

Musical Fidelity M6 amps rated



Does this new two-box powerhouse have star quality?

Multiformat players go head-to-head

Arcam, Cambridge and Marantz battle for honours



# Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

www.hifichoice.co.uk

Issue No. 340

December 2010

£3.99

# Audio fabulous

... but can Audiolabs' 8200CD deliver truly high-end performance for under £1,000?

## New iPod Touch

Is it more than just a pretty face?



## On the Record

Your bible for the best instore and online vinyl outlets



# 21

delightful new products inside including: Pioneer, Yamaha and Teufel

# PLUS!

Next year's hi-fi revealed! Full report on the 2010 Manchester Show

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DECEMBER 2010

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## Little giant

Do Chord's micro components deliver the sonic goods? Find out inside

## COMPETITION WIN!

Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII speakers worth **£2,000**



# Brennan JB7

## Good news for CD owners

### British company re-invents the HiFi

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

When Martin Brennan designed the Brennan JB7 he threw out the rule book. The Brennan is a CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs. It saves space and clutter and delivers near immediate access to an entire music collection. JB7 owners rediscover then fall in love with their music again simply because the Brennan makes it so accessible.

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

You can use the JB7 in two ways. You can use it with loudspeakers or you can play it through your existing HiFi. The Brennan gives names to tracks and albums from a database of 2.6 million CDs as you load each CD. It takes a few minutes to load a CD.



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

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

### What's the point of owning CDs you don't play?

What's the point in owning hundreds of CDs worth thousands of pounds if you never listen to them?

The problem with CDs is that it's quicker to make a cup of coffee than dip into a CD. Try timing how long it takes to pick a CD, load it in the CD player, play a snippet from a track or two, eject it and put it back where it came from. Then there is the problem of finding music. The print on a CD spine is tiny. What if the track is on a compilation CD? What if the CD is in the car? Then there is the clutter. You need to keep your CDs near the player or you won't play them. So you are forced to share your living space with hundreds of cheap plastic boxes.

CDs are great but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore – that's why Martin Brennan designed the Brennan JB7.



in seconds • Browse albums by spinning the volume knob • Display tracks by name as they play • Load CDs in about four minutes • 2.6 million album database – updated monthly • Seven rainbow colour coded playlists • 180 X 32 soft scrolling vacuum fluorescent display • Segue function blends one track into the next • One touch record from vinyl, cassette or radio • Loads and plays MP3 from USB • Remote control or front panel • Volume knob pushes to use as a selector • Delete tracks you

don't like • Clock with alarm • 60 Watt power amplifier • 4.8 X 16 X 22cm steel and aluminium construction • Small and tough enough if you are on the move • Used by restaurants, hotels, pubs, dentists, schools • Sold to more than 30 Countries • Backup music to external USB hard disk for safe keeping • "Superb" - Gramophone • "Best Buy" - Hi Fi choice • Choice of colours Navy Blue or Gun Metal • Optional matching loudspeakers • Prices from £359.

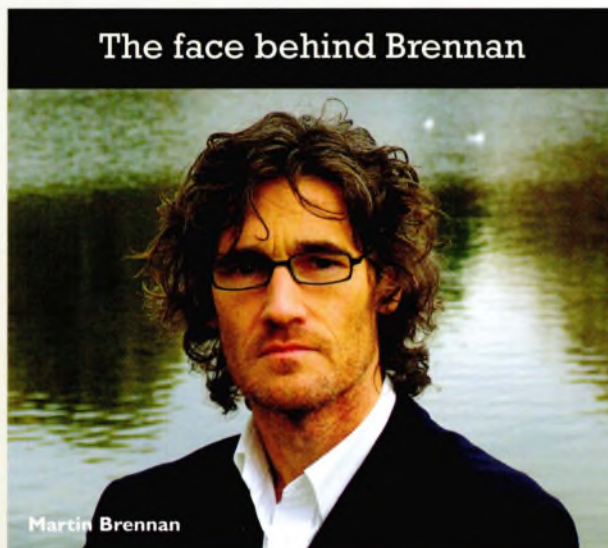
## Key Points

### Three sizes – up to 5000 CDs

• One button plays the entire collection at random • Text search finds tracks / albums / artists



## The face behind Brennan



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

"I always liked the promise of CDs. It wasn't so much the quality but the quick access to a given track. After vinyl and cassette that was a real plus. My first CD player was a five CD multi changer. My second was a ten CD changer for the car. I liked the idea of quick access to more than one CD and music that didn't repeat after 40 minutes. These players were fine but a bit clunky – there were several seconds of silence between CDs and in the car I could never find the right CD.

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

To get the whole story and order visit [www.brennan.co.uk](http://www.brennan.co.uk)



# Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

## YOUR EXPERTS



**PAUL MESSENGER**  
**EXPERTISE:** SPEAKERS

**PAUL** is the UK's foremost expert on loudspeakers. Having worked as a speaker designer and reviewer for over 30 years Paul is internationally recognised for his ability to assess loudspeaker performance, and report on developments in the field.



**JIMMY HUGHES**  
**EXPERTISE:** SYSTEM OPTIMISATION

**JIMMY** has been involved in hi-fi for over 40 years. His knowledge of tweaking and optimising systems is unrivalled in the hi-fi industry and he brings enormous expertise to the pages of Hi-Fi Choice. If anyone can help you improve your set-up, it's him.



**RICHARD BLACK**  
**EXPERTISE:** TECHNOLOGY

**RICHARD** writes exclusively for *HFC* and brings his experience as a successful musician and recording engineer to the title. As Technical Consultant, he's our authority on tech testing, ensuring that our verdicts are beyond compare.



**ED SELLEY**  
**EXPERTISE:** TROUBLESHOOTING

**ED** has spent the best part of decade selling, developing and supporting products from some of the biggest names in audio. A *HFC*'s troubleshooter, he is on hand to help you answer your questions and help you create that perfect system.



**ALVIN GOLD**  
**EXPERTISE:** PERFORMANCE AUDIO

**ALVIN** is an internationally respected audio reviewer who has contributed to a huge range of magazines over the years. He has a very full 30 years of reviewing under his belt and has a passion for both high-performance and high-end hi-fi.



**JASON KENNEDY**  
**EXPERTISE:** TURNTABLES

**JASON** edited *Hi-Fi Choice* through the Brit-pop era and relinquished the helm after 17 years on the title. A hi-fi addict since his twenties, Jason fell for the beauty of vinyl and has never looked back. He's here to help you get the best from your LPs.



**MALCOLM STEWART**  
**EXPERTISE:** EMERGING TECH

**MALCOLM** is a legend in hi-fi magazine circles. A former editor of *Hi-Fi Review* he was one of the best-known and most outspoken reviewers of the 1980s and 1990s. He now writes exclusively for *Hi-Fi Choice* and he loves being 'back'.

# Welcome...

www.hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. **340** December 2010



Whilst we're no stranger to technology on *Hi-Fi Choice*, this month I've had my fill of office banter surrounding music streamers, Spotify playlists and the new iPod range. The perfect tonic to all this tech-talk was Simon Berkovitch's excellent vinyl-buying feature this month on p86. It explains where to shop both online and in-store and even has a city buying-guide for London and the north. All you need, then, is a Pro-Ject 6 Perspex!

What do you think of our cover star this month, eh? - Audiolab's new 8200CD. As a former Audiolab customer I couldn't wait to read Richard Black's in-depth review (p66), especially now the brand is under new ownership in IAG. It seems this new player is making waves and challenging rivals right up to £1,500. A 2011 award winner? Wait and see.

*Dan*

**Dan George** Editor  
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### OUR PROMISE TO YOU

**HI-FI CHOICE** is passionate about high-fidelity. We're dedicated to the very highest standards of sound reproduction. Our commitment is to bring you the most reliable, in-depth hi-fi equipment tests anywhere and we're backed by the UK's biggest technology publisher. Our expert writers will help you get the most from your hi-fi and guide you towards the best-performing products for your budget. Our passion is your passion.



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Jordan Acoustics

# 100<sup>th</sup> *Anniversary* DENON since 1910



The Turntable & The Cartridge



The Headphone



The Integrated Amplifier



The A/V Receiver



The Universal Player



The SACD/CD Player

## Limited Edition Anniversary Products

During this year Denon will celebrate its 100th anniversary. This is a monumental point in Denon's history and to celebrate, Denon have released a limited edition series of anniversary products.

Each model in the series is a signature reference product of luxurious quality and a true quest for perfection. Faithfully reproducing sound the way the original artist intended, the limited edition anniversary models are sure to become collectors items that will sell out very quickly.

- Limited Edition
- Products finished in a luxurious gloss finish
- 5-year warranty
- Certificate of Authenticity from the chief product designer
- Includes a beautiful Denon Brand Book

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AVAILABLE

# DENON

Official Denon Dealers Legacy  
Association Member



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## Introducing five NEW class leading products



**MC452 Quad Balanced Power Amplifier**  
450wpc, Most powerful McIntosh stereo amplifier, Luxurious McIntosh engineering



**MCD1100 CD/SACD Player**  
Variable volume output, Dedicated headphone amp, Five digital input source switching



**C50 Preamplifier**  
Twin moving coil/moving magnet, Dedicated Headphone amp, USB Input, Integrated DAC



**MC302 Power Amplifier**  
300wpc, Larger/Easy to read power wattmeters, Ultra low distortion design



**C48 Preamplifier**  
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# WIN!

WORTH  
**£2,000**

**39** A pair of A.E AE1 MkIII loudspeakers

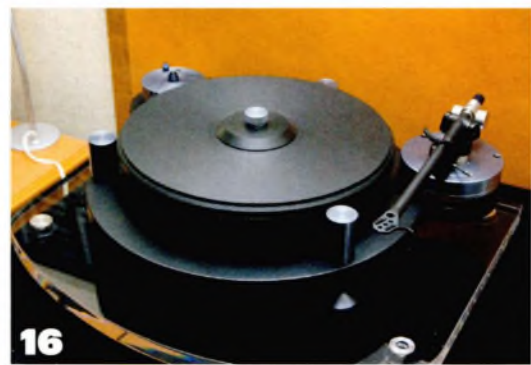


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# Audiofile

All the latest news and views from the hi-fi industry

## Hi-Fi Choice Awards

To celebrate the best audio kit of 2010, *Hi-Fi Choice* assembled some of the industry's biggest movers and shakers for its annual awards

**W**hen you have a winning formula, there really is no need to change it. Forget the stuffy black tie, or elaborate seating plan. All the *Hi-Fi Choice* Awards needed was an excellent venue full of the industry's most influential figures, plus the awards themselves as the main talking point.

Once our guests – who had travelled the length and breadth of the UK to attend – had settled themselves in the cosy confines of the Soho Jazz Club, the afternoon got under way with a brief introduction from publisher Pat Eggington. The stage was then turned over to Editor Dan George and production editor Richard Holliss, to read through the nominees and present the winners with their awards. The lucky recipients each posed for a photo (whether they liked it or not) before we wrapped up another successful year.

**If your names not down  
you're not coming in**

**Dan finds himself the meat  
in a PR sandwich**



**Vicky Deacon and Sophie  
Osman of Pure Digital**



**Three satisfied award  
winners set about the bar**



**Stephen Riddick and Max  
Townshend**



**Shaun and Karen of Bowers  
and Wilkins fend off a  
determined advertising pitch**



**Gearóid and James of Teufel  
demonstrate solid beard  
growth**



**Dan sidles in on Andy  
Naphthine and Alan Porter**



**A variety of smart casual  
styles were on display**



**Keith Haddock shows off his  
Angry Birds progress**

**A cosy venue packed with  
audio brilliance**





1 Andy Napthine on behalf of Aura – Best one-box system

2 Matt Buck on behalf of Beyerdynamic – Best headphone

3 Steve Macintyre of IAG – Best loudspeaker up to £1,000

4 Roger Batchelor of Denon – Best amp up to £1,000

5 Russ Andrews on behalf of Kimber – Best speaker cable

6 Stephen Riddick on behalf of Luxman – High End Award

7 Steve Harris on behalf of Naim – Best DAC

8 Peter Thomas of PMC – Best loudspeaker over £1,000

9 Steve Reichert on behalf of QED – Best interconnect.

10 Vicky Deacon of Pure Digital – Best tuner

11 Martin Morecroft for Resolution Audio – Best CD player over £1,000

12 Shaun Marin on behalf of Rotel – Best amplifier over £1,000



We love it when a plan comes together – IFC's A-Team



Vienna  
acoustics

Beethoven Baby Grand in Piano Black

## Passionate About Music?

From 'Bookshelf' loudspeakers to floor standing arrangements, Vienna Acoustics ensure any style of music is fully realised.

# T+A

HiFi designed and built in Germany

T+A products embody everything you expect from German manufacturing, but the development process is extraordinary.

Driven by physicists, T+A have pioneered many ground-breaking concepts, meaning you can enjoy some of the finest sounding hi-fi in the world.



The **Music Player** combines a CD player, together with the ability to stream music from a computer. Features include a streaming client, high end CD player, iPod interface, digital inputs, internet radio and FM radio. The Music Player is a versatile and exceptional source component.



The **Power Plant** is a powerful integrated amplifier that simply exudes power and offers wonderful sound.

This Power Plant delivers 2 x 240 Watts per channel (4 Ohm) and also includes the unique T+A build quality.

For further information on these two exciting brands contact:

AUDYUS Distribution

Telephone: +44 (0)1480 270550

Web: [www.audyus.co.uk](http://www.audyus.co.uk)

Email: [sales@audyus.co.uk](mailto:sales@audyus.co.uk)



## No feedback

Cyrus unleashes two new mono power amplifiers

**C**yrus has announced a pair of new mono power amplifiers to replace the existing Mono X unit. The new models are built around, what Cyrus is calling, the Zero Global Feedback platform. This is an evolution of the zero feedback system that Cyrus first unveiled in 1998 and, according to the company, has been 'developed to incorporate the latest advances in component technology.'

Cyrus also claims that the Zero Global Feedback system 'brings an inherently natural performance with an unusually quiet

background' and that, although extremely difficult to produce, the performance gains inherent to the design are well worth the challenge involved.

The results are the most powerful amplifiers that Cyrus has produced to date. The £2,500 flagship Mono X 300 is rated at an impressive 235 watts into eight ohms, with the promise of 300 watts into a 'real world speaker load.'

The less powerful £1,700 Mono X 200, produces 150 watts into eight ohms (240 watts into four ohms). Both models still fit inside the standard Cyrus small die-cast metal chassis.



**PRICE:** £1,700-£2,500 **AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 01480 410900 **WEB:** CYRUSAUDIO.COM

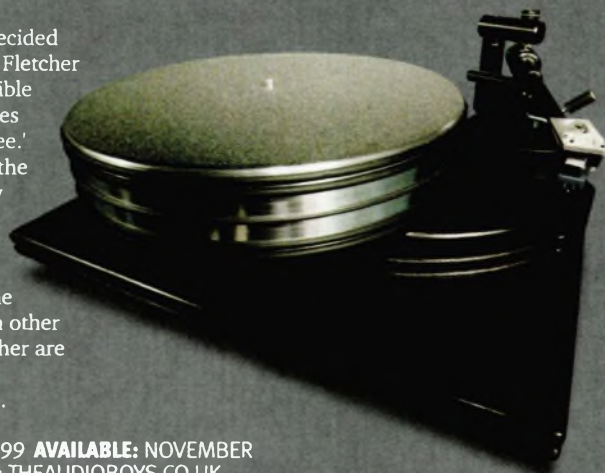
## Turntable legacy

Brand new company offers choice of turntables and tonearms.

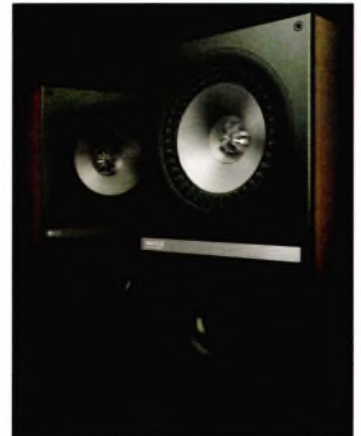
**T**om Fletcher, formally of Nottingham Analogue decided to go it alone and set up Fletcher Audio 'to offer the highest possible European handcrafted turntables with an unquestionable pedigree.'

Sadly, Tom died recently, but the turntables he designed are now ready for sale and include the Omega .3 and Omega .5 (£2,599 and £3,699 respectively).

The turntables also include the £1,999 Zero tonearm, although other tonearms are compatible. Fletcher are claiming to offer 'class leading performance' at this price point.



**PRICE:** £1,999 (TONEARM)-£3,599 **AVAILABLE:** NOVEMBER  
**CONTACT:** 020 8893 5835 **WEB:** THEAUDIOBOYS.CO.UK



### Q'ing up

**KEF** has unveiled the first two models in its all-new QSeries range. The £380 Q100 and £450 Q300 are both two-way standmount speakers, which KEF calls a clean-sheet design.

The speakers include an all-new version of the Uni-Q driver, which borrows technology from the high-end 'Concept Blade' prototypes. This features a large voice coil and 'Z flex' surround. The centrally mounted tweeter operates down to lower frequencies than before, for a smoother hand-over between drivers.

KEF also claims improved bass response, thanks to increased internal cabinet volume and enlarged voice coils. The two models also feature an innovative bi-wire system that has no links or wires to remove and for which KEF has applied for a patent.

**PRICE:** £380-450 **AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 01622 672261 **WEB:** KEFCOM

### Great 8

**BOWERS AND WILKINS** has improved its CM range with the new CM8 replacing the CM7. The CM8 shares many of the acoustic benefits of the flagship CM9, but is significantly smaller in height and footprint. According to B&W, the result is 'perfect for audiophiles with limited space.'

The CM8 makes use of a single 130mm kevlar cone and a pair of 130 paper/kevlar cone bass units. These are complemented by a 25mm tweeter. Like the rest of the range, the CM8 is available in gloss black, rosenut and wenge.

**PRICE:** £1,250  
**AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 01903 221500  
**WEB:** BOWERS-WILKINS.COM

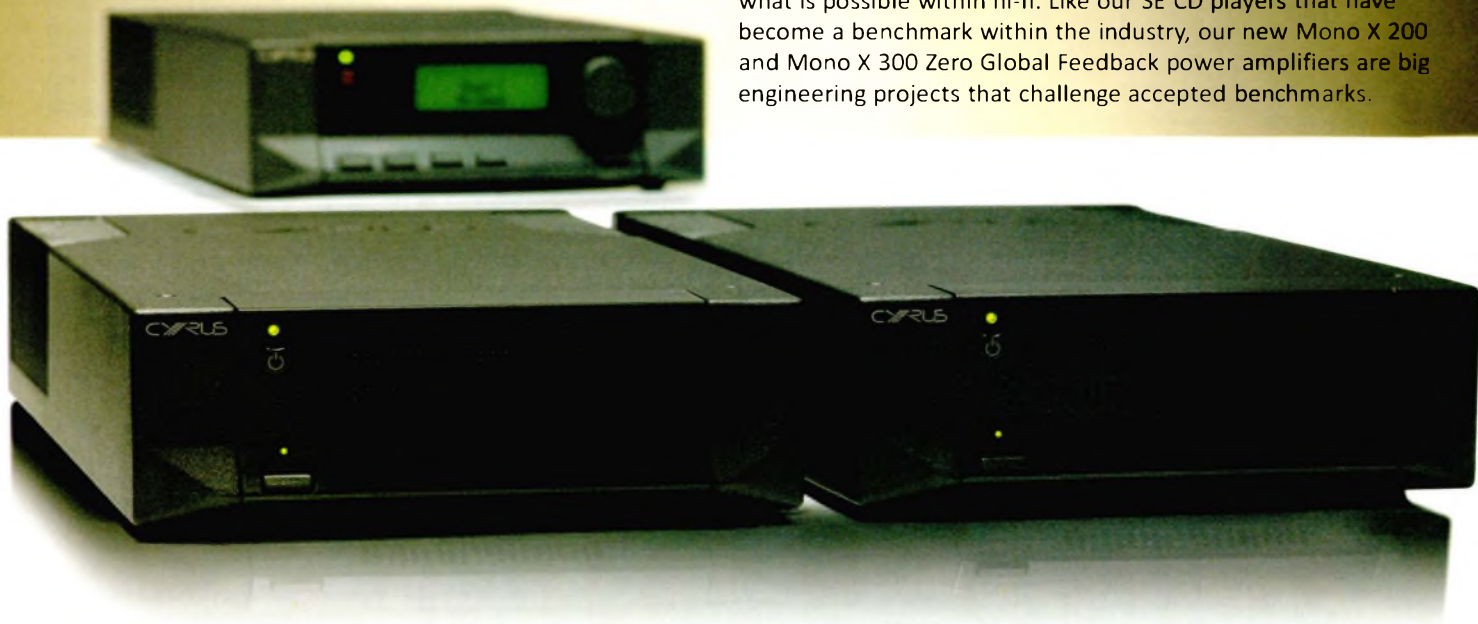




# CYRUS

## Power is nothing without control.

Back in 1998 when the first Cyrus Mono X amplifier was launched it was hailed as a breakthrough. Never content to rest on our laurels, we constantly strive to push the boundaries of what is possible within hi-fi. Like our SE CD players that have become a benchmark within the industry, our new Mono X 200 and Mono X 300 Zero Global Feedback power amplifiers are big engineering projects that challenge accepted benchmarks.



Incorporating the newest advances in component technology, our reengineered Zero Feedback platform delivers some very special sonic benefits, resulting in an exceptional musical performance. Both our new Zero Feedback amplifiers retain our famous large sound stage yet drive even demanding loudspeaker loads with perfect control and ease.

These new amplifiers will be available in stores from October. Book a demonstration at your local Cyrus retailer and experience this outstanding technology for yourself.



SE technology award



SE CD player of the year



CD 8 SE CD player of the year



Cyrus 8 XP, November '09



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
CD PLAYERS  
CYRUS CD 6 SE



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
STEREO AMPLIFIERS  
CYRUS 8 RP



CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER £1000-£1100  
CYRUS CD 8 SE



CD PLAYERS  
BEST CD PLAYER £1200-£1500  
CYRUS CD XT SE/DAC X



STEREO AMPLIFIERS  
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER £1000-£1499  
CYRUS 8 RP D

### Did You Know

Our R&D, Manufacturing and Servicing are all done at our headquarters in Cambridgeshire, England. Having all these departments in one place enables us to not only design world class components, but also allows us to provide outstanding levels of customer care to all Cyrus owners worldwide.

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For the latest news on products or to download a brochure, please visit [www.cyrusaudio.com](http://www.cyrusaudio.com)

Cyrus sales 01480 435577



# Pure Delight

Valves galore in two new Pure Sound models

**P**ure Sound has announced two new hi-fi products to augment its existing line up. The L10 line stage preamp incorporates much of the thinking that has gone into the flagship L300.

The L10 supports four inputs with a separate recording loop, with two pairs of single-ended outputs. It also uses output

transformers and a full valve-rectified power supply for optimal performance. All this contributes to the L10's considerable 17kg weight.

The L10 also includes a remote control for volume. According to Pure Sound, the design 'preserves the verve, colour and energy that almost all preamplifiers and passive volume controls otherwise lose.'

The M845 mono power amplifier (pictured) goes straight to the top of the Pure Sound range. Using a hefty 845 valve in class A single-ended mode, the M845 generates 27 watts of power, which should be sufficient for a number of speaker types.

Like the L10, the M845 also includes a valve-rectified power supply.



**PRICE:** £2,499-£6,999 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01822 612449 **WEB:** PURESOUND.INFO



## Blu audio

**ARCAM** has been putting the finishing touches on its first Blu-ray player, the FMJ- BDP100. The company also claims that not only is it the first 'audiophile Blu-ray player', but that it has been constructed to the same standard as the rest of the FMJ range.

The BDP100 makes full use of multi-layer mechanical damping and 'Stealth Mat' technology. This is coupled with the use of high-quality internal components and 'massive high-end power supplies'. Importantly for the lifespan of any product of this nature, the BDP100 will be upgradable to support 3D in 2011.

As well as Blu-ray support with on-board decoding of high-res audio formats, the BDP100 offers DVD support, as well as high-quality CD playback. This is achieved via the use of precision clock circuits that reclock all signals to minimise jitter and ensure a compatible audio performance. The BDP100 will be available in either black or silver.

**PRICE:** £1,000 **AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 01223 203200  
**WEB:** ARCAM.CO.UK

## New amps

New entry-level separates announced

**Y**amaha is increasing its two-channel range with a selection of entry-level products. The £229, A-S300 and £329, A-S500 (pictured) are both integrated amplifiers that feature many of the styling touches of the more expensive models. They are joined by the £229, CD-S300 player with intelligent digital servo and iPod compatibility.

**PRICE:** £229-£329 **AVAILABLE:** NOW  
**CONTACT:** 01908 366700 **WEB:** YAMAHA-UK.COM





## NEWS IN BRIEF

A selection of news-breaking stories on everything hi-fi



•**QUAD** have launched the third generation of the 11L. As well as performance revisions, the range is now available in an unlacquered finish. [quad-hifi.co.uk](http://quad-hifi.co.uk)



•**TEUFEL** has produced its first pair of in-ear phones. The £59 Aureol Groove is designed to offer total transparency and potent bass. [teufelaudio.com](http://teufelaudio.com)



•**ROBERTS** is showing its eco-credentials with the Expression. It boasts a 100-hour battery life and favourite station button. [robertsradio.co.uk](http://robertsradio.co.uk)



•**DYNAMIQUE** are a new UK-based cable company offering a range of interconnects and speaker cables direct, on a risk free 30-day return period. [dynamiqueaudio.com](http://dynamiqueaudio.com)



•**PURE** have employed fashion designer Orla Kiely to produce the special edition EVOKE Mio, finished in her signature stem-print design. [pure.com](http://pure.com)

# Ready Mercury

New entry-level range from Tannoy

**T**annoy has been busy updating its Mercury series. The Mercury V range takes advantage of a new soft-dome tweeter that is engineered to the same tolerances as the more expensive models. This is partnered with a new pulp-fibre, mid/bass cone.

Other upgrades include slightly larger cabinets, with the internal bracing revised to improve the bass response. This is then topped off with an upgraded crossover, featuring silver-plated wiring and new (Differential Material Technology) damping on the HF capacitors

for a 'class-leading acoustic performance.'

The four-strong range comprises the V1 stand-mount, V4 floorstander, VC Centre and VR wall-mountable surround. Tannoy also claim that the new range is compatible with any of its TS active subwoofers for multichannel use.

**PRICE:** £129-£379 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01236 420199 **WEB:** TANNOY.COM

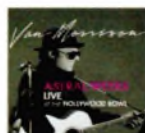


## DESERT ISLAND DISCS

**Rob Follis**, of Rob Follis Associates, lists his favourites.



**JACKSON BROWNE**  
**RUNNING ON EMPTY**  
Years ago I sold guitars, roadied for Slade and toured with Wishbone Ash. This album encapsulated my dream of living "on the road". The girls, the booze, the reality come-down!



**VAN MORRISON**  
**ASTRAL WEEKS LIVE**  
I deliberately missed this tour as 'Bad Van' ruined many concerts for me. Naturally, this was the definitive 'Good Van', with all his classic songs present and brilliantly interpreted.



**LEONARD COHEN**  
**I'M YOUR MAN**  
A left-field rock 'n' roll album that no-one expected, with the most amazing musicians, including Jennifer Warnes in fine form on backing vocals. Compelling.



**SAN FRANCISCO JAZZ FESTIVAL**  
**SAMPLERS 1-20**  
This is my cheat! Years ago I was given vol 5 and I have since tracked eBay and Amazon to complete the set. An odyssey through consummate Jazz.





## a class above

With the same innovations as KEF's revolutionary Concept Blade technology showcase, the all-new Q Series from KEF performs like speakers from a higher price class in terms of realism, musicality and off-axis dispersion.

### Q Series

#### All new Uni-Q array.

Sweet, spacious and true, wherever you sit

A large vented tweeter in the centre of the bass/midrange driver, with a 'tangerine' waveguide and unique Z-flex surround to combine unrivalled dispersion with generous travel for the aluminium MF/LF cone.

#### Advanced bass technologies.

Deeper, tighter and more accurate bass

Inside the fashionably rectilinear cabinets, the new bass driver combines a rigid superlight cone with a massive vented magnet assembly and an oversized voice coil for exceptional sensitivity and distortion-free power handling.

#### Total system design.

A holistic approach, with no compromises.

These advanced new drivers only need first order crossovers, maximising fluency and transparency, and KEF's legendary attention to detail extends from innovations for easier bi-wiring to environment-friendly finishes.



1



SHOW REPORT

# Manchester 2010

This year's Manchester Sound and Vision show was a glimpse of the future says an enthused **Jason Kennedy**

**R**enaissance seems the least apt name for the concrete building that Manchester's Sound & Vision show inhabits, but the visitor numbers suggest that there has been a small but notable renaissance in all things sonic and visual in that part of the world.

It's a show of two parts, with the main floor taken up by huge TVs playing HD material and others making the most of the boom in headphones. The

rest of the building is occupied by manufacturers, rather than the distributors that we saw in Whittlebury last month and it was interesting to contrast the sound made by one of the few companies seen at both events.

Cyrus once again demonstrated its new X series monoblock power amps via Vienna Acoustics speakers, but in a far smaller room than Whittlebury and the result was a distinctly more appealing sound. Another contrast is the near absence of valves, only Pure

Sound was carrying the torch for glass audio.

But the thing that struck home about the exhibitors at this show was how many of them were using a computer as a source, this ubiquitous device has taken over as the music storage medium of choice and this side of the industry is keen to take it onboard.

## 1 KEF Q900

KEF followed the launch of its new Q series standmounts with a trio of floorstanders. The Q500, Q700 and Q900 are all two-and-a-half way designs with a Uni-Q mid/treble unit topping bass and ABR passive radiator driver(s).

The Q500 has 5.25-inch drivers and a single ABR for £700, the

Q700 ups this to 6.5-inch drivers and two ABRs at £1,000. The big Q900 mirrors that array with 8-inch units throughout for £1,200. [kef.com](http://kef.com)

## 2 AUDIOLAB 8200 MB

Audiolab announced its 8200 series integrated amp and CD player recently and has now added a pair of rather more interesting designs to the range. The 8200 CDQ is a version of the CD player with a built-in digital preamp, offering two digital and three analogue inputs for £900. It can be used with 8200 MB monoblock power amps, should circumstances require. This 250-watt black box will set you back £900 per channel, but sounded pretty useful via the Castle speakers on demo. [audiolab.co.uk](http://audiolab.co.uk)

## 3 CHORD CHORDETTE MOGUL

While plenty of exhibitors were using PCs to stream music, Chord was the only one to have made its own computer (see p56). Chord's

“CD was a challenge and now the music file is the latest move in a dynamic audio world.”





3



angle with the £2,195 Mogul, is that it's smaller and better equipped (6x USB, HDMI, analogue out) than a regular PC and being dedicated to the audio task it should sound rather better. It runs Windows 7 and accesses music on an eSata drive, which allows for increased capacity when required. [chordelectronics.co.uk](http://chordelectronics.co.uk)

**4 DUSSUN T2I**

Readers with good memories might recall the Red Rose Audio Spirit amplifier. That amp was allegedly made by Dussun and its similarity to the T2i (£750) is not small. This desktop-style amp has analogue and USB inputs and an onboard Burr-Brown DAC. It also delivers 42 watts-a-side from its attractively hewn aluminium case.

Distributor Cognoscenti also had a more conventionally shaped amp dubbed T6, specced to deliver 100 watts per channel for £760. [Cognoscentihifi.co.uk](http://Cognoscentihifi.co.uk)

**5 NAIM OVATOR S-400**

Naim took the opportunity of using its new NDX network player with the latest addition to the Naim loudspeaker range, the £2,995 Ovator S-400. While it looks very similar to the S-600, it's a scaled down 40-litre version with smaller drive units. It has a 46mm BMR (balanced mode radiator) with its own enclosure, while the cabinet is decoupled from the die-cast plinth with leaf springs. If the sound Naim got in the room is anything to go by, it could well be a winner. [naimaudio.com](http://naimaudio.com)

**6 MARANTZ MELODY MEDIA**

Marantz's latest entrant in the streaming sector is the cute Melody Media M-CR603 at £500. This networked CD receiver has the season's must-have feature Apple Airplay, which means it can stream from iTunes on a PC.



6



7



8

It is not, however, a wireless device as the company isn't so keen on this approach. That said, Marantz does make a Bluetooth adaptor which will plug into the M-XPort. Otherwise the 12-inch wide unit has a 60-watt amplifier, USB input, net radio and both analogue and digital inputs. [marantz.com](http://marantz.com)

**7 T+A MUSIC PLAYER MKII**

Cyrus is bringing in T+A's answer to the network audio challenge, this E series model is a CD player with a processor board built in to accommodate music streaming. It can work with LAN networks, has a USB input and an iPod interface and is thus geared up to deliver internet radio and UPnP sourced-material from a PC or server. It also has an onboard analogue tuner and the 32-bit DAC can be accessed by external digital sources via optical and coax inputs. Price will be £2,500. [taelektroakustik.de](http://taelektroakustik.de)



5

**8 REL T5**

REL has replaced its compact Quake 'sub-bass system' with a slightly taller and considerably shinier new sub called T5 at £425. This cute sub is available in gloss-white or black and incorporates a 125-watt digital amplifier to control a downward firing 200mm long-throw drive unit.

As with its predecessor, it has high- and low-level inputs and controls for level on both inputs, as well as the crossover point. It's 302mm high and won't shake the house unless you provoke it. [rel.net](http://rel.net)





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**9 DENON RCD-N7 CEOL**

Not to be outdone by sister company Marantz, Denon has its own network receiver in a case that bears more than a passing resemblance to the Melody Media.

Ceol, which is Gaelic for music, is an Apple Airplay-equipped receiver with a 65-watt digital amplifier and wireless operation. It also has an iPod dock in its top and supports Napster and Last.fm music services. You can get a control app for Apple touchscreen devices and it's available with speakers for £600, or £530 without. [denon.co.uk](http://denon.co.uk)

**10 MICHELL GYRO SEDUCTION**

Michell Engineering still hasn't finished the secret project it mentioned at Bristol, but has come

up with a new package for a limited run of 99 Seduction versions of the Gyro SE. Its distinguishing feature is the steel-blue finish on parts that are normally polished gold or chrome, including the platter weights, which looks rather good. Each individually numbered Seduction model comes with a Tecnoarm and HR power supply for £2,245. [michell-engineering.co.uk](http://michell-engineering.co.uk)

**11 ROTEL RCX-1500**

Keen not to miss out on the network audio revolution, Rotel showed its latest box of tricks: the £1,195 RCX-1500.

This is a CD player, internet/DAB/FM tuner and wired or wireless streamer with a 100-watt amp on board. It's a better finished device than most and incorporates



a Wolfson 24-bit/192kHz DAC and class D amplifier, of the sort that went down so well in our HFC Awards last month. The ability to stream proper lossless formats such as WAV and AIFF mark it out as a streamer with serious potential. [rotel.co.uk](http://rotel.co.uk)

**12 BOWERS AND WILKINS CM8**

Not one to miss out on a market sector Bowers and Wilkins has produced a slimline version of its CM9 speaker, which it was demonstrating to good effect in Manchester. The £1,250 CM8 is only 165mm wide and uses a plinth to improve stability, but packs in two 130mm bass drivers and a Kevlar midrange of the same size. Treble is provided by one of the firm's preferred aluminium domes. Bowers and Wilkins suggest it can also be used in a home cinema, but frankly that would be a waste of its talents. [bowers-wilkins.com](http://bowers-wilkins.com)

**13 SPENDOR CARBON ST**

Spendor had a couple of new loudspeakers in action, both of

them floorstanders, including the A9 at £3,995 and the Carbon ST, or statement at £6,000. The latter's name comes from the carbon-fibre composite front baffle, which supports a Kevlar composite bass driver, polypropylene midrange unit and bi-elliptical lens tweeter backed by a tapered tube.

With custom crossover parts and a variable thickness cabinet, Spendor tells us that it's a force to be reckoned with. [spendoraudio.com](http://spendoraudio.com)

**14 YAMAHA CD-S300 AND A-S500**

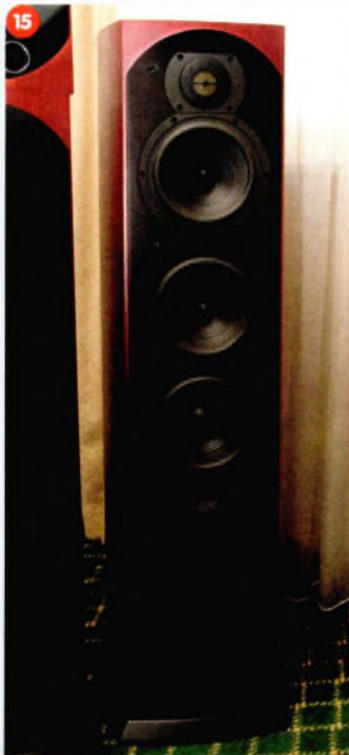
Sporting the same retro-styling that brought its S2000 so much attention, Yamaha's latest offering is the CD-S300, which has a Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz DAC and comes with an Airwired iPod dock, that allows wireless iPod use for £250, or without for £230.

The A-S500 is an 85-watt integrated amp with a separate power supply for its iPod dock input and anti-resonance chassis construction. Both look far too good for the money. [uk.yamaha.com](http://uk.yamaha.com)



# SHOW REPORT

## MANCHESTER SOUND AND VISION



### 15 RICHTER DRAGON

New distributor Cognoscenti is bringing in a range of Australian loudspeakers called Richter, the first examples that we have ever encountered from down under.

Richter's range topper is the £1,800 Dragon, a 'quasi four-way' with 165mm composite mid and bass drivers and an unusual ribbon tweeter. It comes in jarrah or black Tasmanian oak veneers and stands just over a metre high.

Richter's range starts at £750 for the Merlin bookshelf and it makes centre, rear and subwoofer units for multichannel set-ups. [Cognoscentihifi.co.uk](http://Cognoscentihifi.co.uk)



### 16 YAMAHA MCR-040

Yamaha had a very colourful stack of systems that look like single units but, in fact, have detachable speakers. The MCR-040 is a CD receiver with Airwired technology for free range iPod streaming, onboard iPod dock and a USB port for hooking up your PC. For £250, including Airwired, it can play WMA and MP3 CDs, has an RDS tuner and will pump out 15 watts. It only weighs 1.4kg, so is effectively a portable and is available in ten colours. [uk.yamaha.com](http://uk.yamaha.com)

### 17 CANTON CHRONO SL570

Peachtree Audio's stylish iDecco was in action streaming Spotify from a laptop and driving a pair of Canton's new Chrono SL570 floorstanders. This £1,299 speaker is a 2.5-way with aluminium coned 160mm mid/bass and bass drivers augmented by an aluminium/manganese tweeter with a single piece dome and voice coil. It has Canton's wave-surround suspension on the cones and is said to work well in small rooms. It was certainly making a good job of an MP3 signal. [canton.de](http://canton.de)

### 18 PIONEER KODO XW-NAC3

For the home that has two iPods Pioneer has created the Kodo, or heartbeat, receiver with two docks that allows you to mix tunes from both players. This compact white, red or black creation is a Bluetooth-enabled internet radio, that is also a DLNA streamer. Which at £299 seems like a good



deal, but if you don't need the wi-fi element, then the XW-NAW1 is even cheaper. This wall-mountable sound dock has a touch sensitive screen for a mere £169. [Pioneer.co.uk](http://Pioneer.co.uk)

### 19 KEF T SERIES

KEF has taken its lead from the latest generation of ultra-slim flat screens, to produce what must be the shallowest dynamic speakers yet. The T series of multichannel speaker packages features a bass driver that's only 25mm deep and helps to form the structure of the T101 and T301 speakers. These can be wall-mounted or placed on an equally skinny stand, that automatically compensates for free-space placement with a built-in crossover. Prices for a 5.1 system start at £1,200. [Kef.com](http://Kef.com)

### 20 RESOLUTION AUDIO CANTATA 50

The man behind our favourite CD player this year, Jeff Kalt at Resolution Audio, has now finished the matching amplifier.

The heart of the Cantata 50 is based on a DNM PA3 power amplifier, but because of its substantial heatsinking produces rather more power. It's built into the same sculpted shell as the Cantata Music System and has both RCA phono and XLR inputs.

Both Cantati were making sweet sounds via a pair of PMC DB1i speakers and Velodyne 800 subs. [resolutionaudio.com](http://resolutionaudio.com)



One industry lag said to us "we've let the computer industry steal our business". Yet, Manchester gave every indication that hi-fi manufacturers are actually embracing the change with open arms. After all, you might be able to load all your music onto a PC, but you still need an accompanying amp and loudspeakers to make it sound good.

While there's no doubt that the music file is the latest innovation in the audio world and the internet a marvellous source of material, if you want to enjoy a broad range of music to the full, then ensure that you check out the diversity of solutions we heard in Manchester. ●



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Platinum PL200

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Hi-Fi Choice - March 2010





# A timeless musical experience



REFERENCE 5  
Vacuum Tube Line-stage Preamp

■ It is the best **valve preamplifier** I've ever used. ■

Ken Kessler | Hi-Fi News | Jan 2010



REFERENCE CD8  
Compact Disc Player

■ Quite possibly the best all-round **single box CD player** I've heard. ■

Roy Gregory | Hi-Fi+ | Issue 64



REFERENCE PHONO 2  
Vacuum Tube Phono Preamp

■ The most **persuasively lifelike phonostage** I've heard. ■

Jonathan Valin | The Absolute Sound | Jan 2010

Over 40 years Audio Research has established a new syntax of emotional, evocative sound. Motivated by the uncompromising pursuit of the ultimate musical experience, Audio Research has created a succession of products that have each gained iconic status. Built by hand with the end user always in mind, Audio Research components combine innovation with longevity – all units being repairable to original performance standards, no matter how old.

The Audio Research collection encompasses both valve and solid-state technology, delivering some of the most critically acclaimed CD players and amplifiers yet devised. The three components featured above – the latest additions to the world-famous Reference line – have already received the rapturous reception one expects of this prestigious marque.

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# An old pro

The gap between pro and domestic audio is not as wide as you might think, says **Richard Black**

**T**his month's subject was prompted by a question in our letters pages a couple of issues ago on the comparison between domestic and professional audio. Are there real differences? Is one better value than the other? As a long-time user, and also occasionally designer and repairer, of both categories I've given this one a good deal of thought down the years.

The main difference, traditionally, between the categories is that domestic audio is expected to be handled relatively gently, put in place and left there and used for a few hours a day maximum. Professional kit is expected to be shunted in and out of service by hassled technicians, taken on the road, and used for anything up to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Reliability in the face of stress is paramount for pro kit and the tough external build is usually matched by strong internal assembly, over-specified heatsinks (so that the unit survives operation in crammed equipment racks), robust connectors and so on.

But that doesn't necessarily have any impact one way or the other on sound quality. One might think that professional equipment, designed to be used by people whose livelihood depends on it, would be designed to the highest possible sonic standards, equivalent to the finest audiophile domestic kit. On the other hand, there's a perception among many audiophiles that sound professionals are mostly rough 'n' ready types who pay scant attention to the finest audio details. The simple, unsurprising, fact is that audio pros vary, including both ultra-fussy audiophiles for whom no detail is too small and 'that'll do' merchants whose

**The Krell Evolution 402e power amp and 202 two-box preamp are shining examples of pro-audio kit**



interest in fine sound, such as it was, largely evaporated in about 1979. Between those extremes you'll find the full spectrum.

And along with that, you'll find as wide a range of audio performance in the pro world as in the domestic – or nearly as wide. I think it's true to say that you won't find quite as many wantonly bizarre products (single-ended valves and so on) in the pro world, if only because if people want to fiddle with sound there are established and more flexible ways to do it. But you'll certainly find a vast range of amplifiers, for instance, from cheap things made in China and marketed mainly to budget studios, to models which sit just as happily in upmarket hi-fi shops. Why else do you think brands like Krell and EAR Yoshino put rack-mount front panels on many of their products?

## Bedroom audio

The actual circuit configurations and components that go into pro audio are very similar to those used in domestic audio. Take digital components: your CD player is very likely to have the same DAC chip, digital filter and even output op-amps as a professional digital recorder or DAC. Similarly with amplifiers and, indeed if you gave an audio technician the bare circuit diagram of an amplifier, it's unlikely that he or she would be able to tell you whether it was domestic or professional.

At least, that's true if the diagram didn't include connectors. Professional gear is much more likely to use balanced connection than is the domestic stuff, which is also better proof against radiated interference from mains cables feeding lighting from dimmer racks, but that's an issue for live sound only, not recording setups. Anyway, neither of those factors really affects domestic audio, which is why the simpler unbalanced connection usually serves perfectly well.

In recent years, with the growth of 'spare bedroom' studios, the whole definition of pro audio has become a lot more elastic, so pro/domestic overlap is wider than ever. But sometimes differences can be surprising. I used to own a Sony domestic DAT recorder, which cost me £450 retail. A studio-owning friend had a similar-looking pro model, well over £1,000-worth. We found that that the machines were absolutely identical, apart from one minor software change and a couple of cheap switches and sockets. The difference in price simply paid for the higher likelihood of claims under warranty in a pro environment. There really is no hard and fast pro/domestic divide! ●

If you gave an audio technician the bare circuit diagram of an amplifier, it's unlikely that he or she would be able to tell whether it was domestic or professional



**RICHARD BLACK**

A musician and recording engineer, Richard knows a thing or two about hi-fi – he's been writing about it for over two decades

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Pro or domestic audio? Would you be able to tell the difference?

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# Things to come

After years of sticking with convention, hi-fi components are changing shape. **Ed Selley** gets out his ruler

**W**hen we review products for *Hi-Fi Choice*, as well as our copy and opinion, we also submit the technical data, price and measurements. This final calculation always used to have an audio equivalent of a 'cosmological constant' in it. The vast majority of equipment would be – give or take a whisker and your age – 430mm or 17 inches wide. This peculiarly durable figure is the benchmark for full-width hi-fi separates and for the last thirty plus years, the vast majority of equipment has been built to this footprint.

The measurement itself dates back to the traditional width of a turntable with 12-inch platter and nine-inch long arm mounted at the appropriate distance. Amplifiers and tuners began to adopt these dimensions for aesthetic reasons and even when CD arrived to 'replace' vinyl, the players themselves generally retained a 17-inch wide chassis to match the systems they were paired to. There is rarely any need for a CD player or tuner to be as large as it is. A typical internal picture in a review will usually show some lonely circuit boards squatting around a CD transport and plenty of unused real estate inside. Nonetheless, tradition is a difficult thing to part with and this is nothing if not a traditional industry!

Recently however, this tradition seems to be showing some signs of coming to an end. There have always been a few products that eschewed a full width – Cyrus is perhaps the most well known, but the trickle has become a flood of late. The two components that have been driving this are external phono stages and DACs. Increasingly, these are using a much smaller chassis. The choice of excellent DACs, in particular, has never been greater. But the chances are, whichever one you choose, they will be smaller than other components in your system. There are some good reasons for this. Chief amongst them, is that these components have no transport or indeed any need for moving parts that generally increase dimensions considerably. The use of external power supplies reduces the internal components still further and allows for a huge reduction in size.

The key benefit is the material savings in a smaller chassis. The Leema Elements phono and Arcam rDac are comfortably cheaper than their bigger brothers, but their small size means that they are every bit as well-finished and sturdy as their bigger, pricier brethren. The arrival of these components en masse has some interesting implications for the future.

## Opening the floodgates

These smaller units are also a blessing to those for whom space is tight – and the fact that virtually all DACs and phono stages up to £1,000 will result in you buying a smaller unit – may start to alter the customer perception of what size the rest of their hi-fi ought to be. As if on cue, the range of Pro-ject box components is an interesting indicator of the potential direction of hi-fi. The range includes the traditional components one would expect, but a full system – even if it includes a CD player – would only trouble a single shelf of a standard hi-fi rack.

The Pro-Ject range also answers the question of how to make amplifiers (which even when 17-inches wide are usually busier inside than most CD players) significantly smaller, while appealing to audiophile sensitivities. Instead of a single full-width box, customers instead are able to choose from a selection of preamps to pair with their choice of stereo or mono power amplifiers. Not only is the end result smaller, it also enjoys the performance benefit of splitting the sensitive preamp from the power amp at a price substantially lower than any other such combination is available for.

I do not expect to see all hi-fi components shrink overnight. Towards the high end, the amount of internal components that some devices sport (to say nothing of the size of devices like transformers) will mean that these components stay full-width or, in some cases, even larger. I do believe, however, that going forward there is strong case for small hi-fi in terms of both value and convenience. Systems built around sources like the Squeezebox Touch or Onkyo ND-S1 have no real need to be anything like full width, but the results that are possible with them are unquestionably hi-fi. Leaner, smaller components could be just what we need right now. ●

**The Pro-Ject CD Box SE system breaks the full-width mould with mini-sized preamp and amp box**



There is rarely any need for a CD player or tuner to be as large as it is. A typical internal picture will usually show some lonely circuit boards and plenty of unused real estate



**ED SELLEY**

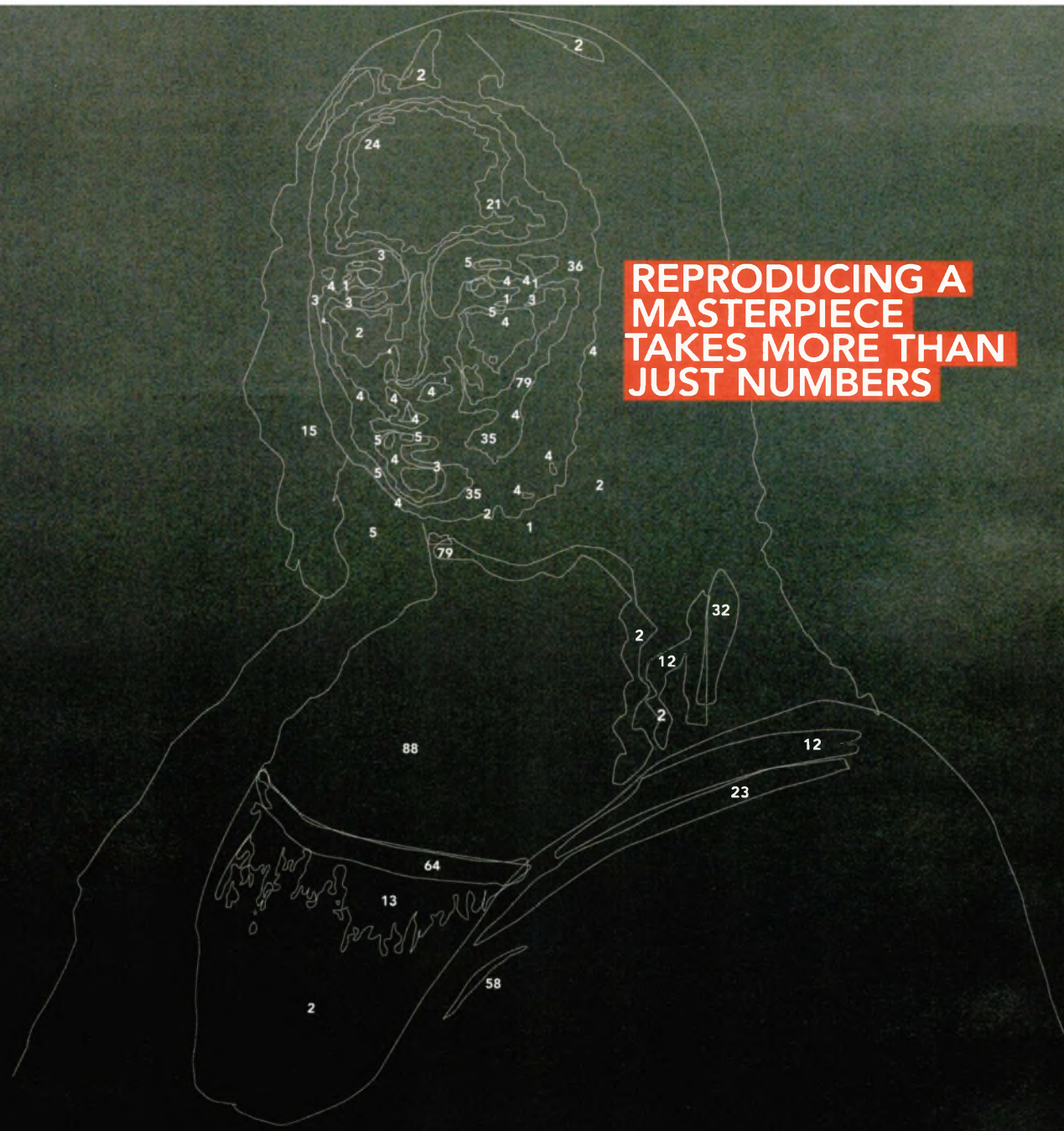
Ed worked in retail before joining some of the biggest names in the hi-fi industry creating and supporting audio products

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# Double Decca

Decca's C4E pickup cartridge produced amazing results, recalls **Jimmy Hughes**, but it was a maddening mix of virtues and vices...

**M**ost audiophiles never forget their first encounter with a Decca cartridge. For many it's a seismic experience, etched in the psyche, upsetting cherished prejudices and beliefs about what an LP record can and can't do. In 1968, the C4E was a revelation – totally different to anything else. Quite simply, it was in a class of its own.

True, audiophiles had quite a few pickup cartridges from which to choose back then. There was only one minor snag; they were all (technical term coming up) shite – mostly fixed-coil magnetic types that sounded worthy, but totally uninspiring. Certainly, judged by today's standards, none sounded especially detailed or dynamic.

At that time, the big selling point with cartridges was tracking ability at ultra-low playing weights. Pickups were promoted on their ability to play at absurdly low stylus pressures – one-gram or less – rather than sound quality. Cartridges like the Shure V-15 set benchmark standards for trackability, and were hugely aspirational.

Manufacturers (and even some magazines) played on fears of record wear, convincing audiophiles to invest in a cartridge that could play at less than a gram downforce. It was, of course, pure marketing-speak. Attempting to track at such low stylus pressures actually leads to groove damage and risks poor sound quality.

A stylus playing at a reasonable weight (say, two grams) has a beneficial 'cleaning' effect on the grooves, producing less surface noise. But the orthodoxy of the time emphasised the need for ultra-low playing weights. So, virtually every high-class pickup in the late '60s and early '70s conformed. Fortunately, Decca resisted the siren call!

## Blown away

Given the nature of the competition, the Decca C4E (and selected SC4E) stood apart like a good deed in a wicked world. The C4E was a lump – a big, heavy (12.9g), flawed and finicky design that tracked at a healthy two grams. It was frankly disappointing when negotiating trackability test discs. But, when playing music, nothing could touch it.

The C4E blew-away all the Goldring, Ortofon, Shures, Stantons, etc. It produced the sort of room-filling presence and vivid immediacy you get from a full-range horn loudspeaker, compared to a low-efficiency compact. Decca's unique Positive Scanning technology enabled the coils to sense the movement of the stylus directly.



Full-frequency stereo sound cartridge from Decca

By dispensing with the cantilever system found in virtually all other pickups, loss of fine detail and softened transients was avoided. The C4E (and later London Mk V) had a hair-trigger responsiveness – a dynamic immediacy – that was breathtaking.

Transient attack was remarkably fast, too and this gave the music stunning presence. Stereo imagery was vivid and holographic, despite relatively poor (15dB) channel separation. Even against the best (and most exotic) of today's cartridges, a working C4E/SC4E delivers superior dynamic attack and transient detail.

For vividness and immediacy, nothing equals a Decca – nothing. The sound has a tactile presence that is simply breathtaking. Not bad for something approaching its half-century! But, wait a moment, the design also had its fair share of flaws and limitations.

Decca cartridges are comparatively fragile and delicate. They're hum-sensitive and need a damped tonearm – plus a fastidious owner prepared to indulge their foibles. Some say that Decca cartridges are also bad trackers. Actually, it's not that simple. Where the disc groove produces lateral movement, the C4E has few tracking problems. But, if the recording has a strong 'difference' signal then the cartridge gets into difficulties. This limitation has its roots in the design – as a pickup for mono LPs.

Living with a Decca was something of a white-knuckle ride – it could sound unbelievable on some discs and truly awful on others. Because its transient performance was so good, when it misbehaved you really heard it. But, on the right LP, nothing matched it for presence and detail. Even forty years on, that remains true. ●

Pickups were promoted on their ability to play at absurdly low stylus pressures – one gram or less – rather than sound quality



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**Clearaudio Unify** tonearm, £1360

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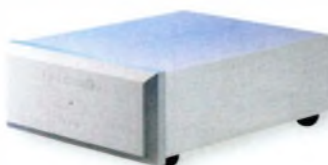
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## Pearly Kings

In our world #1 hi-fi review, *Hi-Fi Choice* tests Marantz's new, Kan Ishizawa-tuned, cut-down Pearlys – the £999 Ki Pearly SACD and amp

**T**he Marantz Ki Pearly SACD player and amplifier are a pair of hi-fi components that have been designed to appeal to a wide range of hi-fi enthusiasts. The Ki Pearly SACD player is a compact, sleek-looking unit that is easy to integrate into any hi-fi system. The Ki Pearly amplifier is a powerful, well-built unit that provides excellent sound quality. Both units are designed to provide a high-quality listening experience.

"Voicing is handled with real grace and passion and reproduced with sweetness and flare"

No file weight  
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**Q&A...**  
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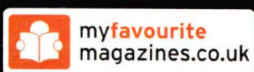


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# Letters

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## Over-priced?

I always enjoy reading *Hi-Fi Choice*, but a recent article had me flustered.

Firstly, that the average system sale at InFidelity is between £8,000 and £10,000. Really? I can't quite reconcile hi-fi costing as much as a small family car, given the huge quantity of materials involved in car manufacture, along with costs of labour, R&D and distribution. It makes me wonder if hi-fi is pricing itself out of business, even though InFidelity's customers seem to be saying otherwise.

Would I be unreasonable in suspecting that a real-world hi-fi budget is around £2,000, especially in an average street where music cannot be played at volume levels that would have a court imposing an ASBO? Would it also be unreasonable to expect excellent sound staging, rhythm, detail etc at this price?

Given that a CD is encoded at 16 bits only, a DAC can extrapolate only so much and yet the best ones seem to be prohibitively expensive. Is there a way for having a reasonably priced stand-alone DAC that can be 'flash' upgraded to take advantage of improvements as and when they come along? Manufacturers could ensure a revenue stream by charging reasonable amounts for upgrading.  
**Cliff Francis, via email**

**HFC** The 'average price' of a system that a dealer sells does tend to vary considerably and there is little in the way of consensus. In part, this is because this variation allows different dealers to fill different niches in a given area – it is likely that there is another dealer in the same area that will have an average system price that is considerably lower.

It is also worth noting that two-out-of-three systems in the article were less than the £8,000 average that InFidelity talked about, which suggests that they can sell less expensive

systems but fewer customers are choosing to buy them!

There is nothing unreasonable about expecting a great performance from a £2,000 system. We have tested many excellent units that would easily form part of such a set up.

There would be less assurance in taking this to be an 'average' budget and it would be outright wrong to believe that more expensive systems are not able to justify their existence in offering still higher levels of performance and features.

The concept of an upgradable DAC is an interesting one, but many DAC's are already able to process bitrates and sampling levels far above what is required for CD and that has really only become of use since the arrival of high-res downloads.

The experience of many manufacturers who have offered upgrade programmes in the past is that the number of customers who actually return their units for upgrade is less than you might think.

Again, in defence of the more expensive products, these are far more likely to have some facility for the customer to upgrade them as evidenced by the Meridian 808.3 we tested in HFC 339, or the long-held tradition of Naim offering upgradeable power supplies.

Value is always going to be in the eye of the beholder, so we try and feature equipment in HFC at a variety of price points to this end.

## Burning issue

First of all let me say that I have been an avid reader for many years, but I was horrified by the turntable *Blind-listening Group Test* in HFC 338.

I assumed that these tests were carried out with a small screen in front of the turntable, so you could not see which one was playing and that a group of listeners would sit and write down the merits on each deck listening through some exotic high-end amp and speakers.

But you have taken the analogue sound of the record player (which is fluid) and converted it into digital, which is at best a series of ones and noughts (or a stuttering water hosepipe) burnt it onto a disc and given it to people who then play it back on their own player. A player which can easily mis-read the information before being channelled through a DAC (which probably isn't going to be high end) to get back to the analogue sound. Just think of all that musical information being lost along the way.

I wonder if you would get the same results from an actual listening test?

**Tim Harrison, via email**

## An InFidelity system; real world or fantasy island?



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**Still able to shine when played back over digital?**

**HFC** – Richard Black replies: I think you may be a little unfair on digital audio, especially as regards your statement 'easily mis-read'. In all the years I've been testing hi-fi I've found disc reading to be extremely reliable (it's easy enough to check). As for musical information being lost, I've spent enough time with both the theory and practice of digital audio to be sure that very little gets lost – indeed a half-decent analogue-digital-analogue chain is typically no more apt to lose information than an amplifier.

In any case, all six turntables used exactly the same digital path so the differences between them will be pretty consistently maintained. Testing them this way was an interesting exercise with the added advantage that the listeners used their own amps, speakers and listening room, removing one potential source of confusion in our normal tests (though most of the regulars are pretty used to it by now).

Incidentally, have you actually tried copying LPs from your Rega to CD and listening to the results? I think you might be a bit surprised.

### Ripping yarns

I plan to start ripping some of my CD overflow. I know that *Hi-Fi Choice* is not a dedicated computer magazine, but it would really help if you were to run a feature on best practice for ripping and storing media, as I don't feel I'm alone in wanting a little more information.

**John Cowx, via email**

**HFC** From similar questions we've received, we know that you aren't alone in thinking this would be a useful article to run. Ever responsive to the needs of our readers, we are looking at the best way to provide this information in an upcoming issue.



May need further explanation

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Crest of the WAV



Sony Sound Forge software rides to the rescue

**I WAS** reading *HFC* 334 and stumbled across Malcolm Steward's article *Perfect Playback*, in which he discusses the problem he and many others have in tagging WAV files.

I play digital audio from a Mac Mini into a Tact RCS digital room correction preamp and thence into Meridian DSP 5200's. All in all, a pretty impressive digital system!

Using Sony Sound Forge Pro 10 software (I can't vouch for the non-pro versions), I've found that I can rip CD's to WAV format and have them tagged automatically. When they are dropped into iTunes on the Mac Mini they will pick up the cover art and retain all the artist metadata. They sound pretty damn good, too!

I just thought that if any of your readers are struggling with WAV tagging, then this might be of help.

**Rod Thorogood, via email**

**WIN A RUSS ANDREWS POWERMAX MAINS LEAD WORTH £45!**

Letter of the Month winners will receive an impressive Russ Andrews PowerMax mains lead worth £45, so drop us a line now: [hifichoice@futurenet.com](mailto:hifichoice@futurenet.com)



A9

Amazingly clean transparent sound  
seamless integration  
relatively unfussy about positioning  
What Hi-Fi



A6

Outstanding true must hear hi-fi  
What Hi-Fi

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**SOUND AND VISION**  
**AWARDS 2009**  
 STEREO SPEAKERS  
 BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £1000+  
**SPENDOR A6**

A5

All round brilliance  
shines through  
What Hi-Fi



**SPENDOR**



# Sound quality that'll blow your socks off?

Are widely accepted music formats undermining the quality of the music we listen to on a daily basis?

## The Music Chain

Much is written about music and the musicians who entertain us, and we rightly exalt great musicians. But there is an interlinked chain of participants, two of which are I believe are crucial to our music scene in today's world. For centuries the music chain was a very short one – composers or songwriters, musicians and listeners, and the judgement on quality was immediate. Recording technologies have changed all this exponentially.

Today, we listen to most of our music from a recording and this gives recording engineers the opportunity to avoid poor acoustics, duff notes and off days. This, of course, means the chain has grown to include the recording engineers, the music distribution system (retailers or downloads), hi-fi manufacturers, hi-fi sellers and the hi-fi purchasers, the latter being the listeners. I should start by saying that hi-fi has become an adulterated term that no longer has its original meaning because it's applied to much equipment that certainly should not be termed high-fidelity.

It's said that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. However, I believe there are two particularly strong links that, if removed from the chain, would seriously damage the quality of recorded music. These are the audiophile, or hi-fi connoisseur, and the specialist hi-fi retailer, the latter in nearly all cases also being the former because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These are the people who most appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver an emotional experience.

## Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

So why is the hi-fi connoisseur so important to the music industry? By their nature, audiophiles are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without the audiophile, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the chain. Let's be honest, over recent years

the majority of music listeners now settle for MP3 convenience and, therefore, mediocre sound quality. If the pendulum ever swings so far that all but a few listen to highly compressed formats such as MP3, music producers will not waste their resources on producing high quality recordings because it would be commercially unnecessary, even if their recording engineers wanted to achieve the best they could. After all, an MP3 or AAC file, the iTunes default format, downloaded at 128 kbps (the most popular download speed), is about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track, 1411 kbps, so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It's rubbish quality made louder. Fortunately, there is still significant demand from audiophiles committed to sound quality to sustain the production of

high quality recordings, but it would be a tragedy if there weren't. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing that they are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

## Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

Just as essential a link in the chain as the hi-fi connoisseur is the specialist hi-fi retailer and the two are rightly dependent on each other. Without the specialist retailer the hi-end hi-fi manufacturer would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for their potential customers – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers are essential to each other.





## Future of Recorded Music

What are the future prospects of maintaining high quality music recordings? We must hope that audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, will continue to drive the demand for quality. But another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Full resolution, CD quality, downloads are already available and should become the norm as long as the general public can be made aware of the tremendous quality benefit. This has happened with HD TV so we know this awareness can grow rapidly. In the meantime, we must highly value hi-fi connoisseurs and specialist hi-fi retailers, of which the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest. Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“ There is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. ”

## OUR TOP 20 UK HI-FI DEALERS

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

### SOUTH

#### Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI  
40 High Street.  
t: 01233 624441  
www.soundcraftthifi.com

#### Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
216 Moulsham Street.  
t: 01245 265245  
www.rayleighhifi.com

#### Colchester

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
33 Sir Isaac's Walk.  
t: 01206 577682  
www.rayleighhifi.com

#### Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY  
9 High Street,  
Hampton Wick.  
t: 020 8943 3530  
www.infidelity.co.uk

#### Maidenhead

AUDIO VENUE  
36 Queen Street.  
t: 01628 633995  
www.audiovenue.com

#### Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
44a High Street.  
t: 01268 779762  
www.rayleighhifi.com

### Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
132/4 London Road.  
t: 01702 435255  
www.rayleighhifi.com

### Southampton

PHASE 3 HI-FI  
37 Bedford Place.  
t: 023 8022 8434  
www.phase3southampton.co.uk

### LONDON

Ealing  
AUDIO VENUE  
27 Bond Street.  
t: 020 8567 8703  
www.audiovenue.com

N1  
GRAHAMS HI-FI  
190a New North Road.  
t: 020 7226 5500  
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11  
ORANGES & LEMONS  
61/63 Webbs Road.  
t: 020 7924 2043  
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

### SOUTH WEST

Bath  
AUDIENCE  
14 Broad Street.  
t: 01225 333310  
www.audience.org.uk

Exeter  
GULLIFORD HI-FI  
97 Sidwell Street.  
t: 01392 491194  
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

### MIDLANDS

Banbury  
OVERTURE  
3 Church Lane.  
t: 01295 272158  
www.overture.co.uk

Birmingham  
MUSIC MATTERS  
363 Hagley Road,  
Edgbaston.  
t: 0121 429 2811  
www.musicmatters.co.uk

Coventry  
FRANK HARVEY  
163 Spon Street.  
t: 024 7652 5200  
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Leicester  
CYMBIOSIS  
6 Hotel Street.  
t: 0116 262 3754  
www.cymbiosis.com

Nottingham  
CASTLE SOUND &  
VISION  
48/50 Maid Marian  
Way.  
t: 0115 9584404  
www.castlesoundvision.com

### NORTH

Cheadle  
THE AUDIO WORKS  
14 Stockport Road.  
t: 0161 428 7887  
www.theaudioworks.co.uk

### Chester

ACOUSTICA  
17 Hoole Road.  
t: 01244 344227  
www.acoustica.co.uk

Hull  
THE AUDIO ROOM  
2 George Street.  
t: 01482 891375  
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

York  
SOUND ORGANISATION  
2 Gillygate.  
t: 01904 627108  
www.soundorg.co.uk

### SCOTLAND

Aberdeen  
HOLBURN HI-FI  
441 Holburn Street.  
t: 01224 585713/  
572729  
www.holburnhifi.co.uk

Edinburgh  
LOUD & CLEAR  
Bonnington Mill,  
72 Newhaven Road.  
t: 0131 555 3963  
www.loud-clear.co.uk

Glasgow  
LOUD & CLEAR  
520 St Vincent Street.  
t: 0141 221 0221  
www.loud-clear.co.uk

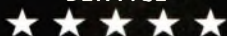
Glasgow  
GLASGOW AUDIO  
135 Great Western Rd.  
t: 0141 3322200/4707  
www.glasgowaudio.com

## STAR QUALITIES

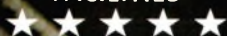
VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



**TOP  
20 UK**  
SPECIALIST  
HI-FI DEALERS

QUALITY  
  
ASSURED  
★★★★★



# How we test

Hi-Fi Choice employs the most rigorous test and measurement regime in the business and here we explain why our definitive verdicts count



## Hi-fi reviews

No other magazine offers a more reliable standard of hi-fi testing. Technical Consultant **Richard Black** explains...

### EXPERT TESTING

**FOR OVER THREE** decades, *Hi-Fi Choice* has been trusted for its combination of subjective and technical review expertise. The crucial consideration for any audio component is how it sounds, but it is important to back this up with laboratory measurements for many reasons – everything from the wish to check basic performance to the possibility of uncovering peculiar behaviour under conditions, perhaps slightly different from those of the subjective tests.

### Listening

Subjective testing doesn't necessarily require the world's sharpest ears. What's more important is the experience to analyse the sound arriving from the hi-fi and this is where our subjective reviewers come in: they have been listening critically to audio equipment for aeons and have learned to identify the characteristics that make kit informative, involving or just plain dull.

### Measurement

But even the most experienced listener, with a stack of familiar recordings heard in familiar surroundings, can't always know what is causing a particular

characteristic in the sound. Brightness, for instance, may be a function of frequency response or distortion and this is where measurements come in. We analyse a range of parameters to see just where the correlation lies between sound and design. Our test equipment has been tried, tested and added to over the years and again our experience with it is unrivalled.

### Straightforward presentation

We call on that experience to boil down the measurements to simple bar charts, which show at a glance how well a component behaves relative to others in its category. It's this combination of subjective and technical expertise that makes our reviews the most useful in the field.

“crucial consideration for any audio component is how it sounds, but it is important to back this up with laboratory measurements...”

### OUR AWARDS



**EDITOR'S CHOICE:** Awarded to those products that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance



**RECOMMENDED:** The products we feel meet a certain high standard of performance



**GROUP TEST WINNER:** Comparative tests can only have one true winner, and this badge says it all

## STATE-OF-THE-ART HI-FI TECH

HFC's test equipment is the most advanced kit available



**AT HI-FI CHOICE**, we have access to some of the most advanced test equipment currently available on the market, including the Audio Precision APx585, which you'll find in the labs of many top hi-fi manufacturers. The 585 can be configured to test a variety of key hi-fi products, such as amplifiers, CD players/DACs and – with the help of a specially-calibrated microphone – loudspeakers.

In conjunction with some conventional lab equipment at our disposal, the 585 will also be used to test analogue playback equipment including phono stages and turntables. These objective measurements – which conform to recognised industry standards – are designed to complement subjective evaluations such as the listening panels organised by our internationally respected reviewers.

The standard of our test facilities is unrivalled in the UK press. Quite simply, no other magazine offers this level of cutting-edge testing, making the verdicts in *Hi-Fi Choice* the only ones you can really trust.



# Unrivalled group tests

*Hi-Fi Choice* is the only magazine to offer blind-listening group tests, fully backed up with objective data

## BLIND-LISTENING TESTS

**THIS CRUCIAL** test involves relatively rapid-fire comparisons of the test units for a panel of three listeners who are not aware of which product they are listening to. Levels are accurately matched and the test is conducted with the minimum of distractions, playing the same programme through each system while the listeners take notes of whatever pleases or bothers them.

In this way, an evaluation free of prejudices based on brand, price or appearance can be made, while the different tastes and sensitivities of each listener help round out the analysis and make it more widely applicable. Occasional repeats of kit give a 'sanity check', while years of experience help make the process efficient and reliable.

## SIGHTED LISTENING

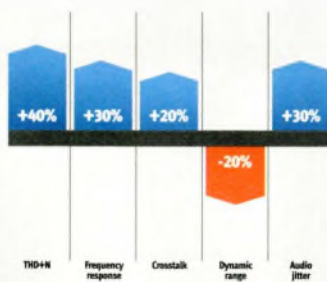
**IN ADDITION** to the 'blind' test, the author also spends a longer period listening to each system with various items of partnering equipment and a wider range of music. Apart from the obvious fact that this is how most people listen most of the time, this also has the advantage that interesting aspects of the sound can be investigated and different musical

styles tried out to see what works, not to mention experimenting with such variables as listening level.

Long-term reference pieces of equipment (some from past reviews) get substituted for the kit under test from time to time, in order to check on performance relative to the rest of the audio world, while recordings made by the author provide a live reference.

## TECH LABS

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



**FOR THIS MONTH'S** CD/SACD player *Blind-listening Group Test*, we pressed into service the APx585 audio analyser (see boxout opposite). This highly sophisticated PC-controlled instrument can simulate many items of lab equipment, including an oscilloscope, audio voltmeter, chart recorder, phase monitor and test signal/sweep generator.

For CD players, the APx585 is used in conjunction with a specially created *Hi-Fi Choice* lab test disc to measure a number of key performance criteria. There are five of these – which are summarised for each of the reviewed products using our unique bargraph system. Anything out of the ordinary is commented on in the lab report which compares like with like across the whole six-way group.

### THD+N

Part of our testing procedure involves measuring THD+N with much lower-level signals (-20dBFS and -60dBFS). THD+N will increase as signal level decreases, owing to the limitations of CD's PCM technology.

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

With CD players, you should expect a flat frequency response from 20Hz to 20kHz. The Tech Labs measure this by conducting a frequency sweep between these two frequencies and monitoring the output.

### CROSSTALK

We measure leakage from the left channel to the right and vice versa. The higher the figure, the better. There should be little difference between the two figures, and what's listed here is the average of the two.

### DYNAMIC RANGE

This spec expresses the difference between the highest amplitude distortion-free signal a CD player can output (a sine-wave is used here). The higher the figure, the better. In theory, a 16-bit CD has a dynamic range of 96dB.

### AUDIO JITTER

This term is applied to distortion caused specifically by the instability in the 'clock', which controls the CD player. It's a subtle effect, but can contribute to sonic veiling.

### TESTING EQUIPMENT USED

**Source:** Exposure 3010 amp  
**Speakers:** Bowers and Wilkins 803s  
**•ATC SCM20**  
**•Rogers LS3/5A**  
**Cables:** Atlas, Furukawa, Kimber, Wireworld

### TEST MUSIC USED

**THE MAVERICKS:** TRAMPOLINE



**PENGUIN CAFE ORCHESTRA:** CONCERT PROGRAMME



**BRAHMS:** GERMAN REQUIEM



## THIS ISSUE'S BLIND PANEL

This month's panel of experienced listeners from within the industry are:



**PHIL HANSEN**  
**JOB:** RED SHEEP COMMUNICATIONS  
**PHIL IS A PR** and marketing consultant, having previously worked as a marketing manager in hi-fi manufacturing.



**ABBAS HUSSAIN**  
**JOB:** MANAGING DIRECTOR  
**ABBAS IS** currently the main man behind Wireworld UK, but was also involved with Orelle, a maker of fine amplifiers.



**ED SELLEY**  
**JOB:** HI-FI TROUBLESHOOTER  
**ED HAS SPENT** the best part of a decade selling, developing and supporting audio products. He now works full-time with HFC.

## DEFINITIVE VERDICTS

No other magazine offers an equivalent listening programme

Few, if any, magazines in the world can equal our dedication and thoroughness in combining blind and sighted listening with extensive lab tests and detailed internal examination of equipment passing through our hands. Each of these is equally important and it's not just that we do them – we also bring to the table decades of audio experience.

Our listeners in the *Blind-Listening Group Tests* for example, are experts from within the hi-fi industry. Each and everyone of them is used to listening critically during product development and initial product testing. In fact, many of them also get involved in making recordings and their own music.

One of these is HFC's Technical Consultant Richard Black, who has been involved with designing, testing and evaluating audio equipment for a quarter of a century.

It's the culmination of all the aspects mentioned on these pages that makes for the most reliable hi-fi verdicts in the business.

TESTED THIS MONTH: CD/SACD PLAYERS  
**TURN OVER NOW!**





## Introducing the new Olive 4HD. Choice without compromise.

The new ultra quiet 2TB Music server \*



Store up to 20,000 high-resolution HD tracks in 24 bit. With more than 250 times the resolution of CD's, you'll hear the difference immediately.

Find the music you want - fast.



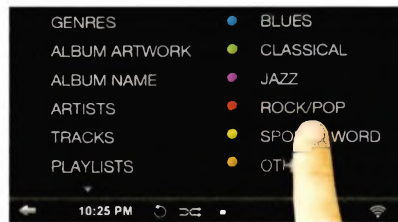
Use the high-resolution touchscreen to select by genre, artist or album; flip through album covers; do a quick search; or save internet radio stations as favorites.



To control your Olive 4 from anywhere in your home, get our iPhone remote app.



Connect multi-room Olive 2 Hi-Fi Players to a wired or wireless home network and you can access your music library and enjoy it in high fidelity in every room of your home. Easily integrates with your current system.



Just insert a CD, tap import on the touchscreen and a few minutes later your music is appropriately tagged and neatly categorized in your music library. Your Olive 4 Hi-Fi Server holds up to 6,000 CDs in original quality.



Unlike listening to your music on a computer, iPod or MP3 music players, the Olive 4 Hi-Fi Server combines a high-resolution DAC, optimized circuit design, CD quality digital sound, ultra-quiet hard drives and passive cooling to eliminate fan noise to deliver the best possible hi-fi audio experience

# olive

\* Olive 4HD Music Server, from around £2200 at great Hi-Fi stores nationwide

Distributed in the UK by;

**Henley Designs**

01235 511166

[www.henleydesigns.co.uk](http://www.henleydesigns.co.uk)



# WIN!

## A PAIR OF ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1 MKIII SPEAKERS

WORTH  
£2,000

**TO WIN** these fabulous, loudspeakers, please answer the following question:

**What material is used to line the cabinets of the AE1 MkIII?**

- A: concrete**
- B: resin**
- C: steel plate**

Please text your answer to AEA, B or C to 87474 or visit [futurecomps.co.uk/AE](http://futurecomps.co.uk/AE) and follow the instructions, leaving your selected answer and details where prompted

**IN OUR** Group Test in HFC 337, the Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII's were comfortably the smallest speakers in the test. Despite this they had no trouble showing the rest of the pack a clean pair of heels. Our listeners loved the exceptional midrange, vanishingly low levels of cabinet coloration and precise imaging.

We felt this performance was a clear demonstration of the advantages of a small loudspeaker of heroic construction and 'heroic'

is the word for the construction of the AE1 MkIII's. The 12mm-thick cabinets are backed up with steel plate, secured with a damping adhesive that means each weighs an impressive 11kg. This hefty cabinet is then beautifully finished in piano lacquer with a shaped and polished aluminium front panel.

We are giving a lucky reader the chance to experience this superb performance for themselves in this month's competition.



**TERMS AND CONDITIONS** To enter the Acoustic Energy competition, you can either (a) text your answer to 87474 at any time between 11.11.10 and 8.12.10, or (b) enter online at [www.futurecomps.co.uk/ae](http://www.futurecomps.co.uk/ae) with your entry being received between 11.11.10 and 8.12.10. By sending your entry, you agree to these competition rules and you confirm you are happy to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and carefully selected third parties. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word 'STOP' at the end of your text message or at the end of your postal entry. Texts will be charged at £1.00 plus your standard network (air) rate.

By taking part in a Competition, you agree to be bound by the Competition Rules, which are summarised below but can be viewed in full at [www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitionrules.asp](http://www.futurenet.com/futureonline/competitionrules.asp). Late or incomplete entries will be disqualified. Proof of posting (if relevant) shall not be deemed proof of delivery. Entries must be submitted by an individual (not via any agency or similar) and, unless otherwise stated, are limited to one per household. The Company reserves the right in its sole discretion to substitute any prize with cash or a prize of comparable value. Unless otherwise stated, the Competition is open to all GB residents of 18 years and over, except employees of Future Publishing and any party involved in the competition or their households.

By entering a Competition you give permission to use your name, likeness and personal information in connection with the Competition and for promotional purposes. All entries will become the property of the Company upon receipt and will not be returned. You warrant that the Competition entry is entirely your own work and not copied or adapted from any other source. If you are a winner, you may have to provide additional information. Details of winners will be available on request within three months of the closing date. If you are a winner, receipt by you of any prize is conditional upon you complying with (amongst other things) the Competition Rules. You acknowledge and agree that neither the Company nor any associated third parties shall have any liability to you in connection with your use and/or possession of your prize.



# Blind-listening Group test

CD/SACD PLAYERS £400-£1,300

## Can multi-format players really match a good CD?

**Richard Black** reveals why modern multi-format machines must be heard if considering a new player

**TIME MOVES ON** and we all get accustomed to slightly different ways of doing things. Who'd have thought, 20 years ago, that hardened audiophiles might give serious consideration to playing their favourite recordings on devices aimed partially at video replay?

Not all the players in this group have anything to do with video, however, or multichannel, or any other new-fangled nonsense. To be precise, two will play pretty much anything on a 12cm disc, while the other four restrict themselves to CD and SACD.

We've had SACD players in *Blind-listening Group Tests* before, but always in a context of principally CD replay. This time, with all six capable of handling high-resolution audio, we were able to make it a more significant factor in the whole test.

You may think that putting a relatively cheap multi-format player against a dearer specialised audio player is a foregone conclusion: but don't be hasty, as our findings – as you're about to discover – don't necessarily

support that. The fact is, adding video and multichannel audio to a player doesn't necessarily add much to cost and because it broadens the appeal of the machine, it will help it sell in greater quantities. It can actually bring cost down thanks to economies of scale.

**"It's perfectly realistic to use the universal players in this group in a sound-only system."**

Full-on multi-format players are definitely intended first and foremost for video duty and while we conducted most of the listening in a household that doesn't even own a TV, we found it useful to borrow one to aid in set up as so much of the process is menu-driven via the TV or monitor. But it's perfectly realistic to use either of the universal players in this group in a sound-only system. Turn the page to find out how successful this can be!



### PRICING

The extremes of the price range here are represented by the two universal players; the Oppo/NuForce and Cambridge Audio. Between those two lie three of the four SACD players, quite closely grouped around £1,000, while the Arcam level-pegs the Oppo/NuForce.

While features don't vary much between models, build and appearance certainly do and the Yamaha is a very impressive-looking machine for the money. But has Arcam's apportionment of the budget yielded more effective results?



### ON TEST



**Arcam CD37 £1,300**  
**P43**

The model name suggests that SACD was almost an afterthought for this player, but Arcam has taken the trouble to include a DAC, which can handle DSD in its native mode, without format conversion. Add the usual thoughtful Arcam approach to looks and build quality and this is an attractive machine.



**Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD**  
**£400 P45**

On the face of it, this is amazing value. The 650BD plays CD, SACD, just about every variant of DVD and Blu-ray too, including video output and all sorts of audio processing options for multichannel software. So putting it up against stereo-audio-only players at twice its price could be a tough test.



**Marantz SA8003 £829**  
**P47**

Marantz has always had a very strong presence in digital audio, ever since it was one of the first CD-player makers in the 1980s. This is one of the company's fancier SACD players, including special tweaks by the revered Ken Ishiwata. It also offers a USB socket for personal music players, including the iPod.



**Oppo BD835E (NuForce edition) £1,295 P49**

Very similar in specifications to the Cambridge player and sharing some of the fundamental building blocks, this machine has a unique audio board using the new and highly regarded ESS Sabre DAC chips. There's also a dedicated stereo output, which should help keep audio divorced from multichannel facilities.



**Pioneer PD-D9 Mk2 £750**  
**P51**

Even the Mk 2 version has been around for a little while now and in Mk 1 guise goes back several years. But the state-of-the-digital art has inched forward in recent years and there's no reason to suppose the D9 would be looking long in the tooth. With Pioneer's Legato Link Pro, it also has one feature no other can offer.



**Yamaha CD-S1000 £899**  
**P53**

A huge beast of a player (it's taller than any other here and considerably deeper), but looks aren't everything and there's no denying these can be quite persuasive. Frankly, it just oozes class all round and there's no skimping internally, either, with a well-filled case and evidence of careful electronic design.



azur 650BD  
Blu-ray Disc Player

Play  
Pause

Stop

Skip  
Scan

<

>

AVCHD

HDCD

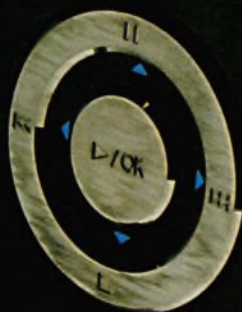
DVD  
VIDEO/AUDIO

20  
SUPER AUDIO CD

COMPACT  
disc  
DIGITAL AUDIO

OPEN/CLOSE

NUFORCE  
edition





*"If you want to make someone feel emotion, you have to make them let go. Listening to something is an act of surrender."*

**Brian Eno**



# Hear it

*as they intended*



## Chord Indigo Plus Digital

Whilst most hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts are happy to accept the influence that interconnects and speaker cable can have on the performance of a system, many people struggle to accept that a digital cable can be equally influential.

The common reaction is that since the cable is only carrying a digital signal, the design and quality of materials used in the cable will have far less influence. Listening tests however, show this is not necessarily the case. Repeated listening tests using high quality digital to analogue converters and home cinema receivers have shown that digital cables can and do have an effect on the sound quality of the system in which they are used. Digital cables are capable of affecting levels of detail, dynamics, sound staging and the rhythmic and tonal characteristics of a system.

The improvements that the Indigo Plus Digital can bring to a system should not be dismissed lightly.

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# Arcam CD37 **£1,300**



SACD playback has a low profile in the case of the CD37, but the presence of a Wolfson DAC is definitely a bonus

## DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** UK
- TYPE:** CD/SACD player
- FORMATS:** CD, SACD
- DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 430x85x355mm
- FEATURES:**
  - Analogue output: dual unbalanced
  - Digital output: electrical and optical S/PDIF
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Arcam
- TELEPHONE:** 01223203200
- WEBSITE:** arcam.co.uk

**A**s SACD players go, this one is remarkably low key. There is an SACD logo on the front, but it's not immediately obvious and the legend at top right clearly says 'Compact Disc Player'. But it does handle the hi-res discs, thanks to a DAC which handles DSD (the SACD 'bitstream' format) in native mode.

That's an interesting detail, as most DACs these days convert both high-bit PCM (CD, DVD-A etc.) and DSD into low-bit PCM before the final conversion to analogue. But the Wolfson DAC used here can convert DSD directly to audio and Arcam has implemented that. Does it make a difference? Well, theoretically, it's the 'purer' option, but there are plenty of other variables.

As usual for Arcam, build quality and exterior finish are excellent, with that nicely legible green display (no CD Text, though) and separate buttons on the front for skip and scan: why do so many other manufacturers fail to realise that one often wants to search for something in a disc immediately after loading it, at which point the remote is usually 10 feet away on the sofa? Good on Arcam for removing another of life's unnecessary frustrations!

There appear to be three completely separate power supplies inside, one switch-mode and two transformer-based, which feed a circuit board characterised by extensive anti-

interference measures – ferrites stuck on critical chips and mechanical damping on some passive components. The audio output is unbalanced only, but is duplicated so you can feed two systems, or a recorder in parallel with the amp, which is another nice touch.

## Sound quality

In a group which our listeners felt maintained a high overall standard, this player was one of the most favourably received. The least successful track was one from the Penguin Café Orchestra, a distinctly miscellaneous mix of instruments that, in all honesty, is not superbly recorded. As a result, it needs all the help it can get at the replay end and the CD37 proved slightly less adept than some at maintaining the individual instrumental characters.

There were also a couple of comments about very slight roughness on voices and, in general, it seems that the CD37 is just a touch uncertain in the upper treble or 'presence' region, especially in busy textures. All the same, under any circumstances other than direct comparison with other highly talented disc players that could easily pass unnoticed.

Against that, one must set this player's unusually good delineation of space and, in particular, depth in images. Reverberation has a marvellously realistic spaciousness to it and both our classical music tracks benefitted from this. The large forces

in Brahms's *German Requiem* were easy to picture, spreading well behind and beyond the loudspeakers, even giving an impression of height – always a good sign, given it's actually a physical impossibility from stereo!

Tonally, the CD37 could do with a shade more weight in the bass. This is a minor problem and the bass has good energy and definition to it. In general, this is a very musical player and a great 'fit and forget' component.

## TECH LABS

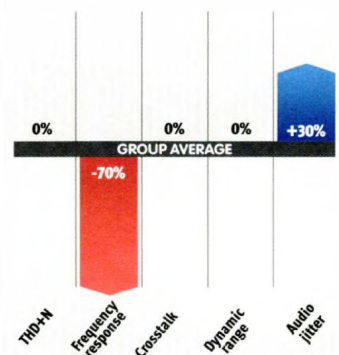
### LAB REPORT

In a group that was highly competitive, the CD37 held its own producing technical results that weren't outstanding, but were nonetheless very good given the price of the unit.

Audio jitter was exceptionally low at 166.3ps. Our blind test panel noted a slight irregularity in the upper treble and our lab test confirms this.

Frequency response was absolutely flat from 20Hz-2kHz, but gradually rolled-off by +/- 0.1dB above 2kHz. This roll-off correlates to what our test panel noted about the upper treble. However, this unit performed commendably in all other areas. It had notably low THD+N, a wide dynamic range and low levels of crosstalk. Overall, a well-designed SACD player.

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Very good detail and imaging, with a great sense of space
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Occasional slight roughness on voice
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WESAY:** Lovely music-making, which transcends any minor technical deficiencies one might identify
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

### OVERALL





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# Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD £400



The budget-priced player of the bunch, the 650BD is remarkably good value and holds its own admirably

#### DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
UK/China

**TYPE:**  
CD/SACD/BD/  
universal player

**FORMATS:**  
CD, SACD, BD, DVD-A,  
HDCD

**WEIGHT:**  
4.1kg

**DIMENSIONS:**  
(WxHxD)  
430x85x315mm

**FEATURES:**

- Analogue output: 7.1 unbalanced
- Digital output: electrical and optical S/PDIF
- Other connections: HDMI, USB x2, ethernet

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Audio Partnership

**TELEPHONE:**  
0870 900 1000

**WEBSITE:**  
cambridgeaudio.com

Is hi-fi, is it home cinema, or is it a bit of home computer equipment? In the days of Blu-ray, USB and internet with everything, the Azur 650BD is all three – with bells on. The 10 front-panel logos denoting specific technologies suggest at once that this is a pretty well-featured unit, while closer investigation doesn't disappoint.

It handles almost every variation of silver disc – CD, SACD, DVD and Blu-ray. Despite that, the insides are not really any busier than most CD-only players. Or, at least, the circuit-board area is no bigger – several of the chips on them have a squillion legs and the internal transistor count is probably in the billions.

The universal transport connects via a computer-type SATA cable, while the power supply is a switch-mode affair, but the audio output circuits are familiar stuff with dual op-amps and decent-quality passive parts. The critical DAC chip is from Cirrus and can handle six channels at 24-bit/192kHz resolution.

If we went into the details of the audio and video features we'd need most of this issue of *HFC*, but suffice to say that pretty much anything you can think of is in there somewhere.

Full set up requires a TV screen (although with careful use of the instruction manual we managed briefly without one), but of course,

for our main purposes, playing audio from CD and SACD, the set up options are largely irrelevant. On the one hand, it's unlikely that this machine will be used in pure audio systems, but on the other it's actually quite a cheap option when viewed just as an SACD player.

#### Sound quality

So is it actually any good? No doubt to some people's surprise, yes, it is. It's tempting to think that with all that irrelevant video-related gubbins flying around, then the 650BD is going to struggle. But look at it this way: the video stuff doesn't add much to the cost and as for spurious signals, CD-only players have got plenty of those already. In fact, with modern design methodologies they're likely to be much better handled in a modern fully featured design than in the no-frills players of a decade ago.

And so maybe it's not such a shock that this techno-wonder proved to be the favourite of our listeners. They found it musical, detailed, open and natural tonally.

One commented that it was perhaps a little brighter than the group average and another suggested that image depth wasn't quite the best of the bunch, but otherwise the general tone was somewhere between positive and ecstatic.

Cambridge should also be particularly happy with some sensational vocals!

#### TECH LABS

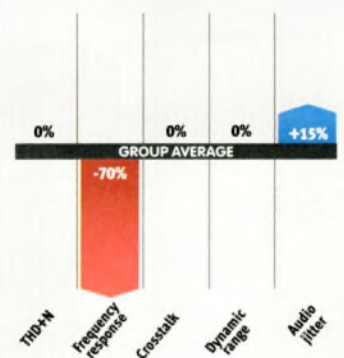
##### LAB REPORT

The 650BD was one of the two truly universal players in this group test. We measured low audio jitter at 202.5ps. Similar to the other players on test, the 650BD had low THD+N and we measured a wide dynamic range of 96dB.

Like the Arcam, this player measured below the group average in the frequency response category. There was a +/- 0.1dB difference in response. Frequency response was rolled-off at the frequency extremes. We measured a gradual roll-off in response from 200Hz-20kHz and another steeper roll-off from 2kHz-20kHz.

Its frequency response was ruler-flat throughout most of the midrange from 200Hz-2kHz. Nonetheless, this is a well-engineered universal player.

##### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



#### Hi-Fi Choice

##### OUR VERDICT

###### SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

**LIKE:** Musical, precise, involving and with great energy

###### VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

**DISLIKE:** Maybe a shade bright of neutral: imaging not the best

###### BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

**WESAY:** Universal in terms of compatibility and features – and very nearly in terms of sound

###### FEATURES

★★★★★

##### OVERALL

★★★★★





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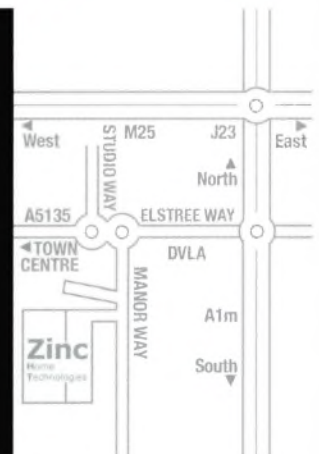
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# Marantz SA8003 £829

Marantz's reputation for its own 'house sound' is on show here with a player that fares well against the competition

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:**  
Japan/China  
**TYPE:**  
CD/SACD/  
universal player  
**FORMATS:**  
CD, SACD, MP3, WMA  
**WEIGHT:**  
7kg  
**DIMENSIONS:**  
(WxHxD)  
435x105x335mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• Analogue output:  
Single unbalanced  
• Digital output:  
electrical and  
optical S/PDIF  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Marantz UK  
**TELEPHONE:**  
01753 680868  
**WEBSITE:**  
marantz.com



Marantz used to append the great man's initials to models 'breathed on' by Ken Ishiwata, but there's nothing in the nomenclature to give that away here. In fact, this is basically a souped-up SA7003, sharing a basic spec, but adding touches like the copper-plated chassis, toroidal mains transformer and a sprinkling of audiophile passive components.

Speaking of components, this player is decidedly old-fashioned-looking inside, with the majority of electronic parts being through-hole types. There are quite a lot of discrete transistors around, made up into Marantz's trademark HDAM circuit, which performs the same function as the more common op-amp chips, but (we're assured) to a higher standard.

Components may be old-fashioned, but the USB input certainly isn't – especially as it's one of the first to support digital input from an iPod. As a result, the SA8003 suddenly becomes a handy way of getting the best quality from any portable music player, or files on a USB stick. It even plays CD-standard WAV files via USB, which should give identical quality to CD. SACD is only stereo, but Marantz does make multichannel (and multi-format) players if you want the full surround monty.

Despite the Ishiwata touches, there are areas where this player feels a little budget-ish in ways that the others don't. Features are basic, for example, but in fairness perfectly serviceable and one upgrade we definitely approve of is the high-quality phono connectors.

## Sound quality

Marantz has something of a reputation for warm sound and that seems to be upheld by this player, possibly a little too much for our panel's ears. They enjoyed it, but seem to have found the bass at times a little more forward than circumstances justified.

What they really liked about the SA8003, with both SACD and CD software, was its clear but unforced detail. Equipment that makes too much of it can be as tiring in the long run as equipment that's casual with it, but this player seems well-established in the middle ground.

It's also very good at handling dynamics, again without undue emphasis and at times even seeming understated. But there's plenty of kick and energy, both functions of localised dynamics, while long-term dynamic swings are handled confidently and, when required, subtly.

Tonally, apart from the warmth, there's a pleasant sparkle to the treble which stops well short of

actual brightness, while midrange is neutral or as near to it, as makes no difference.

Interestingly, we felt in our sighted listening session that this player, when compared with the rest of the field, makes its best impression with CD rather than SACD. The latter is good, but seems to lack a little of the finely etched precision that the format can, at best, offer from some players.

## TECH LABS

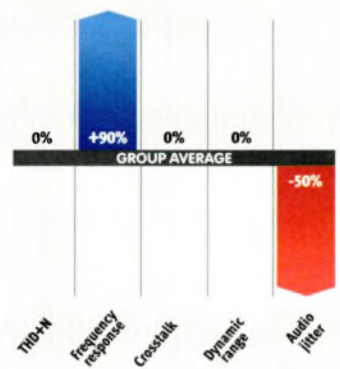
### LAB REPORT

The SA8003 shared similar test characteristics to the other players. It had low THD+N, wide dynamic range and low levels of crosstalk.

However, this player outperforms all of the others in terms of frequency response. We measured a brilliantly low +/-0.008dB change in response. This correlates to a ruler-flat response across the entire audio range.

Jitter, on the other hand, was noticeably higher against the group average. We measured 358.1ps. Jitter, while subtle, can have an effect on the sound and higher levels can decrease sonic transparency. Jitter aside, this Marantz is a well-engineered player that measures exceptionally well.

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

#### SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

**LIKE:** Very good detail, always there but never forced or isolated

#### VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

**DISLIKE:** Slightly less assured with SACD than with CD. Lacks precision

#### BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

**WE SAY:** Classic Marantz sound is a pleasure and iPod compatibility adds to the attraction

#### FEATURES

★★★★★

#### OVERALL

★★★★★



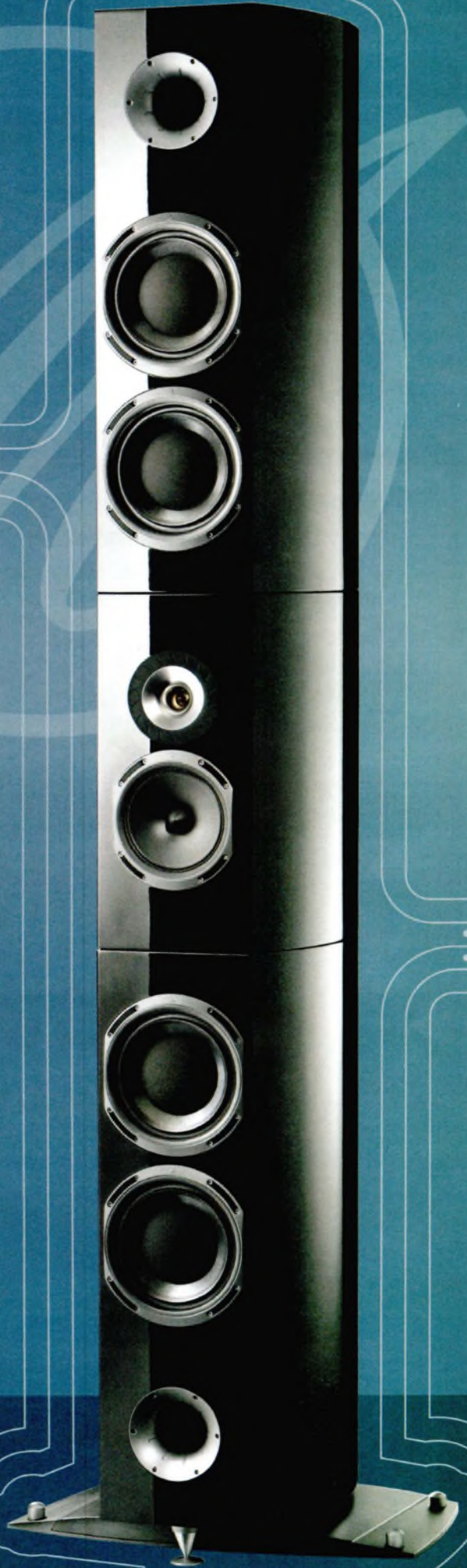


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# Oppo BDP83SE (NuForce ed.) £1,295

With a long tradition in audio excellence, the Oppo is reborn with impressive credentials and new software

## DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** USA/China  
**TYPE:** CD/SACD/BD/universal player  
**FORMATS:** CD, SACD, BD, DVD-A  
**WEIGHT:** 5.1kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 430x77x335mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• Analogue output: stereo unbalanced; 7.1 channel unbalanced  
• Digital output: electrical and optical S/PDIF  
• Other connections: HDMI, USB, RS232  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** HiAudio  
**TELEPHONE:** 0845 052 5259  
**WEBSITE:** nuforce.com

Oppo is not a name that we've had a lot of exposure to, but there's been a buzz in cyberspace about this particular model. It's rumoured to be one of the most capable multi-format players around. The story goes that Oppo used to make a standard BD83, then upgraded it to Special Edition status, then discontinued the non-SE due to problems sourcing parts. It was then worked on by NuForce to create the model we have here.

Its building blocks and operating software show some similarities with the Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD, but there's an important difference in the audio board, which uses DACs from ESS, the specialist also featured in the Audiolab 8200CD reviewed on p66. DACs plural, that is, as there are separate chips for multi channel and stereo. In offering a wholly separate stereo output path, Oppo has side-stepped a criticism sometimes made of multichannel equipment, that there's too much clever stuff in the signal path and it's true that dedicated stereo hardware, at least, gives peace of mind that one hasn't accidentally left some processing in circuit.

The whole audio board shows signs of careful design, with good-quality parts and op-amps, some of which are cunningly disguised by painting them gold. The logic and video board

is a compact affair with the usual video processing options, including HDMI output at practically all frame rates and resolutions. And since this is a Blu-ray player, the transport is a fully universal type that can read most flavours of DVD, as well as BD, SACD and CD.

## Sound quality

This player is quite light and delicate in its presentation, with good detail and well-judged balance. A situation that seemed to suit Brahms's music in SACD, the slightly heavy texture of the music responding well to light-handed reproduction.

Something similar applied to the Mavericks track, a deceptively complex mix, featuring more instruments than are at first apparent. The NuForce Oppo proved adept at presenting these instruments as individual sounds, without losing the sense of an integrated whole. There was also a lovely sense of space in this track and excellent energy; one listener commented that it sounded more like a live gig than a studio recording and we can see what he meant by that. Smaller-scale music was also well served, with lively dynamics and an energetic, snappy presentation.

It does seem now and then that this player's deep bass is a touch shy and that can slightly lessen the impact of some music, for instance



a church organ which relies more than most on the lowest frequencies. But the sheer vigour and bounce of the sound more than compensates for that with most styles of music. Treble is also well extended and quite sweet.

This combination of attributes is not all that common but the energy, slightly lean sound and good detail add up to performance that some listeners will find very attractive.

## TECH LABS

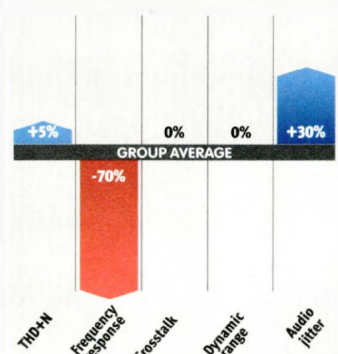
### LAB REPORT

The Oppo was the other true universal player in the group. This is a sophisticated player that can handle just about any format thrown at it.

It had the lowest jitter of the group at 155.4ps. This is a superb measurement from an optical disc player. Internal noise (THD+N) was very low and only beaten by the Pioneer. Channel separation was also notably low at -94dB. Where the Oppo really shines is on high-resolution audio.

With Blu-ray audio playback we measured a dynamic range of 113dB per channel. This unit, like the Cambridge Audio, was full of useful features and was one of the most advanced players in this group test.

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Light-handed presentation, good detail and tonality  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Slight lack of deep bass may come across as lean to some  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Highly capable with good sound in both stereo and multichannel modes  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

### OVERALL





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## Pioneer PD-D9 Mk2 £750

Pioneer's keenly priced CD/SACD player has a lot to offer in terms of electronic wizardry and audio performance

### DETAILS

**ORIGIN:** Japan  
**TYPE:** CD/SACD/ universal player  
**FORMATS:** CD, SACD, MP3, WMA  
**WEIGHT:** 11kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 420x115x340mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• Analogue output: single unbalanced;  
• Digital output: electrical and optical S/PDIF  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Pioneer UK  
**TELEPHONE:** 01753 789789  
**WEBSITE:** pioneer.co.uk

**T**his model was one of a handful that marked Pioneer's return to serious hi-fi separates a few years ago. Now in Mk2 guise, it remains largely as it was then, a simple stereo-only CD/SACD player with little in the way of fancy features. Indeed, so devoid is it of frills that it doesn't even offer track skip from the front panel; the only controls are tray open/close and play/pause.

Beneath the lid it's filled with components, including a screened switch-mode power supply, with considerably more smoothing capacitance than is usually found. The audio circuit board is populated with a mix of surface-mount and through-hole components, the latter including most of the resistors in the signal path. Surface-mount resistors are physically very small and some tweekers have questioned whether their small thermal inertia makes them more prone to modulation effects than leaded parts.

One feature Pioneer does offer in the D9 is 'Legato Link Pro', the latest version of its slow rolloff digital filter which, in pre-Pro days, was one of the first optional filters widely available. Again, we're not hugely enthusiastic about this, but

the alternative is a perfectly standard sharp (-ish) filter and having the choice can only be a good thing. Digital-to-analogue conversion is done by a pair of Wolfson chips.

### Sound quality

The D9 does a good line in deep bass, with plenty of weight to it, but also good control and precision. All our listeners spotted this quickly and also commented that it can border on being too much of a good thing. The ATC speakers we were using are not prone to overstatement in the lower registers, so we'd have to sound a warning note if your system has any bass-heavy tendencies as this could perhaps be a bit much.

But there's lots else to enjoy quite unequivocally. Once again, a combination of good detail and solid, stable and precise imaging makes for easy visualisation of the performers and the space in which they were recorded. Dynamics are good and there's plenty of impetus to percussion and instruments with a sharp attack like piano and guitar.

Voices are slightly less secure, it seems, with some feeling of constraint. It's as if the singer is not quite in the best of health and is

struggling to get the perfect resonance – but one can hear the words well thanks to the clear and open treble and, in general, the emotional tone is also clear.

Our listeners felt that overall; this was one of the best of the day for rhythmic involvement. Evidently the strong bass does no harm there, but the good detail and dynamics are surely equally important in making rhythms vibrant. One of our listener's paid it the nicest of compliments: "I don't want it to end." 'Nuff said!

### TECH LABS

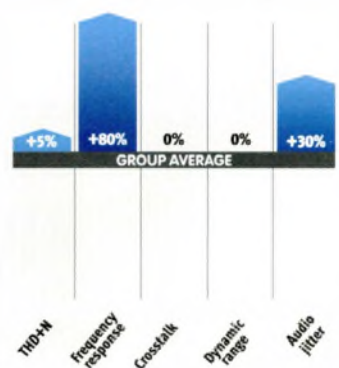
#### LAB REPORT

While on the surface this unit may look like a no frills CD/SACD player. On the test bench it measured the best overall.

This player had the lowest internal THD+N of the group. The D9's frequency response variation was exceptionally low at +/- 0.01dB. Minus a few tiny bumps, its frequency response was completely flat.

Jitter levels were remarkably low at 169.5ps. Similar to the other players in this group test, we measured a wide dynamic range, and low levels of crosstalk. While this player may not stand out looks wise, it more than makes up for it by being a highly capable CD/SACD player.

#### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Very good rhythmically with solid images

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Can seem a little bass-heavy – partner with care

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Despite disappointing ergonomics, an enjoyable player to listen to

**FEATURES** ★★★★★

#### OVERALL





# No reference required.



## CPA8000 Reference Preamplifier

Unparalleled sonic performance and a truly flexible approach to preamplification make the CPA8000 the ultimate high-end reference product and worthy of a place at the top of our product range. The high level of build quality and cool retro look are just the start. Pair it up with its perfect partner, the SPM14000 mono block amplifiers (also pictured here) to release its true potential. In the same double

height format to match, it has all the features of the already advanced CPA5000 but now includes three pairs of outputs, true dual-mono construction with separate power supplies for each channel, and separate left and right frequency EQ adjust. Whether its two channel reference quality amplification or the ultimate in home theatre, the CPA8000 is the only preamp the discerning audiophile will need.

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01622 721444  
sales@chordelectronics.co.uk  
www.chordelectronics.co.uk

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# Yamaha CD-S1000 £899

An impressive audio performance makes this Yamaha a worthy contender with its more illustrious peers

## DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** Japan
- TYPE:** CD/SACD player
- FORMATS:** CD, SACD
- WEIGHT:** 15kg
- DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 435x137x440mm
- FEATURES:**
  - Analogue output: single unbalanced;
  - Digital output: electrical and optical/S/PDIF
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Yamaha UK
- TELEPHONE:** 0844 811 1116
- WEBSITE:** uk.yamaha.com

**A**s big, heavy and imposing CD players go, this is one of the biggest, heaviest and most imposing, at least among affordable machines. The front panel's only slightly bigger than most, but the depth of the unit is remarkable and its use of extensive reinforcement in the base makes it quite something to lift.

We particularly like the ultra-slim CD tray (which opens and shuts almost noiselessly) and the oh-so-retro mains switch.

The insides are surprisingly well filled, too. The transport dominates the central one-third of the width, with part of the power supply board behind it, while the mains transformer (a large frame type), sits to the left. At the right is the audio board, another retro job, with through-hole passive components including stand-up resistors and mylar film capacitors, plus surface-mount DAC chips (a pair of Burr-Brown parts) and op-amps. A further board beneath the audio one handles digital signals.

With this much real estate, there's a risk that mechanical resonance might colour the sound of a system, including the S1000, but Yamaha has applied quite extensive mechanical damping and the top panel is

acoustically quite dead. Performance has clearly not been neglected either – Yamaha proudly extolling the virtues of multiple isolated transformer windings and symmetrical, internally balanced, circuits.

## Sound quality

Although our listeners paid plenty of compliments to this player, it seems that overall it just didn't quite set them on fire with excitement. It's not entirely consistent in the way it handles different kinds of music, or at least that's how it comes across.

For instance, one listener commented on a slightly thin sound on the lead guitar in the Mavericks track, but then went on to comment that the bass is weighty. That would seem to suggest that the upper bass/lower midrange is losing impact, a common enough problem to be sure.

The best results were in the Brahms track, (SACD), which had a good, slightly 'dreamy' feel to it and a realistic sense of space, but even this excerpt felt slightly constrained dynamically. Voices project well, both chorally and solo, but a little more connection with the rest of the music-making might be no bad thing.

In terms of basic tonality, the CD-S1000 seems to do most things right and its treble is particularly

## TECH LABS

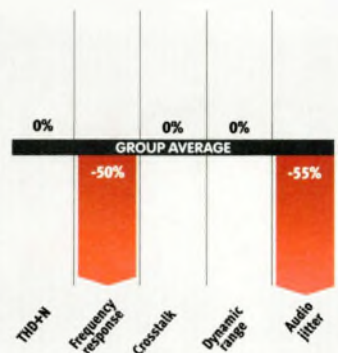
### LAB REPORT

In a group test with very similar products, we were not surprised when the Yamaha produced technical data that was comparable to the other players.

As noted with the other players, the CD-S1000 also had low THD+N, a wide dynamic range and low levels of crosstalk. Frequency response was below the group average at +/-0.09dB. The CD-S1000's frequency response was flat from 20Hz-2kHz. From 2kHz-20kHz the response slopes upwards. A response variation of +/-0.09dB is marginal and should not create any sound anomalies.

Audio jitter was well above the group average at 363ps and while this is not a state-of-the-art figure, it is an acceptable jitter level.

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★☆ **LIKE:** Strong bass; excellent look and feel
- VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★☆ **DISLIKE:** Music seems focussed in the upper midrange to the detriment of overall communication
- BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★☆ **WE SAY:** Very nearly a good player that doesn't quite pull it all together
- FEATURES**  
★★★★☆

### OVERALL





# Lab conclusions

Our six players all did well on the lab bench with very small performance gaps between them. Small or not some of the differences were telling

## TECH LABS

In an age when disc formats are closing in on the pinnacle of design, it is no surprise that this group test is full of talented players. They not only sound good, but they all measure remarkably well too – a true testament to how far the disc format has come.

It was not easy to choose a winner, but we feel that the Cambridge Audio 650BD edged out the competition to take first place. On the test bench, it measured commendably. It had low-levels of harmonic distortion, good channel separation, very low jitter levels and was capable of a wide dynamic range.

Its frequency response deviation tied the Arcam for the highest of the group, but at +/-0.1dB this was minimal in real-world playback and shouldn't create any sound anomalies.

From a technical standpoint, the Pioneer PD-D9 MKII and Oppo BDP-83SE NuForce measured better overall. As many engineers will tell you, having the best technical figures won't always equate to the best sound. Listening is subjective and good technical results are reassuring and can tell a lot about how well a component was designed, but it cannot tell you how good it sounds. To put it simply; the Cambridge Audio

650BD was just more musical sounding, and pushed all the right buttons.

Years ago, it would have been blasphemous for a video disc player to win a group test, but times have changed. Engineering has finally come-of-age and designers are combining state-of-the-art video playback with audio playback. Cambridge Audio has done just this and has done it for a spectacularly low price.

After extensive listening, we felt that the Cambridge Audio 650BD was the best overall and is definitely worth your consideration if you are looking for a great disc player.



This is actually the first *Blind-listening Group Test* we have carried out, where all six players are SACD capable. This comes at a time when questions are being asked of the viability of SACD as a format going forward.

If you are a classical music fan, there is still a worthwhile amount of music being released on SACD and these players will help you get the most from this genre.

If your preferences lie elsewhere, SACD is harder to justify, but the strong CD performance of all six of these players means they should still be considered.

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Make/model	Arcam CD37	Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD	Marantz SA8003	Oppo (NuForce Edition) BD83SE	Pioneer PD-J9 MkII	Yamaha CD-S1000
Price	£1,300	£400	£829	£1,295	£750	£899
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Conclusion	Music-making which transcends any minor technical deficiencies one might identify	Universal in terms of compatibility and features and nearly in terms of sound	Classic Marantz sound is always a pleasure; iPod compatibility adds to the attraction	Highly capable performance with good sound in both stereo and multichannel modes	Despite disappointing ergonomics, an enjoyable player with very good musical communication	Very nearly a very good player, but just doesn't quite seem to put it all together

### Key features

Digital output elec/opt	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1
CD text	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
CD-RW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Balanced output	No	No	No	No	No	No
Formats	CD, SACD	All except AAC	CD, SACD, MP3, WMA	All except AAC	CD, SACD, MP3, WMA	CD, SACD, MP3, WMA

### Lab conclusions E = Excellent | AA = Above average | A = average | BA = average | P = poor

THD+N	2.06% A	2.2% A	2.04% A	2.01% A	2% A	2.05% A
Frequency response	+/-0.1dB A	+/-0.1dB A	+/-0.008dB E	+/-0.06dB AA	+/-0.01dB E	+/-0.09dB AA
Crosstalk	-93dB A	-89dB BA	-94dB A	-94dB A	-93dB A	-92dB A
Dynamic range	96.0dB E	96.0dB E	96.0dB E	96.0dB E	96.0dB E	96.0dB E
Audio jitter	166.2ps E	202.5ps E	358.1ps P	155.4ps E	169.5 E	363ps A



# Verdicts

Technical details aside, these six CD/SACD players also cover a lot of bases in terms of detail and musicality

**WE'VE ALREADY MENTIONED** in passing that this seemed like a very capable group all round and we'd like to be quite clear about this: although it's not part of the *Blind-listening Group Test*, we always drop one or two long-term references into our sighted listening as a reality check and on this occasion they confirmed our panel's feeling that none of the players in this group is in any sense a turkey. Which is good!

Indeed, although six units are, but a small sample of the entire market (which of course includes plenty of models we've reviewed on previous occasions), we certainly believe that this result supports our general feeling that standards of digital disc replay have been creeping up over the years, as one would certainly hope. Hence few harsh words and lots of happy CD listeners.

But that's not to say they all sound the same, nor, by extension, that they will all please everybody.

As if to prove the point, the Oppo/NuForce evidently didn't please one of our listeners at all – yet the other two seem to have enjoyed it from just about all point of view. It's a very capable

machine in terms of more than just features, though its similarity to the (also very talented) Cambridge Audio sets it a slightly daunting challenge in value terms.

Arcam's CD37, at the same price give or take some loose change, adds SACD to Arcam's list of suavely confident audio achievements. No flashy gimmicks, literally or metaphorically, just lovely sound. Actually, one could say much the same for the Pioneer PD-D9, though its slight bassiness causes us a momentary pause for thought in recommending it – that and the looks which we never enormously cared for and which are now getting dated by the hour.

The Marantz SA8003 sees another classic maker in classic form, with sound that's full of effortless detail, if perhaps a little warm subjectively.

Finally, the Yamaha proved the one slight disappointment of the group, never quite grabbing our listeners' imagination despite its clear competence in terms of hi-fi essentials. There's no doubt that it still looks a million dollars though! ●

## THE WINNER IS...

**SOME BLIND-LISTENING Group Test verdicts we reach are hard fought affairs, but we really didn't have to think very hard about this one. When a player is the cheapest in the group by a very substantial margin and the best featured, when it still emerges as the unanimous first choice of our listening panel, there's simply no decision to make.**

**There's no magic at work here, just good engineering allied to the confidence to manufacture in cost-cutting quantities. Result: detailed, realistic, musical sound from any disc source, plus more-than-capable video performance from both standard and high-definition flicks.**

**So you don't want to combine a two channel hi-fi and multichannel home cinema? Hey, then why not buy two Cambridge Audio Azur 650BDs!**



We suggest a trio of amplifier and speaker possibilities to help you make the most of this talented sextet

### AMPLIFIER: Creek 5350 Evolution £1,075

The 5350 is an ideal match for any of the players on test here. The Creek is a compact and handsome package offering superb build quality, a reasonable number of inputs and a healthy 120w power output. Sonically, the Creek offers excellent integration and tonality, with real sweetness of treble. All of this is tied together with a genuine sense of musicality that never fails to make listening an enjoyable experience irrespective of genre. The superb levels of detail the Creek can retrieve make it a natural partner for this SACD capable sextet.



### AMPLIFIER: NAD 375BEE (reviewed HFC 325) £1,000

A real powerhouse of an amp, the NAD has the output to drive most real-world speakers to far beyond normal listening levels, while staying totally in control. This control is coupled with excellent neutrality that allows the connected sources to speak for themselves. The bass, in particular, is full, forceful and exceptionally vivid. The NAD is also capable of superb detail retrieval, which coupled to the wide, flat frequency response, would allow any of our six players to show what they can do. There is even an optional phono stage for the vinylistas!



### LOUDSPEAKERS: Bowers and Wilkins CM9 (reviewed HFC 321) £1,760

A handsome and well-proportioned loudspeaker that is sensitive enough to work well with most amplifiers (although they will benefit from the power and control our two recommendations have). They are the very essence of control and offer a superb insight into recordings. Detail is excellent, but these qualities do not overshadow the overall musicality of their performance. They are the complete package to reveal what any of these players is capable of.









# A super-charged mini

**Malcolm Steward** enjoys some high-end hi-fi time, with a cool-looking stack and combo system that can also digitise your vinyl

**T**he bijou Chord Electronics Chordette package surely must be the ultimate, high-class micro system. The set-up can be as simple or as comprehensive as anyone wishes just as with regular separate components, albeit, perhaps, slightly more flexible.

Yet it has one distinct advantage: the entire Chordette set-up we tested occupies less space than a single 430mm-wide regular component, and there is a purpose built, modular rack available to accommodate the system and make it look swish.

The system under test here comprises the Dual (not pictured), Prime, Mogul and Scamp. Three of these came fitted into the chic £495 Chordette stand for this review, but additional tiers – one per item – are available at £180 each.

All components are silver, but can be finished in a range of colours for an extra £50 per item.

## Meet the players

The £799 Dual is not only an easily configurable phono equaliser/preamplifier, designed to extract excellent performance from a moving coil cartridge, it also features an integral ADC, which will digitise the output of that cartridge so that it can be passed through a USB output to your PC or music server.

This connection makes it an extremely convenient unit, even if it does limit the resolution at which you can record to 24-bit/96kHz. We doubt, however, that this will be a cause for concern to the majority of users.

The £1,495 Prime preamp has four analogue inputs, while its USB connection allows any USB2-

compliant source to attach itself digitally to the unit. A pair of gold-plated analogue phonos, alongside a Chordette control signal and a TOSLINK recording digital output monitor provide the output capabilities.

The power amplifier in this system is the £799, 40-watt Scamp. If more power is required, you can add another and bridge both to deliver 80 watts mono per channel.

Alongside its conventional phono inputs, the amplifier also provides a USB connection for hooking up a computer or an MP3 player. An adjustable gain control allows for easy switching between low- and high-output level sources.

**“It sounds not unlike a grown-up system, delivering detail and drama alongside a dose of rhythmical persuasiveness.”**

The most expensive component in this system is the £2,195 Mogul, the tiniest – but still the most adequately equipped – multi-media PC we’ve ever encountered. With its 1.2GHz VIA Nano processor, the Mogul runs the Windows 7 operating system and has 320GB of internal hard-disk storage. It features both wired and wireless networking capability and an eSATA port enables users to attach an optical drive or additional storage.

If you need more components connected simultaneously, they can be hooked up through one of the Mogul’s six USB 2.0 ports or, if those are all in use, through an inexpensive USB hub, available from any computer store. Be sure to buy a powered hub, if you plan to connect any disk drives to it, though.

As well as its audio capabilities, the Mogul provides an HDMI connection for outputting high-definition video – up to 1080p through the unit’s VIA VX855 media processor.

As the Mogul comes with USB 2.0 port connectivity and each of the new Chordette models has a USB internal DAC – or ADC in the case of the Dual – one can configure a system to use just these ports. For example, you could build a compact desktop computer system using the Mogul, Scamp and a pair of loudspeakers.

The Mogul comes with a wireless keyboard and a touch-screen for full

## DETAILS

### PRODUCT:

Chord Electronics Chordette Dual, Prime, Scamp, Mogul

### ORIGIN:

UK

### TYPE:

Hi-fi system

### WEIGHT:

Dual, Prime, Scamp 0.4kg each;

Mogul 0.5kg

### DIMENSIONS:

(WxHxD)

Dual, Prime, Scamp, Mogul

160x70x40mm each

### FEATURES:

• Inputs: RCA phono, USB, unbalanced 4x RCA phono,

• Outputs: USB, RCA phono, TOSLINK,

4x binding posts, HDMI

• 320GB internal hard disk

• Windows 7 Home

• HD audio

• DISTRIBUTOR:

Chord Electronics

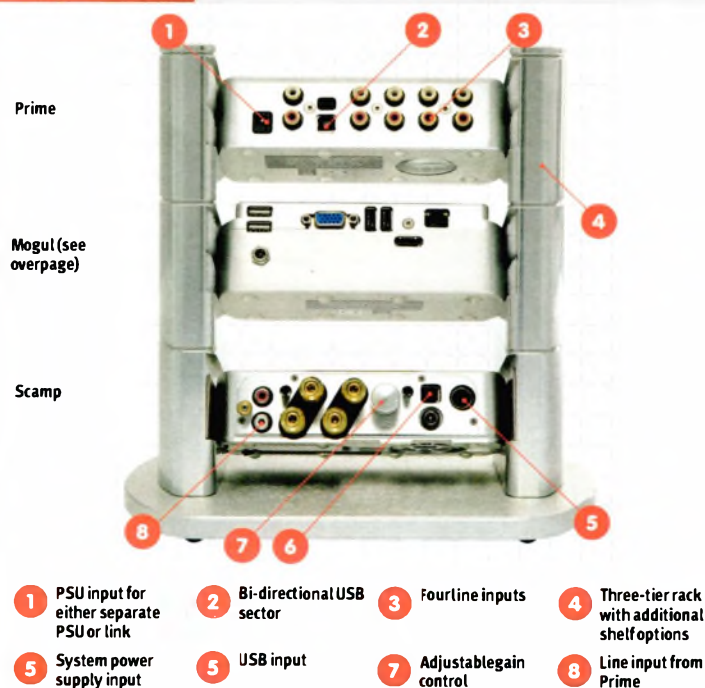
TELEPHONE:

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WEBSITE:

chordelectronics.co.uk

## CONNECTIONS



## CHORD ELECTRONICS

strives to be at the bleeding edge of new technology: witness its early introduction of Bluetooth to allow users to transmit music stored on a mobile phone or device straight to their hi-fi.

This was one of Chord Electronics' founder, John Franks' ways to introduce young music fans to high-end hi-fi.

Figuring that people in their teens and twenties carry lots of music on their mobile phones he thought they might find it attractive if a hi-fi system could read their music off them and play it back with no fuss or need for any cable connections – using the simple process of Bluetooth pairing.

It is inspired thinking and one can only wish the company every success with the idea.





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"Make no mistake, this speaker is the real deal; the fact that it looks so good is just a distraction!"  
Issue 73



"This is an excellent speaker with excellent imaging, good bass extension and beautifully styling"  
Dec 2009



"Natural, dynamic with an exceptionally live sound and outstanding finish"  
A truly great design



[sempre-audio.at](http://sempre-audio.at)

"More than mere hi-fi, this was a musical performance. **fact-8** is a great loudspeaker"



"These PMC's are exceptional, highly desirable in every way"  
April 2010

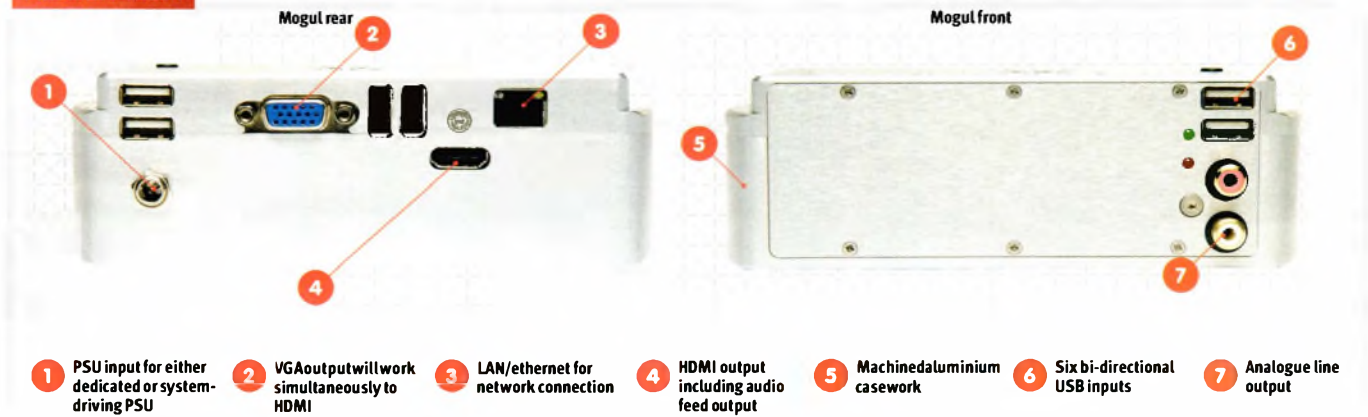


**fact:3**  
HAS ARRIVED

The **fact:8** in Tiger Ebony



**HIDDEN TECH**



operation straight out of its packaging. It also has a USB Wi-Fi adaptor to enable it to talk through the ether with Wi-Fi capable computers in the local network.

**Cable mismanagement**

The system has an admirably solid feel about it, along with an agreeable aesthetic simplicity. The units are internally quite 'busy', as a result of packing all their hi-tech circuitry into such compact casework, but the only external aspect that looks fussy is the wiring mass dangling from the rear of the stack. This mass easily turns into a mess if the cables are not carefully organised and tie-wrapped.

The system came with short Atlas interconnects, but we switched these for one-metre MIT cables, so that we could hide some of the wiring bulk behind the equipment table.

Some sort of cable management system would be worthwhile here, even though such arrangements rarely do any favours to sound quality. Thinner, more flexible wiring would help, too. The units we tested were very early production/demonstration samples and not 100 per cent up to full retail specification. Chord assured us that the full production-quality units would not suffer the minor hiccups we encountered during testing.

For example, we heard a few scratchy sounds through the speakers, when wiggling the USB mouse and we also encountered a degree of latency with it on occasions. You would move the mouse, but the pointer would hesitate for a few milliseconds before responding. However, this, we suspect, might well be a product of the not especially speedy

processor, particularly when it is under a heavy load – for example, when making recordings.

**Sound's good**

As an ultra-convenient, compact media player system, the Chordette proves thoroughly rewarding. It sounds not unlike a grown-up, high-end system, delivering bags of detail and drama alongside a healthy dose of rhythmical persuasiveness. Our primary reason for requesting the system was to experiment with it as a means of easily digitising LPs. In this respect, it proved successful, but the measure of that success depended upon several factors. The Mogul seemed a little challenged in the horsepower department: it did not have the muscle to run our Audacity recording software, at 24-bit/96kHz.

However, the only other – rather more convoluted – option would be to feed the audio signal from the



**THERE IS VIRTUALLY nothing to which one can compare the Chordette system. It even makes the diminutive Cyrus enclosures look bloated. It also makes all other hi-fi look very dowdy with its audiophile swagger. If only Chord could sort out some way of making the wiring at the back of the rack less prominent and ugly then the appearance of the units would be completely beyond criticism. Maybe the company could drill channels through the rack supports to allow thinner, more flexible cables to pass through them. Less mess and fewer cable ties would surely give greater pride of ownership to the aesthetes likely to clamour after these hi-fi trinkets.**

turntable into a phono-preamp, in order to have a suitably equalized, line-level signal to feed to a dedicated external ADC. The output could then be transferred to a more powerful computer for recording.

Playing 24-bit/96kHz tracks from Network Attached Storage – the Chordette system fared well, sounding detailed through NEAT Petite SX loudspeakers. The amplification has an impressive delicacy with jazz, but can also rock aggressively when called upon to do so.

**Compatible**

This might well be the answer to many people's dreams for a convenient compact LP archiving solution. The Chordette system, configured as a simple phono-stage, pre and power amplifier, is hard to beat and fulfils all its promises. It sounded dynamic, energetic and richly textured when partnered with an Amadeus GIA turntable and Dynavector XX2 cartridge. Use the MOGUL as a ripper/player of CD rips and all is fine, too. We just don't feel that it's sufficiently powerful for the demanding task of 'ripping' vinyl at high-resolution using Audacity software. ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** The compact form factor, plus the performance is a real winner
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** The ugly melee of cabling at the rear really needs sorting out
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Anyone looking for an elegant, compact, high-performance system need look no further
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**







# Britain has the X-Factor

**Jimmy Hughes** auditions Musical Fidelity's 260-watt M6 pre/power and thinks its place in the grand final is guaranteed

**M**usical Fidelity is taking on the high end at its own game, whilst lowering the price of entry.

Take the new M6PRE and M6PRX preamp and power amp combo, for example: balanced inputs and outputs (including USB); high-quality MM/MC phono inputs; 260 watts per channel; a regulated power supply system and (claimed) low distortion levels are impressive credits indeed.

And, unlike similar products, this duo is 'high end' at a more realistic

price. Well, okay, they're not exactly cheap, but look around at the high end and you'll see that there's a lot on offer here. The real question here is – can MF's M6 components really offer a challenge to extravagant price-no-object kit?

## Single-ended

As already stated, the M6PRE and M6PRX offer fully balanced circuit topology. It's an operation that's maintained throughout, although not all 'balanced' amps offer this.

## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** M6PRE and M6PRX

**ORIGIN:** UK/Taiwan

**TYPE:** Preamp and power amp

**WEIGHT:** M6PRE 11.4kg  
M6PRX 19.7kg

**DIMENSIONS:** M6PRE (WxHxD) 440x125x390mm  
M6PRX (WxHxD) 440x125x390mm

### FEATURES:

- Fully balanced circuit topology
- MM/MC phono stage
- Dual-mono design
- High-current capability
- USB input
- Power: 260 watts

**DISTRIBUTOR:** Musical Fidelity

**TELEPHONE:** 020 8900 2866

**WEBSITE:** [musicalfidelity.com](http://musicalfidelity.com)

With many, the circuits themselves are single-ended with balanced inputs and outputs. While this gives some improvement over plain single-ended, maintaining balanced-throughout is better.

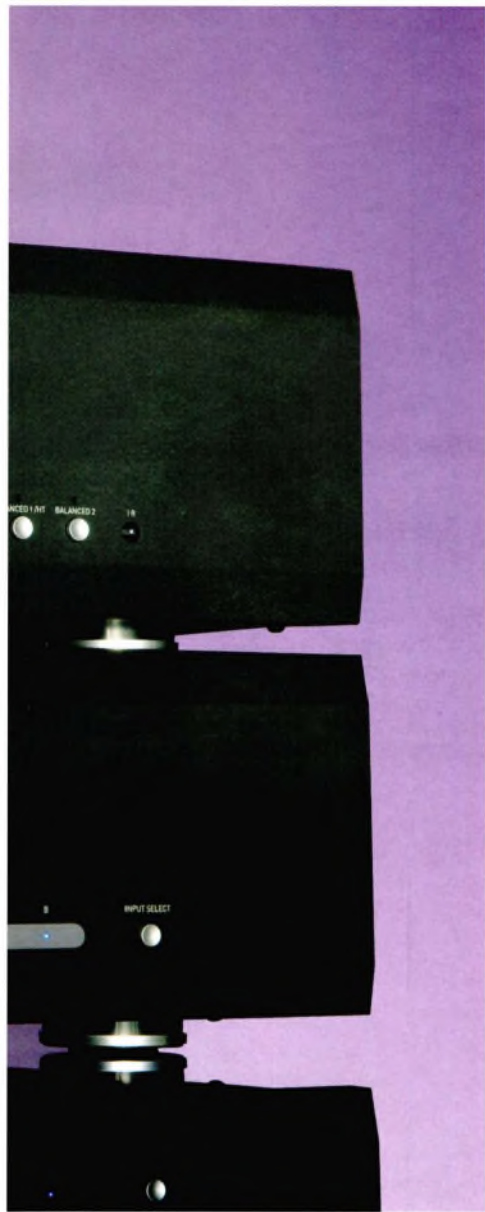
The M6PRE has single-ended inputs for CD, tuner, tape (with monitor), Aux and MM/MC phono stage, plus two balanced line inputs and a USB input. A choice of balanced or unbalanced outputs is offered. Virtually no 'extras' are included – so, no stereo/mono switch, no phase-reverse button and no left/right balance control.

The M6PRX is a dual-mono, stereo power amp offering 260 watts per channel into eight ohms. MF claims the amp can deliver significant levels of current (around 140 amps), with a peak voltage output of 130 volts.

There are two pairs of single-ended line inputs (switchable), plus a set of balanced inputs using XLR plugs. Loudspeakers are connected via two pairs of 4mm sockets/binding posts. Distortion levels are also very low.

With the power amp, typical THD-with-noise is less than 0.003 per cent





from 20Hz to 20kHz (see Tech Labs on page 62). Noise is less than 120dB (A weighted), so you could use this amp with sensitive speakers and not have issues with residual hiss or hum.

MF claims the M6PRE has less than 0.005 per cent distortion, with self-noise measuring around 96dB (A weighted) and, via its balanced outputs, a maximum of 19V RMS (52V Peak) – with these figures being halved for the single-ended outputs. Specifications such as these promise high-end performance.

### Faint buzz

MF's expensive components – like the Titan and AMS series – are built in the UK. The M6 line is manufactured in Taiwan, enabling worthwhile cost-savings, without significantly compromising performance or build quality. Both M6 items are very well finished, feeling solid and confidence-inspiring.

The casework features a combination of alloy (front and side-plates/heat sinks) and steel (top and bottom sections), compared to the all-alloy construction of the Primo. The latter's 'lustre' surface finish is, perhaps, a touch more stylish and expensive-looking than the M6's matt finish, but any preference here has to be personal.

The various knobs and buttons have a nice solid 'feel'. The volume



**WHILE QUITE** a few audio components offer a choice of single-ended or balanced inputs and outputs, in only a handful of cases are the circuits themselves fully-balanced.

In balanced operation, the negative half of the signal is independent of ground (earth) and is 'active' in much the same way (only inverse) as the positive.

It's a bit like two legs on a bicycle; as one leg goes up, the other goes down. In the M6PRE/PRX, balanced operation is maintained throughout. In effect, the circuit is like two mono amplifiers back-to-back – one handling the positive half of the signal, while the other handles the negative. The result is a bigger more powerfully projected sound that has greater presence and dynamics.

control is smooth and well-damped, while the various press-buttons are tactile and positive. A faint buzz from the M6PRX's mains transformers can be heard with an ear close to the amp's casework, but the preamp is virtually silent.

During normal use, the PRX's casework does get warm to the touch, but it doesn't run hot like MF's big Pure Class A power amps. The design is a dual-mono type and (unusually) MF employs bifilar choke-regulation in the power supply to improve performance – something rarely seen nowadays. Indeed, MF believe that choke-regulation has not been used in any hi-fi transistor design – though it was fairly common with old tube amps.

**“The M6 is for those wanting a truthful amplifier – one that neither adds nor subtracts from the source.”**

Interestingly, the M6PRX's circuit is actually based on that of the flagship Titan, using four pairs of output devices per channel.

MF claims the PRX beats most other power amps available, regardless of price. Extremely low, wide-band distortion, low-output impedance, outstanding load-driving characteristics, enormous stability margins and very high-peak current delivery certainly suggests that this mono power amp is really something very special.

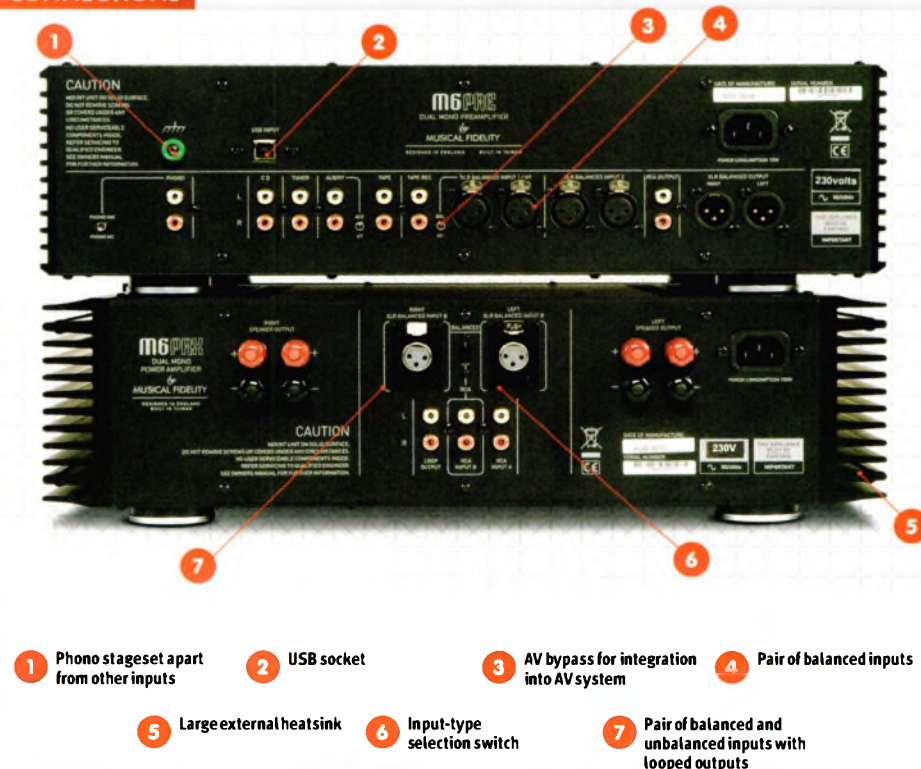
### Delicacy and finesse

The M6 combo produces a clean, solid, open and natural sound. The overall presentation is relaxed, yet incisive, with a refined authoritative quality – as though the amplifier was in complete control and completely unfazed by whatever demands might be made by the music.

Tonally, the impression is one of neutrality and truthfulness. The music sounds solid and commanding, yet this does not come at the expensive of delicacy or finesse. Bass is very deep and powerful, yet tight and controlled. The lower frequencies possess weight and a suitably rich sonority, while remaining nimble and articulate.

The upper frequencies sound clean and open, with good transient attack, impressive fine detail, but no sense of false brightness or added edge. For best results, we strongly recommend balanced interconnects

### CONNECTIONS

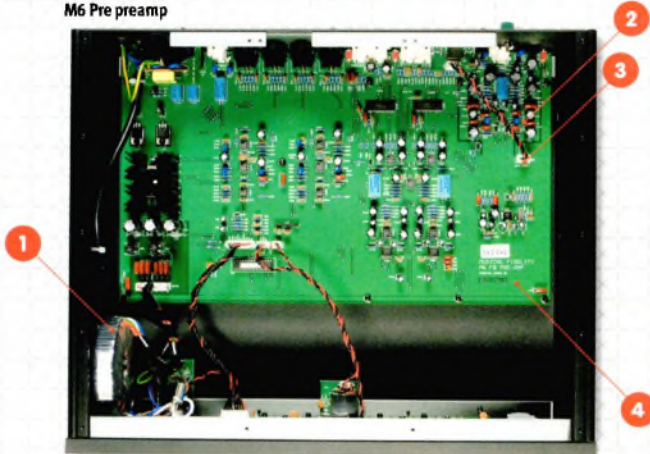


- 1 Phono stageset apart from other inputs
- 2 USB socket
- 3 AV bypass for integration into AV system
- 4 Pair of balanced inputs
- 5 Large external heatsink
- 6 Input-type selection switch
- 7 Pair of balanced and unbalanced inputs with looped outputs

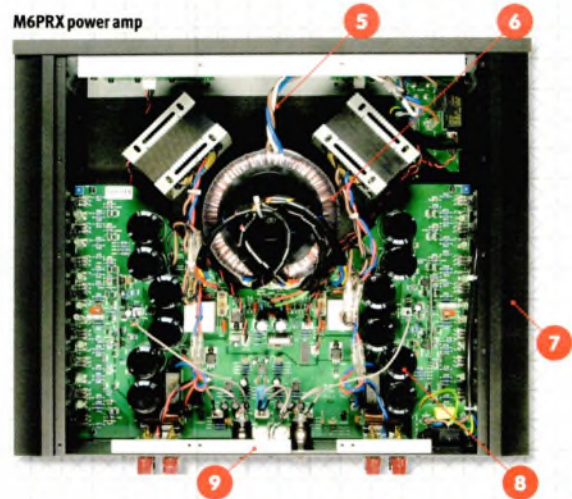


**HIDDEN TECH**

M6 Pre preamp



M6PRX power amp



- 1** Power supply isolated from input board
- 2** Phono stage is suitable for both MM/MC
- 3** USB inputs
- 4** Main board is isolated from front panel
- 5** Layout is symmetrical to keep signal paths the same length
- 6** Massive choke-regulated power supply
- 7** Large external heatsink
- 8** Dual mono layout of amplifier sections
- 9** Input placed between channels for short signal path

between preamp and power amp, as this gives the sound increased scale and dimensionality.

Same goes if your CD player has balanced outputs – investing in a set of balanced XLR cables will ensure the M6 pre/power delivers the best sound quality. Single-ended works fine, but balanced operation sounds noticeably better – bigger and more dynamic, with better separation – and easily justifies the extra cost of special cables.

MF's big power amps – like the kW750 – have a solid unflappable quality. Played loudly, they seem able to reproduce sharp transients and massive dynamic swings without flinching. While the M6PRX does not have the sheer muscle of the kW750, it subjectively creates the same aura of unflappable invincibility. You can push the amp hard without

ever sensing that it's struggling – though, inevitably, it will hit the end stop if you go too far. For most listeners, playing music in an average-sized room with speakers of reasonable (89dB) efficiency, the M6PRX will (probably) be all that's ever needed.

Having a built-in MM/MC phono stage is a nice little 'extra' – and something you don't get on the £8k Primo! Its performance is very good – clean, natural, and quiet.

**Clean and unflappable**

As we've noted already, this preamp/power amp combo is not inexpensive, but it is very keenly-priced – given the standard of build and sound quality. So here's a combination costing around £5k that challenges those amplifiers selling for two or three times its price – a capable and

**HOW IT COMPARES**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY'S superb £7,899 Primo preamp provided a stiff challenge for the M6PRE. Perhaps surprisingly – given the price difference, and the fact that one's tube, and the other's solid state – the two sounded remarkably similar. Ultimately, we felt the Primo gave a sound with greater depth and dimensionality. That the M6PRE got as close as it did though is high praise. In fact, the M6PRE gives a leaner, more tightly drawn presentation.**

While tonally, it's not quite as sumptuous as the Primo, the music is presented with clarity and impressive detail. Likewise, the PRX matched our kW750 disturbingly well. Compared via unbalanced cables, the big amp's dynamic scale and separation made the PRX seem slightly reined-in. However, the sonic gulf reduced significantly when balanced pre/power cables were used, allowing the PRX to face-down its bigger brother.

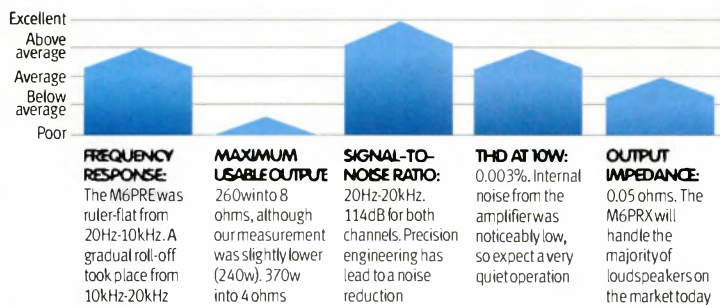
versatile package that offers superb performance and exceptional value. While some tube amplifiers produce a lush, more romantic sound, you'll search far and wide for one that combines the M6's tonal accuracy and neutrality with ample power. The M6 duo is for those wanting a truthful amplifier – one that neither adds nor subtracts from the source you feed it with.

While it's not falsely opulent or beguiling, here is a preamp/power amp set up that does exude a certain smooth natural charm and a clean and unflappable presentation.

Sonically, this combination delivers a solid, authoritative quality. It's always smooth and relaxed, rarely showing signs of strain – even when reproducing busy, complex music. ●

**TECH LABS**

**RESULTS AT A GLANCE**



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Great sound quality – smooth, clean, neutral and with ultra-low noise
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No balance control or stereo/mono switch
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** For those wanting a powerful high-end amp at a realistic price, this is a fantastic package
- SPECIFICATIONS** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**





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# Touchy, feely

The new Apple iPod Touch is incredibly slick and capable of doing some remarkable things, but is it really hi-fi? asks **Ed Selley**

**L**aunched in September, the 4th generation iPod Touch builds on the facilities of the previous models, but is still most easily explained as the screen, processor and basic design of the iPhone, without the ability to make and receive phone calls.

The path of the original iPod (which is now referred to as the Classic) from curio to hi-fi accessory has been a long one and the sheer numbers of docks available (some of which are iPod transports able to extract a digital signal directly from the iPod) are turning it into a hand-held music server. But do the extra features of the Touch make any difference in this context and do they affect the audio performance on the move?

## Mind-boggling

The features the Touch offers are impressive. The unit tested here is a 32Gb (eight and 64Gb versions are also available) 'multimedia platform', able to replay audio and video. While much of this content is still supplied via iTunes, the Touch can also use built-in Wi-Fi support to find content over the internet, via YouTube and from downloadable applications such as Spotify as well as directly from the iTunes store.

The options available from the App store beyond audio are mind boggling and allow you to use the Touch as an SPL meter, remote control, journey planner or indeed a generic device for wasting hours of your life should you go anywhere near the games section. You could call the Touch an MP3 player with knobs on, except Apple spurn anything so low-tech as a 'knob'.

## More functionality

The Touch is more expensive pound-to-gigabyte than the Classic, but does a great deal more and feels beautifully put together. This is not to say the

Touch is ergonomically perfect – the headphone socket is on the bottom of the chassis which means that it is almost always upside down when you extract it from a pocket. This matters because unlike more lowly iPods, the Touch has to be 'lit-up' to skip tracks back or forward which means turning it up the right way each time. As has been the case for years, the supplied earphones are really only fit for the bin, but overall this is a lot of product for the money.

## Beefed-up

The good news is that once you have substituted the supplied earphones for an aftermarket pair, the Touch makes a convincing case for itself as a personal audio device. The iPhone

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** iPod Touch  
**ORIGIN:** USA/China  
**TYPE:** iPod  
**WEIGHT:** 101g  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 111x58.9x7.2mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• 8, 32 or 64gb multimedia player  
• 960x640 full colour touchscreen  
• Stereo headphone socket  
• Built in Wi-Fi  
• Customisable applications  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Apple  
**TELEPHONE:** 0844 2090611  
**WEBSITE:** apple.com/uk

4 benefited hugely from a beefed-up headphone section and the Touch seems to have shared in this. Using AAC lossless files, the sound is open and as the Touch feels like it will go subjectively louder than the Classic, it feels much more relaxed and natural at ordinary listening levels. There also is an excellent sense of positioning and space. Moving through files at increasing compression, the Touch will stay perfectly listenable, with files compressed down to about 160kbps AAC, although some of the sense of air and space starts to diminish.

Connected to an iPod transport and outputting audio over S/PDIF, the Touch sounds the same as any other iPod. This is not to say that there are no benefits. The big, full-colour display is a lovely thing to use and is much easier to read at a distance and the Touch will successfully stream Spotify and other media over Wi-Fi via the dock output, which is a party piece that the Classic cannot do and something that the iPhone often struggles with as the dock will pick up cellular interference from the phone section.

## Class of its own

The iPod Touch can be taken in two different ways. If you are solely looking for a device to use in an iPod transport with personal listening as a secondary concern, it costs more and has less capacity than the iPod Classic. It also sounds the same over S/PDIF once docked (as would be expected).

If you spend much time listening over earphones, the Touch starts to make a case for itself even before the enormous functionality is taken into account. It is a more assured performer than the Classic and is worth the extra outlay. Once you start to make use of the extra features, the Touch is really in a class of its own. ●



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Incredibly flexible, improved sound quality via headphone socket

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Bottom mounted headphone socket annoying

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★

**FEATURES** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** An excellent sonic performer with huge flexibility and superb ergonomics

**OVERALL**

★★★★★



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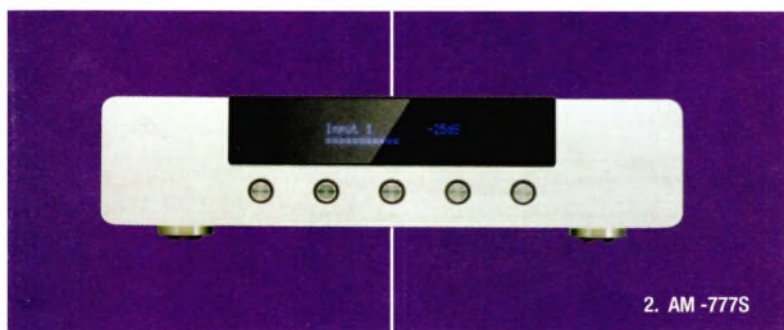
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# A reason to love CD

As **Richard Black** discovers, Audiolab's new CD player ups the ante with a host of technological innovations

**W**ell, it's a funny old world. Here we are with CD allegedly dead in the water and one of the most keenly-awaited products in a while is a – wait for it – CD player!

The experienced audiophile won't be too surprised at that, given the history of LP replay since the 1980s. And, as for the brand that's making the splash, Audiolab has been on and off the radar a bit over the years,

including the spell as TAG McLaren Audio and is now very keen to ensure a lively future by launching eye-catching products.

So just what's so eye-catching about a CD player? Basically two things: funky new design and internal technology. There are some unusual features externally, too, including multiple digital inputs and user-selectable digital filters.

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Audiolab 8200CD

**ORIGIN:** UK/China

**TYPE:** CD player/DAC

**WEIGHT:** 5kg

**DIMENSIONS:** 445x80x305mm

### FEATURES:

- 2 optical digital inputs (up to 96kHz)
  - 2 electrical digital inputs (up to 192kHz)
  - 1 B-type USB input (up to 96kHz)
  - Balanced and unbalanced outputs
- DISTRIBUTOR:** International Audio Group
- TELEPHONE:** 01480 447700
- WEBSITE:** [www.audiolab.co.uk](http://www.audiolab.co.uk)

We've seen both those features before, but not often in quite this much detail and there's an attractive additional extra to the USB input, in that it receives and plays back high-resolution audio (24-bit/96kHz sampling). The majority of USB DACs are limited to 16-bit/48kHz as a function of the hardware in them, but new chips only recently made available have increased this to 24-bit/96kHz and Audiolab has got in quickly to implement that.

## Boutique design

As for internal design and technology, it may ring bells if we mention that the designer of this CD player is one John Westlake. John was a bit of a cult figure in the late 1990s, thanks to his digital design work for Pink Triangle, which did nothing to diminish that company's reputation for individual, free-thinking audio products.

Products that included one of the earliest DACs with selectable filters, though in that case the selection





process involved buying and plugging in a whole filter module.

Fast forward to 2010 and it's much easier to design filters in software and implement them at the touch of a (remote control) button. In this case, four filters are on offer, with fast roll-off (basically the 'standard' filter used in most players since the year dot), slow roll-off, 'Optimal Frequency' and 'Optimal Transient'.

The last gives an impulse response completely lacking in the usual pre- and post-ringing, while Optimal Frequency has practically no aliasing at all and an extremely rapid roll-off between 20kHz and 22kHz. For more technical details on these options, see *Talking Point* opposite.

A fairly quick comparison was enough to convince us that, as we've often found, the fastest roll-off option (Optimal Frequency) gave the best fine detail and tonality and we stuck with that.

The central core of any digital audio device is the DAC and Audiolab's choice here is a chip we

## “What’s so eye-catching about a CD player? Basically, funky new design and internal technology.”

haven't come across before, from Canadian company ESS. A most impressive spec is implied for this chip, 32-bit conversion at over 84MHz. As stated, that's actually largely meaningless, though if you are technically minded and care to read the white paper and patent details from ESS, you'll find that there is certainly some quite-clever thinking in there. But we're not going to get bogged down in a sea of technical details, because that's not really relevant to how the thing actually sounds....

### Get the power

On the other hand, we're happy to give Audiolab credit for the sheer thoroughness with which this player

has been designed. The power supply arrangements are something to behold, for a start.

On removing the player's lid, there's a plethora of reservoir/smoothing capacitors and an impressive number of regulator chips too, signs that extensive measures have been taken against power supply contamination and cross-coupling. This isn't revolutionary stuff but it's well above par for a device in this price category. Ditto the use of discrete-transistor (instead of op-amp) analogue stages at the output.

Op-amps handle some of the audio processing, along with notably good-quality passive components. Less obvious internal stuff includes strenuous measures against jitter, applied both to the internal transport and data from the digital inputs. Again there's a certain degree of spin applied here and terms like '100 per cent jitter attenuation' require slight qualification, but it's clear that the



**TALKING POINT**

**ON THE FACE** of it, Audiolab's 'Optimal Frequency' filter shape should be ideal, as it meets two simple criteria: flat response to 20kHz and zero response above 22.05kHz. In the process it introduces rather lengthy ringing, though, which some argue is audible.

Optimal Transient, by contrast, has no ringing but a response which allows substantial aliasing – distortion above 20kHz.

The other filters, 'Fast' and 'Slow', are simply not quite as extreme as the Optimal Frequency and Optimal Transient respectively.



## Q&A...

WE SPOKE WITH JOHN WESTLAKE, AUDIOLAB'S DESIGNER, ABOUT THE 8200CD



**HFC: Surely that DAC isn't actually converting 32-bit words 84 million times a second?**

**GF:** The conversion indeed runs at over 84 million times per second, with a total of 512 individual binary elements per channel switched every 12 nanoseconds. To provide some perspective, think of SACD's native DSD format – there is but one element per channel switched every 354 nanoseconds! Each modulator operates with 32-bit input words and 6-bit noise-shaped output.

**As most DAC chips sound similar. In your experience, did you consider the Sabre32 DAC a big advance on the previous state-of-the-art?**

The ESS Saber32 combines many refreshing ideas, with a unique ASRC, Hyperstream Modulator architecture and Multi Array DAC. Its greatest advantage is its design flexibility, the more care spent on the surrounding circuit design, the greater the reward in sound quality.

**What would you say are the main advantages of the selectable filters?**

It allows us to suit different listeners' subjective preferences with a push of a button. The different featured filters provide a radically different take on the subject of oversampling filters...

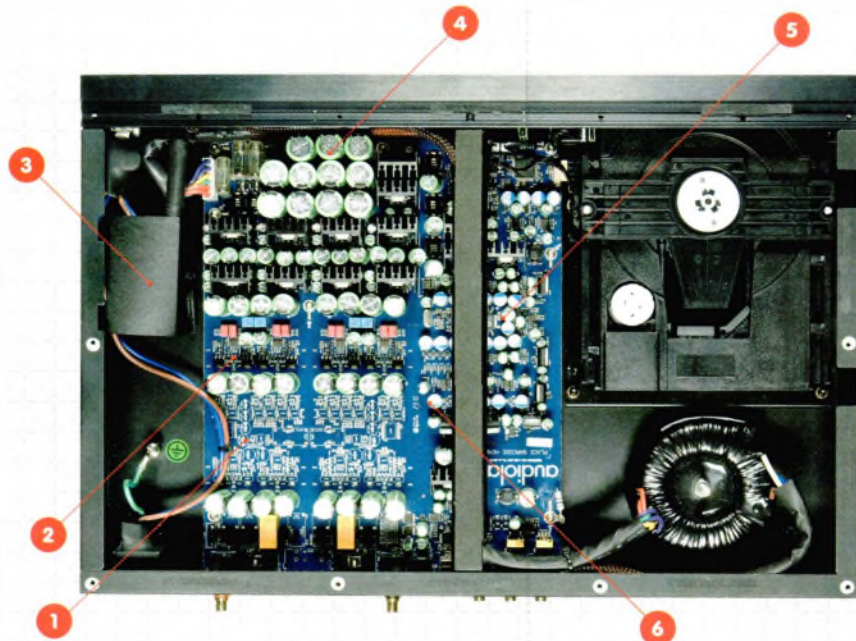
**That circuit board still has vacant positions. Are those for some even more capable model that we can look forward to?**

The future 8200CDQ will combine the features of the 8200CD, but with the addition of three line-level analogue inputs, preamp and Class A headphone output. There's also a 8200DQ to come later, but without the CD section, so a DAC with preamplifier.

**Why no SACD?**

While DSD offers tangible advantages over PCM Audio, it has not been a universal success. Adding SACD would have added significantly to the cost and complexity of the design. We have added 24-bit/96kHz USB and 24-bit/192 kHz digital inputs for higher resolution support.

## HIDDEN TECH



- 1 Vacant circuit board positions for other models
- 2 Symmetrical analogue filter stages
- 3 Filtering of mains supply
- 4 Multipower supply capacitors in parallel
- 5 ESS Sabre DAC
- 6 More supply-smoothing capacitors – low impedance

DAC chip and the circuits around it have some very serious jitter-reduction measures built in and, short of jitter so bad it causes stuttering (which would imply a seriously broken source), that particular bogey seems to have been rendered harmless.

Build quality is highly creditable. You don't get a thick front panel, nor anything fancy in the way of display or controls, but both internally and externally the player is well assembled and finished and it's also pretty smart. The display does show CD text information, which is a nice touch to have and is unusually informative about incoming data when the device is used as a DAC, showing both sampling rate and word length. Balanced outputs are a plus, too.

### Sounds like....

We're inclined to be a bit cynical about claims for millions of bits and super-high oversampling ratios because these things don't always translate into better sound, but it's always intriguing to see what the latest bit of super-tech does actually sound like.

As it happens, the 8200CD was one of the first bits of review equipment

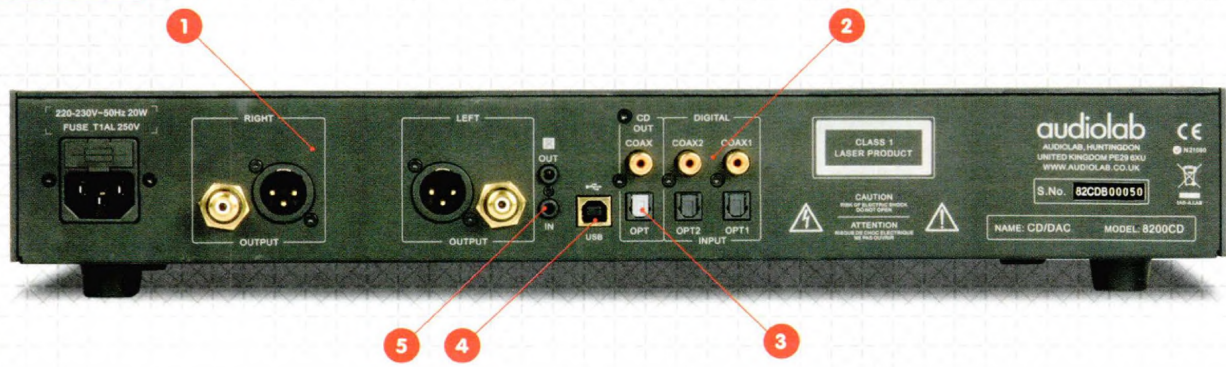
we listened to via a recently-revamped reference system (speakers cleaned inside and out, room rearranged and so on), so it was a doubly exciting experience. Bearing in mind the risk of getting carried away by such felicitous circumstances, we were at first disinclined to be too gushing in our notes on the new Audiolab, but as things went on and we became more sure of our reference points, we began to see some reasons why Audiolab's people are so full of beans over the new baby.

We've become accustomed to high standards of CD replay, so we weren't much surprised to hear plenty of detail, good bass and treble extension. Other basics are also well dealt with, which is very commendable, but not eyebrow-raising. What really caught our imagination, though, was the sheer togetherness of the sound. More than anything, that seems to be the hallmark of this player.

What do we mean by that? Prosaically put, it's that there's excellent integration between different aspects of performance. That always happens in live music, but not by any means invariably in reproduced sound. Bass may be



**CONNECTIONS**



- 1 **Balanced and unbalanced outputs**
- 2 **Digital inputs**
- 3 **Digital outputs**
- 4 **24-bit/96kHz capable USB input**
- 5 **12v triggers**

good most of the time, but becomes uncertain when the midrange gets busy, or detail may suffer at times when the treble's particularly bright. In this case, by contrast, the firm bass just seems to get even firmer in the presence of activity higher up the band, while detail is consistently precise.

As a result, music comes across with an unusually high degree of physicality, less vague than it often feels. Recordings are odd: since the earliest days of 78s, people have proclaimed that they sound 'just like the real thing' and yet improvements continue to be made and are readily apparent to anyone who pauses to listen.

We're not saying that the 8200CD is leaps and bounds ahead of the rest of the world. Indeed, we've heard esoteric players and DACs that can match it in any and all areas, but it rather impressively exceeds expectations for a mere £700 and, in the process, does make the point that many of its competitors just don't quite gel sonically.

A couple of concrete examples might help illustrate this. One recording we've enjoyed a lot is the Brahms *German Requiem* on Harmonia Mundi (we used the SACD layer to audition the players in this month's *Blind-Listening Group Test* p40). It's a well-made recording and on most CD players it has a lovely tonal balance, beautifully natural dynamics and very good imaging, too. But on the 8200CD it had that certain something extra, the last little bit of focus that made it all seem real, pinpointing the positions of the performers and crystallising their individual instrumental and vocal timbres.

In similar vein, an old favourite by Ian Dury showed more than ever, just how sharp and snappy his band sounds. The 8200CD also brought out like never before all the musical invention of the accompaniment and the humour and biting sarcasm in the great man's voice. We'd spotted these things before, but the achievement here was in reminding us, dramatically and emphatically, of it all. Rediscovering familiar tracks like that is always

**HOW IT COMPARES**

**PERHAPS THE MOST obvious competitor is the Cambridge Audio Azur 840C, last seen at a slightly higher price of £800.**

**Like the Audiolab, it's from a UK-based manufacturer that relies on Chinese manufacture to keep costs down, and it's full of clever technology, including unique upsampling to 384kHz using 'Adaptive Time Filtering'. It's a rather bigger and more imposing player than the Audiolab, and it has a bigger display, though we're not sure the display is exactly the glory of either player.**

**The Cambridge also has digital inputs, though less of them (two) and no USB. As for sound, we reckon differences aren't vast, but on the whole the Audiolab strikes us as a little more beguiling, more immediately involving and typically a little more captivating in the long term too.**

**The Cambridge is vastly analytical and is still certainly a very fine player, but the Audiolab may have just pipped it for best all-rounder.**

one of the most joyful effects of good new hi-fi!

**Thrilled to bits**

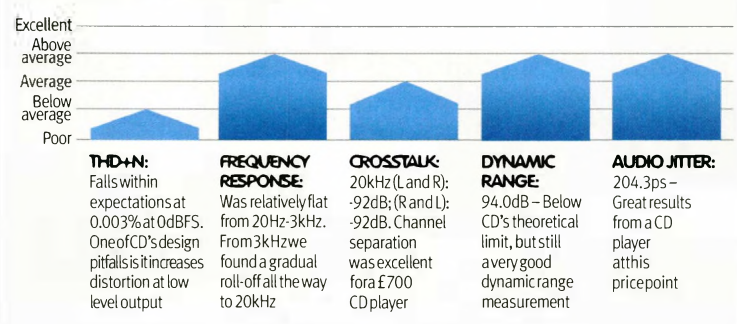
So in summary it's very much the musical and communicative skills of the 8200CD that we found ourselves enjoying, however fine its measured performance (which at least comforts us that we weren't hallucinating).

We'd have to say that if you're thrilled to bits with your current setup that's great, but if you audition this player it could just make you a teensy bit dissatisfied with things as they stand – and we all know where that road leads.

No doubt there will be some who just don't click with it. That's OK too – musical and sonic tastes vary and we wouldn't dream of dictating on the subject. If you already own equipment of the dCS/Meridian class this won't make you turn unfaithful to it. But if you're in the market at anywhere up to, at least, a grand, the 8200CD could just be the piece of equipment that makes you want to say in the demo room, "Where's the cash register?" ●

**TECH LABS**

**RESULTS AT A GLANCE**



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Excellent detail, neutrality and communication
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No SACD support; slightly unprepossessing display
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** One of the finest CD players at £700 it's simply steal
- SPECIFICATIONS** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**







# King of the airwaves

Analogue or digital? Before the decision is made for us, **Richard Black** considers the multi-purpose TEAC T-R650DAB

**S**tandalone 'real hi-fi' tuners (as opposed to table radios and so on) are getting distinctly thin on the ground these days. No doubt one significant reason for that is continuing uncertainty over whether and when FM will be switched off, so if you're about to spring for a tuner it certainly makes sense to get one that's compatible with both analogue and digital broadcasts. This new model from TEAC is just such a beast.

It's actually a full three-band tuner, with good old AM included. And in a further link with the old ways, it has separate FM and DAB tuner sections.

This is significant. Many current tuners (especially table radios) have a single tuner which pulls in both kinds of radio signal, doing quite a lot of the FM decoding digitally. That looks good on paper, but we've yet to hear a unit of that type that has really good FM performance. Typically, there's more background 'hash' than an all-analogue tuner provides and performance in the face of the insidious multi-path distortion is compromised.

## Audio buffering

Instead, TEAC uses a typical modern tuner head from KSE, which includes basically the complete RF-to-audio circuit in one little module. The main circuit board carries little more than

power supply components, some control functions and the most basic audio buffering.

As you'd expect, FM implements RDS and, of course, DAB includes various bits of text information as standard, so there's plenty to look at on the display. DAB's Dynamic Range Control is available and there's a numeric signal strength meter which doesn't tell one much in absolute terms, but is useful for optimising the position of an antenna.

Operation isn't quite the same as most other DAB radios as the 'Enter' button is separate from the tuning knob and there's a DAB feature we haven't seen before, manual tuning by frequency. Most users, however, will do as we did and activate the scan and station list functions.

## No ifs or buts

DAB tuners don't tend to sound much different from one another, and this one seems to follow that rule of thumb. Actually, we felt it was perhaps just a touch clearer and more open than available comparisons, but really there's very little in it. Its radio-side performance on DAB is also par for the course and we had no trouble at all getting breakup-free reception from a casually draped wire antenna. In other words, this is a good DAB tuner with no ifs or buts.

## DETAILS

- PRODUCT:** TEAC T-R650DAB  
**ORIGIN:** Japan/China  
**TYPE:** DAB/FM/AM tuner  
**WEIGHT:** 3.3kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 435x85x305mm  
**FEATURES:**
- DAB (band III only)
  - FM Radio Data System (RDS)
  - DAB Dynamic Range Control (high/low/off)
  - 30 presets each on FM and AM
  - Signal strength meter
  - DAB bitrate display
- DISTRIBUTOR:** TEAC  
**TELEPHONE:** 0845 1302511  
**WEBSITE:** teac.co.uk

## Roof-top antenna

FM is much harder to optimise and here we felt the budget nature of the T-R650 does show a bit. For a start, it's quite fussy about signal strength and wouldn't give us an enjoyable stereo output, however hard we tried with an indoor antenna. We wouldn't expect truly noise-free reception under such conditions but some tuners can at least eliminate the roughest background noises.

Fed from our roof-top antenna, the sound improved considerably and background noise decreased to just a little above the minimum one can expect. However, even in this case, the sound remained a little coarse and edgy. At this sort of price it seems rude to be too picky, but we recall better results from cheaper tuners of not very long ago.

## Energetic

In terms of actual audio performance, the T-R650 is well-balanced tonally, with good, strong bass and decent treble too. It is at its best with energetic music, where its good rhythmic qualities are best appreciated.

For many listeners, DAB may well be the preferred option, all else being equal, with music which majors in subtlety and detail. At the very least, it's good to have the choice! ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Practical and cost-effective with good DAB performance
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> FM reception seems rougher-sounding than usual
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> A good budget solution for the DAB user who wants to keep FM compatibility
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

**OVERALL**  
★★★★★



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision and Audio T are in the process of merging their respective businesses and will become one of the largest independent hi-fi and home cinema chains in the UK with over 50 stores nationwide

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**audio T**

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MONITOR  
AUDIO  
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£2199**  
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PACKAGE OFFER

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**SYSTEM OFFER**

**MARANTZ  
CD6003 & PM6003  
MISSION  
MX1 SPEAKERS**

PACKAGE OFFER

**£579**



**SAVE £1586**

★★★★★  
**SYSTEM OFFER**

**LEEMA  
ANTILA II  
TUCANA II  
SPENDOR  
A6 SPEAKERS  
£6999**

PACKAGE OFFER



★★★★★  
**SYSTEM OFFER**



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SOLO MINI  
MUSIC SYSTEM  
£649**

ALSO SOLO MUSIC FM £649 **LAST FEW!**



OR WITH  
**MONITOR AUDIO  
BRONZE BX2 SPEAKERS  
£699**

PACKAGE OFFER

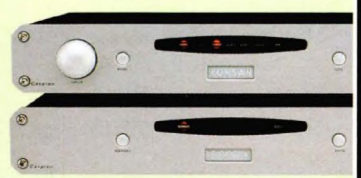


★★★★★  
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DM2/6  
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<b>BRIGHTON HOVE</b> 01273 733338	<b>CHELTHENHAM</b> 01242 241171	<b>HOLBORN</b> 020 7837 7540	<b>MAIDSTONE</b> 01622 686366	<b>POOLE</b> 01202 671677	<b>TUNBRIDGE WELLS</b> 01892 531543	<b>IRELAND DUBLIN</b> 01 275 1100
<b>BRISTOL</b> 0117 974 3727	<b>EPSOM</b> 01372 720720	<b>KINGSTON</b> 020 8547 0717	<b>NORWICH</b> 01603 767605	<b>READING</b> 0118 959 7768	<b>WATFORD</b> 01923 213533	<small>Pricing in Ireland may vary from the UK</small>
<b>BROMLEY</b> 020 8290 1988	<b>EXETER</b> 01392 218895	<b>LEEDS WETHERBY</b> 01937 586886	<b>NOTTINGHAM</b> 0115 911 2121	<b>SEVENOAKS</b> 01732 459555	<b>NEW WEYBRIDGE</b> 01932 840859	<b>WATFORD STORE RELOCATING TO CHORLEYWOOD</b>
<b>CAMBRIDGE</b> 01223 304770	<b>GLASGOW</b> 0141 332 9655	<b>LINCOLN</b> 01522 527397	<b>OXFORD</b> 01865 241773	<b>SHEFFIELD</b> 0114 255 5861	<b>WITHAM ESSEX</b> 01376 501733	<small>Please contact the Watford store for more information</small>

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**Please Note:** Audio T stores that are not listed above carry an alternative product range, predominantly 2-channel, and have their own dedicated website and advertising. Until the merger is complete, which will take a few months, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision and Audio T will remain separate legal entities. Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWADO). **Advert valid until 09/12/2010, E&OE**

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## HI-FI SEPARATES

### CYRUS



Cyrus' award-winning CD Xt SE and DAC X have been upgraded with a '+' suffix. In a recent review, this combination when used with 2 x PSX-R power supplies, received the prestigious 'Editor's Choice' award by Hi-Fi Choice magazine.

The XP amplifiers are based on the circuitry of the top of the range DAC XP+. The entry-level 6XP includes 6 line level inputs along with a zone 2 feature while the 8XP d combines the XP series pre-amplifier with a newly revised power amp, and contains an onboard DAC for digital sources.



CDX t SE+  
CDB SE

CD6 SE  
DAC X+

DAC XP+  
6XP / 8XP

8XPd  
PRE XP

X POWER  
PSX-R

### LEEMA ACOUSTICS

The Stream III CD player features an all-new slot loading transport controlled by Leema's own custom firmware providing secure and reliable disc handling and the best retrieval of digital information this is coupled with the new Leema Quad DAC is a refinement of Leema's own highly successful MD2 Multi-DAC giving a shorter signal path and even better performance. The Stream III features a USB digital output enabling bit-perfect digital archiving.



Many ideas that were pioneered in the award-winning, state-of-the-art, Tucana II, are incorporated in the Pulse III to produce an amplifier with incredible detail and resolution, vanishingly low noise and distortion, and that always communicates with an infectious musicality.

### PULSE III

ANTILA II  
TUCANA II

### ARCAM FMJ

Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and sound quality far beyond that of budget separates.



CD17

CD37

A18

A28

A38

### AUDIOLAB

Audiolab's new 8200CD is a fully-featured integrated DAC and CD transport of advanced specification, and impeccable performance. Featuring a number of digital inputs, it is the most flexible integrated DAC / CD on the market.



8200CD

8200A

8200CDQ

8200P

### ROKSAN CASPIAN M2

Roksan replaces its hugely successful Caspian M series-1 with the Caspian M2 amplifier and matching CD player.



KANDY K2 CD

KANDY K2 AMP

### MARANTZ

CD6003  
PM6003

This award-winning CD and amplifier continues the Marantz tradition of building products that represent outstanding value.



CD5004

PM5004

SA-KI PEARL

PM-KI PEARL

### ROTEL 06 SE SERIES

The 06 SE series includes four new components and updated versions of the classic CD player and 3 stereo amplifiers.



RCD-06SE

RA-04SE

RA-05SE

RA-06SE

## TURNTABLES

### PROJECT

### ESSENTIAL

The Essential is a new, 2 speed, entry-level turntable. It comes fitted with an Ortofon OMB 3E cartridge, dust cover, is easy to set-up and sounds great.



GENIE 3  
DEBUT III  
XPRESSION III

## HI-FI SPEAKERS

### MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM • SILVER RX • NEW BRONZE BX

**Platinum** - This series has been expertly crafted to draw a rich natural radiance from the most demanding music, reproducing the power and scale of dramatic passages with breathtaking fidelity.

**Silver RX** - Available in a choice of real wood veneers and high-gloss piano finishes, Silver RX uses techniques and materials from the Platinum and Gold ranges for outstanding performance.

**Bronze BX** - This exciting new range consists of seven models that build on the strengths of the award-winning BR Series.



### VIENNA ACOUSTICS CONCERT GRAND

### KEF NEW Q SERIES

**Concert Grand** - As with all models in the Grand™ range, the composer name is selected based on the scale, complexity and power of performance for which they are best known. Featured here are the Beethoven 'Concert' and 'Baby' Grand.

**Q Series** - Experiencing the new Q Series is like hearing a system costing many times more.

- All new Uni-Q array
- Advanced bass technologies
- Total system design

Pictured Q100 & Q500



### B&W CM SERIES • 600

### SPENDOR A-LINE

**CM Series** from Bowers & Wilkins has long been a favourite among its discerning customers. Offering a combination of high performance and exquisite styling at a very affordable price.



**600** - This, the fourth generation of the 600 Series, features improved drive units, minimalist crossovers and a whole new design.

**A-Line** - A5, A6 and A9 are compact, high performance, floor standing speakers. They utilize drive units and other design innovations developed for Spendor's flagship ST & SA1 speakers.



PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO)



## HI-FI SYSTEMS AND MUSIC SERVERS

### PEACHTREE AUDIO NOVA

Combining a world class 80wpc integrated amplifier and DAC - Nova is an ideal choice if you're looking to improve computer-based or streaming audio to a "high-end" performance level.



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### ARCAM rCUBE

The new Arcam rCube is a high fidelity audio system that combines flexibility, portability and compatibility with the very latest audio sources in a single, beautiful package.



**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2010**  
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
ARCAM rCUBE

### rDAC

Offering supreme audio and build quality, the new rDAC is an ideal upgrade for conventional sources and network audio products alike.



**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2010**  
BEST NETWORK AUDIO INTERFACE

### ARCAM SOLO NEO

Arcam's new Solo Neo combines superb music performance and network audio capabilities allowing it to play stored music in a multitude of formats, along with its internal CD player and radio tuner.



**Hi-Fi Choice**  
**RECOMMENDED**

### SONOS ZP120 / ZP90 / CR200

This multi-room digital music system lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.



S5 BR100

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2010**  
BEST NETWORK MUSIC SYSTEM

### OLIVE 4HD NEW 3HD

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**Hi-Fi Choice**  
**RECOMMENDED**

## BLU-RAY PLAYERS

### SONY

Sony's new range includes the 2D BDP-S370 and 3D ready BDP-S470 and BDP-S570.



BDP-S370 BDP-S570

### YAMAHA

Enjoy outstanding performance from all your discs including DVD-Audio and SACD.



BD-S1067 - 3D/DVD-AUDIO/SACD

### PIONEER

Get the most out of your movie experience with Pioneer's new BDP-430 and BDP-LX54.

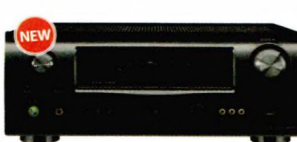


BDP-430 BDP-LX54

## HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIERS AND RECEIVERS

### DENON

Denon's range of A/V receivers bring out the full performance of HD audio and HD video.



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AVR-2311 AVR-4311

### YAMAHA

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RX-V667 RX-V1067  
RX-V2067 RX-V3067

### ONKYO

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TX-NR708 TX-NR1008

## HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGES

### B&W

#### MINI THEATRE

These award-winning packages combine style with excellent sound.



MT-25 MT-30

### Q ACOUSTICS

#### 2000 CINEMA PACK

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### KEF

#### T SERIES

Enjoy serious hi-fi sound with KEF's ultra-slim T Series speakers. Featuring a new low profile woofer and vented tweeter for clear midrange and sparkling detail.



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### ROKSAN

#### CASPIAN M SERIES-1 PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

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### LEEMA ACOUSTICS

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### TEAC

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### PIONEER

#### BDP-LX52 BLU-RAY DISC PLAYER

**£269**

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### ROKSAN LAST FEW! CASPIAN M SERIES-1 PRE/MONO POWER (PAIR)

**£2299**

### ARCAM

#### SOLO MINI MUSIC SYSTEM

**£649**

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### SONOS

#### BU250 BUNDLE

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**SAVE £££**

### MONITOR AUDIO

#### BRONZE BR1 SPEAKERS

**£119**

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### ARCAM

#### BDP100 BLU-RAY PLAYER AVR500 A/V RECEIVER

**£2999**

**SAVE £556**



### DENON & MONITOR AUDIO

#### D-M38 SYSTEM BR1 SPEAKERS

**£299**

**SAVE £110**

### MARANTZ

#### M-CR502 SYSTEM [EX-SPEAKERS]

**£329**

**SAVE £70**

PLEASE NOTE: PRICING IN IRELAND MAY VARY FROM THE UK







# The Sttaf of life



Clean and simple are the watchwords for this very pretty and unusually compact two-way floorstander, says **Paul Messenger**

**U**nderstatement is perhaps the most appropriate word that describes Totem loudspeakers.

Whereas most speaker brands tend to promote themselves by highlighting specific technical or engineering features that distinguish themselves from their rivals – the so-called USP (unique selling point) – Totem's marketing approach has much more to do with emphasising the reproduction of the emotion and soul of the music.

Superficially, at least, there's nothing particularly unusual about the Sttaf. It's a simple two-way floorstander, based on a 140mm bass/mid driver with a 95mm diameter flared and doped paper cone. This is loaded by the larger, upper section of the enclosure and a rear port and crosses over using a second-order network at around 2.5kHz to a 25mm fabric dome tweeter.

## Detail obsession

The devil, as they say, is actually in the obsessive attention paid to the fine detail here and that's the key factor which goes some way towards justifying the Sttaf's substantial

£1,695 pricetag. Enclosure construction methods are rarely given much attention, for example, but in this case the joints between the panels are made using traditional interlocking mitring methods, to give superior fit, strength and sealing.

As the back panel, at least, is just 1mm thick, construction seems to be deliberately fairly lightweight, presumably to minimise energy storage. Furthermore, no damping fill could be seen within the enclosure itself, though the brochure does mention the use of borosilicate as a damping material.

## To load or not to load?

The column itself is stiffened by two cross-braces. The upper one is angled and perforated by large holes, to maintain acoustic continuity and avoid generating focused standing waves. The lower one seals off a section at the bottom of the enclosure for the optional addition of mass-loading material. Although the manual recommends adding 2.3-4.5kg of dry sand, the distributor believes that mass loading is really only beneficial if stability is likely to



The tweeter has a 25mm soft-fabric dome and special modifications behind the magnet to lower the resonance and avoid reflections

## DETAILS

- PRODUCT:** Totem Sttaf  
**ORIGIN:** Canada  
**TYPE:** Two-way floorstanding loudspeaker  
**WEIGHT:** 10kg  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 160x850x242mm  
**FEATURES:**
- Rear port
  - Grille is optional extra
  - 1x25mm fabric dome tweeter
  - 1x140mm bass/mid driver
  - Separate wood plinth
  - Interlocking mitred enclosure construction
  - Borosilicate damping
  - Twin socket/binder terminal pairs
  - Finished in choice of three wood veneers or satin white
  - Hard-wired crossover, 2nd order, 2.5kHz
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Triangle Industries  
**TELEPHONE:** 003215285585  
**WEBSITE:** totemacoustic.com



**PUT BOROSILICATE** into Wikipedia and one is redirected to 'borosilicate glass', a type of glass that adds boron oxide to silica in order to lower its co-efficient of thermal expansion. Totem uses a costly paint-like variation on the borosilicate theme, which has small particles that have high thermal conductivity suspended in a polymer carrier. This treatment is sprayed onto the enclosures in order to assist in dispersing the energy that's generated by the sound vibration created from the back of the drive unit. There's no need to use damping material within the enclosure, so the hysteretic energy-storing effects of such absorbents are avoided.

be a significant issue and that the best sound quality is achieved without any.

Another unusual feature concerns the floor coupling. A small plinth is supplied, which slightly increases the lateral stability footprint and is equipped with very effective spike sockets. The spikes themselves are slightly decoupled by the use of silicone washers and the plinths themselves are also slightly decoupled by the beads of glue that are supplied to fix them to the enclosures – an interestingly unconventional approach, but one that makes accurately lining up plinth and enclosure rather tricky.

The enclosure surfaces are finished in a choice of three high-quality real-

**“What really matters is that the soul of the music is communicated properly and this is something the Sttaf does very well.”**

wood veneers, or painted satin white and the edges around the front and back are delicately chamfered. The connection block, set a little too high off the ground perhaps, carries two pairs of socket/binder terminals; curiously, a small piece of foam is glued in place just above the terminals, apparently in order to block a tiny 1.5mm hole and prevent it from generating unwanted high-frequency coloration.

## Warm and Laid-back

The Sttaf was primarily fed from a system comprising a Naim NAC552 preamp, with NAP500 and NAP135 power amplifiers, driven from Naim CDS3/555PS and Rega Valve Isis CD players, as well as a Magnum Dynalab MD106T FM tuner.

Vinyl record players included a Linn/Rega hybrid, a Funk modified Linn with FXR II tonearm and a Roksan TMS3/Artemiz, all using a Soundsmith Strain Gauge cartridge. Cables were from Naim, Phonosophie, The Chord Company, TM Systems and Vertex AQ.

You won't get deep bass or massive loudness capabilities here of course, but those are the inevitable and acceptable consequences of any small loudspeaker. What really matters is that the heart and soul of the music is communicated properly and this is something that the Sttaf does very well.



**HOME DEMO**

Please contact us to arrange a demonstration of our preamplifier or our Moving Coil Step-up in your own system



# Putting Music First

Our award winning pre-amplifier lets you hear the music the way it was recorded;

uncoloured,  
unsullied,  
unsurpassed.

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Andrew Harrison ~ Hi Fi News



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## Moving Coil Step up

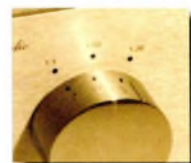
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Jimmy Hughes - Hi-Fi Choice

*"...you're in rarefied super-fi territory"*

Andrew Harrison - Hi Fi +



**Syndicate 22**

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**DETAILS**



- 1 Tweeter has a 25mm soft-fabric dome
- 2 Two pairs of socket/binder terminals permit bi-wiring/-amping
- 3 Rear port, tuned to 48Hz, roughly halfway up the back panel
- 4 Small hole near base can be used to add mass-loading for added stability
- 5 Plinth widens the footprint and is decoupled by glue-fixing and silicone washers
- 6 Surface finish options include three real-wood veneers or satin white
- 7 The 140mm pressed steel frame bass/mid driver has a 95mm diameter flared and doped paper cone

**HOW IT COMPARES**

**TWO OBVIOUS** competitors to the SttAF were featured in our recent group test (HFC 337). Both the PMC GB1i and the Kudos X2 are similar in size and driver configuration to this Totem model, and both cost a little less too. Both of these clearly merit recommendation and the similarities between the three models is significantly greater than their differences. Does the SttAF justify its admittedly modest price premium? On balance the answer is yes, depending a little on the way the port resonance interacts with individual listening room characteristics. While it has slightly lower sensitivity (and dynamic expression might seem a little understated), it's also the smoothest of the three, and very low box coloration ensures a wide dynamic range. The most obvious advantage of the SttAF is that it always remains easy on the ears, yet this never seems to get in the way of conveying the emotion of the music.

upper midband and presence zones and the little SttAF somehow manages to sound a whole lot larger than its physical dimensions lead one to believe is possible. This is particularly impressive with choral music, as the voices are always delicate and well-formed, while the exceptional cabinet control ensures very little impediment to the reproduction of the low level acoustic of the recording venue.

While some might find it a shade too laid back for their personal taste, we believe that these will be very much the minority and most will welcome the impressive sense of scale it delivers, alongside a welcome freedom from any aggressive tendencies. The top end is quite obvious, but it's also quite sweet and very well integrated, so it supplies plenty of detail, but is not in any way obtrusive.

Colorations are well under control, and the enclosure is clearly doing a good job of loading the main drive unit without adding any significant contribution of its own. The fact that it's actually quite a lightweight affair, as well as properly stiffened, means that the enclosure shows little tendency to store energy. This ensures a wide dynamic range and also helps the SttAF sound quick and lively in spite of its basically laid back character – an unusual but unquestionably winning combination.

The spacious imaging will undoubtedly appeal to those who favour recordings made in a natural acoustic – choral material is particularly well served here. Indeed, the only type of music likely to catch out the SttAF is heavy rock, where the limited ultimate loudness capability might start to become exposed.

It's easy to underestimate the capabilities of a small floorstander such as this. It doesn't look like a lot of speaker for £1,695, but it delivers a performance that belies its size and fully justifies its price. ●

While one might fairly criticise some minor departures from strict neutrality – the overall character here is quite warm and laid-back. For example – this is a speaker that's very easy to like and always makes the music sound thoroughly enjoyable.

The bass end is certainly rather strong, one contributing factor being that the port-tuning frequency (around 49Hz) is very close to a major mode in our listening room. Some mid-bass excess is therefore only to be expected and while the bottom end is not its strong point – it lacks some grip, poise and clarity – it somehow mostly manages to avoid delivering an isolated 'thump'.

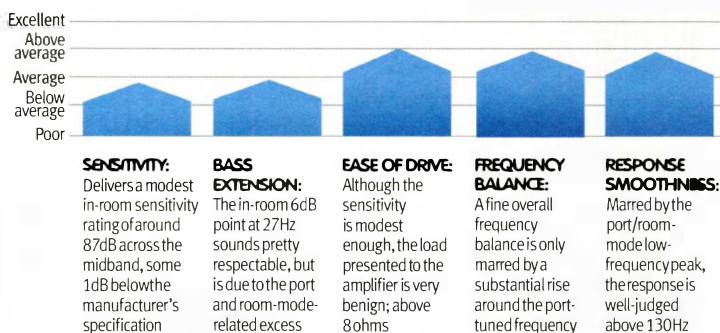
Although the very lowest octave isn't on the agenda, there's little evidence here of the upper bass leanness that all too often afflicts speakers of a similar size and configuration. Indeed, the generally warm character throughout the bass region is very welcome, in that it adds a surprisingly good impression of scale and weight and, therefore, compensates to a considerable extent for the lack of genuine extension.

**Spacious imaging**

Combine that with exceptionally spacious and out-of-the-box stereo imaging, and a tonal balance that is unusual in slightly underplaying the

**TECH LABS**

**RESULTS AT A GLANCE**



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Beautifully judged balance gives fine scale and involving voicing
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Bass grip and grunt and loudness capability are limited
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Happiest at modest loudness levels, this speaker delivers good scale with fine midband
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**





# [audio physic]

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# Bang-on sound

**Alvin Gold** is very impressed with the T500 loudspeaker from Teufel, one of the best-known European direct-sell, hi-fi companies

**T**eufel is by far the best known exponent of direct sell loudspeakers and has been steadily raising its profile in the UK over the last couple of years. The big difference between Teufel and other brands is that they're not available from hi-fi dealers, cutting out the middleman, which means lower selling prices, so to an extent you have to take its qualities on trust. But you do get a generous eight-week trial period, during which the speakers can be returned for a refund if you find you can't get along with them. An additional confidence builder, is the astonishing twelve-year guarantee period, yes that's right, twelve years!

## Conventional design

The T500 is one of the latest from Teufel, a classic three-way floor-stander which, thanks to their distribution model, sells for a very attractive price and pitches Teufel into direct competition with some of the more popular mainstream brands, including Monitor Audio and Wharfedale.

Although essentially conventional in design, there are some noteworthy features, which are not quite by the numbers – see *Our Verdict* below.

The drive unit complement includes a 28mm fabric-dome tweeter, two 170mm bass drivers and a similar size midrange unit, the size chosen to provide the compact footprint and sleek lines that ensures the speaker will not be intrusive in most rooms.

The bass drivers uses Kevlar mesh diaphragms, with long-throw suspensions, while the midrange unit has a sandwich pulp cone. Bi-wiring or (even) bi-amping are both supported. Finally the tall slender reflex loaded enclosure is fitted with a cleverly integrated platform base.

## Sturdy

A lot of effort has gone into optimising dispersion and minimising phase error, as well as improving

time alignment at the point where the tweeter takes over the reins, which is the reason for the stepped-baffle and the deeply recessed tweeter dome. But even leaving this to one side, the T500 is impressively constructed, the sturdy woodwork being made from 18mm MDF with a dark vinyl-wrap wood-effect finish. The price doesn't allow for a real-wood finish.

More impressive than build quality is the T500's high-value rating, which is largely attributable to the fact that the speakers are sold direct to the end user.

The T500 is ready to accept spikes or isolation pads. They don't come in the box as standard, but isolation pads are available optionally, costing

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Teufel T500  
**ORIGIN:** Germany  
**TYPE:** 3-way floorstanding bass reflex  
**WEIGHT:** 26kg each  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 1050x195x325mm  
**FEATURES:**  
• Twin bass drivers  
• Bi-wirable/bi-ampable  
• Integrated platform support  
• Base vented reflex port  
• Phase compensated tweeter  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** Teufel  
**TELEPHONE:** 00800200300400  
**WEBSITE:** teufelaudio.com

around £25 for a set and you can get spikes from various third party sources. Don't economise on this: the tall, narrow form factor places stability at a premium.

## Deep and powerful

This is a high-value package, with a grown up performance, but – and inevitably there is a but – there is more quantity here than quality. The T500 is well made and presented and the bass is moderately deep and powerful, but it is also uneven. The polar response from the tweeter is odd: you need to line up fairly accurately with the tweeter's main axis to achieve a smooth, well-extended response and something similar happens in the low and middle-frequency range too. In this case the effect has little to do with the listening axis, but the bass and midband are similarly uneven, a little wooden and lumpy if you will.

If this sounds like damning criticism, it must be seen in the context of value. There is no questioning that the Teufel offers good value for money and with some care over details like spikes, as well as room positioning, you can achieve a good working balance.

## Audiophile perspective

There is no denying that you get a real bang for your buck here and the ability to audition the speakers in your home for a long period. But we never felt completely comfortable with this speaker, which seems to have been designed more by the numbers, rather than real inspiration. There is nothing objectionable about the sound, but it is more workmanlike than inspired.

Of course, if funds are limited, there are bound to be trade-offs, but from the audiophile perspective we would gladly sacrifice a little of the bass extension for greater overall refinement. ●



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Good value, solid build, extended warranty

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not quite directionally uniform in output as expected

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Strong value for money and excellent trial period and warranty take most of the worries out of buying direct

**EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

### OVERALL







# Progressive electronica

Electrocompaniet has heavily revised its flagship integrated for the MkII version. **Ed Selley** rings the changes

**E**lectrocompaniet has been rather more active in the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice* over the last few years, but a major revision to a product in its 'classic' line is still sufficiently unusual to warrant us giving it some attention.

The EC15 MkII replaces the EC15, which in turn replaced the EC14.7. Rather confusingly, the changes involved in going from the 4.7 to the 5 were generally considered detail ones, but warranted a new model number. The MkII, has virtually no components in common with the MkI, but retains the model number! This might prove a challenge to dealers and customers, but we are sure everyone will manage.

## Classic look

The EC15 MkII is a 120w per channel integrated amp finished in the

company's traditional casework, complete with a thick perspex front panel and a quartet of control buttons – left and right selecting inputs and up and down controlling volume. Aesthetically, this rather divides opinion with some people who love the rather retro-futuristic appearance and those who regard it as a fingerprint magnet and dust trap.

The MkII introduces a neat LED display to show the selected input in place of the older backlit 'block' design. This is easy to read and a marked improvement on its predecessor. We had hoped that this might have included the facility for the EC15 MkII to default to the last selected input – something that the EC15 and EC13 cannot do – but the MkII selects the first balanced input on start-up, whether you use it or not.

The casework is comparatively large, with the EC15 MkII nearly

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Electrocompaniet  
EC15 MkII

**ORIGIN:**  
Norway

**TYPE:**  
Integrated amplifier

**WEIGHT:**  
20kg

**DIMENSIONS:**  
(WxHxD)  
483x135x405mm

**FEATURES:**  
• 120w integrated  
amplifier

• Twin balanced  
inputs

• Proprietary  
floating-transformer  
technology

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Electrocompaniet

**TELEPHONE:**  
020 8893 5835

**WEBSITE:**  
electrocompaniet.com

half-a-metre wide and over 400mm deep. This means that most equipment racks will struggle to accommodate it and you will most likely need to place it on a top shelf.

The fit and finish is extremely good with negligible panel gaps, excellent paint finish and the casework seems less resonant than on some older models. This also contributes towards the impressive 20kg weight. Mention must also be made of the excellent quality speaker terminals and input connections that feel superbly over-engineered in use.

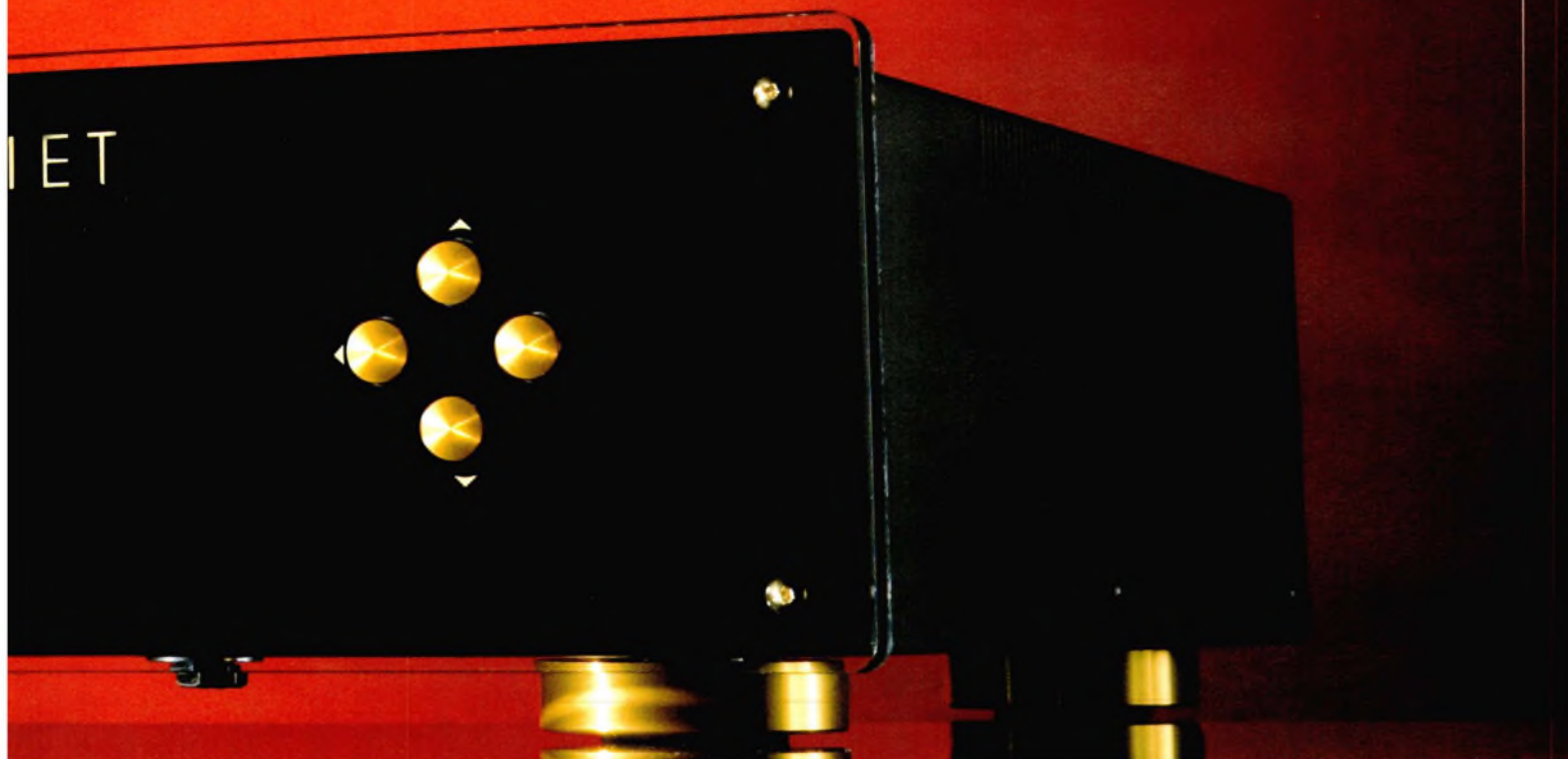
## Under the hood

Internally, the only major component retained from the older model is the transformer. This is understandable, given Electrocompaniet's use of their distinctive Floating transformer technology (FTT, see opposite). Otherwise, the MkII takes the basic premise of the original EC15 and makes substantial improvements.

The MkII doubles the number of output devices used to improve bass control and stability when driving difficult loads. This is further improved by the larger bank of reservoir capacitors which allow for greater current delivery.

In practice, the EC15 MkII is unlikely to struggle with any speaker design at a comparable price point, including electrostatic and planar designs. Like virtually every other Electrocompaniet component, the EC15 MkII is a fully balanced design





and sports a pair of balanced inputs to take advantage of this.

Electrocompaniet make no apologies for preferring the balanced connections and, to this end, supply a set of RCA-XLR adaptors to allow any would be owner to experience at least some of the benefits even if he or she's source equipment is not equipped with XLR outputs.

The EC15 MkII is also fitted with a balanced preamp output, allowing it to connect to a matching power amplifier, either in a bi-amping configuration or exclusively as a preamp. The other four line inputs are the conventional RCA type.

The EC15 MkII has to be considered

**“It takes many of the traditional virtues and builds on them, adding a sense of rhythm.”**

relatively good value. The build quality is up to the standard we would expect and it supports a healthy number of inputs with full remote control.

Most importantly, the amplification stage itself appears to be well-thought-out and comprised of high-quality components.

The 120-watt output seems believable under the circumstances

and means that system building around the Electrocompaniet should not be very difficult.

The lack of internal phono stage places the EC15 MkII at a slight disadvantage for vinyl fans, however, against some of similarly priced competition. But equally, the pair of balanced inputs is a useful feature for anybody with more than one suitably equipped source

### Wide boy

Sonically, the EC15 MkII is classic Electrocompaniet. The defining characteristic is an extremely wide soundstage, which seems to extend well beyond the physical placement



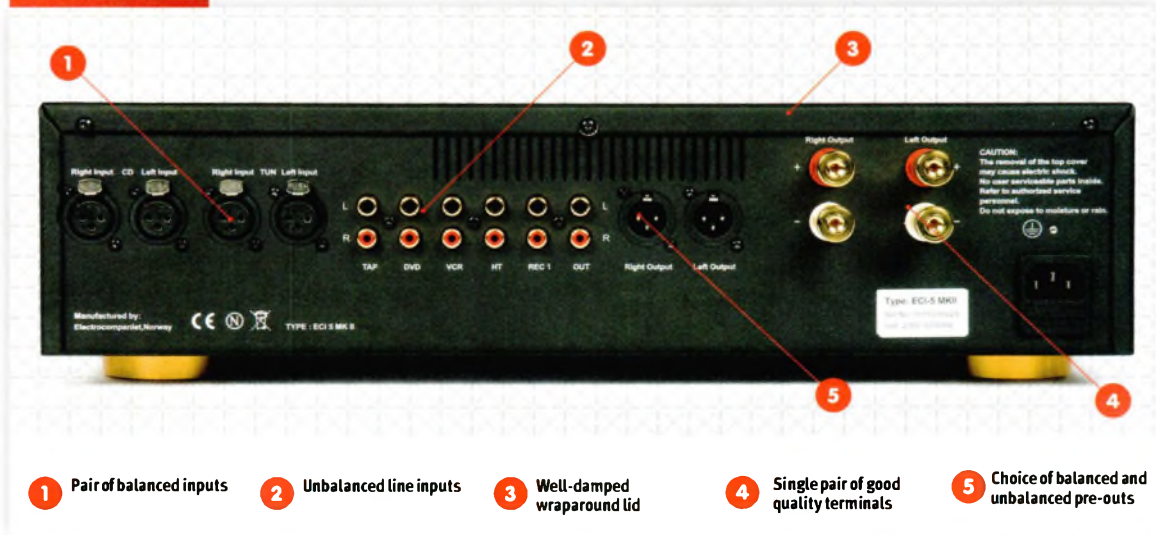
### TALKING POINT

**ELECTROCOMPANIET** are particularly proud of their Floating Transformer Technology (FTT), that features prominently in the EC15 MkII, as it does in virtually all other products in the range.

The technology essentially involves not connecting the connection point of two windings of the power transformer directly to ground. Instead, Electrocompaniet use one bridge and capacitor for each winding of the transformer and ground the bridge. This keeps the earth and signal ground separate and – so goes the theory – results in quieter and improved performance.

It is telling that this transformer is one of the few components from the original EC15 that has made it into the MkII version and is some indication of how important Electrocompaniet regard FTT in terms of overall performance.

### CONNECTIONS



1 Pair of balanced inputs

2 Unbalanced line inputs

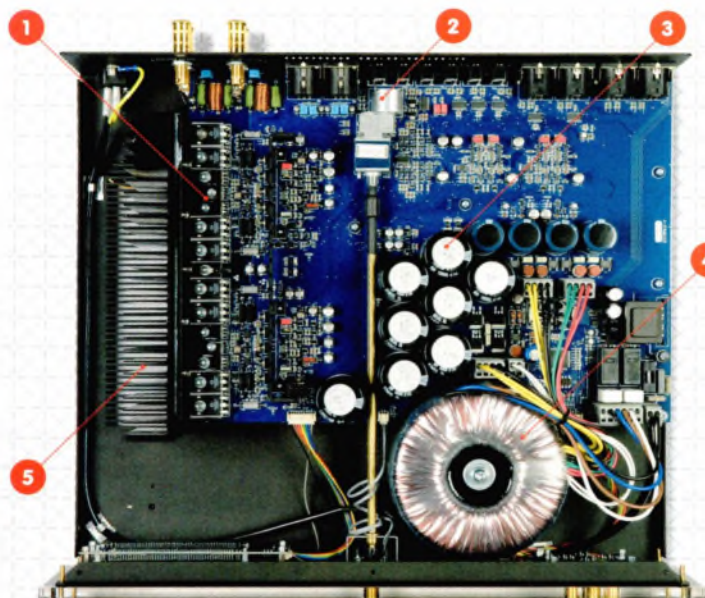
3 Well-damped wraparound lid

4 Single pair of good quality terminals

5 Choice of balanced and unbalanced pre-outs



**HIDDEN TECH**



- 1** Output stage with additional output devices
- 2** Volume pot mounted on rear plate with long pole to display
- 3** Larger bank of reservoir capacitors
- 4** Toroidal PSU casing
- 5** Internal heatsink

of loudspeakers. This enormous sense of space gives the ECI5 MkII a relatively easy job of placing musicians and instruments coherently in relation to one another within it.

The large soundstage does have a habit of persisting, even when listening to small recordings, so there can be slight loss of intimacy to their reproduction as they are given more space than perhaps they had in reality. Many will accept this trade off for the sense of realism that the ECI5 MkII can bring to proceedings with larger scale recordings.

This performance is complimented by excellent bass response. The bassline of any recording is presented

with a force and weight that helps the overall sense of realism greatly. This low-end force is deceptive, because despite the considerable heft that the Electrocompaniet has, there is no sense that it overwhelms the more delicate upper frequencies, or is out of proportion to the rest of the performance. There is also a useful speed to the bass response – it starts and stops with commendable speed and helps give the ECI5 MkII a sense of timing and poise that we have not experienced with older designs.

In terms of tonality, the ECI5 MkII is a strong performer, if not a perfect one. The amp can sound fabulously real with vocals both solo and group,



**THE SLIGHT tendency towards smoothness that the ECI5 MkII can demonstrate would be most easily alleviated with a slightly more upfront CD player.**

**A fine choice to this end would be the Moon CD3.3 HFC 321). This is an especially capable machine in terms of detail retrieval and would partner well with the Electrocompaniet – especially if the optional balanced outputs are specified.**

**The substantial power output of the ECI5 MkII places few constraints on speaker choices, so an interesting choice would be the Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII (HFC 337). The Electrocompaniet has the power to make these little boxes sing and the results should be impressive.**

but instruments can occasionally sound fractionally flat and recessed by comparison. This is not hugely pronounced and may simply be a reflection of how adept the ECI5 MkII is with vocals, but it can contribute to a wider sense that like some other Electrocompaniet designs, there is a slight sense of smoothing off absolute detail and losing some excitement and vitality as it does so.

Depending on what you are looking for, this need not be a bad thing. It helps the Electrocompaniet stay entirely listenable even when playing back poor or harsh recordings and the overall performance is so civilised that you can listen to the ECI5 MkII for hours without it ever becoming grating or tiresome. Equally there will be those who would prefer a little more excitement in their replay and are happy to accept that their listening may not be so even-handed, here the Electrocompaniet may prove too smooth and relaxed.

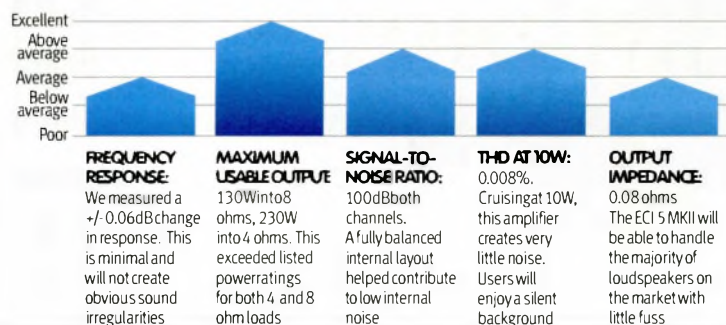
**Fit and finish**

The ECI5 MkII has much to commend it. It takes many of the traditional Electrocompaniet virtues and builds on them, adding a much-improved sense of timing and rhythm, that gives a greater sense of life and enthusiasm to complex material. This is coupled to a useful power output that should handle most loudspeakers that it is likely to be partnered with in most domestic listening environments and a useful selection of inputs and outputs.

The calm, unforced presentation may prove too laid-back for some and this lack of perceived excitement may put off those who want a more forceful performance. Others will enjoy the way that the ECI5 MkII goes about making music and find it exactly what they are looking for. ●

**TECH LABS**

**RESULTS AT A GLANCE**



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big unflustered sound with excellent bass and timing. Beautifully built
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Huge size may prove difficult to accommodate
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WESAY:** Big, characterful amp, with equally big and unforced sound that will appeal to many listeners
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**





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# Retro revival

The latest Roberts radio might have a retro look, but its performance is far from old-fashioned as **Richard Black** discovers

**T**he writer of this review is certainly not the only person to have walked into a shop and asked, in all innocence, "How much is that second-hand Roberts in the window?", only to be put right with the answer, "It's new."

Roberts has always been the king of the retro, making radios that were straight out of its 1950s catalogue, generations after that decade had ended. Or at least, radios that bore a strong external resemblance to those trusty old models.

## 100 hours

Long gone are the 10-transistor circuits of yesteryear. The current FM models are powered by integrated circuits and this DAB model probably includes about as many transistors in its construction than Roberts used in an entire year in the early days of the 'tranny'.

The case is made of MDF and there's a text display on the top: tuning of both channels is digital (the usual twist'n'push control) and the push-

buttons are momentary action types, rather than the latching ones used on the originals. But the overall effect is well done, complete with carrying handle and the use of four large 'D cell' batteries, which gives the RD60 a playing time potentially in the region of 100 hours.

## Creature comforts

Other modern creature comforts include a couple of mini-jack sockets for headphones and line output, another for line input, a USB socket for firmware upgrades and full text information on both DAB and FM. There are presets and a useful one-touch 'Favourite' button to bring up your main station in a single press.

## Casual duty

One doesn't expect a small, mono radio to sound amazing. Nevertheless, the use of headphones does allow the electronics to give of their best (in stereo) and frankly the DAB performance of this model is more than acceptable. FM's not bad, either,

## ▶ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Roberts Revival  
DAB RD60

**ORIGIN:**  
UK

**TYPE:**  
Mono table radio

**WEIGHT:**  
1.5kg

**DIMENSIONS:**  
(WxHxD)  
250x155x100mm

**FEATURES:**

- DAB/FM
- Internal loudspeaker
- Stereo headphone socket
- Line in/out
- Backlit display

**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
Roberts Radio

**TELEPHONE:**  
01709 571722

**WEBSITE:**  
robertsradio.co.uk

if you can arrange the antenna for good reception. (You could in principle attach an external antenna, but who on earth is going to go to that trouble?) Compared with a dedicated, hi-fi, FM tuner, clarity is lacking, but it's perfectly listenable for speech and casual music duty.

But that's not the most likely mode of operation and the internal loudspeaker is far more to the point. Its success varies considerably from station to station, for the simple reason that it sounds extremely dull. That's easy to verify by moving from headphones to speaker and it's true even when listening on axis, even more so when off to the side. One can mitigate this somewhat, bizarrely, by opening the back of the radio (it's hinged with a simple catch, to allow for access to the battery compartment) and listening from behind, but then the bass goes all to pot because the case is designed as a simple reflex-loaded speaker enclosure.

## Ear-splitting

Bass and midrange are not bad tonally with the radio conventionally closed up and we were quite impressed at how loud it will go without any obvious rattles. The dull treble is most obvious on stations such as Radios 3 and 4, but works much better on highly-compressed pop stations which tend to be ear-splittingly bright.

Detail is fair for the breed and it's reasonably easy to hear everything that's going on, but things do tend to sound a bit flat dynamically. Of course, on the stations with the best subjective tonal balance, they are a bit flat.

We're torn between admiration for the looks and general build quality of this radio and reservations about its sound. On the whole, we prefer the sound of the fine models from Vita Audio, but there's a certain charm inherent in a Roberts and we could probably get used to it... ●



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★☆	<b>LIKE:</b> Retro looks; convenient operation; decent loudness; good bass extension and clarity
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★☆	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Treble is dull to the point of extinction
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★☆	<b>WESAY:</b> It's sure to be a talking point, but ultimately the sound disappoints
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★☆	

### OVERALL





# Just for the record

Record doctor (but not qualified GP) **Simon Berkovitch** gives a complete guide to vinyl-buying for audiophiles and music lovers alike. From the best online retailers to the finest record shops in London and Manchester, the Doctor is on call, just for you

**O**f CD is a dying format, surely vinyl must now have as much life in it as yesteryear's wax cylinder, audio cassette or Stereo 8 cartridge? Think again – we don't put such an illustrious selection of turntables, arms and cartridges on test in *Hi-Fi Choice* for nostalgia's sake – and prepare yourself for a diagnosis from the record doctor. You may not consider yourself as a vinyl junkie, but have you ever displayed any, or all, of the following symptoms? A rush of excitement when placing a favourite LP on your turntable and carefully lowering the stylus into the groove? Getting misty-eyed about gatefold artwork when looking at a tiny CD sleeve? Grumbling that downloads just don't have the 'warmth' of good old records? All of the above? Fortunately, there's no cure, but we can prescribe 12-inch-sized tablets, twice daily, to keep the cravings at bay, readily available both on the high street and online.

Inevitably, the future of how we listen to music in the home may be largely digital – the proliferation of DACs available that offer both impressive sound quality and convenience are testament to this prognosis – but vinyl is still a force to be reckoned with.

If your enjoyment of this glorious format has been limited to rereads of records from your youth, or your collection simply stops in the 1980s, just when CD was heralded as the future, you'll be delighted to learn that vinyl is very much alive, thriving in both independent record stores – both new and used – and from a variety of online outlets.

So are you ready to reignite your passion for records? Then this rough guide is your introduction to the best shops and websites from which to buy vinyl. From bargains to

rarities, to fantastic-sounding heavyweight audiophile pressings, your music collection is about to get a makeover – and there's nothing retro about it.

## Getting started

Think record shops and three bold letters will loom large: HMV. Other chain stores may have fallen by the wayside, but HMV still has a firm pull on the purse strings of the music-hungry. Vinyl again features heavily in the racks, with reissues being particularly prevalent, nestling up against the latest white label, 12-inch dance releases. The high street is the obvious place to start when acquainting yourself with your passion for records, but for the more inquisitive travellers, the back streets offer richer rewards.

The case for the death of the independent record shop has been somewhat exaggerated, we feel. Admittedly, numerous factors have contributed to their diminishing numbers, with the recession and younger consumers' preference for downloads high on the list, but a quick trip to Google (or if you're resolutely old school, your Yellow Pages) will quickly inform you what local independent record shops are in your area.

When it comes to independents, the legendary Rough Trade (130, Talbot Road, London, W11) is king. The company has come a long way since its late-1970s formation and remains a mecca for limited edition pressings and obscure reissues from a diverse selection of genres – from reggae to electronica, you'll find it here.

Rough Trade boasts two stores in London (the other is just off Brick Lane in the east end) and both are manned by exceptionally knowledgeable staff – reassuringly, your passion for music is equalled by their

willingness to help you with your purchase. You'll find yourself taking chances on artists that you'd never considered before and often delighted at the unexpected sounds that flood your listening room.

New vinyl isn't just confined to the capital, however. Rough Trade is the template from which many regional stores have mapped out their own take on the indie record store. From Piccadilly Records in Manchester, Sounds Of The Universe in London (see City guides) to Rounder Records in Brighton, a whole world of exciting music awaits you – in the majority of cases, all it takes is a detour from the high street.

## A fine vintage

The dustier corners of cities and towns will also offer you a trip back in time to revisit your youth: welcome to the wonderful world of the second-hand record shop. So, you replaced your played-to-death LP of Pink Floyd's *Meddle* with a shiny, silver coaster back in the 1980s, but fancy experiencing that sublime gatefold sleeve again? Vintage pressings by collectable artists have never been more in demand – and the earlier the pressing the better. Convenient and versatile MP3s may be, but can the immediacy and intangibility of downloaded music replace the thrill of the chase for that elusive folk-rock album; that near-impossible-to-track down prog-rock

**“The dustier corners of cities and towns offer you a trip back in time: welcome to the world of the second-hand record shop.”**





The vinyl solution: an afternoon spent wading through the racks of your nearest second-hand record shop is great news for your hi-fi set up. Just remember that there are new, audiophile outlets, too

Picture credits: Simon Berkovitch, Matt Robbins, Graham Sefton





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Seventh heaven: some picture sleeve 7-inch singles are also collectible, as well as sounding nice and punchy. Why not check out the bass solo in The Who's *My Generation* as it was meant to be heard?

platter; or that hen's-teeth-rare Sun Ra limited edition? Forget convenience – enjoy a fantastically rewarding (but often expensive) hobby and indulge your 'hunter-gatherer' instincts.

Just as it's arguable that Rough Trade is the template from which many independent record shops have drawn inspiration, London's Music And Goods Exchange is the well from which the majority of the UK's used record shops have drunk. From humble 1960s beginnings as a market stall in Hull, to 1960s and 1970s shops in West London, to today's chain of second-hand record (and book, clothing and bric-a-brac) stores, the Music And Video Exchange (as it's known to those in the know) mantra is deceptively simple: every record eventually finds its own price. Records are priced according to condition and rarity and then marked down until they sell. This can result in some extraordinary bargains if you're prepared to get your browsing fingers working overtime through the considerable volume of stock. Music and Video doesn't turn anything vinyl-related away – and we mean absolutely anything. This means that music from all around the globe, of every conceivable genre is often in stock – whatever your passion, you'll have a pretty strong chance of finding it here.

But, just because a record is considered vintage fodder, don't make the mistake of assuming you're sitting on a pot of gold with your old collection. Take the advice of a man in the know...

### Expert advice

"Since the appearance of various price guides and articles, the misconception is that all old records are valuable," says J T Rathbone, specialist vinyl-buyer at Music and Video Exchange. "Somebody reads a newspaper piece about a particular Beatles or Jimi Hendrix LP selling for hundreds of pounds and presumes every record by these artists is of a similar value, regardless of condition or date of issue. The fact is that

"Since the appearance of various price guides and articles, the misconception is that all old records are valuable."

an extremely small percentage of all records released have any value at all, and even a collectible LP might only be worth a few pounds if it's damaged.

"Many charity shops, once a fertile hunting ground for vinyl collectors, now put vintage LPs out at top whack without any regard for the state of the disc itself. Consequently, a lot of these don't sell, so nobody benefits. This, combined with a shift in the market toward eBay and away from traditional shops, has meant less genuinely interesting or unusual records are surfacing in vintage record stores."

Of course, there are still the odd surprises. "We salvaged a probable one-of-a-kind acetate by an embryonic line up of [1960s band] The Move from a suitcase of sleeveless and worthless discs," he explains.

You may be able to find an excellent condition copy of Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, for example, for a matter of pence at Music and Video, but it's the genuine rarities that always set collectors' hearts a-flutter.

"Only recently a lady brought in a quite unique and hitherto unseen printing variation of The Beatles *White album* sleeve, which had apparently been languishing in a cupboard for more than forty years!"

### The online experience

The mention of auction site eBay brings us to the most convenient place to buy records – the internet. If the idea of spending your precious Saturday lurking in a dusty store, elbow-deep in records,

## CITY GUIDE: LONDON

Pleasingly for vinyl lovers, this quintet of stores is just the tip of the iceberg in the capital. Special mention also goes to Intoxica (new and collectable records) and Honest Jons (legendary soul, jazz and reggae specialists), on Portobello Road, W11 – both highly recommended.

### MUSIC & VIDEO EXCHANGE

'Nothing legal refused' is the first commandment of this famous chain of second-hand record stores, running the gamut from expensive rarities to LPs, 12"s and 7"s that can be picked up for a matter of pence. The lack of cherry-picking when buying-in collections ensures that absolutely every genre of music is covered throughout its branches in Notting Hill, Camden, Soho and Greenwich. Rock legends as diverse as The Clash's Mick Jones, Julian Cope and guitar hero Jimmy Page have all shopped here.

**38 Notting Hill Gate, W11 (10am to 8pm, daily)**  
020 7221 2793 [mvshops.co.uk](http://mvshops.co.uk)

### SOUNDS OF THE UNIVERSE

When it comes to new and reissue vinyl, Soho's Sounds of the Universe is an essential port of call. Associated with the cool Soul Jazz record label, if your record habit demands a regular hit of obscure funk, rare groove, heavy dub or wild, free jazz, you'll find many an unexpected pleasure in this well-organised shop's racks. There's also a used section in the basement.

**7 Broadwick Street, Soho W1F 0DA**  
(Monday-Saturday 11-7:30pm)  
020 7734 3430 [soundsoftheuniverse.com](http://soundsoftheuniverse.com)

### SECOND LAYER

Make the pilgrimage to leafy Highgate and be rewarded by the most comprehensive selection of avant-garde and experimental vinyl in London. Offering the best in contemporary experimental music – from psychedelic guitar workouts to drone and noise-rock – Second Layer is the place to be if your musical tastes run to the more esoteric. The enthusiasm of the guys who run the place is only matched by their knowledge and willingness to recommend new and old music.

**323 Archway Road, Highgate N6 5AA (Tuesday-Friday: 12-7pm; Saturday: 12-5:30pm)**  
07878 051 726 [secondlayer.co.uk](http://secondlayer.co.uk)

### RAY'S JAZZ

Tucked away on the third floor of London's legendary bookshop Foyles, is this gem of a record store. Previously housed in the café on the first floor ("Mocha, carrot cake and rare bebop to go, sir?"), the expanded department in Foyles' flagship store gives its considerable selection of modern jazz LPs (and CDs) room to blow freely. Stocks both new reissues and vintage vinyl, as well as blues, roots and folk.

**113-119, Charing Cross Road**  
(Monday-Saturday: 9.30-9pm; Sunday: 11.30-6pm)  
020 7440 3205 [foyles.co.uk](http://foyles.co.uk)

### HAROLD MOORES RECORDS

They don't make them like this anymore. Leave your bag at the counter and descend the stairs to a basement piled ceiling-high with classical and opera. Whether your tastes run to light orchestral or Stockhausen, there are certainly plenty of records to uncover. The basement's stock also runs to jazz and world music – a good place to delve into Ravi Shankar's or John Coltrane's considerable back catalogue.

**2, Great Marlborough Street W1F 7HQ**  
(Monday-Saturday 10-6:30pm)  
020 7437 1576 [hmrecords.co.uk](http://hmrecords.co.uk)





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- 1 Alan's Records, East Finchley
- 2 da capo, Berlin
- 3 Phonica, Soho, London
- 4 Rough Trade East, off Brick Lane, London
- 5 Sister Ray, Soho, London
- 6 Sounds of the Universe, Soho, London

jostling with other punters, doesn't appeal to you, or you simply don't have the time, there are various websites dedicated to every conceivable genre of music, with some catering for people just like you – dedicated audiophiles.

As a reader of this magazine, we're assuming that you either already own a decent turntable, are planning to upgrade it, or are inspired to invest in one. As the high-end of hi-fi is our shared passion, it makes sense to point you in the direction of the best audiophile vinyl sites. After all, you may be reluctant to road test your expensive kit with used records, demanding the cleanest sounds available. Promising the last word in sound quality, audiophile LPs are usually pressed on heavyweight vinyl for a rich, deep sound.

Speakers Corner Records (speakerscorner.de) is a good place to start. Based in Germany with over 500 titles in a catalogue that covers jazz, classical, soul and more, the website is easy to navigate. You can't buy from Speakers Corner direct, but click on the button 'How To Buy' in the menu bar, let them know which country you're in and you'll receive an email about where you can buy its releases.

Closer to home is Stamford Audio, with its breathtaking selection of 150/180/200 gram heavyweight vinyl pressings, both in 33 and 45rpm formats. Its clean-looking home page (stamfordaudio.co.uk) is simplicity in itself: just click on one of the icons to see what treats are in stock.

Jazz fans will be delighted to see what's behind 'New Records: Classic Mono', for example: Cannonball Adderley's classic *Somethin' Else* is made available once more on 200 gram vinyl, promising a sonic treat as it's cut from the original first-generation analogue masters. The quick capsule review? "It sizzles," Stamford Audio promises.

The online experience isn't exclusively about audiophile pressings, however. South Wales' Diverse Vinyl (diversevinyl.com) is the mail order department of Diverse Music, an independent record store based in Newport. Its catalogue changes each week as new LPs are released, so expect to find modern bands alongside classic artists and some audiophile fare. Reflecting this, clicking on the 'Vinyl News' button reveals that Nick Cave's second album from his grungy Grinderman project is now in stock, as is ex-Beach Boy Brian Wilson's *Reimagines Gershwin* LP. Thinking of digging out that old copy of *Pet Sounds* and giving it a spin? Why not check out his latest on vinyl instead of CD or download?

You may wince at your credit card statement, but if what we've set out to achieve with this record-shopping primer has been successful, you'll be enthusiastically hitting the independent shops, attending local record fairs or furiously clicking the 'Add To Cart' button online, expanding your music collection with the greatest format invented. It's what the vinyl doctor ordered. Rekindle your passion. ●

## CITY GUIDE: MANCHESTER

"Manchester, so much to answer for," warbled local lad Morrissey. He may as well have been talking about how your credit card is going to get a hammering at two of the city's best record stores. It's grim up north? Hardly.

### VINYL EXCHANGE

From the same template as London's Music and Video Exchange, Vinyl Exchange is a Mancunian institution, a short stroll from Piccadilly train station. From Krautrock to Disco and the city's own legendary bands like Joy Division and The Smiths, the basement is packed with vintage vinyl, marked down in price until it sells. Naturally, the best stuff doesn't hang around for long. The store does mail order too.

**18, Oldham Street, M1 1JR**  
**(Monday-Saturday 10-6pm;**  
**Sunday 12-5pm)**

**0161 236 1613 vinylexchange.co.uk**

### PICCADILLY RECORDS

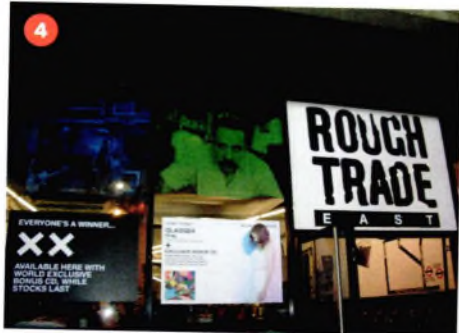
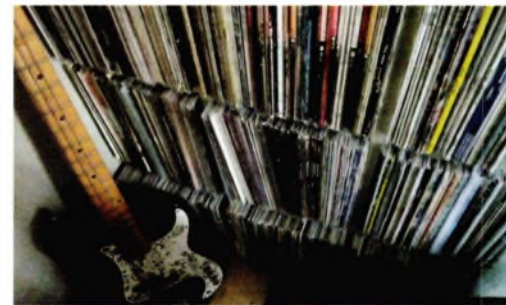
Born in 1978, the North's very own Rough Trade is just over the street from Vinyl Exchange and stocks a superb mix of reissues and new releases. Like any indie store worth its salt, the LP sleeves come with descriptions of the music filed behind the counter and breathless staff recommendations. This spacious store will have you reaching for your plastic before you can say "Essential reissue of long lost Brazilian psychedelic gem". Online shopping is also an option.

**53 Oldham Street, M1 1JR**  
**(Monday-Saturday: 10-6pm;**  
**Sunday 12-5pm)**

**0161 839 8008 piccadillyrecords.com**

### SADLY MISSED: CORN EXCHANGE

When the Corn Exchange reopened after the 1996 bomb blast, its countercultural heart had sadly been bypassed. The grand building remains, but there's no trace of the fantastic record stalls where I excitedly bought my first Pink Floyd bootlegs and Roy Harper vinyl as an impressionable youth with Saturday job money to burn. Happy days.





# WELCOME TO THE NORTH EAST

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Linn LP12, Ekos in black ash	1299	Audio Research LS26, as new boxed	999	Cyrus CD6SE, excellent silver boxed	449	Martin Logan Odyssey, excellent boxed	2999
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Michell Gyro SE, excellent boxed with HR supply	899	Cairn Nitro/K02 Pre/Power Amps, excellent boxed	1499	Esoteric PD5/D05, as new ex demo	Call	PMC FB11 in Walnut, as new boxed	1499
Monitor Audio MA500 Direct Drive, excellent!	249	Conrad Johnson MV60SE Power nr mint boxed	1499	Linn Numerik, vgc	299	PMC Fact 8 in Tiger Ebony, excellent boxed	3249
Pink Triangle PT Too, Linn Ekos, offboard p/s	999	CR Developments Kalypso, vgc boxed	699	Marantz SA8003, excellent boxed, Due in	449	Proac Tablette Ref 8 in cherry, excellent	499
Project RPM10, speedbox, nr mint boxed	999	Cyrus 6VS2, excellent boxed	349	Marantz SA15, excellent boxed	499	Proac Tablette Ref 8 Signature in Ebony, mint boxed	799
Project X Pack, very low hours nr mint boxed	499	Cyrus 3i, with matching monoblocks, vgc	499	Marantz CD17K1, excellent boxed	399	Proac Studio 130 in Oak, excellent boxed	699
Rega P1, ex demo	149	Densen Beat B100, vgc boxed	399	Marantz CD12/DA12 excellent with tabletop remote	1199	Proac Studio 140 in Ebony, excellent boxed	999
Rega Planar 2 c/w RB250 and Super Bias, excellent	149	Esoteric AI10, built in DAC and phono, excellent!	1199	Mendian 507, excellent boxed	599	PSB Alpha B1 Stereophile Product of the year	99
Rega RB250 with stubmod	119	Krell Evolution 600 Monoblocks	Offers!	Meridian 5669/24 DAC, excellent	399	Quad 21L in Birds eye Maple finish, nr mint	349
Roksan Reference PSU in black, ex demo	Call	Levinson No27 Power amp, vgc	1499	Micromega CD10, nr mint boxed new model	599	Rega RS1, mint boxed	279
Roksan TMS1 & DSU boxed, recent TM service	1749	Lyngdorf TDAI2200 with Roomperfect and DAC	2999	Micromega CD30, nr mint boxed new model	1199	Rega R3, in cherry boxed	249
Roksan Xerxes, XPS2, Tabrizi, excellent	599	Marantz SM17 Power, excellent boxed	299	Musical Fidelity KWTR/DM25 Transport/DAC, nr mint	1599	Revel Performa F32, excellent boxed, serious value!	1399
SME 10a turntable and tonearm, mint ex demo	249	Melody 101 pre and Matching Monos, ex demo	Call	Naim CD5X, excellent boxed	699	Spendor S3/5se, excellent boxed	549
SME 20/2a turntable and tonearm, mint ex demo	Call	Melody 2A3 Integrated, ex demo	Call	Naim CD5, excellent boxed	499	Totem Model One Signature, excellent boxed	949
SME 3009/2, excellent	179	Melody 300b Integrated, excellent boxed	799	Naim CDS/CDPS, nr mint boxed	999	Usher CP6371, vgc boxed, due in	Call
Systemdek IIX, c/w Systemdek arm, vgc	149	NAIM NAC122/150, excellent boxed	599	Naim CDX2, excellent boxed with remote	1599	Usher Mini Dancer 2, ex demo, nr mint	Call
Thorens TD125, excellent original box/packing	299	NAIM NAC112 excellent boxed	249	Rotel RCD06, as new boxed	299	Usher Be718 Standmount, excellent boxed	849
Tom Evans The Groove, excellent	1099	NAIM 250, boxed, recased to olive & serviced in 2000	799	Sugden CD21, ex demo nr mint boxed	749	Wharfedale Diamond Home cinema pack, ex demo	Call
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Wilson Benesch Act 1 Tonearm, nr mint superb	799	NAIM NAP250.2, excellent boxed	1749	TEAC P700/D700 excellent boxed 1/2 size pair	749	Yamaha NS1000M, black ash, original grills	749
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Arcam FMJ26DAB, excellent boxed	249	Chord Epic Speaker cables, factory terminated pair	399	Call	Audio Analogue Crescendo Amp & CD, ex demo	799	
Arcam DT91 FM/DAB, excellent boxed	199	Isotek and LAT extension blocks	149	Call	Esoteric SA10 & AI10 combo, as new	2249	
Nakamichi ZX1000L, just serviced, vgc	Call	Isotek Sigmas, nr mint boxed	599	Call	Micromega CD10 & IA60, both as new	999	
Quad FM3, vgc	99	NAIM Supercap in Olive, new Burndy	1749	Call	Micromega CD30 & IA180 both as new	1999	
Quad FM4, vgc	179	Onkyo 507, 607 & 807, as new ex demo boxed	399	Call	Onkyo A733/C733 Amp and CD ex display	599	
Quad FM66, excellent	299	PS Audio Quintessence, as new boxed	499	Call	Rega Saturn, Cursa 3, Exon 3s, excellent	Call	

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**93 Bobbie Gentry**  
Ode to Billie Joe



**94 Steve Miller Band**  
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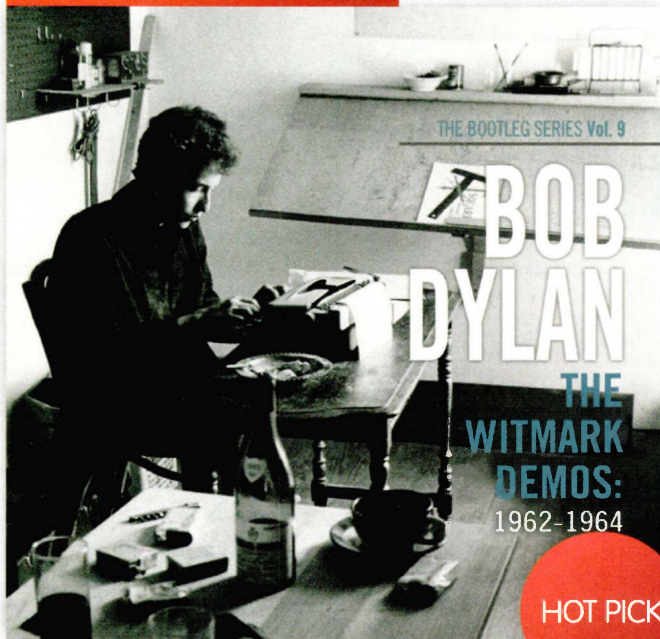


**95 Zoe Van Goey**  
The Cage Was Unlocked All Along

# Music reviews

Hi-Fi Choice's pick of the latest high-quality music releases

## ALBUM OF THE MONTH



HOT PICK

### Bob Dylan

The Bootleg Series Vol 9 – Witmark Demos 1962-64

www.columbiarecords.com

★★★★

Columbia

2-CD set and 180-gram vinyl

“**WRITING FIVE SONGS** before breakfast”, as he once put it, potent compositions poured out of the youthful Bob Dylan during his first prolific flush of song writing, faster than he could record them.

At times they flowed even faster than he could write them down, so he fell into the habit of recording demos of these songs for his publishers, who in Tin Pan Alley-style then transcribed the words and chords for copyright purposes and circulated the ‘guide’ tapes around the industry: if Dylan couldn’t release albums fast enough to record the songs himself, they could at least earn their keep by being recorded by other artists.

The latest release in the ongoing ‘official bootleg’ series, which has so brilliantly set about filling in the gaps in Dylan’s recording

history, collects together 47 songs recorded for his publishers, Leeds Music and later M Witmark & Sons, between the ages of 21 and 24. He did eventually release several of the songs on official studio albums, but here are the earliest known versions of the likes of *Girl From The North Country*, *Don’t Think Twice It’s All Right*, *The Times They Are A-Changin’* and *Mr Tambourine Man* (the latter bizarrely delivered in waltz-time).

Most, however, are ‘lost’ songs, never officially released by Dylan – although some were made famous by other artists, among them *Tomorrow Is A Long Time* (Judy Collins/Elvis Presley), *Mama You Been On My Mind* (Johnny Cash/Linda Ronstadt) and *Only A Hobo* (Rod Stewart).

What we hear in the process is the transition from talent into

“The latest release sets about filling in the gaps in Dylan’s recording history.”

genius, from Woody Guthrie folk-wannabe into the most important songwriter of the 20th century.

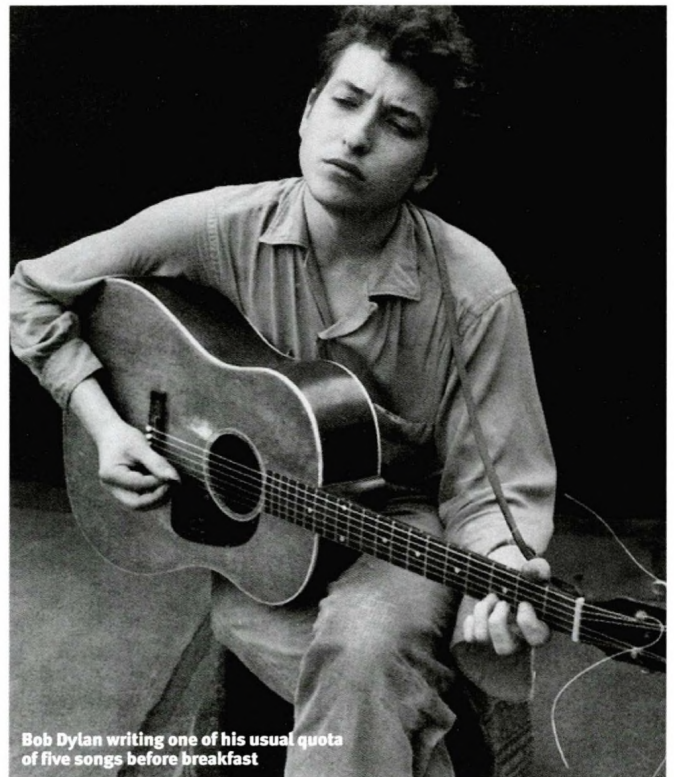
These are demos, of course, recorded in mono, so the sound quality cannot be compared to the four honed and polished albums recorded at Columbia’s state-of-the-art New York Studio. Nevertheless, the sound has been dramatically cleaned up from the illicit bootleg recordings of these tracks which have been circulating for 30 years or more.

A few of the recordings remain decidedly rough, but for the most part there is a striking clarity to his voice, acoustic guitar, harmonica

and occasional piano, which are the only accompaniment.

What’s more, because he was simply documenting the songs for transcription purposes, rather than giving a ‘performance’, there is a quite different aesthetic at work. Paradoxically, at times this works to his advantage. There is no artifice and we get the songs in their raw, unadulterated, one-take state, which in several instances, lends them added potency. Several more of the ‘lost’ songs, such as *Paths Of Victory*, and *Seven Curses*, are similarly gem-like.

Anyone interested in Dylan will find these rare peeks behind his customary curtain of studio inscrutability quite riveting. **NW Standout tracks:** Tomorrow Is a Long Time; Seven Curses; Paths of Victory; Ballad for a Friend



Bob Dylan writing one of his usual quota of five songs before breakfast





## Jimi Hendrix

West Coast Seattle Boy: The Jimi Hendrix Anthology  
sonymusic.co.uk

★★★★

EMI

4-CD box set plus DVD

**THE HENDRIX BACK** catalogue has pretty much been mined to extinction but, believe it or not, another 43 previously unreleased tracks now turn up here, alongside a disc of hard-to-find items from his early career as an RnB sideman.

Hendrix collectors will lap it up, but it's not the place for beginners. The alternative and/or live takes of Hendrix classics cannot match the versions released in his lifetime and many of the unfamiliar tracks turn out to be no more than jams. There's some stellar guitar-playing, but unless you're a Hendrix completist, *West Coast Seattle Boy* is hardly essential.

The Hendrix estate has opted not to augment or clean up this cache of old demos, rough-edged jams and unfinished/abandoned recordings, which on balance, is a blessing. The demos – some of them acoustic – offer a genuinely fascinating insight into Hendrix the songwriter.

A couple of the alternative studio takes – notably *May This Be Love* and *Hey Baby* – rival the versions we know and love. At least one of the unknown songs, *Lonely Avenue*, cries out for a finished version. But although there are plenty of fine moments, you can also hear why most of this material was never released at the time. **NW**  
**Standout tracks:** *May This Be Love*; *Bolero*; *Lonely Avenue*; *Hey Baby*



## Leighton & Britten

Earth, Sweet Earth; Winter Words

Linnrecords.com

★★★★

Linn

SACD/CD hybrid 5.1 /2-channel

**BRITTEN'S WINTER** Words was written in tribute to Peter Pears, the tenor who for many years was closely associated with the composer. Leighton's *Earth, Sweet Earth* is less familiar and is not often performed, possibly because of its technical difficulties. But its lack of familiarity should not be taken as an indication of musical quality (the piano part, in particular, is very complex).

This is said to be the first modern recording of Leighton's *Earth, Sweet Earth* and Britten's *Winter Words* and as far as we can judge it is completely idiomatic. This is especially true of the Britten, which will have been much more familiar to both performers. **AG**  
**Standout track:** Track 11: The little old table

### AUDIOPHILE VINYL

**Bobbie Gentry** Ode to Billie Joe [purepleasurerecords.com](http://purepleasurerecords.com)



★★★★★ EMI/Pure Pleasure  
180g vinyl

**BOBBIE GENTRY'S 1967** debut opens with the best impersonation of Creedence Clearwater Revival you'll hear from a female artist. **It's a raucous swamp-rocker,**



## Officium Novum

Komitas, Jan Garbarek, Arvo Pärt

ecmrecords.com

★★★★★

ECM New Series

CD

**HERE IS AN** exquisite high-concept series of short pieces performed by a classical vocal group, the Hilliard ensemble (countertenor, two tenors and baritone), blended with a heavily jazz-influenced saxophone accompaniment.

The music seems to ebb and swell organically. Even the running order appears to have been chosen to produce natural counterpoints when moving from one piece to the next.

If we have a criticism, it is that the saxophone seems balanced slightly louder than appears natural against the voices. But if this is how it sounded on the day, then fine. In its way, this is a breathtaking example of pure music and it is hard to imagine how it could be improved. **AG**  
**Standout track:** Track 6: Most Holy Mother of God (Arvo Pärt)



## Sandy Denny

Sandy Denny Box Set

islandrecords.co.uk

★★★★★

Island

19-CD box set

**IT'S NOW MORE** than 40 years since Denny died and you'd have thought everything she recorded had been released and re-released many times. But apparently not. Eleven discs in this comprehensive retrospective compile everything she officially released with Alex Campbell, the Strawbs, Fairport Convention, Fotheringay and solo. But there are a further eight discs of rare and unknown material, much of it found within the last year buried away in Island's vaults.

The one thing that stands out here is the rich warmth of Denny's voice, particularly on the previously unreleased material where the folk purity of her singing is allowed to shine without distraction. **NW**  
**Standout tracks:** *Matty Groves*; *Tam Lin*; *The Sea*; *Lord Bateman*

**that's at odds with the rest of the album, but it turns you on to a great slab of vinyl.**

The songs are country tales from the Mississippi delta and sound superb thanks to Gentry's low-pitched, dusky voice and arrangements that border on the psychedelic. The playing, though clearly professional, has a rawness that gives the songs their edge and there's an earthiness to the production that keeps it out of the easy listening ghetto that Gentry would later slip into.

The recording's lack of slickness is at least partly

due to its vintage, but this projects the voice well because it's usually the only element that's in stereo. There is plenty of spread however which makes up for this and it's also appealingly open with some great effects where individual instruments are highlighted in dramatic relief.

Credit must go to Kelly Gordon who produced the album and Sean Magee, who remastered the vinyl at Abbey Road. I doubt the original pressing sounded this good. **JK**  
**Standout tracks:** *Mississippi Delta*; *Ode To Billie Joe*





### Steve Miller Band Fly Like An Eagle

demonmusicgroup.co.uk

★★★★★

Edsel

CD plus DVD/DVD-A

**MANY FORGET THAT** Texan-born guitarist Steve Miller was one of the first popular musicians to make specifically tailor-made albums of high-fidelity rock. After gravitating to San Francisco in the 1960s, he, along with Boz Scaggs and ace bassist Lonnie Turner, went all out to address the ears and mind first.

In mid-1976 *Fly Like An Eagle* sailed into the UK Top 20 on an incredible bed of sonic brilliance. Meaty Roland synthscapes, electrifying Fender Strat-playing and the use of sitar guitar and the solid rhythm section of Turner/Mallaber made for a perfect rock album. This superb new remastered version comes with three bonus tracks, a 22 song DVD concert and a 5.1 surround mix. **MP**

**Standout tracks:** Fly Like An Eagle; Wild Mountain Honey; Rock 'n' Me



### Supertramp Breakfast in America

onamrecords.com

★★★☆☆

A&M

2-CD deluxe edition

#### SOMEHOW PROG-ROCKERS

Supertramp survived the punk revolution, when better bands were trashed to oblivion by its safety-pinned insurrection. Released in 1979, their sixth album put them among rock's titans, topping the American charts, making number three in Britain and selling a staggering 18 million copies around the world.

Sadly, Supertramp have not dated well. Despite digital remastering, the keyboards sound shrill and the falsetto vocals grate. Hit singles *The Logical Song* and *Take The Long Way Home* boast attractive enough melodies, but this is music that not only struggles to escape from its time but also fails to evoke much nostalgia for the era (Ouch! – Ed). **NW**

**Standout tracks:** The Logical Song; Goodbye Stranger; Breakfast In America



### The Orb featuring David Gilmour Metallic Spheres

metallicspheres.com

★★★★★

Columbia

CD/vinyl/download

**AS ORIGINAL PUNKS,** ambient-pioneers The Orb were publicly wary of Floyd. Yet by 1993 things were cool enough for Gilmour to appear with them on the cover of *Melody Maker*.

The first official outing to see Alex Paterson, Youth and David Gilmour together in the studio is divided into just two tracks (*Metallic Side* and *Spheres Side*) and travels a familiar Orb route of heavy dub, punctuated by lengthy slices of ambience.

The crystalline sustaining Fender of Gilmour is here, but this doesn't sound anything like a Pink Floyd record. It is unquestionably Orbular: dance-floor-bound with earth-shuddering basses and skyscraping treble frequencies to warp the mind. **MS**

**Standout track:** Metallic Side

## HIGH-RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS

### Zoey Van Goey The Cage Was Unlocked All Along

linnrecords.com

★★★★★

Chemical/Linn

24-bit/48kHz stereo



HOT PICK

**THE BAND'S** name comes from an Amish girl who ran away from home and wound up in Berlin.

There, street artist, Zoey Van De Kamp embarked upon an affair with film director Wim Wenders and became well-known before slowly disappearing from public view. The trio named after her produces often quirky and surreal pop music that displays great intelligence, wit and individuality.

This 24-bit/48kHz recording serves the minimal acoustic/electric arrangements well. It particularly favours Kim Moore's voice, which it renders with great empathy and subtlety, especially on the close harmonies of *Two White Ghosts*. **MS**  
**Standout tracks:** We All Hid In The Basement; We Don't Have That Kind Of Bread

### Emma Pollock Law of Large Numbers

linnrecords.com

★★★★★

Chemical/Linn

24-bit/48kHz stereo

**THE SINGER,** songwriter, guitarist and former Delgado's new album, is full of hooks and angular,

thought-provoking arrangements, that distance it from the usual singer/songwriter product and work surprisingly well together to form a satisfying, cohesive album. Pollock's vocals are pleasingly robust and animated compared to many of the genre who seem to prefer more whimsy.

The recording positively brims with energy, giving the piano on the opening track and the drums on *Hug The Harbour*, a true-to-life timbre and vitality that naturally enlivens the music. The instrumental detailing and texture, even way back in the mix, is also impressive. **MS**  
**Standout tracks:** The Harbour; Nine Lives

## BLU-RAY DVD

### The Rolling Stones Ladies & Gentlemen eagle-rock.com



★★★★★ Eagle Vision

LPCM, Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS-HD Master

**FILMED WHILE** the Stones were on their *Exile On Main Street* tour in 1972, *Ladies & Gentlemen* captures the band at the peak of its rock

'n' roll powers in front of four massively enthusiastic Texan audiences. I would have been hollerin' too, because it's electric stuff with the band playing 15 storming songs.

Mick's gurning and hip-shaking takes centre stage as ever, but if this starts to wear thin you can avert your gaze and listen to the quality of the tight, but loose playing that demonstrates why they've been so popular for so long.

The disc includes a short interview with Mick, giving his opinion on young shaver Marc Bolan for the *Old Grey Whistle Test* and three nice

rehearsal numbers that are undermined by very raw sound. In fact, the sound overall is more about feel and atmosphere than maximum resolution, but you can hear what's going on and it's not a lot worse than the *Exile* album itself – the extra helping of energy thanks to the concert situation also helps.

The LPCM track is a lot more open and honest and surely closer to what must have been an original stereo recording than the DTS, but the latter has a smoothing effect that some might prefer. **JK**  
**Standout tracks:** Happy; Love in Vain





# 5

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# Help & advice

We've got the answers to everything you've ever wanted to know about hi-fi and weren't afraid to ask. Email us now at [hifichoice@futurenet.com](mailto:hifichoice@futurenet.com) or write to: **Hi-Fi Choice Q&A, Future Publishing Ltd, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW**

## YOUR EXPERTS



### PAUL MESSENGER

**EXPERTISE:** LOUDSPEAKERS

**HAVING WORKED** on both sides of the audio industry for over 30 years, as loudspeaker designer and reviewer, Paul is ideally placed to offer thorough, in-depth analysis of every speaker reviewed, as well as cutting-edge developments in the field.



### JIMMY HUGHES

**EXPERTISE:** SYSTEM OPTIMISATION

**AS EVERY** audiophile knows, there's so much more to getting a system to sing than merely throwing components together. Jimmy Hughes has spent 40 years tweaking and optimising systems, as well as voraciously collecting records.



### RICHARD BLACK

**EXPERTISE:** TECHNOLOGY

**WRITING EXCLUSIVELY** for HFC, Richard brings his experience as a successful musician and recording engineer to bear in our rigorous *Blind-Listening Group Test*. As our technical consultant, Richard is the authority on HFC's test and measurement.



### ED SELLEY

**EXPERTISE:** DIGITAL AUDIO

**RESIDENT IN** the audio industry for over a decade, Ed has considerable experience of both CD and SACD formats on disc, as well as an increasing personal interest in streamed high-resolution audio and network based systems



### ALVIN GOLD

**EXPERTISE:** HIGH-END REVIEWER

**HAVING WRITTEN** for a huge range of magazines, both internationally and in Britain, Alvin has a very full 30 years of reviewing under his belt. A guru of all component types, he's now extending his expertise by building PCs for audio too.



### JASON KENNEDY

**EXPERTISE:** TURNTABLES

**ANOTHER EDITOR**, Jason opted to become a freelance contributor when he relinquished the helm of HFC after 17 years on the magazine. A hi-fi addict since his twenties, Jason fell for the beauty of vinyl and has never looked back.

## ASK US A QUESTION TODAY!

Our experts are on hand to answer your questions. Whether you're looking for future-proof upgrades, advice or help with your current set-up, our two-channel Einsteins have all the necessary expertise and several hundred years of combined audio knowledge to slake your thirst and support your passion for perfect sound. Email your questions now: [hifichoice@futurenet.com](mailto:hifichoice@futurenet.com)

## QUESTION OF THE MONTH

**Q** After many years service, my trusty Audio Technica cartridge has died. I can spend up to £600 for a replacement on my Roksan Xerxes. What do you suggest?

David Moore, via email

**A** The good news is that you have more choices now than you have had for years. The Roksan also works well with most weights of cartridge. A firm favorite of ours is the Ortofon Rondo Red which is a very strong musical performer and well within budget. If the cartridge you are replacing was a high-output model, the best like-for-like replacement is the Sumiko Blackbird, which is an excellent high-output cartridge. Finally, just within budget, is the excellent Goldring Legacy that offers

superb performance coupled with strong build. An expensive choice, but one that should satisfy for years.



## Digital vision

**Q** My current setup is a Linn Sondek with Adikt cartridge, NAD T562 CD player, Linn Intek amplifier and Cyrus speakers. My NAD is becoming unreliable and needs replacing, for which I'm prepared to spend up to £1,000.

You recommend the Marantz SA7003, but another hi-fi mag does not rate it so highly (the Cyrus CD6 SE is also highly rated). Another recommendation I've seen is the Oppo BDP83SE.

My main query, however, is will I notice a significant improvement based upon my amp and speakers? I also require the ability to program the player to select only certain tracks of a CD to play. The NAD has this, but I'm unsure about the others. Also, any recommendations regarding the upgrade of my amp and speakers would be worthwhile, although it is not an immediate priority.

Dave Hodson, Perth



Roksan Kandy K2 CD player

**A** We do feel that £1,000 players do offer some advantages over their less expensive brethren. Our sub £1,000 award winner, the Roksan Kandy K2 is a tremendous player for the price and has a sense of depth and timing that can't be found for less. The Marantz KI Pearl Lite is another strong performer with the bonus of SACD replay if this is useful to you.

In the long term, partnering either of these with highly regarded amps such as the Denon 1510AE would give you an ideal basis for the more subjective exercise of choosing loudspeakers.

## Philippine dream.

**Q** As an avid hi-fi enthusiast, I have a dilemma and need your assistance. We are building a new home in the Philippines and need to relocate our systems into designated areas. We have as follows: Musical Fidelity KW 550, KWDM 25 transport CD, KWDM 25 DAC, KW Phono (no analogue deck as yet).

All powering a pair of Focal Electra 1027 BE speakers. I am, however, worried about the strength of the system in my new lounge 13 metres x 6.0 metres. I think, maybe, the





**The Copland CTA405 has child-friendly valves**

KW550 has the power, but the Focal 1027BE to project? Martin Logan Spires evidently can project greater than 10 metres! One last point, power supply is flaky with brown outs a common occurrence, so can you please recommend a power supply spike regulator.

**C.J Priestly, via email**

**A** There should be no issue with power reserves from the Musical Fidelity, which means that your speaker options are limited only in what you can buy in the Philippines or bring yourself to pay to ship over!

The Martin Logans are potentially a strong choice, but other room-filling superstars include the PMC IB2i and the awesome Bowers and Wilkins 802D loudspeakers, both of which want for nothing in the big sound stakes.

With regards to the power regulation, we would really advise that you consult an expert who is more familiar with the local area and available equipment. Things to bear in mind in this case is the very high power consumption of the KW550 amplifier and the fact that if these units are UK voltage, you may have to do voltage conversion at the same time.

### Baby boomer

**Q** My system currently comprises of a Marantz SA-11S1 CD player, Rega P7 turntable with Rega Fono and an Audio Research VS155 integrated amplifier into Bowers and Wilkins 805S speakers.

I love the sound of my system and, given the choice, I would keep it as it is but my son is now reaching the age where the exposed valves of the Audio Research are likely to become a problem, so it needs to go. If I can I would like to stick with valves, but they would need to be better protected than they are now.

Are there any suitable amplifiers out there? If I were to budget up to £4,000 for this, would I also be able to make a meaningful improvement on the Rega Fono as well?

**Jamie Khan, via email**

**A** The good news is that there is a very fine candidate out there that fits the bill. The Copland CTA405 uses a very similar compliment of valves to the Audio Research, but mounts them all inside a (beautifully finished) enclosed chassis. It is also fitted with an all-valve phono stage that our very own Richard Black was very complimentary towards when he reviewed the Copland back in HFC 305.

You don't mention whether the cartridge on the P7 is moving magnet or moving coil, but the phono stage in the Copland (like many valve designs) is moving magnet only. Even if you did want to connect a moving coil cartridge to the Copland, this would not be impossible if you used a step up transformer such as the Audio Technica AT2000T (HFC 33£).

If you are willing to look at a solid-state design, the Luxman L550A-II is also within budget and well worth a look. This has a sound that is unlikely to offend a valve fan, while offering some solid-state virtues as well. This is fitted with a truly excellent phono stage that supports both types of cartridges and does a fine job with both.

The Luxman also gives you the option of connection to the Marantz via balanced cables. From a child-safety perspective (not a perspective we commonly adopt, it must be said!) the Luxman runs cooler than the Audio Research or the Copland, despite being a Class A design.

**The 802D lives for large rooms.**



## THE HI-FI CHOICE GUIDE TO: BUYING AN FM RADIO

EXPERT  
ADVICE



**WITH THE** government committing to the previous government's pledge to switch off FM at some point in the future, the idea of buying an FM-only tuner might seem to be a strange one. Despite this, there are some strong arguments for giving analogue broadcasting a last hurrah.

To begin with, the "last hurrah" might be longer than people imagine. The government still intends to switch over to DAB, but has decided on a more consensus-based approach than the previous one. If the take-up of DAB is not deemed sufficient by 2015, you might have more listening time than you think.

There is also the question of value. FM is still good value for money – witness the NAD C426 we reviewed last issue (HFC 339) – but there are some astonishing bargains to be had. Tuners have no moving parts and even relatively old units are still capable of great performance when given a strong signal via a decent aerial.

The performance of FM can still make this effort worthwhile. A good signal and some of the higher quality broadcasts can combine to produce a truly remarkable performance that is spellbinding. There is life in the old dog yet ●



# Guildford Audio

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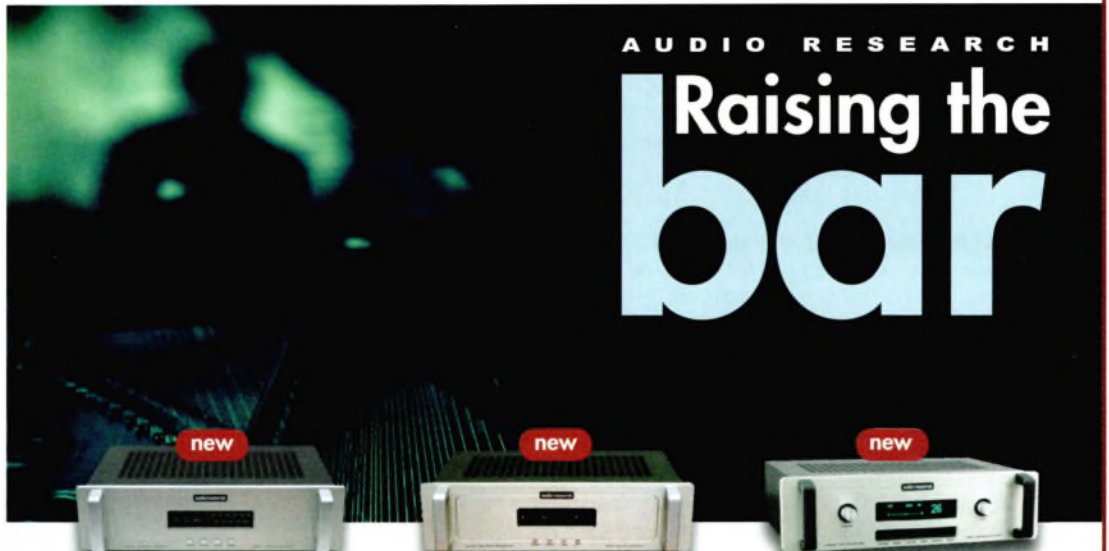
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# Minitest

Now here's a novelty item, a combination recorder/player that's also portable, says **Richard Black**

## Cowon

i9

PRICE: £80 CONTACT: 0131 273 4387  
WEBSITE: COWONGLOBAL.COM

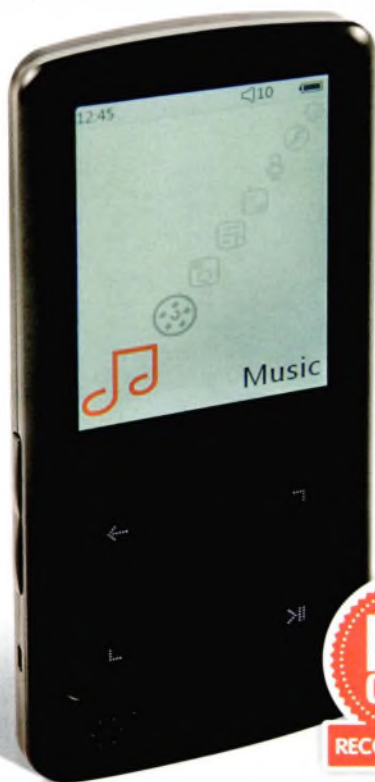
**COWON IS ONE** of the biggest names after Apple in portable audio and has quite a range of models which are generally well regarded for sound quality. This diminutive player, about 8mm thick and a little longer but narrower than a credit card, is a budget model, tested here in 8GB guise (though higher capacities are available).

It does a fair range of things, including showing videos and still pictures on the colour display, storing documents, FM radio and even voice recording. It's reasonably intuitive to operate, though the combination of side-mounted buttons and front-panel touch controls takes a little getting used to. Connection to a computer is simple enough but, annoyingly, requires a system reboot on first operation. File transfer is most easily done by dragging and dropping using your usual computer file system.

We were impressed by the sound of the i9. As with all the players here, we tested it exclusively with CD-format WAV files, of which it can store 14 hours, though lossless FLAC (same quality level) increases that to about 28 hours. It has a full-bodied and clear sound, best appreciated through more upmarket head/earphones than the supplied ones.

With well-produced recordings we were able to hear a lot of detail and some very nice imaging too and there is enough output on tap to drive less sensitive headphones to a satisfying level. The FM radio is, as usual, iffy, relying on the headphone lead for an antenna, but if signal strength is good the sound's acceptable.

**VERDICT** A FINE-SOUNDING player with surprisingly comprehensive features at an attractive price  
★★★★★



## Cowon J3

PRICE: £230 CONTACT: 0131 273 4387  
WEBSITE: COWONGLOBAL.COM

**THIS IS A CONSIDERABLY FANCIER** player than the i9 and offers much greater capacity (an 8GB model costs £165). What's more, it includes a micro-SDHC slot so you can add up to a further 32GB of removable storage, a highly appealing prospect from many points of view. The basic feature set is similar to the i9, in fact, including FM radio and voice recording (at selectable bitrates, in this case), but adds line input recording – though this requires an optional extra cable. Size strikes us as very well-judged for such a device, with a display large enough to show pictures that can be viewed without a microscope, but overall dimensions that will fit easily in a pocket. The display is touch-sensitive (though not multi-touch) and operation is particularly pleasant and largely intuitive. Again, computer connection (via a special USB cable to Cowon's multi-purpose docking connector) requires reboot to set up, but is subsequently easy and fuss-free. The J3 is admirably quick to wake up on switch-on.

The main difference from the i9 in sonic terms seems to be that the J3 has rather less output, enough to drive most low-impedance headphones to potentially unsafe levels but not quite enough for satisfying sound from high-impedance cans. However, it does seem to have a little more subtlety and finesse to it, with greater precision particularly in the bass. Indeed, with good-quality headphones (again, the supplied ones will get you going but aren't marvellous) the combination of drive, extension and detail in the lower octaves is really very fine. Only in the highest treble is the sound occasionally a little dry.

**VERDICT** A VERY IMPRESSIVE PLAYER, offering sounds not far short of those from 'real' hi-fi, with smart looks and pleasing operation  
★★★★★



## Olympus LS-5

PRICE: £199 CONTACT: 0800 111 4777  
WEBSITE: OLYMPUS.CO.UK

**THIS DEVICE MAY LOOK IMPRESSIVE**, but that's nothing to the way it feels – solid, professional and businesslike in the hand. The case is all metal and it sits well in the hand. But what's Olympus doing in a hi-fi magazine anyway? Surely they make dictation recorders, not hi-fi?

They certainly do make dictation recorders, some of them quite capable of recording half-decent music and so it wasn't such a leap to making a recorder that is designed for music duty. Like the Roland (right), this is actually more a recorder than a player but we have faith in these devices for several reasons, not least their frequent very good sound quality when used as players. But a decent recorder is a handy device and one like this is perfectly capable of recording from line-level sources, making archive copies of old cassettes and LPs at up to 96kHz sampling rate. That's quite apart from the built-in microphones, suitable for anything from speech to quite serious recording of live music events.

The sound from the built-in mics has good clarity, admirably low noise and a generally neutral tonal balance, though we found the bass a little uneven. The treble is good, though, lacking the slightly brittle quality that many budget microphones seem to have. Output to headphones is fairly healthy and sounds tonally neutral, but isn't quite as detailed as the Cowon players offer. The real glory is recording from line inputs, which is frankly excellent and a perfectly valid way of making recordings that can be copied to computer.

**VERDICT** A BIT BULKY for everyday use as a player, but recording quality is high and it's very versatile



## Roland R-05

PRICE: £210 CONTACT: 01792 702701  
WEBSITE: ROLAND.CO.UK

**WE'VE REVIEWED A COUPLE OF** similar models in the past, most recently the cracking R-09HR (HFC 308) from Roland's brand Edirol and despite the different name on the front this seems to be in many ways an evolution of those. It's relatively compact for a fully-featured portable recorder with built-in mics, but thanks to intelligent layout all the controls are accessible and easy to use. Our one mild dislike on the practical side is that the headphone jack is on the side of the unit rather than on the top, which seems to be asking for trouble with stress on the connector if the unit is in a pocket. Against that, the display is very clear to read and operation is very quick, with no setup needed beyond setting recording level. Sampling rates up to 96kHz are available in linear PCM, as well as a range of MP3 rates.

Judged both as a player and as a recorder, this unit seems to fall short of the higher standards set by the earlier Edirol devices. The sound is basically all there, not markedly coloured and plausible enough with simple music, but it just doesn't seem to get much beyond that. Playing tracks which we'd loaded from the computer, we felt that there was an unusually high degree of veiling in the upper midrange and treble, while the bass lacks real impact.

The built-in microphones lack precision and recordings made from the line input compound this, with at times what sounds like 'beating' behind sustained high notes. Perplexed by this, we ran some basic lab tests and found that distortion is above average and jitter some of the worst we've seen from any digital device.

**VERDICT** NICE TO USE, frustrating to hear; disappointing by any standards, especially those of previous devices from the same maker



Music on the move is a very broad and flourishing field. It seems that semi-pro recording-based devices have lost their sonic superiority, though their attraction remains if

you have the occasional need to record something.

In general, though, sound quality is maximised by using uncompressed, or lossless, audio file formats and

unless you feel a great need to carry hundreds of hours of material with you that's definitely the way forward. And don't forget that you get what you pay for with headphones too!



pass



## How Much Class A?

Our meters don't go to zero like other meters. They show the current draw of the amplifier's circuit, which has a fixed minimum known as the bias. When the meter isn't moving, you are in the Class A region. When the meter moves, you have moved into Class AB.

Class B circuits have no bias current, and they enjoy severe distortion due to the abrupt transition between the positive and negative halves of the output stage. Class A circuits run so much bias current that they have no transition, but they run hot as hell. Class AB amplifiers are a compromise, where a moderate bias current smoothes the transition, and they operate in Class A until the output current exceeds twice the bias current.

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And that's why our meters don't go to zero.

If you would like to know more, Nelson has written a detailed article on the subject of bias at [www.passlabs.com](http://www.passlabs.com)



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**ART AUDIO** 'Diavolo' 300B SE amp (11+11w), polished stainless-steel chassis with gold anodised trims £1,600, Sony SACD player (SCD 555ES), champagne finish £350, can demo.

**01454 414361 beedeel@yahoo.co.uk (Bristol).**

**ROTEL** CD930AX CD player, Rotel RA930AX amp, NAD533 turntable, pair of Infinity REF11 speakers. Excellent condition.

Complete set £250 or will split. **0151 3427860 (Merseyside).**

**OPPO** DV-980H DVD/SACD player, excellent condition £75, HDMI cable 5m £10 **0208 9513178 (London)**

**SPENDOR** S3 in maple £325.00, Chord DAC 64 mint boxed £800, Naim NAC 82 plus napsc (2001) K boards mint, boxed £800, Naim HI-Cap (chrome bumper) mint £300. **0772 962 0621 (Worcs)**

**RINGMAT** 330 MK11 XLR 3mm record support £20. **01202 515474 (Bournemouth)**

**FERRANTI** Type A1016, EKCO Model U363, Phillips Type 151U, Pye Ref 069009, Cossor Melody Maker. All valve radios, £40 each.

**01684 290581 (West Midlands).**

**SHARP** GF555 twin-tape, radio, spkrs, internal amp, battery and mains (silver) £75 ono, Panasonic RXDS45, CD, tape, radio, mains and battery, £35 ono.

**01684 290581 (West Midlands).**

**NAKAMICHI** CR 7E. Hardly used, cosmetically excellent.

No remote. £600 ono. **020 7485 5077 (daytime) peter@ccmusic.co.uk (London)**

**WANTED** Cyrus cCD 6s and Cyrus 6vs2 in mint condition and at a reasonable price **01753 523350 email: jamesd\_jd@yahoo.co.uk (Berkshire)**

**NAIM** Nait XS amplifier (£1,380) £880, CD5i CD player (£915) £600, or both £1450. PMC DB1i speakers, walnut, (£985) £600. Equipment

purchased March '10. All mint condition, boxed.

**01233 713250 (Kent).**

**BLACK RHODIUM** Polar Illusion metre pair stereo interconnect, deep cryogenic version. *Hi-Fi Choice* award winner, cost £250, sell £125

**01243 528010 (West Sussex)**

**SIMONYORKE** S7 record player and Koetsu coral £8,500, Finite Elemente MR HD07 four-shelves £3,250, MR HD09 amp stand £600.

**01237 473057 (North Devon).**

**RUSS ANDREWS** mains cables, filters, Kimber and digital interconnects. Other items including active studio monitors, too many to list, all mint condition.

**01902 884694 (Dudley).**

**AUDIO SYNTHESIS** Passion 8m passive preamp. Excellent condition, boxed with remote control, manual and transformer p.s. £595 **01628 626085 (Berkshire).**

**AUDIOPHILE BASE** hi-fi support system, incorporating vibration control technology. Four



Naim Nait XS integrated amplifier

platforms (£800) £200. [janhud16@talktalk.net](mailto:janhud16@talktalk.net) **01270 624008 (Cheshire)**

**NAIM** DVD 5 CD/DVD player, hardly used £695, 112x preamp £229, 150x power amplifier 2008 £479, or £649 for the pair. All mint/boxed. **01984 640588. (Somerset)**

**ATC** 50a active speakers, good condition, rosewood (£9,500) £2,500, Stax 3050 Mk2 headphones and stand, silver, immaculate (£850) £500, New vinyl at 40% of RRP. For list, **01453 519700. (Gloucester)**

**REGA** P3 turntable and RB300 arm, Elys cartridge. Boxed, excellent condition. Recent motor upgrade. Arm new and cartridge light use, £375. **07843 762212 or atj.harding@googlemail.com (Hants).**

**PRO-JECT** record deck and Pro-ject phono amp, Musical Fidelity XA-1 preamp, Arcam Alpha 9 CD player, Arcam P60 power amp, Rogers Studio 5 speakers. Includes all power cords (Russ Andrews) and cables/speaker stands and equipment stand. (£3,700) £1,400 ono. Must be heard. **00353 87 637 6623 (Co Wicklow, Ireland).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** Tri-Vista 21 DAC, less than 200 hours use. Excellent condition, boxed with manual. £540 **07905 312191. (Cheshire).**

**ROGUE AUDIO** 88 valve power amp, fully overhauled and modified by Definitive Audio two years ago,

absolute stunner! £1,000 ono. **07905 312191. (Cheshire).**

**VARIOUS COMPONENTS:** Arcam alpha 9 power amplifier 9P, £250. Maplin amplifier boards, 50w/8R, 70w/4R, four available, £25 each. AvonMusic prototype power supply for Class A power amplifiers, £225. AvonMusic prototype power supply for Garrard 4/301 Thorens TD124, £225. Garrard 401 chassis and plinth, £700. Technics SL1210 Mk2 £250. **020 749 98729 (London).**

**PRIMARE** SPA21 amplifier, recommended almost as good in stereo as the I30, mint, remote and manual, two years old £1,100 plus shipping. **00353 86 8127103 or michael.ogrody@gmx.co.uk (Ireland).**

**NAKAMICHI** CR3E £150. Nakamichi CR4E £195. Dunlop Systemdeck 2 £185. Audiolab 8000A £90. All good condition. No offers please. **07513039966. (Dorset).**

**MONITOR AUDIO** Silver RS6 (oak) for sale £300. Just run-in. **01501 820875 (Scotland).**

**TANNOY** DC6t speakers (oak) excellent £500. **01501 820875 (Scotland).**

**MJACOUSTICS** Pro 50 Mk11 subwoofer £175 ono (Excellent condition). **01562 638119 or email mike222@blueyonder.co.uk (Worcestershire).**

**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!



**TEAC** VRDS-T1 transport (includes Trichord upgrade £400) receipt kept, manual, remote, boxed £275.

**01384 293955. (West Midlands).**

**WANTED** Reel-to-reel tape recorder, Sony TC 377 or similar. Must be in good working order.

**01633 421906 (Newport).**

**RUSS ANDREWS** Powermax Plus mains cable. Big improvement for little money. *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy. Clean, precise sound. (£45) now £20. **07981 025698 (Bristol).**

**ARCAM** A38 integrated amp £895. CD37 player £795. Denon TU1800 FM/DAB tuner £150. All in good condition, with boxes. **023 8073 8935 or email: golf3385@hotmail.co.uk (Southampton).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** E100 integrated amp, piano black, excellent condition, digital and phono outputs £250. Aurum Cantus Leisure 5 speakers piano rosewood £495. Unison Research S6 valve integrated amp. £750 **02380 224003 (Southampton).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** P180 (Mosfet) power amp, with choke-regulated power supply. Condition is excellent and was one of *Hi-Fi World's* favorites: "powerful and refined". £525. **07972 341692 / 01424 446282. (East Sussex).**

**CABASSE** mt30 Antigua standmount speakers in wenge (black). Brand new won in competition (£460) £325. Kimbermonoclex speaker cable, 13-feet, WBT slant bananas (approx £1,600) £675. **01933 405875 (Northants).**

**CYRUS CDXT** SE transport player (black), one-year-old, boxed as new. Can demo. **02476 667877/07887 540082 (Coventry).**

**PRIMARE** CDI10 one-box CD player, 70w amp and DAB. Boxed with manual and remote. Russ Andrews Torlyte platform (£1,320) £650 **017919 025005 (Sussex).**

**TACT/LYNGDORF** SDA1 2175 integrated amp, superb quality and performance, 200watts, (silver), boxed (£1,895) £795. **07776 143890 (Southampton).**

**DALI** ikon6 loudspeakers. Unmarked with instructions. £250. **01255 675115 (Frinton-on-Sea, Essex).**

**GRADO** PS1000 headphones, brand new, boxed with warranty, won in competition, £1,200ono. **0115 9397413 (Derbyshire).**

**ARCAM** Alpha 10 DAVE, award-winning stereo amplifier, with factory-fitted Dolby Digital/DTS module, in excellent condition, with remote and original packaging, £450ono. **Alpha10@reticulum.demon.co.uk (Cams / Beds border).**

**AUDIOQUEST** Columbia XLR 1m interconnects, boxed, 48v DBS stunning high-end cables, immaculate and in original case (£400) £175. **07876 226999 (Surrey).**

**MARANTZ** CD 5003 CD player, black, pitch control and CD text, as new (£200) £100 no offers. **01268 415 017 (Basildon).**

**YAMAHA** B2 and C2 pre and power amp, 160 watts per channel, £50 or offers. **steve.paton100@googlemail.com (Cumbria).**

**WANTED:** Top-quality hi-fi separates and complete systems, Naim, Linn, Cyrus, Meridian, Arcam etc, fast, friendly response and willing to travel/pay cash. **07815 892458 (Colchester).**

**MONITORAUDIO** RS6, natural oak, just run-in £300. Tannoy DC6T, oak, immaculate £500. **01501 820875 (Lanarkshire).**

**CHORD** Signature speaker cable, 2m pair, £275. Chord 1m Indigo Plus RCA pair, £475. Chord signature Links, two pair, £25. **07970012450 (Hampshire).**

**AUDIO RESEARCH** LS2b preamp, original box, (£3,000) £780. Theta Pearl transport and Probasic 3a DAC (£4,750) £1,250. Wanted: Transparent ultra/reference s/e interconnect, finite Elemente rack. **07973 220663 (Leicestershire).**

**RUARK TALISMAN** Mk1 speakers with soft-dome tweeters, cherry finish, very good condition, £240. **01425 613983 (Hampshire).**

**PSAUDIO** phones, one year old, immaculate condition, manual, remote, boxes, purchased from new, can be demonstrated, very light usage, £495. **01737 779938 or 01306 884107 (Surrey).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** A1 CD Pro Player, two years old, mint, boxed. Philips Pro 2 mechanism 24-bit/192k DAC. Top-loader, £650. Original Pi Foundation stands circa 1990, 18-inch-high, top plate 7.5in square, sand- and shot-filled, brass-opped floor spikes, good condition, buyer collects, £150. **07789 712775 (Hampshire).**

**REGA** 3 full Isokinetic mods turntable, no arm, buyer collects, £250. **01606 784767 (Cheshire).**

**MJ ACOUSTICS** Ref1 subwoofer, 10-inch downward-firing driver, D.A.M.P amp technology, high/low inputs, variable crossover, expensive option (red cherry), good condition, (£800) £400. Two Musical Fidelity X10Ds and one X-PSU, cylindrical models, both X10Ds are boxed as new, one has NOS Mullards fitted, X-PSU is as new, all leads, £100 each. **07876 705266 (West Yorks).**

**NAIM ARIVA** loudspeakers quality floorstanders, excellent condition, Cherry finish, 100w, original grills, plinths and cartons, but collection best option, (£1,400) £849. **07595 218695 or email: steve.crowe@yachtingpages.com (Bristol area).**

**NEAT MOTIVE 2** loudspeakers, maple finish, unwanted prize, boxed, unopened, £900. **01684 294649 or 07971662734 or email: ultraarry@hotmail.com (Tewkesbury, Glos.).**

**ART AUDIO** Maestro valve monoblocs, 50 watts and valve VP1 preamp, good condition, serviced recently and new valves, (£9,500), £2,500. Can demo. **01476 579201 (Grantham).**

**SPECTRALAUDIO** dma 150mk2 power amp, excellent con, superb sound, manual box, £3650ono. **0115 9126424 (Notts).**

**YAMAHA** NS-F700 loudspeakers, piano black, three-way floorstanders, new boxed 25kg, 354x1012x374mm (WxHxD), unwanted prize, £750. **01245264248 petenicky@tiscali.co.uk (Essex).**

**A&R** A60 amplifier, low one-channel (pre) £30. Mission, 7LE speakers £35. Yamaha NSC 120 centre speaker (boxed) £40. Technics ST70300 analogue tuner £40. **01708457691 (Essex).**

**UNISON RESEARCH** S6 valve amp (not working) open to offers. Buyer collects. **01482 853091 (Hull).**

**RUSS ANDREWS** Kimber Crystal CU interconnect one metre (£150) £70. **07891 533084 (Swansea).**

**PRO-JECT** record deck and phono amp, Musical Fidelity XA-1 preamp, Arcam Alpha 9 CD player, Arcam P60 power amp, Rogers Studio 5 speakers.

Includes all cables, Russ Andrews mains leads and stands (£3,700) £1,600ono. **+00353 87 637 6623 (Co Wicklow).**

**MICHELL TECNO** black tonearm, as new, 15 hours use, upgraded, (£445) £375, no offers. **07736 773830 (Yorkshire).**

**ISOTEK ELITE** 1.5 metre mains cables x4, cost £300. Open to any sensible offer. **07891 533084 (Swansea).**

**ARCAM FMJ A18** six-months old, £350 ONO, Pro-Ject 1.9 Classic (cherry) turntable, MC35FL cartridge, £300 ONO, Trichord Dino, Dino and phono, PSY, £300 ONO. **07896 410722 or 115 9176776 (Nottingham).**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY** KW550 amp, perfect, boxed, buyer collects, £2,500 ono. Arcam CD player 192, perfect, boxed, £350 ONO. Quad CDP99 (MK I) £400ono. **01273 305176 (Brighton).**

**ARCAM FMJ DV29** DVD, audio/video player, silver, good condition, in original box with manual, £350 collected. Price includes 10 DVDs. **01452 614515 (Gloucestershire).**

**CHORD ODYSSEY 2** cables 4-metre pair, terminated (£214) £120. Black Rhodium illusion DCT interconnect 1 metre (£250) £150. Audio Note Lexus interconnect 1 metre (£275) £150. **01243 528010 (West Sussex).**

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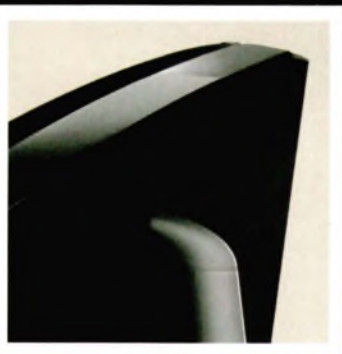
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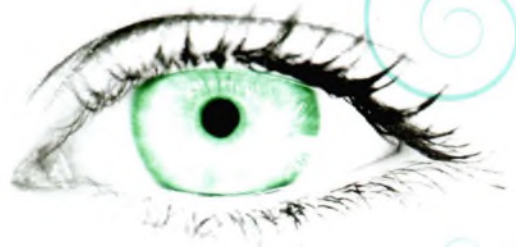
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# Hi-Fi Choice

## Buyer's Guide



Welcome to the *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.

To access selected *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews, simply type: [techradar.com/](http://techradar.com/) into your browser, 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 consult our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can try them with your favourite music and test discs.

## BADGES EXPLAINED

### OUR AWARDS



**EDITOR'S CHOICE:** Awarded to those products that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance



**RECOMMENDED:** The products we feel meet a certain high standard of performance



**GROUP TEST WINNER:** Comparative tests can only have one true winner, and this badge says it all

### NEW ENTRIES...

Every month, our buying bible is updated to include our latest reviews. These new entries are highlighted in yellow and reflect the very best reviews from the previous issue.

## SOURCE COMPONENTS

### 108 \_ CD players

Whether CD or SACD, we list the very best players for the job

### 111 \_ Turntables

Everything is listed here, from a £190 Pro-Ject to a £115k Continuum

### 111 \_ Phono cartridges

The best in both magnetic and moving coil cartridges

### 113 \_ Radio tuners

Surf the airwaves with any one of these carefully selected tuners

### 113 \_ Headphones

Badge-winning headphones for your personal listening pleasure



## AMPLIFIERS

### 115 \_ Stereo amplifiers

Our pick of the world's best one-box integrated amplifiers

### 115 \_ Pre/power amps

For those occasions when two boxes seem better than one



## CABLES

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Our favourite cables for transferring delicate signals are all here

### 117 \_ Speaker cables

Priced per metre, these are our top recommendations for home use



## LOUDSPEAKERS

### 119 \_ Stereo speakers

An invaluable guide to the best loudspeakers for your electronics

## STANDS & SUPPORTS

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Our selection of the best equipment supports for your precious kit

### 123 \_ Speaker stands

Stands come in all shapes, sizes and prices, so take your pick from our list



## DEALER CLASSIFIED

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A veritable *pot pourri* of hi-fi dealer classified advertisements

### 129 \_ Dealer directory

For all your hi-fi wants, check our index of independent hi-fi dealerships





BADGES KEY: RECOMMENDED = ● | EDITOR'S CHOICE = ● | GROUP TEST WINNER = ● | BEST BUY = ●



## CD players

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CD-RW compatible  
Bal analogue out  
Headphone socket  
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### Up to £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments																	
●	Arcam CD17	700	Civilised sound, with a positively deluxe treble. Bass is clear, if not the weightiest ever																	315
●	Audio Analogue Crescendo	599	Simple player that's clear and communicative with the appropriate partnering equipment																	329
●	Cyrus CD6 SE	900	A combination of detail and sheer musical energy with a hint of high end to the performance																	318
●	Denon DCD-1510AE	900	If the SACD format is what you're into, then this player is capable of some impressive sounds																	335
●	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 Pearl Lite SA-KI	899	A key CD/SACD player at an attractive price, with support for digital																	338
●	Micromega CD-10	799	The cheapest in the range, the CD-10 has been fine-tuned to please the audiophile																	328
●	MoonCD.5	999	Admirably energetic music-maker from this very well-built player																	335
●	NAD C545BEE	350	Apart from slight lack of bass control, sound is very fine indeed – treble is beautifully detailed																	322
●	Naim CDSi	895	Its competent musical performance exceeds the expectations of an entry-level player																	307
	Pro-ject CD Box	300	This player belies both its size and its price with sounds worthy of a decent mid-range system																	338
●	Roksan Kandy K2	899	State-of-the-art technology and precision engineering produces a fine CD performance																	335
●	Rotel RCD-1520	695	Lacks optical digital output, but feature-count is fine and sound quality is expressive and open	/608305																323

### Above £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments																		
●	Arcam CD37	1,300	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution	/395096																	318
●	Audio Research CDS	5,055	Audibly better than most CD players on the market – assertive and very dynamic	/455309																	312
●	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
●	Copland CDA 825	3,985	This a highly revealing player that delivers music in a realistically engaging form																		332
●	Creek Destiny	1,400	This player presents the music and nothing but the music and is thoroughly recommended																		328
●	Cyrus Audio CD 8 SE	1,200	A highly civilised player which can, nevertheless, deal convincingly with raw music	/399370																	323
●	Denon DCD-2010AE	1,700	Well equipped, finely detailed and with good support for compressed audio and iPod																		328
●	EMM Labs XDS1	18,995	Very high-performance two channel only player with the option of a standalone D/A converter																		327
●	Leema Stream III	1,495	This is a superb CD player that improves on the performance of its predecessor, the Stream																		339
●	Marantz UD 8004	2,450	Sophisticated and highly capable universal player that just about does it all																		336
●	Meridian 808.3 Signature	10,000	Extraordinarily revealing and open CD player with a first-class performance level																		339
●	Micromega CD-20	1,249	No SACD, unfortunately, but without doubt one of the better mainstream players																		332
●	Mimetism 20.1	5,107	An impressive player that produces a very convincing and musical sound																		330
●	Moon CD3.3	2,200	Excellent detail and a fine choice for those who like their music straight from source	/594609																	328
●	Moon 750D	7,950	Very few CD players can extract as much information off the disc as the 750D																		331
●	Naim CDS XS	1,790	Its composure and openness results in a musical performance that is extremely seductive																		334
●	Rega Isis	5,998	A magnificently musical CD player at a realistic price. USB input is a useful addition																		329
●	Resolution Audio Cantata	5,995	CD player/streamer that's revealing enough to set it far apart from the competition																		336
●	Roksan Caspian M2	1,600	This impressively engineered CD player is punchy and dynamic, with excellent timing																		338
●	Theta Compli Blu	2,998	A very accomplished universal player with support for Blu-ray and HDMI																		337

**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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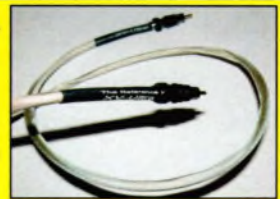
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### Announcement

Signal Collection, LLC (TSC), a specialty distributor of fine audio equipment and manufacturer of highly regarded audiophile cables, announces today that it will no longer be using the "STEREOVOX" moniker due to issues surrounding that trademark, and has adopted use of the name Stereolab™ in its place. Available now is the XV-Ultra Reference digital, the Draco RX RCA and XLR interconnects and Diablo LS loudspeaker cable

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# Turntables

The best record players money can buy



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Switchable speed change	Suspension subchassis	Supplied with arm	Supplied with cart	Issue number
●	<b>Clearaudio Concept</b>	1,100	One of the easiest ways of getting into analogue, with excellent results for the price		33/45	●	●	●	338
●	<b>Continuum Caliburn</b>	125,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and Castellon stand	/587169	33/45/78	●	●	●	320
●	<b>Dr Feickert Woodpecker</b>	2,995	Offers superb bass, excellent build quality and range of arm choices		33/45	●	●	●	335
●	<b>The Funk Firm Funk V2</b>	1,390	Not only as beguiling as those that preceded it, this turntable is also more substantial to boot		33/45	●	●	●	324
●	<b>The Funk Firm Saffire</b>	2,450	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics		33/45	●	opt	opt	309
●	<b>Hanns Acoustic T-30</b>	3,600	The only multi-armbase deck in its price range, it boasts image stability and precise bass		33/45	●	opt	opt	331
●	<b>Lumley Heliosphere</b>	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45	●	opt	opt	319
●	<b>Michell Tecnodec</b>	608	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money		33/45	●	opt	●	309
●	<b>Michell Gyro SE</b>	1,140	A marriage of shot-putter-strength, build quality and robust audio		33/45	●	●	●	338
●	<b>Pro-ject RPM-1 Genie 3</b>	190	The Genie is that rare thing of a product with good looks, fine build and excellent sound		33/45	●	●	●	332
●	<b>Pro-ject 6 Perspex</b>	1,280	Plenty of detail and good rhythmic qualities (arm included)		33/45/78	●	●	●	338
●	<b>Pro-ject X-Pack</b>	1,000	Combines very strong elements (Ortofon Rondo Red) a killer package with top sound and value		33/45	●	●	●	309
●	<b>Rega P3-24</b>	390	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply		33/45	opt	●	●	298
●	<b>Roksan Radius 5.2</b>	1,399	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation		33/45	●	●	●	338
●	<b>SRM Arezzo</b>	699	The Arezzo is an excellent source component for those wanting a superb turntable for vinyl replay	/625025	33/45	●	●	●	325
●	<b>Townshend Rock 7</b>	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
●	<b>Townshend Rock V/Excalibur II</b>	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	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Replaceable stylus	Issue number
●	<b>Dynavector Karat 17D3</b>	699	One of the most thrilling-sounding cartridges on the market		●	334
●	<b>Goldring Legacy</b>	595	An MC cartridge better suited to the smoother-sounding turntable, it unearths a mountain of detail		●	328
●	<b> Grado Prestige Gold 1</b>	150	Unusually assured 'presence' region is the basis of a beautifully musical and involving presentation		●	338
●	<b>Ortofon Rondo Red</b>	385	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price		●	307
●	<b>Ortofon Cadenza Red</b>	750	There's much to admire in this cartridge's fine detail and unfussy presentation		●	330
●	<b>Ortofon Vivo Red</b>	200	Never less than musically convincing, this all-in-one cartridge is remarkably capable		●	338
●	<b>van den Hul MC One Special</b>	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●	235
●	<b>van den Hul Condor XCM</b>	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and resolution to die for		●	265

# Phono stages

Make your turntable sing



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	MM phono inputs	MC phono inputs	Adj impedance	Adj gain	Issue number
●	<b>Cambridge Audio 640P</b>	100	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades		●	●	●	●	305
●	<b>Lehmann Audio Black Cube</b>	335	This phono amp is a very distinguished performer with an MM source		●	●	●	●	335
●	<b>Linn Uphorik</b>	1,850	Exceptional sound quality, the Uphorik could easily win over the next generation of LP enthusiasts		●	●	●	●	334
●	<b>Pro-ject Tube Box SE II</b>	435	The big picture is the most evident thing here, but the finer details are there, too		●	●	●	●	335
●	<b>Soundsmith Strain Gauge</b>	6,100	Revolutionary kit assembly that rewrites the rules about vinyl playback	/618387	●	●	●	●	324

**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.

## HFC TOP PICKS



### Dynavector Karat 17D3 £699

The 17D3 gets very close to the results achieved with MCs at twice the price and few can touch it in terms of sheer musicality and resolution of detail



### Pro-ject 6 Perspex £1,280

Our product of the year 2010. A winning combination of open and even-handed sound, handsome design and excellent build quality



### Dr Feickert An. Woodpecker £2,995

A very flexible and well-thought-out deck that offers brilliant build quality and excellent bass, that is able to work with a wide variety of arms





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# Amplifiers



Our pick of the best one-box amps out there

**Up to £1,000**

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Line inputs	Phono input	Remote control	Headphone socket	Power output (watts)	Issue number
●	<b>Audio Analogue Crescendo</b>	599	In a room of appropriate dimensions, this amplifier has real musical presence	5				50	329
●	<b>Cambridge Audio 840A v2</b>	800	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp offers detail and delicacy (silver finish)	8				120	327
●	<b>Denon DCD-1510AE</b>	900	Offers a taste of high-end excellence at an affordable price	5	MM/MC			70	335
●	<b>Marantz Pearl Lite PM-KI</b>	899	Great all-rounder and attractively priced, the PM-KI transcends its £899 price	5	MM			70	338
●	<b>Moon 1.5</b>	999	A likeable amp in many ways, with admirable bass, treble and imaging	5				60	321
●	<b>NAD C3226BEE</b>	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed	/603281				50	322
●	<b>Puresound A10</b>	685	A superbly involving valve amp at a very competitive price and with genuinely excellent results	2				10	331

**Above £1,000**

●	<b>Arcam A38</b>	1,480	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality	7	opt			100	332
●	<b>Astin Trew AT2000PLUS</b>	1,740	If you prefer timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, this is a contender	4				65	332
●	<b>Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta</b>	1,450	Detailed and lively, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension	5	MC			160	320
●	<b>Creek 5350 Evolution</b>	1,075	One of the most attractive amps in its price range, with a sound that's immediately satisfying	5	MM/MC			120	334
●	<b>Denon PMA-2010AE</b>	1,700	High-class, well-equipped integrated, with a performance that is muscular, refined and detailed	6	MM/MC			80	328
●	<b>Electrocompaniet PI-2</b>	1,600	A superb all-rounder, with insight on one hand and effortless musical flow on the other	6				100	327
●	<b>Electrocompaniet ECI-3</b>	1,650	This is an impressively resolute and powerful integrated amplifier for the money	/618304				70	324
●	<b>Gryphon Atila</b>	6,995	Exceptional subtlety and definition, has enough power to cope with just about anything musical	5				100	328
●	<b>Leema Pulse III</b>	1,495	Offers a clean, smooth sound and has an unusually wide array of inputs	6	MM/MC			150	339
●	<b>Leema Tucana II</b>	3,425	Highly featured, well-built and not short of power, this is a highly resolute and organic amp	/612396				148	323
●	<b>Luxman L550A-II</b>	3,000	An accomplished all-rounder that's able to handle virtually any system	4	MC			20	335
●	<b>Micromega IA-100</b>	1,125	Fast and fluid performer that brings a touch of panache to its role	5	MM			100	332
●	<b>Mimetism 15.2</b>	5,415	A powerful amplifier with great dynamics and high resolution that's rare even at this price	6				180	330
●	<b>MSB Platinum M200</b>	13,656	This amplifier's devastatingly good all-round sound quality sets a benchmark that few will approach	/603452					322
●	<b>Musical Fidelity M31</b>	1,000	Extremely engaging performer, this power amp boasts excellent sonics and solid build	6				70	337
●	<b>Myryad MX12080</b>	1,200	Sound is more assured at the top of the frequency range, though bass is melodious and detailed	8				80	327
●	<b>NAD 375BEE</b>	1,000	A good, solid amplifier that is fundamentally musical and gives a great bang for your buck	/625323				150	325
●	<b>Roksan Caspian M2</b>	1,600	This muscular-sounding amplifier is load tolerant and more powerful in practice	6				85	338
●	<b>Unison Research Unico Nuovo</b>	1,650	A truly successful marriage between tubes and solid-state amplification	7				100	339

# Pre/power amplifiers

Separate boxes can bring clear advantages



**Up to £2,000**

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Line inputs	Phono input	Remote control	Headphone socket	Power output (watts)	Issue number
●	<b>Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W</b>	2,000	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed and controlled					8 opt	200 309
●	<b>NAD C165BEE/C275BEE</b>	1,550	An alternative to the usual integrated route and one that offers flexibility and fine sound					6 MM/MC	130 336

**Above £2,000**

●	<b>Audio Research DS450</b>	7,000	Power amp features a very neutral transparent sound with lots of power and low running temperature					2	450 337
●	<b>Bryston BP16/ 2B SST2</b>	5,700	Preamp and power amp combo offers superb sound quality	/608649				6 opt	100 323
●	<b>Bryston BP26</b>	3,670	Cracking preamp brings detailed results					8 opt	308
●	<b>Chord Prima/Mezzo 140</b>	7,135	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled, and sounds like a dream					5	120 269
●	<b>Classé CP-700/CA-M400</b>	9,200	Pre plus mono power combowith superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility					6 opt	400 293
●	<b>Cyrus Pre XP D/8 power</b>	2,225	Detailed and subtle, with little character added to sound					5	60 336
●	<b>Digital Do Main Ba-1</b>	6,495	By recreating the V-FET, DDM has built one of the most thrilling amplifiers on the market					4	300 327
●	<b>Mark Levinson No. 326S</b>	8,000	Excellent USB implementation, natural sound and solid build. Excellent performance levels					7	338
●	<b>Naim NAC 152 XS/NAP 155 XS</b>	1,920	Preamp and power amp duo offers excellent performance and classic Naim virtues					6	60 324
●	<b>Roksan Caspian M1</b>	2,800	A powerful and enjoyable-sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player					5	85 307
●	<b>Rotel RC158/RB1582</b>	2,100	It looks high-end and it really sounds the part, too					5 MM/MC	200 336
●	<b>Trilogy 909/990</b>	10,390	Extremely musical valve-based pairing with hybrid power and beautiful finish	/625226				6	100 325

**SPECS KEY** **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and on-board phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.



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# Cables

Cables really can make a difference, especially our top recommendations

## Analogue interconnects

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Stranded	Solid core	Copper	Silver	Digital cable type	Issue number
●	<b>Audioquest Sidewinder</b>	45	A detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm			●	●			297
●	<b>Black Rhodium Prelude</b>	90	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit			●	●			293
●	<b>Black Rhodium Coda</b>	150	Superb bass with neutral and detailed midrange, treble sweet with occasional slight constriction			●	●			298
●	<b>Black Rhodium Polar Illusion</b>	250	A good all-rounder, with clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine treble			●	●			321
●	<b>Cambridge Azur Reference</b>	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price: especially adept in the treble			●	●			296
●	<b>Chord Co. Indigo Plus</b>	995	Costly, and high-class cable needs running in, but this is a finely detailed design overall	/608313	●					323
●	<b>Clearer Audio Silver-line</b>	283	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass			●	●			279
●	<b>CrystalCable Piccolo</b>	348	Thin, tougher than it looks, has some qualities of a solid-core type – resolution, focus and articulation				●		●	294
●	<b>Kimber Timbre</b>	145	A very neutral cable that will complement even very upmarket systems				●		●	312
●	<b>Monster M350i</b>	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space.			●		●		281
●	<b>Monster M1000i</b>	230	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere			●		●		284
●	<b>Nordost Wyrewizard Dream</b>	110	Slight lack of precision in extreme treble, otherwise detailed and neutral with authoritative bass				●	●		303
●	<b>Oehlbach NF214</b>	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers with good mid and treble			●		●		281
●	<b>QED Signature Audio S</b>	190	Mellifluous and rounded, this cable is a great choice for lovers of the human voice				●		●	332
●	<b>Supra EFF-IX</b>	77	Lively sounding which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality, musically, a great all-rounder			●		●		306
●	<b>Townshend Isolda DCT100</b>	99	Particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for great listener involvement				●	●		312
●	<b>van den Hul The Wave</b>	125	Neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most			●		●		312

## Digital interconnects

●	<b>Atlas Mavros</b>	285	By any reckoning this is a very revealing wire				●	●		E 336
●	<b>Kimber DV-30</b>	59	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models			●		●		E 317
●	<b>van den Hul The Wave</b>	65	The results this cable achieves are excellent and it scores highly for value				●	●		E 336

## Speaker cables (price per metre)

●	<b>Atlas Hyper 1.5</b>	12.5	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price			●		●		299
●	<b>Atlas Ascent 2.0</b>	60	A highly analytical cable and very fine detail across the board			●		●		294
●	<b>Black Rhodium Jive</b>	14	Bi-wire cable which is full of sonic virtues. It's highly practical, too					●		339
●	<b>CrystalCable Piccolo</b>	1,395	A chip off the old block, has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound (price - 3 metre pair)				●		●	302
●	<b>Kimber 4VS</b>	155	In the right system, this cable is a good choice (price reflects 2.5 metre terminated pair)			●		●		329
●	<b>Monster MCX-1s</b>	5	Notable for its bass, perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers			●		●		280
●	<b>Nordost Heimdall</b>	185	Alternative to Valhalla, silver-plated, micro-monofilament construction, suitable for exacting systems				●	●		278
●	<b>QED X-Tube XT300</b>	12.5	A natural and controlled-sounding cable that's cost-effective for mid-priced systems				●	●		310
●	<b>QED Revelation</b>	15	Sensibly priced, this cable offers a performance which is a step-up from budget types			●		●		318
●	<b>Townshend Isolda DCT</b>	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance-matched' cable with stabilising components added				●	●		241
●	<b>van den Hul The Teatrack</b>	35	A bi-wire cable with a sound that's impeccably timed, neutral and full of detail				●	●		339
●	<b>Wireworld Solstice 52</b>	25	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity				●	●		310
●	<b>Wireworld Oasis 6</b>	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.

## HFC TOP PICKS



**Van Den Hul The Teatrack £33 per metre**  
Curious name aside, this bi-wire cable has assured bass and a positive sense of rhythm whilst extracting an impressive amount of detail



**Kimber 4VS £133 (2.5 metre pair)**  
A wonderfully natural performer that makes itself unobtrusive and lets music take centre stage. The fit and finish is extremely high as well



**QED Signature Audio S £190 (1 metre)**  
The QED has the rare ability to impart no sonic signature of its own to the equipment it connects getting you closer to the music



# TOTAL FILM HOTLIST 2010

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Based on what you've seen them in this year and/or what they're currently working on...



### Hottest Director

Based on what you've seen them direct this year and/or what they're currently working on...



### Hottest Writer

Based on films they wrote that were out this year and/or what they're currently working on...



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That you watched this year...



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That you heard this year...



### Hottest Look

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BADGES KEY:  RECOMMENDED = ●  EDITOR'S CHOICE = ●  GROUP TEST WINNER = ●  BEST BUY = ●

## Stereo speakers

The most influential link in the chain



Up to £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Size - width - height - depth (cm)	Rating	Issue number
●	<b>Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3</b>	363	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	A	24
●	<b>Acoustic Energy Radiance 1</b>	600	Limited bass, power handling and dynamics, but exceptional mid-to-treble voicing	18,5,32,25	A	33
●	<b>Amphion Ion L</b>	900	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment	16,2,32,6,26,5	A	40
●	<b>ATC SCM11</b>	867	A very fine little speaker t-at its best with natural recordings where it adds little	21,38,25	A-	55
●	<b>AudioPro Avanti A.10</b>	350	A tough and effective little speaker – overall balance is quite smooth and even	19,29,26	A+	38
●	<b>Bowers and Wilkins CM1</b>	488	Luxury miniature has laid-back sound, low coloration and fine imaging, but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28	A-	40
●	<b>Bowers and Wilkins 684</b>	699	A fine all-rounder at a realistic price, has a smooth, even and nicely open balance	/483503 20,91,30	A	22
●	<b>Castle Knight 2</b>	400	A true resurgence for the Castle brand, the Knight 2 has a beguiling sound quality	20,38,33,5	A+	42
●	<b>DALI Ikon 6</b>	999	Needs care with setup, impressively transparent and obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	A	37
●	<b>Dynaudio DM 2/10</b>	880	Has fine dynamics, grip, bass and headroom and is well mannered	27,5,45,35	A	22
●	<b>Focal Chorus 706V</b>	389	Advanced drivers deliver an even, healthy dynamic expression and tension	22,39,25	A	27
●	<b>Focal Chorus 726V</b>	950	Compact and realistically priced, the Chorus 726V is a good all-round performer	22,99,37,5	A	25
●	<b>JBL Studio L880</b>	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch	22,99,37	A	25
●	<b>KEF iQ50</b>	599	Looks cute and very discreet, with spacious imaging, good balance and a sweet treble	/483527 17,5,81,5,26	A	23
●	<b>Monitor Audio BR2</b>	230	Good-looking standmount has a muscular sound with superior coherence	18,5,35,25	A-	30
●	<b>Monitor Audio BR5</b>	450	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold-sounding and good value	17,85,25	A-	36
●	<b>Monitor Audio Silver RS8</b>	850	Bold, dynamic sound, it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	A	33
●	<b>Monitor Audio GS10</b>	900	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs, the GS10 is easy to drive	20,36,27	A-	40
●	<b>PMC DB1i</b>	985	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator	15,5,29,23,4	A+	30
●	<b>ProAc Tablette Ref Eight</b>	704	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its brother is even better!	15,27,23	A+	40
●	<b>Q Acoustics 1010</b>	110	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling, fine midband voicing	15,21,5,19,5	A	48
●	<b>Q Acoustics 1020i</b>	140	Outstanding value, t smooth well-balanced and lively sound makes a fine communicator	/516273 17,5,25,26,5	A+	60
●	<b>Rega RS1</b>	390	Clever close-to-wall speaker has a fine coherence and good communication skills	15,32,23,6	A	23
●	<b>Russ Andrews SP-1</b>	352	This tweaked Focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, and great fun	19,2,31,5,24,8	A+	65
●	<b>Spendor S3/5R</b>	750	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, smooth neutrality and g bass extension	16,5,30,5,190	A	25
●	<b>Tannoy Revolution DC4T</b>	599	Ultra-compact, lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	488857 15,85,16	A	40
●	<b>Tannoy Revolution DC6</b>	900	Pretty compact standmount, delivering a lively bass and smooth, coherent midband	23,36,5,23	A	40
●	<b>Wharfedale Diamond 9.1</b>	150	Superior shape and finish. Sound is laid back, but free from boxiness	19,5,30,28	A-	45
●	<b>Wharfedale Diamond 10.5</b>	480	Despite the price, the 10.5 ticks many of the boxes, with superior voice band coherence	/636778 22,88,30	A-	50

Above £1,000

●	<b>Adam Audio Tensor Delta</b>	8,400	This active loudspeaker brings a powerful range of capabilities to its performance	33,56,34	A	50
●	<b>AE Energy Radiance 2</b>	1,000	This speaker boasts fine neutrality, sweet top, fine imaging and wide dynamic range	18,5,92,25	A	30
●	<b>AE Energy Radiance 3</b>	1,500	This speaker's effective enclosure ensures a wide dynamic range and a very clean sound	/587236 23,92,29,7	A	27
●	<b>AE AE1 MkIII</b>	2,000	This speaker has a lovely midband smoothness and superior image focus	18,5,31,25	A	24
●	<b>Amphion Argon 3L</b>	2,300	Solid build ensures an impressively clean sound with loads of bass and fine neutrality	19,9,2,5,30,5	A	44
●	<b>Aspara HL6</b>	4,300	Acoustic material sounds great and there are many strengths in design and performance	18,5,93,34,5	A	
●	<b>ATC SCM16A</b>	2,376	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Includes built-in amps and is good value	27,45,33	ACT	42
●	<b>Audioplan Kontrapunkt IVB</b>	2,898	Boasts exceptional stereo imaging and mid-through-treble coherence	16,35,26	A	45
●	<b>Audiovector S3 Super</b>	2,600	Useful ability to upgrade, offers good musical communication and stereo imaging	19,103,31	A	50
●	<b>Auroual VS</b>	1,650	Fine coherence and imaging of a single driver system, extra help at the frequency extremes	/479149 21,5,107,5,26,8	A	20
●	<b>AVIADM9</b>	1,125	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic sounding	20,30,26	ACT	60
●	<b>Bowers and Wilkins CM9</b>	1,760	Tall, elegant, expressive midband and expansive, but well-controlled bass	/597244 20,102,5,32	A	60
●	<b>Bowers and Wilkins 802</b>	11,500	This high-end speaker has an airy, spacious midband, with clean bass reproduction	36,8,138,56,3	A	27
●	<b>Cabasse Bora</b>	2,200	A real enthusiast's choice with high sensitivity, strong bass and powerful dynamics	/618354 33,27,50	A	52
●	<b>Focal Chorus 816 V</b>	1,099	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37,5	A+	20
●	<b>Focal Chorus 826 V</b>	1,349	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up	28,104,37,5	A	45
●	<b>Focal Chorus 816WSE</b>	1,499	The W cone makes some qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive	99,8,28,2,37,5	A+	39
●	<b>Focal Chorus 826W LE</b>	1,879	Focal has turbo charged the 826 resulting in lots of energy, excitement and fine detail	28,2,103,8,37,5	A	
●	<b>Focal Electra 1027 Be</b>	4,399	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy, low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35	A-	25
●	<b>Free F51</b>	3,500	An elegant design with the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express	16,87,27	ACT	35
●	<b>Gamut Phi5</b>	3,040	Lovely discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches	17,100,24	A	20
●	<b>Green Mountain Audio Rio</b>	2,000	Fabulously tight timing and coherence makes for a very expressive and musical performer	20,8,40,6,34,9	A	80



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## Stereo speakers (continued)

### Shapes and sizes for every budget

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Size - width, height, depth (cm)	Floorstander	Ease of drive	Bass from (Hz)	Free space	Close to wall	Issue number
●	<b>Guru QM10</b>	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
●	<b>Jamo R 907</b>	6,600	Arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships, powerful bass and open midrange	/498515	44,118,9,7	●	A	30	●	317
●	<b>JBL Everest DD66000</b>	44,000	Awesome performance in the true meaning of the word & exceptional musical communication		111,96,5,47	●	A	50	●	331
●	<b>Kudos X2</b>	1,350	Attractive presentation alongside a lively sound makes for an involving experience		166,78,20,6	●		27	●	337
●	<b>Kudos Cardea C2</b>	1,950	This floorstander is a fine all-round performer with fine voicing and neutrality		20,92,5,27	●		23	●	322
●	<b>Magico V2</b>	18,000	High pricing derives this speaker's superb painstaking engineering & impressive performance	/624700	25,5,115,30	●	A	32	●	325
●	<b>Magneplan Magneplanar 1.6</b>	2,500	Great with acoustic and classical material, this dipole panel speaker has superb sound quality		48,16,5,5	●	A	43	●	329
●	<b>Mission 796</b>	1,300	Clean, open and detailed, smooth, relaxed loudspeaker does exactly what it says on the box	/594834	20,6,99,8,31,8	●	A	25	●	321
●	<b>Monopulse 42A</b>	1,995	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics and superb voice coherence		26,110,25	●	A	25	●	302
●	<b>Monitor Audio PL200</b>	4,750	A costly, but beautifully presented loudspeaker with outstanding voicing and character		25,5,100,28,5	●	A-		●	330
●	<b>Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 LE</b>	4,799	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, overall balance is smooth, neutral and open		24,11,5,43	●	A	22	●	308
●	<b>Neat Momentum 3i</b>	1,790	Sounds bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range		22,38,27	A-	23	●	●	302
●	<b>Opera Callas</b>	3,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	/429144	23,37,5,34			32	●	311
●	<b>Opera Seconda</b>	1,995	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth		24,10,2,5,31,5	●	A	20	●	314
●	<b>Pioneer S-2EX-W</b>	5,200	This speaker offers superb midband neutrality and exceptional clarity	/587272	29,1,56,5,42,5	●	A	37	●	320
●	<b>PMC GB1i</b>	1,525	Fine voice reproduction, overall agility and well-judged balance		15,5,87,23,4	●	A	40	●	337
●	<b>PMC FB1i</b>	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweettop end	/429594	20,100,30	●	A	20	●	329
●	<b>PMC fact .8</b>	4,600	Beautiful styling, alongside a superb all-round sound with a notably wide dynamic range		15,5,10,5,38	●	A	55	●	327
●	<b>PMC IB2i</b>	8,900	Delivers a top-class sound quality, fine imaging and exceptional dynamic grip	/617595	33,74,46,5	●	A	25	●	324
●	<b>PSB Synchrony One</b>	3,500	Slim and discreet floorstander that delivers superb sound quality and flexible bass	/516267	22,109,32,5	●	A	45	●	318
●	<b>Revel F32</b>	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound		22,10,5,39	●	A	20	●	256
●	<b>Revolver Screen 3</b>	2,799	Visually dramatic and very successful in delivering genuine high-quality hi-fi sound		50,140,11	A	35	●	●	329
●	<b>Roksan Caspian FR-5</b>	2,475	Sharp-looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression		20,100,25	●	A	22	●	290
●	<b>Sonus faber Luito Monitor</b>	1,690	Subtly designed, elegant-sounding package, especially with good recordings	/603221	18,5,35,33,5	A-	55	●	●	322
●	<b>Sonus faber Minima Vintage</b>	2,490	Easy, graceful-sounding compact, a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	/455417	20,33,27,5	A-	55	●	●	312
●	<b>Sonus faber Cremona Audit.</b>	3,350	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass, this is 'The Little Speaker That Could'		20,35,37	A	50	●	●	305
●	<b>Spendor SA1</b>	1,295	Very high-quality sub-miniature with notably superior sound		16,5,30,5,19	A	30	●	●	334
●	<b>Spendor SP3/1R2</b>	1,600	Conservative styling, superb neutrality and coherence with unusually low coloration		22,40,28	A	37	●	●	317
●	<b>Tannoy Definition DC10T</b>	5,000	Classy speaker has massive base, high sensitivity and precise image focus	/608326	34,112,5,32	●	A+	35	●	323
●	<b>Triangle Genese Lyrr</b>	3,300	A well-balanced speaker with generous sensitivity, fine imaging and good expressiveness		23,30,3,113,3	●	A	30	●	338
●	<b>Triangle Magellan Concerto</b>	16,250	New 'sw2' version is less immediate than its predecessor, but it remains highly entertaining		60,160,45	●	A-	32	●	290
●	<b>Teufel Ultima 800</b>	2,498	Exceptional value for money due to direct sales and easy system-matching		22,98,37	●	A	42	●	335
●	<b>Vivid Audio K1</b>	14,495	With a subtle, fast and wide bandwidth, this speaker is one of the finest on the planet	/625361	28,130,45	A	35	●	●	325
●	<b>Wilson Benesch Curve</b>	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
●	<b>Wharfedale Opus</b>	1,500	Great material value and a solid, if bright and forward sound. Has great loudness potential		26,300,5,41	●	A	23	●	314
●	<b>Yamaha Soavo 2</b>	1,200	Cunningly crafted with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving		22,38,35	A	28	●	●	296
●	<b>Zu Essence</b>	3,750	Realism and communication skills are more than compensation for balance shortcomings		30,5,125,30,5	●	A	25	●	327

**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).

### HFC TOP PICKS



#### Castle Knight 2 **£400**

The Knight 2 continues in the great Castle tradition of excellent finish and solid build and climbs to the top of the pile with excellent sonic performance



#### Focal Chorus 826W LE **£1,879**

Focal has taken the 826 and turbocharged it, keeping the virtues of the stock model but with increased energy, excitement and detail



#### PMC Fact 8 **£4,600**

A fantastic combination of elegant design, well-thought out room-tuning features and superb sonic performance. A 2010 product of the year nominee



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## Equipment supports

Hi-fi equipment supports come in all shapes and sizes



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Top plate size (Cm) Height (Cm)	Number of shelves Wedged	Shelf type	Issue number
	<b>Atacama Equinox</b>	409	Stable, modular design with style and excellent bass transients	81 50,50	● 4	<b>Glass</b>	217
●	<b>Audiophile Base Std Supp't</b>	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57 46,35	● 3	<b>MDF</b>	302
●	<b>Blok Stax 300</b>	180	A simple and effective design that gives some useful isolation across most of the audio band	40,46	● 3	<b>MDF</b>	334
●	<b>Custom Design Inert Matt</b>	70	Isolation platform can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit	40x25		<b>Metal</b>	311
	<b>Custom Design XL4</b>	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal	60,42	● 4	<b>Glass</b>	293
	<b>Custom Design Milan</b>	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57 48,39	● 4	<b>Glass</b>	302
●	<b>Hi-Fi Racks Podium</b>	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great	59,5		<b>Wood</b>	320
●	<b>Isonoe Isolation feet</b>	98	A set of four isolation feet that are ideally suited to microphonic kit like turntables			<b>Alloy</b>	327
	<b>Partington Minim</b>	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78 45,37	● 5	<b>Glass</b>	302
●	<b>Quadraspire QX25 Support</b>	25	Beautifully simple design, cheap and easy to use. Excellent with CD players			<b>Acrylic</b>	327
●	<b>Quadraspire Sunoko-Vent T</b>	800	The sound is detailed and largely uncoloured, while the design is rigid and beautifully veneered	59,47	● 4	<b>MDF</b>	334
	<b>Russ Andrews Tortylite Rack</b>	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Tortylite: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68 54,49	● 4	<b>Tortylite</b>	240
●	<b>Townshend VSSS</b>	1,380	This attractive Seismic Sink retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76 35,50	● 4	<b>Glass</b>	273

## Speaker stands

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



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Top plate size (Cm) Height (Cm)	Number of shelves Fillable	Welded	Issue number
	<b>Anvil Sound Display Stand</b>	229	A variety of smart looks available - sound is clear and precise	50 20,17	● 1		293
●	<b>Custom Design RS300</b>	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration suits it to high-resolution systems	56 16,5,18	● 1		281
●	<b>Custom Design SQ404</b>	220	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance	61 18,16,3	● 4		283
●	<b>Partington Ansa 60</b>	119	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62 18,15	● 4		232
●	<b>Partington Dreadnought BS</b>	299	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62 17,23	● 5		309
●	<b>Partington Heavi II</b>	499	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very precise bass and upper frequencies	53 31,22	● 6		287

**SPECS KEY:** **HEIGHT (CM)** Height of equipment support and speaker stand (not including spikes) in centimetres. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform (Speakers generally overhang top plates). **FILLABLE** The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand. **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

### HFC TOP PICKS



**Partington Dreadnought BS £300**  
Probably the best speaker stand you can buy for the money - heavily engineered and backed up with sound theory, the Dreadnought is real class



**Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T £800**  
A clever solution to the twin problems of equipment cooling and resonance and a worthy 2010 award winner



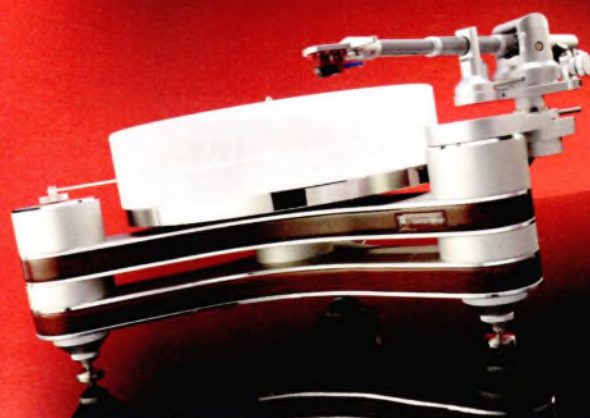
**Townshend VSSS £1,380**  
Although not cheap, Max Townshend's skillfully engineered rack nears the ideal in terms of isolation and spending more doesn't really bring big gains

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# Face the music

HFC's **Jason Kennedy** selects his favourite vinyl albums and complementary hi-fi kit in the first of a brand new series



**FRANK ZAPPA AND THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION**  
*ONE SIZE FITS ALL*  
1975  
Vinyl

Frank Zappa is a key figure in my music collection, I have all the albums released in his lifetime and quite a few of the rest. So picking just one is not easy, but *One Size* has the best mix of jazz, blues and left-field lyrics to make it the pick of the bunch. It's famous for the opener *Inca Roads*, but side two is where the real fun starts. George Duke's funky synth and Zappa's guitar work really shines on *Florentine Pogen* and on *Andy*, where Napoleon Murphy Brock's voice whips things to a stonking climax.



**JOHN FAHEY**  
*LET GO*  
1984  
Vinyl

John Fahey was both a massive fan of the blues and a brilliant blues guitarist, who was labelled a folkie because he played acoustic guitar. He made many brilliant albums but *Let Go* combines his beautiful playing with good-quality recording.

I have a penchant for great acoustic guitar and Fahey's is among the very best on the title track, it's a dynamic and emotional piece that gives you genuine insight into the man himself. They say that an artist has to be tortured to be great and this is all the proof I need.



**STEELY DAN**  
*KATY LIED*  
1975  
Vinyl

Steely Dan is another band which has made plenty of spectacular records but *Katy Lied* is for me their finest. No longer a band in the true sense by this point, the Dan was Becker and Fagan's orchestra and they used the best musicians in the business to write some of the most potent compositions of their era.

There are six guitarists credited across ten songs, tunes that sound deceptively simple, but that were honed to perfection in top-notch analogue studios to produce a degree of finesse that's rarely heard.



**ARVO PÄRT**  
*TABULA RASA*  
1984  
Vinyl

One of the most powerful records I own is also one of the most sparse and elementary. *Tabula Rasa* is both pure and purifying, a highly spiritual work by a deeply religious composer who keeps things minimal for maximum effect. He can produce a sense of exultation and clarity with two violins and a piano and in the process takes the listener to a higher plane, it really is uplifting stuff.

A curtain of guttural strings sounds like rain and if you immerse yourself within it the effect is intense and deeply affecting.



**JEFF BECK**  
*WIRED*  
1976  
Vinyl

1976 was a good year for music and Jeff Beck in particular, who reached the peak of his creative powers on the seminal *Wired*. Featuring Jan Hammer on keyboards and the phenomenal Narada Micheal Walden on drums, it reveals the full range of Beck's skills.

From the nuanced finesse of *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat* to the intensity of *Led Boots*, it's not hard to see why he is still held in such high regard.

The lack of any Beck originals might explain why he never quite managed to scale such heights thereafter.

They say that an artist has to be tortured to be great and this (John Fahey: *Let Go*) is all the proof I need

## ▶ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Townshend Rock V (HFC 307)

**TYPE:** Turntable and tonearm

As vinyl is the king of formats, my preferred source is Townshend's ultimate turntable, a substantial slab of fluid-damped engineering that can reveal more about the music in the groove than any other turntable I've encountered. Nothing else can reduce distortion so well and unearth the depth and body of the sound so effectively.



## ▶ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** Mark Levinson No.326S (HFC 336)

**TYPE:** Preamplifier

This preamplifier worked so well with my active speakers (below) that it has been very difficult to readjust since its departure. It has a combination of finesse, high-resolution and musicality that is revelatory, my records have never sounded so good. It manages to deliver clean, but solid sound across the range and produces so much variety and depth it's uncanny.



## ▶ DETAILS

**PRODUCT:** ATC SCM150A SL

**TYPE:** Active standmount loudspeaker

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**JASON KENNEDY**

A former editor on *Hi-Fi Choice* and now a freelance journalist, Jason has been a hi-fi addict for longer than he cares to remember

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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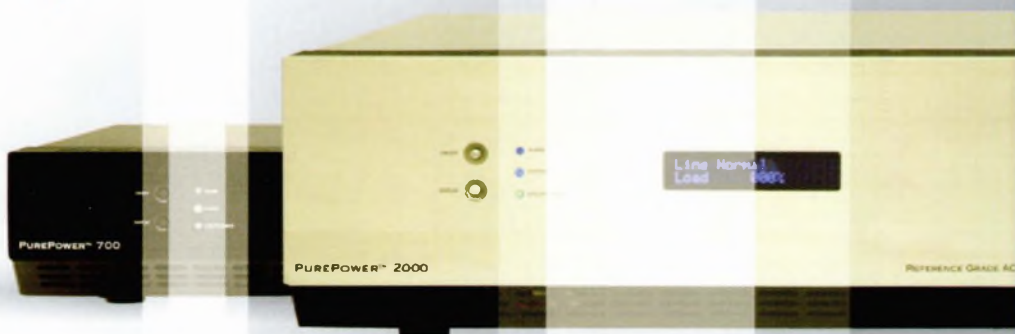
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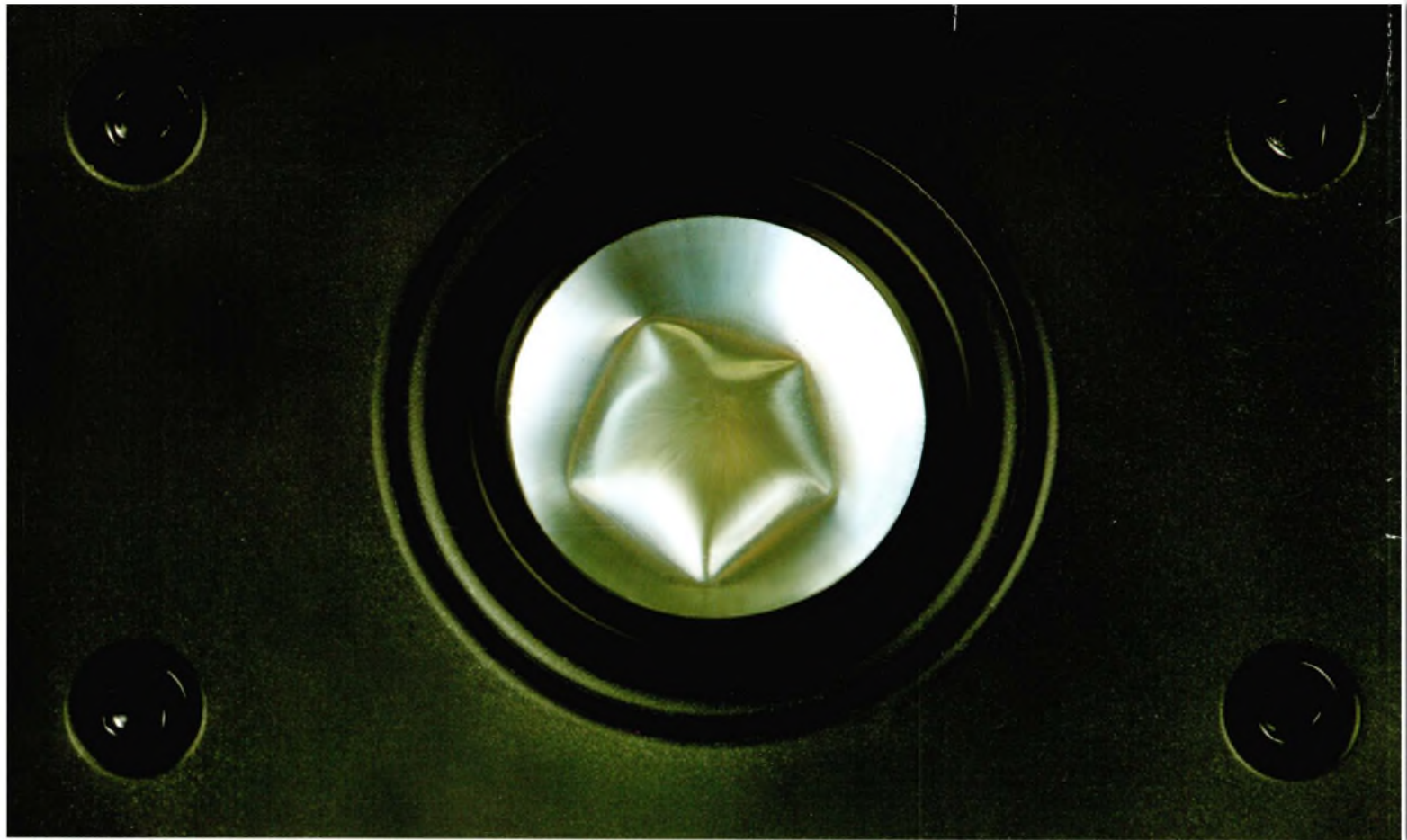


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