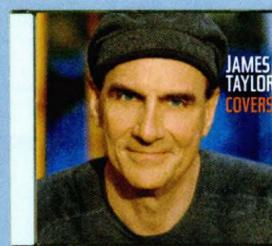
Montreal Symphony Orchestra, Charles

Dutiot (conductor)

HMV The Full Works

**Music:** Perhaps not Holst's finest work, this is still a masterpiece. A brilliant set of character portraits of seven of the planets in our solar system, it uses adventurous orchestration, with bold, propulsive timing and dynamics which add immeasurably to the sense of drama.

**Sound:** The performance is characterful and frequently electric, and sound quality is also very good, making this a particularly fine bargain purchase. **AG**



### JAMES TAYLOR

Covers Hear Music

**Music:** When a songwriter like Taylor turns to covers, the suspicion is he's got nothing left to say. But it could be ol' James merely fancied getting a little funkier than usual. Half of these 14

covers are soul classics by the likes of The Temptations, Junior Walker and Wilson Pickett. Throw in rock 'n' roll standards such as *Hound Dog* and *Summertime Blues* and there's only room for Leonard Cohen's *Suzanne* and Jim Webb's *Wichita Lineman* to fly the flag for his fellow mellow troubadours. Both are laid-back to the point of somnambulism, but the soul and rock covers crackle with energy.

**Sound:** Immaculate arrangements and Taylor's exquisitely timeless voice go some way to make up for the overfamiliarity of the material. **NW**







# THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC

"A warm analogue bubble bath of a recording in the typical Warner Brothers style of the time..."

**ZZ TOP** *Tejas* Warner Bros

**Music:** Before the block-rockin' beats of *Eliminator* made ZZ Top a major commercial operation in the eighties, the trio made some fine blues records, and the high point was this 1976 outing. They play pretty straightforward, down-home blues, but with phat chords and a degree of panache not often

found in the genre. The original vinyl sleeve shows Gibbons, Hill and Beard in some of the finest flares made by man, and they bring this style to tracks such as *Snappy Kakkie* and the superb *Enjoy and Get It On*. Their appeal lies in the tight-but-loose rhythm section, and everything else is a bonus.

**Sound:** A warm analogue bubble bath of a recording in the typical Warner Brothers style of the time. It's impossible not to enjoy the stripped-back tone of the instruments. *JK*



**OUMOU SANGARE**

*Seya* World Circuit

**Music:** It's been six years since Mali's biggest songstress released an album, but worth the wait. The polyrhythmic groove of her funky Wassoulou sound

is very much in evidence, the songs carried largely by ngoni (a precursor of the banjo), marimba and percussion, though often augmented with strings, flute and thumb harps. Floating above all is her incredible voice, at times earthy, at others soaring in gravity-defying swoops, always retaining a directness which marks her out from many in the world-crossover arena.

**Sound:** The energetic Sangare was co-producer on the album, and delivers a spellbinding blend of traditional and modern studio sounds. *DO*



## HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

**GENESIS**

1970-1975 Virgin

**SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid discs plus DVDs)**

**Music:** This five-album, 13-disc box set contains remixed and remastered versions of the five studio albums Genesis made for Charisma with Peter Gabriel at the helm. Each album is on SACD and DVD, with DTS and Dolby cuts on the latter, as well as video footage and contemporary interviews with the band. The set reveals just how skilled a group of musicians and composers they were, with tracks such as *Selling England By The Pound* and *Supper's Ready* scaling the heights of prog-ness. Given the choice we'd have swapped the pre-Collins/Hackett *Trespass for Live*, but other than that it's all essential.

**Sound:** Producer Nick Davis has done a superb job with these albums, which sound far more alive, crisp and solid than earlier remasterings. A treat for the fan and newcomer alike. *JK*



**GUSTAV MAHLER**

*Symphony No 7*

London Symphony Orchestra, Valery Gergiev (conductor) LSO Live

**SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc plus stereo CD)**

**Music:** Of all Mahler's symphonies, the 7th is surprisingly subtle in its detail, and it's this subtlety that Gergiev manages to tease out of the LSO, who are on top form here. The unusual use of instruments, the surprising emphases, the occasional explosion of pizzicato strings and the kaleidoscopic intensity of the score as a whole add up to one of the most convincing accounts of this work available, and easily the best we've heard from Gergiev.

**Sound:** It was recorded live in the Barbican auditorium, and the engineers have captured a clean picture even in the densest moments, with a spread and depth, especially from the multichannel mix, that goes a long way to being true to life. Even without the multichannel element, however, the DSD/SACD recording is more organic and expressive than the CD sound. *AG*



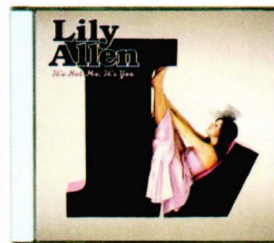
**RICHARD STRAUSS**

*Four Last Songs & Arias*

Renée Fleming (soprano), Münchner Philharmoniker, Christian Thielemann (conductor) Decca

**Music:** In an era of fey operatic sopranos and assorted big-name pseudo-classical dross, here is a real artist, singing real music. Renée Fleming has a wonderful voice, pitch-true and luminous, with a depth that eludes most of the pretenders, and the results are genuinely moving.

**Sound:** Highlights include the final song of the *Four Last* and the three arias from *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which elicits a purity and expressiveness that's in danger of being in a class of its own. The recording is clean and with a strong sense of a real acoustic which doesn't swamp the music. *AG*



**LILY ALLEN**

*It's Not Me, It's You* Parlophone

**Music:** Taking time out from her recent career as tabloid pin-up, Lily Allen has found time to produce a second album – and very good it is too. Rather than bringing in a bevy of trendy producers, she's chosen to work with just one, and the result is a pleasingly consistent update of her debut. All the Allen trademarks are here – jaunty beats, deceptively casual vocal style, potty-mouthed lyrics and a fistful of catchy melodies.

**Sound:** Kylie Minogue's sometime producer Greg Kurstin worked on all the tracks and has succeeded in taking the freshness of Allen's debut and polishing it up without crowding her voice and lyrics. She's definitely alright, still. *DO*



**CARL ORFF**

*Carmina Burana*

LSO Richard Hickox (conductor) Chandos

**SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc plus stereo CD)**

**Music:** Orff's most famous work has long suffered the indignities of being associated with Nazism and Old Spice aftershave. It's a song cycle based on 24 'cantiones profanae' – bawdy drinking songs originally sung by medieval students and monks – scored for three vocal soloists, three choirs and orchestra. It's one of the most powerful choral works in the canon, owing something to Igor Stravinsky in its primitive energy, though with less of his high-minded experimentalism.

**Sound:** It's hard to go very wrong with a score of this integrity, but after a blistering opening, there's the suspicion that the energy of the piece slips a bit more than it should. *DO*





*exposure*



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- 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



# 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 [alan.sircom@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:alan.sircom@futurenet.co.uk)

## ULTRASONE-IC

I was interested by Richard Black's review of the Ultrasones PRO 750 headphones in the recent Ultimate Group Test (HFC 312), as I own a pair of Ultrasones and have listened to several of the firm's models. Mr Black's description of the sound of the PRO 750s is basically what I heard from an earlier version of that model – bassy sound and inferior stereo imaging.

I own a pair of HFI-650s, the predecessor to both the current HFI-680s and the PRO 650s. The HFI-650s have quite interesting stereo imaging, the described "S-Logic Natural

**Below:** Ultrasones PRO 750 headphones



Surround" effect, and that is somewhat different to the particularly good stereo imaging of my original Beyer DT-990s, the 600-ohm version of which *Hi-Fi Choice* praised a few years back.

The HFI-650s (a closed-back model) are basically a recording engineer's tool, as they're very revealing of detail, but in a way that isn't aurally fatiguing for long periods, probably due to the angling of the earpieces. The detail is presented from a somewhat distant perspective, quite unlike other headphones, including my Beyer DT-990s, but they aren't particularly suited to home music listening, as they don't have an audibly flat frequency response – their bass does extend to low frequencies, but is rolled off to lower amplitude than the midrange.

More interesting for home music listening would be Ultrasones's open-back models, of which the original HFI-2000s had quite remarkable stereo imaging. They sounded unlike any headphones I've ever heard, including upmarket Sennheiser models – it was more like listening to distantly placed loudspeakers than to headphones. I didn't buy them because, unfortunately, their bass response was quite overblown and obscured the natural timbre of acoustic bass instruments to some degree, as well as reducing the otherwise good rhythm-following ability of their midrange.

My older Beyer DT-990s are substantially

## "the HFI-2200 may be the better model for home music listening"

better in those two respects. The HFI-2000s also had a narrow-bandwidth frequency notch in the upper midrange – not unpleasant, but reducing transparency compared to the DT-990s. I'm hoping Ultrasones has improved on those two weaknesses of the HFI-2000 for its two current versions, the HFI-2200 and PRO 2500, because the stereo depth effect was truly worthwhile.

Reading the current Ultrasones product descriptions, I see that the PRO 2500s feature the same diaphragms as the PRO 750s, and therefore may have the same upper-treble flaw. Hence the HFI-2200 may be the better model for home music listening, and it seems that Ultrasones intends them for such.

It would be interesting if *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewed either or both models and made a comparison to the current Beyer DT-990 (with a much lower impedance than the originals) and other current AKG, Audio-Technica, Grado and Sennheiser models not yet reviewed.

I think it's particularly fortunate that you have the services of Richard Black as a reviewer, seeing as he's a piano player and a recording

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS

With the credit crunch hitting hard, it looks like there's no way I'll ever afford the sort of hi-fi I've always lusted after. Strange thing is, as my potential to buy high-end equipment drops away, so my ability to fantasise over it grows ever stronger and – in my fantasy world – my budgetary limitations know no bounds. So, keep on producing *The Collection*, no matter how poor the economy gets... It's good to have something to dream about. But my question is, what do you guys fantasise over?

**Pete Tansley** via email

**HFC** Assuming you're limiting us to hi-fi... it's those highly yummy products that even the most blag-worthy among us don't get to keep for long (typically, the better the product, the shorter its leash). It's kit such as Krell's Evolution One and Two – which you always wished you had the room and the money to own. And *The Collection* will keep on going for as long as there are luxury high-end products to collect.

If we aren't limiting ourselves to hi-fi, the task becomes a little easier, as it involves a grain hopper full of Angelina Jolies and an awful lot of baby oil.

**WIN**  
RUSS ANDREWS'  
SOUND  
SOLUTIONS BOOK



The author of our 'letter of the month' will receive a free copy of Russ Andrews' excellent hi-fi book, *Sound Solutions*. This compact and invaluable tome is an excellent guide to getting the best out of the equipment you already own. So drop us a line, or email [alan.sircom@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:alan.sircom@futurenet.co.uk)



engineer. Even though there were two very good pianists in my family, I can't play piano very well, but I'm familiar enough with the character of the instrument to the extent that I always use piano recordings for evaluation of hi-fi equipment, along with several other types of reference recordings.

**Chris Taylor** via email

#### SWAP SHOP

Here's an interesting idea – why not ask your reviewers to live with a system outside of their comfort zone to see how the other half lives? Get the budget specialists to deal with £50,000 worth of luxury hi-fi, while the high-enders try to live with a system costing £500. Give the classical lovers a real rocker's system and vice versa. Wouldn't it be interesting to see what they all think?

**Martin Porteous** via email

**HFC** It's a great idea, Martin – though we're not sure how the reviewers will take it. Some of them have erected an electric fence around their comfort zones. But we'll try to sneak it past some of them. If anyone else has a burning desire to see the *HFC* team perform one of many cunning stunts, just send us an email.

#### OK COMPUTER

Having read Alex Craven's letter in *HFC* 315 (Tomorrow's Hi-Fi?), I felt I had to comment. It's little wonder hi-fi dealers are dying; they're still forcing people into buying a CD player

## “Why not ask your reviewers to live with a system outside of their comfort zone?”

when almost everyone else has moved on. I listen to my music through a laptop these days, which I plug into a very respectable amplifier and speakers. Recently, I wanted to upgrade my system and took my computer to a store, only to be frogmarched from the premises for such heresy.

**Tim Dyson** via email

**HFC** Not every hi-fi dealer is as unenlightened as that, Tim, but there is some considerable inertia to contend with. There are still millions of CDs in circulation and regular use, even in a downloading world, and they need to be played. Of course, that a computer can play and rip those discs does blur the issue still further. There's also the problem that some dealers (at least those who haven't gone down the custom-install route) aren't as PC-savvy as they should be.

#### LOUD, LOUDER, LOUDEST

Why are hi-fi buffs angry over Metallica's *Death Magnetic*? When is metal hi-fi or easy listening? Metallica have a great modern guitar crunch. Imagine what it would sound like if Naim or Linn were to engineer their next recording... Sometimes hi-fi gets in the way of the music.

**Gavin Martin** via email

**HFC** It's not just hi-fi buffs who are angry on this one; Metallica fans generally are annoyed that *Death Magnetic* sounds more dynamic when played through *Guitar Hero* than it does when played on download or CD. It seems that *Death Magnetic* is the latest casualty in the Loudness War, where the sound is pushed to the limits of the format and limited to keep it playable. This may make the recording loud and not challenging for iPod earphones, but it ultimately undermines the dynamics of the musicians playing. So sometimes hi-fi just shows that the recording gets in the way of the music.

#### STOP IT, IT HERTZ!

It seems that under the “Sound Quality” heading in all of Paul Messenger's reviews, he focuses almost completely on the measurements of a product.

Although I can appreciate that some technical information may in fact be worth knowing, and his use of it will ensure an accurate review, it doesn't tell me anything about what the product actually sounds like. This is highlighted in his review of the Mission 790 speakers (*HFC* 312) – I have no idea at all what “boosting output 50-140Hz” sounds like. It begs the question, is Paul Messenger deaf and does he rely solely on measurements?

Please could you ask him to be more descriptive with regard to the actual sound of the product itself, with less technical information, which – in my opinion anyway – is useless.

**Michael Green** via email

**HFC** Paul's tests are extremely thorough, because he tests equipment as well as listening to it. He does, however, sometimes rely on a form of technical shorthand, especially when trying to run a long review over a relatively short amount of space. Specifically, 50-140Hz refers to the bass/upper-bass section of the music. Imagine a piano keyboard; the lowest A key is tuned to 27.5Hz and A above middle C is 440Hz, while the top C is nearly 4.2kHz (4,186Hz). Anything you'd play with your left hand is classed as 'bass', anything you'd play with your right hand is 'treble', and the couple of octaves or so around middle C is 'midrange'.



Above: Mission 790 speakers



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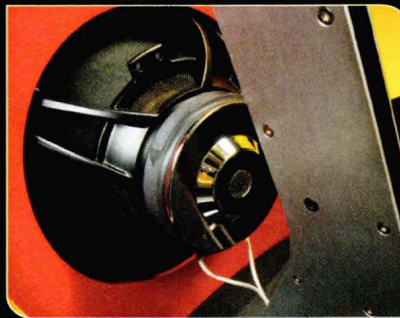
# REVIEWS

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



## EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 34** Naim NAIT XS integrated amplifier
- 38** Unison Research Unico Primo integrated amplifier
- 42** Keith Monks Classic Mk.IIc record-cleaning machine
- 46** Astin Trew AT2000 integrated amplifier
- 50** Jamo R 907 loudspeaker
- 56** Opera Grand Callas loudspeaker



## ROUND-UP

### DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS £20-£130

- 60** Profigold PROA4801
- 60** Clearer Audio Copper-line Alpha
- 61** Kimber DV-30
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## ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

### LUXURY STANDMOUNTS £1,000-£3,000

- 66** Amphion Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary
- 67** DALI Helicon 300 Mk2
- 68** Guru QM10
- 69** JBL LS 40
- 70** Spondor SP3/1 R2
- 71** Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2



## OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion after a livelier...  
w tubes shone through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidelity and ease. It even seems to be

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

### VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b>	★★★★☆	<b>PRO</b>	Good build and open, lively sound from a valve DAC with plenty of inputs. Transport is also great value for money.
<b>FEATURES</b>	★★★★☆	<b>CON</b>	DAC doesn't engage as well as the transport with loss of weight and power through the bass unless you prioritise quality. Cables cost extra and competition from single chassis designs won't help.
<b>BUILD</b>	★★★★☆		
<b>VALUE</b>	★★★★☆		
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	Advance Acoustic is being very ambitious producing a two-box player of this build quality and price. Something just has to give and it is the DAC, which can't do justice to the transport's efforts.		
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b>	★★★★☆		

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...**



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine





# Naimsake

*The musically rewarding Naim NAIT now delivers lavish poise and style, too*

**PRODUCT** Naim NAIT XS

**TYPE** Integrated amplifier

**PRICE** £1,250

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43.2x7x30.1cm

⊖ Weight: 8.6kg ⊖ Analogue inputs: 4x RCA/DIN, 1x phono stage, 1x 3.5mm stereo-jack socket for iPod/MP3 ⊖ Analogue outputs: 1x preamp, 1x tape (DIN) ⊖ Stereo subwoofer output ⊖ Rated power: 60W (8 ohms)/90W (4 ohms) ⊖ NARCOM remote control

**CONTACT** ☎ 01722 426600 # www.naimaudio.com

The NAIT (Naim Audio InTegrated) amplifier has enjoyed an intriguing history. The first iteration, released in 1983, was a truly fascinating shoebox design for which no output figures were ever published – the standard reply to anyone foolish enough to ask “How many watts has it got?” was “Enough”. (In truth, the figure was around 12.5, but the amplifier would deliver sufficient current to drive most loudspeakers.) And the perverse functioning of the design’s highly individual balance control still bemuses people to this day. In spite of this and other idiosyncrasies, though, the amplifier acquired a legion of enthusiastic and loyal supporters who recognised its ability to convey music with an assurance that eluded most of its contemporaries, even if they cost more, offered conventional balance functions and had lots more watts.

The SUPERNAIT, released in 2007, is in its own way equally as ‘out there’. This high-powered, full-sized integrated was unusual because it contained DAC circuitry and had digital inputs so that users could connect their 21st-century digital sources – computers, media servers and the like – directly to the amplifier. This marriage of convenience and high performance proved hugely popular, to the extent that Naim has now produced the Son of SUPERNAIT, the less costly design

whose development name apparently was the NAIT Speed, but which is now officially called the NAIT XS.

Fitted into a slimline aluminium Series 5 case, the amplifier is powered by a 380VA toroidal transformer, but can be usefully supercharged with a Flat-Cap, Hi-Cap or

**“The design is the first to use Naim’s newly developed bayonet PCB mounting technique, which reduces microphonic effects.”**

Super-Cap external power supply for anyone who wants to extract the maximum amount of performance from this no-frills design. It might look like the familiar NAIT 5i, but under the hood there’s a powerplant derived from the SUPERNAIT.

Although the NAIT XS benefits from an optimised, shortened and simplified signal path, this isn’t the only performance-enhancing feature it enjoys. The design is the first to employ Naim’s newly developed bayonet PCB mounting technique, which permits the board to ‘float’, reducing microphonic effects. Furthermore, the heatsink is castellated to provide maximum cooling for reliability, enhanced dynamic performance and to reduce the capacitance effects of a small number of longer PCB tracks. Naim has been aware of the problems caused by vibration creeping inside its electronics for some time, and the XS includes features specifically designed to reduce it. That’s why, for example, the mains switch and IEC socket on the rear panel are also allowed to float and aren’t immovably attached to the chassis. This controlled freedom reduces air- and structure-borne vibration entering the amplifier through the mains cable.

Many detailed aspects of the construction of this amplifier might sound far-fetched to a cynic, but each has undergone stringent listening tests to demonstrate its validity and justify its inclusion in the design. This extends as far as the precise placement and tightness of the cable ties used to dress the

minimal cable runs. While that might sound rather like obsessive/compulsive behaviour, if it makes an audible difference where a cable tie is placed, then why not address that situation? Especially when the cumulative effects of these ‘insignificant’ considerations are audible and beneficial.

The amplifier has six line-level analogue inputs, one of which, like Naim’s preamps and the SUPERNAIT, outputs power to run an external Naim phono stage, which is a worthwhile facility for those who value the superlative performance that vinyl offers. Conversely, for those who don’t, there’s an auto-switching 3.5mm stereo-jack socket on the front panel for connecting an iPod or other MP3 player.

The XS also offers a unity gain option and an AV bypass function, whereby it can be used in conjunction with an AV processor in a home cinema system. This is controlled by a rear-panel switch, which for normal use should be set to ‘off’. Be warned: when the bypass mode is selected, the signal connected to the AV input passes straight through the XS at full gain – neither the volume control nor the mute button will have any effect upon it! ▶





## Q&A

We spoke to Naim's sales manager, Doug Graham, about the user-friendliness of the NAIT XS.



**HFC: The XS sounds more than acceptable straight out of the box, which is something you couldn't always say about Naim gear in the past. Is there any reason for this?**

**DG:** Our experience indicates that the same incremental improvements that occur during warm-up and running in with our other products also occur with the NAIT XS. Your review sample was partly run in and will continue to sound better as it becomes fully warmed up. But if you're enjoying it straight from the box, then perhaps we're just getting better at designing things!

**What type of buyer is the NAIT XS primarily targeted at?**

I think the majority of NAIT XS buyers will be first-time Naim owners. There will, of course, be the older 'Olive' range owner who will make the transition into triptych design attracted by the NAIT XS's upgrade potential and power. I think it's fair to say that the amplifier will surprise quite a few of those people!

**Can the phono connections provide the same degree of isolation available through the DINs, or will using them always compromise the performance of the amplifier to some degree?**

The phono sockets have never been our 'first choice' in connectors, but we fully understand the inconvenience of not having them included on some of our products for some consumers. We want our products to be able to 'live outside' a full Naim system. Flexibility is highly attractive, but, nonetheless, we can't drag ourselves away from what we believe is the best connection for the sake of convenience. We will continue to use DIN and enjoy its electrical/sonic benefits, while offering flexibility with the traditional phono sockets. The comments we've received since we included both DIN and phono connections on our CD players and preamps have been quite interesting. The customer can try both, and they do. Would you care to guess which one they mostly prefer to use?



❑ The XS provides preamp-out and power-amp-in sockets that are connected with a linking plug for normal integrated-amplifier operation. It also provides an unfiltered analogue stereo subwoofer output through a pair of RCA phono sockets. This duplicates the preamplifier output and has no low-pass filtering applied. (Since this is a full-range signal and the output is happy to drive long interconnects, it could conceivably be used as a line-level feed to another power amplifier and speakers to extend the main system's sound into a second room.)

While the XS is obviously going to work well in a system with other Naim components, the model is also designed to be sufficiently versatile and flexible to be included in a wider range of set-ups with non-Naim sources and loudspeakers – which, in part, is how we tested it.

### SOUND QUALITY

The £1,250 XS sits between the NAIT 5i and the SUPERNAIT in terms of pricing and position in the company's integrated-amplifier hierarchy. Comparing it with these two amplifiers (£735 and £2,350 respectively) demonstrates how well it sits between them performance-wise too. While the NAIT 5i is a very respectable and musically informative

performer, the XS clearly has the beating of it in an A-B comparison. Not only does it sound cosmetically more polished and capable than the NAIT 5i, which sometimes sounds a little raw alongside the XS, but it also seems more temporally organised and better able to define the space between notes, as well as the note shape itself. In this respect its performance moves closer to that of the range-topping SUPERNAIT, an amplifier whose communicative skills and expressive ability are comfortably in the premier league.

The XS, as one might expect, exhibits the long-established Naim characteristics of crisp timing, precise pitch determination and rhythmic urgency, all of which imbue appropriate music with vitality and pace. However, like more recently released Naim components and, perhaps, unlike Naim amplifiers of yore, it also possesses what used to be called 'Round Earth' (as opposed to Flat Earth) qualities. This is perhaps most noticeable in the way that it handles the didgeridoo on Vivid Curve's *Live at Edgefield* CD – although the instrument sits at the back of the mix on tracks such as *Hundred Naked Kangaroos*, the XS renders its contribution in almost microscopic detail, presenting it not as a monotonous, continuous drone,





but as a progression of differently intoned phrases, each of which adds colour, expression and individuality to the music.

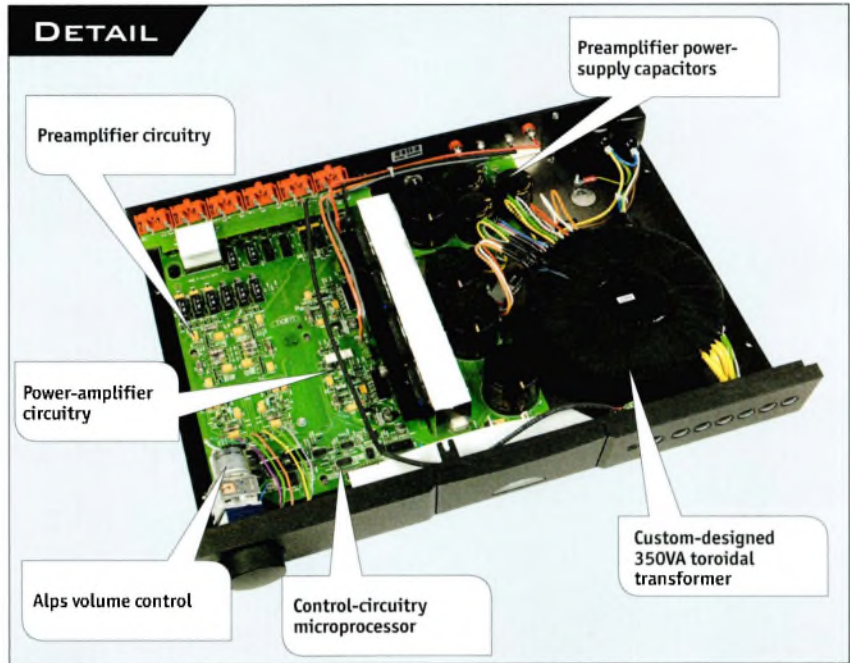
In truth, analysing the performance in terms of specifics is rather missing the point. The XS is designed to make music more communicative and enjoyable on an emotional level, and in that respect it fully achieves what it sets out to do. It enables listeners to appreciate those often subtle effects performers include that instantly raise a smile or a nod of recognition when you hear them. This communicative ability, which elevates the baby Naim's performance way above that of many far more expensive high-end amplifiers, is almost certainly a result of the design's speed and lack of background clutter. When music is present, you hear it; when it's not, you hear nothing. There's no smearing or blurring with the XS: notes begin and end with near clinical precision, regardless of their depth in the mix.

This brings us neatly to another subject that isn't traditionally regarded as a Naim forte: soundstaging. Partner the XS with suitable loudspeakers and you may well be surprised by the depth and width of the images it can cast, as well as the solidity and stability of the elements within that stage. Given a sympathetic recording, those elements are presented within a distinct acoustic environment, which can be wet or dry depending on the amount of reverberation it offers. The air surrounding percussion instruments and percussive elements – for example, cymbal strikes or artificial harmonics on a guitar – truly enhances the credibility of the portrayal the amplifier provides.

**A NAIM PERFORMANCE**

Since its early days, Naim has strived not just to build high-performance amplifiers, but to build high-performance amplifiers that are consistent. To ensure sample uniformity, the firm goes to inordinate lengths both in selecting and matching components and in rigidly standardising the build of each of its designs. That extends to measures such as always placing cable ties in exactly the same position on a particular wiring loom and strictly maintaining the layout of the wiring. In the NAIT XS, for instance, the volume control is hand-wired to the PCB to minimise microphony.

These aren't Looney Tunes notions, as demonstrated by a manufacturer who we witnessed altering the sound of a CD player merely by changing the orientation of a single earth connection. Turning a wire and connector through 90 degrees on the circuit board spectacularly transformed the player's presentation.



**“Partner the XS with suitable loudspeakers and you may well be surprised by the depth and width of the images it can cast...”**

The downside of this scrutiny is that sometimes the truth doesn't sound as good as the performance through a less revealing amplifier: the XS paints a warts-and-all picture of recordings, exposing overtly, for example, the fact that home-studio synthesized backing tracks can rarely match the genuine articles from a professional studio. One favourite review recording closes with a track laid down by the artist in his home studio, compared to the rest of the CD, which is a live recording. The multi-track home brew sounds horribly artificial, gated and dry with lifeless timbre to the instruments. We doubt that was the effect the artist was aiming to achieve. If he'd had the opportunity to play back the track on the XS he might have realised his error.

The class of the NAIT XS also shines through brilliantly on well-recorded classical music, where its acuity with instrumental timbre and ability to reveal playing nuances come straight to the fore. On the London Chamber Orchestra recording of Dave Heath's *The Frontier*, not only can you appreciate the fine acoustic of the venue and the rich tonality of the strings, but also the gusto with which the players approach the music and the striking effects of the unusual playing techniques employed. Throughout this entire CD, the XS majors on blending

power with subtlety, easily conveying the full weight and might of the orchestra playing fortissimo, while at the same time showing remarkable finesse and delicacy in revealing the composition's detailing and the dynamics of the instrumentalists' playing.

With the XS, Naim continues to broaden the appeal of the NAIT concept to encompass an ever wider range of listeners. Like the early NAITs it's a musically communicative, minimalist design, but now the performance is balanced by worthwhile sophistication and poise **HFC**

*Malcolm Steward*

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> The XS is an extremely persuasive musical performer, and the longer you listen, the more this amplifier convinces you of its potential.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> The phono connections broaden its appeal, but they're not on a par with the DIN sockets if you want the optimum performance.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> The Naim NAIT has traditionally always been a love-it-or-loathe-it kind of amplifier, but the XS iteration turns it into one that will appeal to and please a far broader audience than before.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
URL <a href="http://www.techradar.com/498536">www.techradar.com/498536</a>	



EDITOR'S CHOICE

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# Class act

For an impressive performance, look no further than the Unico Primo integrated amp

**PRODUCT** Unison Research Unico Primo

**TYPE** Integrated amplifier

**PRICE** £1,450

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43.5x9.5x43.5cm

⊖ Weight: 15kg ⊕ Inputs: 5x line-level unbalanced (1x phono) ⊕ Outputs: 4+4 bi-wiring ⊕ Power rating: 85 watts (8 ohms)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.ukd.co.uk

It may be a good idea, before you read the following review of Unison Research's latest integrated amplifier, to check out our recent coverage of the Unico CDE CD player (a Best Buy winner in *HFC* 315), as it's the obvious partner for the Primo amp – although there are others in the Unison Research range that would fit the bill. A strong reason for regarding the Unico CDE as the preferred partner is that it's a particularly strong CD player, which means any system built around the two models would be particularly well endowed at the front end, a key requirement for strong performance from any complete system. Of course, this depends on the amplifier being of comparable quality, but as we hope to demonstrate, there are few worries on that score.

The Primo is Unison's entry-level hybrid valve/transistor integrated amplifier and comes in a slimline housing with a finish closely matching that of the Unico CDE CD player. In fact, the two can be stacked vertically with minimal heat build-up, since both are relatively cool-running. The amplifier runs cooler than many solid-state models when idling and increased heat build-up when powered up is modest. The chassis is made from polished aluminium and acts as an effective heatsink, with

louvres in the top panel adding increased thermal dissipation.

The Primo has a power rating of 85 watts per channel RMS into an eight-ohm load under all conditions, though Unison states that output is higher for non-correlated signals – that is, for anything but steady-state tones. The model shares with its sister amplifier, the Unico P (*HFC* 293), a design

**“...there's nothing obviously valve-like in the sound of this amplifier. It could easily be mistaken for a solid-state design...”**

based on a single double triode, in this case an ECC83/AX7 instead of the ECC82/AU7 combination used previously by Unison. This type of triode input stage is said to have quite different characteristics to the ECC82. Apparently the choice arose from technical and listening-based investigations initiated by Unison technical staff, based initially on existing models in the company's range which were modified to suit. Some improvements to the driver and power output stages have been made to suit the new input, with power-supply revisions including a larger, more powerful mains transformer and filter capacitor stage, with the intention of improving dynamics and bass-response drive capacity.

As standard, the Primo is a line-level amplifier, with a total of four line inputs and one tape circuit. But there are a couple of additional features that may be of interest. One is the ability to convert a line input to an MM/MC phono stage, which will set you back a relatively modest £150 for an internal

RIAA board – the phono input is already identified on the rear panel and is marked on the source selector. If you don't choose this option, the input is a standard line input, one of the four already specified.

## SOUND QUALITY

Valve amplifiers aren't to everyone's taste, even if they can be easier on the ear and

more relaxed-sounding than solid-state models. And it's fair to say that some early amplifiers in the Unison Research range fall into the ambivalent category.

But no such qualifications are required in this case. This is, by any standards (entry-level or otherwise), a first-rate amplifier. For starters, it has an impressive power output. Not only does it go loud; it does so with some grace, and in particular it stays consistent in sound as the volume is turned up to quite impressive levels – tested on this occasion using a pair of Mordaunt-Short Performance 6 LE speakers. It's that telltale hardening of the sound as the volume output is increased that makes many amplifiers stand out for all the wrong reasons. That said, in most respects, there's nothing obviously valve-like in the sound of this amplifier. It could easily be mistaken for a solid-state design, if you didn't know better. It is, of course, solid state, in that the output stage uses MOSFETs, though they have the reputation of being the ▶





most valve-like of solid-state devices. But MOSFETs frequently don't live up to the stereotypes and lack a certain grace and transparency, which isn't an issue here.

The first thing we noticed was that the Primo is unusually solid-sounding, and it has this quality at virtually any volume level, within the limits established by its output stage. This is an amplifier with real grip, which became apparent in one of the early tests using a new recording of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (Helmuth Rilling, Aurelius Sängerknaben Calw on the Hänssler Classic label in PCM and SACD). This was a real test in many respects, thanks to the way in which large orchestral forces and multiple choirs in the Requiem Mass are juxtaposed with a small chamber orchestra to partner the tenor and baritone soloists. Somehow, the Primo managed the clash of scales surprisingly well, and the result had a compelling unity of purpose, again with the solidity and consistency already referred to.

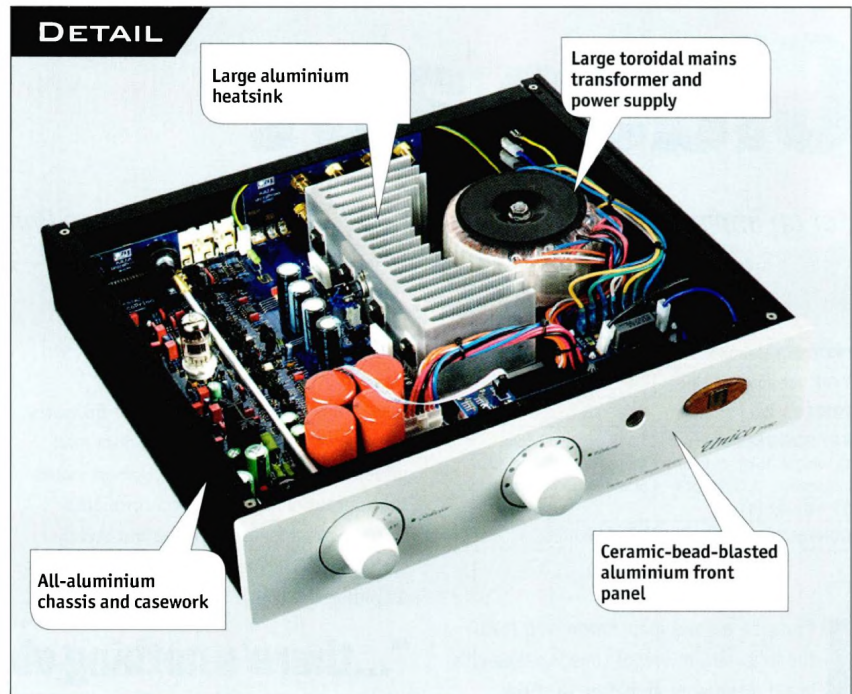
Another quality the amplifier brings to the table is an unusually fine bass. It's rich but pure and unerringly tuneful, as well as being essentially free of the romantic haze that persists with some valve amps. You can hear this from the start of Mahler's 7th Symphony (played by the LSO under Valery Gergiev). This, like the Britten, is an SACD

### SUBWOOFER SOUND

An unusual and potentially extremely useful feature of this amp is a dedicated output which can be used to drive an active subwoofer or some other line-level input – on a processor, for example. Using a good-quality subwoofer is the main attraction here, though, and this could make a great deal of sense if you intend to use something a little more audio-oriented than a standard-issue home cinema sub.

An additional attraction is that the power amplifier in the subwoofer will take on a lot of the load, which means that adding a subwoofer will, in effect, increase the output of the amplifier. This should make a big difference, since bass soaks up power like no other part of the audio spectrum.

Unfortunately, the Unico Primo arrived too late to be tested with the MartinLogan Descent i subwoofer, but from experience with other good-quality amplifiers (all home cinema multichannel models in this case), adding a subwoofer has the effect of opening the window, as well as simply boosting power.



**“Another quality the amplifier brings to the table is an unusually fine bass. It’s rich but pure and unerringly tuneful...”**

recording, or more correctly a multichannel hybrid recording, but it's a distinguished one that blossoms in high-quality DSD and therefore offers a performance level that's perfectly suited for this amplifier.

The main qualities of the Unico Primo, then, are its generous output, its consistency with level, its tuneful bass and its ability to keep its act together when things become difficult and potentially messy – which is the danger with the dense and complex Britten recording. In addition, the Primo is an amplifier with a strong sense of detail and precision, the kind that sounds close even when the system is in an adjoining room. In short, it's a class act. It's not exactly swimming in toys and gadgets, but everything necessary for a purist amplifier is there (though admittedly there's no balance control, which some might miss). Other highlights include the ability to add a phono stage at a moderate cost and the fact that it can also drive a subwoofer in a 2.1 or 2.2 set-up. This is a very handy addition and one which should extend the amplifier's useful life beyond the point where it might otherwise be considered due for upgrading.

The Primo is also exceptionally well built. Though slimline, it still weighs a substantial 15kg, partly thanks to a massive toroidal

power transformer, extensive use of die-cast heatsink extrusions and a thick one-piece front panel. We're less impressed by the remote control, however, which looks fine at first sight, but is marred by prominent fixing screws on the top plate and by the controls themselves, which are tiny and awkward to use. In its favour, though, this is the same remote that's supplied with the Unico CDE CD player, so you only need the one handset to control the entire system – leaving you one spare to lose down the back of an armchair. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> An exceptionally well-sorted amplifier that gets the basic sound parameters just right, without straying off into valve-like excess.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	<b>CON</b> It has no obvious weaknesses, though you do have to pay a little extra for the phono input. The remote control isn't great, however, and there's no balance adjustment.
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> This is an amp that lives up to its billing and works brilliantly with the Unico CDE. Build quality, externally and internally – including the smooth-running controls (all two of them) and the twin sets of loudspeaker terminals – is excellent.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
URL <a href="http://www.techradar.com/499279">www.techradar.com/499279</a>	



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1.



2.



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- 4. KSL Kondo Neuro integrated Amplifier

- 5. SME 2012A Turntable with KSL Kondo iOJ Cartridge
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- 7. Kore-Edo LLA-1 Control Amplifier & PLA-1 Power Amplifier



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KATH MOKS

JET-MOVE STANDARD ELECTRIC CLEANING MACHINE  
HAND BUILT IN GERMANY



# Monksy business

Keith Monks introduces the updated version of its classic seventies record-cleaning machine

**PRODUCT** Keith Monks Classic Mk.IIc

**TYPE** Record-cleaning machine

**PRICE** £2,695

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 48.9x39.3x46.2cm

○ Weight: 32kg ○ Broadcast-standard precision

○ Whisper-quiet operation ○ Five-year guarantee

○ Finishes: Classic White, Royal Blue, English Oak

**CONTACT** ☎ 01983 857079 # www.keithmonks-rcm.co.uk

If you need a record-cleaning machine (RCM), then there really is only the one option: Keith Monks. Not only is the brand acknowledged as the best in its field; its products have been used by the BBC and other notables for some 40 years.

These genuinely professional machines are true heavy-duty workhorses engineered to clean records non-stop, all day and every day, if required. For example, the normal home of the customised vacuum pump they employ is a kidney dialysis machine, where failure is not an option. This pump is used in every model across the range, so domestic buyers enjoy the same level of performance and reliability that the BBC, other major broadcasters and archivists experience.

The cleaning fluids recommended for use with the machines are Monks proprietary discOvery solutions that contain no alcohol,

artificial chemicals or additives. Totally tree-hugger-friendly, the biodegradable liquids claim to remove all manner of contamination from records, including muck and grime from your charity-shop purchases and particle residue from pressing stampers on your brand new albums.

The Classic Mk.IIc is a single-brush cleaning system with a combined deck-mounted brush cradle and built-in fluid-dispensing system

**“...the normal home of the customised vacuum pump employed is a kidney dialysis machine, where failure is not an option.”**

for 12-inch records. It's supplied with a dedicated cleaning brush that's engineered to reach safely and effectively to the bottom of the record groove. Equally noteworthy is the proprietary vacuum-and-buffer-thread record-drying system, which safeguards the record from any potential damage while it's being dried.

The 'Classic' name is entirely appropriate here, because this is a near exact copy of the original machine that was launched in 1969, except that it enjoys improved quality

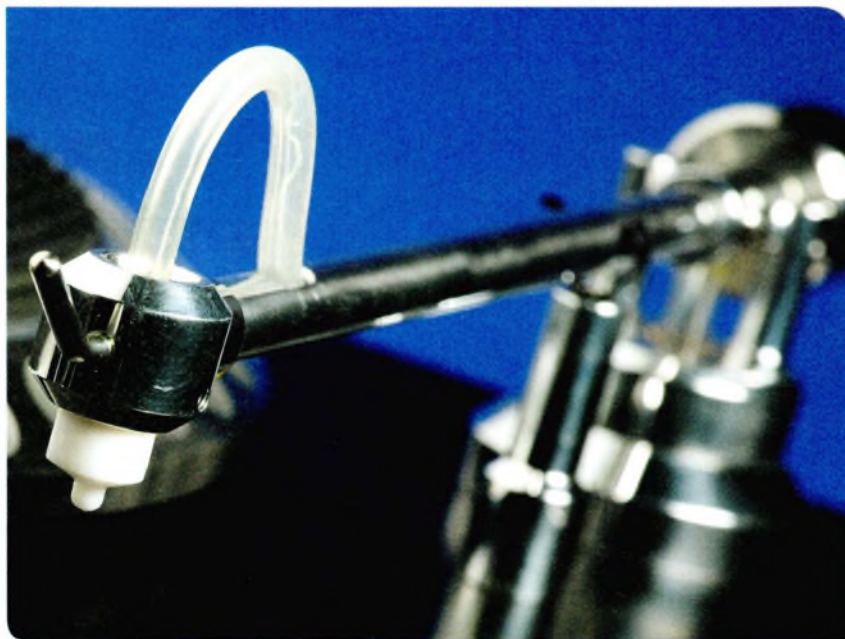
and reliability and better finishes, including Classic White, Royal Blue and English Oak. As with the first machines, fluid is still applied to the disc using a manual screen-washer pump button from the Mini – that's the original Sir Alec Issigonis/Leyland-designed Mini and not the more recent BMW-built pretender.

Getting to the stage of using the cleaner involves a little preparatory work, not the

least of which is taking the Classic out of its packaging. Don't try this unaided if you have any back problems, as the machine weighs 32kg. Once it's unpacked, you need to fit a component that supports the cleaner's deck while you work inside, before removing a couple of transit fittings from the pump and the scrubbing brush. Then all that's left is to fit and adjust the counterweight on the suction arm.

Once you have your machine set up according to the comprehensive instructions (which would benefit from a few helpful illustrations for those who don't enjoy ploughing through pages of text), then it's time to fire up the cleaner and rejuvenate some vinyl. It's worth kitting yourself out with a stock of new record sleeves, because there's little sense in putting your shiny discs back in the old ones.

Operation of the machine is simplicity itself: having filled the cleaning-fluid reservoir, you place the record on the special platter mat and throw the main toggle switch to 'wash', which starts the assembly rotating. You then position the record-cleaning brush over the disc and push the washer button to release the discOvery liquid. The brush encourages the fluid to penetrate into the groove and dissolve or loosen any solid contaminants. Finally, you swing the washer arm back to its rest position, switch the main switch to 'dry' and lower the suction arm. ■





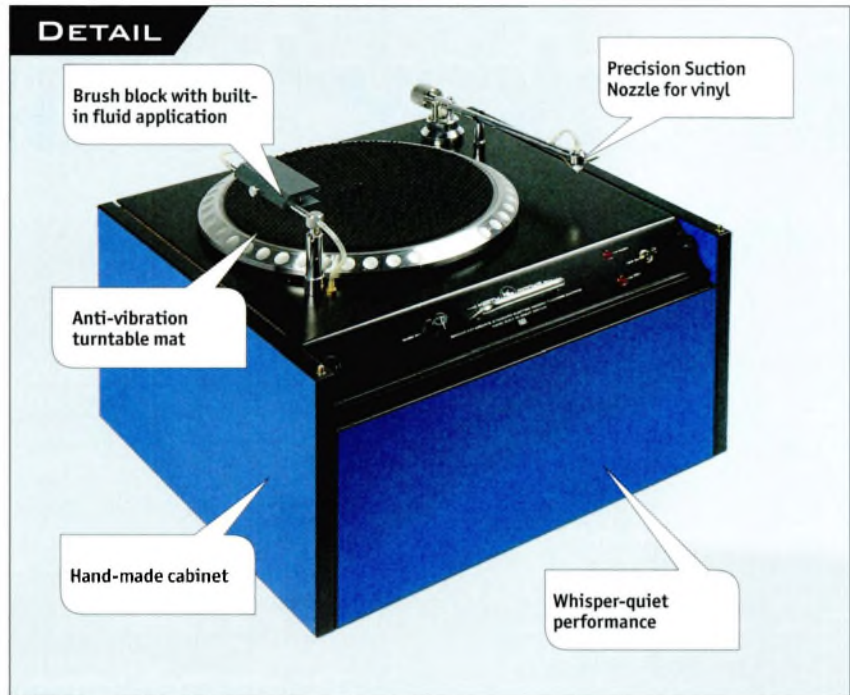
onto the disc label, from where it tracks back to the outer edge of the disc, sucking up the fluid as it goes. If you've applied the right amount of fluid you should end up with a perfectly dry disc ready to be flipped and have its bottom wiped, as it were. If you've applied too much you'll need to repeat the vacuum operation.

Judging exactly how much fluid to use so that records are both perfectly clean and dry when you take them off the Classic Mk IIc is something that you'll only learn by practising on a few LPs. There's no danger of causing any real damage here, but it's probably best not to use your favourite, irreplaceable discs until you've figured how many pushes of that Mini washer button work best for you.

Having ascertained that one full depression plus a half-hearted stab worked for us, we carefully introduced the Classic Mk IIc to one of our oldest albums, a 42-year-old Chuck Berry recording that had been liberally and regularly dusted with cigarette ash and played on various Dansettes and music centres during our carefree teenage years. After listening to this badly abused disc following the RCM's ministrations, we have to admit that we were more than delighted. As a matter of fact, we weren't far short of being amazed. Certainly the absence of noise, clicks and pops was appreciable and welcome, but what delivered the killer punch was the increased amount of music that was being unearthed: subtle changes in Berry's guitar sound, inflexions in his voice, echo on the drums, even previously unnoticed bass lines all became overtly apparent.

Purchased in the 1980s from a record wholesale outfit housed under a filthy London railway arch, Barry Reynolds' *I Scare Myself* still sounded cosmetically flawless, so we were fascinated to hear how it would clean up. To be honest, we weren't expecting much – certainly not the vibrancy and enhanced dynamics that the band exhibited after its wash and brush-up, nor the increased level of subtle detail that emerged out of the mixes.

Only one album, a very regularly played Joni Mitchell disc of dubious provenance, failed to show any immediate audible benefit after cleaning, but a second spin on the machine with a little more fluid and a touch more downforce applied to the vacuum arm finally did the trick. The cleaning even seemed to eradicate the previously ever-present hint of sibilance in Joni's voice.



## “Even a 19-year-old clubber appreciated the effects of the Classic Mk.IIc, when we cleaned and played The JAMs’ album *Shag Times*.”

Even a 19-year-old clubber appreciated the effects of the Classic Mk IIc, when we cleaned and played The JAMs’ album *Shag Times* and listened to *Whitney Joins The JAMs*. Here was a young man who'd heard many of the loudest and clearest PAs in the UK, being absolutely astounded by all the previously unheard information he could detect on a track with which he was very familiar. Vocal clarity and instrumental timbre both showed dramatic improvements after cleaning, and the reduction in vinyl noise was equally remarkable.

The beauty of the Keith Monks system is that as well as reviving old records, it can also improve the sound of fresh vinyl by washing away contaminants that remain on the disc after the manufacturing process. We tested this by cleaning some brand new, never-played vinyl after using Monks's special BreakTheMold™ pre-wash fluid. The improvement was astonishing: guitars and voices sounded incredibly vibrant, fuller and richer harmonically.

On *Off Night Backstreet*, Joni Mitchell sings, “Maybe I'm just dramatising... I don't care”, which might well be the delirious reaction to this device by any vinyl enthusiast who hears his or her albums after they've undergone a thorough laundromatting on the Classic Mk IIc, especially after hearing

the wealth of previously undiscovered information waiting to be set free from those grooves. The differences frequently seem on a par with changing from a £100 moving-magnet cartridge to a £1,000 moving coil.

Everyone with a cherished record collection needs access to one of these devices. Hardcore vinyl fans with huge collections should buy their own, while everyone else might consider, perhaps, buying one with a group of like-minded friends in some sort of time-sharing deal. The purchase won't be one that anybody will regret. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> This machine does a fine job of rejuvenating dirty (and brand new) discs, so they look and, more importantly, sound significantly better.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> Even after practice it can still be a bit of a sloppy process, with surplus cleaning fluid – which, admittedly, does no harm – spraying off the disc onto the deck.
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Regardless of the slight quibbles, the Classic Mk.IIc is a real godsend for the vinyl fan. As noted above, the improvements in the music and its quality that this machine produces can be little short of staggering.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> <b>OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
www.techradar.com/498528	



## UNISON

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The Vitus Audio SS-010 amplifier is not just highly recommended, it embodies the spirit of this webzine's highest honor, a "Most Wanted Component" award.

Dave Thomas  
The Stereo Times, June 07



SS-010 Integrated Amplifier



SCD-010 Integrated CD Player



UK Distributor: Metropolis Music, Phone: 01435 867 438  
email: [info@metropolis-music.co.uk](mailto:info@metropolis-music.co.uk), web site: [www.metropolis-music.co.uk](http://www.metropolis-music.co.uk)

Vitus Audio, Virkelyst 80, Gjellerup, DK-7400 Herning, Denmark, Phone: +45 9626 8046, Fax: +45 9626 8045  
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HI-FI CHOICE  
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integrated amplifier

ASTINTrew

remote source

MP3

# Trew colours

*Proof that features and good sound aren't incompatible*

**PRODUCT** Astin Trew AT2000

**TYPE** Integrated amplifier

**PRICE** £1,349

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43x11x39.7cm

⊙ Weight: 12.2kg ⊙ Power output: 65W (8 ohm)/

85W (4 ohm) ⊙ Inputs: 5x line, 1x RCA, 1x balanced

⊙ Outputs: 1x line, 1x preamp, 1x subwoofer

**CONTACT** ☎ 01491 629629 # www.astintrew.co.uk

For a long time now we've been told that when it comes to sound quality, less is more, so tone controls have been banished along with flicking UV meters and most other fripperies, some of which seemed fundamental to earlier generations. But with today's multi-source mayhem and the need to integrate our personal music players into the hi-fi, features have started to make a comeback.

One company that's clearly into giving us flexibility is Astin Trew, one of the more recent entrants to the 'designed in the UK, built in China' arena, which has carved out a niche by adding valves to the solid-state circuits in its CD player and pre/power amplifiers. The features on its new AT2000 integrated are not of the old-school variety – there are still no tone controls – but are instead designed to make the amp rather more multiroom-friendly than most and to offer the iPod user something with which to engage. For the MP3 crowd, there's a front-panel mini-jack input, as well as headphone sockets for full-size and 3.5mm jacks, something we've never seen before. These are both connected to a dedicated headphone amplifier, which might come as a pleasant surprise to those used to the quality of an MP3 player's output.

The back panel reveals a slew of socketry that's designed to make integration into a multiroom system easy, including inputs and outputs for Cat 5 cables terminated in RJ45 plugs and an RS-232 port for control from a data bus. Alternatively, there are inputs and outputs for remote control with a cabled system such as might be used where the amp is hidden out of sight. The manual suggests

power supply for the power-amp section, supplying quiescent current to the MOSFET output devices. This is presumably why there's only a small difference between outputs into eight- and four-ohm loads.

## SOUND QUALITY

Although the valve plays only a small part in this circuit – the signal doesn't pass

**“The AT2000 is remarkably transparent and reflects the quality of the incoming signal with a very natural and fluent precision.”**

ways of combining AT2000s in multiroom set-ups and, where sound quality is the goal, encourages the use of balanced leads between amplifiers, which is unusual in such set-ups, but undoubtedly good advice.

That balanced input is one of five line inputs offered and sits alongside pre, line and subwoofer outputs. The last are a very rare feature in the stereo world, but a sensible one given the unpopularity of large speakers in the contemporary domestic environment! Another input dubbed 'amp in' gives direct access to the power amp, bypassing volume, and therefore could be used to incorporate this amp into a home cinema system.

We mentioned that Astin Trew has a predilection for combining valves with transistors in its designs – the AT3500 CD player, for instance, has one in its output stage, and so, despite appearances, does this integrated. It doesn't sit in the signal chain per se, but rather operates within the

through it – there's something of a glass-audio quality to the sound of this integrated. It has the nimbleness and realism that we associate with good valve designs and, while it has more power than most vacuum-driven devices, it doesn't have the sense of power one associates with transistors. This is something you either love or loathe, and fans of valve designs are very much in the latter camp. At *Hi-Fi Choice* we quite like a bit of grip in the bass, but accept that the musicality that's achieved without it is rather beguiling.

The AT2000 is a remarkably transparent amp in all important respects – it produces attractively open results and reflects the quality and nature of the incoming signal with a very natural and fluent precision. There's no sense here of the sound being mechanical or etched; rather, instruments and voices are placed in the context in which they were recorded. So Peter Gabriel's voice has a lot of space around it and has a



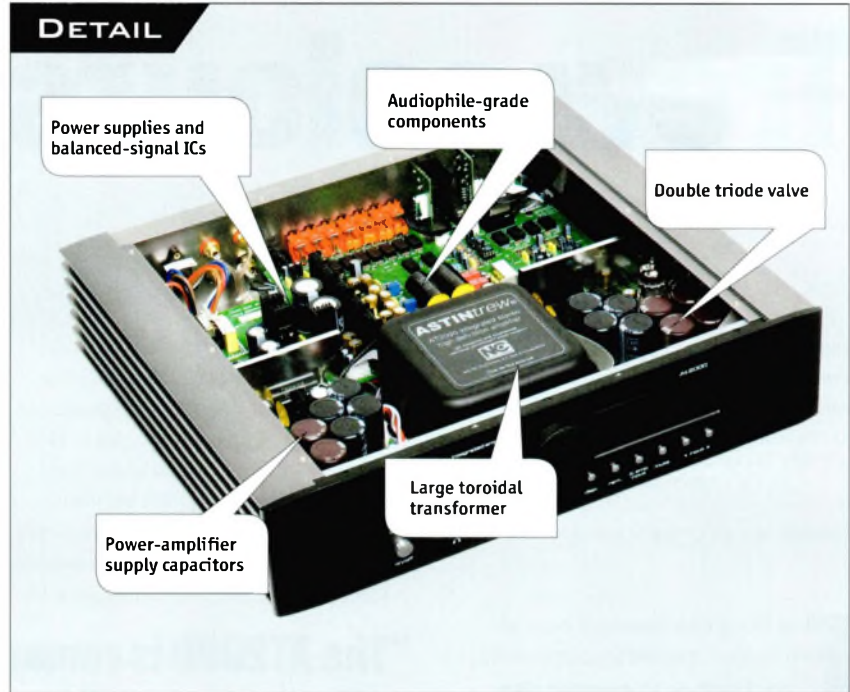


## NEVER CONNECTED

The preamp section is biased to operate in class A and benefits from the presence of a Never Connected power supply. This is a licensed technology created by Fenson & Co that's used in components including ECS preamps, Michell turntable electronics and Trichord phono stages as well as other AT designs. Its purpose is to isolate the audio electronics from the ever-increasing levels of pollution on the mains, something which is an issue in every system used in the urban environment and beyond. It's claimed to be as noise-free as batteries, but with the benefit of high voltage and low impedance that you get with the mains. Effectively it means that the amplifier's power supply doesn't 'see' the mains in all its noisy glory, as is usually the case.

good sense of stereo solidity on the song *Musical Box* (from the Genesis album *Nursery Cryme*), while the double-bass-playing on Frank Zappa's *The Ocean is the Ultimate Solution* is dirty and compressed. With that, however, you can appreciate the quality of playing and composition as well as you can with better recordings. More powerful and grippy-sounding pure solid-state amps will give the latter more drive and urgency, but also tend not to have the transparency on offer here, a transparency that means the better recordings in our record collection are very easy to appreciate indeed.

The AT2000 has been priced to compete with the likes of Arcam's A38 (now £1,300). Regular readers of *Hi-Fi Choice* will recall how well the A38 fared in a recent *Ultimate Group Test*, so we pulled it in for comparison with the Astin Trew – and we have to say that the newcomer comfortably held its own. While the Arcam has a beefier bottom end, it's not able to resolve fine detail with the clarity of the AT, although both have a similar grip on timing. However, if you appreciate instrumental and vocal timbre or just want a more realistic sound, then the AT definitely has the edge. At least, it does with Guru QM10 loudspeakers (£1,695; see page 68), which are, perhaps, not a typical partnership choice, even if they are remarkably musical.



**“It’s the sort of amp that will work well with vinyl, where the smooth top end combined with great dynamics will exploit its skills.”**

We brought in the PMC GB1 floorstander (£1,330) to act as a more realistic partner, and its more open and relaxed style revealed more of the AT's own openness and low-level resolving powers.

With a more appropriate source than our reference Resolution Audio Opus 21 – namely the Cambridge Audio 840C – things went well so long as we stuck with refined software. Barb Jung was as dynamic and three-dimensional as ever, but putting on the more challenging *Third World Love*, with their trumpet-led jazz vibes, did reveal the CD player's relatively coarse top end. This is a difficult album to get enjoyable results from, and the amplifier's transparency did reveal why. Although very competent, the Cambridge isn't a match for dearer machines in a revealing context such as this.

It's the sort of amp that will work extremely well with vinyl, where the smooth top end

combined with great dynamics will exploit its skills. There's no phono input, sadly, but that's what standalone phono stages were made for.

With the AT2000, Astin Trew is offering a genuine alternative to the majority of integrated models in this price range. It's a design of such subtlety and finesse that it rivals Sugden's classic A21 amp, but without the thermal and power challenges of that model. The fact that it offers so much flexibility is the icing on a highly musical cake. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> A transparent- and realistic-sounding integrated amplifier with a dynamic character that really engages. A highly flexible model with some unusual features.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> Not as obviously powerful as some, and it would be nice to have a phono input. Does anyone need two headphone sockets, though?
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> If you're looking for subtlety rather than slam and you prefer the timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, then the excellent AT2000 is a serious contender for your money.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
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EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine





# No box rocks

*Jamo's latest boxless loudspeaker brings flagship performance down to size – just!*

**PRODUCT** Jamo R 907

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £5,500 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 44x118.9x48.7cm  
 ⦿ Weight: 52.4kg ⦿ Drivers: 28mm soft-dome DTT tweeter in enclosure, 150mm magnesium cone midrange, 2x 380mm air-dried paper cone woofer ⦿ Sensitivity: 89dB ⦿ Impedance: 6 ohms/4 ohms (nominal)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01923 205600 🌐 www.jamo.com

**T**he idea is simple: take the flagship R 909 dipole speaker (reviewed in *HFC* 280) and make it smaller. The result is the R 907 – which despite the design criteria is still one of the biggest speaker systems you can buy.

Jamo's latest open-plan loudspeaker arrives nose-to-nose on a pallet, packed in a wooden case you could sub-let. Moving the speakers out of the box is just about a two-person lift, and they need a huge room to breathe. In other words, although this is a smaller design than the R 909, it's no less uncompromising.

Its dipole construction places the R 907 into a relatively rare subset of loudspeakers. A dipole design that uses conventional 'cone and dome' drivers makes even electrostatic speakers seem commonplace. The concept's not without its supporters, though; loudspeaker demigod Siegfried Linkwitz (he who effectively rewrote the book on loudspeaker design, as well as being one half of the double act that brought us the Linkwitz-Riley crossover) is a strong advocate of dipoles.

In simple terms, dipole speakers radiate energy (music) to the back and front of the loudspeaker, by having the drive units on a single baffle board, without any cabinetwork behind that baffle. At a stroke, this eliminates any potential cabinet coloration and hysteresis loops from the air pressure inside the cabinet influencing the motion of the loudspeaker drivers. Of course, this only works if the baffle is tough enough to stay the course; the seven-layer MDF-sandwich front baffle board is 43mm thick, glued and shaped under high pressure. The result is a baffle shaped not unlike the hitty part of a whopping great cricket bat, stuck handle-first in the ground. The baffle's rigidity is reinforced by a double

5x60mm damped rear bracing arm and a 23kg cast-iron base; the bi-wire terminals sit either side of the brace in that hefty base. There's a box the size of a telephone directory in with each speaker – this contains an alarming

**“A dipole design that uses conventional ‘cone and dome’ drivers makes this speaker almost unique in approach.”**

collection of spikes, nuts, spanners and torture implements. If you don't like to see trailing wires and speaker gizzards, the magnetic rear grilles do a fair job of pretending there's a speaker cabinet.

Cabinets do have a distinct bonus when it comes to bass reinforcement, though, because the air moved to the front of the driver has an alarming habit of scooting round the back of the unit, effectively 'short-circuiting' the speaker below around 200Hz. This is why hybrid electrostatic systems from the likes of Martin Logan have a dipole panel unit and a bass driver in a subwoofer box.

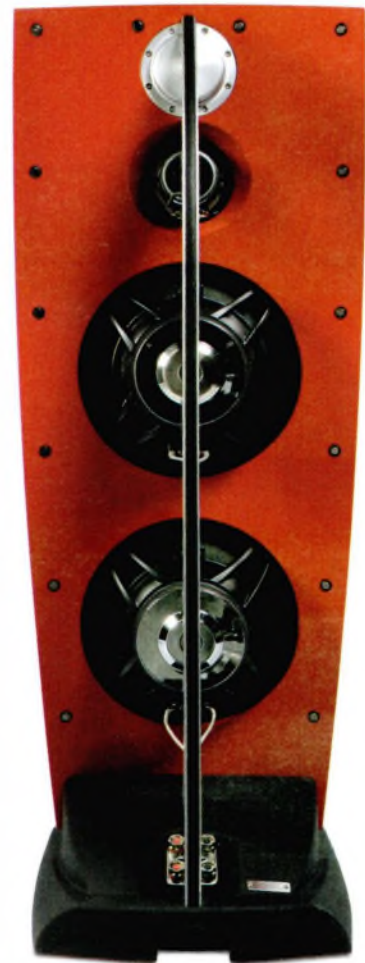
Jamo's system does without the box, thanks to a significant bass boost engineered into the crossover, overcoming the 'short circuit' and giving the speaker a gentle 6dB/octave roll-off from its 100dB peak at 200Hz. As such, the R 907 gives workable bass down at around 30Hz and – as a handy by-product – the 2x 380mm drive units don't need to be made from relatively heavy materials. They're made from a lighter grade of air-dried paper and have vented pole pieces and baskets and sport 50mm voice coils, all of which is claimed to give them a 30Hz resonance frequency and a fast, taut bass response.

Midrange is covered by a 150mm magnesium drive unit, developed in tandem with SEAS, which uses a combination pole piece and back plate in place of a conventional ferrite ring. It also has a ventilated voice coil aided by the solid matt chromed phase plug. This is similar to the unit found in the R 909, but lacks the Stonehenge-like standing stones magnet arrangement around the voice coil.

The R 909 uses ScanSpeak's legendary Revelator tweeter unit, but the R 907 relies on an enhanced version of the DTT 28mm multi-coated textile dome tweeter. Unlike the other units in the speaker, the tweeter is

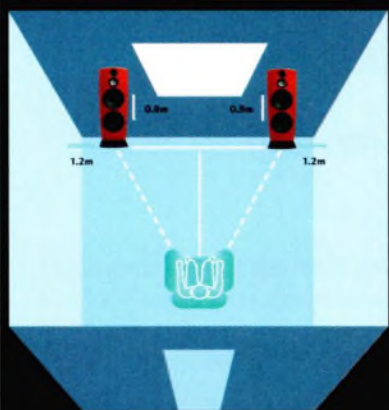
enclosed in its own double-damped chamber, so isn't technically behaving as a dipole.

Despite being a three-way, four-drive-unit design, the crossover network is surprisingly simple, with crossover points at 250Hz and ▶





## SET-UP



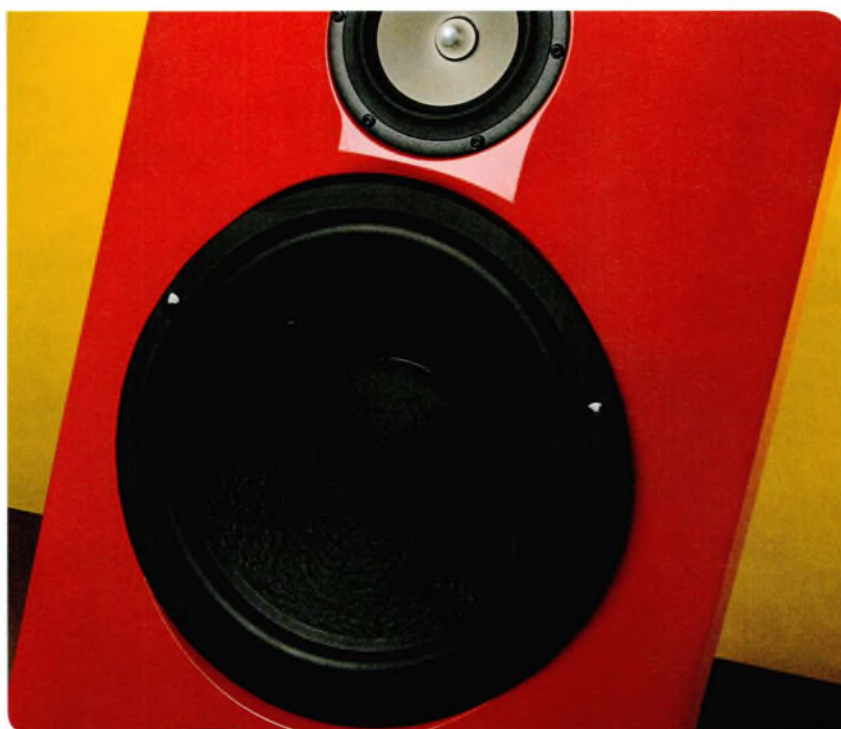
### POSITIONING

Jamo offers some very clear advice in the accompanying instructions. The speakers should be placed 90cm from the rear wall and 1.2m from the side walls, angled roughly ten degrees to the back wall. You're also advised to place yourself at a 30-degree angle from each speaker. In other words, you and your speakers should each be at one of the corners of an equilateral triangle. Jamo suggests this is a good starting point for fine-tuning the speaker positioning, and also advises playing the long game with regard to placement; place the speakers as above, do nothing for a couple of days and only then start experimenting.

You'll also find the speaker benefits from damping the critical first-reflection points, especially along the side walls, but also below (and even above) the speaker. Fortunately that needn't involve 'room treatment' kit; shelves along the side walls and a carpet in front of the speakers will work wonders. This is what Jamo means by "critical damping" in the manual, and this form of room-tuning yields greater benefits than millimetre-sized adjustments to the speakers' overall position.

### SYSTEM MATCHING

Given a claimed 89dB efficiency and four-ohm impedance load, Jamo doesn't place great emphasis on partnering electronics. Naturally, it's expected that the products partnering a top-notch loudspeaker will be of a good standard, but as long as you don't plan on using a three-watt triode amp, the speaker is remarkably unfussy. We used a surprisingly low-cost (relatively speaking) 100-watt integrated amp without complaint, although the better the electronics, the better the sound.



2.5kHz, straightforward 12dB/octave (or second-order) slopes throughout and a low parts count. What components are in the crossover are quality, though, with Clarity Cap foil capacitors and air-coil inductors. Of course, we'd expect nothing other than the best given the rest of the design.

### SOUND QUALITY

Jamo has a clear objective with the R 907 (and the R 909) – to make a speaker with all the benefits of a dynamic loudspeaker, but

none of the limits of a box – and it has largely achieved this goal. Reading over the listening notes for the R 909, the ever so slightly smaller R 907 does make the tweeter closer to ear height when listening. If your normal listening position is slumped in a couch, though, this will sound like a mid-forward design. This is a speaker that demands your attention, both mentally and physically.

The first thing that hits you is the bass. Literally – bass notes reach you with a physical force that's as impressive as it is deep and powerful. The strange thing is, the bass driver doesn't seem to be moving much air in the process. Put your hand up against the bass driver of a subwoofer pumping out super-deep bass and each beat will feel like a stiff breeze; with the R 907, the air hardly moves at all. This is because of the dipole arrangement and, in sonic terms, it makes bass seem fast, deep and reasonably well controlled.

Then you realise the bass and midrange are unlike anything you've ever heard before. The sound is extremely fast, making recordings seem more 'live' than usual. Listening to *My Drug Buddy* by Evan Dando and Juliana Hatfield (a live acoustic recording made in a radio studio in California), one got the uncanny impression of being sat in the studio with them. The same thing applied to Seasick Steve recordings, where the speaker's output had precisely the same weight and tonality as Steve's cranked-up Roland Cube 30 amplifier, and almost the same volume, too. This doesn't just sound like the recording; it sounds like the artist is making the recording in your room.



This is where the Jamo hits its zenith. Like a panel electrostatic speaker, it has no timing lag from the speaker cabinet, making the sound appear more temporally 'there' than that of any conventional model. It also has the headroom and range of traditional cone-and-dome speaker drivers, so the sound is far larger, louder and more dynamically impressive than with any electrostatic. In other words, this is like a panel speaker for those who want to play AC/DC, or Mahler's Eighth at a good lick.

The problem with eliminating the cabinet is that it leaves the nature of the loudspeaker drivers fully exposed. Those box colorations can on occasion be more than benign; they can help calm down frisky drivers. In the case of the R 907, the top end of the loudspeaker can turn shrill. This makes the model less capable of handling a wide variety of musical (or more accurately, recording) styles; something with a lot of treble energy – such as early Led Zeppelin albums – quickly moves past 'exciting' and into 'scorching'. This will make the Jamo unpopular with those who plan on using the speakers hanging off the back of some network audio products. It also means the idea of using the R 907 with almost any amp isn't practical; a few hundred well-designed watts will tame the upper midrange.

The character of the speakers will ultimately shine through, whatever you hook them to and whatever you play through them. This



**BOX-FREE SPEAKERS**

Jamo isn't alone in developing no-box speaker designs; but it is one of the few brands currently building a model that features conventional drive units. The vast majority of panel loudspeakers use similarly flat transducers.

The commonest dipole speaker design uses one or more electrostatic panels to generate treble, midrange and – sometimes – bass. Examples of this approach include models from Quad (Anglo-Chinese), Audiostatic (from Holland), Sound Lab (from the US) and MartinLogan (also from the States). Other designs have used magnetostatic drive units (Magnepan, from the US) and ribbon arrays (Apogee, also from the US – no longer in production).

Aside from Jamo, Siegfried Linkwitz has developed the Orion speaker, which is typically sold as a (highly regarded) kit. Then there's Gradient, with its Helsinki 1.5 loudspeaker (see 'CES Show' in this issue, p12-15). Finally, there's an army of 'bodgers' who are willing to take a hammer to the living-room wall for a similar effect.

**“The character of the speakers will ultimately shine through, whatever you hook them to and whatever you play through them.”**

is considered acceptable with box speakers because there's no way to eliminate the box colorations, but is not accepted with panels. Which is a shame, because if you dismiss this speaker out of hand, you miss out on a model that's like the Quad Electrostatic for rockers.

Most of us equate dipole designs with electrostatics, and that means the Jamo R 907 comes as a bit of a shock, in both good and not so good ways. The good part is the discovery that it can knock out military-grade bass, but with that comes the revelation that removing the box does not remove coloration and the character of those drivers shines through. Which makes this model a sort of 'tweener' product, lying somewhere in between the sheer accuracy of an electrostatic panel and the sheer entertainment factor of a big-box speaker. If that sounds like 'compromise' to you, then the Jamo R 907 is unlikely to win you over. If it sounds like 'two wrongs

making a right', then it just might be that no other speaker on the market will suit you better than this one. **HFC**

*Alan Sircom*

**VERDICT**

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	<b>PRO</b> With powerful bass and an open midrange, the R 907 is entirely free from the overhang and honk a big box can sometimes produce...
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> ...though it's not free of colorations from the drivers themselves. Also, thanks to the size and weight, this isn't a speaker to be shoehorned into smaller rooms.
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	

**CONCLUSION**  
While hardly a universal solution, the R 907 is arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships. Its distinctive character is a love-hate thing – and not just due to the dipole design – but if you fall into the 'love' camp, little else will do.

**HI-FI CHOICE** ★★★★★  
**OVERALL SCORE**

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# TITAN

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**GOOD NEWS:** *It is without doubt the finest amplifier MF have ever created!*

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It was seven years ago Musical Fidelity launched its kW monster amp. It received outstandingly enthusiastic reviews. More importantly, perhaps, the customers loved it so much that the limited edition of 75 pieces sold out in four months!

MF decided to wait for five years before they started trying to go a step forward from the original kW. It has taken them more than two years to develop the TITAN. The significance of this extended development time will not be lost on those familiar with Musical Fidelity's exceptionally rapid and efficient development cycle. The TITAN has been a gigantic task!

The TITAN follows Musical Fidelity's established pattern of having an external PSU to ensure no transformer interaction with delicate signal circuitry. The TITAN system is in two identically sized, beautifully finished boxes.

The technical performance of the TITAN is truly exceptional. 1kW into 8 Ohms, 2 kW into 4 Ohms and, give or take a fraction of a dB, 4kW into 2 Ohms. Of more interest are the distortion and signal to noise ratio. The distortion is fabulously low at less than 0.01% from 10Hz to 50kHz. Usually (but not with MF) distortion is only quoted at 1kHz. With most amplifiers (apart from Musical Fidelity) there are dramatic increases in distortion with rising frequency. The higher the frequency the worse the distortion.

The TITAN is in a whole different world to other amplifiers. Its distortion is less than 0.01% from 10Hz to 50kHz. Even at 100kHz its distortion is only hovering around 1%. MF believe these are quite remarkable and significant figures.

The TITAN's ultra low wide bandwidth distortion results in an incredibly clean sweet sound. There simply is no grain or harshness or any "mechanical" feel to the sound. Needless to say the TITAN has colossal dynamic range and will drive any loudspeaker with authority and ease. Put simply, in practise, it is almost impossible to clip or limit the TITAN under any circumstances.

It sounds like a delicate Class A tube amp (until dynamics are required). MF believe that this sound quality is due to the TITAN's inherent ultra low wide bandwidth distortion, super low noise, colossal load driving ability and total system linearity. By this MF mean that you can drive any loudspeaker and the TITAN will always deliver a linear low distortion response regardless of loading.

The TITAN is fully balanced from beginning to end. It has inputs for balanced and single ended and two sets of high quality loudspeaker terminals with 30 micron gold plating. The TITAN also has a trigger input allowing it to be switched by the upcoming Primo Pure Class A fully balanced triode preamp or any other trigger signal.

MF have spared no expense in the build quality and design of the TITAN.

At £19,999 the TITAN is hardly cheap but then it's the best amp MF know how to make. They believe that like its forerunner the kW, it will still be competitive in 10 or 20 years time and so do we!

0% Deal\*: Dep: £1,999 + £500.00 for 36 months

\*subject to status †subject to conditions







# Grand Opera

*This Italian-made beauty features unusual multi-tweeter arrays – just like its little brother*

**PRODUCT** Opera Grand Callas

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** From £5,750 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 27x106x40cm

⊖ Weight: 50kg ⊖ Drivers: 5x 25mm soft-fabric dome tweeters, 4x 135mm main drivers ⊖ Sensitivity: 89dB  
⊖ Impedance: 6/4 ohms (nominal/minimum) ⊖ Real wood and leather finish ⊖ Solid-copper phase plugs

**CONTACT** ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.operaloudspeakers.com

**T**his gorgeous and very substantial floorstander doesn't exactly come cheap, but given its no-compromise build and finish, it actually costs rather less than you might expect – especially when you consider it has a number of interesting and unusual features. It's the latest from Opera, a company that's associated with electronics specialist Unison Research; the two firms share premises on an industrial estate just outside Treviso in north-east Italy.

The Grand Callas (£6,500 in the pictured luxury-gloss finish) might be a brand new model, but it has much in common with the rather unconventional second-generation Callas standmount we reviewed in *HFC* 311. Apart from the fact that the regular Callas uses its solitary cone driver for bass as well as midrange, with further assistance from reflex-port loading, the midrange and top end of the two models are effectively identical, and also very different from the high-end speaker norm. Instead of just the usual single tweeter, there are no fewer than five tweeters in each speaker – two at the front and three at the rear. It's an arrangement that has a number of implications, especially in the way that high frequencies are distributed in the listening room, though pinning the consequent effects down precisely will be tricky.

The Grand Callas is therefore essentially a floorstanding variation on the standmount Callas theme, with a built-in passive subwoofer. The very attractive full-height enclosure fills in the space that would otherwise be used for a stand with a sealed sub-enclosure, roughly 40 litres in capacity. This loads three matching 135mm drive units (apparently identical to each other as well as to the midrange driver), featuring 100mm-diameter magnesium-alloy

cones around large (38mm), fixed solid-copper 'bullet' phase plugs.

The enclosure sides are crafted in subtle curves, and built from very substantial MDF panels, variously 30mm, 40mm and 50mm

In actuality the front two tweeters only operate in parallel at the bottom end of their working range; although both come in at a nominal 1.5kHz, as the frequency rises the upper tweeter is slowly rolled off, so that the overlap 'lobe' ▶

**“Instead of just the usual single tweeter, there are no fewer than five in each speaker – two at the front and three at the rear.”**

thick. Careful internal front-baffle sculpting avoids blocking the rearward radiation from the cone drivers, while further shaping on the outside should assist lateral dispersion.

Presentation is exceptional, in the very best Italian tradition. The curved sides are formed with veneer strips that simulate horizontal staves, while the top is a chamfered solid-wood slab. The shaped front panel is elegantly trimmed in hide. Furthermore, the floor-coupling arrangements are first class, with substantial steel 'wings' and hefty spikes, extending the lateral footprint and ensuring superb physical stability. The spikes here are brass with large domed tops, which not only look a bit classy, but are also highly visible – helpful in avoiding stubbed toes! Two pairs of notably substantial terminal pairs provide a bi-wiring or bi-amping option, but are linked by brass strips when delivered.

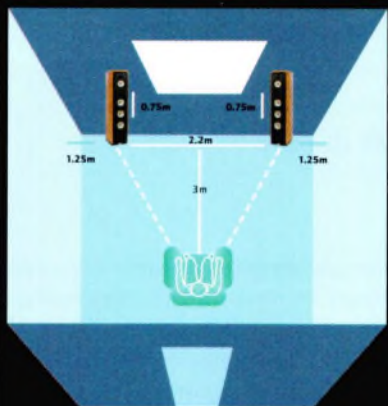
The SEAS-sourced bass and midrange drivers have advanced Excel motors, with copper rings above a T-shaped pole piece to minimise distortion. High power handling is assured via 38mm aluminium-former voice coils, with a 14mm peak-to-peak excursion capability, and the solid-copper pole extension aids cooling.

The tweeters, also sourced from SEAS, have 25mm coated soft-fabric domes, again have high linear excursion capability, and use compact neodymium motors so they can be mounted close to the midrange driver and each other. Distributing the treble signal across five tweeters naturally increases the treble power-handling dramatically, though part of this extra headroom is used up by opting for a relatively low crossover frequency of 1.5kHz.





## SET-UP



### POSITIONING

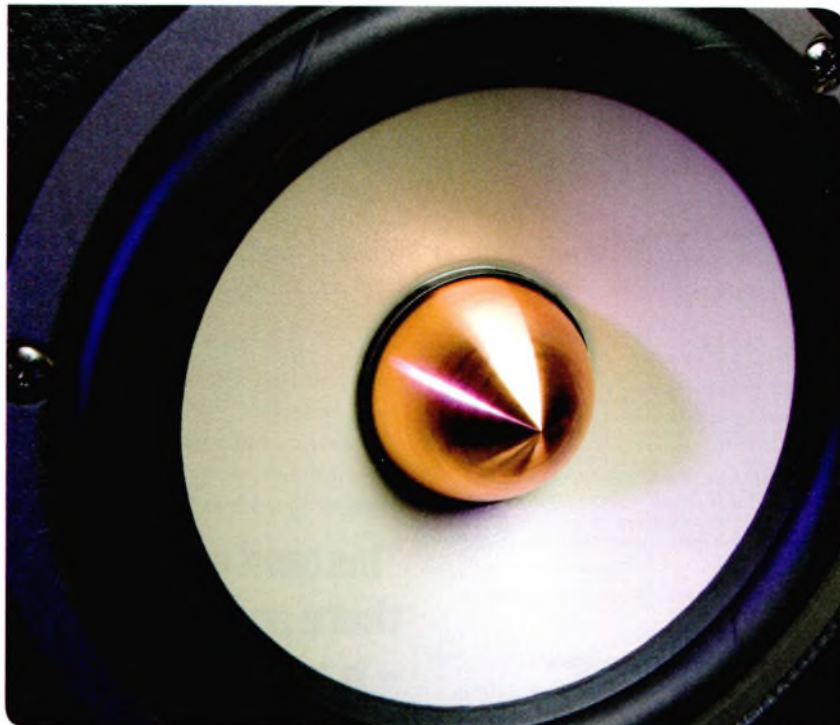
It's unlikely you'd try to place this speaker close to any walls, if only because of the way the rear-panel tweeter array is intended to increase the reflected high-frequency energy. Opera suggests experimenting with positioning, recommending a minimum distance of 50cm from side walls. That's good advice, and our in-room measurements confirmed the superiority of sealed-box loading in delivering a smooth and even bass.

Clear of walls by 1-1.5m, and measured under far-field in-room averaged conditions, the Grand Callas delivers a power response that stays within  $\pm 3$ dB across virtually the entire audio band, with decent bass extension down to 25Hz (-6dB with reference to the midband in-room). This is very creditable indeed, and the inherent simplicity of the single sealed-box resonance means that precise positioning shouldn't be too critical.

### SYSTEM MATCHING

The simpler bass-resonance behaviour of a speaker with sealed-box loading inevitably makes life easier for the driving amplifier. However, the lack of extra 'free' output from a reflex port also tends to compromise the sensitivity, requiring rather more amplifier power to achieve similar loudness levels.

In practice the multi-driver Grand Callas delivers a healthy enough 89dB sensitivity or thereabouts, which should be sufficient to fill a good-size room with decent levels of sound. However, this is counterbalanced by an impedance that falls mostly between 4 and 6 ohms, so decent current delivery is required. The impedance variations might introduce some tonal balance shifts when partnered with single-ended valve amps, such as a number of Unison's own models.



is directed progressively upwards, and output below the three spaced sources is somewhat suppressed. At the same time, the triple-tweeter array on the rear will tend to behave as a line source and concentrate its output in the horizontal plane, adding to the room-reflected treble output and helping to flatten out the overall far-field power response.

### SOUND QUALITY

First impressions are always useful, and with the Grand Callas these were mostly – though

not entirely – favourable. The fundamental 'differentness' of the stereo imaging initially gave some cause for concern, but happily further acclimatisation after trying the speakers with a wide variety of material tended to accentuate the positive.

One of this speaker's most notable strengths is its fine overall tonal balance and smooth even-handedness. It sounds pleasantly open without any aggressive tendencies, and no part of the frequency band seems exaggerated or out of place.

The in-room measurements do suggest that the top end might sound rather bright, but that's probably because the extra reflected high-frequency output, derived from the rear-mounted triple-tweeter array, shows up in the power response. Subjectively the top end is certainly obvious and perhaps a little strong (probably in part because the bass is on the dry side). It also lacks a little poise and precision perhaps, but crucially it never sounds unpleasant, maybe because of the extra headroom and freedom from strain that comes from using multiple tweeters.

The bass end is smooth, even and well extended. It errs just a little on the dry side when the speaker is well clear of walls, but those who prefer a slightly richer character can easily remedy this by moving the speakers back a few centimetres at a time until the desired result is achieved.

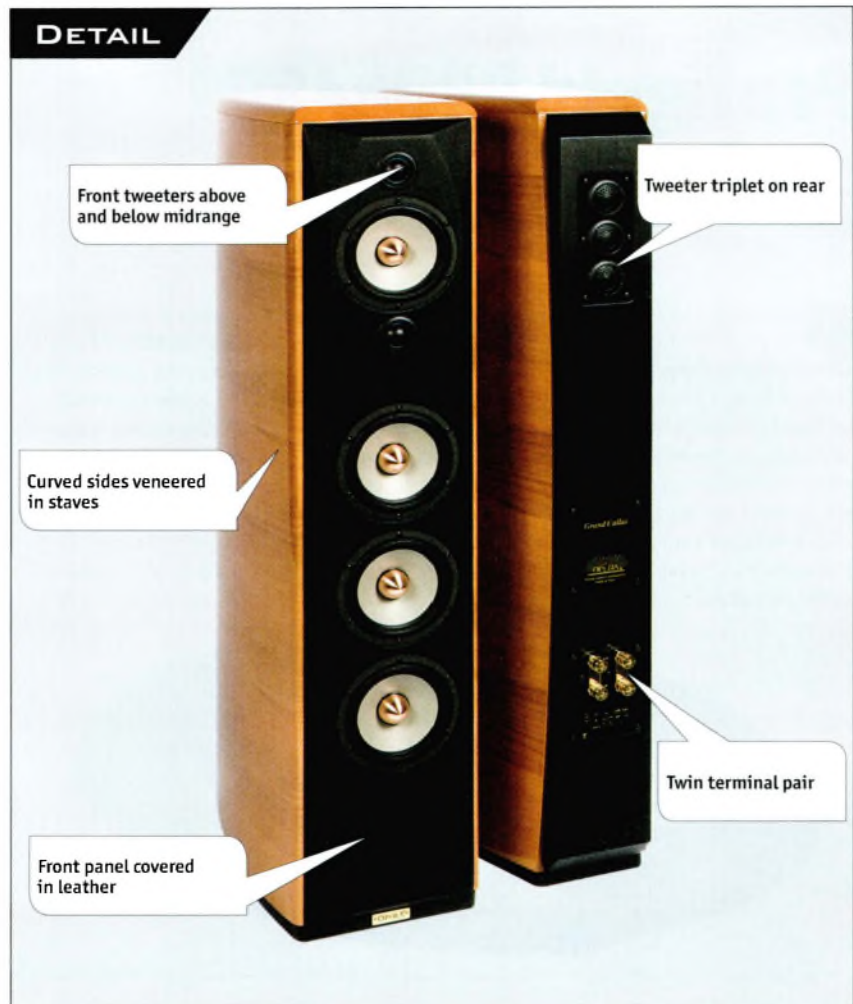
The speaker's dynamic performance is rather more mixed. It has a prodigious dynamic range, vindicating the considerable efforts that have gone into building a mechanically and



acoustically 'dead' enclosure, but dynamic grip and expression somehow seem a bit matter-of-fact and muted. One might wish for a little more drama and excitement through the midband, though it's hard to explain why; perhaps it's a consequence of the rather laid-back image that seems to form itself a little behind the plane of the loudspeakers themselves.

It's the imaging that really sets this speaker apart from the herd, and indeed this is the key feature that makes it a particularly interesting proposition. Changing over from a regular speaker with a conventional solitary high-quality tweeter, one is initially aware of some loss of focus and precision, and a shifting of perspectives. Although this seems somewhat disconcerting at first, after spending a little time resetting the radar and listening to various different types of music, the positive benefits start to emerge.

The key question is how best to deal with the stereophonic illusion in the listening room. The purest form of stereo is the dummy head recording replayed through headphones, which can deliver an extraordinarily convincing surround soundfield from just two channels. But such recordings barely exist in practice. Although 'proper' coherent stereo material is sometimes found, the vast majority of recordings in the real world are artificial constructs, so precise accuracy at the reproduction stage is not necessarily of paramount importance.



**MULTIPLE TWEETERS**

The multiple-tweeter approach isn't unique to Opera, but it is very unusual, and since the effect of the rearward-facing tweeters will rely significantly on the sound-reflection characteristics of nearby surfaces, the net results will not be entirely predictable.

On the plus side, power handling and headroom will be much improved, considerably enhancing the subjective freedom from strain. At the same time, the sharpness and precision of the stereo-image focus is bound to be somewhat diluted.

In the arrangement adopted here, the close-spaced triple array mounted on the rear will tend to act as a line source, so most of its de-correlated, room-reflected output will be concentrated in a horizontal plane, adding depth rather than height to the perceived image.

The front-mounted tweeters will also behave as a line source around the crossover region, but rolling off the upper one early will tend to direct the highest frequencies upwards, increasing the impression of 'air'.

**“It’s the imaging that really sets this apart from the herd. After a little time resetting the radar, the positive benefits start to emerge.”**

While the most precise imaging is delivered when room-reflected sound is minimised, many designers and listeners reckon that some addition of the listening-room acoustic gives a more natural result. Just how far one goes down the road towards full omnidirectionality (and hence maximum room-reflected sound) is a matter of debate and taste. Certainly the addition of room-reflected sound gives a better impression of the musicians performing in the room, adds extra air and spaciousness, and usually gives better results for those not sitting precisely in the stereo 'hot seat'.

The Grand Callas is particularly good at delivering the last two. The extra spaciousness seems particularly effective with choral and orchestral music, and when replaying movie soundtracks stereophonically, while the reduced 'hot spot' sensitivity also attracted favourable comment from off-axis listeners. Though not without its limitations, ultimately this is a

speaker that goes a long way towards justifying Opera's claim that it delivers a "more natural" listening-room experience. **HFC**

*Paul Messenger*

<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	<b>PRO</b> Beautifully presented and finished, and substantially built, this offers an extremely smooth and well-balanced sound that's pleasingly open without being aggressive.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> Could use tauter timing, more dynamic grip and drama, and sharper imaging. Things can get a little congested, and the top end could be sweeter.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A beautiful speaker that delivers a very solid, even-handed and attractively open sound. The multi-tweeter approach boosts spaciousness while curbing aggressive tendencies, though the sound could have more convincing dynamic grip and drama.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
URL <a href="http://www.techradar.com/49282">www.techradar.com/49282</a>	



# Profigold PROA4801

**TYPE** Digital interconnect

**PRICE** £20 (1m)

**CONTACT** ☎ 0031 71 8900 200 # www.bandridge.nl

**P**rofigold is a brand of Bandridge, a large outfit most of whose products end up in stores such as Currys. The Profigold badge, however, denotes a certain audiophile tendency, and in the past we've found some of these cables to be very respectable budget alternatives to the usual hi-fi suspects. This particular example is a cable specifically targeted at digital signal transmission (it'll serve just as well for video as the requirements are the same), whose

most striking characteristic in present company is its welcome flexibility, despite the 8mm diameter. According to Bandridge, construction uses OFC copper conductors, with tape and braid screening and some pretty robust connectors fitted. Longer lengths, up to five metres, are available, in which case the model number changes – PROA4802 is two metres, and so on.

Cheap it may be, but this cable seems to need little or no special pleading. As with

all the cables in this round-up, we tried it between various combinations of source and DAC, and achieved results varying from decent to very good. One of the ironies of digital signal transmission is that the fragility of the signal depends on the receiving equipment, so the very best DACs, which have good jitter and interference rejection, are less fussy about cabling. As a result this cable did very well with the dCS DAC. It's also entirely satisfactory feeding any digital recording device. With cheaper DACs there seemed to be just a shade of grain and coarseness in the sound at times, and tonality is a little lumpy in the upper bass, otherwise, this is an impressively capable budget cable. **HFC**



## VERDICT

Perfect for linking to digital recorders, this also gives good results with most DACs, adding little of its own character with just a slight loss of precision.



# Clearer Audio Copper-line Alpha

**TYPE** Digital interconnect

**PRICE** £39 (0.5m)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01702 543981 # www.cleareraudio.com

**T**his is the entry-level digital interconnect from Clearer's large range of audio cables, but its construction gives little indication of its budget origins. The wire itself is quite stiff, we didn't specify a length when we asked for a sample, and the 0.5-metre cable supplied proved a little awkward to fit. Either longer or shorter would have been more obliging, but we persuaded it into place in the end! Conductors are of 'six nines' copper, including a solid-core centre wire

and triple screening with a braid and two tapes, a very generous assembly, especially at this price. The phono connectors are good-quality parts from Canare and are claimed to be 75-ohm impedance, which is actually impossible – but never mind; they won't be any worse in that department than any other models and are very robust.

As with all the cables here, a quick check showed that data pass unchanged from one end to the other, so sound quality is a function

of secondary factors, principally jitter. It's surprising, though, how important these can seem when one listens in certain situations. With a DAC of good basic sound quality, but with jitter rejection known to be rather modest, we heard a slight decrease in bass tightness and perhaps a shade less 'air' in the treble. This rather skewed the balance, too, and the sound became more focused on the midrange, which superficially could make it seem more 'immediate'. It's all quite minor stuff, though, and we were generally impressed with the lifelike sounds all our DACs produced when fed via this cable. It's certainly good value and well suited to most mid-range applications. **HFC**



## VERDICT

There are some slight foibles at both frequency extremes, but this cable has a good grasp of what's required and does well with a wide range of kit.



# Kimber DV-30

**TYPE** Digital interconnect

**PRICE** £59 (0.5m)

**CONTACT** ☎ 0845 345 1550 # www.russandrews.com

**R**ecently reduced in price, this cable sells in some quantity and is available in various forms – different lengths and with different connectors fitted. For general comparability and convenience we chose normal phonos, but BNC and F-type connectors are also available. Because the latter are true 75-ohm types it may be tempting to go for them, but unless your equipment is fitted with the same type it's worse than pointless: adding any kind of

adaptor on the end of a digital cable is a big no-no. Stiff, despite its modest 7mm diameter, DV-30 is composed of copper conductors and cellular Teflon dielectric, with what feels like a Teflon jacket, too, and Kimber's own 'Ultraplate' phono plugs – unpretentious but tough, and offering very reliable contact thanks to their split centre pin.

Kimber seldom nods, it seems, and this is another highly successful cable. In typical Kimber fashion, it does its job well, and rather

self-effacingly, too; it was only by comparing it with other models that we became aware of its particularly neutral and even-handed balance and its admirable handling of detail. Minor flaws in digital cables, leading to small amounts of added jitter, often seem to affect detail in subtle but insidious ways, but in this case we were able to hear more depth and precision than we could with some other cables in the same price bracket. When connected to a couple of mid-range DACs, there is a slight feeling of recessed treble on some very busy recordings. And, although the best DACs were less cable-dependent, we also thought we heard just a shade more image depth with this cable there, too. **HFC**



## VERDICT

A superb performer that lacks very little, even compared to Kimber's high-end models. Tonality, detail and imaging are really very fine.



# Merlin Scorpion Digital

**TYPE** Digital interconnect

**PRICE** £130 (1m)

**CONTACT** ☎ 0870 321 0215 # www.merlincables.com

**W**e dislike carping, so we might as well get a complaint (or at least a concern) about this cable off our chest at the outset: it's *insanely* inflexible, and more than capable of levering the guts out of a cheap phono plug. Decent ones, as fitted to upmarket CD players and DACs, will survive, and that's clearly the kind of market Scorpion is aimed at. That said, it's something of a tweeker's delight. Not only does it tick all the obvious boxes – chunky

12mm diameter, 'highest grade' conductors (Merlin doesn't claim to have made the basic wire), ferrite noise suppressor and silver-pin phono plugs – it's also cryogenically treated and can optionally be supplied burned in and/or demagnetised. It can be ordered in any length and with any combination of phono and BNC plugs fitted, a good thought.

It may be that the ferrite has a part to play, because this cable has a sound of its own which we very much like – and, in this case,

there seems to be more of that sound in the performance, even with very jitter-immune DACs, pointing the finger at radio-frequency interference (RFI) as a possible culprit. Along with generally neutral tonality in the midrange there's also some very good treble, and we found a slightly 'darker' colour to the low midrange and bass which seemed to make bass melodies stand out a little more than we heard from other cables. Small amounts of noise and hash in the low-frequency reaches are something one only becomes aware of when they're removed, and that's apparently the case here. Worth the trouble, it seems! **HFC**

Richard Black



## VERDICT

It's always nice to find a product reducing a distortion one didn't know was present. Sound is clear with unusually revealing low frequencies.





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GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

# LUXURY STANDMOUNTS

*A stunning range of speakers that'll give floorstanders a run for their money*

This month we're focusing on high-quality standmounts, in the broad price range of £1,000-£3,000 per pair. The initial plan was to look at the larger examples of the type, preferably with 200mm main drivers, but it seems precious few such models now exist. The once ubiquitous '8-inch' (200mm) driver has all but disappeared, replaced by the 6.5-inch (165mm in modern parlance).

Meanwhile, standmounts as a breed have also declined steadily in favour of floorstanders. However, there are signs demand for them has begun to increase again. Standmounts actually have several potential performance advantages over floorstanders, and stereo-music lovers may be starting to recognise the fact.

That said, there are just as many variations in performance among the six models gathered here as in any other group of speakers, and as usual we'll try and sort them out on your behalf.

To avoid compromising performance unpredictably, we're using high-quality stands – Kudos S100s (500mm and 630mm versions) and 600mm Partington

Heavis. The Guru, however, has its own specific decoupling arrangements, and uses a stand based on the Kudos S50 with a large wooden top plate.

There's plenty of variation in this group. The cheapest model is the £1,000-per-pair JBL LS 40, ironically from the same range as the most expensive model in our last loudspeaker group test, the LS 60. Amphion's Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary has much in common with the company's Helium 520 and Prio 520 floorstanders, including a comparable price tag.

Reviewed in *HFC* 313, the Guru QM10 is an intriguingly different loudspeaker, well worth a second look here. Recently updated with the latest drive-unit technologies, Spondor's SP3/1R2 is very much part of the respected British/BBC tradition, with all that implies in performance and presentation.

DALI's Helicons, with hybrid dome/ribbon tweeters and classy cabinetwork, have been among the company's most successful products. Hopefully the new Mk2 models will continue the tradition. The Magellan Duetto SW2 might be the

most costly speaker in our group, but it's the least expensive in Triangle's six-strong flagship Magellan range. **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Naim CDS 3/555 PS, Meridian 808.2 CD players
- ⊕ Linn Sondek LP12 (modified)/Rega RB1000/Apheta turntable/arm/cartridge
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner
- ⊕ Naim SuperLine, Rega los phono stages
- ⊕ Naim NAC 552, XTC PRE-1 preamps
- ⊕ Naim NAP 500 power amp
- ⊕ Cables from Chord Company, Vertex AQ, Phonosophie, Naim
- ⊕ Speaker stands from Kudos, Partington
- ⊕ Equipment supports from Mana, Vertex AQ, Naim, Townshend

## MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Alison Krauss *Forget About It*
- ⊕ Ennio Morricone *The Soundtracks*
- ⊕ Various artists *Heartworn Highways*
- ⊕ Mavis Staples *We'll Never Turn Back*
- ⊕ Laurie Anderson *Strange Angels*
- ⊕ VPO Maazel *Sibelius Symphonies*

## ON TEST



Amphion Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary  
£1,200



DALI Helicon 300 Mk2  
£2,054



Guru QM10  
£1,695



JBL LS 40  
£1,000



Spondor SP3/1R2  
£1,600



Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2  
£2,995



## LISTENING TESTS

Loudspeaker listening poses an altogether more complex set of problems from those involved in assessing components further up the hi-fi chain. Loudspeakers vary dramatically in size, type and tonal balance, and also interact strongly and often unpredictably with the room, according to where they're placed. The fatal difficulty facing sequential unsighted loudspeaker presentations is the strong tendency to judge each example according to how its balance differs from the model that preceded it. Accordingly, extended hands-on listening sessions were adopted, giving proper scope to adjust to the inevitable changes in balance and also to experiment with the positioning of different models.

## LAB TESTS

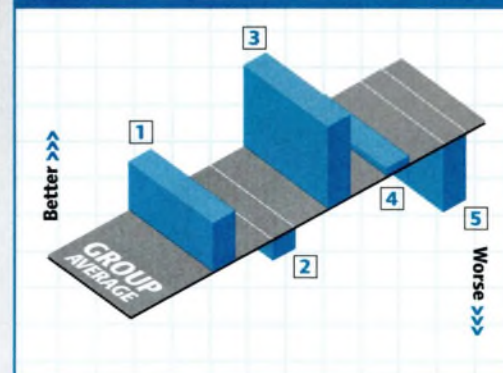
The speakers were tested under in-room conditions, in order to be as representative as possible of real-world operating conditions. The test equipment used was a Neutrik Audiograph analogue-signal generator with synchronised pen recorder, and this was used to plot the far-field in-room averaged response traces, as well as the impedance plots, which provide the core of the measurement work. Pair-matching was also checked at one metre

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

## LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

- 1] Sensitivity:** Sensitivity is a measure of how loud a speaker will go for a given voltage from the amplifier. It's scaled to 2.83V at 1m (corresponding to one watt of power for an eight-ohm load).
- 2] Bass extension:** The bass behaviour of loudspeakers is heavily modified by the room in which they're used. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB with reference to the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.
- 3] Ease of drive:** The lower the impedance of a speaker, the more current it will extract from the driving amplifier for a given voltage (volume) setting. Lower-impedance designs are therefore theoretically harder to drive, but they also tend to be more sensitive.
- 4] Overall frequency balance:** The overall broad frequency-response trends do much to define the character of a speaker, although true neutrality is the obvious goal.
- 5] Response smoothness:** Beyond the overall tonal balance of the speaker, small-scale smoothness has much to do with sound and harmonic shading.

### OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





£1,200 per pair ☎ 01623 517000 🌐 www.amphion.fi

# AMPHION ARGON<sup>2</sup> ANNIVERSARY

*A new and improved version of Amphion's stylish standmount*

**A**mphion might be located in the heart of Finland, but this hasn't stopped the company, which was founded barely a decade ago, from making its mark on the international hi-fi stage.

The Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary is a recently introduced and allegedly improved variation on a familiar theme. Whereas the standard Argon<sup>2</sup> costs £1,000, this Anniversary version costs £1,200 in painted black or white, or £1,400 in real-wood veneer. Less obvious advantages of the Anniversary lie in an improved tweeter – an SEAS Integrator, with a titanium dome diaphragm – and its associated crossover network.

Whether it should be seen as a larger version of the Ion L (HFC 310) or a standmount equivalent to the Prio 520 or Helium 520 (HFC 302 and 314 respectively) is debatable, though the two 520 models are, perhaps, the nearer relatives. That said, the Anniversary is more costly than the recently introduced Helium 520, despite one fewer bass/mid driver, a much smaller enclosure and the need for stands, so it'll have to perform its socks off to justify its continued existence.

Like all Amphions, it has super-clean Scandinavian lines, very much in the art-deco tradition, with the styling reinforced by the sharp-edged construction and white-painted finish of our samples.

And like all Amphions seen to date, it also has a 'waveguide'-loaded tweeter. A species of horn with a truncated throat and a very wide flare, this increases the efficiency at the bottom end of the tweeter passband, and therefore enables the crossover point

to be lowered (to around 1.6kHz). Secondly, it helps match up the acoustic sizes of the bass/mid and the treble drivers. Thirdly, by recessing the tweeter in respect of the front panel, its voice-coil-to-listener distance becomes similar to that of the cone driver, improving the time alignment and simplifying the crossover transition.

The tweeter here has a 25mm metal dome diaphragm, while the 165mm bass/mid driver has a 115mm metal cone around a fixed 'bullet' pole extension. A single pair of high-quality WBT terminals is fitted just below the small-diameter rear port, with foam bungs supplied to block the ports if preferred.

## SOUND QUALITY

Provided the bungs aren't used and the speakers are mounted well clear of walls, the bass is strong, but not sufficiently excessive as to prove a handicap. There is some audible evidence of the upper-mid excess seen in the measured power response, and this might explain the mild fierceness and aggression when the volume is turned up high. But in every other respect this is a thoroughly impressive speaker, with low coloration and fundamentally good neutrality.

The best feature, though, is the lovely overall coherence, which comes with impressively precise and accurate stereo-image focus, a sweet and well-extended top end and a worthwhile helping of genuine transparency.

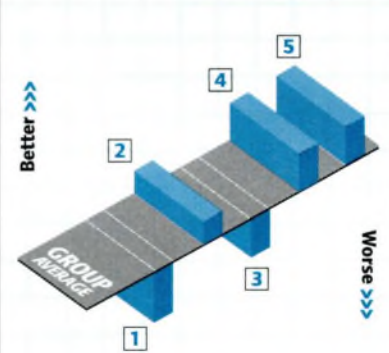
The Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary essentially does precisely what a good standmount should. Its flaws are largely innocuous and its strengths are very real. **HFC**



## LAB REPORT

This is a difficult speaker to summarise. The sensitivity here is quite modest, at around 85dB across most of the audio band, though it's punctuated by a quite obvious broad peak, +2.3dB, 500-900Hz. Above 1kHz the response is exceptionally smooth, flat and even. The upper bass is also very well ordered and flat, but the midbass, centred on 45Hz, looks rather too strong, registering +5dB with reference to the upper bass, even with the speaker mounted well clear of walls. Bungs are supplied to block the port output, if preferred, and should definitely be tried if the speakers are used quite close to a wall. Happily, too, in view of the modest sensitivity, the impedance stays at 8 ohms or higher throughout, and therefore won't stress the amplifier's current delivery. Pair-matching looks pretty good and the relatively small ports are tuned to 38Hz.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	85dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/- ohms	8/7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	24Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<p>Does just what a good standmount should, with notably superior coherence and focus. Bass alignment might be tricky, but box coloration is notably low, although it can sound aggressive when driven hard.</p>
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> 	



£2,054 per pair ☎ 0845 644 3537 🌐 www.dali.eu/uk

# DALI HELICON 300 MK2

The Mk2 Helicon standmount delivers a smooth, open performance

**D**anish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries – DALI for short – has links to Denmark's largest hi-fi retail chain and makes a huge range of models, starting with the beer-budget Concepts and extending right up to the awesome Megaline.

Now in Mk2 form, the 300 is the standmount in a four-strong range of stereo Helicon models, with a price tag hardly changed from that of the original model we reviewed over four years ago. That said, £2,054 is pretty hefty for a standmount and you're entitled to expect something a bit special by way of justification. And that's pretty much what you get.

Extracted from its packaging, the lustrous high-gloss-over-wood cabinet with similarly glossy black front panel is definitely de luxe. This rear-ported enclosure is not only beautifully finished; it's also rather elegantly shaped, the sides made from glued layers of thin MDF, forming a shallow curve with the back of the speaker significantly narrower than the front. This helps avoid focusing the internal standing waves that are created by parallel sides and may well increase stiffness, too.

The main driver has a 165mm cast frame and a pulp diaphragm 120mm in diameter, the latter impregnated with long wood fibres, formed into a curved dish-shaped profile. The top end is handled by a special two-driver module, similar to that first introduced in the Euphonia series, combining a 25mm fabric dome with a 10x55mm ribbon device on a single alloy chassis. Such an arrangement should ensure fine mechanical integrity, wide bandwidth and consistent lateral dispersion to the very highest frequencies.

Two pairs of exceptionally large (not to mention somewhat pretentious) terminals are fitted and the speakers are supplied with hefty wire links – probably superior to the brass strips that are usually found.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is an exceptionally smooth and even-handed speaker, delivering a sound quality that's always very easy on the ears. The voice band is very well projected, admittedly at the expense of some warmth, but this ensures that detail is explicit. The character is attractively open, though some mild pinched and nasal colorations are also audible, even though box effects are clearly well controlled. The top end is sweet and very nicely judged, too, attesting to the efficacy of the double-tweeter arrangement.

However, when compared directly with some of the other standmounts in this group test, some weaknesses become apparent. Although the stereo images are usefully 'out of the box', focus isn't particularly precise, and there's a clear lack of 'hear through' transparency when reproducing material – such as a choral work in a cathedral setting – where genuine space and depth perspectives ought to be resolved with due precision.

Likewise, dynamic tension and expression seem a little weak, suggesting perhaps that there's rather too much of an impediment between the amplifier and drive units, resulting in a lack of vigour, vitality and immediacy. Ultimately this is a very polite speaker that should be easy to live with, but it doesn't have the most exciting sound around. **HFC**

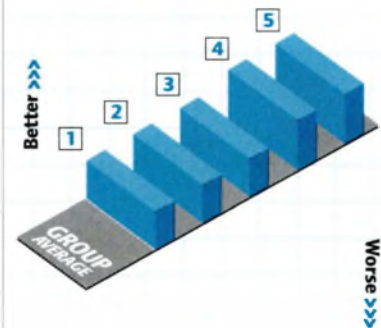


## LAB REPORT

This Mk2 Helicon 300 comfortably exceeds its admittedly modest performance specification. Measured sensitivity is around 88-89dB, rather than the 86dB claimed, while the impedance stays above 5 ohms throughout, even though a 4-ohm load is specified. The upshot is a decent sensitivity alongside a relatively easy load. Interestingly, outside the 36Hz-tuned port region in the bass, the impedance is substantially flat, indicating the use of extra conjugate compensating components. The pair match is pretty good.

The in-room far-field averaged response is pretty good and significantly smoother than that of this model's predecessor, though somewhat marred by a clear excess around 47Hz, with a +5dB peak, even when the speakers are well clear of walls. Elsewhere the balance holds within a promising and smooth +/-3dB, with the upper mid (650Hz-2.5kHz) a shade prominent.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	4/- ohms	8/6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	37Hz	23Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	A beautifully finished loudspeaker with a smooth sound. The bass packs plenty of punch and voices are well projected with lots of detail, but imaging lacks transparency and dynamic tension is weak.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	



£1,695 per pair ☎ 01727 893928 🌐 www.guruproaudio.com

## GURU QM10

*This very discreet speaker is unconventional in nearly every respect*

The Guru QM10 originates from Sweden, where it was originally designed a few years back by one Ingvar Ohman, whose passion for hi-fi has always exceeded his interests in loudspeaker manufacturing or marketing. To bring Ohman's designs to a wider world, a company called Guru Pro Audio has taken on the tasks of building and selling. Here in Britain distribution is being handled by The Sound Practice, part of leading Naim dealer Tom Tom Audio, and the diminutive QM10 (QM standing for Quality Manager) made its debut at the Heathrow show last March.

In outline terms this is a very simple two-way standmount speaker, so its £1,695 price tag seems quite steep, especially since the whole thing is finished in dull-but-discreet matt black, albeit with nicely post-formed vertical edges. (Gloss black is available to order, for an extra £100.) No grille is available, so the drive units remain undressed.

A two-way driver line-up might seem conventional, but the QM10 differs from the norm in most respects, most obviously in its shape, the largest dimension being its width, and the smallest its height. The internal dimensions are nicely distributed to spread standing-wave modes, though dispersion control is clearly another important factor.

Because of the large footprint, a special version of the Kudos S50 stand with a large MDF top plate is supplied for £175 per pair. The speaker actually 'floats' on four small but quite stiff foam cylinders, decoupling speaker from stand in a controlled manner.

The small 102mm main driver has a very slim roll surround, a 95mm flared paper cone, and is reflex-loaded by a narrow slot-shaped port. The tweeter appears to have a small 16mm polycarbonate diaphragm loaded by

a short horn and a phase plug. Signal is applied through a single pair of 4mm sockets, and a blue LED illuminates if the speaker is being driven into overload.

### SOUND QUALITY

According to the designer and distributor, the Guru is intended for close-to-wall siting, over-angled inwards so that you can just see the outside edges from the listening seat. While for most of the listening this advice was followed, in-room measurements showed significant departures from neutrality with the speakers thus positioned, so checks were made in various locations – though in truth the alternatives seemed to offer little benefit.

Whatever the positioning – experimentation in situ would be well worth trying – the QM10 does have significant limitations in terms of absolute tonal neutrality, but they're not sufficient to spoil an otherwise very coherent and entertaining performer.

Best of all is how impressively big it can sound for such a small speaker, though under certain conditions the bass might be a little too enthusiastic for some tastes, leading to some heaviness and thickening. There's even a worthwhile helping of dynamic expression here, along with some tension and authority, which again comes as a bit of a surprise from something so discreet.

Voices are sweet and notably coherent, if slightly over-projected, yet it manages to control any aggressive tendencies without sounding in any way 'shut in'. The unevenness does, however, lead to a measure of hollow and slightly echoey 'cupped hands' coloration.

The Guru may not suit everyone, but it does provide something a little different that's invariably musically engrossing – and that makes it thoroughly worthwhile. **HFC**



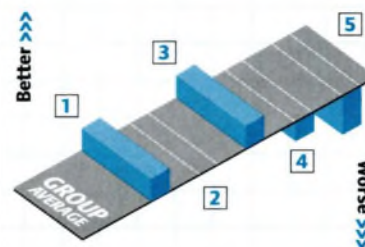
### LAB REPORT

The QM10 is rated at 86dB sensitivity, which is fairly conservative. Our in-room far-field averaged measurements indicate a rating of around 87-88dB, but it's impossible to be precise here because the frequency balance is somewhat uneven.

That unevenness – it's distinctly midbass-heavy (40-60Hz), lean through the upper bass and lower midband (80-300Hz), and then peaks significantly around 1kHz – might call into question its absolute neutrality and hence its monitoring suitability, and is bound to add an element of character to the sound quality. The treble looks well judged above 1.6kHz, barring a modest dip at 4kHz.

However, helped by the port output (tuned to 37Hz), bass extension is quite remarkable for such a small loudspeaker, delivering very decent in-room output down to 25Hz. Pair-matching is very good, and the amplifier load looks reasonably easy to drive too, staying above 5 ohms throughout.

### HOW IT COMPARES



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

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	26Hz

### VERDICT

#### SOUND



This clever close-to-wall speaker has fine coherence and good communication skills. It somehow manages

#### PRACTICALITY



to sound much bigger than it looks, although the bass can get a bit unruly and voices have some coloration.

#### BUILD



#### VALUE



**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE**  
★★★★★



£1,000 per pair ☎ 01707 278100 🌐 www.jbl.com

# JBL LS 40

*JBL's advanced horn technology in an attractive standmount format*

**T**he biggest global brand in loudspeakers, JBL is a major part of the American Harman International group, with interests that extend across a huge range of different acoustic applications.

Among the company's home hi-fi models, the LS Series are newcomers and relatively upmarket speakers too. The range consists of five models – three stereo pairs (two floorstanders plus the standmount featured here), plus a subwoofer and a centre-front dialogue model for the home cinema sector. All the full-range models share the same horn-loaded treble drivers, alongside different bass and bass/mid driver arrangements.

A fairly large and heavy example of the standmount type, the £1,000 LS 40 is an attractive and very well-built speaker, with a charcoal finish on the front, back, top and base, flanked by shaped, high-gloss, real-wood veneered sides. The enclosure tapers gently from front to back, avoiding parallel sides, but the most unusual feature is the use of horn-loaded high-frequency drivers – a particular area of JBL expertise – which can be found in their most advanced forms in the company's flagship domestic models and its top PA systems.

Three drive units are arranged in a two-and-a-half-way configuration. A 165mm drive unit with a 130mm paper cone diaphragm operates up to 2kHz, at which point a 50mm titanium dome compression driver, loaded by a good-size moulded bi-radial horn, comes in with 24dB/octave slopes. A much smaller horn tweeter then takes over above 8kHz.

Twin terminal pairs offer a bi-wire/-amp

option. One undoubted bonus with the horn drive units is that their diaphragms are well hidden and protected from prying fingers.

### SOUND QUALITY

Even when stand-mounted well clear of walls, the LS 40 has an obvious tendency to thump in the bass. Short of blocking those very active ports, it's hard to see how this can be avoided, and it does tend to dominate the overall character, except when reproducing material with negligible bass content.

Happily, the high-frequency peak also revealed by the power-response measurement seems much less obvious or intrusive, though to what extent that might be down to the hearing limitations of an ageing reviewer is difficult to say. Younger readers will have to check this out for themselves.

Fortunately, the LS 40 handles the rest of the audio band very well indeed. Stereo-image focus is particularly tight, presumably because the use of a horn for higher frequencies narrows the dispersion and thus favours direct over room-reflected sounds. Time coherence is very good, too, so the speaker is fundamentally expressive and communicative, even mildly dark. There's also a touch of hollowness and slight boxiness, though these colorations are substantially well controlled.

There's much to like about the LS 40, which clearly represents good material value for money, and it's a pity the total performance is marred by the problem it shows at the bass end. Though to what degree that may be due to an unfortunate interaction with our listening room is impossible to say. **HFC**

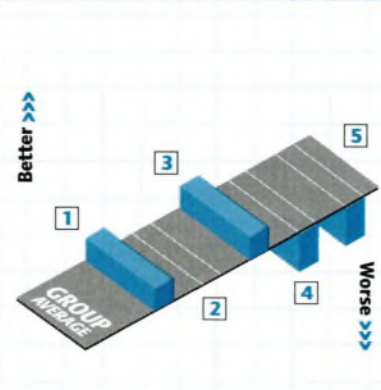


### LAB REPORT

The LS 40 delivers a rather unusual measurement set in several respects. The far-field in-room averaged measurements hold within reasonably close limits from 100Hz right up to 8kHz, but above and below those points things look much less happy. The port output, tuned here to 48Hz, shows a massive 10dB peak centred on 50Hz. And the upper treble, especially 9-13kHz, also shows a SdB excess. The trace in between might have been a little smoother perhaps, but the overall trend here is very well judged – much more even than we found with the larger floorstanding LS 60 – making the problems towards the band extremes all the more unfortunate.

Sensitivity is a respectable 88dB, bordering on 89dB, and the impedance only fleetingly falls below a relatively easy-to-drive 6 ohms, though the curve itself is actually quite complex, especially in the presence region.

### HOW IT COMPARES



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

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m / 2.83V	87dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6 ohms	7 / 5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	27Hz

### VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	A stylish, part-horn-loaded design, the LS 40 offers good basic material value for money and has excellent imaging and fine midband coherence, expression and neutrality. But midbass thump was far too obvious.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	



**£1,600 per pair** ☎ 01323 843474 🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

## SPENDOR SP3/1R2

*A classically styled compact monitor from a venerable British firm*

One of the most famous names in the history of British speaker design, Spendor was founded by an ex-member of the BBC Research Department around 40 years ago, primarily to make broadcast monitor loudspeakers, though its speakers quickly won a cult following amongst the hi-fi fraternity too. The company has maintained its early reputation, and since the current management took over at the beginning of this century, Spendor has gone from strength to strength, with a mixture of ranges catering for both contemporary and traditional tastes.

As the name suggests, the Classic R series, most of whose models curiously carry an SP prefix, is very much of the latter type. The five speakers in the range are all standmounts with 'picture frame' front baffle edges, and cover a wide range of enclosure and driver sizes.

This £1,600-per-pair SP3/1R2 is one step above the bottom rung and is described as a compact two-way monitor. Some may consider the presentation somewhat old-fashioned; others will find its classically traditional appearance, nicely finished in an understated real-cherry veneer, attractive, discreet and commendably restrained.

The SP3/1R2 is, logically enough, the successor to the SP3/1R, which itself followed the SP3/1. The size and type of enclosure – roughly 16 litres in capacity and employing the classic BBC damped-thin-wall technique, albeit now executed in MDF rather than birch ply – remain basically unchanged. The extra refinements introduced at each stage reflect the latest developments in drive-unit design and crossover networks.

A two-way design loaded by an unusually large rear port, the model shares a new 180mm Spendor bass/mid drive unit with the even newer A6 floorstander. This unit has a 120mm ep38 polymer cone, a wide surround and a high-excursion motor with a powerful magnet, and (perhaps most significantly) it operates up to a relatively high 3.7kHz. Twin terminal pairs feed the drivers via a new type of inductor and heavier, higher-quality wiring.

### SOUND QUALITY

The bass, frankly, isn't the SP3/1R2's best feature. It doesn't have much in the way of low bass weight and the alignment proved tricky under our room conditions, tending to favour the midbass port output over the upper bass. Best results were obtained with the speaker well clear of walls, though experimentation is advised to suit individual circumstances.

If that's a weakness, it's probably the only one, because the SP3/1R2 has a midrange to die for – beautifully neutral and essentially free from coloration with an exceptionally wide dynamic range and negligible boxiness. Excellent overall coherence attests to the fine integration of the two drive units, as well as the natural sweetness of the new tweeter, ensuring fine stereo imaging with good depth perspectives, especially with massed choirs in a proper acoustic environment.

While the SP3/1R2 isn't best suited to providing the sort of drive demanded by some rock or dance material, its subtlety in handling the tonal colours of acoustic instrumentation as well as the expressive character of the human voice is more than fair compensation. **HFC**

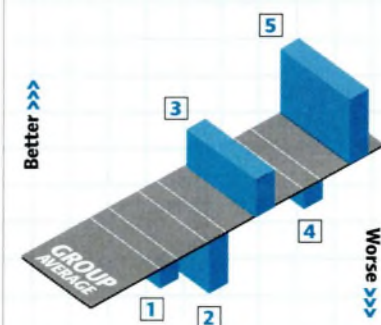


### LAB REPORT

Above 120Hz, the SP3/1R2's in-room far-field 'power' response is highly impressive. Although it could, perhaps, be a little smoother, it looks beautifully controlled right to the uppermost limits of human hearing, with just the odd unwanted 'wiggle'. Below 120Hz, things looked less happy, presumably because the speaker's bass alignment didn't match our room particularly well. However, with the speakers mounted well clear of walls, the net bass output above 40Hz comes out pretty well, since the lack of 70-120Hz output more or less matches the recorded 40-70Hz.

Sensitivity is around 87dB, which is a respectable enough figure in view of an easy-to-drive impedance that barely falls below 8 ohms throughout and is much higher than that above 700Hz. However, the 58Hz port tuning means that bass extension is effectively restricted to 40Hz. The pair match is particularly good.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -10%
- 2] Bass extension >> -30%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +40%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m / 2.83V	88dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal / minimum)	8 / 5.7 ohms	8 / 7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	-	37Hz

### VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	With attractively traditional styling, this offers superb neutrality and coherence with very low coloration, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range – more than making up for a modest degree of bass weight and drive.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	



£2,995 per pair ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.triangle-fr.com

# TRIANGLE MAGELLAN DUETTO SW2

*This French model is pricey, but has a seriously dynamic sound*

**F**ounded back in 1980, French company Triangle has its own distinctive take on loudspeaker design, which has won numerous followers here in Britain in recent years. Although probably best known for its popularly priced Esprit EX models, with advanced drive units in cost-effective vinyl-finished enclosures, the firm produces two rather more luxurious ranges: the mid-price Genèse models and the seriously upmarket Magellans. The success of the gigantic multi-driver Magellan (reviewed in *The Collection* 2004) spawned a six-strong SW2 series of Magellan variations in 2006, including this £2,995-per-pair Duetto SW2, the company's sole standmount offering.

All the characteristic Magellan ingredients are included, but in a relatively compact enclosure, resulting in an assertively styled speaker. The cabinetwork is beautifully finished in high-gloss lacquer over mahogany veneer (burr walnut is an option), and the sides are curved so the speaker is narrower at the front and the back than it is in the middle, which may help to avoid standing-wave focusing.

The main bass/mid cone driver has a shiny cast frame and is mounted below a rather dramatic-looking horn-loaded tweeter at the top and above two small ports. The horn mouth here is 88mm in diameter, while the bass/mid unit has a 115mm flared paper cone with an integral pointy dust cover and a rubber roll surround. Two pairs of hefty and rather clumsy socket/binders provide the bi-wire/-amp option, linked by equally substantial brass strips.

## SOUND QUALITY

Although the measured results reveal some rather negative sonic criticisms, the Magellan Duetto SW2 actually sounds much better than its in-room power response implies. In some respects it really does justify its elevated price, setting a standard for dynamic performance that seems far beyond the capabilities of less costly models.

One can hardly describe this as an even or tidy performer, especially across the broad midrange. But the presence suck-out doesn't prove as obviously audible as the power response might suggest. And it does cut through the superficialities of sonic smooth inoffensiveness and get straight to the heart of the music, unequivocally communicating the intentions of the musicians without paying overmuch attention to the sonic niceties along the way.

As with the midrange, bass delivery isn't particularly smooth, even or deep, but with the speakers mounted on open stands well clear of walls, its relative output does nicely balance the midrange and treble. Furthermore, it comfortably punches its weight in terms of agility, power and enthusiasm.

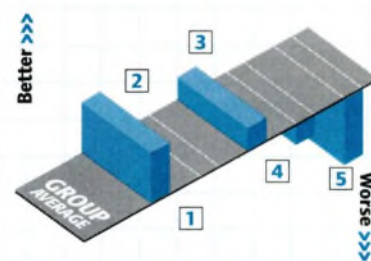
When initially installed, the Duetto's rather spiky and edgy delivery was noticeable and a little off-putting. But it has excellent timing and quite good transparency as well, so a measure of depth is apparent with appropriate material. The best – and rarest – feature of all is that it brings a real dynamic expression and tension to a musical performance, and that makes the whole experience thoroughly entertaining and involving. **HFC**



## LAB REPORT

The measurements delivered by this high-class standmount are frankly a little bizarre. Midband sensitivity measures an impressively high 91 dB, even though the impedance stays mostly above 5 ohms. However, the in-room far-field averaged 'power' response trace is far from smooth through the broad midband, due mainly to a substantial suck-out from 1.5kHz to 4kHz that reaches a depth of some 6dB between 1.7kHz and 2.8kHz. That suck-out aside, it nevertheless holds within a reasonable +/-3dB limit across the band above 80Hz. However, the bass alignment didn't match our room characteristics particularly well, while the zone from 250Hz to 1.5kHz also shows significant unevenness. Bass extension is reasonably well maintained down to around 30Hz, which is a little below the port-tuning frequency of 40Hz, though output around 48Hz was clearly too strong. Pair-matching is unexceptional.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	91dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	6/4.5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	35Hz	28Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	This very substantial speaker from Triangle sounds a lot better than its flawed power response suggests. Despite a lack of smoothness it's a fine communicator, boasting real dynamic tension and vigorous expressiveness.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	



# CONCLUSIONS

These exceptional standmounts all have something to offer, but one rises above the rest

Expectations were high when plans were laid to cover a group of good-size, high-quality standmounts. As it turned out, large standmounts have become very thin on the ground, and most of those models that did arrive fall broadly into the '15-20 litre with 165mm main driver' category – larger than the miniatures, but much smaller than designs that were commonplace 20 years ago

Though some of the models in the group did demonstrate the benefits a standmount offers over a floorstander, few if any of

our contenders delivered a good in-room bass alignment under our conditions, which was rather disappointing. It's a shame none have followed B&W's 'hollow bung' retuning lead, and it may be relevant to point out that the Amphion fared best here, and has the smallest-diameter port.

Particularly underwhelming on the bass-alignment front was the £1,000 JBL LS 40. It had a decent midband and looked like fine material value for money, but was marred by indiscretions at both extremes of the audio band.

Although Amphion's £1,200

Argon<sup>2</sup> Anniversary isn't such obviously good value as the Helium 520 we reviewed in *HFC* 314, it's nevertheless a fine performer with genuine transparency that illustrates the strengths of the standmount format.

The Guru QM10 (£1,695) remains a decidedly quirky proposition, but it's an undeniably interesting and very involving one, even though strict neutrality isn't at the top of its agenda.

The real star of the show, though, was the £1,600 Spondor SP3/1R2. It might lack some bass weight, but it more than makes up for

this with its lovely open midband neutrality, well-suppressed box effects and fine dynamic range.

Although the £2,054 DALI Helicon 300 looks quite delicious, this Mk2 version was sonically a shade disappointing. While it's unquestionably easy on the ears, tension, drama, transparency and focus all seemed a little weak.

As for the £2,995 Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2, it could hardly be more different. Ignore the oddball measurements and simply embrace the superb dynamic life and expression – they just sound so real. **HFC**

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### AMPLIFIERS

**SUGDEN A21AL SERIES 2** £1,399

Not the most powerful amp, but a true classic, with super-sweet Class A sound.

**NAIM NAC 122X/NAP 150X** £1,615

A musically rewarding pre/power combo offering outstanding grip and insight.

### CD PLAYERS

**CYRUS CD 8 SE** £1,200

Its radical CD platform delivers a sound that's civilised and musically convincing.

**REGA SATURN** £1,298

Top-end sweetness and transparency are superb, and it excels right across the band.

## HINTS AND TIPS

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

»» Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is extremely important. Do take the time and trouble to experiment before you fit the spikes.

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

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

»» Use good quality speaker cable if you want your system to perform at its best.

## STANDMOUNTS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Amphion Argon <sup>2</sup> Anniversary	DALI Helicon 300 Mk2	Guru QM10	JBL LS 40	Spondor SP3/1R2	Triangle Magellan Duetto SW2
PRICE	£1,200	£2,054	£1,695	£1,000	£1,600	£2,995
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
PRACTICALITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Sharp art-deco styling and fine voice-band coherence, with excellent image focus.	Beautiful presentation and sound that's very easy on the ears, but a little bland.	A quirky but interesting and very involving proposition, despite the lack of strict neutrality.	A fine midband and good value for money, but marred by indiscretions at both extremes of the audio band.	It might lack bass weight, but it has a lovely open midband neutrality with fine dynamic range.	Sounding far better than its bizarre measurements suggest, this offers superb dynamic life and expression.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE	19x38x31cm	20.8x43.5x35.6cm	30x23.2x25.2cm	22x49x34cm	22x40x28cm	25.4x46x35.1cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	2.5-way	2-way	3-way	2-way	2-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x102mm	1x165mm	1x180mm	1x160mm
STAND/FLOOR	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand	Stand
CABINET FINISH	Painted	High-gloss wood	Painted	High-gloss wood/textured	Real-wood veneer	High-gloss wood veneer
BI-WIRE	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT · G = GOOD · A = AVERAGE · P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	85dB P	89dB G	88dB A	88dB A	87dB A	91dB G
EST. BASS EXTENSION	24Hz G	23Hz G	26Hz A	27Hz A	37Hz P	28Hz A
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	8/7ohms G	8/6ohms G	7/5ohms A	7/5ohms A	8/7ohms G	6/4.5ohms A
FREQUENCY BALANCE	+20% G	+30% G	-10% A	-20% P	-10% A	+10% A
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+20% G	+30% G	-20% P	-20% P	+40% G	-40% P

# GURU

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"These speakers are exceptionally communicative, expressive and entertaining to the point where the whole experience quickly becomes seriously addictive"

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*David Price - Hi Fi World*

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*Martin Colloms - Hi Fi Critic*



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# QUALITY FURNITURE CABLES & ACCESSORIES

## S&C Modus S1

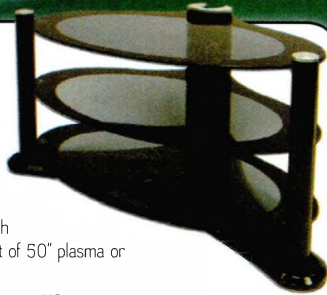
- LCD/Plasma Glass Stand

- A cable management system is included built-in to the rear leg to keep the clean lines of the stand, and contrasting aluminum caps finish the appealing look of this furniture unit.
- Available in two sizes

S1-37 - Ideal for smaller screens up to 37inch

S1-50 - Will easily accommodate the heaviest of 50" plasma or LCD TV sets

- Both models have a Maximum top shelf weight 120KG
- Very easy to assemble

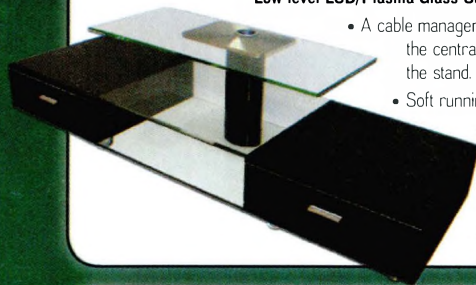


## S&C Modus S2

- Low level LCD/Plasma Glass Stand with Draw Units

- A cable management system is included built into the central column to keep the clean lines of the stand.
- Soft running draws.

- 1440mm wide by 450mm depth by 385mm high
- Shelf spacing, middle 160mm, bottom 150mm
- Maximum top shelf load 60Kgs

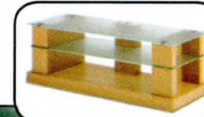


## 4000 series

- Suits screens upto 63" wide
- Maximum total load: 70kg
- Choice of 3 finishes, oak, black oak or walnut, as well as black or frosted glass
- Cable management compartment
- 10mm Toughened safety glass
- End units include storage
- Castors included



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# Atacama

## Atacama Equinox Hi-Fi Racks

The Equinox Series was first launched in 2001 with the introduction of the Equinox HiFi Rack. It soon gained 'Best Buy' status, but in 2004 it achieved the ultimate accolade of 'Product of the year' at the What HiFi? Sound & Vision Awards. Amazingly, it has now won this award for the last 5 years.

- The Equinox has the unique ability to grow with your system. Simply add individual shelf modules to achieve the rack you require.
- Each single shelf module is isolated on heavy duty spikes to ensure optimum performance from your audio/AV system.
- All models incorporate glass shelves toughened to BS 6206A and EN 12600:2002, which are decoupled from the rack framework to prevent vibration affecting sensitive equipment.



EQUINOX

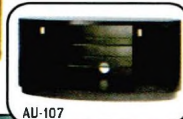


EQUINOX XL PRO SE

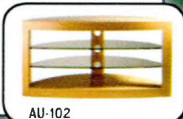
audinni AU-106 Oak finish  
AU-107 Black Oak finish

Using a combination of real wood veneer and glass with hidden touches to enhance the aesthetics of each piece, the design team at audinni have created a quality product with pleasing curves. The audinni range will enhance the look of any room.

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AU-107



AU-102

# WALL MOUNTS, CABLES & ACCESSORIES

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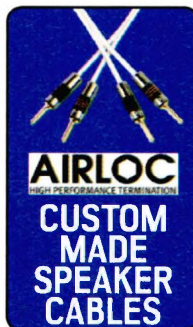
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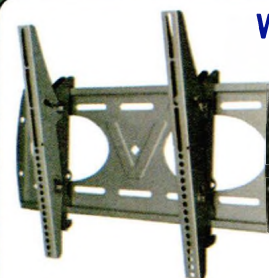
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# ASK ALAN

Got a burning hi-fi question? Ask Alan...

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Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.  
Or email your queries to [alan.sircom@futurenet.com](mailto:alan.sircom@futurenet.com)

### TOYS IN THE ATTIC

Dear Alan,

I found an old valve amplifier in the attic of my parents' home recently, but I'm not sure what kind; it's sort of bronze-coloured and has two sets of valves running down either side of the top, and there are three big, heavy, metal, square bronze-and-black things at one end. It's squeezed into a box and I haven't taken it out and inspected it yet, but it looks in pretty good nick. What is it, and can I use it?

**Tony Moss** via email

**HFC** The amp is very probably a Leak Stereo 20 power amp, and very good it was too. Given that it's in the bronze finish, it's likely a late-1950s/early-1960s model. Good examples can go for upwards of £500, although they more commonly change hands for £200-£300.

The Stereo 20 is a pretty robust bit of kit, but remember that it's a power amp and should be used with a preamp, or else you'll hear your CDs at full volume. Also, simply throwing the switch after years of slumber can cause all manner of power-up troubles. The best bet would be to have it checked over by a specialist first. Even if components have degraded too far for practical use, the Stereo 20 is relatively easy to restore and even upgrade. Check out the Vintage Amp Doctor ([www.vintageampdoctor.co.uk](http://www.vintageampdoctor.co.uk)) or GT Audio ([www.gtaudio.com](http://www.gtaudio.com)) and see what options are open to you.

### HI-FI MEETS HOME CINEMA

Hi Alan,

I want hi-fi and home cinema from the same system, but I don't want to compromise either. Trouble is, most home cinema systems I've heard don't sound good in stereo. So, what's the best way of approaching this? I have about £5,000 to spend on the whole shebang (excluding projector and screen) and it'll go into a dedicated room of approximately 4x3m.

**David Fitzhenry** via email

**HFC** It sounds like a riddle, but the best way of joining hi-fi and home cinema is to keep them sort of separate. Create a dedicated two-channel pathway using audio-only components and another for multichannel home cinema. This way, when playing music, the AV side of the chain doesn't intrude. The two meet at the 'bypass' section of the hi-fi amp or preamp. Of course, this uncompromising approach does make life tougher than many would countenance, and – if the hi-fi system doesn't have a bypass for home cinema – might involve setting the system volume to a predetermined level to get the balance right. Still, if a job's worth doing...

We're fond of Dual Concentric/Uni-Q-like designs when it comes to handling both

hi-fi and home cinema duties; they possess the directivity characteristics needed for home cinema (you want to fill a room with good sound, not create a 'sweet spot'), but without sacrificing the coherence and even-handedness required by hi-fi. Six identical KEF or Tannoy floorstanders with the attendant centre channel and one or two good, musical subwoofers would make a lot of sense; with your budget, three pairs of KEF iQ50s, the matching iQ60c centre and a pair of the PSW2500s would make a very tidy loudspeaker system here. Partner the front pair of speakers with a Roksan Kandy (which has a bypass for a home cinema amp) and the rest with a Denon AVR-3808 or an Onkyo.

### WRONG WAY ROUND

Dear Alan,

My hi-fi system comprises a Naim CD5i CD player, a Musical Fidelity X-A1 amp (now ten years old), Triangle Zephyr XS floorstanding loudspeakers and Cardas Crosslink cables. It sounds great, although the Naim does emit a bit of a hum in standby mode. I've replaced the original mains cable with a Nordost Shiva, which has improved dynamics no end.

Also, when I play two test discs, the sound that's supposed to come out of the left speaker comes out of the right, and vice versa. I think it's called 'out of phase'. I've tried changing the speaker connections, but I have them red-to-red positive and black-to-black negative, so I can't understand why it's happening. When I play a CD, it sounds clear and vibrant, so maybe I don't need to worry.

**Julian Bedford** Leeds

**HFC** Answering the second question first, your speakers aren't out of phase; you've wired the left speaker to the right speaker terminal and vice versa. It's easy to check the phase; on one of those test discs, you'll





## BIG POWER BOOST

Dear Alan,

I have the opportunity to buy a second-hand Ayre V-1xe or a set of ECS EA-1 monoblocks, but as they're currently at different ends of the country, it's going to be difficult to make a side-by-side comparison.

The amp choice will form the basis of a new system, likely to be partnered with a Logitech transporter in the short term and then a high-end CD player in due course – e.g. the Meridian 800 series, an Ayre etc. Ideally, I'd start with the source feeding directly into the power amp. Existing speakers will be used in the short term, but I'd expect to demo a pair of Kudos C30s, Living Voice OBX-RWs, 802Ds etc next year.

I understand the need to demo and partner components carefully, but you need to start with something, and as I have the option to pick up

either the Ayre or the EA-1s at a very good price, I think I'll start with the amp and work from there.

**Simon Murfin** via email

**HFC** Truth be told, either option will do very well indeed. Both are extremely detailed-sounding, although the Ayre is perhaps the more musical performer, while the EA-1s will have a more powerful grip over the bass.

An acceptable substitute for a listening test would be to try out a Quad system and a Naim system of around the same price. If you like the even-handedness of the Quad and want more of the same, then go for the Ayre. If you like the excitement of the Naim, go with the EA-1s. But remember that the differences between the Quad and Naim will be more marked than those between the Ayre and ECS amps. Tough choice!

☉ have the sound of a person talking between the two speakers. If your speakers are out of phase, that voice will sound diffuse and disembodied, as if it's all around you, whereas if the speakers are in phase, it'll sound tightly focused in between the loudspeakers. Swap the speaker cables over at the amp end, retaining the red-to-red and black-to-black line-up you have, but changing the left wire for the right and vice versa.

It's very difficult to classify hum easily; one man's 'unacceptable' is another's 'whisper-quiet'. That said, Naim players are particularly sensitive to their environment. Naim itself suggests "a hi-fi system usually shares a mains circuit with other household equipment, some of which can cause distortion of the mains waveform. This distortion can in turn lead to mechanical hum from mains transformers. Some Naim transformers are large in size, making them relatively sensitive to such distortion, and it may be necessary to take account of transformer hum when siting your equipment." Some have taken the extreme step of placing the hi-fi system on a separate, dedicated mains spur, but a slightly more pragmatic solution is to plug in a mains-noise suppressor as close as possible to your CD player. This should help reduce noise from other products around the house, such as fridges, TV decoders and computers. Kemp Electronics and Russ Andrews both supply products that might help.

## REBEL MC

Dear Alan,

My system comprises a Sony SCD-XA3000ES SACD/CD player, a Dual 505-3 turntable with a Pro-Ject Tube Box phono stage, a Musical Fidelity A5 amplifier and Monitor Audio GS20 loudspeakers. The cables are from Transparent, except for Russ Andrews power cables.

I'd appreciate some advice on two upgrades I have in mind. Is Ortofon's Salsa MC cartridge a good choice for an upgrade, and what would you recommend as an upgrade to the CD/SACD player? This should be stereo-only, of course.

**Vitor Inácio** via email

**HFC** An MC cartridge would not be a good upgrade for a Dual 505-3 turntable. The arm will serve up some serious compliance issues with a MC cartridge, which will make the sound worse than with a good cheap MM cartridge. It'll also shorten the life of the cartridge and possibly the bass drivers of your loudspeakers, as even the slightest warp in the record will create a subsonic oscillation that'll cause your drive units to 'flap' through their full excursion several times a second. You could try one of the Grado Prestige MM cartridges instead.

As regards the CD player, we reckon the Sony SCD-XA5400ES is an excellent replacement for the 3000. To improve on it, we'd suggest the Marantz SA-11S2 or the Esoteric SA-10.

## ALAN'S TIPS RESTORATION COMEDY

The improvements engendered by modern design techniques and developments such as surface-mount devices mean today's products are better made, more reliable and have tighter tolerances than ever before. Paradoxically, it also means that those products won't have the very-long-term life expectancy of equipment made a generation or two ago.

Classic products from the pre-transistor age often used point-to-point circuits on tag boards, often of Bakelite or resin-bonded paper; components were attached by hand to the board and soldered in sequence. In theory, anyone with a photo of a correctly assembled circuit, the right replacement components, a soldering iron and a modicum of electronics nous could restore such a product without necessarily referring to a circuit diagram.

From the late 1960s to the late 1980s, discrete components were still largely placed by hand, but on printed circuit boards. Many products – especially valve designs – still use discrete components on circuit boards with large tracks. Replacing components on such a circuit requires more of a deft hand than when dealing with point-to-point circuits (often because components have very short wire 'legs'), and therefore the time taken to restore components on the board can be longer. Also, whereas a point-to-point board can be easily replaced if badly damaged, a similarly broken PCB is virtually irreparable.

The miniaturisation that revolutionised the PC industry has resulted in a move to surface-mount devices (often abbreviated to SMDs). These are tiny versions of traditional electronic components placed with computer precision on a circuit board; although they're extremely reliable and of very high precision, SMDs are also extremely difficult to repair. Similarly, LSI (large-scale integration) or VLSI (very-large-scale integration) chips are effectively whole circuit boards on single slivers of silicon, with individual components at the microscopic level; repairing such devices is currently impossible. This means if the company that made the product no longer exists or no longer supports that product, repairs can be at best uneconomical and at worst impossible.

In short, if you want to buy a product to hand down to your children's children, the highest of hi-tech may not be the way to go.





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# GLOSSARY

## TECHNICAL TERMS

**5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO** Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

**BALANCE** Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

**BASS** The lowest three octaves of the audio band – “low bass” refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), ‘midbass’ the middle octave (40-80Hz) and ‘upper bass’ the top octave (80-160Hz).

**BI-AMP** (sometimes tri-amp) Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

**BI-WIRE** (sometimes tri-wire) Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

**CD-R** Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that haven't been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

**CD-RW** Rewritable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

**CLASS A** The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

**CLASS AB** Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

**CLIPPING** An amplifier's output waveform is ‘clipped’ if the volume is advanced too far and no more ‘volts’ are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

**CLOCK** Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

**CROSSOVER** A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

**DAB** (Digital Audio Broadcasting) Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

**DAC** or digital-to-analogue converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

**DOLBY DIGITAL** A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, e.g. 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used

is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

**MP3** (MPEG Layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disk.

**OUTPUT IMPEDANCE** A measure of resistance to alternating current. A source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

**PCM** (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

**PRESENCE BAND** Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

**QUANTISATION NOISE** A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

**SACD** (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high-resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

**SAMPLE RATE** The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

**SENSITIVITY** The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

**THX** Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier-power and speaker-dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

**TOSLINK** The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical-fibre signal-transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

**TRANSISTOR/MOSFET** The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid-state-amplifier output stages.

**TREBLE** High frequencies; the top end of the audio band, i.e. above 3kHz.

**TWEETER** Treble driver.

**TWO/THREE-WAY** Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands; a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

**WATTS** (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

**WOOFER** Bass driver.

**DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL** Forerunner to DD that ‘steers’ information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

**DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER** A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, e.g. bass driver, tweeter.

**DSD** (Direct Stream Digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

**DSP** (digital signal processor) Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

**DTS** or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

**DVD-AUDIO** High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

**ELECTRICAL DIGITAL** Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

**FILTERS** Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the ‘personality’ of CD-player sound than most other factors.

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE** The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

**IMPEDANCE** With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

**JITTER** An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

**KBPS** (Kilobits per second) Digital-data-rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

**LINE LEVEL** Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as ‘line level’. It follows that all inputs labelled ‘CD’, ‘tuner’, ‘aux’ or ‘tape’ are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

**LOSSLESS COMPRESSION** A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

**LOSSY COMPRESSION** Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, ‘audible’ within a sequence of music.

**MIDRANGE** The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear

## DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

**AGGRESSIVE** Forward and bright sonic character.

**AMBIENCE** The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

**ANALYTICAL** Highly detailed.

**ARTICULATE** Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

**ATTACK** The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

**BALANCE** Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

**BODY** Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

**BOXY** The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

**BRIGHT** A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

**DARK** A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency.

**DECAY** The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

**DEFINITION** (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high-fidelity sound.

**DEPTH** (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

**DETAIL** The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

**DRY** A sound that is devoid of ‘juice’, which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

**DYNAMIC** The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

**EUPHONIC** An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

**FAST** Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and ‘snap’.

**FOCUS** A strong, precise sense of image projection.

**FORWARD(NESS)** Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

**GRAINY** A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

**GRIP** A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

**GRUNT** See grip.

**HARD** Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

**HARSH** Grating, abrasive.

**IMAGING** (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

**JUICY** Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

**LOW-LEVEL DETAIL** The quietest sounds in a recording.

**MUSICAL** or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective ‘rightness’ in the sound.

**NATURALNESS** Realism.

**OPAQUE** Unclear, lacking transparency.

**OPEN** Sound which has height and ‘air’, relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

**PACE** Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

**PRESENCE** A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

**PRESENCE RANGE** The upper midrange.

**SEISMIC** Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

**SIBILANCE** An emphasis of the ‘S’ sound, often heard on radio.

**SNAP** A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or ‘snap’ of live instruments.

**SPEED** A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

**STURDY** Solid, powerful, robust sound.

**THICK** A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

**THIN** Bass-light.

**TIMBRE** The tonal character of an instrument.

**TIMING** A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

**TRANSIENT** The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

**TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT** A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

**TWEAK** To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

**TWEAKER** Someone who enjoys this process.

**VEILED** Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

**WARM** A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

**WEIGHT** A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.



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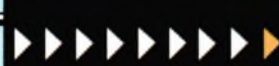
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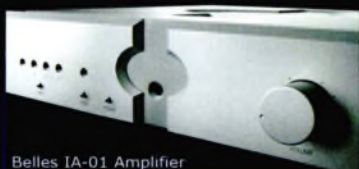


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# CD PLAYERS

*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 75 ohms 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



### Yamaha CD-S700 £400

The CD-S700 is a good, no-frills CD player, without any of the SACD gubbins found in its bigger brothers. It does, however, include a USB port for connecting to an MP3 player.



### Marantz SA8003 £700

Just missing our Awards judging for 2008, the high-scoring SA8003 is our current favourite player under £1,000. Playing both CD and SACD, the 8003 is a class act.



## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

### Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELECTRIC OUTPUT	OPTICAL OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
BB	Arcam CD17	500	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever	●	●	●	●				315
BB	Arcam CD37	1,000	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution do honours to CD and SACD alike	●	●	●	●				310
BB	Caim Tomado	850	The Tomado is a full-on experience that shuns compromise and delivers intensely real sound for its price		●	●				●	305
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative		●	●	●			●	293
BB	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Ultra-civilised sound is not to every taste: rhythm-lovers may find this player frustrating		●	●	●		●		315
BB	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift; otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value		●	●	●				285
BB	Denon DCD-500AE	160	Cheap, well built and good, if slightly soft-edged sound quality			●	●			●	295
BB	Marantz CD6002	280	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw; performance is class-leading in most areas		●	●	●	●		●	301
BB	Marantz SA8003	700	Classic Marantz sound in a classy and attractive package		●	●	●				315
BB	Naim CD5i	875	Its strikingly competent musical performance comfortably exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player				●	●			307
BB	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation; smaller-scale works can lack focus			●	●		●		291
BB	Roksan Kandy K2	750	State-of-the-art technology and precision engineering produces a fine CD performance		●		●		●		315
BB	Yamaha CD-S700	400	Extremely musically accurate CD player with a remarkably silent transport and USB input		●	●	●				316
BB	Yamaha CD-S2000	999	Sophisticated, this is a beautifully controlled, high-resolution player, although SACD is stereo-only	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	309
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
EC	Audio Research CD5	4,500	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – natural and refined, yet assertive and very dynamic		●	●			●		312
BB	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
BB	Caim Fog 3	1,995	Ergonomically challenged, high energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board		●	●			●	●	302
EC	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
BB	Classé CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced		●	●	●	●	●	●	286
BB	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,100	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music		●	●	●				310
BB	Cyrus Audio CD8x/PSX-R	1,400	Lightness of touch is the key here, but there is also good bass and some very fine detail on offer too		●	●					295
EC	EMM Labs CDSA	6,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks	●	●	●	●		●		302
EC	Esoteric X-05	3,495	Superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you into the music	●	●	●	●		●		314
EC	Leema Antilla	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best		●	●	●		●		291
BB	Leema Stream	1,095	The most timely disc player at its price point has tactile imaging and good dynamics, but unusual control system		●	●	●				306
BB	Linn Akurate CD	3,985	This highly engaging multi-format non-video player doesn't have huge transparency, but is musically addictive	●	●	●	●		●		299
EC	Marantz SA-11S2	2,700	Superb value for money, this well-balanced player features various filter settings to customise performance	●	●	●	●		●		304
EC	Marantz SA-7S1	5,000	Something of a bargain even at this price, the SA-7S1 sets the benchmark for CD/SACD players of its ilk	●	●	●	●		●		297
EC	Meridian G08	2,250	Advanced digital processing with special apodising filter that gives a very clean sound		●	●	●		●		312
EC	Naim HDX	4,500	The HDX hard disk player represents an entirely new paradigm for high-fidelity replay. Who needs CD players?		●	●	●				311
BB	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,250	An exceptionally fine CD player that provides a high-end and musically rewarding performance		●	●					307
BB	Shantling CD-T1 000SE	1,600	Commendably committed player which gets right to the heart of a wide variety of musical styles		●		●		●	●	306
BB	Sony SCD-XA5400ES	1,199	Elegant, refined control system and very strong CD/SACD performance. Sound is bold with high resolution	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	313
BB	Unison Research CDE	1,950	Valve CD player with interchangeable DACs that can double as a standalone DAC that oozes musicality	●			●		●	●	315

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

## TOP BUYS



### Arcam CD37 £1,000

A welcome flagship newcomer, with sound that does honours to the venerable CD format, while also helping to prove the worth of SACD. Practical, unfussy and excellent value.



### EMM Labs CDSA £9,495

Although expensive, the high-end CDSA from Canadian expert EMM Labs manages to redefine the performance of both CD and SACD. A true audiophile piece of kit.





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|---|---|--|---|--|

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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

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.

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, 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.

## TOP BUYS

**Ortofon**  
Rondo Red £325

Despite being the base model in the Rondo range the Red delivers detail, power and resolution and is very well priced to boot. A cut above its rivals.

**Creek Audio**  
OBH15 £220

Practical and highly compatible unit offering fine detail and a pleasing mellow balance. If you actually buy one, ask the supplying dealer what OBH stands for.

**Funk Firm**  
Saffire £1,900

Something of a gem the very individual Saffire is refined and pleasingly neutral with excellent dynamics and very strong timing ability.

**Avid**  
Volvere £2,750

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



## Our favourite 🏆 BEST BUY 📌 EDITOR'S CHOICE TURNTABLES

### Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	
📌	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
🏆	Clearaudio Emotion	985	Beautifully built with open and clean sound emphasising mid and top, but delivering nice timely bass	33/45			🏆	🏆	309
🏆	Clearaudio Champion	1,365	Small, practical and good-sounding, with impressively 'dead' arm. Isolation recommended	33/45			🏆		268
🏆	Clearaudio Performance	1,940	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance. Good arm and cartridge	33/45			🏆	🏆	295
🏆	Clearaudio Ambient	4,220	Innovative use of materials leads to a fast, precise and thrilling sound (tonearm extra)	33/45			🏆	🏆	271
📌	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	opt	284
📌	The Funk Firm Saffire	1,900	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics	33/45		🏆	opt	opt	309
🏆	Goldring GR2	265	Nicely finished Rega-manufactured deck with RB250 arm and an open, engaging sound quality	33/45			🏆	🏆	266
📌	Michell Tecnodec	886	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money	33/45			🏆	🏆	309
🏆	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	450	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	600	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 X-Pack	800	Combines some very strong elements (Ortofon Rondo Red) into a killer package with top sound and value	33/45		🏆	🏆	🏆	309
🏆	Pro-Ject RPM 9 X	1,200	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
🏆	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	895	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation (acrylic version tested)	33/45	🏆	🏆			248
📌	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	🏆	🏆	🏆		195
📌	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
📌	Townshend Rock V/Excalibur II	7,000	If you want to hear everything that's on a record then there's no better machine for the job (includes Excalibur II)	33/45	🏆		🏆		307

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

### MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
🏆	Denon DL-103R	200	Adds refinement to basic DL-103, at a price. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around		🏆		285
🏆	Dynavector DV-10X5	250	A high-output MC with superb dynamics and fine timing that's difficult to mount, but well worth the effort		🏆		307
🏆	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	🏆		🏆	235
🏆	Ortofon Rondo Red	325	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price		🏆		307
🏆	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
📌	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		🏆		265
📌	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		🏆		253

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

### Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUO GAIN	AUO IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
🏆	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
📌	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 stylus for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.



# SALE

## 100s OF REDUCTIONS

# FINAL REDUCTIONS: BUY NOW AND BEAT UK PRICE RISES

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Panasonic, Pioneer, Pro-Ject, Pure, Q Acoustics, QED, Quad, Roksan, Rotel, Samsung, Sennheiser, Sonos, Sony, Soundstyle, Tannoy, ThemeScene, Topfield,

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#### CD PLAYER NAD C515BEE

- Graphite or titanium finish
- Optical & coaxial digital outputs
- Quality 192kHz/24 bit Delta Sigma DAC
- £161.44 (Was £176.12, Save £19.57)

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008

#### AMPLIFIER NAD C315BEE

- Graphite or titanium finish
- Toroidal transformer for superior soundstaging
- Handy front MP3 input
- Includes system remote control
- £161.44 (Was £195.70, Save £34.26)

#### SPEAKERS Q ACOUSTICS 1020i

- Black, beech or cherry finish
- Improved version of Award-Winning 1020 model
- Add biwire cable for even better performance
- £97.82 (Was £127.19, Save £29.37)

### GADGETS/MULTIROOM

#### MULTI-ROOM SYSTEM SONOS BU150

ENJOY MUSIC IN EVERY ROOM

£685.06

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008



#### INTERNET/DAB/FM RADIO PURE EVOKE FLOW

WAS £146.76  
SAVE £24.47

£122.29

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008



#### MULTI-ROOM SYSTEM LOGITECH SQUEEZEBOX DUET

- Stand alone network client and stunning remote control with colour screen
- Remote also acts as 2nd, portable client with own headphone socket

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008

WAS £273.99  
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### HI-FI SEPARATES

#### CD PLAYER MARANTZ CD6002\*

WAS £264.21  
SAVE £48.94

£215.27

\*In-store exclusive



#### AMPLIFIER DENON PMA500AE\*

WAS £195.70  
SAVE £58.73

£136.97

\*In-store exclusive



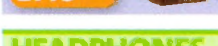
- Black or silver
- Two pairs independently switched speaker outputs

#### SPEAKERS WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 9.1 ANNIVERSARY

WAS £176.12  
SAVE £29.36

£146.76

\*In-store exclusive



#### LESS THAN HALF PRICE TANNOY MERCURY F4 CUSTOM

WAS £371.87  
SAVE £207.57

£164.30

\*In-store exclusive



#### AMPLIFIER CREEK EVOLUTION AMPLIFIER

- Audiophile hi-fi amp at a brilliant, low price

WAS £533.40  
SAVE £141.96

£391.44

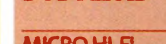


#### TURNTABLE PRO-JECT GENIE II

WAS £136.97  
SAVE £14.68

£122.29

- Premium, Gloss Red finish, also available



### HEADPHONES

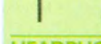
#### EARPHONES GOLDRING GX200

- Includes a choice of comfort-fit silicone buds

WAS £48.89  
SAVE £19.58

£29.31

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2007



#### HEADPHONES GRADO SR60

WAS £88.04  
SAVE £9.79

£78.25

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND & VISION

### ACCESSORIES

#### INTERCONNECT QED QUNEX 3

WAS £48.89  
SAVE £29.36

£19.53

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008



#### HI-FI RACK ATACAMA EQUINOX

3 SHELF OPTION

£220.12

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008

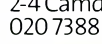


#### SPEAKER STANDS SOUNDSTYLE Z2ii

BLACK OR SILVER

£68.46

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008



### SYSTEMS

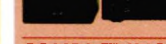
#### MICRO HI-FI DENON DM37DAB

- Available without speakers for £176.12 (Was £225.06 Save £48.94)

WAS £293.57  
SAVE £58.73

£234.84

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2008



#### COMPACT AV SOLUTION ROTH ALFIE

- All-in-one DVD/CD/MP3 player & 2.1 speaker system

WAS £391.44  
SAVE £146.81

£244.63

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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. However, 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. Sound quality judgements are muddled by listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

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

### RECEPTION

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

### TOP BUYS



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



**Creek Evolution £285**  
 Classy tuner with a sound that's detailed, cohesive and extended tonally.



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



**Onkyo T-4555DAB £350**  
 A real radio bargain, this DAB/FM tuner is free from grain and tonal blemishes.

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **TUNERS**

### FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>FM TUNERS</b>										
	Creek Audio Evolution	285	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy	FM,M	80	●	●		●	308
	Creek Audio 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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">BEST BUY</span>	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,295	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
	Pure DRX-702ES	210	Apparently good value is restricted by persistent veiling on FM: 'PAC' on DAB mellows sound a little	DAB,FM,M	99	●	●	●	●	283
	Rega Radio 3	398	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor make this an appealing FM performer	FM,M	20		●			283
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●		242
	T+A T1210R	1,000	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated, with useful features too	FM	100	●	●			283
<b>DAB TUNERS</b>										
	Arcam 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
<span style="font-size: x-small;">EDITOR'S CHOICE</span>	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	●	●	●	●	298

**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. Integrated simply means that both pre and power are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a 10-watt valve amp, but it takes a 200-watt behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. Although, 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 FOR THE BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics (including amplifiers) perform better when they are warmed up. To help protect the environment, switch your amp on, at least one hour before listening.

### WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Running separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on a speaker is bi-wiring. 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.

### WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered, but when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

## Our favourite STEREO AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>								
	Arcam DIVA A70	500	A smart and practical amp offering good snap and pace, with natural dynamics and good detail	6	MM	● ●	60	289
	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		● ●	100	300
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Practical, affordable and impressively flexible amp with a laid-back approach but plenty of insight too	7	opt	● ●	100	303
	Cambridge Audio 640A v2	300	Slightly cheap-feeling controls are the only real downside to this powerful and lively little amp	6		● ●	75	279
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	500	Ticks all the boxes for bass, clarity, imaging etc. and invites the listener into the music with uncommon grace	6		● ●	100	294
	Cambridge Audio 840A v2	750	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp revels in loud music, but also offers detail and delicacy when required	8		● ●	120	315
	Creek Audio Evolution	545	Dynamics can seem understated, but energetic bass and fatigue-free treble make it an enjoyable listen	5	opt	● ●	85	311
	Cyrus 6vs2	600	Spunky little amp that reproduces instrumental timbres and acoustic spaces well, with real musical involvement	7		● ●	40	293
	Denon PMA-700AE	250	One of a growing number of new low-cost amps, it offers good timing and analysis at up to moderately high volume levels	4	MM	● ●	50	284
	Marantz PM8003	630	Detail isn't the utmost, but great vitality makes this amplifier quite thrilling	5	MM	● ●	95	315
	Musical Fidelity X-T100	899	By separating amp and TRIPLE-X power supply, this deceptively powerful valve-sporting amplifier is both enticing and musical	3		● ●	70	288
	Naim Audio Nait 5i	750	More versatile than previous Nait's, the 5i is a great all-round amplifier that offers vivid insights into all manner of music	4		● ●	50	305
	Onkyo A-933	500	Puts the music first, with sound that delivers the basics correctly but above all involves the listener	5		● ●	80	278



# BUYER'S BIBLE STEREO AMPS

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

### Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Rocksan Kandy K2	750	Superior design and high performance credentials makes this amplifier a must-have bargain	5	MM		●	125	315
	Unison Research Unico P	795	Sound belies indifferent measured performance with good detail, balance and flowing melodic quality	5	MM	●		50	293
	Yamaha A-S700	500	Very honest, deceptively powerful amplifier, though it's not the most dynamic performer around	5	MM	●	●	90	316
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	ATC SIA 2-150	2,248	Revealing, dynamic and powerful amplifier that works with a wide range of speakers. Superb build quality	4			●	150	314
	Arcam A38	1,300	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality	7	opt	●	●	105	314
	Boulder 865	7,750	Extremely transparent to detail but less revealing of energy, high power, superb build but only balanced inputs	4		●		150	303
	Copland CTA405	2,498	A musical and involving amplifier which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards	5	MM	●		50	305
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6		●	●	100	286
	Jadis Orchestra DIP	2,995	A smooth, refined, yet dynamic-sounding tube amplifier with the added 'novelty' of an iPod dock	5				40	313
	Leema Pulse	1,195	An organic and revealing sound alongside good power reserves and superb features, including a great MM/MC phono stage	5	●	●		80	306
	Moon Evolution 1-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5		●		150	288
	Musical Fidelity A1008	2,999	With DAC, phono stage and built-in valve buffer, this powerhouse amp can really grab hold of a loudspeaker	4	●	●		250	295
	Mystère ia 11	1,250	Small, deceptively powerful integrated valve amp with a crisp, pacy sound	4				40	302
	NAD M3	1,899	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle	7		●		180	285
	Naim Audio SuperNait	2,400	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6		●	●	80	294
	Pathos Classic One MK3	1,535	An attractive amp offering a beautiful musical presentation with good tonality and detail	5		●		70	305
	Primare I30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			●	100	267
	Pure Sound A30	1,100	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though	3				30	298
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,299	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor	5	opt	●		21	296
	Unison Research P70	3,495	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power	4		●		70	302
	YBA YA201	1,290	Built like a tank, but with supermodel looks, this amp delivers an exceptional performance with all kinds of music	6	●			100	316
	Yamaha A-S2000	1,499	One of the few amplifiers to offer the benefit of true balanced operation at this price point	5	opt	●	●	160	309

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

### Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>										
	Advance Acoustic MPP206/MAA406	900	This pair has good build and finish and a balance of qualities that's hard to beat for the price	●	●	4	opt	●	150	309
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,800	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed, composed and controlled	●	●	8	opt	●	200	309
	Croft Precession I/Polestar I	1,400	Compact pre/power combo with battery preamp and hybrid power, with freedom from timesmear, bass could be firmer	●	●	6			25	290
	Cyrus Pre Vs2/6 Power	1,000	Pre offers stunning resolution and feature count for the money and power is subtle, open and musical	●	●		●	●	50	290
	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
	Rotel RC-06/RB-06	598	A capable and surprisingly powerful-sounding combination which offers real value	●	●	5	●	●	70	285
	Russ Andrews HP-1/PA-1	1,198	Simply featured, but sounds appealingly realistic and solid. Highly capable in all areas design	●	●	2		●	50	303
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>										
	Arcam C31/P38	2,050	Very civilised sound, in the best possible way. Well featured and smartly built	●	●	7	opt	●	100	308
	Border Patrol Control Unit	2,995	Bluff looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around	●		5	opt			277
	Bryston BP26/3B-SST	5,300	The epitome of the iron fist in a velvet glove school of hi-fi. Dynamically superb and very detailed	●	●	8	opt	●	150	308
	Bryston BP26 DA/28 SST	5,500	Bryston's top preamp is now a serious competitor. The power amp reveals a lot of signal and serious grunt	●	●	6	opt	●	100	278
	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream	●	●	5		●	120	269
	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
	Cyrus DAC XP	2,000	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs	●	●	2	opt			316
	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings	●	●	8		opt	80	276
	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
	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
	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
	Howland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes: one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	opt		125	250
	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
	Marantz SC11S1/SM-11S1	5,300	Preamp and power amp duo delivers high resolution and is consistent with different loudspeaker loads	●	●	6	●	●	220	304
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	2,245	A well-matched, powerful and enjoyable sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player	●	●	5		●	85	307

**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.



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Artcoustic	Chord Electronics	Goldring	Loewe	Musical Fidelity	Pioneer	QED	Samsung	Sound Org	Teac
Atacama	Cyrus	Grado	Logitech	Nevo	Pixel Magic	Quad	Sennheiser	Sound Style	Toshiba
Audiolab	Da-Lite	In Focus	Marantz	Onkyo	PMC	Quadraspire	Sharp	SpeakerCraft	Van Den Hul
B&W	Denon	Ixos	Meridian	Optimum	Primare	REL	Sim2	Spectral	Yamaha

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**Samsung Series 6 'Rose Black' LCD TVs**  
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**Panasonic VIERA PZ81**  
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### HOME CINEMA SEPARATES

#### Onkyo

This impressive range includes the new TX-SR606 and TX-SR506 A/V receivers and the award-winning DV-SP406 DVD player.



#### Yamaha

The DSP-AX8635E AV amplifier features full support for HD audio formats ensuring maximum enjoyment of all high definition sources. Also available is the award-winning DSP-AX763 and the flagship DSP-Z11 at selected stores



#### Denon

The range includes the award-winning Denon DVD1940 DVD player and outstanding AV amplifiers and receivers including the new AVR-1909 and AVC-1HD

### BLU-RAY DISC PLAYERS

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#### Denon DVD-2500BT

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#### Pro-Ject Turntables

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#### Genie 2

The new Genie 2 is an ideal choice for vinyl lovers on a budget



#### Roksan Kandy K2

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This award-winning CD and amplifier from Marantz gives true high-end performance and represents outstanding value for money.



#### Cyprus

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#### Arcam FMJ Series

Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and a level of reproduction far beyond that of budget separates systems

### LOUDSPEAKERS

#### B&W 600 Series

The fourth generation of the 600 series features new drive units, crossovers and a whole new design

#### B&W MiniTheatre MT30

Award-winning 5.1 speaker system available in silver, black or white



#### Dali Lektor 1

These speakers deliver remarkable performance from compact enclosures.

#### Q Acoustics 1010i 5.1

Smart styling complements the Q Acoustics' award-winning performance.



#### KEF KHT3005SE

Award-winning 5.1 speaker package available in high gloss black or silver.



#### Monitor Audio

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**Arcam Solo Mini**

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**Teac Reference Series 380**

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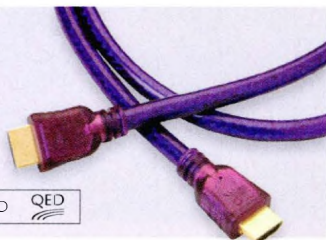
**B&W Zeppelin**

This award-winning iPod docking station ticks all the boxes: it's beautiful, solid as a rock and sounds amazing!



Essential Accessories

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# STEREO SPEAKERS

*Speaker pairs for stereo sound*



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

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

## Positioning

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

## Going multichannel

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



## Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

## Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts 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



**KEF**  
iQ50 £489  
Cutey styled and beautifully discreet, this latest Uni-Q has attractively spacious imaging, good overall balance, a sweet treble and fine consistency.



**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 6LE £4,000  
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	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
★	Advance Acoustic UM20	200	Classy styling and finish, with solid build and fine overall balance when sited close to a wall	18,30,21		A	43	●	●	307
★	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
★	Amphion Helium 520	1,000	Sharp styling and fine value for money with excellent voice band coherence	16,104,22	●	G	28	●	●	314
★	Amphion Ion L	750	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence and a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment in test room	16,2,32,26,5		A	40	●	●	310
★	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
★	Bowers and Wilkins DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	30,33,23		A	23	●	●	226
★	Bowers and Wilkins CM1	500	Luxury miniature has neutral, laid-back sound, with low coloration, fine imaging but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28		A-	40	●	●	279
★	Bowers and Wilkins 684	699	A fine all-rounder at a realistic price, this floorstander has a smooth, even and nicely open balance	20,91,30	●	G	22	●	●	315
★	Bowers and Wilkins 683	899	A fine all-round performer with high-class drivers at a very realistic price	20,99,34	●	P	20	●	●	304
★	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 M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21		A-	40	●	●	269
★	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 M12.2	449	A true classic standmount with lovely presentation, fine sound balance, superior coherence and low coloration	20,37,25		A	40	●	●	265
★	Focal Chorus 706V	369	Advanced drivers deliver a smooth, even, overall balance with healthy dynamic expression and tension	22,39,25		A	30	●	●	307
★	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 Cetan 300	595	Does tone colour, dynamics and detail with aplomb and communicates superbly in its +2dB 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	Shapely, vinyl-covered standmount has lively dynamics and fine imaging, but could be smoother and sweeter	22,37,33		A+	40	●	●	284
★	KEF iQ50	489	Looks cute and very discreet, with spacious imaging, good balance, a sweet treble, but weak dynamics	17,5,81,5,26	●	A	23	●	●	315
★	Mission élan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacey, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34	●	A+	48	●	●	298
★	Monopulse 42A	995	Uniquely different in style and sound, midband time coherence is magnificent but treble is too restrained	26,110,25	●	A+	28	●	●	271
★	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25		A-	30	●	●	294
★	Monitor Audio BR5	400	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold sounding, good value and an easy electrical load	17,85,25	●	A-	36	●	●	293
★	Monitor Audio GS10	800	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs. High-quality stereo design which takes 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
★	PMC DB1i	825	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator with fine warmth and sweet treble	15,5,29,23,4		A+	30	●	●	310

**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 **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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# STEREO SPEAKERS continued

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (W/H/D) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DIALNE	BIWAS FROM (W/2)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
🏆	PMC TB2+	795	Classy transmission line standmount has superior midband, restrained presence and a bright clean top end	20,40,30		A	28	●	275
🏆	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	699	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its Signature brother costs £200 more and is even better!	15,27,23		A+	40	⊗	267
🏆	Q Acoustics 1010	99	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling but fine midband voicing at a very sharp price	15,21,5,19.5		A	48	●	286
🏆	Q Acoustics 1050	330	Great value, the sound lacks smoothness but has fine dynamics and impressive transparency	19,5,97,5,30	⊗	A+	28	●	284
🏆	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26		A-	30	●	292
🏆	Rega R1	298	Cute baby sounds busy, coherent and involving, if a touch thin. Sweet and delicate treble with even bass	15,32,24		A	50	●	269
🏆	Russ Andrews SP-1	399	This tweaked Focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, most importantly, great fun	192,31,5,24,8		A+	65	●	309
🏆	Spendor S3/5R	725	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, but lovely smooth neutrality and good bass extension	16,5,30,5,190		P	25	⊗	310
🏆	Tannoy Revolution DC4T	599	Ultra-compact floorstander that lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	15,85,16	⊗	G	40	●	316
🏆	Tannoy Revolution DC6	900	Pretty compact standmount likes wall loading, delivering a lively even bass and smooth coherent midband	23,36,5,23		A	40	●	307
🏆	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
🏆	Wharfedale Diamond 9.1	180	Superior shape and finish at an exceptionally sharp price. Sound is laid back, but free from boxiness	19,5,30,28		A-	45	⊗	307
🏆	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
🏆	A2T Mezzo	2,000	Seamless overall coherence, with persuasive monitoring capabilities. Sounds a little mid-forward. Top could be sweeter	27,5,40,26		A+	40	⊗	281
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,350	Costly but clever; adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount	24,5,37,31,5		A	26	●	288
🏆	ATC 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
🏆	ATC SCM16A	2,203	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Good value, including built-in amps and fuss-free	27,45,33		ACT	42	⊗	300
👑	Auroual VS	1,650	The fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, plus extra help at the frequency extremes	21,5,107,5,26,8	●	G	20	⊗	314
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	Bowers and Wilkins 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
👑	Bowers and Wilkins 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
🏆	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
🏆	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,250	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up	28,104,37,5	●	A	45	⊗	287
🏆	Focal Chorus 816WSE	1,399	The W cone treatment makes some of the qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive	99,8,28,2,37,5	●	A+	39	⊗	308
🏆	Focal Chorus 836V	1,549	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier. Has good bass with genuine grip, but top could be sweeter	28,115,38	●	A	28	●	290
👑	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,000	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35	●	A-	25	⊗	276
🏆	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
🏆	Gamut Phi5	2,550	Lovely and discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches	17,100,24	⊗	P	20	⊗	305
🏆	Guru QM10	1,695	A very clever close-to-wall standmount with fine imaging, that sounds a lot bigger than it looks	30,25,2,23,2		A	40	●	313
👑	KEF Reference Model 201/2	3,500	Very classy but costly three-way standmount with much improved Uni-Q; could be more transparent	25,42,41		A	30	●	298
🏆	Kudos Cardea C1	1,450	A very pretty compact standmount with a delightfully subtle and delicate sound quality	20,35,27		A	40	●	304
🏆	Kudos Cardea C30	5,250	An absolute honey that fully justifies its hefty pricetag, lacking only a little dynamic tension	20,112,27	●	G	22	●	310
👑	MartinLogan Source	1,599	Careful install needed, but capable of remarkable transparency at an extremely competitive price	24,120,37	⊗	A	42	⊗	303
🏆	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
🏆	Monopulse 82	2,495	Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics, fine imaging and a wide dynamic range	27,110,25	⊗	A-	<20	⊗	281



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Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO SPEAKERS continued

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM Hz	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Monitor Audio PL300	5,500	Completely new level of sophistication from a brand best known for mainstream, cost-effective designs	41,111,47	●	A-	28	●	301
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 LE	4,000	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, while overall balance is smooth, neutral and open	24,115,43	●	A	22	●	308
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Opera Callas	2,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	23x37.5x34	●	B	32	●	311
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Opera Seconda	1,525	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth	24,025,31.5	●	A	20	●	314
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	PMC Water 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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	PMC FB1i	1,950	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	20x100x30	●	G	20	●	311
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	PMC GB1i	1,330	Pretty little floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing	15.5,87,23.4	●	A	30	●	306
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	PMC OB1i	3,200	This floorstander delivers a smooth overall balance with wide bandwidth and dynamic range	20 02.5 32.5	●	A	20	●	311
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Quad ESL 2805	5,000	Uniquely wonderful natural realism, exceptional imaging, coherence and low level detailing	70,107,38.5	●	A-	45	●	294
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well-disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	20	●	256
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	●	A-	48	●	274
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Ruarik Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruarik's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●	259
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Sonus Faber Minima Vintage	2,150	Easy, graceful sounding compact is a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	20,33,27.5	●	A-	55	●	312
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Spendor SA1	1,100	Exceptionally fine sub-miniature, especially with its partnering stand, with surprisingly effective dynamics	16.5,30.5,19	●	A-	25	●	240
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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	●	P	28	●	314
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	●	A	35	●	277
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Triangle Genese Quartet	1,995	Great material value and a solid all round sonic performance with great loudness potential	23,117,37	●	A	25	●	302
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Triangle Celius Esw	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	●	A	22	●	277
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Wharfedale Opus	1,500	Great material value and a solid, if bright and forward sound. Has great loudness potential	26,100.5,41	●	A	23	●	314
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Yamaha Soavo 2	1,200	Cunningly crafted standmount with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving	22,38,35	●	A	28	●	296

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

## SUBWOOFERS

### Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM Hz	SCALE NUMBER
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	MartinLogan Dynamo	449	Refined, compact sub brings established MartinLogan virtues to a new price and size point	29,35,32	200	25	301
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">●</span>	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated pile driver, with deep, state of the art performance	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	ISSUE NUMBER
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	ACS T2	500	Earcanal earphones display an impressive midband intelligibility and a knack for digging out the detail						28		315
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	AKG K1000	650	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270		244
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Audio Technica ATH-W1000	400	Superbly comfortable and very revealing. Long listening sessions are a pleasure with new musical insights			●		●	250	●	304
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass			●		●	290	●	287
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Beyerdynamic DT880	230	Combines musical involvement with a high degree of analytical virtues. Very comfortable		●	●	●		205	●	312
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Denon AH-D2000	250	Among the best closed-back headphones we've heard and very fine by any standards.			●		●	350	●	309
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Denon AH-D5000	500	Sound is comparable with good open-back models, while isolation both inward and outward is useful			●		●	320		312
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Denon AH-D7000	800	One of the best closed-back designs, bearing comparison with the finest open models. Bass, in particular, is excellent			●		●	295	●	314
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	Grado GS1000	995	One of the finest transducers on the planet, with detail to die for			●	●		250	●	288
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Sennheiser HD595	160	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable			●	●		270	●	266
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Sennheiser PXC450	299	Noise-cancelling model, as good as it gets for making the most of listening in planes, trains and automobiles			●		●	240	●	302
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">■</span>	Sennheiser HD650	330	Clear and detailed, with very natural tonality through bass and midrange and just a little treble coloration			●	●		275	●	312
	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">EC</span>	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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## DINO PHONO Amplifier





# 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					
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Atlas Questor	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	CrystalCable Piccolo	260	Thin cable, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid core type generally – notably resolution, focus and articulation	●	●	●			294
	Kimber Timbre	118	A very neutral cable that will complement even very upmarket systems	●	●	●			312
	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●	●	●			281
	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere	●	●	●			284
	Nordost Wyewizard 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
	Profigold PGA3000	60	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good	●	●	●			299
	Supra EFF-1X	77	Lively-sounding cable which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality. Musically, a great all-rounder	●	●	●			306
	Townshend Isolda DCT100	99	Sound has a particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for a great listener involvement	●	●	●			312
	van den Hul Integration Hybrid	125	Bass is nothing remarkable, but mid and treble are outstandingly open and clear: very transparent	●	●	●			306
	van den Hul The Wave	100	Generally neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most	●	●	●			312
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>									
	Atlas Compass	50	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble, make this fine value	●	●	●		E	289
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Wireworld Starlight 5	90	Clear gains in detail and imaging precision are this cable's main strengths: good value and near-high-end performance	●	●	●		E	279
<b>SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE</b>									
	Atlas Hyper 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 Silver Screen	6	Screened speaker cable with excellent treble, but just a little light in the bass at times	●	●	●			310
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,480	A chip off the old block, this speaker cable has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound	●	●	●			302
	Kimber 8PR	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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Nordost Heimdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low coloration, 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
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical	●	●	●			287
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 0 2px;">EC</span>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all round	●	●	●			241
	van den Hul The Bridge	6	Better bass than treble, with good detail though a touch of constriction at times	●	●	●			291
	Wireworld Solstice 5 <sup>2</sup>	45	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity	●	●	●			310

**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 EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	1,200	Expensive 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 Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform that can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit		40x25			Metal	311
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail, but is nicely lively		56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal and largely harmless		60,42		4	Glass	293
	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 Icon 400	600	Beautifully built, conveniently adjustable and with little sound of its own, a very classy rack	75	57,41		5	Glass	263
	Milly Foculpods	19.50	A set of four isolation pads that are amazingly useful for damping vibration and improving sound	2	5			Polymer	311
	Partington Minimi	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 Platform	130	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound	8	48,36		1	Torlyte	302
	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
	Townshend VSSS	1,300	The Seismic Sink goes all glassy and attractive, yet retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

## Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	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 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 RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration and ringing suits it to high-resolution systems	56	16,5,18	●		1	281
	Custom Design SQ404	200	Robust four pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance of speakers great and small	61	18,16.3	●		4	283
	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
	Partington Dreadnought BS	295	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62	17,23	●		5	309
	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.

## Equipment Racks

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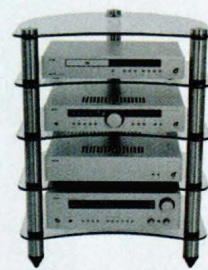
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It's Jack Nicholson  
in the front row.  
Brilliant!

I hope  
Kate Winslet  
wins this time.

I hope  
Mickey Rourke  
piledrives Hugh Jackman  
for making *Australia*.

Look! It's  
*The Boy In The Striped  
Pyjamas* represented via  
the medium  
of dance!

Where's  
WALL-E?

Pfft.  
*Revolutionary Road*  
is just *Mad Men* meets  
*American Beauty*...

Never mind, WALL-E.  
Bring back  
Whoopi Goldberg.

And Benjamin  
Button is just *Youth  
Without Youth* with a more  
fashionable director.

Fail. You guys  
don't even have  
a drinking game  
on the website.

In the  
current economic  
climate, this is all  
a bit unsavoury.

Is this really  
**totalfilm.com**?  
Your list features  
are awesome!

Uh-oh!  
Angelina Jolie!  
Great shoes!

*The Dark Knight*  
better win Best Picture  
or I'm putting on clown  
make-up and blowing up  
the Academy.

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- ACOUSTIC ENERGY** - launching the long awaited Radiance Series of loudspeakers
- ARCAM** - FMJ AVR600 - making its first major public appearance at the Show. A state of the art 7.1 home cinema receiver with stunning sound and sleek styling. FMJ T32 'Smart' DAB Tuner
- CYRUS** - WORLD EXCLUSIVE see an amazing (currently secret) product from Cyrus to be released March 2009.
- DENON** - European launch of the DVD-A1UD Blu-ray player.
- EXPOSURE** - showing new additions to the 3010S family.
- FOCAL** - see the stunning new Utopia range!
- JVC** - launch of the HD750-DILA projector, the first THX certified home cinema projector.
- KEF** - see and hear the new C and Q series
- KEITH MONKS** - FREE record cleaning! Each visitor will get one record cleaned free.
- MERIDIAN** - introducing the DSP7200 horizontal centre channel speaker
- NAD** - launching an amazing 12 new products!
- NAIM** - see and hear a number of new products, including the new NAIT XS.
- PMC** - launching a new high performance i series model.
- PROAC** - demonstrating two exciting new products.
- PSB** - launch of the Synchrony loudspeaker series.
- SENNHEISER** - the new IE Series in-ear headphones and HD800 a serious headphone for £999!
- SIM2** - demonstrating the new Domino D60 Full 1080p HD projector.
- SPECTRAL** - showcasing some new furniture designs.
- WILSON BENESCH** - see and hear the A.C.T. C60 loudspeakers.
- YAMAHA** - debut of the Soavo 1 loudspeaker in Piano finish.

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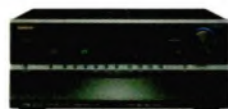


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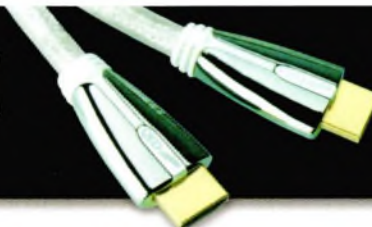
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Resolution Audio S30 Integrated amplifier. Works in conjunction with Opus 21 CD player. Very neat office style solution. New unused.	£800	£2150
Resolution Audio Opus 21. Silver/silver. 3 years old. Condition as new.	£1650	£2950
SME 20/12A turntable with KSL silver wired 312S arm. Demonstrator - less than a year old.	£8500	£11500
Living Voice Avatar II Maple.	£1500	£2700
Living Voice Avatar I Black gloss.	£1000	£3000
Lector MM phono stage. Nice looking. Sounds alright as well.	£400	£800
LV MC step up transformer. 80 Ohms.	£350	£650
Michell ISO/Hera phono stage.	£200	-
Benz Micro Glyder As new.	£400	£650
Transfiguration Esprit. Only 20 hours use. Perfect condition.	£600	£1200
Jan Allaerts MC2. Finish Gold. Only 100 hours of use.	£1750	£4500
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VDH Grasshopper III GLA. Optimum load 500 ohms / .45 mv output. Just serviced & calib. byVDH.	£1500	£3350
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Kuzma Airline tonearm. Boxed. Bit of a palaver, but sounds great. Perfect condition.	£5000	£7500
Sugden A21SE integrated. 3 years old. Very tidy.	£1000	£2150
Sugden A21 power amplifier. Titanium.	£475	£1200
Cairn Integrated. Remote control & balanced input. Black.	£450	-
Monopulse 42A loudspeakers. Sand.	£450	-
Vitavox MM300 12" high power handling bass drive units. Very light use. Super serious.	£400 pr	-
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# 2nd-hand shootout

Getting an earful of some £1,500 speakers

**T**his month we're focusing on a trio of relatively recent loudspeakers from around Europe, plus an active classic from the nineties.

The first of our nearly-new best buys is the KEF XQ40. This sturdy floorstander offers a powerful yet neutral sound with a delicate treble response. It costs £2,000 new, yet we managed to find an ex-demonstration pair for just £1,300. If you need a good example of the money you can save by buying ex-demo, this is it. However, it's this type of deal that also highlights potential pitfalls. KEF offers a five-year guarantee on its speakers, but it only covers the first owner and, interestingly, it isn't valid if the serial number has been removed or tampered with. The lesson here is to make sure you actually see the speakers you're buying and/or buy from a registered dealer. Buying ex-demo effectively makes you the first buyer, thereby ensuring you have

KEF's guarantee intact.

For something a bit more unusual, you might like to consider the Focal-JMLab 928. This French-built model is, like the KEF, beautifully finished. A very sophisticated treble unit with complex suspension, composite woofers and a multilayered cabinet combine to make a low-distortion, pacy-sounding speaker. Although it's made abroad, the UK sales and service department is comprehensive. And unlike some other foreign brands, Focal UK is directly connected to the manufacturer and not a third-party distributor. While

many distributors offer excellent service, a direct link with the manufacturer effectively cuts out the middleman, often making spares cheaper and easier to obtain. Although only launched in 2005, the 928 is already out of production. It's rare second-hand, but its short retail lifespan makes it something of a second-hand bargain. Although it cost around £2,800 new, we found a two-year-old pair for just £1,450 – effectively half-price. If you can, find a pair finished in Diamond Black. This colour option replaced the original three wood finishes in 2007, thereby guaranteeing you one of the last pairs made. Although the drive units are quite expensive to replace, Focal claims they're extremely reliable. They certainly shouldn't give cause for concern on a pair of speakers of this age. Like KEF, Focal doesn't offer a transferable warranty, although staff told us they do "look kindly" on manufacturing defects.

The Dynaudio Focus 220 hails from Denmark, and in many respects is typical of Scandinavian speakers, with a sound that's very smooth, warm even, if not as dynamic as that of the other models here. While smaller than their

## "KEF offers a five-year guarantee, but it's not valid if the serial number has been removed."

counterparts, the 220s are equally well made and are available in a wide range of quality wood veneers. The Focus 220s also have a warranty that's transferable – provided the speakers were bought from an authorised Dynaudio dealer. Considering that Dynaudio quoted us £195 for a replacement woofer and an eye-watering £340 for a tweeter, it's essential that the drivers be in perfect working order. Launched just three years ago, at a price of just over £2,000, there are now plenty to choose from, and, as with the XQ40s, we found a nice pair for just £1,300.

And now for something completely different. The Meridian DSP5000 active speakers were launched in the early nineties and epitomised the digital mastery of the Cambridge-based company. With active amps and DACs built in, the DSP5000 offers an audiophile solution for those wanting a clutter-free hi-fi system – just add a CD transport and you're away. Recently

**Pictured:** Dynaudio Focus 220 speaker

discontinued, the DSP5000s benefited from a wide range of upgrades over the years. Although mostly upgrades in the firmware, the biggest change came with the introduction of the MkII version. This brought about an improvement in the DAC from 18-bit to 24. It's an upgrade worth having, as it brings an added sense of realism.

With each speaker containing three drivers, three amps, two DACs, digital crossovers and DSP units, there's an awful lot to go wrong! Don't let you this put you off, though: Meridian electronics are superbly made and should last for years. The company also offers full service back-up for



**Pictured:** KEF XQ40 speaker

even the earliest examples. If you're at all nervous, then the best advice is to buy from a dealer with a guarantee back-up. When buying second-hand, check the plinths and spikes are included. Also check that power chords and the Meridian M5 and S5 cables are supplied. The latter cables can be a little troublesome, but don't let that put you off buying a pair of speakers; replacement S5 cables are readily available second-hand. There should also be a remote control with the speakers, and it may have the 511 S-patch box, too. The 511 is essentially a splitter that enables you to use more than one pair of speakers in a Meridian C68 system. Although MkIs are now available for well under £1,000, our budget will get us a decent pair of MkIIs. For a speaker that cost over £4,000 new, this is a real audio bargain. **HFC**

*Dominic Todd*

*Next month: budget phono stages*



# READER CLASSIFIED

Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified*, the UK's first and best free private ads service for second-hand hi-fi. These pages are a must-read if you're thinking about buying used kit, and if you want to sell something it's definitely the place to be. It's free to place an advertisement – simply submit your ad of up to 30 words,

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**ARCAM FMJ A22** amp with phono board, £350. Arcam FMJ CD 23 CD player, £350. Arcam FMJ T21 tuner, £100. Linn Sondek LP12, £400. Rack, £25. [peter@brookes.org.uk](mailto:peter@brookes.org.uk) or 07966 086593 (W Mids).

**ARCAM SOLO**, £650. Epos M5 real wood speakers, £180. Both boxed. Soundstyle Z2 speaker stands, 6m QED cable, £40. 01474 355296 or email [david.pryor@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:david.pryor@tiscali.co.uk) (Kent).

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**AUDIOQUEST PIKES PEAK** bi-wire speaker cable 8ft (2.5m) pair, factory-terminated with AudioQuest PK-BFA Gold banana plugs, boxed, approx 150 hours' use (cost over £1,000), £650. 07787 126639 (Lanarkshire).

**AVI DUO** loudspeakers in excellent condition, one year old, cherry finish, superb sound

quality (HFC Best Buy), £600. 07770 917525 (Surrey).

**BOWERS & WILKINS 802D** Diamond loudspeakers, rosenut finish, mint condition, boxed, £5,350. Musical Fidelity, Trivistor 300 hybrid integrated amplifier, 300 watts/channel, mint, boxed, new valves, £1,350. Or £6,200 the pair. 07859 388167 (SE London).

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR** 640A amp and 640C v2 CD player, good condition, £160 the pair. Also Yamaha RX-V420RDS AV receiver, £80. 07900 243100 (Lancashire).

**ESOTERIC CD** player with VRDS tray, only a few weeks old, have to sell due to moving abroad. (£9,995) £8,000. Also Roksan TMS3 turntable with Artemiz arm and Shiraz MC cartridge, with Trichord phono stage. (£9,999) £8,000. 01242 431536 (E Sussex).

**EXPOSURE X** integrated amp, excellent condition, £80. Yamaha DSP-A5 AV amp, Dolby Digital, DTS, excellent condition, £50. 07846 675141 (Northants).

**HI-FI NEWS** January 2007 to March 2008. *Hi-Fi Choice* January 2005 to December 2007 40 copies, £20. Buyer collects. 020 8590 8530 (Essex).

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Above: Marantz PM7200 integrated amplifier

**LINN SONDEK LP12** black ash, Akito arm, K9 cartridge, Valhalla upgrade, excellent condition, reasonable offers please, buyer collects. 01926 887411 (Warks).

**LUMLEY REFERENCE** LV1 preamp, very good condition, £150. B&W DM7 loudspeakers, £30. Speakers to collect. 07956 236764 or 0191 417 1669 (Tyne & Wear).

**MARANTZ CD6000** KI Signature CD player, £275. Rotel RA05 amplifier, £275. 01903 813883 (W Sussex).

**MARANTZ CD6002** CD player, latest model, fully boxed in excellent condition. (£270) £140. 01384 412234 (W Mids).

**MARANTZ CD17** MkII KI Signature, £400. Arcam A85

amp, with Arcam phono boards, £400. Marantz CD Recorder DR6000. Plays, but needs attention. Offers, can also demo. 07941 015908 (Surrey).

**MARANTZ PM7200** amp, little used, but run in, excellent condition. Class A and A+B, £220 ovno. Marantz PM66SE amp, excellent condition, full working order, hardly run in, £80. Yamaha KX393 stereo cassette player (as new), a brilliant bit of kit, £80 ovno. 01685 350176 (Merthyr Tydfil).

**MERIDIAN 566** 24-bit DAC £450, 502 preamp £500, 557 power, £600, Ruark Prologue One speakers, £450, Audiophile Base 3, £450. All pristine. £2,000 for everything. 01392 444182 [timiambeing@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timiambeing@yahoo.co.uk) (Exeter).

## 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 demo and judge the seller as well as the goods!



## FOR SALE

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A5** CD player, as new, upgrading, low usage. (£1,500) £800. 01268 415017 (Essex).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A300** amplifier, mint, boxed, 150 wpc. £1,400 new. Will accept £450. Bargain, no offers, buyer collects, upgrading. 01446 741825 (S Wales).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY XA-50** monoblock power amplifiers (pair) £320. Musical Fidelity X-PSU £160, X-PRE, £130 (or £250 for both). All in excellent condition, lightly used in second system. 07882 791040 (London).

**NAIM ALLAE** speakers in maple, unmarked and in very good condition with boxes, £895. Naim CDX, includes remote and packaging, £895. 01276 503994 or andyuk777@yahoo.co.uk (Surrey).

**NAIM NAC 112** preamp, £269. NAIM Arriva floorstanding speakers, cherry finish, 2005, £495. Chord Anthem 2 interconnects, RCA factory termination 0.5m, £109.

Odyssey 2 loudspeaker cables 3m unterminated, £45. 01984 640588 (Somerset)

**NAIM NAC 72** preamp with MC phono board. Naim NAP 180 power amp, black, £750 the pair. Rega R3 speakers, £350. All excellent condition. Cash only. Buyer collects, can demo. 07773 756277 (Bristol).

**NAIM NACD 3** CD player, NAC 62 preamp, NAP 140 power amp, plus KEF Q55 floorstanding speakers. All

perfect condition, £500 the lot. 01254 233745 (Lancs).

**NAIM SYSTEM CDS1** CD player, 122X, 150X pre and power combo with Flat-Cap x2, Naim Intro II speakers in maple finish. All mint condition, boxed, leads, remotes (£4,000), £2,750. 01656 782523 (S Wales).

**NAKAMICHI BX-125E/BX-125** two-head cassette deck, finished in black, excellent condition, £150. 01603 450293 (Norfolk).

**OPTIMUM 2000** hi-fi table, glass and chrome, five shelves, excellent condition, very attractive item, barely used. (£500) £199. 01932 855562 or 07905 481523 (Surrey).

**PIONEER A300-R** Precision amplifier, never used, in storage since purchase, boxed, £200. 01484 865442 (W Yorks)

**PRO-JECT RPM5** turntable, good condition, hardly used, one year old, £300 ono. 07946 465191 (London).

**PRO-JECT RPM5** turntable with Ortofon Tango cartridge. Pro-Ject Phono Box II. Excellent condition, 15 months old, £200. 07525 069114 (Middx)

**ROKSAN KANDY KA-1** Mk III integrated amplifier, superb condition, fantastic amp which received 5/5 reviews. Original box and remote, £250. 07775 820110 (Merseyside).

**SENNHEISER HD 600** headphones, boxed (£269), accept £90. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

**SENNHEISER HD 650** headphones for sale, £170. Reason for sale: I am upgrading. 01793 541240 (Swindon).

**SEVENTY LYRITA LPs**, unplayed, so as new, £350, also Cogan Hall loudspeaker cable, £75. 02392 453382. (Hants)

**SICK KRELL 300** CD player with CD drawer stuck closed, otherwise in excellent condition. Does anybody fancy taking it on? Any offers? 01359 259152 (Suffolk).

**SILTECH SIGNATURE** Forbes Lake XLR, £1,200. Golden Ridge digital XLR, £320. Ruby Hill mains, £500. Musical Fidelity MVX-2 preamp, A370-2 power amp (£5,000), £1,000. 07900 394165 (London).

**STANDESIGN FIVE-LEVEL** equipment rack with cable management, black finish, offered in excellent condition, boxed, £250 new, urgent space required, hence silly price, £50. 01934 521621 or stemar1@tiscali.co.uk (Somerset)

**SUGDEN A21 aL** pure Class A amplifier, excellent condition, factory-serviced, original packing, £475. 01403 255153 or email richermail@aol.com (W Sussex).

**TACIMA SCREENED** mains cables, two available, 1.5m, both boxed as new, improve clarity and detail with tighter, deeper bass. Half price! £15 each. Add £4 per item p&p. 01384 412234 (W Mids).

**TANNOY CHESTER**, 1978, £400. Quad 12L, Rosewood

piano gloss, £250. Partington Dreadnought Ultima flagship heavyweight stands, (£350) £150. All no offers. Priced for quick sale. 07876 705266 (W Yorks).

**TOTEM ARRO** front speakers, Totem Dreamcatcher Centre, Totem Lynx dipole rears. Mission M5 subwoofer, boxed, all maple, mint (£2,900), £1,400. 07891 533084 (Swansea).

**TOWNSHEND SPEAKER** cable 3m (£310), £180. Kimber KCAG interconnect (£416), offers. MIT Z cord 2 power cables 1.5m x2, £70. Monster Cable 300<sup>2</sup>, four pairs, and one pair 400<sup>2</sup>, £12 each + p&p. Stratos 3 (£110), £35. Six-tier equipment support, oak. Offers. All ono. 0115 912 6424 (Notts).

**WANTED:** Audioquest speaker cable, 2 or 3m pair. Bi-wire preferred, medium to high-end. 01772 468116 (Lancs)

**WANTED:** Chord Odyssey 2 speaker cable 2x3m, with silicon jacket and Chord plugs. Also wanted, PMC DB1 speaker wall brackets. 01234 302769 or 07840 428253 (Bedford).

**WANTED:** Kenwood KD 750 or L-07D turntables, Yamaha NS 2000 and Sonus Faber Electa loudspeakers. + 32 (0)16 62247, +32 (0)494 190796 (Belgium).

**WANTED:** Nakamichi CR-7e cassette deck, preferably mint/excellent condition. 07759 205820 or 01483 271669 evenings, email s.banks@surrey.ac.uk (Surrey).

**WANTED:** Good-quality record deck/turntable, Garrard or Thorens, tonearm and cartridge, valve amplifier and speakers from 1960s onwards. 01726 812966 (Cornwall)

**WANTED:** Roksan Xerxes lid and hinges, mid-90s model. Also wanted, a working record cleaner. 07731 699579 (Stoke-on-Trent).

**WANTED:** Top-quality hi-fi separates and complete systems: Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc. Fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash. 07815 892458 (Essex)


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# Next month

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# HI-FI CHOICE

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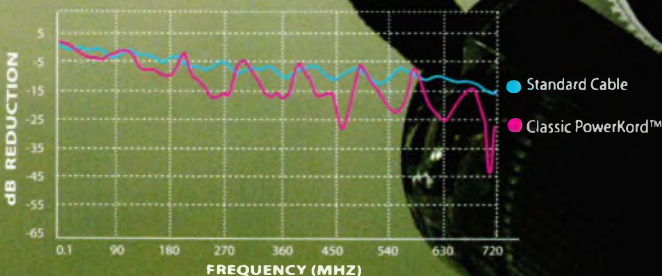
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