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August 2009

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All quotes by **Paul Messenger**, who is probably UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.

WELCOME...

HI-FI CHOICE SEPTEMBER 2009 ISSUE 323

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Many thanks to those of you who've been in touch about our new-look Buyer's Guide. It seems you like the improvements! Now fully up-to-date and comprehensively price-checked, *HFC's* Buyer's Guide is the most trustworthy audio listings guide anywhere. Plus, it's refreshed and condensed form leaves us more room for your favourite, in-depth hi-fi reviews, so dig-in!

Although summer is traditionally a quieter time for the audio industry, *Hi-Fi Choice* is always looking forward some three-to-six months and we've not only seen, but heard some of the incredible new kit that's coming your way this side of Christmas. Some of it, in fact, is already in this very issue – check out our exclusive review of Rotel's long-awaited new 15 Series – a CD and pre/power amp with a story to tell...

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



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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.



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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.

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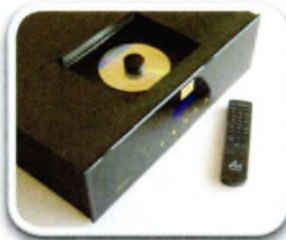
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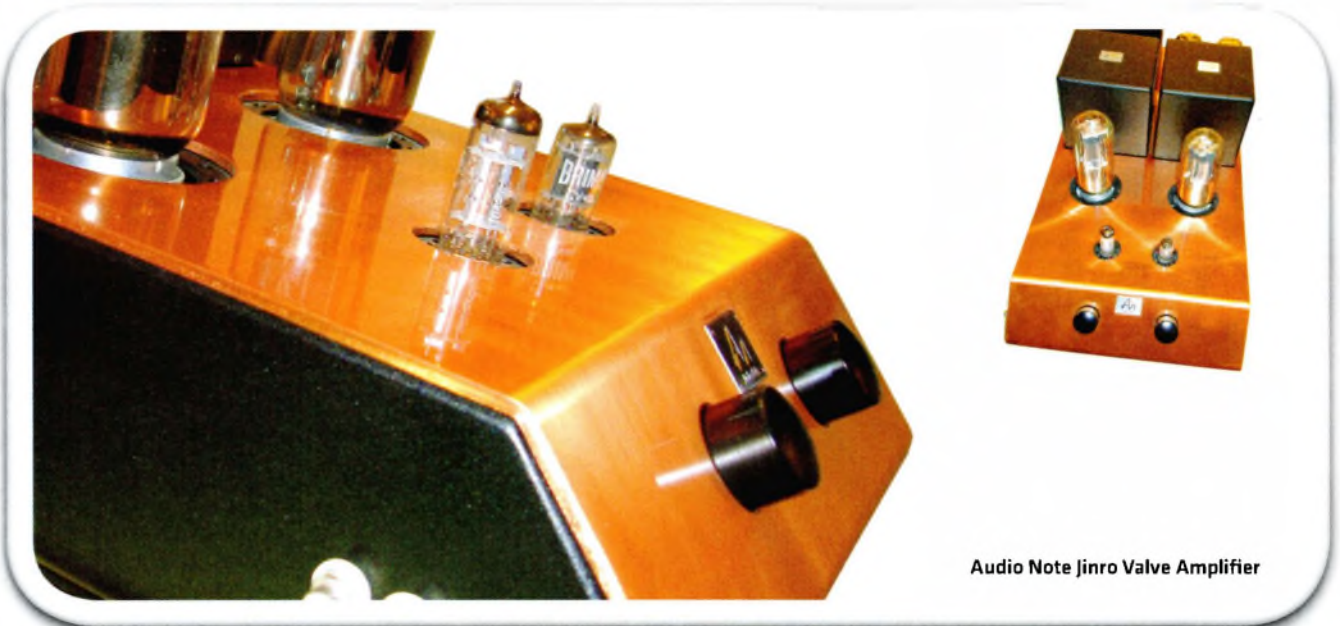
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MORDAUNT-SHORT PERFORMANCE 2

Mordaunt-Short takes Performance to a new level

Mordaunt-Short has released the Performance 2, the first standmount in a range that first saw the light of day in 2004. Having established the Performance 6 floorstander, with its distinctive polymer-resin cabinet and all-metal drive units, M-S has introduced a standmount in much the same vein. Performance 2 is a reflex-loaded, two-way design that stands 48.6cm high and utilises the same technologies found in its floorstanding stablemate. The cabinet is now made from 'an even more effective formulation of the original proprietary polymer-resin material' with M-S using injection moulding to build the monocoque enclosure in a style that's closer to that of the top Performance 6 LE model. This material combines a hard exterior shell with an acoustically damped, relatively low-density interior. This combined with the absence of parallel internal sides means that standing waves are minimised and coloration is kept extremely low, according to its makers.

Performance 2 has an innovative driver compliment including a 165mm aluminium CPC drive unit that extends down to 48Hz, while the ATT dome tweeter takes the treble up to 30kHz in order to take advantage of the wide bandwidth available from high-resolution formats.

The continuous profile cone (CPC) driver is the third generation of its type and is based on the driver developed for the P6 LE, with radial ridges to enhance rigidity and a single-piece construction. The 'V-Form' cone surround is said to increase the radiating area of the system, at the same time as aiding structural rigidity. Its varying thickness is said to aid the piston motion of the cone and enhance the speaker's timing qualities. A voice coil spider made of aerospace-grade visco-elastic also helps deliver greater performance.

The tweeter uses ATT (aspirated tweeter technology) and has a chrome tube that sticks out of the back of the cabinet. This 'elongated metal diffuser' floats in its own enclosure and allows the rear of the tweeter to 'breathe'.

At the other end of the price scale, Mordaunt-Short has released its Aviano range which is priced to sit between its Avant and Mezzo line-ups. It consists of two standmounts (Aviano 1 and 2), as many floorstanders (Aviano 6 and 8), plus a sub and centre channel speaker. Distinguished by curved front baffles, the Aviano models use CPC aluminium mid and bass units with metal-dome tweeters in housings that are designed to improve dispersion. The range takes a lot of its technology from the Performance models, albeit in the context of traditional cabinets and finishes.

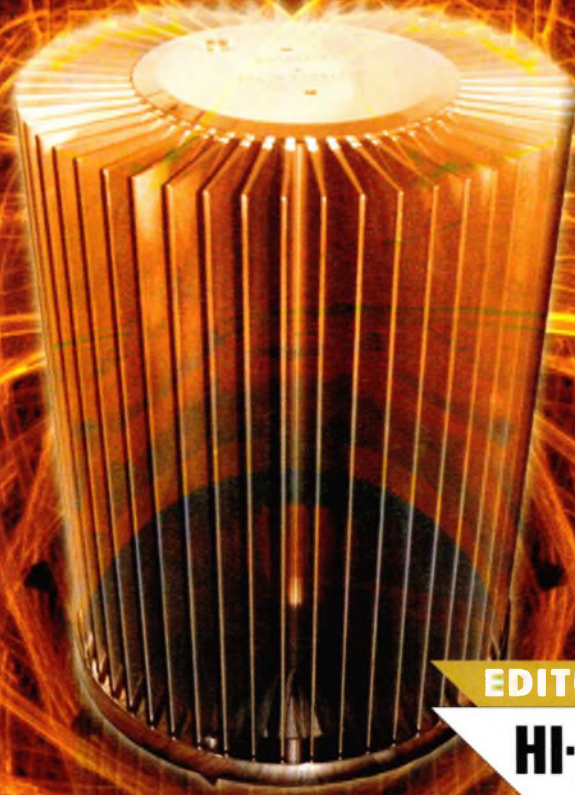
Price (P2 including matching stands) £3,000; (Aviano) from £250

Due September ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.mordauntshort.com



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EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



" It just has such natural dynamics, exceptional levels of detail, excellent bass resolution and power, superbly judged tonal balance, and the ability to convey a musical performance with a greater level of holistic entirety than any other power amplifier had previously shown was possible. "

CHRIS BRYANT, HI-FI CRITIC ISSUE #12

" I've listened to many of the world's best amplifiers over the last 25 years. Some have been brilliant when carefully partnered with ancillary equipment and loudspeakers that suited their capabilities, and it hasn't always been the most expensive that have shown greatness. But here is one from a little known brand that has delivered superior performance to all others I have heard so far, and which is also capable of driving difficult speaker loads to high levels. "

PAUL MESSENGER, HI-FI CHOICE AUG 09

" It's quite difficult to discuss the sound of an amplifier that is, quite simply, the best that we've heard to date. "

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PIONEER RANGE

An impressive range of components heralds a new phase in Pioneer hi-fi

Pioneer has totally revised its range of CD players and amplifiers with the introduction of the MK2-K G-Clef range. The new line-up consists of five components: the A-A9MK2-K and A-A6MK2-K amplifiers, PD-D9MK2-K and PD-D6MK2-K SACD players and the F-F6MK2-K DAB/FM tuner. Pioneer's aim with the revisions has been to produce a more open sound and 'ultra-quick responsiveness'. According to the company's general manager in the UK Mike O'Mahony: "The G-Clef components are guaranteed to perform in perfect harmony, creating true-to-the-original audio performances."

As with the previous range Pioneer has used AIR Studios to carry out the tuning on these components, a case of Pioneer's engineers using the facilities there rather than employing professional studio engineers to do the job. But they probably didn't influence the finish, which combines a 'silk-soft hairline' black aluminium front panel with a blue LCD display.

The A-A9MK2-K is the more powerful of the two amplifiers, offering a 70-watt output. It shares a non-feedback power supply and low-ESR (Equivalent Series Resistance) capacitor alongside parallel drive Schottky barrier diodes in the rectifier circuit along with the 60-watt A-A6MK2-K. What differentiates the A-A9 is the selection of a large toroidal mains transformer rather than the EI type found in the A-A6. Both models have twin mono-symmetrical construction to minimise inter-channel interference and hence improve stereo-imaging.

A lot of work has gone into reducing the potential for resonance in casework, the more expensive amp having a 'rigid underbase' and a

metal foot which is said to deliver more stable bass. Side and top panels are also in 'rigid aluminium'.

The A-A6 has an MM phono input while the A-A9 ups the ante to accommodate MC cartridges, while both amps feature 'Sound Retriever' processing to assist compressed audio formats. There's also an aluminium remote with one handset able to control Pioneer components.

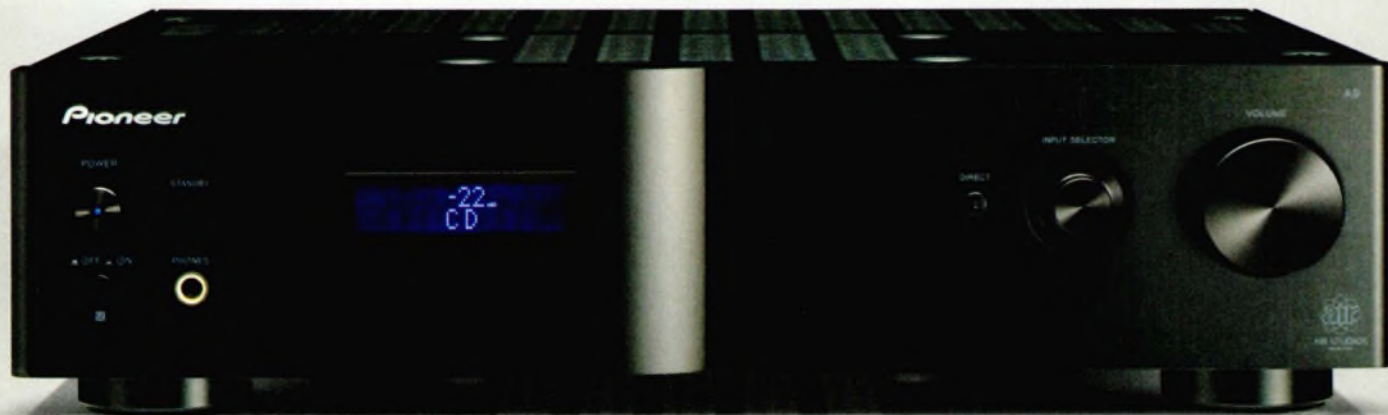
The PD-D9MK2-K and PD-D6MK2-K SACD players continue to offer Pioneer's proprietary Legato Link Pro processing which quadruples the sampling rate and combines with Hi-Bit technology, which expands the word length from 16-bit to 24-bit. The players' casework has also been rigidised with the PD-D9 getting 'TAOC hi-carbon composite' metal feet to stand on.

Twin D/A converters are employed from Wolfson in the PD-D9 and Burr-Brown for the PD-D6, while a single decoding chip for DSD reduces the signal path length in order to minimise noise. The PD-D9's sampling rate converter (SRC) re-samples the data in and attempts to decrease jitter, while isolated PSU blocks are employed to keep electromagnetic interference at bay.

The F-F6MK2-K tuner allows you to programme up to one hundred stations on both FM/AM and DAB bands and has a 192kHz/24-bit DAC chipset. RDS radio text is also included. Expect a review in *Hi-Fi Choice* in the coming months.

Price from £400 (PD-D6MK2-K) Due now ☎ 0870 600 1539

www.pioneer.co.uk



WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10.1

Wharfedale is heralding its new Diamond 10 series with the 10.1, the latest incarnation of its most successful bookshelf loudspeaker. Replacing the 9.1, the new 10.1 includes a stronger curved-wall cabinet and a composite front baffle with piano-black finish. It retains the 125mm Kevlar cone of its predecessor, but the main driver has a more substantial chassis with a massive flange. A diamond pattern has also been moulded into the cone surround, apparently to damp standing waves. The tweeter is a 25mm soft dome that's protected by a 'metal diffusion phase corrector' or grid, which is said to 'iron out high-frequency perturbations up to 30kHz'. A neat aesthetic touch is an invisible grille fixing, so there are no holes on the baffle. Sensitivity is a low 86dB and bass extension is said to go down to 45Hz – not bad for a 29cm-tall box.

Price: £200 **Due:** now ☎ 01480 447700

www.wharfedale.co.uk



FM SWITCH OFF 2015?

The media's reaction to Lord Carter's report on Britain's Digital Future gave the impression that FM tuners will be obsolete in 2015, but a closer look at the actual report is more positive. The reality is rather closer to our story in *HFC 321*, where we reported that the BBC's Tim Davie didn't expect a digital switchover during his lifetime. What Lord Carter says is, "At the heart of our vision is the delivery of a digital radio upgrade programme by the end of 2015. On that date all services carried on the national and local DAB multiplexes will cease broadcasting on analogue". Which does sound bad, but it depends on certain criteria being met and these include 50 per cent of listening to be digital (which includes non-DAB sources) and that DAB achieves comparable coverage to FM, reaching 90 per cent of all population and all major roads.

Ofcom is incentivising broadcasters to achieve this by threatening to terminate licenses to FM broadcasters that don't also take up a DAB license, but as such things are extremely expensive and listener numbers still very low, this is not an appealing option for commercial broadcasters. In essence, what Carter's report is saying is that he wants the digital switchover to happen in 2015, but circumstances will have to change considerably for this to be achieved.



BELLES IA-01

US-based amplification specialist Belles has produced its first integrated amplifier in the IA-01. Built around the technology developed for its LA-01 preamplifier and MB200 power amp, the new integrated produces 180 watts per channel and uses very simple circuitry and fully discrete components. Belles claims that its stand-out feature is the ability to 'remove itself from the equipment equation and just leave the music', something it seeks to achieve with 'ultra-quiet operation' and wide bandwidth (the literature quoting 0.2Hz to 125kHz). Based around a balanced transformer, the IA-01 has four single-ended inputs and a pre-output alongside the speaker terminals on its minimalist back panel.

Price: £5,250 **Due:** now ☎ 01684 593085

www.powermodules.com



TRIANGLE QUATUOR SE

Triangle has revamped its Quatuor floorstanding speaker to SE (special edition) status by incorporating elements of its Grand Concert model. The French speaker expert has incorporated the tweeter from its Grand Concert SW2 range-topper, which is machined from a single piece of aluminium and weighs in at 1.4kg. It's said the high-mass approach has been chosen for its ability to eliminate high-frequency resonance. Quatuor SE uses two tweeters: a 110mm midrange and three 205mm bass units in a cabinet that stands 133.8cm high. Triangle used blind listening tests to select internal cabling for the Quatuor SE, eventually settling on one cable for the mid and bass and another low-capacitance type for the treble. The new speaker is said to be more open and refined than the standard version and also to be less fussy about partnering amplifiers.

Price: TBC **Due:** now ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.triangle.fr

GRADO GS1000i

Grado has upgraded its flagship headphone to the GS1000i. Launched in 2006, the original GS1000 has been thoroughly revised. The main changes include the use of a new species of mahogany, said to go through an 'intricate' curing process for the earpieces, upgrades to the transducers themselves and cable modifications – the cable is an improved eight-conductor design (revisions which are said to result in greater control of bass and treble). The ear cushions are said to create 'individual listening rooms' for each ear.

Price: £1,100 **Due:** now ☎ 01279 501111

🌐 www.gradolabs.com

HARBETH P3ESR

Harbeth has announced the P3ESR, its successor for the HL-P3 bookshelf monitor loudspeaker. Owner and designer Alan Shaw wanted to incorporate the company's Radial-2 mid/bass driver and make the P3ESR easier to drive than the HL-P3. It uses a five-inch version of the Radial-2 unit, alongside a tweeter from SEAS (alternatives to the latter were considered, but Shaw found that it couldn't be bettered).

The P3ESR was born out of the BBC LS3/5A and stands at only 31cm tall and is said to deliver exceptional bass response. Harbeth's design brief for the speaker included matching or exceeding midband sensitivity and increasing minimum impedance from four to six ohms, factors which mean less power is needed to drive the speaker. The P3ESR comes in cherry veneer as standard, but alternatives including maple and rosewood (pictured) are available at extra cost.

Price: £1,349 **Due:** now ☎ 01444 484371

🌐 www.harbeth.com



Soundbites

MONITOR AUDIO'S Airstream 10 is a retro-style DAB/FM/internet radio that's finished in real-wood veneer and has 'orientation flip' – the ability to be used upright or on its side. It streams audio, has a built-in alarm clock, and offers four presets – just enough to cover the decent online radio stations out there!

Price is £225.

☎ 01268 740580



ALIUM AUDIO is bringing the Chinese Shuguang Treasure Series valves into the UK. These use 'the world's finest' high-polymer compound carbon which gives the glass its black finish and is said to enhance and maintain the stability of electron flow. The range includes 300B, 2A3, KT88 and 6CA7 valves, and prices start at £145 per pair.

☎ 01273 608332



DENON has a new luxury in-ear headphone dubbed AH-C710. It features an ergonomic design, a 'radial cascade damper' for reducing cable transmitted vibration, plus an acoustic optimiser for improving sound. The housing is a combination of soft plastic and aluminium. Expect to pay £140.

☎ 02890 279830



NAD'S IPD 2 iPod dock offers analogue audio and S-video connections to any amplifier, and also allows control and display via NAD models with Data Port. It also automatically charges and allows stand-alone control of iPods with the supplied remote control. More importantly, it's white. Recommended price is £95

☎ 01279 501111



DALI has replaced its Royal Menuet speaker with the Mentor Menuet – a 25cm-high bookshelf design. It uses a 110mm mid/bass unit with a wood fibre cone, while the tweeter is larger than usual at 28mm with an ultra light dome. It will retail for £479.

☎ 0845 6443537

Unison and Opera

The Unison Research and Opera loudspeaker factory has been non-stop of late, **Dan George** reports on a plethora of new valve-based electronics



Some people talk to their plants, but certain species respond better to opera

With just days to go before *Hi-Fi Choice* went to press, we took a call announcing a raft of new products from the Unison Research/Opera loudspeaker factory, near Treviso, Italy. Not wanting to miss a scoop story, we grabbed our camera for a non-stop day-trip.

The term 'family run' is commonly used to describe businesses who want to instil a sense of trust and confidence in the consumer. But in the Unison Research/Opera factory, there's no marketing bull, it's just the way it is: Giovanni Nasta, his wife and their two sons, head up the compact team. There's even a feeling that the engineers are part of the wider family – the entire staff are closely bonded and seem highly integrated into the company's day-to-day affairs.

Both Unison Research and Opera loudspeakers share the same factory, to the north of Venice. Despite the impressive size of the premises, the in-house team is small and highly efficient, building all kit to order. All production is done in the factory, with just a small number of components such as chassis, transformers and front panels made locally to specification

With two brands residing in the same building, there's a certain natural synergy between Opera's speakers and Unison's electronics. If ever there was a combination of brands that removed the guesswork and head-scratching from system-building, then this has to be it.

From Opera, we heard the new £20,000 Malibrán floorstander – a multi-tweeter, multi-driver, 130kg tower with design cues from the Grand Callas. The speaker comprises four baffle-mounted, five-inch midrange drivers plus tweeter, three 10-inch, SEAS-developed, side-firing bass



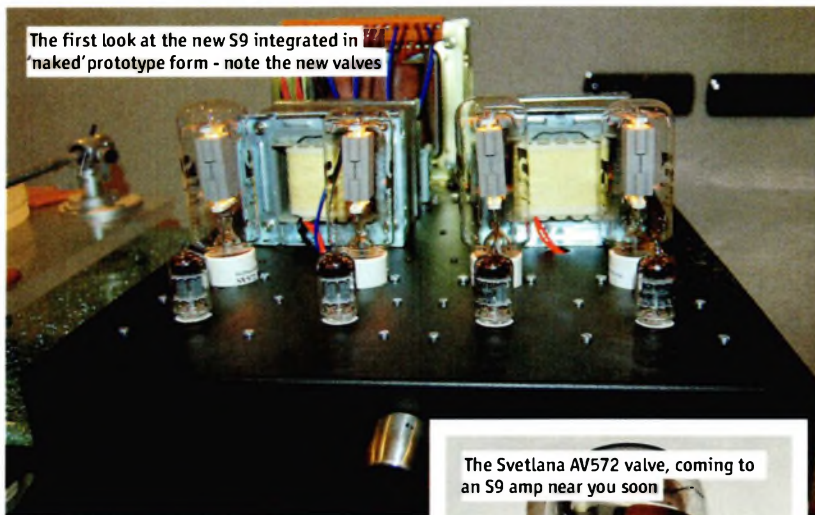
Rack 'em up - a wealth of new beauties from Unison Research, including the new server



Opera's new £20,000 multi-driver Malibran looking the part

units, plus four rear-firing, Scanspeak tweeters. The tower, which at 146 litres is much smaller (and cheaper) than the Grand Callas, has been designed to be domestically friendly and easy to place in-room thanks to user-controlled filters.

Perhaps the most innovative new product, however, is the new Unico Music Server from Unison Research, which as the name suggests, is a hard disk-based music source. Although based on carefully chosen PC architecture, the selected components eschew the need for forced-air cooling, allowing the unit to run incredibly quietly. Stored discs can also be played back from RAM instead of the hard-disk, allowing for silent replay. There's also massive 6.5-inch touch-screen interface panel, thought to be class-leading.



The first look at the new S9 integrated in 'naked' prototype form - note the new valves

The Music Server is, of course, also a CD player and is based on a TEAC drive with conversion done by Wolfson and a newly designed tube output stage to boot. It currently boasts a high-spec 750GB Western Digital drive, which should store around 1,500 uncompressed CDs.

On the analogue side and following 2009's Giro turntable launch (*HFC* 318), Unison has also re-introduced two phono stages. SimplyPhono is an all-tube unit operating in Class A, based on four ECC83 double triodes. It features a new symmetrical board layout and a number of design changes said to reduce crosstalk by up to 20dB. This is joined by the PhonoOne, based on five ECC83 tubes, a matching power supply called PhonoPowerSupply, plus a new venture – a mains power conditioner, named the Unico SF1.

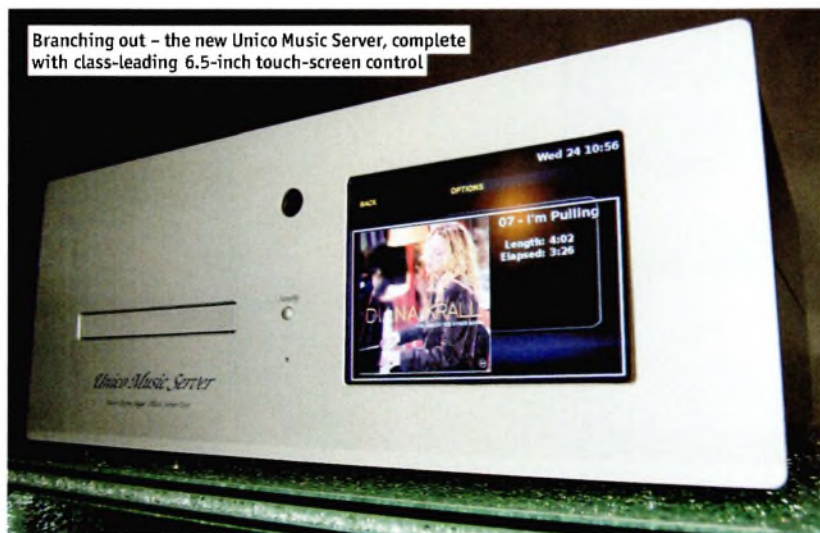
The best surprise, however, was kept until the end. Still in prototype form, Unison's head engineer Gianni Sachetti unveiled the new S9 integrated valve amp. At its glowing heart is a valve that Sachetti has spent two years working



The Svetlana AV572 valve, coming to an S9 amp near you soon

with – the Svetlana AV572 (above). Due for its first outing at Milan's Top Audio show, the new S9 is all about the new tube, which Sachetti says is from "the best valve factory in the world."

Both the new Unison electronics and the Opera speakers are destined to arrive in the UK in the coming weeks and months. But for an exclusive look at the Malibran speaker, be sure to check out Alvin Gold's review in *HFC's The Collection* on sale in September. **HFC**



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Richard *Black*

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

Technology

Why blind listening tests can provide the most reliable verdicts

One of the central tenets of this journal has always been comparative listening tests, conducted 'blind'. By this we simply mean that the listeners don't know which specific products they are listening to and everything practical is done to eliminate incidental differences, such as playback level. Once distracting factors have been eliminated, what's left should be the clearest possible picture of how a product performs against its peers.

Blind listening has always had its proponents and detractors and recently there have been a few articles, both in other parts of the hi-fi press and from manufacturers, suggesting that blind tests are, at best, inefficient and, at worst, useless and/or misleading. We have great faith in our testing methodology in *HFC* and naturally don't quite agree with either of those suggestions – but it is important to have a clear idea of what blind listening is trying to achieve.

You see, there's blind listening and blind listening. Our tests are simple and straightforward. They are conducted on a fairly small group of products (half a dozen, say) in a typical domestic environment with ditto ancillaries and they are conducted quickly. That's partly a practical consideration, but we've also found that longer tests seem to give no better indicators. Within the parameters of such tests, if listeners haven't heard anything significant in a couple of minutes, they're not going to.

At the other extreme, large-scale formal tests conducted by university departments as part of the development of lossy coders, for instance, can take days of organising and hundreds of man-hours of listening. They take place in tightly controlled environments and use complex statistical methods to process

the results. Listeners are typically required to grade performance on a scale of one to five, or else identify sound X as either A or B. Clearly this is nothing like domestic listening – it's not meant to be, but it serves a purpose.

Our listeners, by contrast, are encouraged to write anything at all they think appropriate. Comparing, contrasting and juxtaposing their comments during a review is a useful tool in helping you, the prospective purchaser, decide whether a product will press your buttons.

One recent comment we saw criticised blind listening as discounting the other factors that go towards making a piece of hi-fi aspirational – look and feel, features and so on. Which is why we invariably discuss such factors and provide a photograph or three for good measure. We also listen sighted, usually both before and after the panel has made its impartial comments. Significantly, we have found good correlation between listeners and, on occasions when a product is repeated from an earlier test, between sessions.

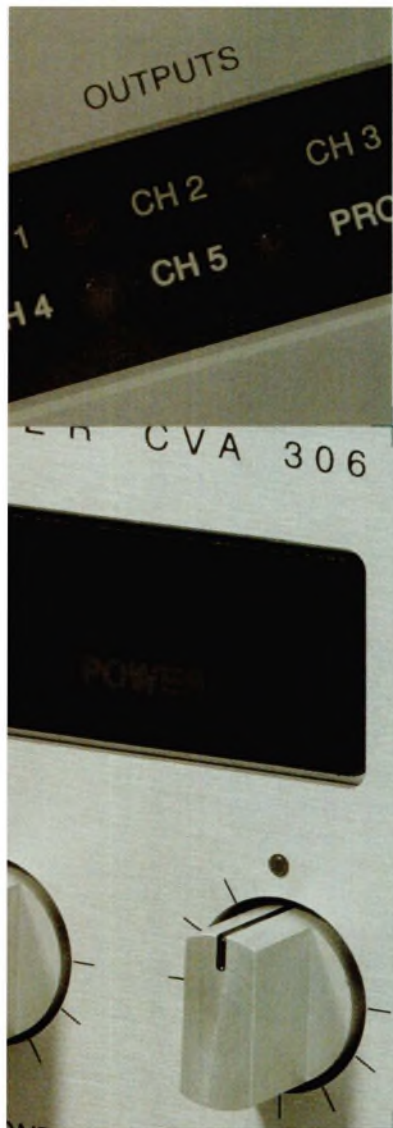
The big university-style listening tests are useful, too. The Audio Engineering Society has published numerous papers detailing how these tests are done and the results they have produced, and no one reading those papers can be left in any doubt of their utility.

Tests like that would be both impractical and useless for *Hi-Fi Choice*. We have evolved our own unique tests that suit our needs well. No test for anything is perfect and any test can be misused, but anyone who discounts all blind tests for all audio purposes has misunderstood the procedures badly. **HFC**



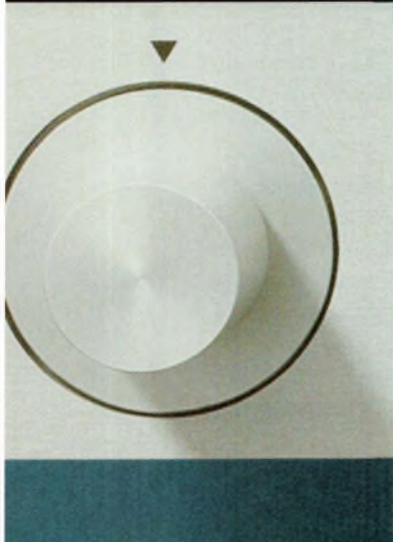
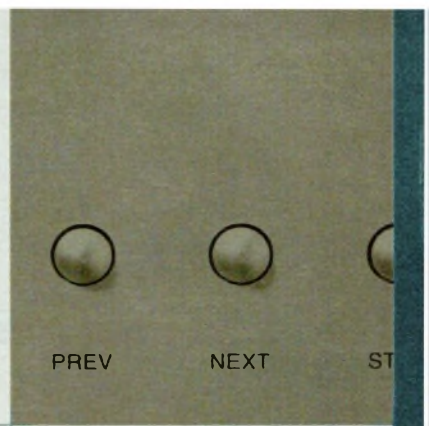
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"...anyone who discounts all blind tests for all audio purposes has misunderstood the procedures badly."



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Jason Kennedy

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

Living Legend

A recording legend reveals the horrors of modern music

"...we who appreciate sound quality have not done anything to educate people about what's wrong with MP3..."

George Massenburg is something of a living legend. Like me, you may have seen his name among the credits on your albums. His production and engineering credits include Billy Joel, Linda Ronstadt, Madelaine Peyroux, Little Feat and Randy Newman among many others, yet he started out as an electronics engineer and produced the first parametric equalizer. His GML company manufactures high-end electronics for studios and, as a consultant, he has been involved in numerous high-profile studio designs. It's safe to say that he knows more about sound recording than most of us put together. For that very reason, I expected him to be quite old, so when he gave a guest lecture recently for the AES (Audio Engineering Society), it was quite a surprise to see an energetic man in his early fifties.

The reason he wanted to talk to the AES is that he is very concerned that we who appreciate audio engineering and sound quality have not done anything to educate people about what's wrong with MP3 and other compressing codecs. He showed us footage of an extremely popular music video from YouTube and the sound was indeed dire when replayed through a pair of ATC SCM150 active loudspeakers, but then this is YouTube, so you don't expect decent bit rates when video is being streamed simultaneously. So he played us uncompressed and MP3 versions of a high-quality recording, the MP3 sounded a little a little less smooth, but the difference wasn't enormous. Then we were played the artefacts that the MP3 process had added to the original, essentially the difference between the two versions that the compression process produced. This sounded very nasty indeed – a sort of hissy midrange noise. Massenburg then did the same demonstration with some more raucous material by Neil Young. He described the effect as "trashing all his [Young's] work on the upper guitar and hi-hat." And while the artefact is not dissimilar to guitar distortion, it's different enough to screw up the

sound, and once you've heard its character it's hard to ignore. Massenburg describes these MP3 artefacts as "well over 25 per cent peak error" and, given the level of the distortion, it's hard to disagree with him. We were played the effect with both hi and low bit ProTools MP3 recordings and it was very similar in both instances. It would seem, therefore, that any form of lossy compression is a bad thing.

He went on to play a number of very high-quality recordings, some of them on copies of the multi-track originals, which were fascinating. Stevie Wonder's *Superstition* has a very funky keyboard line played on a Clavinet and those who have listened carefully to it have often wondered whether there is more than one keyboard line. It would seem that there are, we were played the two lines separately and could hardly believe how ham-fisted the playing seems to be, yet when you put them together they blend perfectly and produce one of the strongest grooves on record. He also played some contemporary tracks taken straight from the desk, things like Tom Petty's *You Don't Know How it Feels* and a fabulous bit of early sixties' Dylan. It was quite a treat.

Massenburg's main concern is that "we've got a generation of kids who think that this [MP3] is right", and apparently bands have been turning up at mastering studios with either MP3s of their work or copies that have been through a lossy compression system prior to its finalisation. According to vinyl mastering engineer Miles Showell of Metropolis Studios this is happening more and more.

Apple Lossless and other lossless formats are not so bad according to the pros, but Massenburg is keen that all recordings should be made to the highest standard or, in his words "make clean originals so you can come back to it one day." Let's hope the recording fraternity hears the call. **HFC**



Hi-fi legend George Massenburg lectures on the sound quality from audio compression



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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

Our picks from Munich

Gems from the annual High End show

“Although I’ve no personal experience of Unison’s valve-hybrid models, I’m a big fan of Gianni Sacchetti’s valve amplifiers.”

Although the German High End Society’s Munich show in May seemed busy enough and actually boasted an increase in exhibitors over the previous year, several of the larger, more international brands (including the two largest global hi-fi speaker companies, Bowers and Wilkins and Focal) were notable absentees.

Also missing was German distributor TAD Audio Vertrieb, which handles several significant and creative hi-fi brands including Opera loudspeakers and Unison Research, and Rega, both of which are introducing several interesting new products.

The Italian Opera-Unison operation has proved particularly adept at finding and filling gaps in the market. Although I’ve no personal experience of Unison’s solid state and valve-hybrid models, I’m a big fan of Professor Gianni Sacchetti’s valve amplifiers. I loved the single-ended Performance and the push-pull P70, both of which I reviewed in these pages, and understand that the latter’s baby P40 brother has become a worldwide hit.

I’ve put my name down to try a P40 sometime soon, but what really interested me was the news that Sacchetti has found a suitable replacement for the 845 valve used in a number models, including the S8. The 845 triode has long been his favourite power valve sonically speaking, but it has been proving increasingly difficult to find good-quality examples that can deliver consistent performance at acceptably low prices.

Now he’s found an alternative, a triode from a Russian Svetlana factory called an SV572. A modern design combining fine performance and consistency at a good price. Two are needed to replace each 845, but the prototype we heard at the press meeting was clearly delivering top-class, single-ended valve audiophile sound quality.

The substantial upmarket speakers used in this demonstration were also interesting. Sitting between the earlier Tebaldi and Caruso models, the Malibran represents designer Mario Bon’s latest ideas on loudspeaker/room integration,

many of which are unusual and radical, but also make a good deal of sense.

Malibran (named after a legendary 19th century mezzo-soprano) is a large three-way floorstander, each with no fewer than 12 (!) drive units. The bass up to c180Hz is delivered by three 250mm long-throw aluminium cone units, each operating in a 40-litre sealed-box. Four 125mm midrange drivers, with magnesium alloy cones, fill up much of the front and are arranged so the roll-off frequency progressively rises as one moves up the line, so just the top one crosses over directly to the solitary front tweeter. Four subsidiary tweeters are mounted in pairs on the rear, to provide Opera’s ‘Cross Linked Dipole’ system, which directs treble output upwards and downwards.

Britain’s Rega has long been recognised as a leading choice for those with audiophile aspirations but limited funds, and cost-effective engineering has long been the company’s watchword. Accordingly, Rega is introducing two new and decidedly upmarket components, an Isis CD player and an Osiris integrated amplifier, each with very classy presentation, substantial build (Isis weighs some 18kg, Osiris around 30kg), and an anticipated pricetag of around £6,000.

Although all Rega’s CD players use the same disc drives, Isis will use just the one in 50 that’s closest to the exact spec. Separate transformers and circuit boards are used for the analogue and digital circuitry and the Burr-Brown DACs, operating in dual-differential mode, have their op-amp outputs by-passed, so Rega can implement this function with discrete components.

Osiris’ circuitry is fully complementary and symmetrical. It uses a single pair of Sanken output transistors per channel, to deliver a rated 160 watts into 8 ohms and much more into lower impedances. And the overseas distributors are reportedly very happy. **HFC**



Munich’s High End show is fast becoming a must-attend event

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Past Glories

Are golden oldies really goodies?

“For those who know what they want and the models they are looking for, there is a huge argument for the use of older components”

Despite the continued economic gloom, interest in vintage items from cars to clothes remains strong. Likewise, a strong retro theme can be found in many aspects of modern life from the smart new Fiat 500 to the fresh portrayal of a 1960's icon in the new Star Trek film. This movement is having a considerable affect on hi-fi and interest in older, 'classic' items has been growing from an already strong base to reach new parts of the market.

In some cases there are perfectly valid reasons for seeking an older piece of equipment. Anybody with a healthy collection of cassettes is unlikely to find much amongst current manufactured output to rival some of the higher-end designs from Nakamichi and Pioneer. Even a format still considered current such as FM has seen a decline in the number of truly high-end tuners available and may see you benefit from searching out an old Audiolab 8000T or Leak Troughline, if you cannot afford a Magnum Dynalab.

Officially defunct formats such as Laserdisc, a format that enjoyed tremendous success in America for a number of years, but died almost overnight around the same time that it launched in the UK, will also require you to look for an older model if you wish to keep enjoying the medium.

Beyond this, however, is an increasing willingness to experiment with older items in categories and price points where there is no shortage of new material. In part, this is possible due to the harmonisation of connection types, unit size and overall design over the last twenty five years or so – an amplifier from 1989 is unlikely to provide any connection issues to a CD player from 2009, whereas an amp from 1969 may not be so accommodating. In a similarity to the used car market, high-end product from yesteryear is available for today's mass market prices – and given that much of the interest is directed at the vintage high end, then it's probably as good a reason as any to look at high-end product for a

truly competitive performance in modern terms. The car analogy also extends to the fact that should your vintage high-end product need parts or attention, you will almost certainly be reminded about how much it originally cost. Even with these considerations taken into account, there are still good reasons why the market continues to grow.

I have recently spent time with owners of a Technics SP10 direct drive turntable from the 1970's, a Marantz PM4 from the early 1980's and an original Naim Nait. All were purchased in the not too distant past and all for prices that can only be considered reasonable. They had been integrated into systems that also contained modern components and the results were universally excellent. For those who know what they want and the models they are looking for, there is a huge argument for the use of older components. Watching the used values of some components over time suggests that there are many people coming around to this way of thinking – and, of course, those who spot a nice little earner when they see it.

There are also those who are not quite confident enough to introduce a component old enough to vote into their system, but there is an increasingly strong streak of retro revivalism in some modern hi-fi. The Yamaha stereo amps and SACD players are extremely advanced internally, but unapologetically ape their designs from the 1970s. Also hailing from Japan, Luxman and Accuphase are busy producing some extremely sophisticated units wrapped in casework that has not undergone significant alterations over the years.

Closer to home, the evergreen Michell GyroDec and Tannoy Prestige line have a timeless aesthetic, but are capable of state-of-the-art performance. Should you want a period hi-fi to match your new retro room, new or used there has never been a wider choice. **HFC**



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EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 26** Rotel RCD-1520 CD player & RC-1580/RB-1582 amps
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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

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

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...pare this with marantz's £800 player, the 17 MkII M, which has excellent build and e a very good impression in HFC 243. At same price there's also the Cyrus 7, a ng all-rounder in a compact case.

...ter 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... have had them on for several days with the... after a livelier... w tubes shone

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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 ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★

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CONCLUSION

...Acoustic is being very ambitious producing a two-box 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.

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KEY FEATURES (RCD-1520) Size (WxHxD): 43x9.9x32cm ▷ Weight: 6.5kg ▷ 12V trigger and external IR control ▷ (RC-1580) Size (WxHxD): 43x9.9x33.7cm ▷ Weight: 7.7kg ▷ Inputs: MM/MC inputs, 5x line inputs, 2x tape circuits ▷ Outputs: Electrical digital output ▷ (RB-1582) Size (WxHxD): 43x14x40.6cm ▷ Weight: 17.1kg ▷ MP3 compatible ▷ 200 watts ▷ 12V trigger and external IR control

CONTACT ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.rotel.com

Rotel is not the first and it certainly won't be the last to introduce mainstream high-fidelity components to supply a perceived need for affordable and essentially straightforward high-quality music-making. Rotel already has a history in this area, dating back to the well-liked, UK-optimised RA820 amplifier in the mid-eighties. In Rotel's case, the new models are known collectively as the 15 series, which includes a single CD player and integrated amplifier, two preamps and two power amps. Here we look at the CD player and the senior of the two pre and power amplifiers, which cost a little under £2,800 in combination. Not cheap then, but a long way from the high end. Each of the components tested is available in brushed silver or black,

while highlights of the series include the so-called Balanced Design Concept, a 'disciplined synthesis of physics, electronics and mechanical engineering', though there's little to indicate what this means. Rotel points to particular care over parts selection, to the

“The Rotel combo’s main strengths are its forward, punchy sound which help it to seem alive and agile.”

extent of avoiding surface-mount components as far as possible, because component substitution of SMD's is hard work.

The circuit layout attracts another jargon phrase – Symmetrical Signal Trace, meaning that the individual channel layouts are identical, to preserve imaging and soundstaging. Star-grounding is also used, wherever possible and Rotel lays great stress on evaluating circuits by ear.

Looking at each of the three components individually, the power amplifier employs a segmented (multi-section) power supply with a large transformer to minimise hum and to guard against voltage drop under operational conditions. Rectifiers, voltage regulation and storage capacitors are selected for tolerance and sound quality. With the CD player, Rotel specifies Wolfson for D/A

conversion and digital filtering, which has a strong reputation for sound quality, along with Burr-Brown op-amps.

The RC-1580 is powered by an 'oversized' transformer, with UK-made electrolytic capacitors from BHC. A low-noise differential

mode MM/MC phono input is included, along with a unity gain stage to allow a surround sound processor to be patched in, bypassing the volume control. Another highlight is that the design is intended for the world of custom install, with an infra red input and an RS-232 interface.

The RB-1582 is a well-specified power amplifier. It is heavy, thanks to the large on-board power supply and is capable of delivering 200 watts per channel from its bipolar Class A/B output stage. Once again, an IR input is fitted and the amplifier has 12 volt triggers.

The three components look very clean, largely because of the bright aluminium finish and more generally due to care over attention to detail. The slot-loading CD player mechanism is smooth and completely trouble-free, making it a slightly simpler operation than a player with a drawer-loader. The socketry on the various back panels was of a decent quality, especially so in the case of the power amp's loudspeaker terminals.

The latter has straightforward line inputs and four-millimetre binding power outputs, the only extras being 12-volt in and output trigger sockets. Predictably, the preamplifier is more elaborate. It too, has remote control in and outputs and two 12 volt triggers, so the whole system can be woken up by the pressing of a single remote control button.

SOUND QUALITY

On the whole, this is a fine combination, individually and collectively, but don't make the mistake of thinking that its qualities are evenly spread. The Rotel combo's main strengths are its forward, punchy sound, which help it to seem alive and agile. On the minus side, the amplifier in particular, can sound raw and aggressive. The treble tends towards



[Review] Rotel RCD-1520 CD player, RC-1580 preamplifier and RB-1582 power amplifier

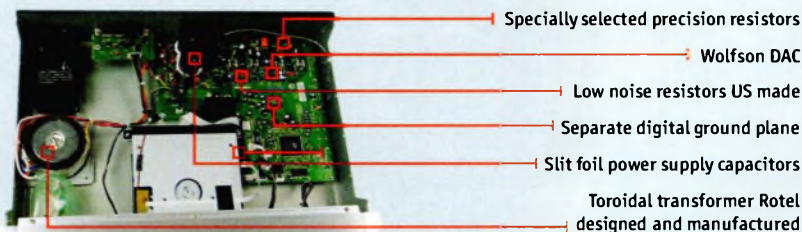
being bright and edgy too, which is particularly noticeable with other system components that err in the same direction.

The Cabasse ENC-1050, a medium-size standmount two-way speaker (scheduled for review in a future issue of *HFC*) is a particular offender with the Rotel amplifier when compared to the system that had been built around it a few days earlier – comprising a Denon DCD-SA1 and a Belles IA-01 integrated amplifier. This last is a high-grade, £4,000 design which is undergoing sea trials preparatory to an upcoming review. And yes, these components are way out of Rotel's league, but were on hand for a different purpose. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to compare the Rotels to something as near as we could contrive to an absolute standard of excellence.

It is extraordinary how different two amplifiers can sound. In addition to the forward mid/upper balance and the treble's propensity for sounding raw and edgy by the best standards, the Rotel's bass is also balanced on the lightweight side of normal, its definitely thinner and less muscular than with the other test system and this (please note) was through the same loudspeakers. There is also a clear difference in the way timing cues were handled by the two reproduction chains and the Rotel lacks the obvious sense of depth that is part and parcel of the Belles amplifier.

But the Rotel pre/power is still a good amplifier. Especially when driving speakers that are a little easier to cope with, our long-term Yamaha and Monitor Audio models proving the point. In most cases it is convincing, even the forward-sounding balance had a positive effect by helping the system sound punchy and dynamic.

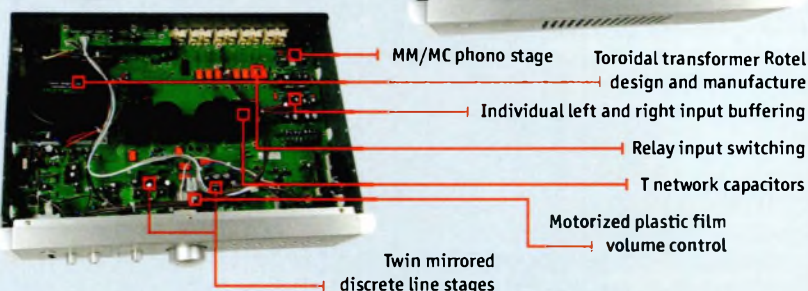
RCD-1520 CD PLAYER ::



RB-1582 POWER AMPLIFIER ::



RC-1580 PREAMPLIFIER ::



But it's the CD player that impresses us most of all. It still has a trace of what was sounding suspiciously like the Rotel 'house sound'. It is a little forward in balance, though only a little, but it is also surprisingly sweet and open-sounding. Image depth is impressive and lateral soundstaging is expansive. It 'breathes' in a way that contrasts favourably with other similarly priced players.

We also discovered that the Rotel player copes surprisingly well with marked and damaged discs. It seems that a slot-loader doesn't have to compromise usability, which is an obvious danger, though it is worth practicing handling discs carefully to avoid getting finger marks over the surface.

Although the amplifier has attracted some mild opprobrium in this test, it works well on the whole, but it was quickly apparent

that the real star here is the CD player, which at the asking price is clearly rather special. Overall, the combination is tonally on the lightweight side of neutral and there's a hint of untidiness, yet the presentation is also dynamic, colourful and vivid. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

NUT & BOLTS

The CD player is intended for replay of standard CDs or MP3-loaded WMA discs and has standard programme and random play functions. Direct track access is available from the remote control and an RJ45 is fitted for Ethernet-equipped systems. Usefully, Rotel has fitted a remote control input which could be used with an external receiver when the player's standard remote control receiver is blocked by furniture.

Amplifier facilities include phono (MM/MC), five line inputs and two tape circuits, with a 3.5mm socket for a media player and a similar socket available for headphones. The tape feed can be selected separately from the input selected for listening, both from the front panel and using the remote control.

The only features that we missed were the ability to turn the display lighting off or down and an optical digital output from the CD player.



VERDICT - RCD-1520

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

CONCLUSION

CD player lacks optical digital output, which might upset some users, but its feature-count is otherwise fine and sound quality is expressive and open.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/608305

VERDICT - RC-1580 RB-1582

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

CONCLUSION

Well-endowed and powerful, the only caveats concern the upfront balance, occasionally harsh treble and what was perceived as a lack of depth

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

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PRODUCT The Chord Company Indigo Plus
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CONTACT ☎ 01980 625700 # www.chord.co.uk

The Chord Company makes an enormously wide range of interconnects and other cable types, Indigo Plus being the reassuringly expensive cream of the crop. It is available in various fixed and custom lengths and is also comes with fittings other than the single-ended phonos on our test cable, including XLR balanced and DIN.

Indigo Plus is based loosely on The Chord Co's Signature Plus and is constructed similarly, except that Indigo uses stranded silver-plated copper conductors – Signature uses solid cores – and a better-quality Teflon dielectric. Indigo Plus incorporates two separately insulated cables which are linked at each end and provide separate primary and secondary signal return paths. The secondary signal return is also multi-stranded and the cable is said to have an extremely wide bandwidth. The secondary return path is said to enhance timing, dynamics, detail, depth, soundstaging and noise rejection, though a balanced cable construction will be superior in this respect; if your main system is appropriately equipped.

The connectors are extremely firmly anchored, and look as though they will sustain a lifetime of hard knocks, which is not always

the case even with some very costly cables from elsewhere. One aspect of this cable that we were less than happy about was its stiffness. It won't bend easily around tight corners, while the last few inches behind the plugs will barely bend at all.

One of the most appealing elements of the Indigo Plus, however, is the use of low-mass, silver-plated RCA plugs, with vibration-damping acrylic plug casings polished to a pleasing mirror-finish.

SOUND QUALITY

We were pre-warned that Indigo Plus takes a long time to run in, so it was used continuously for more than a week (with the volume setting at zero) before putting it to the acid test. The main test bed was the flagship Denon CD/SACD player and amplifier pairing, the PMA-

“One of the most appealing elements of the Indigo Plus is the low-mass, silver-plated RCA plugs, with vibration-damping casings...”

SA1 and DCD-SA1, with a Nordost Valhalla balanced interconnect, the unused cable removed from the active circuit when not in use. Other components included Monitor Audio Platinum PL300 speakers and Atlas Mavros speaker cable. Concerned about the stiff cable construction, we did check for

microphony, but without success. This doesn't necessarily mean it is not an issue, but it is certainly not a dominant concern.

By any standards, this cable is very good though as so often in its class, the distinguishing characteristics can be subtle and system dependent. It may not be ideal for Naim systems, for example, though there is good reason to believe it works well with Denon and other similar makes. It is a very clean, transparent-sounding cable, with a clear, translucent treble, which is slightly brighter and less muscular than some comparable cables, such as the Atlas Mavros (which, unlike the new Atlas Asimi cable, was available for comparison).

The bass is also extremely fine; characteristically lean in balance (perhaps, just in contrast to the treble) there is no

perceptible bloom, but we did feel it was not quite as subtly nuanced as a Nordost Valhalla balanced cable. However, this may have more to do with the balanced operation, which is partly determined by the occluding effect of the treble. Stereo imagery, on the other hand, is always very precisely articulated.

Coming to a balanced assessment of a cable as costly as this is far from easy and the bottom line depends critically on the character of the host system. But this is a thoroughly dynamic and musical cable which shines in high-resolution, high-end systems. **HFC**

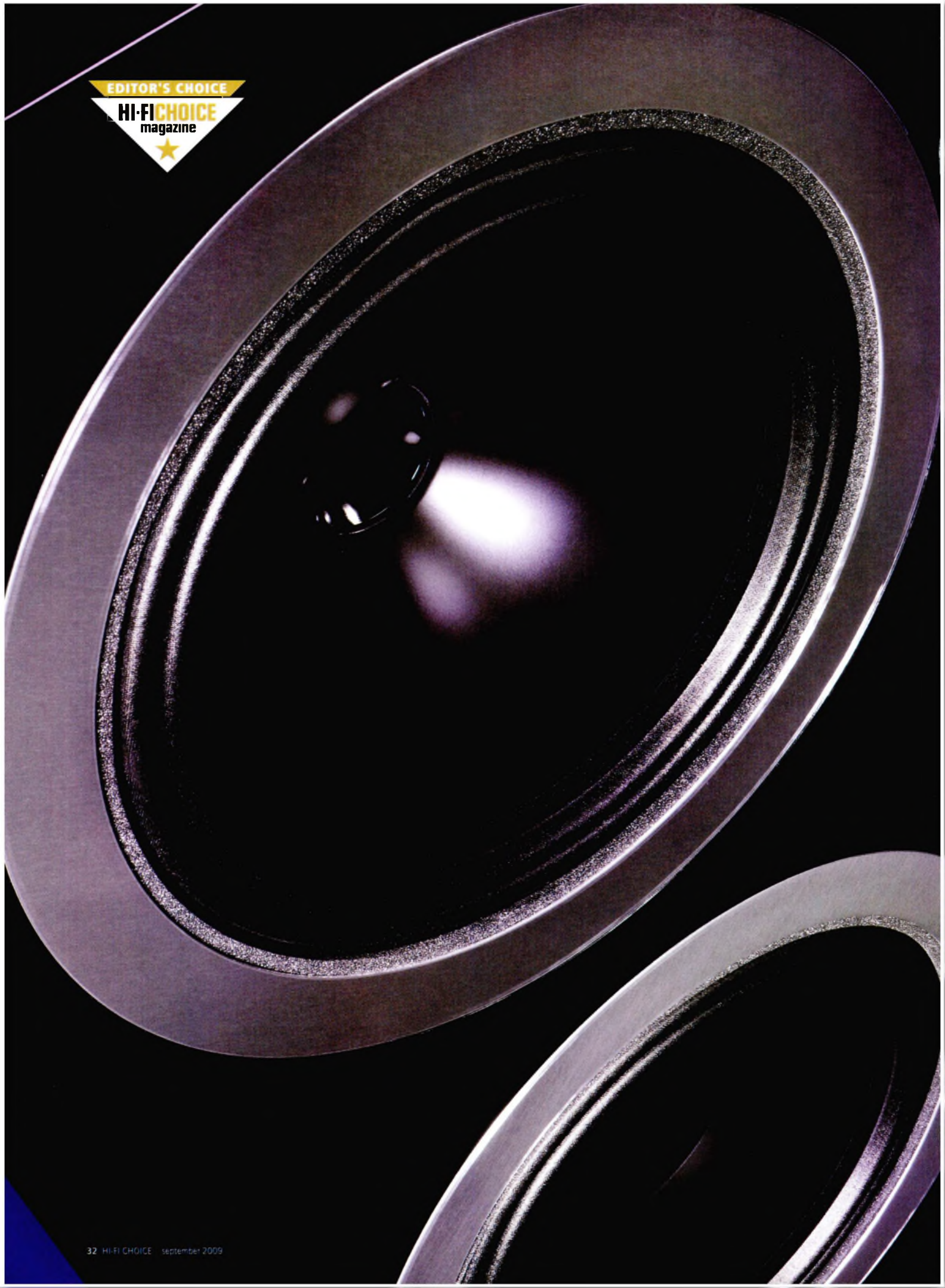
Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION Costly, but high-class cable needs running in. Even then it is a little shy at the low-frequency extreme compared to the treble. But overall this is finely detailed design.
PRACTICALITY ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★☆	
URL www.techradar.com/608313	

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Dynamic Definition

A large, muscular, elegant and contemporary variation on the Dual Concentric theme

PRODUCT Tannoy Definition DC10T

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £5,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 34x112 5x32cm
 ⦿ Weight: 34.5kg ⦿ Drivers: 254mm Dual Concentric mid/treble, 254mm bass ⦿ Power handling: 125 watts (8 ohms) ⦿ Sensitivity: 92dB ⦿ Frequency response: 30Hz-35kHz ⦿ High gloss black finish ⦿ Deep cryogenic-treated crossover components ⦿ Strongly curved sides and heavy bracing

CONTACT ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

Tannoy is one of the oldest names in British hi-fi (and ProAudio) loudspeakers, as well as being one of remarkably few companies from any field of operations whose names have passed into the English language as verbs (Hoover and Google being two other obvious examples).

Although the company has changed hands several times – it's currently part of the Danish ProAudio operation TC Group – it has still maintained considerable continuity, both in terms of the team responsible for the designs and in the unique Dual Concentric drive unit that has formed a cornerstone of its model line-up since 1948.

Tannoy seemed to become preoccupied with its professional audio products in the immediate aftermath of the TC Group merger in 2002. However, it now appears to be paying more attention to the hi-fi sector, first with the introduction of the Revolution ranges of models during 2008 and now the much more upmarket and brand new Definitions.

This DC10T is the largest of three Definition models, which are a very different proposition from the range that carried the same name back in the mid-1990s. At £5,000 per pair, this is an unquestionably costly loudspeaker, but it's also a very substantial and beautifully built one. The DC10T name translates as follows: the 'DC' bit refers to the Dual Concentric drive unit that does most of the work; the '10' refers to the size (in inches) of both drive units; 'T' is for Tower, the type of speaker we usually refer to as a floorstander.

The DC10T is actually a two-and-a-half-way design, with two 10-inch (254mm) drive units. The Dual Concentric driver combines a 180mm paper bass/mid cone with a 25mm horn-loaded tweeter that fires through the centre of the cone, so it's effectively a two-way full-range drive unit. A bass-only drive unit of similar size

and construction sits below the DC unit, to ensure plenty of low-frequency output.

One interesting detail is that the surrounds of both these drivers are made from heavily doped fabric and formed into a 'double-S' profile. This rather old-fashioned technique has

“Provided the amplifier and speaker cables are up to the task, (the DC10T) sounds powerful as well as entertainingly agile...”

been coming back into favour recently, as it seems to have less hysteresis than the more common rubber surrounds. Subjectively, this seems to give greater 'speed' at some expense in terms of coloration.

The earlier, more costly Dimension series feature an extra external super tweeter, but the WideBand tweeter used in this Definition model has a 25-micron, titanium dome that extends its frequency response to 35kHz. The tweeter horn is the latest version of Tannoy's 'tulip waveguide' and, incidentally, keeps the delicate parts well away from prying fingers and accidental damage. Other engineering features include a crossover network whose components have received deep cryogenic treatment, while internal wiring is silver-plated, high-purity copper. Twin terminal pairs are fitted for bi-wiring or bi-amping, plus a fifth terminal that may be used to earth the driver chassis to the amplifier – allegedly reducing RF interference and enhancing dynamic range.

All this considerable engineering is packaged into a large, very elegantly shaped and beautifully finished enclosure, with notably crisp and clean contemporary lines. Our samples came in a high-gloss black finish, dramatically contrasting with the silver trim around each driver and near the base, but dark walnut and cherry (again high-gloss) are slightly less extreme alternatives.

The relatively large main driver means that this speaker has to be quite wide and also fairly tall (in order to get the tweeter horn up to seated ear-level). Behind the consequently rather imposing front panel, the sides are strongly curved towards a much narrower back, so that reflections and internal horizontal standing waves should be nicely dispersed. Two large ports are also mounted on the

narrow rear panel. The grille is held in place by magnets concealed beneath the front panel surface, which are invisible if the grille is not used.

Under the surface, the body is constructed from high-quality plywood, made from dense

birch grown in cold regions of the world. The bracing incorporates Tannoy's Differential Material Technology (DMT) techniques to couple the driver/enclosure interface rigidly and with appropriate self-damping. We have one minor criticism, however, regarding the spike floor-coupling arrangements. Although they are well-handled, the narrow back ▶






Wadia 381i CD Player

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does compromise stability. A plinth would enhance both appearance and stability, though a rear outrigger would be sufficient to improve the latter.

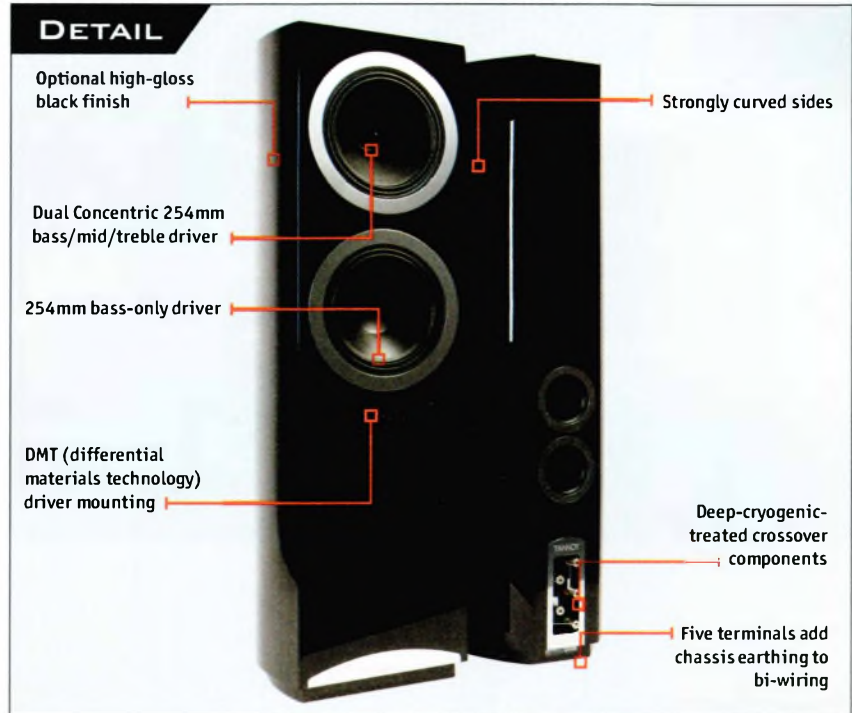
SOUND QUALITY

Ports tuned to a low 28Hz, plus two large 254mm bass drivers ensure that the DC10T delivers more than ample low bass, even when sited well clear of the walls in our reasonably large (4.2x2.6x5.5m) listening room.

Indeed one can fairly argue that the DC10T delivers rather too much bass below 75Hz under our listening conditions, but this doesn't really prove a problem subjectively in practice, because the quality of the bass is mostly very good. Provided the amplifier and speaker cables are up to the task, it sounds powerful as well as entertainingly agile, albeit with just an occasional hint of chestiness.

The caveat is important because the load drops to a very low three ohms at low frequencies, which is really too low for comfort. However, the practical implications are difficult to assess, because the sensitivity across the same bass frequencies is very high indeed, of the order of 95-97dB. The overall midband sensitivity is pretty generous at around 91-92dB, so even low-power amplifiers should deliver decently high listening levels without distress. The greater worry is the possible influence of the speaker cables, which must be low in resistance (either short, or with a good cross-section of conductor).

Although sensitivity is high and the overall balance above 100Hz is pretty well-ordered, it's not particularly smooth and the far-field



'power' response shows a quite obvious dip at the mid-to-treble crossover point (1.5kHz).

The DC10T might not, therefore, be the most neutral speaker on the block. Certainly, voices do sound a bit shut-in, with some 'cupped hands' coloration, but a few minutes playing music quickly makes one realise that those factors are not necessarily the most important ingredients in making music sound interesting, involving – and fun.

Indeed, as soon as the speakers are connected up to music sources, their 'fun factor' comes through strongly. This is an immensely entertaining loudspeaker, thanks to a combination of fine overall coherence and excellent dynamic capabilities. Few speakers can match its ability to define dynamic contrasts and hence convey the musical expression that is an innate part of tight dynamic control.

Most of the listening was carried out using Vertex AQ speaker cables from a Naim NAC552 preamp (NAP500 amplification), fed from a CDS3/555PS CD player, a Linn/Rega/SoundSmith turntable and a Magnum Dynalab MD103T FM tuner.

Additional listening was done with the five-conductor, LFD-sourced Tannoy-branded cable (originally supplied for the Dimension series). The extra earth wire did seem to offer a modest increase in dynamic range by lowering the noise floor. And a pair of 200/400W MSB M200 Platinum monoblock power amps were added to the mix, which allowed the speakers to be driven to unfeasibly high levels. Their ability to upset the neighbourhood by delivering Leftfield's alternative house album *Leftism* at full power and with excellent quality was deeply impressive, making this an ideal speaker for

those who like to party at home.

The horn-loaded tweeter used by Dual Concentric drivers has high inherent efficiency and hence plenty of headroom. While the DC10T's top end sounds clean, sweet, well-balanced and nicely integrated, the horn does concentrate the treble output into a 90-degree cone, so the ratio of direct-to-reflected treble sound is lower than with a conventional direct-radiating tweeter. This, in turn, has significant consequences for the stereo imaging, sharpening the soundstage focus, but somewhat reducing the impression of 'musicians performing in the room'.

This DC10T is not without character and its colorations might, perhaps, be a little too obvious for some tastes. Equally important, however, it supplies an uncommon degree of dynamic grip and drama, which seems more than fair compensation. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

BOX-FREE SPEAKERS

Deep Cryogenic Treatment (DCT) is a technique applied in a number of hi-tech engineering industries today. It involves using liquid gases such as nitrogen to slowly cool key components, especially metals, to around -190 degrees centigrade, then restore them equally slowly, to room temperature. This process is believed to relieve stresses created during manufacturing processes and is claimed to result in more consistent physical structures at a microscopic level.

Although the mechanisms and reasons are still not well understood and evidence is largely anecdotal, its use in audio components (consumer and professional) does seem to be growing steadily, thanks to the efforts and facilities of companies like Frozen Solid Audio.

Respected cable makers such as Townshend, Ecosse and Black Rhodium have been using DCT for some time and after extensive listening and engineering reliability tests, Tannoy is now applying it to the new Definition series crossover networks and internal cables.

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

PRO
Classy shape and fine high-gloss finish, this big speaker has high sensitivity and delivers real dynamic expression with plenty of grip and punch, plus precisely focused stereo images.

CON
Bass is a bit too strong and midrange has some coloration. Needs low resistance speaker cables.

CONCLUSION

Classy big speaker has massive bass, high sensitivity, real dynamic grip and precise image focus. A real party animal, but midrange has some coloration. A separate plinth would also improve stability.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE



URL www.techradar.com/608326

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Arcam FMJ P38 Power Amplifier.....	£349.00
Cyrus AV Master 8.0 AV Processor.....	£374.00
Cyrus Discmaster 8.0 DVD Player.....	£318.00
KEF KHT3005SE AV Speaker Package.....	£1,039.00
KEF XQ10 Speakers.....	£654.00
Loewe Individual 32 Selection LCD TV.....	£1,499.00
Loewe Xelos A32 DR+ 100 LCD TV.....	£1,124.00
Monitor Audio R53 Speakers.....	£324.00
Parasound TH42P281 Plasma TV.....	£374.00
Pansonic TH50P2900 DVD Player.....	£1,294.00

LOUGHTON 020 8532 0770

Arcam Logo Sub Woofer.....	£374.00
KEF XQ40 Speakers.....	£1,499.00
KEF XQ50C Centre Speaker.....	£489.00
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Living Control Musicbox 6 HDD Audio Server.....	£2,974.00
Merantz BD7003 Blu-Ray Player.....	£319.00
Merantz MW8000 Power Amplifier.....	£374.00
Musical Fidelity A5.5 CD Player / Amplifier.....	£2,599.00
REL R505 Sub Woofer.....	£749.00
Yamaha DVD52700 DVD Player.....	£274.00

MANCHESTER 0161 831 7969

Artocoustic C1 Centre Speaker.....	£324.00
Artocoustic Diabolo Surround Speakers.....	£344.00
Cyrus DAB 8.0 DAB Tuner.....	£324.00
Loewe Viewision DR+ DVD Recorder.....	£399.00
Monitor Audio Radius R225 Surround Speaker.....	£99.00
Pioneer BDP-LX51 Blu-Ray Player.....	£299.00
Pioneer PDX29 CD System.....	£454.00
Revel S12 Surround Speakers.....	£349.00
Yamaha AS2000 Amplifier.....	£374.00
Yamaha CD200 CD Player.....	£349.00

NOTTINGHAM 0115 911 2121

Arcam DVA DV157 DVD Player.....	£649.00
Herman Karbon AVR165 AV Receiver.....	£389.00
KEF IQ90 Speaker.....	£349.00
Loewe Connect 37DR+ Media LCD TV.....	£1,649.00
Loewe Individual 28 Selection LCD TV.....	£1,079.00
Loewe Individual 46 Composite LCD TV.....	£2,899.00
Monitor Audio Radius R270 Speakers.....	£249.00
Musical Fidelity A5.5 Amplifier.....	£1,104.00
Musical Fidelity X-DAC V8 DAC.....	£499.00
Quad L1212 Speakers.....	£249.00

POOLE 01202 671677

Arcam Dva AVP700 AV Processor.....	£749.00
Arcam DVA P1000 AV Power Amplifier.....	£349.00
Cyrus Pre V52 Pre Amplifier.....	£655.00
Loewe Blu-Tech Vision Blu-Ray Player.....	£499.00
Loewe Connect M37 LCD TV.....	£1,409.00
Loewe Cube 2 Motorised Stand.....	£309.00
Loewe Spherios 37 LCD TV.....	£2,369.00
Onkyo TXSR876 AV Receiver.....	£349.00
Pioneer DVHLX61D DVD / HDD Recorder.....	£324.00
Yamaha DVDS1700 DVD Player.....	£199.00

SEVENOAKS 01732 459555

Arcam FMJ T31 Tuner.....	£279.00
Bose L598 / III DVD System.....	£1,899.00
Bose L546 / III DVD System.....	£2,399.00
Denon AVR1509 AV Receiver.....	£199.00
Denon AVR209 AV Receiver.....	£89.00
Entertainment PC EPC Classic Entertainment PC.....	£399.00
KEF Picotone 3+ iPod Dock.....	£299.00
Parasound TH46PZ85B Plasma TV.....	£349.00
Parasound TH50PZ200B Plasma TV.....	£1,199.00
Samsung LE22A656 LCD TV.....	£249.00

SOUTHAMPTON 023 8033 7770

Denon DVD1800BD Blu-Ray Player.....	£349.00
KEF KHT510 DVD System.....	£499.00
Merantz PM11 S2 Amplifier.....	£1,999.00
Merantz ST7001 DAB Tuner.....	£209.00
Monitor Audio Good Signature GS10 Speakers.....	£354.00
Monitor Audio Short Wedz 2 Speakers.....	£399.00
Onkyo DVBD065 Blu-Ray Player.....	£289.00
Quad 908 Power Amplifier.....	£649.00
Quad 98 Power Amplifier.....	£389.00
Yamaha BDS2900 Blu-Ray Player.....	£429.00

TUNBRIDGE WELLS 01892 531543

Arcam DVA DV157 DVD Player.....	£449.00
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Parasound DMHEX78 DVD / HDD Recorder.....	£199.00
Parasound DMHEX87 DVD / HDD Recorder.....	£229.00
Quad L-the Sat Surround Speakers.....	£69.00
Yamaha DSPAX763 AV Amplifier.....	£299.00

YEovil 01935 700078

Arcam Solo Mwaie 5.1 DVD System.....	£1,299.00
REL B2 Sub Woofer.....	£304.00
REL R-306 Sub Woofer.....	£534.00
Roksan Caspian M Series Mono Amplifier.....	£1,949.00
Roksan Caspian M Series Power Amplifier.....	£744.00
Roksan Caspian M Series Pre Amplifier.....	£1,099.00
Roksan Caspian PhonoStage SE M-Series Phono Stage ...	£999.00
Roksan Caspian Pre DST1.5 / XPS3 PSU / Speed Control.....	£779.00
Roksan FR5 Speakers.....	£1,249.00
Roksan Xerxes 20 (Artemis / Shivala) Turntable.....	£4,279.00

*Some items are ex-display but all are sold with full warranty. These products are only available from the stores listed and are subject to availability - please confirm before travelling. All prices were correct at time of going to press. End-of-line and clearance offers are not available in conjunction with any other offer or promotion. Advert valid until 19/08/2009, £80E.

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Radio daze

Compact table radio with the big sound!

PRODUCT Vita Audio R2i

TYPE Table radio/iPod dock

PRICE £300 (black lacquer finish)

CONTACT ☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.vitaaudio.com

We were a little surprised to read on the Vita Audio website that the company has only been selling its distinctive table radio-based products since late 2006 – surprised, because they already feel a familiar part of the landscape. Coming from the same stable as Ruark loudspeakers, they make a point of applying decent audio design – both in electronics and acoustics – to the basic idea of a table radio. Tivoli arguably blazed a trail on this front, but Vita Audio has certainly adopted the philosophy with enthusiasm.

The R2i includes DAB and FM radio, a couple of line inputs (phono sockets at the rear, mini-jack at the front) and a universal iPod dock, plus a notional 20-watt amplifier and two loudspeakers, each in its own enclosure with a downward-firing reflex port. On the top of the unit is Vita's familiar 'RotoDial' control, which isn't absolutely the most intuitive user interface we've ever seen, but works well enough. On the upmarket R4 this is removable to use as a remote: here, the remote is a separate credit card-size item.

Three different finishes are available for the R2i. Walnut is the basic option, while white or black lacquer will set you back an extra £20. Frankly, given the quality of the lacquer, that's

a bargain – we were very impressed with our black sample and it seems very resistant to scuffing and scratching, too. Finish is to a very high standard generally, while the insides are neatly and efficiently assembled, but the display's a little prosaic and not great for legibility off-axis.

Various signal-processing options are on offer, including loudness, '3D sound' and simple tone controls, and be aware that 3D sound and loudness both default to 'On' when power is removed and restored, though not when the unit is switched on and off via front panel or remote. As usual with DSP, off is best.

“This one managed the likes of Ian Dury, Mahler, Handel, various solo piano tracks, choirs – the lot, with admirable insight.”

SOUND QUALITY

If we're going to make any complaints, it will only be that FM reception isn't brilliant. Unless you are lucky and have excellent signal strength, the supplied telescopic antenna will barely suffice and really, who connects a table radio to a rooftop twig? However, DAB works much better and both it and iPod sources are quite capable of showing that this is a remarkably capable little unit. The R2i has plenty of oomph, but also considerably more subtlety than one usually expects from the breed and it also offers a commendably neutral frequency balance.

All too often, integrated units like this sound muffled, or harsh, or both. This one suffers from neither affliction. Instead, it is clear and open with very good bass and natural treble. It has enough kick to do decent justice to a drum kit and a sufficiently flat response in the midband not to interfere with the tonal qualities of familiar voices. Turn up the wick and there is enough volume available to produce satisfying sound levels in a typical mid-size room, nor is there any hint of rattling or buzzing from within the unit.

But that's all specifics. The best part is the general feeling the R2i gives, that it is really

playing music. All too many of its kind sound as if they are struggling with anything more demanding than a radio phone-in show. This one managed the likes of Ian Dury, Mahler, Handel, various solo piano tracks, choirs – the lot, and all with huge aplomb and admirable insight. There's even a reasonable semblance of stereo, though obviously images are both narrow and rather vague. It might look a bit expensive at first, but we would rather listen to this than to many 'systems' available at a similar price. Admirable in every way. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION Very smartly built and well thought-out, the true glory here is sound that needs no special pleading on grounds of convenience – full-bodied, neutral and detailed. FM tuner is not very sensitive, however, and the volume control can be fiddly and the display is hard to read off-axis. But audio-philosophers deprived of the full monty won't be disappointed!
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/611865	



MUTE PASS THROUGH POWER

BRISTON

BP16 PREAMPLIFIER

VOLUME

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

BRISTON

BRISTON

Power squared

New pre/power amps combine excellent build quality with a high-power performance

PRODUCT Bryston BP16/2B SST2
TYPE Preamplifier and power amplifier
PRICE £2,850 (each)
KEY FEATURES (BP16) Size (WxHxD) 11.6x43.3x35.3cm
 Ⓞ Weight: 5kg Ⓞ Inputs: 6x line, 1x tape Ⓞ Outputs: 2x line, pre out, tape out Ⓞ (2B SST2) Size (WxHxD) 8.9x42.9x38.4cm Ⓞ Weight: 12.7kg Ⓞ Power output: 100 watts (8 ohms)
CONTACT ☎ 08704 441044 # www.bryston.com

When we tested the Bryston 2B SST2 power amplifier in *The Collection* last year, we were blown away by its effortless power and incredible resolution. The only problem with the 2B SST2 is that it's the company's most ambitious power amp to date and as a consequence, it's very expensive. Fortunately, however, the SST2 technology developed for the 2B has now been trickled down into the rest of Bryston's power amp range. This means that our test subject power amp, the 2B SST2, has much of its bigger brother's sophistication, without the prohibitive expense.

Partnering it is a newcomer to the preamplifier range, the BP16, which has the option of an on-board DAC or MM phono stage. The BP16 is one of two relatively new preamps to the Bryston range, sitting midway between the entry-level BP6 and the top-dog BP26. It shares the same casework as Bryston's B100 integrated and has the same preamp section.

Despite its no-nonsense appearance it uses software control to provide extra features, but keeps the signal within fully discrete, analogue class A circuitry. But being based on an integrated, it doesn't have a balanced

preamp output to match the input on all Bryston power amps, which seems odd.

In standard trim, the preamp has six line inputs and a tape loop (effectively seven inputs), plus there is the option of adding four digital inputs to make it a BP16DA, and also an MM-only phono stage (BP16P). Those with moving coil cartridges will have to add the external BP-1.5 phono stage and MPS-2 power supply, however. Other features include a full-size headphone socket, balance control, mute and a 12-volt trigger.

It's an extremely flexible preamp with a very substantial remote handset, although this costs an unpalatable £350. In fact the

Changes to the 2B brought about by SST2 technology include a new soft-start power switch, an RF filter on the input and higher input impedance. Noise and THD have been lowered, too and capacitors in the input and feedback loop have been upgraded.

Unlike the BP16, the 2B SST2 has balanced as well as single-ended inputs the sensitivity of which can be changed between one and two volts – the standard one-volt setting offering six decibels of extra gain. The one-volt setting is considered standard, but the two-volt option is said to offer lower noise and thus sound better, but it does require more gain from the preamp.

“...there is one market-leading factor built into the pricing, Bryston's legendary nuke-proof build and 20-year warranty...”

duo itself isn't on the cheap side, but there is one market-leading factor built into the pricing and that's Bryston's legendary nuke-proof build and outstanding 20-year warranty and for that it deserves commendation.

The 2B SST2 is the latest incarnation of Bryston's entry-level stereo power amplifier, a model that has been around since Margaret Thatcher first took office, but now offers twice its original power output at 100 watts into eight ohms. This figure increases to 180 watts into four ohms and there is also the option of bridging the 2B SST2 to turn it into a 320-watt monoblock!

SOUND QUALITY

Arriving at the Bryston amps after our considerably more expensive reference Classé pre/power combo, we were struck by two things. Firstly, the combination's slightly 'pro audio' sound and secondly, how remarkably powerful the 2B SST2 is given that it's the base model in the range.

Our Bowers and Wilkins 802Ds presented no load problems to the Brystons but did, perhaps, highlight our 'pro audio' findings: by high-end standards, there is a slight shortfall in absolute refinement, but this has to be tempered by the fact that the price is not high-end in the full sense.

The amps are extremely revealing and assured for the asking price and the longer we listened, the better they got. Interestingly, however, all of the relevant subjective comparisons we made with well-regarded and with more affordable amplifiers went distinctly in favour of the Canadian pairing, which speaks volumes for the design.

The amps are extremely good at revealing the depth of a note. The full harmonic structure of each instrument or voice is presented in a highly natural and convincing manner. So high bells have remarkable depth of tone and if some reverb has been added to the mix then the sound has even more body. The Brystons even go as far as ▶



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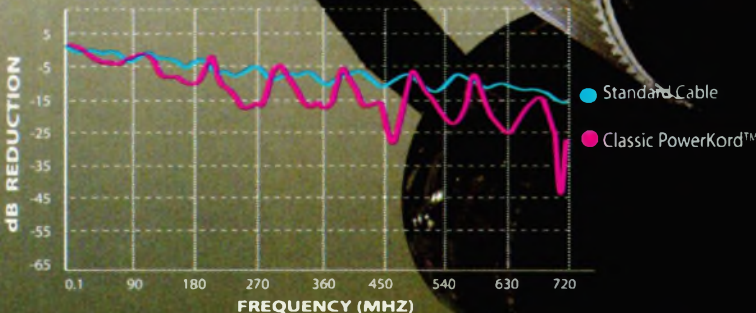
'One of the best value for money mains leads we've heard.'

What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision

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HiFi Choice magazine

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Mr C Donnelly, London

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The PowerMax Plus™, our best selling mains cable...
"The improvement over a standard giveaway cord is clear - you get improved clarity, smoother highs and weightier bass. Stereo imaging becomes more expansive, and the equipment's presentation sounds cleaner and more precise"
What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision Ultimate Guide to High End Entertainment, Sept. 08



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making more affordable amps seem thin at high frequencies, suggesting that the company's claims about attention being paid in this area has wrought useful returns.

While not quite as open as the best in class, the amps are extremely revealing through the midband, producing entirely convincing imaging with genuine solidity of stereo. There is a delicacy to instruments that is unusual: quietly struck cymbals and piano have a degree of nuance that is rare, we were particularly enthralled by this aspect of the Avishai Cohen Trio's performance.

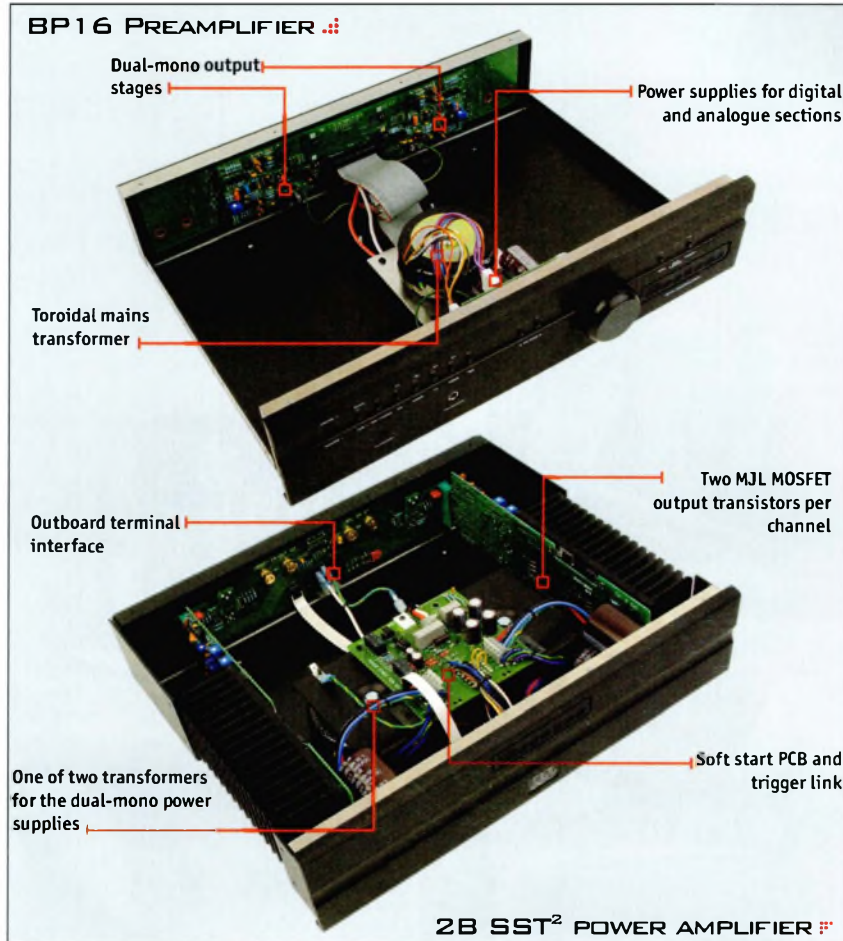
We were also particularly impressed by the grip that you get in the bottom end. This allows Cohen's double-bass to stand out from the band and feel like it's in the room, an effect that's further exaggerated especially if you turn the wick up. The combination of delicacy, bass prowess and transparency through the midband combined with the great timing it delivers really is the icing on a very special cake.

Taking the timing ability a step further, we assessed the amps by putting together a system stacked with kit that times particularly well. This included the Leema

FIRST TO LAST WATT

With SST² Bryston set out to develop amplifiers that sound as good at low output levels as they do at higher ones. They call this philosophy 'first and last watt'. Most amplifiers have a power curve whereby the best noise floor, drive capability and distortion are achieved from around one third power output upwards, typically below this level the noise floor becomes apparent and the sound lacks energy. Bryston has sought to achieve this by addressing three factors, firstly by getting rid of low-level crossover distortion, which is said to have been virtually eliminated by using very fast driver transistors and a quad complementary output design that reduces the capacitance seen by those transistors. Secondly, Bryston made further efforts to reduce low-level noise in the system and thirdly, it concentrated its efforts on reducing distortion in the treble in particular and across the band in general.

Bryston claims that it puts more effort into reducing high-frequency distortion than its competitors and has the honesty to state that "the results are remarkably 'flat' THD-with-frequency curves, showing almost no tendency to increase distortion as frequency rises." As this an area where solid-state amplifiers are often at their weakest, its good to see that one company at least, puts its energies into resolving the matter.



Acoustics Tucana integrated amplifier and the Guru QM10 loudspeakers at the sharp end. Slotting in the Brystons just gave us more of what we were already hearing – on-the-money timing plus depth of tone.

Taking the BP16 on its own, we tried the variable output of Resolution Audio's Opus 21 CD player to remove the preamp from the system, to see how it changes things when used. The result gives bigger voices, a little more space, slight veiling but similar dynamics. All components add some character in this situation and the BP16 did well to intrude so subtly given the flexibility that it brings to the party.

Using the 2B SST² with an impressive MSB Technology transport and DAC which has its own volume control, reveals that it's a propulsive powerhouse that can deliver a degree of realism that is positively electric

with a serious source. It's the sort of combination that makes you want to dispense with preamplifiers altogether and live on the single-source edge. Certainly this is a simpler and sometimes cheaper option if done correctly.

The Bryston BP16 and 2B SST² make a convincing pairing and deliver a sound that is subtle, yet revealing. At the same time they offer real driving power and excel in the bass and there's not a lot more you can ask of an amplifier at this price. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★☆

CONCLUSION

Bryston consistently builds very high-quality amplifiers and the SST² upgrades bring real sonic gains. The power amp is marginally the better of the pairing, but the real magic happens when the two work in unison.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/608649

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BARQUE CONSONANCE M12 Mk2



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HORNING Eufrodite, Aristoteles & Agathon

Summer lovin'

Meet your new go-anywhere travel companion

PRODUCT Pure Move

TYPE DAB/FM portable radio

PRICE £80

CONTACT ☎ 0845 148 4001 # www.pure.com

Summer's finally here and what better way than to spend it outdoors? Even audiophiles have to leave the hi-fi behind sometimes, but that needn't mean missing out on music. And with a number of key summer music festivals (of all genres) now being broadcast on the radio, there's never been a better time to take your radio on your travels.

Pure's new palm-sized DAB/FM portable radio, called Move, has been designed with outdoor use firmly in mind. It'll happily pop in your pocket, but it also has a rear-mounted, hinged stand when it needs to be standalone. Perhaps the most notable feature, however, is the incredible battery life. Use the supplied Li-ion-equipped ChargePAK and the Move will provide over 40 hours of portable DAB listening from a ten-hour charge. A power adapter is included, too.

Move covers both digital and analogue bands, with full DAB III reception and decoding up to 192kbps. It offers ten presets each for DAB and FM and has a useful number of additional features for its size (width 15cm height 8.5cm, depth 2.7cm) and price. These include a 3.5mm auxiliary input, headphone output and something called textSCAN, which

allows users to pause and control DAB scrolling text – useful should you need to 'name that tune'. FM benefits from RDS and there's also a USB input for future updates via PC.

Build quality is excellent: the fascia boasts a brushed-aluminium finish which fronts a soft-touch-rubber main chassis. A central toggle switch controls volume, station search/select and textSCAN and there is a further pair of two-function control buttons that delve into menu, presets, info and DAB or FM operation.

Move's key-press-activated, orange-backlit LCD display is small, but legible and can be

“Use the supplied Li-ion-equipped ChargePAK and the Move will provide over 40 hours of portable DAB listening...”

left permanently on if required. It displays 16x2 characters, plus a number of function icons. As part of Pure's EcoPlus family, the company claims an impressive 0.95-watt power consumption for Move, which might make you feel better in your main hi-fi is 'always on'.

SOUND QUALITY

Hi-fi it ain't, but let's get some perspective here; as palm-sized, ultra-portable radios go, Move has a very appealing sound quality, if in the classic 'tranny' mould. It's 50mm drive unit

gives a typically small-scale bandwidth that eschews the frequency extremes and instead favours the all-important speech band. Legibility with the spoken word is, therefore, very good.

With headphones attached – we used our real-world reference Sennheiser HD 650s (£400) – the sound comes alive and shows the strength of Pure's electronics expertise; let's not forget that with the Evoke-1, Pure started the whole DAB thing off. Go back to the internal speaker, however, and the lack of bass is inevitable. Orbital's *Halcyon* (from the new hits album, 20) at 128kbps on DAB had plenty of

midrange drive and high-frequency bite, but was notably bass-shy. That said, Move has to be put in context – it's a 280-gram radio after all.

A move to Radio 3 in FM (test location five miles from the Wrotham mast in Kent) and things step-up, as you might expect. The gulf between FM and DAB – even at 192kbps – becomes obvious, especially with the HD 650s. Following a tune with the Move is easy, but speech is where it performs best.

For the money, Move is certainly fair value, especially when considering the built-in proprietary ChargePAK. In fact we've yet to come across a better-equipped, better-built radio with these tiny dimensions. It might not be bargain territory, but the superb construction, great feature count and two-year warranty certainly makes it worthy of a Best Buy badge in our eyes. **HFC**

Dan George



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★☆	CONCLUSION Not cheap, or audiophile, but a feature-packed, beautifully built DAB/FM radio that is truly portable and is a pleasure to use.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★☆	
URL www.techradar.com/608367	

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



ZONE 2

SETUP

Box clever

Cyrus has upped its game with its latest DAC-equipped integrated

PRODUCT Cyrus 8 XP d

TYPE integrated amplifier (with built-in DAC)

PRICE £1,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 7.3 x 21.5 x 36cm
 ⦿ Weight: 5.9kg ⦿ Rated power: 70 watts (8 ohms), 115 watts (4 ohms) ⦿ Digital inputs: 2x coaxial, 2x optical, 1x USB ⦿ Analogue inputs: 6x RCA phono
 ⦿ Outputs: Zone 2 or tape, bi-wire speakers, tape, preamp, 3.5mm headphone

CONTACT ☎ 01480 435577 # www.cyrusaudio.com

Cyrus is a company that refuses to stand still. Its MD, Peter Bartlett, is keenly aware that in hi-fi you need to keep things fresh if you want stay in business. The new 8 XP d integrated is a good example of this approach, it crams in more inputs and features than any previous Cyrus amplifier and most of the competition to boot. Yet it still fits in the half-width casework that is synonymous with the brand. After all, we've seen some densely packed back panels in our time, but in the sockets-per-square-inch-department this takes the biscuit.

It's not just about inputs and outputs though, what is really significant about the 8 XP d is what Cyrus has managed to fit inside the casing. The preamp is based on the same circuit topology as the company's £2,000 plus DAC XP and, while it's not fully dual-mono like the XP, it is based on the same concept when it comes to components and layout.

The 8 XP d costs £600 more than its v2 predecessor, but much of the increase can be attributed to the preamp section. The other source of cost is the inclusion of an onboard DAC indicated by the d suffix, something you won't see on the 6 XP integrated, but which is available as an upgrade. The DAC used is a

Burr-Brown device, the precise nature of which is not divulged. All that Cyrus will say is that it's the same as you can find in a, "very expensive UK-made music server starting with N" – so no prizes for figuring that one out! However, as anyone who follows such things will be aware, it's not what you've got, it's how you use it that counts and here Cyrus has gone such lengths as including separate toroidal transformers for the signal and control sections of the amplifier, in an effort to keep noise at bay.

The DAC takes inputs from RCA coax and Toslink optical S/PDIF inputs, as well as a USB socket on the back panel (the latter makes it the first Cyrus product that's fully compatible with PC sources and allows it to effectively operate as a high-quality soundcard). USB is not the greatest digital audio interface that

less noisy than previous iterations. It also allows for the amp to have an ecologically sound, sub-one-watt power consumption at standby, so you can leave it on without fearing the wrath of your tree-hugging, eco-warrior neighbours.

The huge feature list on the 8 XP d includes the ability to name individual inputs and when you consider that there are eleven in total this is almost essential. You can also adjust the sensitivity of the various inputs by +/- 6dB, so that output level doesn't vary too much when you switch from one to another.

Even more clever is the ability to play different sources in different zones, or rooms as we earthlings refer to them, although this does of course require amplification in the remote 'zone' or room.

“It's not just about inputs and outputs, what is really significant is what Cyrus has managed to fit inside the casing.”

a PC can offer but it is, as the name suggests, pretty well universal and avoids the cost and complexity of adding an onboard soundcard with a 'proper' digital output. Cyrus makes the point that a PC attached to this amp via USB has greater potential for good sound than a dedicated server, this on the premise that the amp can offer a quieter environment than something which has to combine hard drives with D/A conversion. Cyrus should know as it used to make such a thing... anyone remember the LinkServer?

The power amplifier has been upgraded by a new power supply section, in fact the whole amp has a new PSU and this is claimed to be

SOUND QUALITY

The first system we put this amp into consisted of the Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player and Guru QM10 speakers, a set-up that suits it rather well because all three elements are very strong on timing. So much so, that for the first time Radiohead's *In Rainbows* sounded musical and engaging (after a number of less satisfactory encounters using other hardware). This seemed like an auspicious start and confirmed that the 8 XP d is capable of resolving timing cues as well as its forebears, something that the presence of all that processing power could well undermine.

Bringing in a more revealing and even-

handed speaker, in the form of Bowers and Wilkins 802D, doesn't seem to phase this compact amplifier either. With only 70 watts to its name and an inevitably limited power supply in physical terms, one might expect it to struggle with this speaker, but the result is hardly embarrassing. Of course, you get

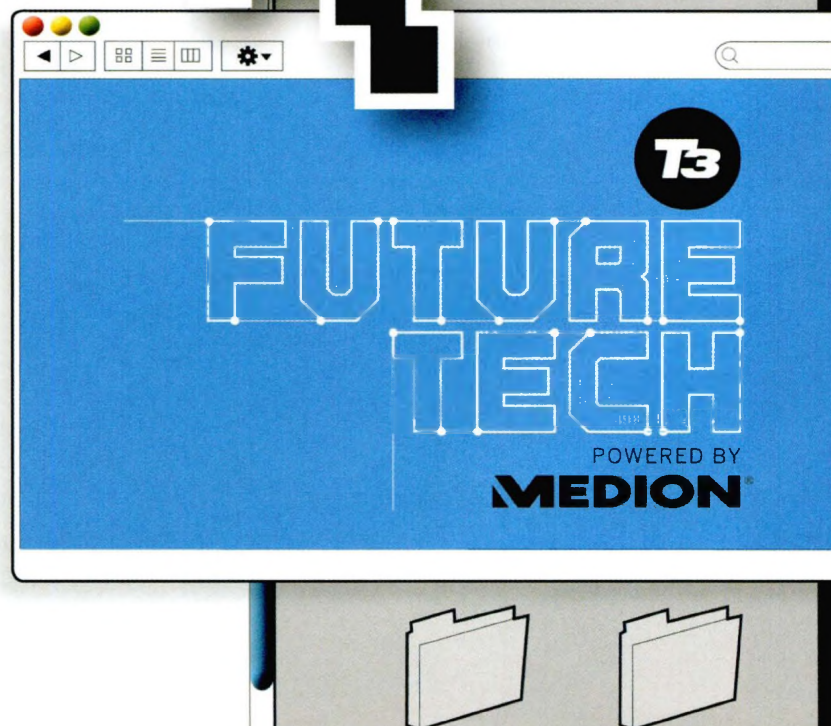




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UPGRADES

Cyrus has always been good at offering upgrade options to both its current and older models. You can, for instance, upgrade any of the old Cyrus 6, 7 and 8 amplifiers to 6 XP, 8 XP, 8 XP d or even 8 XP d Qx status, for a price that broadly represents the difference between the original purchase price and that of the model being upgraded to. As that last unruly set of suffixes suggests, there is even an upgrade available for the 8 XP d: the Qx DAC. This is the converter in the company's DAC X and DAC XP preamp, and essentially the best it can do in this department. The most straightforward upgrade is to add a PSX-R external power supply (£500) which you can hook up at home with no need to return the amp. The 8 XP d naturally has a socket for one of these.

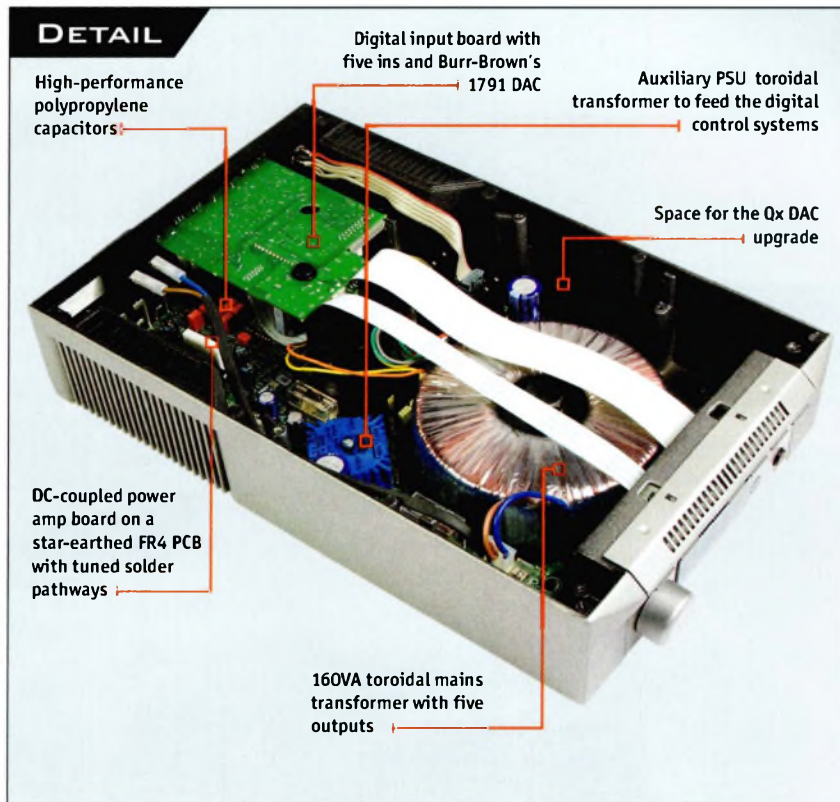
more substantial bass with more powerful amps, but the key elements are all there and it is possible to listen at a reasonable level without discomfort.

These results were achieved using the amp in analogue mode. Going over to its onboard DAC, the sound is a little bit tighter with some extra treble sparkle and a bit more transparency. It's not clear-cut, however, and which approach works best will depend on the quality of the CD player being used. The Opus 21 doesn't have digital out, so a Bryston BCD-1 was used and it was a close-run thing as to whether the analogue out was superior to the digital feed via the Cyrus' onboard DAC.

Concentrated listening reveals that the digital input has a more open and smooth sound, compared to the drive and power of the analogue input. Basically, you hear the Bryston's 'Pro Audio character' when using its output stage and this suits some material and some systems better than others.

As Cyrus is so pleased with the preamp on the 8 XP d we put this up against the Bryston BP-16 (see review on page 38). The dedicated design makes a good case for its price, showing the half-width competitor a clean pair of heels in all departments save for timing, where things are pretty much on a par.

We also repeated the Cyrus demonstration from the Bristol show, where visitors were



“Going over to its onboard DAC, the sound is a little bit tighter with some extra treble sparkle and a bit more transparency.”

shown what difference a CD transport makes compared to a PC. First we ran a Belkin USB cable from a Macbook, this produces a rather pared-down, but musical enough result and with Bob Dylan and his guitar the lack of detail isn't an issue, it's the musical engagement that counts. Moving to The Chord Company's Optichord optical cable (from the Mac's headphone/digital out) makes a big improvement; in truth it makes the USB sound flat and crude. *Girl From the North Country* on CD via a coaxial cable (The Chord Company's Signature) made a very good case for dedicated audio hardware – the Cyrus revealing increased dynamics, genuine high-frequency extension and significant increases in detail, which brings a vitality to the music.

Our final comparison is against one of our favourite integrated amps, the Arcam A38. This is marginally less expensive than the

Cyrus, but does not have the luxury of an onboard DAC. plus the plethora of extra inputs. As an analogue amp, the A38 has a smoother and more assured sound that has greater power, but fails to match the spark of the Cyrus.

The 8 XP d is the most ambitious Cyrus integrated to date and it does not disappoint, timing is as ever on the button and detail resolution is remarkably good for something with so many features. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	PRO Impressively resolute for something with so many features, it's hard to imagine anyone needing more sockets and it manages to sound musical.
FEATURES ★★★★★	CON The casework is not as slick as the competition at this price and the display is difficult to read when viewed from an angle.
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★★	

CONCLUSION
Cyrus has done a remarkable job to get so much flexibility out of such a compact box. But it still looks a little basic next to the best of the competition. However, if you want an upgrade for a system with several digital sources it's a no-brainer.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/608669



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

HEAT PROTECT

Second coming

Leema has improved upon an already successful formula

PRODUCT Leema Antila II and Tucana II

TYPE CD player and integrated amplifier

PRICE £2,735 (CD player); £3,425 (amplifier)

KEY FEATURES (Antila) Size (WxHxD): 11x44x30.7cm
 ◉ Weight: 12kg ◉ Digital outputs: Toslink, RCA phono
 ◉ Analogue outputs: XLR, RCA phono ◉ LIPS system integration
 ◉ 10x 24/192 stereo DACs ◉ Real-wood finish
 (Tucana) Size (WxHxD): 11x44x30.7cm
 ◉ Weight: 18kg ◉ Inputs: 5x RCA phono, XLR, unity gain, 3.5mm MP3
 ◉ Outputs: tape, preamp, 3.5mm headphone
 ◉ Rated power: 148 watts (8 ohms)/285 watts (4 ohms)

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

Leema Acoustics has had a busy year. Not only has it put the substantial Xanda loudspeaker into production, but it has also delivered a complete range of high-end amplification topped by the mighty Altair 500-watt monoblock power amps. The powerhouses arrived just in time for demonstration at the Bristol show, where their scale rather overshadowed the appearance of a new version of the Tucana integrated amp in the same room. Tucana II, as it has been dubbed, is now joined by a revised version of the Antila CD player bearing the same suffix which is also now known as the Antila II.

We reviewed the first Antila a year ago (HFC 291) and got a very engaging and revealing result, so naturally, we were very keen to obtain the revised model. The changes are not huge, though – obviously Leema realised that as the player was hardly broke it didn't need fixing – just a bit of refinement. What Leema has done, however, is to replace surface-mount (SMD) components with hand-matched, high-grade alternatives in 'key areas of the player.' Interestingly, this is the second instance of this approach that we've come across in

recent times. Rotel has done the same in its new 15 series, so maybe SMD isn't quite as desirable as some make it out to be? The other change to the Antila II is to the analogue output filter, which is said to introduce less noise and cross talk than its predecessor.

The most striking aspect of this player is its use of no fewer than 20 DACs, in what Leema calls its MD² topology. This parallel arrangement of 24/192 converters is said to produce 'analogue-like midband and high-frequencies' and naturally lends itself to balanced output.

The most obvious change to the back panel of the Tucana II amp is the addition of balanced inputs to match the player, but it's the front panel that is really different. It has gained a row of switches which can be used to

ability to control a loudspeaker. The transistors themselves have been changed to Thermaltrack devices, which have internal thermal sensors and are better able to combat heat distortion. Finally, the PCB layout has been optimised to minimise interaction between stages. All of which has added around £500 to the price of the Tucana II, making it one of the more expensive British integrations on the market.

The remote control has also changed to a slimmer and more attractive device that operates both player and amp – its buttons arranged in a manner that suggests it shouldn't be too easy to change input when you want to change volume, a factor which undermined its predecessor. The only minor irritation that remains is that output level

“The most striking aspect of this player is its use of no fewer than 20 DACS, in what Leema calls its MD² topology.”

adjust input gain, alter channel balance, instigate tape monitoring and mute output. There is also a mini-jack input for your MP3 player next to the mini-jack headphone output, plus a shallower volume knob.

Under the lid, the 'Altair project' has made its mark: the input and voltage amplifier stages have been re-designed to increase slew-rate and to make it more symmetrical on positive and negative swings, the goal being improvement of detail resolution and a resulting increase in image-precision. Leema has also lowered the impedance of the output stage which effectively increases the amp's

drops when the input is changed, this may be more of an issue for a reviewer, but given that input gain is now adjustable it does seem a shade Kinnock-esque inasmuch as it thinks it knows what's good for you!

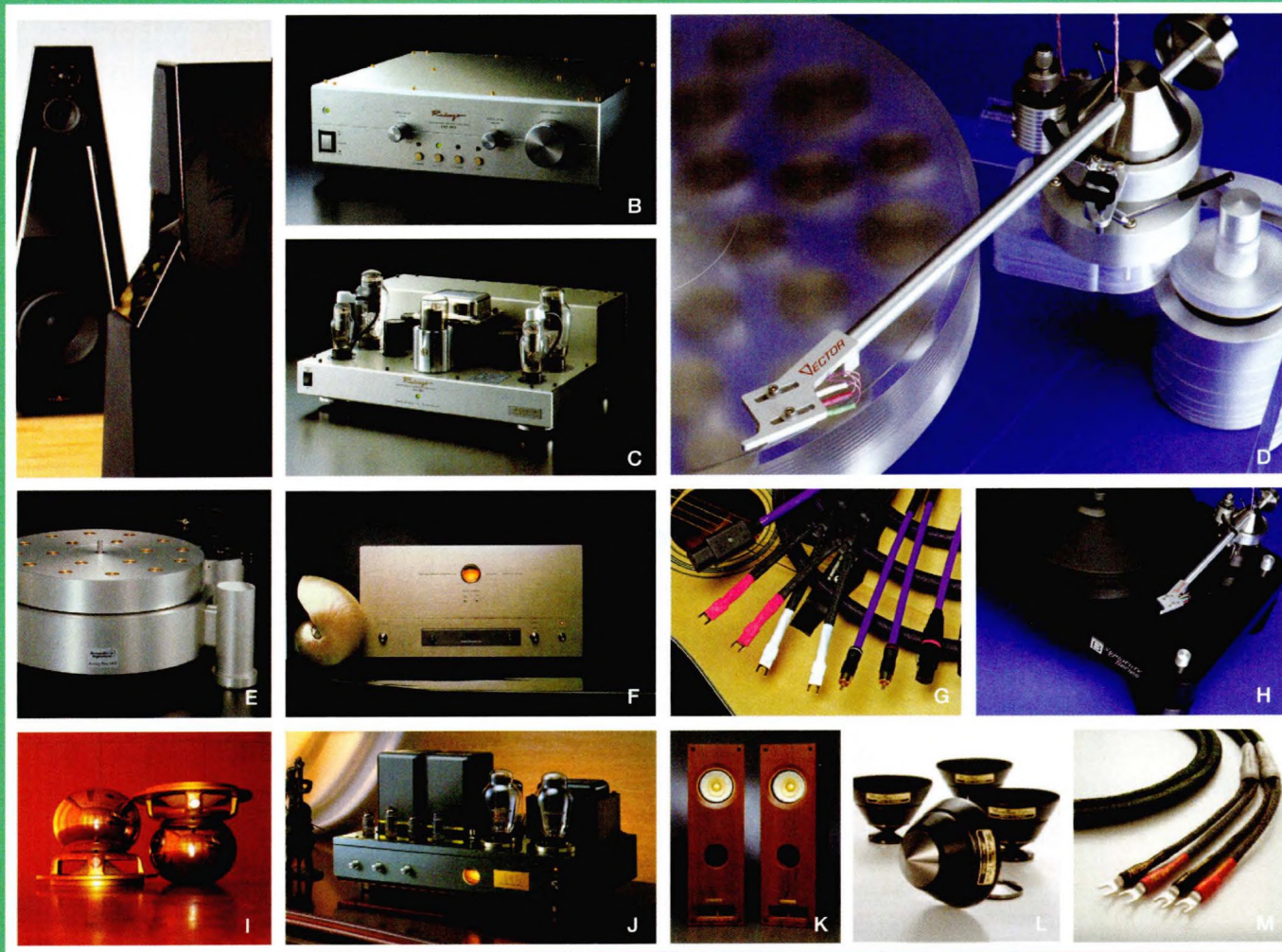
In practical terms the display on the Antila II is a little bit deep in the casework which makes it hard to read at an angle, but you can easily defeat it with the remote for a subtle sonic improvement. There are no track access numbers, but keeping a digit on the 'next' button causes it to scroll through the tracks quite quickly – when you get there it goes straight into play. Or, at least, it does if you have programmed it to operate in the style of a DVD player, standard CD-style operation is the default. One surprise... the balanced output level is lower than the single ended, usually it's the other way around.

Build quality is very high with both units. The casework is made up of aluminium top, front and heatsinked side panels, with stainless steel used for the base and rear panel. The Tucana's rear end is now ventilated for extra cooling capacity.

SOUND QUALITY

We have been using the original Tucana amplifier as a benchmark for some time now, so it is interesting to hear what Leema has





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- A. Gershman Black Swan
- B. Reimyo CAT-777
- C. Reimyo PAT-777
- D. Basis Vector Tonearm
- E. Acoustic Sig. Analogue One
- F. AirTight ATM-3
- G. Basis PSTT Cables
- H. Basis 2800 & Vector Arm
- I. Feastrex Coaxial Drive Unit
- J. AirTight ATM300
- K. Feastrex D6
- L. Harmonix TU-220MT
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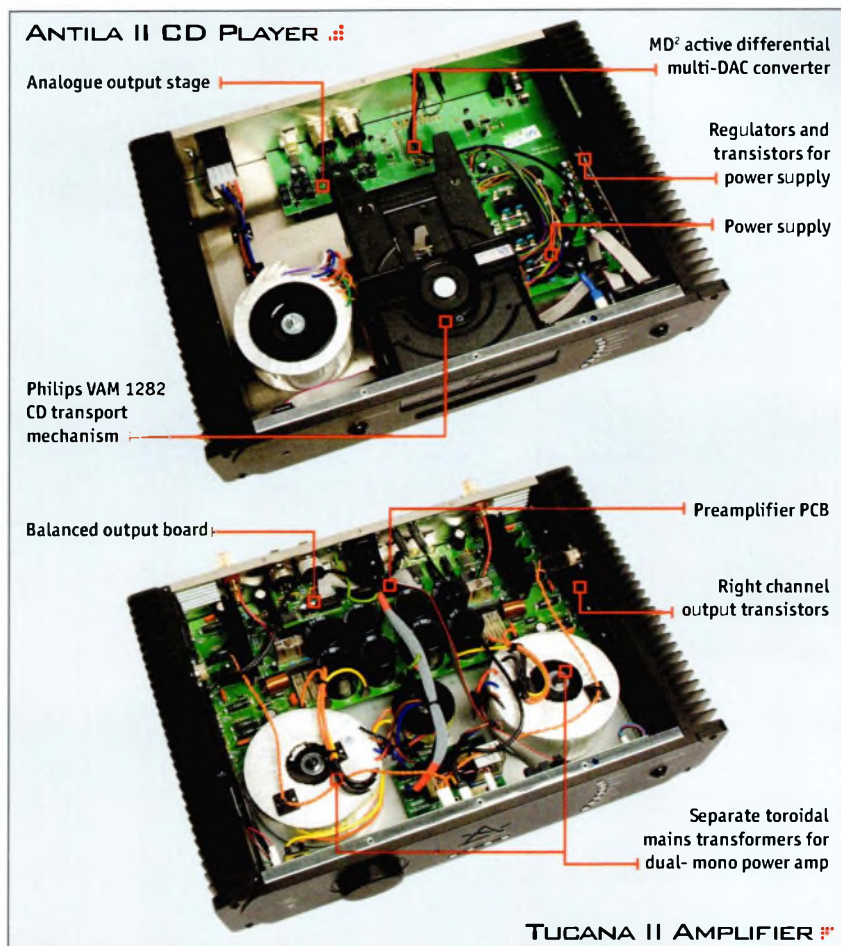
Luxman D-N100 & SQ-N100

done to improve it. The only minor shortcoming with the Mk1 is a slightly forward quality that discourages high-level listening. Having said that, there are those that prefer this sort of balance because it is more lively and up beat. Tucana II still has some of this characteristic – it sounds better at low and medium levels than high ones with our Bowers and Wilkins 802D loudspeakers – but the changes have brought about a reduction in background noise which means that you can hear more low-level detail. It is much easier to hear subtle details and the amp has a more natural, organic balance.

Alongside this is a distinct improvement in the dynamics department, the first Tucana was no slouch in this respect, so this is a remarkable achievement and one that means you hear the life and vitality in every recording that manages to capture it. It also means that the compressed ones sound very much that way, but that's the price you pay for fidelity.

Timing remains a strong point as well and this is reinforced when you add the Antila II CD player to the mix: both units are very much on-the-ball when it comes to the definition of leading edges. They do this rather better than most and without adding anything in the way of edginess. In fact, if anything, the balance errs on the dark side.

The CD player's top end is also a little more shut-in than our Resolution Audio Opus 21 reference, but it has a focus to it that allows you to hear precisely what the singers are



CLEVER LIPS

LIPS or Leema intelligent protocol system is the bus system that Leema incorporates into all of its components, essentially it lets components 'talk' to each other. They don't just say turn on or off either, in a mixed stereo/multichannel system the individual components are programmed to decide whether they need to be on for a particular replay requirement. For instance if there is a Hydra power amp driving the rear channels in a multichannel system but you play stereo material the Hydra 'sees' that CD has been selected and powers down as only the main left/right amplification is required.

LIPs is also designed to integrate with custom installation set ups, the manual detailing its protocol headers, packets and specifications in great detail. In the context of an Antila/Tucana set up it allows the CD player to control the amplifier and display volume level and input selection (meaning that the amp itself need not be on view), it will also let the Antila II override another source when you press its play button.

saying rather better than the Opus 21 – so, in many respects, it's a stronger contender.

Bass is very well served, the amplifier in particular having a chewy bottom end that gives bass guitars and drums a real shape and presence. The Smashing Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream* is a horribly compressed album, but it has some great guitar work which makes it worthwhile. With the Leema pairing this was augmented by heavy, juicy bass that times superbly. We got through three or four tracks before the call of duty reasserted itself.

It's clear that the refinements made by the Leema team have paid off. The original products were already good and the II-suffix kit is now even better. The Tucana II is the more changed of the two, both mechanically and sonically, and it sounds more earthy and organic for it. Its character is more up-beat than average, but now that impressive low-level resolution has been added to the mix it is an amplifier to reckon with. The Antila II is a fast and resolute player that should hold its

own against anything in its price range and the way in which it times so well. Combine these qualities with high-quality build and you have a very welcome addition to the ranks of the British high end. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT - ANTILA II

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



CONCLUSION

The Antila II is a fast and accomplished performer that is among the most revealing at its price. The display could be easier to read, but build and finish are excellent.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE



URL www.techradar.com/612396

VERDICT - TUCANA II

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



CONCLUSION

The new Tucana II is a more resolute and organic amp than its predecessor, this combined with great flexibility and fine timing make it a serious contender.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE



URL www.techradar.com/612396



Baby Brother

Can the slightly smaller, but considerably cheaper S-4EX repeat the success of its S-2EX sibling?

PRODUCT Pioneer S-4EX

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £3,000 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 26x49x37.5cm
 ◉ Weight: 20kg ◉ Drivers: 30mm Ceramic Graphite-dome tweeter, 140mm Magnesium cone mid, 160mm Aramid cone bass ◉ Sensitivity: 85.5 dB ◉ Power handling: 160 watts ◉ Frequency response: 34 Hz-100kHz ◉ Curved sides and rounded back

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

With a speaker-building tradition that goes all the way back to 1937, Pioneer is active across a wide range of product types and is very much a multinational operation these days. These S-EX models, for example, use drivers designed by the company's ProAudio division TAD (Technical Audio Devices) and built in Japan. While the speakers are actually built in China, most of the design work is done in France, assisted by US-based Welsh engineer Andrew Jones, while Britain chips in with evaluation at Air Studios!

Put an S-4EX in a different room from an S-2EX and you'd be hard pressed to say which was which. Only direct side-by-side comparison makes it obvious that this is the *petit pois* and the other the cannonball, so similar do they appear at first sight.

Although the shape and proportions of these

“...first impressions on playing music through the S-4EX were that it's a little dull and lacking in excitement.”

two hefty standmounts are indeed very similar, there are also some substantial differences, as a consequence of which this smaller model costs £3,000 per pair, while its bigger brother carries a rather more eye-watering £5,200 price tag.

The reasons are several. Pioneer's EX-series of top-quality speakers comprise six basic models (or twelve, if you count the beech and teak-veneered variations as different). Those six actually consist of two ranges of three, each consisting of a floorstander, a standmount, and a horizontal centre-front, AV-oriented model. The S-1/2/7EX threesome came first, and are all somewhat larger and heavier than the S-3/4/8EX models and also use costly

beryllium tweeter diaphragms. However, the newer, slightly 'lower tech' and significantly less expensive S-3/4/8EX series has to make do with tweeter diaphragms made from something called 'ceramic graphite'. The core question that this review should therefore be addressing, is to try and establish to what extent the economies introduced for the newer, less costly S-4EX compromise its performance vis-a-vis the senior S-2EX.

While some of the price difference between the two models is down to a slightly larger enclosure, bass driver and (presumably) heftier construction, the most important difference concerns the tweeter. Exactly what 'ceramic graphite' consists of remains something of a mystery, though Pioneer describes it as: 'one of the lightest and most rigid materials available for diaphragms', and supplied some data comparing it to other tweeter diaphragm materials. Naturally enough these showed it in a favourable light, probably only bettered by diamond and beryllium, both of which are presumably much more costly to acquire and fabricate. Furthermore, beryllium has environmental issues that some may find objectionable: it's highly poisonous, so although this is unlikely to affect the end-user, one might question whether the mining and processing involved should be condoned.

The S-4EX might be 8kg lighter than its

our samples, though a much lighter high-gloss beech is also available.

The similarly massive partnering stand has received equally hefty construction, for the base, the top slab and three fat verticals. It has an impressively generous stability footprint top and bottom, though the four floor-coupling cones look a little too blunt to penetrate thick carpets. With more than a nod towards mollycoddling health and safety considerations, a rear stud further ensures floor stability and retaining bolts secure the speaker to the stand. ▶





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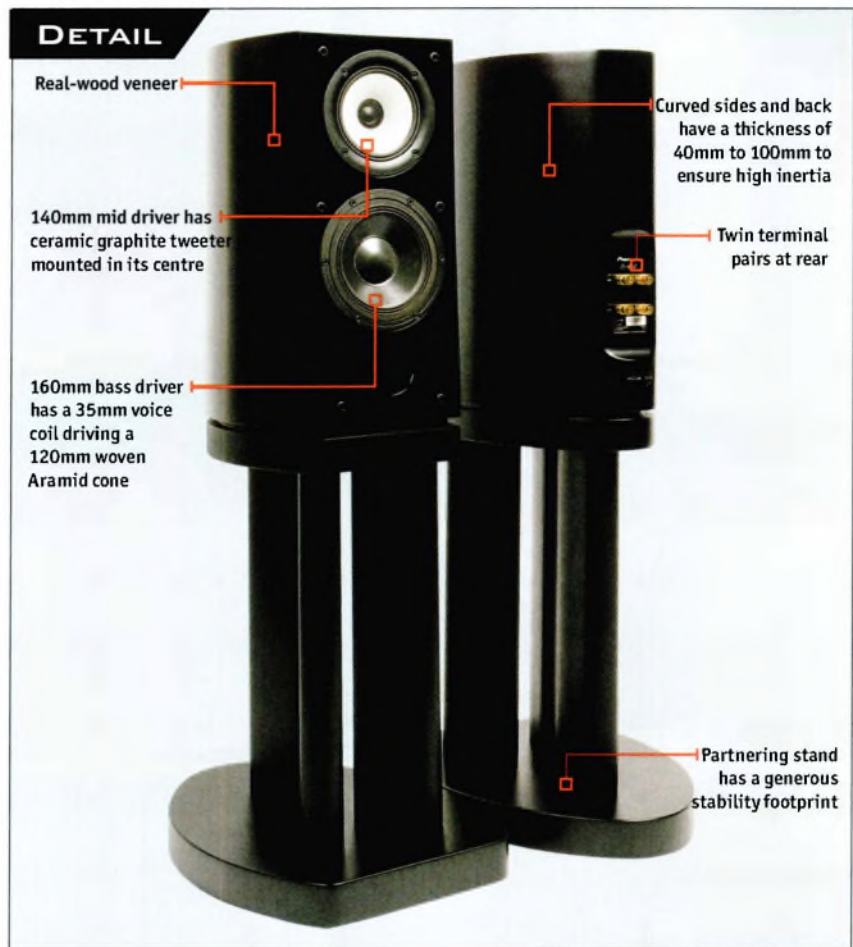
Although only two drive units are apparently visible, this is, in fact, a three-way design as the smaller uppermost 140mm driver has a 30mm tweeter (the afore-mentioned ceramic graphite affair) mounted down the centre of its 100mm white magnesium alloy cone. The 160mm bass driver has a 35mm voice coil driving a 120mm woven Aramid cone, terminated by a corrugated 'double S' surround formed from polycarbonate urethane.

The bass driver/enclosure combination is reflex loaded by a modest front port, while twin terminal pairs are mounted directly through a flat portion on the rear. The well-shaped grille is a fairly hefty affair and leaving it off does reveal the mounting sockets.

SOUND QUALITY

Claimed sensitivity is just 85.5dB, an unusually low figure that's significantly below the 87dB indicated by our measurements. Even at 87dB it's somewhat below average, especially as the impedance hovers around four ohms through much of the bass region, while bass extension is realistically restricted to around 33Hz, with the ports tuned to 43Hz.

The far-field averaged 'power' frequency response looks very well-ordered and is especially smooth above 500Hz. Indeed, it's interesting to note that the ceramic graphite tweeter used here delivers a much smoother response than the beryllium unit used in the S-2EX. However, the overall balance does



COHERENT SOURCE TRANSDUCER

Among the interesting proprietary technologies in the S-EX-series loudspeakers is the Coherent Source Transducer (CST), a species of concentric two-way driver that combines a 140mm midrange unit with a 30mm dome tweeter on a common chassis.

There are clear parallels with KEF's Uni-Q driver, which first appeared in 1988, at the same time that Norwegian specialist SEAS was independently developing the same concept.

Although both owed something to Tannoy's Dual Concentric driver from 40 years earlier, the technological breakthrough that led to the Uni-Q, the SEAS and ultimately the Pioneer CST, was the development of a new magnet made from an alloy of Neodymium (NeFeB).

This was much more powerful than those that had gone before, so it could be much smaller for the same power, allowing a tiny tweeter to be located within the centre of a regular bass/midrange cone driver. That, in turn, significantly assisted the crossover integration, as well as achieving axi-symmetric distribution.

err on the warm side, output beginning to fall above 700Hz and looking quite restrained through the presence zone, in contrast to what we found with the S-2EX, which was stronger around 3kHz and also brighter, if more peaky, in the treble. The pair match was exceptionally good.

Although undoubtedly a smooth and even-handed performer, first impressions of playing music through the S-4EX were that it's a little dull and lacking in excitement. It certainly didn't quicken the blood or enthusiasm in the way its elder sibling had.

Although that first impression was never entirely dispelled, the virtues of this speaker do sneak up on you and while it does seem to lack a little vim and vigour, it's tonally sweet. The overall character is a shade dark and textures are a trifle thickened, but the sound is impressively free from any boxiness and very smooth and easy on the ears. Superior mid-to-treble coherence is another notable strength and this contributes towards creating a spacious and well-focused stereo soundstage.

The positive benefits of standmount operation are clearly in evidence, not only in the precision of the imaging and the freedom from boxy cabinet colorations, but also in the clean, crisp bass delivery, even though there's no great impression of weight or scale here. Another function of this speaker's fine

enclosure engineering is an excellent dynamic range, with fine resolution of low-level information. And, although it's difficult to say if the drive units per se are responsible or whether it's a function of the rather laid-back and restrained tonal balance, the degree and quality of the actual dynamic expression does seem somewhat muted. At the end of the day though, the result is clean and smooth, but ultimately a little underwhelming. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	PRO Has all the major benefits of a standmount, including clean bass and fine imaging. Sound is smooth and evenhanded, with low cabinet coloration and a wide dynamic range.
EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Overall balance is laid back and restrained to the point it verges on dull, while dynamics seem somewhat lacking in vim and vigour.
VALUE ★★★★☆	

CONCLUSION
A high-quality performer in terms of smoothness, low coloration and wide dynamic range, but it doesn't provide an S-2EX standard of performance on the cheap, as the sound is a little dull and lacking in excitement.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/608680

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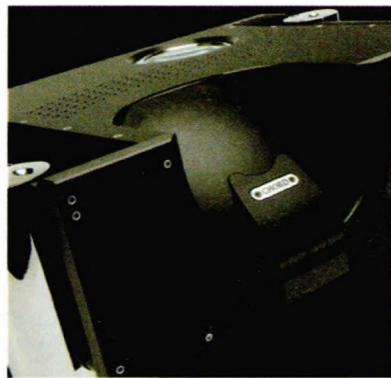
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GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

CD PLAYERS

There's never been a better time to upgrade your CD player, says Richard Black...

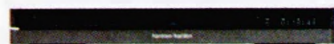
ON TEST



Arcam FMJ CD17
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Cyrus CD8SE
£1,200



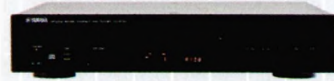
Harman/Kardon HD990
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Marantz SA7003
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Moon CD.5
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Yamaha CD-S700
£400

The death of CD has arguably been heralded, expected... and flatly denied by the market, which may have declined considerably, but still amounts to many millions of discs sold, billions more still in treasured collections.

The average Joe may be happy with his £30 supermarket DVD player, but that still leaves a large number of people, like us, who are prepared to pay more for a decent audio performance. And as our £400 to £1,100 *Ultimate Group Test* shows, you don't need a blacked-out MP's expense account to be able to afford great hi-fi sound.

Even with the CD player under threat, there's still plenty of choice around, across a wide price range from eminently affordable to eye-wateringly expensive. And it's interesting to compare the market now to that of 10 or 20 years ago. Certainly there's less product variety available now than there was then, though some of the players that have vanished may be largely unlamented. In terms of performance, though, there's been considerable progress.

Leaf through back issues of *Hi-Fi Choice* and you'll find that budget players of yesteryear needed rather more pleading on grounds of price than today's models, when compared with the high end (which hasn't advanced quite so fast). Both sound and measurement have come on in important ways, however.

That may mean that there is rather less sonic character available and some may lament that, but while character can be fun, long-term listening pleasure does tend to correlate better with accuracy and we're in no doubt that on

that score, some of today's players do very well. Better DAC chips, better digital filters (though, surprisingly, there's still room for improvement) and increasing confidence in designing output stages and power supplies have all contributed.

As a result, now is probably a very good time to upgrade. Economic uncertainty has encouraged manufacturers to offer very attractive products at prices that, in real terms, compare very favourably with those of a decade or two ago, while the standards of build and feature lists of many modern players would have graced far dearer kit only a few years ago. Tempted? Then read on... **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- Ⓞ Cambridge Audio Azur 840A integrated stereo amplifier
- Ⓞ EAR802 preamp/519 monoblocks
- Ⓞ Bowers and Wilkins 803S loudspeakers
- Ⓞ ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
- Ⓞ Kimber, Furukawa and other custom cables

MUSIC USED

- Ⓞ Otis Redding *The Dock of the Bay*
- Ⓞ The Mavericks *Trampoline*
- Ⓞ Dick Hyman *Plays Fats Waller*
- Ⓞ Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*

EARS USED

We are, as ever, deeply grateful to our panel of expert listeners. Highly experienced veterans of the industry, who gave up their time to listen to the players and give us the benefit of their findings:

Mark Hockey (Harman/Kardon)
Reuben Klein (RAM Technology)
Steve Reichert (Armour Home Electronics)





LISTENING TESTS

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

LAB TESTS

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

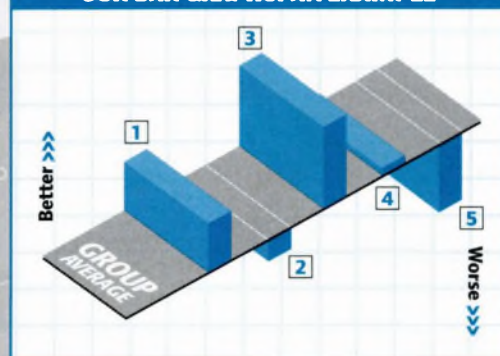
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

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

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

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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ARCAM CD17

Proprietary 'Mask of Silence' technology enhances performance

Arcam currently offers two regular CD players, the CD37 and the cheaper CD17. The latter, however, manages to offer quite a lot of the dearer model's looks, feel and features, and generally makes a good first impression with the usual Arcam all-metal case and nicely legible display. Inside, it's a typical Arcam job: neat and tidy with a minimum of fuss, but decent components where it counts. The power supply uses a good-size toroidal transformer and there is plenty of local regulation of power rails for the various stages and functions within the circuit.

Arcam has applied its 'Mask of Silence' measures to parts of the circuit, which in practice takes the form of small ferrite slabs glued on top of critical integrated circuits so as to absorb electromagnetic interference and prevent it from contaminating other parts of the circuit. This, of course, makes it impossible to see the part numbers on the chip, but Arcam is not hiding anything and proudly announces that the DAC chip is the latest part from Wolfson Microelectronics, the WM8741. This chip has a mighty-impressive specification for basic operation and also offers quite a few additional features that Arcam has chosen not to implement, such as selectable filters and volume control.

One feature that we definitely approve of, is anti-clipping processing. Digital mastering of CDs these days quite often allows slight overload to occur, which can in some instances sound distinctly rough. Giving a CD player some analogue headroom above the notional 'full level' is very much a good thing and makes such discs more pleasing to hear, though sadly few such recordings will truly qualify as audiophile. Output from the CD17 is available on twin sets of phono sockets, plus both flavours of digital.

SOUND QUALITY

This player's sound seems to have some tonal character to it which makes it something of a question of taste. Most significantly in this regard, bass is unusually present, which for some listeners clearly spoiled the overall effect, especially as this bass did not seem to be as well-integrated with the midrange and treble as one might wish for.

On the other hand, the general effect of this player is lively and rhythmic, which for many listeners will make it an attractive proposition. One might feel there's something of a conflict between lively presentation and over-full bass, but the bass is still quite well-controlled and higher frequencies are taut and precise. As a result, and as often happens in cases like this, each listener's reaction will depend to a considerable extent on the music playing and the listener's taste.

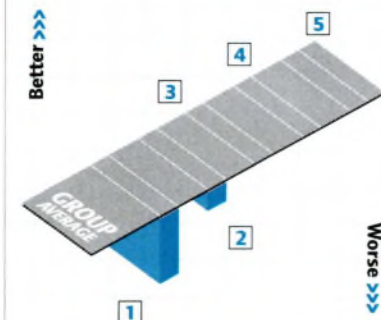
Music without very much obvious low-frequency content benefits from the energetic feel and solo voice with guitar, for instance, is very convincing. In fact, voice in general is well served by this player, as long as the bass doesn't start to mask it as can happen at times. One listener felt the frequency range responsible for consonants in the human voice was a little harsh, but if so it can't have been by much as no one else commented on this.

What our listeners did agree on is that the very highest treble reaches are a touch constricted and lacking air. Despite that, stereo imaging is stable and assured with good depth. Detail is good too, though it takes perhaps a little more concentration to hear all of it than with the best of this group. Overall there is a lot to recommend this player, but we would certainly recommend an audition if only to see how the bassy balance grabs you. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

This player's apparently disappointing showing on the comparison bar chart is largely a function of the high group average. Distortion measures around 0.003% which is already looking very close to blameless: but in any case it rapidly vanishes into noise as output level is reduced. At just -3dB output, distortion is below 0.001% and at any level below -20dB it is effectively unmeasurable, which is just as things should be. Jitter isn't quite so well-behaved and there is a trace of it in evidence, an unusual result for an Arcam player in our experience. The level is low, however, and it's probably insignificant. The noise spectrum is largely clean, though if one looks really closely there's a hint of digital breakthrough around -100dB. There's also a little hum, only around -80dB, but possibly just audible with the volume turned up high. In-band response flatness is excellent and the digital filter is typical of current players.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -40%
- 2] Jitter >> -10%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 0%
- 5] Digital filter >> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.3V	2.1V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.003%
Signal-to-noise ratio	109dB	105dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	Bass is a little heavy and the treble not always the most open, but there's plenty of energy and rhythmic precision and stereo imaging is very good.
FEATURES ★★★★★	Handles voices with confidence and ease.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE





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CYRUS CD8SE

Custom 'disc-reading' system is quite an achievement

Cyrus launched this player just over a year ago and made great play of its 'Servo Evolution' transport mechanism. Justifiably so, indeed, for it is a considerable achievement for a company like Cyrus to come up with what is, in effect, a fully custom disc-reading system. Granted, many of the component parts are standard stuff, but Cyrus has done some clever low-level engineering and optimised the transport for high-quality audio duty. The result, the company claims, is more accurate reading of decent-quality discs: one assumes that some other parameters not so important for high-quality audio, such as jog-resistance or reading of damaged discs, have been slightly compromised, though if so it's not obvious from our experiences.

Given that most CD players seem to get bit-perfect readings off most discs one might query the importance of this devotion but, of course, the key results will be in the listening.

Audio circuitry is apparently pretty much unchanged from the original CD8 and the most obvious difference is that the CD8SE is a slot-loading player. Slot-loaders gained a dodgy reputation based on their early application in cheap in-car players and so on, but there's nothing wrong with them as a breed. This one is a little slow and doesn't quite eject the disc far enough for easy removal, but we've no real quibbles.

The slot mechanism does take up a little less space in the case than the old tray one, but Cyrus has still had to be cunning to get the circuit boards in – they are, in fact, stacked, facing in opposite directions. As one would hope, there are high-specification electronic components in evidence and the familiar power supply arrangements using two small toroidal transformers, one for control and motor supply and one for digital

and analogue audio circuits. Twin analogue outputs are provided as well as both flavours of digital, and there's also scope for upgrading with a PSX-R power supply.

SOUND QUALITY

Although there was the odd discordant note sounded about this player's performance, on the whole our listeners found it enjoyable, informative and generally most engaging. It is particularly good at creating large and stable images and that, coupled with its good detail resolution, makes it very good at reproducing large-scale music.

It is also good with small groups of performers, though, and scored a notable success with solo piano where its sound was described as full but also quick, with a solid image and natural tonality. In the Otis Redding track, the band was very clear and tonally consistent around the nicely defined vocal centrepiece and the music was felt very compelling and engaging.

There is evidently plenty of bass volume and body, and it's tuneful and well-defined too, but the rhythmic impetus it imparts is not always quite the utmost. Under some circumstances this could be a serious drawback, but our listeners felt the effect was quite mild and largely compensated for by the detailed and lively midrange.

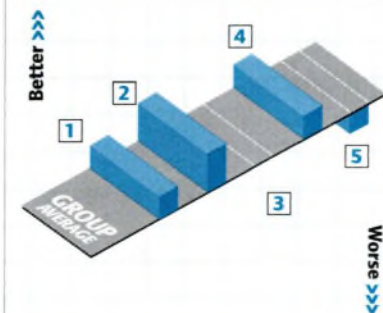
For some reason, not a single comment came from the listening panel about the CD8SE's treble. Our subsequent sighted listening suggested that the simple reason for this is that it's very well balanced and integrated with the rest of the band – unfussy, in a word. It has very natural decay and, perhaps, just a shade less sparkle than some, but is never less than convincing, like most of the player's performance. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

This player's one weakness would appear to be the digital filter. Actually this has an exemplary stopband, with almost no stray signals appearing above about 25kHz, but its response in the transition band from 20kHz to 24kHz is a little further from ideal than most and there is just a little aliasing visible on the spectrum for signals down to 20kHz. Ideally there would be no aliasing at all, but practically all current players allow a little above 20kHz. Other measurements are very good, with noise low in level and largely unaffected by hum and very low distortion under all circumstances, even at high frequencies. Jitter is excellent, so low that one can't realistically measure it in a 16-bit system. Although we don't measure it numerically, we were impressed by the low mechanical noise from this player, one of the quietest we've come across recently – in many cases, mechanism noise is higher in level than the electrical noise from the speakers!

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.1V	2.21V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.0008%
Signal-to-noise ratio	120dB	106dB

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Equally confident with small- and large-scale music, this player has excellent resolution and imaging and plays music with conviction. A slight lack of bass impact is its only weakness.





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HARMAN/KARDON HD990

This player marks a return to hi-fi excellence

Harman Kardon is one of several firms to have almost vanished from the stereo hi-fi world, only to re-enter it with a bang – in this case, rather recently. This CD player and a matching amplifier landed on our test bench just two months ago, impressing us not only with their basic performance, but also with the distinctly generous list of extras on offer. Some of those are built into the amp, but this player is unusual at its price in offering balanced analogue outputs. It also sports an Ethernet-style socket labelled 'HRS-Link', which allows for digital connection to matching HK products (principally the HK990 amp) in which case it provides jitter-free synchronisation between source and receiver.

You get the usual digital outputs, of course, but also a digital input, allowing the HD990 to function as a DAC when connected to sources such as digital radio or a computer. There's obviously a practical advantage to that in simplifying cabling in many cases, but a quality argument is advanced not only by HK's use of high-quality components (twin Analog Devices DAC chips and highly rated analogue parts) but also by the 'RLS IV' digital filtering. Harman is not alone in implementing its own digital filtering – Cambridge Audio comes to mind – but it's not the easiest approach and finding it in such a competitively priced product is a pleasant surprise. It appears to give high-ratio upsampling, to 384kHz too.

Physically, this is a slimline and lightweight unit, both characteristics aided by the use of a switch-mode power supply. The transport is a regular audio one and a single circuit board carries logic, conversion and analogue output functional blocks. Operation from the remote control is distinctly preferable to the front panel buttons, but in general this is a pleasant machine to use.

SOUND QUALITY

To some extent, this player's biggest strength is also a weakness, especially in a comparative test like this. As one listener aptly commented, it is a 'forgiving' player that is not inclined to pinpoint weaknesses in recordings. The other side of that coin, though, is that it is not the most revealing with top-quality recordings either, so it does slightly underplay the excitement of really convincing works of sonic art. To put it another way, it does not have quite the highest resolution on offer.

There are various ways in which less-than-perfect resolution can manifest itself and the HD990 does avoid the most obvious – at no point did we or our blind listeners feel that the music was masked or muddy. Indeed, with typical decent recordings the sound does have plenty of detail and it's easy enough to hear exactly what's going on. In really good recordings, some players will reveal more: but this one still produces a sound that, heard in isolation, seems well-defined and clear. Thus far, any purchasing decision over this player would appear to hinge on whether one values top performance with a few recordings, or good performance with most.

Part of that good performance is down to the slightly light and inherently rhythmic character of the HD990's sound. This has the effect of pleasantly pointing up detail within the midband, while at the same time presenting fairly clear bass and high treble.

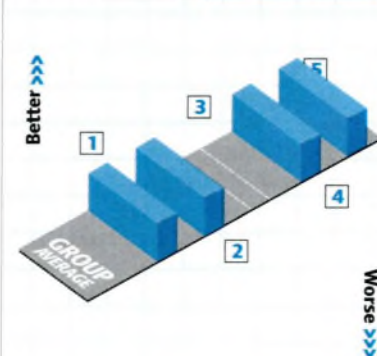
Overall result: sound which is never less than plausible and often highly satisfying, but which doesn't truly reach audiophile heights. Imaging is a little forward but, given that, it still has decent perspective and very good lateral definition. The price is attractive and the player offers a solid and subtly differentiated performance. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

This player's use of a proprietary digital filter is vindicated by an unusually good result for both stopband rejection and transition band steepness of response. Although there is still a trace of aliasing, it is very low in level up to 21 kHz, making its overall level with real music recordings several dB lower than from most current players and DACs. This, in turn, means that Alias-intermodulation distortion will be lower than usual. With harmonic distortion at remarkably low levels too, it's not obvious where the cause of our listeners' reservations lies, for all other results are pretty much beyond any reasonable reproach. We did find slightly higher distortion on one channel only at high frequencies, but this only showed up with rather unrealistic test signals – with music the distortion level is likely to remain around the noise floor. Hum is a shade higher than average, though we didn't find it audible under normal conditions.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.02V
Total harmonic distortion	0.0009%	0.0006%
Signal-to-noise ratio	116dB	107dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	Sound falls short of the highest standards, but is never less than good, making the most of less well-engineered discs. The light, rhythmic character, decent detail and price are appealing.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★☆☆	



£600 01753 680868 www.marantz.co.uk

MARANTZ SA7003

Multi-faceted player also handles SACD

Marantz has always had a strong presence in cheap and mid-price disc replay and this is the current mid-ranger. Like its dearer siblings, it plays not only CD but also SACD, the latter in stereo-only. Why not? SACD transports evidently carry a much-diminished price premium now that the technology is no longer new and most modern DAC chips will handle SACD-format (DSD) data with ease, including the high-performance Cirrus Logic part that Marantz has chosen for the SA7003.

Interestingly, that component is the only surface-mounted audio part in the whole player. Marantz has elected to stick with through-hole components elsewhere, including the latest version of its 'Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Module', a circuit built entirely with discrete transistors which performs the all-important analogue filtering and output buffering functions. Despite the relatively high number of components that entails, the entire audio circuit sits on a single circuit board not markedly larger than that in most of the other players in this group.

While the upmarket variant of this, the SA8003 (effectively, the Ken Ishiwata signature version, we understand), uses a toroidal transformer, the '7003 makes do with a frame transformer, albeit quite a large one. There are less tweaky and special-grade components than in the '8003 too, while one external difference is that only the latter has a USB socket on the front panel. The '7003 does keep the headphone socket, though, complete with its own level control, a very useful feature for many. As well as CD and SACD discs, the player will handle MP3 and WMA data CDs. It is available in the pictured champagne finish or black.

SOUND QUALITY

Marantz kit is frequently cited as sounding very civilised and this player seems unlikely to buck that trend. Our listeners, who of course didn't know which player they were writing about, quickly picked up on the SA7003's smooth, clean sound and impeccable manners and, once again, levelled the criticism that attack could be crisper and more immediate.

There were also some surprising comments. Something about the imaging seems a little odd, as it was felt slightly narrower than it should be but also taller, clearly some kind of psychoacoustic trick in a standard stereo system. Intrigued by that suggestion, we spent some time after the panel had left listening to a range of well-imaged recordings and in the end came to the conclusion that it is basically an issue of slightly compressed image depth making instruments at the rear seem to rise physically above those at the front.

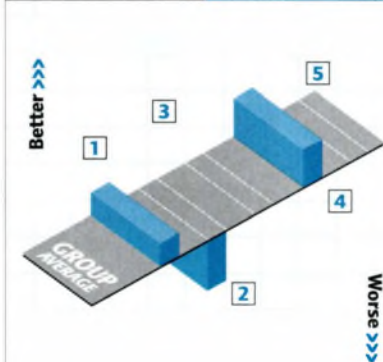
Bass from this player is extended and tuneful, though not always the tightest. Instruments like timpani, which have both sharp attack and long decay, can sound a little less clearly defined than usual. Piano sounds a little softer in the bass, treble is just a little on the soft-grained side, too, though it has nice ambience and decay.

There's a very good rendition of voices, which are clearly articulated, well-balanced and natural in timbre. At the other end of the scale, large ensembles (orchestra, big rock bands and so on) lack a little grandeur, not only in terms of perceived size but also tonally – the music could do with more sweep, one listener suggested. All the same, the good tonal balance and detail that this player always provides make for enjoyable listening across a wide range of music. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

The numbers don't give it away, but Marantz has recently taken to using an unusual (though not unique) digital filter design in its players. Instead of the usual symmetrical pulse response with equal amounts of 'ringing' before and after the main impulse, this one has almost no ringing before, but a lot of it after. The ringing isn't audible, due to the fact that its frequency is ultrasonic and because it won't be provoked at any significant level in practice. But different filter types certainly sound different and this may well be a factor here. Other results are largely excellent, the exception being jitter which, surprisingly, is on the high side for a current CD player. 0.5ns isn't a lot in absolute terms but may just have an effect as it raises the noise floor a little in the treble. Distortion once again is superb, vanishing completely into noise for output levels below -20dB at all frequencies.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> +10%
- 2] Jitter >> -30%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> +20%
- 5] Digital filter >> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.3V	2.38V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.0008%
Signal to-noise ratio	110dB	107dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	Highly civilised sound may not be to all tastes, but it allows plenty of detail to be heard easily. Voices are particularly well served.
FEATURES ★★★★★	Impact is not the most marked, however, and image depth lacks a little.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★



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MOON CD.5

A classic no-frills player is a performance winner

Yes, the product name really is 'CD-point-five'. Presumably it once undercut a CD1 as the new base model. At least there isn't a CD5: it's the CD5.3, and a very fancy-looking beast it is, too. This, by contrast, is a classic no-frills basic CD spinner. It has a simple red LED display, basic connections (digital output is electrical-only) and no enhanced disc compatibility. It is built into a simple, but high-quality case which adds a touch of class and is notably swift to accept commands, making it a good machine for the impatient.

Inside, the theme of simple, but well done continues with a classic audio-only transport and a single circuit board on which are mounted all components, including the toroidal mains transformer and the mains inlet. Almost all components are surface-mount types and their number has been kept low by using recent, highly integrated control and decoding chips. The actual DAC is a Burr-Brown part which feeds a classic output filter/buffer stage using popular op-amp chips.

In its literature, Moon discusses the options of upsampling and oversampling, pointing out that the former doesn't necessarily give better results, but because it is a more recently adopted technique. Indeed, few current players seem to use it: this one certainly doesn't, sticking instead with classic oversampling for the crucial digital filtering function. The fact is, that the true performance of any digital filter is down to the details, not the overview, of its implementation.

SOUND QUALITY

Since Moon has staked pretty much everything on sound, rather than features, in this player, it's good to be able to report that it scores highly in almost all areas. If it has a drawback,

it is that there can sometime be a degree of vagueness to the sound, especially when it is richly textured. Everything is there but it is perhaps a little harder to pinpoint every instrument, every melodic line, than with some other players.

But there is much to compensate for that, and in practice one is seldom aware of it because the general feeling of life and energy this player imparts is really very good. It achieves this not by excelling remarkably in one or two specifics, but by dealing evenhandedly with tonal, imaging and rhythmic issues. The bass is well-extended with good control and attack, midrange is admirably neutral and treble extends effortlessly upwards with both sweetness and precision.

This is another player that serves vocal lines well. In the Mavericks' track, which is tricky because of the very thick accompaniment, the voice was very clearly presented and also very stable. The accompaniment here was a little less precise than some, but was very well imaged with good extension in both width and depth directions. The Rachmaninov track also showed how large the CD.5's image can be – indeed, one listener wondered whether it wasn't a little exaggerated. On the whole we'd suggest not: apart from anything else, overdone imaging is usually accompanied by a hole in the middle and there was none of that here. Still, we had little trouble 'seeing' the orchestra well beyond the loudspeakers.

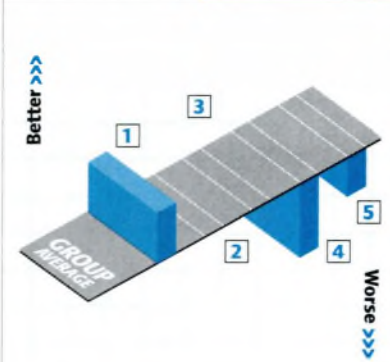
With smaller ensembles, down to lone guitar or piano, images remain steady and convincing. Just occasionally there's a hint of glassiness in the sound on bright recordings, but the over-riding impression one gets from the Moon is one of committed, energetic music-making. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

This player looks disappointing on the comparison bar chart in all areas bar one, but the actual measurements it gives are much more encouraging. Noise is a little on the high side and the noise spectrum is unusual in being quite 'coloured'. It's coloured in a useful way, though, with a dip around the critical 3kHz region and, in practice, we weren't aware of any excess noise under normal listening conditions. Most recordings have more noise than this anyway. There are also a few discrete spurious tones in the noise spectrum, but again it's unlikely anyone will ever hear these unless the volume is turned up unrealistically. Distortion is so low we had to give it a notional 'worst case' figure which it certainly better: this is the first piece of kit we've ever measured where we can't with certainty pinpoint any distortion above noise. Gold stars for that. Digital filter performance is a little below par.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Distortion >> +30%
- 2) Jitter >> 0%
- 3) Linearity >> 0%
- 4) Dynamic range >> -50%
- 5) Digital filter >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	1.96V
Total harmonic distortion	0.003%	0.0005%
Signal-to-noise ratio	108dB	96dB

VERDICT

SOUND



Admirably energetic music-making from this rather bare-bones, but well-built, player. Very slight lack of detail does little to detract and images are large and convincing. Good neutral balance.

FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE





£400 ☎ 0870 444 5575 🌐 www.yamaha.com

YAMAHA CD-S700

Budget-price, but is the performance up to par?

Yamaha's re-entry to the world of hi-fi separates has unleashed quite an impressive range of products. This is the cheapest of the single-disc CD players and comes in at an attractive price for what appears to be a well-specified solution. It's a well-built machine, too, and is quite heavy thanks to a reinforced and sturdy case. In order to discourage case resonance, Yamaha has even gone to the trouble of providing a damping layer of metal glued to the underside of the top cover. The front panel is real metal, another nice touch as this price.

Upon removing the cover, we found a heavily shielded transport flanked on one side by most of the power supply and on the other by the dedicated audio circuit board: logic circuits are on a separate board at the rear. We say 'most' of the power supply because the audio board has its own supply, fed by a dedicated winding on the mains transformer but rectified, smoothed and regulated locally. Minimalism is the key note as regards audio circuitry, with little more than the DAC chip and a few transistors in evidence – it hardly looks as if there are enough parts to do the job! Component quality is, as one would expect at this price, nothing remarkable, but the DAC is a good-quality part.

Yamaha has also provided a USB input on the front panel, allowing USB sticks and MP3 players to be plugged-in. The player doesn't seem to recognise uncompressed (WAV) files, but is happy with the usual compressed formats. You will need the remote to switch between CD and USB – we also found the remote more appealing than front-panel buttons for regular operation, as this player responds very slowly to the latter.

SOUND QUALITY

Listeners who appreciate plentiful bass could find much to admire here. Nothing wrong with good extension, of course, but our listeners did feel that this might be a bit too much of a good thing. It's not so much that bass is over-emphasised, but it is not as well controlled as one might wish for and, as a result, has a way of dominating proceedings that isn't quite natural. This remains the case in pretty much any recording though, of course, it is most obvious in those with a 'busy' bottom octave or two. The Mavericks provided a classic example of that within our blind test programme and our listeners found this track rather disappointing, despite the initial attraction of energetic low notes.

Higher up the spectrum, treble is extended but a little dry, with less air to it than some. Midrange seems largely neutral, though there's a hint of lift in the lower vocal register. In terms of rhythm and pace, this player is actually quite assured, especially in tracks which are not too extended in frequency range. It was particularly successful with the Otis Redding track, which had our listeners tapping their toes and writing admiring comments about imaging and space around the voice. The trouble is that when a recording is more extended in treble, bass or both, the effects in those registers do detract noticeably from the better performance in the midrange.

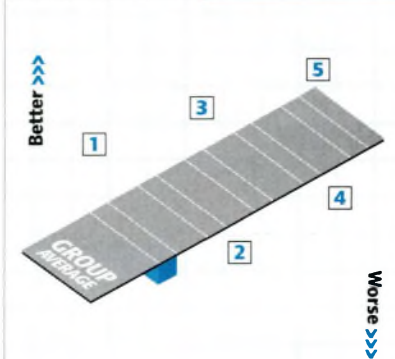
Detail, too, is a little less clear than most, with varying results depending on the music. In our solo piano example, the complex offbeat rhythms proved rather hard to follow, while the full symphony orchestra lost a good bit of inner detail. Despite all that, this player does manage to provide engaging and enjoyable music under most circumstances and at its very modest price is well worth a listen. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

In present company, the most unusual feature of this player is its tendency to produce higher orders of harmonics than most – for a 1kHz test frequency, the distortion includes not only the usual 2kHz and 3kHz but also higher frequencies, up to 13kHz. They're at a very low level, but experience suggests this kind of thing can still have some significance in deciding how a product will sound. Measurable distortion persists down to about -30dB output, but vanishes below that and distortion levels rise very little with increasing frequency. Noise is good, impressively free of spurious tones, and is just perceptibly worsened by a trace of jitter, almost certainly insignificant in practice. The digital filter follows a typical pattern, with just a trace of aliasing at 20kHz and increasing amounts up to the notional cut-off at 22.05kHz. Response in the stopband is exemplary, but there's a very small rise, about 0.2dB, through the treble, which acute ears may just detect.

HOW IT COMPARES



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

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.18V
Total harmonic distortion	0.002%	0.0015%
Signal-to-noise ratio	110dB	105dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	An attractive feature set, appearance and price don't quite compensate for a rather dry sound that lacks some detail and could do with rather more bass control. Enjoyable, but it lacks some finesse.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★☆	
VALUE ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★☆



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Noel Keywood, Hi-Fi World July 09

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Adam Smith, Hi-Fi World July 2008



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CONCLUSIONS

These six CD players cover a lot of bases in terms of detail and performance

We said in the introduction that we enjoyed these players. It's the nature of the experience that we enjoyed some more than others, but overall the standard seemed high. Even the lowest-scoring player, from Yamaha, clearly has considerable merit and it also deserves an honourable mention for being very well built and generously featured (not least the USB socket, which makes it a handy way of interfacing portable music players with a proper hi-fi system). Its sound is not fully a match for the others in the group, but then it

comes in at a considerably lower price and all things considered it's not a bad machine at all.

Moving up in price, we scored the Harman/Kardon and Marantz players identically in every respect. Don't regard them as practically interchangeable, though, for they sound different, look different and offer different features – the HK, for instance, having a digital input and balanced output going for it, while the Marantz plays SACDs. In terms of sound, Marantz can yet again be counted on to go for the civilised approach, while the HK is a little more idiosyncratic, with its

light and agile sound compensating rather successfully for a slight lack of resolution.

Arcam has had a nearly unbroken string of recommendations in these pages and we feel rather heartless denying one to the CD17, which is in many ways a good player. Just this once, though, we feel a trifle disappointed by the player's presentation, wishing principally that it had a little more control in the bass. In many ways, it represents a valid alternative to the HK and Marantz players, but scores much lower on features, even though it costs a little more.

That leaves the two most expensive and, according to our blind listeners and our own tests, most convincing players: Cyrus and Moon. It may seem perverse that we've scored the Cyrus higher overall and yet a little lower as an aggregate of other factors, but we felt its total 'user experience' deserved the extra recognition. Both, however, are sonically assured players that will delight many listeners and are thoroughly professionally turned out. Just the sort of thing we like to see for a thousand smackers! **HFC**

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Needs a powerful amp but rewards with exceptionally detailed sound.

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£699
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HINTS AND TIPS

►► Handle CDs carefully. Modern players are very forgiving of small scratches, but there comes a point.

►► Differences between CD players can be quite subtle. Use familiar discs in auditions and switch between players with minimal interruptions.

►► Use good-quality cables and keep them short if possible. Don't coil up any excess, though, as this can invite radio interference.

►► If the display can be switched off, do so for any serious listening. It often subtly improves resolution.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Arcam FMJ CD17	Cyrus CD8SE	Harman/ Kardon HD990	Marantz SA7003	Moon CD.5	Yamaha CD-S700
PRICE	£700	£1,200	£550	£600	£999	£400
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Bass a little heavy and treble not always the most open, but there's plenty of energy and rhythmic precision.	This player has excellent resolution and imaging and plays any music with conviction. Slight lack of bass impact.	Good, if not great, sound makes the most of less well-engineered discs. Rhythmic character and detail are appealing.	Highly civilised with plenty of detail. Voices are particularly well served. Impact not the most marked.	Admirably energetic music-making; very slight lack of detail does little to detract. Good neutral balance.	Good features and price, but rather dry sound. Lacks some detail and bass control. Basically enjoyable.
KEY FEATURES						
ELEC DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OPT DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
CD R-W	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CD TEXT	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
BALANCED O/P	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
OTHER FORMATS	MP3	SACD	MP3	WMA	MP3	WMA
SIZE WXHXD	43x8.4x29cm	21.5x7.5x37cm	44x6.5x33cm	44x11x34cm	43.5x9x33cm	43.5x10x30cm
WEIGHT	5.1kg	3.5kg	3.8kg	5.9kg	6.2kg	6.2kg
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
DISTORTION	0.003% G	0.0008% E	0.0006% E	0.0008% E	0.0005% E	0.0015% E
JITTER	0.25ns G	<0.1ns E	<0.1ns E	0.5ns A	<0.2ns G	0.2ns G
LINEARITY	<0.1DB E	<0.1DB E	<0.1DB E	<0.1DB E	<0.1DB E	<0.1DB E
S/N RATIO	105dB G	106dB G	107dB G	107dB G	96dB P	105dB G
STOPBAND REJECTION	80dB G	75dB G	90dB E	80dB G	65dB A	80dB G

Round-up

Four ways to cushion your precious vinyl and improve its performance

Decades ago, all turntables had a rubber mat – and no one gave it a second thought. Then a few manufacturers started using felt instead of rubber, others used glass or plastic for platters and

suddenly the mat, or lack of, was an essential part of the sound. Discs vibrate when played and both platter and mat have a fundamental effect on that vibration. So, here are four approaches to optimising things...

Funk Firm *Achromat*

TYPE Turntable mat

PRICE £55

CONTACT ☎ 01273 585042 🌐 www.thefunkfirm.co.uk

The Funk Firm arose from the ashes of Pink Triangle, the lamented purveyor of turntables designed to be as near non-resonant as possible. Funk's brief is similar, but its range more diverse and this mat is a product intended principally to benefit non-PT/Funk turntables. The name derives from 'achromatic', meaning colourless, which gives a clue as to the claims made for the sound. This is achieved by using a foamed-plastic material which rapidly turns vibrational energy into heat, hence avoiding resonance. The mat is hard and fairly stiff and is available in 3mm (as tested) and 5mm thicknesses, the latter £5 dearer. There's a recess for the label to ensure the LP contacts the mat properly.

We found that the effects of the Achromat are most pronounced on a metal platter, as expected, but it does also work on plastic platters. In the latter case, it gives a slight improvement in detail and stability of imaging, but its effect on the bass is not necessarily going to be everyone's taste – it tends to become slightly lighter and 'faster'. On a metal or glass platter, replacing the usual felt or rubber mat, the Achromat gives a sound that is indeed considerably less coloured and

also distinctly more detailed than before. Voices seem more natural and large ensembles of instruments are very well-defined and differentiated. Bass is roughly similar in weight and extension, but has less overhang and tonality is given a lift in precision across the frequency range. **HFC**

VERDICT

A very impressive upgrade on metal platters, this mat has some benefits on plastic platters, though some may prefer the bass without it.



Origin Live *Platter Mat*

TYPE Turntable mat

PRICE £49

CONTACT ☎ 02380 578877 🌐 www.originlive.com

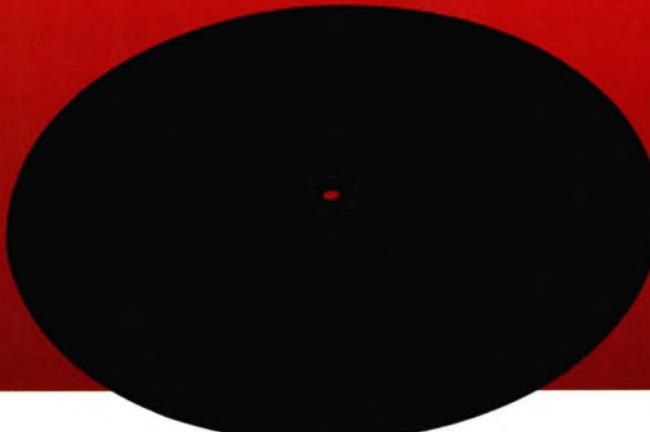
This is about as simple as a mat can be – a flat sheet of hard plastic, just 1.5mm-thick. The price is presumably explained by the fact that it's not any old plastic: Origin Live doesn't identify it and we don't recognise it as any of the usual engineering materials. The top surface is shiny, the bottom matt and it is quite non-resonant when struck. It is also slightly oversize, which we can't imagine ever being a problem on any decent turntable, but does make it slightly harder to lift off a record. Origin Live does not necessarily recommend it as a replacement for existing mats, pointing out that it can often sit on top of the old one, its minimal thickness being unlikely to cause problems with arm height adjustment.

Accordingly, we tried this mat both on, and instead of, felt and rubber mats with metal or glass platter and on a plastic platter deck. In the latter case we could hear a difference but were inclined to be ambivalent about its direction, the results varying a little from one disc to the next, though the fundamental character of the sound was seldom much changed. However, with a metal platter the results were little short of profound. Most noticeably, the sound improved markedly

in terms of rhythmic snap and dynamic attack, and this was, perhaps, most obvious with the Origin Live mat on top of felt. Rubber underneath was a little less lively and with the mat directly over metal the sound was a little too coloured for our tastes. Similar, though less marked, results were obtained with glass platters. **HFC**

VERDICT

Not always the most neutral tonally and lacking some detail at times, this mat is, however, perfect for lovers of energetic rhythm.



Pro-Ject Cork Mat

TYPE Turntable mat

PRICE £11

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

VERDICT

At a near-giveaway price, this mat certainly begs to be tried. Bass is its best suit, but it works well all round on glass platters especially.

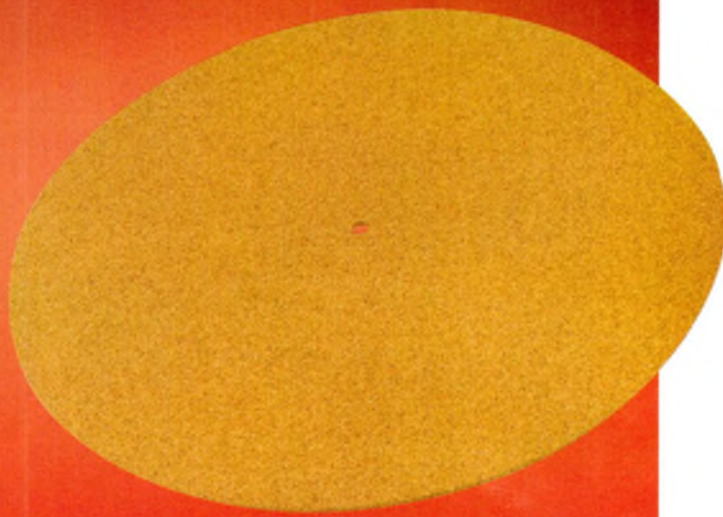
HI-FI CHOICE



Cork is the material used for a mat on most LP cutting lathes as well as some quite esoteric turntables, including the EAR 'Master Disk' and some highly regarded models of yesteryear. It has many good things going for it, including a very high resistance to any kind of resonance and a naturally 'grippy' surface which is soft enough to give good contact with an LP. Just 2mm-thick, this mat will easily replace a typical felt or rubber mat and can also be put on turntables not normally provided with a mat – most arms will have enough height adjustment to compensate. It weighs very little and hence is unlikely to upset suspension.

In just about every situation where we tried the Cork Mat, it rewarded us with some very impressive bass. Low-frequency instruments seem to gain an extra couple of semitones of clearly audible range, while percussion and special effects have more impact. Against this should be set a slight decrease in detail compared with results obtained using some other mats or, in the case of plastic platters, no mat at all. There's some coloration and a little high-frequency smearing which does interfere a little with resolution and this probably also accounts for the slightly blurred imaging we heard too. Perhaps the best result overall was on a glass platter, the cork seeming to react well with this basis

and the sound benefitting from a nice lively character, in addition to the bass benefits already mentioned. **HFC**



Ringmat 330 MkII XLR

TYPE Turntable mat

PRICE £53

CONTACT ☎ 01277 200210 # www.ringmat.com

VERDICT

Brings quality to the highest frequencies, but this mat is not at its best in the bass and does not avoid slight resonance in the midrange.

HI-FI CHOICE

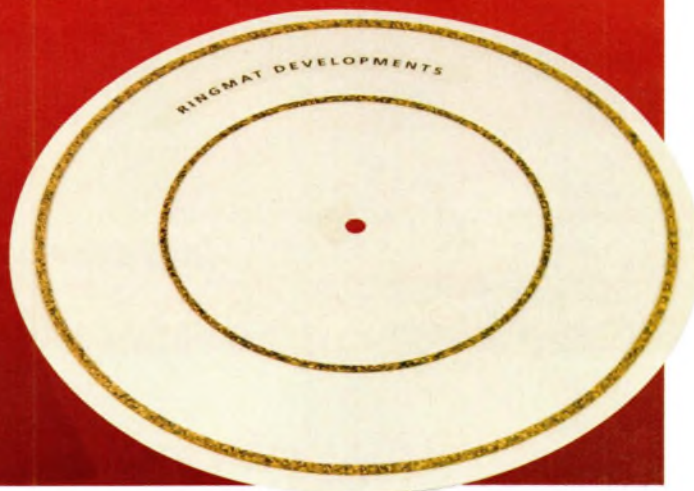


Ringmat started out as the descriptive name of a product consisting of thin concentric cork rings stuck to both sides of a piece of stiff paper. Since then the range has grown and there is now a whole Ringmat Support System available, in one go or piecemeal, plus various models of which this is broadly typical: others offer slightly different overall thicknesses and/or enhanced performance due to detail design differences. The aim, we are told, is to support the record minimally, but in such a way as to break up and diffuse resonant modes – which sounds reasonable. Details about this, plus a huge amount of fascinating useful information for the vinyl tweeker, make the Ringmat website well worth a visit.

It's certainly true that the results this mat gives sound distinct from those with the others in this group. Most noticeable, we felt, was the generally light and airy quality of the sound, with superb detail in the highest frequencies and a lovely open quality to ambience and subtle imaging cues. This seems to be very consistent across applications, whatever turntable and platter material is used, though of course some of the turntable's own character still remains. Slightly less consistent is the effect at lower frequencies. We did detect some slight coloration in the midrange, its precise quality and degree varying from

one platter to another, while bass is clear, well defined and rhythmic but not always as deep as some supports may manage. Other Ringmat products claim to address this last point. **HFC**

Richard Black



It seems clear that no single mat can be the perfect answer in all situations. Turntables vary a lot in design and the choice of platter material in particular, will decide which mat has what effect on the sound. It seems to us that Achromat gets the closest to being a true

all-rounder, though on a plastic platter its effect is not vast because it's basically 'more of the same'. If you prefer more kick, the Origin Live is well worth a try, while the Ringmat is good at combining lovely tonality with rhythm. The Pro-Ject mat is great for bass and a real bargain.

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Wes Phillips, Stereophile June 2009

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TALK TALK



THE COLOUR OF SPRING

TALK TALK
The Colour Of Spring
EMI

"Bandleader Mark Hollis, a serious-minded character, quickly realised the dangers of trying to please the pop fans."

Words by Ian Harrison

Classic Album

Originally taking the UK record scene by storm, Talk Talk's album *The Colour of Spring* has since attained cult status

One of the more unusual instruments on *The Colour Of Spring* comes courtesy of the Variophon, an analogue, German-made 'wind synthesizer' played by blowing into a mouthpiece. Here it makes a haunting sound somewhere between the human voice, electronics and woodwind – an ideal tonal inclusion on this classic of intelligent eighties pop, complementing as it does music of pastoral subtlety and texture which, as on spectral penultimate track *Chameleon Day*, seems to reach beyond the corporeal world. Singer Mark Hollis's vocals may often be pained and tightly wound, but the album's acoustic chamber ambiances are anything but inarticulate.

Strange then, that this Tottenham/Southend three-piece were initially seen as synth-pop contemporaries of Duran Duran, probably because their first album *The Party's Over* came to prominence on the back of some regrettable, white-suited videos and photo shoots. Bandleader Mark Hollis, a serious-minded character already in his late twenties, quickly realised the dangers of trying to please the pop fans. With producer/co-writer Tim Friese-Green a member in all but name, 1984's electronic *It's My Life* gave way to *The Colour Of Spring*.

Success on the continent had allowed the group room to indulge themselves a little. "The aim (of the album)," Hollis huffily told NME's Neil Taylor in February 1986, "is to present great variety in terms of mood and arrangement, treating the whole thing as a concept. An album shouldn't be something from which a single is pulled, leaving the rest filled up with rubbish." Hollis was in his middle teens in the early seventies glory years of progressive rock and wanted to bring more than a Mellotron to the table. Citing as influences vintage gospel, Bartók and Debussy, and the touchstone jazz recordings made by Miles Davis and Gil Evans – references *outré* to this day for a supposedly chart act – the band

entered the studio with heavyweight guests including Steve Winwood on organ and bassist Danny Thompson. On arrival the players were told... nothing. After they'd played along to tracks, Hollis and Friese-Green would simply erase anything that didn't fit with the self-revealing shape of the song.

If the process was arcane, the results were extraordinary. There's no shortage of tunes to hum here; see *Life's What You Make It*, which piledrives on four piano notes, while ambivalent opener *Happiness Is Easy* anticipates Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy*. Variophon-happy tone-poem *April 5th*, meanwhile, sees a soulful Hollis emoting imprecise lyrics with something like delight, (the imperfection of words is a recurring theme on the LP, with *I Don't Believe In You* asking, "where do words begin," and *Living In Another World* declaring "speech gets harder"). This cyclic collection ends on the benign *Time It's Time*, on which death and rebirth are suggested among the choirs and woodwind instruments.

Remarkably, the album reached number eight in the UK and sold two million copies worldwide. It would be the last time the band would play live and Talk Talk would head into more ethereal realms with 1988's *Spirit Of Eden* and 1991's *Laughing Stock*.

A few years later on a self-titled solo album, Hollis would make explicit reference to his past on a soulfully-murmured, minimal piano piece also called *The Colour Of Spring*. In it he referred to bridges burned and how to "immerse in that one moment".

Since then, having seemingly vanished into his music, Hollis has released no new material and is thought to be living in Wimbledon. But what a lot there is to pick over, and immerse oneself in, with what he has left behind. HFC



SCHUMANN, BARTÓK THE BERLIN RECITAL

Martha Argerich, Gidon Kremer
EMI Classics www.emiclassics.co.uk



Music: Pianist Martha Argerich and violinist Gidon Kremer have an almost mystical relationship, which is particularly important in the Bartók where the two parts are treated as independent but complementary. In these works, piano and violin don't directly play off each other, but instead take part in a discourse, the Bartók revealing itself as the star turn in this issue.

Sound: These EMI Classics live performances are magical and fortunately, so is the sound quality. The engineers have not felt impelled to try to bridge the gap between the percussive piano and the violin. This is exquisite music-making and one of the great recent chamber releases. **AG**



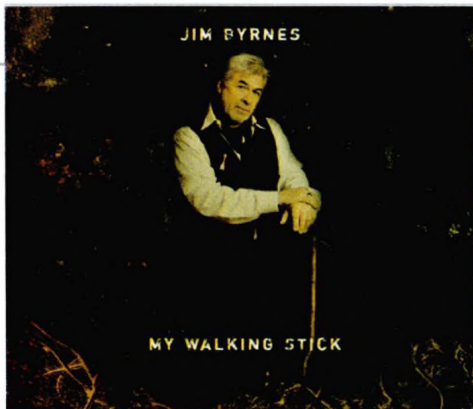
ERIC CLAPTON & STEVE WINWOOD

Live From Madison Square Garden
Warner Bros
www.warnerbrosrecords.com



Music: Take the best blues guitarist and the finest blue-eyed soul singer of their generation and the results, billed back in 1969 as the world's first 'super group', were disappointing. Over subsequent decades, Clapton and Winwood came to regard Blind Faith as unfinished business and last year they played their first full concerts together in 40 years. The three best songs are pleasingly rescued, alongside sprightly takes on Winwood/Traffic classics such as *Dear Mr Fantasy* and Clapton solos *After Midnight* and *Cocaine*.

Sound: There's no indication of how much tarring-up was necessary in the studio but, for a live recording, the quality is as pristine as you could wish. **NW**



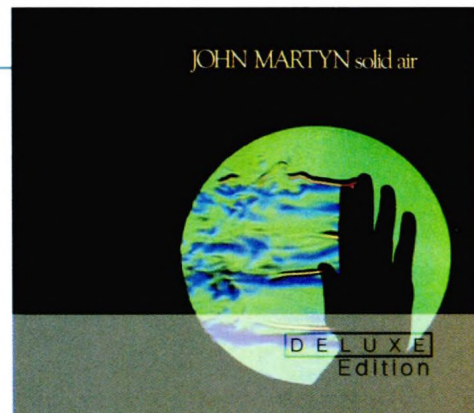
JIM BYRNES

My Walking Stick
Black Hen
www.blackhenmusic.com



Music: This is the third album from the veteran blue-eyed bluesman since he hooked up with acclaimed roots producer Steve Dawson and the combination is still going strong – ably backed by legends, including Randy Bachman's keyboardist Chris Gestrin and drummers borrowed from Bowie (Matt Chamberlain) and Tom Waits (Stephen Hodges). *Ol' Rattler* buzzes with restrained energy, *Lookin' For A Love* is a sweet doo-wop tribute, *Walk On Boy* is a superb frame for Byrnes' soulful whisky-soaked voice and even the mock tango of the title track goes off into some interesting places.

Sound: The vocal production is only matched by the separation and the subtle rhythm washes – a beautiful sound at any volume. **PS**



JOHN MARTYN

Solid Air (Deluxe edition)
Universal/Island Records
www.islandrecords.co.uk



Music: Recorded in three weeks with Danny Thompson and members of Fairport Convention, John Martyn's diamond 1973 album was inspired by a move to Hastings. It showcases the mellifluous flowing guitar style that became his trade mark and is made perfect by his elided vocals, nowhere better heard than on the stunning title track. This, the definitive version, comes with an entire alternative album, three fine out-takes and three French live cuts.

Sound: The best-ever Solid Air CD is characterised throughout by Martyn's slap-acoustic guitar style, where his right hand is more important than the left. Standout examples are the alt-take of *Man In The Station* and the unreleased *When It's Dark*. **MP**



TINARIWEN

Imidiwan: Companions
Independiente
www.independiente.co.uk



Music: You might have imagined that being the coolest African rock'n'roll band in the world, namechecked by Robert Plant, Bono, Chris Martin, Thom Yorke *et al*, might have encouraged Tinariwen to dilute or Westernise their sound. Instead, to record their fourth album, the Tuareg desert warriors returned to their Saharan home with a mobile studio and generator and recorded a dozen songs in their village and out in the bush. The result?

Simply their hardest, rockiest and most dramatic desert-blues set to date.

Sound: Field recording goes super-digital: snaking electric guitars, mesmerising traditional percussion and tribal ambience with a thrilling production that makes it all sound as deep and clear as an ancient well. **NW**



THE GREAT RECORDINGS

André Previn (cond), LSO
EMI CD (10 disc set)
www.emiclassics.co.uk



Music: Here's a more productive way of using your time than listening to chunks on Classic FM. This eclectic series of recordings from 'Mr Preview's' years as principal conductor of the LSO, mostly of British and other mid-period works, includes a compelling account of Messiaen's *Turangalila Symphony*. In fact, there's very little routine dross here, some Tchaikovsky and Ravel's Bolero apart, and these are all complete, mainly very well regarded, recordings from the height of André Previn's career.

Sound: Naturally there's some spread in the quality of the recordings, but on the whole they almost all rate as good, while some are not far short of star quality, even today. **AG**



ZAP MAMA

ReCreation
Heads Up International
www.headsup.com



Music: Zaire-born, Paris-based Marie Daulne founded the Afro-centric vocal group Zap Mama in the early nineties. She's backed by a band these days, but Daulne's voice takes centre stage, her elastic vocal chords discoursing equally well when singing, rapping or venting from her arsenal of onomatopoeic sounds. In French and English with elements of samba, Congolese vocal harmonies and European funk-pop, the grooves are on the mellow side but never stray into blandness.

Sound: The production is as clear as a bell and ideal for radio, but perhaps just a little too spotless and pristine for attentive listening – a little grit would have worked wonders. **DO**



JOHN CRAMPTON

Boogie In The House
John Crampton Music
www.johncrampton.co.uk



Music: John Crampton is a modern day, old-school blues hollerer channelling the spirits of John Lee Hooker, Bukka White, Blind Willie Johnson and a host of (mostly dead) blues greats from his base in Brighton. He plays alone, with stomp board and harmonica, but while he's known for his accomplished fretwork on his National steel guitar, here he puts the spotlight on the banjo, albeit still very much in a blues style. On a set of mostly original songs, he kicks up a hellfire storm of righteous, rocking blues.

Sound: It's simply recorded, just a man, a room and some serious blues licks, but the balance is just so and weaves an intimate, close-miked spell. **DO**

BRENNAN JB7

Small enough to pick up with one hand.
Big enough for a lifetime of music.

What's the point owning CDs you don't Play?

What's the point in owning hundreds of CDs worth thousands of pounds if you never listen to them? The problem with CDs is that it's quicker to make a cup of coffee than dip into a CD. Try timing how long it takes to pick a CD, load it in the CD player, play a snippet from a track or two, eject it and put it back where it came from. Then there is the problem of finding music. The print on a CD spine is tiny. What if the track is on a compilation CD? What if the CD is in the car? Then there is the clutter. You need to keep your CDs near the player or you won't play them. So you are forced to share your living space with hundreds of cheap plastic boxes. CDs are great but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore - that's why Martin Brennan designed the Brennan JB7.

Good news for CD owners

British company re-invents the HiFi

"Mr Brennan you are a genius. The JB7 is truly a wonderful thing. I have only owned mine for two days but already it feels like an old friend. I admire its simplicity of operation, its range of functions, its unobtrusive size, and the quality of sound simply delights me. It's all I could wish for. Thank you. Kind Regards"

When Martin Brennan designed the Brennan JB7 he threw out the rule book.

The Brennan is a CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs. It saves space and clutter and delivers near immediate access to an entire music collection. Customers rediscover/fall in love with their music again simply because the Brennan makes it so accessible.

The Brennan also records from vinyl and cassette so you can enjoy your entire music collection but keep it out of the way in another room or retire it to the attic. You can use the JB7 in two ways. You can use it with

loudspeakers or you can play it through your existing HiFi. The Brennan gives names to tracks and albums from a database of 2.6 million CDs as you load each CD. It takes a few minutes to load a CD.

The Brennan has a unique text search facility that shows a reducing number of matches as you press successive letters on the remote control. Once you get the hang of it you can find one track or album out of your entire music collection in a few seconds. So to find "Nessun Dorma" you would press letters "NES" or "DOR" and scroll through the shortlist of matches.

The face behind Brennan



Martin Brennan

Martin is a physicist and computer engineer. He has around twenty silicon chips to his name, written over a million lines of computer code and co-designed the world's first 64 bit games computer.

"I always liked the promise of CDs. It wasn't so much the quality but the quick access to a given track. After vinyl and cassette that was a real plus. My first CD player was a five CD multi changer. My second was a ten CD changer for the car. I liked the idea of quick access to more than one CD and music that didn't repeat after 40 minutes. These players were fine but a bit clunky - there were several seconds of silence between CDs and in the car I could

never find the right CD. A few years ago I had a go at loading my cassette collection onto a PC. Cassettes were obsolete but I owned around 100 and the music on them reflected an important period in my life. I recorded all of the cassettes on to the PC over a period of several weeks. The thing is I never listened to the music on the PC. Somehow using the computer to listen to music never worked out. Maybe the computer was in the wrong place but I think it lacked the immediacy of a physical play button. In the end the computer got a virus and the music files were lost - I still had the cassettes thankfully. The JB7 is really my personal ideal music player".



Key Points

Three sizes - up to 5000 CDs

- One button plays the entire collection at random
- Text search finds tracks/ albums/ artists in seconds
- Browse albums by spinning the volume knob
- Display tracks by name as they play
- Load

- CDs in about four minutes
- 2.6 million album database - updated monthly
- Seven rainbow colour coded playlists
- 180 x 32 soft scrolling vacuum fluorescent display
- Segue function blends one track into the next
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- Loads and plays MP3 from USB
- Remote control or front panel
- Volume knob pushes to use as a selector
- Delete tracks you don't like
- Clock with alarm
- 60 Watt power amplifier
- 4.8 x 16 x 22 cm steel and aluminium construction
- Small and tough enough if you are on the move
- Used by restaurants, hotels, pubs,

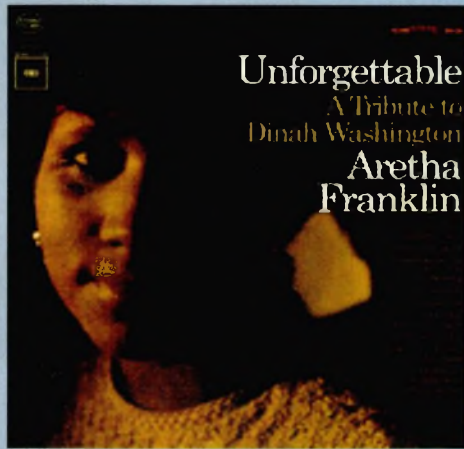
- dentists, schools
- Sold to more than 30 Countries
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- "Superb" - Gramophone
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Daily Mail



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ARETHA FRANKLIN

Unforgettable

CBS/Speakers Corner 180g
www.speakerscornerrecords.com



Music: This 1964 album is subtitled *A Tribute to Dinah Washington* and was recorded a few months after her death by a 23-year-old Franklin. Her voice combines power, range and soul and the way she uses it brings a dynamic to these ten songs that energises them in no uncertain terms.

Sound: Recorded with voice at centre and band sections in either channel, this has plenty of character, yet tone is good, the tape compression quite appealing and there's plenty of vibrancy. But it's very much of its time. **JK**



RICHARD HOLMES / GENE AMMONS

Groovin' With Jug

Pacific Jazz/Pure Pleasure 180g
www.purepleasurerecords.com



Music: The *Jug* in the title was the nickname of tenor virtuoso Ammons, while *Groovin'* refers to Hammond B-3 organ player 'Groove' Holmes. Recorded over one day in two locations in LA, side one is the evening at the Black Orchid and side two the daytime session in the Pacific Jazz studios. In both cases you have masters of their craft making very fine soul-jazz vibes.

Sound: The club side is a superb example of the art with great tone and energy, but the studio cuts are more open. Very good for its vintage. **JK**

HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

ELEANOR MCEVOY

Snapshots
MOSCO
SACD (stereo/ multichannel hybrid disc)
www.mosco.ie



Music: If Irish songstress McEvoy looks a little short on the locks front on this album it's because it was originally released ten years ago on CD. This limited edition reissue of her third album reveals a more upbeat sound with keyboards and percussion from producer

Rupert Hine as well as loops and strings. The eighties' sound is a far cry from the more natural folksy feel of *Yola*. Her voice is as dusty and yearning as ever and the songs are clearly well crafted, but seem slightly overwhelmed by the production.

Sound: A slick offering, it has sumptuous bass and plenty of definition. The only problem is a slightly grainy quality which is apparent on both SACD and CD. **JK**



WORKS FOR CLARINET AND STRINGS

Sonolumina Ensemble
IsoMike
SACD (stereo/ multichannel hybrid disc)
www.cdbaby.com/cd/sonolumina



Music: The three composers represented here were at their height in the mid-20th century. The piece by Ingolf Dahl is neo-classical and originally composed for a group of musicians including Benny Goodman. But all three are excellent pieces, the Bohuslav Martinu more classically oriented, while the Karel Husa is more percussive and reminiscent of Kodaly.

Sound: This is one of a continuing series of recordings made by Ray Kimber using his unique IsoMike with its giant, butterfly shaped baffle. But these are landmark recordings which are crystal-clear without sounding excessively upfront, as well as offering a sense of depth and shape, even when reproduced in two-channel stereo. **AG**



NEIL YOUNG

Archives Vol 1
Warners
Blu-ray disc (24-bit/ 192kHz PCM)
www.warnerbrosrecords.com



Music: It's a very select bunch of artists who could get away with calling a ten-disc box set of Blu-ray discs 'volume 1'. And an even more select bunch who could justify the running time with only the first decade of their career. Young's early years and solo career up to

1972's *Harvest* are all here in intimate detail, with loads of unreleased versions and contemporary live material. Linked with contemporary film footage and copious notes, this is a sumptuous package.

Sound: If you can afford £200, the Blu-ray version of *Archives'* frankly awesome attention to detail and as-real-as-it-gets reproduction trumps the CD and DVD approximations of the same material. **DO**



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www.audioemotion.co.uk

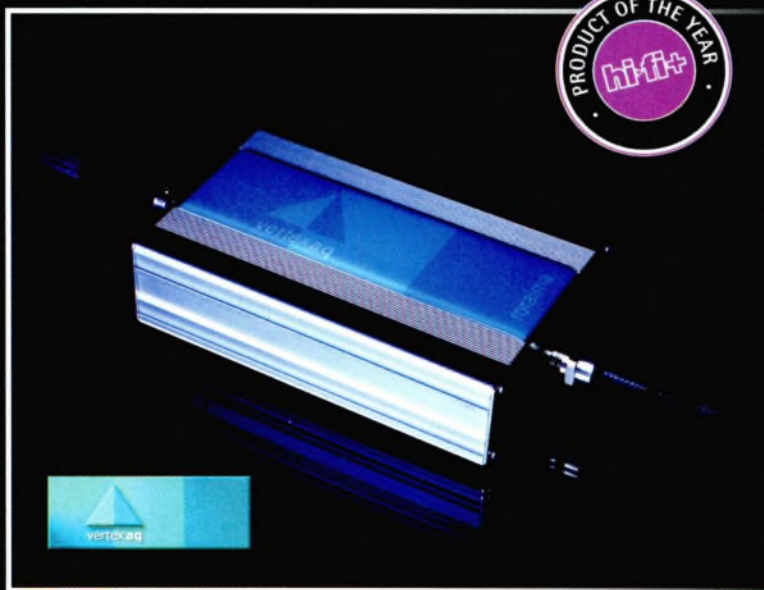
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30 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE



"In purely performance terms they represent a bargain, both as upgrades and in releasing the performance potential in the equipment you have already paid for. At no point in the (review) process did the cost of the upgrade seem expensive given the musical results."

Roy Gregory, HiFi+ issue 54

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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

The Link effect

I have just read your review on the Harman Kardon HD 990 CD player and HK 990 amplifier. I am wondering about the HRS Link when the player is used 'stand alone.' I think I am correct in saying that most CD players use S/PDIF to send the digital data to the DAC? Does this player use the HRS link when used with another manufacturer's amp and if this is so, do you set it up on the handset? This player seems to have some good ideas built into it and to link the master clock to the transport is clearly one of them, although is this new?

Also, I note the player is fitted with a computer-type power supply. I have heard that these are frowned upon in high-end circles as they are supposed to be noisy. Have I got this



Harman Kardon HD 990 and HK 990 CD player and integrated amplifier

“Turn ‘em up and they’re amazing, but at background listening levels when friends are over, the bass is non-existent.”

right or am I grasping the wrong end of the stick? I enjoyed your article and thought that I may buy this player, but it's not easy to get a demo up here in the far north of Scotland.

Mike Booth via email

HFC Richard Black replies: Unfortunately the HRS Link is proprietary – it will only work between suitably equipped models from Harman Kardon. The same is true of all other clock/ data interface systems we've seen in domestic audio – you're right, it has been done before a few times.

Computer-type (switch-mode) power supplies have been associated in the past with noise and other problems, but if they're done properly they can be entirely satisfactory. HK seems to have got this one well under manners. Regular supplies have their own problems to address, too!

Low-level bass

My system: Densen B420 CD, Exposure 2010 pre and power amps, Ruark Prelude speakers,

Pro-Ject Xpression turntable/9c arm/Otofon FF15 C cartridge.

I quite recently swapped a set of KEF Q5 speakers for my current Ruark Preludes. I've been very happy with the swap – I've lost some grunt and punch, but gained a sweeter, more natural sound that is just amazing with voices and acoustic instruments.

However, there is always a trade-off and the main thing I miss is bass response at low volumes. Turn 'em up and they're amazing, but at background listening levels, when friends are over, the bass is non-existent.

Is this simply a design of the speakers 'thing', or is there something else I can do? Would more power help? I'm already bi-amping, but am saving the pennies with a view to getting the Danes in for my amplification as well as my disc spinning.

Neil Glasgow

HFC You're right Neil, speakers are a compromise and the more affordable and domestically friendly they are the more ▶

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Zapper off

What is it with Russ Andrews, where does he get off charging £161 a pair for a Zobel network attached to a couple of banana plugs? I refer of course to the Zapperator that appeared in News (HFC 321), a device of dubious functionality and approximately £5 worth of parts. His apparent cynicism sullies an otherwise noble pursuit and should not be encouraged.

B Jacks Yorkshire

HFC Russ Andrews is without doubt the king of the tweaking market and we've tested plenty of his products that have hit the spot in terms of performance and

value for money. However, Richard Black's review of the Zapperator (HFC 322) revealed that on this occasion, the product failed to live up to his expectations. One good thing, however, is Russ's home trial scheme, so you can try without fully committing to a purchase.



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

WHAT satellite

July 2009. Issue 277. On sale Now

& Digital TV



On test
Panasonic
DMR-BS850:
Freesat PVR,
Blu-ray recorder,
Foxsat-beater?



Panny brings Blu-ray to Freesat

ALSO

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❑ compromised they become. But there is one way of getting the result you are after and it costs you nothing but effort – effort put into moving the speakers towards the room corners for your cocktail soirees. If that is not convenient, you either need a speaker that is more efficient, which generally means larger, or you need a fuller-sounding amplifier, which is not what you tend to get with Densen. As you plan to upgrade the amp anyway, perhaps this is where you should concentrate your efforts?



Vive le combo

After your enthusiastic reviews of Cairn's Fog and Tornado CD players, I was disappointed to read that you didn't find that the matching Diablo amplifier lived up to the name. Disappointed, because I have a Tornado 192 and Diablo pairing which I use with Triangle Celius speakers that produce a fantastic result. Rarely have I come across another system that can match this one for speed and visceral excitement.

PD Terre France

HFC We were likewise a little disappointed in the result from the Cairn Diablo after the thrilling results we got with both the company's CD players. Inevitably, we did not test the amplifier with a Cairn CD player in our *Ultimate Group Test*, it would hardly have been fair on the other amps, and

"The majority of the participants could not distinguish between a high-end digital source from a computer-based music server!"

possibly you are getting great results because the pair have a synergy together that isn't obvious with the amp alone.

Blind down under

Several weeks ago, in the monthly meeting of the Sydney Audio Club, we had a blind testing of, among other things, digital sources.

The majority of the participants – all seasoned audiophiles – could not distinguish a high-end digital source from a computer-based music server! And further, most preferred the sound of a \$6 generic interconnect to a well-known brand costing \$600! What is one to make of such experiments?

For my part, and when it comes to amplifiers, it's quite easy for me to identify the Brystons I now use, against the PS Audio and Densen alternatives I also have and use occasionally.

The sheer powerful presentation of the Bryston monoblocks cannot be mistaken for something else, but again could it be only a case of the massive differences in power output (500 watts vs. 150 watts)?

Arthur Katakalos Australia

HFC Blind tests can be misleading things but they are nonetheless a useful way of getting past preconceptions as you have discovered. The limitation with blind tests is usually the limited duration of auditioning that can be given to each component being tested, that's why we combine the results of blind test panels and longer term sited listening when arriving at our conclusions. There is also no doubt that there is a learning curve involved with blind panel listening (read Richard Black's column in *Dispatches* for more on the subject).

A recent AES publication described a rigorous and long-term blind testing of the differences between high-resolution (24/96 PCM and SACD) audio and standard CD, the conclusion being that the differences

aren't audible. Yet most of us have heard the opposite, when Pioneer first mooted high bit rate PCM this was apparent and it's still the case today, but you need more than blind testing to prove as much.

Mains matters

With more and more articles appearing in *Hi-Fi Choice* about the importance of mains quality, I'm surprised that no-one has mentioned a simple and inexpensive tweak that can be applied to any mains cable with beneficial results. I'm referring to ferrite collars, an item which has become more commonplace inside things like computers in recent times because of legislation designed to stop such devices polluting the mains. I have a number of different ferrite rings at the inlet end of my mains cables and these include a clamp-on variety that used to be sold through the magazine. It's a small grey plastic casing containing a split ferrite 'tube', the split makes it very easy to attach to cables and I'd like to get some more of these simple devices, but have not seen them anywhere else. Do you still have any for sale?

Barry Crump Cumbria

HFC Those of us who have been with the magazine for longer than we expected can remember the ferrite clamps you have, but in truth it's been a long time since they were sold through the magazine. A look around the interweb reveals that there are plenty examples of the breed available, we found one that accepts cables up to 13mm in diameter for £2.66 from JPG Electronics and Maplin does a range with full specs that start at £1.73 (it calls them clip-on ferrites). Looking at the Maplin photo you can see one that looks very much like the example we used to sell back in the day.

Below: Cairn Diablo integrated amplifier



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Open and natural

I'm looking for an open and natural sound with real musical neutrality and depth and would like to keep separates matching if possible. What are your thoughts between Arcam's CD37 and A38 or Naim's CD5X and NAIT XS combinations? I have also considered a Cyrus CD 8 SE and 8XP, although owner reviews highlight CD reliability questions.

I have heard (and like) PMC GB1i speakers, too. Should I consider anything else, such as ProAc's Studio 140 or Spondor's A5?

I have recently been using an Arcam Solo; brilliant in its own right but never designed to compete at this level, together with Monitor Audio RS6s. Substituting my old faithful A&R Cambridge A60 and Arcam Alpha 6 CD improves detail, clarity and control. I am seeking refinement and a satisfying long-term ownership.

The A60 (29 years old) and Alpha 6 CD (17 years old) both still perform and are a real credit to Arcam, as is Arcam's customer service – illustrated by sending me a replacement part for my A60 free of charge after all these years. Finally, if you think I'm making a mistake sticking to a single brand, what best mix and match would you propose as the basis for an audition?

Nick via email

HFC Our inclination would be to stick with Arcam for your electronics requirement. Not only has it proved itself with regard to longevity and service, but it does indeed sound open and natural. Naim has the edge when it comes to timing, but Arcam kit gives you a bit more neutrality and image-precision for the money. We would agree with your choice of CD37 CD player and A38 amplifier, which is an extremely capable pairing that is both revealing and able to drive

a wide variety of loudspeakers. On that front we also like the PMC GB1i – it's a highly entertaining floorstander with very natural sound. We haven't tried the Proac you mention, nor the Spondor A5, but the latter consistently builds fine loudspeakers and the former has a great reputation, so try to listen to all three if you can.

R20 ranking

My system consists of a Rega P7 with Rega Exact, Primare CD31, Primare I30 amp and Primare R20 phono stage with QLN Signature speakers (20 years old) and The Chord Company cables.

For a long time I have wondered how the Primare R20 ranks and have looked for a serious review but have never seen one. So I was very glad when my favourite hi-fi magazine *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewed it in issue 320. It seems to be pretty good if not a class-leader.

In my system, I'm very pleased with the sound quality, the combination of I30 with CD31 and XLR interconnects is marvellous.

I'm quite pleased with the sound from vinyl, too, but I wonder how to upgrade my equipment so I can get even more exciting sound from my vinyl collection? I have a Rega Exact which is an MM, but plan to buy an MC cartridge.

However, my budget is £1,000-£1,500 and my question is how to spend this money? Which MC cartridge do you recommend and do you recommend any other phono stage or can Primare change the R20's MC gain so it can fit every MC cartridge?

Mattias Sweden

HFC The Mk2 revision to the R20 increased the gain so that it is better suited to MC cartridges. We contacted Primare to see if you can get your stage



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 STEWARD

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.

CM9 partnership

I was very interested in your equipment review on the Bowers and Wilkins CM9 loudspeaker and especially the part on system matching. You state the CM9 is not particularly equipment-fussy and can work well with a modest stereo amplifier.

At present I have a Cyrus CD 8 SE CD player with a PSX-R. My present amplifier is the NAD C370 stereo integrated rated at 120 watts minimum continuous power into 4/8 ohms.

I am intending to upgrade to a pre/power amplifier in the future, but my question is will my present amplifier work with the CM9 loudspeaker?

Dave Cotter via email

HFC The answer is yes. The NAD 370 should be able to drive the CM9 loudspeaker. It has enough power so long as you don't want to fill an auditorium and it was a well-regarded amplifier in its time.

The real question is, will the combination sound good? And that is less easy to answer. The CM9 is a pretty revealing loudspeaker and it will expose both the good and less good aspects of the C370's character, but so long as its limitations are not of a grainy or abrasive character the result could be rather better than you are expecting.

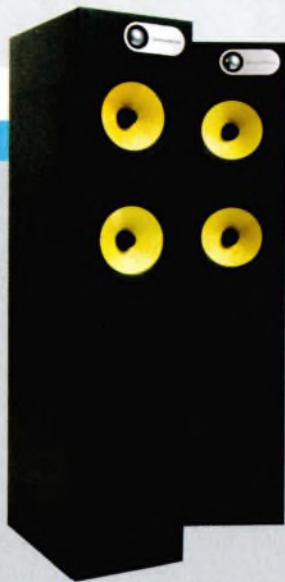


Power partner

In *HFC* 286 you said you would like to hear the Audiolab 8000P power amp with a better preamp than the 8000Q, with which it would be naturally partnered. Well, I use one with a Musical Fidelity ASCR preamp and it does sound excellent. The combination powers a pair of KEF IQ5 speakers. My question is this: If I added a second 8000P and bi-amped the speakers would I notice enough of an increase in quality to justify the outlay? Shall I seek out an Audiolab dealer and try to set up a comparison?

Alan Gitsham via email

HFC The advantage of bi-amping – where a second stereo amp is used to power one half of a speaker and the existing one drives the other – is not an increase in power but greater refinement and resolution. Looking at your set-up, albeit without any details of the source, we'd say that the amplification outclasses the



loudspeakers. A second power amp would help, but a better speaker would transform the sound. Depending on your budget, we would suggest the Bowers and Wilkins 684 at the affordable end of the scale, or the PMC GB1 at the more ambitious end. Both are a similar size to your KEFs, but are rather more revealing.

upgraded, but apparently the change is too great. The question really is how best to allocate your budget given that spending more on a cartridge than the value of your turntable doesn't make sense. What we would suggest is a great value high-output MC such as the Dynavector 10X5 (pictured below), combined with a serious equipment support of the Townshend VSSS variety. This might seem an odd approach, but by isolating your turntable and electronics properly you will get a massive overall upgrade even before you change the cartridge. This approach also means that should you go for a better turntable in the future, then it too will be able to perform at its best.



The iPod upgrade

I'm in the market for a new hi-fi system. I appreciate good music, but I've not had the hardware to really do it justice. A couple of friends have very good Naim set-ups and the sound is just amazing. It makes me jealous every time I hear it! I currently don't have any hi-fi kit to speak of, just my trusty iPod, but the music only sounds ok, not amazing. iPods are ok for train journeys and keep fit sessions, but when you just want to kick back and listen to some smooth soul or jazz you need some decent kit. Up until now I've not been able to purchase anything decent due to various reasons in life!

But now I'm at a point where I can invest in some hardware. I don't have much vinyl so would only be looking for a CD player to start with and some amps. Is it best to go the route of pre and power amp or an integrated amp? I have a budget of £2,000, which probably isn't enough, but I need to start somewhere! I've looked at Naim kit but looking online at the prices, it looks like it's not possible with my budget. What would you suggest as a first foray in to the world of audiophile hardware? I read the magazines but I'm just bamboozled and don't know where to really start. Any help or suggestions would be much appreciated.

Phil Wiltshire via email

HFC You say that Naim prices are out of your league, but if you start with its 5i series electronics and add speakers from a third party, you can get on the Naim ladder with a two-grand budget. The components in question are the CD5i (£895) CD player and the NAIT 5i (£765) integrated amp, these leave you with about £350 for some speakers – try Rega's RS1 standmount (£398). This set-up will deliver many of the qualities you hear in bigger Naim systems and get you a lot closer to audio nirvana than any personal stereo.



Power

How much power do you need to drive a given pair of speakers adequately? The answer depends on the character of the speakers in question and what you consider adequate. While speakers don't vary hugely in sensitivity, or 'ease of use' as we refer to it in the *Buyer's Guide*, differences of 3dB between two models are common. In practice, this difference means that the speaker with 3dB less sensitivity needs twice as much power to achieve the same volume level as the one with 3dB more. All other things being equal, high-sensitivity is a good thing. But so long as a speaker measures 87dB or above, you are not likely to have difficulty finding an amplifier to drive it, so long as other aspects of its electrical character are not too challenging. We point these things out in our lab reports in order to make it easier for you to figure out whether your amplifier will be able to drive a given loudspeaker.

High-output power is no longer the preserve of back-breaking power amplifiers. Nowadays even quite affordable integrated amps deliver as much power as a separate power amplifier from ten years ago and 100-watt examples are increasingly common. Do you need this much power? We'd argue that when it comes to solid state or transistor amplifiers the answer is yes. There used to be a school of thought which espoused that more power meant less transparency and worse timing and this lingers on in some of the more extreme fringes of the audiophile community. But modern amplifiers can combine both resolution and power in a remarkably engaging fashion, which means that you are unlikely to end up listening to an amp that is struggling to drive the speakers and revealing as much in the resulting sound.

Valve amps get away with far lower output power because of the smooth way in which they clip when the going gets tough. You need more sensitive speakers to be sure, we wouldn't encourage anyone to combine valve power with a speaker that has sub-90dB sensitivity, but even then a 25-watt amplifier will run out of steam at anything above medium volume levels. The key to their appeal is that when valves start to struggle or clip they, do so in a benign fashion that doesn't bring a harshness to the sound.



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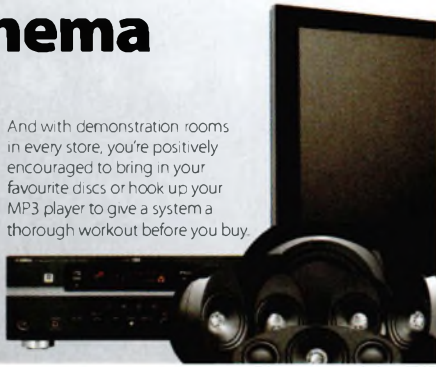
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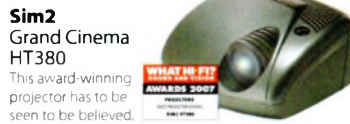
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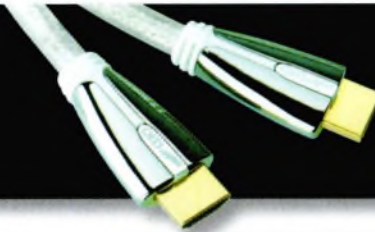
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<p>PANASONIC TX-L32X10B 32" LCD TV £449</p>	<p>PANASONIC TX-L32S10B 32" LCD TV £539</p>	<p>PANASONIC TX-L37G10B 37" LCD TV £719 PRICE INCLUDES TRADE-IN DISCOUNT</p>	<p>PANASONIC TX-P42G10B 42" PLASMA TV £799 PRICE INCLUDES TRADE-IN DISCOUNT</p>
<p>PANASONIC TX-P42V10B 42" PLASMA TV £1199 CLAIM FREE DMP-BD60 BLU-RAY PLAYER</p>	<p>SAMSUNG UE40B7020 40" LED TV £1199</p>	<p>PIONEER PDP-LX5090 50" PLASMA TV £2099</p>	<p>PIONEER PDP-LX6090 60" PLASMA TV £3199</p>

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HFC BUYER'S GUIDE

Welcome to the new-look *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Guide* – the ultimate directory to the very best high-performance hi-fi gear that you can buy. Here, you'll find our favourite current products listed under easy-to-use categories, with up-to-date pricing and trustworthy verdicts.

Reviews you can trust

Hi-Fi Choice test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the UK's most respected hi-fi journalists and use the most stringent techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest disc players, amplifiers, tuners and loudspeakers.

Reviews online

We've also included *techradar* listings where our reviews appear online with our sister site *techradar.com*. To access selected *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews online, simply type: *techradar.com/* into your browser (remembering the forward slash), followed by the six-digit number printed in the first column of our *Buyer's Guide*.

How to use this guide

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

**THIS MONTH'S
HI-FI HIGHLIGHT**

Unison Research's P70 integrated (reviewed in HFC 302), still catches the eye, thanks to its stunning design. The P70 is a combination of elegant hardwood casing, a semi-transparent Murano glass frontage and a range of glowing valves. What's more, it delivers a performance to match its looks. Price £4,995.



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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

Any one of these fine players will make sweet music for years to come

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS									
				WWW.TECHNOLOG.COM	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000													
	Arcam CD17	700	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever		●	●	●	●					315
	Cairn Tornado	950	The Tornado is a full-on experience that delivers intensely real sound for its price		●	●	●	●					305
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	550	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative		●	●	●	●					293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	800	Superbly capable with a combination of resolution and tonal evenness that's well worth hearing		●	●	●	●					315
	Cyrus CD6 SE	900	A combination of detail and sheer musical energy with a hint of high end to the performance			●	●	●					318
	Harman/Kardon HD990	550	Highly detailed with excellent extension at both extremes and impressive resolution	/594818	●	●	●	●	●	●			321
	Marantz CD6002	320	A hint of treble unevenness is the only specific flaw: performance is class-leading in most areas			●	●	●	●				301
	Marantz SA8003	830	Classic Marantz sound in a classy and attractive package. Our favourite sub-£1,000 player	/456022	●	●	●	●	●				315
	NAD C545BEE	350	Apart from slight lack of bass control, sound is very fine indeed – treble is beautifully detailed			●	●	●					322
	Naim CD5i	895	Its competent musical performance comfortably exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player					●					307
	Quad 99CD-S	700	Revels in big music thanks to fearless presentation: smaller-scale works can lack focus, though				●	●		●			291
	Rega Apollo	586	Unless you can't abide top-loaders, check this out: musically it's a highly praiseworthy performer			●		●					285
	Roksan Kandy K2	895	State-of-the-art technology and precision-engineering produces a fine CD performance	/483697	●	●	●	●		●			315
	Yamaha CD-S2000	979	Sophisticated, this is a beautifully controlled, high-resolution player, although SACD is stereo-only	/488867	●	●	●	●	●	●			309
ABOVE £1,000													
	Arcam CD37	1,300	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution	/395096	●	●	●	●					318
	Audio Research CD5	5,055	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – assertive and very dynamic	/455309		●	●	●		●			312
	Bryston BCD-1	2,500	Not as open as some but more timely than most. it also sounds a lot more gripping than it looks			●	●	●		●			300
	Cairn Fog 3	2,200	Ergonomically challenged, high-energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board			●	●	●		●	●		302
	Classé CDP-102	2,950	Its sound is rich and dynamic with a full bottom end and impressive power for such a smooth player			●	●	●	●	●	●		286
	Consonance Droplet CDP3.1	1,995	A CD player which gets to the nub of what music is about. Engages the listener every time			●		●		●			322
	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,200	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music	/399370		●	●	●					310
	EMM Labs CDSA	9,995	Classy, stripped down to basics SACD/CD player with some excellent engineering below decks		●	●	●	●		●			302
	Esoteric X-05	3,995	Superb resolve of fine detail with a perfectly judged balance and an ability to draw you in	/478365	●	●	●	●		●			314
	Leema Stream	1,170	The most timely disc player at its price point has tactile imaging and good dynamics			●		●					306
	Leema Antila	2,735	Musically engaging player that will have you going through your CDs afresh			●	●	●		●			291
	Linn Akurate CD	4,750	This multi-format non-video player doesn't have huge transparency, but is musically addictive		●	●	●	●		●			299
	Marantz SA-11S2	3,300	Superb value, this well-balanced player features various filter settings to customise performance		●	●	●	●		●			304
	Marantz SA-7S1	5,900	A bargain even at this price, the SA-7S1 sets the benchmark for CD/SACD players of its ilk		●					●			297
	Meridian G08	2,400	Advanced digital processing with special apodising filter that gives a very clean sound	/455040		●	●	●		●	●		312
	Moon CD3.3	2,200	Another revealing and refined player which warrants inclusion on anyone's must-hear shortlist	/594609		●		●		●	●		321
	Naim HDX	4,500	The HDX hard disk player represents an entirely new paradigm for high-fidelity replay			●	●	●					311
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	1,450	An exceptionally fine CD player that provides a high-end and musically rewarding performance			●	●	●					307
	Shanling CD-T1000SE	1,700	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	/465933	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		313
	Unison Research CDE	2,495	Valve CD player with interchangeable DACs that doubles as a standalone DAC that oozes musicality	/483759		●		●		●	●		318

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in 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.

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

The best record players you can buy

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHNOPIAN.COM	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	ISSUE NUMBER
	Avid Volvere	2,900	A combination of a heavy platter with sprung suspension makes vinyl sound powerful and solid		33/45	●	●		298
	Clearaudio Emoton	1,185	Beautifully built with open and clean sound emphasising mid and top, but delivering nice timely bass		33/45			●	309
	Clearaudio Performance	2,300	Ceramic-magnetic bearing spells a surprisingly uncoloured performance		33/45			●	295
	Continuum Caliburn	115,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and Castellon stand	/587169	33/45/78			●	320
	EAR Disc Master	8,800	Combines new 'no contact' drive technology and high-quality materials to bring state-of-the-art resolution		33/45/78	●	●	opt	276
	The Funk Firm Saffire	2,450	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics		33/45	●		opt	309
	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45			opt	319
	Michell TecnoDec	579	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money		33/45			opt	309
	Pro-Ject RPM 5	550	Great looks plus engaging sound puts it in the serious league, but needs good isolation for best results		33/45	●	●	●	279
	Pro-Ject RPM 6 1	750	With its 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	1,000	Combines some very strong elements (Ortofon Pondo Red) into a killer package with top sound and value		33/45	●	●	●	309
	Rega P3-24	390	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, much improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply		33/45		opt	●	298
	Rega P5/RB700	684	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm		33/45	●		opt	257
	Rega P7/RB700	1,271	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company		33/45	●		opt	257
	Roksan Radius 5/Nima	1,375	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation		33/45	●	●	●	248
	SME Model 10A	4,105	Superbly built and highly resolute design, tested with a Series V/309 hybrid arm		33/45	●	●	●	195
	Townshend Rock 7	1,498	Has the ability to pull detail out of a vinyl groove, making it the most resolute turntable at its price	/587280	33/45			●	320
	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		33/45	●		●	307

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC recommendations

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				WWW.TECHNOPIAN.COM	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Denon DL-103R	290	Adds refinement to the basic DL-103. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around			●		285
	Dynavector DV-10X5	295	A high-output MC with superb dynamics and fine timing that's difficult to mount, but well worth the effort				●	307
	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss			●	●	235
	Ortofon Salsa	280	Despite a touch of midrange coloration, this cartridge really involves the listener with good extension and a clean sound				●	290
	Ortofon Rondo Red	375	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price				●	307
	Sumiko Blue Point Spec Evo III	239	High-output MC with refinement at high frequencies and a nimble, articulate and revealing sound				●	270
	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light				●	235
	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and resolution to die for				●	265

PHONO STAGES

Get the best performance from your turntable

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHNOPIAN.COM	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUO GAIN	AUO IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Cambridge Audio 640P	100	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades		●				305
	Creek OBH15	240	Practical and highly compatible unit offering fine detail and a pleasing, mellow balance		●	●			305
	Tom Evans Microgroove	480	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat			●			234
	Tom Evans The Groove	1,900	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral; a good choice for maximum information retrieval			●			201
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	563	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility		●	●	●	●	234

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



Cambridge Audio 640P £100
If you need a low-cost way to get your turntable talking to your amplifier, this is by far the best option



Dynavector DV-10X5 £295
Fiddly to set up, but dynamics are superb from this high-output MC cartridge, making it a firm HFC favourite



Townshend Rock 7 £1,498
A great turntable for those upgrading from an entry-level deck. Sound engineering at a bargain price

ROBERTS SOLAR DAB PHILIPS CINEMA 21:9 LG GD900 CRYSTAL
HTC MAGIC BBC iPLAYER HD
AMAZON KINDLE 2
FLIP MINO HD LENOVO IDEAPAD S10E
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ASUS EEE PC SEASHELL
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RADIO TUNERS

Surf the waves with these carefully selected tuners

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS											
	Creek Audio Evolution	350	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy		FM,M	80					308
	Denon TU-1500AE	180	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound		FM,M,L	100					281
	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
	Rega Dynalo 3	390	Strong bass, clear treble and a high enjoyment factor makes this an appealing FM performer		FM,M	20					283
	T+A T1210R	1,200	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated		FM	100					283
DAB/FM TUNERS											
	Arcam FMJ T32	600	A highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. iPod functionality is definitely a bonus	/559242	DAB,FM	100					319
	Denon TU-1800DAB	300	There's a little grain on FM, but the decent performance on both bands makes this a great choice		DAB,FM,M	200					283
	Marantz ST7001	330	FM reception could offer a little more detail and insight, but DAB is fine		DAB/FM						283
	NAD C445	350	FM is laid-back despite a bright balance, but detail is good. DAB is slightly livelier than most		DAB,FM	30					299
	Onkyo T-4555DAB	400	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard		DAB	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.

HEADPHONES

Audiophile solutions for home and travel use

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	ACS T2	500	Ear-canal earphones display an impressive midband intelligibility and a knack for digging out the detail	/479584						28		315
	Audio Technica ATH-CK10	279	In-ear headphones offer unforced detail, natural dynamics and excellent clarity							15		319
	Audio Technica ATH-W1000	559	Superbly comfortable and very revealing – makes long listening sessions a pleasure							250		304
	Beyerdynamic DT1770	222	A touch coloured in the mid, but less than most closed cans: detailed and with excellent bass							290		287
	Beyerdynamic DT880	230	Combines musical involvement with a high degree of analytical virtues. Also very comfortable							205		312
	Denon AH-D2000	300	Among the best closed-back headphones we've heard and very fine by any standards							350		309
	Denon AH-D5000	600	Sound is comparable with good open-back models, while isolation both inward and outward is useful							320		312
	Denon AH-D7000	900	One of the best closed-back designs, bearing comparison with the finest open-back models	/478417						295		314
	Etymotic ER-4P	195	Fiddle with in-ear earpieces and angles of approach and you'll be repaid with super-detailed sound							20		319
	Grado SR60i	100	A strong contender with out-of-class sound in most areas: a brilliant budget all-rounder	/603478						210		322
	Sennheiser IE8	260	With its combination of neutral midrange and treble, this is arguably the best for in-ear, all-round sound							20		319
	Sennheiser HD650	388	Clear and detailed, with very natural tonality through bass and midrange with just a little treble coloration							275		312
	Shure SE420	260	Expensive and no replacement for top conventional 'phones, but streets ahead of most in-ears							15		295
	Shure E500PTH	382	Sophisticated in-ear design with three drivers, plus switchable 'voiceover' mic in the lead							20		285
	Stax SR-001 Mk II	249	Expensive and power-hungry, but this electrostatic drags personal stereo into the world of high fidelity							280		268

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.



T+A T1210R £1,200

There aren't many similarly priced rivals to the Magnum Dynalab MD 90T for FM fans, but Germany's T+A has really hit the spot with the T1210R



Sennheiser HD 650 £388

An easy recommendation - Sennheiser's HD 650 should really cost more than this - it's simply fabulous and is a genuine bargain in the world of hi-fi



ACS T2 £500

For regular travellers, the ACS T2 with its custom-moulded earpieces is an obvious choice, thanks to natural noise-cancelling, all-day comfort and great sound



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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

Our pick of the best one-box amps

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740A	550	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	800	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp revels in loud music, but also offers detail and delicacy		8	☑	☑	☑	120	315
	Marantz PM8003	750	Detail isn't the utmost, but great vitality makes this amplifier quite thrilling		5	MM	☑	☑	95	315
	Moon 1.5	999	A likeable amp in many ways, with admirable bass, treble and imaging		5	☑	☑	☑	60	321
	NAD C3226BEE	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed	/603281	7	☑	☑	☑	50	322
	Naim Audio NAIT 5r	765	More versatile than previous Nait's, the 5r is a superb amplifier that offers vivid insights into all manner of music		4	☑	☑	☑	50	305
	Roksan Kandy K2	895	Superior design and high-performance credentials makes this amplifier a must-have bargain	/483722	5	MM	☑	☑	125	315
ABOVE £1,000										
	ATC SIA 2-150	2,376	Revealing, dynamic and powerful amplifier that works with a wide range of speakers, has superb build quality	/478483	4	☑	☑	☑	150	314
	Arcam A38	1,450	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality		7	opt	☑	☑	100	321
	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	/498574	4	☑	☑	☑	65	317
	AudioAprologue Puccini Settanta	1,450	Detailed and lively, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension		5	MC	☑	☑	160	320
	Copland CTA405	2,998	A musical and involving amplifier, which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards		5	☑	☑	☑	50	305
	Harman/Kardon HK 990	1,000	Very clever, with built-in DSP room correction and more – but most importantly a powerful and revealing amplifier	/594820	7	MC	☑	☑	160	321
	Jadis Orchestra DiP	3,450	A smooth, refined, yet dynamic-sounding tube amplifier with the added 'novelty' of an iPod dock	/465908	5	☑	☑	☑	40	313
	Leema Pulse	1,170	An organic sound alongside good power reserves and superb features, including a great MM/MC phono stage		5	☑	☑	☑	80	306
	Lyngdorf Millennium Mk IV	10,995	State-of-the-art digital amplifier successfully transcends virtually all the problems that afflicts others of its type	/603231	5	☑	☑	☑	150	322
	Moon Evolution i-7	5,450	Sophisticated, with an elegant build and sound quality, yet very limited features, even by high-end standards		5	☑	☑	☑	150	288
	MSB Platinum M200	13,656	This amplifier's devastatingly good all-round sound quality sets a benchmark that few will approach	/603452	☑	☑	☑	☑	322	
	Myryad MX12080	1,200	Sound is more assured at the top of the frequency range than the bottom, though bass is melodious and detailed		8	☑	☑	☑	80	321
	Mystère ia11	1,450	Small, deceptively powerful integrated valve amp with a crisp, pacy sound		4	☑	☑	☑	40	302
	NAD M3	2,700	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	Its spellbinding, refined musical performance is a challenge to all integrated amplifiers	/498536	6	☑	☑	☑	60	317
	Primare i30	1,750	A smooth, sophisticated yet agile performer and beautifully built, too		6	☑	☑	☑	100	267
	Pure Sound A30	1,400	Valve integrated, with the accent on music rather than rhythm. Needs more inputs, though		3	☑	☑	☑	30	298
	Sugden A21aL Series 2	1,399	Lovely solid-state Class A amplifier, sweet as a nut and more powerful than its predecessor		5	opt	☑	☑	21	296
	Unison Res. Unico Primo	1,395	Line input can be converted to phono (at extra cost), plus an excellent mix of valve and solid-state virtues	/499279	5	☑	☑	☑	85	317
	Unison Research P70	4,995	Delightful valve amplifier with fine neutrality, sweet midband, impressive bandwidth and ample power		4	☑	☑	☑	70	302

PRE/POWER AMPS

Separate boxes can bring clear advantages

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000											
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,000	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed and controlled		☑	☑	8	opt	☑	200	309
	Naim NAC 122x/NAP 150x	1,615	Musically rewarding with outstanding sophistication and insight for such a modestly priced design		☑	☑	6	opt	☑	50	287
ABOVE £2,000											
	Arcam C31/P38	2,450	Very civilised sound in the best possible way. Well featured and smartly built		☑	☑	7	opt	☑	100	308
	Border Patrol Control Unit	3,995	Bluff-looking valve preamp, with one of the most neutral yet dynamic sounds around		☑	☑	5	opt	☑	277	
	Bryston BP26	3,670	Cracking preamp brings detailed results		☑	☑	8	opt	☑	308	
	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	7,135	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled, and sounds like a dream		☑	☑	5	☑	☑	120	269
	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	9,200	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility		☑	☑	6	opt	☑	400	293
	Cyrus DAC XP (preamp/DAC)	2,275	A 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	2,400	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings		☑	☑	8	opt	☑	80	276
	Densen Beat B-250/B-350	8,600	Upgradeable to surround, with sweet preamp, but slightly coloured power amp		☑	☑	6	☑	☑	125	270
	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	18,900	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers		☑	☑	9	opt	☑	125	250
	Marantz SC11S1/SM-11S1	6,198	Preamp and power amp duo delivers high resolution and is consistent with different loudspeaker loads		☑	☑	6	☑	☑	220	304
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	2,800	A 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.

SPECIAL READER OFFER

HI-FI CHOICE



Worth
over
£1,000

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

CABLES

Cables really can make a difference, especially our top recommendations

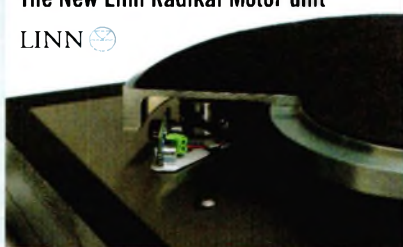
BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECH2424.COM	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Audquest Sidewinder	45	A detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm – slight upper-bass warmth does little to detract		✳	●			297
	Black Rhodium Prelude	90	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit		●	●			293
	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass with neutral and detailed midrange, treble generally sweet with occasional slight constriction		●	●			299
	Black Rhodium Polar Illusion	250	A good all-rounder, with clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine treble		●	●			321
	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price: especially adept in the treble with no trace of dryness		●	●			296
	Clearer Audio Copper-Line Alpha	88	Sounding like something a good deal dearer, this cable offers near high-end detail and seems highly compatible too		●	●			295
	Clearer Audio Silver-Line	283	Commutex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass		●	●			279
	CrystalCable Piccolo	348	Thin, but tougher than it looks, Piccolo has some qualities of a solid-core type – notably resolution, focus and articulation		✳		●		294
	Kimber Timbre	145	A very neutral cable that will complement even very upmarket systems		●	●			312
	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space.		●	●			281
	Monster M1000i	230	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere		●	●			284
	Norost Wyrewizard Dream	110	Slight lack of precision in extreme treble, otherwise detailed and neutral with authoritative bass			●	●		303
	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers with good mid and treble		●		●		281
	Profigold PGA3000	80	Not the ultimate for lovers of clinical precision, its character is engaging and detail and extension are good		●	●			299
	QED Signature Audio S	190	Mellifluous and rounded, this cable is a great choice for lovers of the human voice		●		●		321
	Supra EFF-IX	77	Lively sounding cable which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality, musically, a great all-rounder		●	●			306
	Townshend Isolda DCT100	99	Sound has a particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for great listener involvement			●	●		312
	van den Hul The Wave	125	Generally neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most		●	●			312
	van den Hul Integration Hybrid	170	Bass is nothing remarkable, but mid and treble are outstandingly open and clear		●	●			306
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
	Atlas Compass	85	Slight improvement in detail over giveaway cables, plus distinctly more tuneful bass and more open treble		●			E	289
	Kimber DV-30	98	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models		●	●		E	317
	Merlin Scorpron Digital	130	Reduces distortion, making sound clear with unusually revealing low frequencies		●			E	317
	SupraAnCo	30	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)									
	Atlas Hyper 1.5	12.5	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but its performance at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price		●	●			299
	Atlas Ascent 2.0	60	A highly analytical cable, with more bass extension than at first appears and very fine detail across the board		●	●			294
	Chord Silver Screen	6	Screened speaker cable with excellent treble, but just a little light in the bass at times		●	●			310
	CrystalCable Piccolo	1.395	A chip off the old block, this speaker cable has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound (price reflects 3 metre pair)			●	●		302
	Kimber 8PR	21	A cable that really enjoys the music, also admirable for the levels of analytical detail it allows through		●	●			299
	Monster MCX-1s	5	Notable for its bass, which is perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers		●	●			280
	Norost Heimdall	185	Alternative to Valhalla, silver-plated, micro-monofilament construction, suitable for exacting systems		●		●		278
	QED X-Tube XT300	12.5	A natural and controlled-sounding cable that's cost-effective for mid-priced systems			●	●		310
	QED Revelation	15	Sensibly priced, this cable offers a performance which is a step-up from budget types		●	●			318
	Supra Sword	108	Zero inductance construction, medium-resolution cable that has an excellent midband and is very musical		●	●			287
	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance-matched' cable with stabilising components added			●	●		241
	van den Hul The Wind	50	Separate conductors provide plenty of room for experimentation and the conductor quantity keeps resistance low			●	●		318
	Wireworld Solstice 5 ²	25	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.

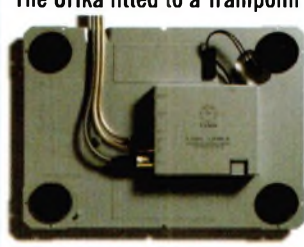
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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

Perhaps the most influential link in the chain

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000											
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	363	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight		20,90.5,24	●	A	24	●		294
	Acoustic Energy Aelite 3	735	Wood-veneered all-rounder has exceptional neutrality with deep, smooth bass		20,103,39	●	A	22	●		292
	Amphion Ion L	900	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence and a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment in test room		162,32.6,26.5		A	40	●		310
	ATC SCM11	867	A very fine little speaker that's at its best with natural recordings where it adds little and reveals much		21,38,25		A-	55	●		293
	AudioPro Avanti A.10	350	A tough and effective little speaker – overall balance is quite smooth and even		19,29,26		A+	38	●		319
	Bowers and Wilkins CM1	488	Luxury miniature has laid-back sound, with low coloration and fine imaging, but weak dynamics		16.5,28,28		A-	40	●		279
	Bowers and Wilkins 684	699	A fine all-rounder at a realistic price, this floorstander has a smooth, even and nicely open balance	/483503	20,91,30	●		22	●		315
	Bowers and Wilkins 683	879	High-class drivers and a great price makes for a warmly recommended speaker		20,99,34	●		20	●		304
	DALI Ikon 6	999	Needs care with setup, but rewards you with impressively transparent and obsessively detailed sound		19,100,33	●	A	37	●		271
	Dynaudio DM 2/10	880	Unfashionably bulky standmount has fine dynamics, grip, bass and headroom and is well mannered		27.5,45,35		A	22	●		299
	Focal Chorus 706V	389	Advanced drivers deliver an even, overall balance with healthy dynamic expression and tension		22,39,25		A	27	●		319
	Heco Celan 300	649	Does tone colour, dynamics and detail with aplomb and communicates superbly in its +2dB mode		23,36,33		A+	40	●		301
	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch		22,99,37	●	A	25	●		275
	KEF iQ50	599	Looks cute and very discreet, with spacious imaging, good balance and a sweet treble	/483527	17.5,81.5,26	●	A	23	●		315
	Monitor Audio BR2	230	Good-looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence		18.5,35,25		A-	30		●	294
	Monitor Audio BR5	450	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold-sounding and good value		17,85,25	●	A-	36	●		293
	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	850	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
	Monitor Audio GS10	900	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs, the GS10 is a high-quality stereo design which is easy to drive		20,36,27		A-	40	●		284
	PMC DB11	895	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator with fine warmth and sweet treble		155,29,234		A+	30	●	●	310
	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	704	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its brother costs £200 more and is even better!		15,27,23		A+	40	●		267
	Q Acoustics 1010	110	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling, but fine midband voicing for the price		15,21.5,19.5		A	48		●	286
	Q Acoustics 1020i	140	Outstanding value, the smooth, well-balanced and lively sound makes for a fine communicator	/516273	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	390	Clever close-to-wall speaker has a fine coherence and good communication skills		15,32,23.6		A	23		●	319
	Russ Andrews SP-1	352	This tweaked Focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, most importantly, great fun		192,31.5,248		A+	65		●	309
	Spendor S3/5R	750	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, but lovely smooth neutrality and good bass extension		165,30.5,190			25	●	●	310
	Tannoy Revolution DC4T	599	Ultra-compact floorstander that lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	/488857	15,85,16	●		40		●	316
	Tannoy Revolution DC6	900	Pretty compact standmount likes wall loading, delivering a lively bass and smooth, coherent midband		23,36.5,23		A	40		●	307
	Wharfedale Diamond 9.1	150	Superior shape and finish at an exceptionally sharp price. Sound is laid back, but free from boxiness		19.5,30,28		A-	45	●		307
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	/587236	23,92,29.7	●	A	27	●		320
	Amphion Argon2 Anniversary	1,200	Notably superior coherence and focus, fine neutrality and dynamic range with low coloration		19,38,31		A-	24	●		317
	Amphion Helium 520	1,000	Sharp styling and fine value for money with excellent voice-band coherence		16,104,22	●		28	●		314
	Amphion Argon 3L	2,300	Very solid build ensures an impressively clean sound with loads of bass and fine neutrality		19,92.5,30.5	●		26	●		322
	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,550	Slim, laid-back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range		17,99,26	●	A	28	●		275
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,950	Adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount		245,37,31.5		A	26	●		288
	ATC SCM19	1,534	Super-linear motor system and heavy-weight construction makes the ATC a pro favourite		22,44,31.5		A-	54	●		285
	ATC SCM16A	2,376	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Includes built-in amps and is good value		27,45,33		ACT	42	●		300
	Aurousal VS	1,650	The fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, plus extra help at the frequency extremes	/479149	21.5,107.5,26.8	●		20	●		314
	AVI ADM9	1,125	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic sounding		20,30,26		ACT	60	●		301
	Bowers and Wilkins CM9	1,760	Tall, elegant, expressive midband and expansive, but well-controlled bass	/597244	20,102.5,32	●	A	60	●		321
	Bowers and Wilkins 805S	1,950	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back, but a real delight		24,39,33		A	25	●		271
	Bowers and Wilkins 802D	9,500	Great timing, superior dynamics and a sweet top end all enhance musical communication		37,115,56		A	20	●		267
	DALI Ikon 7	1,400	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior delicacy and transparency		20,114,34	●	A+	22	●		275
	Dynaudio Focus 220	2,630	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble		20.5,98,29.5	●	A-	20	●		281
	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,099	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics and a sweet top end, but could be smoother		28,100,37.5	●	A+	20	●		288
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,349	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	1,499	The W cone 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	1,699	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier, but has good bass with genuine grip		28,115,38	●	A	28	●		290
	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,399	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	3,500	An elegant design for anyone after the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express		16,87,27	●	ACT	35	●		301
	Gamut Phi5	3,040	Lovely and discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches		17,100,24	●		20	●		305

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

ABOVE £1,000

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRABAR.COM	SIZE W,H,D (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM Hz	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISFC NUMBER
	Guru QM10	1,595	A very clever close-to-wall standmount with fine imaging, that sounds a lot bigger than it looks	/465869	30,25,2,23,2		A	26			317
	Jamo R 907	6,600	Arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships, it offers a powerful bass and open midrange	/498515	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 C2	1,950	This floorstander is a fine all-round performer with fine voicing and neutrality		20,92,5,27			23			322
	Kudos Cardea C30	5,250	An absolute honey that fully justifies its hefty pricetag, lacking only a little dynamic tension	/394973	20,112,27			22			310
	MartinLogan Source	1,799	Careful install needed, but capable of remarkable transparency at an extremely competitive price		24,120,37		A	42			303
	Mission 796	1,300	Clean, open and detailed, this smooth, relaxed loudspeaker does exactly what it says on the box	/594834	206,99,8,31,8		A	25			321
	Monopulse 42A	1,995	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics and superb voice coherence		26,110,25		A	25			302
	Monopulse 82	2,495	Could be more neutral, but excellent coherence, lively dynamics and fine imaging		27,110,25		A-	20			281
	Monitor Audio PL300	6,000	New level of sophistication from a manufacturer best known for mainstream, cost-effective designs		41,111,47		A-	28			301
	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 LE	4,799	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, while overall balance is smooth, neutral and open		24,115,43		A	22			308
	Neat Momentum 3i	1,790	Sounds a lot bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range		22,38,27		A-	23			302
	Opera Callas	3,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	/429144	23,37,5,34			32			311
	Opera Seconda	1,995	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth		24,102,5,31,5		A	20			314
	Pioneer S-2EX-W	5,200	This speaker offers superb midband neutrality and exceptional clarity	/587272	29,1,56,5,42,5		A	37			320
	PMC GB1i	1,425	Good-looking floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing		15,5,87,23,4		A	30			306
	PMC FB1i	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	/429594	20,100,30			20			322
	PMC OB1i	3,600	This floorstander delivers a smooth overall balance with wide bandwidth and dynamic range	/429697	20,102,5,32,5		A	20			311
	PSB Synchrony One	3,500	Slim and discreet floorstander that delivers superb sound quality and flexible bass	/516267	22,109,32,5		A	45			318
	Rega R7	1,467	Super-slim and super-smooth floorstander has fine agility with a slightly bright overall character		27,98,35		A	25			271
	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities		22,37,30		A-	48			274
	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well-disciplined sound		22,105,39		A	20			256
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,475	Sharp-looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression		20,100,25		A	22			290
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals		22,84,31		A	22			259
	Sonus faber Luito Monitor	1,690	A subtly designed, elegant-sounding package that's hard to beat, especially with good recordings	/603221	18,5,35,33,5		A-	55			322
	Sonus faber Minima Vintage	2,490	Easy, graceful-sounding compact is a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	/455417	20,33,27,5		A-	55			312
	Sonus faber Cremona Audit	3,350	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass - this is 'The Little Speaker That Could'		20,35,37		A	50			305
	Spendor SP3/1R2	1,600	Conservative styling, superb neutrality and coherence with unusually low coloration		22,40,28		A	37			317
	Tannoy Glenair 10	3,399	With a 250mm dual-concentric driver this is a generously proportioned, highly engaging speaker		36,100,35		A+	38			295
	Totem Model 1 Signature	1,975	Expensive, but very seductive miniature delivers a beautifully smooth and balanced midband		17,31,23		A	35			277
	Triangle Genese Quartet	2,775	Great material value and a solid all-round sonic performance with great loudness potential		23,117,37		A	25			302
	Triangle Magellan Concerto	16,250	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it remains highly entertaining		60,160,45		A-	32			290
	Lsher 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
	Vivid Audio B1	10,500	Impressive cabinet design combined with hi-tech drivers to make a truly world-class speaker		27,110,38		A-	40			261
	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,383	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package		23,91,37		A	28			254
	Wilson Benesch ACT	9,100	Enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well-balanced, but top end might be sweeter		23,108,36		A	20			252
	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
	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

SPECS KEY **SIZE W,H,D (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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EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

A decent hi-fi rack makes a sound investment

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE
	Atacama Equinox	409	Stable, modular design with style and excellent bass transients	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35		3	MDF	302
	Custom Design Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform 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 nice and lively		56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal		60,42		4	Glass	293
	Custom Design Milan	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57	48,39		4	Glass	302
	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great		59,5			Wood	320
	Milty FoculPods	22.5	A set of isolation pads that are amazingly useful for damping vibration and improving sound	2	5			Polymer	311
	Partington Minim	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37	●	5	Glass	302
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	680	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural-sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Toriylite Platform	146	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound	8	48,36		1	Toriylite	302
	Russ Andrews Toriylite Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Toriylite: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Toriylite	240
	Townshend VSSS	1,380	This attractive Seismic Sink retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76	35,50		4	Glass	273

SPEAKER STANDS

Not all stands are made equal – try one of our top buys

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	229	A variety of smart looks available – sound is clear and precise	50	20,17	●		1	293
	Custom Design SQ402	100	More of a range than a model. Capable of fine results, especially with Acoustic Steel top plates	62	18,16.5	●		2	299
	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration suits it to high-resolution systems	56	16,5,18	●		1	281
	Custom Design SQ404	220	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance	61	18,16.3	●		4	283
	Partington Ansa 60	119	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
	Partington Dreadnought BS	299	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62	17,23	●		5	309
	Partington Heavi II	499	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very precise bass and upper frequencies	53	31,22	●		6	287

SPECS KEY **HEIGHT (CM)** Height of equipment support and speaker stand (not including spikes) in centimetres. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). 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 SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand. **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.



Milty FoculPods £22.50

Cheap as chips way to bring real sonic benefits to both electronics and loudspeakers - these rubbery wonders help destroy vibration and come in handy packs of four



Partington Dreadnought BS £300

Probably the best speaker stand you can buy for the money - heavily engineered and backed up with sound theory, this mass-fillable stand is a top recommendation



Townshend VSSS £1,380

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Second-hand guide

This month, HFC looks at a quartet of high-quality CD players from the safe and predictable, through to a rather less well-known modified Sony.

The first of our familiar offerings is Naim's CDX2. Launched in 2002, and still on sale today at £3,250, the CDX2 is a true stalwart. Since its launch, Naim's 'middle' CD player has been a top-selling model in its £2,500-£3,500 price category, with a tight, rhythmic sound and Naim's excellent reputation for service. It's little wonder the CDX2's popularity means there are plenty of models out there. We found an immaculate, two-year-old example for £1,900 and an older one for just £1,800.

Since its launch, the only major alteration has been a change of mechanism in 2007 to the Philips VAM1202/12. There is some debate as to the relative merits of which transport sounds better, but no overwhelming reason to prefer one over the other. Having said that, we do know that Naim has had to replace a few of the older transports as they started to 'thunk'.

Naim offers a five-year guarantee, but it is only to the first registered owner. Having said that, if you buy from a reputable dealer then an extended warranty should be included. With regard to future servicing, Naim is one of the best in the business and will doubtless be able to keep it running for decades. If you ever want to upgrade, then Naim's XPS or XPS2 power supplies work wonders.

Leema Acoustics is a relatively new company, although this hasn't prevented them from already winning many accolades and much respect among reviewers and customers alike. The Antila CD player was launched in 2007 and upgraded shortly afterwards. All players were recalled and modified, so there should be no issues here. Leema offers a five-year guarantee which is fully transferable, meaning that even the oldest models will still have around three years remaining – great news for second-hand purchasers. Being so new, the Antila has no reported problems, but Leema did point out that purchasers should contact the company for a new registration card having bought a second-hand model.



Above: Leema Acoustics offers a fully transferable guarantee for its Antila CD player

Although around £2,800 new, we found an ex-display model for just £1,900 and other second-hand versions for even less, making it great value.

By far the most unusual CD player here is the Modwright Signature Truth XA1200ES. Modwright is an American company who performs extensive power supply and output upgrades to mostly Sony ES CD and DVD players. The £1,800 model we saw for sale was one of the very rare conversions on the Sony XA1200ES SACD player (most conversions are carried out on Sony's universal DVD players).

The first modified Sonys were launched around 2002, but this one dates from much later and you can still buy a new, unmodified XA1200ES for around £500. You might ask whether the extra £1,300 is worth it for what is, essentially, a second-hand £500 Sony SACD



Above: Naim's CD player, the CDX2, has been a top-selling model since its launch in 2002

heavyweights, either. At its launch in 2006, Musical Fidelity's MD suggested that the KW DM25s matched or beat any CD player, regardless of price. Perhaps over-egging it a bit, it's true that the balance, dynamic range, low noise and sheer cohesion do make this two-box player a superb-sounding machine. Along with the Modwright, it's the best-sounding here and

“The first modified Sonys were launched around 2002, and you can still buy a new, unmodified XA-1200ES for around £500.”

player. Well, by fitting a valve output stage, separate power supply, upgraded clock and host of other tweaks, the sonic improvement is huge. Modwright prides itself on its sound quality-per-pound and this is shown by this SACD player being, in some respects, the best-sounding here. It may be one of the best-sounding, but it's probably the hardest to service. Sony centres are unlikely to touch it, although Modwright do, at least, have UK representation in the form of Angel Sound Audio. You can also be assured that Sony has an excellent reputation for reliability and a good record in keeping spare parts for a reasonable period of time.

If you're looking for value, then the Musical Fidelity KWDM25 CD transport and DAC is worth a look. Unlike the others, it's a two-box CD player, with a physical presence to match the most esoteric American brands. It wasn't just the looks that were supposed to match these US

you'd really have to add an XPS to your CDX2 to get a truly competitive Naim. Unlike the Naim, however, this model has since been discontinued. This lessens the time parts will be available and that will have a knock-on effect in lowering values. Despite costing £4,000 new, we've seen early models sell for a fraction above our budget (£2,100) – deeply tempting. Our advice is to seek a model from an MF dealer with some form of warranty. With multiple, choke-regulated power supplies in each box, there's more than usual to go wrong.

Choosing between these four is an unenviable task. The Naim is the safest, most conservative bet, although not great value. A nearly new Leema is tempting, especially considering its excellent warranty. The Modwright has a wonderfully fluid sound, although the MF possibly just edges it and should be easier to service. Once again, there are no losers, just four impeccable reasons for buying second-hand. *Vive la différence!* **HFC**

Dominic Todd

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ARCAM CD92 CD player, Rotel RC1070 preamp, two Rotel RB980 power amps. All boxed, mint condition, manuals etc. £650 the lot (upgraded). 01535 652992 (W Yorks)

MUSICAL FIDELITY KW250S in pristine condition for £1,750 ono (£5,000). 07527523118 or email: ttinga@hotmail.com (Glos)

WILSON BENESCH Torus infrasonic generator and

amplifier, mint condition £3,200. Also Square 2 speakers in maple, as new £1,300, original boxes. Can demo.02380470107 (Hants).

REL Stentor 3 subwoofer (£2,500) £950. Kimber orchid digital interconnect (balanced) 0.5 metres £130. Kimber scart to scart 0.5 metres £60. Isotek premiere mains leads 2 £30 each. 01772 314151 (Lancs).

DENON DM37 DAB system in silver with matching speakers £199 + postage (£330). Couple of months old with receipt, mint, boxed. 01384 412234 (W Mids).

NAKAMICHI 680ZX cassette deck £150. Pioneer PD6700 CD player £50. Cambridge T21 FM tuner, teak finish, immaculate condition, £30. QED interconnect £5.

Ixos 104 OFC interconnect £10. Naim NAC A4 speaker cable, five metre pair, white £20. Naim NAC A4 speaker cable, 10 metre pair, white £40. 01228 544376 (Cumbria).

NAIM DVD5 player 2005 £999, 112 pre-amp £279. The Chord Co. Signature interconnects, RCA terminated, one metre £349. All mint and boxed. The Chord Co. Odyssey 2 loudspeaker cables, four metres, factory terminated, mint £89. 01984 640588 (Somerset).

PIONEER PL12D turntable cart with OM10 £50. Hitachi FT5500 tuner £70. Technics SLP200 CD £350. Can post. 01606 784767 (Cheshire).

WILSON BENESCH Arc speakers, six years old, but boxed and unused for last two years. Excellent condition, gloss burr walnut finish, original

boxes. Demo no problem. £1,200. 07908 205519 (N London).

QUAD FM4 tuner, excellent sound and condition. Boxed, complete £180. Marantz PM66KI Signature amplifier (*HFC Best Buy* at £400).

Boxed and complete with KI certificate £160.

01702 520063 (Essex)

RUARK Talisman II loudspeakers, external crossovers, active or passive drive, excellent condition, £275. Icon Audio Stereo 40, with tube rings on all valves, £300. 01582 867139 (Beds).

MORDAUNT SHORT Performance 6 LE gloss black, stunning, mint (£4,000) £2,500 ovno. 07866 727448 (Essex).

MANA Base, table, wall-shelf, three levels £400. Tom Evans Microgroove Lithos £250. Foundation Audio 18inch, four column stands (20kg) £100. 020 8898 3383 (Middx)

ATC 20-2 active loudspeakers, still under warranty, unmarked with all boxes, manuals etc £1,995. HNE granite stands polished with leather, one off for ATCs, £375.



Above: **Mordaunt Short Performance 6 LE**

Hi-fi magazines for sale. *Hi-Fi Choice* issues 246 to 318. *Hi-Fi News* various 04 to 09. *What Hi-Fi* various 02 to 09. Offers. 01766 781211 (Gwynedd).

NAIM CDS CD player and power supply, Naim CDI CD player, Naim 102 preamp, Croft valve Epoch special preamp. Lector 20E valve preamp. Russ Andrews Kimber Signature power leads, two Kimber power leads, Cardas interconnect, one metre. Sensible offers invited. 020 8524 2181 (Essex).

REGA R5 loudspeakers, superb sound and condition £440. Ixos bi-wire cable £25 (three metres x2). Two Cambridge P500 power amps, 2x55 watts, £150. 01619 020719 (Lancs).

LINN Kan speakers, immaculate condition with black four column stands, £195. 07737 471547 (S Yorks).

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right. Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper demo and judge the seller as well as the goods!



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MERIDIAN 504 tuner, no marks, no box £300. 0191 4171669 (Tyne & Wear).

ROBERTS MP23 CD/radio sound system, top of the Roberts range. As new, hardly used, under warranty, boxed etc, – four months old – (£250) £145 ono. 01304 360230 (Kent)

MYRYAD MXI 2150 amp silver, 150 watts, three years old, excellent condition, £850 ono, fully boxed, buyer collects. 01652 618420 (N Lincs).

LINN Komponent speakers: 110 floorstanders, 104 bookshelf, 120 subwoofer. Silver, two years old. £700 ono. 01777 711386 (Notts)

MUSICAL FIDELITY Tri-Vistor integrated hybrid amplifier, separate power supply. Serviced by MF + new valves, 350 watts (8 ohms), 600 watts (4 ohms) Mint, boxed with Russ Andrews Reference power cord. £1,425. 07859 388167 (SE London)

CHORD three metre HDMI cable 1.2 tested to 1.3. New (£95) £60. QED Reference two metre HDMI 1.3 cable, new-in-box £60. QED Signature Audio Silver Spiral, one metre interconnects, new-in-box £75. QED Qonduit MDH6 high-performance six-way

conditioning block, including 1.5 metre mains cable, new-in-box, (£240) £100. 01639 774144 (W Glamorgan).

DAHLQUIST DQ10 speakers, Magnum MC250 amp and preamp, Marantz CD5001, £995. 07742 511175 (Warrington).

ARCAM CD92 CD player, Rotel RB980BX power amps. All-boxed, mint, manuals etc. £650 the lot (upgraded). 01535 652992 (W Yorks).

NAIM Highline DIN to DIN one-year old, boxed with manual as new £425. Grado 325i headphones one-year old £180. Rega Ear headphone amp one-year old £90. 07795 652876 or email: m_ whiteley@hotmail.com (Bucks)

NAD 352CT integrated amplifier, 80 watts, RMS, award winner, immaculate, pampered, 30 months old, can demonstrate. £195 ono. Roksan Kandy LIII integrated amplifier, 120 watts, RMS, six months old, mint, 18 months unused warranty, can demonstrate, £475 ono. 01479 870261 (Grantown on Spey).

CYRUS CD6S CD player in quartz silver (£650) £350, Cyrus 6vs2 amplifier in quartz silver (£700) £399, Epos M5 speakers in dark cherry (£350) £199. All items fully boxed and mint. 01384 412234 or email: leet2009@hotmail.co.uk (W Midlands)

MISSION 752F rosewood speakers, good condition, hi-fi classic £285 ono. Rotel RA-05

amplifier in black with box £265. TCI Viper interconnect £25. 0797 915445 or 01903 813883 (W Sussex)

SENNHEISER HD 595 headphones, mint, boxed (£160) accept £85. 07891 533084 (W Glamorgan).

SHANLING CDT 80 CD player, immaculate condition, hardly used, still in original packaging. (£650) sell for £250 ono. 07751 537148 (Oxon)

KEF XQ1 in silver. Matching stands. Excellent condition, as new. £500 ono. 07766 078281 (London)

SONY DVD 5725D, Sony STR-D8940 FM/AM receiver, Yamaha YST-SW320 subwoofer, Yamaha IV5C200 speaker, NS-200 three small speakers NS100. £375 ono. 01245 348444 (Essex)

MARANTZ CD17 MkII Signature, black, excellent. Arcam 85 integrated with Arcam phono, black, excellent £300 each or £550 the pair. Can demo. Marantz DR6000 CD recorder black, offers. 07941 015908 (Surrey).

CAMBRIDGE DACMagic £110. Kimber Select KS-1030, 0.5 metre, mint, boxed £700. Sennheiser HD650 with Russ Andrews cable upgrade, low use, mint £200. Both for £800. 01908 661094 (Bucks)

THE CHORD COMPANY Odyssey 2 speaker cable, two metres, £20, Odyssey 2 speaker cable, three metres £25, Signature Coax cable £90. 01382 644815 (Dundee)

MARANTZ 19 vintage receiver. Working and in fair condition, needs checking over. open to offers. 0121 550 9613 (W Mids)

SHAHINIAN Compass speakers, Mirage speakers, two Marantz recorders, R1 stands, QUAD 2/11s. Good condition. 07931 598393 (Middx)

BOWERS & WILKINS DM 705 speakers, beech. Current model, immaculate, boxed, £450. FS700 dedicated stands filled £95. 01202 730449 (Dorset).

TANNOY DC2000 speakers £80 (can be auditioned) Various recent *Hi-Fi Choice*, *Hi-Fi World* magazines, £2 each. 01246 277394 (Derbyshire).

MONITOR AUDIO BR2 Bronze speakers, beech. Gold-plated bi-wire terminals, superb sound, four months old. Excellent condition, £150. 01495 717921 (Gwent)

CYRUS 8VS2 integrated amplifier £499. Cyrus CD8SE CD player £899. Cyrus PSX-R power supply £299. All less than one month old. 01785 613408 (Stafford).

WANTED Sugden IA4 integrated amplifier, possibly in silver. Must be in very good condition. Call 01332 843758 or 07789 527793.

WANTED Marantz ST6001 tuner (black) in good condition with manual. Will pay good price or swap with Marantz ST7001 (new). 01179 650311.

WANTED Sony CDP-557ESD or similar CD player in good working condition, can travel to pick up. Please call 07549 820608 or email: robpark9@yahoo.com

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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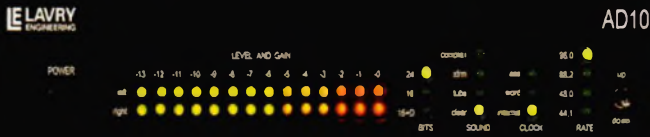
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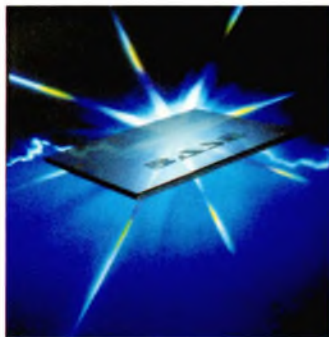
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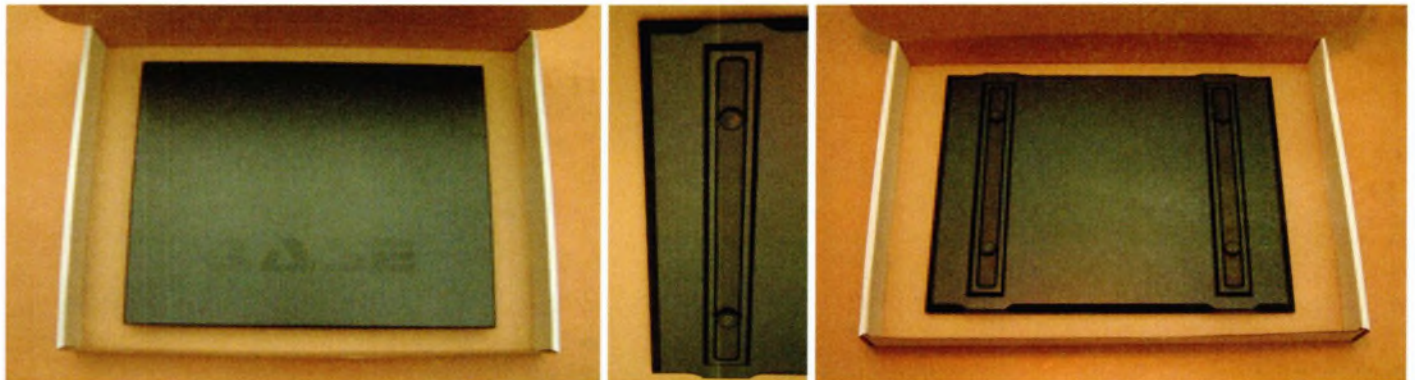
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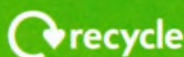
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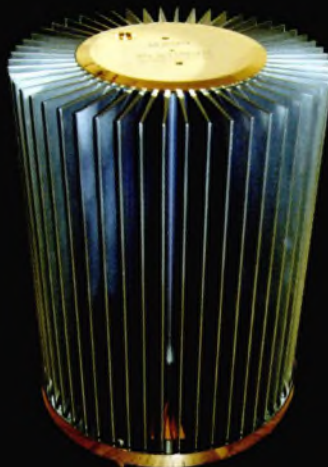
Jason Kennedy - HiFi+ : Issue 65 (June 09)

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