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WELCOME...

HI-FI CHOICE JULY 2009 ISSUE 321

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One of your favourite sections in *Hi-Fi Choice* it transpires is our monthly *Ultimate Group Test*. It's our unrivalled three-step test procedure (sighted listening, lab testing and 'blind' listening), that makes *HFC's* reviews the most reliable and trustworthy in the magazine world. And we're grateful that you appreciate the lengths we go to in bringing you the most

accurate and unbiased reviews, from the UK's most respected audio journalists – the ears that you can count on! This month, our six-way *Ultimate Group Test* has highlighted a rather special integrated amplifier that will undoubtedly form the basis of an incredible hi-fi system, as well as pleasing upgraders everywhere. Turn to p62 to find out what our test team discovered this month...

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*.
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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.



JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice* and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back as HFC's Operations Editor, ensuring that things run smoothly whilst continuing to review and contribute to the UK's best hi-fi title.



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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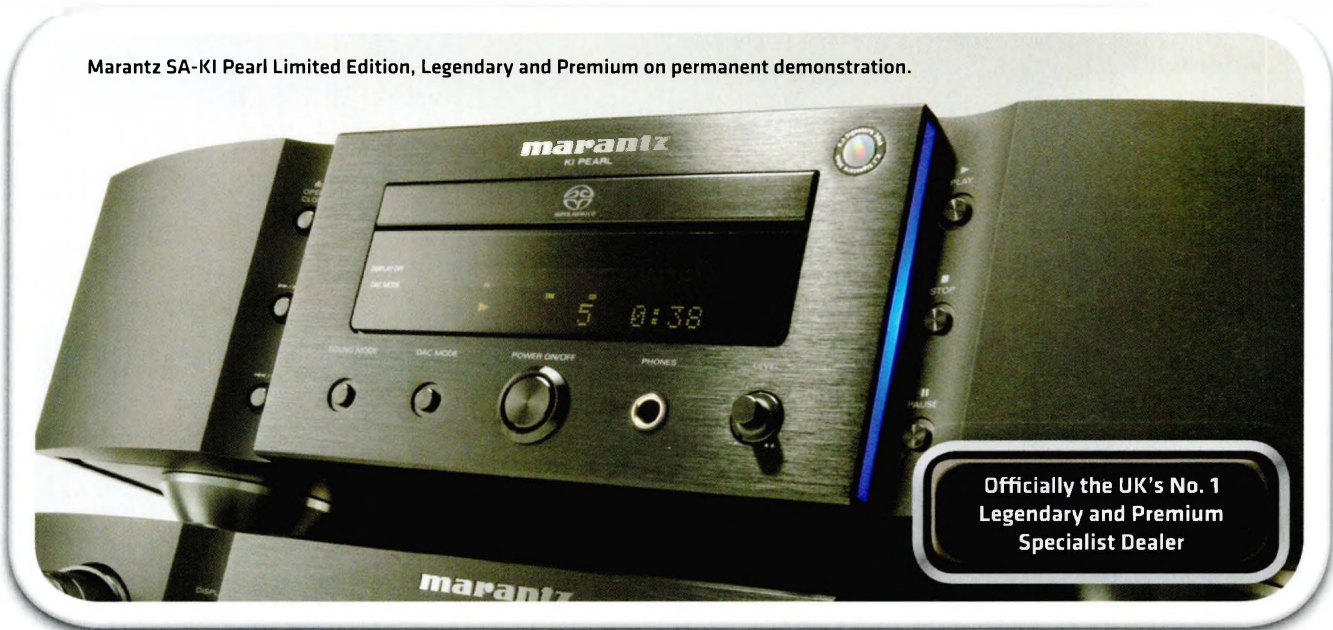
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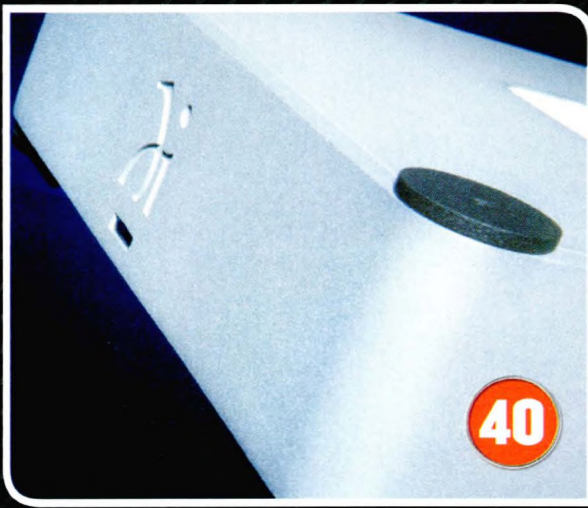
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Ultimate guide to high-performance hi-fi, gathering together all our favourite products for you. Updated monthly...

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— Chris Martens
The Absolute Sound 2007
Editors Choice Awards

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Ag-12 (DIN/RCA)



Ag-12-L (L-DIN/RCA)



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— Marc Mickelson, Soundstage.com Reviews Choice Award

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www.metropolis-music.co.uk

GRYPHON AUDIO ATILLA

New Danish high-end integrated is a performance powerhouse

Danish high-end audio specialist Gryphon has launched Atilla, its latest entry into the serious integrated amplifier market. The 100-watt dual-mono design is said to have been created in response to demand for a lower powered variant of the company's existing Diablo model. Despite the reduction in power from the Atilla, it remains well equipped to drive all but the most demanding speakers, thanks to an output stage that doubles power into a halving of the load (200 watts in a 4-ohm load).

It's not a mere powerhouse, of course, as ever with Gryphon components significant attention has been paid to casework and electronic design. The Atilla is essentially two independent mono devices for reduced crosstalk and minimal interference. It employs a short signal path that runs along extra-thick copper traces and the absolute minimum of wiring. In addition to four regular single-ended inputs with PCB-mounted RCA phono sockets, there is a balanced input with gold-plated XLR sockets to exploit signal transmission in balanced mode.

Unusually for a transistor amplifier, it avoids negative feedback – a popular approach with valve designs – and something that improves measured performance when employed. But amplifiers without it do seem to have an unusual degree of transparency. Volume is managed

by a microprocessor-controlled 50-step attenuator that's built using hand-selected components, this is also the same device that's used in Gryphon's upmarket range of preamplifiers.

A stylish remote handset allows input selection and volume control alongside adjustment of brightness on the vacuum fluorescent display, not to mention two power buttons. Inputs can be named, so long as you can do so in eight characters and both maximum and start-up levels can be programmed to stop the unwitting from blowing up your system. There is also an AV throughput where one input bypasses the volume control for integrating the amp into a two/multichannel set-up.

Vinyl users have the option of ordering the Atilla with an MM/MC phono stage and long-term upgradeability is ensured by the onboard flash memory which can be updated via PC.

Gryphon was founded in 1986 by Flemming Rasmussen who started out as a textile designer prior to becoming a high-end distributor and an established component designer. The Gryphon brand got started with a head amp (similar to a phono stage) designed by Rasmussen for his own use, but which eventually caught the attention of his Japanese distributor. The company now makes virtually all the elements of a high-end system, except for analogue sources.

Price £6,995 **Due now** ☎ 08454 000400 🌐 www.gryphon-audio.dk



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*trustedreviews.com, Dec 2008:

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cnet uk, Dec 2008: "Earth-shattering THX bass"

Best of Electronics/LLOXX, Jul2008:

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SONUS FABER LIUTO RANGE

New luxurious Sonus Faber models at the affordable end of the spectrum

Italian loudspeaker extraordinaire Sonus faber is launching the Liuto range, three new models at the more affordable end of its collection. Liuto will replace the Domus range and sits beneath the existing Cremona and Homage models. The new line comprises the Liuto Tower three-way floorstander, Liuto Monitor two-way standmount and the Liuto Smart which is a flexible home cinema-type speaker that can be used both horizontally and vertically and is primarily intended for multichannel systems.

The name Liuto comes from the Italian word for lute, the instrument said to have inspired the shape of the cabinets. The speakers' shape has been selected for its elegance and the intrinsic stiffness it brings, plus, of course, its potential for quelling internal standing waves. As ever with Sonus faber the finish is more luxurious than most, in this case a combination of goffered black and high-gloss black piano lacquer, with black leather covering the front baffle. The smaller Liuto Smart sports wrap-around black leather, with goffered black panels at either end.

The drive unit compliment across the range is custom-built and consists of a 25mm fabric-dome tweeter covering the treble and a 150mm mid/bass driver with a 'polypropylene textile' cone. In the Liuto Tower these are augmented by a 220mm aluminium/magnesium alloy driver with a coaxial 'anti-compressor' that is designed to remove cavity resonance and distortions. The Tower stands at just over a metre tall and offers a specified sensitivity of 89dB for a nominal eight ohm impedance. Assuming that a metal cone doesn't complicate things, these specs suggest a none too challenging load for amplifiers from 50 watts upwards.

The standmount Monitor weighs in at eight kilos and stands at 350mm high. Sonus faber also makes a dedicated stand (£550) that brings the speaker up to a similar height to the Tower. The Monitor is inevitably less efficient than the Tower with an 86dB specified sensitivity, but being a two-way it undoubtedly offers an easier load overall.

Expect an exclusive review of the affordable new Monitor standmount very soon.

Price (Monitor) £1,690; (Tower) £3,490; (Smart) £1,000 each

Due now ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com





MUSICAL FIDELITY AMS35i

Billed as 'By Musical Fidelity' the latest addition to the company's premium range is the AMS35i, a pure class A integrated amplifier. Following in the footsteps of the Primo preamplifier and inhabiting a very similar case, the AMS35i delivers 35 watts per channel and is said to offer exemplary distortion figures that produce 'a beautiful silky clean sound'. Technical performance is said to be up with the AM550 power amp and the casework is finished to reflect this, the front and top panels are machined from solid billet and the heatsinks have a radiused edge.

Price £6,000 **Due now** ☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

CONSONANCE RANGE

The MkII versions of Consonance's M12 and M15 mark that rare thing, a new arrival on the horn speaker market. The Chinese valve and horn specialist has revised both of its horn-loaded designs with refinements to the drive units that are said to improve the treble, make the midrange fuller and the bass deeper with an increase in detail overall. The M12 MkII has a 300mm paper coned bass driver in a reflex loaded cabinet that's topped by a horn loaded 51mm compression driver. The horn itself is also wooden and brings the overall height to 93cm, while the combined sensitivity for the system is a healthy 97dB.

The M15 MkII is the same configuration with a 380mm bass driver and 72mm dome providing mid and high frequencies, each speaker weighs 60kgs and has 98dB sensitivity.

Price £4,495 (M12 MkII); £6,995 (M15 MkII) **Due now**
☎ 01273 608332 🌐 www.ora-consonance.com



YAMAHA MCS-1330

Yamaha is upping the mini-system ante with its MCS-1330 slimline component system. The new system comprises a separate 6cm-high, aluminium front-panelled CD player and iPod docking receiver alongside two-way loudspeakers. The CD-1330 CD player has a front panel USB port and a BurrBrown DSD1791 DAC, while the partnering R-1330 receiver delivers 60 watts per channel and combines an FM tuner with an MM phono input, (at present there is no DAB option). The NS-BP400 loudspeakers utilise a 25mm soft-dome tweeter and a 130mm aluminium-cone woofer. Underneath their piano black exterior lurks a vibration-control cabinet structure (VCCS), which consists of 'strategically placed pieces of composite material' that are designed to reduce cabinet resonance. Finishes include black and silver for the electronics and black, white and dark veneer for the speakers.

Price £999 **Due June** ☎ 01908 366700 🌐 www.yamaha-uk.com





LINN LP12SE UPGRADES

Linn is offering two new upgrade options for its LP12SE turntable, the Radikal DC motor and Urika onboard phono stage.

Radikal is an appropriate name, as Linn has always used AC motors in the LP12 up until now. Radikal is a brushed motor housed in a machined casing with auto-calibration for speed control, which is managed by an external power supply.

Urika puts the phono amplification and EQ right inside the turntable, something Linn says was made possible by the AC motor. The advantage is that it shortens the signal path and thus minimises the potential for noise to enter the system. Urika includes a new screened and balanced T-Kable with increased flexibility and dual-mono design to minimise cross talk.

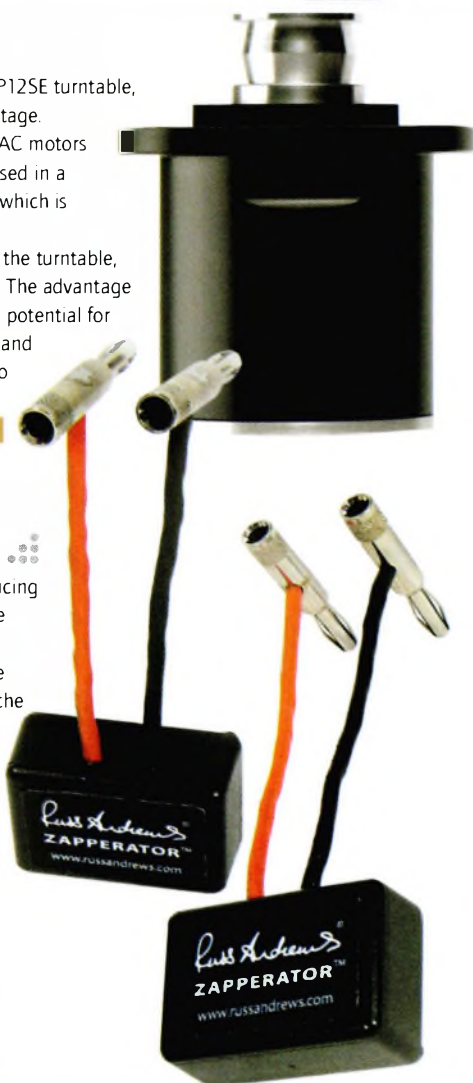
Price (Radikal) from £2,500; (Urika) £2,250 **Due now**
 ☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk

RUSS ANDREWS ZAPPERATOR

Russ Andrews' new Zapperator is a device for reducing RFI which sits on the terminals of any speaker. The Zapperator is a tuned Zobel network that is designed to absorb RFI (radio frequency interference) and noise in the interface between amplifier and loudspeaker, essentially the noise that the speaker cable picks up on its way to the speaker. Russ engaged audio engineers Ben Duncan and Paul Houlden to develop the product and Russ claims that it audibly improves sound quality: it's said to lower the noise floor allowing more detail to be reproduced, enabling the sound to become more natural.

The Zapperator is connected using 'piggy-back' banana plugs or spade connectors to each of the speaker terminals.

Price £161 per pair **Due now**
 ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com



FM SWITCH OFF UNLIKELY

The head of BBC radio Tim Davie has said that a digital switch over is unlikely to happen in our lifetime because DAB uptake has been too slow. At the MediaGuardian's Radio Reborn conference Davie stated "What is absolutely clear is that continuing current purchase trends will not lead to switchover in our lifetime; we need a step change in approach". He was addressing the decline in radio listening in general alongside the problems with getting DAB into enough homes for a digital switchover to be acceptable. At present only 18.3 per cent of radio listening is on DAB a situation that will not be greatly improved until there are better, cheaper DAB radios on the market according to Davie.

In January, Communications Minister Lord Carter said in his report on Digital Britain, that there would be no digital migration plan until digital radio accounted for more than 50 per cent of radio listenership.



Soundbites

THIEL calls its SmartSub range 'the world's first intelligent subwoofers' because they are said to overcome the problems of integrating subs with the main speakers and the room. There are four SmartSubs each using aluminium cone drivers and prices start at £2,395.

☎ 01727 865488

SUBCAST is a wireless system connecting subwoofers from Soundcast Systems. With transmitter and receiver modules that plug into amp and sub it allows freedom of placement. Using the 2.4Ghz band it uses a frequency-hopping system to avoid drop-outs and will be priced at £150.

☎ 01279 501111

ONKYO is calling its DS-A3 iPod dock 'a serious piece of audio engineering' which can't be bad for £100. It apparently 'sounds fantastic' with Apple Lossless files and comes with a remote so that it can be used in any system.

☎ 01494 681515

NHT loudspeakers is to cease trading, not because it is bankrupt but because it feels the need to take time out and take stock of the situation in the audio market. Founder Chris Byrne who bought the company back last year says that NHT's service division will continue to operate but existing stock will be sold off. email: help@nhthifi.com

ETON'S FR140 is a solar-powered, wind-up AM/FM/SW radio that's being promoted as a must-have for the festival season. It costs £30, weighs 200g and comes complete with an LED torch and mobile phone charging capability. It's the Swiss army knife of the wireless world.

☎ 02392 313 090

IMERGE'S MediaServer MS1 combines full HD video playback with audiophile-grade Wolfson DACs in a multiroom server that is infinitely scalable with upwards of 3TB RAID 6 storage. Imerge claims that it provides peerless performance with both music and movies. Prices start at £5,507 plus £9,882

☎ 0870 0104880





Heathrow Show

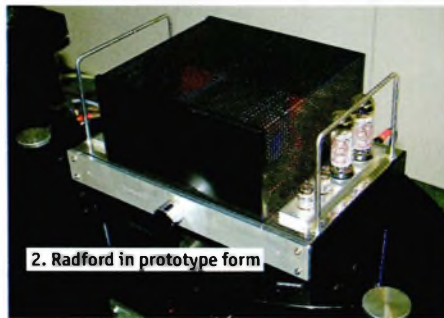
Small can still be beautiful as **Malcolm Steward** discovered when he strolled around the intimate setting of the recent hi-fi show at Heathrow

The April show at the Park Inn, Heathrow appears to have become the default event championing the industry's 'small guys'; in particular, the niche players whose equipment is far from bland and doesn't bow to mainstream convention. As such, it is a great show for the enthusiast who wants to see and hear the latest hardcore equipment, especially valves, horns and the like. That having been said, some of those 'small' guys are doing rather well for themselves at the moment: recessions and credit crunches conveniently seem to circumvent individuals with plenty of disposable income.

The vote for most interesting and very appealing-looking loudspeaker went to the German company **Audiaz** for its Eta model, the least expensive in its range at £14,000, and designed specifically not to be overly critical about where it is placed within the room. The speaker was wired, both internally and externally, with Teflon-coated, Silver ribbon-style cables. They look like Nordost but they're not, the demonstrator was at pains to point out. The speaker is available in Cherry or Maple veneers as standard or in



1. Audiaz's Eta speaker strikes a pose



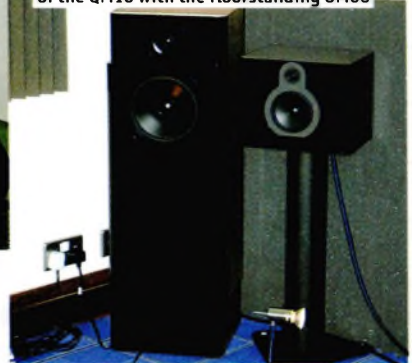
2. Radford in prototype form

special finishes to suit individual demands: even the crossover can be ordered with Silver components and those intent on tweaking to the maximum can choose a 20mm Diamond treble driver instead of the Air Motion transformer pictured.

A step or two along the same corridor took visitors back nearly fifty years – and not just because Icon Distribution was playing Buddy Holly on vinyl. No, along with the new Tannoy Definitions, which were on static display, the company had a pair of Tannoy Canterbury horns being driven superbly by the revisited, 25-watt **Radford** ST25A and a prototype Radford pre-amp, which is expected to sell for around £3,000 plus a phono stage that should retail for around £2,000. The venerable ST25A Mk6, which looked and sounded truly magnificent playing Holly and the Crickets, and more, will set lucky buyers back £10,000.

Distributor **Tom Tom Audio** was showing the big brother to the astonishing Swedish Guru QM10 loudspeaker – the chunky, floorstanding OM60. Along with its muscular appearance the £7,995 design incorporates a wealth of technology to allow its two drivers to cover the entire musical bandwidth accurately and without compression, coloration or distortion. The mid-bass unit claims to operate from below 20Hz to above 7kHz, which is no mean feat. The unusual displacement of the units on the stepped baffle is not a 'time-alignment' ruse but, Guru explains, is to form a common

3. Guru was hoping to repeat the success of the QM10 with the floorstanding OM60



4. The Aspara HL6: a £4,500 'next-gen' model

"wave radius focal point" to ensure that the sound remains integrated over the entire horizontal listening area.

More luscious-sounding vinyl – including 1957 Sonny Rollins and Art Pepper albums – awaited visitors to the **Pure Sound** room, where the five-input, L300 Line Stage pre-amplifier was demonstrating that it was worth every penny of its £4,799 asking price, through the Aspara



5. Pure Sound's Rubato pure copper mat

HL6, a 'next-generation' horn loudspeaker whose appearance won't, like most of the breed, frighten the children. And the retail price, around £4,500, ought not scare the parents, either. The combination of the 93dB-efficient HL6 and the L300 seemed to excel in delivering a presentation that did not want for subtlety; something that could not be said of every demonstration we witnessed!

5 Also on show in the **Pure Sound/Aspara** room was the Pure Sound Rubato pure copper turntable mat, which designer, Guy Sergeant assured us would work just as effectively on a suspended deck as it did on his unsprung, direct-drive Technics/SME combination. We still suspect that decks with lightweight platters like the Technics may respond better than, say a Linn, but that is something you'll have to try for yourself. In his system, however, the combination seemed to be working well.

6 Walking into the **Black Ravioli** room, we felt immediately at home with most of the sources being used to demonstrate the company's vibration control products – an LP12/ARO record deck and a Naim CD555 player along with Belles amplification and Focal loudspeakers.



6. Black Ravioli's comprehensive range of vibration-control tables showing off

Surprisingly, even the music was familiar – Rockin' Jimmy and the Brothers of the Night. And this writer thought he might be the only person in the UK with a copy of that album, apart from the late Alexis Korner who brought the band to my attention. Now, while many companies boast of using aerospace technology in their products, Black Ravioli employs, quite literally, the opposite approach. Its expertise comes from nuclear submarines, where, you'd imagine, vibration control is a rather important consideration. The demonstrations produced clear differences and the prices seemed very reasonable, too.

7 **HiAudio** was demonstrating a slim-line prototype CD-ripper/music server from NuForce, which is set to sell at around 2,000 euros without the touch-screen that is the preferred method of operation. This 21st-Century source was in a room alongside more traditional components including an as-yet-unnamed phono pre-amp still in prototype form from Graham Slee and a selection of his headphone amplifiers such as the new £230 Novo.

8 Our last call of the day to the **Artisan Audio** room proved to be perhaps the most exciting of all because we got to hear the cartridge Paul Messenger has been raving about, the Soundsmith Strain Gauge Phono Cartridge and Full Function Preamplifier System, to afford it its complete appellation, mounted in a Morsiani CM-1 uni-pivot tonearm.

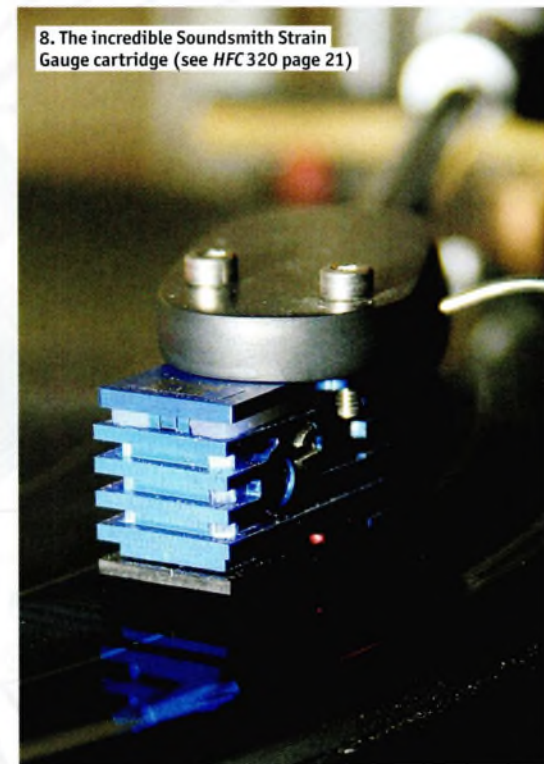
Every cartridge I have encountered, even the finest of them, has had some smidgen of character, even if it were just an infinitesimal inference of there being something mechanical between the music and the listener. The SG, I would venture, after an admittedly brief audition,



7. Above: NuForce's prototype ripper and music server. Below: Graham Slee's £230 Novo



has none. Thank goodness it was the last sound we heard, because had it been the first everything else at the show may have been disappointing. **HFC**



8. The incredible Soundsmith Strain Gauge cartridge (see **HFC 320** page 21)



Words by **Dave Oliver**

Classic Album

Johnny Rotten makes way for John Lydon's memorable Public Image Ltd

After the messy break-up of the Sex Pistols in 1978, the one-time Johnny Rotten, now insisting he be known by his real name, John Lydon, made a distinct left turn with his hastily formed next band, Public Image Ltd. Their first album spawned the classic single of the same name, but much of it sounded rushed and unfocused.

But their second album in November 1979 took unfocused to a whole new level of creativity. *Metal Box* pulled in an amazingly diverse set of influences, including rock, prog, reggae, space-rock, Arabic scales, disco, kraut-rock, classical, African rhythms – you name it, it was in there, somewhere.

It sounded like nothing that had gone before. At the time it seemed willfully awkward and difficult, though there were enough ideas flowing fluidly over its 12 tracks to prevent it ever seeming merely self-indulgent, despite the extensive running time of some of the tracks, and a dearth of standard song structures.

Even the sound of the album was extreme – bass and treble frequencies all appear to be working overtime and there's not much presence in the midrange that's guaranteed to stretch your speakers' abilities, as well as (in the original vinyl version) the balance of your record player's tonearm.

Jah Wobble's booming bass intro to ten-minute opener *Albatross*, followed by Keith Levene's jagged metallic guitar stabs established the tone for a set that careered between twisted pop (*Memories*), hard-driving avant noise (*Careering*), dismembered soundscapes (*Poptones*) and ambient electronica (*Radio 4*); all the time with Lydon stretching his vocal abilities beyond his standard sarcastic yelp and a deadpan monotone where it suited him. It's an exercise in wringing the absolute maximum from a voice that by most musical standards would be considered 'limited' at best and

still constitutes his best sustained performance on record.

Recorded and largely written at various studios in London in 1979, the three core members of the band (they were rapidly going through a succession of drummers at the time, that both Levene and Wobble ended up bashing the skins on a couple of tracks) were often barely on speaking terms. The tension certainly comes across in the music, which despite its multiple hooks, fascinating aural mash-ups and occasional flashes of dark humour is never an easy listen. Even the relatively quiet synthesiser swashes of *Radio 4* appears on the same side in the original three-disc version with the self-descriptive abrasive onslaught of *Chant*.

The album first emerged in a mock 16mm film canister – literally, a metal box. No doubt the band's intentions were sincere and not fully borne of gimmickry, when they suggested that the idea of putting the music onto three separate 12in singles (each playing at 45rpm) would result in improved fidelity.

The album was quickly re-released in 1980 as a more conventional double album called *Second Edition*. This was later updated to conventional CD and a recreation, albeit smaller, of the original metal box, with just a single disc. For serious collectors, vinyl reissue specialists 4 Men With Beards produced a replica of the original in 2006, with three 45rpm discs. This time in a shiny, rather than the original matt finish metal box.

PiL had another creative leap ahead of them, with 1981's percussion-based *Flowers Of Romance* album, before morphing into a more conventional pop/rock vehicle for Lydon. But the ingenuity of *Metal Box* would never be repeated, by him or anyone else. **HFC**



METAL BOX
Public Image Ltd

"It's an exercise in wringing the maximum from a voice that by most musical standards would be considered 'limited' at best."

Words by **Richard Black**

Technology

Harman Kardon has returned to its 'audio roots' with an impressive DSP-based integrated amp

In this issue, we review an interesting new amplifier from Harman Kardon, the HK990. The most obviously unusual feature about this product is that it incorporates the necessary signal measuring and processing abilities to compensate for irregularities in the response of the listening room and loudspeakers. It's not the first product to do this, but the idea has had a bit of a mixed reception over the years.

It's certainly tempting to think that if you throw enough digital signal processing power at an audio problem, such as wavy frequency response, objectionable resonances, noise or distortion, you can make it go away. But while DSP is impressively capable, there are certain things that are beyond its capabilities and, in general terms, it cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Before we look at just what those limitations are in relation to equalisation, let's briefly examine what such systems are trying to achieve. Basically, of course, flat frequency response, but to get that it is necessary to find out the actual response of the loudspeakers in the room. All sorts of things affect a speaker's response, including cone breakup, cabinet resonance, crossover integration and more. Unfortunately, some of these inevitably mean that response will not be the same at all angles, so the response one is trying to correct appears different depending on where one examines it from. Meanwhile, rooms always have some resonant modes or 'standing waves', which make some frequencies more prominent and cause them to reverberate for a while after the original sound has died away.

Up to a point, it is indeed possible to flatten an arbitrary frequency response. It's actually quite easy to set up a microphone near a loudspeaker, measure the response (most microphones have a flatter response than most speakers) and generate an inverse

curve. The problem is twofold. First, there's a fundamental difference between the sort of non-flat response you get from a tone control, for instance, and that produced by a mechanical system with resonances, like a loudspeaker. A resonance has the property of prolonging the duration of sounds at, or near, a certain frequency, and correcting for this electronically is not simply a matter of boosting or reducing output at some frequency. You need to generate another, cancelling, resonance and that's not easy – in fact, since most mechanical systems have a slightly variable resonance frequency, it's just about impossible unless you construct an incredibly detailed model of the system.

Second, the response within a room depends on where in that room you measure the sound signal, because a typical listening room is quite small acoustically and there are standing waves at all sorts of audio frequencies at all points within it.

For this reason, most recent speaker/room equalisation systems try to be a bit crafty and take more than one measurement. The Harman Kardon system is a case in point, and takes a measurement at the listening position and then another one quite close to each loudspeaker. It's clearly doing some kind of reality check based on the speakers' response and taking little account of any very sharp resonances.

Systems like this still follow the 'garbage-in, garbage-out' rule of thumb and will certainly never make a pair of desktop PC speakers sound like £5,000-worth of electrostatics. However, it's clear enough from our experience with the HK990 that the technique is well worth experimenting with: given the right material, the results are encouragingly positive. **HFC**



Harman Kardon's clever HK990 amplifier

"It's tempting to think that if you throw enough DSP power at an audio problem, you can make it go away."



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Malcolm Steward

Malcolm Steward was one of the country's best-known hi-fi reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. His intolerance to less than gripping sound systems is legendary.

Going for a song

Where to go for audiophile-grade online music

"One has to wonder if Amazon and iTunes employ the same OAPs to evaluate their discs."

There is one thing I do not fully comprehend about Amazon's venture into the music download market and that is how the pricing works. For example, you can buy The Ting Tings' track *That's Not My Name*, all five minutes and eleven seconds' worth of it, for 29p while you have to pay 79p for three and a half minutes' worth of Lily Allen's *It's Not Me, It's You*. So the price is not based on track length nor does it appear to be connected to the artist's talent. Mind you, judging by the results of the customer ratings, taste and discernment don't seem to figure too highly among the Amazon clientele.

When I last visited, the number one selection was Sir Terry Wogan and Aled Jones performing *Little Drummer Boy/ Peace on Earth*. One has to wonder what sort of person would willingly hand over 59p for two minutes and 42 seconds' worth of old-fogey rap. (Terry's 7.8m breakfast show listeners! – Ed.) There is also a classical section where, for example, one can buy Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* at £9.99 for the album or for 79p per 'song' as Amazon describes the individual concertos.

All this content is free of any crippling DRM (Digital Rights Management) and available as 256kBps VBR (Variable Bit Rate) MP3 files. The sound quality is not up to audiophile standards, but is adequate for background or on-the-move music. At the low prices one can hardly complain too bitterly.

Another good thing about Amazon's venture is that it reduces iTunes' hegemony in the download market. Nonetheless, at the time of writing and despite the competition, iTunes has maintained its premium pricing. If you want to buy tracks from the aforementioned Ting Tings album you'll have to fork out an extra 50p for each of them. Lily Allen and, even more amazingly, Sir Terry Wogan and Aled Jones command the identical 79p per track. One has to wonder if Amazon and iTunes employ the same OAPs to evaluate their discs.

Regardless, genuine audiophile sound quality requires more than fairly high bit-rate compression and the avoidance of DRM. It needs uncompressed files and those, regrettably, don't seem to interest mainstream e-tailers.

For anyone who desires the finest downloads, you might steer your internet browser towards www.hdtracks.com. It's best seller, the excellent *Raising Sand* by Robert Plant and Alison Krauss were available in 24-bit/96kHz format tracks at \$2.49 (£1.67) a piece or the whole album could be downloaded for \$15.98 (£10.70). If you just want the 16-bit/44kHz format then individual tracks cost \$1.49 (£0.99) and the entire album is yours for just \$11.98 (£8). Sadly, despite my complaint some months ago, the site still proclaims "For the time being, HDtracks only sells to U.S. Residents." So, unless you can find a way around that restriction, all you can do is wait for it to recognize the existence of the UK market.

There are no such problems, as one might expect, with Linn Records – www.linnrecords.com. Linn offers a catholic selection of audiophile repertoire, including classical, jazz, Scottish, easy-listening and rock/pop. Rather than offering just one hi-res option, it provides the full set where possible, from MP3 (320k) up to Studio Master 24-bit/192kHz FLAC ensuring results from your iPod will be more enjoyable and your home server will be very contented. Prices range from £8 to £20.

Throughout my search I did notice that several companies have entirely missed the point – or even may be trying to mislead gullible consumers – by offering "high-resolution MP3s", a phrase that surely defines oxymorons.

In a more positive vein, I found a treat for classical fans at www.2l.no/hires/index.html, where they can download a host of tracks encoded at various bit rates that prove just how satisfying truly hi-res audio can be. **HFC**

Raising Sand

Robert Plant | Alison Krauss



Raising Sand by Robert Plant and Alison Krauss is available as a 24-bit/192kHz download

Definition



Definition is an outstanding new range of audiophile loudspeakers from Tannoy. Designed to get the very best from stereo music in the home, Definition distils and refines Tannoy's eight decades of loudspeaker expertise into a design of unrivalled performance value and stunning aesthetics.

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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

Jewel in the crown

Little-known Californian outfit MSB has one of the finest amps around

"Results were impressive, confirming this as the best amplifier I've yet heard."

The power amplifier is the prima donna of the hi-fi system: big, often glamorous, and frequently expensive. Which is not to say that choosing one is easy. There's no such thing as the perfect power amp – at least that's what I believed, though the events of the last couple of weeks have certainly given pause for thought.

Since most of my work is reviewing loudspeakers, I don't get to try all that many amplifiers and the succession of Naim models I've used over the past 30 years have served very well. For speaker reviewing I need a power amplifier that gives consistently good sound quality across a wide range of speaker types, alongside impeccable reliability. Over the past decade a NAP500 has fulfilled these criteria very well.

Which is not to say that it's perfect. Valve designs, such as the Unison Performance, have offered some advantages in midrange delicacy and transparency. However, valve amps are significantly less consistent when it comes to driving complex loudspeaker loads, effectively ruling them out for regular speaker reviewing.

Until recently, the only solid state amp I've found that could rival the big Naim was the DartZeel NHB-108. All the others that I've tried have tended to sound slower, more ponderous and/or less open and extended at the top end. Until I got to play with a pair of M200 Platins, from a little-known Californian operation called MSB. The company's main activities are in digital audio products, but decided it needed to develop a 'reference' amplifier to hear what was going on.

To keep signal paths short, the amplifier is deliberately contained within a tight space in the middle of a bulky 30.5 cm, 45.5 cm tall cylinder, above the very generous power supply components (dual 600W transformers plus 220,000uF capacitance). This central section is surrounded by deep tough-on-fingers blue cooling fins, except for a cutaway section for the inputs (balanced or single-ended) and outputs and the

amplifier sits within a damped tri-spiked cradle. Bi-polar transistors and balanced configuration are used throughout; unusually, there's no feedback at all, either local or global.

The exceptionally good news is that this power amplifier sounds absolutely wonderful. Or should I say it doesn't sound at all? It simply amplifies the signal, across a wide bandwidth and dynamic range, accurately, precisely, and without any discernible character of its own.

It seems to combine the very best characteristics of valve and solid state and while it may not quite have the romantic midband of the very best valve designs, it certainly doesn't suffer from the thickening or congestion that tends to characterise solid state devices.

There may not be any artificial sweetening here, but neither is there any harshness. Instead the sound quality is fundamentally neutral and uncannily consistent, right across the audio band. The M200s sounded so good, I brought out possibly the most critical of all speakers, my Rehdeko 175s. Happily results were just as impressive, confirming this as the best amplifier I've yet heard.

While there's no denying the excellent sound quality, there are also practical drawbacks. At £13,656 per pair, the M200s are unquestionably costly. More seriously, my samples suffer from some mechanical hum, which is irritating, but possibly soluble. More seriously, because their class A bias is set high, the amps run very hot – I reckon they generate around half a kilowatt of waste heat, which is both costly and very inconvenient for those without air conditioning, especially as summer approaches. Furthermore, in order to get rid of the hum and the heat, the amps must be physically unplugged from the mains.

Happily, a more practical version with user-adjustable bias is planned and I for one can't wait to get hold of a pair. **HFC**



MSB's M200 Platinum power amplifier: now a firm part of Paul's reference system

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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 most internationally renowned reviewers in the field

Speaker magic

Speaker core technology just got better

"In contrast to a traditional loudspeaker, there is no single preferred shape for the panel."

You may have noticed that we're not a great manufacturing nation any more. That's something perhaps handled better in economies with lower labour rates and better access to raw materials. But we still have certain talents, in particular we're quite good at being inventive and there are quite a few smaller to medium-size British companies in the early noughties in the business of generating bright ideas for others to license and produce. A good example of this is Cambridge-based NXT.

NXT has long been the bastion of ideas that initially seem counter-intuitive, but then turns out to be rather good at certain specific niche tasks. The core idea is DML – Distributed Mode Loudspeakers, which uses bending-wave physics as its enabling technology. In a traditional loudspeaker, a drive unit acts as an air pump, its cone moving as a piston in response to an applied audio signal. In an NXT speaker, a strategically positioned excitor triggers a range of carefully calculated resonant modes in a (usually) flat panel that is the nearest NXT offers to an audio diaphragm. It doesn't even need to be completely flat; it can take various shapes, the curvature of the inside of a car door or trim panel, for example, or that of the internal fuselage of an aircraft – NXT has been developed for both environments.

In contrast to a traditional loudspeaker, there is no single preferred shape for the panel, but NXT lends itself to being light, very compact, and generally doesn't require grills, which are undesirable in many applications. NXT has other interesting properties too: flexible form factors – long and thin is a popular example – and very wide dispersion. Because the whole panel acts as an audio radiator, there are particular benefits for niche applications such as mobile phone earpieces, as the requirement to position the ears at an exact point to ensure intelligibility is relaxed.

Not all applications of NXT technology lend themselves to high-quality audio applications,

though they are often inventive aesthetically and in other ways, too and some NXT designs sound better than you might expect. Recent developments include use in cars and in bluetooth hands-free kits, while Hitachi has a TV screen that acts as a loudspeaker. Another key application uses a neat inversion of the way that NXT panels operate to form a finger or stylus operated haptic interface with tactile feedback, another typically inventive application of bending wave physics. With Windows 7 on the horizon, interfaces of this kind are a hot subject right now.

Perhaps the development that comes closer than any other to meeting the requirement of the audiophile community is the retro-looking AFR (Audio Full Range) driver, which is an application of NXT's balanced mode BMR technology. AFR looks like a more or less conventional moving coil driver, though in reality it is fully based on NXT with weights added to the radiator to help optimize high-frequency behaviour, but without the problems this would cause in a moving coil driver. The driver has wide directivity and the ability to cover much or all of the audio band and the ability to emulate a point source, while low frequency performance is broadly comparable to a traditional loudspeaker of the same dimensions. Another advantage of AFR, is that it can be produced using much of the machinery and jigs used for conventional loudspeakers, so tooling is eased. These drivers have barely left the development labs, but you can expect to see more loudspeakers based on AFR in the medium term future.

One final factor gleaned in my discussion with NXT is that the company has not fallen victim to the current economic malaise and had recently posted its first operating profit for a considerable period. Well there's no law that says all the economic news has to be bad. **HFC**



NXT Balanced Radiator speaker technology in Revo's block docking station



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WIN!

A pair of Guru QM10 loudspeakers worth £1,595

Guru is a small Swedish loudspeaker company with a big reputation. The standmount QM10 is distinguished by its unique shape and engrossing sound. In our review in *HFC 313*, Paul Messenger described the Guru as, "exceptionally communicative, expressive and entertaining to the point where the whole experience quickly becomes seriously addictive." One small, but important aspect of the design is the use of special foam feet that help to isolate the speaker from its stand, while another is a blue LED that illuminates if it is being driven into overload.

With a greater bass authority than similarly sized speakers of more conventional design, the QM10 is an excellent choice for anyone who really appreciates music. It's also an amazing-looking speaker, with a style and performance that will enhance any hi-fi set up. For your chance to win a pair just correctly answer the question below.

QUESTION:

What are the Guru QM10's feet made of?

A: Gnomes **B:** Combs **C:** Foam

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Choice Cuts

New music reviewed and rated by our experts

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

COMPACT DISC



OJOS DE BRUJO

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Music: Barcelona's Ojos De Brujo burst onto the world scene with a mixture of flamenco guitars and scratching turntables back in 2002, their flamenco/punk/hip-hop/rumba melange seemingly a pointer to the future of Spanish pop that was a world away from the bland stylings of Enrique Iglesias *et al*. They've mellowed a bit on their fourth album, with singer Marina becoming a mother and their sound, inevitably, becoming a little more focused.

Sound: The edges might be a bit smoother, but ODB's sound is still a cacophonous clutter of styles and instruments and will always benefit from a high-quality system that can pick the bones (and cajon, and tablas and *scratchismo*) from the details. **DO**



SIOUXSIE & THE BANSHEES

Live At The BBC

Universal www.umusic.co.uk



Music: Despite sparking off that whole goth thing, the Banshees were the most sophisticated band to emerge from the punk explosion and this Beeb compilation reminds you of just how strong and diverse their material was. From the energetic bounce and sparkle of *Hong Kong Garden*, to the brooding magic of *Christine*, this three-CD set has all of the key Radio 1 sessions, plus a bonus DVD with virtually all Siouxsie's TV appearances between 1978 and 1985.

Sound: The Banshees were always perfectionists and back then, so were the BBC's engineers. Most of these cuts equal the dynamic range of the official tracks and the early ones actually eclipse them. Stark clarity throughout. **PS**



XTC AS THE DUKES OF STRATOSPHEAR

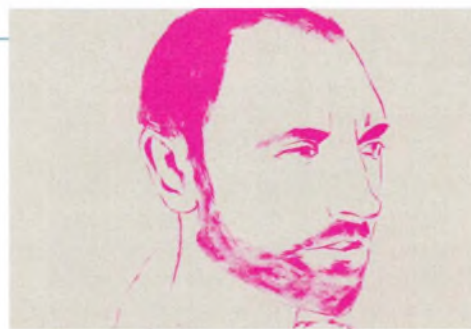
25 O'Clock/Psonic Psunspot

Ape Records www.ape.uk.net



Music: Many forget the English psychedelic pop revival of the mid 1980s spearheaded by The Soft Boys and Television Personalities. Andy Partridge and Colin Moulding of XTC jumped right in with the wonderful *25 O'Clock* EP, where early Floyd, The Electric Prunes and Love could be heard coming through XTC's very English quirkiness. By 1987's *Psonic Psunspot*, the band had made a full-blown album of gorgeous Beatles/Kinks/Byrds/Beach Boys psych-pop. These new book editions come with plenty of bonus tracks and videos.

Sound: A little muddy perhaps, but if backwards guitars, oscillating sounds, sitars, bongos, mellotrons and other such psych gimmickry are your cup of tea then these recordings definitely will be too. **MP**



FINK

Sort Of Revolution

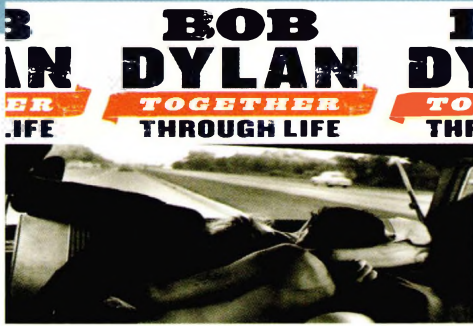
Ninja Tune

www.ninjatune.net



Music: Finian Greenall, aka Fink, first appeared as an ambient triphopper in the mid-nineties, but these days he's more of a post-electronica singer-songwriter, the chillout king to Beth Orton's comedown queen. This quietly understated set features delicately strummed acoustic guitars, rippling percussion, gentle piano figures (from nu-soul everyman John Legend) and Fink's velvety voice conjuring the ghost of John Martyn, especially on the multi-tracked choral effects of *Q&A*.

Sound: Not a hi-fi recording, the sound is muffled, but the close-miking delivers an extremely intimate, even claustrophobic atmosphere that's perfect for a reflective Sunday morning. **DO**



BOB DYLAN

Together Through Life

Columbia

www.columbiarecords.com

Music
Sound



Music: It takes time for a new set of Dylan lyrics to sink in and intellectual types already claim to have detected references to Ovid and Chaucer in this unexpectedly swift follow-up to 2006's *Modern Times*. Musically though, the impact is immediate – rowdy, raucous, raw and rugged with a very 'live' feel. His voice here is a roar rather than the growl of recent years and if the preoccupation of many songs is with mortality and memory, there's a mood of defiance, almost of rage against the dying of the light.

Sound: Muscular and pumping, with light and shade provided by fiddle and the accordion of Los Lobos's David Hidalgo on every track. **NW**



BAABA MAAL

Television

Palm World Voices

www.palmworldvoices.com

Music
Sound



Music: On first hearing, the first new studio album in eight years from the Senegalese star sounds underwhelming. The talking drums and high-octane tribal rhythms of other west African music are notable mostly by their absence. Instead, we get a set of soft-hued, songs and gentle melodies enlivened by gentle washes of electronica and the surprising collaboration of New York's Brazilian Girls. But Maal's voice remains one of the great glories of African music and the impressively subtle and complex beauty soon emerges.

Sound: Producer Barry Reynolds provides a high-tech gloss that washes over the tracks with an ambient, almost mantra-like flow. **NW**



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony II 'The Year 1905'

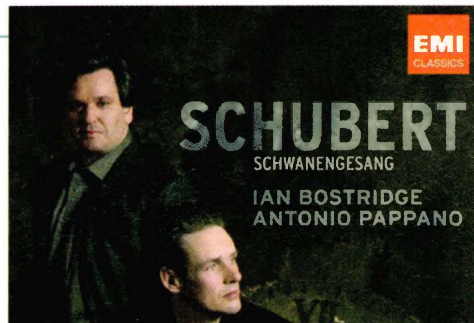
Vasily Petrenko (conductor), Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
Naxos www.naxos.com

Music
Sound



Music: The first in what will be a complete Shostakovich symphonic cycle, the 11th has a mixed reputation. Its subject matter is the Bloody Sunday massacre of 200-plus demonstrators by Czarist soldiers and it was first performed on the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution – but its militaristic qualities (2nd movement) and the bell motif in the finale make for a forceful, if unsettling musical experience.

Sound: The performance is unusually brisk and the orchestra is in excellent form, albeit with some slightly odd stereo perspectives at times. But this does nothing to detract from a gripping account which serves as an excellent showcase for the large orchestra. **AG**



FRANZ SCHUBERT

Schwanengesang

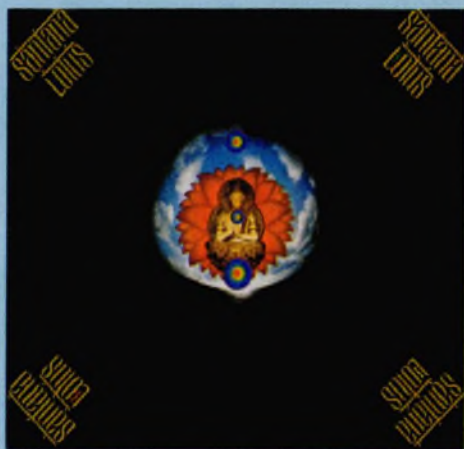
Ian Bostridge (tenor), Antonio Pappano (piano)
EMI Classic www.emiclassics.com

Music
Sound



Music: This *Swan Song*, the main work on this disc, is one of the final works that Schubert wrote in his short lifetime and was published posthumously. Ian Bostridge has a rare passion and ability to communicate the essence of the music which comes across in virtually everything he has recorded, but particularly with Antonio Pappano, with whom he has an almost spiritual connection. That connection is fully in evidence here in these bittersweet songs of 'distant or unattainable' love.

Sound: Recorded at Abbey Wood, there is an unusual intimacy to the sound, which speaks of sympathetic engineering and is fully in keeping with the nature of the music. **AG**



SANTANA

Lotus
CBS/Speakers Corner 180g
www.speakerscorner.de



Music: This lavishly packaged three-LP set released in 1974 was originally exclusive to the Japanese market. Its 22 tracks reveals the large and talented New Santana band at its very best. The set manages to escape the predictability that had crept into Santana's studio work by delivering a vibrant and expansive sound that lives up to the hype.

Sound: For much of the recording there is plenty of atmosphere, but limited dynamics and bandwidth. However, you can hear what's going down and the pressing is top-notch. *JK*



OTIS SPANN

Portraits In Blues Volume 3
Storeville/Pure Pleasure 180g
www.purepleasurerecords.com



Music: Otis Spann was the piano player in Muddy Waters' band, but here he is on his own and sounding very much at ease. This set was recorded in 1963 and features 11 great tunes including *TB Blues* and the inimitable *Jelly Roll Baker*, tunes which Spann makes his own in a subtle, yet irresistible fashion. It's not hard to hear why Waters held on to him for nearly twenty years.

Sound: Made in Copenhagen and cut for PP at Abbey Road, this album sounds almost mono. It lacks sonic sophistication but has plenty of detail to enjoy. *JK*

HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

ERIC BIBB

Rainbow People
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)
www.opus3records.com

Music: Through Opus3, Eric Bibb has been a familiar name in high-resolution music for some time. Yet it was a surprise to find that his debut album dates from 1977, well and truly in the analogue era, a fact that does it no harm at all, quite the contrary.

Bibb is more relaxed than on later outings and it suits him well. It's not as overtly bluesy as his later work and has folk and world overtones. There's sax, percussion, double bass and even strings, but the crucial thing is it never feels like he's trying too hard.

Sound: Opus3's seventies' recordings never disappoint and this one sounds sweet. Very natural and with great tone but you'll have to ignore some tape hiss, but it's better than the Dolby compressed alternative. *JK*



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Piano Concertos 3, 4, 5
Sir Charles Mackerras (cond), Artur Pizarro (pianist)
Scottish Chamber Orchestra
Linn Records (Two-disc set),
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)
www.linnrecords.com

Music: Pianist Artur Pizarro has recorded several of the Beethoven piano sonatas for the same record label. But if the piano here has a slightly unfamiliar sonority, it is because it is a Blüthner, rather than the more familiar bell-like Steinway or Bösendorfer and this, perhaps, accounts for the slightly softer quality of the performance, which may sound a little muted to some.

Sound: The sound is not as big as some of the better known performances on disc, but it contains intimacy and poise, Linn's engineering is spot-on, and the multichannel SACD mix helps provide a strong measure of involvement. *AG*



PERCY GRAINGER

Lincolnshire Posy
Jerry Junkin (conductor), Dallas Wind Symphony
Reference Recordings
HDCC (24-bit recording)
www.referencerecordings.com

Music: Grainger was the eccentric Australian composer and pianist who dabbled with the avant garde and early electronic instruments, but these individualistically scored arrangements focus on his love of British and Irish folk music. Some are reinterpretations (*Danny Boy*), others use the originals only as inspirations in a diverse set of pieces which are dense, layered, and atmospheric, with intimations of the way that folk singers sing – not entirely in tune, but with counter tones which can be beautifully evocative.

Sound: This 24-bit HDCC recording allows plenty of space for the largely wind-based orchestra to coax out a wealth of subtle timbres from the instruments. *DO*



Utopia III



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Diablo review, Hifi+ magazine


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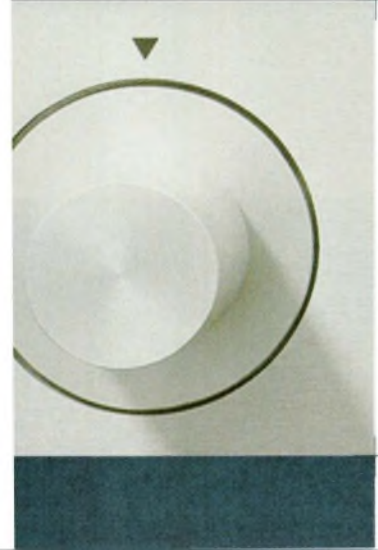
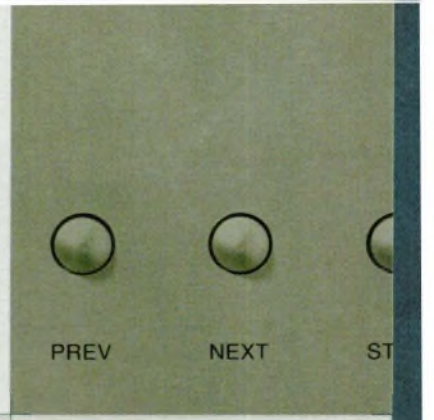
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COPLAND

Copland Audio Products:
Scandinavian Cool.



Copland's design team believes that its greatest challenge is to use a scientific approach to create a product which conveys art. Although music has its basis in mathematics, its raison d'être is to communicate emotion.. Soul. Spirit.

To achieve this end, Copland has chosen to blend the best of proven technologies - the valve - with the most sophisticated of modern methodologies. Because of this, you will find a compact disc player in a range which also reverses the vinyl LP. You will find stereo playback, which has served pure music for a half-century, alongside multi-channel amplification, designed to recreate the cinematic event in the home.

All of this reaches you, the music lover and cineaste, through components which reflect the most striking of Scandinavian virtues: minimalism, simplicity, clarity.



CDA823 - High resolution CD player



CTA305 - High Performance valve preamplifier



CTA520 - Power amplifier (stereo or mono)



CVA306 - Multi Channel Valve preamplifier



CVA535 - 5 channel Audio Video amplifier



Choice mail

The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Letters, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Or email your letters to jason.kennedy@futurenet.com

A bit of fun

Here is a bit of fun using a piece of software available from: www.dynamicrange.de/en/ download. If you rip a CD to .WAV and then run the folder contents through the application it uses an algorithm to measure and give each track a dynamic rating and then an average for the album. Now don't get too hung up on how it does it, lets just say my findings are that the more dynamic a CD, the higher a score it gets, so it's on the right track.

I've done around 25 CDs so far and the highest, with a score of 17, is Ry Cooder and VM Bhatt's *A Meeting By The River*. I'm not surprised as this is the best thing I've ever heard on CD. One track hits a 19!

So 17 is the score to beat so far. To let you know how hard that is here are some others:

The Nightfly - Donald Fagen - 16

Ricky Lee Jones - Ricky Lee Jones - 15

90125 - Yes - 13

Tattoo You - Rolling Stones - 13

(original 80s CD)

Wicked Game - Chris Isaak - 13

Hats - Blue Nile - 12

Tilt - Scott Walker - 11

Sgt Pepper - The Beatles - 11

Boston - Boston - 10

Appetite for Destruction - G'n'R - 10

Chinese Democracy - G'n'R - 10

Dark Side of The Moon - Pink Floyd - 9

(30th Anniversary SACD/CD)


Ladyhawke - Ladyhawke - 5

Now the folks who have created this (Pleasurize Music Foundation) want a rating of 14 to be the dynamic standard. I think they will be hard pushed, 10 sounds more like a

decent starting point from the modern CDs I've tested so far. The lowest found so far is Iggy Pop's modern remix of *Raw Power* with a mighty score of 2!

Dave Jagles via email

HFC That's quite an interesting piece of software. We see that the people at the German Pleasurize Music Foundation are suggesting that music is more pleasurable when the dynamic range is 14dB or more. It certainly is if you have a decent system. We came across an organisation in America last year that has the same goal. Turn It Up is made up of recording industry professionals who think that heavy compression and pushing recordings into the red is destroying music. We have to agree and hope that this slowly rising tide will have some effect in the struggling world of the record industry.

The useful thing about this software is that it will allow those of us who appreciate the finer things in life, the hi-fi fraternity, to identify the better-recorded albums and, one would hope, buy enough of them for the business to take notice. So get on the web and order the 

"...the application uses an algorithm to give each track a dynamic rating..."



Pictured: Ry Cooder and VM Bhatt's *A Meeting By The River* has serious dynamic range

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Back in the chain gang

I've been interested in hi-fi for over 20 years, ever since I first bought a Nakamichi tape deck, which I still have. Its been a difficult year for me, since being made redundant last summer, but now I have just been offered a job. The relief I feel at the moment is amazing. Now I can afford to buy some new CDs and maybe improve my hi-fi system in the future. Two years ago I bought a pair of Triangle Zephyr XS floorstanding speakers and these have improved the sound of my system no end. Maybe it's due to their high 91dB sensitivity. Thanks for a great magazine.

Julian Bedford West Yorkshire

HFC Triangle speakers from France have always been better than average when it comes to sensitivity and the models that we have reviewed have consistently impressed us. It's unlikely that sensitivity is the main reason for this, there are equally easy to drive speakers around that are less entertaining, but it clearly helps.

Triangle's usually have an upfront, lively sound that suits a lot of music extremely well and we're delighted that you have had such a great result with them.

Congratulations on the job offer, by the way and thanks for the kind comment about *Hi-Fi Choice*.

WIN!
LOUDSPEAKERS:
A VISUAL
HISTORY
A1 POSTER



Letter of the month winners will receive a limited edition (100) A1 loudspeaker history print, by a former *HFC* staffer. With photographic images of products from 1874 to the present day, this is one audiofile collectible you can't afford to miss. So drop us a line now: jason.kennedy@futurenet.com

Waterlily Acoustics (*A Meeting By The River*) back catalogue while you still can.

I've bought an iPod and I like it

Since I stopped using my portable MiniDisc player about eight years when I learned to drive, I never thought I would use a portable music player again, but the advantages of using an iPod have just dawned on me.

I found that on my hour drive to work, my CD collection was slowly getting scratched to bits, taking CDs in and out and stacking them as I change discs. I've just bought a 120GB iPod Classic and have started to rip my CDs in Apple lossless, for the best sound quality. So far I've ripped 61 albums, which totals 22.24GB. On that basis, I should be able to carry around with me about 332 CDs, more than enough for any car journey.

I have no intention of using the iPod as a source in my hi-fi, but now I can easily see why it's so popular, it's easy to use and to be fair sounds quite good. It also has a feature which I think any music lover will love. It's called Genius, I haven't used it yet, but the feature can either create playlists based around a type of song you give it, by analysing your music collection, or by using Apple's database, it can suggest songs you might like. If it works, I'm hoping it will introduce me to some new music I never knew about. Of course I will be buying the CD, rather than downloading!

At the moment, I still for the life of me, cannot understand why some high-end hi-fi is iPod-compatible, like the £8,500 Chord preamp. Surely anyone who has that sort of money will use CDs or records, as the main source. I guess, as long as it doesn't cost too

"I, therefore, have no reservations in recommending it to Linn users out there."

much more to add that feature, then there's no harm in adding it?

Sometimesuk HFC Forum

HFC The iPod and its like (other MP3 players are available) are remarkable devices when it comes to music on the move, but as MSB Technology has proved with its iLink digital dock (below) it is also a potent competitor to CD when its output is converted to S/PDIF digital and fed to a decent DAC. Chord Electronic's Indigo DAC/preamp/dock licenses MSB's approach to turn the iPod into a serious music server and while the price is high don't dismiss it until you've heard the results.

Tweaks and mods

Being a Linn LP12 user means one has to be prepared for constant maintenance, adjustments, tweaking and... modifications. It's all part of the Linn users' love/hate affair with this legendary piece of hi-fi history. Recently my Valhalla power supply (that the deck had fitted when new) started to play up,

with variations of the speed as well as a lack of torque when starting the platter from idle.

This got me thinking about replacing the Valhalla with an Origin Live DC motor and power supply in the hope of giving a new lease of life to an otherwise perfectly fine deck. So I purchased and installed the new DC 200 motor and the Ultra power supply and transformer. Even though I have only been listening for a few days, the improvement in sound is very easy to hear and cannot be missed. The thing that struck me first was the impact of the bass notes which are distinctly tighter, more full and expressive rather than they were before.

I'm not sure if it's the DC motor (as against the Valhalla synchronous AC motor) or the extra torque a larger motor applies, but the result is unmistakable. Another very noticeable difference is the surface noise has all but disappeared! It's hard to say why this is so, nothing else in the set up of the turntable was altered (VTA, VTF etc) but it lets the music flow (almost) uninterrupted by pops and the slight 'hiss' that comes from surface noise on less than 'perfect' records.

The ability to adjust the speed at a turn of a trim-pot at the back of the power supply, is an extra plus and a luxury that I never experienced with the Valhalla. Without going into too much audiophile jargon, I have to say this was money well spent and the modification produced better-than-expected results. I, therefore, have no hesitation in recommending it to any Linn users out there.

This little report was done out of pure satisfaction from a genuine product that does make a difference, unlike so many 'snake oil' offerings in the hi-fi industry.

Arthur via email



Below: Linn's Majik variant on the LP12 is ripe for upgrading

HFC It's always nice to revive a well-loved turntable with something like this, as there have been more modifications made available for the LP12 than any other design we can think of. Classics include the so-called Naim Armageddon which seemed only to be available to the select few and more recently, Funk has offered two levels of upgrade the first of which demonstrates very impressively. Don't forget Linn's range of updates either, they may cost a little more but they come straight from the source, so to speak.

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BARQUE CONSONANCE M12 Mk2



FEASTREX Full Range Available

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

- 36** Bowers & Wilkins CM9 loudspeaker
- 40** Wadia 170i transport
- 44** Moon CD3.3 CD player
- 48** Teufel Ultima 7 loudspeaker
- 50** Harman/Kardon HD990 CD player and HK900 amp
- 54** Mission 796 loudspeaker



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

AMPLIFIERS £950-£1,500

- 62** Arcam FMJ A38
- 63** Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta
- 64** Cairn Diablo
- 65** Moon i5
- 67** Myryad MX12080
- 69** Yamaha A-S2000



ROUND-UP

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- 58** QED Signature Audio S
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- 59** Wireworld Equinox 6



OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

...nor an... we liked... point here is... to the job of... recommend you... the 17 Mill M, which has excellent build and... a very good impression in HFC 243. At... same price there's also the Cyrus 7, a... ng all-rounder in a compact case... 'er trying the Heart with the standard... s we switched over to the Siemens... grade, a comparison somewhat muddled by... e fact that it was a cold for hot swap - the... days with the... after a livelier... w tubes shone... through. The Siemens-equipped player has an... n snappier sound with better timing that... es with dense material with remarkable... fidence and ease. It even seems to be

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

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★★	PRO	Good build and open, lively sound from a valve DAC with plenty of inputs. Transport is also great value for money.
FEATURES	★★★★★	CON	DAC doesn't engage as well as the transport with loss of weight and power through the bass unless you price the quality. Cables cost extra and competition from single-chassis designs won't help.
BUILD	★★★★★		
VALUE	★★★★★		
CONCLUSION			Acoustic is by no means a slick player of this build quality and price. Something just has to give and it's the DAC, which can't do justice to the transport's efforts.
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★			

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★



Black beauty

B&W's flagship CM9 is the pick of an impressive new range

PRODUCT Bowers and Wilkins CM9

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £1,760 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20x102.5x32cm

⊙ Weight 26.6kg ⊙ Drivers: 25mm Nautilus aluminium dome tweeter, 150mm Kevlar midrange, 2x165mm paper/Kevlar bass ⊙ Sensitivity 89dB ⊙ Power handling: 200 watts ⊙ Rear-vented bass reflex system

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

Bowers and Wilkins' CM speaker range has recently been augmented by four new models: including the CM Centre 2 centre speaker, which is larger than the existing CM Centre, the compact CM5 stand-mount and the ASW 10CM subwoofer. The fourth model, the CM9, is the top-dog in the CM range and physically the largest model. It has the most extended bass and given a suitable amplifier, will play the loudest. This makes it perfect for those looking for good sound quality delivered at realistic sound levels. It also boasts a level of fit and finish that is distinctly high end.

To put it in context, the CM range – which slots between the 600 series and the high-end 800s – started life as a single model, the CM1, an impressive quality compact which made up for its lack of cubic inches with better-than-average bass extension for the size and necessarily low sensitivity as a result. But it had limited trouser-flapping ability and needed a lot of power to have any useful output. The CM1 was eventually expanded into a fledgling range, which has recently been expanded further with additional special-application models, both for music and for home cinema/multichannel use. Hence the range now extends to two compact two-ways, two floorstanders, two centre speakers and a subwoofer.

In contrast to the CDM range that preceded the CMs, the tweeters are fully enclosed and the enclosures are rectangular boxes, which means they look somewhat simpler and cost less to make. But this doesn't mean the designers have not addressed the aesthetic issues. The black gloss finish is first-rate, with excellent detailing and the standard of presentation really is the icing on the cake.

This reviewer is not very enthusiastic about the silvery rings around the drivers, or the fact that the larger units have different colour cones for the midrange and bass (they use different materials), but the speakers are

ends of the volume spectrum. The CM9 doesn't need to be driven hard to perform well and it will cope with more power for longer should it be required and when the amplifier allows.

“The narrow baffle has the advantage of widening the listening window, so that several people can listen at once...”

supplied with ultra-slim grills that attach magnetically to the front and effectively cover the working parts, without significantly detracting from the sound.

The designers have opted for a narrow enclosure, achieved by using two small-diameter bass units in parallel instead of a single larger one. The narrow baffle has the advantage of widening the listening window, so that several people can listen at once without a noticeable loss of image focus. A single larger bass unit would have had the opposite effect, namely narrower imagery and a more restricted listening area.

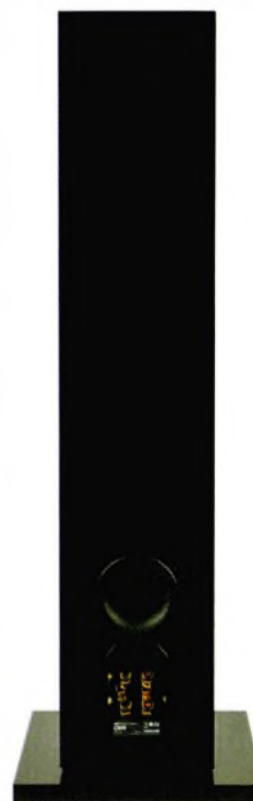
To ensure stability, the speakers come with some plain rectangular plinths, which usefully extend their footprint. You also get carpet-piercing spikes and hard, round-section feet as an alternative, with enough adjustment available in each case to take care of uneven flooring. It's a great-looking package, with the emphasis on elegance and practicality.

Compared to the 600 series, which look superficially similar, the CM are better specified. For example, they are fitted with longer voice coils and bigger magnets which translate into greater power and less distortion. Cabinet bracing is also improved, and the cabinet walls are covered in real wood veneers, which helps stiffen the enclosures, in much the same way that bread helps stiffen a cucumber sandwich. The veneers are also reflected in superior finish.

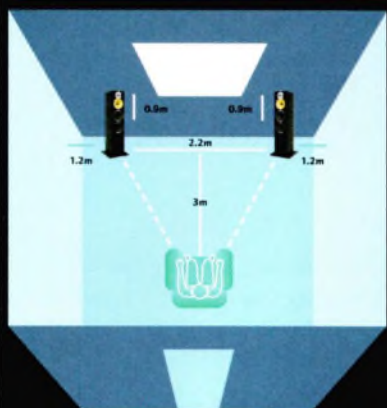
As the biggest model in the range, the CM9 has the highest sensitivity – 89dB/watt nominally, where the CM1, for example, is rated at a lowly 84dB – so you gain at both

SOUND QUALITY

The frequency range covered by the CM9 is 30Hz – 50kHz at 6dB and is more tightly specified at 56Hz – 22kHz +/-3dB. We haven't see the response plot, but most of it probably lies below the line, between 0 and -3dB, with the output holding within 2dB over a ten degree vertical arc and 60 degrees horizontally. Impedance is nominally eight ohms, but dips to three ohms, which means it is best thought of as a six-ohm load, though ☑



SET-UP



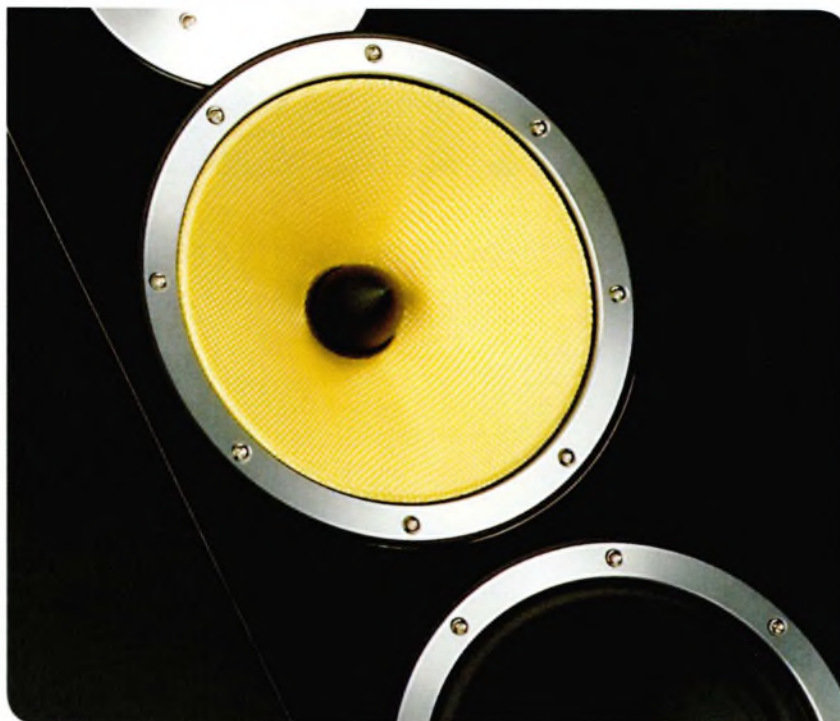
POSITIONING

Set up is covered in the makers' instructions, but you will need to run the speakers intensively for a while, which loosens the sound up, and don't even consider these speakers if you have cramped surroundings. Sitting too close is a recipe for lack of integration. Choose the speaker position so that the rear port has at least half a metre of free air behind and start by using them without the foam plug or ring supplied, which tends to reduce the ability of the bass to 'breathe'. The enclosures are best used with minimal toe-in (ten degrees maximum), which works because the lateral dispersion is even over a broad angle, and because it gives well-differentiated left-right imaging.

SYSTEM MATCHING

On one level, the CM9 is not particularly equipment-fussy, appearing to work well with a range of amplifiers. Even a modest home cinema amplifier (in stereo of course) reinforces the impression that it is not a difficult load for most amps to cope with. Conversely, power handling is good enough to cater for the output of most amplifiers, though the Krell FBI was clearly over-specified for the role. Having established that you can run this speaker on the end of a 50-watt amplifier, you should find that a good-quality 100-watt design should do a fine job and is probably close to optimum in most situations.

This said, you should choose the partnering amplifier with some care. Although not bright and despite being well integrated, the CM9 has an unusually transparent quality, and it will react badly to some amplifiers and programme material by sounding a little coloured and boxy, as described under Sound Quality. The key idea is simple: quality first.



the 89dB sensitivity means that you shouldn't need too much power to get a good result. The main test amplifier was a Krell FBI, which can deliver 300 watts per channel without breaking a sweat, which is more than sufficient horsepower for any reasonable use. But in a brief outing with a high-quality 50-watt integrated amp, the Denon PMA-SA1, even this reduced power level was sufficient to propel the CM9 a long way, with no danger of hitting the end stops in a room which is more than eleven meters long. This is not a hard loudspeaker to drive.

You wouldn't expect a modern Bowers and Wilkins to be far from tonally neutral and the CM9 doesn't disappoint. This is palpably a very accurate loudspeaker with a full, but well-

contained bass and a treble quality that has come some way from the occasionally thin, edgy quality of some earlier generations of metal dome tweeters. It's not that the company's speakers were particularly edgy, but there was something about their tweeters

BOX CLEVER?

Why use a plain box shape when B&W is so well known for its fluid, organic shapes, for example in the 800 series and the Nautilus?

According to B&W's senior product manager, Mike Gough, the conventional shape is really driven by the aesthetic taste of the potential customer rather than cost. There are two factors at work here – the sound quality level and the use of shape to achieve it. B&W has sought to satisfy the requirements of as wide a customer base as possible and it is quite clear that there is a significant body of potential customers that want high sound quality, but have a very traditional aesthetic taste in furniture.

Of course, having eschewed placing the tweeter on top as in the previous CDM range, B&W kept to as narrow a frontal aspect as possible for the whole speaker in order to give the wide dispersion needed for good imaging over a reasonably broad seating area. In the past, a larger speaker inevitably meant a bigger bass driver, with looser, less well focussed imaging. In this case a pair of smaller drivers provide the larger radiating area that was required, whilst maintaining a narrow cabinet.



and the slightly antiseptic way the treble was framed as a whole, that somehow underlined the high frequency output. It seems that the process of continual refinement really has delivered the goods and the result is a speaker that is palpably better integrated and that sounds less loudspeaker-like – more transparent if you will. In part, this is because it is no longer possible with this loudspeaker to hear the treble as a separate entity, independently of the bass and the midrange. The Kevlar FST midrange unit plays a part here by boosting energy in the middle and upper midband, the region just below where the tweeter takes over.

The result is a loudspeaker that is obviously smooth and in control, but is also capable of delivering real surprises when the occasion demands, one of which was playing a CD of wind music, a new Naxos title called *Passaggi*,

CM9 TECHNOLOGY

The CM Series generally, and the CM9 in particular, benefits from Bower and Wilkins' trickle-down policy of utilising as much as is practical from the flagship 800 Series products. The technologies on offer are derived from a familiar palette, with greater refinement where possible to keep within the budget.

The CM9 has an FST midrange unit operating between 350Hz – 4kHz with a woven Kevlar axially asymmetric cone, much like the one used in the 800 series. The Kevlar is impregnated with resin and coated with a polymer layer to stiffen and damp the fibres. The FST cone edge is trapped (FST stands for fixed suspension transducer), which restricts its freedom of movement over much of the cone area and helps absorb bending waves. This is intended to give a more consistent and controlled dispersion across the frequency range, effectively reducing its ability to generate antiphase output towards the edge of the cone. This unit is also responsible for the power handling and output capability.

The tweeter is a derivative of the Nautilus tube-loaded aluminium dome used elsewhere in the range, with a bandwidth extending to 50kHz (-6dB) and the system is reflex-loaded using a rear-facing flowport, whose flared dimpled construction is calculated to reduce wind noise.

Last but not least, the crossovers are of 'remarkable simplicity' (sic), with much emphasis being placed on the auditioning quality of individual crossover components and the synergy between them and the drive units.



“...continual refinement really has delivered the goods and the result is a speaker that is palpably better integrated.”

which is scheduled for review in *Choice Cuts* next month. The exotic woodwind textures featured on this disc were beautifully handled, with a palpable feel of the player's breath energising the instruments. In track eight (part II of Nebojsa Zivkovic's *Tales from the Centre of the Earth*) the music has a tremendously exciting rhythmic pulse and here the CM9 brings a powerfully tactile quality and bite to the proceedings. We did notice a degree of interaction between the speakers and the amplifiers though, which in the worst case tends to induce a small, but noticeable amount of colouration and a degree of boxiness in the midrange.

The bass is perceptibly warm when we used it without the foam ring or plug in the reflex port (they're supplied separately, with the advice to use them if the speakers are placed close to the wall behind). Generally the bass breathes better and gives a greater impression of differentiation in the depth plane, if some space is left behind the speaker and the foam is not used.

This is a first-rate newcomer, easier and more relaxing than some previous Bowers and Wilkins, with a more expansive sound and a

better-integrated treble. It is realistically priced, and beautifully finished, but take some care over set up. The speaker does offer a wide listening window, which is not just limited to a point immediately between the two speakers. It is quite transparent, though, and should be used with clean-sounding electronics, if you don't want to excite the slight residual boxiness identified above. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Tall, elegant, expressive midband and expensive, but well-controlled bass. Power handling is good, and sensitivity is high enough for almost any respectable amplifier.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	CON Hint of colouration in some amplifier hook-ups and some transparency that requires clean-sounding electronics.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	

CONCLUSION
Refined floorstander hits almost all the right spots on the button. Treble quality is better than most metal dome Bowers and Wilkins' systems, but there is an occasional trace of midband boxiness.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/597244

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Hi-fi iPod?

Wadia has brought its high-end expertise to get hi-fi sound from Apple's iPod

PRODUCT Wadia 170iTransport

TYPE iPod dock/transport

PRICE £390

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 6.8x20.3x20.3 cm

⊖ Weight: 1.1kg ⊖ Digital output: 1x coaxial
⊖ Analogue output: 1x RCA phono ⊖ Video output:
composite, S-video ⊖ Remote control and digital
interconnect supplied

CONTACT ☎ 01992 573030 # www.wadia.com

The Apple iPod has undoubtedly changed the face of music listening as the majority of music lovers know. It was not the first MP3 player and it's not the best sounding, but thanks to outstanding design and ergonomics it transformed music on the move and has gone on to invade the home as well. This is achieved with inexpensive standalone sound docks with built-in amp and speakers, or for better results, with docks that allow you to stream the player's analogue output to an existing system.

Sound quality is inevitably compromised by a number of factors, but the compact and essentially cheap nature of the DAC in an iPod seems to be one of the biggest. The second, of course, is users' preference for compressed music files in order to boost the capacity of the device. Downloads also play a part in quality.

Realising these limitations, high-end digital specialist Wadia has built a dock that can output a digital stream from an iPod for external conversion. Wadia is the first and, so far, only company to do this with an unmodified iPod. The only competition that we have discovered comes from MSB Technology whose iLink dock requires that the iPod be modified for the purpose, which is partly why the price of player and dock is considerably higher at £1,900.

The Wadia 170iTransport is almost as stylish as the iPod itself thanks to a compact square case with rubberised spike feet and a high-quality anodised finish. The key to its appeal, of course, is the Wadia logo cut into the front,

you know to take the player out of the dock and re-seat it to achieve this end.

As mentioned earlier most iPod users compress the music they want to hear in order to get more on the player, this inevitably

“...high-end digital specialist Wadia has built a dock that can output a digital stream from an iPod for external conversion.”

something that is usually only found on components costing over ten times the asking price here. A variety of dock inserts are supplied to accommodate different models of player and the list of these seems fairly comprehensive, with all but the Shuffle and iPhone present. We would recommend that you go to wadia.com for a definitive list to make sure your player is supported.

Featurewise, the 170iTransport has a coaxial digital output and analogue out on RCA phonos, these sit alongside video out in composite and S-video varieties. The connections are of the same quality that you find on amps and CD players at this price, essentially quite basic and for this reason we would suggest you avoid doing what we did, that is using a high-end Chord Indigo digital interconnect which has extremely tight plugs. Wadia supplies a digital interconnect in the box alongside a small remote, but this can only be used to find next and previous tracks in an album or playlist, it has + and - buttons too, but these 'may be used with future Wadia products.' The final 'mode' button changes output from digital to analogue, but not back again, which can be a trifle irritating unless

compromises sound quality and while it may not be so apparent via the supplied headphones in this situation it's obvious. The format that Wadia's UK distributor MDC recommends is Apple Lossless which compresses files to about half their original size but without an obvious reduction in sound quality. The best system available is WAV which is totally uncompressed and, therefore, takes up acres of space, but if you want the best results and have a system that can take advantage it's space worth using.

SOUND QUALITY

We used the 170iTransport with two varieties of iPod Classic, a 120GB version of the current anodised finish model and its predecessor, a 5th-generation 80GB example. The latter was used because it's an MSB iLink-modified unit that works in both the Wadia and MSB docks and was used for comparison with that competitor. It's a comparison which makes a good case for the extra cost of the MSB, in a high-end system the iLink is clearly a superior player and one which can hold its own against CD transports of like price. It has a more open sound, presents more image depth and is clearly more revealing, the 170iTransport seems thinner through the midband and the bass and while not short on grunt, does not go so far down. With challenging material the Wadia struggles to maintain its poise in a highly revealing system, a job that the MSB is clearly more at home with. It's crucial to remember here that even if you include an iPod Classic in the equation, the 170iTransport is a third the price of its competitor. ▶

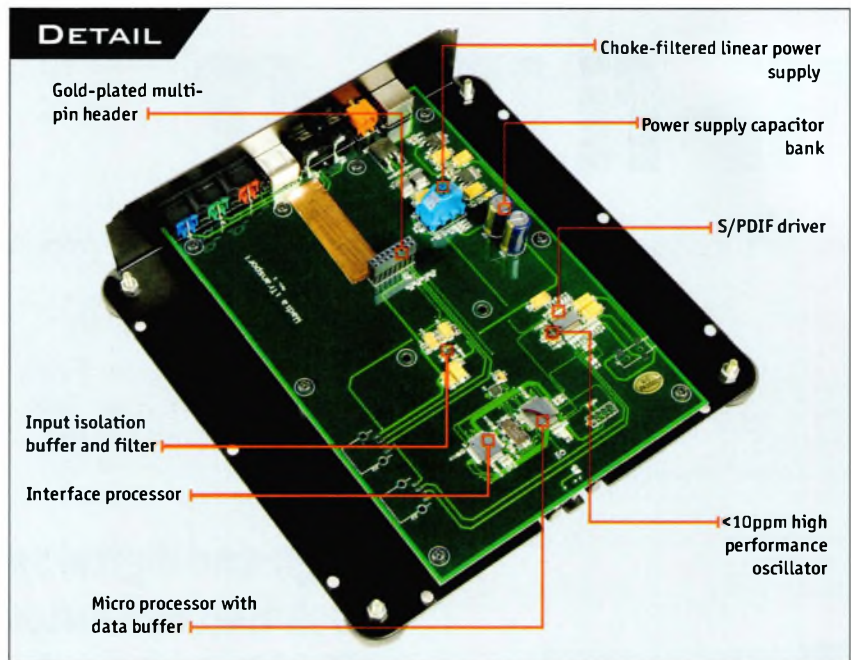


THE ONE AND ONLY

Given the huge popularity of the iPod and its potential for use in proper hi-fi systems it seems a bit strange that only Wadia makes a docking station that can produce an S/PDIF output. We asked John Schaffer at Wadia why this is: "Concerning the iTransport, we learned that it was possible to access the digital data stored on some iPod models based on changes to the iPod platform and that projects in the automotive space were beginning to take advantage of this new capability. So we decided to pursue the project, working in conjunction with Apple to implement the needed architecture to extract the digital audio signal. We are currently the only company with this ability however that will change over time".

At the time of writing the 170iTransport was the only 'transport' in the Wadia catalogue, but this is apparently because it is between models. Nonetheless it suggests that the company has more than a little faith in the world's favourite gadget.

On its own terms the Wadia does a remarkably revealing and entertaining job with both Apple Lossless and WAV files on the iPod. Tord Gustavsen's *Tears Transforming* is as captivating as ever in emotional terms and a good deal of its image depth and 'air' is revealed thanks to plentiful detail. With WAV files it sounds smoother and the presentation takes the edge off less than pristine recordings, Gillian Welch's *Time (The Revelator)* can sound a little edgy when fully exposed, but the Wadia makes it easier on the ear. A more meaningful comparison was made with Arcam's rDock (£150) an analogue-only dock that can be used with any line-equipped amplifier, which offers full remote control and full display with Arcam Solo components. Pitting the two against one another using the analogue output reveals a difference that is not slight. The Wadia delivers greater transparency and solidity of sound that makes the rDock seem vague and lacking in resolution.



"The Wadia 170iTransport is a remarkable piece of kit and can give a fully badged-up CD player a run for its money."

Moving from the Wadia's analogue output over to the coax digital out and plugging this into a Russ Andrews DA-1 DAC represents another leap in quality. Now you have depth of image, precision, bass weight and shape that puts the iPod in hi-fi territory. Alison Krauss sounds exquisite and her Union Station band positively sumptuous, it's not hard to hear why fellow reviewer Alvin Gold, among others, is so keen on this particular artist.

Arguably, the most important test came when we brought in a well-regarded CD player to compare as a transport. As it consistently performs well, we used a Cambridge 840C CD player and took its coaxial digital output to the DA-i DAC to keep the playing field level. There is the option of taking the Wadia's output into the Cambridge's digital input, but that would favour the disc spinner. Here the 170iTransport met its match, the Cambridge turns in a slightly more relaxed and refined

result that means you can hear more and play louder without discomfort. But given that the 840C is so well-regarded and more expensive, the difference is not that big.

The Wadia 170iTransport is a remarkable piece of kit. It sounds extremely good given that it works with a mass-market source and it can give a fully badged-up CD player a run for its money. If you already have a compatible iPod and fancy using it as an audiophile music server this is the most affordable way to do it. Anything that can turn such a popular device into a piece of hi-fi is impressive and this does a spectacular job for the price. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Stunning sound from a portable. It's easy to use, has a broad compatibility with players and is a nice bit of product design.
FEATURES ★★★★★	CON Scrolling with the thumbwheel produces clicks through the system. There's limited remote functionality and insubstantial sockets.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION If you own an iPod and appreciate good sound quality this is a no-brainer. With uncompressed files and a decent DAC it turns a personal stereo into a source that can compete on with dedicated disc spinners, and music server functionality to boot.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL: www.techradar.com/594928	

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MOON

Repeat Prog Random

Repeat Prog Random

The new Moon

A new CD player that out-performs the competition?

PRODUCT Moon CD3.3

TYPE CD player

PRICE £2,200

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x89x33.2 cm
 ◉ Weight: 8kg ◉ Digital input: 1x S/PDIF (RCA)
 ◉ Digital output: 1x S/PDIF (RCA) ◉ Analogue outputs: 1x RCA, 1x Optional balanced RCA ◉ RS232 port ◉ IR input ◉ SimLink Port

CONTACT ☎ 0131 555 3922 🌐 www.simaudio.com

Moon's latest CD player, the CD3.3, stands out in the company's range for a number of reasons, not least being its technical superiority over the next model up, the CD5.3 RS. (reviewed in *HFC* 307). But if the latter looks less impressive on paper than the CD3.3, then it's a different matter in the flesh, even though the signal to noise ratio in the new model is a decibel better, THD (total harmonic distortion) the same and the upsample rate four times higher. If only reviewing CD players were a matter of comparing numbers, fortunately for us it's not.

Yet even if the more expensive CD5.3 RS is the better player, what the numbers do tell you is that the CD3.3 is a more up-to-date player, with the latest processing chips responsible for the higher 1.411Mhz upsample rate. The DAC is a Burr-Brown PCM1798, which operates at 24-bit/192kHz and the oversampling filter runs at eight times.

Moon makes a lot of its own casework at its facility in Quebec, Canada and it does an exceptional job. At its price point, this is a very nicely put together player with high-quality machining and anodising. The loading drawer is described as 'proprietary' and is likely to have been sourced elsewhere as part of the transport mechanism, but it oozes class with a beautifully smooth operation and slim solid aluminium construction. It's a little

inconvenient having the basic control buttons underneath this drawer but you can, of course, use the remote. It would, perhaps, have been more logical to swap the left-hand buttons for those on the right, for ergonomics.

between the transport mechanism and the rest of the player. This consists of four gel spacers between the two elements which should help to keep vibration out of the transport. There is just one circuit board

“...if the more expensive CD5.3 RS is the better player, the CD3.3 is more up-to-date with the latest processing chips.”

Fortunately, however, if you leave the drawer out, it will close itself after a little while, which is a nice touch.

The back panel reveals quite an array of connections including blanked-off space for balanced XLR sockets. If you include these at the time of purchase they will cost an extra £150, although analogue output on RCA phonos is provided in either case. Usefully, it has S/PDIF digital in- and outputs on RCA phonos too, so you can connect another digital source to the DAC onboard the player. Moon suggests that you could connect a music server or PC to this input, but the latter don't tend to have S/PDIF digital outputs unless fitted with an appropriate soundcard.

Alongside the audio connections there is an RS232 port for incorporating the CD3.3 into multiroom systems. You can also use it for firmware updates. Simlink sockets allow interactive use of the player in a Moon system and an IR input means you can use an external eye if you want to hide the player away. But then you wouldn't be able to appreciate the clarity of its red LED display which we rather like.

Moon's engineers have also incorporated what it calls M-Quattro gel suspension

within the player with separate areas for digital and analogue signals, each with its own ground plane in order to minimise interference between the two sections. The power supply starts with a toroidal transformer and uses ten stages of DC voltage regulation which feed the various elements in the circuit. The analogue side of which being a DC servo design that has no capacitors, as these are considered deleterious to low bass.

Moon has managed to make this player less expensive than its predecessor, the Equinox, which given exchange-rate fluctuations of late is quite a feat. They tell us that the CD3.3 pricing benefits a lot from the hard work the company undertook on the "lean chassis design" for its more affordable 1-Series. This was achieved by designing parts that would be cheaper to manufacture and faster to assemble.

Since all its products are hand-assembled in Canada, assembly time is not a negligible portion of the cost. The other thing Moon did was to use a conventionally shaped case for the CD3.3, the Equinox had an unusually shaped fascia and casework with the transport mechanism under a bump in the hood, so-to-speak. ▶



Q&A

We spoke to Moon's Product Development Manager Dominique Poupart about the CD3.3 player.



HFC: The CD3.3 has the highest upsampling rate of any machine in the range at 1.411Mhz. What does this bring to the sound and why is it not used on your more expensive players?

DP: The higher sampling rate gives livelier sound, with more tri-dimensionality in the soundstage. It is clearly better. Technology is always evolving, but not always for the better. When it can reliably give better sound, then we jump in. A few years ago, high-rate upsamplers existed, but there were compromises related to their use and we refused to have those compromises in our products. So we made players without it.

Is an S/PDIF input really going to be used for PC music when PCs are usually limited to a USB output?

A lot of serious listeners now add a pro sound card to their PCs to get a good S/PDIF output. And from this output, feeding the DAC in the CD3.3 with non-compressed files, or even better with hi-res files, gives fantastic results. We do have a USB input available in the optional DAC of our latest i3.3 integrated amplifier. This flexible solution will accommodate customers that wish to use USB, along with many other digital inputs. With the CD3.3, a lot of people may also use the S/PDIF digital input to hook up their DVD player in a home cinema/music stereo combi system.

What are the sonic benefits of having both digital and analogue circuits on the same board, as surely separate boards would reduce the potential for interference between the two?

There is no sonic benefit, but the cost reduction of having only one main board to manufacture gives more budget for other things. Things like very special, UK-sourced, gel bushings! Also, let's not forget that there are digital and analogue signals on the board that holds the DAC anyway.

This player has a very nice loading mechanism, who makes the transport?

We do most of it, hardware and software speaking, in Canada. In fact, we seriously modify an existing loader, keeping only a few 'dumb' parts that would not have been meaningful to redo and/or would have cost too much for the return. During the engineering process, we aimed at integrating the transport part design and the M-Quattro parts to make one nicely optimised assembly.



▣ SOUND QUALITY

The work that Moon has done to refine the electronics in this player and the attempts to keep mechanical resonances away from the disc drive pay off with a refined and revealing sound. The CD3.3 makes other players at this price point seem slightly crude, a little bit more electronic and digital by comparison. For some this will not be welcome, a gritty, hard-edged sound is quite popular in some quarters because it feels more alive and definite. This is partly because a lot of refined-sounding CD players lack energy and have a softness to them that smothers the life in the music. That is not the case here – with this player, Moon has chosen its path very well, bringing out the energy in the music by virtue of resolving the fine detail.

When we first started listening to it the amplification used was the Classé CP-700 and CA-2200 pre/power, which is considerably more expensive and has a similarly smooth, clean sound. This revealed how much subtlety the Moon could pull out of the pits and lands in a disc, but the combination stayed a little too close to the smooth side, overall.

By substituting a Bryston BP-16 preamp and 2B SST2 power amp, a combination that's more appropriately priced and has a character

that's more warts 'n' all, the result is a good balance of finesse and grip. Such balances are, of course, a matter of taste and will be affected in no small way by the loudspeakers, cabling etc, but with Bowers and Wilkins 802D speakers on the end, this system delivers clean highs and punchy lows with an open and precise midband.

There are more than a couple of references to the timbre of the bass in our notes, this end of the spectrum being particularly well served when a suitably meaty double bass line or kick drum came along. Both of which are in full effect on the Avishai Cohen Trio's *Gently Disturbed* album. In the track *Eleven Wives*, the drums are placed well behind the rest of the band and in a very distinctive, live acoustic. They sound superb and very real when the volume is up. Then Avishai leaps in for a solo on the double bass and takes up the front of stage in no small way, his instrument sounding solid and real thanks to excellent stereo-imaging.

We gave the onboard DAC a spin by comparing the outputs of two audiophile iPod docks, Wadia's i170 (see page 40) in the affordable corner versus MSB Technology's iLink in the no-holds barred department. The converter onboard the Moon proved equal



MOON CD5.3 RS

Last year we listened to and got quite excited about Moon's CD5.3 RS, the next player up in the range. The CD3.3 has much of the character of that player but not all of it, the dearer machine has a bit more life and vitality thanks to stronger detail resolution and dynamics. The underlying character of clean highs is very similar however. The CD5.3 RS costs an extra £1,300 for which you also get a more distinctive bit of casework and a chunky aluminium remote handset.

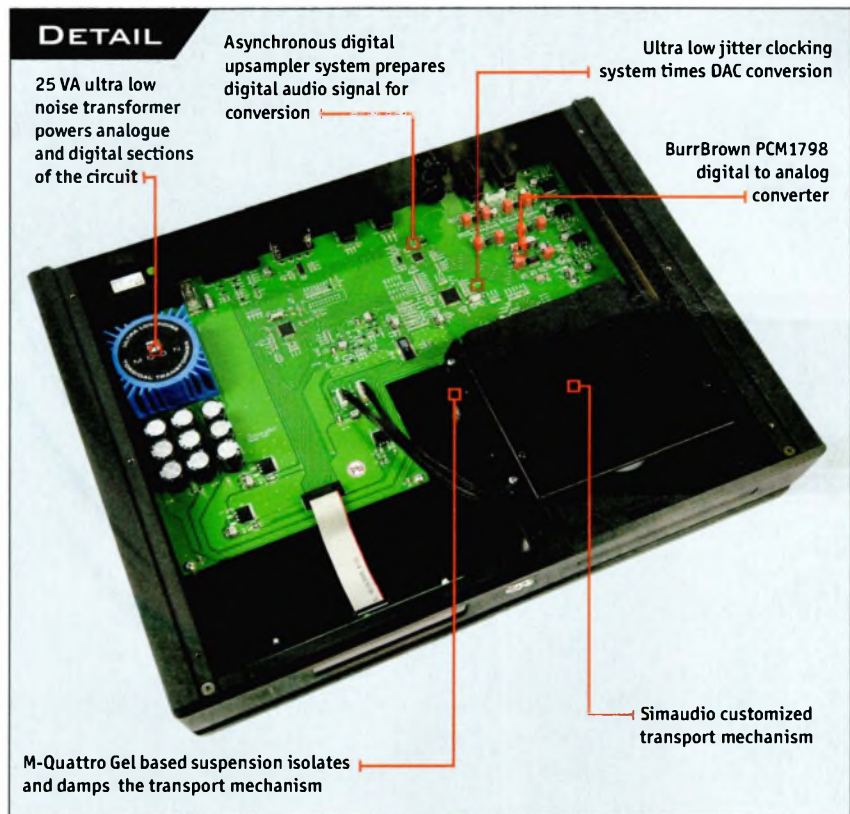
to the task of differentiating these two devices, revealing that the dearer option delivers a considerably richer, cleaner and more three dimensional result. A result that came extremely close to that achieved by spinning a disc of the same material on the player itself. The Moon reveals the sampling rate of the incoming signal on its front panel, a figure which will be limited to the 96kHz ceiling of the RCA phono connection.

Next to an elderly, but refined, Sony XA333ES the CD3.3 sounds upbeat and on the ball. Putting on Ornette Coleman's *Change of the Century*, the sax and trumpet playing has a vivacity and attack that gives the music an energy and buzz that the older player can't remember. This is also reflected in the double bass which is better focussed and slightly deeper in the Moon's hands. On another track,

BOX-M-QUATTRO

Moon has gone to some lengths to keep vibration away from the point at which the laser reads the pits and lands on the disc. It accepts that vibrations can come from various sources outside the player, but it can come from inside, too. The eccentricity in many discs caused by poor QC at the manufacturing stage makes the transport's job considerably harder, because that eccentricity induces vibration into the system when the disc is spinning. You can now, however, buy a device that trims the disc edge to centre your disc.

Moon's approach has been to search the whole world to find a gel material that could suspend its transport adequately, reassuringly it finally found it in the UK. The silicone-based gel is claimed to offer excellent shock and vibration damping, the material disperses resonance three-dimensionally due to its unique molecular structure. Dubbed M-Quattro, this suspension system derives from the Delta system which was originally developed for the Moon Andromeda player.



“The Moon CD3.3 is a subtle player and those who are looking for excitement would be better off with a Bryston or Cairn...”

Eric Bibb's *Candyman*, the analogue nature of the original recording is immediately apparent in the relatively high tape hiss and the quality of the voice, which has more character and depth in it than plenty of up-to-date examples. Putting it plainly, the voice sounds more real, not perhaps as in-the-room as vocal recordings can be, but in terms of tonal subtlety ahead of the competition.

The Moon responds very positively to better recordings, such as Andy Sheppard's recent *Movements In Colour* disc which delivers a massive soundstage via this player. It's a cleverly contrived studio creation admittedly, but that's what reverb and other tricks are for and it's a pity that not more producers use them. Sheppard's sax may be a little larger than life, but it has superb timbre and comes right into the room on the opening track.

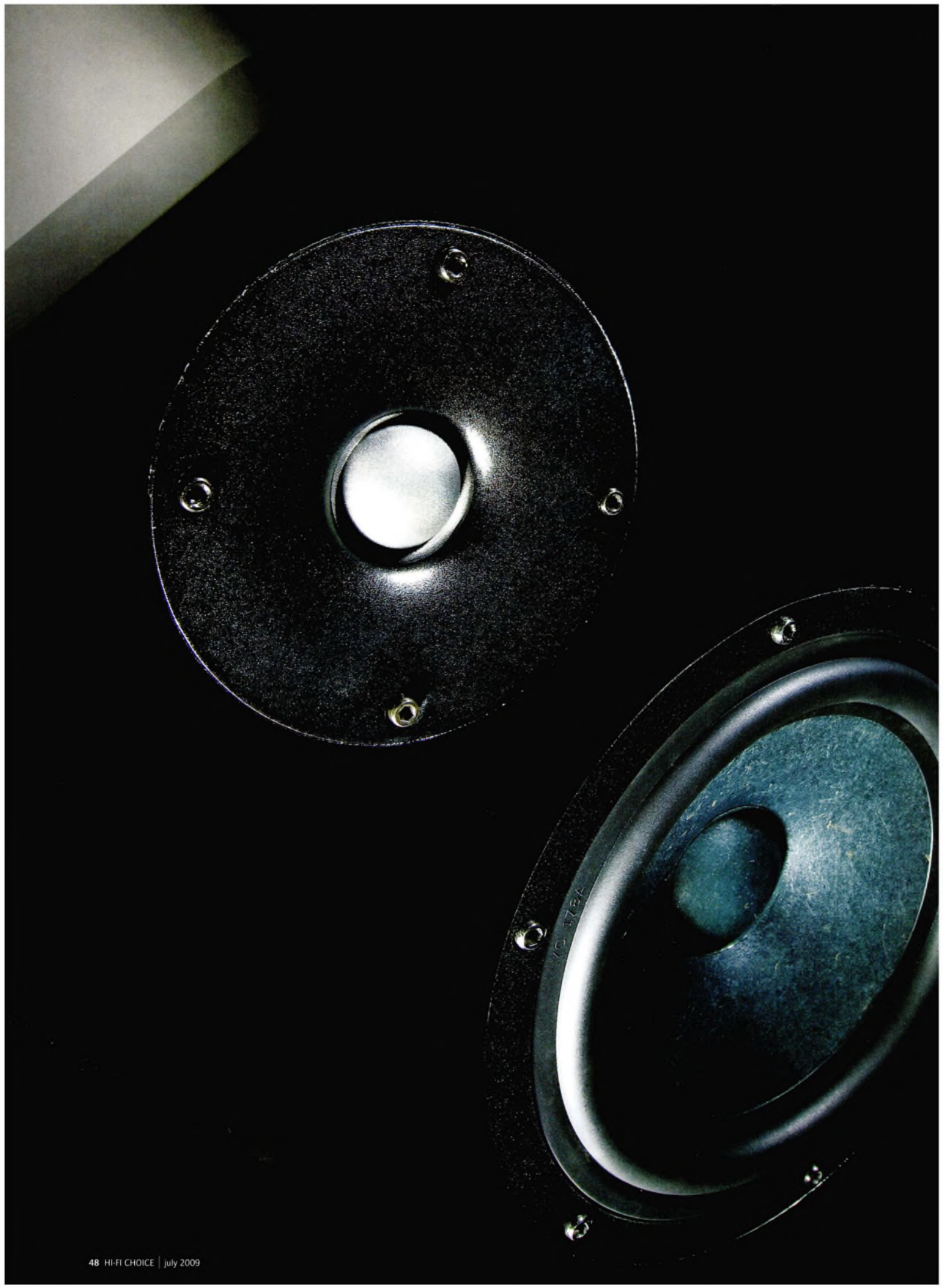
On the album *Sensuous*, Japanese artist Cornelius goes even further down the road of producing acoustic space with technology rather than buildings, the results via the Moon being positively widescreen in scale and combined with some of the most chewy bass we've ever heard. All this and good timing, too there's not a lot more you can ask of a CD

player at almost any price.

The Moon CD3.3 is a subtle rather than demonstrative player and those who are looking for excitement would be better off with a Bryston or Cairn at around the same price. Those of a sophisticated bent will, however, find a lot to appreciate about this refined, yet timely and tonally rich player and we'd be fools not to recommend it. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Nicely built and usefully equipped with a digital input and large, clear display this is a revealing and entertaining player.
FEATURES ★★★★★	CON Some will crave more character from their electronics perhaps, while others will curse the placement of the transport buttons.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION This is another revealing and refined player from Moon, one which warrants inclusion on anyone's must-hear shortlist, if resolution of timbre and timing are considered important. We think they are and can wholeheartedly commend the CD3.3.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/594609	



Devil may care

Smart two-way floorstander from Europe's largest loudspeaker e-tailer

PRODUCT Teufel Ultima 7

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £988 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 25.3x103x33cm

● Weight: 21kg ● Drivers: 28mm soft dome tweeter, 200mm bass/mid driver ● Impedance: 4 ohms

● Separate single- and bi-wire terminal pairs

● High-gloss black finish

CONTACT ☎ +4930 30 09 30 39 🌐 www.teufel.eu

Punching 'teufel' into my computer's German translation widget produced quite a surprise, as the English translation came out as 'devil'! Quite why a loudspeaker company should associate itself with the Dark Side remains obscure, but Berlin-based Teufel has been around for thirty years, so its somewhat unorthodox business model clearly works.

Teufel began life in 1979, producing loudspeaker kits for the German DIY market, moving on into fully assembled systems a decade later and then in the early 1990s abandoned regular retail distribution in favour of mail order sales, apparently so it could improve price competitiveness. Assisted by the growth of the internet and the breaking down of commercial barriers across the EC, that's very much the approach that Teufel is taking here in the UK.

However, a look at the website indicates that home cinema packages are definitely a priority over stereo speaker pairs, but the company's large model portfolio does also cover every known audio sector.

This £988 per pair Ultima 7 (offered with a 10 per cent discount as we went to press) sits close to the top of the handful of stereo packages on offer. Described as a 'high-end design', this simple two-way, port-loaded floorstander is more conventional than most of its range-mates, though it does use a 200mm bass/mid driver with 150mm flared paper cone that's significantly larger than today's norm. The tweeter's 29mm fabric dome is also bigger than average.

Clad entirely in a high-gloss black finish, it looks rather monolithic, but that's probably the intention. It's a pity, though, that no additional plinth is supplied to extend the stability

footprint and improve the appearance. Spikes are supplied, but these were more decorative than functional (albeit invisible in use), and lacked any lock-nut provision.

Since this is a two-way, finding a row of six

However, the weakness here is the lack of dynamic expression, a factor that is difficult to explain and rather undermines the speaker's impressive behaviour in other respects. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

“The delightfully neutral tonal balance is the Ultima 7’s stand-out feature and is a worthwhile achievement by any standards”

terminal socket/binders along the bottom rear edge, just below the slot-shaped port, was puzzling. The manual explains that the inside pair are used for single wiring with the outer two pairs linked; for bi-wiring the outer pairs are separated and used, and the inner pair ignored. We questioned why you'd bother with the inside pair at all?

SOUND QUALITY

Some of the measurements were a little surprising. While the bass extension is exceptional (+2dB at 20Hz under far-field in-room conditions), the midrange sensitivity is a very modest 87dB, despite a main driver with a good size magnet and a lightweight 150mm paper cone, as well as an impedance that falls to six ohms or below on three occasions.

The load doesn't look unduly demanding in terms of amplifier current supply, but the sharp dip to around 4.5 ohms at 900Hz is unusual and a little worrying. The ports are tuned to a low 28Hz, while the pair match was very good.

Measured under far-field in-room conditions, with the speakers well clear of walls, the sub-60Hz output is decidedly strong – around 6dB above the broad midrange datum – thanks presumably to the generosity of the port output. Above 60Hz the frequency balance is smooth and very well ordered indeed, holding within an impressive +/-3dB up to 12kHz.

The delightfully neutral tonal balance is the Ultima 7's stand-out feature and a worthwhile achievement by any standards. Furthermore, the measured bass excess didn't seem to be a handicap; rather it helps the speaker deliver a fine impression of weight and scale.



VERDICT

SOUND

★★★★☆

PRO

Unusually neutral and even overall tonal balance, alongside plenty of low bass output. Attractive deep black gloss finish with nicely softened edges.

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

CON

Seems a little pricey, especially considering the direct sale policy. Weak dynamic grip dilutes the excitement and involvement.

VALUE

★★★★☆

CONCLUSION

Fine overall neutrality with plenty of low bass output makes this attractively finished speaker difficult to criticise, but the sound lacks dynamic grip and excitement. Floor coupling could be improved and connection arrangements are confusing.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

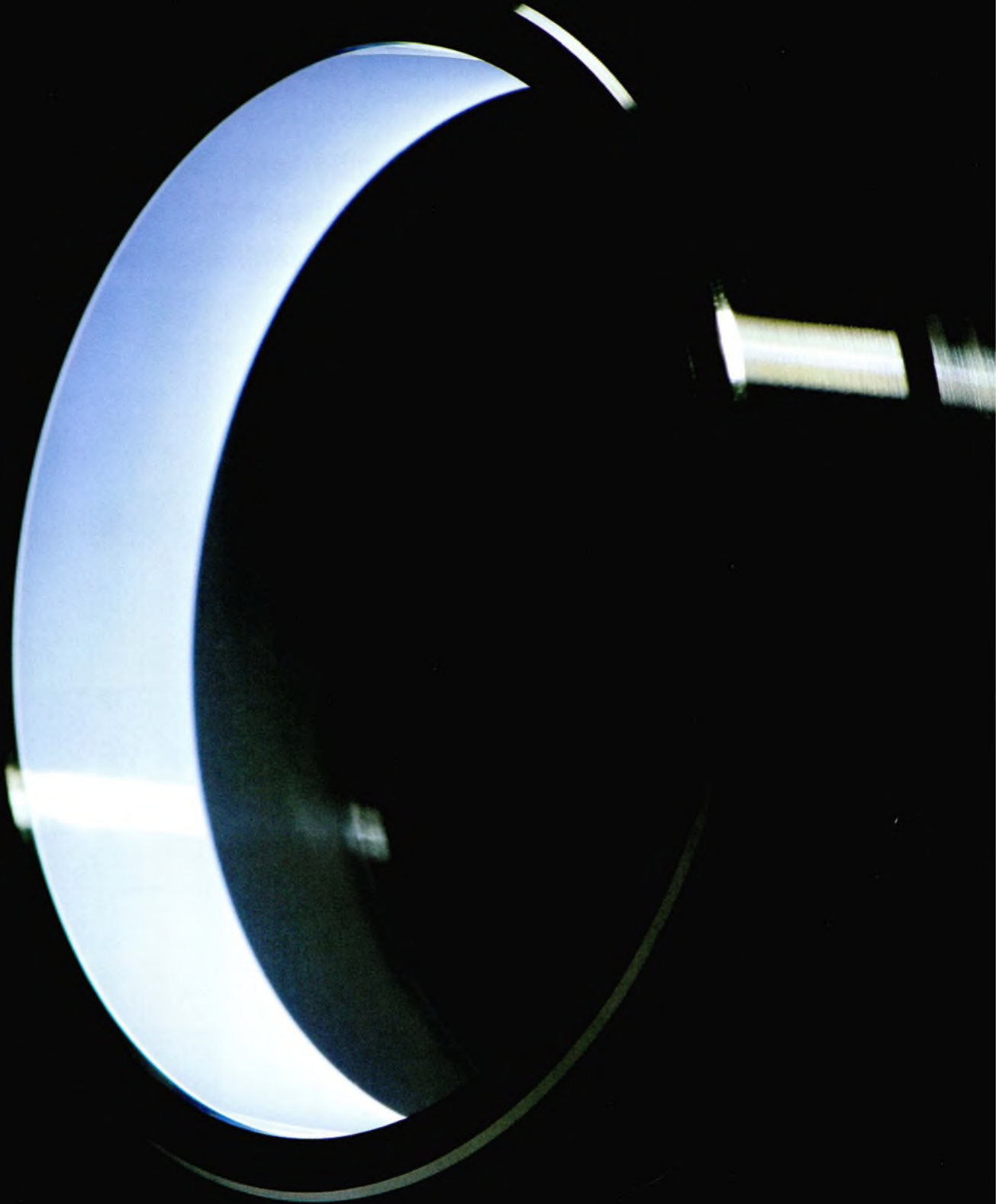
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HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Volume



Triumphant

Harman Kardon has stepped-up with a highly desirable source and amp

PRODUCT Harman Kardon HD 990 and HK 990

TYPE CD player and integrated amplifier

PRICE £550 (CD player); £1,000 (amplifier)

KEY FEATURES (HD 990) Size (WxHxD): 44x6.5x33cm
 ○ Weight: 4kg ○ Digital outputs: 1x electrical, 1x optical, HRS-link ○ Analogue outputs: 1x phono, 1x XLR (balanced) ○ Digital inputs: 1x electrical, 1x optical
 ○ Compatibility: CD-R, MP3-encoded CD, CD-Text (HK 990) Size (WxHxD): 44x16x44.5cm ○ Weight: 24kg ○ Power rating: 150 watts per channel (8 ohms)
 ○ Digital inputs: 2x electrical, 2x optical, HRS-link ○ Digital outputs: 1x electrical, 1x optical ○ Inputs: phono (MC/MM), XLR (balanced) ○ Outputs: Loudspeaker (two switchable), pre out, subwoofer (right and left), 2x record out, 1x headphones

CONTACT ☎ 01707 278100 🌐 www.harmankardon.com

It has been a good few years since Harman Kardon had a 'wow' moment in the audio world. Its efforts have been concentrated in the AV arena for far too long now, but, it seems, high-quality audio has never been out of the firm's mind. The new HD 990 player and HK 990 amp are products with a difference. Actually the CD player isn't quite so unusual, though it does have a few less common features that we'll come to in a minute. The amplifier, though, turns out to be a thoroughly different colour horse. Yes, you put a little signal in one hole and it comes out of another much bigger, but what goes on between the two is – or can be if one chooses – a lot more complex than pure amplification.

Harman Kardon has a well-established presence in home AV, where things are done a bit differently. In such circles, it's quite normal to have a lot more stuff going on in an amp than mere amplification. Features like video

source switching are never going to be much use on a two-channel audio amplifier like this, but digital inputs and digital signal processing can do a lot of useful things, including room response measurement and correction and this

dictated by a combination of its high power rating (150 watts into 8 ohms, though we had no trouble extracting 200 watts from it in our tests), a high standing current which causes the first few watts of output to be delivered in

“The enormous size of the amplifier is dictated by a combination of its high power rating – 150 watts into 8 ohms”

is where the HK 990 comes into its own.

HK has been rather clever with all this. Realising that not all users will want all this processing in the signal path all the time, the HK 990 has been provided with sophisticated routing options for each input, so that some or all of them can be directed through an all-analogue path from start to finish. Since basic switching functions are carried out by relays, as in many current amps, this means that the signal path is not necessarily more complicated than in much more basic amplifiers.

If you choose, though, you can send each input (or just some of them) via a digital chain that first samples analogue inputs at 96kHz and then applies room correction and/or digital tone controls, before converting back to analogue and amplifying to loudspeaker levels. Basic analogue functions are kept simple, with little more in the path than relays and minimal buffering, while digital stuff is handled by high-power DSP chips on a dedicated circuit board. The enormous size of the amplifier is

Class A (and causes power consumption to be a high 180 watts at idle), dual mono operation of the power amplification channels right down to separate mains transformers and the simple need for a lot of space at the back to accommodate analogue and digital input and output sockets. The front panel design is quite crafty in that it looks a bit like a preamp resting on top of a power amp, but at the end of the day this is a very big chassis.

Another area where HK shows its involvement with AV is in the provision of subwoofer outputs. One or two subwoofers can be catered for and the automatic room/speaker correction process, the rather cringe-makingly named 'EzSet/EQ', includes them in its setup process, which should aid subwoofer integration considerably. With or without subwoofers, the process is much the same: one plugs the supplied microphone into the relevant socket and follows the printed instructions and hints on the display, taking measurements at the listening position and near each speaker. The unit then computes the EQ requirements to achieve a flat overall response and stores the parameters.

In use, one has the very sensible option of selecting low frequency correction (subwoofers only), low and mid (up to 1kHz) or low, mid and high frequencies, the highs being notoriously difficult to correct sensibly. It's all fascinating stuff and certainly a lot cheaper and more flexible than early implementations of such schemes – 15 years ago, the Marantz Audio Computer cost £10,000!

The HD 990 has two features to add to the usual CD player set: digital inputs (to use ▶



Q&A

Hi-Fi Choice spoke with Harman Kardon's Brand Manager about the new HD 990 and HK 990



HFC: We haven't heard much from

Harman Kardon in recent years – what's been going on?

PR: While we have continued with a range of budget-based two-channel products, Harman Kardon has been very busy in the home cinema product area. Having got these products well established, we then returned to our heritage (over 50 years of audio product history) and decided that we now needed resume our position of strength in the dedicated two-channel market.

The HK 990 would clearly be at home in two-channel AV systems. Is that its destination or is dedicated audio more the target?

Definitely it's the latter. The Harman Kardon HK 990 is first and foremost a high-end audio masterpiece. This amplifier has the ability to drive almost any loudspeaker on the market and combined with its advanced processors will make partnering it to any product very simple indeed. However, if you do want to add an AV processor then the HK 990 would be a very formidable two-channel AV amp.

Does the EzSet/ EQ procedure adjust phase response or just magnitude?

Harman Kardon's EzSet/EQ technology does indeed discreetly adjust both the phase response and magnitude to make this unique amplifier sound excellent in every possible environment.

How does RSL IV differ from regular digital filtering?

It differs from regular digital filtering by using a strong and high-quality interpolation filter prior to the traditional digital filtering. This allows for a very relaxed digital filtering process, with less signal ringing and, as a direct consequence, very low digital jitter.

Does Harman Kardon see room correction as an increasingly important feature in forthcoming audio products?

Of course, we know how well our products can perform in our test environments. Our aim is to have our customers receive the same level of performance at home. However, the one variable we cannot control is the listening environment of our customers and its impact on the overall audio performance. Offering an easy to use, automatic room correction system is a great help in getting the two performance levels to match.



its high-grade converter as an upgrade DAC) and a 'High Resolution Synchronisation' (HRS) link socket which connects to a similar one on the HK 990. This is a good idea that's been used before, sending a clock from converter to transport, so that jitter is no longer a critical issue in the digital interface. Both the HD and the HK 990 feature HK's own digital filtering implementation 'RLS IV', and both have a balanced analogue connection alongside regular phono sockets, giving a choice of five ways to connect the two: unbalanced or balanced analogue, optical or electrical S/PDIF and HRS. No such complications apply to the phono, which handles both types of cartridge.

SOUND QUALITY

With so many options on offer it seemed sane to start on familiar territory with the HD 990 connected via analogue leads to the HK 990, which was set to bypass everything possible. Under these circumstances we were first pleased, then increasingly impressed. Pleased, that is, that the sound obviously met basic criteria for quality, with decent bass and treble extension, neutral midrange, lack of obvious

noise etc. Impressed, because as we sat through various more or less familiar tracks from a variety of discs we realised that this duo is actually very capable and very musical.

Those two things don't always go hand in hand. We've all heard products that seem to tick all the hi-fi boxes but still don't quite convince musically. In this case, though, everything comes together in a very happy manner to give performance that has scale, presence, imaging, detail – but above all, credibility and involvement. You don't have to listen hard to this kit, the sound draws you in and gets into the brain with minimal listener input. And it does this, as far as we could discover, with pretty much any style of music one could name, everything from thrash to classical to folk-rock to Jake Thackray.

If there's a limitation, it's in dynamics which – perhaps a little perversely, given the power on tap – seem a little tame at times. Of course the amp will play loud, very loud indeed if one wants, but just occasionally we found ourselves wondering whether the difference between loud and quiet sections of a track were quite as wide as we'd heard on past occasions.



Taking things in small stages, we tried the various alternative CD-amp connection options. Quite frankly, we were struggling to hear differences. The balanced analogue connection seemed a shade clearer than unbalanced, with perhaps slightly deeper stereo images, but we wouldn't advise anyone to fret over it. All three digital connections seemed broadly similar to the analogue ones, which should be a big surprise since, as far as we can see, all of them work properly and the D-A conversion in amp and CD player is carried out the same way. We did run some lab tests, which simply showed that HRS works fine, but doesn't offer much if any upgrade over S/PDIF because that works fine too, with next to no detectable jitter.

Then the fun started. Having gone through the room correction setup process, which took all of five minutes including unpacking and connecting up the microphone, we cued up some familiar recordings and had a long session of comparing the settings. Since for most of this review we weren't using a subwoofer (a brief session in a system with a single one was quite impressive), we had effectively two options, mid-frequency correction only, or mid and high. The results in a way say as much about how recordings are made as about room correction in itself.

By far the most convincing results came with recordings made by this review's author, recordings of small classical ensembles in



“If there’s a limitation, it’s in dynamics which – perhaps a little perversely, given the power on tap – seems a little tame at times.”

HRS-LINK

As mentioned, HRS-Link is a bidirectional interface that carries a clock from the HK 990 to the HD 990 and digital audio data the other way. Doing this relieves the HD 990 of any responsibility for providing a low-jitter data stream and also makes the cable itself far less critical. In normal digital data transfer, the clock must be extracted from the data and if the data is jittery this is hard to do with precision. However, when the clock is sent from converter to transport it means the converter knows exactly how much data to expect. Any small amount of jitter that it detects at the input stage can be easily removed by buffering the data and clocking it out a few nanoseconds later under control of a high-quality master clock, which also controls the precise moment of data conversion. It's a simple and highly effective technique. However, modern chips for receiving and reclocking normal digital-audio data streams work very well and reduce jitter to near-immeasurable levels, which is doubtless why we found no practical advantage from HRS.

venues with a decent natural acoustic. Of course, a major factor in this case was that the original sound was still fresh in the memory, but in addition there's a fundamental difference from studio productions in that the latter have no absolute reference – they are mixed over loudspeakers to sound generally plausible, but are paintings rather than photographs. If you put a single high-quality microphone in a reverberant space, however, you are capturing sound in a way that can theoretically be replayed precisely. It's no exaggeration to say that such recordings really came to life with room correction engaged.

Studio productions can sound impressive via room correction, but the difference is much less night and day and is not always an improvement. No surprise: the 'reference' included speakers and a listening room which may have been somewhat similar to ours or yours.

But there's a happy conclusion to draw. At the prices being asked, this is a very good CD player and a mighty fine amp, even without the extra features. Having those features may make things even better for you – if not, just

ignore! We had to wait a while to get these new products: it was worth it. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT - HD 990	
SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION A highly detailed player with excellent extension at both extremes and impressive resolution between. Well featured and pleasant to use.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/594818	

VERDICT - HK 990	
SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION The key point about this product is that it is a very good amp. The successful digital signal processing, extra inputs and high power are icing on a tasty cake.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/594820	

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



MISSION

Shine on

Mission's 79 series is home to this tall, dark and handsome floorstander

PRODUCT Mission 796

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £1,299.95 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 206x99.8x31.8cm
 ◉ Weight: 10kg ◉ Drivers: 25mm dome tweeter, 150mm bass/mid, 200mm bass unit ◉ Power handling: 50–200 watts ◉ Sensitivity: 90dB ◉ Impedance: 8 ohms nominal (4 ohms minimum) ◉ Frequency response 38Hz – 20kHz (+/-3dB) ◉ Finishes: Black piano gloss, white, rosewood

CONTACT ☎ 01480 447700 🌐 www.mission.co.uk

The 796 has all the hallmarks of a Mission: the sleek, narrow-fronted enclosure, the smooth, gentle curves, even the inverted tweeter mid/bass unit, which has long been Missions' preference and enables the shorter enclosure. Mission may be a closed book to some, however – there has been a dearth of new models since the takeover by the Chinese-controlled IAG group some years ago. But long before that Mission was a celebrated name (remember the 770?) and IAG took its time before it launched the new 79 series, which is its most upmarket available apart from the Pilastro.

The 796 is a senior sibling of the 760, which was reviewed in *HFC* 312. They both feature similar technology. They use the same 25mm tweeter, for example, a soft dome unit

“This is a sophisticated design that works well with a wide variety of music types, more so for medium and small-scale music.”

in a cast aluminium chassis with a rare earth magnet and a stiff, but light impregnated textile dome. The 200mm bass driver cone is made from polymer-reinforced aramid fibre – a derivative of Nomex, which is extremely light and well damped. This lightness translates into the ability to respond quickly to electrical signals.

There is a third driver, too a side-firing midbass/midrange unit. It's your choice whether they face inwards or outwards, but in most rooms, facing inwards should give a more accurate and consistent midbass, though

in narrow rooms the alternative outwards-facing layout will usually give a fuller balance.

The enclosure is the most impressive part of the package. Apart from the obvious aesthetic virtues, the curved sides and top panel make for a usefully asymmetrical internal shape to discourage resonances. The structure also uses three densities of particle board, including multi-layer ply for the main walls, again as a resonance control measure.

SOUND QUALITY

The balance of the 796 is not completely neutral, to some extent echoing the results that reviewer Paul Messenger found with the much smaller 790. The upper midband prominence of that speaker is less obvious here and there is much less of a 'shouty' balance, which we were able to establish thanks to a pair of 790s that were available for a side-by-side comparison. But if it is not obviously coloured, the 796 is still perceptibly lean in balance and the overall effect is not as muscular as some.

Nevertheless, despite the marginal loss of scale and authority, the 796 is a thoroughly enjoyable loudspeaker. With an appropriate orientation, that is inwards- or outwards-facing side-firing drive units according to the shape

and consistent imagery. The only point we would take issue with is sensitivity, which is lower than the 90dB specification suggests.

The 796 is unusually well turned out, too. Apart from the enclosures, which are coated in seven layers of lacquer and rubbed down after each application, the speaker also boasts some fine detailing in the design of the plinth. Add the smooth, fluid shape, and you have an unusually elegant solution to getting good sound in the home. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Clean, open and detailed, this smooth, relaxed loudspeaker does exactly what it says on the tin.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★	CON The high sensitivity rating is on the optimistic side, and there's only moderate power handling: it complains if pushed too hard. Dynamically, it is not as forceful as some.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION The hallmark of this speaker's design is that it's relaxed, easy on the ear and rather sophisticated. All-in-all, the 796 has a moderately wide bandwidth, though it is not an especially muscular performer.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/594834	

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> AUDIO EMOTION
EXCLUSIVE

"By the highest standards, the 2905's get everything right to a degree that had me in awe."

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Sam Tellig, Stereophile Magazine

"I have to say something I never thought I'd live to utter: I have now found a panel that will allow me to 'let go' of the Apogee Scintilla... I have to say that this is the finest speaker on the planet."

Ken Kessler, HiFi News

QUAD

the closest approach to the original sound.

Black Rhodium Polar Illusion

TYPE Interconnect

PRICE £250 (1m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 01332 342233 # www.blackrhodium.co.uk

Black Rhodium has embraced the Deep Cryogenic Treatment of cables wholeheartedly and the Polar Cables products all feature it. The basic idea is to cool the conductor materials to very low temperatures – Black Rhodium quotes -196 celsius – so as to improve the crystalline structure of the metal. This is not wishful thinking: super-cooling is an established method in various industries which has been shown to increase wear resistance in various


metals. What is still somewhat open to question is exactly what it does to the electrical characteristics of conductors, as measurements to date have been inconclusive, though there's plenty of anecdotal evidence for its effectiveness.

This cable is a simple unshielded twisted pair, each conductor being solid silver-plated copper with PTFE insulation. The channels are lightly twisted together: one might think this would give terrible crosstalk but we tested it

and the effect is negligible. Connectors are Eichmann Bullet Plugs.

We've found a few Black Rhodium cables in the past to be quite fond of bass. This one certainly has no fear of low frequencies but, in fact, we were most impressed with the treble, which is admirably clear and crisp. With delicate percussion and harmonic-rich sounds like violin, there is a beautiful airiness to the sound which at the same time is very clearly connected to the midrange and bass. As a result, detail positively shines and it's a real pleasure to hear the inner workings of familiar recordings. Imaging is good laterally and has excellent depth, while tonality is very neutral. **HFC**



VERDICT	
A good all-rounder, with an even-handed approach that includes clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine definition in the upper octaves.	HI-FI CHOICE ★★★★★

QED Signature Audio S

TYPE Interconnect

PRICE £190 (1m pair)


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

This is a new model from QED, one of the UK's cable pioneers whose range now covers practically every imaginable home entertainment application. QED has clearly not forgotten its roots in specialist hi-fi, though, and this cable shows every sign of attention to audio detail. Quite a bulky design, some 8mm in diameter, it features multiple conductors internally, six to be precise, in a 'quasi-balanced' connection – current is carried by the cores, while the

screen is normally connected at one end only, the nearest to true balanced operation that can be managed with the intrinsically unbalanced phono (RCA) plug connection. Silver-plated copper is used, with a dual-layer screen that's particularly dense and the plugs are very high-quality, rhodium-plated types with split centre pin for good grip. Multiple cores give the cable high, but not problematic, capacitance and improve hum immunity.

We found this cable to have a very slightly 'dark' balance, just perceptibly favouring the upper bass, which, however, did nothing to conceal a lively and informative treble. Deep bass is quite lovely, with great impact but no shortage of control where needed and, as a result, excellent tunefulness. We have slight concerns about the imaging, which didn't seem to us the most precise of this group, though lateral imaging is broad and stable. We did particularly like the sound of voices via this cable, the tonality giving both male and female voices real impact and very good communication. In general, it's inclined to emphasise the melodious nature of music rather than the rhythmic. **HFC**



VERDICT	
Mellifluous and rounded, this cable could be the perfect foil to slightly bright systems and is a great choice for lovers of human voice.	HI-FI CHOICE ★★★★★

Russ Andrews Crystal Cu

TYPE Interconnect

PRICE £282 (1m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 #www.russandrews.com

Russ Andrews is the long-time distributor of well-known company Kimber Cable, but this RA-branded model is, in a sense, a variation on a Kimber theme, using as it does Kimber conductors. In fact, it is apparently a Kimber Timbre interconnect with the addition of a fourth conductor (Timbre has two on one leg and one on the other) to make it symmetrical.

It is available for rather less money with Kimber Ultraplate phono plugs, but we chose

the upmarket variant with WBT's new minimal-contact plugs fitted. Rather like the better-known Eichmann connectors, these have a plastic body with just a small metal contact strip for the earth connection, the idea being to avoid circulating currents in the plug body. The centre pin is made of copper and is hollow, with a curvy gap cut in each side to give it some springiness and enhance grip in the socket – the body has a screw-down clamp for the same reason.



As with the Black Rhodium cable (opposite), which shares a few design details with this one, we found treble to be very clear and open, with great detail. In this case, though, the rhythm was for us the outstanding quality of the sound. Thanks to a strong, but not over-full bass and a vigorous midrange, there is a real snap to the sound and both percussion and instruments like piano benefit with some real foot-tapping potential. For some reason, this cable seemed a little fussier than the others about what equipment it connects and a valve preamp with relatively high output impedance gave slightly less good results, comparatively sluggish though still detailed and enjoyable. **HFC**

VERDICT

Marked down only for slight compatibility issues, this cable is excellent in the right context and can contribute to superb pace, rhythm and timing.

HI-FI CHOICE



Wireworld Equinox 6

TYPE Interconnect

PRICE £220 (1m pair)

CONTACT ☎ 020 8991 9200 #www.wireworldcable.com

Wireworld's range is large and just keeps growing – and evolving. The '6' range replaces the '5' range (no, really) as of now and at the time of writing is not even fully described on the company's website. As far as we can see the main changes are to the plugs, which are aluminium-bodied and have silver-plated copper connector parts. The centre connector is hollow, while the outer is multi-leafed and the plug is a tight fit in sockets.

Wireworld uses silver-clad OCC copper for the conductors: OCC stands for Ohno Continuous Casting, a technique for producing very long-grain copper which should, in principle, give near-ideal electrical behaviour. Insulation is high-density polythene. We were surprised how high the capacitance of this cable is – still well below the level that might cause perceptible treble roll-off, but suggesting the use of multiple conductors internally.



Sonically, this would appear to be the ideal cable for lovers of strong, deep bass. There's a feeling with this cable that a few extra semitones at the bottom end have been revealed. This is really more to do with low-end confidence than extension as such, but if you like that sort of thing it's great. Even better, if you're more interested in upper frequency regions there's no price to pay in terms of definition higher up, as the bass is achieved without dominating midrange or treble. The very highest treble may not be absolutely as crystalline as with, say, the Black Rhodium, but both it and the midrange are unemphatically detailed. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT

The bass is glorious and upper frequencies hardly any less assured. The treble restriction does little to hide detail, which is clear and unforced.

HI-FI CHOICE



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

INTEGRATEDS

We test six highly desirable amps delivering verdicts you can trust

ON TEST



Arcam A38
£1,450



Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta
£1,450



Cairn Diablo
£950



Moon i.5
£999



Myryad MXi2080
£1,200



Yamaha A-S2000
£1,488

Music storage formats may come and go but hi-fi amplifiers show little sign of abating. In fact, in order to build an amp, you don't even need any special bought-in subassemblies (CD transport etc.) or external command protocols or licences (iPod docks). It all adds up to why the amplifier market is still one of the best-stocked in the hi-fi arena.

It's also very varied in what it has to offer. Take this month's *Ultimate Group Test*, for example. Even though we set out to populate this group following fairly strict criteria we've still ended up with an interesting mix of features, ratings and capabilities. Some idea of how diverse the spread might have been can be drawn from comparing the complex Harman/Kardon HK990 (see page 50) with low-power valve amps. Each of which has few inputs, no remote control and are similarly priced to the six considered here.

At the end of the day, by far the most important feature is the quality of the sound produced as the amp drives a loudspeaker. Though we have no hesitation in admitting that other aspects can be important, everything from the number of inputs to the ease with which the amp can be customised, for instance by adjusting input levels to match each source. As far as quality is concerned, it has been our general experience over recent years that this is, in almost all cases, very good. Only occasionally do we find ourselves questioning whether a manufacturer was really happy with a product before releasing it. But more often than not, we're happy to accept that any reservations we may have are more to do with differences of taste.

And this is exactly where the famous *Hi-Fi Choice* blind listening tests are so useful. Not only do our listeners bring together many years of critical listening experience, they bring differing tastes and reactions. If they're strongly critical of a product we may have to draw gloomy conclusions, but it's more likely that some of them will have many positive things to say, from which we can infer some of the character traits of each product in the hope that this will assist your purchasing decision. This is what we have attempted to do over the following pages, where you will find distilled opinions on six tasty bits of audio electronics. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ▶ ATC SCM20 loudspeaker
- ▶ Bowers & Wilkins 803S loudspeaker
- ▶ Cambridge Audio Azur 640C CD player (as CD transport)
- ▶ Cambridge Audio DacMagic DAC and dCS Elgar DAC
- ▶ Pink Triangle Export turntable/SME309 arm/Highphonic MC-A3 cartridge
- ▶ Wireworld, Kimber and Bespoke Audio cables

MUSIC USED

- ▶ Michael Jackson *Thriller*
- ▶ Miles Davis *Kind of Blue*
- ▶ Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*
- ▶ Bertouch *Trio Sonatas*
- ▶ Arthur Bliss *Conversations*

EARS USED

This month's panel of industry experts who give up their time to come and listen 'blind' to the amplifiers were: David Drewett (Audio Partnership) Abbas Hussain (Wireworld) Andy Moore (Arcam)





LISTENING TESTS

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

LAB TESTS

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

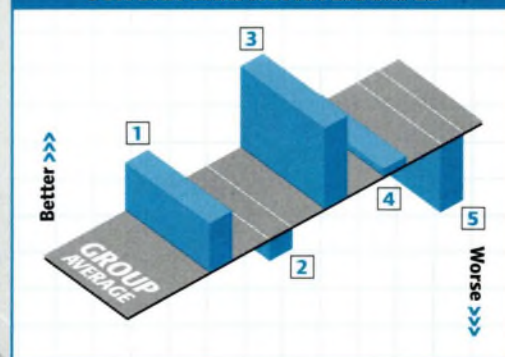
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

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

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





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ARCAM FMJ A38

The A38 is fast becoming a future-classic

Anounced just over a year ago, this amp is the successor to Arcam's well-liked A32 and seemed to us, when we first reviewed it in *HFC 308*, entirely worthy to inherit its ancestor's laurels. Superficially it resembles the earlier model quite closely, with a near-identical front panel. The display is particularly smart and informative and can be customised to show, for instance, volume settings as a 'thermometer' display or in numeric values.

The basic feature set also matches the A32 closely, losing the latter's tone controls but retaining the generous provision of inputs: seven including the two record in/out pairs. Twin switched output terminals and separable preamp and power amp stages are also featured. Phono operation is not standard, but is available as an option, in which case both MM and MC cartridges are accommodated.

In the interests of ensuring thermal stability of the output stage, Arcam uses a pair of output transistors specifically designed for this kind of application, with extra components built in and closely thermally coupled. Similar devices, but of an earlier version, were used in the A32. The electronic volume control and sealed reed relay input switching also appeared in the A32, but Arcam has added more detailed measures against mechanical vibration and electromagnetic interference, in the shape of damping pads and ferrite noise absorbers glued on top of key components. The case is also damped to reduce any effect it might have on the sound by resonating along with the music.

There is an unusually dense array of circuitry inside this amplifier. Some strive for minimalism, but Arcam has gone rather the other way and added plentiful signal buffering to separate inputs, signal paths and functions. Component quality is good throughout.

SOUND QUALITY

This amplifier put on a fine showing for our 'blind' listening panel, who had plenty of complimentary things to say about it.

Interestingly, the impression that comes out of their notes is that it follows the general Arcam 'house sound' in being detailed and unemphatic, plus neutral almost to a fault. Findings like that, from listeners who don't know which amplifier they are listening to, are really the strongest possible support for tests like these and indeed for the whole validity of subjective testing.

It's also only fair to Arcam to mention that there seems to be slightly more impact in the sound than previous blind tests have suggested. Several times in the past we've found Arcam amps to sound great over the long term, but a little short of immediate 'reach out and grab you' factor. Now it seems the company has managed to address this and although one of our listeners still found the sound a little less dynamic than some, the other two were taken with this aspect.

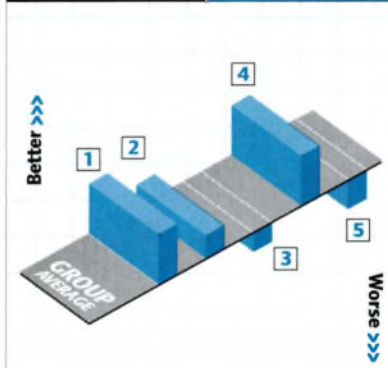
As for detail and related factors, there was little but praise. In any kind of music it's easy to hear which instruments are playing and where they are positioned and this remains true even when the lines cross or overlap. Imaging, indeed, was judged the best of the group, with extension beyond and well behind the loudspeakers, just as it should be.

Listening over longer periods after the main blind session, we were once again struck by the way this amplifier works something close to magic, drawing the listener in as time passes almost without one noticing – the diametric opposite of listener fatigue. Tonal balance is beautifully judged with fine extension at both ends and the bass is particularly good at matching weight with agility. We were not aware of any particular liking for, or aversion to, any style of music. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

The numbers and our bar chart give the gist of a fine technical performance, but the all-important details are even more to Arcam's credit. For instance, while the distortion figure quoted is good, it refers only to midband measurements. High-frequency distortion is hardly any higher in level and at any frequency the distortion quickly vanishes into the noise floor as playback level is reduced. In other words, the important 'first watt' is almost impeccably clean under all conditions, including into awkward loads. Although the noise figure looks less impressive, this is in the context of a high group average and Arcam has banished any kind of mains hum to almost unmeasurable levels. Power output is generous, with a modest amount of dynamic headroom and bandwidth is excellent. Standby power consumption is low – just as well since there's no actual power switch. Two watts translates to about £2 per year.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	100W	128W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.005%	0.004%
Frequency response (20i to 20kHz)	-	±0.1dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	A confident and distinguished all-rounder that combines a finely judged mix of abilities with high power and useful features. Lack of exhibitionism is its only vice, if one can call it that.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★	





£1,450 01623 517000 www.audioanalogue.com

AUDIO ANALOGUE PUCCINI SETTANTA

Exotic Italian with a lavish sound quality

In its promotional literature, Audio Analogue likes to make much of its inspirations in Italian art, though it's not immediately obvious what this link might be, except to say that this is a nicely conceived and executed piece of industrial design, with well-finished aluminium front, top and sides.

The basic specification is nothing unusual, with a 70-watt rating and five line inputs, plus a subwoofer (line-level) output. There's also a phono input capable of dealing with both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges

Selection between inputs is, as is usual these days, electronic and the volume control is also electronically switched. We have some slight reservations about the way this has been implemented, for two reasons. First, the rotary control is a 'jog' function – twist one way and volume starts ramping up, the other way and it heads down. The trouble with this is that it's largely a matter of luck whether one gets one step or two on a quick flick of the control. Second, the volume steps are rather bizarrely arranged. Although they are a mere 0.5dB at the very top of the range (although the volume will never normally be set that high!), over most of the typical listening range they are 1.5dB, which is quite large, and given that double-stepping often occurs it is, in practice, quite hard to adjust volume in less than 3dB increments.

Internal construction is very neat, with a mixture of through-hole and surface-mount components. The mains transformer is large and has separate windings for each channel, making the amp very nearly dual-mono, and component quality is good throughout.

SOUND QUALITY

There's more than one approach to designing good-quality hi-fi. Unconditional neutrality is obviously one way, but a little character is not necessarily so bad and some listeners certainly prefer that if it's done right. It seems to us that Audio Analogue has unashamedly gone down

the 'character' route with the Puccini Settanta.

As a result, some of our listeners' notes seem a little contradictory at times, but a pattern does emerge. While one complains of a lack of bass extension and weight, another praises bass control; then, in a later track, opinions vary wildly over how dynamic the sound is. All this, however, comes down to how each individual reacts to the subtle departures from neutrality that make up the Puccini personality. For a start, bass control is not quite the same thing as extension and weight. A little abandon in the lowest octaves can come across as greater extension and 'control' is a bit of a loaded term – one listener's control is another's dryness.

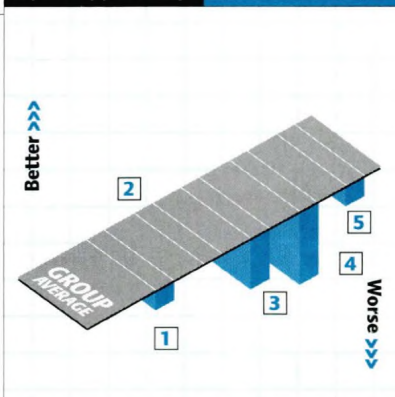
As for dynamics, it seems that in this case the sound has more of this in some frequency ranges than others. The upper midrange is particularly lively and, as a result, vocals seem dynamic, but lower frequencies are perhaps a little less so. In the treble there is also good dynamic swing, but what's most noticeable here is an unusual level of detail. One listener commented that this amp gave the best rendition of wire brushes on a drum-skin.

On the other hand, the treble does sometimes seem a little dry. One of our favourite test tracks features quite a lot of subtle percussion, fading naturally into silence, and we felt here that the sound died a little quicker than we're used to. Overall, then, this amp seems likely to give most pleasure to those who value clear, precise sound above all. It will also please LP lovers, by the way – the phono stage is well above average with particularly good detail and clarity. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

There's plenty in the Puccini's measured results to support our subjective findings of character. Above all, the distortion spectrum is unusually busy, with not just the usual handful of low-order harmonics but quite a few higher ones too. As the basic figure shows, the level of distortion is unusually high for a solid-state amp these days and this level remains largely unchanged over a wide range of output level. Even at less than 1W output, distortion is still around 0.15% relative to the fundamental, though it does disappear once levels drop to 0.1W or so. There is, however, very little rise in distortion level with frequency. As for the rest, the numbers seem satisfactory. Hum from the transformer is low, though there is a little hum modulation at high output levels, but noise is fine. Output impedance and response flatness are par for the course: RIAA response of the phono stage is almost perfect and phono noise is low.

HOW IT COMPARES



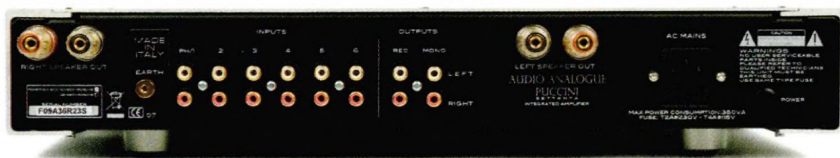
- 1] Dynamic Power >> -10%
- 2] Frequency response >> 0%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -30%
- 4] Distortion >> -50%
- 5] Output impedance >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	70W	72W
Distortion (1kHz /8 ohms)	0.07%	0.25%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	±0.2dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	This amp seems to be designed to have a particular sound character. It is detailed and lively, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension and isn't always the most melodious.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★





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CAIRN DIABLO

Good-looking French amp delivers on detail

It may not have the highest profile in the UK, but Cairn is a well-established French company, going back to 1994. Its product range, never less than smart and in some cases distinctly futuristic, currently includes CD players and various amplifiers – there was once a loudspeaker, too. This model, part of the ‘Classic’ series, certainly has a classic specification at 70 watts, with five line inputs (but no phono option), tape, preamp and subwoofer outputs and, of course, remote control.

The most striking feature is surely the lone rotary knob, which is nicely profiled and surrounded by an unusual amount of legending. It transpires that Cairn has made this lone control operate both volume and source selection: rotate it to adjust volume, push briefly to cycle through sources, push and hold for a second to select tape monitor. This may sound fussy, but it’s no more trouble than more conventional arrangements and one very quickly gets used to it. What can be a little tedious is volume adjustment: the Diablo offers nice small steps from its electronic volume control, but at only 20 steps per revolution of the dial, it takes a good spin to make more than a minor adjustment. Balance control and mute are available only from the remote.

Cairn has built this amplifier on a classic pattern, with the heatsink dividing the case in half, transformer to the left and circuit board to the right. The latter is on the small size, thanks to the use of almost entirely surface-mounted components, though, of course, the output devices (MOSFETs) are ‘leggy’ components, as are the various supply smoothing capacitors. Inputs are switched by relays and the volume control has good headroom, so high-output sources should be no problem.

SOUND QUALITY

Our listeners had reservations about this amplifier but still found some areas to praise. Its particular strength seems to be treble detail,

which is very good under all conditions and helps make the most of bright melody instruments and also orchestral violins. Percussion within an orchestra was sharply delineated, but the rather more present percussion on pop and jazz tracks seemed a little less clear.

On the debit side, the comments centred on a degree of congestion that varied, but never quite vanished, according to the music playing. This was most evident in vocal selections, where the voice was rather less easy to follow than with the other amps in the group and also showed up in the baroque classical track with its small ensemble of mostly midrange-based instruments.

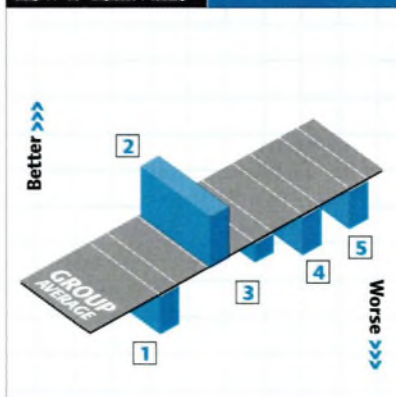
In terms of rhythm and timing, our listeners suggested that this amp is a little sluggish, somehow being late with the beat. That might sound technically impossible, but it would appear that the attack on notes somehow registers on the ear a little behind the sustain of the sound, rather than before it as should normally be the case. As a result, music that depends heavily on rhythm for its effect (rock, most obviously) becomes lack lustre and unenergetic. There’s plenty of weight to the bass and we detected no obvious tonal imbalance between bass and midrange either, but overall the timing just doesn’t quite gel.

Classical music doesn’t usually depend quite so heavily on a regular pulse and as a result the sound is generally more convincing here. There is plenty of dynamic contrast in evidence and the tonal character of each section of Rachmaninov’s *Symphonic Dances* was clear and melodies easy to follow. We also had good results with simple ballad-like material and

LAB REPORT

Generally middling in its abilities, this amp led the field in response flatness, with no measurable roll off at 20kHz and just the smallest hint of attenuation at 20Hz. This is worth mentioning as it pretty much rules out any response anomalies as an explanation for the sluggish bass (and it’s not phase response either – odd phase response with flat frequency response is theoretically possible but doesn’t happen in practice). Distortion is certainly higher than the group average and may help explain the congestion, but it behaves well in terms of variation with frequency and with level. What does strike us as noteworthy is the variation in noise floor with signal level. Ideally, both white noise and distinct tones due to hum etc. will remain constant at any output, but in this case both seem to rise a little with signal. This has a somewhat similar effect to jitter in digital systems and may conceal transients to some extent.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	70W	66W
Distortion (1 kHz / 8 ohms)		0.02%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)		+0.0dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	Detail is good, particularly in the treble and tonal balance is generally OK, but there’s a persistent sluggish quality to the bass which significantly lessens one’s involvement in many types of music.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★☆





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MOON I.5

Hidden gem from the largely high-end manufacturer

Moon is a brand of Canadian manufacturer Simaudio, which has been plying its trade for nearly 30 years. The range is slanted towards the high end, but features a few distinctly affordable products, of which this is one. Don't confuse this model, by the way, with the i-5, which was a considerably more upmarket amp, now replaced by the i-5.3. The 'i-point-five' is clearly considered as a stepping stone to the i-1, which in turn was once the Moon entry point.

One area in which the entry-level status shows up is the relatively low power rating – just 40 watts into the normal 8 ohms notional loudspeaker impedance. Is this a big limitation? Actually, as our Lab Report shows, it's a very conservative rating and, in practice, there's a good few watts more available, but it's worth bearing in mind that the difference between 40 and 80 watts is only 3dB, or three steps on a typical electronic volume control. And while with inefficient loudspeakers, in a large room, every decibel is precious, most current speakers in most UK-size living rooms will play at more than satisfying levels with less than 40 watts on tap.

Because the output is relatively modest, Moon has been able to dispense with the usual heatsink and just dump waste heat into the case, as a few other manufacturers do with similarly rated amps. Cost saved there has been put into other areas, notably the mains transformer which is particularly large. The main circuit board features mostly discrete transistors, with just a couple of op-amps and two more integrated circuits handling input switching. The volume control is a traditional mechanical one, motorised for remote operation. Input provision is decent, with five line-level inputs at the rear and a 3.5mm jack socket at the front: there's no recording output but you do get pre out and a headphone socket, plus single speaker terminals.

SOUND QUALITY

If this amp caused some disagreement between our listeners, it still united them on

the subject of its bass, which is firm, extended, lively and tuneful. It's a good start, but performance in higher registers doesn't always quite match it and there is, at times, a degree of congestion and dryness that detracts somewhat. As a result, reactions once again vary according to musical and sonic taste.

One of our most successful tracks over many group tests has been the opener by Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, which in some ways (not all though!) is a very fine piece of sound engineering. It has loads of bass, well-placed vocals and a very busy texture, all of which provide plenty for a piece of audio electronics to deal with. In this case, the bass sounded highly convincing and suitably energetic, but the vocal line was surprisingly hard to latch on to and follow. The many instrumental lines in the mix were better defined, though, and there was a good sense of dynamics.

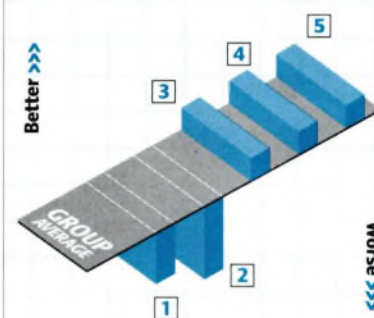
Clearly one's reaction to that will depend on whether one hears bass or vocals first and foremost. Trying a selection of tracks, we found some consistency in the i.5's uncertainty with voices. Funnily enough it seems relatively happy with choral voices, but where there is a solo voice with instrumental accompaniment it is often the latter that dominates.

Returning to the blind session, instrumental-only tracks also divided opinion. There was a suspicion of confusion in *Kind of Blue*, whereas the Rachmaninov shone out in brightly lit colours with good spatial separation of the orchestra. In fact, over an extended listening session, we felt that there is quite a lot about this amp that is understated: it does grow on you and we ended up quite fond of it. Voices do continue to be something of an Achilles Heel, though. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

Power delivery is comfortably in excess of the claimed 40W and there's over 60W available on a realistic basis under dynamic conditions, nearly 90W for very brief peaks. Frequency response of this amp looks poor, but this is a little deceptive: actual response is within 1dB from 10Hz to 18kHz. Even so, that degree of treble loss can be audible and it's possible this, at least, partly explains the sound with human voice, which is very treble-rich. In terms of distortion the amp is well behaved, the spectrum containing mostly third harmonic together with a few higher, odd-order, harmonics at lower levels. Distortion hardly rises with frequency and falls quickly with signal level, so that low outputs are pretty much pristine. The noise floor is low and largely free of hum harmonics, while the output impedance is low. The volume control on our sample had some backlash leading to variable channel imbalance of up to 1dB.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	40W	58W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.03%	0.007%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	±1.1dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	A likeable amp in many ways, with admirable bass and some good treble and imaging too. However, it seems congested with many vocal recordings and is on occasion a little shy dynamically.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★



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MYRYAD MXI2080

Promising amp offers useful upgrade potential

Apart from the delightful little Mi, Myriad's products fall into two visually coherent series, the MX and the Z. This is one of two MX integrated amps, the other being a 150-watt model in a considerably taller chassis. To all intents and purposes, the specification suggests a perfectly typical integrated, with eight line inputs and two recording outputs. There is also a preamp output and, on closer inspection, it transpires that this unit is really a preamp and power amp in a single chassis.

With ever more integrated amps featuring separable sections, the distinction between integrated and pre/power is pretty blurry these days, but Myriad has made the break complete by giving each function its own mains transformer. What's more, there is no internal connection between pre and power sections: instead, one must link them externally using a couple of short jumper wires (supplied). There's a spare output for each preamp channel to facilitate bi-amping.

Indeed, the power amp very nearly qualifies as dual mono, since each channel is a physically separate module fed from its own winding on the large mains transformer. All this makes the amp unusually well qualified for stepwise upgrading. Build quality is very good throughout, using a mix of through-hole and surface-mount components. The preamp board selects inputs via relays and adjusts volume with a good-quality electronic control. Myriad has made the most of the system, offering input trim and balance control – other user options include renaming the inputs. Volume steps are 0.5dB. As in many current amps, the mains switch is at the rear and standby is activated by touching the silver protrusion above the display – disconcerting if one does it by accident!

SOUND QUALITY

This was yet another amp to cause some disagreement among our listening panel. Again, though, there is some logic behind the differing comments. The two listeners who

basically liked it commented on aspects such as the airy quality of the sound, clearly meaning that in a complimentary sense as in a feeling of air around the performers. The third, though, clearly found this very characteristic a curse rather than a blessing and would evidently have preferred a more solid-bodied account of the music.

But if your tastes run more to upper-midrange clarity and sweetness, you may well find much to appreciate here. Even the bass, in fact, which while not at any stage described as particularly full or deep was nevertheless found to have plenty of energy and definition to it. Where this amp really excels, though, is with delicate sounds in the upper octaves, which sing out beautifully and then decay naturally into ambience.

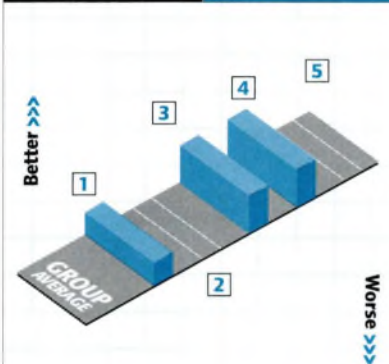
Not surprisingly, it made it a good match with Miles Davis on *Kind of Blue*, where much of the solo trumpet work is quite restrained. It was easy, through the MXI2080, to hear each note starting and then later dying away, while the percussion behind was also precise and almost tangible. Dynamics were good here too, especially 'microdynamics', the little changes from note to note or even within one note that do so much to keep music alive.

At the other extreme of scale, the Rachmaninov showed that this amp can maintain a clear and stable stereo image across a wide range of frequencies. The deepest bass lacked something in comparison with some of the other amps in this group, but not in a way that stands out. The baroque chamber ensemble was precise, too though this proved unexpectedly sensitive to the lack of deep bass, which robbed the harpsichord of some resonance. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

As the comparison bar chart shows – the only one in this group with no negative numbers – this amp measures well. Very well, in fact, with both numbers and more subtle parameters like spectral composition of the distortion looking most impressive. Distortion is low under any reasonable conditions, including into tricky loads, and actually seems to fall very slightly at high frequencies, a very rare occurrence. What distortion there is consists mostly of second and third harmonics, suggesting that basic circuit linearity is good. At output levels below a couple of watts, it's near impossible to measure any distortion at all. Hum and noise are very low and independent of signal level, while the response across the audio band is very flat. The rated power output is comfortably met, with a modest amount of dynamic headroom allowing practical output of about 100W. This is the sort of measurement set we're happy to see.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic Power >> +10%
- 2] Frequency response >>> 0%
- 3] Dynamic range >> +20%
- 4] Distortion >> +20%
- 5] Output impedance >>> 0%


SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	B0W	88W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.02%	0.005%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.2dB	±0.2dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	The sound is rather more assured at the top of the frequency range than the bottom, though bass is still melodious and detailed. Good detail and dynamics will endear it to many.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	





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YAMAHA A-S2000

Retro-looking amp is surprisingly complex

If you are the sort of person who gets excited at the thought of owning the maximum amount of hi-tech gubbins, look no further – you’ve found your holy grail. Seldom have we seen so much electronics attending the ostensibly simple function of amplifying line-level and phono signals to drive loudspeakers. It’s not so much that the amplifying circuits are massively complex, though there is certainly plenty going on there: no, what really impresses us is the way in which Yamaha has implemented a vast array of features in this amplifier.

Take the volume control, for instance. Some amps in this group use electronic attenuation, some a mechanical potentiometer. This one uses both. The volume knob operates a potentiometer, but that is sampled digitally and its position used to control an electronic attenuator, giving the precision and channel matching of an electronic unit with the single-turn easy adjustability of the traditional method. The balance adjuster, of course, acts on the same attenuator. The tone controls, meanwhile, are implemented similarly but are completely bypassed when in their centre position – a relay clicks deep within the unit and the audio signal simply avoids the relevant circuit. Flick the ‘Mute’ switch and the volume rotates until level has been cut back by 20dB: flick again and the original value is restored.

It’s all very impressive stuff. The connections list is good, too with six line inputs (one balanced), MM and MC phono, two switchable speaker outputs and a headphone jack. The power amp is balanced and floating and is supplied by a very large-frame transformer and exceptionally large reservoir capacitors. Despite the vast size, the insides are a bit cramped, but most of the prolific wiring carries control signals rather than audio. Multiple output transistors and large heatsinks bode well for unusually arduous use.

SOUND QUALITY

We would love to be able to report that all the electronics had been implemented to stunning

effect, but sadly this amp does little to dispel the widely-held notion that there is such a thing as too much complexity in audio – even if some of it is bypassed in normal use. Certain aspects of performance are enjoyable, including some particularly extended bass, but there is almost always some cautionary note to be sounded even in such cases. Hence the bass may be extended, but it’s not very precise and often feels rather slow, lagging the rest of the ensemble or mix.

Treble is also extended and in simple music can actually sound distinctly sweet and very attractive, but it hardens up rapidly as textures get dense, resulting in a loss of clarity that’s discouraging when one wants to hear all the fine details in a recording. This affects voices particularly, hardening the sound of vowels and slightly obscuring consonants so that intelligibility is compromised.

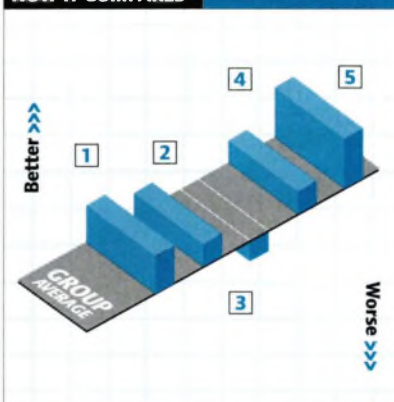
In terms of the programme material chosen, Miles Davis’s trumpet was found harsh and slightly indistinct, while violins lost some of their ‘woody’ character. The bass drum in the Rachmaninov was weighty, but lacked impact. Dynamics seemed generally well portrayed across the different musical styles, but in the absence of truly realistic instrumental timbres there was a lack of organic feeling in the way dynamic shifts occurred.

Perhaps the most successful application for this amp was for background listening, which is clearly absurd for a product at this price, but does make the point that it is happy enough providing a broad-brush, generalised approach to sound. Ironically its phono stage seems rather detailed, as built-in phono stages go, but overall we’d need some convincing that the sound is really up to the mark. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

While measured performance is for the most part perfectly satisfactory, there are a few hints that may go to explain the disappointing subjective results we obtained from this amplifier. Distortion is low and includes an unusually wide spread of harmonics. At the same time, there is a relatively large amount of mains hum in the output. While pure 50Hz hum is pretty harmless, its higher harmonics can become audible, especially in the presence of audio. The level of the hum varies just a little with signal level, though not alarmingly so and there is no serious amount of hum modulation in evidence. In terms of basics, output power is delivered confidently into eight and four ohm loads, from an unusually source impedance and frequency response via line inputs is very flat – less than 0.1dB down at 50kHz. The phono stage (both settings) is just a shade tilted down in the treble, with excellent deep bass extension.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	90W	102W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.02%	0.006%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±0.3dB	±0.1dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	Although the fundamentals are all there, the sound just doesn’t quite add up to a cohesive whole. Congestion, hardness and lack of bass impact, though all slight, conspire to come between music and listener.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★



CONCLUSIONS

Many of these amps can make the heart of a great system

Having suggested at the outset that we would rather comment on characteristics than rate each amp as some kind of 'pass' or 'fail', we nevertheless found some more successful than others at the core task of convincing listeners they are hearing the live event. On this occasion it seems the outstanding success has been the Arcam A38, which above all transcends the electronic means to deliver the musical end. It also happens to have a pretty decent feature set too and the fact that it measures rather well provides comforting

reassurance that our ears weren't deceived. As the current phrase goes, 'what's not to like'?

Still, you may prefer a more immediate and upfront sound. In that case, be sure to have a listen to the Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta. In many ways it's diametrically opposed to the A38 – strongly characterised, with a less neutral balance and considerably more overt detail. It has plenty of snap, though perhaps less weight than some, and its inclusion of a very good phono stage will also be a factor in its favour for many.

With the same overall score as the Audio Analogue, Moon's i5 and Myryad's MX12080 also have their own admirable qualities. The Moon has great bass, the Myryad is more confident in the treble. In fact, the two form quite a complementary pair, a yin and yang if you like, and an amp combining their qualities would be quite something. Actually it probably exists – and if our experience is anything to go by, costs more than the two put together...

Our blind testing regime has not favoured Cairn and Yamaha,

although it looks very much as if both companies have tried hard. The trouble is that neither the Diablo nor the A-S2000 seems able to deliver the degree of involvement that the other four can offer. Each has its definable weakness, the former a rhythmic sluggishness, the latter congestion and lack of detail, which sufficiently obscures the aural view to make listening almost as much a chore as a pleasure. Neither is a bad amplifier, but standards on this test are high and it is reasonable to be demanding. **HFC**

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PMC GB11

£1,330
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HINTS AND TIPS

» Remember to allow some ventilation space. Even amps which idle cool can get quite warm when driving speakers good'n'loud

» Use decent cables, and check them from time to time. Phono and 4mm

plugs appreciate being removed and reinserted now and then (power off!) to scrape away corrosion

» Most amps don't take long to warm up, so power off when you're not listening for an hour or more.

AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Arcam A38	Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta	Cairn Diablo	Moon i5	Myryad MX12080	Yamaha A-S2000
PRICE	£1,450	£1,450	£950	£999	£1,200	£1,488
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Confident and distinguished all-rounder with high power and useful features. It's also extremely capable.	Detailed, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension and isn't always the most melodious.	Treble detail is good, and tonality OK, but there's a sluggish quality to the bass which lessens musical involvement.	Likeable for admirable bass and good treble and imaging. Rather congested on vocals and a little shy dynamically.	More assured at the top of the frequency range than the bottom, though bass is always melodious and detailed.	Fundamentals are all there, but sound doesn't gel: slight but frustrating congestion, hardness and lack of bass impact.
KEY FEATURES						
LINE INPUTS	7	5	5	6	8	6
TAPE OUTPUTS	2	1	1	0	2	1
PHONO INPUT	Optional	MM/MC	No	No	No	MM/MC
SIZE (WXHXD)	43x11x37cm	44.5x8.5x41cm	43x9x24.5cm	43x9x37.5cm	43.5x9.5x36cm	43.5x14x46.5cm
WEIGHT	9.5kg	13.5kg	9kg	8kg	11kg	23kg
BALANCED INPUT	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
CLIP POINT	32V G	24V A	23V A	21.5V A	26.5V A	28.5V A
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	±0.1dB E	±0.2dB E	±0.0dB E	±1.1dB A	±0.2dB E	±0.1dB E
DYNAMIC RANGE	103dB G	101dB G	103dB G	104dB G	105dB E	104dB G
OUTPUT IMPEDANCE	0.14 ohm G	0.13 ohm G	0.16 ohm A	0.1 ohm G	0.11 ohm G	0.06 ohm G
POWER CONSUMPTION	46W/2W	32W/1.5W	15W/15W	11W/10W	28W/2.5W	57W/-

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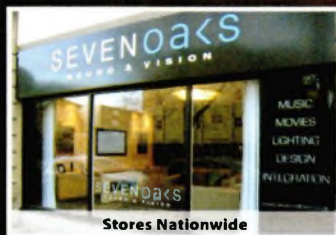
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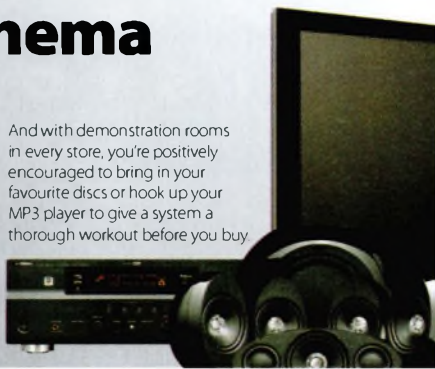
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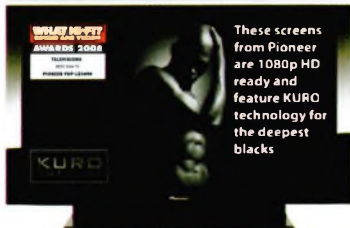
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HI-FI SEPARATES

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The award-winning 'Servo Evolution' CD players - CD6 SE, CD8 SE & CDX t SE



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PAUL MESSENGER

Former Hi-Fi Choice editor Paul is widely regarded as the UK's foremost loudspeaker expert and is on hand to answer your speaker questions.



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. He's also HFC's 'Mr. Tweaker'.



RICHARD BLACK

Richard is a professional musician and recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. If your question is technical, he's your man.



MALCOLM STEWART

Former editor of Hi-Fi Review magazine, Malcolm was one of the best-known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. Still going strong, he only writes for Hi-Fi Choice.



ALVIN GOLD

Alvin has been writing about his obsession for more than 25 years. He has expertise across all product types and despite the photo is 'happy to be of service'.



JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of Hi-Fi Choice and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back as HFC's Operations Editor and loves giving advice.

CHEAP AND NASTY

I have come across a large collection of LPs that I'm keen to play. I have an old Hitachi deck that has been extracted from a separates system, but it is cheap and nasty and could hardly be described as hi-fi. However, rather than chucking it in the skip, I was thinking of replacing the cartridge in the vague hope it could output something resembling a quality sound.

As I don't want to spend too much on this old thing, can you recommend a cartridge under £50? I have found the Ortofon OM 5E which seems to get good reviews, but so far I really have no clue about turntables.

Tartan Rabbit HFC Forum

HFC It seems unlikely that you will be able to enjoy the potential of your record collection with a cheap Hitachi turntable. We would recommend you spend just a little bit more on a complete turntable and cartridge rather than trying to get a result out of something so basic. There are some remarkably capable turntables around at a very reasonable price, the most affordable being the Pro-Ject Genie 2 which sells for around £175. That may be a bit more than the price of a basic cartridge, but what you get is a very capable turntable with a properly aligned cartridge.

Or scour the second-hand options for a Pro-Ject, Rega or Systemdek. Only if that route fails would we tentatively suggest an Audio Technica AT95E for £20, which is more than good enough for the Hitachi.

ON THE SHELF

I'm aiming to sort out my old hi-fi gear later in the year and was wondering which brand(s) of small bookshelf speakers (not stand mounted) would sound good with my amp. I bought an Inca Tech Claymore in the late 1980s and understand that although the exterior is obviously dated, it is and was rated as a quite respectable amp. I'll probably be looking to spend in the region of £200-250 for a pair of speakers, but as I've been out of touch for so long, it's an absolute minefield out there for choice. Music tastes range from rock through to opera.

Rob via email

HFC When you say 'bookshelf speakers' not stand mounted we assume you actually mean to put them on a bookshelf or similar. In which case you need to find a sealed box or a front-ported design with limited bass output to avoid a boomy balance.

As there aren't any sealed box designs available in your price range, we would suggest you audition the Advance Acoustic UM20 which at £200 appears to be very well suited. It is the exception to the above rule as it has a rear-firing port, but being very small it works well close to walls and has a fabulous finish for the price.

CLEANING VINYL

What's the best way to clean vinyl records? I know some suggest investing in one of the commercially available cleaning machines, however, my question relates more to manually cleaning records that have been affected by exposure to dust and other substances. Would warm water with some dish-washing liquid help, or is there some particular chemical solution that will do the trick? Some of my records are in desperate need for a good clean up, so any advice you can impart would be most welcome.

Arthur Kobal via email

HFC You can use warm mildly soapy water to clean vinyl LPs, but this tends to smear and leave a residue. We would recommend the very simple, but effective Knosti Disco antistatic record cleaner, a trough which you fill with cleaning fluid that has brushes in it. You then spin the record manually and put the vinyl in the drying rack. The cleaning fluid is a mix of isopropyl alcohol and distilled water which you could make up yourself if you could find the correct ratio. The Knosti cost £45 last time we saw it, but may be cheaper online.

WARM AND SMOOTH

I know some purists will turn up their noses at my preference, but I would be grateful for any recommendations for a warm, smooth amp to drive my Sendor SSE loudspeakers. I know there's no substitute for listening, but I'd be grateful for tips on where to start. Why a warm smooth amp? I need a full warm sound at low volume levels as my listening room is below my young son's room and so I seldom listen at high levels. My listening room has wooden floors and big windows, I've negotiated corduroy curtains and rugs on the wall and floor, but the room still sounds bright, especially in the



FORM AND FUNCTION

My Soundstyle four-tier rack is getting long in the tooth. Apart from that its a post box-red metal frame with 40mm diameter legs with smoked glass shelves. I think it was an XS100 or something. Anyway the top shelf was never really wide enough for the deck to look comfortable. Hence I need a new one.

Looks aren't as important as the sound (note; suspended record player) but I can't have a pig in the house. A Seismic Sink stand is out of my price range at the moment so any ideas? I need a minimum of four tiers as I want the pre and power amps to be two shelves away from each other.

Ivor Jones via email

HFC We did a round up of equipment supports in the last issue (HFC 320) and our finding there was that the chunky solid wood 'tables'

that make up the Hi-Fi Racks Podium do a fine job. Our review concluded that this £125 per tier system is a keenly priced bit of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great under all sorts of kit. Easy upgrading is a welcome bonus.

If you would prefer a more sophisticated aesthetic, then we like the Custom Design Signature 750 which is 75cm-high and has four tiers for £350. There's an Acoustic version of this with iRAP platforms on each shelf for £600.



SHOULD I SPIKE MY STANDS?

Spikes are often described as offering isolation to the stands and speakers they support but in practice what they do is quite the opposite, they actually couple the thing they support to the surface below much like a nail. They are useful for levelling stands on carpeted floors but if you spike both speakers and equipment supports you create a potential feedback loop, whereby it's easier for energy coming out of the speaker cabinet to get into the equipment support and hence the source and amplifier producing it.

Spikes gained popularity in the eighties because they change the sound. Whether they do so in an entirely positive fashion is a matter of taste, but their effect is to enliven the mid and top and make the bass leaner, which gives the sound a subjectively faster feel. They also seem to have a tuning effect which can create a stronger sense of timing, but this will vary with the floor make up and in general does not increase the resolution of a system. Nonetheless, there are many audiophiles who swear by them. Their popularity is still so great that manufacturers of speakers and stands dare not release products that don't accept them.

It has been asserted that because of their shape spikes operate as rectifiers, transmitting energy in one direction and not the other, an assumption that some manufacturers have built into components as well as stands. Unfortunately it's not the case, mechanical rectifiers are pretty rare things and a lot more complex than a sharpened stud.

At *Hi-Fi Choice* our contributors are split into those that like the spike effect, such as Paul Messenger and Malcolm Steward, and those that prefer support systems that attempt to isolate the equipment being used. Their number includes Richard Black and Jason Kennedy.

There are a number of alternatives available to those wishing to experiment. The easiest one to try is the glide, which is a plastic foot on the end of a threaded stud. These allow easy levelling and don't mark floor surfaces, they are available with the same M6 and M8 threads as spikes.

summer when the curtains are open. I listen to music mostly after a hard day at work, while relaxing with a glass of wine.

My current amp is an Arcam FMJ A22 and the speaker cable is vdH Teatrack. I listen to most music, except hard rock and techno and I'm particularly fond of Jazz. I heard a mate's Unison Research Unico recently (also with Spendor S5Es) and was really impressed with the 3D stereo imaging and timbre of voices, so I suppose that's the sort of thing I'm after.

I borrowed a Cyrus 6 recently and while stereo imaging and detail were very good, it didn't have the Unico's ability with voices. It also sounded a little sterile and brittle for me at low volumes. So, while I like the Arcam's sound, I'm trying to find improved stereo imaging and ability with voices.

I'm considering a Unison Research Unico or Sugden A21 a series 2. Do you have any other suggestions around £1,000? I'm happy to buy second hand too.

JP via email

HFC On reading your query the Sugden A21 came immediately to mind as class A seems the logical way to go. The Unico amps are hybrids with a strong class A bias as well, which is probably why they appeal. We would expect them to be slightly more powerful and better at imaging than the A21, but probably not as warm. The other option you have, of course, would be to go for one of the warmer variants of valve amplifiers. As a rule, contemporary valve amps go out of their way to dispel the myth that the breed sound cosy so such things are not that common, but having said that those that use pentode valves in a push-

pull arrangement have a smoother, fuller sound than any solid state design. We like the Pure Sound A30, a fully class A design that delivers 30 watts a side and should suit the Spendors nicely.

AUDIO STREAMING

Is there anything available that does the work of a Western Digital HD media player but only for audio? Of course, this can still be used for audio also, except that it does not have a digital out that can be hooked into an external DAC for near-audiophile sound.

Harish Kini HFC Forum

HFC The media player you mention is an inexpensive interface for movies stored on a hard drive. It requires a monitor to be operated, but is capable of surprisingly good results. It also has digital optical out so has some hi-fi potential. There's nothing that simple and inexpensive in the audio world to our knowledge, but it probably won't be long before something comes along. An option that's pretty close is the Sonos system, which is usually used in wireless set-ups but gives better results when wired directly to a NAS drive (network attached storage) and a DAC.

The other alternative would be the Brennan JB7 - CD player, amplifier and 40GB server in one. At £300 this offers surprisingly good sound. It also has a line out that would allow that side of things to be improved further.





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Ken Kessler, HFN Jun 09 - Performance 'Black Pearl'



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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 niche 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. Many pundits believe that SACD's future lies with classical recordings, a genre that remains buoyant for the format.

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, and for 2009 DACs are back!

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 44.1kHz 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



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.



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				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELECTRIC OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000											
	Arcam CD17	500	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever.	●	●	●	●				315
	Cairn Tornado	850	The Tornado is a full-on experience that shuns compromise and delivers intensely real sound for its price.	●	●					●	305
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	500	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative.	●	●					●	293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	750	Ultra-civilised sound is not to every taste: rhythm-lovers may find this player frustrating.	●	●					●	315
	Creek Evo	495	A minute treble lift otherwise this is a very capable player that offers fine value.	●	●						285
	Cyrus CD6 SE	900	A winning combination of detail and sheer musical energy with more than a hint of high end to the performance.		●	●					318
	Denon DCD-500AE	160	Cheap, well built and good, if slightly soft-edged sound quality.		●	●				●	295
	Marantz CD6002	280	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw; performance is class-leading in most areas.		●	●	●	●		●	301
	Marantz SA8003	700	Classic Marantz sound in a classy and attractive package. Our favourite sub-£1,000 player.	●	●	●	●				315
	Naim CD5i	875	Its strikingly competent musical performance comfortably exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player.			●					307
	Quad 99CD-S	650	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation; smaller-scale works can lack focus.		●	●				●	291
	Rega Apollo	498	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out: musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer.		●		●				285
	Roksan Kandy K2	750	State-of-the-art technology and precision engineering produces a fine CD performance.		●	●	●		●		315
	Yamaha CD-S2000	999	Sophisticated, this is a beautifully controlled, high-resolution player, although SACD is stereo-only.	●	●	●	●	●			309
ABOVE £1,000											
	Arcam CD37	1,100	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution.	●	●	●	●				318
	Audio Research CD5	4,500	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – natural and refined, yet assertive and very dynamic.		●	●				●	312
	Bryston BCD-1	2,050	Not as open as some but rather more timely than most, it sounds a lot more gripping than it looks.		●	●				●	300
	Cairn Fog 3	1,995	Ergonomically challenged, high energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board.		●	●			●	●	302
	Classe CDP-102	3,000	Rich, dynamic CD/DVD player with a full bottom end, impressive dynamics and a luxurious yet revealing balanced.	■	●	●	●	■		■	286
	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,100	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music.		●	●	●				310
	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
	EMM Labs CDSA	9,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks.	●	●	●	●			●	302
	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
	Leema Antila	2,495	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh. Balanced connection is best.		●	●	●			●	291
	Leema Stream	1,095	The most timely disc player at its price point has tactile imaging and good dynamics, but unusual control system.		●	●					306
	Linn Akurate CD	3,985	This highly engaging multi-format non-video player doesn't have huge transparency, but is musically addictive.	●	●	●	●			●	299
	Marantz SA-11S2	2,700	Superb value for money, this well-balanced player features various filter settings to customise performance.	●	●	●	●			●	304
	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
	Meridian G08	2,250	Advanced digital processing with special apodising filter that gives a very clean sound.		●	●			●	●	312
	Naim HDX	4,500	The HDX hard disk player represents an entirely new paradigm for high-fidelity replay. Who needs CD players?		●	●	●				311
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,250	An exceptionally fine CD player that provides a high-end and musically rewarding performance.		●	●					307
	Shanling CD-11000SE	1,600	Commendably committed player which gets right to the heart of a wide variety of musical styles.		●		●			●	306
	Sony SCD-XA5400ES	1,199	Elegant, refined control system and very strong CD/SACD performance. Sound is bold with high resolution.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	313
	Unison Research CDE	2,350	Valve CD player with interchangeable DACs that can double as a standalone DAC that coozes musically.		●		●			●	318

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 £1,100

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 £9,995

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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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



Dynavector DV-10X5 £250

Although fiddly to mount, this high-output MC cartridge has superb dynamics and equally fine timing, making it well worth the effort of proper fitting.



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 BB EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	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
EC	Continuum Calibum	115,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and proprietary Castellon stand. Amazing sound.	33/45/78			●	●	320
EC	EAR Disc Master	7,695	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high-quality materials to bring state of the art resolution	33/45/78	●	●	opt		276
BB	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
BB	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
EC	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
	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a distinctive sound and a performance that reflects the vinyl you spin on it	33/45			opt	opt	319
	Michell Technodec	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
EC	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design, tested here with Series V/309 hybrid arm	33/45	●	●	●		195
EC	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
	Townshend Rock 7	1,498	Has the ability to pull detail out of a vinyl groove, making it one of the most resolute turntables at any price	33/45			●	✘	320

Our favourite BB EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	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
EC	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and detail resolution to die for		●		265
EC	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		●		253

Our favourite BB EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	A/D GAIN	A/D 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
EC	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP	●				201
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

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

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

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

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

SPECIAL READER OFFER

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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 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 TUNERS

■ BEST BUY ■ EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIGNAL STRENGTH METER	ROTARY TUNING KNOB	SCALE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
■	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
■	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!	FM	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
DAB TUNERS										
■	Arcam FMJ T32	550	A highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. iPod functionality is definitely a bonus	DAB,FM	100	●	●	●	●	319
■	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 ST70C1	250	Midband detailed and precise: treble can be thick but bass is extended, and sound generally energetic	DAB,FM,M	200	●	●	●	●	299
■	NAD C445	300	FM is laid-back despite bright balance, but has good detail. DAB slightly livelier than most	DAB,FM	30	●	●	●	●	299
■	Onkyo T-4555DAB	350	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard in all areas on	DAB,FM	40	●	●	●	●	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)	SCHE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	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

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)
UP TO £1,000								
	Roksan 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
	Vincent SV-236	999	Valve hybrid whose sound is as idiosyncratic as its styling, short on neutrality but high on sparkle	6			100	295
ABOVE £1,000								
EC	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	1,200	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality	7	opt		105	314
	Astin Trew AT2000	1,349	If you prefer the timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, then this is a serious contender	4			65	317
	Copland CTA405	2,498	A musical and involving amplifier, which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards	5			50	305
	Creek Destiny	1,100	A highly assured performer that doesn't superimpose its personality on the music	6			100	286
EC	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
EC	Moon Evolution i-7	4,750	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, very limited features, even by high-end standards	5			150	288
EC	Musical Fidelity A1008	2,999	With DAC, phono stage and built-in valve buffer, this powerhouse amp can really grab hold of a loudspeaker	4			250	295
	Mystère ia11	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 NAIT XS	1,250	Delivers a spellbinding, refined musical performance that sets a new benchmark for all integrated amplifiers	6			60	317
EC	Naim Audio SUPERNAIT	2,400	Serious communicative ability meets convenience in this sophisticated and powerful integrated design	6			80	294
	Primare i30	1,500	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer, and beautifully built too	6			100	267
	Pure Sound A30	1,100	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though	3			30	298
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,299	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor	5	opt		21	296
EC	Unison Res Unico Primo	1,450	Line input can be converted to phono (at extra cost). Sonically, this is an excellent mix of valve and solid state virtues	5			85	317
EC	Unison Research P70	3,495	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power	4			70	302
	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

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £2,000									
	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	2,000	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
EC	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,575	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication, grip and insight for such a modestly priced design			6	opt	50	287
EC	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
ABOVE £2,000									
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	6,100	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled and sounds like a dream			5		120	269
EC	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	13,350	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility. Sounds stunning, too			6	opt	400	293
EC	Cyrus DAC XP	2,200	A knockout DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz			2		266	
	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,300	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings			8	opt	80	276
EC	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,200	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp and slightly coloured power amp, but sound is big and assured			6		125	270
EC	Gamut D3	3,430	Creamy smooth, yet lets you hear all the fine detail that goes to making a tonally rich, dynamically strong sound			5	opt		265
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price					200	247
EC	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers			9	opt	125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it					700	234
EC	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 on-board 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.

ADVERTISEMENT



Music - quality or quantity?

Music Compression – friend or foe?

A remarkable thing has happened within a few short years. The music industry has become what must be one of the very few, alongside perhaps the food industry, to be driven downwards in relation to quality by consumer demand - and the majority of consumers are not even aware of it!

It is normal for an industry to try and improve on what has gone before. High definition TV's are an obvious upgrade from the previous standard. The computer industry constantly strives to provide faster processing speeds and larger memory capacity. However, it is the crossover of the computer industry with the music industry, the linking of the two, where things have started to go wrong. This is not to fault the computer industry, for speed and user convenience are the selling tools of its trade. Nor is the music industry inherently culpable, although it has largely acquiesced while complaining of lost revenues through illegal downloads. It is consumers that have driven quality down through a deepening, but blind, love affair with the MP3 and AAC formats and the ubiquitous iPod.

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Falling Music Sales

I do not believe it is any coincidence that world-wide music sales tumbled in 2007 to their lowest level since 1985 and this is despite an overall far more affluent population than all those years ago. So why put the finger on MP3 & AAC (iTunes default format) and the iPod? It is not that they exist, nor resentment at their undoubted success. It is more the lack of knowledge on the part of consumers in what they are embracing and the hi-fi industry must shoulder its share of the blame. Both of these formats are compressed mediums, with different levels of compression. There is information irretrievably lost and they lack the full dynamic range. In short, they are inferior mediums in comparison to the standard CD format, let alone even higher resolution formats

now available (such as studio quality 24 bit, 96kHz FLAC files). The sad part is that convenience and 'music on the move' has helped to create a demand for these inferior substitutes and, what is even sadder, is that most users are not even aware of what they are missing.

There are still discerning people around who know how exciting and involving music can be, how it can deliver an emotional experience. Twenty years ago there were many hi-fi enthusiasts who enjoyed pursuing quality. It mattered which speaker leads were used, or the quality of the interconnects, or the rigidity provided by speaker stands. These still make a very significant difference but relatively few realise it now. The performing artists, musicians and sound engineers who strive to make the recording quality as high as possible must despair at the current trend.

Quality or Quantity?

When a friend's teenage son bought his first iPod, he was thrilled that it could store 2000 tracks. That this was at a low quality setting with a high degree of compression was not a relevant or indeed a cognitive factor. The maximum download quality for AAC is 320kbps. Most tracks are available at no better than 192kbps but many iPod users legally download at 128kbps, the most popular, or even 64kbps because either that's all that is available, or because they can store a greater number of tracks or, very often, because they're unaware of the difference. The cost is usually the same regardless. If you are jogging and using a cheap pair of in-ear headphones, you probably wouldn't greatly appreciate a high quality recording. But play back through a decent quality hi-fi and all you are doing is amplifying a very poor quality signal and the difference from, for example a full resolution CD (1,411kbps), is huge. The old maxim holds true - rubbish in, rubbish out.

The 80 Gigabyte iPod Classic is advertised as holding 20,000 songs (4MB per song). In comparison, a high quality music server will use approximately 500MB to store an

average CD (with say 10 tracks) at full resolution, a ratio of 10 or 12:1. It's no wonder that the music server, also a flexible computer based product, can reproduce music far more faithfully and far more enjoyably and is, therefore, more suitable as a prime listening source. The reality is that a generation is now growing up without recognising the loss and appears to be indifferent to quality, almost as if it's an irrelevance. This may be because so many have not heard the difference. Earlier generations enjoyed listening to 78rpm records until LP's came along. A cheap hi-fi stack system could be enjoyed until CD's came along (although a high quality record deck could, and still does, compete). The point is, once you've heard better, it's difficult to downgrade again.

So where do we go from here when many hi-fi systems feature an iPod docking station as standard? The future of quality music in the home is certainly not MP3 & AAC recordings because they are not suitable as a prime listening source. That is not what the formats were designed for. Download speeds are now far faster and computer hard drive memories far larger than a few years ago when these formats came into mass usage. Discerning music lovers using downloads will be listening to studio

quality FLAC files, or their equivalent, in the near future. The quality is so far removed from MP3 that the additional cost is easily outweighed. Even CD quality recordings are left behind. Vinyl has staged a strong comeback recently because it's still immensely enjoyable to listen to. However, technology doesn't stand still and it's therefore more important than ever that you seek out a specialist hi-fi dealer to set you on the right path.

Get Expert Advice

Specialist hi-fi manufacturers continue to try to make their products perform to the highest standards in any given price range. Specialist dealers, of which the ones listed on this page are amongst the very best in the UK, know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it. However, it also needs the consumer to get listening again and to demand quality, to seek expert guidance on how to achieve the best performance at home and to have it expertly installed and set up. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by using a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one but it's unquestionably worth the difference.



QUALITY OR QUANTITY?..

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

Listed here are
**20 OF THE BEST HI-FI
DEALERS IN THE
COUNTRY.**

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
01233 624441

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street.
01245 265245

Colchester

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

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street,
Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea

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

Southampton

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

Worthing

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

LONDON

N1

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

SW11

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

SOUTH WEST

Bath

AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
01225 333310

Exeter

GULLIFORD HI-FI
97 Sidwell Street.
01392 491194

MIDLANDS

Banbury

OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
01295 272158

Birmingham

SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street,
Bloxwich.
01922 493499

Birmingham

MUSIC MATTERS
363 Hagley Road,
Edgbaston.
0121 429 2811

Coventry

FRANK HARVEY
163 Spon Street.
024 7652 5200

Leicester

CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel Street.
0116 262 3754

Nottingham

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

NORTH

Cheadle

THE AUDIO WORKS
14 Stockport Road.
0161 428 7887

Chester

ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road.
01244 344227

Gateshead

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

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam Street.
0114 275 6048

York

SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate.
01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

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

Glasgow

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

STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



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

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

Positioning

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

Going multichannel

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



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



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 HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
BB	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
SB	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
SB	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	750	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep smooth bass	20,103,39	☼	A	22	☼	☼	292
SB	Amphion Helium 520	1,000	Sharp styling and fine value for money with excellent voice band coherence	16,104,22	☼	G	28	☼	☼	314
SB	Amphion Ion L	750	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence and a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment in test room	16,226,26,5		A	40	☼	☼	310
SB	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
SB	AudioPro Avanti A.10	350	A tough and effective little speaker. Overall balance is quite smooth and even	19,29,26		A+	38	☼	☼	319
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	DALI Monitor 1	1,000	Beautiful miniature with advanced drivers sounds marvellously coherent with fine vocal expression	16,32,24		A	40	☼	☼	296
SB	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
SB	Epos M5	349	Gorgeous miniature works well close to wall. Could be smoother but communicates with authority	18,33,21		A-	40	☼	☼	269
SB	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
SB	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
SB	Focal Chorus 706V	389	Advanced drivers deliver a smooth, even, overall balance with healthy dynamic expression and tension	22,39,25		A	27	☼	☼	319
SB	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
SB	Heco Celan 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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	Mission élan e34	400	A return to form for Mission with a pacy, vibrant sound matched to good looks	35,96,34	☼	A+	48	☼	☼	298
SB	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
SB	Monitor Audio BR2	200	Good looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25		A-	30	☼	☼	294
SB	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
SB	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
SB	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
SB	PMC DB11	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 **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).



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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVING	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	
BB	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 1020i	140	Outstanding value for money, the smooth, well-balanced and lively sound makes for a fine communicator	17,5,25,26,5		A+	60	●	318
	Quadral Pico	849	Could be more muscular, but neutral and open with spacious imaging and little coloration	19,34,26		A-	30	●	292
	Rega RS1	398	Clever close-to-wall speaker has fine coherence and good communication skills	15,32,23,6		A+	23	●	319
	Russ Andrews SP-1	399	This tweaked Focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, most importantly, great fun	19,2,31,5,24,8		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
ABOVE £1,000									
	AE Energy Radiance 3	1,500	This speaker's very effective enclosure ensures a wide dynamic range and a very clean sound with a smooth top end	23,92,29,7	●	A	27	●	320
	Amphion Argon ² Anniversary	1,200	Notably superior coherence and focus, fine neutrality and dynamic range with low coloration	19,38,31		A-	24	●	317
	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	24,53,31,5		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
EC	Aurousal VS	1,650	The fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, plus extra help at the frequency extremes	21,5,107,5,26,6	●	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
EC	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
BB	Focal Chorus 826V	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
EC	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	26	●	317
EC	Jamo R 907	5,500	Arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships, it offers a powerful bass and open midrange	44,118,9,7	●	A	30	●	317
	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
EC	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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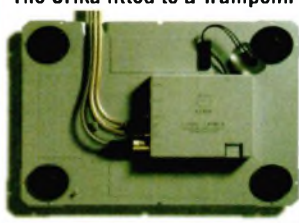
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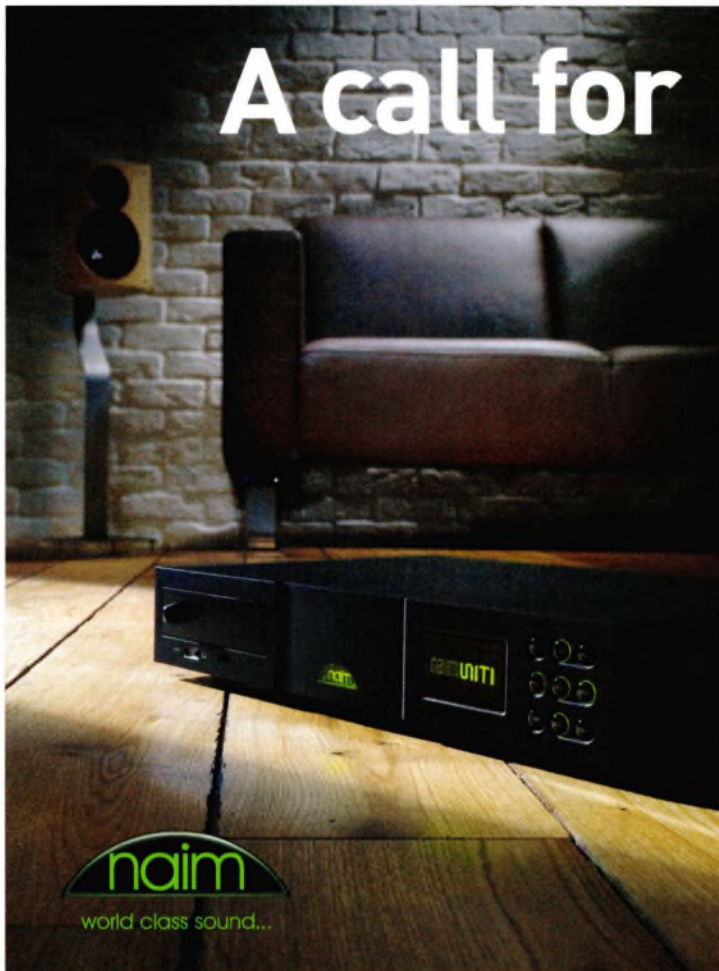
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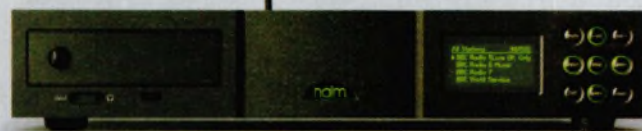
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Our favourite EC BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DIAL	BASS FROM Hz	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Neat Elite SE	1,499	Smooth and natural performer with notably expressive midband. Fine voice articulation and unusual sweetness	20,90,18	●	A	25	●	267
RB	Neat Momentum 3i	1,745	Sounds a lot bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range	22,38,27	●	A-	23	●	302
EC	Opera Callas	2,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	23,37,5,34	●	B	32	●	311
RB	Opera Seconda	1,525	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth	24,102,5,31,5	●	A	20	●	314
EC	Pioneer S-2EX-W	5,200	This speaker offers superb midband neutrality and exceptional clarity. It also handles timing and imaging really well	29,156,5,42,5	●	A	37	●	320
RB	PMC FB1i	1,950	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	20,100,30	●	G	20	●	311
RB	PMC GB1i	1,330	Pretty little floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing	15,5,87,23,4	●	A	30	●	306
RB	PMC OB1i	3,200	This floorstander delivers a smooth overall balance with wide bandwidth and dynamic range	20,102,5,32,5	●	A	20	●	311
EC	PSB Synchrony One	3,000	Slim and discreet floorstander that delivers superb sound quality and flexible bass	22,109,32,5	●	A	45	●	318
RB	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
RB	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid-back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	●	A	25	●	271
EC	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound	22,105,39	●	A	20	●	256
EC	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities	22,37,30	●	A-	48	●	274
RB	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,000	Sharp looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression. Could be warmer and richer	20,100,25	●	A	22	●	290
EC	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●	259
EC	Sonus faber Cremona Audit	2,690	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass... this is 'The Little Speaker That Could' (stands £575 extra)	20,35,37	●	A	50	●	305
EC	Sonus faber 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
RB	Spendor SP3/1R2	1,600	Conservative styling, superb neutrality and coherence with unusually low coloration	22,40,28	●	A	37	●	317
RB	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
RB	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,595	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband	17,31,23	●	A	35	●	277
RB	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
RB	Triangle Cellius Esw	1,395	Not the smoothest sound around, but has great vigour and enthusiasm, plus good scale and weight	20,117,34	●	A	22	●	277
EC	Triangle Magellan Concerto	14,750	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it's easier to live with and remains highly entertaining	60,160,45	●	A-	32	●	290
RB	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build	35,127,65	●	A	20	●	270
EC	Vivid Audio B1	7,750	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make truly world class speaker	27,110,38	●	A-	40	●	261
EC	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,36	●	A	20	●	252
EC	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	●	A	28	●	254
EC	Wharfedale 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
RB	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 RB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM Hz	SPEAKER NUMBER
RB	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
EC	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1,000	18	246
EC	Eclipse TD725sw	2,700	Delivers solid meaningful bass, but with unusual tunefulness, speed and articulation	52,47,50	500	40	287
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
EC	REL 305	795	Landmark mid-price sub, works particularly well with low crossover frequency, looks great too	32,36,34	300	25	284
RB	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
RB	REL T1	595	Standard setter at the price: flexible, easily set up and packs quite a punch	36,40,420	300	25	291
RB	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
	REL Storm 5	1,000	Well engineered, good bass depth, appropriate for mixed hi-fi & home cinema/multichannel systems	34,52,37	200	15	267
RB	MartinLogan Dynamo	449	Refined, compact sub brings established MartinLogan virtues to a new price and size point	29,35,32	200	25	301
	Velodyne SPL-800R	699	Powerful, highly configurable sub with auto setup feature and attractive, compact packaging	26,27,33	1,000	28	286
EC	Wilson Benesch Torus	5,200	Amp and sub package built like a sophisticated 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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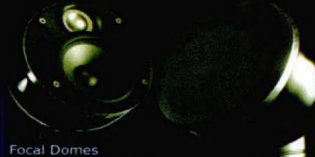
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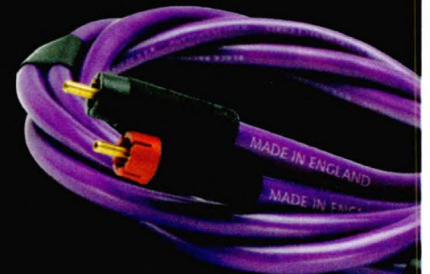
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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being

best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not

quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ACS T2	500	Earcanal earphones display an impressive midband intelligibility and a knack for digging out the detail						28	315
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audio Technica ATH-CK10	279	In-ear headphones offer unforced detail, natural dynamics and excellent clarity						15	319
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audio Technica ATH-W1000	400	Superbly comfortable and very revealing. Long listening sessions are a pleasure with new musical insights						250	304
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT770	190	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass						290	287
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT880	230	Combines musical involvement with a high degree of analytical virtues. Very comfortable						205	312
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon AH-D2000	250	Among the best closed-back headphones we've heard and very fine by any standards						350	309
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon AH-D5000	500	Sound is comparable with good open-back models, while isolation both inward and outward is useful						320	312
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Etyimotic ER-4P	195	Fiddle with in-ear earpieces and angles of approach and you'll be repaid with super-detailed sound						20	319
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD595	160	Technology from upmarket HD650 model makes this a very revealing headphone that's also extremely comfortable						270	266
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser IE8	260	With its combination of neutral midrange and treble, this is arguably the best for in-ear all-round sound						20	319
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD650	330	Clear and detailed, with very natural tonality through bass and midrange and just a little treble coloration						275	312
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shure SE420	240	Expensive and no replacement for top conventional 'phones, but streets ahead of most in-ears with real refinement						15	295
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shure E500PTH	420	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead; high-quality stuff						20	285
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stax SR-001 Mk II	239	Expensive and power hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity						280	268
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stax SRS-2020 Basic Sys. II	349	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way						205	295

SPECS KEY: **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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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

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
MB	Atlas Questor	70	Very open and informative at high and mid frequencies, with slightly dry bass. Imaging particularly fine	●	●				295
MB	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A lively and detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm. Slight added upper-bass warmth does little to detract	●	●				297
MB	Black Rhodium Prelude	80	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit	●	●				293
MB	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass and excellently neutral and detailed midrange: treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction	●	●				299
EC	Black Rhodium Concert	255	This DCT cable from the Polar range gives a distinctively dark timbre, rich in detail, with low subjective noise	●	●				270
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	244	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass – at a price!	●	●				279
EC	CrystalCable Piccolo	260	Thin cable, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid core type generically - notably resolution, focus and articulation	●	●		●		294
MB	Kimber Timbre	118	A very neutral cable that will complement even very upmarket systems	●	●				312
MB	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space. Clear treble, too	●	●				281
MB	Monster M1000i	200	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere	●	●				284
MB	Nordost Wyewizard Dream	95	Slight lack of precision in extreme treble, otherwise detailed and neutral with authoritative bass		●	●			303
MB	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers. Very good mid and treble	●	●				281
MB	Profigold PGA3000	60	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good	●	●				299
MB	Supra EFF-1X	77	Lively-sounding cable which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality. Musically, a great all-rounder	●	●				306
MB	Townshend Isolida DCT100	99	Sound has a particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for a great listener involvement		●	●			312
MB	van den Hul Integration Hybrid	125	Bass is nothing remarkable, but mid and treble are outstandingly open and clear: very transparent	●	●				306
MB	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
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
MB	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
MB	Kimber DV-30	59	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models	●		●			E 317
MB	Merlin Scorpion Digital	130	Reduces distortion, making sound clear with unusually revealing low frequencies	●					E 317
MB	SupraAnCo	80	This cable can give a useful fillip to a good transport/DAC combination, even in a high-end context	●		●			E 304
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
MB	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
MB	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
MB	Chord Silver Screen	6	Screened speaker cable with excellent treble, but just a little light in the bass at times	●	●				310
EC	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,480	A chip off the old block, this speaker cable has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound		●		●		302
MB	Kimber 8PR	12	A cable that really enjoys the music, also admirable for the levels of analytical detail it allows through. Excellent value	●		●			299
MB	Monster MCX-1s	8	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers. Good mid and treble	●		●			280
EC	Nordost Hermdall	162	Alternative to Valhalla, silver plated, micro-monofilament construction, low coloration, hi-res and suitable for exacting systems	●		●			278
MB	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			310
MB	QED Revelation	15	Sensibly priced, this cable offers a performance which is a step-up from budget types	●		●			318
EC	Supra Sword	116	Zero inductance construction, medium resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is fundamentally musical	●		●			287
EC	Townshend Isolida DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all round		●	●			241
MB	van den Hul The Wind	50	Separate conductors provide plenty of room for experimentation and the conductor quantity keeps resistance low		●	●			318
MB	Wireworld Solstice 5 ²	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
<small>BB</small>	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
<small>BB</small>	Custom Design InertMatt	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
<small>BB</small>	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great under a variety of kit		59,5			Wood	320
<small>BB</small>	Milty FoculPods	19,50	A set of four isolation pads that are amazingly useful for damping vibration and improving sound	2	5			Polymer	311
	Partington Minim	420	Adds its own character to the benefit of rock, most particularly, but slightly to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37	●	5	Glass	302
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51,5	49,39,5		4	MDF	217
<small>BB</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	226	A variety of smart looks available – sound is clear and precise	50	20,17	●		1	293
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More a range than a model, capable of fine results especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16,5	●		2	299
<small>BB</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>BB</small>	Partington Ansa 60	99	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
<small>BB</small>	Partington Dreadnought BS	295	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62	17,23	●		5	309
<small>EC</small>	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
<small>EC</small>	Russ Andrews Torlyte	299	Very relaxed sound from this metal-free design, with excellent imaging too	60,50	15,21			3	280

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.

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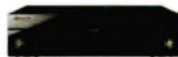
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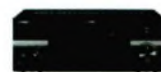
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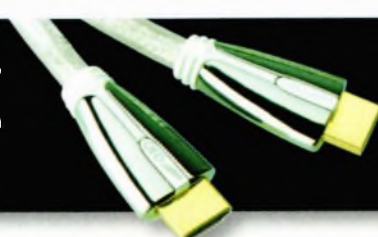
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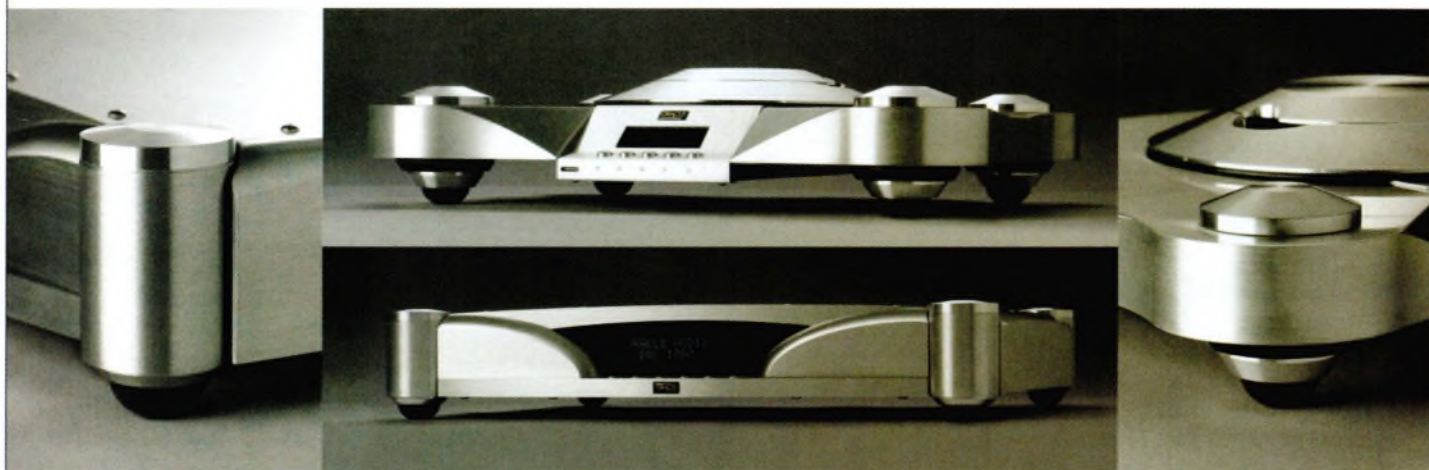
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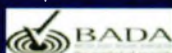
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2nd-hand shootout

Let Hi-Fi Choice guide you to the best £500 speakers

This month's second-hand bargain trail has turned up a trio of high-quality floorstanders and something of an audio classic. Spending £500 on a pair of second-hand floorstanding speakers allows you to consider speakers that, despite only being a few years old, would have cost between £800 and £1,200 new.

The first of these is the Mission e82. As part of the elegante range, this sleek speaker was built between 2004 and 2008. The £1,200 e82 received excellent reviews for its open, pacy sound and stylish design. Rather than the usual matte black or wood finish, the e82 was available in a wide range of striking metallic colours including gold! Although a wonder to behold, the finish, as Mission itself admitted, can damage easily.

For this reason, don't consider a pair without first inspecting them and either collect in person or have delivered in the original box, only. Experience has shown that the crossover can also detach from the inside of the cabinet so check for rattles. In other respects the e82 is a reliable and cheap to repair speaker. At just £20 for a tweeter and around £35 for a woofer, the e82 is the most

cost-effective to maintain here. The five-year



Pictured: The Tannoy Eyris 3 and Monitor Audio RS8

warranty is not transferable so, if you're after peace of mind, best buy from a dealer. For £50 less than our budget, we found a pair that appeared cared for and were finished in the oh-so-bling gold.

Launched a year after the e82s, the Monitor Audio RS8 Silver is still a current model. Although costing less new than the other two here, this £800 floorstander can still hold its own. Like the Mission, it's a fairly punchy and dynamic speaker although still relatively couth. At around £50, the gold dome tweeter's more expensive than the Mission, but it's still a relatively cheap speaker to fix. Monitor Audio told us that the guarantee is transferable, although at just two years, it's the shortest of the floorstanders. In terms of both mechanical and finish durability, the RS8 holds up well. Worthy of note are the matching plinths that not only hold the speakers securely, but also

“Rather than the usual matte black or wood finish, the e82 was available in a wide range of striking metallic colours including gold!”

protect the base of the cabinet from the ravages of vacuum cleaners, unsteady feet and children's toys – make sure they're present!

Although released back in 2001, it was only last year when the final batch of Tannoy Eyris 3s sold out. This highly rated speaker was a keen rival for the similarly priced e82 and, whilst it may lack a little of its impact, made up for it with first-rate refinement and treble detail. With a woofer coming in at over £80, the Eyris 3 isn't the cheapest to fix but the price is a mark of the drive unit quality. Of the three nearly new speakers, it's the Tannoy that has the best warranty. Valid for a full five years and transferable provided the original sales receipt is shown, the Eyris 3 is the safest bet for a private purchase. Like the others, it's a reliable speaker, although do check the tweeter grills are present. For exactly £500 we found a late pair, still with two years' warranty, box and original receipt, finished in an attractive walnut real wood veneer.

Long before the term 'floorstander' had even been coined, if you wanted a large speaker then you'd have probably considered

Pictured: The BBC research-inspired Spendor BC-1



something like the Spendor BC-1. The first hand-built examples of this BBC research-inspired speaker came in 1969. This was followed by Spencer Hughes and his wife Dorothy, hence the name

Spendor, establishing a manufacturing business in 1971. The first major improvement was in '75, with a switch to more consistent

rubber woofer surrounds. 1977 saw an increase in power handling from a feeble 40 watts to a slightly more effective 55 watts. Finally, in 1982, new bonded-on magnets brought the BC-1 wheezing into the Eighties. Yet, by 1984, it was all over for the BC-1. New high-power, and highly efficient designs such as the Celestion SL6 and SL600 made the BC-1 look decidedly old-fashioned. For all this, the BC-1 is still a superb sounding speaker. Twenty-five years on and it still has a beguiling mid-range that can eclipse most modern speakers. Second-hand prices reflect this with the very best, early '80s, examples going for just over our budget. In terms of parts, there are still plenty of second-hand drivers about and Coles Electroacoustics +44 (0)1992 466685 still make a compatible super-tweeter. It's a speaker that mustn't be driven too hard and that demands some care and attention but, provided with a good source, has the potential to be by far the most charming speaker here; that's progress for you! **HFC**

Dominic Todd
Next month, £1,000 turntables

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FOR SALE

ESOTERIC X-01 CD/SACD player, mint, limited edition flagship model. Original boxes, instructions and remote, guarantee remaining.

Stereophile class A+ recommended component, (£10,000) £4,495, no offers. 07777 628426 (Avon)

PRO-JECT MM/MC phono stage, £20. Denon TU260L AM/FM tuner, multi award winner, boxed and instructions, £20. Grado SR60 headphones, highly rated, boxed, £40. All in excellent condition. 01708 740550 (Essex).

GARRARD 301 turntable. Brand new and still in original box and packaging with manual. Inspection report, template and all accessories. Serial No.79904. Rare opportunity. Sensible offers. 01708 552552 (Essex).

CYRUS CD65 CD player, Cyrus 6VS2 amp (both in quartz silver), Epos M5 speakers (dark cherry) (£1,700) £999. All boxed and in pristine condition. email: leet2009@hotmail.co.uk (W Midlands).

PASSLABS 1.5 Aleph P £4,000. Audio Note ANS611 transformer £3,000. Altec 604 £200. Altec 417 £300. Audio Note io £900. Ortofon MC3000II £350. Cello Cartridge £2,500. Trio KT815 decoder £250. Rolling Stone Box Set MFSL £850. Ariston RDII turntable £75. 07944 909209 or email; stevehifiman@hotmail.co.uk (Herts).

CYRUS 8VS2 integrated amplifier £499. Cyrus CD8SE CD player £899. Cyrus PSX-R power supply £299. All less

than one month old. Genuine reason for sale. 01785 613408 (Stafford)

NAIM CD5X CD player, mint condition, boxed £899. Chord Company Chameleon Silver Plus interconnects, RCA factory terminated 1m £69, 0.5m £59. Odyssey 2 loudspeaker cables 4m factory terminated £89. 01984 640588 (Somerset).

MARANTZ SA11-S2 SACD player, warranty and manuals, excellent condition £2,300 ono. Shunyata Hydra-2 £275. Shunyata Diamond Black power cables £100 each. 07810 434589 (Surrey).

DALI IKON 7 floorstander, *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy, hardly used, mint condition. Bargain (£1,000) £500. 07896 348829 (Surrey).

MUSICAL FIDELITY The Preamp II MM/MC phono, tape loop £50. Musical Fidelity P170 power amp £100. Sony CDP XE CD player £20. 01277 841493 (Essex).

JEFF ROWLAND Coherence One preamp, Model 3 monoblocks £2,150. Castle Harlech loudspeakers £285. Celestion 66 studio monitors £300. B&W DM6 £175. 01255 421589 (Essex).

OPERA Seconda speakers (cherry) (£1,700) £750. Unico Research valve/MOSFET Secondo 120-watt integrated amplifier (£1,650) £750. Unico valve FM/AM RDS tuner (£950) £450. All mint and below half price, superb reviews – copies available. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

JVC QL7 DD turntable £350. Grundig A5000 SVX6000 pre/power 120-watt £250. Tannoy

M1 speakers, cherry £50. Bang and Olufsen system 5500 £499. 01708 457691 (Essex).

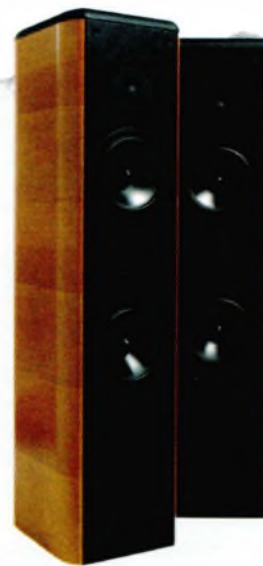
ICON AUDIO LA4 preamp, MB90 power amps and passive Icon preamp (£2,700) £1,350. Five-input switchable triode 90-watt, 5-star review. Spare valves included. 07736 773830 (Yorks).

KRELL KAV 400 Xi integrated amp 200-watt. Two years old. Mint £1,395. Also Graham Slee phono stage. EraGold V with external PSU. Mint. £200. 01453 762290 (Glos).

NAIM NAC 62 preamp, NAP 110 power amp (service 2002) £250. Castle Eden loudspeakers, plus Atacama stands £250. 01623 201481 (Norfolk).

MERIDIAN 500 transport upgraded by Trichord, Clock 4, NC PSU, diodes and regulator board (£500) sounds stunning! Boxed, remote, manual, £300 ono 01235 762171 (Oxon).

CASTLE ACOUSTICS Howard S2 quarter wave speakers, mahogany, new drivers 2002. Reason for sale: upgrade to Quad 989. £550 ono. 01748 823029 (N Yorks).



Above: Opera Seconda

SONUS FABER Minima Amator speakers and Ironwood stands, elegant walnut, 88dB, very good condition, box and manual £700. Sennheiser HD650 headphones, brand new, sealed box, guarantee and manual £180.

01453 544354 (Gloucs)
MICHELL Hera power supply for Iso/Argo amplifiers, Gyrodec platters Mark 1 & 2 upgrades. Rare Cyro blue base. LFD Spirolink 2 interconnects and power cable. Offers. 07870 912 963 or email: wittering@raisedfloorsystems.co.uk (Herts).

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

RUSS ANDREWS Silver Reference mains cable 2004, four feet £800. 07846 058506 (Herts).

NAD C525 CD, C320 amplifier silver, boxed as new, £75 each. Buyer collects, please call after 5pm. 01384 897009 (W Midlands).

BOWERS AND WILKINS DM610 loudspeakers, black ash, excellent sound £90. Denon tuner £40. Alphason speaker stands £20. 01253 357715 (Lancs).

REL Stentor subwoofer (£2,500) £950. Kimber Orchid balanced digital innerconnect 0.5 m £130. Kimber scart to scart 0.5m £60. Two sets oak cone jumbo feet £10 each. 01772 314151 or mckendrick@btinternet.com (Lancs).

LINN LP12 turntable, three years old in black. Ekos tonearm with Adikt cartridge and Cirkus bearing. Hardly used, immaculate condition. (£3,600) £1,700. 01269 595271 (Carmarthenshire).

KIMBER Select KS-1021 (-11dB attenuation) mint and boxed, £250 bargain. Graham Slee Solo headphone amp inc PSU (£600) £280. Grado RA-1 headphone amp, battery powered (£350) £200 mint. 01908 661094 (Bucks).

CYRUS Pre V2 six months warranty £400ono. Cyrus X Power amps (two) 2/3 years old £550ono. Cyrus PSX-R power supply 2 years old £250 ono. Spondor S5E speakers,

3 years old, cherry £600ono. Mint condition, original packaging with manuals. Buyer collects.

0131 317 9977 (work) or 01721 723 946 (home) (Peeblesshire). **ATC** SCM11 speakers £425. Naim CD 5i £375. Naim Nait 5i £375. 02920 419226 frank8ush@ntlworld.com (S Wales).

QUAD 33/303/FM3, wooden rack £200. Nakamichi 680ZX cassette deck £150. Pioneer PD 6700 CD player £50. A&R Cambridge T21 FM tuner £30. QED phono lead £5. IXOS 104 OFC phono lead £10. 01228 544376 (Cumbria).

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO Azur 640C V2 silver CD player with remote and power cable, boxed as new. £140 (including postage). 07837 322576 (Cambridgeshire).

RUARK Prologue 2 speakers, *Hi-Fi Choice* recommended, cherry, excellent condition, boxed, (£1,250) £450. Buyer collects please. 01268 774416 (Essex).

DENON AVR1909 AV receiver black £150. Yamaha AX763 AV amp black £150. 01625 433996 (Cheshire).

MUSICAL FIDELITY E624 24-bit CD player, as new £175. Sugden AU41 power amp, 100-watt, bargain £90 as new. 01371 850665 (Essex).

KEF XQ1 in silver. Matching stands. Excellent condition. Genuine reason for sale. £600 ono. 07766 078281 (London).

BOWERS AND WILKINS DM1101 Speakers and Apollo stands £50. Jamo centre 200 and 100 rears with Jamo stands £40. All in very good condition, will split. 07941 471561 (Cambs).

ARCAM CD92 CD player, Rotel RC1070 preamp, two Rotel RB980BX power amps. All mint, boxed, manuals etc. £650 the lot (upgraded). 01535 6522992 (W Yorks).

ATACAMA Equinox hi-fi two-shelf base unit in silver and arctic frost glass shelves, £65. Onkyo CS515UK micro system in silver, CD, DAB, speakers, as new £150. 07970 115378 (Avon).

YAMAHA DSP A5 AV amplifier DTS, Dolby Digital, 5x70-watt. Excellent condition £40. 0784 6675141 (Northants).

CLEARAUDIO Emotion turntable £550. 07747 663377 (Herts).

MUSICAL FIDELITY A308 pre/power combo, amazing build quality. Rarely for sale second hand, mint. (£3,800) £1,900, absolute bargain. Quad 12L rosewood piano gloss, mint £200. 07876 705266 (W Yorks).

HEYBROOK Integra classic stereo amp, £300. Tandberg TR2055 stereo receiver, needs attention, classic original, service manual, offers over £100. 01566 783199 (Devon).

ARCAM Alpha 6 amplifier, Alpha 5 FM tuner, Bowers and Wilkins DM4 speakers/stands. Good condition/boxes. Also

Alpha 5 CD player (not working) £100 ono. 0151 428 1524 (Merseyside). **MISSION** 751 speakers £50, Chord mains cable 1.5m £70. No offers. 07868 175364 (W Mids).

ARCAM DV79 DVD player, black, mint condition, remote, instruction manual, boxed, HDMI interface £275 ono. 01772 745553 (Lancashire).

QUAD 306 power amp, Quad 34 control unit and Quad FM4 tuner, all with original instruction books, £350. 020 8361 3435 (North London).

ROKSAN L2.5/S1.5 pre/power amps with DS1.5 (PSU) £1,100. TEAD Microgroove+ phono stage (0.5mV output) £450. Sony TCK6ES 3H cassette deck, Dolby B, C, S & HX Pro £120. 07805 731653 (Surrey).

REVEL M22 speakers in maple, immaculate condition, highly recommended standmounts (£1,800) £850. 01872 870602 (Cornwall).

CYRUS Pre X preamplifier boxed £350. Rotel RB991 power, 200-watt, £350. Or swap for Naim. 01977 609839 (W Yorks).

CARY AUDIO CD-308 upsampling CD player, HDCD, remote volume control, high-end performance and construction in black, mint condition, boxed (£800) £345. 07776 143890 (Hants).

NAIM Flatcap power supply. Late 2001 model, olive style. Immaculate condition in original box. Complete with power cable and snaic interconnect. £200. David 07736 280018 (N Yorks).

WANTED: idler wheel part no. 940-005 7.5 IPS for Ferrograph Series 7 open reel recorder. 01543 372169 (W Midlands)

WANTED: Crimson ElektriK 510/520 pre and power amp, working or faulty condition. 00 3531 6279810 (Ireland)

WANTED: Stax SRD-7/SB energiser, Stax Lambda earspeaker (normal bias, Moth 30-watt stereo power amplifier) chris@crystalclear.co.uk, 01923 286760 (Herts).

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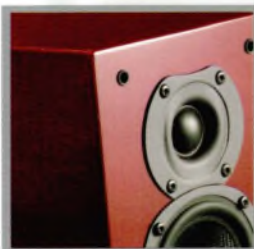
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