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WELCOME...

HI-FI CHOICE OCTOBER 2009 ISSUE 324

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There was a time when Naim was for the Naimists and the non-believers looked elsewhere, but the winds of change have been blowing in from Salisbury. It seems, at least, that where the entry level is concerned, the engineers have made a more 'accessible' Naim – one that's more for the people than for the converted. So it's a warm welcome to the XS range, with our pick –

the new NAC 152 pre and 155 power – reviewed on p24 this month.

Eagle-eyed readers may also notice some subtle improvements to the issue this month. We've now packed in more product reviews than in previous issues and things are set to get even bigger and better next month, so don't forget to pick up your bumper-sized *Hi-Fi Choice* around mid-September – it's the shape of things to come.

Dan
Dan George Editor

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

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

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



JIMMY HUGHES

With more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt, Jimmy is one of the country's best-known hi-fi experts. His knowledge of system-matching, hi-fi-tweaking and record-collecting is unmatched in the industry.



RICHARD BLACK

Richard is a professional musician and recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He has a knack for writing about complicated subjects in a readable way – and he only writes for *Hi-Fi Choice*.



MALCOLM STEWARD

Former editor of *Hi-Fi Review* magazine, Malcolm was one of the best-known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He currently edits hi-fi industry bible *The British Audio Journal* and also writes exclusively for *Hi-Fi Choice*.



ALVIN GOLD

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



JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice* and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back as a freelance writer and using his considerable hi-fi expertise to contribute to the UK's best hi-fi title.



ED SELLEY

A highly knowledgeable audio expert, Ed has worked for a number of prestigious manufacturers including Cambridge Audio and Yamaha. Specialising in product support and development, he brings a wealth of professional and enthusiast knowledge to the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

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



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CHOICE

new Ken Ishiwata's 30th Anniversary Masterpieces are here...



When you first encounter the new **KI Pearls**, the first thing you notice are their unique '**Silk Pearl**' finishing. The first of its kind in fact for **Marantz**. But it's the magic that **Ken Ishiwata** has created inside the box that really gets the pulse racing. He has built-in everything possible to ensure that the music is reproduced exactly as the original artist and recording engineer intended.

SA-KI:

"Fed all manner of SACDs from Mobile Fidelity, Linn, Telarc and other admirable die-hards, the SA-KI showed itself to be a thoroughbred player reminiscent of the far costlier Esoteric devices, though the voicing differs. Marantz itself used the adjective 'silky' to describe the Pearls' black finish."

Ken Kessler
Hi-Fi News Sept 09

PM-KI:

"The phono stage was open, quiet and precise, especially the MM setting, and in every sense - from vinyl to CD to SACD - the bass was consistently quick. Decay or transient stops down below were as progressive or abrupt as required, nigh on perfect, while well-recorded bass drum kicks were reproduced with a vividly detailed sensation of pedal, hammer and skin in motion."

Ken Kessler
Hi-Fi News Sept 05



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new Three prestigious new products from Musical Fidelity...

(NEW) AMS35i Integrated
Taking sleek styling cues from the best selling **Primo pre-amp**, the **AMS35i** looks set to become another winner. First impressions are phenomenal! There really is nothing quite like pure Class A done properly and this new creation is testament to **MF's** skill and knowledge when it comes to world class amplification.

(NEW) AMS50 Power Amp
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(NEW) Primo Preamplifier
"It's not often that I hear a preamplifier that actually adds to the listening experience, but this is one and for that reason I come away very impressed."
"Commandingly musical sound infused with a dash of that old valve magic makes this one of the very best preamplifiers around."
David Price, Hi-Fi World June '09
Hi-Fi World
VERDICT ●●●●●



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and prestigious studios around the globe.

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"The way in which the Tensor Gammas fill the space in between themselves is nothing short of astounding."
Adam Smith, Hi-Fi World July 2008

Hi-Fi World
VERDICT ●●●●●

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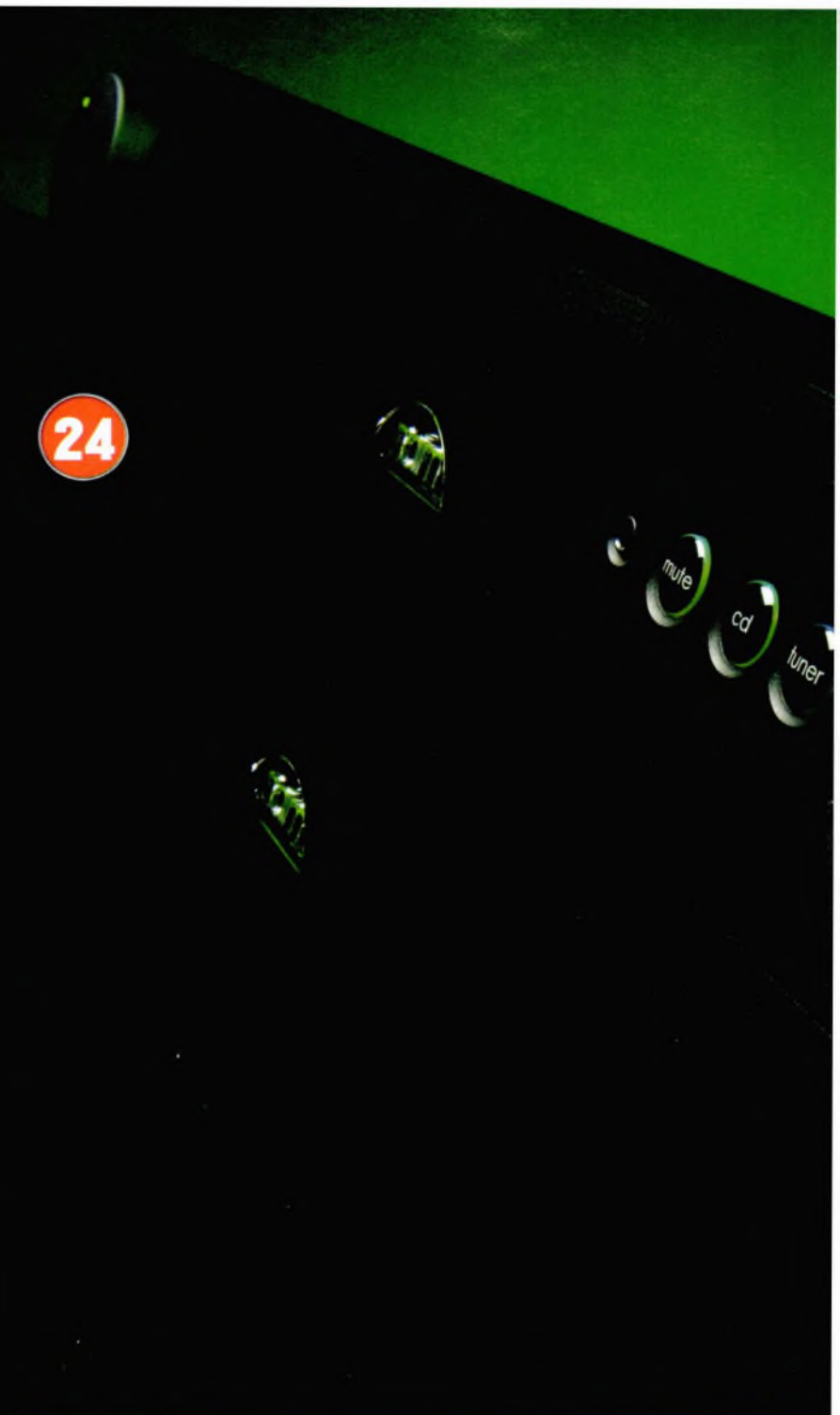
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Tucana II

The Tucana was Leema Acoustics' first hi-fi electronics product. Within a short time it established itself as a true reference amplifier winning many prestigious awards. The new Tucana II extends both the performance and features, to set a new world-wide benchmark.

Tucana II

Borrowing heavily from developments pioneered in the staggering Leema Reference Series Altair IV amplifier, the Tucana II is an even more accomplished performer than its multi-award winning predecessor. Improved dynamic range, resolution of fine detail, and remarkable clarity help the Tucana II present music with life-like verve into even the most fussy of today's audiophile speakers. This highly refined amplifier can deliver over fifty amps to each channel with a vice-like grip and precise control of the loudspeakers.

New features on the Tucana II include an MP3 input, balanced input, headphone output, direct input selection, adjustable input gain, and a balance control.

The Tucana II helps even the most complex music make complete sense.

Leema Acoustics: Award winning hi-fi



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to find your nearest dealer



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Email: info@leema-acoustics.com

CHORD ELECTRONICS CPM2800 & CYAN

Innovative new product from one of the UK's finest audio manufacturers

Chord Electronics has been hard at work introducing new products and updating existing models in its range. The all-new CPM2800 integrated amplifier features a complete set of digital inputs, in addition to its five analogue line inputs. These include Chord's proprietary Bluetooth system, one coaxial and optical input apiece and a USB input. This allows for audio to be sent straight from a computer to the onboard decoder and amplified directly. With 120 watts on tap, it should have little difficulty with the majority of loudspeakers.

This technology is replicated in miniature in the new Cyan digital integrated amplifier. Built into the same chassis as the compact QBD76 DAC, it features two analogue inputs (one balanced) and the same range of Bluetooth and digital inputs as the CPM2800. Despite its diminutive dimensions, Chord has announced there will be a high power and a low

power version, with the former offering 50 watts into 8 ohms and the latter an impressive 90 watts – achieved with the help of two of the newest generation high-frequency power supplies.

Meanwhile, the highly regarded Red Reference player has evolved into MkII status. The MkII gains a selection of digital inputs on the rear to allow it to act as a DAC to other digital sources in a system, while the digital stage itself has been subject to a number of detailed revisions in the pursuit of improved performance.

Lastly, the company will soon be unveiling the new optional 'Invicta' styling. Introducing wooden side panels and new internal lighting on selected models, pricing for the new styling has yet to be confirmed.

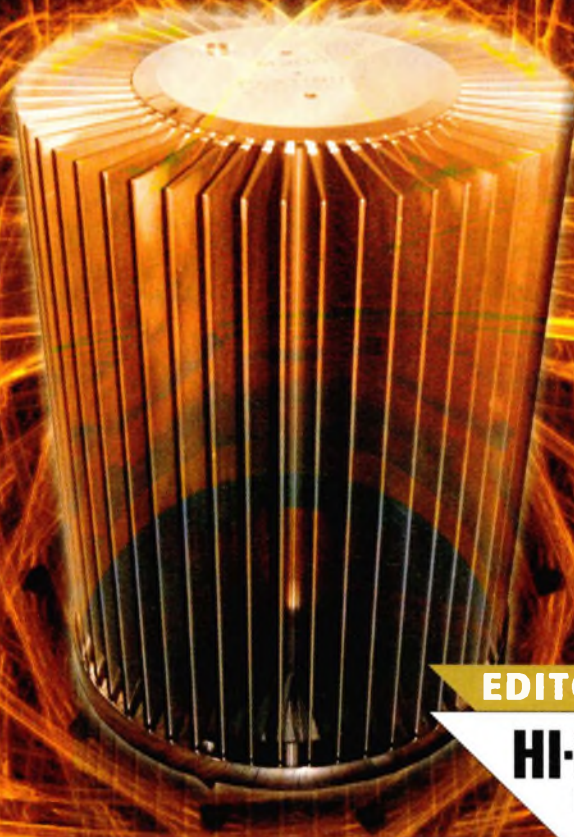
Price £5,895 (CPM2800); £13,061 (Red Reference MkII)

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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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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NAIM XS SERIES

Complete new range announced by Salisbury

In addition to our review of the NAC 152 XS preamp and NAP 155 XS power amp (see page 24), and the NAIT XS (HFC 317), Naim has now announced its full range of accompanying XS components. The line up is finished in the brushed anodised black fascia – the first slimline components to be so finished and an indicator that they are a step up from the 5i series of units.

The CD5 XS introduces a switchable digital output in a departure to previous Naim practice. Improvements to the clock and the same new board isolation as the rest of the XS components, should ensure a useful increase in performance. Naim trademarks, such as the swing arm CD mechanism and switchable DIN/RCA analogue outputs remain. The NAT 05 XS tuner cocks a snook at talk of an FM switch-off and uses the same new board mounts and a highly compliant bracket to prevent microphony in the tuner head.

Amplification options comprise the existing NAIT XS 60-watt integrated amplifier, the NAC 152 XS preamp and the NAP 155 XS power amp. All three borrow from the highly regarded SUPERNAIT and offer design refinements such as simplified internal layouts,

an AV bypass for easy incorporation into AV systems and the option of DIN or RCA inputs for better integration into non-Naim systems.

The range is completed by the FlatCap XS, which has detailed internal revisions to the decoupling and isolation of the dual 24-volt supplies which, according to Naim, are significant improvements. The twin outputs of the FlatCap XS can either be used to power the NAT 05 XS, CD5 XS or the preamp section of the NAIT XS. Both outputs can also be used to boost the performance of the NAC 152 XS.

Price £1,750 (CD5 XS); £995 (NAT 05 XS); £1,325 (NAIT XS);
£895 (NAC 152 XS); £1,025 (NAP 155 XS); £675 (FlatCap XS)
Due now ☎ 01722 426673 🌐 www.naim-audio.com



MONITOR AUDIO SILVER RX

Monitor Audio's new Silver RX series of slimline loudspeakers are available in a choice of real wood veneers and high-gloss piano finishes and use techniques and materials from the Platinum and Gold ranges.

The line-up features new RX drivers that employ a method of shaping the C-CAM material in the pursuit of improved performance. Also present is a 'rifled' bass port said to reduce turbulence and increase bass response. The range also mounts the drivers from the rear of the cabinet to better decouple them, whilst the cabinet itself employs additional cross bracing for extra rigidity.

The range includes two pairs of bookshelf and two pairs of floorstanding models with centre, subwoofer and surround speaker for multichannel purposes.

Price: from £300 (RXLCR) to £1,000 (RX8)

Due: September

01268 740580 www.monitor-audio.com



PMC AFX-19PRO01/AFX-19AR050

PMC speakers has announced that it is to distribute Airfonix wireless audio products in the UK. The American-based company's products are designed to retrofit any active or passive loudspeaker and give them the option of wireless connectivity. The range features 24-bit two-channel transmitters and receivers with a 'Smart channel' selection system that detects existing wireless networks and adjusts frequencies to avoid conflict. In addition, both models in the current range are fitted with balanced and unbalanced outputs, as well as coaxial digital outputs, while some are also equipped with digital inputs. The units are housed in a slimline extruded aluminium casework.

Two models that offer uncompressed 24-bit audio, the AFX-19PRO01 and AFX-19AR050, are both dual-channel wireless receivers, and being equipped with a 50-watt digital amplifier they make connection to a passive loudspeaker an easier proposition. The range also includes smaller transmitters, forthcoming multichannel transmitters and USB keys.

Price: £375 (AFX-19PRO01); £475 (AFX-19AR050) **Due:** now

08704 441044 www.airfonix.com

MARANTZ CD6003/PM6003

The replacement for the well-regarded 6002 series, Marantz's new PM6003 integrated amp and CD6003 CD player, are intended to improve on their predecessors and come wrapped in the company's new 'M1' styling. The main feature is the addition of a USB socket on the CD6003, derived from the SA8003. This allows for the connection of USB devices, including iPods, directly to the fascia of the CD6003 for improved playback quality. The PM6003 offers five line-level inputs and a moving magnet phono stage as a sixth input. Two sets of speaker terminals make bi-wiring a relatively simple option.

Prices: £300 (each) **Due:** now 01753 680868

www.marantz.com



PURE SOUND A10

Following on from the highly regarded A30 integrated, Pure Sound is set to release the A10. Developed to meet the need for a compact and relatively affordable Class A amplifier, the A10 allows for the connection of two inputs and uses four 6P14 valves – a descendent of the EL84 – operating in a push-pull configuration to give an output of 10 watts per channel. The valves are auto-biased and require no user monitoring. This simplicity means that the A10 can use high-quality components throughout.

Price: £600 **Due:** now ☎ 01822 612449
 🌐 www.puresound.info



WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 10 SERIES

Following on from the announcement of the Diamond 10.1 standmount last month, Wharfedale has revealed details of the Diamond 10 range. This includes two further standmount speakers and five floorstanders, with a wider variety of centre and surround speakers. The range is an extensive development of the 9.0 series, with stronger cabinet walls, a composite front baffle, upgrade crossovers and a new main driver design. The range is also available in four separate finishes.

Price: from £130 to £680 **Due:** now
 ☎ 01480 447700 🌐 www.wharfedale.co.uk



KEF VENTURAS

For those determined to have a summer break despite the best efforts of the weather, KEF has announced its Ventura range of outdoor custom install speakers. Made of a UV-resistant high-impact ABS cabinet, all models feature a 'military-grade' aluminium mounting bracket and grille. The bracket can be adjusted through 180 degrees and there are also threaded-brass inserts for other mounting options.

Sonically, the Venturas are said to be voiced for clarity and impact in an outdoor setting. The range features fluid-cooled aluminium tweeters and long-throw, low-distortion woofers. The range consists of three models: the compact Ventura 4, intermediate Ventura 5 and largest Ventura 6.

Prices: £250-£350 per pair **Due:** now
 ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com

Soundbites

ROBERTS has unveiled the Elise, a DAB/FM radio with nine presets, including a 'favourite' station button which, with one touch, will return the unit to your preferred listening. Compatible with both battery and mains power, it also features a line output, a large and clear display and is available in a choice of black and white finishes. The recommended price is £50
 ☎ 01709 571722



DENON has the answer for those unable to afford the £170 asking price of its AH-C710 headphone, by unveiling the more affordable AH-C360. This in-ear design offers high-performance and user comfort, as well as a Radial Cascade damper to reduce cable-transmitted noise. Available now at £50.
 ☎ 02890 279830



IXOS has launched the Neo clock radio speaker system. Designed for use with the latest iPods, it features an FM radio and USB streaming to act as a speaker upgrade for a laptop or netbook. Output is 10 watts and Ixos claims full bandwidth performance. It costs £110 and is available now.
 ☎ 01844 219000.



LINN is to release the Dynamik power supply, that promises to 'redefine Linn system performance.' The Dynamik is compatible with the Klimax, Akurate, Majik and Classik ranges. The Dynamik will be part of a summer promotion at Linn dealers.
 ☎ 01413 077777



CLEARAUDIO has unveiled the Emotion SE turntable. Featuring a new 20mm-thick chassis, improved main bearing and equipped with the Carbon Directwire version of the Satisfy tonearm (complete with Aurum Beta S Wood cartridge), it costs £1,790 and is available now.
 ☎ 01252 702705



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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 turntable suspension is of paramount importance

One of the biggest decisions facing a turntable designer is whether to provide some kind of suspension. Of the models featured in our *Ultimate Group Test* this month, some have a full spring suspension, some have a little isolation provided by squidgy materials under the deck and some are practically direct-coupled to the surface beneath. So, what's so good (or indeed bad) about suspension?

LP replay works by detecting absolutely minuscule movements of the replay stylus. In theory, any such movement is caused entirely by the modulated record groove passing by underneath. But, clearly, if vibration is induced in the disc or arm from external sources, the cartridge can't know that it is spurious and will transduce it into electrical output – bingo, distortion! The idea of suspension is to decouple the platter/subchassis/arm system from the outside world so that vibration can't get in from the support underneath. Support that system on springs and it will resonate at some low frequency: above that, vibrations will be progressively attenuated.

There are a few practical problems, however. One has already been hinted at – resonance. Typically, the resonance is well below the lowest audible frequency, but it may end up quite near the frequency at which arm/cartridge assembly resonates against the springiness of the stylus suspension. If that is so, tiny amounts of low-frequency vibration from disc imperfections, the drive system or the outside world may end up producing quite large movements of the stylus and hence large unwanted subsonic output. This isn't audible, but can cause distortion in the cartridge itself, in the loudspeakers and even in the amplifiers.

Getting the suspension resonance low enough to guard against this is tricky and typically expensive.

Secondly, it is essential that the suspension must bounce quite linearly, up and down or side to side. Some turntable suspensions cause 'yaw' – they don't bounce quite linearly, but cause the subchassis assembly to rotate slightly about an axis near the platter spindle. This makes the cartridge speed up and slow down relative to the spinning platter, causing rather unpleasant frequency modulation distortion or 'wow'.

Yet another problem stems from the tendency of arms to be adjusted for tracking weight by offsetting the balance. A few arms (Rega, being the best known) adjust tracking weight by using a spring, so that both static and dynamic balance of the arm is kept steady. But, if this is not done, any up-and-down movement of the arm base will cause a small change in tracking weight at the cartridge, in turn causing both subsonic output and wow as the geometry around the stylus changes.

And then there's the drive belt to consider and the electrical leads from the arm and more... Given all this, it's little wonder that many manufacturers decide that a full spring suspension is likely to introduce as many problems as it solves and opt for soft feet which do a basic suspension job at midband and treble frequencies. Damping a suspension is superficially attractive, but renders it far less effective at higher frequencies. Ideally, a floppy spring suspension is the way to go but, in the real world, good results can be, and have been, obtained from almost any imaginable suspension – or none! **HFC**



The Michell Gyro SE/RB250 turntable (see review on page 65) is spring-suspended

"If vibration is induced in the disc or arm, the cartridge will transduce it into electrical output – and bingo, distortion!"

Wireless Wonder...



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Simon Pope

Simon Pope is an ex-hi-fi magazine editor who now works in high-end audio PR. He has a music degree, training in classical music and once worked as a mastering studio engineer

Dig the new breed

The recession isn't all doom and gloom, a new breed of hi-fi dealer has emerged – and it's all great news for the consumer

"In many ways, this downturn has ironically paved the way for the hi-fi industry in the UK to improve."

I'm no John Maynard Keynes. My economic nouse goes as far as making sure I have enough in my pocket to cover my haddock and chips and a can of Scotland's finest – Irn Bru, not Tennent's Super – on a Friday night. Yet apart from this slice of fiscal wizardry, the past 12 months in the audio industry have also given me insight into the route that our somewhat specialist industry has taken by default.

If you read the *Daily Mail* as opposed to your bank statements (which, come to think of it, is probably the only situation under which I would read it), you'd be led to believe that you have no money left, are going to lose your job tomorrow and that your children are on the brink of starvation.

The reality is not that bad, however. Manufacturers, distributors and retailers alike have all felt the pinch to varying levels – and if anyone in audio tells you otherwise, look skywards for the proverbial flying pig – but, despite this, many people still buy hi-fi.

In many ways, this downturn has ironically paved the way for the hi-fi industry in the UK to improve. Before the banks dramatically revealed themselves to be wobbly propositions at best, there was too much gear around and not enough people to buy or sell it. The market was – and perhaps still is – saturated. The result is that retailers are extremely selective in what they want – and I think the days of seeing certain well-respected, upper-end components in twenty dealers are truly over.

A new breed of dealer has emerged, although it might be more accurate to call them boutique audio retailers. They don't work from the high street, but from units, converted chapels and separate home extensions. It's friendlier and more akin to a domestic environment – no customer is going to barge in and demand a

£30 interconnect in the middle of a demonstration. They specialise in a select range of products with a bespoke service. There are no vulgar cash registers or dreaded point of sales material to be seen – just drop dead gorgeous hi-fi, lots of records and CDs and real passion for what they are selling, not what fiscal reward they get for selling it. Admittedly, there are only maybe a handful of these new types of dealer throughout the country, but at that level it's all that is needed. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Recessions inevitably result in natural selection and the survival of the fittest, but this can be welcome. True, fewer dealers sell less equipment – but they sell better equipment at all prices. The right retailer for the right product can easily sell more than 15 uncommitted dealers could. The service that you can get from this relative handful of specialist retailers is exceptional: it's undeniably reassuring that that five star service is part of the package if you are spending your hard-earned pension or savings on a hi-fi to last you a long time.

A few of these retailers are the sole sellers of certain products and brands, realising that if you want something that specialist, you – or the dealer – will be prepared to travel. Selective distribution also keeps the price controlled tightly, with no discounting – very important in the luxury audio market, although you, dear reader, may disagree!

We can surely agree on one thing that will come out of the financially tumultuous times in which we find ourselves, however: the next time you do have the dosh to buy a new system, you may have to travel a little further to get it. But, trust me, you'll certainly be glad you did. **HFC**



Since the recession, more hi-fi dealers are specialising in high-end kit



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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



September 2009

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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

The big DABate!

Is it such a good idea to switch off analogue radio in 2015?

"...most countries that chose DAB have already announced plans to move to the superior DAB+ format."

Sometime in the middle of June, the Government-commissioned Carter report on Digital Britain was published. The following day, most of the country's newspapers informed us that FM radio would be switched off in 2015.

That date may still be six years away, but it threatens to be a disaster for the hi-fi enthusiast: FM radio's alleged replacement, DAB, simply doesn't sound as good, so a prime source of hi-fi music could well disappear. However, more careful reading of the report, and a little reflection on the issues involved, does suggest that those early headlines might have overstated the situation.

I have enormous respect for the BBC, which has always seemed one of the better reasons for living in the UK. Much of its programming continues to set an enviable standard, endowing the venerable institution with a huge store of public goodwill. But, its behaviour in the political arena in recent years seems to have been much more suspect, especially with DAB digital radio issues, which have done little to enhance the Corporation's reputation for prioritising customers' interests.

Some form of digital radio was inevitable following the growth of all forms of digital audio and video during the 1990s. However, those radio broadcasters responsible for instigating the appropriate standards – effectively the BBC in Britain – have often chosen unwisely.

The issues surrounding the DAB format adopted for UK terrestrial digital radio broadcasts has both technical and consumer issues. Even though DAB only became a commercial reality some ten years ago, work on the format had started way back in the 1980s, with much of the 1990s spent undertaking test transmissions. By the time the service was formally underway, the digital compression codec that had been selected was already getting very long in the tooth.

It would probably have made some sense to have held back until a codec with superior compression performance, such as AAC, had

arrived, but it was decided that the UK would take the DAB plunge – for whatever regrettable political reasons. Even early DAB transmissions sounded inferior to high quality FM and the situation soon became worse when the BBC cut the bit-rate of its main network stations to make room for new services.

The inadequacies of the original DAB format have had a number of negative consequences. Key factors are probably that fewer countries than expected took up the format and, in those countries that did adopt DAB, fewer consumers than anticipated have purchased receivers.

Furthermore, most of the countries that originally chose DAB have already announced plans to move to the considerably superior DAB+ format. However, the UK is sticking with the original DAB format, presumably for fear of upsetting the owners of the several million receivers that have already been sold and cannot be upgraded to DAB+.

Digital radio is, of course, also available via other sources, including digital satellite and terrestrial TV platforms and the internet, any or all of which are potentially able to deliver better-than-DAB quality.

Still more facts continue to tilt the odds further away from DAB. While it's currently estimated that some nine million DAB radio receivers have been sold in Britain, there are more like 120-150 million analogue radios. Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of retaining full analogue FM network coverage is that so many radio listeners do so in their cars, with very few cars being equipped with DAB radios thus far.

Furthermore, the Carter report doesn't actually suggest that FM radio will be switched off, rather that it will carry "a new tier of ultra-local radio". It's a suggestion that some may regard as wishful thinking and others as a fate worse than death. **HFC**



It's estimated that some nine million DAB radios have been sold in the UK



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I just love surprises! Well folks, I got a big one when I first hooked up a pair of single ended Argentums Mythos interconnects (a subdivision of Ultralink/XLO Products, Inc.) and they sounded amazingly close to my reference \$2500 Photon interconnects. WOW! WOW, again! The phrase "high value" just doesn't cut it. I'd call these a "phenomenal value" and a brand new price/performance leader in today's cable marketplace!

Robert H. Levi - Positive Feedback Online - Issue 40

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Alvin Gold

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

Just the ticket

Concert-going is still as popular as ever...

"Promenade tickets remain at £5, which, for a night out in London, is a conspicuous bargain."

As a keen observer of the human condition (it says so on my CV), as well as a reasonably regular classical concert goer, I often have spare moments when the music is playing to observe what's going on around me. From everything I have noticed, live classical music is in rude health – none more so than with the BBC Promenade season, about to get underway as I write.

In our current straightened times, many of us are no longer able to afford expensive holidays to far-flung destinations or expansive flatscreen TVs, but we can still stretch to the odd concert ticket – and what better a ticket than to a night at the Proms?

The Proms represent particularly good value. The Royal Albert Hall has about 6,000 seats to sell – three times as many as the Royal Festival Hall – providing an added incentive for ticket prices to be realistic. Also, don't forget that the Promenade tickets (standing or lying around on the floor) remain at a mere £5 which, for a night out in London, is a conspicuous bargain. Better still, Promenade tickets are not presold: you can always get a ticket if you're willing to queue, an old and honourable Prom tradition.

It's not just the Proms that offer an affordable evening of classical music. The majority of concert tickets tend to be relatively inexpensive – and therefore popular. I have been pleased to note just how full many of the concerts I've recently attended have been. Generally, I avoid the more mainstream programmes but, even so, I've noticed that the Royal Festival Hall and the Barbican – London's main classical music venues – are often all but completely full.

Don't let those crowds deter you. As it's classical music we're talking about, you're unlikely to be disturbed by noises off – apart from applause at the wrong time (or too quickly after the music ends) and the mercifully

occasional phone call to the prat who has failed to switch his mobile off.

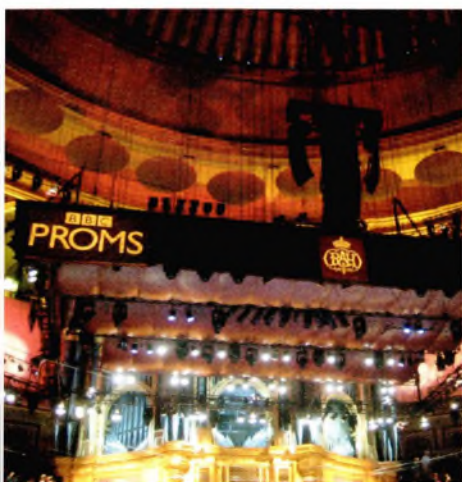
In short, classical music remains one of the most civilised nights out – especially as most of the key concert venues have improved their acoustics and general ambience. In London, this is particularly true of the recently remodelled Royal Festival Hall and the Royal Albert Hall, which had been looking decidedly shabby until its recent refit.

Speaking to the Proms' press office, I discovered that tickets sales, which have been on an upwards trajectory for some years, are now running slightly ahead when compared with figures from the same time last year. The number of concerts on offer has now also tipped the 100 mark for the first time, enhancing its status as the world's premiere classical music festival.

There is still a requirement to increase the popularity of programming, of course. This means broadening the range of music that people are exposed to and, therefore, find engaging. It's easy to fill a concert hall with Rachmaninov or Beethoven symphonies, but it's harder to pull large audiences for Xenakis or Boulez, for example. Innovation in programming is key to improving this situation.

One suggestion is an idea developed by my hometown orchestra, the excellent Bournemouth Symphony. For a while it ran a series of mainstream concerts followed by a freebie post-concert event of contemporary (or near contemporary) music. This was usually played by a small group of orchestral leaders, with the programmes normally of fairly short duration.

A typical example I can remember was Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* – not exactly radical to modern ears, maybe, but a revelation to my mother, in one of the last concerts she attended. **HFC**

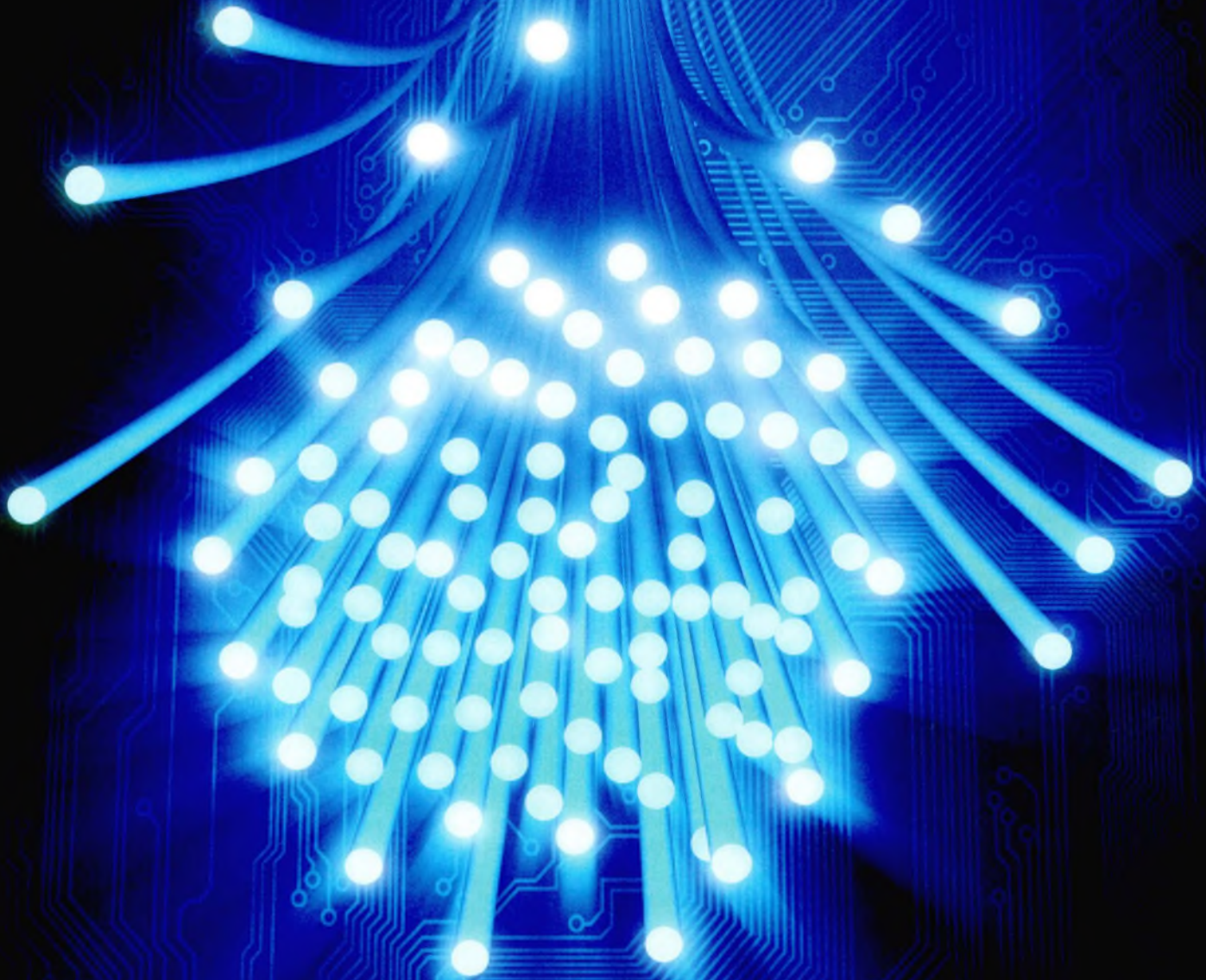


The annual BBC Promenade concerts represent excellent value for money



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the science of cables to a new level. ”**

Tesla Accelerator speaker cable review - Hi-Fi World, August 2009

Hi-Fi World
VERDICT

REVIEWS

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



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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

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

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

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRO	Good build and open, lively sound from a valve DAC with plenty of inputs. Transport is also great value for money.
CON	DAC doesn't engage as well as the transport with loss of weight and power through the bass unless you price the quality. Cables cost extra and competition from single channel designs won't help.
HI-FI CHOICE	★★★★☆
OVERALL SCORE	★★★★☆

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★



Dynamic duo

New XS pre and power amp are our pick of the new range

PRODUCT Naim NAC 152 XS and NAP 155 XS

TYPE Preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE £895 (152); £1,025 (155)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43.2x7x30.1cm (Both units) ◊ Weight (152) 3.8kg, (155) 7.9kg ◊ (152) Analogue inputs: 6x line ◊ Frequency response: 4Hz-40kHz ◊ (155) Power output: 60 watts (8 ohms), 90 watts (4 ohms) ◊ Frequency response: 4Hz-75kHz

CONTACT ☎ 01722 426600 # www.naim-audio.com

In the past, to use one piece of Naim electronics in a system was really only an interim step to using a complete Naim system. The philosophy of design and the resolute use of DIN connections ensured that Naim equipment really partnered best with other members of the same family. Customers essentially had to go 'all in' and, of course, a great many of them did; Naim developing a level of brand loyalty that is still very much alive and well.

More recently, however, Naim has made its products more accommodating to work in mixed component systems. The DIN connections were joined by conventional RCA phono plugs some years ago and 2007 saw the release of the Supernait , which added digital inputs – a feature that actively encouraged the use of non-Naim components. This was followed by the Nait XS, which borrowed heavily from the amplification of the Supernait (less the digital inputs) and earned our praise in HFC 317.

Now we are greeted with the NAC 152 XS preamp and NAP 155 XS power amp, which share the design philosophy of the two Nait's but are split into Naim's preferred two-box solution. These replace the earlier NAC 122x

and NAP 150x and are part of the new XS range of components that Naim are bringing to market.

Visually, the 152 and 155 are the first "slimline" Naim boxes to sport the brushed, anodized, black aluminium fascia of the more costly Naim units. The fit and finish of the two boxes is truly excellent and belies their relatively modest price. Internally, both units make use of the new bayonet type PCB fitting for critical boards. This is a system that attempts to achieve some of the isolation of the flagship Naim component – where the boards are elegant floating brass affairs – at a more realistic price point. This is one of

“... the simple propulsive force of the pairing becomes addictive. The NAC 152 XS and the NAP 155 XS impressed from the outset...”

the measures that Naim has taken in its characteristic approach to reducing vibration. Other features such as the decoupled connectors and thick, non-resonant chassis are all present and correct.

The NAC 152 XS preamp is equipped with six line level inputs, four of which support either DIN or RCA connections, one being shared between RCA and a front 3.5mm input for MP3 duties and a powered DIN input for a Naim phono stage. Like the Nait XS, there is also an AV bypass feature that allows the 152 to connect to the pre-out of an AV receiver and handle the stereo duties of an AV system with its own volume control knocked out of the circuit. In addition, the 152 can be upgraded

to full control over RS232 if you wanted to integrate it into a custom install system. There are three outputs – two RCA (one is listed for subwoofer purposes) and one DIN output. One socket conspicuous by its absence is a mains input, the 152 being powered either by DIN connection to a Naim power amp or by upgrading to the FlatCap XS power supply (see 'Cap in Hand' overleaf). A Naim system driving remote is supplied.

The 155 is, by comparison, simplicity itself. Offering the same 60 watts output into eight ohms and 90 watts into four ohms that the Nait XS does, it uses a larger transformer which should endow it with better handling of tricky

speakers, although the integrated is no slouch in this regard. The rear panel has left and right channel outputs that use four millimetre sockets and a single DIN connection to provide power and signal to the preamp. It has exactly the same compact dimensions as the 152, so accommodating the pair of them should not prove too challenging.

SOUND QUALITY

The two units were tested as a pair but were used outside of a full Naim system environment with a view to seeing how well they would perform outside of the fold. There is a strong likelihood that anyone spending a whisker under two thousand pounds





Inspire Hi-Fi

eclipse



worth waiting for...

HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT ★★★★★

Review: September 2009

Superb build and finish allied to an effortlessly musical sound, makes the Inspire Eclipse a highly impressive debut.

"At all times, the Eclipse excelled at simply laying out the performance in a way that made me feel I was hearing the band exactly as they intended. All this comes about as a result of the Inspire's fine sense of uniformity and evenness across the midrange and treble. This flows together so well that overall effect is to imbue music with a lush expanse of detail and ebullient warmth, but with a delicious sprinkling of light top end and delicacy as a garnish. Acoustic instruments stand out as natural and full-bodied, whilst the Eclipse also captures the grittier style of electronic instruments and never leaves you in any doubt as to what is playing."

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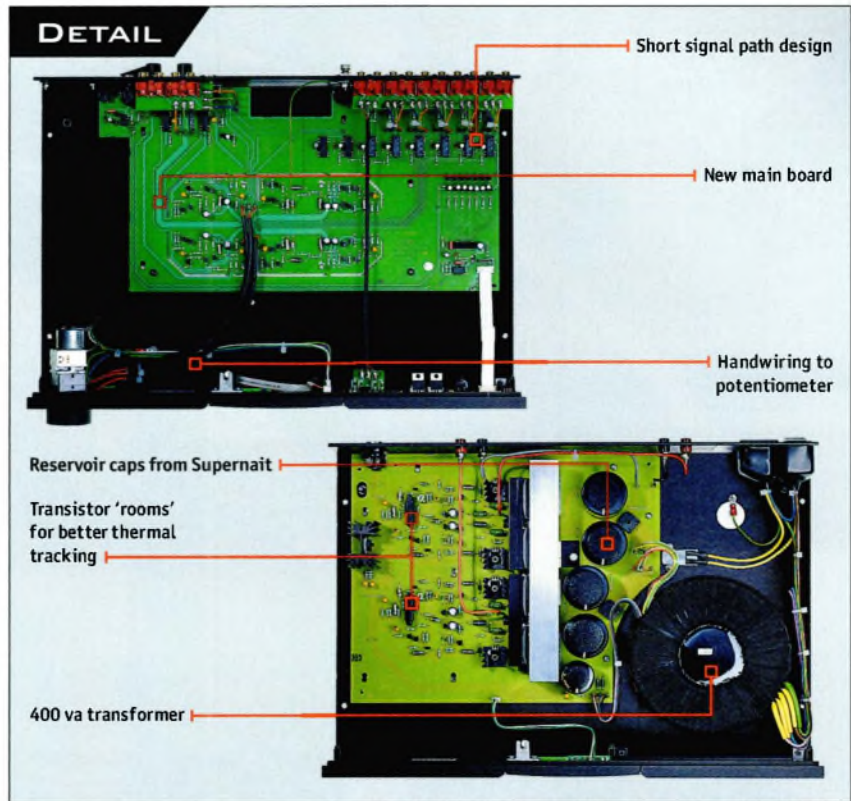
upgrading to this combination would have to use it with their existing components for some time before potentially moving on. We thought it would be interesting to see what this would be like.

Unusually, we found that the warm-up time of the 152 and 155 even quicker than the Nait XS, which we felt was pretty rapid. After a few hours, the two boxes started giving strong indicators of what they were capable of and further improvements were gained the longer the units were running.

The first impressions of the pairing were very positive. Goldfrapp's *Felt Mountain* was delivered with confidence and assurance. The ample bass of the recording is beautifully recreated with all of the detail and timing that is required to show the work at its best. Goldfrapp's vocals are placed perfectly in relation to the sparse instrumentation and electronic effects.

There is more of a sense of soundstaging than with some older Naim designs – vocals leave the confines of a speaker and where appropriate, are centralised with instruments being placed sensibly in relation to them. The effect is not the 'holographic' soundstage sometimes possessed by valve amps, but it provides believable placement to musicians and makes sense of what is going on.

Tonality from the pairing is especially good. Regina Spektor's *Mary Anne meet the*



Gravediggers is filled with simple piano and bass pieces and the Naim duo reproduced these with almost startling realism with the decay of individual notes being tangibly real and adding hugely to the sense that the performance is being reproduced accurately. Larger and more complicated orchestral pieces retained this accuracy and managed the task of relaying this detail without losing the cohesion of the work.

In the course of listening, the pair were given an enormous range of voices both solo and group to handle and at no stage did their standards of realism and detail slip. In absolute terms, there is the slight sensation that the very top end is slightly rolled off, but this only really becomes apparent next to equipment that is considerably more expensive.

Above all, however, the simple propulsive force of the pairing becomes addictive. Their reproduction of Orbital's *The Altogether* was as fast and dynamic as we could reasonably wish for and anything which requires some timing and attack to it is unlikely to be handled better by any remotely price comparative equipment. The fact that this pace and timing – a long

time Naim trademark – is not achieved at the expense of their ability to replay more delicate music is, perhaps, their most singular achievement.

The NAC 152 XS and NAP 155 XS impressed from the outset and continued to win praise from there onwards. Whilst they would undoubtedly shine when partnered with the forthcoming source material from the XS range, they demonstrated beyond any doubt that they can happily be installed outside of a full Naim system and provide a thoroughly satisfying musical performance. When their excellent build, extensive feature set and useful upgrade options are also taken into account we have little difficulty in recommending them. **HFC**

Ed Selley

CAP IN HAND

We also had the use of a FlatCap XS during the review. This provides two 24-volt DC feeds to power either two sources or – as was the case here – power the NAC152 XS separately of the power amp. The results suggested that the sense of space around performers improved and the already sharp timing takes another step forward. It is also possible to use one output to power the selection section of the preamp and the other output to power a Naim CD, tuner or the Stageline phono stage – we also tried the latter and found it offered considerable benefit. You do, of course, have the flexibility of being able to try and see what works best in your system. This makes the £675 FlatCap XS strong value for money, as you have a variety of options to try the 24-volt outputs on.



VERDICT

SOUND



PRO

The 152 has excellent detail, superb timing and comprehensive connectivity, while the 155 boasts realistic tonality and control over most loudspeakers.

FEATURES



BUILD



CON

The 152 sounds better through DIN than phono connections and the 155 suffers from limited connectivity and a limit to soundstaging.

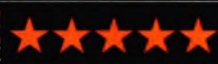
VALUE



CONCLUSION

An excellent performing, keenly priced and well built duo that possess the classic Naim virtues whilst adding features and a helping of compatibility that should win it friends with a new audience.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE



URL www.techradar.com/620960

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



High Definition Driver 300 Ω

Close encounters

Sennheiser's new high-end HD800 sets a new benchmark for headphone performance

PRODUCT Sennheiser HD800

TYPE Headphone

PRICE £1,000

KEY FEATURES ◉ Weight: 350g ◉ 56mm Ring Driver
◉ Cable length: 3 metres ◉ Impedance: 300 ohms
◉ Sensitivity: 97dB for 1 milliwatt ◉ Dynamic, circumaural, open-back design

CONTACT ☎ 01494 551551 # www.sennheiser.co.uk

Sennheiser is probably the world's most prolific maker of high-quality headphones. Its output covers not just hi-fi models, but dedicated studio and DJ types and indeed such specialities as telecoms and aviation headsets. And yet, until very recently, it had avoided the very high end of the hi-fi market. Yes, there was the outlandish Orpheus electrostatic model, launched back in 1991 as a £10,000 system with its dedicated valve amplifier: it lasted a while in the catalogue but never seemed to be heavily promoted and didn't exactly sell in telephone numbers. Anyway, electrostatic headphones can be a bit of an acquired taste and opinions on this one were mixed.

Instead, Sennheiser's strongest suit of late has been upper-midrange models including the HFC award-winning HD650, at around £300, which are a popular choice with audiophiles and professionals alike.

We've consistently found lots to like about it and its cheaper companions, but not surprisingly felt that it was trumped by some of the £500-plus models from Grado and Audio Technica, for instance. Then, around the beginning of this year, word leaked out that Sennheiser was about to launch a much more ambitious model, a dynamic type like the HD650, but with a newly developed transducer design and all sorts of deluxe features and specifications. This was the HD800.

It's taken us a while to get hold of a review sample, not least because demand worldwide

“... very few loudspeaker designs can come even close to the level of detail resolution that headphones like these can provide.”

has so far outstripped Sennheiser's ability to supply, but here we are at last with a pair of these rarified beasts. So what's all the fuss about? First and foremost it's the new driver included in the headphone. A headphone drive unit is typically like a loudspeaker driver in that a flat or slightly conical diaphragm is propelled by a few turns of wire in a magnetic field. In this case, however, the driver diaphragm is actually an annulus, or flat doughnut shape. Sennheiser calls it a 'Ring Driver' and explains

that it has a significant advantage over a circular diaphragm, in that it doesn't resonate in the same way at high frequencies.

Headphone drivers suffer from the same compromise as loudspeaker ones regarding size. Bigger is better for bass but leads to resonance problems in the treble. The Ring Driver is 56mm in diameter, larger (by a couple of mm) than any other headphone driver in current production, but is claimed to have a much greater resistance to resonance. Sennheiser doesn't go into detail on this, but speaker designers have long understood that

the centre of a circular driver is a problem point as energy arrives there from all directions and has nowhere to go: the result is not only resonance but uncontrolled, chaotic, behaviour that can have nasty effects on audio. Dealing with this is a black art in both headphone and speaker (especially dome tweeter) design.

Having neatly sidestepped that issue, Sennheiser has employed various measures to ensure that nothing else in the HD800's design lets the performance down. Construction is based on high-performance plastics which we would have sworn were metal, but no – metals would have been too inclined to resonate and colour the sound, so ultra-hard polymers were used instead. Cabling uses four cores of high-purity copper with Teflon insulation and the outer insulation and braiding of the cable have been carefully chosen to minimise mechanical noise-coupling up the wire. Even the headband has been designed against resonance, using both metal and plastics, well-padded, of course, for comfort. The ear cups are also luxuriously padded and every part of the HD800 is designed to resist resonance and rattling.

There's one more feature that deserves mention. The Ring Driver, with its large size, produces a good approach to a planar wavefront which seems to the ear to have travelled from afar, aiding sound naturalness. Sennheiser has angled the driver so that the sound appears to come from slightly in front of the head. The precise acoustics of ▶



PATHOS

its what you don't see **that creates the music**

“ UKD Studio is a place where you can experience the ultimate in European listening pleasure, from our unique selection of hand crafted pieces of hifi architecture to our unparalleled service... ”

Dana Berkmen : UKD Studio

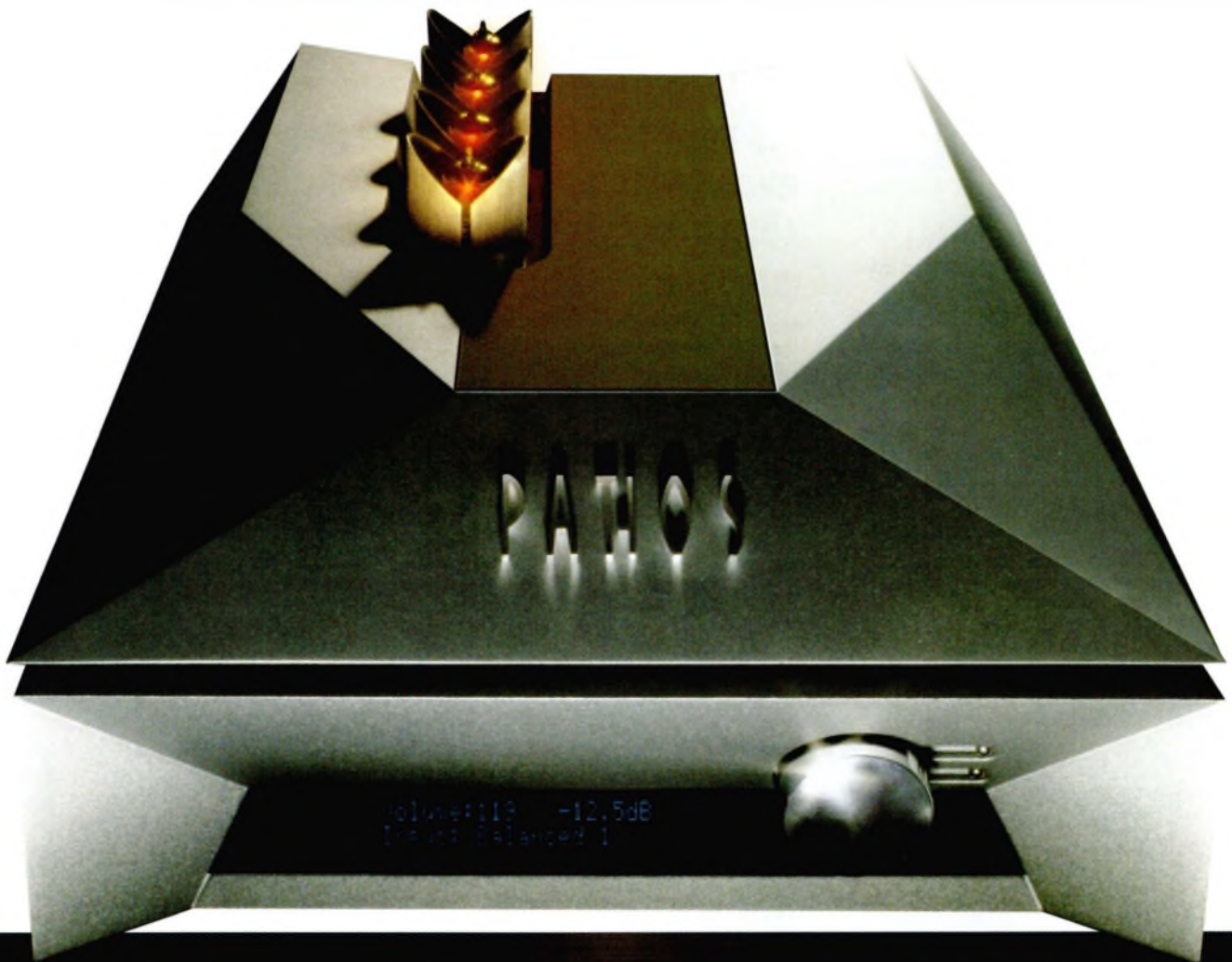
We cater for all tastes and pockets and deliver a product and sonic experience that's second to none.

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headphone coupling is a tricky subject, but this is an ingenious approach to ensuring a flat and realistic frequency balance.

SOUND QUALITY

We've had plenty of exposure to high-grade headphones over the last couple of years, so expectations were high for this newcomer. We were not in any sense disappointed, for this is certainly one of the most revealing bits of audio kit it has been our pleasure to encounter. Like a lot of really fine gear, it's not 'impressive' on first listen, but it doesn't take long to realise that something rather special is going on in the neighbourhood of one's ears.

If you're not a regular headphone user, you may not be familiar with the advantages of good 'cans'. Viewing them as second-best to loudspeakers has some justification – no headphone will ever whack your whole body like good speakers can, imaging takes a little getting used to and it's a rather solitary experience. But very few loudspeaker designs on the planet can come even close to the level of detail resolution that headphones like these can provide.

The first impression of this model is likely to be of a very slightly 'soft' sound – not in the sense of 'not loud' but soft in presentation. To put it rather coarsely, the sound does not stab you in the ear the way some cheap headphones can seem to do. Any idea that the balance is treble-shy, however, will very quickly be corrected. In fact the treble is both lively and rich, but it is so clean that its sheer quality needs a little adjustment time. This quality is



at its most apparent when textures are thick but include lots of treble detail, or conversely when subtle high-frequency instruments are playing, such as those various little dangly bits of metal whose names only professional percussionists know. Listen to sounds like that and the chances are you will suddenly think, as we did, 'Damn, regular hi-fi is just so coloured'.

It's not just the treble. Midrange is amazingly detailed. Voices and instruments all have exactly the timbre that they do in real life and they don't interfere with each other the way they can when played via less exalted

reproduction equipment. A single flute at the back of an orchestra is just as clear as two dozen violins at the front, just like real life.

Of course if the recordings you listen to are below par you'll get the proverbial warts and all, but even that's not so bad: the HD800 is ruthlessly revealing, but somehow still seems to make the best of whatever redeeming features a recording possesses.

When we reviewed the Grado GS1000 (now superseded by the GS1000i) in HFC 288, we praised it to the skies as the highest quality transducer we knew of. But we now believe its mantle has now passed to the HD800. **HFC**

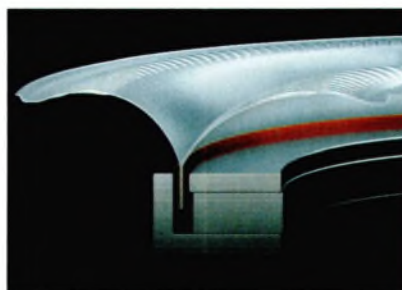
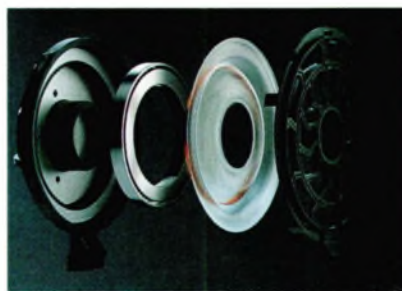
Richard Black

HOW TO DRIVE THEM

Any good headphone deserves a good dedicated amplifier. Sennheiser UK sent our review sample with a Grace M902 headphone amp/ DAC (about £1,500) while company boss Dr. Jörg Sennheiser recommends the Lehmann Audio Black Cube (£650).

We used various devices from the Grace down to the headphone socket on a £200 CD player and although the latter showed some strain it was still obvious that the HD800 is a very special transducer. The biggest difference is in tonal balance, as general-purpose headphone outputs usually have a series resistor intended to ensure compatibility with high- and low-impedance headphones (the HD800 is 300 ohms– high by current standards). This leads to a slightly altered frequency response which isn't crippling but does detract slightly.

If funds are tight, we would recommend a cheap standalone headphone amp such as those from Creek or Pro-Ject – it will more than get you going and you can always upgrade later.



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Sound is simply superb in every way, beautifully balanced across the range and incredibly detailed. Comfort is also excellent, even over extended listening sessions.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Currently hard to find due to high demand and undeniably expensive. Can lead to your loudspeakers feeling neglected.
VALUE ★★★★★	

CONCLUSION
Headphone listening may not be for everybody or every day, but this exquisite new model will undoubtedly move things closer to that state of affairs, thanks to excellent performance levels. It's certainly worth making sacrifices for.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/619269

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★



Big box bruiser

It may look unfashionable, but this Pro-oriented standmount will show many speakers new tricks

PRODUCT PMC IB2i
TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker
PRICE £8,900 per pair
KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 33x74x46.5cm
 ◉ Weight: 41kg ◉ 2.4m ATL (advanced transmission line)
 ◉ Drivers: 75mm midrange dome with 190mm magnet, 250mm flat diaphragm bass driver ◉ Sensitivity: 89dB ◉ Power handling: 120-500 watts
CONTACT ☎ 01582 405694 # www.pmc-speakers.com

Last summer, we hauled PMC's monolithic two-piece MB2X/XBDi speaker in for test in the *Hi-Fi Choice 2008* Collection edition. The pair used a total of four 300mm bass drivers, each loaded by a generous transmission line, which inevitably delivered altogether too much bass in our 4.3x2.6x5.5m listening room.

Although the bass was clean, had massive headroom and was hugely enjoyable in a rather melodramatic way, it was the midrange driver that this speaker used that actually got us excited.

For its three-way designs, PMC likes to use 75mm dome midrange units. This size of diaphragm best 'splits the size difference' between a bass driver and a tweeter – and therefore maintains a greater consistency in dispersion throughout the audio frequency range than is possible with a two-way design.

However, PMC has two different 75mm midrange drivers. The first is a partly out-sourced one with a conventional motor, used in domestically oriented models like the OB1i and the new PB1. The second, concerning us more here, is a driver with a huge 190mm magnet, making it entirely in-house and fitting to the costlier professional models – like that MBX2i and the IB2i on test here.

When collecting the MB2X/XBDi speakers, PMC brought down pairs of the EB1i and IB2 for us to try. Both models share the same 250mm transmission line-loaded flat-diaphragm bass driver, but the EB1i is a floorstander (with the 'i' suffix referring to the latest tweeter upgrade), and also has the version of the 75mm midrange dome with the smaller magnet. The IB2 is a slightly smaller (though still very large by today's standards) standmount.

The latter samples lack the latest tweeter, but do have the 'Pro' – this is a much larger magnet version of the 75mm midrange dome, as the speaker had originally developed to

provide close voice-matching to PMC's big professional monitors (primarily for surround sound, rear channel monitoring).

While it's true that the IB2i (£8,900 per pair, including stands) costs £1,900 more than the EB1i – and those original IB2 samples lacked

“The pair swiftly reveal themselves to be the latest in a succession of illustrious reference speakers by which rivals will be judged”

the latest tweeter – it took us very little time to decide that we significantly preferred the IB2. This was partly because of its superior midrange grip and dynamic tracking, but also down to the cleaner and easier bass delivery achieved by leaving more space below the driver and port.

A couple of months later, the tweeter upgrade had been carried out and a pair of IB2is arrived for long-term assessment, quickly establishing themselves as firm favourites. The good news is that this pair swiftly revealed themselves to be the latest in a succession of illustrious reference speakers by which other rivals will be judged.

Standmounts, especially large ones like this, are certainly unfashionable these days, not to mention somewhat nostalgia-inducing: we're reminded of 1970s milestones like the Spondor BC3 and Linn Isobarik. Slim floorstanders might be today's style icons, but this speaker, like those earlier classics, has an attractively chunky purposefulness. It comes with a simple tubular steel frame stand (fixed by beads of Blu-Tack). This fixes floor-spikes securely and lifts the base of the speaker some 35cm off the floor, helping the bass propagate in a properly spherical manner.

The 250mm bass driver, designed by PMC but actually built by British bass driver specialist Volt Loudspeakers, has a flat 190mm diameter diaphragm and a stiff rubber roll surround. Besides its massive magnet, PMC's own soft fabric, 75mm dome midrange driver is mounted on a large frame and inset behind a shallow 'waveguide', distinguishing it from the 'domestic' version. The new 27mm soft fabric-dome tweeter was recently developed in collaboration with Norwegian specialist SEAS, which also makes it for PMC.

To maintain phase coherence, PMC uses steep 24dB/octave multi-element crossover networks. These are fed from three pairs of multi-way socket/binder terminals, each individually bolted through an alloy panel, which in turn is fixed to a much larger

panel that occupies about half of the back panel, accommodating the complex crossover network proper.

The enclosure comes nicely decorated in a dark American walnut real-wood veneer. ▶





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❑ All drivers are flush-mounted, with the front vertical edges nicely rounded. A hefty, full-height MDF-frame grille is supplied, but is probably better left unused.

Bass loading is accomplished by PMC's traditional 'advanced transmission line' (ATL). This technique is not that dissimilar to reflex or tuned column loading, but its proponents claim it has its own unique advantages. Certainly the partitions forming the folded line considerably stiffen the sides (though not the top, base or back).

SOUND QUALITY

Auditioning was carried out in a heavily furnished and somewhat irregular 4.4x2.6x5.5m (WxHxD) room. The speakers were 2.2m apart with their backs 0.6m from the nearest wall. Most of the listening was done on a system with a Naim CDS 3/555PS CD player, a modified hybrid Rega/Linn Sondek LP12/Rega RB1000 tonearm/SoundSmith Strain Gauge cartridge vinyl player, and a Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner. Amplification included Naim NAC552 and XTC PRE-1 preamps, Naim NAP500 and MSB M200 Platinum power amps. Cables were from Chord Company, Vertex AQ, Phonosophie, Synergistic Research and Naim, while equipment supports included Mana, Vertex AQ, Naim and Townshend types. Single wiring was used between amplifier and speakers, the speaker terminals joined by Vertex AQ mechanical damping links in place of the supplied brass rods.

IN-ROOM INSIGHT

Simple in-room measurements might not delve deeply into underlying loudspeaker technologies, but they do give important clues to the overall perceived tonal balance and a guide to optimum placement.

The IB2i pair delivered more than ample bass output even with speakers well clear of walls. Indeed, bass output below 100Hz is significantly stronger than the rest of the band, and the lower midband in particular.

Although the in-room far-field averaged 'power' response isn't entirely flat or neutral, the frequency balance is smooth, tidy and holds within +/- 2dB from 500 Hz upwards. This is a very impressive result under in-room conditions, though the top end (above 8kHz) is maybe a shade strong.

Sensitivity is a pretty average 87dB or thereabouts, alongside an amplifier load, which is mostly 6 ohms or better, dipping down to 4 ohms minimum around 100Hz. The line here is tuned to a low 29Hz, ensuring plenty of low bass output.



Although fundamentally quite neutral, the mild balance anomalies are audible as a slight lack of warmth, leaving cellos and male voices a little short of richness but, in virtually every other respect, this is an exceptional loudspeaker.

The bass excess hardly ever seems intrusive, probably because it's unusually clean and well-timed: indeed it's actually rather welcome in adding extra weight and scale to the proceedings. The enclosure top and back feel quite 'live' when music is playing and, therefore, probably limit the overall dynamic range and low-level resolution somewhat. It still remains essentially evenhanded, however, with excellent time-coherence and good dynamic expression, especially through the midband. It can also go astonishingly loud with fine control and plenty of headroom.

It is a genuine monitor, confirmed by the ease with which it is possible to identify even subtle changes made 'upstream' amongst the system components. We're not certain whether it's possible to describe any loudspeaker as 'all things to all men', but the IB2i comes damn close.

It might not deliver the fastest or most dynamic sounds around and it might not offer the ultimate in transparency and image depth. But it gets close enough to all these goals and does so with the sort of solid overall neutrality and stereo imaging, something that other designs which are

more extreme in one or other respect often fail to achieve.

The IB2i is not a cheap loudspeaker, but there are many far more costly models out there in today's marketplace. While these 'high-end' speakers may well offer a little extra refinement in one direction or another, we're not convinced that these refinements necessarily justify the sometimes exorbitant pricetags. Since this PMC is primarily aimed at a professional studio sector where fancy pricetags are simply not tolerated, the IB2i is a top-class hi-fi speaker at a not unreasonable price. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT

SOUND

★★★★☆

PRO

This large standmount's Pro-style midrange dome delivers superb grip and dynamic expression alongside more than ample, clean bass and a sweet, open top end.

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

CON

The shape is unfashionably chunky, while the sound is a shade bright and lacking some warmth. Monitors don't necessarily flatter the music.

VALUE

★★★★☆

CONCLUSION

This large standmount might look unfashionable, but it delivers top class sound quality at a realistic price. A genuine monitor, it delivers good neutrality, fine imaging and massive headroom with exceptional dynamic grip and expression.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

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Golden receiver

Receivers are making a comeback – and this impressive £600 NAD is arguably their poster boy

PRODUCT NAD C725

TYPE Stereo AM/FM receiver

PRICE £600

CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 # www.nadelectronics.com

Just like monstrous 1980's clobber, knitting clubs and involuntary redundancy, receivers also appear to be coming back into fashion in 2009. But, unlike the first three ill-advised comebacks, the NAD C725 is a pleasingly persuasive argument for why receivers are a better idea than ever.

Like practically all contemporary amplifiers, the NAD C725 is equipped with digital control: you already have a display and enough computer power onboard to operate a tuner module. Given that, the addition of an FM/AM tuner to an amplifier is nothing more than an all-in-one metal box – about the size of a packet of playing cards – that includes its own aerial connectors and fixes to the inside of the back panel with two screws. It's a real no-brainer – in the best possible way.

As it happens, NAD has rather more history with receivers than most respected hi-fi names. It has tended to regard them as entirely valid hi-fi components, designing them carefully to perform as such.

If one ignores that little radio module, the insides of the C725 are typical of recent NAD integrated amplifiers, with a medium-size toroidal transformer, generous power supply smoothing capacitors and a power amplifier circuit built almost entirely with discrete transistors. Assembly is neat and mostly done with through-hole

components, though there are a few small daughter-boards using surface-mount parts.

DAB radio is not a built-in feature, but there is a socket for a DAB module (about £150 extra). Similarly, you can add an iPod dock module for an additional £100, though, of course, any iPod or other portable player can simply be plugged into the relevant audio input and operated via its own controls. Four further line inputs, plus twin recording outputs (one optionally a 'Zone 2 output'), subwoofer output and separable preamp and power amp sections complete the audio line-up at the rear.

“Imaging is precise and well extended, while detail is also good, making this receiver a great choice for the classical music lover.”

The two sets of speakers are separately switchable. NAD rates the unit at 50 watts, but we got a comfortable 70 watts from it, with peaks more like 100 watts – and even more into low-impedance loads. It's a well-featured beast, but not too sophisticated to appeal to the purist. Inputs are relay-switched, the volume control is a traditional single-turn potentiometer and tone controls can be bypassed.

SOUND QUALITY

Given that we have described the NAD C725 as more or less an amp that just happens to have a tuner built-in, we should say straight away that it's actually one of the best FM tuners we've heard in a while. We tuned it in (more swiftly than many current models) to

several stations and were most impressed with the clean and lively sound we got from all of them. Far too many tuners have a residual graininess to the sound that one starts to believe is intrinsic to the format: models like this prove the opposite and revive one's faith in analogue radio. It's no top Naim, Magnum Dynalab or vintage Revox, but it is damn close.

Even so, FM broadcasts don't typically provide the toughest test of amplifiers. Listening to a selection of familiar tracks from CD suggested that, as an amplifier, this one is characterised by good control and decent detail but perhaps not the utmost musical

vigour. Bass seems a shade curtailed in extension and its attack can be just a little tame too, slightly taking the edge off the rhythmic tautness of rock, jazz and anything that depends strongly on rhythm for its effect.

Midrange and treble, however, are neutral and clear and vocals are highly believable. Imaging is precise and well extended in both dimensions, while detail is also good, making this receiver a particularly great choice for the classical music lover. It seems to have remarkably catholic tastes in speakers, too, making it a good basis for subsequent upgrading.

In short, comprising a good amp and a very good FM tuner, the NAD C725 makes for a great receiver. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION This receiver's very good FM tuner section is a delightful surprise, with unusually clean and detailed sound, the amp also has decent mid detail and treble extension.
FEATURES ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
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PRODUCT Electrocompaniet ECI-3

TYPE Integrated amplifier

PRICE £1,650

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 11.5x48.3x41 cm

⊖ Weight: 12 kg ⊖ Power output: 70 watts (8 ohms),

120 watts (4 ohms) ⊖ Inputs: 5x RCA phono, XLR

⊖ Outputs: 2x tape, XLR & RCA preamp

CONTACT ☎ 01865 759020 🌐 www.electrocompaniet.no

By a quirk of the pop world's recent loss, Electrocompaniet made a return to national news recently – in Norway, at any rate. In the scramble to squeeze every last drop of news out of the late Michael Jackson, it was noted that the star's producer Bruce Swedien credited the company's amplifiers on Jackson's mega-selling *HIStory* album. That said, you would be forgiven for thinking that Electrocompaniet was history on these shores, conspicuous by its absence from the UK amplifier scene in recent years. But, if the launch of its thrilling ECI-3 is anything to go by, Electrocompaniet is far from yesterday's news: in fact, it's making a classic comeback of King of Pop proportions.

Electrocompaniet has been making serious hi-fi for well over forty years and used to have a high profile in the UK, something it appears to be trying to re-establish now. It makes a substantial range of largely two-channel equipment for both domestic and professional markets.

The Classic range – of which the ECI-3 is the most affordable amplifier – has no fewer than five CD players, two integrated amps, three preamps, three stereo and three monoblock power amps, and a phono stage! That's a substantial range – and it's not the only one in the portfolio. It's got to be one of the largest product ranges we've

seen in the two-channel arena for some time

Electrocompaniet claims that this amp is built with the same quality components as its most prestigious models – presumably there are fewer of them as this is also the least powerful amp on the roster. Electrocompaniet prides itself in fully balanced, DC coupled operation, so this integrated amp has XLR in and outputs to make full use of the balanced circuitry. Balanced configuration is usually chosen because it has the potential to result in lower noise, something that's not always apparent in domestic set-ups where you don't tend to use miles of cabling.

The front panel has a distinctive appearance,

“Electrocompaniet makes a substantial range of largely two-channel equipment for both domestic and professional markets.”

devoid of knobs. With a mere five buttons it is both minimalist and initially confusing. However, it's actually intuitive: when the light on the motorised volume pot behind the panel moves, you know that you've found the north/south volume buttons, for example. The west/east buttons change input, illuminating names in the 'navigator window' on the left of the fascia as the relays click. A relatively conventional multiproduct remote is also supplied, adding mute to the small roster of functions, effectively putting the amp into standby.

Inside the substantial acrylic-fronted box, one of Electrocompaniet's floating transformer technology power supplies can be found. This is said to be capable of delivering twice as much current as conventional designs. The company backs this up by stating that, as with

all of its amps, the ECI-3 is stable into loads down to half an ohm. This isn't something that you'd expect it to have to deal with – even the most challenging speakers rarely drop below an ohm – but it's reassuring nonetheless.

The back panel is pretty straightforward. There's a row of RCA phono inputs and outputs beside balanced versions of the same. You don't get a unity gain input for home cinema systems and neither is there a bus system or software upgrade port, however. Compare this set-up with the Arcam A38, for example: it has two sets of speaker terminals, a space for optional phono stage, a 12v trigger, remote socket and so on

– all of which have to come out of a similar budget. Maybe this is why Electrocompaniet can afford to incorporate fully balanced operation in the ECI-3?

SOUND QUALITY

Electrocompaniet is keen that its amplifiers should be used with a source that's capable of delivering a true balanced output and suggested that we use one of its own CD players for the test. This was tempting, but would have complicated the review process. Instead, we elected to use Leema's Antila II (reviewed in *HFC* 323). Out of interest, the single-ended and balanced inputs of the amp were both hooked up to the Antila II with suitably terminated DNM reson cables and compared. The difference was not all that obvious to be frank, but we used the





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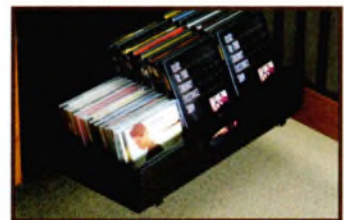
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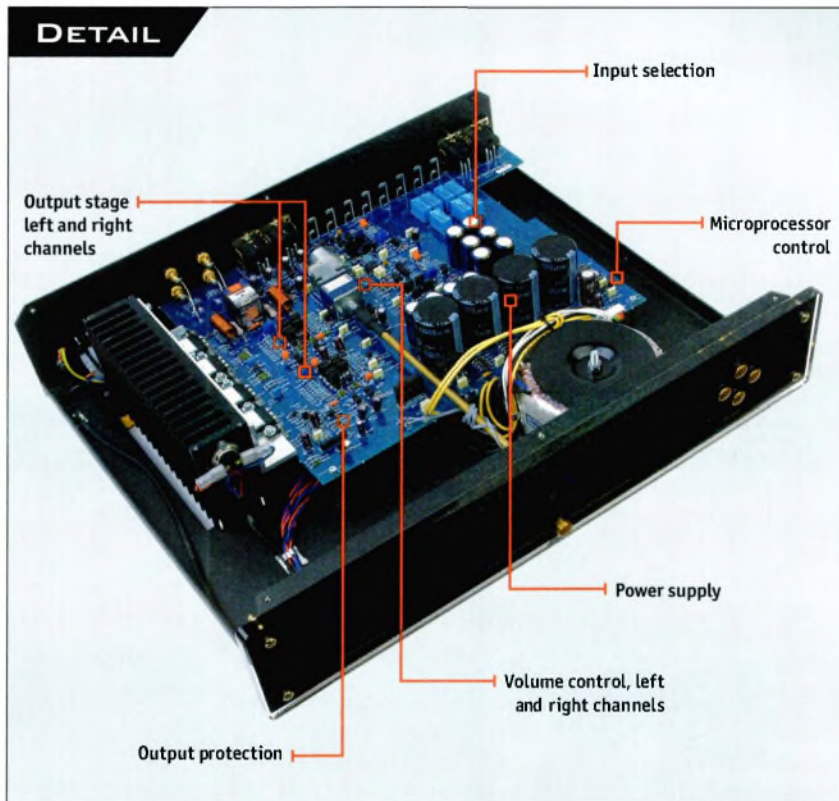
balanced connection for all the non-comparative listening nonetheless.

SOUND QUALITY

Noise is notably low with the ECI-3, which makes us wonder if that balanced connection does make a difference after all. Our *Keith Jarrett Carnegie Hall* disc didn't seem to give up all of its reverberant detail, for example, but you can hear a long way down into the mix. High frequencies are not only a little darker than usual, but also extremely clean: the right hand piano keys come through in a truly shimmering fashion that's highly convincing.

Our next disc – Cougar's fine *Patriot* album – revealed impressive depth of image against a backdrop that can only be described with the immortal phrase 'inky blackness' – it's that quiet, alright. Here the cymbal tone is very natural, if not as harmonically rich as usual. Still, it's very convincing and makes a good case for suggesting that other amps add some high-frequency haze of their own.

The heavier riffs of the album are dealt with in a calm and yet fully bone-crunching fashion that encourages one to turn up the wick, but the real revelations come with the better acoustic recordings. András Schiff's Beethoven



HISTORY LESSON

Electrocompaniet came about after Norwegian record and broadcast producer Svein Erik Børja was inspired by an AES lecture given by a Dr Matti Otala in 1973.

Otala was of the opinion that transient intermodulation distortion (TIM) was one of the biggest barriers to fidelity in amplifiers. Børja took this theory to Per Abrahamsen of Electrocompaniet and asked him to produce an amplifier that minimized TIM, a project that was encouraging enough for a 25-watt power amplifier to go into production by the name of The 2 Channel Audio Amplifier.

In the years that followed, this design was refined and changed as Per and his team realized that TIM reduction was not the whole story. One of his biggest breakthroughs was the discovery that by increasing feedback by 10dB, the sound improved dramatically. The original design has gone on to form the range that Electrocompaniet produces today, but you won't find a 25-watt unit in their portfolio any longer.

Piano Sonatas, for example, provide plentiful reverb, attack and dynamic vitality alongside tremendous delicacy in the slower passages.

As the Electrocompaniet is about the same price as an Arcam A38, albeit with fewer features, we dug one out of the store cupboard to see how it would fare. Impressively, the results suggested that we could have a new benchmark – the ECI-3 proving to be significantly more precise and calm compared with the louder, livelier and rather busy Arcam.

Both amplifiers have similar timing qualities, with no undue emphasis on leading edges, but the Electrocompaniet's precise midband removes much of the haziness to leave a cleaner musical phrase. This makes long-term listening a more pleasurable experience. There is also impressive grip on tap for a 70-watt amplifier (it would seem that Electrocompaniet's approach to power supply design has paid off when it comes to controlling the loudspeaker). Double bass has real texture and weight, yet remains nimble and on the ball. It also makes for very clear-cut imaging: on a spin of our Gillian Welch test disc, she is placed left of stage with her guitar while her cohort is on the right. This may not

sound all that impressive, but usually the two are melded together in the centre and the playing cannot be easily separated.

Bringing in PMC's PBI speaker in place of our Bowers and Wilkins 802D reveals that the transmission line-loaded PMC's balance is rather better suited to this amplifier's character. The PBI has a very open midband and this works rather well with the slightly dark character of the ECI-3, the pairing turning in a highly revealing and engaging sound with a variety of discs – one that makes alternative amps sound positively veiled.

If this model is anything to go by, Electrocompaniet's return to the UK is long overdue. This is an impressively resolute and powerful integrated amp for the money. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND



PRO

A highly revealing and powerful amplifier that is extremely well built and finished, with fully balanced operation – a rarity at this price.

FEATURES



BUILD



CON

The slightly dark mid/top won't be to all tastes. Front panel operation is also willfully obscure to the uninitiated.

VALUE



CONCLUSION

Taste cannot be ignored when it comes to sound quality and we like the calm, clean presentation of this amp enough to forgive its relative lack of midband sparkle. The fact that it's so revealing is the key to its addictive musicality.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE



URL www.techradar.com/618304

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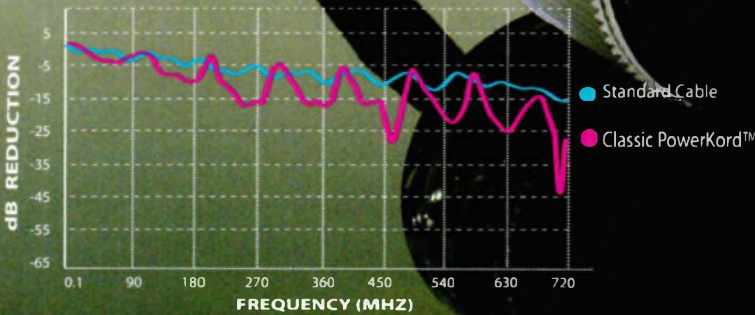
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What HiFi? Sound & Vision Ultimate Guide to High End Entertainment, Sept. 08



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Moonlight Sonata

Cambridge Audio's affordable micro components are certainly something to sound off about

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Sonata

TYPE CD player and receiver

PRICE £200 (CD player); £350 (receiver)

CONTACT ☎ 0845 090 2288 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

Undeniably, Cambridge Audio dishes up a more than decent range of true affordable products – an important consideration when the purse strings of many consumers are tightening. Lately, however, offerings from its budget portfolio have tended to be full-width and largely traditional in specifications and features. So, with an eye to modernising both the look and functionality of its budget offerings, Cambridge has recently drawn back the curtains on the Sonata series.

The range comprises the DR30 receiver (£350) and CD30 CD player (£200) reviewed here, plus the DV30 DVD player (£200) and the DD30 iPod dock – thrown in when you buy the receiver plus either the DV30 or CD30.

This price range suggests that Cambridge Audio isn't trying to offer the cheapest small-scale sound solution to potential buyers. Indeed, the product literature suggests that sound quality has been given serious consideration. One might wonder just how clever it's possible to be with a £200 budget, but this is the manufacturer behind the DacMagic, after all – possibly the most praised £220 hi-fi product so far this century.

Although the CD30 doesn't include any of the DacMagic's features like custom digital

filtering, it is equipped with a pretty high-spec DAC chip, decent analogue circuitry and a proper audio transport. Additionally, the power supply is a small switch-mode affair and both flavours of digital output are available.

The DR30 comes with a regular analogue power supply with a toroidal transformer, providing the backup for a proper discrete-transistor output stage, mounted on an internal heatsink. Cambridge Audio rates the amp at 40 watts, which chimes with our findings. Peak power, however, is considerably higher for brief moments, or on one channel at a time. Radio reception in this instance is

“With an eye to modernising the look and feel of its budget offerings, Cambridge has drawn back the curtains on the Sonata series”

courtesy of a small DAB/FM module.

Three line-level inputs are included and there's also a dedicated socket for the DD30 dock, while an additional MP3 player input and a headphone output are on the front panel. A record output and subwoofer in/out sockets make up the additional connectivity.

SOUND QUALITY

While it's possible to point to the odd specific area of performance where this system falls short of high-end performance, it is still remarkably capable, given the price. What's

most surprising is how it generates a real sense of musical scale, complete with striking dynamics, full frequency range and extended images in all directions. You just don't expect such assurance from budget kit. It's not so much that the equipment is diminutive, as plenty of high-end firms have packaged kit in small cases, it's more that what's inside is simple and low-cost that causes the surprise.

There are limits, though – not least in absolute loudness. Driving some power-hungry speakers, the DR30 was distinctly stretched trying to reproduce peaks in a dynamic orchestral recording, but short of those peaks it

still maintained a high standard of both attack and detail. The lowest bass never quite solidifies in the way the best midrange amps can manage and high treble can be hard and brittle. That said, midrange is very neutral and full of lively little details.

Separating CD30 and DR30 suggests that the two are evenly matched in abilities. The CD player's bass is a little more confident than the amp's, but presentation is generally similar.

The DAB radio module works well and delivers notably better results on FM than some of its kind. Sound is acceptably clean and free from electronic whistles, although it's no match for a dedicated FM tuner.

The DD30 iPod dock works well and seems to get the best out of solid-state music, though the system is revealing enough to make data-compressed music obvious. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★☆	CONCLUSION An appealing system that offers a fine combination of features and sound in a neat space-saving package, at a truly bargain price.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★☆	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/618331	



French fancy

Eccentric but compelling three-way standmount

PRODUCT Cabasse Bora

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £2,200 per pair; £475 (stands)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD) 33x27x 50cm
 ○ Weight: 15kg ○ Driver: 200mm Duocell membrane
 ○ Power handling: 80 – 200 watts ○ Impedance: 8 ohms (nominal), 4.1 ohms (minimum) ○ Sensitivity: 91dB ○ Frequency response: 52Hz – 24kHz

CONTACT ☎ 01684 593085 # www.coherent-systems.co.uk

Ask any self-respecting audiophile to name the most influential European territory for loudspeakers and the answer used to be unequivocal – the UK. But times have changed and with just a handful of honourable exceptions, the British manufacturing scene (or what little there is left) now looks conservative, if not downright tame. So if you're looking for cutting-edge engineering and innovation, then the leading country since the turn of the millennium is generally accepted to be France, where the tone is set by the three leading brands: Focal-JMLab, Triangle and Cabasse.

This is the story of a new mid-range model which superficially at least, looks conventional, but in reality incorporates a number of novel ideas and technologies. The model is the Bora and it comes from the third named of this powerful Gallic triumvirate, Cabasse (which, by the way, is now owned by Canon in its second stab at Europeanising its audio production, following the original Canon loudspeaker brand which was once based in the UK). A pair will set you back a not insubstantial £2,200, so this is a serious design that costs serious money.

The Bora doesn't quite resemble other loudspeakers, any more than it apes other features of its opposite number from other producers. Yes, it does look like a bog-standard eight-inch, two-way, reflex-loaded design, but it doesn't follow all the usual rules, that's for sure.

The business end of the reflex loading port is the long slot at the base of the front panel. The slot acts as a mouth, in effect baffling and dispersing the output of the real port, which vents from the points downwards-facing circular exit hole, which is mounted on the internal hidden base of the loudspeaker. The forward-facing slot provides room coupling and its large physical area means wind velocities are lower than in the main

port structure, which helps mask port-generated wind noise. The limited height of the slot also means it reduces vertical height of the enclosure compared to a conventional port. This means that it also removes the requirement to vent the

“The Bora doesn't quite resemble other loudspeakers, any more than it apes other features of its opposite number...”

enclosure at the rear, which would have introduced phase integration.

The Bora may appear like a conventional two-way, but it isn't; discounting the unusual port design, closer examination shows that the tweeter is mounted coaxially in the centre of the midrange driver, which makes this a point-source compound driver whose radiating element is the white-coloured annular ring surrounding the tweeter diaphragm.

Bass comes from a proprietary Duocell cone driver. Duocell – a material that was developed as long ago as the 1980s – is a variable thickness, low-density structural foam which is said to be light, rigid and well damped. So notwithstanding first appearances, the Bora is, in fact, a true three-way loudspeaker.

Add these noteworthy design elements together and the obvious effect is to shrink the height of the loudspeaker, which is a major factor in most Cabasse designs, not just this one. The coaxial mid and treble driver also plays a key part in defining the performance of the Bora, especially in the areas of stereo imagery and, in particular, the uniformity of dispersion in the two planes, as well as mitigating the effects of phase errors around the crossover due to the geometry imposed by standard vertically stacked designs.

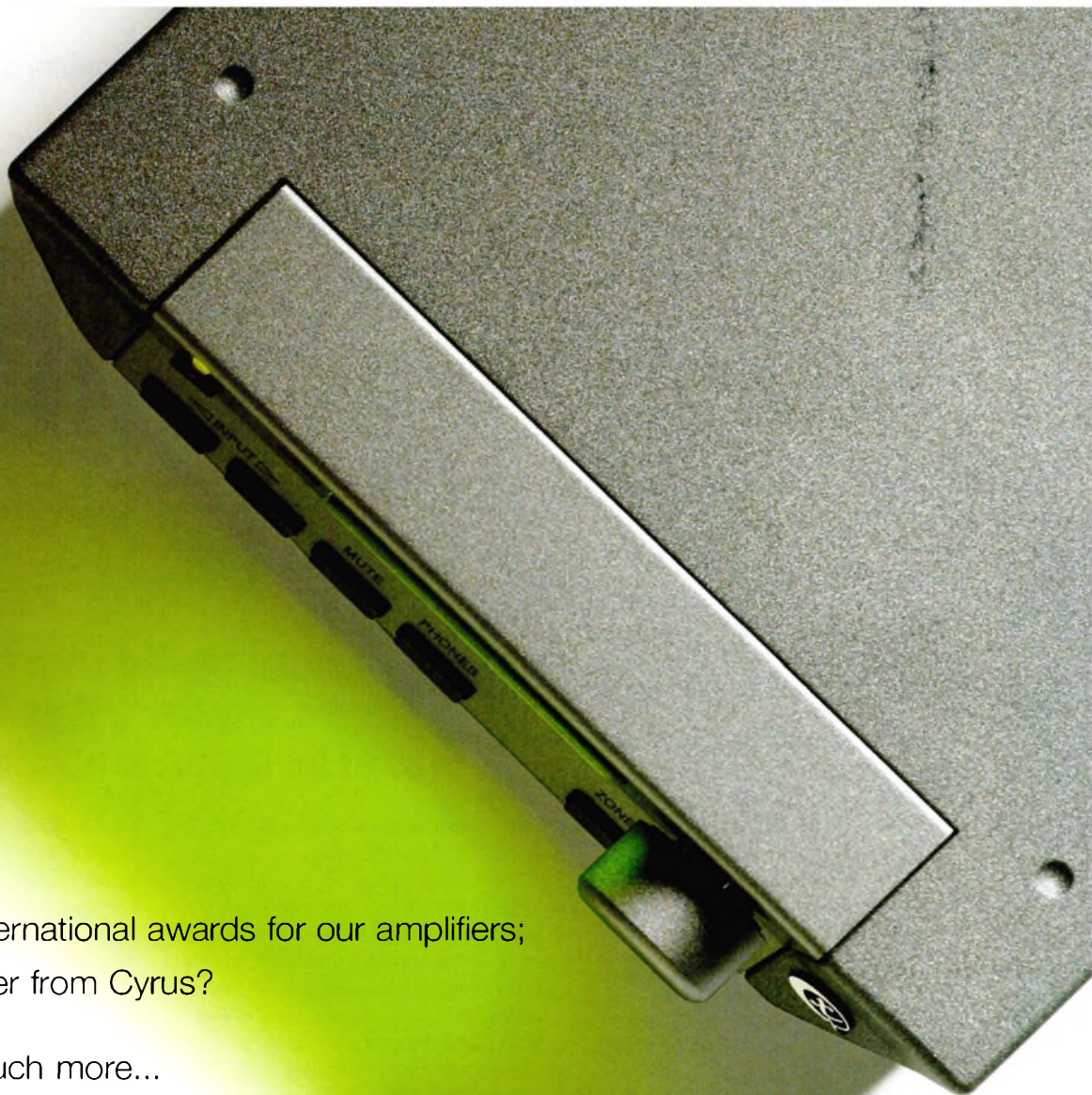
The speaker's side panels are curved for stiffness meaning the internal cavity is irregular in shape, which has a positive effect on enclosure resonant behaviour. Around the back is a single pair of 4mm binding posts, though it coped well with spade terminals on the test. No provision, however, is made for bi-wiring. Our test sample was supplied in a high-quality gloss black finish.

SOUND QUALITY

The surprises continued through to the listening. With most hi-fi components, and this certainly includes loudspeakers, technical and musical worth generally go hand in hand, although there are

some (in)famous example of products that are technically so-so, yet are capable of delivering great sound, though typically only with a carefully selected choice of music. The linkage between the yin and the yang is not completely established with the Cabasse, which has some clear (if relatively minor) technical





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❑ deficiencies, although it almost always delivers great music.

The most obvious of the technical deficiencies concerns the levels of background colouration associated mainly with the low to mid-treble. The effect is to add a degree of thickness or congestion to voices in particular. This is quite obvious on audition, though it is never excessive. There is some bloating of detail in the upper bass region, too though the bass itself is nicely extended and 'breathes' well. The colouration is probably a side effect of the higher than usual treble crossover.

Despite these objective shortcomings, the Cabasse performs extremely well. We ran an extremely wide variety of music through the Bora, using more than one amplifier, but concentrating for much of the time on a simple, but high-power integrated amplifier from Belles, which will be reviewed in these pages in a month or so.

The Bora generates a strong, punchy sound, with plenty of presence and quite strong dynamics, which if anything is enhanced by the higher than expected sensitivity – a finding that has no technical justification, but is often the case with high-sensitivity loudspeakers. More to the point, the Bora has fine imagery of the kind often associated with KEF Uni-Q or Tannoy Dual Concentric designs, but with unusually fine midband behaviour, which benefits because the midrange diaphragm doesn't 'cup' the tweeter, reducing a known source of colouration.

POWER HANDLING

Electrically, the Bora stands apart from the norm. The two crossover frequencies are 800Hz and 4.4kHz, apparently using compound slopes. Note the unusually high treble crossover frequency: the co-axial midrange and treble driver changes the rules here and means the midrange is covered in its entirety by a single drive unit, with the tweeter effectively removed from the midband equation. This can be expected to have the effect of generating a more coherent, uniform sound, but may explain the observed coloration artefacts.

Low frequency bandwidth extends to around 50Hz, which is close to the port tuning frequency and power handling is a healthy 250 watts nominal. Sensitivity, at 90dB/watt/metre, is higher than usual for a system this size, it being a clear decibel or so louder than most otherwise comparable floorstanders (not just on paper, but also in practice), which is the flip side of the measures that Cabasse has taken to reduce bulk.



The single-point source construction of the mid and tweeter is a key factor in ensuring that the sound remains consistent on- and off-axis, both laterally and vertically, and that no matter the listening axis, it is virtually impossible to hear the join between the two drivers. The bass is not coincident with the mid and treble of, course, but because its output doesn't stray far into the mid band, which is where the ear's direction-finding buds are tickled, consistency is retained throughout the audio frequency band.

What the Bora offers that many others don't is a clear sense of musical flow and narrative and an organic way of dealing with musical information that makes it very easy to engage – not just with the notes, but with the expressive qualities that the performers bring to bear.

Here is a classic example of a loudspeaker that is more than the sum of its parts, where

musical communicativeness triumphs over strict technical accuracy. The compact packaging, of course, is a real boon. Nevertheless the Cabasse Bora doesn't deviate far from the straight and narrow, but it does offer superb, stable three-dimensional imaging, bold dynamics and a surprisingly potent bass. You will need to choose your amplifier with special care and ensure that there is plenty of room around the speaker so that it can breathe properly and help balance the mid and bass in the listening room. The Bora also rewards being used on solid stable stands, such as the Atacamas used for this test. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND

★★★★☆

PRO

Capable of immersive, engaging music-making, the Bora also offers high sensitivity, strong bass and powerful dynamics given the compact dimensions.

EASE OF DRIVE

★★★★☆

BUILD

★★★★☆

CON

Some colouration, especially in the treble and upper bass, needs care over partnering equipment and room set-up.

VALUE

★★★★☆

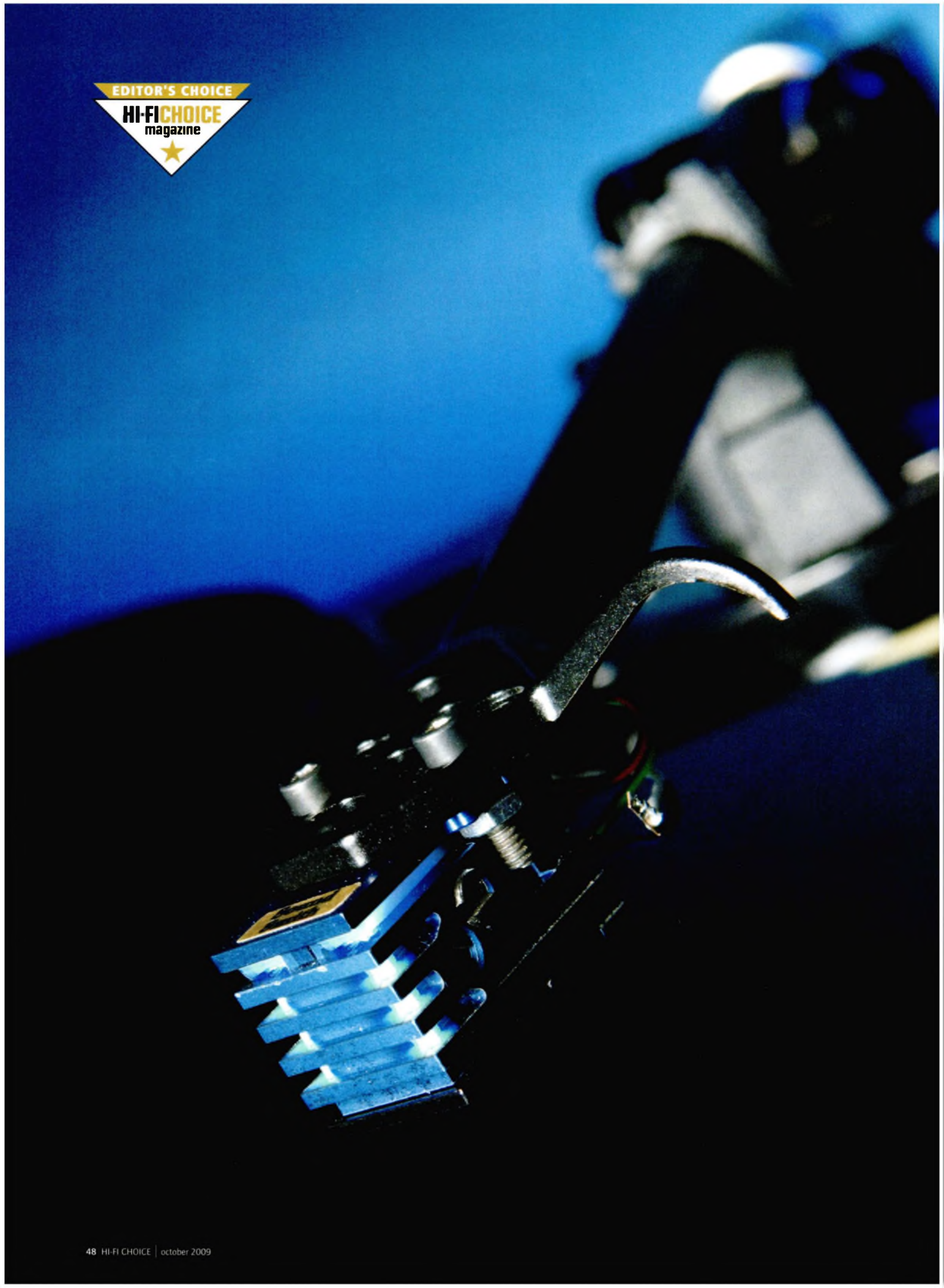
CONCLUSION

A real enthusiast's choice, which if looked after is a powerful and engaging choice, with unusually stable, consistent imagery, both on- and off-axis, as well as detail and expression.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

URL www.techradar.com/618354



Taking the strain

Revolutionary kit that rewrites the rules about vinyl playback

PRODUCT Soundsmith Strain Gauge

TYPE Cartridge and phono stage

PRICE £6,100

KEY FEATURES (Preamp) Size (WxHxD): 40x9x40cm

⊖ Weight: 10kg ⊖ (Power supply) Size (WxHxD):

15x7.5x20cm ⊖ Weight: 1.8kg ⊖ Interchangeable

stylus assemblies ⊖ Wide range of stylus options (inc

78s) ⊖ Cartridge has blue lights ⊖ Single-ended or

balanced line-level outputs

CONTACT ☎ 01494 858471 @ www.sound-smith.com

As dedicated audiophile and vinyl buffs for over three decades, we in the *HFC* office have enjoyed an expansive collection of vinyl using a succession of high-quality, low-output moving-coil phono cartridges and phono stages. However, we recently found a phono cartridge that uses an entirely different operating principle – and one that could well eclipse any previous kit. Ladies and gentlemen, we have pleasure in presenting the Soundsmith Strain Gauge...

For some 35 years, the Soundsmith company has specialised in servicing audio equipment, especially cartridge re-tipping, and more recently the re-manufacturing of Bang and Olufsen's highly regarded cartridges. Now Soundsmith is developing its own variations, including the Strain Gauge.

The Soundsmith Strain Gauge phono cartridge, as the name unequivocally points out, uses strain gauge elements to 'read' the vinyl groove – changing the rules completely. The magnetic principles that have hitherto been almost universal need no longer apply.

Strain gauge cartridges aren't new, however. The idea and the occasional example has

been around since the Euphonics Miniconic back in the 1960s. Sao Win reintroduced the idea in the 1970s, but neither of these had a very noticeable impact on the marketplace.

That might well be because the market simply wasn't ready. The amplifiers of the time had built-in phono stages specifically intended for various types of magnetic cartridges, complete with RIAA equalisation, because magnetic cartridges read groove velocity. However, a strain gauge cartridge is totally different. It requires an external power source to operate (it's not a transducer) and it uses what effectively amounts to a Wheatstone bridge to measure displacement rather than velocity.

“The idea of purchasing a phono cartridge with an accompanying box of electronics no longer seems strange.”

That serious amplification consigns phono stages to entirely separate units almost as a matter of course. The idea of purchasing a phono cartridge with an accompanying box of electronics no longer seems strange – perhaps the strain gauge cartridge's time has come at last.

In essence, a strain gauge uses semi-conductor elements that change their resistance when subjected to deflection by a force. By measuring this change in resistance, the cartridge 'measures' the motion of the stylus in the groove. It does this by means of a special pre-amplifier that feeds an

electrical current into the cartridge, then measuring what comes out. This explains the distinctive little blue lights that shine from the front of the cartridge

Apart from needing that separate specialist preamp unit and its substantial outboard power supply, the Strain Gauge looks and behaves like most normal cartridges. It doesn't need any more than the four wires normally fitted to any tonearm, which is very convenient. However, it does have a couple of extra features that are not normally found on high-end cartridges.

The first extra is the presence of two stiff little screws that adjust cartridge azimuth and VTA. The second is a detachable stylus

assembly, held in place by powerful magnets and useful for those interested in vintage 78s. No fewer than six interchangeable stylus assemblies are available and all are relatively inexpensive by high-end cartridge standards. Even the most costly SGS-6, with ruby cantilever and nude line-contact stylus, costs less than £500.

However, the cheapest complete Strain Gauge package, including the cartridge, the essential pre-amplifier unit and its outboard power supply, starts at a much more substantial £6,100, while the full feature top model doubles that to £12,200. ▶



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shown: full sonus faber product range available

❑ All the preamplifiers have the same rather nostalgic casework, with hardwood trim, routed grooves and bright multi-coloured lighting. Even the basic SG-400 version reviewed here has an additional stereo analogue input, a by-passable volume control and comprehensive defeatable muting features. More costly models add part and full remote control, a much more comprehensive range of preamp inputs, plus dynamic displays of downforce, optimum bias compensation, and disc warps and record eccentricity indicators. The electrical output has a fixed high pass 'rumble' filter below 12Hz.

Although it's possible to connect the Strain Gauge as a preamp, connected directly to a power amplifier, using its own volume control and feeding other sources via its analogue inputs, the sound in our system was preferred when it was simply used as a fixed output single-ended line level source, feeding Naim NAC552/NAP500 amplification. Balanced outputs are also available.

The SG-400 arrived fitted with the SGS-6 'optimised contour' stylus assembly. Whatever stylus used, the Strain Gauge cartridge seems to have a very low moving mass and very little internal damping. These are both probably good things, as damping seems to introduce subjective time-smear.

Aided by the sensibly square shape, fitting and aligning the cartridge in our Rega RB1000 tonearm was easily, quickly and successfully accomplished, helped by very detailed instructions. Incidentally, the RB1000 is mounted on a hybrid Linn/Rega turntable.

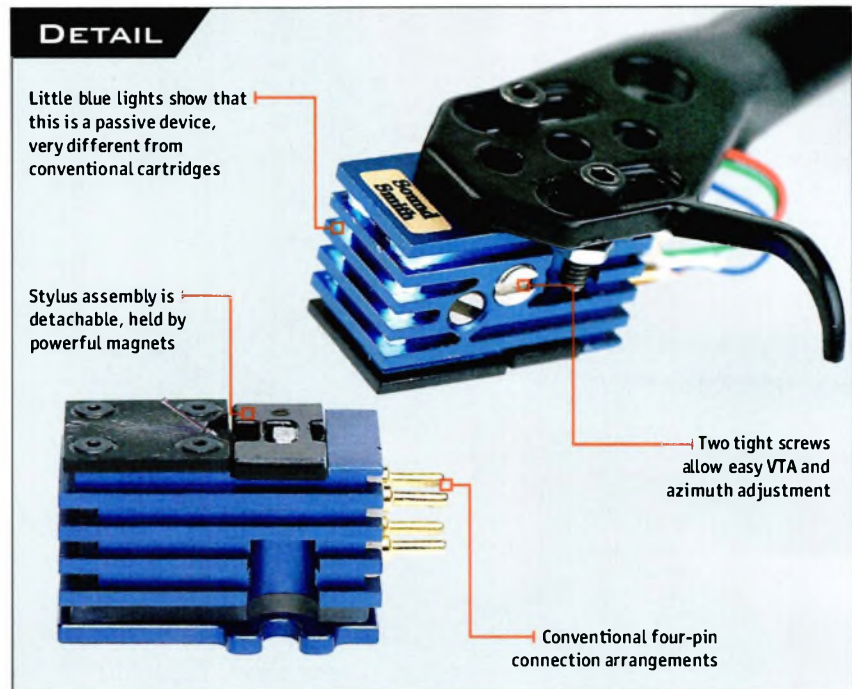
FEATURE-HEAVY

Phono or pickup cartridges rarely incorporate anything much in the way of features and facilities, but this Strain Gauge model is very much the exception.

In fact, it's available in a large number of variations, in both styli and the mandatory SG preamp unit, while the cartridge itself is fitted with stiff bolts that enable azimuth and vertical tracking angle (VTA) to be easily adjusted, particularly useful with fixed headshell tonearms.

The styli range from a bonded Shiabata on an aluminium cantilever to an 'optimised' line contact with ruby cantilever and includes examples for older discs, including 78s. These stylus assemblies are held tightly in place, magnetically, and are also relatively inexpensive.

That's not true of the seven versions of the SG preamp, however, which can double the price of the package. Extra features include remote control over volume and four line inputs and dynamic read-outs of downforce, force balance per groove wall and record eccentricity.



Measurements at 1.8g downforce gave very positive results, showing an essentially smooth and flat response, only disturbed by a slight rise at high frequencies above 10kHz, with a modest peak of about +2dB at 15kHz. Channel balance was close; stereo separation was wide; and the LF resonance in a 14g effective mass tonearm occurred around 12Hz.

SOUND QUALITY

We could describe the sound of this cartridge with a number of different adjectives – and nearly all of them highly complimentary. In a very real sense, it seems to combine the best qualities of both vinyl and CD, with the sweetness and detail of the former, alongside the smooth, clean clarity of the latter.

Alongside an impressive freedom from time-smear, smoothness and overall neutrality are two of the Strain Gauge's more striking characteristics. In this respect, it makes most conventional cartridges sound relatively coloured and untidy. Surface noise on ageing, well-played discs is still audible, but rarely intrusive and doesn't seem to get in the way of the music.

Maybe it's just a little too smooth and dynamic expression a little constrained, but background noise is very low indeed, so the actual dynamic range is wide. Since installing the Strain Gauge, we've also found it much

easier to comprehend previously obscure lyrics, especially from artists like Tom Waits and Bob Dylan.

Stereo imaging is first class, with superior stability, fine focus and precise positioning. Central image focus is particularly impressive and the stereo soundstage has fine depth perspectives. We encountered no tracking problems whatsoever in months of use, at a 1.8g downforce.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Strain Gauge takes no prisoners. Although many recordings sound wonderful, poor recording practices such as excessive compression are not disguised and their inadequacies are ruthlessly revealed.

It's also a shame that this cartridge is quite so expensive, but we'd argue that you can have few regrets about purchasing something that completely changes one's vinyl and hi-fi listening experience for the better. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Radical approach brings an exceptionally sweet and clean sound to vinyl replay, notable for its freedom from time-smear and unusually good vocal intelligibility.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Price is very high and dynamics could perhaps be more vigorous and exciting. Styling leaves something to be desired.
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION This revolutionary approach to vinyl replay delivers truly exceptional results, with a clean, sweet clarity. A wide range of feature options are available, the only disadvantage being the very high initial purchase price.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/618387	

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



MSB
Digital iLink

Transformer

MSB's iLink system will change the way you think about the iPod, forever

PRODUCT MSB iLink

TYPE Digital music server system

PRICE £1,900

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 12.5x9.5x7cm

Weight: 0.5kg Digital outputs: Toslink optical, RCA coax, XLR AES/EBU Jitter reduction RF operation

CONTACT ☎ 01424 434870 🌐 www.msbtech.com

Evidently, MSB Technology is an audio company of an altogether different stripe to those we usually encounter. Its MB200 power amplifiers have previously knocked our socks off and its MSB Platinum CD III and DAC III transport and converter also have a fearsome reputation as a killer pair of components – albeit one in a distinctly high-end price bracket.

So, imagine our surprise at last September's Heathrow show to discover that MSB Technology was demonstrating the aforementioned Platinum CD III and DAC III transport and converter not with the CD III transport, but with an iLink iPod dock. For a cutting-edge audio technology manufacturer, this seemed an unusual choice to say the least. Has the company lost the plot? Far from it – MSB may well be ushering the future.

Astonishingly, by the end of this review, we'll wager you'll put aside your preconceptions of the iPod as a kid's toy. Your high-end CD player may also be worried about receiving its P45...

MSB's argument is that by modifying an iPod so that it emits a digital output and carefully treating it, this ubiquitous personal audio device is capable of results that can equal a CD transport. Controversial stuff, especially as MSB makes such a transport itself. The company also considers the iPod to be the best audio server available today because it's inexpensive, superbly designed and – with the company's intervention – capable of high-quality sound. If it's more than competition for CD transports, it's trouble for music servers, too.

MSB's iLink modification, which is currently limited to fifth-generation iPod Classics only, changes the player itself, allowing it to output a proper S/PDIF digital signal, although the iPod continues to function in the normal way. Wadia's competing 170iTransport (HFC 321) can be used with a wide range of standard iPods because it extracts a USB output from

the player. While this works well – much better than using the iPod's onboard DAC, in fact – if you've ever compared the USB output of a laptop with a digital output from the same source, you'll know it isn't the last word in fidelity. This is partly why the iLink is so expensive for a dock, because it isn't just that – it's a modified iPod Classic as well.

MSB says that the current generation of Classics are not suited to the application because it's so difficult to open them up without damage. Unfortunately, it doesn't

“In essence, if you have a decent system the iLink will equal or better your current source if used with a decent DAC...”

bode well for anyone wanting to replace a battery, but that's always been an iPod issue.

The iLink also has a feature that you don't see in other docks: it can transmit its signal via RF when you stick a small transmitter into the iPod. This allows the selection and playback of tracks from an armchair. Sound quality is improved if the player is placed in the dock, but it's still a useful feature.

MSB has recently added the option to upsample the iLink's digital output to 176.4kHz or four times CD's 44.1 sampling rate. This is an unusual feature in what is effectively a transport, because so few DACs accept a digital signal above 96kHz. MSB naturally offers this option on its Platinum DAC III, so the upsampling option on the iLink will clearly be of

interest to owners of this converter. The point is, however, that MSB continues to work on upgrades to the iLink as well as its other hardware. These upgrades can be retro-fitted, should you end up with a suitably equipped DAC in future.

SOUND QUALITY

The iLink was largely used with an MSB Platinum DAC III – an extremely revealing and inevitably expensive device – so we also used Russ Andrews' sadly discontinued DA-1. What

both converters revealed is that the iLink is as good a transport as most CD players. In fact, we only found one transport that clearly betters it – the (\$11,000) EMM Labs TSD1 CD/SACD transport, a very expensive ▶



[Review] MSB iLink digital music server system

❑ piece of kit that would be hanging its head in shame had the result come out any other way.

With decent CD players like Leema's Antila II, the difference between it and the iLink – with both going through the MSB DAC – is only apparent on very resolute equipment. If anything, the extra openness and depth resolve of the iLink trumps the greater drive and bass weight of the Antila II. Some will prefer the latter, but the iLink is the more revealing – just.

This and other comparisons were made by putting WAV files of CD tracks onto the converted iPod Classic, as this uncompressed file type gives the highest fidelity at the expense of using significantly more HD real estate than compressed formats.

Of those supported by the iPod, Apple Lossless is the best we've heard. Files of the same material on this and WAV are, to all intents and purposes, sonically identical, which is handy if you want to put more music onto the player. It's important to set up iTunes as per MSB's instructional video if the application is going to provide the requisite quality to make the iLink sing, but this is straightforward.

We did a bit of listening using the Russ Andrews DA-1 converter with a Cambridge 840C as a transport. It's a comparison that makes the iLink sound refined and the disc player a little bit too lively and raw, but never short on energy. The iLink is also energetic, but adds less of its own character to proceedings, an approach that lets a lot more of the detail through and produces a three-dimensional soundstage of impressive solidity and depth.

We also used it as a benchmark when assessing the Wadia 170iTransport and it came out of that comparison rather well, even

TECH NO PRISONERS

As its name suggests, MSB Technology is first and foremost a tech company. It demonstrated the world's first Dolby Digital demodulator back when that format was called AC-3 and used with LaserDisc. It also built the first 24/96 DAC to be available to the mass market in its Link DAC. It licenses the iLink technology to Chord Electronics in the UK, who has incorporated it into the Indigo – a digital and analogue preamp/processor with an onboard iLink dock that can also extract the analogue output of unmodified iPods. The Indigo is significantly more expensive than the MSB iLink, but does include rather more features and facilities.

The company also lists OEM (original equipment manufacturer) components on its site. These include DAC modules, DSP digital filter and clock kits, as well as complete DAC boards that can be installed in a transport or computer server to produce a high quality analogue output.



considering the price disparity. In essence, if you have a decent system the iLink will equal or better your current source if used with a decent DAC, while the 170iTransport is unlikely to upset the pecking order.

Putting a standard 44.1 iLink up against one with the 176.4 upsampling upgrade results in a subtle advantage for the latter, with a slight improvement in focus and the removal of a digital haze around notes. It takes a bit of listening for, but it's clearly there – if you have the MSB DAC, the low cost of the upgrade is like a small price to pay. In fact, there was talk from distributor ABC Audio of offering this at no extra cost if taken at the time of purchase.

One surprising discovery that we made when using the 176.4 unit is that this sample rate can be transmitted via an RCA coax

interface. Since the days of DVD-A, we had been under the impression that coax cables and RCA phono plugs are limited to 96kHz. Now, according to MSB, the latest transmitters and receivers have pushed that figure up to an impressive 192kHz.

MSB might call iLink a 'digital music server', but it is more than that. Combined with a good-quality DAC, it is a source that can compete with any other in the digital field. Yes, it's expensive and you need a computer to get music onto the iPod, but you'll ultimately have a digital source of outstanding resolution. To think that we audiophiles dismissed the iPod as just another gadget! **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND ★★★★★	PRO Turns the humble iPod into a high-fidelity music server and gives you the option of using it from your armchair. Listening doesn't get much better.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	CON Only works with modified fifth-gen iPods. Only partial remote operation is possible. Could well make your CD player obsolete!
VALUE ★★★★★	
CONCLUSION MSB has taken the iPod to a level that no one suspected was possible. It has created a digital music server that has fabulous design and great sound when connected to a good-quality DAC. The only barrier to world domination is its price.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	
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March 2008 C1 - HI-FI CHOICE



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February 2007 C10 - HI-FI WORLD



"Timing and rhythm are exceptional"

"A directness of communication rarely seen in a floorstander"

July 2008 C2 - WHAT HI-FI



"Crisply detailed performers with Jaw dropping transient abilities"

"A beautiful package at the price"

September 2008 C20 - HI-FI WORLD



"The C2 just sounds so right straight from the off"

"The muscular neutrality mad the Kudos The overall star of the show"

March 2008 C1 - HI-FI CHOICE



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We've reviewed plenty of Wireworld cables over the years and generally had pretty good results with them. Naturally, we were interested when the company offered us samples of its latest, sixth-generation middling models.

Like most high-end cable vendors, Wireworld likes its three-letter abbreviations. Here, we are treated to both DNA and CDT – Composite Dielectric Technology. The former stands for Delineated Neutralizing Array. Nowhere in its literature does Wireworld entirely explain what this is, but it is evidently an attempt to minimise the effects of series inductance and parallel capacitance within the cable, both of which have the ability to modify the signal. The slightly laboured abbreviation also refers to the DNA helix which this resembles. The Oasis 6 employs a double helix of flat conductor arrays wound together.

CDT is more obvious – the cables use a mix of dielectric (insulation) materials to deliver a closer approach to ideal properties than one dielectric alone. This idea is far from new: cables using foamed plastic (a plastic and air composite) have been available for decades. In fact, such dielectric mixes are among the very few ways in which a cables designer can genuinely reduce both inductance and capacitance, fundamentally linked by the laws of physics for a given dielectric. But do they

really damage signals? Wireworld's suggestions that they do are just the usual unproven argument about minute changes in frequency response, which in any case can be negated by impedance matching. Rather than rehear that argument, let's have a listen...

SOUND QUALITY

Having hooked up a familiar system with the user-friendly interconnects and cumbersome speaker cables, we are rewarded with a rather mellow sound. Yet, despite that mellowness, there's a welcome 'bite' to any kind of sound that brings with it good impact and attack

“Despite the mellowness, there's also a welcome bite to any kind of sound, bringing good impact and attack with it.”

when needed. Bass is strong and clear and has excellent extension.

Naturally, we were curious to find out how these results held up with various kit (sources, amps and speakers) connected via the cables, and also when each cable was partnered with other makers' wires in other parts of the system. On average, we found the speaker cable to have the more pronounced signature and certainly its bass is a consistent feature across a range of amps and speakers, from all-valve systems to quite modest solid-state integrated amps. It's not magic and doesn't add to the extension of a small speaker, but it does ensure that low frequencies are delivered

very cleanly and with good definition, helping the bass to sound natural and full of life. We also very much enjoyed the cable's imaging, which seems particularly stable compared with a handful of products from other sources.

The interconnect has much less of an obvious effect on the bass, but its treble seems more restrained than many alternatives. This was particularly true with older source components with relatively high output impedance: we felt the sound here went beyond mellow and bordered on dull. With CD players, tuners and phono amps of recent vintage, though, it was very much more a case of 'not over-bright'

rather than in any sense dull and the generally good imaging was allowed to shine through unhindered. It does seem that the interconnect and speaker cable complement one another nicely and in every system we tried we were happy with their overall result. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT – INTERCONNECT	
SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION A slightly mellow cable which suits most systems, but can sound a little dull with older source components.
PRACTICALITY ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
URL www.techradar.com/617560	

VERDICT – SPEAKER CABLE	
SOUND ★★★★★	CONCLUSION Excellent bass with impact, tunefulness and extension all first-rate, plus very good imaging. Awkward to handle, though.
PRACTICALITY ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★
BUILD ★★★★★	
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GROUP TEST: JASON KENNEDY & LAB REPORTS: RICHARD BLACK

TURNTABLES

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ON TEST



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Michell Gyro SE
£1,565



Pro-Ject RPM 9.1
£1,400



Townshend Rock 7
£1,720



VPI Scout
£1,595

Since our last turntable *Ultimate Group Test* in HFC 309, the value of the pound has plummeted and the price of hi-fi kit manufactured abroad has shot up by 30 per cent, sometimes even more. Presented with those facts, one's knee-jerk reaction is to buy British, especially when it comes to analogue audio.

However, because of economies of scale, the two non-UK manufactured entries in our *Ultimate Group Test* look to represent tremendous value on the face of it. Pro-Ject's RPM 9.1 is a stylish middleweight with a carbon-fibre tonearm and freestanding motor.

VPI's Scout looks like a lot of turntable for the money, thanks to its generous proportions and sexy unipivot tonearm.

Faced with such chic competitors, it looks like our four contenders from the UK are going to have their work cut out to grab some of the glory. At least some have certain technological aces up their sleeves – hopefully enough to give them an advantage. Townshend's Rock 7, for example, has a cartridge damping trough and Funk's V2 comes equipped with a clever drive system. The final pairing, Michell and Avid, rely on good old-fashioned engineering – crucial when it comes to a vital mechanical process like tracing the vinyl groove.

For this *Ultimate Group Test*, we asked the suppliers to include a tone arm on each deck, but not a cartridge. Last time around, we also included a cartridge but, at this price point, nobody would want a turntable, arm and cartridge out of the box. So, by using the same cartridge on all, we feel that you will get a better idea of how the various options compare. Ortofon distributor Henley Design lent us a pair of Rondo Bronze moving coils

for the purpose. This fine cartridge has a higher tracking force than average at 2.3g, but it certainly worked well on the assembled decks.

All of the turntables here are belt drive designs that offer 33.3 and 45rpm operation, but only one of them – Funk – offers a switch to change speed: the others require that you flip the belt to another pulley.

Additionally, VTA (vertical tracking angle) adjustment is becoming more common – all but the Townshend offer this useful feature for adjusting the tonal balance of a cartridge. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Trichord Delphini MkII phono stage
- ⊕ Classe CP-700/CA-2200 pre/power amplifiers
- ⊕ Bowers and Wilkins 802D loudspeakers
- ⊕ Townshend DCT interconnect and speaker cables
- ⊕ Custom Design Icon equipment support
- ⊕ Townshend VSSS equipment support
- ⊕ Van den Hul Spindle Oil
- ⊕ Ortofon Rondo Bronze MC cartridge

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Phantom Limb: *Phantom Limb*
- ⊕ Steely Dan: *Aja*
- ⊕ Taj Mahal: *Recycling The Blues And Other Stuff*
- ⊕ Joni Mitchell: *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*
- ⊕ Mussorgsky: *Pictures At An Exhibition*

EARS USED

This sort of in-depth review would not be possible without the generous assistance of those who give up their time to take part in the blind listening in exchange for a cup of coffee and an almond finger. Our thanks are due to Paul Benge (ABC Audio), Keith Haddock (Haddock Communications) and Peter Skinner.



LISTENING TESTS

With the turntables kept out of sight, our listening panel heard each in turn using the same music in the same order. The operator then changed the cartridges over and set up each turntable using the same alignment tools. We used a Polaris Plus alignment gauge, Shure downforce scales and Roksan's VTA gauge. As turntables are highly sensitive to support, each turntable was auditioned on a Custom Design Icon equipment support, equipped with a damped aluminium top shelf to lower resonance. After the blind tests, we used the spring-suspended Townshend VSSS stand. Each turntable was also assessed individually with a wide variety of material to fully assess its potential.

LAB TESTS

Various tests were carried out to check for accurate and constant speed, extraneous vibration from the motor, bearing and surroundings, damping of resonances within the disc and in the arm and other parameters, such as arm friction. Test equipment used for this included a specially cut test lacquer and a separate custom-made test disc, commercial test discs, a rumble coupler and a high-resolution digital recorder, the A/D converter of which (linked to a PC running various bits of analysis software) made interpreting measurements a simpler and quicker process than it used to be – digital has its uses!

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

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

1) Speed accuracy: Simply a question of how close to the nominal 33.3rpm the platter goes round (for turntables with synchronous motors which follow mains frequency, itself subject to variations of up to 0.25%, this is corrected to mains at exactly 50Hz).

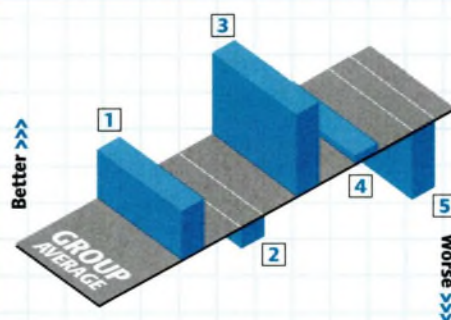
2) Wow and flutter: A measure of how much the platter speed 'wobbles' about the nominal 33.3rpm. Wow is low-rate variations and flutter high-rate. This causes pitch instability in the sound which is distressing to hear, so good measurements are important here.

3) Rumble: The background low-frequency noise the deck itself produces due to bearing friction and motor noise.

4) Arm resonance: The arm must hold the cartridge still against the reaction of the stylus in the groove. Mechanical resonances in the arm degrade this. They are measured by applying a known impulse to the arm and measuring cartridge output.

5) Vibration breakthrough: The degree to which vibration from the floor gets through to the disc and stylus, via the turntable's feet and suspension.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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AVID DIVA II

The lovely clamp steals the show, but audio lacks dynamics

The Diva II is the most affordable turntable in the Avid range and yet it shares the aesthetic and many of the key elements of the more expensive models. Unlike those, however, it is not a spring suspended design: instead, its three feet contain a 'triple elastomer layer system' using a Sorbothane isolating/damping compound. The mounting of the chassis to these three pods is certainly compliant, but it's a pretty stiff support system and there's certainly no danger of bounce.

The core of the turntable is an aluminium casting that sits on the three feet and supports the turntable bearing and the armboard. You can see this component on all the Avid designs, but usually it sits in a sprung suspension. The main bearing has tungsten carbide/sapphire at its thrust point and does not require any lubrication as it uses oil-impregnated phosphor bronze bushes.

The brass bearing cap comes right through the centre of the platter, where its coarsely threaded spindle accepts a very chunky SME-style screw-on clamp. The coarse thread does make for quick clamping, but it's easy to put the thing on at the wrong angle if you're in a hurry: a little patience is still required, but it is a lovely clamp. The platter itself is made from MDF and topped with cork in the style of other Avid designs.

The motor is a separate unit in a heavy steel housing that sits underneath the platter and transmits drive via a round belt to a steel sub-platter. The motor is switched on and off by a separate power supply in a well-finished case. Speed change is not achieved here: this is achieved in the old-fashioned way with an alternative drive pulley.

The Jelco arm is supplied by Avid, as is the cast mounting plate that it sits on. This is a simple Japanese design with VTA adjustment, sprung anti-skate and dynamic downforce. The arm cable is a plug-in type with an SME connector and can be upgraded if required.

SOUND QUALITY

Alongside the Townshend entry, the Diva II is one of the most neutral sounding turntables in the group. It has a relatively dry balance that is closer to CD – a quality that will not necessarily endear it to vinyl fiends.

That said, it's a vibrant and pacy deck that's slightly lean through the upper bass and has reasonable, if not totally enthralling, timing. It's also appealingly open, a quality that combines well with strong bass, but imaging could be stronger.

Surface noise is kept well at bay, helpful with even slightly worn LPs. String tone is better than average and at least one panellist thought he heard a resemblance to its first presentation several hours earlier.

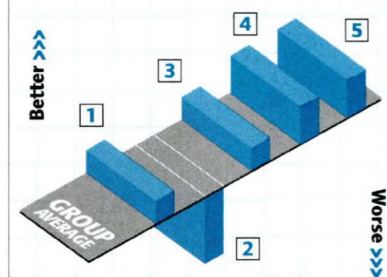
We were a little surprised that, despite a good showing, the Diva II didn't seem to perform as well as its predecessor, the original Diva, did back in 2003. That model was rather different, however, and had an SME Series 309 tonearm onboard. It's possible that the Jelco tonearm, while nicely built, does not have the integrity of the Rega RB300/301 found on half the turntables in this test in one form or another.

Putting the deck on our Townshend VSSS stand clearly helped, increasing soundstage scale and adding bass weight – but not enough to bring out genuine star quality in the context of a very strong group. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

Relatively free of obvious resonance, this turntable shows quite good damping of both the disc and the arm tube. Despite its essentially non-suspended design, it is fairly insensitive to external vibration and what does come through is basically a dull thud – high frequencies are well attenuated by the acoustically dead chassis. Motor noise is low, while speed accuracy of our sample was very good. The only real weakness is wow and flutter, something of a surprise as the drive system appears to be well-made and the belt is visually stable as it runs. Nevertheless, there is clearly audible speed variation, with a cycle time that suggests the culprit may be the belt. This could easily explain the lack of dynamics noted by the listening panel.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Speed accuracy >> +10%
- 2] Wow and flutter >> -40%
- 3] Rumble >> +10%
- 4] Vibration breakthrough >> +20%
- 5] Arm resonance >> +20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Actual
Speed accuracy	-0.25%
Wow and flutter	0.07%
Rumble	-75dB

VERDICT

SOUND

★★★★☆

FEATURES

★★★★★

BUILD

★★★★★

VALUE

★★★★☆

A good-looking design, but possessing a sound that, while quite neutral with good bass, lacks the dynamics to put it among the contenders in this price range. An alternative arm might make a difference.

HIFI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
★★★★★

DEFINITIVE AUDIO



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



1. CEC TLOX Belt Drive CD Transport
2. Living Voice OBX-RW Loudspeaker in Ebony
3. New Audio Frontiers 845 SE Integrated Amplifier
4. KSL Kondo Neiro Integrated Amplifier

5. SME 2012A Turntable with KSL Kondo iOJ Cartridge
6. New Audio Frontiers KT66 Legend Integrated Amplifier
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FUNK V2

This turntable may look light, but its performance is anything but

Since last year's turntable *Ultimate Group Test*, Funk has moved out of London to the South Coast and revised what is now the base model in its range. It has also come up with a good selection of new ideas and tweaks for its own and other makers' turntables, but that's par for the course.

The V2 is not that different to its predecessor: it still has a three-point belt drive by virtue of using two idler wheels along with the drive pulley. The idea is that it avoids pulling the bearing in one direction – as is the case with most belt drive designs – which should reduce friction.

What has changed for the V2 is that a higher torque motor has been selected and – out of necessity – a new PCB has been created to drive it. This has also led to a change in the platter: it now has greater mass, courtesy of a steel plate underneath the Achroplat platter. The expanded vinyl platter started off being extremely light on the original Funk, but has slowly gained weight over the three versions since its introduction – a factor which will have increased its inertia along with its potential for energy storage. According to Funk, the advantage of the air-bubbled Achroplat is that it can turn energy into heat with ease, so this should not be an issue.

The rest of the turntable is pretty simple. Everything fixes to a curvy piece of MDF and this rests on Sorbothane decoupled round feet. The motor also sits in a Sorbothane bed in an attempt to keep its vibrations away from the stylus/vinyl interface.

Power is supplied by a wall wart supply and speeds are selected with a curvy metal knob under the cartridge. It's the only turntable in this group to offer electronic speed selection.

The arm is Funk's re-working of the new Rega RB301. It involves quite a lot of work, but you end up with a post that slides in a collar to adjust VTA. Funk also adds an earth lead to the arm so that it can be used with low output cartridges without fear of interference.

SOUND QUALITY

Despite its insubstantial appearance, this Funk turns in a solid performance that blows away our visual preconceptions. It produces remarkably real and three-dimensional stereo images of voices and instruments with good recordings. The major misconception that this deck's low mass instils is that of lightweight bass, but the new motor and heavier platter have allowed it to delve deep into the low frequencies in a clean and resolute fashion.

What is immediately apparent on setting the needle on the record is that the timing is bang on the money, with a speed and nimbleness that is enthralling. This, combined with more than decent dynamics and a good piece of music, makes for an emotionally powerful listening experience.

With a killer groove like Steely Dan's *Peg*, the hi-hat drives the tempo and the guitar tone is beautiful, the whole ensemble playing together with a coherence that is rare even among turntables.

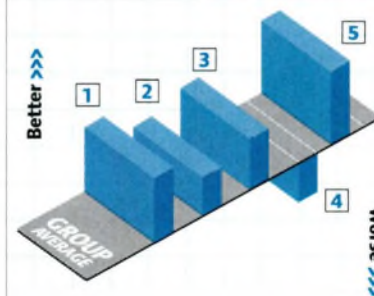
The V2 does, of course, improve with good isolation, something Funk is planning to launch this year. On our VSSS stand, the image improves still further and the output level seems to increase, which is a strange one.

Built on clever thinking rather than hardcore engineering, this Funk is not only as beguiling as those that preceded it, but also that little bit more substantial to boot. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

The design of this turntable is all about non-resonant materials and this seems to have borne fruit. Arm resonance is particularly low – this is only partly a function of the arm itself and just as much related to the structure the arm is attached to. Tapping various parts of the chassis confirms this, with only very mild resonances in evidence that are soon damped out. Vibration breakthrough is fairly high in level, inevitable given the very little suspension afforded by the design, but again it is mostly at very low frequencies and so shouldn't colour the sound too obtrusively. The 'vector drive' seems to do its job, delivering low wow and flutter, and motor and bearing noise are both kept to low levels. Speed accuracy of the unit was superb.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Speed accuracy >> +40%
- 2] Wow and flutter >> +20%
- 3] Rumble >> +30%
- 4] Vibration breakthrough >> -20%
- 5] Arm resonance >> +50%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Actual
Speed accuracy	0.02%
Wow and flutter	0.03%
Rumble	-78dB

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



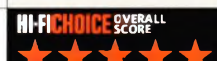
BUILD



VALUE



The V2 delivers everything that's great about vinyl in a stylish and well-designed package. It may not be the most resolute player for the price, but it's easily the most engaging and rhythmically coherent.



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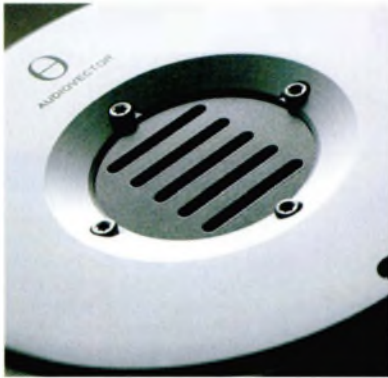
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MICHELL GYRO SE/RB250

A marriage of shot-putter-strength build quality and robust audio

The Gyrodek was the turntable that made Michell's reputation and the Gyro SE is a simplified version of that model. It doesn't have a base or a lid, but in essence it's the same turntable. On this occasion, Michell decided to supply its Isolation Base in order to demonstrate what this substantial slab of acrylic on aluminium cones can do for this impressively engineered turntable.

With its chrome-plated peripheral weights and circular subchassis, this is undeniably a distinctive turntable, especially in the black finish shown here. This colour option adds about £100 to the price, but the good looks more than justify the supplement.

Out of the box, the Gyro SE requires the longest build up of any of the decks here. It took us about 20 minutes, but you do get to appreciate the quality of engineering that goes into it along the way. For the mechanically minded, it's a straightforward operation. We particularly like the main bearing and the way it's designed to pump oil to the thrust point. The machined motor casing is also a luxury touch.

Being a spring-suspended design, it has a separate acrylic spider that sits underneath the whole caboodle and lifts it up on three turned feet. The subchassis then sits on three springs that can be adjusted when the arm and cartridge are installed. The springs are hidden underneath black cylinders that sit on the subchassis casting, strategically mass loaded to balance the weight of the arm – and you don't have to adjust the springs to achieve this offset.

Michell held off supplying its Techno Arm, but did send along a Rega RB300 (one of the remaining few) with the underslung Tecno

Weight (£70) and a VTA adjuster (£20), plus a finger lock-nut (£8) that makes setting VTA rather easier than getting a spanner onto a nut under the arm board.

SOUND QUALITY

We auditioned the Michell with and without the Isolation Base and discovered that this slab of spiked acrylic has a generally positive effect on the resulting sound. In particular, it allows a calmer and quieter presentation, with lower noise helping to produce better dynamics and scale. Results were better on the Townshend VSSS stand, which rather surprisingly improved the turntable's timing, albeit at a price close to the record player as a whole.

Timing is not generally a strongpoint of the Gyro SE: its true skills lie in presenting a wide soundstage populated with authentic sounding instruments and voices. Listeners were impressed by its ability to reveal hall ambience during the Mussorgsky. Imaging, while not short on scale, is a little weak when it comes to stereo solidity: you don't get the same degree of realism that we heard with the best in the group.

There is a slight loudness or forwardness to the balance which is less appealing, suggesting that this deck is sensitive to its supporting surface. Detail is well served and it does midband presence very nicely, but the bass, while well-defined, is relatively lean and doesn't plumb the depths to full effect.

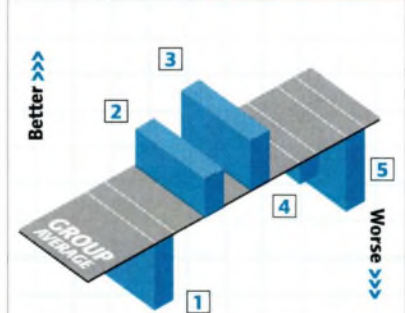
As the only suspended subchassis turntable in this group, we had expected the Michell to have the upper hand in many respects. So, it was a surprise to find it lagging behind the class leaders. That said, it serves up plenty of engineering for your money. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

The sonic signature of this deck is largely a function of the cast aluminium subchassis. Under almost any kind of provocation – even loud noises near the deck – adds a handful of long-duration resonances in the low midrange, colouring the sound. It is even set off by vibration from beneath the deck, undermining what should have been distinct benefits of the spring suspension. At other frequencies, this suspension works well: the acrylic base makes very little difference. Disc impulse results and even arm resonance tests again show the effects of the subchassis. Speed is a little less accurate than we'd like and wow is just at the level where it becomes audible, while rumble is at or below the measurement threshold.

HOW IT COMPARES



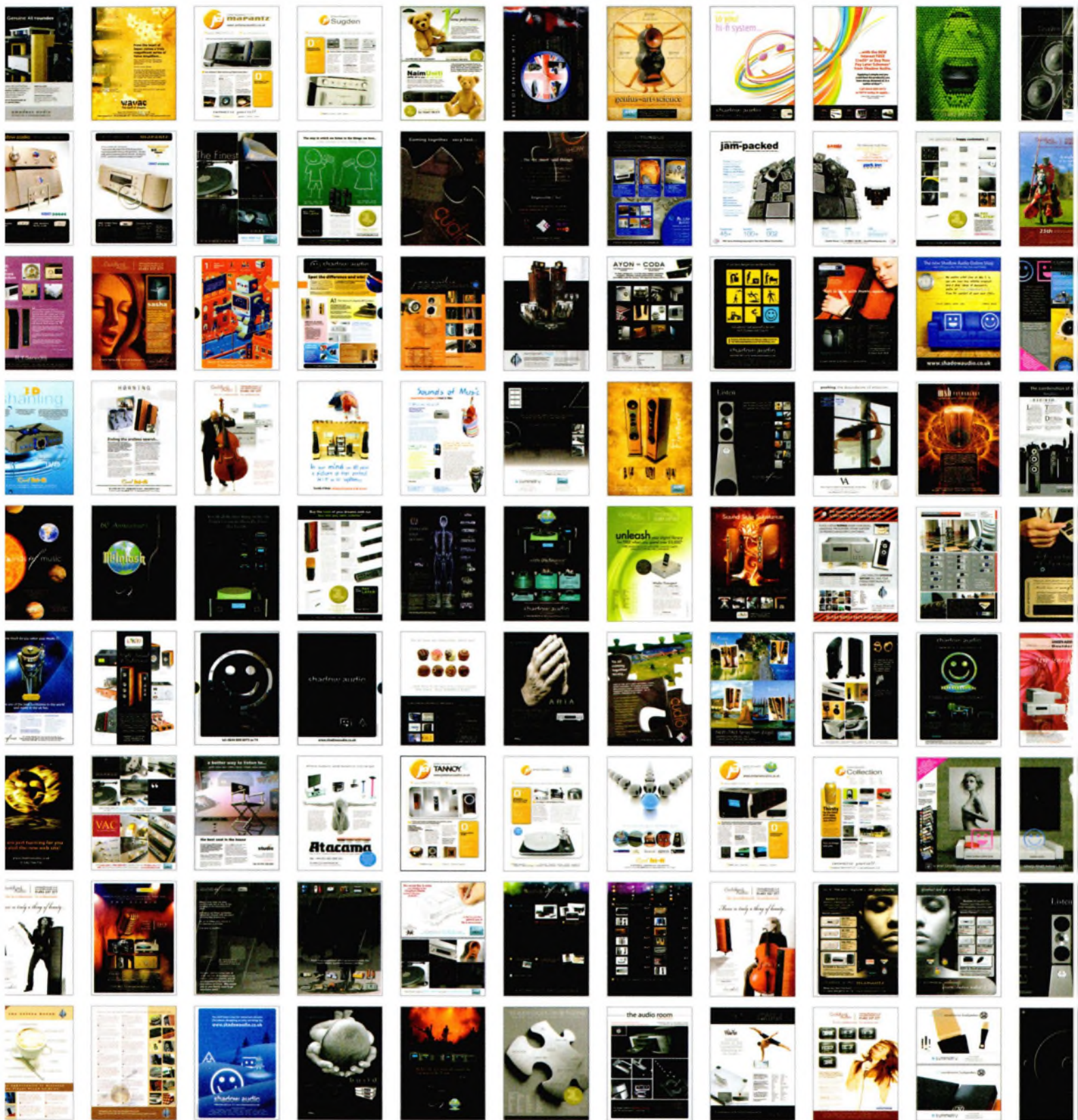
- 1] Speed accuracy >> -40%
- 2] Wow and flutter >> +20%
- 3] Rumble >> +30%
- 4] Vibration breakthrough >> -10%
- 5] Arm resonance >> -50%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Actual
Speed accuracy	-1%
Wow and flutter	0.05%
Rumble	-80dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	Build quality is, as ever with Michell turntables, exemplary and the sound is none too shoddy either.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	Good dynamics and image scale are enhanced by adding the very reasonable Isolation Base.
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★



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PRO-JECT RPM 9.1

A masterclass in turntable design – and highly listenable too

Chunky yet attractive, the RPM 9.1's simple form and freestanding motor lend it a purity of design that makes other turntables seem fussy.

The penultimate model in Pro-Ject's range of nine inch tonearm turntables, it's available in two variants: the gloss graphite version tested here and an acrylic plinth model which has an 'X' suffix. It's pitched at a level where distributor Henley Designs considers it likely that potential customers will have an idea of what cartridge they might like to use – and, therefore comes without a needle. However, if you choose an Ortofon cartridge at the time of purchase, there is a 25 per cent discount to be savoured.

There is no suspension, but the three feet are made from aluminium cones with a Sorbothane layer between foot and plinth, offering a decent degree of vibration damping similar to the VPI approach.

The plinth itself is a 38mm slab of MDF with a dark grey, gloss finish. It supports an inverted main bearing which has a ceramic thrust pad and the Pro-Ject 9cc carbon-fibre tonearm.

The platter is driven by a freestanding motor that sits on top of a heavyweight base. A spacer is supplied so that you know how far away to place the motor. This spacing affects the fine balance between transmitting enough energy to start the platter and minimising the amount of motor vibration that gets into it. The platter itself is also 38mm thick and comes with a heavy brass puck that simply sits atop the vinyl, making changing records a lot quicker than with threaded clamps.

The 9cc tonearm is a curious amalgam of old and new technologies, a beautiful woven carbon-fibre arm tube allied to a thread and

weight anti-skate system and a decoupled/flimsy counterweight. Our only gripe is that the finger lift is tiny and easy to drop when attempting to put the arm in its clip. One typical Pro-Ject bonus is that it's easy to upgrade the arm cable with an interconnect of your choice.

SOUND QUALITY

This Pro-Ject is a capable turntable and certainly one that appealed to several of our listeners. Admittedly, it was the final presentation of the day, but the consistency of comments suggests that performance is the most persuasive factor here.

As with previous designs from Pro-Ject, the RPM 9.1 is a smooth operator. Some felt that it might be a little bit too smooth and that it doesn't seem to commit as a result, but the more vinyl that was played, the less this seemed to be an issue. A key characteristic is a strong sense of drive that results in good timing and the sense of engagement with the music that this brings.

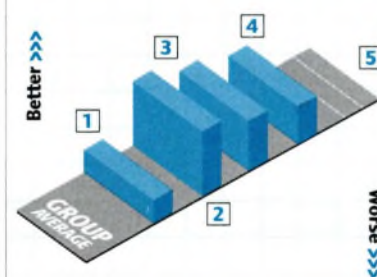
Imaging is not all that impressive by the standards achieved elsewhere, however. There is also insufficient image depth and little in the way of three-dimensionality. Another factor is that, while generally neutral, the turntable enhances certain instruments – like the electric guitar on Steely Dan's *Peg* – which might indicate a midrange bump in the response.

A smooth, yet engaging sound is what most people demand from their vinyl playback, and it's hard to argue with the Pro-Ject's compelling style. It's not the most dynamic or revealing turntable, but it does certainly reel you in and keep you listening. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

The one area where this deck clearly shines is speed stability, its wow and flutter figure being about as good as it gets. That said, the standalone motor housing needed some tweaking of position before the drive belt became properly stable, so such excellence is not guaranteed if setup is not carefully done. Arm resonance is fairly well-controlled, but there is a little ringing in evidence at a highish frequency in the midband – resonances even of quite short duration are more evident higher up. Disc impulse results are good, with little more than a brief click audible and no significant resonance showing up on the spectrum plot. Vibration breakthrough is better than most solid-chassis decks, but an isolating support would be useful.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Speed accuracy >> +10%
- 2] Wow and flutter >> +40%
- 3] Rumble >> +30%
- 4] Vibration breakthrough >> +20%
- 5] Arm resonance >> 0%

SPECIFICATIONS

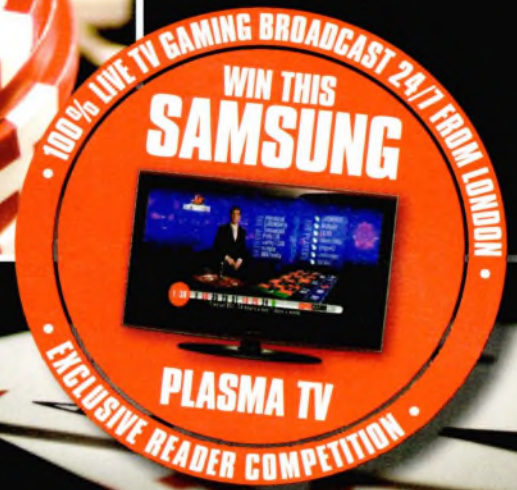
Measurement	Actual
Speed accuracy	+0.2%
Wow and flutter	0.02%
Rumble	-80dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★	The RPM 9.1 is a very agreeable turntable. Not top of this class, but highly listenable and well-timed, with a natural balance and smooth sound that guarantees long term analogue enjoyment.
FEATURES ★★★★★	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★★	
HI-FI CHOICE <small>OVERALL SCORE</small> ★★★★★	



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TOWNSHEND ROCK 7

Never mind the looks, it's the sonic personality that'll bowl you over

The Rock 7 first appeared in *HFC* 320, so needs little introduction to our regular readers. For the rest of you, this is the latest and most affordable in the Townshend turntable range.

Available in troughless form for just short of £1,000, the Rock 7 was produced in order to bring down the entry level of the species to an accessible point for more vinyl lovers. Whereas Townshend's top Rock V has a full chassis that hides all working parts, the Rock 7 lets it all hang out. It's a back to basics design that its maker hopes will bring the benefits of front end damping to a wider audience.

Fabricated from 6mm steel plate, it sits on three damped, spring feet which have no adjustment, with the outrigger on the opposite side of the platter to the armboard, there to balance the weight of the arm. The feet are simple yet extremely effective, with a large coil spring inside a rubber bellows with small air holes. This allows slow speed movement and also stops the thing from bouncing.

The 39mm thick white platter is made from high-density polyethylene and sits on a steel bearing in a brass journal. It is turned by a sub-platter that looks rather better than our original review sample and driven via a short round section belt by a freestanding motor.

The motor sits in a steel case suspended on Nylonite bands, the whole thing powered by an IEC lead that plugs in the back. Speed change is manual.

The damping trough combines with silicone fluid, a double outrigger for the tonearm and an extra counterweight (to offset the outrigger) to provide a sink for resonance produced by the stylus. The trough swings away from the platter when you want to

change records and a clamp is available as an optional extra. This Rock 7 was reviewed with a Rega RB300 arm, but the deck also accommodates the RB301 (£221).

SOUND QUALITY

This turntable impressed us the first time around with its solidity of imaging and high levels of detail: in this six-way *Ultimate Group Test* these qualities were at the front of the pack. Panellists noted the impressive soundstage depth and the way that instruments and voices have more body and depth of tone than usual.

It clearly has an integrity to it that is rare in turntables at this price point. This allows cymbals to sparkle and bass lines to be followed with ease, each note clearly defined and differentiated from the others. It also manages to reduce background noise to such a high degree that makes way for low-level detail to come in and flesh out the picture. You can easily hear how Steely Dan treated the guitar solo on *Peg* and the depth of reverb that Phantom Limb applied to the various elements of the song *Don't Say a Word*. It's surprisingly focused and detailed: the tuba on the Taj Mahal LP, for example, is well-defined, but there is a lack of midband warmth.

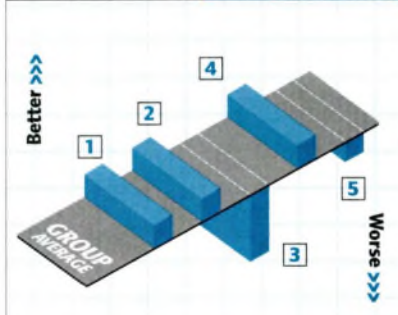
That last comment is telling, Rock turntables don't tend to have the same degree of vinyl warmth that you get with most others and some will miss it. But there will also be those who will find a whole lot more on pretty much every LP they spin. It's not the romantic sound that many associate with the format, but rather a more robust and resolute variation that has the consistency of digital sources without their less appealing characteristics. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

Although our measurement figures all relate to tests done with the damping trough in place, it's intriguing to compare results with and without. It certainly has an effect, though – most noticeably in damping very low-frequency vibrations in the arm/cartridge system. For instance, the arm impulse test without the trough shows clear ringing around 10Hz, as also occurs with all the other decks. Swing the trough into place and this almost completely disappears. Audio-band resonances are very slightly reduced in level, but there is still a significant signature from the chassis which shows up in both arm resonance and chassis tapping tests. Also, the damped suspension is only moderately effective in cutting out structure-borne vibration.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Speed accuracy >> +10%
- 2] Wow and flutter >> +10%
- 3] Rumble >> -40%
- 4] Vibration breakthrough >> +10%
- 5] Arm resonance >> -10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Actual
Speed accuracy	+0.2%
Wow and flutter	0.04%
Rumble	-68dB

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

While it may not be the prettiest turntable, this is by far and away the most revealing at the price. If you want to hear more of what's in the groove, there is no competition. Fear not – the silicone stays in the trough.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
★★★★★

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FLIP MINO HD LENOVO IDEAPAD S10E
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VPI SCOUT

An all-American turntable and impressive arm at a jolly good price

Of VPI's seven-strong range of turntables, the Scout is the New Jersey-based manufacturer's most affordable offering: at just under £1,600, it must be the least expensive US made turntable on the market. But, what it lacks in price, the Scout makes up for in size, being easily the widest turntable in the group, although it just about fits on a standard width equipment support.

Furnished with a solid plinth design with a separate freestanding motor block, the Scout's only means of keeping stand-bound resonance at bay are Sorbothane mountings above each of the conical feet. The latter are tipped with a ball, rather than a spike, that will be a lot kinder to supporting surfaces. The plinth is composed of MDF atop a steel plate, while the platter is a 34mm slab of acrylic that sits on an inverted bearing with a Teflon thrust pad and a case-hardened shaft.

The motor sits in a steel box that accepts a kettle lead, but cleverly hides this junction underneath the turntable. What you do see is a switch sticking out that turns it on and off. Drive is via a round section peripheral belt and speed change is a matter of flipping the belt onto the lower pulley for 45rpm.

The JMW9 tonearm is a unipivot design that's beautifully finished but a pain to set-up, thanks to the wobbly nature of the genre. It has a sharp tip that acts as the bearing point and a rather ineffectual arm clamp that does little to hold it in place. One unusual aspect is that the arm wire, which plugs into the terminal block at the rear, acts as the sole means of anti-skating. No interconnects are supplied with the turntable, so we used some of The Chord Company's Chameleon leads for the review. While relatively affordable at £90,

these leads are of significantly better quality than found on the other arms in this test.

SOUND QUALITY

The Scout is clearly a capable turntable. It might be initially disconcerting wielding its wobbly unipivot arm, but the results make for good listening. One listener even wondered if it might be the Rock 7.

In practice, it's not quite as revealing as that design, but it delivers the fluidity that is the quintessence of vinyl. It doesn't have the greatest imaging skills, but it can deliver impressive tonal shading in the context of an energetic and lively overall sound. Some listeners found it a little too forward, mentioning that ambience was lost or overshadowed by the more forthright instruments in a mix – the guitars on Joni Mitchell's *Overture-Cotton Avenue* having too much attack, for example.

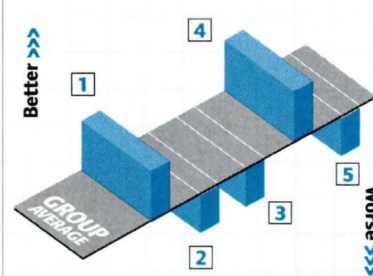
Stereo imaging, although lacking precision, is not short on scale and while timing does not appear to be a strongpoint, it is easily on a par with most of the competition. In fact, one listener considered it to be fast and together, but the overall consensus was more considered. The treble is a little smoothed off, but the bass is well-defined and it has a degree of composure that suggests highly engaging long-term listening.

The Scout does most things better than average and its good quality finish and build combine with this to make for an attractive package. The unipivot JMW9 is easily the most impressively built tonearm in this group and, for those who like using alternative cartridges, it offers the easiest means to swap the things over if you buy a second arm wand. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

This turntable has unusually poor rejection of external vibration and would benefit considerably from an isolating base. Indeed, testing it for breakthrough on a typical hi-fi table clearly showed that someone was listening to music next door! There is also quite a lot of resonance in evidence within the structure, which will colour both the deck's intrinsic sound and any structure-borne vibration that gets into it. The arm's main resonances are relatively high in frequency (around 1kHz) and only moderately well-damped. Speed stability is a little below par and the wow analysis seems to show variation once per revolution. The very high pivot point will, of course, increase apparent wow on warped discs.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Speed accuracy >> +30%
- 2] Wow and flutter >> -20%
- 3] Rumble >> -20%
- 4] Vibration breakthrough >> -30%
- 5] Arm resonance >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Actual
Speed accuracy	+0.8%
Wow and flutter	0.06%
Rumble	-72dB

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★☆	This is a lot of fancy record player for the money. The arm is particularly well-finished and the deck is likewise well put-together. The sound has a consistency and cohesion that ensures vinyl addiction.
FEATURES ★★★★☆	
BUILD ★★★★★	
VALUE ★★★★☆	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE ★★★★★	

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CONCLUSIONS

As the dust of this six-way skirmish settles, which turntables take the accolades?

The standard of turntables in this price range is extremely high and all of the assembled models warrant rack top space in the listening rooms of analogue audio aficionados.

Representing a higher price range than last year's *Ultimate Group Test*, the results are that much more impressive. While it isn't too difficult to select the most successful contenders in the group, the graduations thereafter are extremely fine. In reality, if used with a decent cartridge and set up in such a way as to give their best, all six turntables will bring vinyl

nirvana direct to your home. However, the testing process does allow us to hear the small, but potentially significant, differences between these designs.

The model that came out most bloodied in the skirmish turned out to be the Avid Diva II. This is surprising given the quality of its predecessor but, looking at both models, we discovered that costs have been cut in key areas like the platter. We also noticed that the tonearm is also different and, in performance, the result was an unusually high level of wow and flutter.

A nose in front are a duo of turntables that are within the apocryphal gnat's chuff of one another – the Pro-Ject RPM 9.1 and the VPI Scout. The Pro-Ject wins out when it comes to the all-important groove, and the VPI has a flow to it that probably comes from the freedom of the unipivot tonearm, itself easily the most sexy arm in the group.

Each have their pros and cons but both could well have walked away with coveted *HFC* badges in other circumstances.

But, today's winners are the three models that take a different

approach to the task of reading tiny undulations in a groove – the Funk V2 with its low mass multi-point belt drive; the Michell Gyro SE, which offers the best material value; and the Townshend Rock 7, with its damping trough and serious suspension.

The Townshend is the most revealing and has the widest bandwidth. On the other hand, the Michell has good dynamics and image scale, but the appropriately named Funk has a fleetness of foot and an ability to extract the soul of the music like no other. **HFC**

TRY THEM WITH THESE

AMPLIFIERS

LEEMA PULSE £1,195

A highly capable amplifier with surprising power reserves and a decent phono stage.

NAIM NAIT XS £1,250

Combine with phono stage and speakers and vinyl is still the choice of the gods.

LOUDSPEAKERS

GURU QM10

An unconventional standmount that loves vinyl and Naim amps.

PMC FB11 £1,850

Combine this speaker with the Leema amp, lie back and dig the vinyl groove.

HINTS AND TIPS

>> Place turntables as far away from loudspeakers as is practical. It also makes sense to use a wall shelf or isolating stand like the Townshend VSSS. Ensure support is perfectly level.

>> If replacing or providing cables from the arm, make sure they are shielded to

minimise hum. Don't forget the earth connection, either.

>> Take care to keep the platter clean so that dust isn't forced into the grooves by a clamp, for instance. Michell and Avid make dust covers, or you can use an old LP.

TURNTABLES AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Avid Diva II	Funk V2	Michell Gyro SE	Pro-Ject RPM 9.1	Townshend Rock 7	VPI Scout
PRICE	£1,480	£1,390	£1,565	£1,400	£1,720	£1,595
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
OVERALL	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
CONCLUSION	Neutral with good bass, but lacks the dynamics and timing to put it among the best.	Not the most resolute at the price, but easily the most engaging and rhythmically coherent.	Good dynamics and image scale that are enhanced by adding the Isolation Base.	Highly listenable and well-timed, it's got a natural balance and a smooth sound.	The most revealing at the price. If you want to hear more music, there's no competition here.	Relaxed, with an overall consistency and cohesion, this turntable ensures vinyl addiction.
KEY FEATURES						
SIZE	45x14x39cm	44x13.5x33cm	50x17x38cm	44x18x32.5cm	40x15x34cm	48x16x35.5cm
WEIGHT	9kg	4kg	16kg	12.5kg	14.5kg	12kg
SPEEDS	33/45	33/45	33/45	33/45	33/45	33/45
REPLACEABLE LEADS	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
MOTOR TYPE	AC synchronous	DC	DC	AC	Synchronous	AC synchronous
SWITCHABLE SPEED	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SPEED ACCURACY	-0.25% G	-0.02% E	-1% A	+0.2% G	+0.2% G	+0.8% A
WOW AND FLUTTER	0.07% A	0.03% G	0.05% G	0.02% E	0.04% G	0.06% G
RUMBLE	-75dB G	-78dB G	-80dB E	-80dB E	-68dB A	-72dB G
VIBRATION BREAK	+20%	-20%	-10%	+20%	+10%	-30%
ARM RESONANCE	+20%	+50%	-50%	0%	-10%	-20%

Round-up

Time for speaker supports to stand up and be counted

Small speakers never work at their best on the floor: they're out of one's 'earline' and floor reflections can do ghastly things to frequency response. Therefore, a stand is pretty much essential.

We wouldn't recommend cutting corners, however. Cheaper stands can resonate, wobble and generally come between you and the music. So, here are four, solid contenders, all at midrange prices.

Atacama HMS1

TYPE Loudspeaker stand

PRICE £170

CONTACT ☎ 01455 283251 @ www.atacama-audio.co.uk

The HMS1 is a new model from Atacama, itself one of the senior names in hi-fi support products. The nautical-sounding HMS stands for High Mass Stand and, while this stand isn't remarkably heavy on its own, it certainly becomes so when filled with Atacama's Atabites, little metal chips apparently designed expressly for the job of filling loudspeaker stands.

These Atabites certainly do a good job, making the pillars of this stand exceptionally dead, but they make up the weight to 25kg per stand and add quite markedly to the cost – £90-worth are needed for a pair of these stands.

The base and top plate are made of steel, the top being completely plain (21x14cm) while the base is neatly shaped to conceal the hardware underneath, including the threads for four spikes. Standard heights are 61 and 70cm.

This stand has been developed in conjunction with Proac – a manufacturer whose models are often on the hefty side – so it comes as little surprise to discover that our ATC alternative works well on the HMS1.

Sound is clear and detailed with some very nice imaging. We were a little surprised, however, to discover that bass is not always perfectly uncoloured – there can sometimes be a trace of coloration in the lower octaves, detectable by comparison with even more robust stands. That effect is less with smaller speakers, probably for the simple reason that they put out less bass energy in the first place. With such models, we found this stand a very good match.

In this case, the excellent precision of the lower midrange maximises the subjective bass and sound is very good all round. **HFC**

VERDICT

A solid and straightforward stand. Very stable thanks to its large base, which gives particularly good results with smaller speakers.



Custom Design RS203

TYPE Loudspeaker stand

PRICE £150

CONTACT ☎ 0191 262 4646 @ www.customdesign.co.uk

We've seen a few Custom Design stands before, but they have all used two or four pillars. Just recently, however, the company has added three-pillar versions – the RS303 is the ultimate in rigidity, with pillars so wide they practically meet in the middle – but the stand on test here, the RS203, seems a reasonable compromise between elegance and brute strength.

The top plate is a practical 19x17cm size and standard heights are 51 and 61cm. Custom sizes are available to order, and the stand is also offered in 'mercury' finish.

Construction is all steel, with the top being made of 'acoustic steel' – exceptionally non-resonant material.

The stand itself needs assembling, a simple enough procedure using large bolts and spikes.

We strongly recommend the inert filler (£30 extra), as it does an excellent job of damping the pillars.

The change to three pillars and – perhaps even more importantly – three spikes certainly aides stability. We also reckon it's slightly improved the focus of sound from speakers mounted on top. Bass is particularly solid and precise, with excellent timing, especially when the spikes are securely bedded into a wooden floor. Our ATC speakers, which are heavy as standmount models go, benefitted from this most markedly, but smaller, lighter speakers also showed the same effect.

Midrange is largely neutral, although we thought we detected a hint of coloration in the presence region, and treble is clean and without smear. **HFC**

VERDICT

A good all-rounder that can safely be recommended for any small speaker. Bass is its strongest suit, but higher frequencies are also clear.



BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Hi-Fi Racks *Podium T5*

TYPE Loudspeaker stand

PRICE £249

CONTACT ☎ 01572 756447 🌐 www.hifiracks.co.uk

We first encountered Hi-Fi Racks a few issues back (*HFC* 320) when we reviewed the Podium equipment rack. This is the matching stand, similarly crafted in solid oak (available in black finish if you still yearn for the 1990s), but with a concealed addition in the shape of a thick, steel plate in the base. This adds inertial mass and, of course, aids stability considerably, while also providing a firm foundation for the floor spikes.

The top plate is threaded for upwards-facing spikes. Although the company's website offers a few standard specifications, these are little more than a guide as almost any combination of top-plate size and height is available, with three or four legs. Fixing points for cable ties are attached to a rear leg. An isolation plinth is available, basically another base plate with metal spike cups on the top, and a pair was

supplied with our review stands: we listened mostly without them.

In truth, this isn't the most revealing stand we've put to the test, but we ended up liking it rather a lot. Admittedly, the sound lacks a little in detail compared with more engineering-based stands, but it has a very pleasing tonal character – not least because there's some gentle coloration that subtly enhances vocals.

Bass is extended, but slightly vague: its attack is not ballistic, but rhythm is still clear and easy to follow. Midrange and treble are very nicely balanced with each other. High treble sounds particularly sweet, making us wonder if even the best metal stands we've heard still add a trace of coloration that is lacking in wooden designs like these. **HFC**

VERDICT

An appealing stand visually, the T5 also works well under varied speakers. There is, however, a little congestion in the lower ranges.



Russ Andrews *Torlyte Stand*

TYPE Loudspeaker stand

PRICE £303

CONTACT ☎ 0845 345 1550 🌐 www.russandrews.com

Russ Andrews offers various Torlyte support components, all relying on this particular 'wonder material'. Torlyte is light, but rigid and also has very good self-damping, all of which makes it a good choice for any application where resonance is to be avoided. Here it is used for just the base of the stand, while the pillars are solid wood and the top plate is made of smartly veneered particle board.

The triangular shape also helps avoid resonance, while the large footprint of the base enhances stability. Various sizes and heights are available, with spikes supplied for the base and oak cone feet for the top (the latter are also available as an option for the base).

It has been some years since we tried any Torlyte under our speakers and it made for an

interesting contrast with the thoroughly different approaches used by the other stands in on test here. We tend to favour the metal and mass approach purely from the point of view of deep bass extension and clarity, but if you are more sensitive to higher frequencies, this stand has much going for it.

This stand's performance is chiefly admirable for the way in which it draws attention to the music and its message, rather than the technical niceties of performance – treble is clear and midrange is detailed.

Stereo-imaging is also very good, with one particular small speaker giving us image depth we hadn't previously thought it capable of. **HFC**

VERDICT

Not quite the perfect all-rounder, but a very good stand for those who value musical commitment and midrange precision.



Richard Black

Just as with any other hi-fi component or accessory, different models do a slightly different job and will serve different purposes. All these stands gave good results with the three speaker models we used for listening, but in different ways.

Easiest to recommend – because it's clearly the most different from the rest – is the Russ Andrews Torlyte stand, which presents very natural

and unforced music. The Hi-Fi Racks Podium is also very assured in midrange and treble, though its bass isn't quite as detailed as some may wish for.

The Atacama and Custom Design models are somewhat similar in approach and appearance, but differ slightly in sound, with Custom Design's offering just having the edge in the bass precision department.

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For more information, go to www.cyrusaudio.com

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How many inputs does the Cyrus 8 XP d have?

A: 11 B: 1 C: 11

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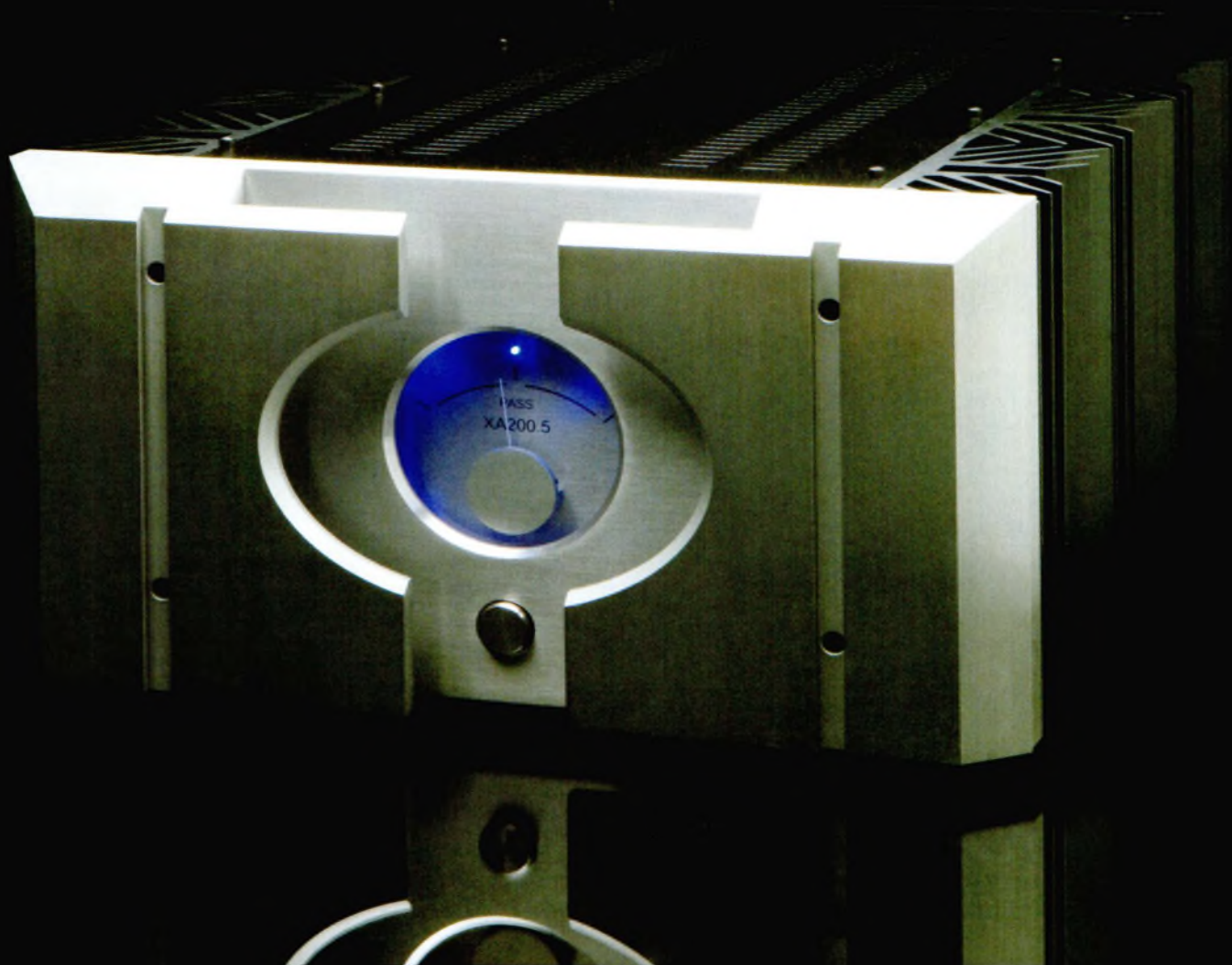
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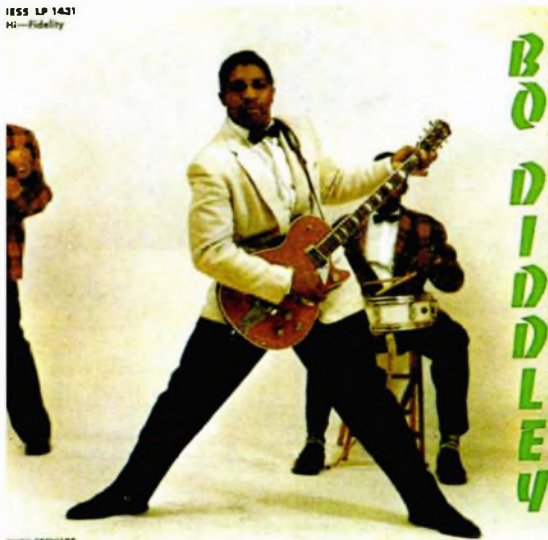


ChoiceCuts

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ISS LP 1431
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BUCK STEWART

BO DIDDLEY
Bo Diddley
Chess

"His great innovation was the Bo Diddley beat – that would be hit upon and used by a vast array of groups..."

Words by **Ian Harrison**

Classic Album

A legend in his own lifetime, Bo Diddley's music has been an influence on rock bands and music lovers everywhere

Made-up of singles cut from 1955 to 1958, the first Bo Diddley album boomed, shivered and throbbled with otherworldly sounds that only Ellas McDaniel's home-built oblong guitar could make. "The amplifiers you used back then weren't like these digital ones you got now," Bo told this writer in 2001. "You had to just do it from the gutbucket, from the grit, down to the earth. I taught myself how to do that."

Having electrified his instrument by cannibalising his mother's old radio set, here was the guitar as lightning rod, making songs like *Bring It To Jerome* and *Who Do You Love?* into fuzzy, super-rhythmic transports of delight.

As well as turning budding rock 'n' roll guitarists on to the power of electricity, volume and distortion, Bo had another shattering card to play. His great innovation was the Bo Diddley beat – a stuttering rhythm, something like a boogie-woogie rhumba – that would be hit upon and used by a vast array of groups, including Buddy Holly and The Crickets, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Captain Beefheart and The Magic Band, and later by The Smiths, The Jesus & Mary Chain, New York Dolls and The Clash. More than 50 years on, it still has the capacity to move listeners.

Its creator was born Otha Ellas Bates in 1928 in Mississippi. Bo moved to Chicago's South Side when he was six and, as a teenager, played violin in church. Soon though, he was seriously distracted by the music of Louis Jordan, Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker, the latter in particular for his weird, haunting guitar sounds. Having switched to guitar, Bo and friends, including maraca-shaker Jerome Green, took to street corner busking before graduating to famous blues nexus the 708 Club in 1951.

All roads led to Chess Records, the local label that had already released sides by Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. In March 1955, Bo made his debut with a song named after

himself, with the swaggering *I'm A Man* on the flipside. Having been picked up by rock 'n' roll DJ Alan Freed, it hit big on the US R'n'B charts, kickstarting a good year for Bo. Follow-up *Diddley Daddy* was also a success and offers of live work poured in, with Bo famously taking his own kitchen on the road. An appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, though, ended badly when he was famously banned for singing *Bo Diddley*, rather than Sullivan's choice, the coal-mining lament *Sixteen Tons*.

Mainstream success was not to be his, however, possibly due to the fact that these one-chord, blood-pumping songs were so idiosyncratic and raw. *Hey Bo Diddley* is a rewrite of *Old MacDonald*, concerning a farm with "women everywhere", while *Who Do You Love*, which featured the guitar of Jody Williams, is a voodoo rocker where Bo attempts to impress a woman called Arlene by telling her he wears "a cobra snake for a necktie" and doesn't mind dying. Co-written by Willie Dixon, *Pretty Thing* is a libidinous workout of beats, gob iron and guitar. But as this compilation of eight '55-'58 singles recorded at Chess's South Side studios shows, they were also built to last and had an influence far beyond their sales.

Though he enjoyed British success in 1963, his songs were better known when other people – Brit bluesers The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Pretty Things and The Yardbirds among them – played them. "I started something," Bo said back in 2001. "I have no idea what I did – but I did it."

For fifty years, Bo Diddley – a Rock 'N' Roll Hall Of Famer, Live Aid performer and Grammy winner – kept on playing the clubs. He passed on to the great rock 'n' roll revival show in the sky in June 2008. According to his family, one of his last acts was giving the thumbs up and saying the word 'wow'. The feeling's mutual, Bo. HFC



MIKE OLDFIELD

Tubular Bells

Mercury/Universal
www.tubularbells2009.com



Music: A simple cycle of piano notes augmented by glockenspiel, Farfisa organ and an E-droning guitar would ignite the music industry like nothing before it in 1973. Not only did Oldfield's debut birth the Virgin empire, it was also used in the movie *The Exorcist*, thus making the 19-year-old Oldfield one of the youngest and most successful musicians in history. Now there's a new Bahamian mix and five other editions to choose from, including this one, which comes with a bonus disc of career highlights.

Sound: Though much has been made of the new remastered stereo mix, it lacks the bite and sheer pluck of the original, especially when Tom Newman's volume console pushes everything skywards at four minutes 14 seconds! **MP**



WILCO

Wilco (the album)

NONESUCH
www.nonesuch.com



Music: Over a 15-year career, Wilco have abseiled across the face of popular music, one minute posing as alt-country figureheads and the next as America's experimental answer to Radiohead, with mercurially talented founder Jeff Tweedy as the only constant. On their seventh album, Tweedy finally seems to have settled comfortably into his own skin – or rather he's learned to wear his several skins simultaneously: the lovely *Solitaire* is classic alt-country, while tracks such as *Bull Black Nova* are more like Television or Sonic Youth.

SOUND: Guitarist Nels Cline and percussionist Glenn Kotche do their best to add abrasively avant-garde textures to some of the most melodic and accessible songs Tweedy has ever written. **NW**



TODD SNIDER

The Excitement Plan

Continental Song City
www.continental.nl



Music: With production from Don Was – of Dylan and Stones fame – singer songwriter Snider's follow-up to his *Peace Queer* album is his finest set yet, his energetic yet world weary vocals perfectly delivering lyrics with a realistic acoustic *Pulp Fiction* feel (it's not every modern country song that can blend in lines such as "shaking like a hooker on meths"). The penultimate number, *Money, Compliment, Publicity*, is a minor masterpiece from near skid row. It actually makes the excellent Seasick Steve look a bit, well, seasick.

Sound: Superbly recorded, the dynamics are wide and crisp while still sounding authentic. Harmonicas seem to drift in from somewhere nearby... **PS**



PUCCINI MADAMA BUTTERFLY

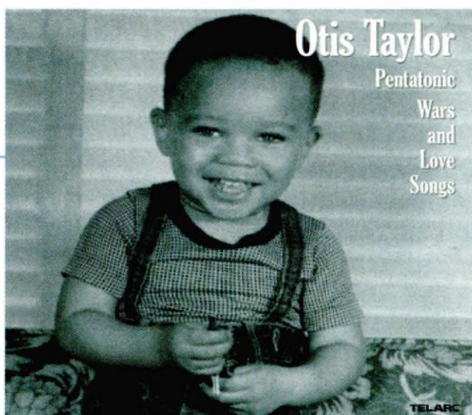
Orchestra dell' Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Antonio Pappano (cond)

EMI
www.emiclassics.com



Music: *Madama Butterfly* is one of the landmarks of Italian opera and this is arguably the most important recent version. The lead role is taken by the famous Romanian Angela Gheorghiu, whose dark toned, creamy voice makes the role her own. Her voice, which is technically a *spinto* soprano, means she is suitably lyrical, yet capable of portraying the drama of such a role.

Sound: The work is Italian, but the libretto is an American/Japanese tragedy set in Nagasaki. This excellent production manages to capture both western and oriental features of this richly idiomatic score. **AG**



OTIS TAYLOR

Pentatonic Wars And Love Songs
Telarc
www.telarc.com



Music: Taylor's music is often described as trance blues, but it's closer to country folk, albeit with elements of blues, jazz and rock. Much of his work has focused on injustice and the legacy of slavery, but here he tackles a set of love songs with a characteristic lack of sentiment. *I'm Not Mysterious* is a tale of puppy love between two eight-year-olds, crushed when their racial difference is made clear to them, while *Mama's Best Friend* tells the story of Taylor's gay mother.

Sound: Taylor's hypnotic acoustic and electric guitar lines and growling vocals are augmented by his daughter Cassie's whispered tones. The album is also enhanced by Gary Moore's lead guitar work in a full band set that's both passionate and intimate. **DO**



RODRIGO Y GABRIELA

11:11
Rubyworks
www.rubyworks.com



Music: In one of world music's more improbable success stories, this Mexican duo went platinum with their 2006 self-titled album of flamenco/Latin-tinged acoustic guitar instrumentals. The follow-up offers more of the same, only different. Last time they covered songs by Metallica and Led Zeppelin: here the songs are all their own, but their acoustic guitar riffs rock hard enough for Metallica now to consider covering R&G.

Sound: Whereas the last album was recorded 'live' in the studio, *11:11* is a more carefully-worked concoction, with additional instrumentation, including electric guitar and thrillingly dynamic contrasts between the soft/heavy passages. **NW**



COPLAND, BERNSTEIN & DANKWORTH

Emma Johnson (clarinet), John Lenehan (piano)
Naxos
www.naxos.com



Music: Most of the material from this clarinet recital, which includes Bernstein's *Clarinet Sonata*, Copland's *Clarinet Sonata* and *Nocturne*, as well as John Dankworth's *Suite for Emma* and *Picture Of Jeannie*, is jazz-tinged, though the works predominantly sound a little too rounded and lacking in the kind of subtlety of timing to really work convincingly as jazz.

Sound: If the works, and even the performances, could be described as lacklustre, the Naxos sound is, at least, even and serviceable, underling the lyrical nature of the scores rather than their dynamism. **AG**



THE PROCLAIMERS

Notes and Rhymes
Universal
www.universalmusic.com



Music: For many, Craig and Charlie Reid faded away after their late 1980s hits *Letter From America* and *500 Miles*. In fact, the twins have been producing consistently fine albums of Caledonian country soul ever since, and their eighth long player is fully on song. From the rockabilly-flavoured opening title track through the soaringly beautiful ballad *Love Can Move Mountains* and ferociously anti-war rant of *I Know*, it's heart on sleeve stuff, delivered with an infectious lack of irony.

Sound: The lads' full-blooded vocal harmonies and acoustic guitars are augmented by a full band and a big, open sound that'll work equally well in the car or on the listening couch **DO**

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BIG STAR

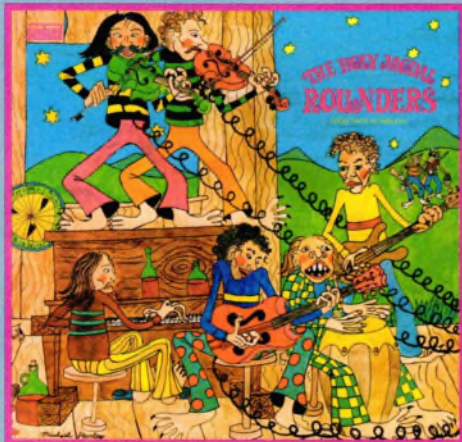
#1 Record

Ardent/Classic Records 200g
www.classicrecords.com



Music: Big Star were a shortlived American band of the early 1970s led by Alex Chilton, who became a cult phenomenon that went on to influence some of the best music of the 1980s. Their sound is a mix of country rock with jangly Byrds-style guitars alongside vocal harmonies that are reminiscent of Crosby, Stills & Nash.

Sound: Classic has given this its top-notch Clarity SV-P II treatment on translucent vinyl. It sounds crisp and detailed with surprisingly good imaging for the '72 vintage. Heavy laminated sleeve too. *JK*



THE HOLY MODAL ROUNDERS

Good Taste Is Timeless

Metromedia/Sundazed 180g
www.sundazed.com



Music: The Holy Modal Rounders were a group of acid-folkies with a penchant for old-timey tunes and twisted Americana. This 1971 album keeps its tongue firmly in its cheek for the most part and while tracks like *Boobs A Lot* show their age, the use of largely acoustic instruments, including banjo and fiddle, give them an air of authenticity.

Sound: This is a decent, though not outstanding, transcription that lets you hear what's going on even if dynamics are limited and decent imaging scarce. *JK*

HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

JERRY GRANELLI V16

Vancouver '08

SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)
www.songlines.com

Music: Jerry Granelli has been quietly making an impression on the jazz scene for over 40 years, and quietly is the word – he must be the most restrained drummer around. This SACD/DVD set is a studio recording with what's described as a '16 string organism', two guitars and a bass joining Jerry for 11 tracks of largely original material. V16 can sound like a more freeform King Crimson at times which is no bad thing, and while the occasional groove gets going on *The Truth* and *Unnamed*, their inclination is toward restrained spontaneity.

Sound: A very open sound with very low noise makes this a spacious and precise recording, there is no obvious use of effects or compression and the whole sounds remarkably natural. *JK*



MAHLER SYMPHONY N° 8

London Symphony Orch, Valery Gergiev (cond)

LSO Live

SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)
www.lso.co.uk

Music: A new recording of Mahler's final completed symphony is always a major event. Not because it was Mahler's finest score, but because its scale is out of proportion even with other Mahler symphonies. A vast orchestra, supported by full-blooded organ and vocal forces, makes this one of the most dramatic works in the repertoire. Not for nothing is it known as the 'Symphony of a Thousand' – especially when performed in a vast auditorium as St Paul's Cathedral.

Sound: This is a startling and thrilling performance. Although the fine detail tends to be swamped, there's a scale, depth and architectural sweep rarely heard on disc, especially in multichannel at high volume. *AG*



ALYN COSKER

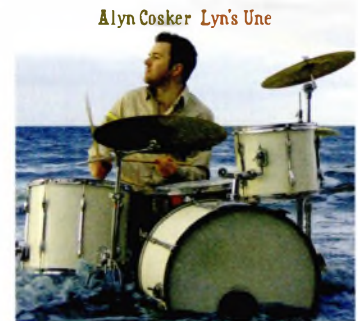
Lyn's Une

Linn Records

SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)
www.linnrecords.com

Music: Away from his day job as drummer with the Scottish National Orchestra, Alyn Cosker makes rhythmically inventive jazz fusion records like this one, which blends elements of bop, swing and rock. Not a drummer who makes a virtue of powerhouse histrionics, Cosker instead concentrates on the groove, coaxing his bandmates on with fills and inflections, hints and suggestions. He may not lead from the front, but you always know he's there, and there are moments of lyrical beauty here from bassist Ross Hamilton and soprano sax of Paul Towndrow.

Sound: This spacious and clean recording leaves plenty of room for dramatically dynamic leaps from the soloists and Coker's gently cajoling drums. *DO*



Alyn Cosker Lyn's Une

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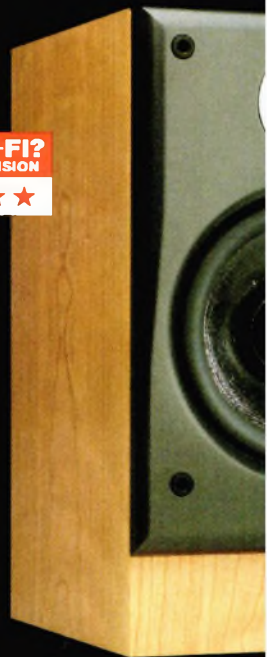
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What HiFi - ATC SCM11

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SOUND AND VISION



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What HiFi - ATC SCM40



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



SCM19

"Refined and resolute speaker that is hugely capable and immensely revealing for it's price... a more three-dimensional and substantial soundstage... music with wide dynamic range is revealed in all it's glory from the quietest to the loudest notes."

What HiFi - ATC SCM19

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: HiFiChoice@futurenet.com

Over the hill?

I can assure Malcolm Steward, whose somewhat curt and rude references to "old fogeys" and OAPs in his July column rather disturbed the normally placid nature of my nostrils, that it is far more likely to be the iPod generation who suffer from the affliction known as cloth ears!

For Malcolm's benefit, this old fogey's hi-fi system includes the following: Michell Gyro/Rega RB300/Dynavector DV-10XS turntable, arm and cartridge; Roksan Caspian CD player and FM tuner; Yamaha CDRHD/1500 hard disc/CD recorder; Musical Fidelity X-LP phono amp, X-Cans headphone amp and X-PSU power supply (the barrel-shaped ones); Roksan Caspian integrated amp and power amp bi-

"I listen to jazz and female vocalists. I also enjoy what some classical snobs might call 'chocolate box classics'..."

amping a superb pair of Living Voice Avatar loudspeakers. Does he really think that, owning that lot to play my favourite music on, I am going to waste it on Terry Wogan murdering *Little Drummer Boy*?

I listen to jazz and female vocalists. I also enjoy what some classical snobs might call 'chocolate box classics', i.e. Mozart, Handel, Grieg and Tchaikovsky, plus some folk music and some rock. I buy CDs and downloads from Linn Records and, moreover, I even own a copy of *Raising Sand* by Robert Plant and Alison Krauss that he mentioned. Oh yes – I also own (and even occasionally play) several Dire Straits albums on vinyl! Does that put me beyond the pale that Malcolm Steward seems to have erected around himself? Further, I can assure Malcolm that my collection does not include a single sample of Moira Anderson, Des O'Connor or Anne Zeigler and Webster Booth!

Could you please tell Malcolm that in my experience it tends to be the older generation – even we OAPs – who actually do know what good hi-fi and sound quality is, and that it is

the iPod generation who are lacking in sophistication, since most of them have probably never heard 'real' music on a decent hi-fi.

HFC Malcolm Steward replies: I certainly did not wish to offend older readers and I do not believe that becoming a fogey has anything to do with reaching certain age. Being a fogey is purely a state of mind: almost certainly one in which a) Terry Wogan and Aled Jones performing *Little Drummer Boy* and *Peace on Earth* sounds so appealing it makes you reach for your purse, and b) one in which you believe that carrying your change in a purse is a rather rakish move for the modern gentleman.

The shame of the hi-fi fanatic

Why oh why is everyone (at least among the hi-fi PC brigade) so scared of admitting they spend time and money on trying to better their systems to become more 'hi-fi'? I have seen comments in reviews such as, "Its highly



There's nothing ageist about Roksan's Caspian CD player, preamp and power amplifier

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Going up to 11

In a quest for quality and quantity I've worked my way up to a pair of Bryston 28B SST2 1,000-watt mono blocks which are too much for the tweeters on my Bowers and Wilkins 800Ds, so they had to go after only six months because it was obvious it was going to be a continuing problem (I had told the dealer that I wanted to go loud, but this is obviously subjective).

This is where, perhaps, a volume test on those suitable larger/top-end amps and speakers would have been helpful and may save some people from making expensive mistakes!

Jason Gattiker Somerset

HFC The definition of what constitutes high volume will obviously vary from person to person and be relative to the room around them. With this in mind, we can assure you that some of the reviewing team very definitely listen on the loud side! We are entirely in agreement that high volumes are nothing to be ashamed of – indeed, often something to be actively encouraged. During any review we undertake, it should be taken as read that the unit-source or loudspeaker will be tested at higher levels and the performance factored in to the final rating.

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LOUDSPEAKERS:
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musical without being too 'hi-fi sounding'." It's as if to use the words 'hi-fi sounding' is a cardinal sin.

Well not in my house matey. I want my music to sound enjoyable and hi-fi! If I didn't I would just play my old 45s on my jukebox – which is fun, but not what I strive for. I'm willing to pay for and work for music with dynamics, imagery, dazzling transients and stunning boom-less controlled bass. Anyone else out there willing to come out and say they like hi-fi to sound like hi-fi? If not, well I say stop spending your hard-earned money on kit then. Just get an iPod!

That's my thought on it. Does that mean nobody wants to know me anymore?

Ivor Jebson via email

HFC The comment that a equipment can be too 'hi-fi' in nature is not a reference to how enjoyable it is to listen to – often quite the opposite. The term has become used with reference to occasional pieces of equipment that, whilst stunning with beautifully recorded music, have a habit of seizing upon poorly recorded music and revealing all of its shortcomings. We are of the opinion that the best of the best lets the great recordings sing, while still flattering superb music that is less beautifully recorded. We are still delighted to talk to you all the same.

Shocking advice

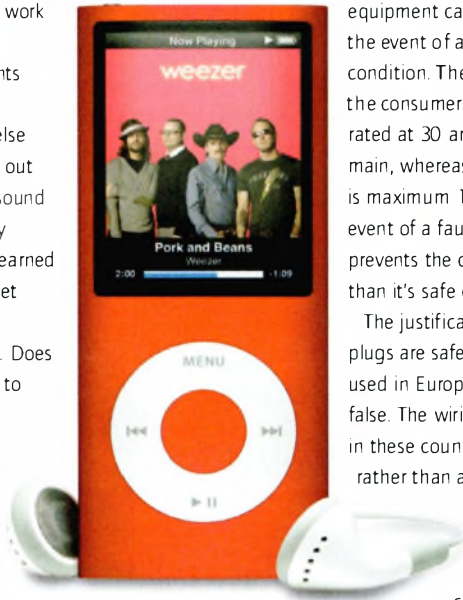
I am writing to you to express my concern over Paul Messenger's column 'Electric Avenue' in *Hi-Fi Choice* 322, where he discusses mains supplies and cables.

I understand that this is his personal opinion, however, the fact that it appears in print and that *HFC* has a wide readership, a large proportion of whom will be nontechnical, means that his comments are at best inappropriate and at worst downright dangerous. I was quite frankly appalled to read the way he dismisses UK electrical safety regulations as 'stupid' and 'draconian'.

His sweeping statements imply that avoiding fuses is a good thing and the implication is that the electrical safety legislation is over-zealous. This is simply not true.

Because of the ring main system used in the UK, these fuses are required to protect the

"I was quite frankly appalled to read the way he dismisses UK electrical safety regulations as 'stupid' and 'draconian'."



equipment cables themselves in the event of an over-current fault condition. The circuit breakers in the consumer unit are normally rated at 30 amps for the ring main, whereas the plug top fuse is maximum 13 amps. In the event of a fault, this fuse prevents the cable passing more than it's safe current limit.

The justification that un-fused plugs are safe because they are used in Europe and the US is false. The wiring systems used in these countries use a radial, rather than a ring configuration and, as such, each socket, or pair, has it's own circuit breaker at the

switchboard. These are normally rated at a lower current, generally 15 amps, meaning that a normal equipment cable will not see more than it's rated current. In this situation, there is no requirement for additional protection for the cable as the breaker offers an adequate level of over-current protection.

Whilst it may be possible to use nonstandard, un-fused, plugs safely under certain specific circumstances, Mr Messenger makes no such qualification and seems to be advocating their general use. This is utterly irresponsible. It is also probably illegal and may well invalidate your home insurance, or at least complicate any claims, regardless of whether they were the direct cause of a fire or injury.

As a journalist, Mr Messenger should be aware that people may misinterpret his statements, therefore, I would urge him to reconsider his comments regarding safety regulations and let's hope that no members of the public take his comments at face value and end up getting hurt or killed as a result.

I would also strongly recommend consulting a qualified electrician on any matters concerning electrical wiring and safety, rather than taking the word of a journalist.

PKG via email

HFC *Paul Messenger replies:* I thank PKG for his useful feedback to my column in *HFC* 322. Although his criticisms might seem rather severe,

I've also found his comments very useful and illuminating.

While I took good care not to suggest that any fuses should be removed or bypassed, it's also true to say that some of my comments were at least incautious and, therefore, possibly irresponsible. Perhaps, it's an age thing. I was brought up in an era where 'common sense' ruled and 'Health & Safety' hadn't yet been invented. The house in which I spent my 1950s childhood had a mixture of two, five and 15 amp round-pin earthed sockets and plugs, with nary a fuse between them.

Quite when the currently universal 13 amp square-pin came into use I don't know – probably sometime during my childhood. Despite studying secondary school science teaching to BEd level (not to mention Britain's 1970s and '80s DIY boom), PKG's letter gave me the first rational explanation of the change from un-fused to fused plugs that I've encountered in fifty years. Whether I should blame myself, the government or the education system for this oversight is perhaps a moot point.

While it's good to understand, albeit belatedly, why things are the way they are, that doesn't alter the fact that fuses do adversely affect sound quality. Superficially speaking, the normal UK practice of putting three different fuses in series between the consumer unit and the component (one prior to the spur, one in the plug and one in the component itself) might seem like unnecessary overkill, so I'm pleased to find that there are good reasons for doing so. Whether it's possible to have one's safety cake while also enjoying the sonic benefits of reducing the source impedance of the mains I do not know, but would certainly be interested in finding out. Anyone with any good ideas?

The Phonosophie fuse is ideal for hi-fi use





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PAUL MESSENGER

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



JIMMY HUGHES

With more than 40 years as an enthusiast under his belt, Jimmy is one of the country's best-known hi-fi experts. He's also *HFC's* "Mr Tweaker".



RICHARD BLACK

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



MALCOLM STEWARD

Former editor of *H-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 on the magazine as a freelance writer and hi-fi expert.

Gyrodec SE tweaks

I have a Michell Gyrodec SE with a fully modded OL RB250 and a Denon DL110. I'm also using an Achromat and Michell record clamp. The HR power supply upgrade I added recently also made a difference.

It's all going through a Musical Fidelity phono (the latest and cheapest one, but it sounds great – better than the X-LP I was using previously) into a Cyrus Pre vs2 (Cyrus powers bi-amping Bowers and Wilkins 805s loudspeakers).

So the only upgrade left to me is the Orbe platter, but I've read that it kills the immediacy of the music. Others have said, including Michell themselves (obviously), just go for it. I'd be interested in your opinion on this, please?

Cyrusstu via forum

HFC The Orbe platter is considered by many to be the last upgrade you ever need to do to a Gyrodec whilst others, as you say, find it darkens the tonal performance and robs the deck of many people's favourite feature – the rotating counterweights. We would actually consider auditioning different cartridges and phono stages ahead of a radical change like the Orbe platter.

The Denon and Musical Fidelity are good at their price points, but the Creek OBH-15 or Trichord Dino will give a massive step forward in performance, while a higher spec cartridge such as the Ortofon Rondo would further show what your existing deck and arm combination are capable of.

Upgraditus

From reading the help column of *Hi-Fi Choice* I believe you might be able to advise on the following. I am in the process of upgrading my system which consists of Linn LP12 (+Valhalla) with Linn Basik arm, Audiolab 8000A amp, Marantz CD52 MK II SE CD player and Monitor Audio BR5 loudspeakers. Other recent purchases, (not fitted yet) are Edwards MCI phono stage, Ittok LV II arm and a Sumiko Blue Point cartridge.

Would any of the following be worthwhile purchases to add significant improvements to the overall sound (budget restrictions considered), either singly or in combinations: MOSE/Hercules II power supply, Cetech sub-chassis, Origin Live DC motor upgrade?

I would also appreciate your comments on upgrading my CD player.

Mike Cantwell via email

HFC The Hercules power supply is very good, but it is ultimately an evolution of the Valhalla. The Origin Live DC motor is a considerable step forward over the Hercules but is considerably more expensive. An interesting and worthwhile option between these two price points is the Heed Orbit. The Cetech chassis does make a considerable difference, but some find they prefer the LP12 in its more original state, so see if you can get a demo before you buy.

With regards to your CD player, you should be able to see a worthwhile improvement from the NAD C545, reviewed in *HFC* 322. Alternatively, if you are happy with the Marantz sound, the CD6002 would also represent a reasonable step forward.

India calling

I reside in Mumbai and my system comprises a Cambridge Audio 540C CD player, Chord Electronics CPA3000 preamp and SPM1050

power amp, with an XLR interconnect (The Chord Company Anthem) between them, a pair of KEF XQ5 speakers with QED Genesis silver spiral bi-wire speaker cable. I also use a QED Qunex Silver Spiral lead as an interconnect between the CD player and the preamp.

I like both classical and jazz, but the CD player is now showing its age and I am looking to improve the set-up with the following options:

1. The Cambridge Audio 840C – I had a demo of it at my place and liked what I heard.
2. Marantz SA-11S2 – I have heard that its analogue (balanced) out is a problem.
3. Naim CD5x – it may be cheaper than the Marantz, but costs more in the Indian market
4. Denon DCD 2000AE – it doesn't have an XLR output.
5. Moon 3.3 – aftersales service and warranty is not possible in India.

I hope you can help me in choosing the right CD player for my system.

Dilip Deshmukh Mumbai, India.

HFC Ultimately any choice will need to compliment the detailed sound of the Chord Electronics' kit and we feel that the Marantz is likely to offer the best match from the list you present. It has a richness and slight tonal warmth that would be a very strong match with your existing equipment. It is also a peerless SACD player, which is useful in terms of your musical preferences where the format is still alive and well.

As you say, the SA-11S2 is not fully balanced, but this really isn't an issue when you sit and listen to it – indeed once the levels have been matched many people have often preferred the unbalanced connections. The Moon is also a fine choice, but we would be unwilling to recommend any product without full distributor support. ▶



Sourcy PC

I want to build a system that can get excellent performance from one input only – my computer. I've just bought the Beresford DAC and I will be using it with an Airport Express. I want to build a system that is elegant in theory, possibly at the expense of ugliness in components.

My main criterion is value: I want to get a bargain. I've been looking on eBay for vintage stuff like the Audiolab 8000A and Musical Fidelity A1, but in keeping with the computer source, I was thinking it might be an idea to move forward a little. All I need from the amplifier is one input and a volume control. This brings up two options which I don't know much about, but both are appealing in different ways.

Firstly, the T-Amp. I love the theory behind these, but it seems that at the budget end of the scale they don't give out much power, while the high-end ones are well out of my league.

Secondly, a power amp on its own. Is this viable at all? For example, can the Beresford do the pre-amp part adequately? It has a volume control and a fixed-line output.

Any suggestions? I'm still most likely to go the vintage route for the amp and save money for some nice speakers, but the idea of something a bit 'different' certainly appeals.

AP via email



HFC 'Classic' products have been the source of much interest of late and the prices for some amps – such as the ones you list above – have seen their values increasing considerably. It may be that an amp can be considered a 'bargain' if they no longer depreciate. Beyond the amps you mention, the Sugden A21 and Naim Nait series are simple, robust and sonically appealing.

Your modern options are a little more varied. The T amp can produce some remarkable results but for a little more outlay, there are some interesting options from Flying Mole who has an interesting range of small, single-input amps that would be excellent for the task. The other option would be to replace both amp and speakers with the very elegant AVI ADM9.1 active loudspeaker (pictured above) which would provide you with a perhaps the most elegant solution of the lot.



My space

Some years ago whilst living and working in Hong Kong, I was persuaded, like many others, to jump into an emerging home theatre market. After seeking some sound advice I eventually put the following together: Denon AVC-A1D receiver, Arcam CD 72 player, Sony DVP –S7700 DVD player and a combination of Bowers and Wilkins loudspeakers (front, rear and subwoofer). Aside from assorted cables and interconnects there's also a Samsung 52-inch full HD plasma.

All were purchased to accommodate a diverse taste in music and the gymnastics involved with a good action movie. All have performed admirably, however in advancing years (46), I'm now bored with them. What can I do to re-ignite my passion of listening through this set-up, as opposed to burning my CDs to the PC and the, perhaps, predictable use of an iPod?

My room size, incidentally, is approximately 600 square feet, with ten-foot-high ceilings.

I would appreciate knowing your views and recommendations towards possible enhancements, upgrades, etc. Budgets are in line with previous purchases or perhaps not – as technology has advanced a great deal in the years since I purchased the above. In addition to this, what devices are in the market for good digital reproduction of music stored on the iPod?

Steve via email

HFC That is truly an enormous room to fill! The Denon AV receiver is unable to decode the very latest HD formats natively, but is still a strong performer. From a hi-fi perspective, however, we feel the best way forward would be to bypass the AV receiver and attach a stereo integrated or pre-power to power the front two channels. Any amp with an AV bypass or direct in will perform this task admirably and you have a wide range of choices.

You don't specify a budget, but the Cambridge Audio 840E and 840W would allow for a power output sufficient to deal with your considerable room. An upgrade to the bigger Bowers and Wilkins 703 loudspeaker should allow for a room-filling stereo performance without the subwoofer. The Arcam is a capable CD player, but you might want to look at newer models – such as the excellent Arcam CD17 or CD37 (pictured left).

Stepping up

Many integrated amps and preamps – especially valve designs – are fitted with phono stages suitable for connection to moving magnet or other high output designs. This can be a problem for turntable users, as many of the cartridges that we rate very highly are moving coil designs with an output far too low to use successfully with a moving magnet phono stage.

Perhaps the simplest option is to ignore the in-built phono stage and buy a separate one that supports moving coil cartridges – after all we are big fans of some designs that cost as little as £100 – but this ignores the fact that many of the phono stages in valve amps especially are very good. A fine example of this being the Copland CTA405, which is fitted with an all-valve affair that earned considerable praise from us in HFC 305. What if you wanted to keep using that?

The answer is to use a step-up transformer between your turntable and moving magnet phono stage. The transformer is completely passive and works by increasing (stepping up) the voltage from the cartridge signal to a level that can be used by a moving magnet phono stage. Some of the more sophisticated models have options to better control the impedance that the cartridge presents to the phono stage and to vary the amount of gain the transformer produces.

Transformers are available from about £250, up to thousands for some of the more high-end units and will also require an additional interconnect to function. As they are a popular method of using moving coil cartridges in Japan, they are more common among Japanese brands than in European ones, with many of the Japanese manufacturers who produce moving coil cartridges also making a step-up transformer. Some British companies who specialise in valve products such as Audio Note and Pure Sound also produce models to accompany their product range.

The transformers themselves are sensitive to noise from other components in the system, so will need to be placed with some care. This noise will usually manifest itself as a hum through the turntable. Using a long interconnect to get the transformer clear of your other electronics will generally yield the best results. The flipside to this care and effort is that high-quality moving magnet stages can show their potential when partnered with some of our favourite moving coil designs.

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HI-FI COMPONENTS

Cyrus

Cyrus has introduced a new range of amplifiers. Featuring circuitry developed for its DAC XP, the **8XPd** and **PreXPd** include digital inputs - ideal for playing music stored on your computer - while the entry model, **6XP**, is based on the 8XP but without the digital option. These new models also include two-zone multiroom capability.



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



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Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and a level of reproduction far beyond that of budget separates systems. Arcam's FMJ range includes two CD players, three integrated amplifiers, monobloc and stereo power amplifiers plus a DAB/FM/AM tuner. A range of home cinema components is also available. Available in silver or black.

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Roksan KANDY K2

The K2 amplifier sounds more accurate, more delicate and even more powerful than its award-winning predecessor, the Kandy LIII. The matching CD player is an impressive performer and is the ideal partner.

The K2 speakers feature a custom designed woofer and ribbon tweeter. These are housed in solidly built, piano lacquered cabinets for outstanding performance.

Rotel 15 SERIES

Rotel's highly-regarded 15 Series moves from home cinema to hi-fi with a new CD player, integrated amplifier, two pre-amps and two power amplifiers. Brand new technology, passionate attention to detail and a stylish new look make Rotel's flagship line-up more appealing than ever.



Marantz SA/PM-KI PEARL

To celebrate 30 years with Marantz, its Brand Ambassador, Ken Ishiwata, launches the KI Pearl SACD player and integrated amplifier. These products, limited to just 500 units each, are already receiving glowing reviews and has been awarded Editor's Choice by Hi-Fi News magazine (09/2009).

TURNTABLES



Michell Gyro SE

Based entirely on the GyroDec, but without the costly acrylic plinth and dustcover, the Gyro SE brings the same qualities in a more affordable and compact package. A Gyro SE can always be converted into a GyroDec by purchasing a plinth and dustcover.

Pro-Ject Genie MKIII

This MKIII version includes a new motor, more stable motor base and a new tone arm with traditional anti-skate. Supplied with an OM3e Ortofon cartridge fitted, the Genie MKIII is available in Standard Black with White, Piano Black and Red finish options available at extra cost.



ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS

Arcam Solo Mini

Award-winning integrated CD, Radio and Amplifier with iPad control via optional Lead/iDock.



B&W Zepplin

This award-winning iPod docking station ticks all the boxes: it's beautiful, solid as a rock and sounds amazing!



HI-FI SPEAKERS



Dali Lektor

Dali complements its range with the Lektor 2. Only slightly larger than the award-winning Lektor 1, this new model represents outstanding value.



Monitor Audio Gold Signature

The GS10 re-writes the book on compact monitor performance, easily eclipsing the dazzling standard set by its predecessor, the GR10. It may be small, but the GS10 showcases the multiple talents that make the Gold Signature series so remarkable.

Spendor A SERIES

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HOME CINEMA SEPARATES

Yamaha

Yamaha's new 2009 range includes five new AV receivers, a home cinema soundbar, and two TV stands with built-in surround sound.



Denon

Denon has introduced the 10 series AV receivers. Models include AVR1610, AVR1910 and AVR2310.



Onkyo

Onkyo raises the bar once again in the competitive world of home cinema with its TX-SR607 which features Dolby ProLogic IIz support.



Sony STR-DA2400ES & BDP-S550

Highly-acclaimed AV receiver and Blu-ray disc player from Sony. [What Hi-Fi Group Test Winner - March 2009]



BLU-RAY

Panasonic DMP-BD60 & 80

These new players from Panasonic blend comprehensive features with top-drawer picture and sound quality.



Pioneer BDP-LX71

View film exactly as the filmmakers intended, in 1080p resolution, at 24 frames per second with the BDP-LX71.



Denon DVD-2500BT

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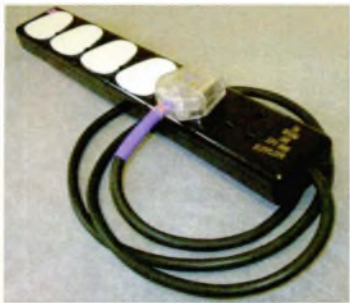


David Price Hi Fi World

"The Orbit....a brilliant sounding £65 Mains Cable ..over any other £100 + mains cable"

Janine Elliot HI FI News - The Missing Link Family of Cables.... -

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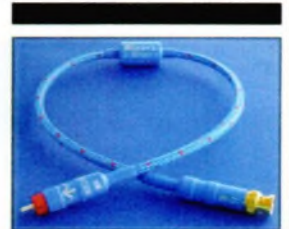
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HFC BUYER'S GUIDE

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**

Michell's TecnoDec (page 97) is six years old, but time has done nothing to alter our opinion of this hugely talented deck. A breeze to set up and use, it has a sonic ability that few competitors can match at the price.



	Source components	
96	CD PLAYERS	
97	TURNTABLES	
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	Amplifiers	
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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							ISSUE NUMBER
				WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	
UP TO £1,000											
	Arcam CD17	700	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever		●	●	●	●			315
	Cairn Tomado	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	●	●	●	●	●		323
	Marantz SA7003	600	Highly civilised sound may not be to all tastes, but there's plenty of detail to be heard		●	●	●	●		●	323
	Marantz SA8003	830	Classic Marantz sound in a classy and attractive package. Our favourite sub-£1,000 player	/456022	●	●	●	●			315
	Moon CD.5	999	Admirably energetic music-making from this very well-built player		●	●	●				323
	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
	Roksan Kandy K2	895	State-of-the-art technology and precision-engineering produces a fine CD performance	/483697	●	●	●		●		315
	Rotel RCD-1520	695	Lacks optical digital output, but feature-count is fine and sound quality is expressive and open	/608305	●	●	●		●		323
	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 CDP.3.1	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		●	●	●			323
	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 Antlia II	2,735	Great build and multiple DACs give this a fast, revealing and totally engaging sound	/612396		●	●		●		323
	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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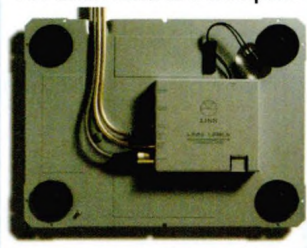
The new RADIKAL Motor Control Unit and URIKA Phono Stage is now available for audition - A must for any serious LP12 music lover.

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

The best record players you can buy

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHRADAR.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 Emotion	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 Calburn	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 Technodec	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 Rondo 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

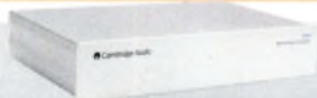
BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Denon DL-103R	290	Adds refinement to the basic DL-103. One of the best rock'n'roll cartridges around			●		285
	Dynavector DV-10X5	295	A high-output MC with superb dynamics and fine timing that's difficult 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.TECHRADAR.COM	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	ADJ GAIN	ADJ 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

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
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SAVE: £80
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TURNTABLE PRO-JECT GENIE III

- Latest incarnation of this brilliant, budget deck
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- Choice of finishes

WHAT HI-FI FIT
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SEPTEMBER 2009

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WHAT HI-FI SOUND & VISION

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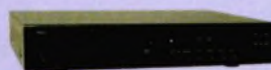
"SOLID, COHESIVE SOUND: SUPERB ORGANISATION, ARTICULATE BASS"
WHAT HI-FI SOUND & VISION
MAY 2009



CD PLAYER NAD C545BEE

RRP: £349.95
SAVE: £35
£314.95

"A BRILLIANT PLAYER FOR THE MONEY"
WHAT HI-FI SOUND & VISION



GADGETS/MULTIROOM

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ACCESSORIES

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- 3m £34.95 (RRP £64.95, Save £30)

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HEADPHONES GRADO SR60i

RRP: £99.95
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RRP: £49.95
SAVE: £25
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HI-FI SYSTEMS

MICRO HI-FI ONKYO CR525

- CD/MP3 player
- DAB/FM tuner
- 2 x 20W amplifier
- Black finish

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MICRO HI-FI DENON DM37DAB

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- Black or silver

RRP: £229.95
SAVE: £30
£199.95



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- Includes free cradle (worth £29)
- Also latest Sonos BU250 available now: £799.95

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

RADIO TUNERS

Surf the waves with these carefully selected tuners

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				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
	Pega Radio 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	SPECIFICATIONS								
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	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 DT770	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. **CIRCUM-AURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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
	Asin 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
	AudioAnalogue Puccini/Sezzanta	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
	Cyrus 8 XP d	1,500	High on features with a revealing upbeat sound and impressive five input onboard DAC	/608669	6				70	323
	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
	Leema Tucana I	3,425	Highly featured, well-built and not short of power, this is a highly resolute and organic amp	/612396	7				148	323
	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
	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, pacey 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
	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 AMP/ITER	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 BP16/ 2B SST ²	5,700	Preamp and power amp combo offers superb sound quality	/608649			6	opt		100	323
	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
	Classe 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
	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.



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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

CABLES

Cables really can make a difference, especially our top recommendations

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK	STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
	Audioquest 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	Complex, 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
	Nordost 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								
	Chord Co Indigo Plus	995	Costly, and high-class cable needs running in, but this is a finely detailed design overall	/608313	●	●		323
	Kimber DV-30	98	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models		●	●	E	317
	Merlin Scorpion Digital	130	Reduces distortion, making sound clear with unusually revealing low frequencies		●	●	E	317
	Supra AnCo	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 Co 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
	Nordost 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 Soistice 5 ²	25	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity		●	●		310

SPECS KEY **STRAINED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.



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Dino Phono Amplifier



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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS

Perhaps the most influential link in the chain

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				WWW.TECHPOD.COM	SIZE (W x D x CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (#/2)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
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		162,326,265		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 DB1i	895	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator with fine warmth and sweet treble		15,5,29,23,4		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		19,231,5,24,8		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 Radance 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	Cassy 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				SPECIFICATIONS							
BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHPOUR.COM	SIZE W,H,D (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE 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 instal 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	20,6,99,8,31,8		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	29,156,5,42,5		A	37		●	320
	PMC GB11	1,425	Good-looking floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing		15,5,87,23,4		A	30		●	306
	PMC FB11	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	/429594	20,100,30			20		●	322
	PMC OB11	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 Luto 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 Definition DC10T	5,000	Classy speaker has massive base, high sensitivity and precise image focus	/608326	34,112,5,32		A+	35		●	323
	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
	Usher Compass CP-6381	2,500	Lots of speaker for your money, with plenty of deep bass, unusual styling and massive build		35,127,65		A	20		●	270
	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)



Amphion Ion L £900
A great-looking loudspeaker that also boasts a superb mid/treble coherence and a super-sweet treble, some experimentation with positioning will reap rewards



Mission 796 £1,300
Mission's 796 is a great choice for audiophiles looking for a clean, open and detailed sound with classic Mission aesthetics and great build quality



Opera Seconda £1,995
Classy, sealed-box, two-and-a-half-way Italian floorstander with a very fine fit and finish and a superior voice band



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Pre Amplifiers		Price	Loudspeakers		Price	Turntables/ Arms/ Cartridges & Phonostages		Price	
Accoustic Arts Pre 1	£1,495	Krell FPB700cx (upgraded600)	£6,995	Aion Phalanx/Poseidon	£10,000	Audio Note AN5 6 II	£3,800	LFD MC1 PhonoStage & psu	£495
Arcam Delta 110 pre	£150	Krell Evolution 302	£7,250	Anthony Gallo Acoustics Nucleus	£300	Boulder 2008 Phono	£13,995	Linn LP12/ARO/Armedgedon	£2,495
Arcam Delta 110 Pre	£150	Krell Evolution 402	£9,500	Arcam One	£300	Cello Cartridge	£2,800	Luxman PD131	£190
ART VPI	£425	Krelli KMA160's	£2,200	ART Emotion	£3,250	Clear Audio Master & TQ1 arm & Transfig	£5,995	Luxman PD444	£0
Audio Flight Flight 1 Pre	£2,995	Krell K5A250	£1,995	ATC SCM 100 A	£2,500	Denon DL103 CL	£500	Michell Gyro SE	£850
Audio Research LS2 mkII	£1,295	Krell KST 100	£895	ATC SCM 100A SL	£4,995	Denon DL103 CL	£500	Michell Gyrodek QC	£1,000
Audio Research Reference 2 mkII	£3,850	Linn Klimax	£3,495	ATC SCM 100SL YEW	£6,000	Dynavector 10X4	£150	Mission 774 Wand	£100
Audiolab 8000C	£200	Lumley 0001 Reference	£1,100	ATC SCM 20/2A mkII & HNE stds	£2,495	Garrard TPA 10 Pick Up Arm	£200	Naim Audio Phono boards	£45
Audiolab 8000Q	£245	Lumley Reference M120	£1,750	ATC SCM 10 2A	£1,800	Graham Slee Era Gold V	£395	Origin Live Encounter	£750
AVI 2000MP	£495	Mark Levinson 335	£3,495	Audio Acoustics Fundamental K2	£7,000	HENLEY DESIGN HMC100 PHONO STAGE	£200	Origin Live Digital Stylus Force Gauge	£57
B.A.T. VK30	£1,495	Mark Levinson ML436	£7,975	Audio Acoustics Sapphires Ti C	£0	Kenwood DC3000	£299	Origin Live Encounter 3 tone-arm	£550
Bonnet Timpano	£2,200	Mark Levinson 333	£3,495	Audio Acoustics Sapphire Ti C Mocha	£0	Tannoy Mercury MXC centre	£40	Ortofon 510 MM	£35
Boulder 1012	£6,495	Mark Levinson 436 Monoblocks	£6,995	Audio Physic Spark 1	£895	Titan	£995	Ortofon Kontrapunkt B	£650
C.A.T.5L1 Ultimate	£4,895	Mark Levinson ML434 Monoblocks	£4,995	Audio Physic Virgo 3	£2,250	Velodine FSR 10	£495	Ortofon MC15 Super	£65
Chord Electronics cpa2200	£3,000	Mark Levinson ML9	£895	Audiocvector M3Signature active	£2,100	Wilson Audio 5 1	£5,750	Ortofon MC3000	£795
Creek P43R	£120	McCormack DNA 125	£1,150	Aurousal A1 MKII	£495	Wilson Audio 5 1 Watt Puppies	£5,000	Ortofon Jubilee	£1,000
Crimson Electronics 710 Pre Amp	£3,995	McIntosh MC 252	£3,400	Avantgrade Acoustics Duo	£4,500	Wilson Audio Grand SLAMM series 5	£29,990	Ortofon MC25FL	£65
DNM 3d twin	£3,750	McIntosh MC 3000i	£2,295	B&W 800D	£7,995	Wilson Audio System 7	£8,995	Ortofon Rohmann	£850
DNM series 2/3	£325	McIntosh MC 252	£3,000	B&W 800D	£10,995	Wilson Audio Watt Puppy 5 1	£5,495	PHONOTE PHONOTE MC	£1,350
Electrocompaniet EC 4 5	£495	McIntosh MC 352	£3,250	B&W DM620	£120	Wilson Audio Watt Puppy 8	£16,900	Pro Ject 2 Xperience / DVX10	£425
EMM Labs Switchman 3	£4,595	McIntosh MC501 monoblocks	£5,950	Based on the Gamut L 3	£1,800	Wilson Audio Watt3/Puppy2	£3,750	Pro Ject RPM4	£90
Gryphon Prelude	£5,695	McIntosh MC501 monoblocks	£5,950	Beauhorn B2 2 Revelation	£1,800	Wilson Audio Watt3/Puppy2	£3,750	Rega Planar 3	£300
Gryphon The Gryphon Pre amplifier XT	£1,695	Musical Fidelity 750k Supercharger	£2,495	Bose ACOUSTICMASS® 3	£150	Yamaha NS 99AV	£80	Roksan Xerxes 10/DS15/Artemiz/Jubilee	£3,500
Krell Showcase Processor	£1,800	Musical Fidelity KW550	£3,999	Bose Acoustimass 10 Series III	£499			SME CA1 Carrying arm	£75
Lumley pre/phono 0001 Reference	£500	Myryad MA 240	£650	Consensus Audio Magma	£13,500			SME Model 10A	£3,336
Mark Levinson 3Bs	£1,800	Naim Audio 180	£595	Definitive Technology BP3000	£2,500			SME Model 30/A	£8,995
Mark Levinson ML No 326s	£7,995	Orpheus Lab Three 5	£1,695	Dunlavy SC IV	£1,695			SME Series 3009 MKII	£250
Mark Levinson ML6A	£7,000	passlab alpha pre 1.2 power amps	£7,500	Eclipse 508TD & Silver Stds	£595			SME Series V Arm	£1,795
Mark Levinson 3Bs	£1,650	Passlabs X600 monos	£6,500	Elac Jet CL310 Jet	£550			SME Model 20/2A	£5,695
Marsh P2000	£325	Passlabs X600	£5,995	Eltax Symphony 8.2	£75			SME Model 30/12A	£19,563
McCormack RLD 1	£1,150	Quad 303	£150	Gale Centre 2	£35			SME Model 30/2A	£12,995
Melody Pure black 101	£2,299	Quad 520 S & F	£375	Gale Model 5	£150			SME Series 3009 MKIII	£2,995
Meridian Audio 541 surround controller	£300	Restek Sixtant	£425	Gale Sub-Zero 10	£35			Stanton 500 AL II	£50
Michell Argo HR + Hera	£550	Roksan Caspian M Series-1 Mono (pair)	£1,500	Gershman Avant Garde RX 20	£2,750			Thorens MCH 63 TP16 Wand	£100
Michell ISO HR/Hera	£295	Ruby Chameleon	£295	Goldmund EPILOGUE 1 + 2	£26,120			Tube Technology MM MC Phono stage	£995
Myryad MP 100	£375	Sumo Polaris 111	£0	Hales concept 5	£2,200			VPI TNT 4 + Rokport Arm	£6,500
Naim Audio 102	£595	Tag Avantgarde 100x4	£1,295	IMF MKIII Ref Pro Monitor	£795				
Naim Audio HI CAP	£400	Tom Evans Linear A	£3,750	Infinity Kappa 9	£1,995				
Naim Audio Nac 62	£250	Tube Technology Genesis Monoblocks	£2,500	Jamo surround 300	£90				
Naim Audio NAC92 preamp	£200	VAC 30/70 Monoblocks	£6,995	JAS Orsa	£995				
Naim Audio NAC72	£300	Xindak PA1 Monoblocks	£2,200	JBL TLX103,121,111	£180				
Quad 22	£60	XTC power one	£1,300	JMLab Diva Utopia	£7,500				
Quad 33	£90	Yamaha AX 492	£100	JMLab Electra 1037 be	£5,750				
Sonic frontiers SFL-2 sonneteer	£1,400	YBA Passion 1000 stereo	£7,990	JMLab Nova Utopia Be	£11,995				
Tact 2 Xx	£1,995	YBA Passion 600 Monoblocks	£7,750						
Tom Evans PUL5E 2	£1,500								
Tom Evans Argo Hr	£595								
Tom Evans The Vibe	£2,495								
VAC Renaissance Signature MKII Pre	£6,995								
YBA Passion Pre	£3,495								
YBA Passion Monoblocks	£13,995								

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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

A decent hi-fi rack makes a sound investment

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Atacama Equinox	409	Stable, modular design with style and excellent bass transients	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
	Audiophile Base Std Suppt	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35	●	3	MDF	302
	Custom Design hert 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 Torlyte Platform	146	This unassuming platform can be a godsend, cleaning away mid/treble muddle from the sound	8	48,36		1	Torlyte	302
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte, a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
	Townshend VSSS	1,380	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

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
Although not cheap, Max Townshend's skillfully engineered rack nears perfection in terms of equipment isolation, diminishing returns kicks in if spending more

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Speakers

B&W pair M-1 speakers, black mint/boxed	£195
B&W pair M-1 speakers, silver mint/boxed	£195
B&W pair VM-1 speakers with stands, black. Mint/boxed	£295
B&W active AS-2 sub woofer. Mint/boxed	£195
B&W DM-1800 speakers with dedicated stands	£150
Dynaudio Audience 7 speaker, superb/boxed	£395
Hales Transcendence 5 speakers	£2895

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Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua MC cartridge, unused. (£1999)	£1499
Selection of new high end MC cartridges, please call	
Blue Pearl turntable	POA

Amplifiers

Almarro A50125-A int' amp (ex demo) mint	£2250
Almarro 318-B (new)	£2250
TRI TRV-M300SE monoblocks (NEW)	£3995
Meridian 551 integrated amp, superb cond	£695
Roksan Caspian int amp with remote	£495
Almarro A205-A int amp (NEW)	£1195
Wavac MD-805 monoblocks (AS NEW)	£7995
Audio Note Keron monoblocks (ex demo)	POA

Pre-amps

Mark Levinson ML326S with phono, ex-demo	POA
Mark Levinson ML 40 processor/pre-amp (£30,000) mint	£7995
Audio Note M9 phono pre-amp (ex demo)	POA
Proceed PAV pre-amp	£495

CD Players, DACs and Transports

Lector Digitube DAC BRAND NEW (£1100)	ONLY £795
CEC TL-OX belt drive CD transport (AS NEW)	£8995
CEC TL-1N transport with DA-1N DAC (AS NEW)	£8500
TRI CD valve player Made in Japan (NEW)	£1895

Miscellaneous

Winds Stylus gauge (NEW)	£395
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Main Dealer for:

Mark Levinson, Ayre Acoustic, Tannoy Prestige speakers, Thiel speakers, Audionote, Esoteric, SME, Stax, Cello, Lyra, My-Sonic, Revel, Audio Tekne, Michell, Esoteric.

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Analogues

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Ariston RD80, ex condition	99
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Second-hand guide

Four classic amps that are sweet on the ear and easy on the wallet...

Our first two amps in this quartet of used gems – the Musical Fidelity A1 and Naim Nait – may have their roots in the early 1980s, but don't panic. This may have been the decade that style forgot, but it is in some respects a golden age for amplifiers – and one that casts a significant shadow over recent models.

The Musical Fidelity A1 (2008) bears more than a passing resemblance to its 12-year deceased forefather. The original A1 went down in audiophile history for its fluid Class-A sound quality and somewhat temperamental reliability. To be fair, the A1 was so refined that users piled on the volume. Combined with typically inefficient 1980s speakers, the resultant meltdowns weren't that surprising.

But, don't be fooled by the A1's looks – this amp may look like the original, but it's completely different inside. It's still Class-A, but is based on the circuitry from the KW series. At 36 watts, it's nearly twice as powerful as the 20-watt original.

Musical Fidelity admits that it's not the most dynamic amp out there, but that was never the point with the A1. Instead, the 'always on' Class-A switching ensures a super-smooth and cohesive sound quality. Although only launched just over a year ago, we've already seen early examples available for £500.

Musical Fidelity also offer a full upgrade and rebuild package for the original A1. It costs £400, comes with a one-year guarantee and is worth serious consideration if you can get hold of a cheap, original A1. In our opinion the original – complete with half moon buttons – still looks the best.

Always a strong rival for the A1, the Naim Nait is as impressive today as it was 25 years ago. Although only £765 new, it's well worth considering a second-hand one around £500 for two reasons.

The first is that, such is the quality of its sound, it's far from out-classed in this company. Secondly, of all the amps here, it's the one most likely to hold its value longest. Although the Nait 5i was first launched in 2003, our



Naim's sleek-looking Nait 5i amplifier was first launched in 2003

budget is enough for one of the later, 5i versions. The italic letter 'i' is important as it represents a series of upgrades made from 2007. The italic 'i' versions are easy to spot: they have a front-mounted mini-jack socket for iPod or MP3 player connection. Somewhat confusingly, the 5i is occasionally referred to as the Nait 5i-2.

Although beautifully made, glitches aren't unheard of. Naim CD remotes have been known to interfere with the amp and some transformers are noisier than others. Having said that, Naim's service backup is superb, so any issues can easily be resolved. For our budget, we found a six-month-old example from a dealer for just £465.



Musical Fidelity offer a full upgrade and rebuild package for the original A1 amplifier

copper-plated chassis, an expensive ring transformer, WBT speaker sockets and a myriad of custom tuned parts. The design was so successful that it lasted nearly ten years with MKII KI Sig and then MKII KI Sig M (Modified) versions following on.

As usual, there is some debate as to which model sounds best – early versions had a large gold plaque to the left of the temperature

“When buying second-hand try to avoid ex-Japan models. They may be cheaper but have to be used with a transformer.”

Buying a recently replaced or tweaked model can be a great way of saving money. The Analogue Audio Verdi Settanta received such a tweak earlier in the year to become the REV 2 version. Differences are small, which makes the original such good value. At just over £1,200 new, it can now be had for just over £500.

Featuring a hybrid preamplifier section, the Verdi Settanta uses 6922 double-triode valves in its pre-map section. It's also armed with some pretty serious components in the power amp section – enough to make it the second most powerful amplifier here. As even the oldest models are under two years old, any Verdi Settanta will still be under guarantee. As long as you have the original receipt, the warranty is transferable.

Our final choice is from a class above the others here, but dates back to 1998. The Marantz PM-17 KI Signature was one of the first Marantz products to establish a successful marketing link between product and designer – that designer, of course, being Ken Ishiwata. This tweaked version of the PM17 offered a

control. With the MKII, this was toned down and moved to the top right of the fascia. 'M' versions can be disguised by their silver rather than gold finish and an additional badge to the left of the input selector.

When buying second-hand, try to avoid ex-Japan models. These may be cheaper but have to be used with a step-down transformer. This not only affects the sound quality, but also invalidates any Marantz service back-up. Essentially, if it goes wrong, you're on your own. The casing can scratch easily, the remote control isn't the sturdiest and cracks around the battery flap aren't unknown. It's also worth checking that the temperature gauge works.

Originally priced at £1,300, but soon costing £1,500, the immaculate 2001 model that we saw for £475 looked like a good buy.

These are four very different amps, but each of them seduce the listener in their own way – and at around the £500 mark, they'll all sound even sweeter. **HFC**

Dominic Todd
Next Month £1,000 speakers



The Marantz PM-17 KI Signature with its more than passing resemblance to a decent valve amp

READER CLASSIFIED

Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified*, the UK's first and best free private ads service for second-hand hi-fi. These pages are a must-read if you're thinking about buying used kit, and if you want to sell something it's definitely the place to be. It's free to place an advertisement – simply submit your ad of up to 30 words,

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ISOTEK NeoPlug mains cleaner, new. £15. Cambridge Audio Pacific, 1m interconnect in packaging. £10. Sony STS3ii FM/AM, boxed. £20. 01766 781211 (Gwynedd).
NAD Cassette player 6240, immaculate condition, hardly used. £50, plus postage. 01269 595271 (Carmarthenshire)
REGA R5 loudspeaker, piano black, good condition. £440. 2x Cambridge P500 power amps, 50 watts. £150. Ixos Bi-Wire speaker cable 2x 3m £25. 0161 9020719 (Manchester).
STAX SR-202 Lambda basic headphones, including SRM-252 driver unit, mint and boxed. £200. Creek OBH-215E headphone amplifier, hardly used, some warranty. £100 07818 658722 (Warks)
QUAD ESL-2805 electrostatic loudspeakers, brand new, factory-sealed boxes. £3,250 ono. 07745 995179 (Milton Keynes).
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 640c CD player, 3.5 year guarantee (£230): £120. Monitor Audio Bronze 2 loudspeaker (£200): £90. Pro-Ject Debut turntable. £40. Buyer collects. (Cardiff). richardjsugg@yahoo.co.uk.
OPERA Seconda loudspeaker, cherry/black leather. £875. Unison Research FM/AM Unico R Valve tuner. £575. Mint and boxed. 02380 738935 (Hants)
PIONEER PD 6700 CD player, black. £50. Nakamichi 680 ZX 3 Head twin-speed cassette deck: £150. SME 3009 Mk2 10" detachable headshell tonearm. £20. SME armboard for Linn Sondek LP 12 turntable. £5. 01228 544376 (Cumbria)

NYTECH CTA252XD Mk 2 receiver, mint and boxed. £85. Acoustic Energy Aegis One loudspeaker, immaculate. £50. 01922 453931 (Walsall)
ROKSAN Artemiz tonearm cable upgrades, Linn/SME. £110. New Sound Dead steel turntable mat. £59. Benz Micro MC205L, boxed. £90. Rega Elys MM, excellent condition. £45. 01243 863371 (West Sussex).
ARCAM Solo amp/CD/DAB/FM, silver. £450. Bowers and Wilkins 685, black, stand-mount loudspeaker. £220. Pro-Ject Phono Box 5E MC/MM. £60. 0208 464 9055 (Bromley, SE London)
PROAC Studio 250's, floorstanding loudspeaker for sale, good condition, photos available. Original cartons, but heavy speakers, so collection would be best. £950. scooby@what20.freeserve.co.uk 01142 360166 (Sheffield).
REGA Planar 3 RB300 arm. £160. Cyrus DAD 1.5 CD with remote. £125. Ion Obelisk 3 35-watt amplifier. £85. 01925 470619 (Cheshire)
ROTEL RA-06 amplifier, silver. Marantz CD6002 CD player, silver. Kelly Tranducers, one pair KT2 and one pair KT3. All boxed, as new. £1,650. 01684 295781 (Gloucs).
DNM Reson solid core loudspeaker cables, four metre pair, terminated, factory-fitted banana plugs: £90. Audio Note Lexus interconnect, one metre pair, terminated, factory phono plugs: £90. 01243 528010 (West Sussex).
CHORD CO. Chameleon 0.5m XLR Interconnect. £59. Russ Andrews 8vs loudspeaker cable,

10ft 6in, terminated both ends, never used. £145 01772 468116 (Lancs)
EXPOSURE 20105 power amplifier, not run-in, boxed. £300 ono. 01226 250021 (South Yorkshire).
KEF C40 loudspeaker, black, floorstanding. £220 ono. 01623 811460 (Derbyshire).
ATC SCM20A-2 active loudspeakers, three-years old, unmarked with manuals and boxes. £1,895. Matching HNE granite stands, £395. 01766 781211 (Gwynedd)
IMPULSE H2 loudspeaker for sale. Grey cabinets, grey fabric. 020 8694 6246 (London)
NAIM NACA4 white loudspeaker cable, ten metre. £40. QED phono/phono interconnect lead. £5. A&R Cambridge T21 FM tuner, teak, immaculate condition. £30. 01228 544376. (Cumbria).
ARCAM A85 amplifier, silver finish, excellent condition. £225 ono. 07810 106413 (Merseyside).
CHORD CO. Rumour 2 loudspeaker cable, 2x three metres, terminated with plugs. £50. Grado SR60, one year old,



Above: Opera Seconda loudspeakers

boxed. £45. Sony cordless headphones: £12. 01656 782523 (South Wales).
CREEK OBH-21 headphone amplifier. £90. Isotek Gemini 4-way filter. £90 Six Isoclear isolation feet with springs. £30. 07864 102846. (Bath).
DALI Ikon Vokal 2 centre channel speaker, boxed, one month old, purchased from Sevenoaks (£399). £249. 020 8951 3178 (Sevenoaks).
ROKSAN Kandy Mk III integrated amplifier and CD Player. Monitor Audio Silver R56 loudspeaker. All immaculate condition. £1,000. 0208 7761031 (Kent)
TOM EVANS Vibe preamp and Pulse power supply. £2,400. Dynavector HX75 power amp, 75 watts. £900. Leema Tucana integrated amp, 148 watts. £1,850. 01595 694205 (Shetland).

BUYING TIPS

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

FOR SALE

210 new/unplayed/sealed vinyl LPs for sale at 50% of cost. 60 second-hand LPs from £3. Will separate if necessary. 01453 544354 (Gloucs).

MERIDIAN G06 CD Player (£1,600): £950. Creek OBH-11 headphone amplifier (£125): £100. Van den Hul First Ultimate one metre interconnect: £125. All-in original packaging. All mint. All less than one year old. 07952 852263 (Merseyside).

LYNGDORF Millennium Mk4 Reference amplifier. As new. £5,500. 01743 344136 (Shropshire).

OPTIMUM OPT4000 equipment rack H69.5x W61xD52cm, 4x 6mm clear glass shelves, 17cm between shelves 1 & 2, 20cm between shelves 2 & 3 and 3 & 4. Polished chrome shelf spacings. £120. 07970 028771 (Bucks)

MERIDIAN G98DH DVD/CD/DVDA transport in black. One owner, immaculate. Box, all cables inc comms and MHR, plus upgraded Chord Company mains. New MSR+. £1,600 ono. 07733 126265 or email: patmarcus172@googlemail.com (W Mids)

RUSS ANDREWS Reference Power Chords with Wattgate 320i & Superclamps. 11 in total of various lengths. Perfect condition. £50 each. 07535 709990 (Essex).

ARCAM CD92 CD player, Rotel RC1070 preamp, two Rotel RB980bx power amps, all boxed, mint, manuals etc.

£650 for the lot (upgraded). 01535 652992 (W Yorks). **MUSICAL FIDELITY** KW250S in pristine condition for £1,750 ono (£5,000). 07527 523118 or email: ttnga@hotmail.com (Glos).

WILSON BENESCH Torus infrasonic generator and amplifier, mint condition £3,200. Also Square 2 loudspeaker in maple, as new: £1,300, original boxes. Can demo. 02380 470107 (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. Two Isotek premiere mains leads: £30 each. 01772 314151 (Lancs).

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

NAKAMICHI 680ZX cassette deck: £150. Pioneer PD6700 CD player: £50. A&R Cambridge T21 FM tuner, teak finish, immaculate condition: £30. QED interconnect: £5. Ixos 104 OFC interconnect: £10. Naim NAC A4 loudspeaker cable, five metre pair, white: £20. Naim NAC A4 speaker cable, 10 metre pair, white: £40. 01228 544376 (Cumbria)

NAIM DVDS player 2005: £999. 112 pre-amp: £279. Chord Co. Signature interconnects, RCA terminated one metre: £349 pr, all mint/

boxed. Chord Co. Odyssey 2 loudspeaker cables, four metres, factory terminated, mint £89pr. 01984 640588 (Somerset)

PIONEER PL12D turntable cart with OM10: £50. Hitachi FT5500 tuner: £70.

Technics SLP200 CD: £350. 01606 784767 (Cheshire)

WILSON BENESCH Arc loudspeakers, 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, excellent (*HFC Best Buy* at £400). Boxed 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, excellent: £300. 01582 867139 (Beds)

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

MANA Base, table, wall shelf, three levels: £400. Tom Evans Microgroove Lithos: £250. Foundation Audio 18 inch 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, stunning: £375. 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 (2x three metres). Two Cambridge P500 power amps 2x 55 watts: £150. 01619 020719 (Lancs).

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

OPERA Seconda loudspeakers (cherry) (£1,800): £750. Unison Research valve/mosfet Secondo 120-watt integrated amp (£1,800): £750. Unico valve FM/RDS/AM tuner (£1,100): £450. All mint and below half price. 02380 738935 (Hants)

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

ROBERTS MP23 CD/radio sound system, top of the 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 amplifier, separate power supply. Serviced by MF + new valves, 350 watts (8ohms), 600 watts (4ohms): £1,425. 07859 388167 (SE London)



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*Music
Quality or
Quantity?*

Music Compression – friend or foe?

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

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

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Falling Music Sales

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

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

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

Quality or Quantity?

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

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

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

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

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

Get Expert Advice

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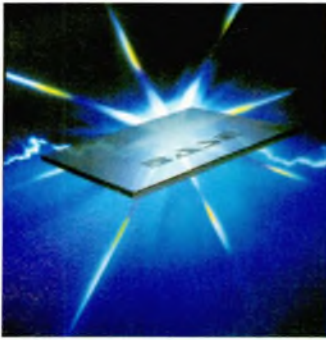
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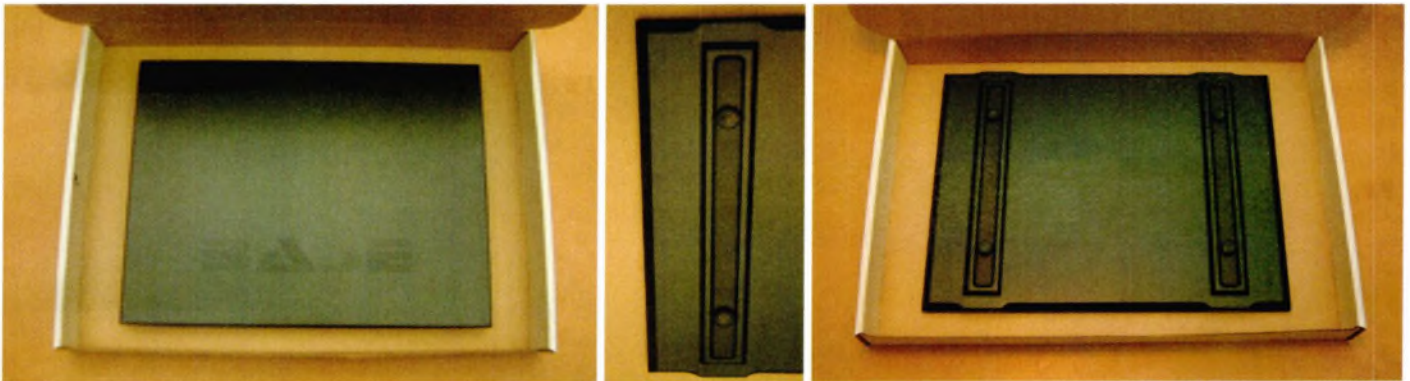


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