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September 2008

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December 2008

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March 2009

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**Argon3L**

August 2009

"Smooth, clean, neutral and very well controlled, with a wide dynamic range"

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

# WELCOME...

HI-FI CHOICE NOVEMBER 2009 ISSUE 325

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



All too often, when the long summer evenings begin to shorten, September can become a sombre time with thoughts turning to a cooler autumn and our infamous British winters. But for audiophiles, there's good reason to cheer: the latter part of the year is 'our' season – the dark nights discouraging us from straying from the listening seat and the cold air making the warm

glow of valves even more alluring.

So in celebration of 'our' season, we've made *Hi-Fi Choice* bigger and better. We upped the amount of pages and increased the number of reviews. You'll also notice more news, a much improved *Buyer's Guide* and, of course, more product reviews than at any time in the last year – and there are more improvements 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...

The Essential Guide To Audio Excellence In The Home



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



### PAUL MESSENGER

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



### JIMMY HUGHES

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



### RICHARD BLACK

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



### MALCOLM STEWARD

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



### ALVIN GOLD

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



### JASON KENNEDY

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice* and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back as 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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## Limited Edition Pearl Components

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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 09

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## ONKYO ND-S1

*Onkyo takes on Wadia and MSB's class-leading hi-fi docks with a £150 challenger*

Onkyo has taken some time out from throwing its weight around in the multichannel category to release the technically interesting ND-S1 Digital Media Transport. Like the MSB iLink reviewed last issue (HFC 324) and the Wadia iTransport (HFC 321), the ND-S1 is able to bypass the internal digital to analogue stage of the iPod and output a digital signal to a suitable DAC. The good news is that the Onkyo drops the price this functionality is available for to just £150. This, according to Onkyo, has huge implications for the iPod as a serious audio source; "adding a ND-S1 Digital Media Transport to an AV or (DAC-equipped) hi-fi system effectively turns an iPod into versatile audiophile-grade multimedia server that can be held in the palm of a hand."

To achieve this, the ND-S1 features optical and coaxial outputs

controlled by a high-precision clock, accurate to +/- 10ppm to minimise jitter. A USB port is also fitted to allow for the iPod to sync with iTunes whilst in the dock. The dock will also support video playback over composite video from a suitably equipped iPod. A wide variety of iPods are supported including all versions of the iPhone in flight mode and a dedicated remote is supplied for control and function access.

Onkyo sees the ND-S1 being used principally with its AV receivers and the A-5VL DAC-equipped stereo amp. The recent increase in the availability of DACs at affordable price points should also mean the ND-S1 finds many homes outside of Onkyo systems as the iPod moves further into use as a serious hi-fi source.

**Price:** £150 **Due:** October ☎ 01628 473350 🌐 [www.onkyo.co.uk](http://www.onkyo.co.uk)





## NEWS



### NAIM ZERO S ❖❖



In a significant change of direction, Naim has announced its first DAC, the Zero S.

The design is innovative and ambitious – the Zero S is the world's first Apple-authenticated high-end DAC, which means that it will connect to any iPod or iPhone via USB and take the digital signal directly from it. This is backed up by eight conventional digital inputs spread across Toslink, BNC and RCA connections. At the heart of the unit is a pair of Burr-Brown 1704 mono DAC chips with a SHARC DSP operating as the digital filter. Furthermore, Naim claims the Zero S is the first zero-jitter DAC, thanks to an innovative clock system that is not recovered from the digital input, but instead is generated on-board for improved performance.

**Price:** £1,950 **Due:** October ☎ 01722 426600 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

### SYSTEM AUDIO JIFFY ❖❖



The Jiffy is the latest offering from Scandinavian speaker company, System Audio and the smallest model from the company to date. The Jiffy is designed for easy placement on a bookcase or shelf, but also includes a rear bracket and VESA standard plate that will attach to the swivel fixtures used on LCD televisions. Alternatively, System Audio's own stands can be used for floor and tabletop mounting. Available in black and white with matching or contrasting grills, the Jiffy should prove an unobtrusive addition to most living spaces.

**Price:** £389 **Due:** now ☎ 01727 865488

🌐 www.symmetry-systems.co.uk



### DENSEN B-275 ❖❖



Densen has unveiled its new flagship preamplifier, the B-275. While the design is new to those of us outside the company, it turns out that the concept has been used internally for test work for some years. The B-275 is the first Densen product built on the company's Superleggera principles, which entails keeping the power supply with its three custom-made transformers and their attendant vibration and interference in a separate chassis away from the delicate preamplifier circuit with customisable volume control. The B-275 offers conventional line inputs, one of which can be converted to a moving magnet or moving coil phono stage, as well as a 5.1 or 7.1 input for multichannel use.

**Price:** tbc **Due:** now ☎ +451 75 18 12 14 🌐 www.densen.com





## ROTH AUDIO OLi4

Roth Audio's OLi 4 floorstander is said to promise "room filling sounds for wallet-friendly money." Using a two-and-a-half-way crossover, the OLi 4 boasts a pair of 17cm woven-fibreglass woofers and a 25mm tweeter. These are mounted in a cabinet constructed using the Roth 'Dead as Lead Technology' which aims to eliminate distortion from the speaker's own energy, through specific damping. Finished in black and silver the OLi 4 is also designed to match any home décor.

**Price:** £299 per pair **Due:** now ☎ 01462 492090

www.rothaudio.co.uk

## REVO IKON

The Revo IKON "takes a generational leap forward" and is the first digital radio with a full-function 3.5-inch touch screen that operates as an icon-driven user interface and can also display colour station logos, plus artist and track information where available. In addition, the IKON is Apple certified and will double up as an iPod sound system. The list of supported formats is extensive with the IKON able to broadcast DAB, DAB+, FM, AM and internet radio as well as being able to access Last.FM

**Price:** £280 **Due:** October ☎ 01555 666161 www.revo.com

## LEEMA ACOUSTICS ELEMENTS

Leema's new Elements phono stage is intended to bring much of the design philosophy of the reference-grade Agena phono stage at a more affordable price point. Compatible with moving magnet and moving coil cartridges the low frequency filter only operates below 20Hz to prevent noise from warped records and motor or bearing noise.

**Price:** £495 **Due:** now ☎ 01938 811900

www.leema-acoustics.com



## MONITOR AUDIO PL200

The latest addition to the Monitor Audio Platinum range, the PL200, is designed as a compact version of the PL300. In fact, it occupies only one-third the volume of its larger sibling, mainly due to using a 6.5-inch version of the 8-inch bass driver. Power handling and bass response are reduced, but Monitor insists that the essential characteristics of the PL300 are retained. Other features of the Platinum range, such as the C-CAM ribbon tweeter, 4-inch midrange driver and wide, adjustable feet are retained. The PL200 is available in santos rosewood, ebony and piano black finishes.

**Price:** £4,750 per pair

**Due:** now ☎ 01268 740580

www.monitoraudio.com



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*HiFi+ Issue, 65*

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## TEUFEL ULITMA 60

German direct sales speaker company Teufel has released its latest offering. The Ultima 60 floorstander is an impressive one metre tall and comprises a 25mm soft-dome tweeter, a dedicated 160mm midrange driver and two further 160mm bass drivers. Like the rest of the Teufel range, the Ultima 60 is sold direct and is backed up by an impressive 12-year warranty. They are initially also available with a 15 per cent introductory discount.

**Price:** £290 per pair **Due:** now

+4930 30 09 30 39 [www.teufel.eu](http://www.teufel.eu)



## LES PAUL 1915-2008

The music industry lost an icon on the 13th of August when Les Paul died at the age of 94. One of the pioneers of the electric guitar, Paul built his first solid-body electric guitar in 1941 and proceeded to refine the design for some years after that. The Les Paul electric guitar has been in continuous production since 1952 and has changed little since then. It has been the instrument of choice for some of the most seminal guitarists of the last fifty years.

Paul was also one of the pioneers of multi-track recording. A talented musician in his own right, he recorded numerous hits in the 1950s with his wife Mary Ford and continued to record and perform until his death. He was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1978 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988. Gibson president Dave Berryman said, "As the 'father of the electric guitar', he was not only one of the world's greatest innovators but a legend who created, inspired and contributed to the success of musicians around the world."

## PLANET ROCK 10 BEST

Twelve thousand Planet Rock listeners have been voting online for their Greatest Album of all time and have voted Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* as their number one. The 1973 work was one of three Floyd albums in the top ten and beat Led Zeppelin's *IV* to the top spot with Messrs Page and co also having three albums in the top ten. Other artists to feature included Guns 'n' Roses and Meatloaf.

## CD SALES SLUMP

Warner Music recorded a £22m loss as sales of CDs continue to slump. Alternatively, sales of online music downloads rose by 5.4 per cent. The figures confirm the increasing preference of the music buying public for favouring individual songs and singles over albums. The move has also reignited rumours that Warner may consider merging with rival EMI to create a more survivable entity. Warner has stated it anticipates revenues improving in the second half of 2009 due to the timing of releases.

## RICHARD TO THE RESCUE!

Our very own Richard Black has launched a new service that promises to rescue the essence of a musical performance. Recording Rescue is "a new kind of audio restoration service... one that can restore the performance." Richard offers a service that can correct recording or musical errors that creep in during mastering and can spoil the end result. Rather than being purely software dependent, Richard is able to draw on his considerable experience to correct errors far more naturally and retain the life that can be lost when a piece is over corrected. If Recording Rescue cannot save the work, you won't be charged for it.

[www.recordingrescue.com](http://www.recordingrescue.com)



## Soundbites

QED has announced its latest arrival, the XT Evolution. Borrowing from technology developed for the Genesis and X-Tube series, it uses a figure 8 layout of five individually insulated copper sets wound around a hollow central tube. The result is a low inductance and a minimal effect on the amplifier's damping factor. The XT is priced at £6.50 per metre. ☎ 01279 501111

TANNOY'S new TS range of active subwoofers is intended to "address the demand for accurate and tuneful bass from a compact and discreet enclosure." Using a combination of highly linear drivers, oversized magnets and BASH amplification, the three-strong range offers high-performance coupled with user-friendly features. Prices range from £460 to £690. ☎ 01236 420199

MONSTER has released the lively sounding Turbine In-Ear speakers. As the world's first in-ear speakers with a specially engineered driver, the Turbine has been fitted with a "Patented Magentic Flux Tube" and micro strand conductors. The result, claims Monster: "allows people to hear truly remarkable sound from in-ear headphones." Expect to pay £130. ☎ 01932 841349

SENNHEISER has been working on the HD238, an open-backed variant of the closed 200 series headphones. A compact on-ear design with soft, flat earpads, the HD238 is designed for home and quiet environments, "the perfect solution for very high-quality audio from anything with a 3.5mm socket." Price is £70. ☎ 01494 551551

TEAC'S SR-2DAB cuts a dash with its wooden cabinet and leatherette finish. It offers iPod and iPhone replay as well as FM/DAB/RMS functionality. In addition, the SR-2DAB offers digital clock and alarm features, as well as a calendar and preset equaliser functions. The sonics are reported to be impressive thanks to separate speaker enclosures and bass reflex port. Available now priced £150. ☎ 0845 1302511

## Leema Acoustics

Hidden away in the Welsh valleys, Leema Acoustics is a small hi-fi company with big ambitions. HFC caught up with Lee Taylor, one half of Leema's dynamic duo to find out what makes the company tick



If ever there was a hi-fi company that's 'off the beaten track' then this is it. After a five-hour trip from the South East, with only polite gesturing from our sat-nav for company, we caught up with Lee Taylor, one half of the ex-BBC Leema Acoustics team in a remote location in Welshpool. So remote, in fact, that "no-one knows where it is."

"We used to do all the production here" says Lee, "speaker production is now outsourced... but all of the electronics production is done in the UK; it's designed here, manufactured by a sister company here in Welshpool and when it comes back for testing it sits on a soak-rack for up to two weeks – we have a very low return-rate."

Of course, regular readers will know that Leema started out with loudspeakers, with more than a nod towards the much-admired sound abundant from the BBC days. But with bulky speakers now made elsewhere to spec, it's the electronics design that gets Lee's attention.

Testing and quality control is clearly of the utmost importance to Leema Acoustics, too, yet we couldn't help but wonder what the company's sonic goals were when designing hi-fi. "It's got to sound as real as possible," commented Lee. "My background is in recording studios – touring around with bands – so you have an inherent feeling for what sounds real."

It's that natural, real sound that we're really after... for me it's all about realism." As a design team, there's myself and Malloy (Nicholls) – we are the only design team and we are ruthless; when we launched the Tucana (amplifier) there were three or four completely different amplifier designs before we came to that one (points)."

Hi-Fi Choice recently reviewed and rated the latest version of this classic amplifier, which is

now called Tucana II and boasts 150 watts for its £3,425 asking price, so we asked Lee about trickle-down technology and Leema's obvious extension into the high end. "Tucana II is an upgraded version, using a lot of ported-down technology from the Altair. I tend to favour large inefficient speakers that tend to need lots of power... in order to get proper transient response and a real dynamic range you need a lot of power."





Space is at a premium at the rural Leema HQ, but if you worked there, you wouldn't want to move building, either



Early days: Leema's diminutive Xen

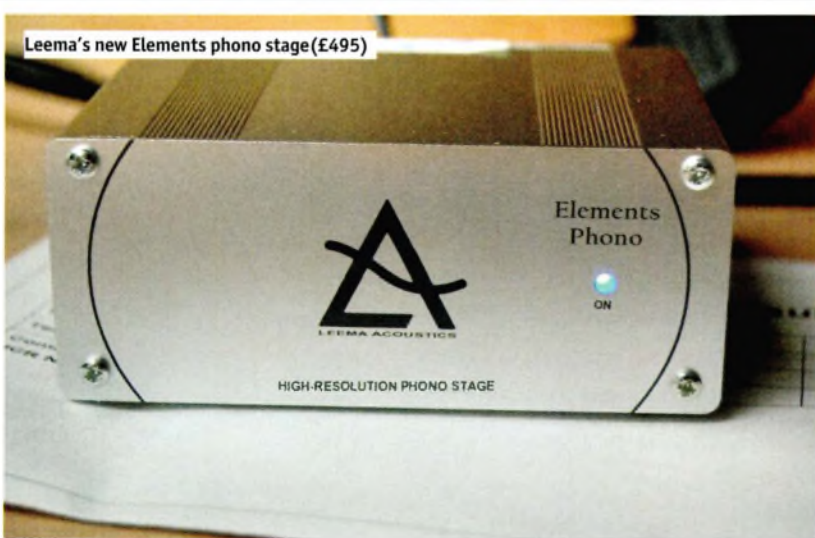
Leema customers are known to be immensely brand-loyal, which Lee happily confirmed: "They generally start with Tucana, then they buy a Pyxis preamp, then a Hydra and bi-amp. People are very loyal; we offer a five-year warranty, we don't quibble about anything if there are problems with the kit... and we try to look after our customers. People are always surprised that it's us that reply (to emails); we're very hands-on, we (Mallory and Lee) are the guys that answer all the technical enquiries. I think it's a very old-fashioned approach."

Like most UK hi-fi companies, Leema enjoys strong overseas business, where sales growth remains healthy; "Eighty per cent of what we make is exported" said Lee. "We're in 27 different countries - we're in the top five of Welsh exporters! We're a quiet little company, rapidly moving up."

Itching to know what was next from the Welshpool factory, we pressed Lee for some scoop product information; "We do have a new



Testing equipment: a Leema engineer takes a well-earned screen break



Leema's new Elements phono stage (£495)

product that I can't talk about, that does have a number of leading-edge technologies in it, including Bluetooth and Wi-Fi." We also have a new phono stage (pictured left) this is ported-down from the Agena and is first in a new range called Elements - they're shipping now and are ridiculously good - very transparent, extremely good headroom because they are a solid-state design."


With our time coming to an end and despite fearing a lengthy answer from our parting question, we couldn't resist asking ex-studio man Lee if he found himself frustrated by modern recording standards: "I think it gets worse over time because people are pressurised to do it fast and not to do it well."

Luckily for us audiophiles, however, there's no danger of Leema Acoustics speeding up its production line. **HFC**



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## Richard *Black*

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

## Technology

*A feast of analogue restoration techniques for audio historians*

**W**e've something a little different from the usual in this month's *Technology* column – the nearest thing to a free lunch we've seen in a while. Actually, if you've any interest at all in historical audio, this is more like a free four-course dinner with vintage wine and brandy thrown in. I refer to the 'Manual of analogue audio restoration techniques', written by the late Peter Copeland and published by his long-time employer, the British Library. It is available as a free download from the BL website at [www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/anaudio/manual.html](http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/anaudio/manual.html) (or just go to [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk) and search for 'Copeland manual').

I met Peter Copeland once, in the early 1990s and my impressions of him were much like everyone else's: he was a charming and eloquent chap who seemed to know everything there was to know about sound recording and its history. He was also delighted to share his knowledge with anyone interested, so it was no surprise that one of his last projects was writing down as much as possible of what he knew, for later generations of audio archivists and restorers. He died in 2006, before he had quite finished this task and the British Library has had it neatly typeset and organised as a PDF file, all 340 pages of it, which is available as a tribute to Copeland's memory.

Now, obviously, if you're the sort of person whose idea of connecting with technology starts and stops with operating the 'power' and 'play' buttons on a CD player, you may think this is all a bit arcane. Even so, I recommend a read because the sheer variety of information presented is little short of awe-inspiring. There's heavy technical stuff on 'power-bandwidth product' and detail on

archival documentation strategy that's of no conceivable use to most audiophiles. On the other hand, there is fascinating detail, for instance, on the variations from label to label in how LPs were cut and made. Actually, there's enough detail to convince anyone that it's a miracle hi-fi ever happened. You might think that the 'that'll do' mentality is a product of the MP3 age: you'd be wrong, and Copeland provides plenty of examples from the past.

It's probably the LP fraternity who will find most of day-to-day interest. For a start, there's the best description I've ever encountered of how and why different stylus shapes work. Copeland manages this by unselfconsciously mixing technical and distinctly untechnical language – 'the stylus will follow the groove wiggles' is a typical example of the latter. But there's also a lot of information, invaluable to collectors of mono discs from the 1950s, about the equalisation or frequency response curves used by different manufacturers. Refreshingly, Copeland is more inclined to pragmatism than dogma on this subject, pointing out that all sorts of subjective decisions were made by recording and mastering engineers. Therefore, in a nutshell, the philosophy that 'if it sounds right, it is right' has both historical and scientific support.

Some of the information has since aged, principally sections relating to digital audio and computers. Not all the digital stuff though and it's worth having a read to come up with some practical reminders of why digital shouldn't necessarily be trusted implicitly. Copeland's work will stand the test of time, just as Olson's and Langford-Smith's have done. **HFC**

The late Peter Copeland, audio expert

"If you've any interest at all in historical audio, this is more like a free four-course dinner with vintage wine and brandy"

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VIVID audio



## Ed Selley

Ed Selley worked in retail before joining some of the biggest names in the hi-fi industry. He is highly experienced in creating and supporting all manner of audio products

**"With music files being essentially intangible, it is a short jump to renting access to an infinite collection."**

# Streaming crossroads

Cyber collections could simplify DRM issues and unleash broadband's potential

In evolutionary terms, the normal development of an audio format has been pretty straightforward. The media, be it wax cylinder or Blu-ray disc, will be designed and finalised and released onto the world stage to success (CD, DVD) or failure (DCC, 8-Track). The hardware will arrive on the release date and generally improve over time whilst extending to all price points that the market creates. Throughout the life of the product, the hardware and software will be symbiotically linked – one will generally not survive long after the death of the other.

We currently, however, find ourselves in a position quite different to this. The music streamer – a device that will replay music from a remote location over ethernet or wireless connection can be said to have reached maturity. Streaming solutions are widely available in both discrete solutions, such as the Squeezebox, or integrated into other devices such as Naim's Uniti or larger AV receivers.

They are on sale for the price of a budget CD player and equally can be found at prices equivalent to high-end units as well. They handle a huge variety of formats on the fly up to and including those comfortably superior to CD. So far, so in keeping with the usual laws of evolution, but there are still some considerable holes in format delivery that ask some interesting questions over their future.

At the moment, it is still something of a challenge to legally buy high-quality, ready to go files, for a streaming device. Linn and Naim are hard at work supporting their products but their releases are somewhat genre-specific while iTunes possesses choice galore, but at a quality far removed from CD.

Most users generally seem to convert CDs at home into the lossless format of their choice which works well enough, but offers no performance advantage over CD and can be a laborious undertaking. On a personal note, I have ripped my

CDs once for MP3 player use and regard doing so again with the level of enthusiasm I usually reserve for mowing the lawn.

Into this impasse, ride music streaming services such as Spotify. In the interests of research, I have forked out a princely 99p for a day pass, raising the streamed file size from 160k Ogg Vorbis files (which certainly work for casual listening) to 320k MP3. As I type, the files are being squirted via USB into a Cambridge Audio DacMagic, and Nils Lofgren currently sounds pretty good.

The interface is instinctive to any iTunes user and on my very ordinary broadband line there have been no dropouts or interruptions (including adverts). With Spotify making efforts to extend onto the iPhone and Squeezebox, could the availability of media for streamers be solved by not owning it at all?

With music files being essentially intangible, it is a short jump to renting access to an infinite collection rather than owning a smaller personal one. Record labels can relax DRM as the music will never truly leave their sight and I can continue my slow move into classical music appreciation by listening to different performances of the same piece without having to invest in each one.

If we look past the threats made to FM, the much maligned *Digital Britain* report has pointed the way to the sort of broadband speeds that would support the streaming of lossless files for many households. At the moment, the future of how we might go about listening to music is up for grabs.

A 'high-res iTunes' could see us still owning music albeit tucked away on hard drives whilst higher speed broadband could see my collection increase exponentially in size but without it ever 'existing' in my house. Nature abhors a vacuum – let us see if the same can be said about digital audio. **HFC**



Spotify streaming at 320kbps is not to be sniffed at



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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

"I want to mark the loss of the man who deserves the credit for starting and bringing some respectability to subjective hi-fi reviewing"

## The first stereophile

The US hi-fi world mourns the passing of its most dedicated journalist

It's been a busy month, so instead of my normal practice of writing about a single topic, I've got several items to cover.

### J. GORDON HOLT (1930-2009)

First, I must note with sadness the passing of J. Gordon Holt, the most influential and significant US hi-fi journalist of his generation. Since I only met him once, briefly, at a Chicago CE Show way back in the early 1980s, an obituary would not be appropriate, but I do want to recognise the loss of the one man who deserves the credit for starting and bringing some respectability to the process of subjective hi-fi reviewing.

Gordon began by writing and equipment-reviewing in the very early days of US hi-fi magazines, but became disenchanted at the way publishers and their commercial interests were able to interfere with and influence editorial judgments. His patience ran out and in 1962 he founded and launched a subscription-only magazine called *Stereophile*.

While admitting he was no businessman, he wrote and edited it almost single-handed for 20 years and after selling it in 1982, kept a close association until 1999. It's a tribute to Gordon's foresight and integrity, not to mention his sense of humour.

### NO WOOD LIKE OLD WOOD

A hundred years ago, when my architect grandfather built the house in which I live, he put in large bow windows facing the main road, albeit at a respectable distance. There was, of course, no traffic in 1909 and my late aunt, then a child, would take her mattress onto the balcony to sleep above the porch on a balmy summer night.

When we moved in 20 years ago, we closed off the now unusable balcony, but merely rebuilt the single-glazed front windows to cope with the ravages of 80 years. This was a mistake, as 1988 building timber wasn't a patch on the original. So

we've rebuilt them again, this time using a Dutch company called Engels that uses hardwood frames and sealed double glazing.

The big surprise is how much quieter the listening room has become – provided the windows are kept shut. Traffic and wind noise have been substantially reduced and even the presence of a bus stop 30-odd yards away has become much less intrusive.

The net effect is, of course, an unexpected but significant increase in the dynamic range of the room. Measuring the improvement is tricky with the primitive tools at my disposal, but I reckon it's around 5-6dB and the new noise floor is now significantly smoother and less 'spiky'.

### IPLAYER CLOSES IN ON FM

Last month, I discussed DAB and the threat it posed to FM radio transmissions. What I didn't say – or indeed know at the time – was that the BBC has recently substantially upgraded the sound quality of its internet radio services.

Although we're still talking about a digitally compressed feed, I gather it's now using the more recently developed AAC codec, compared to DAB's older and significantly inferior MP2 codec. It's also streaming its programmes with a decent bit-rate, too.

I stumbled across this by accident, as I've avoided the BBC's internet radio streams because they've always sounded dire. To avoid missing a favourite radio programme, I'd record it from satellite, just like a TV programme (Freeview would do just as well). When I failed to do so recently, I went to the BBC website's 'Listen Again' service (using a MacBook Pro and an inexpensive Fubar USB DAC), and was surprised to find it sounded much better than my DAB-derived recordings.

The obvious, if controversial conclusion, is that the BBC's iPlayer service is now superior to DAB, and gets rather closer to good FM. **HFC**



BBC iPlayer: no license required



**ECLIPSE**



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September 2009

## TD712zMK2

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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

*"The Collection provides a thrilling opportunity to get to grips with some unashamedly expensive hi-fi."*

# Raising the sound bar

Whatever the quality speakers still need to be in the right place

The annual *Collection* special edition (on sale 24 September) is always a learning experience. It marks the beginning of the season for hi-fi, which is particularly welcome this year after living through a massive financial crunch. *The Collection* provides a thrilling opportunity to get to grips with some unashamedly expensive hi-fi. Second, it is a mad scramble to get the job finished on time, which always gets the adrenalin pumping.

I had a surprising number of exotic speakers to test this year, most of which were expensive, space-consuming monsters. In one case, the wooden packing crates were so big they had to remain outside my front door for the duration. I lost contact with parts of my building completely.

The biggest issue this year, however, involved configuring the listening room. At some point it became apparent that my preferred layout, in which the speakers flanked a bay window and fired down the length of the room (which measures roughly 4x11 metres), was not working well for all the test speakers. Bass and drive were being lost into the bay, especially when the equipment rack that was formerly in the bay had been moved out to a new position for unrelated reasons. It wasn't an issue with all the speakers.

The smaller ones were largely unaffected and the same applied to the MartinLogan CLX, because being dipoles they simply didn't radiate much sound into the affected area. It wasn't always a problem with the larger moving coil speakers either, or I would have come up against the issue in the past. But when the speakers were designed to be used fairly close to the back wall, room-related effects suddenly became a live issue.

The first stab at a resolution was to fire the speaker across the width of the room, rather than down its length, but it was not possible to generate big bass which was limited by the relatively short throw available when using the room this way.

The bingo moment came by turning the system around by 180 degrees, so that the speakers were placed half way down the length of the room, close to the usual primary listening position and fired towards an armchair that was now repositioned in the bay.

This chair became the new preferred listening seat and sitting in the mouth of the bay helped damp the otherwise unhelpful local acoustic. Both the Focal JMLab Scala Utopia and the Morel Fat Lady benefitted from this, particularly the Morel, which suddenly developed a sense of drive and authority that had not previously been the case.

In this disposition, the backs of the speakers were pointing into open space, which doesn't sound ideal on paper, especially in the case of the Morel, which is not designed to be used too far from room boundaries.

The Focal was also affected, especially the deep bass, which is the foundation of the sound with large-scale works. The finale of *Mahler 2/ Abbado* etc was used as a test piece and slightly lacking in audible deep down weight, especially in the final organ-reinforced orchestral and choral crescendo.

But there was still some wall loading, because the room narrows somewhat where the speakers were positioned and they were not far from the side walls. By toeing in towards the listening seat, they were toed out somewhat towards the side walls.

This seemed to suit the Morel particularly well, more than I would have predicted in advance. All thanks then to the men from Focal and Morel (Fraser Robertson and Russell Kauffmann, respectively) who cooperated to find this resolution and who wouldn't leave until they had succeeded. Believe me I tried: it was well after dark before I could get them to listen to me – and the session had started that morning... **HFC**



Morel's curvy carbon Fat Lady



PRIMALUNA PROLOGUE EIGHT | KRELL S3001 | SONUS FABER LIUTO TOWER | £8,380



# Face the music

*Back by popular demand, Beautiful Systems combines a range of high-end kit in order to reach sonic nirvana*

**F**loorstanding loudspeakers finished in high-gloss piano black – is there anything sexier?

High-gloss piano black loudspeakers immediately create an impression of class and exclusivity. They whisper 'music' to your eyes and send out siren calls to your wallet. I suppose it's the appeal of having a surrogate grand piano at the end of your room.

Since hi-fi is the one musical instrument that everyone can play without needing talent, or having to practise, it's a pleasure to own something that looks so musical and sounds so cool. Not that the Sonus faber Liuto Tower needs any extra help in the looks department.

A tall (100cm-high) slim-line floorstander that tapers seductively to the rear, the Liuto abounds in gentle contours and cool curves. The rounded corners and soft edges create an elegantly stylish impression – while improving sound quality by ensuring a smoother more even sound dispersion.

Like all Sonus faber speakers, the Liuto cabinet is superbly finished and beautifully styled. An added touch of luxury is the black leather covering of the front baffle – a sexy little detail for those who prefer listening with the grilles off.

The tapered design of the Liuto was inspired by the shape of the Lute – chosen because it offers excellent rigidity, while reducing the effects of standing waves inside the cabinet.

## CUTTING-EDGE RETRO

As more and more people turn to downloads, along with iPods and iPhones for their music, the whole concept of hi-fi separates is slowly starting to take on a somewhat retro feel – even with equipment that aims to be stylish and modern.

And there's nothing more 'retro' than the vacuum tube. Technologically speaking, the use of tubes in a CD player used to be regarded as the ultimate anachronism. But, as the CD format ages, it too is starting to become a relic of a bygone age. So, the irony of mixing 'old' and 'new' technology is becoming a tad blurred – not that anyone cares much about such niceties these days.


Sonically speaking, tubes go rather well with CD, delivering a sound that's smoother and richer, without the brightness/thinness that can afflict the silver disc. PrimaLuna's ProLogue Eight is thus a happy marriage of old and (relatively) new technology.

But usually, CD players just use tubes in the analogue output stages. With the ProLogue Eight, the line up consists of six tubes – a 5AR4 Rectifier, plus 12AU7 and 12AX7 triodes – one each per channel. By experimenting with different brands of tube, you can change the sound of your player

## RUSSIAN MILITARY TECHNOLOGY

However, with the ProLogue Eight, PrimaLuna has gone a stage further – literally so. It has used a small Russian Military triode tube to generate the clock frequency. This, according to the company, results in an exceptionally clean jitter-free oscillator signal.

Apparently, the tube oscillator creates a near-perfect square wave output with unusually fast rise-times. The tube itself is purpose-designed for this function. It's run conservatively, so a lifespan of between five and ten years should easily be possible. Check out the PrimaLuna website for more information on the amazing tube oscillator.

The ProLogue Eight reviewed here, however, is slightly different to the one enthusiastically endorsed by Richard 

**“Since hi-fi is the one musical instrument that everyone can play, it's a pleasure to own something that looks so musical and sounds so cool.”**



**PrimaLuna ProLogue Eight**  
**£2,090**

CD player with tube analogue output stage and rectifier, plus the unusual use of a tube oscillator to clock both the drive and DAC for reduced Jitter. Has a single set of unbalanced analogue outputs and a digital output.



**Krell S300i**  
**£2,640**

Relatively compact, Class A amplifier, offering a 150-watt output and full remote control. Features a massive 750VA mains transformer and an XLR balanced line input. Unique balanced iPod/iPhone input via a 30-pin cable.



**Sonus faber Liuto Tower**  
**£3,490**

Compact three-way floorstander in piano-black finish. Unusual Lute-shaped cabinet for reduced standing waves and improved cabinet rigidity. Sensitivity rated at 89dB. Power handling, 40 watts to 250 watts.



Black in HFC 311. Our version came fitted with a Super I/V internal circuit board – an optional upgrade costing an extra £159. This has superior-quality Op amps and is well worth having.

#### SIZE MATTERS

Krell tends to be associated with massive power amps and separate preamps with heavy price tags. The S300i is a relatively affordable integrated offering a meaty 150-watt output into eight ohms (300 watts into four ohms), and three unbalanced line inputs, plus a set of balanced (XLR) inputs, and a balanced input (via a 30-pin socket) for an iPod.

In true Krell style, the amp has a massive 750VA toroidal mains transformer and around 38,000 microfarads of power supply capacitance. The direct-coupled output is class A. The preamp is fully balanced, though there is only one balanced input. The special iPod input calls for particular mention.

When you connect your iPod or iPhone via the supplied 30-pin connector, audio signals are taken from the fully differential output of the device's internal DAC and this balanced topology is maintained through to the preamp – ensuring improved sound.

Krell claims it's the only company doing this at present.

#### PERFORMANCE MATTERS

With any hi-fi system – even beautiful ones – the overall result is what counts. But, it's still important to evaluate each part separately. So, we initially tried some of the components individually – starting with the loudspeakers.

The Liuto Tower immediately impresses with a combination of natural open tonality and crisp attack. It produces a clear detailed sound that was lucid and articulate. At the same time, it sounds very integrated. Even sat close by, the effect is surprisingly homogenous – the three drive units blend unusually well together.

The top end is crisp and sharp; the mid-band smooth and open. Bass is full and fairly extended, but clear and not boomy. The bass and mid chambers are separate and ported. Efficiency is quite high at about 89 decibels.

The Liuto Tower has that effortless relaxed quality you tend to get with reflex speakers – different to the tight and overdamped effect produced by sealed enclosures.

Power handling is rated at between 40 watts to 250 watts and there are three drive units with crossover points at

350Hz and 3kHz. The tweeter is a 25mm pre-coated fabric-dome type with soft polymer surround.

The midrange is handled by a 150mm thermo-moulded polypropylene textile cone, synergistically optimised for its enclosure. The woofer is a 220mm lightweight aluminium/magnesium alloy cone driver, designed for dynamics and high linearity.

The PrimaLuna ProLogue Eight offers a winning combination of smoothness and warmth, with good definition and fine detail. It sounds tack-sharp and immediate, without seeming thin or bright, giving the music a very clean focused quality.

Although initially unaware of the player's special tube oscillator, there is a certain 'something' about the sound that strikes us as different and special – a combination of cleanliness and relaxed sweetness, allied to crisp-biting clarity.

In the context of this system, it's a pity the ProLogue Eight only has unbalanced analogue outputs; it would have been nice to take advantage of the S300i's balanced input option.

But the ProLogue Eight proves to be a very good CD player – well above average in terms of sound quality. It's not the fastest kid on the block in





**“There’s an unforced naturalness which makes it ideal for classical music, where the combination of low coloration and integration creates an impression of effortless ease.”**

terms of track access, but the sound is rather special.

Krell’s S300i also sounds crisp and detailed. It has a tight, lean sort of tonality that sits on the sharp/articulate side of neutral – something of a Krell signature. But, while it definitely isn’t romantically warm or beguiling, neither is it antiseptically bright or clinically thin.

The kind of sonic presentation offered by the S300i will best suit those who like a fast immediate driving sort of presentation. There’s also ample power, and the amp will play quite loudly.

The volume control is electronic and each ‘step’ produces a subtle increase in level, with 12 indent points for each 360 degree turn.

Volume levels are indicated on a display pane and range from 0 to 150. Using the ProLogue Eight and Liutos, we found a setting of 60 to 65 to be about right on most classical CDs, with 80 to 90 on the loud side. Over 100 verges on the unsociably loud, though still usable.

The amplifier runs moderately hot, and benefits from about an hour or so to fully warm up, in order to achieve the best results. The case temperature reaches about 40 degrees and there are two massive heat sinks to the left and right of the case, but no internal fan is needed. In fact, it runs a shade hotter in the area closer to the tubes.

Both the ProLogue Eight and S300i are fully remote controllable and come with cordless handsets. The Krell remote will even address certain functions on your iPod/iPhone (and charge the battery) when connected to the S300i.

**WE THREE ARE ONE**

Although comprised of products from three different manufacturers, the combination proves to be well-balanced and compatible. The sound is lucid and detailed, with an emphasis on definition and clarity, as well as a crisp open tonal balance.

Bass is quite full and extended given the size of the loudspeakers, while the

overall sound is sharp and immediate, with lots of presence and impact.

It’s a system that handles all kinds of music. There’s an unforced naturalness which makes it ideal for classical music, where the combination of low coloration and integration creates an impression of relaxed effortless ease.

Stereo soundstaging is very clean and precise and the sound has depth and spaciousness. The amplifier also has sufficient power to encompass heavy rock and does not flinch when called on to kick ass. It’s capable of going pretty loud without sounding hard or aggressive, retaining control alongside impressive precision and attack.

That said, we value this combination mostly for its ability to reproduce unamplified instruments and voices with finesse. But – no need to discriminate; whatever your taste in music, this system is capable of handling it. At less than £10k, it provides a taste of real high end. **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*



# YAMAHA



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# REVIEWS



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

## EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 30 Magico V2 loudspeaker
- 35 Grado GS 1000i headphone
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## OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

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

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

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

## OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



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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...

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



# Bay area tech

*Magico's latest high-end speaker is a performance winner*

**PRODUCT** Magico V2

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £18,000 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD) 25.5x115x30cm  
 ◉ Weight 54kg ◉ Drivers 20mm MRI ring radiator tweeter, 2x 175mm Nano-Tec bass drivers ◉ Sensitivity: 89dB ◉ Frequency response: 32kHz-40kHz ◉ Baltic Birch wood finish ◉ Magico's Elliptical Symmetry crossover

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.absolutesounds.com

**B**ased in San Francisco, Magico is one of three brands at the last CES in January to have an Israeli connection. In this case, the Israeli designer, Alon Wolf, a classical guitarist and engineer, set up shop in San Francisco where the speakers were subsequently designed and built. Some bass driver assembly work is carried out by Morel in Israel, while crossover components come from Raimund Mundorf in Germany. The ScanSpeak Revelator tweeter is made in Denmark, along with the woodwork.

Magico is one of the newer names on the block, but that's not to say that it's an ordinary company. It started making waves in the US about three years ago and attracted a lot of attention at this year's CES, for its exceptional sound quality.

This at any rate is what the European Sales Manager of a major Japanese manufacturer told us. And he is a man with a particularly impressive track record of setting up good demonstrations, as well as being involved in the design and voicing of his own loudspeaker range. Well it wasn't exactly what he said. What he actually said was that Magico was the best sound in show for the last two years and this reviewer agrees with him. For despite its seemingly conventional appearance, in our opinion, Magico is the most exciting loudspeaker introduction for several years.

The V2 is the entry-level model in the Magico range, which stretches to £35,000 for the Mini 2 and then there are the big, seriously expensive models which are marked POA on the price list. In the US, the company is seen as a key competitor (perhaps we should say *the* key competitor) to Wilson Audio, which for many is the high end epitomised.

The V2 looks ordinary enough at first glance: a 2.5-way floorstanding medium size speaker with a shape that's familiar from many other makes. Check out the Mini 2 (featuring in

*The Collection 2009*) and you will see that Magico is not locked into making speakers with the form factor of the V2. The relative simplicity of this particular model is intended to ensure that its pricing is accessible.

But it is not as simple as its appearance suggests. Leaving the exquisite finish to one side, one difference is that it is a sealed box/infinite-baffle speaker, while its rivals are

They have a distinct sound of their own. This said, the Revelator tweeter is clearly a different and superior animal from the early version of the same model, which generally could be heard in their own right. This may well be related to how it is integrated into the midband and bass.

The main part of the midrange is particularly impressive: it is expressive, finely detailed, ▶

**“It is rare for sound and technology to converge so precisely on the same goal, but this is exactly what has happened.”**

invariably a variation on the bass-reflex ported theme. Second, the enclosure is built with an integrity that is second to none and this also applies to many of the finer details, the crossover in particular.

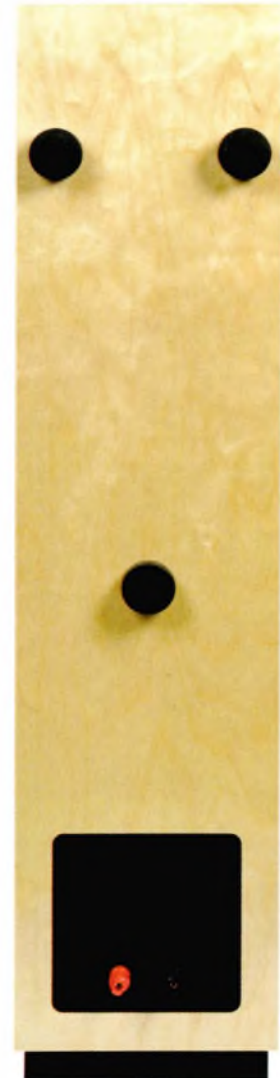
So why a sealed box, you ask? Alon Wolf's response, when he was caught on his way to catch a plane, was somewhat Delphic. Yes, there is a very good reason not to use a bass reflex, but only if one can execute a sealed design properly.

Reading between the lines, we believe his thinking is that a reflex alignment is by nature excessively resonant and inherently compromised, which can result in systems that can be difficult to control. A sealed box alignment offers slower attenuation in the lower frequencies, albeit starting from a higher one. The danger is that the balance between the two will be audibly lean. Read on to see if this is an issue.

## SOUND QUALITY

Having established that this is an almost uniquely exacting design that reinvents the very grammar of high-end loudspeaker design, we must also report that it is just as impressive on audition. The V2 is a lot more than just an engineer's wet dream.

It is difficult to know where best to start, as this is an unusually seamless performer. There is no detectable discontinuity between the bass, the midband and the treble. Each seems to grow organically from its neighbour, which in itself is quite remarkable. The exotic tweeters that some of Magico's peers use are blessed with some great qualities, but generally, their performance cannot be described as seamless.





# Tucana II

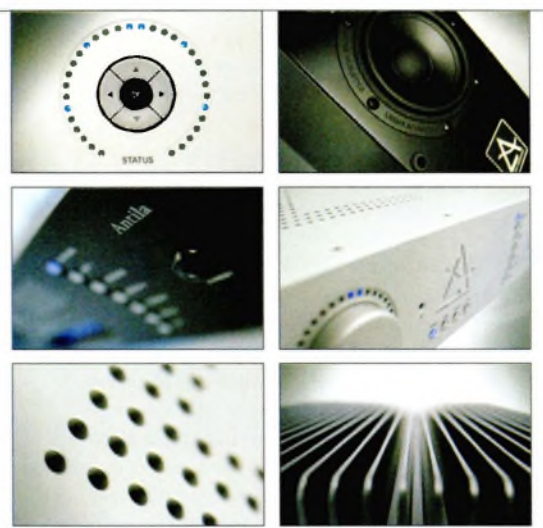
The Tucana was Leema Acoustics' first hi-fi electronics product. Within a short time it established itself as a true reference amplifier winning many prestigious awards. The new Tucana II extends both the performance and features, to set a new world-wide benchmark.

# 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.



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layered and free of any obvious colourations. It also has the kind of delicacy and transparency that is more often associated with the world of electrostatics. There were some superb passages during the test, for example, of Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody*. But making too much of particular pieces of music is missing the point with a loudspeaker that was both as easy to listen to and live with, as it was musically informative.

So is the balance lean? A little, yes, but not too much so. What the V2 lacks is that slightly loose underdamped upper bass, too beloved of many high-end speakers and, in particular, speakers from the US. The V2 is fast, taut and agile and there is no noticeable bloom, still

### CONSTRUCTION

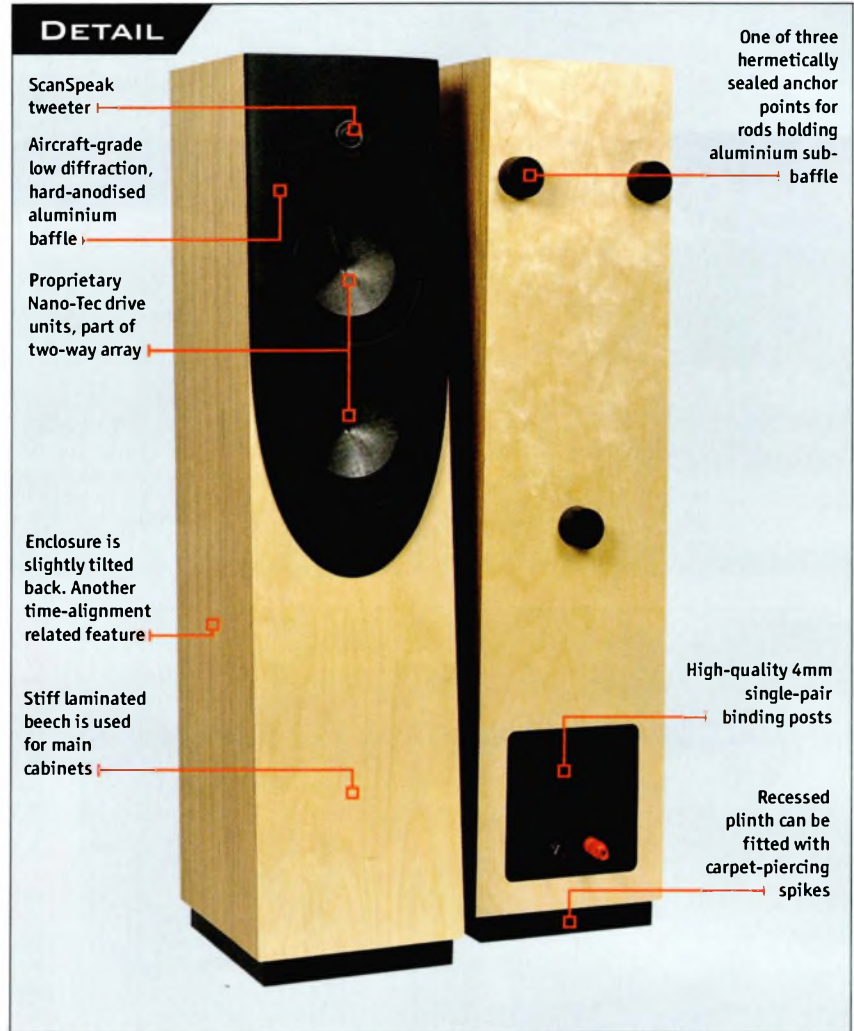
Though compact, the Magico 2 enclosure is heavy, and immensely rigid and well damped. Alon Wolf is adamant that particle board like MDF is not appropriate for high-performance speakers and instead specifies 17 ply baltic birch, cut into strips, glued together, with part of the panel thickness rotated 90 degrees for stiffness.

Fixing the driver is equally painstaking. They are bolted to a 25mm-thick anodised aluminium, low diffraction sub-baffle, which in turn is fixed with three stainless steel bolts to the rear panel. This locks the woodwork in place between them, as though held in a vice. The fixing points for the bolts are hermetically sealed.

There are two similar Nano-Tech (sic) 7-inch woofers, which are designed in house and cross over at different frequencies. The sandwich cone consists of an asymmetric Rohacell cellular core, faced with carbon fibre nanotubes and a continuous single-piece carbon fibre outer cone, with no separate dust cap. This makes it incredibly stiff and light. You can apparently stand on a cone without damaging it.

When we mentioned that Leak famously advertised the same property for its sandwich cone way back in the 1960s, Alon pointed out that the Magico cone is much lighter. The unit has an immensely powerful, but compact Neodymium magnet which allows it to 'breathe', with a 75mm underhung voice coil made from aluminium strip.

The ScanSpeak tweeter is said to be the best available version and measurably different from the one specified for the Mini 2, for example. The crossover specifies some exotic components, including inductance-free interleaved capacitors and system wiring is solid-core, high-purity lacquered copper.



less room boom. Room positioning is best with moderate toe-in to hit the tweeter's hot spot, but there is no need to dial-in room reinforcement, by placing the speakers near walls or by encouraging early reflections. Just the opposite, in fact. The speed and articulation of the bass is best when the V2 is in open, unobstructed space. That said, the Magico is not as picky about room placement as some other speakers that we can think of.

But it is fussy about amplifiers. It likes very clean amplification and plenty of it. It worked well with the Krell FBI integrated, but it also worked beautifully with the Esoteric A-03. Bridged A-03s, which yield 200 watts per channel, would probably be even better.

One anecdote from a test that was full of incident is worth recounting here. A product manager who represents the competition and who was openly sceptical of the V2 in conversation, was clearly shaken and, yes, stirred, within seconds of the music starting. We even detected tears welling up in his eyes! This is truly a loudspeaker that drills down to the musical depths.

It is very rare for sound and technology to converge so precisely on the same goal, but this is exactly what has happened, in this case.

The V2 is a painstakingly designed and immaculately voiced, loudspeaker. It covers all but the final few tones of the full audio band, can go loud and can convey the essence of a musical performance in space, like few others. It's expensive, yes, but given what has gone into this design, we are prepared to suggest that it is good value and have marked its score sheet accordingly. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> Fast, assured and highly articulate loudspeaker which is more European in balance than many loudspeakers which really are European.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> Slightly lean bass may not suit all tastes (though bass reach is good). It can also be demanding of its partnering equipment, so be warned.
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Accomplished mid size speaker that sets new standards in most areas and comes close in most others. Its high pricing derives directly from its superb, painstaking engineering, the result of which is an impressive musical performance.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
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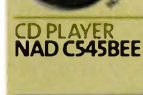
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# Get an earful

*Grado's updated GS1000i is a comfortable, innovative and first-class performer*

**PRODUCT** Grado GS1000i

**TYPE** Headphone

**PRICE** £1,100

**CONTACT** ☎ 01279 501111 # www.gradolabs.com

**N**early three years ago (HFC 288), we reviewed Grado's flagship model, the GS1000. We hardly stinted with praise, describing it as possibly 'the finest electricity-to-sound transducer in the world'. But three years is a long time in audio – long enough for two particular things to happen. First, Grado informed us that a new version of the GS1000 was available, sporting the suffix 'i' for 'improved'. Second, Sennheiser weighed in with the HD800 (HFC 324), a direct competitor at a similar price, which we wrote about in the last issue in terms suggesting it might be a match, or more, for the GS1000.

That gives this new model two marks by which to be judged – its predecessor and the newcomer from Sennheiser. But what has Grado actually done to justify the 'improved' tag? All that's obvious externally is a thicker (and slightly shorter) cable. The company is invariably coy with technical details, but its website does give a few pointers. For a start, the new cable has eight conductors, made of ultra-high purity, long-crystal copper, the same material as is used for the voice coils. The dynamic drive unit is upgraded, while the wooden surround uses a new type of wood and all the tweaks are claimed to give better control and stability of the treble and bass.

The experience of wearing these headphones is exactly the same as with the original GS1000, dominated by the bizarre-looking but effective foam earcups which, attached to a moderately springy headband, keep the drive units stable on the ears with minimal pressure on any sensitive bits of the head. No headphone is perfectly comfortable over a long period, but these do better than most: the headband can become a little uncomfortable on the top of the head after

**“...endless rhythmic vivacity and high resolution, makes it one of the most convincing bits of audio kit we know.”**

a while, but it's a simple matter to move it a centimetre or two. Sound seems consistent every time the headphones are put on – some are very fussy about exact placement but these are quite forgiving.

## SOUND QUALITY

There's no doubting the very high performance achieved by this model. Tried in alternation with the original GS1000 (we bought the review sample and have hundreds of hours experience with it), it clearly maintains the general sound character. Tonal neutrality is excellent from lowest bass to highest treble and detail is superb. And as with all the highest quality headphones, one is aware from the first few seconds of music that the

resolution is in a different league from most loudspeakers, showing up musical details (and occasionally blemishes too) that had simply not registered before.

As for differences from the non-'i' GS1000, we had to listen for quite a while before we were really sure that we heard any at all. Despite Grado's claims, we couldn't convince ourselves that the treble was significantly changed, but the bass is indeed a touch more secure and indeed is a particular glory

of the model; very extended but always clear and tuneful. The midrange seems to us just slightly more present and vocals are as a result slightly more clearly differentiated from instrumental accompaniment, for instance. But this is nit-picking, as overall the character seems largely unchanged.

Comparing this model with the HD800, we'd have to say we felt the latter to have the edge in both tonal neutrality and detail. On the other hand, the Grado is, perhaps, a little more lively dynamically and that alone will make it the obvious choice for many listeners. It has endless rhythmic vivacity and that, combined with the high resolution, makes it without a doubt one of the most convincing bits of audio kit we know. We've also learned that Grado has a new 'professional' model, the PS1000, placed above the GS1000i. Although considerably dearer, it could be the new point of reference. Watch this space. **HFC**

*Richard Black*



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>CONCLUSION</b> Certainly a superb transducer, capable of astonishingly high performance standards. Now facing stiff competition, it still demands an audition.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>URL</b> <a href="http://www.techradar.com/624782">www.techradar.com/624782</a>	



VOLUME

# Belle ringer

*A new integrated amplifier from Belles pushes the envelope on high-end sound*

**PRODUCT** Belles Statement IA-01

**TYPE** Integrated amplifier

**PRICE** £5,250

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43.2x76x33cm

⊖ Weight: 16.8kg ⊖ Power output: 180 watts (8 ohms), 300 watts (4 ohms) ⊖ Inputs: 4x line ⊖ Output: 1x RCA ⊖ Distortion: <0.05% at rated power (1M & THD) ⊖ Frequency response: 0.02Hz - 100kHz

**CONTACT** ☎ 01684 593085 🌐 www.coherent-systems.co.uk

**B**elles came like a bolt out of the blue! Sharing the same UK distributor as Cabasse speakers, the arrival of its IA-01 amplifier prompted three nagging questions: Just who is Belles, what credibility does the company have in the high-end amplifier stakes and is the IA-01 an amplifier that can be taken seriously alongside a plethora of better-established companies, such as Naim?

The parent company trades under the banner Power Modules Inc. and has a history going back more than 30 years. Belles is the product name of their pre, power and integrated amplifiers, the test subject here being in effect a synthesis of the technology of two existing models, the LA-01 preamp and the MB200 monoblocks.

Convection cooling uses the fine-pitched heat exchanger fins that cover the two side panels, with the cooling capacity probably more than is strictly needed in most situations as the amplifier runs fairly cool, even under sustained drive. There is nothing special about the standard of fit and finish, but it is more than adequate. The amplifier is well built internally and uses good-quality components; an ALPs volume control for example, but the signal is piped from the back of the amp to the potentiometer and

back again afterwards, which is not an ideal arrangement. A long-spindle volume pot would have been a better arrangement.

By any standards, the IA-01 is a no-nonsense amplifier. It's a dense, heavy lump and is unexpectedly compact. It is far less bulky, however, than many otherwise similarly designed audiophile amplifiers. The outer structure is fabricated from aluminium panels, the thick front panel having bevelled edges and a cut-away central feature, which together count as one of the only concessions to style. The unit sits on Stillpoint feet and a palm-size, full-function remote control covering power, mute, input selection and volume is also included.

The minimalist theme continues. There are just four identical line inputs, a preamplifier

**“...the test subject here being a synthesis of the technology of two prior models, the LA-01 preamp and the MB200 monoblocks.”**

output, but no tape circuit, no headphone socket and (less surprisingly) no phono input. Internally, the circuit is entirely discrete, with no integrated opamps.

A preamplifier level output, however, is provided, which means that the unit could be used with a separate power amplifier, though given that the power amp is without doubt the strongest part of the package, this may turn out to have limited application in practice.

The main output consist of a single set of good-quality 4mm binding posts. Mains power switching, sequential input selection and full mute are available from spring-

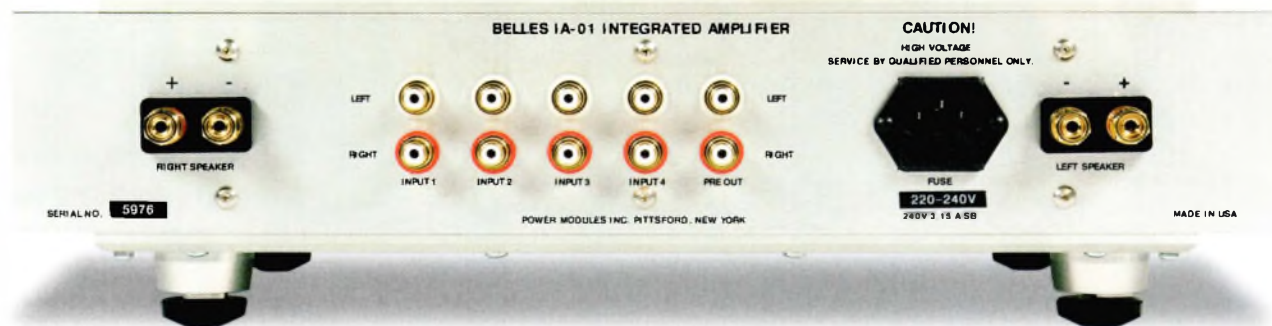
loaded front panel switches. The only other front panel furniture is the rotary volume control, plus the LED input and mute status telltales. It all makes for a simple and very matter of fact package.

## SOUND QUALITY

For an amplifier with no discernable pedigree on this side of the Atlantic, the Belles gives a great account of itself as a bold, well controlled and dynamic amplifier. Generally it doesn't have a strong voice of its own, which is a good thing, of course, and in many comparisons its boldness and raw power should stand it in very good stead. The fact that it's a high-power amp is not the issue here, but the manner in which it delivers power is. It almost sounds

as though it is enthusiastic about getting involved; it also avoids the flatness and congestion that characterises some second-ranking amplifiers.

This doesn't mean it is beyond criticism. We were able to compare it to the excellent Denon PMA-SA1, which has a similar price to the IA-01, as well as the more costly Esoteric C-03 preamplifier and AO-03 power amplifier. Both have a level of sophistication that ultimately eludes the Belles and this is particularly true of the Esoteric, which has a polish and finesse that is quite out of the ordinary, but is what you'd expect given the price differential. ▶



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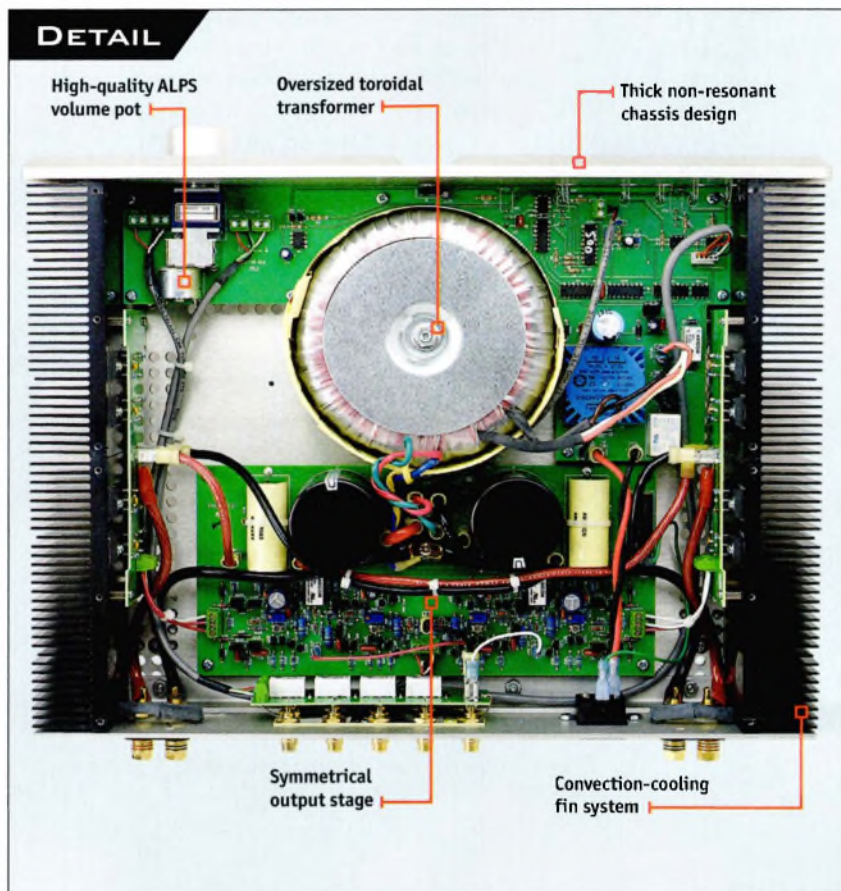
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◀ The Denon ran the Belles much closer. Of the two, the American amplifier is clearly much more powerful and ultimately the Denon has a mild, but characteristic colouration which the Belles lacks. But the Belles can sound slightly grainy and gruff, though it is far from being overtly harsh or aggressive. Just the opposite, in fact. And despite its overall liveliness, the IA-01 has an almost mild-mannered demeanour through the midband, albeit with a trace of something slightly closer to the knuckles at the high-frequency end of the spectrum. The bass is audibly completely unobstructed and the Belles is open and generous and never constrained or lacking in drive.

On the whole, the IA-01 is comfortable driving most of the loudspeakers we had access to, including most of the speakers that form part of *The Collection 2009* (on sale 24th September) – from the diminutive Eclipse TD712 Mk2 to the large and unusually complex Opera Malebran, which from first appearances looks like an amplifier-breaker if ever there was one.

But for reasons it's hard to put a finger on, the Belles IA-01 is not altogether comfortable driving the MartinLogan CLX at high levels, perhaps because it can't handle the unusual electrical loading these



## DESIGN

**The power amplifier is a Class AB design based on MOSFET active devices. Its power output is rated at 180 watts per channel into eight ohms, rising to 300 watts into four ohms. It is also said to have a high peak current delivery in excess of 32 amps, so it should be able to cope with moderately difficult loads – the only counter example being the MartinLogan CLX.**

**That the IA-01 has a vice-like grip on the loudspeaker load is implied by the damping factor of 2000, while the 100kOhm input impedance will not impose adverse loading in the form of frequency response modification on any line-level source. The circuits are single-ended internally and externally. There is no balanced input option here, which is unusual on a US-sourced high-end amplifier.**

speakers impose towards the upper frequency limits. It's not that the Belles can't cope, or that it sounds distorted, it just sounds slightly out of sorts. This is a loudspeaker that demands a certain kind of sympathetic synergy and an amplifier with a more graceful and atmospheric quality. Although it costs a lot more money, this is one case where the additional cost of the Esoteric pre and power amp would pay dividends.

A good result then. And the proposition is even more attractive, because the amplifier is so sensibly priced by the standards of its peers. At the very least, it doesn't subscribe to the syndrome that any amplifier aimed at the audiophile community with a respectable power output is apparently required to cost an arm and a leg.

The brief mention of the Naim in the introduction was not entirely accidental. Although there are many very obvious differences, there are also sufficient common factors for the comment to be valid.

The Belles is a kind of American Naim, given it's simplicity, and we suspect that there is even some commonality in their voicing. The IA-200 might even prove attractive to those who aspire to a Naim, – a high-power one anyway – but who can't afford the entry price.

But this is a very attractive design even leaving this point to one side. This is not an amplifier that ticks all the boxes and you may want something a little more sophisticated, but the Belles IA-01 is an open, dynamic amplifier with excellent control and definition. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*




VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> Bold and dynamic with plenty of grunt, in a compact, attractive and easy to handle package.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> A suggestion of softness in the midband and, although it works with most loudspeaker makes, it lacks the polish to make the most of some of the more high-resolution speakers.
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Good, solid, straightforward amplifier with a performance that is fundamentally musical. It has a variable quality when played with some high-end speakers, but there's no denying that you get a lot of bang for your buck.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
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# Small God

New company hopes to bring a touch of the divine with its affordable valve integrated

**PRODUCT** Idyam Zeus  
**TYPE** Integrated valve amplifier  
**PRICE** £800  
**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8400 1234 # www.idyam.com

Idyam is a new arrival in the UK. Built in China and sold through the Computer Warehouse, its product range consists of three iPod docks – two of which have valve amplification built in, plus the larger Apollo and Zeus amplifiers.

The Zeus tested here uses four 12A7 valves and four 6L6 valves in a relatively conventional circuit to produce a healthy 40 watts into eight ohms, albeit at a rather high 10 per cent THD. Four and eight ohm outputs are provided on the rear panel to assist with impedance matching speakers and the terminals themselves are sturdy three-way types able to handle most cabling. Three inputs are fitted and, as might be expected for the price, all are line level with no onboard phono stage.

The fit and finish of the unit is good – the controls feel solid and the quality of materials used throughout is pleasingly substantial with a thick acrylic front panel, chrome top plate and brass fins down the side. There is no cage to cover the valves, Idyam adopting a system of acrylic guards and a metal top cover instead that, whilst aesthetically pleasing, ought not to be considered child-proof.

A novel feature is the use of two small VU meters on the front panel. They certainly add visual interest to the product, but do not appear to be remotely accurate during listening. Our sample was supplied with an Idyam 'Blue' iPod dock which will be supplied free of charge to early purchasers of the Zeus.

### SOUND QUALITY

The amp achieves good real-world listening levels and shows no signs of distress driving a pair of Bowers and Wilkins 705s. Like most valve amplifiers, it benefits from a few minutes warm up before serious use and afterwards

**“...the two small VU meters on the front panel add visual interest, but do not appear to be remotely accurate during listening.”**

proves to be an engaging listen.

Simple pieces of music are presented with a natural tone and sense of space that is hard not to like. *John Law Burned Down the Liquor Sto'* performed live at the *Down from the Mountain* concert is superbly atmospheric and there is a pleasingly three-dimensional sense of the performers and their position relative to one another. Vocals are also reproduced well with a sense of realism and detail, but equally they are not separated from the instruments as

if being offered up for dissection. There is also an excellent sense of presence and authenticity to instruments coupled with a very honest and real decay to notes that helps complete the sense of being with the musicians.

Whilst not a rhythm machine in comparison to some similarly priced solid-state designs, the Idyam reproduced the infectious get up and go of ZZ Top's *Tres Hombres* very well and even made some sense of the extraordinarily dense live recordings, as well as capturing much of the frenetic nature of the performances

Switching to more recent and aggressive music begins to display some of the ultimate

limitations of the Idyam, mainly in respect to the bass performance. And while there is no shortage of absolute bottom end, there is a tendency for it to be somewhat lacking in resolution – if you are willing to spend a little more on a valve amplifier, better bass performance is available. Equally, the timing which is solid enough with more relaxed styles can come across as a little too relaxed as music increases in tempo and removes some of the vibrancy of the recording that other amps can bring out more successfully.

For those whose listening tastes are more refined, however, there is much to commend the Idyam's sonic performance, especially given its good build quality and its extremely competitive price. Listeners seeking a more palpable sense of excitement may find it a little too laid back, however. **HFC**

Ed Selley



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	<b>CONCLUSION</b> Keenly priced and well thought out amp with much to commend it to the music lover with simpler musical tastes. Not a complete all-rounder but worth a look.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> <b>OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
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# Future-proof

*Fully upgradeable, this basic turntable from SRM is a surefire winner*

**PRODUCT** SRM Arezzo

**TYPE** Turntable

**PRICE** £699 (without arm or cartridge)

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43 8x12 5x39cm  
 ◯ Weight: 6kg ◯ Two-speed belt-drive ◯ Machined acrylic subplatter ◯ PTFE spindle support pad  
 ◯ AC synchronous motor

**CONTACT** ☎ 01767 313691 # www.srmdesign.co.uk

**A**ny good-sounding product that's keenly priced and readily upgradeable gets our vote. True audiophiles are always keen on upgrades. If nothing else, it lets you start with the basic model and then make improvements as funds permit.

This is a key aspect of SRM's Arezzo turntable. There are three versions based on a common chassis: the basic Arezzo (£699); the Arezzo Kinetic (£1,148); and the Arezzo Ultra (£1,698) – plus an Arezzo Reference at £2,998.

The Arezzo features a resonance-controlled two-part acrylic plinth with three-point isolation. An AC synchronous motor drives the platter via a sub-platter using a 'Duo Drive' twin-belt system.

Speeds of 33rpm and 45rpm are offered and changing speeds entails the platter being removed and the belts shifted over to different pulleys. Because of the extra belts, this is slightly fiddly – not ideal for those who want to change speeds often.

It's usually impossible to say that any one part of a turntable is more important than another, but there's no question that the motor and drive system play a crucial role in determining the final quality of sound. SRM believes in a 'tight' coupling between motor and platter to avoid loss of detail and dynamics and ensure good speed stability. An LP record is an analogue device, so the 'load' on the motor varies according to the

loudness of the music being played – the louder it gets, the greater the 'drag' on the drive system.

While decoupling the motor from the platter may lower noise levels and improve isolation, the lack of a good, solid drive leads to a loss of focus and slight pitch waver – particularly noticeable with instruments like piano that produce sounds with sharp, fast-transients. In the Arezzo, the motor is situated very close to the inner platter and couples to it via two short square-section drive belts. The Kinetic upgrade adds a second 'flywheel' pulley and employs five drive belts to give increased traction.

Naturally, the facility to upgrade the deck is welcome, but the important question is – what standard of performance is offered by the basic model? – is it good enough to satisfy without the add-ons?

We've lived with the 'Full Monty' Arezzo Ultra for some months now and been very satisfied with the results. But, while the Ultra offers a worthwhile improvement over the cheaper versions, the basic Arezzo is very good.

Arezzo designer Stuart Michell recently made

**“...the facility to upgrade is welcome, but the important question is – what standard of performance is offered by the basic model?”**

a simple improvement to the deck that (he feels) makes the basic Arezzo sound superior to the Arezzo Kinetic. The mod derived from work done on the Arezzo Reference, it's simple to fit and is available as a free upgrade kit.

The upgrade consists of seven 4mm round platter-support points made from rubber. This improves the isolation between platter and main bearing/motor, as well as damping the main bearing slightly.

## SOUND QUALITY

To ensure a fair comparison, we used the same arm and cartridge we'd been using on the Arezzo Ultra. First impressions certainly seem to bear out Stuart's claims. The standard Arezzo produce a bright, open, tonal balance with excellent control and coherence, sounding crisp and focused, with excellent fine detail and dynamics.

Although the more expensive turntable remains superior in certain aspects, the basic model gives it a very good contest. The sound is detailed and clean, displaying the open 'airy' qualities we associate with the Arezzo Ultra – not especially rich or warm, but very crisp and tactile. Definitely no fake-tan 'analogue warmth' here!

The bass sounds full, but not overly powerful. The low end has a tidy clean quality that sounds tight and controlled, if not especially deep or voluminous. However, a better arm (we used the Moth Mk 1 with Incognito wiring) would no doubt change this.

We've been really impressed by how secure and stable the Arezzo Ultra sounds. Not just in terms of solid image placement, but pitch.

There's a complete lack of pitch waver – something you rarely encounter with LP. It was almost like listening to CD – and we mean that as a compliment.

Although the basic Arezzo lacks the flywheel and big power supply, it also offers the excellent pitch stability of its bigger brothers. If there is a loss of security, it's very slight. We half expected the basic Arezzo to be noticeably less stable than the Kinetic or Ultra models, but, it's not.

Difficult piano LPs reproduce with pitch stability that invites comparison with big expensive turntables – those having ridiculously heavy platters, huge motors and frightening price tags.

However, the Arezzo avoids the Brute Strength and Ignorance approach, taking a different path. It has a (comparatively) light acrylic platter and a normal-sized motor – albeit a higher torque version than other ▶





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manufacturers' use. Yet it achieves outstanding speed stability. How?

The secret seems to be its multi-belt drive. Designer Stuart Michell believes the motor (rather than a heavy platter) is boss – and, therefore, it needs to drive the platter without loss of torque. Thus, there is very little decoupling between motor and platter; the square section belts are deliberately kept short and tight to minimise springiness.

The Arezzo certainly allows the listener to relax – something not always possible with vinyl. One huge benefit with CD is its sheer reliability; it rarely ever breaks up or gets stuck, and has no background noise or speed (pitch) irregularity problems. CD has its own irksome faults, but not these.

Being an analogue turntable, the Arezzo is prone to the faults of vinyl LPs. But subjectively, it almost sounds as though it isn't. It gives a remarkably solid and assured performance that rarely feels as if it's about to go off the rails.

Even demanding LPs reproduce with surprising calm. The pickup sounds as if it is having a (relatively) easy time of things and gives the impression of being able to cope with whatever the grooves might throw at it. Even



**UPGRADES**

The various upgrades are as follows: The Kinetic Drive (with flywheel and five belt-drive) costs £449. The high-current PSU costs £449. The isolation platform and dust cover bought together costs £269 – or £200 for the cover and £89 for the platform.

The deck can be bought ready-fitted with a Moth (Rega) arm. The basic Moth Mk 1 (RB-251) with SRM resonance-controlled counterweight costs £130. With Incognito straight-through wiring, this increases to £270.

The Moth Mk 3 (RB-301) with SRM resonance-controlled counterweight costs £165; with Incognito wiring it's £305. Further options include the Moth 700 and 1000 tonearms at £390 and £725, respectively.

when a disc did have a bit of turbulence, it was usually handled with relaxed ease.

In the past, we've heard turntables that offered similar qualities, but nearly always they've been big, heavy, extremely expensive monsters with massive platters and humongous motors. That the Arezzo does what it does with (comparatively) modest resources is impressive and largely down to the drive system used.

Stuart Michell uses a special high-torque version of the Premotec AC motor. This motor – a derivative of the old Phillips motor used in the Linn and Rega – has increased 'drive'. Indeed, Stuart claims the standard Premotec motor would not have the necessary torque to drive the Kinetic flywheel.

With multi-belt drive, the motor is most definitely in charge of the platter. Some

turntables simply use the motor to get the platter up to speed; once achieved, stability is maintained by the flywheel effect of the (heavy) platter. With the Arezzo, the motor is the driving force.

While you do get further improvements in sound quality with the Kinetic and Ultra upgrades – essentially, a subtler more finely shaded sound with greater detail and dynamics – the standard Arezzo performs superbly, giving most listeners everything they will ever need from a vinyl replay source. We can't recommend it highly enough. **HFC**

*Jimmy Hughes*



**VERDICT**

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> The basic Arezzo is a great turntable producing superb results at a realistic price. It's very good as supplied, but offers a clear upgrade path for those wanting something even better.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	<b>CON</b> Difficult to find anything to complain about, except for the fiddly speed change and expensive optional lid.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	

**CONCLUSION**  
The Arezzo is an excellent source component for those wanting a superb turntable for vinyl replay. Whether you're new to vinyl, or an established vinyl fan with a big collection, the Arezzo will bring your LPs to life.

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

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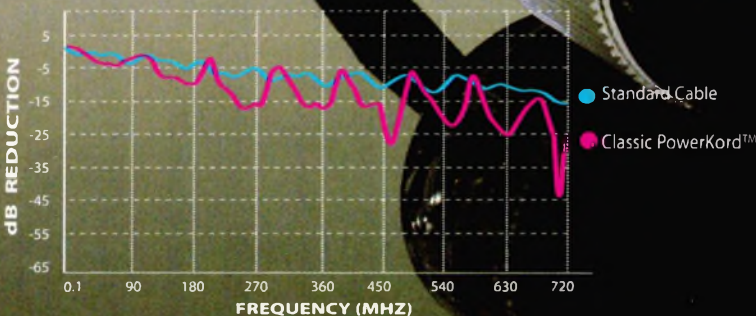
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EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine





# Blast from the past

Nineties company Trilogy is back with an impressive hi-fi duo

**PRODUCT** Trilogy 909/990

**TYPE** Preamplifier and power amplifier

**PRICE** £4,495 (909); £5,895 (990)

**KEY FEATURES** (909) Size (WxHxD): 42 8x9 9x42 4cm

⊙ Weight: 7.5kg ⊙ Inputs: 6x RCA phono ⊙ Outputs: 2x pre, 2x tape 1x RCA phono ⊙ TASlink bus system ⊙ PIN code protection (990) Size (WxHxD): 42 8x11 3x42 4cm ⊙ Weight: 24.5kg ⊙ Power: 100 watts (8 ohms), 160 watts (4 ohms) ⊙ Inputs: 1x XLR, 1x RCA phono

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8856 8856 # www.trilogyaudio.com

Trilogy is a name that you may remember from the nineties, when it could be found on a range of valve amplifiers that were often chrome-finished and highly regarded. Trilogy ceased production in 1999 because, according to designer Nic Poulsen, not enough time was spent on selling the product, due to the fact that most of it went into making it sound and look as good as possible.

Poulsen didn't abandon hi-fi, however, and went on to start IscTek the mains conditioner company. He then went on to form Isol-8 and then, in 2007, to revive Trilogy, a move that eventually led to last year's relaunch.

Despite appearances, the latest Trilogy models are still valve amplifiers, but they have some distinct differences to most of the breed. The 990 power amplifier is a hybrid design with a solid-state output stage of the feedback-free variety and the 909 preamp is the most sophisticated example of its type in the glass-audio world, thanks to onboard microprocessing that makes an iPod look ill-equipped.

A clue as to its flexibility lies in the

dot-matrix display. This can be set to show volume level, input and even the time, but before you can do anything with the 909 you need to enter a PIN code. This is for security reasons, but you only need to do it once unless the preamp is unplugged from the mains for more than half an hour. It's unlikely to stop some 'tea leaf' from half-inching it should he feel the need, but is worth remembering if you ever spot one on eBay.

More relevant features include timer turn on/off, input naming (with alternative language options), maximum volume setting

**“...the latest Trilogy amplifiers are still valve amplifiers, but they have some distinct differences to most of the breed.”**

(to stop your kids destroying the speakers), variable input gain and selectable record out – which allows separate listen and record. The list continues to include multiroom readiness and when the 909 is connected to a Trilogy power amplifier with the TASlink bus system, it can show information about the amp such as the operating temperature.

This has more features than you can shake a stick at to be frank and more, perhaps, than most of us are ever likely to need, but according to Poulsen they can be incorporated into the equipment without undermining sound quality and they clearly differentiate the 909 from its competitors.

Rather than a potentiometer, the 909 preamp uses shunt attenuation via Reed relays to control volume and has a shunt-

regulated power supply with Mundorf film-foil capacitors.

The 990 power amplifier is built around a massive central heatsink. This element has to be milled from a solid aluminium billet and, therefore, adds not a little to the cost of the 'amplifier'. It does look stunning, though. Turn the amp on and blue LEDs illuminate each hole. Under the lid you will find a choke input and shunt-regulated valve stage driving a fully bridged transistor output stage, one which itself is split into FETs for the first watt and bi-polar devices

where extra current is required, so it is almost a tri-brid in practice.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Trilogy pairing matches the superb paint finish of the casework with a high-quality dynamic and beautifully timed sound that reveals a lot of detail, whilst keeping the spotlight on the music at all times. This is a distinctly valve characteristic: the ability to bring out the message in the music ahead of more tangible and matter-of-fact aspects like tone, power and imaging. The Trilogy components do this without the usual limitation on power that pure glass designs struggle with and which restrict the level at which you can play and the speakers that can be used. Here we have the grace and the grunt, albeit without the grip one gets with pure solid state power amps.

With the resident Bowers and Wilkins 802D speaker there is a shortfall in terms of bass solidity compared to our admittedly bigger – in terms of power if not money – Classé CA-2200 power amp. What you get instead is a fluidity and nimbleness across the band that makes the music significantly more engaging and well, musical.

Its balance stops you listening to the sound and focus on the music. Avishai Cohen's double bass-playing doesn't have the power that one expects, but it has a pace and dexterity that is far more engaging. This quality extends to everything you play. ▶





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*eclipse*



worth waiting for...



Review: September 2009

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

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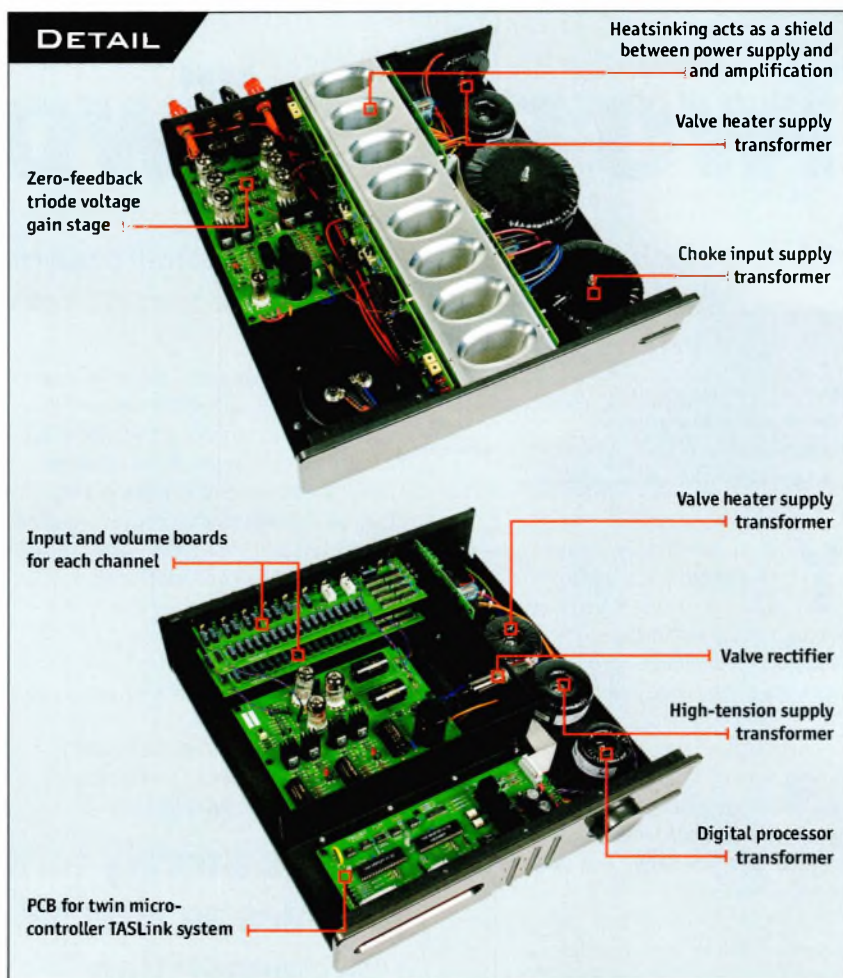
be it Keith Jarrett's remarkable poise on the keyboard or the improvisations of Brewed By Noon's jazz-rock.

We pulled out a pair of Living Voice Auditorium OBX-R speakers to see if they might gel a bit better and provide the self-damped bass that Trilogy considers suited to its products. This proves to be the case, the bass while not hugely extended is tight and well-defined with bass lines as articulate as you like. The emphasis is still on the tune however: these amplifiers don't seek to impress with sound effects, rather they concentrate on the details that matter. These include the timbre of instruments and voices and the ability to keep up with the pace of the playing. It's almost as if other amps struggle to achieve this, the degree of freedom from overhang being a real eye-opener.

We also tried PMC's mighty PB1i speaker to see if the amps could control its ATL bass system. Which it can, the bass remains taut and dynamic with good extension and plenty

## ZERO FEEDBACK

Feedback is used in the output stage of most amplifiers and pretty well all transistor types because it reduces measured distortion and increases the amount of control that an amplifier has over the speaker it's driving. However in valve circles, zero-feedback designs are considered to be desirable by enthusiasts who feel that this approach increases the fluidity of the sound, making it more natural. Trilogy has gone for zero feedback in both these components for this reason and because designer Nic prefers the type of speakers that do not need amplifiers with a vice-like grip in order to produce articulate and informative bass. He cites designs from the likes of Wilson Audio and ProAc as having a synergy with his amplifiers. The latter are also a popular choice among pure valve amp fans for reasons of sensitivity if nothing else, but the Trilogy 990 is not short on power and so can be used with a wide range of speakers.



of timbral detail. What also comes through is the high level of detail that the amp can deliver, which is useful on good recordings, but can be a bit too revealing of lesser ones. There is a degree of midrange emphasis that can exaggerate artefacts that other amplifiers leave relatively disguised. The PB1i is particularly revealing through the midband and for this reason may not be the best choice for these amps despite its lovely bass.

One problem with the 909 is its fairly high noise, which turned out to be down to the tubes doing the amplification. Swapping them for a quieter set lowered the noise considerably. Not completely, but to a level that's about average for glass audio which is

rarely, if ever silent. Nic says he will be reducing gain in the pre and power to bring it down further still.

The 909/990 pairing is a welcome return for a company that puts rather more thought into the internals and execution of its products than most in valve audio. Speakers need to be carefully selected for best results, but you won't find this much speed and fluidity combined with adequate power in many other quarters. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



### VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> Exceptional musicality combined with huge flexibility and superb build quality mark these out as class-leaders.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> The quality of the casework makes the price high and those after precise imaging and inky-black backgrounds won't be impressed.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Trilogy is reborn in a totally revitalised form offering a mountain of features in some stunning casework with a very distinctive finish. The key quality of musicality is still at the fore and that's what appeals above all else.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
URL <a href="http://www.techradar.com/625226">www.techradar.com/625226</a>	

# Two plus Two

Yamaha makes a welcome return to the hi-fi market with a two-channel system

**PRODUCT** Yamaha MCS-1330  
**TYPE** CD player and stereo receiver  
**PRICE** £995 (sold as a pair)  
**CONTACT** ☎ 01908 366700 # www.yamaha-audio.co.uk

Yamaha is a company that has rediscovered two channel. Having allied itself rather strongly with home cinema over the past decade, it has come back to its roots with the vigour of the born again. Maybe someone in the boardroom started listening to music again! This resurgence has spawned some superb-looking separates and is now filtering down into smaller systems, like these separates that are sold together and are designed to deliver decent sound from easy to use and attractive hardware.

MCS-1330 is the name that Yamaha appends to the electronics under consideration here and this review includes the R-1330 receiver and CD-1330 CD player. We used these with Yamaha's NS-BP400 speaker system. Both components are extremely well finished in three-quarter-width cases that when stacked together, stand a little higher than your average full-size amplifier. Yamaha is clearly going after the territory Denon has aggressively jumped into and TEAC staked out a while back with its gold bricks.

As for features, Yamaha has held back on chucking in everything it can and stuck with the key options required in this sector. Specifically, an iPod dock with full remote

functionality, an FM tuner, and a CD player that will spin MP3 and WMA-encoded discs. The only notable absence is DAB, which can be found on the competition at this price. There is a front panel USB input, but it's designed for 'mass storage devices' like flash memory keys and MP3 players rather than a PC, which seems an odd approach.

Speaker terminals are good quality and will accept 4mm plugs if you prise out the plastic caps and there are RCA phono inputs for a turntable and a line level source such as a DVD player or set-top box.

Using the FM tuner with the supplied twisted wire antenna can be a little challenging. The aerial can't pull in a

**“This is a nicely turned out pairing that provides an alternative aesthetic to the competition.”**

completely clean signal for stations like Radio 2 and the auto presetting process stored about 27 non stations as it scanned about a third of the band. A decent antenna may be a necessity in some situations – it's useful to have so many presets, though. The process is pretty straightforward once you have read the manual and given up on trying to set them all by wit alone. With a clean signal and the audiophile's station of choice, Radio 3, the results are very good with the fine imaging qualities of the medium demonstrated in full effect.

## SOUND QUALITY

For our test, we used the amplifier with a pair of Cyrus CLS50 speakers and connected the two Yamaha units with the supplied interconnect. The system has a Pure Direct mode, which dims the displays when engaged. The pairing puts in a taut and fairly revealing performance on CD, with a reasonably open and clear sound and average detail levels for the price.

It doesn't have the timing of regular separates, nor their dynamics, but there's enough bounce in its step to get your toe tapping, while vocals are not too vague in placement and shape. We compared it with a relatively old alternative, albeit a more

expensive one in its time. This put the Yamaha in a significantly better light thanks to its decent bandwidth and appealing openness, a combination that made bands like the ill-fated *Trio of Doom* (McLaughlin, Pastorius, Williams) sound more substantial and three-dimensional via some Dali Menuet speakers.

This is a nicely turned out pairing that provides an alternative aesthetic to the competition. It won't trouble full-size separates at the price but that's not its purpose. Instead, it provides decent sound quality and represents a big step up from budget units. What's more, it doesn't try to blind you with features. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	<b>CONCLUSION</b> It won't upset the separates market and it lacks power, but this stylish pairing is close behind in all else and has lots of fine detail with its open and dynamic balance.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> <b>OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★☆
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
URL <a href="http://www.techradar.com/625282">www.techradar.com/625282</a>	

# DENON



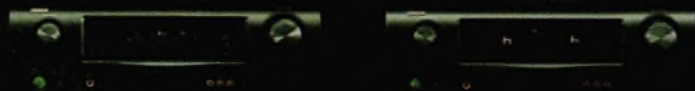
# surrounded by success



**Denon AVR-1910 High Definition AV Receiver** // What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision selects the new Denon AVR-1910 as its Multichannel Receivers Group Test Winner, describing it as a 'frighteningly good all-rounder'. In its September 2009 edition, the UK's largest home cinema and hi-fi magazine, also says the new Denon sounds 'hugely entertaining' with an 'unbelievable amount of detail'. Part of Denon's new generation of AV Receivers, the AVR-1910 features Dolby's latest ProLogic IIz sound program which supports two additional front-height speakers, enabling an even more lifelike surround sound experience.

AVR-1610

AVR-2310



*What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision  
Multichannel Receivers Group Test Winner  
Denon AVR-1910*

**DOLBY**  
PRO LOGIC IIz

BEST BUY  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine  
★

**NAD**

Stereo Integrated Amplifier C 375BEE



# Master Stroke

NAD's latest amplifier successfully bridges the gap between budget and high-end hi-fi

**PRODUCT** NAD375BEE

**TYPE** Integrated amplifier

**PRICE** £1,000

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43.5x13.5x35cm

⊖ Weight: 15.3kg ⊖ Inputs: 7 line-level, one optionally MM/MC phono ⊖ Outputs: Two sets speakers (switched), headphones, two record outputs, two preamp outputs ⊖ Rating: 150 watts (8 ohms)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

**N**AD made its name with budget amplifiers and its presence in that market continues to be strong. More recently, it has added the upmarket 'Masters' range – considerably more expensive products with more refined sounds and looks. In terms of hi-fi separates, though, there has been quite a gap between the ranges – a gap which the new 375BEE goes some way towards closing. But is it just more of the same stuff that goes in the cheaper amps?

Not according to NAD, which claims this amp is, in fact, closer to the Masters series M3. Among other Masters-type features, it uses a 'building block' approach for upgrades, including an optional phono stage (£70), which NAD supplied to us for this review – its performance is summarised in the box overleaf. We noted in fixing the phono module that there is a second expansion port, but as yet no product has been announced to fill it. A DAC, perhaps?

As the photographs clearly show, this is a pretty big chunk of amplifier. That's not surprising when one considers its specification, which includes a power rating of 150 watts into the usual 8 ohm notional impedance. NAD makes great play of its 'Full

Disclosure' power specification, welcome in these times of 1,000-watt desktop audio, though most proper hi-fi companies certainly don't stoop to such depths. Still, in practice this means NAD's specifications are distinctly conservative. We ran a few tests on the 375BEE which showed its continuous power delivery (driving two channels) to be barely a whisker below 200 watts, while a shade over 220 watts is available into one channel at a time and brief peaks (up to about 50ms, which is enough for most real-world musical

**“We spent a lot of time revelling in the classy combination of power and control which the amplifier offers.”**

transients) of 250 watts can be supported.

This kind of power puts a strain on the internal workings if they aren't robust. But there are no such worries here as four pairs of output transistors per channel are in circuit, sharing the high output currents quite safely. They are mounted on large heatsinks and fed from a substantial toroidal transformer and a pair of very large reservoir capacitors. This approach means that sustained high power delivery is not an idle boast: just about the only disadvantage (apart from the obvious ones of size and cost) is relatively high power consumption at idle, but this is still only in a region of 60 watts, similar to the 375BEE's obvious competitor, the Cambridge Audio 840A.

In common with many large-scale audio manufacturers, NAD is still using through-

hole components for most of its circuits. The circuit boards of the two discrete power amplifiers (separate back to the mains transformer) are well filled with parts, while the single board mounted on the base is home to the relays, which switch inputs and outputs, various power-supply parts and also a couple of completely enclosed 'Class A gain modules', which are evidently NAD's answer to the ubiquitous op-amp. Gain control is still a motorised potentiometer, with tone and balance controls alongside – defeatable, of

course. Inputs and outputs are plentiful, with a preamp output for bi-amping. The amp can be bridged if you really need 500 watts or so of output, in the company of a matching 275 power amp similarly connected.

Incidentally, as well as measuring output power we checked basic distortion and frequency response figures. They are all very impressive – midband distortion staying in the region of 0.001 per cent even at 200 watts output. That's not a trivial thing to achieve and we congratulate designer Bjorn Erik Edvardsen (the BEE suffix) on doing so.

## SOUND QUALITY

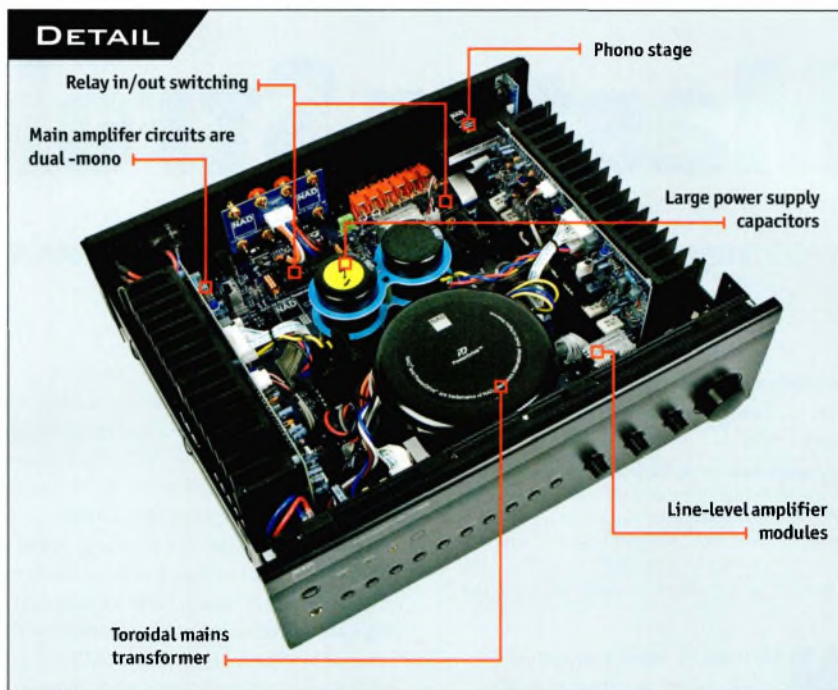
Faced with a powerhouse like this, there's a strong temptation to load up a noisy disc at the outset, wind the volume control up high and settle back for some good old aural



abuse. We did exactly that, but were rather taken aback by the results. We've used high-powered NAD amps before and always found them enjoyable, if not always well controlled or revealing at high power. This one breaks that tradition, for it offers some of the best control we've heard at anything like the price.

We weren't exactly using the world's easiest speakers, either. The Bowers and Wilkins 803S is a fairly tricky load and needs a firm hand to keep the bass precise, but the 375BEE proves more than ready for the challenge. Even when delivering peaks close to the 200 watts threshold (which was louder than we were comfortable with) there was no sense of strain, nor of the shift of focus that often occurs when amps start to run out of puff – loud bass making the midrange and treble wilt, and vice-versa.

As a result, we spent a lot of time revelling in the classy combination of power and control which the amplifier offers. Perhaps the odd rock'n'roller might find it a little too clean, but unless your musical tastes run almost exclusively to the 'down and dirty' it's likely you'll be as taken as we are with the combination of refinement and uninhibited power delivery. As we've mentioned before in these pages, classical music tends to have



wider dynamics than most other styles and hence benefits most from high power output, and indeed we found ready use for the power in uncompressed symphony orchestra recordings. Bass drum and timpani rarely sound so vivid!

There is also lots to admire and enjoy at more modest volumes. Another break with early high-power NAD amps is in the high degree of neutrality across the midrange. Previously, we've had some limitations about the degree of naturalness in voices, but on this occasion we find it very hard to pick fault in this area. This is accompanied by some excellent resolution of detail, making it very easy to separate the different lines within a multi-layered piece of music. As usual, stereo imaging follows where detail leads, and although we have heard just a shade more image depth (from amps costing considerably more than a grand, mind you) we have hardly heard better imaging stability. In a well-recorded oratorio recording, for instance, we found the placement of the voices absolutely consistent irrespective of the accompaniment behind them. An excellent result.

By this point, you're probably waiting for the big 'but'. Frankly, there isn't one. Forced to find criticism, we would have to resort to

minor details of sound. Thus the highest treble isn't quite as open and airy as true high-end amps manage, nor is the deepest bass as precise though they both come shockingly close. And ergonomics-wise, the volume control has a little backlash. And, of course, the unit, smart as it is, doesn't actually look a million dollars. But honestly, we reckon an unscrupulous reseller could put a fancy, thick aluminium front panel on this with some natty engraved graphics, jack the price up by a factor of two or three, and make some pretty easy sales.

There are some very good amplifiers out there, these days, between £500 and £2,000. The NAD 375BEE is not by any means the only game in town but it is a very fine amplifier by any reckoning. We used it with some very smart sources and speakers and it never once nodded. We are delighted to recommend it unconditionally. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## PP375

Normally, add-on phono stages are simply a circuit board that plugs in, piggy-back style, to the main amplifier circuit. This one is a fully enclosed module that screws to the back panel (replacing a blanking plate) and connects to the circuit via a flexible cable strip. It uses mostly surface-mount components, fitting quite a complex circuit into a small space, with separate input sections for moving coil and moving magnet cartridges. Like the rest of the amp it measures very well and subjectively we found it streets ahead of the usual integrated amp phono section. Sound is beautifully clear and full of life, and significantly is free of hum (no mean feat with a large mains transformer only inches away) and also lower in noise level than most can manage. For the LP-lover, it arguably turns a very good amp into a great one.



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> Bold and dynamic with plenty of grunt, in a compact, attractive easy to handle package. Offers remarkable control for its price with little strain at high volumes.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> Slight softness in midband, and while it works with most speakers, it lacks the polish to make the most of some high resolution speakers.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A good, solid, amplifier that is fundamentally musical, and gives a great bang for your buck. It offers a control at high volumes not usually found with NAD amps, and offers neutrality in the midrange with excellent detail resolution.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
URL <a href="http://www.techradar.com/625323">www.techradar.com/625323</a>	



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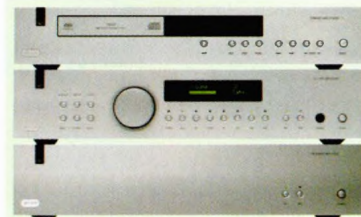
### HI-FI COMPONENTS

#### Cyrus

Cyrus has introduced a new range of amplifiers. Featuring circuitry developed for its DAC XP, the **8 XP d** and **Pre XP d** include digital inputs - ideal for playing music stored on your computer - while the entry model, **6 XP**, is based on the 8 XP 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**



#### Arcam FMJ

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.

#### Leema ANTILA II CD PLAYER | TUCANA II AMPLIFIER

With stunning sound quality and captivating good looks the new Antila II CD player features unique MD2 active differential multi-DAC converter technology to provide breathtaking realism.

The dual mono designed Tucana II uses three heavy-duty toroidal power transformers, has a refined bi-polar output stage and is capable of swinging over forty five amps of current, ensuring a vice like grip and precise control of the speakers.



#### 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 CD6003 | PM6003

Replacing the highly-regarded 6002 series, the new PM6003 amplifier and CD6003 CD player, come housed in Marantz's stylish M1 casing. The CD player features a front mounted USB socket allowing improved performance from devices such as an iPod or MP3 player while the amplifier has five line-level inputs along with a MM phono stage and two sets of speaker terminals for ease of bi-wiring.

### 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

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WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2008

#### B&W Zeppelin

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WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2008

### 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.

#### Wharfedale Diamond 10.1

This 10th generation version of the '80s classic combines insight, precision and control along with fine build and finish.



#### Monitor Audio

Using techniques and materials from its Platinum and Gold ranges, the **Silver RX** series of slimline speakers are available in a choice of real wood veneers and high-gloss piano finishes to complement any room.

#### Spendor A SERIES

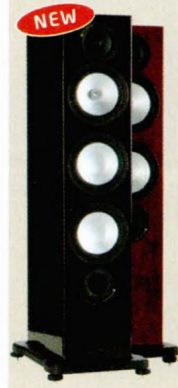
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#### KEF REFERENCE

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#### B&W CM SERIES

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#### B&W MT-25

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#### B&W Panorama

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WHAT HI-FI FIT AWARDS 2008

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)



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EDITOR'S CHOICE  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine  
★

# Vivid imagination

*From the designer that brought us Bowers and Wilkins' snail, Vivid dishes up a wood-free wonder*

**PRODUCT** Vivid Audio K1

**TYPE** Integral standmount loudspeaker

**PRICE** £14,495

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 28x130x45cm

⊙ Weight: 56kg ⊙ Drive units: 26mm metal dome tweeter, 50mm metal dome midrange, 4x 158mm metal coned bass units ⊙ Sensitivity: 89dB ⊙ Impedance: 6 Ohms ⊙ Finish: Five high-gloss automotive colours

**CONTACT** ☎ 01903 530005 🌐 www.vividaudio.com

**V**ivid Audio is a pretty unusual loudspeaker manufacturer. Based in South Africa, it makes all of its own metal drive units and encloses them in high tech cabinets with not a scrap of MDF or wood of any sort in sight. The Vivid Audio speakers are designed by Laurence Dickie, the man who is responsible for the original B&W Nautilus, or snail speaker. It's also a design that has had a profound influence over that company's entire range since it was created in the early nineties.

Nowadays, Dickie works at Turbosound, the live PA specialist and Vivid speakers are his only domestic creations in production.

The Vivid K1 was the biggest speaker in the range until the arrival of the mighty Giya, which will be appearing in 2009's *The Collection*. It stands 1.3m high on its moulded-in stand and while its slim shape ensures that it does not impose too much, it still makes its mark in the room. The distinctive form is achieved using a cast carbon fibre reinforced-polyester compound for the cabinet. This is a material that is selected for its ability to be moulded into an acoustically desirable shape from the perspective of both stiffness and the removal of diffraction.

With a box cabinet, sound radiates not only away from the drivers but across its front surface until it reaches an edge at which point it diffracts or bounces off. The curved shape around the mid and high frequency drivers, in particular on the K1, ensures that this does not happen. The final benefit from using this material is that it can be finished with almost any spray paint available on the market, apparently, the Korean Vivid distributor launched the Giya with a sample finished in a daring Lamborghini orange.

Like the smaller Vivid B1 that we reviewed in 2004 (*HFC* 261) the K1 has mid/bass drivers on both the front and the back of the enclosure, in this case four in total and these

operate in a very unusual fashion. For bass below 100Hz, all four are in use. For frequencies above this point, the output of the two rear units and the lower front unit is rolled-off leaving only the top front unit to produce bass and midrange up to 880Hz, where it hands over to the midrange dome.

Dickie calls this crossover a series parallel square because it maintains linear impedance

clearly going on here. Noise floor is not the right description really as it's more like a lack of overhang. What you are not hearing is a box joining in or drive units not being able to contain resonances.

This speaker is so fast and devoid of box coloration that it just doesn't join in with the music the way that so many others do. It's a quality that's so common that we accept it ▶

**“Clearly amplifiers used with this speaker have got to be quiet and need to be highly resolute.”**

across the band and it's a good example of the ingenuity that he has brought to this and the other Vivid speakers.

The Nautilus influence can be found in tapered tubes that extend behind the mid and treble domes within the cabinet and have their ends covered on the rear side. By designing these domes with external ring magnets the rearward radiation can be absorbed by damping in the tapered tubes.

The two anodised aluminium domes are not hemispherical but catenary in shape, which is like a suspended chain. This shape, more precisely described as a rotated catenary, was chosen because it pushes the first break-up mode of the driver up to 50 per cent higher than can be achieved with regular aluminium domes.

The K1's crossover is in the relatively flat base of the speaker with the signal being carried to the drivers via van den Hul cable. The base itself discreetly houses bi-wire WBT terminals and no fewer than five threaded holes for spikes, not something we chose to use, but hours of levelling fun could be yours should you feel the urge.

## SOUND QUALITY

The first thing you notice when firing up this speaker is that it seems to have a lower noise floor than other speakers. Backgrounds are distinctly quieter. This makes no sense at all, as speakers don't have a noise floor because speakers are passive devices that transduce electrical energy into acoustic energy and, therefore, should all be intrinsically silent. And yet this is not the first time the phenomenon has been encountered so there's something



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*Trevor Martin*

Trevor Martin, Guildford Audio

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as part of the music rather than as a distortion. But, take it away and you know that you are hearing a cleaner result.

This seems to be most obvious with piano pieces, the first disc to be spun was one of the Schiff Beethoven sonatas on ECM. At this stage, it was only clear that there seemed to be less noise on what is an extremely quiet recording, which in turn produced a more musically engaging result. And also one with more dynamic range than is usually perceived, which is a sure sign that there is less noise coming out of the system.

It was not until we put on Keith Jarrett's *Carnegie Hall* disc that it became clear that the piano sounded less fulsome and woody than usual, but also that it was more realistic in its solidity. After all, concert grands stopped sounding woody a long time ago.

This result could be interpreted as the K1 being short on instrumental timbre, but the sheer level of detail that's on offer here rather rules that out. Each instrument still has a character, Avishai Cohen's double bass is quite woody enough and for some subtle reason his playing, along with that of his two cohorts, takes on a greater sense of occasion in this speaker's hands.

The longer you listen with the K1, the more you can hear and one thing that's perhaps less

### REACTION CANCELLING

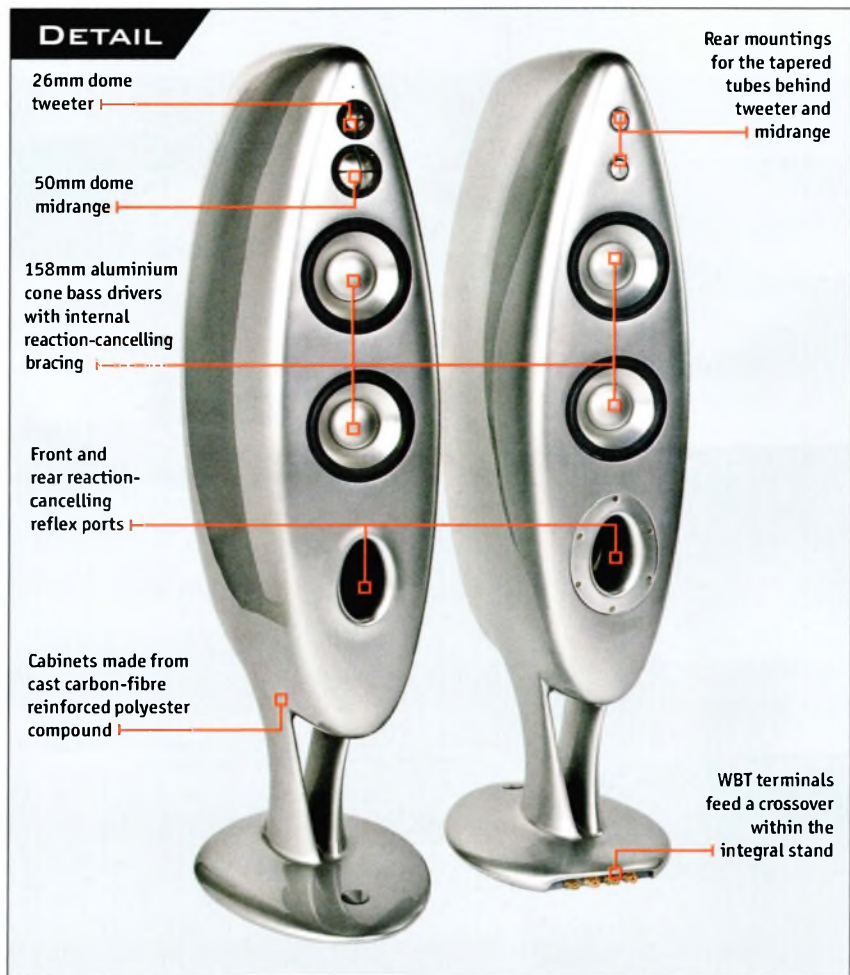
The dipole arrangement of the bass drivers here has a fairly significant structural purpose. Between the magnets of each opposing pair of drivers is a tensioner that couples the two units rigidly together.

In this way, forces produced by the recoil to the cones movement can be cancelled out as both drivers receive identical signals below 100Hz where this approach is most effective.

Above this frequency, a differential force begins to appear due to the series parallel square crossover. In order to offset this, the drivers are compliantly mounted on elastomeric o-rings.

The same reaction-cancelling approach has been used with the twin ports on the K1, something that's pretty obvious when you look into one and can see right through to the other.

This was done because like the movement of a cone, the air movement within a port exerts a small reaction force on the cabinet. As a consequence, the nature of the port resonance becomes sensitive to the coupling of the cabinet to the ground with spike mounting producing a higher Q than if such things are avoided. By adding a second port, Vivid claims that the problem of cabinet reaction is completely eliminated.



## “Leema’s Pyxis preamp and Altair IV power amps, are revealed to be even better than we thought they were.”

welcome is that it's highly revealing of the amplification with which it is partnered. We tried the Trilogy pre/power pairing that we also tested this month because they are similarly fast and have such great musicality. But they aren't quiet enough, as the low level hiss that the valves produce undermines the end result.

On the other hand, Leema's Pyxis preamp and Altair IV power amps, are revealed to be even better than we thought they were, thanks to the K1. They bring a degree of speed and transparency to the result that is in the very top league.

Clearly amplifiers used with this speaker have got to be quiet and need to be highly resolute. The same applies to the source. You may not need the very best, but you will have little difficulty in assessing the good from the OK. We got spectacular results with the EMM Labs TSD1 transport and DAC2 with the K1 and Leemas, a set-up that delivers digital audio gratification of the very highest calibre.

Discovering just how resolute this speaker is makes us wonder if we ever got the best out of

the B1 some five years ago. Somehow we doubt it. The Vivid K1 is undoubtedly one of the finest speakers on the planet. Lord only knows how the Vivid Giya manages to improve on its performance. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>PRO</b> Uncannily revealing and neutral speaker that uses a number of original technologies to raise the state of the loudspeaker art.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	<b>CON</b> Aesthetics may not be suitable for all tastes and you do need top quality source and amplification to do the job properly.
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Subtle, fast and wide bandwidth with great timing. There isn't a lot more that you can ask of a speaker. It might seem expensive, but for the engineering and inspiration that's gone into it, the value is in fact unusually high.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	
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# DEFINITIVE AUDIO



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



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2. Living Voice OBX-RW Loudspeaker in Ebony
3. New Audio Frontiers 845 SE Integrated Amplifier
4. KSL Kondo Negro Integrated Amplifier

5. SME 2012A Turntable with KSL Kondo iOJ Cartridge
6. New Audio Frontiers KT66 Legend Integrated Amplifier
7. Kore-Eda LLA-1 Control Amplifier & PLA-1 Power Amplifier



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# Sonic frontiers

Anthem storms the UK market with this exciting new integrated

**PRODUCT** Anthem Integrated 225

**TYPE** Integrated amplifier

**PRICE** £1,500

**CONTACT** ☎ 01825 750858 🌐 www.anthemav.com

Canadian companies consistently produce some remarkable hi-fi products and yet, almost without exception, we here in the UK seem to do our utmost to ignore them. Fortunately, a handful have managed to breach that barrier, including the near-legendary Magnum Dynalab FM tuners, the Bryston electronics imported by PMC and the Classé range, distributed by Bowers and Wilkins.

Another brand that wishes to see itself enjoy the same success is Anthem from Sonic Frontiers International, a well-respected producer of AV products and sister company to the Paradigm loudspeaker concern. But don't let the mention of Anthem's AV multichannel electronics and processors put you off, as Sonic Frontiers has plenty of hard-core audiophile experience.

In the 1990s it built a low-powered (25-watt), high-performance valve integrated amp, followed by a (90-watt) valve-transistor hybrid design. And the product we're testing here is a solid-state integrated, that is said to deliver 225 watts per channel into an eight-ohm load.

The 225 is well-equipped and even includes a MM phono stage. This might seem like a good thing, but as it is a component with high-end aspirations you might be tempted to ask why? It's hard to think of any moving magnet cartridges that truly qualify for high-end status

Similarly, the inclusion of tone controls (albeit accompanied by a tone-defeat button) seem out of place, especially on an amplifier that features a balanced input. There's a sense here that one hand is giving, while the other is taking away, or that the design simply wants to be all things to all men.

It also incorporates a 12V trigger input/output, an IR receiver in and out and an RS-232 interface to allow it to communicate with custom control systems, all of which suggest that it could find its way into an intelligent home set-up just as easily as it

**“The Integrated 225 shows that Anthem clearly understands what is important in portraying music.”**

might be included in an audiophile system. The 225 also comes with a programmable, learning remote control handset, already set-up with IR codes for a host of international – for which read predominantly North American – ancillary devices.

## SOUND QUALITY

Fronted by the new Naim CDX2 CD player and a Cambridge Audio DacMagic driving a pair of NEAT Momentum 4i loudspeakers, the Integrated 225 turns in a musically rewarding performance. It sounds particularly rhythmic, sprightly and sure-footed when playing Albert Lee and Hogan's Heroes' *Like This* album. Lee plays an Ernie Ball Music Man guitar, for instance, fitted with low-slung, single-coil pickups that give

it a distinctive wiry tone with loads of bite and attack. The Anthem flawlessly portrayed the guitar's clean, vintage tone and character with crisply defined, but not exaggerated leading edges.

The rhythmic dexterity of the amplifier comes to the fore playing The Specials' *Monkey Man* track from the *30th Anniversary Tour* CD. It clearly relishes the syncopation and demonstrates clearly how the bass and drums work together to create the distinctive, two-tone rhythms that feature on every track.

Nobody could ever accuse this amplifier

of complacency or being laid-back: it demonstrates a vivid enthusiasm for upbeat music. Equally, it is musically revealing, a facet that is highlighted by its portrayal of the timbral qualities of Deborah Harry's voice, vividly contrasting the abandon and sheer exuberance of her early days in Blondie with the rather more languid, almost jazzy presentation of her later years. The same is true of its presentation of Van Morrison's vocalizing, in which his increasing maturity from album to album is markedly evident in his timbre and his delivery.

The Integrated 225 shows that Anthem clearly understands what is important in portraying music: but maybe it is not so clued up about UK market sensibilities. Regardless, it is still a fine attempt to woo British buyers. **HFC**

Malcolm Steward



## VERDICT

### SOUND



### FEATURES



### BUILD



### VALUE



### CONCLUSION

The 225 demonstrates an admirable musicality, however, it might have been better if the budget for the tone controls had been spent elsewhere.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE



URL [www.techradar.com/626399](http://www.techradar.com/626399)

GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

# LOUDSPEAKERS

Some of the best value speakers on the market get the ultimate treatment

In this month's *Ultimate Group Test* we cover a fairly affordable selection of loudspeakers, with price tags from £600 to £1,360 per pair. By chance, whereas three are British designs (though not manufactured in the UK), three of the loudspeakers are French in origin.

Five of the six are floorstanders, starting at £800 per pair, but for the sake of contrast, we've also included an interesting and much smaller standmount – the Acoustic Energy Radiance 1. Although they cost just £600 per pair, the price of good-quality stands should take the Radiance 1's total cost much closer to the floorstanders. This standmount partner to the Radiance 3 (reviewed in *HFC* 320) has the same radical tweeter – with DXT-lens technology, albeit in a much smaller, rather neater and very good-looking package.

KEF's £800 per pair iQ70 is a very close relative of the iQ50 that we looked at in *HFC* 315. The two share similar configurations and technologies, but this iQ70 has the 'next size up' in drive units, enclosure and price point.

Focal's £949 per pair Chorus 726V is another 'big brother', this time to the 716V (see *HFC* 292). It's also the largest model in Focal's 'beer budget' 700V Series of models and, therefore, is best suited to larger rooms, despite its quite compact dimensions.

Like Focal, Tannoy splits its budget Revolution models into two groups: the cheaper common or garden versions and the more costly Signature series with superior cabinetwork. Recent price rises mean this Signature DC4T now officially costs £1,198 per pair, but it does come with very compact cabinetwork.

Codenamed Antal and Altea, the similarity of the names of the largest two models in Triangle's vinyl wood-print finished Esprit Ex series, have led to some confusion in the past. This Altea Ex is the smaller of the two, with one less bass driver and a shorter enclosure, though it's still a substantial package.

Though less well known in Britain than the other two from across the Channel, Brittany-based Cabasse is actually the Grand Old Man of French

hi-fi loudspeakers. It specialises in coaxial drive units and has been through a number of changes recently, including being purchased by Japanese multinational Canon. **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

- Ⓢ Naim CDS 3/555PS CD player
- Ⓢ Linn Sondek LP12 (modified)/Rega RB1000/SoundSmith Strain Gauge turntable/arm/cartridge
- Ⓢ Magnum Dynalab MD 106T tuner
- Ⓢ Naim NAC552, XTC PRE-1 preamps
- Ⓢ Naim NAP500 power amp
- Ⓢ Dartzel CTH-8550 integrated amp
- Ⓢ Cables from The Chord Company, Vertex AQ, Phonosophie and Naim
- Ⓢ Equipment supports from Mana, Vertex AQ, Naim, Townshend

## MUSIC USED

- Ⓢ Alison Krauss, *Forget About It*
- Ⓢ Ennio Morricone, *The Soundtracks*
- Ⓢ Various artists, *Heartworn Highways*
- Ⓢ Mavis Staples, *We'll Never Turn Back*
- Ⓢ Laurie Anderson, *Mr Heartbreak*
- Ⓢ Sibelius, *Symphonies (VPO Maazel)*

BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used extensively during the tests

## ON TEST



Acoustic Energy Radiance 1  
£600



Cabasse MC40 Java  
£1,359



Focal Chorus 726V  
£950



KEF iQ70  
£800



Tannoy Revolution Signature DC4T  
£1,198



Triangle Altea Ex  
£1,195

## LISTENING TESTS

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

## LAB TESTS

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

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

## LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

**1] Sensitivity:** Sensitivity is a measure of how loud a speaker will go for a given voltage from the amplifier. It's scaled to 2.83V at one metre, a figure that can be misleading, as loudspeaker sensitivity can vary quite significantly across the audio range and because lower impedance speakers extract more current and hence power from an amplifier than higher impedance examples.

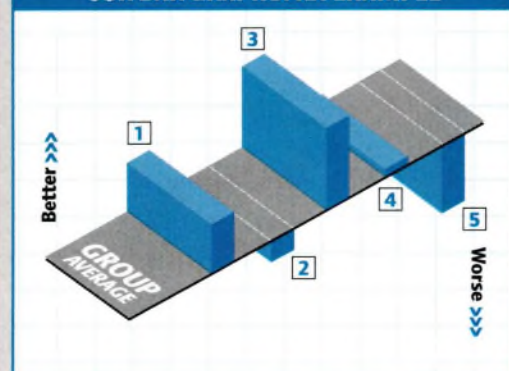
**2] Bass extension:** To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room

**3] Ease of drive:** Lower impedance designs are theoretically harder to drive, but they also tend to have higher sensitivities, which reduces their voltage requirement for a given level of loudness.

**4] Overall frequency balance:** The overall broad frequency response trends do much to define the character of a speaker, although true neutrality is the obvious goal

**5] Response smoothness:** The small scale smoothness has much to do with the delicacy of the sound, and its ability to deliver subtle harmonic shading.

### OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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# ACOUSTIC ENERGY RADIANCE 1

£600 per pair ☎ 01285 654432 🌐 www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

How does a high-quality standmount stack up against the big bcys?

Since the original AE1 appeared in the early 1980s, Acoustic Energy's compact standmounts have had considerable credibility. The company is now owned by Malaysian interests, but trademark features like metal cone drivers with characteristically pointy central dust covers have helped maintain its identity.

We wanted to include a standmount in this month's *Ultimate Group Test*, to contrast with the floorstanders and having reviewed AE's larger three-way Radiance 3 in *HFC* 320, we elected to include the much smaller two-way Radiance 1. At £600 per pair, this costs rather less than the others, but that takes account of the need to finance a pair of stands

The key feature of the Radiance range is an acoustic lens or waveguide surrounding the tweeter. Licensed from Danish company DXT, its purpose is to mitigate the inevitable discontinuity in dispersion around the crossover zone, between the relatively small tweeter diaphragm and the much larger midrange diaphragm driver. The DXT lens uses carefully calculated concentric rings in order to maintain a consistent dispersion and hence a consistent power response right through its operating band

Finished in a choice of attractive real-wood veneers, the enclosure is braced internally and built from 15mm MDF. The curved sides are both fashionable and functional, helping disperse internal reflections and avoid focused standing waves. The narrow enclosure back has

two pairs of socket/binders plus a port, and the optional grille is held by hidden magnets.

The bass/mid driver has a 130mm frame and 95mm cone, together with that pointy central dust cover. The tweeter has a 38mm 'ring radiator' soft fabric diaphragm loaded at the front by the lens. Fed from twin terminal pairs, the crossover network is deliberately kept as simple as possible.

## SOUND QUALITY

Positioning this speaker proved very tricky in our listening room, as the port output is quite strong and, by unfortunate chance, is tuned to coincide with a major room mode.

Experiment suggested that the flattest and most even overall in-room frequency balance was achieved with the ports blocked and the speakers quite close to the wall. However, listening tests revealed that, even though the bass was less even, the overall sound was significantly better with the port open and the speaker moved a little way out and away from the wall. Care should be taken to move the speakers to and fro in order to achieve the best subjective balance.

If the bass fell somewhat short of the ideal under our conditions, in every other respects the Radiance 1 is a splendid little performer. The mid-to-treble voicing is beautifully handled and superbly natural and any mild lack of dynamic enthusiasm is countered by the wide dynamic range, largely thanks to the minimal enclosure contribution.

While it's inevitable that such a small speaker will have limitations in bass weight and power (this is not as obvious as one might expect) its sins of omission here are quite easy to forgive, especially once you tune in to the lovely smoothness further up the band.

The overall sound is crisp, clean and free from any chestiness or boxiness. Stereo imaging is well focused and spacious with good rendition of depth and perspective, and the lack of any

unwanted enclosure effects brings a fine impression of airiness to the proceedings. **HFC**



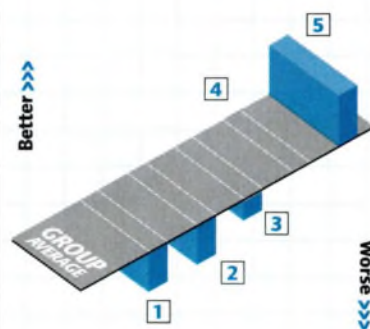
## LAB REPORT

Given the small dimensions and modest diameter bass/midrange driver, it's hardly surprising to find the little Radiance 1 has less bass extension and lower sensitivity than the much larger floorstanders that comprise the rest of this *Ultimate Group Test*.

Unfortunately the 55Hz port tuning coincides exactly with a major mode in our room, so the bass end is rather uneven when measured under in-room far-field conditions, though decent extension down to 35Hz (-6dB) is maintained

Although sensitivity is just 87dB, the load looks easy to drive and stays above five ohms. Best of all, the Radiance 1 delivers an impressively smooth and even tonal balance throughout the broad midrange and treble at all frequencies above 130Hz. Careful positioning in a room should extend this smooth balance through the bass region, too.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> 0%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +30%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88 dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4Ω	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	50Hz	33Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<p>Although bass, power handling and dynamic expression are inevitably somewhat limited, this speaker does everything else really well, with exceptionally well-judged mid-to-treble voicing.</p>
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> 	

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Hi-Fi Choice - December 2007



# CABASSE MC40 JAVA

£1,360 per pair ☎ 01684 593085 🌐 www.cabasse.com

*A welcome return of one of France's oldest speaker outfits*

**C**abasse is one of France's longest established speaker companies, with an illustrious history that goes back well before hi-fi became a 1970's mass market phenomenon. The company, based on the Brittany coast in the North West corner of France, still has family connections (through Christophe, son of founder Georges), but has recently undergone considerable reorganisation after acquisition by Japanese multinational Canon.

Although it has always been a major player on the French scene, British availability has been rather sporadic, Cabasse returning to the UK a year ago, after an absence of several years. The complete range of available models is huge, partly because it mixes stereo pairs with multichannel extras and is arranged in a three tier hierarchy, dubbed Oceo, Idea and Artis.

The Oceos begin with the conventional MC20s, but this MC40 Java is one step up the Oceo ladder and the MC40s use Cabasse's own distinctive variation on the co-axial drive unit theme. Its ultimate expression (La Sphère)



has no fewer than four different independent driver sections mounted co-axially on the same chassis, but here the technique is just applied to the midrand and treble drivers, operating above 900Hz in this three-way design, while frequencies below that crossover point are handled by two 170mm bass drivers and a downward-firing port.

The co-axial unit is particularly unusual in having an annular ('ring doughnut') shaped diaphragm, surrounding a tiny (15mm) horn-loaded dome tweeter. The annulus has an outside diameter of 82mm, while the twin drivers operating through the bass and lower midband both have 120mm diameter diaphragms.

There's a proper plinth, but the spikes – cones are a more appropriate description – are more decorative than functional. They're quite big, but hardly sharp enough to guarantee penetrating a carpet and are only locked by a serrated edge wheel the same size as the cone base, which is, therefore, hard to tighten. The woodprint finish, in either cherry or purple cherry, looks better than most, while both sides have a mild convex curve.

As one might anticipate from its very distinctive driver technology, the Cabasse model sounds rather different from its French rivals. The generous port-loaded bass driver line-up clearly indicates the speaker should be sited well clear of walls and this is confirmed by the in-room measurements.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Java's most salient sonic feature is its smooth neutrality, right across the board. The sound quality is, above all, very easy on the ears and will be very easy to live with too, though some might find it a little too restrained for personal taste. While the bass and midband are beautifully integrated, the top end does err on the cautious side and the shallow depression around the high mid-to-treble crossover region may well account for a mild lack of bite and brio.

The bass drives things along purposefully, with plenty of weight and scale, while the stereo images further up the band are well formed with good spaciousness. Dynamic range is very good, though dynamics themselves seem a little understated. Coloration is pretty well controlled, though not without a little midband boxiness, and there's room for a little more tension and transparency here, but its essentially vice-free behaviour singles it out from the pack. **HFC**



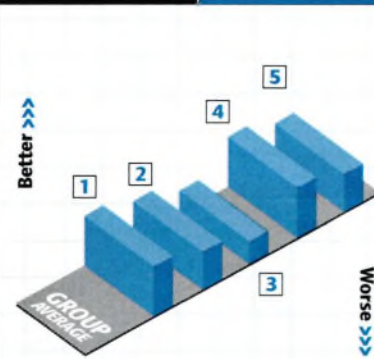
## LAB REPORT

It's something of a Cabasse tradition to build high-sensitivity speakers and this Java is no exception, registering around 92dB, add to this the overall in-room far-field tonal balance, which is for the most part unusually smooth and well controlled, barring some unevenness 300-900Hz.

Furthermore this is combined with impressive evenness and extension well down into the bass region, assisted by a port that's tuned to a low 32Hz, helping to give an in-room -6dB point right down at 20Hz. Interestingly, the treble proper is rather restrained here and the usual mid-to-treble crossover depression is up at 5.9kHz.

The high sensitivity and extended bass means a relatively demanding amplifier load, the impedance dropping to around four ohms across the upper bass and lower midband (which is where the difference comes in). The pair match between our two samples was very good.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	92dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/3.4 ohms	6/4 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	ns	20Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	This large and handsome speaker has a notably smooth and evenhanded neutrality. The top end is rather restrained, which might not suit some listeners, but others will welcome its understatement.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	

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# FOCAL CHORUS 726V

£950 per pair ☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-fr.com

A compact floorstander from Focal's Chorus 700 range

France's leading specialist hi-fi drive unit and speaker manufacturer, Focal used to market its complete speaker systems under the JMLab brand, changing over to its original Focal name earlier this century.

Its least costly range of speakers are traditionally christened Chorus, but the latest strategy brought in two distinct ranges – the simpler 700Vs and the more elaborate 800Vs.

Although both the 800V and 700V ranges have similar basic enclosure shapes and driver types, there are also numerous detail differences. A fair chunk of the £400 price difference between 726V and 826V lies in the elimination of the 826V's costly separate alloy plinth. Instead, the 726V comes with spikes that fit directly into the base of the enclosure, reducing the overall stability. Furthermore, the spikes themselves have thumbwheel lock-nuts that are difficult to tighten and keep tight.

This £949 726V is the largest of the 700s, one step up from the 716V that we reviewed way back in *HFC* 292. Wrapped in 'black ash' vinyl woodprint (with Amati and Wenge options), it has tapering side panels, so that

the main internal faces are not parallel. The whole thing is not only quite compact, standing less than a metre tall, but also feels very solid, weighing a hefty 23.5kg, thanks in part to the thick panels and the addition of further internal bracing.

A full three-way design, Focal manufactures all its drivers in France and all three cone drivers have 165mm cast alloy frames and 120mm diameter paper cones coated with 'Polyglass' micro-spheres, though the midrange unit has a different dust-dome arrangement. Focal's familiar inverted-dome tweeter has an aluminium/magnesium alloy diaphragm and is mounted in a rigid cast chassis at the top edge of the enclosure, unobstructed by the V-shaped grille. The speakers come with little perforated metal grilles protecting the tweeter diaphragms and these are easily removed for best quality. A large-diameter front port provides reflex bass loading and signal is applied to a single terminal pair.

## SOUND QUALITY

Best kept well clear of any walls, the combination of twin 165mm bass drivers, plus a 40Hz-tuned port ensures that there's ample bass output here. Indeed, if anything there might well be a bit too much – not really deep bass, rather a mild excess of the warmth and richness that's usually associated with the mid and upper bass.

But this is more of a characteristic than a flaw, as the bass sound quality remains agile and informative. It drives the music along with enthusiasm and a fair amount of dynamic gusto, without adding the sort of delayed reaction effect that results from cabinet colorations, although orchestral textures can show a touch of thickening too.

This isn't the smoothest or most neutral performer, but it is impressively lively and expressive, working particularly well when operating at modest loudness levels. Some might find its overall character a little too bright, either for personal taste or a particular system and it's true that the sound did show a tendency to become a little edgy and aggressive as the volume was wound up high.

Boxiness is well controlled and stereo images are spacious, if slightly compromised in focus and depth. Timing and dynamic range are both good and dynamic expression is comfortably above average. On balance, the 726V must rate as a fine all-round performer at a very realistic price. **HFC**



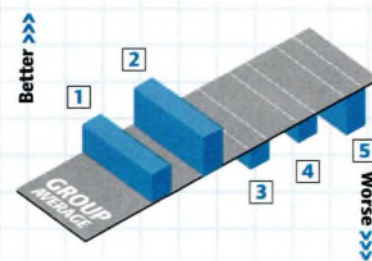
## LAB REPORT

The 726V delivered a rather uneven in-room far-field frequency balance, which makes picking the sensitivity rather difficult. On balance, 91 dB would seem to be the best estimate and against this must be set a rather demanding amplifier load that drops down to three ohms around 120Hz.

The pair match of our samples was very good and the port is tuned to around 40Hz here, so ultimate bass extension will be slightly compromised, though it still registers a very decent -6dB at 25Hz under in-room conditions.

Although the 726V has clear advantages over the smaller 716V, below 100Hz across the rest of the band it might be slightly more sensitive. But it's also significantly less smooth, with obvious peaks at around 750Hz and 7kHz, that are bound to affect the overall character of the sound.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +15%
- 2] Bass extension >> +20%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -20%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91.5dB	91dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/2.9 ohms	5/3 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	39Hz	25Hz

## VERDICT

### SOUND



Compact and realistically priced, the Chorus 726V is a good all-round performer.

### PRACTICALITY



Although it gets a little edgy when driven hard, it makes up for this with superior dynamic expression and tension.

### BUILD



### VALUE



**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE



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# KEF IQ70

£800 per pair ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.com

*The middle of three floorstanders could well be the best...*

Conceived and designed in Maidstone, Kent, but manufactured somewhere in China in order to keep the selling price competitive, the IQ70 carries an official price of £800 per pair and is closely related to the Best Buy IQ50 we reviewed in *HFC* 315. Indeed, viewed in isolation it would be difficult to identify one from the other, though placing them side by side clearly shows that this more costly model has a slightly larger enclosure and the next size up in main drivers – 165mm rather than 130mm.

The Uni-Q driver that gives this model its name is a variation on the co-axial theme, positioning a tiny 19mm tweeter on the polepiece in the centre of the bass/mid driver's 120mm polymer cone. The Uni-Q driver has been steadily developed since the 1980s and the particular innovation in this latest variation is a 'tangerine waveguide' around the tweeter. This consists of eight small vanes extending inwards from the outside edge of the tweeter dome, an arrangement that helps the dome more

closely approach the pulsating sphere ideal.

Other improvements for the latest generation include re-mapped crossovers and a new bass driver with a 115mm 'dual composite' cone. A front port provides extra bass reinforcement and shaped foam bungs are supplied to block this if desired, though in practice this seems unlikely.

The enclosure back and sides form a continuous curve, which looks attractive, should improve overall stiffness, and avoid focusing internal lateral standing waves. The front panel is very gently curved, too. At standard price the enclosure is finished in walnut, dark apple, or black ash vinyl woodprint; real wood veneers are available for an additional £200. A moulded black 'bump' covers much of the top surface, matching the curve of the Uni-Q driver frame.

The speaker is supplied with an attractively shaped moulded plinth. This feels a bit lightweight, but holds the spikes securely in place and also helps the speaker's overall physical stability. Twin terminal pairs come connected by wire links (rather than brass strips), which is another worthwhile bonus.

## SOUND QUALITY

Although the in-room measurements show ample output throughout the bass region, even when the speakers are positioned well clear of walls, the IQ70 still somehow manages to sound a shade small and a bit weak in serious bottom end drive and authority. There seems no obvious explanation for this, but it does suggest that a little wall reinforcement might be beneficial and that the port bungs are unlikely to be helpful.

Although the overall character is mostly smooth and well balanced, it only serves to make the measured peak in the upper midband that much more obvious. At low listening levels it might be considered something of a bonus, as it tends to emphasise detail and vocal articulation. Start winding up the volume, however, and the speaker begins to start sounding a little aggressive and less comfortable, while the slightly pinched and nasal voice coloration becomes more obvious and intrusive.

The top end sounds smooth, sweet and attractively open, stereo images are precisely focused and any enclosure colorations as such seem to be very well under control. While the basic dynamic range is good, dynamic expression and vigour did seem a little weak. **HFC**

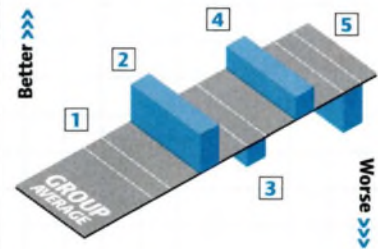


## LAB REPORT

Sensitivity is estimated at around 89dB, a decent enough figure for sure, but one that is only a broad approximation, as the in-room far-field frequency response is rather uneven below 1kHz. Bass extension is well maintained right down to 20Hz, though the 38Hz port tuning does lead to some excess around 50Hz. The load spends most of the audio band down around four ohms and will, therefore, require an amplifier with good current delivery.

Although the top end looks beautifully smooth and well judged above 1kHz, the 700Hz-1kHz prominence is rather more obvious than with the IQ50, and there's also some lack of 220-600Hz output here. The pair match was very good, and there's close similarity between the frequency balance traces for this IQ70 and the smaller IQ50, though naturally this larger model delivers rather more bass weight.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	6/4 ohms	8/7 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	36	20 Hz

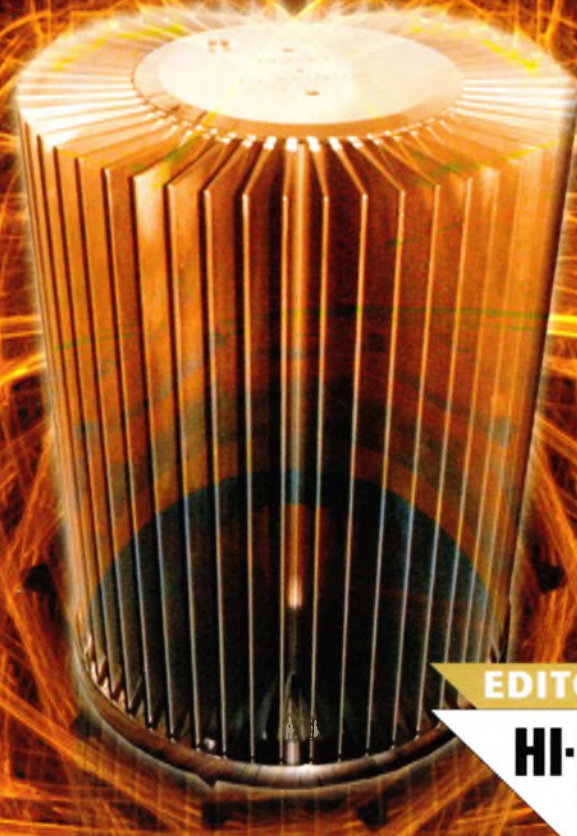
## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	Much about the IQ70 is undoubtedly good – it's sharply priced, attractively styled, goes deep into the bass and has a smooth, open top end. However, the upper mid peak is a little too obvious to ignore.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	



# msb TECHNOLOGY

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
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CHRIS BRYANT, HI-FI CRITIC ISSUE #12

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# TANNOY REVOLUTION SIG DC4T

£1,200 per pair ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

*This speaker has a luxury finish, but lacks a much-needed plinth*

**T**his historic famous name of British sound reproduction, now part of the Danish ProAudio TC Group, has recently turned its attention back to the domestic audio scene with three new ranges of models: Revolution, Revolution Signature and Definition.

Several speakers from each of these ranges have already been covered in these pages, but not this £1,000 per pair Revolution Signature DC4T, although it does have a great deal in common with the Revolution DC4T we reviewed in *HFC* 316.

The name might seem a little clumsy, but it has logic. This is part of the Revolution series, but the Signature bit refers to the lovely real-wood finish and extra port trim. The DC4T bit refers to the use of a 100mm Dual Concentric main driver in a Tower enclosure.

It's certainly a very pretty as well as a very small floorstander. The two 100mm drivers allow a very slim front view, while the depth is no greater and it stands less than a metre tall. Add in the need for close-to-wall placement



and you have one of the most discreet speakers around. Unfortunately, once the spikes are fitted to the small footprint, it's also one of the least stable and desperately needs a proper plinth to make good floor coupling. Pretty though the veneer work and curved sides are, a plinth would have been a more worthwhile Signature addition.

A two-and-half-way design, the 100mm Dual Concentric driver fires a horn-loaded tweeter from the centre of an 85mm treated-paper cone. A similar size bass-only driver is used to add extra low frequency output, as is a silver-trimmed lozenge-shaped front port. There are five terminals in toto: two pairs for signal connection and an extra one to earth the driver chassis to the amplifier – a Tannoy option that makes some sense, but is difficult to implement with regular speaker cables.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Revolution Signature DC4T benefits considerably from close wall proximity, giving a good overall balance when so sited and indeed integrating with the wall reinforcement far better than is often the case, giving a fine overall coherence right across its admittedly limited bandwidth and with a commendable lack of boxy effects.

While there's no way such a small loudspeaker will deliver serious bass weight or dramatic dynamic expression, most of the rest is very positive. Its best feature is the overall coherence and openness through the broad midband, which brings considerable expressiveness and believability to human voices. The bonus here is a freedom from any thickening or chestiness and fine agility.

The dual concentric bonus brings fine imaging to the party, alongside superior off-axis consistency, so although there's some lack of air and transparency and one might criticise a lack of smoothness and sweetness which can become intrusive if the volume is turned up high, this speaker is always informative and engaging.

Unaccompanied voices are particularly impressive, as is spoken word, the superior voice-band coherence emphasises the advantage of this smallest variation on the Dual Concentric theme. While it might not be the best choice for heavy beats, it does work very well indeed within the inevitable constraints its size imposes. However, the fact that they look very nice and take up so little room space might well encourage partnership with a subwoofer or two. **HFC**



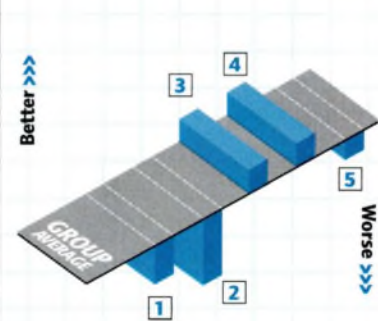
## LAB REPORT

The combined cone area of these little drive units is marginally less than that of a single 165mm unit. But the combination of a tiny enclosure, a very easy to drive impedance that stays mostly above 16 ohms and never falls below eight ohms and a port that's tuned to a relatively high 55-60Hz, means there's very little bass extension below 45Hz and the sensitivity is a relatively modest 87dB too.

The measurements for this Signature version are very similar to those found with common or garden Revolution, including regrettably the poor pair match, the only variations due to the different port arrangements.

Although it's not particularly smooth, the broad midband is held within quite tight limits. The lack of serious bass output strongly indicates that some close-to-wall reinforcement is very desirable here.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	87dB	87dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/5s	8/8 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	55Hz	45Hz

## VERDICT

### SOUND

★★★★☆

### PRACTICALITY

★★★★☆

### BUILD

★★★★☆

### VALUE

★★★★☆

A recent price rise and the lack of a proper plinth are sources of criticism, but the sound quality is impressive enough. Though no bass excavator, its mid-to-treble coherence works beautifully, even when close to a wall.

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



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# TRIANGLE ALTEA EX

£1,200 per pair ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.triangle-fr.com

*An idiosyncratically styled floorstander that is typical of Triangle*

**F**rench company Triangle has enjoyed a good run of success in *Hi-Fi Choice* over the years, thanks mainly to a refreshingly original approach to drive unit design. The control and management of the company changed substantially a few years back, but this doesn't seem to have had much impact on the design of the speakers themselves, which can, perhaps, best be summarised as oozing idiosyncratic Gallic charm, sonically if not physically.

Although we've reviewed several iterations of the Antal, the largest model in the Esprit Ex series, this is the first Altea to come our way. It's the smaller of two floorstanders in the company's least costly range, though its £1,200 per pair price tag is the result of some significant recent rises – when we reviewed the larger Antal Ex some eighteen months ago, it cost just £1,125 per pair.

Although the Altea Ex looks purposeful enough, with its three drive units mounted in a solidly built and braced enclosure, it's not the most attractive speaker around. It has a slightly

curved dark charcoal painted front panel and a rather indifferent vinyl woodprint, in cognac or black, covering the other faces.

A two-and-a-half-way design, the bass driver is loaded by a large flared front port and its 120mm fibreglass diaphragm is reinforced by a large dust cover. In the Triangle tradition, the bass/midrange driver has a flared paper cone diaphragm roughly 112mm in diameter, terminated by a double-S fabric surround, and this in turn is loaded by a small rear port. The 19mm tweeter is Triangle's T22500 horn-loaded design, which the company claims offers superior crossover integration, because the horn mouth is larger than a conventional dome.

It sits on a proper damped-steel plinth, which looks good and provides excellent stability. There are five points of floor contact here – four rather pretentious-looking 20mm spikes at the corners of the plinth lack any lock-nut arrangements and, therefore, tend to wobble rather easily. A large centre-front cone to earth the front panel is fitted with a captive disc, which will work very well on wooden floors, but is unlikely to pierce a carpet. Connection is via twin terminal pairs.

## SOUND QUALITY

The in-room measurements made it abundantly clear that this speaker should be kept well clear of walls, but notwithstanding this observation and in spite of its two ports and bass drivers, the overall character is a shade thin and lightweight.

While it's true that the bass lacks a little warmth and authority, its timing is good and it's bouncy, quick and generally informative, if somewhat understated.

As with other Triangle designs, the real strength here lies in its expressive and dynamic midrange and top end. This is certainly lively and engrossing, but also has a tendency to 'shout' when the volume control is turned up high, partly because of a general lack of smoothness, but also because the restrained bottom end leaves the upper half of the audio band sounding a little exposed.

Image focus seems pretty good and there's little evidence of enclosure colorations here. While the Altea Ex is always entertaining and involving, with fine voice articulation, the lasting impression is of a somewhat untidy sounding speaker that doesn't, perhaps, do quite enough to disguise the kind of limitations that are inevitable at this sort of price. **HFC**



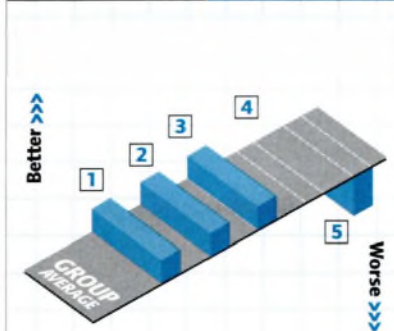
## LAB REPORT

Although Triangle describes this as a three-way, and it does indeed have three drive units, one suspects something may have been lost in translation, as we Anglo-Saxons would refer to the Altea as a two-and-a-half-way.

Sensitivity is a pretty generous 90dB, especially since the bass extension goes well down to 22Hz, assisted by a main front port tuned to 40Hz. Although the impedance is fairly demanding, it does stay above five ohms throughout, but sadly the pair match of our samples was poor.

The frequency balance, measured under far-field in-room conditions, closely resembles that found with the larger Antal Ex. The averaged trace departs from the flat around 50Hz and is notably uneven in the upper midband, with a 600Hz-1kHz peak and a trough 1-3kHz. The treble is reassuringly flat, if a shade strong.

## HOW IT COMPARES



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

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/minimum)	8/4 ohms	7/5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	45Hz	22Hz

## VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★☆	Not the prettiest speaker around, the Altea Ex is nevertheless dynamically informative and invigorating. The bass, however, does little to disguise a degree of untidiness further up the band.
<b>PRACTICALITY</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★☆	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★	

# Anthem Award Winners!

The highly respected Canadian brand Anthem is now available in the UK and we're extremely proud to have won the coveted EISA award for Best Product 2009-2010, HT High-End for the Anthem Statement D2v and Anthem P5 Multi-Channel Amplifier. If you'd like to hear the very best A/V pre-amp processor and power amplifier available - contact us now!



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**Richard Stevenson**  
*hi-fi news June 2009*

"Its performance is simply stunning"

**Alvin Gold**  
*Home Cinema Choice July 2009*





# CONCLUSIONS

Among our speaker selection are four standout options for audiophiles

**A**lthough the price band for this *Ultimate Group Test* is sufficient to ensure a good general standard of performance, it's certainly not enough to ensure freedom from design compromises. And as is usually the case with loudspeakers, every company has chosen its own set of these.

This places the reviewer in the impossible position of trying to compare one set of compromises with another. Do you prefer kiwi fruit to mangoes, or vice versa? It's

a question that has no rational answer, but in this case the editor demands that some are awarded badges; others not.

This *Conclusions* section therefore presents the opportunity to point out that the difference between a 'badged' and an 'unbadged' is often very small. So small that it may well be better ignored if the styling of a specific model appeals, or if it's available from a favoured retailer or at an advantageous price.

Working up the price ladder, the Acoustic Energy Radiance 1 (£600) might have weak bass and loudness capability, but its mid-through-treble voicing is quite exceptional.

KEF's £800 iQ70 certainly supplies extra bass authority than the smaller iQ50, but at a price premium and some cost in midband smoothness

The £950 per pair Focal Chorus 726V could also be smoother, but it has warmth in abundance.

The Tannoy Revolution Signature DC4T might seem quite costly at its official £1,200 price, but it sounds very good within its inevitable size constraints

At £1,200 Triangle's Altea Ex also seems a little pricey, but its slightly lightweight character belies an entertaining dynamic expression.

The Cabasse MC40 Java might be pricey at £1,359, but it does deliver a smooth sound right across the band, albeit with a rather restrained top end. **HFC**

## TRY THEM WITH THESE

### AMPLIFIERS

**ROKSAN KANDY K2** £895

A superior design with ample power reserves and a sweet, but authoritative sound quality.

**NAIM NAIT XS** £1,250

A stand-out integrated amplifier that delivers a very communicative musical performance every time.

### CD PLAYERS

**MARANTZ SA8003** £830

Classically smooth, detailed and sweet Marantz sound in an all-round attractive and good value package.

**REGA APOLLO** £586

Top-loader has an unusually sweet top end at its price and is a fine all-round musical communicator.

## HINTS AND TIPS

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

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

» Moving a speaker from free space location to close to wall will substantially boost the mid-bass.

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

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

## LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

						
MAKE	Acoustic Energy Radiance 1	Cabasse MC40 Java	Focal Chorus 726V	KEF iQ70	Tannoy Rev Sig DC4T	Triangle Altea Ex
PRICE	£600	£1,359	£950	£800	£1,198	£1,195
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
PRACTICALITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
OVERALL	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Limited bass, power handling and dynamics, but exceptional mid-to-treble voicing.	Fine scale and unusually smooth and even tonality, while the speaker's top end is quite restrained.	Warm and rich sound with plenty of dynamic brio, though not particularly smooth or even.	Ticks most of the boxes in a neat overall package, but this speaker's mid-band peak is audible.	Pricey, needs a plinth and no bass excavator, but its superior coherence works well close to a wall.	The sound might be a bit lightweight, but the dynamics are vigorous and entertaining.
<b>KEY FEATURES</b>						
SIZE (WxHxD)	18.5x32x25cm	25x110x35cm	22x99x37.5cm	24x102.5x31.5cm	22.6x95x22.5cm	26x106x41cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2-way	3-way	2.5-way	2.5-way	2.5-way	2.5-way
MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)	1x130mm	2x170mm + 1x100	3x165mm	2x165mm	2x100mm	2x160mm
STAND/FLOOR	Stand	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor	Floor
CABINET FINISH	Real wood	Real wood	Vinyl woodprint	Vinyl woodprint	Real wood	Vinyl woodprint
BI-WIRE	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>LAB CONCLUSIONS</b> E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
SENSITIVITY	87dB <b>A</b>	92dB <b>G</b>	91dB <b>G</b>	89dB <b>G</b>	87dB <b>A</b>	90dB <b>G</b>
EST. BASS EXTENSION	33Hz <b>P</b>	20Hz <b>G</b>	25Hz <b>A</b>	20Hz <b>G</b>	45Hz <b>P</b>	22Hz <b>G</b>
IMPEDANCE (NOM/ MIN)	7/5ohms <b>A</b>	6/4ohms <b>P</b>	5/3ohms <b>P</b>	8/7ohms <b>P</b>	8/8ohms <b>G</b>	7/5ohms <b>A</b>
FREQUENCY BALANCE	0% <b>A</b>	+30% <b>G</b>	-10% <b>A</b>	+10% <b>G</b>	+10% <b>A</b>	0% <b>A</b>
RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS	+30% <b>G</b>	+20% <b>G</b>	-20% <b>P</b>	-20% <b>P</b>	-10% <b>A</b>	-20% <b>P</b>

# Round-up

All four products in our Round-Up will make a difference to your system

It's many years now since news spread from the hard-core tweaking community about the effect that mains quality, including the cables, connectors and filters used to supply it, has on hi-fi sound. For

reasons that still aren't well understood, all kinds of mains devices can and do have an effect, so it's worth spending at least a little money and trouble on it to enhance your listening pleasure.

## Clearer Audio Copper-Line Alpha Power-Hub

**TYPE** Distribution block

**PRICE** £65 (four-way, with half metre cable)

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

So it's only a mains distribution board – but Clearer Audio still manages to write a four-page information sheet on it! And indeed this makes the point that even in as simple a component as this there's plenty of detail. The gauge of the copper in the flying lead, insulation on same, physical construction, internal connection, filtering strategy... any or all of which may well help to contribute to the overall result. Available as a four-way (as reviewed), six-way or eight-way board, this Hub is based on an aluminium channel with good-quality, plastic-fronted sockets. They are wired together with the same proprietary Copper-Line Alpha Power Cable that leads out to the plug. Usefully, there are also LED indicators for power, surge damage and earth continuity – any one not indicated means trouble.

We found this unit clearly beneficial compared with a £3 moulded plastic distribution board, but more significantly when compared with a

home-made alternative using MK switched sockets. Although hardly a matter of night and day, the Clearer board gave subtly more focus to the sound and seemed to extend the depth of images just a little further back. We didn't detect any tonal shifts as such, but bass seemed a shade more clearly etched, especially for some reason when we were using a valve-amplified system. In-line filters can sometimes constrict the treble, but we couldn't hear any such effect here. The filter's effect is modest, though – clicks from a noisy light switch were still audible. **HFC**

### VERDICT

A competitively priced distribution board with surge and filtering components: gives a worthwhile improvement in clarity.



## Isol-8 IsoLink 1 cable

**TYPE** Mains power cable

**PRICE** £75

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8856 8856 ✉ www.isol-8.co.uk

Isol-8 is the company started by one-time IsoTek designer Nic Poulson, also known as the man behind the Trilogy line of amplifiers. It is a pure mains conditioning specialist, with a range extending up to sophisticated mains regenerators and high-current filters costing in the low thousands. This simple cable is the company's introduction to its range – and ours. It uses Oxygen-Free Copper conductors of generous diameter, screened overall with a tinned copper braid. Connectors at both ends are good-quality industrial parts: the more upmarket Isol-8 cables have the same wire but fancier connectors. Standard length is 1.5 metres, but other lengths are available to order.

It's always interesting to try mains cables on different components and we're certainly glad we did in this case, as results seemed to vary quite widely. Annoyingly, we couldn't find a consistent pattern across the range of equipment we had available, but a solid-state phono stage certainly showed a clear improvement in resolution, almost as if some background noise had been removed. A moderately upmarket CD player hardly benefitted, but a slightly elderly high-01 end one was much more inclined to show improvements, with better resolution again and also a

slight gain in treble openness. Meanwhile, two power amplifiers, one valve and one transistor, seemed to gain a semitone or three of bass extension – obviously that's impossible, taken literally, but a little extra clarity in the lowest octaves can easily come across that way. Although we can't predict exact results, we're happy to recommend you give this cable a try. **HFC**

### VERDICT

Improvements vary across a range of kit, but this cable does seem to make some improvement to everything we connected it to.



# Moth Marketing mains distribution block

**TYPE** Distribution board

**PRICE** £70 (four-way, £85 with cable)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01234 741152 🌐 www.britishaudio.co.uk

**M**oth makes no fancy claims for this block, pointing out, however, that unless you have a vast number of sockets fitted next to your hi-fi you will need some kind of distribution board and the more capable this is the better. This unit, available optionally with six or ten outlets, is housed entirely in steel and wired with exceptionally heavy-gauge copper. The flying lead is by Supra and is screened, making the whole assembly unusually resistant to receiving and transmitting radio-frequency interference. There is no filtering inside, just wire, and the sockets are good-quality units. Usefully, the back plate is extended and has holes to facilitate fixing to the wall.

Used to feed a basic single-source system, this board helps the sound escape from its cage somewhat, giving a subtle extra amount of space to images and once again improving focus overall. When we tried swapping equipment around, we soon found that high-current devices appreciate this block, especially high-power, solid-state amplifiers. These seemed unusually keen to dispense power, giving the sound a fillip in the dynamics department and also suggesting, at times, that bandwidth

is improved, especially during loud musical passages – there's no sense of this when the music's quieter. We also thought we heard a trace more detail from a phono stage powered by a 'wall wart' supply, something we hadn't expected. For units connected by an IEC lead, there was a very clear advantage in using a screened cable from the distribution block to the kit. **HFC**

## VERDICT

Robust design, partnered with screened, heavy gauge cable result in improvements across a range of kit, especially high powered units.



# Russ Andrews Mini Purifier

**TYPE** Mains purifier

**PRICE** £145

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

**R**uss Andrews' 'Purifier' accessories are all shunt-connected mains filters: that is, they sit connected to the mains supply and effectively 'suck' the interference out of it without coming between mains and audio equipment. Many experimenters have found this approach preferable, though there are so many variables in specific designs that it may be dangerous to generalise. We looked at the Ultra Purifier some years ago and have also investigated the much cheaper 'Silencer' which implements some of the same ideas. The crucial part of all Purifier designs, however, is a component which RA dubs a 'clamp' – in this case the Super Clamp, though the most sophisticated Mega Clamp is available for an extra £110. This part provides very rapid reaction to over-voltage spikes on the mains, adding to the general high-frequency filtering provided by the capacitors also included.

If our comparisons between this and other items in this Round-up are anything to go by, differences are qualitatively different from cable changes. Above all, the sound seems to acquire an extra delicacy and refinement, as if some rather rough-sounding distortion has been

removed. As a result, sounds are generally clearer and better defined and rhythm, always a concern of Russ Andrews', is fractionally more precise and convincing. As always, we tried various combinations of kit (simply plugged into the same distribution board with the Mini Purifier) and these findings were remarkably consistent across the lot, perhaps just slightly more apparent with digital source components and analogue. Classic tweakery, really – slight, yet somehow obvious. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

## VERDICT

Just plugging a little box in near your hi-fi may sound like magic but the theory holds water and the results speak for themselves.



**W**hile we wouldn't go quite as far as some commentators – mostly manufacturers of mains accessories, perhaps unsurprisingly – who assert that mains quality is of absolutely paramount importance in any audio system, we're happy to recommend a modest expenditure on mains upgrades for all, but the most modest

systems. We tested these units with systems costing roughly between £3,000 to £10,000 and easily heard differences: small differences, but the sort of thing that, once heard, one would be loath to give up. Fiddling with installed mains wiring is an expensive option, but these simple devices are easy to install, affordable and above all, effective.

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To enter the Electrocompaniet competition you can either (a) text your answer to 87474 at any time between 15 September 2009 and 14 October 2009, or (b) enter online at [www.futurecomps.co.uk/electrocompaniet](http://www.futurecomps.co.uk/electrocompaniet) with your entry being received between 15 September 2009 and 14 October 2009. By sending your entry you agree to these competition rules and your random you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word STOP at the end of your text message or at the end of your postal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network tariff rate.

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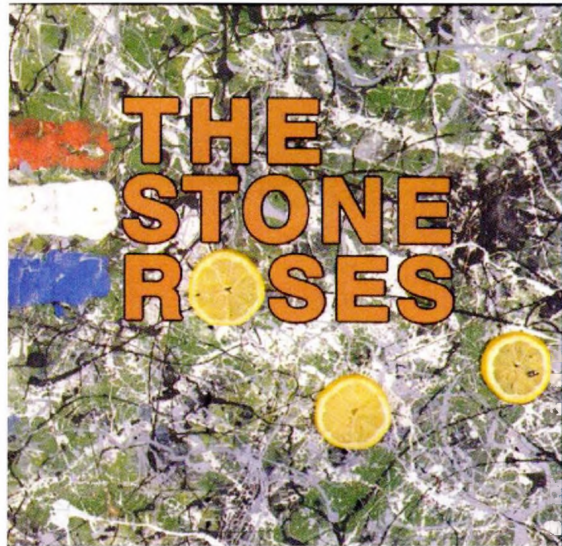
Atlas Minors  
March 2008

**AWARDS**

# ChoiceCuts

New music reviewed and rated by our experts

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



**THE STONE ROSES**  
The Stone Roses  
Silvertone

"The music press loved them and credited them with coaxing white indie kids to dance..."

Words by David Oliver

## Classic Album

*It taught white boys to dance and was named NME's best album of all time. No wonder it took so long to follow up.*

It's been 20 years since the Stone Roses were briefly the biggest band in Britain and their legacy looms large over British pop, thanks to the amber moment of one album.

Far from overnight sensations, they'd been slugging away since 1983 on a Manchester scene still in thrall to New Order and The Smiths. Despite a local following and the promotional graffiti bearing their name, they were largely ignored by the rest of the world.

Singles *Sally Cinnamon* and *Elephant Stone* garnered passing attention but it was their self-titled debut album that set the Manchester cat among the UK pop pigeons in May 1989.

Catapulting them from the periphery to the forefront of the scene, the album's mix of classic 60's lads' pop, knowing nods to the cooler 70's rock and production from Abbey Road veteran John Leckie led to instant adoration from virtually all quarters.

The music press loved them and credited them with coaxing white indie kids to dance. Nonsense, of course, they'd always danced, but the Roses' youth and of-the-moment fashion sense, infectious melodies and loping rhythms broke down barriers between band and audience and delivered the group's own illusion of entitlement to all who heard them.

It may not sound like a dance record now, but the Roses managed to imply dance music from a pop/rock framework.

The rolling grooves of *I Wanna Be Adored* and *I Am The Resurrection* topped and tailed the album, with timeless singalongs like *She Bangs The Drums*, *Waterfall* and *This Is The One*, capturing the Roses' appeal in microcosm. There's a little padding too. *Elizabeth My Dear's* Simon & Garfunkel-fuelled paean to her majesty didn't need to be there, and *Don't Stop* was actually John Leckie's idea to make up the running time by recording *Waterfall* backwards.

Alan (Reni) Wren's drumbeats offered a skitteringly original template to the usual 4/4 stomp of indie and rock, while Gary (Mani)

Mounfield's bass counterpoint was the groove's engine and John Squire's much-emulated chiming guitar rang the changes. The weakness of Ian Brown's voice was assuaged by his 'I'm a star, me' attitude, inspiring a million clod-hopping monkey men across student dancefloors nationwide.

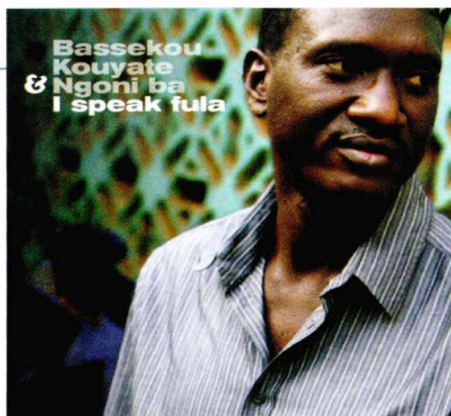
Going straight in at number 32, it spent more than a year on the charts. The NME calls it the best album ever and all the attention rather went to their heads. They played Spike Island to 27,000 in Merseyside and even had the brass balls to turn down a support slot on a Rolling Stones tour.

Legal hassles with their former label delayed a follow-up album and the lack of direction led to the departure of Leckie and a muddled and a confused album lacking the hooks or charm of their debut.

The Roses gradually withered away, with first Reni jumping ship, then Squire, before the rest called it a day in 1996. Oasis took up the baton for melodic lad-rock and the dancing white kids picked instead the fickle fruits of Britpop.

But their place in the British pop firmament is safe and buoyed by regular reissues every ten years or so. The album was reissued in 1999 and for its 20th anniversary John Leckie was asked to remaster the original, perhaps overdue, since it was apparently only mastered for vinyl on release. He also amassed hours of demos and out-takes for a vinyl reissue, one-CD Special Edition, two-disc Legacy Edition and everything-but-their-mum's-kitchen-sinks Collectors' Edition box set.

Luckily, even the most basic version now includes the groovesome *Fools Gold*, the single not on the original UK issue though included in the US. That's all you need to wind back to a time when simian-stepping front men and drummers in fishing hats were the coolest thing on the planet. **HFC**



## BASSEKOU KOUYATE & NGONI BA

I Speak Fula

Out Here  
[www.outhere.de](http://www.outhere.de)

**Music:** It's funny how so much of the world's most thrilling music is currently emanating from Mali. To the names of desert-rockers Tinariwen, late guitar wizard Ali Farka Toure and kora legend Toumani Diabate, we can now add Kouyate, master of the funky African banjo, known as the ngoni. From the shimmering tenderness of *Tineni* to the zestful, rock 'n' roll attack of *Ladon*, if you want a primer in everything that is best about African music, it's all here in his second album.

**Sound:** Engineered by Jerry Boys who twiddled the knobs on *Buena Vista Social Club*, you'll hear the same winning combination of earthy authenticity and sparkling audio clarity. **NW**



## BIG BOSS MAN

Full English Beat Breakfast

Blow Up  
[www.blowup.co.uk/records](http://www.blowup.co.uk/records)

**Music:** Paul Weller, The Mighty Boosh, Thievery Corporation, Nike, Mojo and the International Red Cross have all raved about, or used, Big Boss Man cuts over the last few years and it's easy to see why. Their bubbling, beguiling blend of soul jazz, boogaloo and sixties grooves is a bit more in 2009-cum-1966 territory on their third album, hence the title, but it's all still a great atmospheric mix of tight danceable rhythms and sweet, sweet melodies. The *Sergeant Pepper* of boogaloo – and you really shouldn't go without your breakfast, should you?

**Sound:** A fat, full sound from Nick 'Klaxons' Terry. The Hammond organs, the range and the separation are a treat and sound superb on any decent system. **PS**



## THE DURUTTI COLUMN

Four Factory Records

Kooky Disc  
[www.kookydisc.co.uk](http://www.kookydisc.co.uk)

**Music:** Thirty years ago there was a band called The Durutti Column, but the only member who turned up for their first studio date was frail guitarist Vini Reilly. But his beautiful guitar arpeggios and resolved compositions straddling jazz, classical and rock made for timeless music. This box set of the first four albums includes two bonus CDs of unreleased tracks and copious interviews.

**Sound:** Though first issued cheaply on CD in 1988 and again in 1996/1998 (without original artwork) this time the albums have been mastered from the original quarter-inch tapes and sound as close to the original vinyl LPs, and heaven, as possible. Beautiful glowing soft remastering using Prism converters by Keir Stewart. **MP**



## MONSTERS OF FOLK

Monsters Of Folk

Rough Trade  
[www.roughtraderrecords.com](http://www.roughtraderrecords.com)

**Music:** You take Conor Oberst and Mike Mogis from Bright Eyes, cult singer-songwriter M Ward and My Morning Jacket's Jim James, put them in a Malibu ranchhouse and you have MOF – although GOA (Giants of Americana), might be a better title. Super-groups usually turn into indulgent mutual admiration societies but these monsters have come up with a shining beauty – a wonderfully freewheeling record of shared songcraft and musical empathy that is, for once at least, the equal of its considerable parts.

**Sound:** It's all about the sublime, soaring harmonies, a perfect blend of West Coast sweetness and southern spice, which is certain to evoke comparisons with Crosby, Stills and Nash. **NW**







## GWYNETH HERBERT

All The Ghosts

Naim Edge

[www.naimedge.com](http://www.naimedge.com)



**Music:** This 27-year-old singer songwriter's first two albums were on Universal and she seemed destined to become yet another jazz standards diva. But she ditched their plans for a big band album and followed her own muse, taking in elements of folk, indie and jazz to deliver last year's *Between Me And The Wardrobe*, which surprisingly came out on legendary jazz label Blue Note. This album follows similar themes, with sparse arrangements for keyboards, guitar, bass and percussion supporting her strong, smoke-tinged contralto voice.

**Sound:** Recorded at Peter Gabriel's Real World studios, this largely acoustic album is very intimate, with loads of space around instruments, which don't seem to have been miked too close. **DO**



## LIAM FROST

We Ain't Got No Money...

Emperor/PIAS

[www.myspace.com/listentoliamfrost](http://www.myspace.com/listentoliamfrost)



**Music:** The young Manchester singer songwriter's debut album in 2006 was a melancholy beast, dealing with the death of loved ones, but this is more of a soul-pop party affair, packed with rousing choruses, Motown beats, and big, horn-led arrangements. Co-writing with alt-pop troubadour Ed Harcourt, he's pulled off a startlingly about-face with a romantically uplifting record full of life and heart. A standout includes his duet with Martha Wainwright on *Your Hand In Mine*.

**Sound:** There's a straining for grandeur in the arrangements that echoes Springsteen almost as much as the likes of Elbow and Coldplay on this warmly produced album. **DO**



## FRENCH FLUTE CHAMBER MUSIC

Tournier • Schmitt • Pierné  
Françaix • Roussel

Mirage Quintet



## FRENCH FLUTE CHAMBER MUSIC

Mirage Quintet

Naxos 8.570444

[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)



**Music:** The influence of the two giants of the French impressionist music scene, Debussy and Ravel, is heavy in these works, which are open and expansive, refined and with unusual clarity of line. The Tournier *Suite* and the Schmitt *Suite En Rocaille* come across to modern ears as rather naïve, with not enough to engage the intellect. But the music develops in the disc, especially in the hands of Roussel whose neo-classical *Serenade* is made of sterner stuff.

**Sound:** Much of the success of this disc is down to some dedicated playing (in a Toronto church) and a strong quality of ensemble from the Mirage Quintet, a talented young Canadian group. **AG**



## BEETHOVEN Piano Sonatas Vol. 5

Sonata No. 9 in E major, Op. 14, No. 1  
Sonata No. 10 in G major (Op. 14, No. 2)  
Sonata No. 13 in E flat major, Op. 27, No. 1  
Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (Moonlight)

## BEETHOVEN EDITION 10 VOL 5

Idil Biret

NXS 8571260

[www.idilbiretarchive.eu](http://www.idilbiretarchive.eu)



**Music:** Turkish-born Idil Biret has always had a precocious empathy for the piano – she started recording professionally at the age of nine and has recorded much of the Romantic repertoire, including all Beethoven's sonatas. This disc should be seen as a sampler of what she has achieved with those sonatas – the playing is completely effortless and her ability beyond doubt.

**Sound:** The *Moonlight Sonata* will rightly be the focus of this disc and the performance is fluid and uncontrived. The technical audio standard is satisfactory but unremarkable, as the acoustics sound like they are from a very ordinary and dry-sounding studio. **AG**

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## MOTÖRHEAD 1916

Music Sound ★★★★★

Epic/Pure Pleasure 180g  
www.purepleasurerecords.com

**Music:** Motörhead on an audiophile pressing! Someone at Pure Pleasure must be a fan. The album *1916* actually dates from 1991 and while it's mostly predictably hard and fast, it also has moments of respite from the band's patented heads-down thrash. Guitar player Phil 'Wizzo' Campbell also joined the ranks adding depth and variety to tracks reminiscent of Thin Lizzy and G'n'R at their best.

**Sound:** The harder and faster the tune the more compression is used. This is tight, bright and hard, but it's never less than metal. *JK*



## MISSISSIPPI FRED McDOWELL

Music Sound ★★★★★

I Do Not Play No Rock 'n' Roll  
EMI/ Pure Pleasure 180g  
www.purepleasurerecords.com

**Music:** Mississippi Fred McDowell plays 'straight 'n' natchel' blues in a country style with a bottle-neck slide that's as raw and real as you like. Usually on acoustic but with some nice electric work too, he has a fine feel for a groove and makes a superb job of all nine tracks thanks to spot-on timing and an keen feeling for the blues.

**Sound:** This is a fine-sounding album with good dynamic range and great tone. It's more like dual-mono than stereo but makes up for it with vitality. *JK*

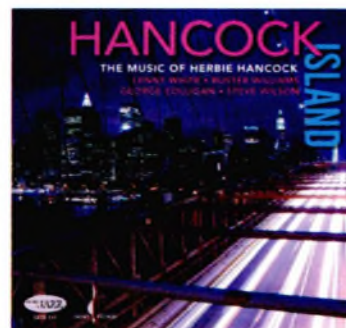
## HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO

### HANCOCK ISLAND

The Music Of Herbie Hancock  
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)  
www.chesky.com

**Music:** The line-up for this tribute to pianist Herbie Hancock is headed by long-time Hancock sideman Lenny White on drums, with Buster Williams on bass, relative newcomers George Colligan on keys and Steve Wilson on alto and soprano sax. The latter takes the lead on eight tunes including *Cantaloupe Island* and *Rocket* with varying degrees of success. While the playing is top notch and undoubtedly great live entertainment, at home you can listen to the originals, which inevitably sound better despite the increased fidelity here.

**Sound:** Chesky does a great job of capturing the space and tone of this band with a very clean and open recording, albeit maybe a little too clean. *JK*



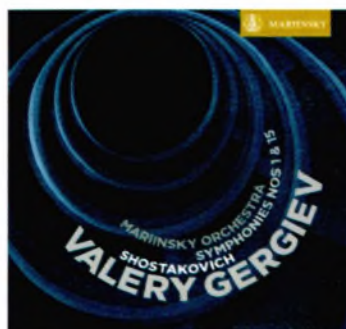
Music Sound ★★★★★

### SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONIES 1 AND 15

Valery Gergiev (cond) Mariinsky Orchestra  
Mariinsky  
SACD (stereo/multichannel hybrid disc)  
www.lso.co.uk

**Music:** The *1st symphony* is completely lacking in some of the clichés of Shostakovich's later output, the darker, embittered quality of the *15th* in particular. The latter turned out to be his final symphony, and is notable for its startling quotes from the *William Tell Overture*. Both are performed brilliantly with Valery Gergiev at the helm, but of the two, the *1st*, written when the composer was only 19, has something extra, and comes across with a real sense of passion and drama.

**Sound:** The Mariinsky (previously Kirov) orchestra, is marketed by LSO, with whom it shares a conductor, and, it seems, similarly high technical and musical standards. *AG*



Music Sound ★★★★★

### SULLIVAN, SIBELIUS

Shakespeare's Tempest  
Kansas City Symphony  
Reference Recordings  
24-bit HDCD (24-bit)  
www.referencerecordings.com

**Music:** It makes sense to include these very different but thematically linked interpretations of Shakespeare's last play. Sir Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert fame) wrote his incidental music for the play when he was just 19, and it's an enthusiastic and grandstanding work heavily influenced by Mendelssohn clearly announcing a restless and inventive talent. Jean Sibelius wrote his interpretation 65 years later and it's a more deeply atmospheric work, with some beautiful harp passages and a splendidly evocative storm.

**Sound:** Conductor Michael Stern (son of violinist Isaac) conducts in a performance that's balanced and finely nuanced, effortlessly conveying the varied textures. *DO*



Music Sound ★★★★★

# Choice mail

*Paul Andrews*  
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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](mailto:HiFiChoice@futurenet.com)

## Vive le hi-fi Francaise

When did the French suddenly become so dominant in hi-fi? I mean this with particular reference to loudspeakers, where it seems that Focal and Triangle have been joined by Cabasse in producing highly regarded products. But when I look at electronics, I see that companies such as Metronome and Jadis are winning the plaudits as well. Have the French recently raised their game or are we just a bit more pro-European these days?

**A Cook** via email



**HFC** The quality of material being produced by the French hi-fi companies is very high but we don't feel this is a very recent innovation, as Focal and Triangle have been producing many exceptional products for at least the bulk of this century. We do feel that the industry is looking at continental

**“Has anybody noticed that all car radios are inbuilt, so replacements may not fit? It's going to be a field day for jobs and other pond life.”**

products in a more favourable light and this is reflected in the much higher level of representation they are currently enjoying. This is part of a wider process where as a country we have looked beyond our prodigious local output, firstly to the US and Japanese products before embracing those from the rest of Europe and China.

## Standard radios are job charter

Thanks for Paul Messenger's comments on DAB (HFC 324). As he says, most listening is done in cars. Has anybody noticed that all car radios are inbuilt, so some replacements may not fit? The minute there is a mass change then the chances of having your car broken into for a non-original DAB radio are going to be pretty high. It's going to be a field day for jobs and other pond life.

**Ian Hall** via email

**HFC** DAB is increasingly available as a factory option on new cars. Many older models have the conventional aperture that

aftermarket models will fit into, but there is a big group of cars which – as you say – are fitted with uniquely shaped FM radios. There are some options that might bridge the gap – adaptors to fit unique apertures are available and Pure Digital has released the Highway, which will broadcast DAB on an FM frequency. Whether the British public will be expected to make these alterations *en masse* is one of the many questions surrounding the Digital Britain report.

## Middle age spread

I cannot be alone in thinking that equipment seems to be getting bigger? My purchases from the early nineties seemed to fit happily into my rack without hitting the uprights or hanging out of the back. Recent visits to dealers have introduced me to equipment that seems an awful lot bigger than I've had before! I remember reading somewhere that a hi-fi separate was 19 inches (430mm) wide.

The equipment I have been demoing has often been an inch wider, which is the

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Phono stages – a lament

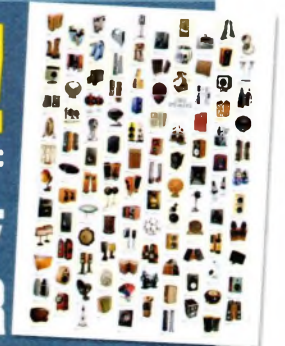
What has happened to amps with a good internal phono stage? I am a relatively keen user of vinyl, but my space for audio kit is somewhat restricted. Shopping for amps in the £1,500-£2,000 price point gives me no shortage of choice until I want an amplifier with a decent moving coil phono stage built in. I can understand that a generation of amplifiers might have been designed when vinyl was supposed to be 'dead' but with it now enjoying a resurgence, where are the internal phono stages? I now find myself being forced to consider two boxes and the attendant extra space and cabling.

**Elliot Kauffman** via email

**HFC** The internal phono stage (especially in moving coil guise) remains a comparatively rare fitment on most integrated amplifiers and we do, in part, agree that it's a shame. Moving coil circuits are relatively delicate, though, and extracting good performance from one in the body of an amp can be a tricky business.

The good news is that many of the Japanese amplifiers at this price come with good moving coil stages. You could also consider a step-up transformer (which needs no plug) to work with a more common moving magnet stage as detailed in last month's *Ask Us* section.

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difference between it going into a shelf and requiring the top shelf (and putting them all on there seems to rather defeat the object!) and the relative heights seem to be increasing as well. Is it time hi-fi went on a diet?

**N Hammick** via email

**HFC** There seems to be some evidence that a number of companies are making boxes bigger than they were a few years ago. Exactly why this might be the case is open to debate, but manufacturers are often seeking to try and keep sensitive components away from sources of noise and interference and this will obviously have an effect on the size of the outside dimensions. The good news is that we still regard some smaller pieces of equipment as being the easy equal of their chunky rivals, so you need not have to accommodate something that's too huge.

### Sense of loss

Whilst I appreciate that this is a sensitive subject for any magazine that, for the most part, specialises in new equipment, I feel that there is an unspoken area of new purchases that the consumer ought to consider that goes unmentioned. I speak, of course, about depreciation. I have recently sold an amp and CD player that I bought at the same time. Both cost roughly two thousand pounds new and both were well-respected British makes.

Two years down the line, the CD player has fetched nearly twice the price of the amplifier. This was not something I had really considered when I bought the units, but I could have had a larger amount to spend on upgrading if I had, perhaps, chosen different products.

The motoring press has long taken depreciation into account and it can shape the choices that people make to a considerable degree. With some pieces of high-end equipment costing as much, perhaps as an industry we would do well to start to factor depreciation into the scores of product for those of us with a propensity for upgrading.

**E.Hill** via email

**HFC** This is a tricky area to fully account for as, like the motoring industry that you allude to, depreciation is even more variable for electronics than it is for cars. Some companies are considered extremely strong in certain product categories and less so in others, which means that even if you had purchased a matching set of models, you may not be 'up' as much as you thought. The comparatively smaller size of the used hi-fi market can also lead to unusual

## "I have recently been in the fortunate position to audition what will be my 'last' turntable – the one I intend to be buried with..."

variations in the price of less common equipment. If you sell an unusual product when nobody is interested in buying it, you can take a heavy loss. Equally, if two people want the same product, you can see some remarkable results. Then, more in keeping with the classic car market, you will often find companies and individual models undergo a revival and this can also see values climb far more rapidly than almost anything in the car market. In summary, it is a lack of crystal ball as much as any sensitivities that keeps us from talking too much about depreciation!

### The hundred grand turntable

I am sorry to drag this up again, but I feel I have a new perspective on the Continuum Caliburn turntable (HFC 321) and its £115,000 price tag.

I have recently been in the fortunate position to audition what will be my 'last' turntable – the one I intend to be buried with so to speak. I have recently experienced extended demos of the SME 30/12 and Audio Note TT3, both of which are between £35,000-£40,000 with a suitable cartridge.

As you can see, I am in no way averse to the high end (or if you are my wife, you can see I am deranged), but I feel I need to ask if the Continuum can be twice as good as either of these products, let alone the three times its price tag suggests it should be. It is undoubtedly more aesthetically pleasing than either of the two British decks, but how can it possibly justify the premium?

**A Hargreaves** via email

**HFC** Only one of our team has heard the 30/12 and he hasn't heard the Caliburn and, as far as we know, nobody in the team has heard the Audio Note. The law of diminishing returns suggests that the Caliburn can only be a degree better than the two British decks rather than twice or three times as good and as said before, it will depend on how far you are prepared to go to pursue absolute performance.

A worthwhile analogy might be looking at the performance difference between cars at the Supercar level and cars at the Hypercar level. An extra ten or fifteen miles an hour will often double the cost. The choice, of course, is yours.



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**RICHARD BLACK**

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



**MALCOLM STEWARD**

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



**ALVIN GOLD**

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



**JASON KENNEDY**

Jason Kennedy was a former editor of Hi-Fi Choice and spent an incredible 17 years on the title. Now he's back on the magazine as a freelance writer and hi-fi expert.

## Shielding hell

I have just bought myself two brand new amplifiers from a BADA dealer. They are Musical Fidelity's 550k Supercharger (now discontinued) and cost £1,000. I saw this offer and thought it's a bargain not to be missed!

I'm still waiting for them to arrive and will let you know what I think when I get them. Until funds permit, I plan on using the pre-outs on my integrated amp and using it as a preamp.

I also use Nordost cables throughout and intend to put Blue Heaven interconnects between the amp and monoblocks, but I have been warned that as they are unshielded the amplifier may hum. Can you advise please?

Obviously, I plan to use my existing interconnects to see if this will be a problem, but if it is, then I'm not sure what other shielded interconnects are available on the market for a maximum of £150. As I want a cable of a similar tonal balance, fast, pacey and detailed, I'm open to ideas

**Sometimesuk** via email

**HFC** The absolute necessity of shielding will depend in part on the length of the cable in question and what it is going to be routed past, so you may be fine with your existing lengths. In terms of options with higher levels of shielding, the Supra EFF-IX may fit the bill nicely as the Supra designs carry a high level of proprietary shielding on them. It should be comfortably within your budget as well.

## Time to try the coil?

My hi-fi system currently consists of a Fatman 182 amp, Quad 11L speakers, Pro-Ject RPM4 with an Ortofon Red cartridge, Cambridge Audio 640P phono stage and The Chord Company Rumour 4 cable. Where would I start with upgrading?

I realise my amp is a budget one, but I do love the sound of valves and can't afford a new one at the moment. Would getting a better phono stage or cartridge be the way to go? Or should I save for a better turntable?

**Hixy** via forum

**HFC** The RPM4 is a solid and capable deck and we don't feel that upgrades in this direction will be worth it as they will most likely overmatch the rest of the system. Also, the Ortofon (we presume you mean the 2M Red) is a good and highly regarded cartridge. It may be worth experimenting with a jump to moving coil model.

Perhaps something like the Ortofon Salsa would be a positive upgrade and work well with the 640P. One area that might be well worth consideration is changing the 640P. If you like the valve sound that the Fatman is producing, why not look at Pro-Ject's very capable Tube Box? This would support moving magnet and moving coil cartridges going forward and be well and truly capable of handling an amp or speaker upgrade in the future.

## Lost my zing

I have a problem with getting the following kit to sound good together. I have a Tube Technology Fusion CD player (five years old), Myryad MP100 MA 240 amplifier (ten years), Cura C21 loudspeakers (eight years) and Townshend Isolda cables and interconnects

My problem seems to be with recessed sound, in the box rather than out front. While it's lovely on solo piano, the detail and separation's not there with more complex stuff. The cymbals don't seem to zing like they should. I know valves deteriorate, but they have been replaced.

As I'm coming up to retirement, I want to sort out the problem but don't know which area to address - i.e. CD player or amplifier and please don't say the whole bloody lot

All the above kit was highly rated at the time, but it seems to be less than the sum of the parts rather than the other way round

The music I listen to is mainly acoustic jazz and vocals from ECM and ACT labels, most of which is nicely recorded

Ideally, I am willing to change one piece, either the amp or CD player, but not the speakers. These are relatively small floorstanders and my wife won't accept anything larger (although she may accept standmount monitor types).

I have a budget of £3,000 and would appreciate any advice or ideas you may have.

**John Wilson** via email



**HFC** The Tube Technology CD player is still a highly regarded product and has little issue producing a substantial soundstage, so our thoughts would be to retain that. There is no shortage of choice in amplifiers up to three thousand pounds. The Copland CTA405 could well be worth a look - it has excellent drive and tonality, but has a lovely wide soundstage and great imaging. It should have no difficulty driving the Cura's to a respectable level as well.

Another option would be the Densen B-200/B-310 pre power combo. Densen equipment certainly possesses the 'zing' that you are searching for and generally manages to do so without sounding overly forward or aggressive. Whether you find the soundstage to be as wide as the Copland, it would still be an ideal starting point for an enjoyable demo or two.

## Cyrus the great

Just wondering if you can offer me some advice about upgrading my hi-fi? I have been getting a lot of different advice on forum sites and wanted a professional opinion.

My current set-up is a Cyrus amp with a NAD 541i CD player and Bowers and Wilkins CM4 speakers. I propose to upgrade to a



## Can I trust my Linn with vinyl?

My system comprises Sugden's latest A21 AI Mk2 and CD21 incarnations with Mowgan Audio Mellt loudspeakers and decent-quality interconnects. Although there may be better CD players around for £1,200, I'm very happy with the overall sound I get for the investment.

I also have a good vinyl collection, which is handled by a Linn Axis, which I've had for many years (recently serviced) with Basik Plus arm, Goldring 1012GX cartridge, and a Cambridge Audio 640P phono stage.

I'm using the external phono stage instead of the Sugden's built-in unit because of turntable positioning and cable runs, although my impression is that it loses nothing to the integrated unit.

Some of my vinyl is duplicated on CD and when I listen to well-recorded acoustic/semi-acoustic stuff, I hear the sort of differences that reading *Hi-Fi Choice* and others might lead me to expect. Generally, bass is more extended and solid on the CD player with mid/upper ranges a bit harder and brighter and the leading edge of percussion instruments slightly less well defined. I wouldn't say one version is light years ahead, but if pushed, I'd probably listen to the CD, while the exception to this would be with classical music, which vinyl suits better.

So the question is, is the current turntable reasonably balanced with the rest of the kit? How good is the Axis/Basik Plus, compared to the sort of results I might expect if I spent the same amount on a new turntable set-up

as I did on the individual Sugden units (i.e. £1,000-£1,500)? Or is the existing set-up good enough to benefit from a cartridge upgrade?

I just have the feeling that the sound I'm getting from vinyl isn't quite as good as it should be.

**Barry Riley** via email

**HFC** The Linn Axis was well regarded in its time and could still potentially have much to offer. An interim step you could try is to switch to moving coil, either with the high-output Dynavector 10x5 or the low output (and very lovely) Ortofon Rondo series. The 640P can handle either of these cartridges and if they provide the leap forward then you have a healthy sum to spend on vinyl!

If you find that performance hasn't made a significant leap forward, you can remove your newly purchased cartridge and substitute something like Michell's Tecnodec or Roksan Nima, which are within budget and both would represent a leap forward over the Axis. In time and budget allowing, it would be worth looking to upgrade the 640P, which is a talented budget phono stage but can be bested by stages like the Trichord Dino.



Cyrus 8 XP d amp, Cyrus CD 8 SE, Cyrus X Power and PSX power supply. I like the sound of the Bowers and Wilkins CM4s and want to keep them in my set-up, but I will look to replacing them in a few years time.

In the meantime, I'm wondering if my speakers will be up to the job for this set-up? I welcome your suggestions.

I also thought about two X power amps and a pre XPD instead of the integrated and run each one as a mono and bi-amp them. I've also looked at the dedicated Cyrus monoblocks as well.

**Mark** via email

**HFC** The CM4 is capable enough to work well with the system you list. But to be

honest, it might well be better to leave the power amp and power supply for now and upgrade CD, amplifier and speakers first. If you like the Bowers and Wilkins' 'house' sound, the extremely talented CM7 would, to our mind, be a better system, used with the 8 XP d and 8 SE. This would then allow you to experiment boosting performance later on with the X Power and PSX.

### Low resistance

I have recently upgraded the cables on the main part of my system (Musical Fidelity A308 amplifier, MFA308cr CD player and Spendor S8e loudspeakers) from Ecosse ES4.45 speaker cable (terminates 4 to 4) and Atlas Voyager interconnect to Nordost Red Dawn – both for speaker cable (again, terminates 4 to 4) and interconnect.

While the sound is certainly clearer (perhaps thinner) and faster and requires slightly less

volume from the amp for a given listening level, cymbals can sound splashy, when they didn't previously and some female voices now are sibilant (in a way they did when I had a pair of Tannoy 609s years ago – which I put down to the metal tweeter and horn-loading)

The bass is certainly present, but seems to be masked by the exuberant treble. All in all, the sound is, perhaps, a little harsh and becomes fatiguing, which is not what you want from your hi-fi! I would have thought that after around 100 hours' use, the cables should be burnt in, so that should not be the problem.

I know Spendor recommends low-resistance cables and the Red Dawns have a higher than normal impedance at 110 ohms. But it has been suggested to me that the Nordost is not suited to Spendor loudspeakers.

Any suggestions before I cut my losses and go back to Ecosse, probably the MS4.7s and the Symphony?

Incidentally, which are better speaker cable terminations, banana plugs or spades, as both seem to have their champions?

I look forward to seeing your comments. Many thanks and keep up the good work.

**Jeremy Mayes** via email

**HFC** Nordost cabling does seem to have a very definite effect on systems and as you have apparently discovered, the results are not always as expected. The above-average resistance on the cables may be responsible for the results you are getting, but equally, this could be the elusive factor of synergy being lost. It would probably be best to revert to the original cabling and possibly experiment with other models on a try-before-you-buy agreement.

Banana plugs and spades do indeed have their champions. Well implemented, there is little to choose between either of them sonically, but personal preference leans towards the 4mm plug because it works across more amplifiers and has the cabling leaving the amp and speaker at a more benign angle. Shallow we know, but there you are.

### Power cables

The effect of good-quality interconnects and speaker cables appear to be widely reviewed and understood. However power conditioning and power cable effects appear less obvious.

I have the inexpensive Tacima mains conditioner, together with both Clearer Audio Copper Line Alpha and The Chord Company Power Chord mains cables on trial. Using a modest system (Arcam A60, Arcam Alpha 6 CD player, Monitor Audio RS6, Chord Crimson, and QED Silver Anniversary), the results are surprising, with voices and instruments clearer, more open and with improved detail.

The Power Chord performance is significantly better than the Copper Line Alpha, although

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to be fair, there exists a large price difference. The Power Chord delivers overt clarity and detail, unmatched by the Copper Line Alpha, although the latter supports a more forgiving, almost smoother performance with less well recorded material.

I was sceptical at first about potential improvements, but having tried these products myself, I find performance gains at least as significant as interconnects or speaker cables. I plan to buy power cables now that I can retain longer term, as I upgrade to an Arcam A38, CD37 and PMC GB1i. What would you suggest and have you considered including your own findings in a section of the *HFC Buyer's Guide*?

**N Drabble** via email

**HFC** Mains cabling seems to excite more of a debate than speaker cabling and interconnects and in truth, our experiences do seem to vary based on location – those of us in the countryside often find our mains is perfectly alright – and the equipment being used.

If you were looking for a step forward over your existing treatment, we would suggest retaining the same mains leads and changing the Tacima to something like the Isotek Sirius, which we rate very highly. The filtering this unit is capable of should improve matters more than a similar expenditure on more mains leads.



## Phono fun

I am wondering if you could give me some advice. I have had my current system for some years now and purchased virtually all of it from Powerplant in Brighton, who always gave me good advice. It seems that they are no longer in business and I am, therefore, without a trusted and reliable source of professional advice.

My current system is as follows: Roksan Xerxes deck with Tabriz arm, Ortofon Kontrapunkt A cartridge, Audiolab monoblocks (pre Tag McLaren) and Bowers and Wilkins' 802 speakers. I recently upgraded my

Audiolab C preamp to an Audiolab Q (again pre McLaren) on eBay. This is something I've been meaning to do for ages and Powerplant did advise me that an upgrade of my preamp would be the next sensible step.

The upgraded sound is great, but I have one problem: no phono input. However, as the bulk of my music collection is 700 vinyl records, collected over the last 40 years and far outweighing the 200 or so CDs I possess, I need your help.

So my question is, which phono stage would you recommend? Obviously I could look out for a second hand Audiolab PPA on eBay. However, I read good things about other phono stages: Tom Evans, Creek, Michell Iso, Graham Slee to name I'd also like to get the best out of my Grado SR125 headphones.

My musical taste is very eclectic: jazz, blues, folk, rock, classical etc. so I need a phono stage that handles my diverse interests. Any advice?

**Marek Urbanowicz** via email



**HFC** Good though the Audiolab phono stage was, we don't consider it superior to some of the modern designs we have seen of late. The cheapest design we would consider to be a reasonable starting point is the Creek OBH-15, which offers a rewarding and detailed listen. Further up the price scale, the Trichord Dino is an excellent basic phono stage with the useful upgrade option of the Never Connected power supply. If you are really after an excellent unit, Trichord's Diablo or some of the Whest products are capable of excellent results.

## Decisions, decisions

I currently play my records on a fine Transrotor Zet 1 turntable, equipped with a TR 9.1 tonearm and van den Hul cable. The phono cartridge is a MM Goldring 1042.

I use the phono stage of my Arcam A32 and although the result is satisfying I know that this turntable and tonearm is capable of more.

If I consider an upgrade of £1,000, would you invest in a better phono stage or a better cartridge?

**Paul Van Wezemaal** via email

**HFC** We would be inclined to divide your budget roughly in half and consider a moving coil cartridge such as the ubiquitous Ortofon Rondo Red or the Dynavector DV-20x and look at the phono stages such as the Trichord Dino or the Primare R20 MkII. Further down the line, it is worth remembering that the Transrotor will accept some very nice arms as well, so you have many options open to you.

## The sensitive kind

If you are seeking to increase the level of your system, then amplifier power is only one variable to alter it. The other is the rated sensitivity of the loudspeakers that the amplifier is powering. Virtually all loudspeakers have a rated sensitivity, which is expressed as the output in decibels for a single watt of input. In the same way that amplifier power can be rather different to the manufacturer claims, sensitivity can vary, too.

An average sensitivity loudspeaker will produce about 88 decibels for a watt of input. As the decibel scale is exponential, a speaker capable of 89-decibel sensitivity is going to be considerably louder and speakers with sensitivities in the nineties are going to be very sensitive indeed.

This means that your preferred listening level can be reached on a lower amplifier output. As such, if you are intending to upgrade loudspeakers and keep the same amplifier you will need to pay attention to any differences in sensitivity. A two-decibel drop in rated sensitivity can be the difference between your amplifier producing all the output you need and being unable to do so. Many amplifiers these days produce sufficiently large outputs for this to be fairly academic, but many valve and class A designs do not have this luxury.

Some manufacturers develop a reputation for sensitive loudspeakers and others do the opposite. If you want to increase the available output from the same amplifier, manufacturers such as Triangle and Tannoy produce loudspeakers that are generally more sensitive than average. In the case of Tannoy, their large dual-concentric designs, such as the Glenair, have sensitivity rated in the mid-90s, are designed with valve amplifiers in mind and go very loud on small outputs. By the same token, loudspeakers such as Dynaudio and ATC are generally happier with amplifiers with a healthier output.

The final piece in this puzzle is that very sensitive loudspeakers often do not sound their best on the end of very powerful amplifiers, while less sensitive loudspeakers will not sound their best on amplifiers that are unable to drive them to the required levels. Your own listening preferences will shape this to an extent, but it is important not to end up trying to drive an enormous pair of loudspeakers to stadium levels on a single-ended valve amp.

# Made in Japan – Three Steps to Heaven

*In part one of our new monthly feature Jon Marks looks back at Kenwood's groundbreaking L-07D turntable*

Cast your mind back to a time when CD was but a blip on the screen of a research lab's oscilloscope, when British hi-fi was the best money could buy and the world was flat. If you're old enough to recognise the meaning of that last phrase, you'll know it sums up the zeitgeist of a period when Audio GB and its purist products stood bravely against the tide of bland, mediocre boxes sent to our green and pleasant land from Japan. Of course, while cheap hi-fi was often pretty nasty, the only thing such a truly blinkered view of hi-fi from the East accomplished was to blind believers to some of the gems built in Japan, one of which is Trio/Kenwood's outstanding L-07D from 1979.

The design of hi-fi gear is often about balancing compromises, sometimes technological, sometimes budgetary. At the meeting in the mid-to-late Seventies where Kenwood decided to produce its Laboratory Series of components, it's clear the accountants were locked in the stationery cupboard. The L-Series was to be Kenwood's definitive statement on the accurate reproduction of recorded sound, uniting original thinking and solid research in a design brief to be executed without compromise.

Since Kenwood (or Trio as it was known in the UK when the L-07D was produced) was and is, a company with interests in a wide range of test and radio communication equipment, the 'L' team enjoyed a rare benefit – the time and opportunity to put their theories to the test in the lab and build a turntable which was unique in addressing so many key

**“The L-07D is one of my favourite turntables of all time – truly a magnificent machine.”  
Harry Weisfeld, VPI Industries.**

concepts in its design.

The result turned many accepted ideas on their head – there was to be no rubber mat, no suspension, no lossy damping, no regulation of the speed of the direct-drive motor within a tight feedback loop. Instead, there was a plinth made of aluminium embedded in resin-concrete and damped by a sheet of mahogany. The large-diameter platter (with its stainless steel mat) rotated on a motor whose bearing sat on a Teflon thrust-pad, its speed controlled by a complex outboard power supply.

## THE SUM OF THE PARTS

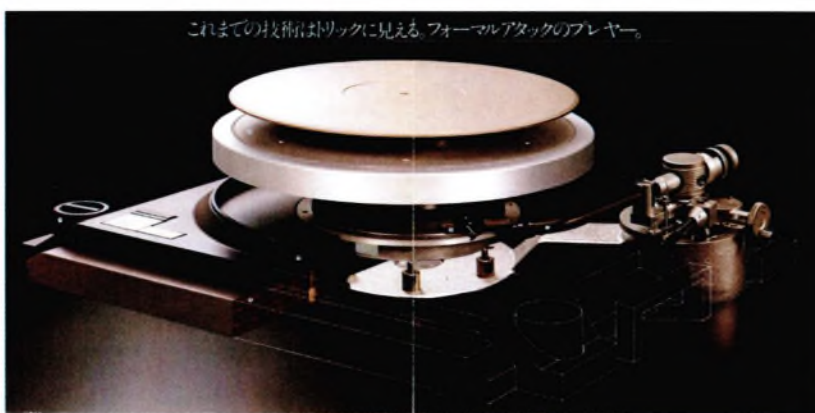
As a fan of Japlish, I'm somewhat disappointed by the clear, concise English in the L-07D's manual, in which Kenwood sets the bar high: 'The L-07D was designed and developed with a view to making an ultimate record-playing system, which converts the music information cut in the record with 100 per cent accuracy

into an electrical signal.' To do this, the 'L' team focused their attention on four main aspects of turntable design: 'high rigidity and good anti-vibration properties; high transient load characteristics; high-fidelity electrical signal transmission; the three supporting points in the pickup loop (bearing shaft, tonearm pivot and cantilever supporting point) are extremely accurate.'

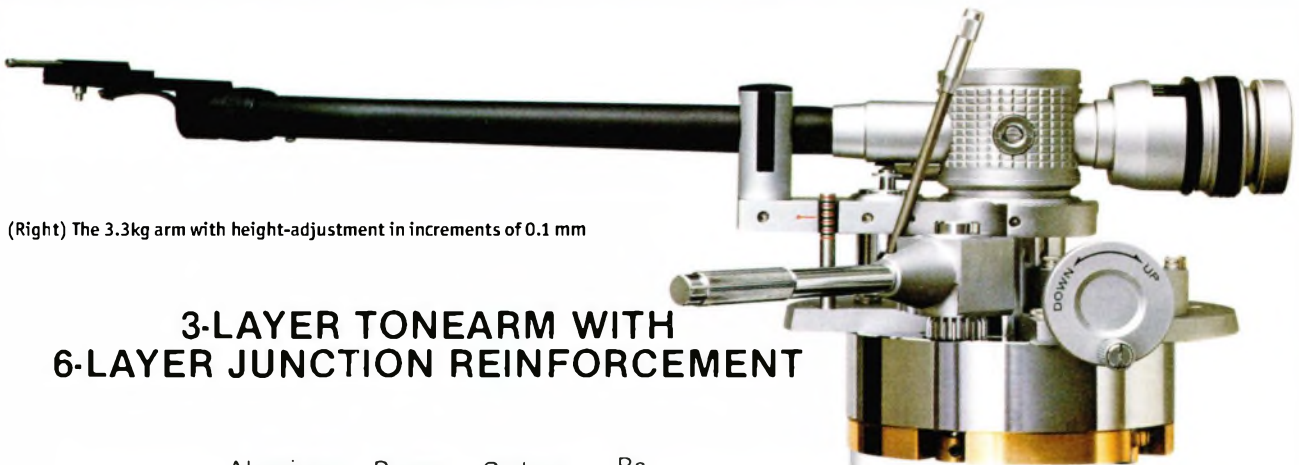
The heart of the L-07D is the large, hardened aerospace aluminium beam which links the mounting points for the arm and bearing. Cast around this beam is the upper part of the plinth, which is made from Kenwood's ARCB (Anti-Resonance Compression Base) material, a resin-concrete material.

Constrained-layer damping is used throughout the deck and its arm, and appears in the plinth in the form of the mahogany sheet, layered with aluminium which is screwed tightly to the underside of the ARCB plinth. This approach also serves another of the designers' goals, that of keeping the deck's centre of gravity low (this is in stark contrast to turntables whose sub-plinths sit on springs).

The L-07D's motor is fixed to the aluminium beam with six large hex-head bolts and is a world away from the feeble, low-torque devices found in many cheap direct-drives. Inside its

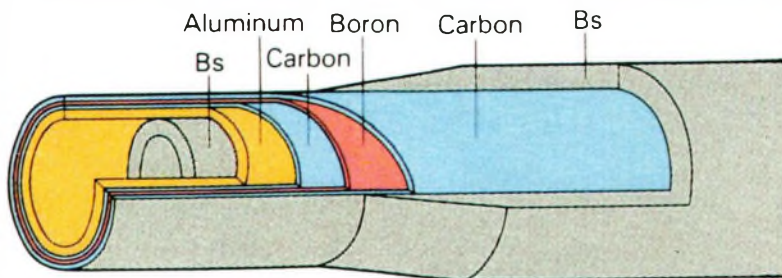


(Above) The L-07D's plinth and platter structure.

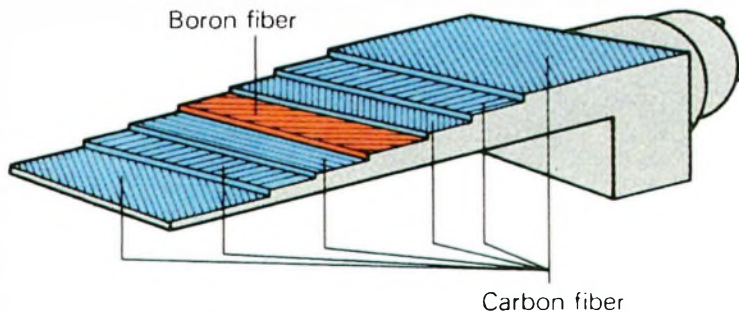


(Right) The 3.3kg arm with height-adjustment in increments of 0.1 mm

## 3-LAYER TONEARM WITH 6-LAYER JUNCTION REINFORCEMENT



## CARBON-BORON FIBER LAMINATED HEADSHELL



(Above) Constrained-layer damping in the L-07D's headshell and arm tube

cast aluminium shell is a brass sleeve containing the 12mm hardened stainless steel shaft which sits on a Teflon thrust-pad. Despite the deck being nearly 30 years old, few of the L-07D owners I've contacted report any obvious wear, even on unserviced bearings.

This may, in part, be due to the secondary ring magnet on the rotor which provides a degree of 'magnet levitation', reducing the proportion of the platter's weight actually borne by the thrust-pad.

The 5.5kg platter is another of the L-07D's unusual features. Based on a thirteen inch-diameter aluminium casting, it has a layer of Duralumin screwed to its underside to reduce ringing. The mat is made of stainless steel. This approach means no lossy materials to dissipate any of the stylus's movements and yields no discernible ringing when the platter is struck. Its high moment of inertia makes it immune to

slowdown caused by stylus drag.

Completing the synergetic package is the 3.3kg arm. Again, the engineering quality is outstanding. The arm is fixed to the plinth using a four-jaw collet chuck similar to the type you'd find on a power drill. With the chuck loosened, arm height can be adjusted by 0.1 mm for each revolution of the vernier control built into the base of the arm.

Aerospace materials make another appearance in the arm tube, whose core is a J-shaped, hardened aluminium pipe wrapped in alternating layers of carbon and boron fibres. The same goes for the removable headshell, again emphasising the importance of constrained-layer damping to the 'L' team.

Finally, meeting the criteria for optimal signal transmission is the high-purity copper Litz wiring, whose conductors are double-shielded and laid out horizontally within the arm.

### BACK TO THE FUTURE

Kenwood's engineers may have set themselves a tough design brief, but was that brief the right one? In a word, yes. Although the L-07D has a low profile amongst the ranks of Japanese super-decks from the late Seventies to mid-Eighties, it's earned a loyal following all over the globe, especially in the UK, Germany and the US.

One of its fans is Harry Weisfeld, designer and owner of VPI Industries, who revealed his L-07D influenced the design for the HR-X in its use of constrained-layer damping and periphery record clamp. "The L-07D is one of my favourite turntables of all time – truly a magnificent machine". When I asked him what he thought made the L-07D special, one point he raised was the quality of the motor: "The motor runs very well – the 'table is virtually silent... When I replaced the Teflon thrust disc (after it had worn down), it was almost noiseless – you ▶

### THE L-07D MOTOR

Harry Weisfeld attributes the musicality and rhythmic ability of the L-07D to the fact that the motor's speed isn't under the permanent control of a tight feedback loop, as is the case with almost all other DDs. This is covered in the owner's manual thus: 'In the L-07D, the motor coil is driven at a constant current, therefore counter-electromotive force in the coil can be ignored and control can be more precise... When the motor's speed difference is beyond +/- three per cent, the speed is controlled to obtain a large torque. When it is less than +/- three per cent, the phase is controlled to obtain a wide lock range and large phase gain.' As a +/- three per cent speed error is unlikely ever to happen whilst listening to an LP, what this boils down to is that the motor does not rely strongly on feedback for dynamic stability; the platter is kept rotating at a very steady speed more by the combination of the motor's current drive and the platter's large moment of inertia than by the outboard power supply's feedback mechanisms.

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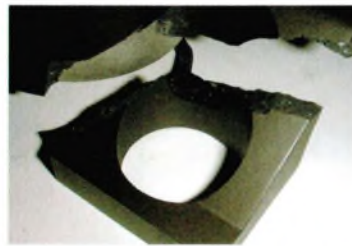
**Z Lensman**  
East Grinstead  
**01342 305103**  
www.zlensman.com

**www.blackrhodium.co.uk Telephone: 01332 342233**

(Below) The L-07D can be fitted with a second tonearm behind the platter.



(Right) At least this footer is repairable



(Above) Richard Kunz's deck with Kenwood centre weight, periphery clamp and unpainted feet



(Above) The original arm fitted with an Orsonic headshell

## BUYING AND MAINTAINING AN L-07D

America is home to the busiest owners' forum, which is run by the very knowledgeable Howard Spine ([www.l-07d.com](http://www.l-07d.com)), who provided a number of the pictures in this article and who offers a repair service for decks which have been damaged or are out of adjustment. One of the forum's members is Richard Kunz, whose L-07D is pictured here with its stripped and lacquered mahogany plate.

In the UK, Vantage Audio ([www.vantageaudio.co.uk](http://www.vantageaudio.co.uk)) repair and refurbish L-07Ds, even those which are badly damaged. They also supply newly manufactured parts like the platter mat, centre weight and periphery clamp. L-07Ds sometimes crop up on eBay and are occasionally offered for sale on Howard's owners' forum. While it's frequently best to buy in good condition (prices vary, but can be up to around £2,000), incomplete or faulty decks can usually be repaired and restored.

could spin the platter, walk away and go have lunch, you came back, it was still spinning. That is world-class machining. The bearing was so polished, it looked like NASA had made it."

One of the reasons for the L-07D's following is its very musical, fluid sound. As Harry commented, "The L-07D doesn't sound like your normal direct-drive. It has a relaxed, easy-to-listen-to, very rhythmic sound." As an owner of an L-07D myself, the main traits which drew me to it were its musicality, its fluidity and its dynamic range. The combination of these characteristics makes for very enjoyable listening sessions, but not at the expense of transparency or analytical precision. Its presentation has genuine solidity and impact too, especially in the lower registers, where bass (when called for) is hard, fast and very clean. On the other hand, there's true delicacy as well – solo violin is crisp and airy and female vocals have a purity and clarity missing from almost all other DDs.

Trio/Kenwood's L-07D is, without doubt, one of Japan's classic turntables from an era when real advances were being made in vinyl replay. As Arthur Khoubesserian of The Funk Firm commented: "I have a lot of respect for the design of the L-07D. Although it's a very different approach from mine, it really went out on limb." Alex Crespi of Hovland still has his L-07D, as does their Chief Industrial Designer, Jeffrey Tonkin, who uses the deck (with its rewired arm) to demonstrate their products at CES: "The arm is very well designed and the table has a tremendous amount going for it. If they built this model today, it would have to retail for at least \$20,000." No mean feat for an iconic turntable on its 30th birthday. **HFC**

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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/](http://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**

*PMC produces a wide variety of speakers, each with its own distinctive style and level of performance. All are worthy of our coveted Best Buy accolade and the DB11 is no exception (page 114). Fantastic value at a fiver below £900, these standmount loudspeakers deliver an expressive and involving musical experience.*



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## Source components

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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
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
	Arcam CD17	700	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever		●	●	●	●	●		315
	Cairn Tornado	950	The Tornado is a full-on experience that delivers intensely real sound for its price		●	●				●	305
	Cambridge Audio Azur 740C	550	Very flexible, this innovative upsampling player sounds exceptionally neutral and highly informative		●	●	●			●	293
	Cambridge Audio Azur 840C	800	Superbly capable with a combination of resolution and tonal evenness that's well worth hearing		●	●	●				315
	Cyrus CD6 SE	900	A combination of detail and sheer musical energy with a hint of high end to the performance			●	●				318
	Harman/Kardon HD990	550	Highly detailed with excellent extension at both extremes and impressive resolution	/594818	●	●	●	●	●		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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
	Arcam CD37	1,300	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution	/395096	●	●	●	●			318
	Audio Research CD5	5,055	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – assertive and very dynamic	/455309		●	●			●	312
	Bryston BCD-1	2,500	Not as open as some but more timely than most. It also sounds a lot more gripping than it looks			●	●			●	300
	Cairn Fog 3	2,200	Ergonomically challenged, high-energy player with Gallic charm and digital preamp on board			●	●			●	302
	Classé CDP-102	2,950	Its sound is rich and dynamic with a full bottom end and impressive power for such a smooth player		●	●	●	●	●	●	286
	Consonance Droplet CDP3.1	1,995	A CD player which gets to the nub of what music is about. Engages the listener every time		●		●				322
	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,200	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music	/399370	●	●	●				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 Antila 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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












## TURNTABLES

The best record players you can buy

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WWW.TECHNOVAR.COM	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 Caliburn	115,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and Castellan 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 Funk V2	1,390	Not only as beguiling as those that preceded it, this turntable is also more substantial to boot		33/45				324
	The Funk Firm Saffire	2,450	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics		33/45			opt	309
	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45			opt	319
	Michell TecnoDec	579	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money		33/45			opt	309
	Michell Gyro SE/RB250	1,565	A marriage of shot-putter-strength, build quality and robust audio (including arm substitute)		33/45				324
	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 onboard electronic power supply		33/45			opt	298
	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	1,720	Has the ability to pull detail out of a vinyl groove, making it the most resolute turntable at its price		33/45				324
	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			ISSUE NUMBER
				WWW.TECHNOVAR.COM	MM	MC	
	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 Saisa	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 Conдор 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.TECHNOVAR.COM	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUO GAIN	AUO IMPEDANCE
	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
	SoundSmith Strain Gauge	6,100	Revolutionary kit assembly that rewrites the rules about vinyl playback	/618387				324
	Tom Evans Microgroove	480	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat					234
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	563	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility					234

**SPECS KEY** **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you. **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown. **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.



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



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



**Townshend Rock 7 £1,720**  
A great turntable for those upgrading from an entry-level deck. Sound engineering at a bargain price

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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
<b>FM TUNERS</b>										
	Creek Audio Evolution	350	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy		FM,M	80	●	●	●	308
	Denon TU-1500AE	180	Well attuned to the crowded modern FM band, this tuner produces clear, detailed sound		FM,M,L	100	●		●	281
	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,295	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves ... but its sound is simply sublime		FM	opt	opt	●	●	257
	Rega 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
<b>DAB/FM TUNERS</b>										
	Arcam FMJ T32	600	A highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. iPod functionality is definitely a bonus	/59242	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
	Sennheiser HD800	1,000	These headphones will convert loudspeaker listeners to the delights of personal stereo performance	/619269			●	●	●	350		324
	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 MD90T 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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## INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

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BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SITE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
	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 C326BEE	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed	/603281	7		●	●	50	322
	Naim Audio NAIT 5i	765	More versatile than previous Nait's, the 5i 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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>										
	ATC SIA 2-150	2,376	Revealing, dynamic and powerful amplifier that works with a wide range of speakers, has superb build quality	/478483	4			●	150	314
	Arcam A38	1,450	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality		7	opt	●	●	100	321
	Astin Trew AT2000	1,349	If you prefer the timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, then this is a serious contender	/498574	4		●	●	65	317
	AudioAnalogue Puccini/Settanta	1,450	Detailed and lively, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension		5	MC	●	●	160	320
	Copland CTA405	2,998	A musical and involving amplifier, which also has incredible insight and is user-friendly by valve amp standards		5		●	●	50	305
	Cyrus 8 XP d	1,500	High on features with a revealing upbeat sound and impressive five input onboard DAC	/608669	6		●	●	70	323
	Electrocompaniet ECI-3	1,650	This is an impressively resolute and powerful integrated amplifier for the money	/618304	5				70	324
	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 Tucana II	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
	Myriad 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 a11	1,450	Small, deceptively powerful integrated valve amp with a crisp, pacy sound		4				40	302
	NAD M3	2,700	Massive and flexible, it goes very loud with fine authority and dynamic range, but lacks some sparkle		7		●	●	180	285
	Naim Audio NAIT XS	1,250	Its spellbinding, refined musical performance is a challenge to all integrated amplifiers	/498536	6	●	●	●	60	317
	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	SPECIFICATIONS							
				WWW.TECHRADAR.COM	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	SITE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>											
	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
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>											
	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 SST²	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
	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	9,200	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility		●	●	6	opt	●	400	293
	Cyrus DAC XP (preamp/DAC)	2,275	A DAC/pre with naturalness and resolution to die for and six digital inputs for signals up to 96kHz		●	●	2		●	266	
	Densen Beat B-200/B310	2,400	Lively, energetic combination that bring a great sense of scale to familiar recordings		●	●	8	opt	●	80	276
	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	18,900	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers		●	●	9	opt	●	125	250
	Naim NAC 152 XS/NAP 155 XS	1,920	Preamp and power amp duo offers excellent performance and classic Naim virtues		●	●	6		●	60	324
	Roksan Caspian M Series-1	2,800	A powerful and enjoyable-sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player		●	●	5		●	85	307

**SPECS KEY** **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and on-board phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

SPECIAL READER OFFER

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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
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>								
	Audioquest Sotewinder	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 CopperLine 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 Wyewizard 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
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>								
	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
	SupraAnCo	30	This cable can give a useful fillip to a good transport/DAC combination, even in a high-end context		●			E 304
<b>SPEAKER CABLES (PRICE PER METRE)</b>								
	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
	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance-matched' cable with stabilising components added		●	●		241
	van den Hul The Wind	50	Separate conductors provide plenty of room for experimentation and the conductor quantity keeps resistance low		●	●		318
	Wireworld Solstice 5 <sup>2</sup>	25	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity		●	●		310
	Wireworld Oasis 6	40	Excellent bass with tunefulness and extension all first-rate. Awkward to handle, though	/617560	●	●		324

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

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Creek Evolution CD Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) .....	(545.00)	<b>£349.00</b>
Linn Unidisk SC Universal CD Player E/D (1Yr G/tee) .....	(3145.00)	<b>£1995.00</b>
Linn Linto Phono preamp Blk S/H (1Yr G/tee) .....	(1180.00)	<b>£599.00</b>
Linn C 4100 Power Amp Sil New (2Yr G/tee) .....	(1980.00)	<b>£1295.00</b>
Naim CDX 2 CD Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) .....	(3250.00)	<b>£2595.00</b>
Naim DVD 5 DVD Player E/D (2Yr G/tee) .....	(2600.00)	<b>£1495.00</b>
Naim Allae Speakers - Chelly E/D (2Yr G/tee) .....	(2500.00)	<b>£1475.00</b>
Naim SuperNait Amplifier E/D (2Yr G/tee) .....	(2475.00)	<b>£1725.00</b>
Naim NAP 250 Power Amp E/D (2Yr G/tee) .....	(2750.00)	<b>£1995.00</b>



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Arcam P1000 Power amp Sil <b>ED</b> .....	(Was 1600.00)	<b>Now - £769.00</b>
Arcam AV9 Processor Silver <b>ED</b> .....	(Was 3750.00)	<b>Now - £1595.00</b>
Arcam P7 7Ch Power Amp Sil <b>ED</b> .....	(Was 2950.00)	<b>Now - £1399.00</b>

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO SPEAKERS

Perhaps the most influential link in the chain

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHNOVA.COM	SPECIFICATIONS						
					SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-THRIVE	BASS (FROM) (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	SCALE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
	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	✱	A	22	✱	315	
	Bowers and Wilkins 683	879	High-class drivers and a great price makes for a warmly recommended speaker		20,99,34	✱	A-	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		16,5,30,5,190			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	
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
	AE Energy Radiance 3	1,500	This speaker's very effective enclosure ensures a wide dynamic range and a very clean sound	/587236	23,92,29,7	●	A	27	✱	320	
	Amphion Argon2 Anniversary	1,200	Notably superior coherence and focus, fine neutrality and dynamic range with low coloration		19,38,31		A-	24	✱	317	
	Amphion Helium 520	1,000	Sharp styling and fine value for money with excellent voice-band coherence		16,104,22	●		28	✱	314	
	Amphion Argon 3L	2,300	Very solid build ensures an impressively clean sound with loads of bass and fine neutrality		19,92,5,30,5	●		26	●	322	
	ALR Jordan Classic 5	1,550	Slim, laid-back floorstander has sweet sound with fine coherence, imaging and dynamic range		17,99,26	●	A	28	✱	275	
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,950	Adjustable ABR gives much of the weight of a floorstander with the agility of a standmount		24,537,31,5		A	26	●	288	
	ATC SCM19	1,534	Super-linear motor system and heavy-weight construction makes the ATC a pro favourite		22,44,31,5		A-	54	●	285	
	ATC SCM16A	2,376	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Includes built-in amps and is good value		27,45,33		ACT	42	✱	300	
	Aurousal VS	1,650	The fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, plus extra help at the frequency extremes	/479149	21,5,107,5,26,8	●		20	●	314	
	AVI ADM9	1,125	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic sounding		20,30,26		ACT	60	✱	301	
	Bowers and Wilkins CM9	1,760	Tall, elegant, expressive midband and expansive, but well-controlled bass	/597244	20,102,5,32	✱	A	60	●	321	
	Bowers and Wilkins 805S	1,950	Classy standmount with excellent coherence and imaging. Can sound laid back, but a real delight		24,39,33		A	25	●	271	
	Cabasse Bora	2,200	A real enthusiast's choice with high sensitivity, strong bass and powerful dynamics	/618354	33,27,50		A	52	●	324	
	DALI Ikon 7	1,400	Bulky vinyl floorstander has high sensitivity and a bright sound with superior delicacy and transparency		20,114,34	●	A+	22	●	275	
	Dynaudio Focus 220	2,630	Cleverly tapered floorstander has a brilliantly smooth, neutral balance and very sweet treble		20,5,98,29,5	✱	A-	20	●	281	
	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,099	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics and a sweet top end, but could be smoother		28,100,37,5	●	A+	20	●	288	
	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,349	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up		28,104,37,5	●	A	45	✱	287	
	Focal Chorus 816WSE	1,499	The W cone makes some of the qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive		99,8,28,2,37,5	✱	A+	39	✱	308	
	Focal Chorus 836V	1,699	Bulky, sharply priced three-way could be prettier, but has good bass with genuine grip		28,115,38	●	A	28	✱	290	
	Focal Electra 1027 Be	4,399	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy and low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive		26,5,111,35	●	A-	25	✱	276	
	Free FS1	3,500	An elegant design for anyone after the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express		16,87,27	✱	ACT	35	●	301	
	Gamut Phi5	3,040	Lovely and discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches		17,100,24	●		20	✱	305	

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

### ABOVE £1,000

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WWW.TECHRADAR.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	●	A	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	●	A	22	●	●	310
	MartinLogan Source	1,799	Careful install needed, but capable of remarkable transparency at an extremely competitive price		24,120,37	●	A	42	●	●	303
	Mission 796	1,300	Clean, open and detailed, this smooth, relaxed loudspeaker does exactly what it says on the box	/594834	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	29,1,56,5,42,5	●	A	37	●	●	320
	PMC GB1i	1,425	Good-looking floorstander has great class with fine delicacy and sweet detailing		15,5,87,23,4	●	A	30	●	●	306
	PMC FB1i	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	/429594	20,100,30	●		20	●	●	322
	PMC OB1i	3,600	This floorstander delivers a smooth overall balance with wide bandwidth and dynamic range	/429697	20,102,5,32,5	●	A	20	●	●	311
	PMC IB2i	8,900	Delivers a top-class sound quality, fine imaging and exceptional dynamic grip	/617595	33,74,46,5	●	A	25	●	●	324
	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
	Revel M22	1,800	A remarkably clean and revealing speaker with superb tonal and microdynamic capabilities		22,37,30		A-	48	●	●	274
	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound		22,105,39	●	A	20	●	●	256
	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,475	Sharp-looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression		20,100,25	●	A	22	●	●	290
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals		22,84,31	●	A	22	●	●	259
	Sonus faber Luito Monitor	1,690	A subtly designed, elegant-sounding package that's hard to beat, especially with good recordings	/603221	18,5,35,33,5		A-	55	●	●	322
	Sonus faber Minima Vintage	2,490	Easy, graceful-sounding compact is a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	/455417	20,33,27,5		A-	55	●	●	312
	Sonus faber Cremona Audit.	3,350	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass... this is 'The Little Speaker That Could'		20,35,37		A	50	●	●	305
	Spendor SP3/1R2	1,600	Conservative styling, superb neutrality and coherence with unusually low coloration		22,40,28		A	37	●	●	317
	Tannoy 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



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BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

## EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

A decent hi-fi rack makes a sound investment

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	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 Supp't	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57	46,35		3	MDF	302
	Custom Design Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit		40x25			Metal	311
	Custom Design Icon Signature	330	Gorgeous wood and glass looks: sound lacks a little detail, but is nice and lively		56,37		4	Glass	286
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal		60,42		4	Glass	293
	Custom Design Milan	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57	48,39		4	Glass	302
	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great		59.5			Wood	320
	Milty Foculpods	22.5	A set of isolation pads that are amazingly useful for damping vibration and improving sound	2	5			Polymer	311
	Partington Minim	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78	45,37		5	Glass	302
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	680	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural-sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews 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

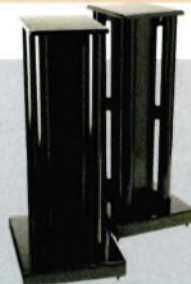
Not all stands are made equal – try one of our top buys

BADGE	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT (CM)	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Anvl 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

**SPERKS KEY** HEIGHT (CM) Height of equipment support and speaker stand (not including spikes) in centimetres. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform (Speakers generally overhang top plates). FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand. SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.



**Milty Foculpods £22.50**  
Cheap as chips way to bring real sonic benefits to both electronics and loudspeakers - these rubbery wonders help destroy vibration and come in handy packs of four



**Partington Dreadnought BS £300**  
Probably the best speaker stand you can buy for the money - heavily engineered and backed up with sound theory, this mass-fillable stand is a top recommendation



**Townshend VSSS £1,380**  
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## 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 Trancendence 5 speakers £2895

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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 Kegon monoblocks (ex demo) POA

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Mark Levinson ML326S with phono, ex-demo POA  
 Mark Levinson ML 40 processor/pre-amp (£30,000) mint £9995  
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 CEC TL-1N transport with DA-1N DAC (AS NEW) £8500  
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Krell KPS30i, excellent, recent lasermach, stunning	2999	Linn Akurate 212, excellent boxed	CALL
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# Second-hand guide

This month, we juggle prices and performances from loudspeakers around the £1,000 mark

**H**ere we have a trio of floorstanding speakers of recent vintage and a near-field monitor that began life in the 1970s. The oldest model is the Bowers and Wilkins CDM 9NT. Built between 2000 and 2003, it didn't stay in production for very long but this wasn't down to any lack of ability. Topping the CDM range, the 9NT was actually more expensive than the £1,400 805 Nautilus. Despite sharing a tweeter with the 805, it's a very different speaker. With twin paper/Kevlar woofers and a separate woven Kevlar midrange unit, this is a full-range design in every sense. Standing one metre tall, it's an exciting speaker to listen to with powerful dynamics and a broad sound stage.

All models are out of guarantee now, so the £900 pair we saw at a dealer with a one-year dealer warranty looked a safe bet. These speakers are very well engineered but even if something does go wrong, drive units aren't too expensive. Bass and mids are around £70, whilst a tweeter costs £75. Of a range of finishes, the Red Stained Cherrywood is the most distinctive.

If the Bowers and Wilkins' is too big, then you might like to consider the ProAc Studio 140.



The 'large room' Bowers and Wilkins CDM 9NT (above left) and the 'bullet proof' ProAc Studio 140

Now in its sixth year of service, the Studio 140 has proved very popular and has yet to even be modified. It's also incredibly reliable. ProAc has a strong reputation for robust speakers, which is borne out by its claim that it hasn't had a single pair back. 'Bullet proof' is how they describe the Studio 140s. Bullet proof or not, it's reassuring to know that like the Bowers and Wilkins, drive units cost around the £70 mark. In terms of sound quality, the Studio 140s are very much the all-rounder here. Equally capable with a wide range of music and happy in a variety of room sizes. In terms of matching electronics, though, they do tend to suit smoother-sounding amplifiers; bright ancillaries will be very much exposed as such. Although £1,400 new, we found an ex-demo pair from a dealer for £950 – a great saving for a speaker that's pretty much as new.

The last of the floorstanders is the Roksan Caspian FR-5. Launched in mid-2005, the Roksan is now an exceptional second-hand bargain. A pair new would cost nearly £2,500

**“ProAc has a strong reputation for robust speakers, which is borne out by its claim that it hasn't had a single pair back.”**

for black, or £2,750 for maple finishes, making it comfortably the most expensive speaker here. However, for exactly £1,000 we found a three-year-old pair in black. More good news comes from the fact that, as no changes have been made to the speaker, you're buying the current spec, whatever the age. Like the other floorstanders, it's also reliable with no construction issues. The downside? Well, although the FR-5 speakers came with a five-year guarantee, this is not transferable which, perhaps, partly explains why they shed their value so quickly.

Finally, something very different. In terms of size and vintage, the Harbeth LS3/5a is of another order to the others here. The LS3/5a was a BBC-designed, near-field monitor speaker dating from the early 1970s and during its long life, it was made by several manufacturers including Rodgers and Spendor. We say "during", in fact the LS3/5a is still made today in modified form, by both Rodgers and Sterling Broadcast. Although these can be had brand new from between £765-£1,500,



Launched in mid-2005, the Roksan Caspian FR-5 loudspeaker is an exceptional second-hand bargain

we've gone for the slightly riskier option of second-hand models. They're highly sought-after and are, therefore, likely to hold their value exceptionally well. Before you do take the plunge, though, it's worth remembering that Harbeth no longer supplies most parts and that the original KEF drive units are very

hard to get hold of. That being said, there is a great online community for these speakers and even a dedicated website! For something that's not just a piece of hi-fi history, but beguiling to listen to and a sound investment, the £1,200 price we saw for a pair of immaculate Harbeths didn't look quite so steep after all.

There's little doubt that the value for money award here goes to the Roksans. A 60 per cent saving on a pair of speakers with a long life ahead is a no-brainer of a deal. The Harbeths will prove a far riskier venture. Look after them, though and they'll hold their value the best here. For a large room the CDM 9NTs are an ideal speaker. If you like your sound stage to be big and bold they'll make an excellent choice. The ProAc's sound good with any music genre and should prove an excellent long-term bet. In short, there're no duffers here, just proof that £1,000 gets you an enviable choice from the second-hand market. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

Next month, £500 turntables

# 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,

remembering to include your phone number and county. The simplest way to send your ad is via email to: [hifichoice@futurenet.com](mailto:hifichoice@futurenet.com) Or mail to: **Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.** Please note that this service is open to private advertisers only.

## FOR SALE

**BANG AND OLUFSEN** 9300 Beocenter, all touch control CD/tape/radio recorder, two speakers. Black and chrome £1,800 ono. 01554 754133 (Llanelli)

**AUDIOLAB** 8000M mono power amps (five). Excellent condition in original boxes with manuals. 125 watts per channel £650 collected. 01452 614515 (Gloucs).

**AURUM** Cantus Leisure Hybrid standmount loudspeaker. Ribbon tweeter, rosewood, gloss finish plus stands. Ten weeks old. Will accept £500. 01945 463856 (Cambs)

**ARCAM** A65+ integrated amp. Excellent condition, superb phono stage (MM) 40 watts, silver. Speaker terminals x2, manual. CR224 remote £125 inc postage. 07768 081615 (Sheffield).

**BENCHMARK** DAC1 preamp. Ten months old. As new, all original packaging £900. 01237 479922 (Devon).

**MICHELL** Argo preamp £200, M&K V125 sub 12 inch £200, Pro-Ject Debut III, black £85, Cambridge Audio 640P, silver £60, MS Pageant Series II £60 NAD 3020 preamp £20. All good condition, Some boxed 01722 334694 (Wiltshire)

**ROKSAN** Kandy LIII integrated amplifier, 120 watts RMS, six months old, mint, 12 months unused warranty remaining, can demonstrate. £450. NAD C352 integrated amplifier, 80 watts RMS, two years old, mint, less than 50 hours use, can demonstrate. £185 01479 870261 (Inverness).

**ARCAM** A90, P90, CD 192, Monitor GS20 floorstanders,

Chord Co. Chameleon, Chord Co. Odyssey, six-socket conditioner. Beautiful sound, mint condition. Manufacturers guarantees. Very little use. Boxed £2,500. 0121 602 8349 (Midlands)

**PIONEER** RT707 reel-to-reel tape recorder. Carefully stored, recently checked and all working. Comes with 20x seven-inch reeled tapes, little used.

Buyer collects from North Hampshire, GU14. £250 or swap for a Audiolab power amp. Further details 01252 513048 (Farnborough)

**THE CHORD COMPANY** Chameleon silver plus interconnect, one metre (£125) £60. Chord Co. Cobra 3, one metre (£60) £30. All boxed, as new. 01384 412234 or email [leet2009@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:leet2009@hotmail.co.uk) (West Midlands).

**PLINIUS** Koru phono preamp. Silver, six months old, mint condition. RCA/XLR balanced outputs. Fully adjustable loading via external dip switches £1,100. 020 8898 3383 (S London)

**ARCAM** CD73T CD player. Silver, original box with manual, remote, immaculate. (£450) £180 posted. 01384 412234 or email [leet2009@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:leet2009@hotmail.co.uk) (West Midlands)

**ARCAM** FMJ A32 amplifier (£1,200) £700. Arcam CD93T CD player (£900) £375. Both mint and boxed with all original accessories. 07966 057648, (Dorset).

**NAIM** CD5x CD player, 122x preamp, 150x power amp, Stageline MM phono stage, A5 2.7m speaker cable, Rega P3 turntable, Neat Motive 2

speakers (Rosenut). As new, mint. £2,100 the lot. 07725 199 071 (Cheshire).  
**ELAC** fs207.2 speakers, cherry finish, mint cond (£995) £425. Boxes and manuals. Could deliver, within reason. 02920 419226, or email [frank8ush@ntlworld.com](mailto:frank8ush@ntlworld.com) (South Glamorgan).

**ARCAM** AVR 250 receiver, (silver), Monitor Audio BR2 speakers (cherry), Monitor Audio (bronze), Atacama Nexus 5 speaker stands (graphite). All in excellent condition £300. 01924 365942 (West Yorks)

**MICHELL** Hera power supply for Iso/Agro amplifiers. Gyrodec platter upgrades and rare Gyro Blue base, LFD Spirolink 2 interconnects and LFD power cables. 07870 912 963, or email [stuardarshan67@googlemail.com](mailto:stuardarshan67@googlemail.com) (Bedfordshire).

**MARANTZ** PM7200, Marantz CD7300 (gold), Marantz PM 7001 (silver), Arcam CD72 (black), all boxed with manuals. Reasonable offers considered 01933 626185 (Northants)

**MORDAUNT-SHORT** Performance 860 floorstanding speakers (piano black). These



**Above: Clearaudio Emotion**

received excellent reviews, (can email reviews and photos). (£1,900) £550. Excellent condition. 01424 446282. (Sussex).

**BOWERS AND WILKINS** CDM 1NT, standmount speakers in Cherrywood finish. In good condition with original packing and manual. £300. 07775 540362 (Cambridgeshire).

**ONIX** BWD-1, very rare FM tuner with Onix SOAP power supply. Collector's classic, first-class condition, working perfectly, great performer. £350. 01707 657801 (Hertfordshire).

**LINN** Komponent 110 floorstanders in silver, two years old. Also Komponent 120 subwoofer. (£1,600) £400. 01777 711386. (Notts).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** E100 amplifier. £600 CD player

## 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**

E500, FM tuner. Owned from new. All in perfect working order and excellent condition (one small nick on CD). Gloss black, well reviewed. Plus vdH leads, system and individual remotes. Boxed. (£1,800) £599. 07961 023253 (North Kent)

**MARANTZ** SA11-S2 CD/SACD player with warranty, box and manual, £2,300. Shunyata Hydra 2 mains conditioner £275. Shunyata Diamondback mains cable £100. 07810 434589 (Surrey).

**ROKSAN** Caspian M-Series 1 CD player. Little used, excellent condition £499. Chord Co chameleon silver plus cables, 2x one metre pair £45 each. 07729 600847 (Sussex)

**CLEARAUDIO** Emotion, in pristine condition, with original box. Includes Satisfy tonearm and Aurum Alpha cartridge in need of retipping. £400. 07905 307131 (London)

**ISOTEK** NeoPlug mains cleaner, new: £15. Cambridge Audio Pacific, one metre interconnect in packaging: £10. Sony STS3il 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 three metres £25. 0161902 0719 (Manchester).

**STAX** SR-202 Lambda basic headphones, including SRM-252 driver unit, mint and boxed, £200. Creek OBH-21SE headphone amplifier, hardly used, some warranty: £100. 07818 658722 (Warks)

**QUAD** ESL-2805 electrostatic loudspeakers, brand new, factory-sealed boxes, £3,250. 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. Email richardjsugg@yahoo.co.uk (Cardiff).

**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 ten-inch 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 MC20SL, £90. Rega Elys MM, £45. 01243 863371 (West Sussex).

**ARCAM** Solo amp/CD/DAB/ FM, silver, £450. Bowers and Wilkins 685, black, standmount loudspeaker, £220. Pro-Ject Phono Box SE MC/MM: £60. 020 8464 9055 (Bromley, SE London).

**PROAC** Studio 250s, floorstanding loudspeaker for sale, photos available. Original cartons, but heavy speakers, so collection would be best £950. 01142 360166, or email scooby@what20.freeserve.co.uk (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)

**THE CHORD COMPANY** Chameleon 0.5m XLR Interconnect: £59. Russ Andrews 8vs loudspeaker cable, 10ft 6in, terminated both ends. £145. 01772 468116 (Lancs)

**EXPOSURE** 2010S 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** NAC A4 white loudspeaker cable, ten metre pair £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).

**THE CHORD COMPANY** Rumour 2 loudspeaker cable, 2x 3m, terminated with plugs: £50. Grado SR60, one-year-old, 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 (London)

**ROKSAN** Kandy Mk III integrated amplifier and CD player. Monitor Audio Silver RS6 loudspeaker. All immaculate condition £1,000. 020 8776 1031 (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)

**210** new/unplayed/sealed vinyl LPs for sale at 50 per cent of cost. 60 second-hand LPs from £3. 01453 544354 (Gloucs).

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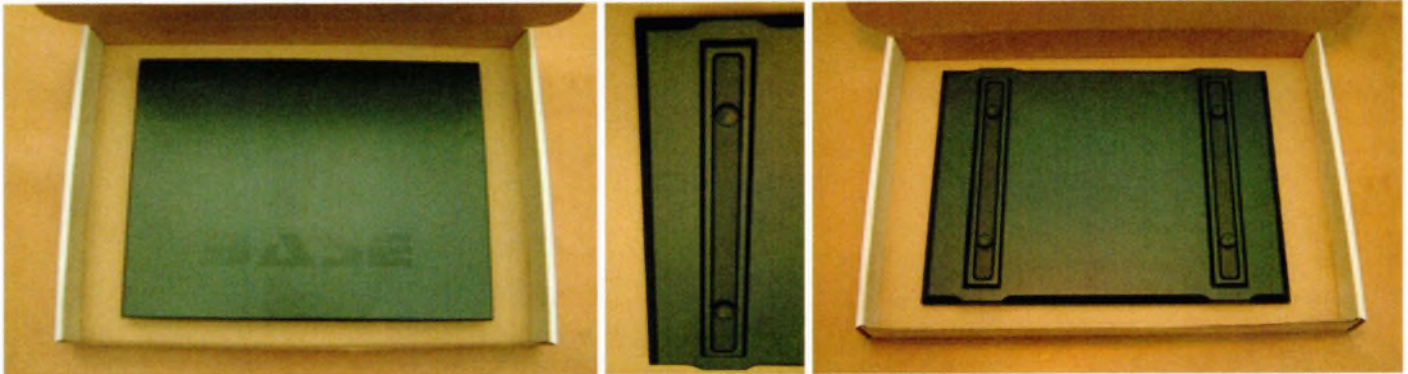
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ISSUE 326 ⊕ AWARDS 2009 ⊕ ON SALE 15 OCTOBER 2009

# HI-FI CHOICE

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## HI-FI CHOICE



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SOUND AND VISION



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