

Rotel RCX-1500: full system, £1,200!



Our verdict on Rotel's vision for 21st century streaming hi-fi

British amp super test

Discover Britain's best integrated amp in our definitive six-way test



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

www.hifichoice.co.uk

Issue No. **342**

February 2011

£3.99

Sound Seduction

How Michell made the best-ever Gyro

Turn your iPod 'hi-fi' for £75!

Ground-breaking digital dock gives Apple 'perfect' sound

20

hand-picked products including: Arcam, Cyrus, Roksan, Creek and more



Naim system mega test

We reveal three set-ups that every hi-fi buyer should hear

PLUS Beatles rarities complete guide:
We reveal the LPs that could make you rich



New Year's Resolution

Tested: the amp partner to our favourite CD player of 2010

COMPETITION WIN!
An Audiolab 8200CD CD player worth **£700**

How many CDs do you own but never play?



Comes with credit card size remote control

Store, browse and listen to your complete CD collection on the revolutionary Brennan

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 literally hundreds of cheap plastic boxes.

CDs are a great way to listen to music but they are also inconvenient, inaccessible and a bit of a chore.

The Brennan JB7 is a CD player with a hard disk that stores up to 5,000 CDs - and that's not all

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 the originals in another room or retire them to the attic.

Small enough to pick up with one hand yet big enough for a lifetime of music, the Brennan JB7 is one man's brilliant idea for everyone's forgotten music. Starting at just £359* it's only available direct from Brennan at www.brennan.co.uk.

Key features

- ▶ Browse albums by spinning the volume knob - push to play
- ▶ Display track names as they play
- ▶ Delete tracks you don't like
- ▶ Seven rainbow colour coded playlists
- ▶ Segue function blends one track into the next
- ▶ One touch record from vinyl, cassette or radio
- ▶ One button plays the entire music collection at random
- ▶ Plays MP3 downloads - future proof
- ▶ Clock with alarm
- ▶ 60 Watt, 4.8 x 16 x 22 cm steel and aluminium construction
- ▶ Backup music to external USB hard disk for safe keeping
- ▶ You can use it with your existing hi-fi or on its own



"I've suddenly re-discovered my love of music - it's amazing"

"I feel like a teenager all over again - thank you Brennan"

The Brennan JB7 is available in Cobalt Blue or Titanium Metallic



Money back guarantee

If you're not suitably impressed with your Brennan JB7 we'll collect it free of charge and refund you in full.

* Plus P&P

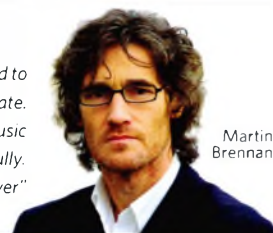
The face behind Brennan

Martin is a physicist, computer engineer and silicon chip designer. He 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. I liked the idea of quick access to more than one CD and music that didn't repeat after 40 minutes. A few years ago I had a go at loading

my music onto a computer - but I never listened to it - I needed something simpler, more immediate. In the end the computer got a virus and the music files were lost - I still had the originals thankfully. The JB7 is really my personal ideal music player"



Martin Brennan

To get the whole story on the Brennan JB7 and order visit www.brennan.co.uk

brennan

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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 a decade selling, developing and supporting products from some of the biggest names in audio. As *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 STEWARD
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. **342** February 2011



As I type this introduction, *Hi-Fi Choice* – along with the rest of the consumer electronics industry – is gearing up for the world's biggest show – CES Las Vegas, 2011. Most of the big US guys will be out in force, flexing their R&D muscles and revealing some of the hottest products coming our way throughout the year. It's the place where trends are born and products can be 'made' before they are even reviewed and rated.

Outside of purist hi-fi circles, we expect to see a proliferation of tablet computers for 2011, which will become increasingly important in our industry as interfaces and control systems for networked audio products. In fact, if Marantz's recent demonstration of its Apple Airplay-equipped NA7004 music streamer (coming soon) is anything to go by, 2011 will be a great year for music-listening. Viva Las Vegas!

Dan

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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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For further details or to arrange your demonstration please call us on **0800 121 4771**.

“ Big, powerful, reliable, and endowed with the sonic chops necessary to ace the performance parameters audiophiles have come to know and expect, the MA7000 is a fantastic integrated that is hard not to love. Couple its sonic accomplishments with its intuitive layout, noiseless operation, and rock-solid build, and you’ve got the kind of piece worth rushing home to after a day of hard work. For those of you shopping the upper leagues of hi-fi in search of a final destination from of a one-box design, the MA7000 may be one of the most compelling solutions to have come around in a long time. Very highly recommended! ”

Sonic Flare Review, Apr '09

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450wpc, Most powerful McIntosh stereo amplifier, Luxurious McIntosh engineering



MCD1100 CD/SACD Player

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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

Twin moving coil/moving magnet, Dedicated headphone amp, USB Input, Integrated DAC

There is nothing quite like a McIntosh

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WIN!

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WORTH £700

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The ultimate turntable package with TecnoArm



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Dealer systems: Three from Salisbury's finest



"the sort of detail that makes you realise just how good vinyl can be"

Jason Kennedy, *Michell Gyro SEducation* p60

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GROUP TEST

AMPLIFIERS
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Audiofile

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

Admire the VU

Onkyo returns to 'proper' hi-fi at last with a welcome new three-strong line-up for 2011

PRICE: £1,500-£2,500
AVAILABLE: NOW
CONTACT: 01628 473350
WEB: EU.ONKYO.COM

Onkyo has taken some time out from the AV market to go back to its roots with an all-new trio of two-channel components. Onkyo feels that this new range is its best yet and cite 60 years of experience in high-quality audio to strengthen the argument.

The most visually striking of the three units is the £2,500 M-5000R power amplifier. Thanks to a sizable pair of VU meters on the front panel, the visual effect is unashamedly retro. The internals, however, are bang up to date with 80 watts available into eight ohms and 150 into four.

Unlike some previous Onkyo two-channel designs, the M-5000R is a class AB rather than Class D design. The M-5000R also makes use of Onkyo's proprietary AWRAT (Advanced Wide Ranging Amplifier Technology) to reduce distortion and improve current delivery. The internal layout is completely symmetrical to minimise errors in stereo playback. A pair of balanced inputs are fitted to best match the M-5000R to Onkyo's AV processor, the PR-SC5508, whilst conventional RCA inputs are fitted to suit the matching preamp.

The M-5000R is partnered by the £1,700 P-3000R preamplifier. In addition to a conventional set of analogue inputs and a moving magnet phono stage, this features no less than

five digital inputs, including a balanced AES connection and USB, all of which are powered from a separate power supply and are decoded via a pair of Burr-Brown 192 kHz/32-bit DACs. The analogue inputs and outputs are all conventional unbalanced RCA type. The front panel features an illuminated display to show what input is selected as well as adjustments made to the adjustable tone controls.

The final component in the trio is the £1,500 C-7000R CD player. Onkyo has decided against SACD replay or streaming capability in favour of a 'straight' CD player. This uses the same rigid and isolated chassis design as the amp components and supports WMA and MP3 playback as well as CD. An interesting and unconventional feature, is that the analogue circuitry can be switched off leaving only the digital circuitry running, essentially turning the C-7000R into a CD transport. This, combined with the AES digital output, suggests that Onkyo might be inviting owners to at least try a high-quality digital connection between CD and the preamplifier rather than the more conventional analogue.

All three units are available in black and silver and are on sale now. *Hi-Fi Choice* will be bringing you an exclusive in-depth review, soon. ●



Onkyo has decided against SACD replay or streaming capability in favour of a 'straight' CD player



UNDISTORTED

ONKYO HAS made extensive use of DIDRIC (Dynamic Intermodulation Distortion Reduction Circuitry) in all three components. This works to reduce noise by improving linearity and reducing distortion in the super high frequency (above 100kHz) range. Onkyo claims that this is important because although well above the threshold of human hearing, the effect of 'beat interference' will have an affect on frequencies that can be heard during normal listening.

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acoustics

Beethoven Baby Grand in Piano Black

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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

Email: sales@audyus.co.uk

Best Buy

Bryston launches its first ever media player, with a twist

Bryston's first foray into streamed audio is the stylish-looking BDP-1. Its approach is rather different from that of other recently announced hi-fi media players.

For instance, the BDP-1 is equipped with an Ethernet port, but unusually this is for control purposes rather than replay of

music over a network. The BDP-1 relies on four USB sockets to access material – two powered ports on the rear panel and two ports on the front panel for stick drives. These can receive audio in all major file formats up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution. Information is displayed on the front panel and the controls are very similar to a CD

player, although iPod and PC control is also available.

The other unusual feature of the BDP-1 is that it is essentially a pure digital transport with no onboard digital-to-analogue conversion and will need to be connected to an external DAC to produce audio.



PRICE: £2,300 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 0870 4441044 **WEB:** BRYSTON.COM

Tri-colour

Triangle offers new entry models in a range of brilliant coloured lacquers

Triangle has decided to liven up its entry-level speaker range with a choice of three high-gloss piano lacquer finishes.

Comprising a standmount, floorstander and a matching centre channel speaker, the aptly named Color range is available in black, red and white (with yellow apparently on the way) finishes with individual grille covers. The trademark Triangle high-sensitivity and titanium tweeter have been retained.



PRICE: £469-£899 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: +0033 032 3753 821 **WEB:** TRIANGLE-FR.COM/EN



Clear-thinking

CLEARAUDIO has announced its lowest-price moving coil cartridge to date, in the form of the Concept MC. It has been designed to work with Clearaudio's range of budget turntables. The Concept uses an aluminium/magnesium body with a ceramic surface layer and is a more conventional shape than the more expensive Clearaudio designs.

The eight-gram weight and two-gram tracking force should be easy enough for most arms to accommodate. The cantilever is boron with a microline stylus profile. The output is a relatively high 0.42mV, which should not prove a problem for most phono stages in the price range. Clearaudio also offers a two-year warranty for peace of mind.

PRICE: £550 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 01252 702705
WEB: CLEARAUDIO.DE



Fatties on the rise

FATMAN has been busy updating its range of iPod docks and amplifiers. The iTube ValveDock MkII looks similar to its predecessor, but offers more power and a USB input. The Carbon Trinity is part of the 'all-in-black and all-in-one' line up. This features an onboard iPod dock and a 25-watt hybrid amplifier.

The Carbon Trinity also features a USB input, as well as more conventional line inputs. Both models can be ordered with optional speakers.

PRICE: £300- £500
AVAILABLE: NOW
CONTACT: 01462 492090
WEB: FAT-MAN.CO.UK



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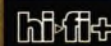
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Issue 73



"This is an excellent speaker with excellent imaging, good bass extension and beautiful styling"

Dec 2009



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A truly great design

sempre-audio.at

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



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



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

April 2010



fact:3
HAS ARRIVED

The **fact:8** in Tiger Ebony

Streaming Fidelity

Early news of Musical Fidelity's new Universal Music Controller

Musical Fidelity has taken the wraps off its CLiC streamer for the first time. Full details have yet to be confirmed, but we know the CLiC can replay media over both ethernet and wireless.

The CLiC can also replay media over a USB stick, via a front-mounted USB input. Direct iPod connectivity is also supported

and information is displayed on a full-colour front display.

Additionally, the CLiC offers three digital and three analogue inputs, which coupled with a choice of both fixed and variable outputs will allow it to function as a preamp in a system if required. The CLiC shares casework with the half-width M1 units and has been seen in black and silver finishes.



PRICE: £TBC AVAILABLE: MAY 2011 CONTACT: 020 8900 2866 WEB: MUSICALFIDELITY.COM



Finnish line

AMPHION'S Ion miniature monitor loudspeaker will be available as a package with the NuForce Icon2 digital amplifier/DAC. The set-up has been on sale for some time in Scandinavia, appearing in Apple Stores in Finland as the top-end audio package and making Amphon and NuForce among the few specialist audio manufacturers to be welcomed onboard in Apple's outlets.

Amphon claims that the system is "equally at home linked to a TV, as it is placed next to an iMac or as part of an integral separates audio system." It sees the combination as offering the flexibility to be used in a variety of ways, while at the same time offering small size, good build quality and competitive pricing. The package will be available from early next year.

PRICE: £999 AVAILABLE: NOW
CONTACT: +0035 817 2882 100
WEB: AMPHION.FI

XTZ meets DSP

Innovative technology in a new package

XTZ has partnered with Dirac Research to produce the MH800 multimedia system. This consists of a pair of active two-way loudspeakers that use a forward-firing, three-inch driver and downward-firing, five-inch driver powered by 40-watt Class D amplification. When connected to a computer over USB, the Dirac software enables a choice of algorithms to maximise performance.

PRICE: £TBC AVAILABLE: FEB 2011
CONTACT: 07517 889 738 WEB: XTZ.SE/UK



NEWS IN BRIEF

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



• **FURUTECH** has launched a new entry-level range. The ADL Alpha line all feature a cryogenic and demagnetising process for optimal sonic performance. furutech.com



• **BLUE HORIZON** has unveiled a range of isolation components, including an interesting two-layer turntable matt to benefit different record thicknesses. bluehorizonideas.com



• **KLIPSCH** has added to its earphone range with the £40 S3, which takes the design philosophy of the more expensive models to a new price point. klipsch.co.uk

• **LIBRATONE** has arrived in the UK with the Beat Wireless speaker. This can stream wirelessly from various sources to a range of 30 feet. libratone.com



• **OZAKI** has released a travel iPod dock available in a range of colours. Ozaki claims an impressive 40 hours of playback from six AA batteries. ozaki.us/en

Primed for hi-fi

Primare unveils its new 30 series components for 2011

Primare has updated the 30 series range, which now consists of the CD32 CD player, I32 integrated amplifier and R32 MM/MC phono stage.

The CD32 retains a dedicated CD mechanism with a five-second memory buffer for optimal performance.

The CD32 is also capable of playing MP3 and WMA formats on both disc and USB stick. The matching I32 amplifier uses Primare's UFPD Class D technology to produce 120 watts.

An interesting feature and one that could prove a popular addition with

audio enthusiasts, is a forthcoming module that will also allow the I32 to act as a media streamer.

Its R32 phono stage is a full-width (for the first time) and dual-mono design with gain and impedance adjustments on the rear panel.



PRICE: £800-£2,200 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** +46 47072 92 15 **WEB:** PRIMARE.NET

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

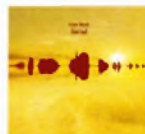
Matthew Bramble, of Cambridge Audio, lists his favourites



RADIOHEAD
THE BENDS
Just one of those albums I can listen to over and over again and never tire of. Quiet, loud, dense, sparse indie rock accompanied by the amazing Mr Yorke's miserabilist falsetto.



THE BEATLES
ABBEY ROAD
How many bands despite being in disarray can produce something like this for their 11th studio effort? And McCartney had one of the great rock and roll voices ever, so there.



KATE BUSH
AERIAL
After a long gap the reclusive Ms Bush returned with songs about P1, snippets of birdsong and the presence of Rolf Harris. It shouldn't work, but it does, and how.



BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS
UPRISING
The last before Bobs untimely death, a slice of prime reggae that takes me back to my schooldays in Camden and the music world I was discovering.

11



*"eXQuisite cinema sound...
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wide dynamic range..."*
Home Cinema Choice
November 2009.

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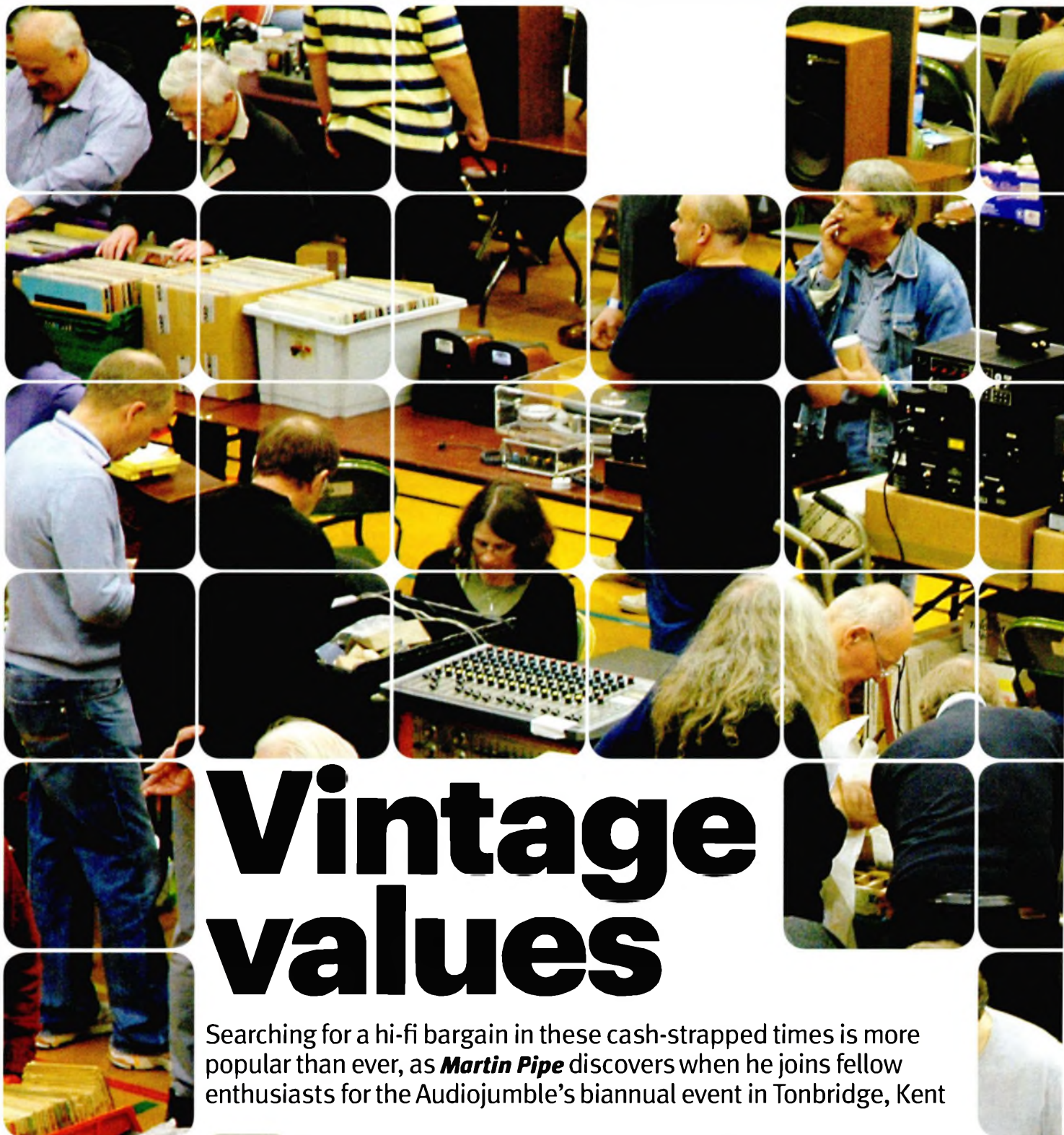
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INNOVATORS IN SOUND



Vintage values

Searching for a hi-fi bargain in these cash-strapped times is more popular than ever, as **Martin Pipe** discovers when he joins fellow enthusiasts for the Audiojumble's biannual event in Tonbridge, Kent

Twice a year, Tonbridge's Angel Centre hosts the aptly named Audiojumble. Now in its 19th year, this feast of audio goodies encompasses everything from vintage wireless sets to modern hi-fi components. The last event was visited by around 400 eager hobbyists, who

could pick and choose goods from no fewer than 140 stalls. Most were selling secondhand gear, although some specialist dealers (such as Audio Emporium) also had a presence.

The local hi-fi club, specialist booksellers, a vintage-radio collector's organisation and record stalls added further variety. Overall, the audiojumble

is pleasant alternative to the usual hi-fi shows, with some real bargains waiting for the eagle-eyed.

What really came across, however, was the camaraderie and enthusiasm. In fact, a fair number of the stallholders we spoke to were not commercial vendors, but hi-fi fanatics disposing of their surplus gear.

SHOW REPORT: AUDIOJUMBLE, TONBRIDGE, KENT



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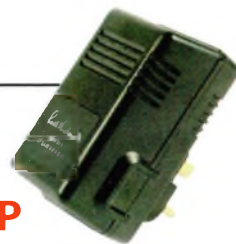
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**SALE ENDS
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NAD

1 One of the joys of an audiojumble is the sheer unpredictability of the equipment on offer. Here, a NAD 3020 and its (almost!) matching tuner – the mainstay of many an '80s-vintage budget system – are stacked atop a Tascam 133. The latter is a rack-mountable three-track cassette-deck of professional orientation – the third track (which occupies the tape 'real-estate' usually reserved for recording on a cassette's flipside) is intended for timecode, enabling film soundtracks to be 'sync'd' during post-production.

SATURN

2 A true rarity, this. The Transcription Saturn was designed by the legendary David Gammon, who was also responsible for the iconic Hydraulic Reference. Belt-driven by a synchronous motor, the two-speed Saturn has a proprietary tonearm with removable headshell. On the

example pictured below, this has been removed, but not replaced afterwards! The seller was hoping to fetch £150 for it; but as its appearance suggests, a lot of tender loving care is needed here. This Saturn would need more than a clean, a headshell and new belt; the platter's record supports had also gone hard.

THORENS

3 From rarity to completely unique! The owner of the deck pictured top right, had stripped down a Thorens TD150 and painstakingly used the collection of parts he ended up with to create his own turntable. The plinth is of a very unusual design – the sections that support the motor, platter and tonearm are mechanically isolated from each other, with the goal of reducing rumble, feedback and other 'nasties'. Completing the package, for which the seller was asking £300, is a Mission tonearm, Hitachi



cartridge and Thorens badge. What, we wonder, would the Swiss company make of his efforts?

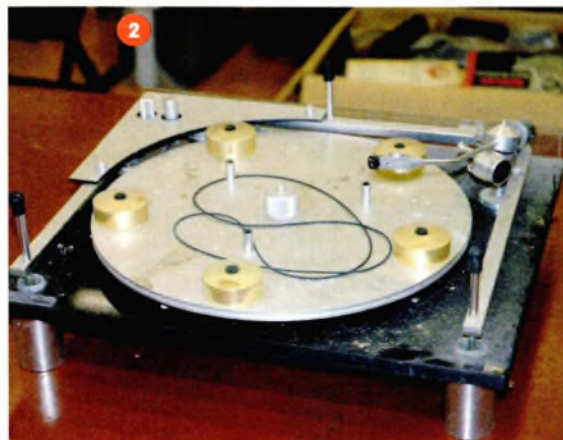
REVOX

4 For many audiophiles, the only home-recording format worth bothering with is analogue reel-to-reel. And for these 'tapeheads', Audiojumble proved to be a veritable feast. We saw decks of every conceivable shape and size, as well as tape stock both new and used. Plenty of 4000-series Akais

and TC377s, the budget staples of their heyday, could be had for bargain prices. Revox was also well-represented; in addition to A77s, we counted three G36s. The A77's tubed predecessor, this well-built machine is still sought-after on account of its warm and open character. This superb specimen had a £300 pricetag.

NAKAMICHI

5 Anyone wanting to transfer cassettes to digital has usually considered one of those peerless Nakamichis, which are capable of extracting every ounce of detail from the much-maligned format. The ZX-7 shown above is a 'classic Nak', with three heads, pressure-pad lifter and azimuth-adjustment (albeit record-only). Although in good condition and bundled with a Chord Company interconnect for Naim amps, the transport – we were told – was reluctant to operate. From our own experiences of these machines, the culprit could be a dud sensor bulb or stretched loading-belt. Thus the £40 price – a real bargain!



SHOW REPORT: AUDIOJUMBLE, TONBRIDGE, KENT



ORACLE

6 Another one for the audiophile with practical electronics experience was an Oracle Delphi Mk1 (above top), a desirable 'superdeck' from the late '70s. The seller told us that he was selling it for only £250 (one of the other bargains of the show) because the 45rpm mode did not work. 33rpm was fine and so the motor and much of the circuitry that drives it was presumably OK.

With a repair, new drive belt and other servicing the lucky purchaser will be able to fit the tonearm of his choice and enjoy a seriously musical performance from his vinyl!

QUAD CLASSIC

7 For a mere £15, one lucky punter could have become the new owner of a late-1950s Quad (then Acoustical Manufacturing) QCI control unit (see above). Although designed for use with the Huntingdon company's famous Quad II power amp, it could you'll be pleased to hear – with the addition of a suitable HT/LT power supply – be converted for use with other equipment.

Like much audio of this vintage, the valved QCI caters for the plethora of record equalisation – curves that were common at the time. Sure, it's mono – but so too were those 78s...

VALVE TESTER

8 In addition to records, CDs and hi-fi equipment of all ages and sophistication, Audiojumble proved to be a fertile hunting-ground for electronic components (notably tubes) and test equipment. We came across everything from multimeters and oscilloscopes to SPL meters and Ferrograph tape-recorder test-sets. In the 1960s, valve-testers like the one pictured below, would have been a staple tool of the local hi-fi store's back-room repair department. This Japanese import would have been an affordable alternative to the AVO models of the period.

QUAD

9 A pair of Quad ESL57s (see top right), was expected to sell



for £500 – a small price to pay for two chunks of audio history. If you have amps that are capable of driving these unique room-heater look-alikes, you can expect superb imaging and transparency. Not bad for a design that's well over 50 years old.

We spotted another (more expensive!) pair of ESLs in better condition, as well many other classic vintage speakers and drive units from the likes of Celestion, Linn, Wharfedale, KEF, Lowther, Goodmans and Tannoy.

DENON AND TEAC

10 Stacked up against a wall were columns of Denon integrats and TEAC CD players. Other goodies included a DIY John Linsley-Hood stereo amp and a Sony DAT deck. We don't know how the stallholder was able to acquire several examples of the same model and in such good condition too, but the prices were eminently affordable (under £100 per unit) and a good starting-point for the budding audiophile with little cash to spend. Entry-level turntables (like the famous Dual 505) could be yours for as little as £15.



KEITH MONKS

11 Once upon a time, these beautifully engineered Keith

Monks record-cleaning machines would have proudly-graced record shops and hi-fi dealers the length and breadth of Britain. The fellow (above) selling this particular two-turntable example told us its last owner was a Hereford record shop. A good buy for an enthusiast with an extensive vinyl collection.

Virgin 180g audiophile vinyl, mercifully not yet in need of the Keith Monks treatment, was also available from several stalls.

The next Audiojumble takes place on Sunday 13th February 2011. Early entry (9.3C) £10; standard entry (10.0C) £5. audiojumble.co.uk ●

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Hi-fi without wires a reality

Richard Black reports on how Kent-based Chord Electronics is pioneering Bluetooth as a credible wireless hi-fi standard

Last issue, we included in our *Ultimate Group Test*, the Chord Chordette Peach, one of the first products to support audio transmission over Bluetooth. Having done a little research both before and after writing that review, I thought it's worth explaining what audio over Bluetooth is really all about.

Bluetooth is one of a range of wireless systems designed to transport digital data over a radio link. Others you've probably come across include the mobile phone networks and 'wifi', the name given to wireless replacements for the Ethernet computer networking standard. The obvious question then is: 'Why do we need more than one wireless system?'

The simple and almost complete answer to that is that the systems are designed to cover different ranges and data loads. The mobile phone network has a range from hundreds of metres up to many miles (in open country), with data rates up to a few megabits per second. It uses multiple transmitters to give continuous coverage over what should ideally be the whole country. Wifi, by contrast, is intended to transport data around a small area, typically a few tens of metres, but with quite high data rates: in excess of 100Mb/s under good conditions. (By the way, Mb, with a lower-case b, is megabits: MB, upper-case, is megabytes – one byte is eight bits. Data rates are always given in megabits/s.)

Bluetooth was conceived as an ultra-short-range wireless system, for applications like sending audio from an in-car phone to a head-worn earpiece – a couple of metres at the most with a data rate of a few kilobits/s. But users always want more and boffins like a challenge, and it wasn't long before the useful range was raised upwards to 10m or more with a corresponding rise in data rates to over 1Mb/s. Someone realised that this could support decent audio quality in stereo and the 'Advanced Audio Distribution Profile' was born.

Chord's Peachy Bluetooth hi-fi products show just how hi-fi without wires can be executed



Bluetooth headset

A 'profile' is just one bunch of set-up parameters for a Bluetooth link: various others are described in the full Bluetooth specification (currently standing at an incredible 2,302 pages – no, I haven't read it all). 'A2DP' as it's become known, allows for stereo audio to be transmitted with a data rate of up to 512kb/s. Now full CD quality requires 1,411kb/s, and with Bluetooth version 2 theoretically good for 2Mb/s, you might think that uncompressed CD-standard audio would be possible, but an intrinsically real-time data link like digital audio needs some data bandwidth in hand to cope with momentary interruptions and opting for such a conservative rate was probably wise.

As a result, A2DP is not uncompressed 44/16 audio. In fact, in its default form, it's not even very good data-reduced ('compressed') audio. In this mode, it uses a 'sub-band coder' or SBC, which is a bit like MP3 in that it throws away a fair bit of data, but it's much less efficient than MP3 because it keeps more data but still sounds worse. This may seem daft when MP3 could have been used, but SBC has two advantages in this instance: it is very simple to implement at both transmit and receive ends (so it requires little computing power), and it has very low 'latency' or input-output delay, something that's an issue when Bluetooth devices may also carry conversations. If you're wearing a Bluetooth headset to listen to music on your phone and a call comes in, you don't want a 100m/s (or more) delay in the circuit.

The latest addition to the A2DP toolkit is the APT-X codec, which matches SBC's latency, requires a manageable amount of computing power and sounds very much better. APT-X is a Belfast-based specialist whose data-reduction codecs are much used in pro-audio, where their key feature of low latency is very useful. With APT-X, we reckon Bluetooth can genuinely enter the hi-fi fold. The interesting news, though, is that the latest versions of Bluetooth (standardised but not yet on the market) include provision for even higher data-rate links, which could almost certainly support

uncompressed 44/16 audio, maintaining the ease of connection which is Bluetooth's great advantage over wifi. True hi-fi without wires is coming at last!

With APT-X, we reckon Bluetooth can genuinely enter the hi-fi fold...true hi-fi without wires is coming at last



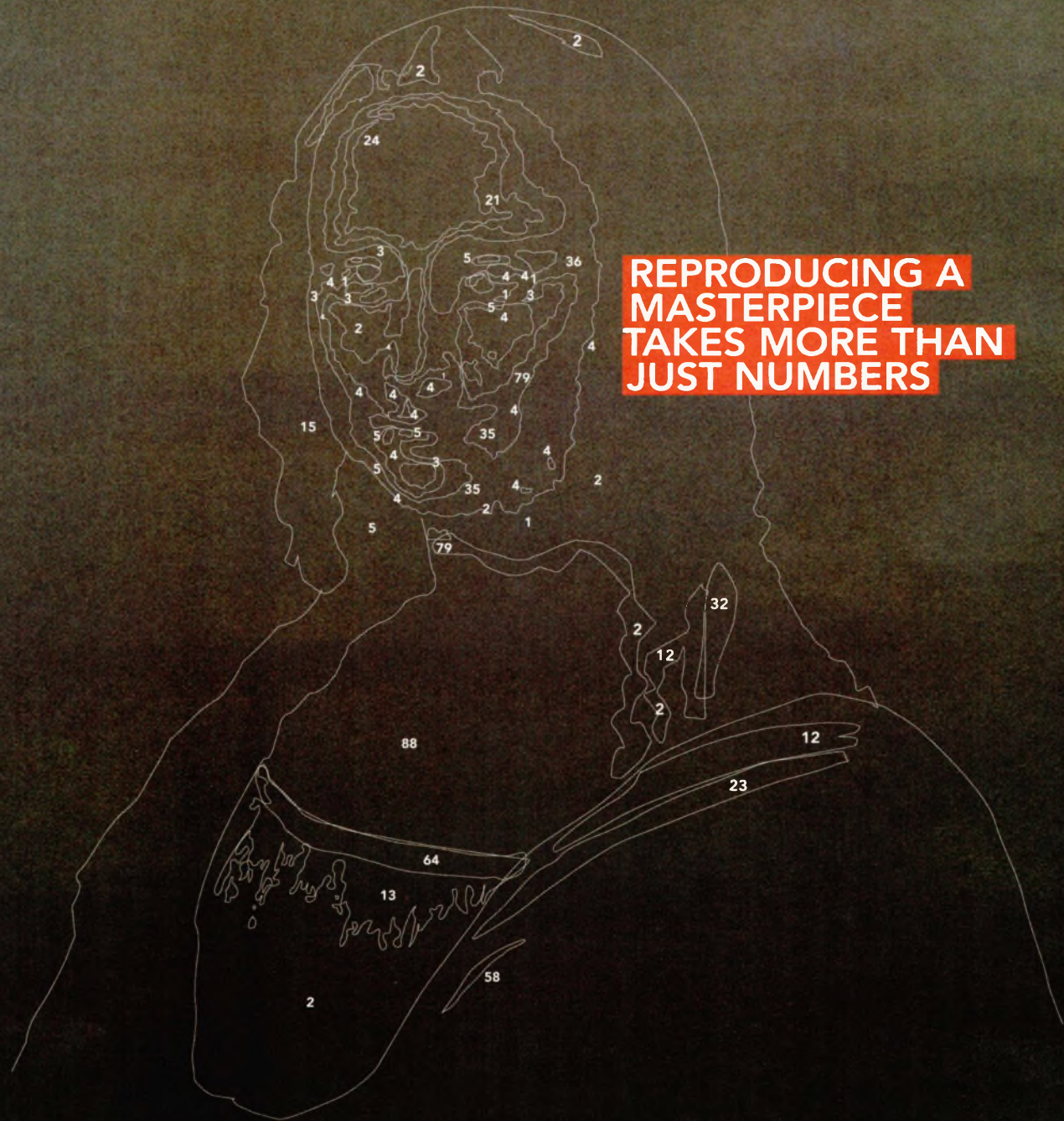
RICHARD BLACK

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

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Life in the old dock yet

Does the media streamer make 'hi-fi' iPod docks already obsolete?
Ed Selley considers the case for and against

At a recent demonstration of a new media streamer, a PR representative of the manufacturer made the observation that the streamer renders the iPod dock obsolete as a hi-fi product. He argued that there is nothing in a hi-fi context that an iPod dock can do that a streamer cannot do better.

There is certainly some merit behind this superficially sweeping statement. Unless you have bought your music collection almost entirely from iTunes, and taken the novel step of downloading it direct to an iPhone and iPod Touch, your music collection will be stored on a hard drive. (If you have, I suspect that you might be a little too far into the Apple concept to have much in the way of other equipment.) You can transfer this to an iPod and place it in a dock or simply play it directly via a streaming device. The streamer thus inarguably simplifies the process of listening to the audio on your home computer.

There is also the sense that the streamer is the computer audio product with the greater credibility in hi-fi terms. A streamer can take the collected learning of 30 years of digital and make use of all but the transport. The streamer

is the spiritual successor to the CD player, with new models taking many of the design and technology trends of their CD players and making products that are in many cases driveless variations on the same. The Linn Akurate DS and Naim NDX are effortlessly credible high-end

in a manner that very little with an iPod sticking out the top can ever be.

Finally, in control terms, the streamer also holds advantages. Streamers often have displays that can show far more information than an iPod screen. Indeed, liberated from the dock, your iPod Touch can become a fantastic remote control for your streamer rather than part of your hi-fi system in its own right.

Classic source component

With this thorough drubbing for the iPod dock duly issued, it looks hard for the dock to justify its existence. And yet, when I consider some other arguments, I would be less enthusiastic to call time on the dock just yet. The simple fact remains that the ubiquity of the iPod is truly remarkable. The majority of people with an interest in listening to music own one in some form or another.

It is also a product bought in large numbers by people in age groups that are not natural hi-fi customers. The iPod dock (and its more sophisticated relation, the digitally equipped iPod Transport) still offers the best "way in" for someone who enjoys listening to music enough to buy an iPod, to take that one step further and look into hi-fi for the first time.

A second key consideration is price. The PURE i-20 (see p71) is yours for £80. Partnered with a £193 iPod Classic, the resulting combination is more expensive than the Squeezebox Touch, but offers music on the move. In fact, the ability to listen to a piece of music in the house and continue listening to it when you leave is a real boon. Like the Squeezebox, the PURE offers the ability to output a signal digitally to an external DAC for a further boost to the (already very creditable) performance.

This cost-effectiveness coupled with the ubiquity of the iPod is why the separate dock is not quite ready for the great bargain shelf in the sky. Serious audiophiles, slaving at the prospect of 24-bit/192kHz will find AAC Lossless to be on the ordinary side (not to mention nowhere near as proviso-free to use as FLAC) but for those starting out on the hi-fi path it is more than good enough – and it is something that nearly every one of the millions of iPods sold is capable of outputting.

The streamer can claim to be the high performance option for getting hi-fi's talking to computers but the iPod dock is too important a "way in" to hi-fi to be written out of the list of source kit quite yet.

The steamer has become the spiritual successor to the CD player, with new models taking many of the design and technology trends



Apple in the dock: but fancy streamers haven't surpassed the iPod quite yet



ED SELLEY

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

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Do you use an iPod in your hi-fi system, or do you choose not to 'pollute' your set-up? Email us now: hifichoice@futurenet.com

All hail the BC1?

Spendor's BC1 was probably the most influential loudspeaker of its time, spawning a thousand imitators recalls *Jimmy Hughes*, but it enthralled and frustrated equally

Spendor was unknown when it launched the BC1 in the late '60s. Yet within a short while its speaker had received fabulous reviews and was being hailed as a breakthrough. A new plastics material, Bextrene, was used for the bass/mid driver and this promised new levels of accuracy and reduced coloration levels.

The design had its roots with the BBC which developed Bextrene as a self-damping cone material to deliver smoother, less-peaky results than paper. The aim was to achieve a smooth open low-coloration mid-band that was comparable to the Quad ESL, but with deeper bass, greater power handling, and none of the ESLs positioning foibles.

The cabinet was made from plywood, with internal damping panels to reduce resonance, and (unusually) the 8-inch bass/mid driver was mounted behind the front baffle rather than on the front; a subtle but important design detail that few appreciated at the time – or now, for that matter!

The BC1's Bextrene bass/mid unit might have broke new ground, but high frequencies were handled by the venerable Celestion HF-1300 – a driver dating from the late '50s with limited extreme high frequency response. The original BC1 featured just two drive units; commercial BC1s employed an extra tweeter.

Tax doesn't have to be taxing

To extend the frequency response to 20kHz – and avoid purchase tax – an STC (later, Coles) super tweeter was added. Back in the days before VAT, certain items were exempt from Purchase Tax if they were deemed for 'professional' (non-domestic) use.

The definition of a 'professional' loudspeaker was – three or more drive units and/or one drive unit with a dimension of 12-inch or greater. Hence the absurd – nay, obscene – popularity of EMI's crappy 13x8 elliptical driver, and the amazing number of three-way loudspeakers on the market at that time!

In the early '70s, BC1s were hugely aspirational. I bought a pair in 1971 and demand was such that I had to wait months to obtain them. They cost almost £200 – a huge sum given I earned about £22 a week at that time. They produced a smooth, well-balanced, if somewhat circumspect musical presentation that was refined and homogenous.

BC1s would sound great on first-class recordings, but not so good if things weren't to their liking. They were very revealing, but mostly in the negative sense of showing what was



Big tweeter: the professional version had an extra driver

wrong with your recordings rather than what was right with them. However, to be fair, isn't that what a monitor speaker's supposed to do?

Those exuberant early stereo recordings from the likes of Decca or Mercury Living Presence, which are so highly prized now sounded brash and edgy when heard on BC1s. It's perhaps no coincidence that recordings from the late '60s onwards grew smoother and more refined (less extreme, less exaggerated) due to the rise of this new breed of speaker.

I eventually sold my BC1s for a pair of Gale 401s (out of the frying pan...), and by the end of the '70s owned Linn Isobariks – a very different sort of speaker, albeit one that was still based around Bextrene-coned drive units. BC1s seemed to have been well and truly eclipsed. But were they?

In 1980, I interviewed classical recording engineer John Shuttleworth. A decade or so earlier, he'd penned a glowing (and very influential) review of the BC1 for *Studio Sound* magazine. Indeed, reading his article had helped to convince me to buy a pair of them. As luck would have it, he still had his BC1s – the original two-driver design.

Hearing John's BC1s was a pleasant shock; they sounded crisp and detailed – every bit as impressive as his review had made them out to be. The sound was clean and focused, with the treble much smoother and more integrated than I recalled – all the better for not having that (nasty) STC driver? I thought so...

Would the extra tweeter still have been used had there been no tax break available? I guess we'll never know! ●

In the early '70s, BC1s were hugely aspirational. I bought a pair in 1971 and demand was such that I had to wait months just to obtain them



JIMMY HUGHES

A hi-fi enthusiast for four decades, Jimmy's knowledge of system-matching and record-collecting are unmatched in the industry

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Did you buy BC1s too, or did you find something better at the time?

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Looking for salvation

I read Ed Selley's column, *Preaching to the converted* (HFC 339) with great interest recently. I've been a hi-fi follower for about 30 years and having just turned 50 decided I'd like to treat myself to a new CD player. I'm not sure if it's worth investing £2,000 in the latest player or instead diving into the world of music streamers – in particular the Olive 3 or 4HD – which have caught my eye but I've yet to hear.

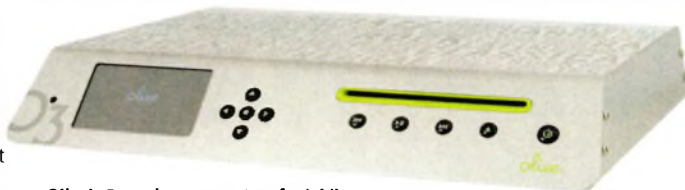
I recall talking about the future of hi-fi with friends in the early '80s even before I bought my Marantz CD74 in 1985 and we realised, that it would head in the iPod direction. Of course, at the time we didn't know about file compression.

We expected hi-fi sound quality to improve with time, not to drop to cater for the posers who want to show off with the latest Apple invention. But the public wants what the public gets so here we are talking about the possible end of the CD. Somebody once told me the sound quality on MP3 is absolutely fabulous. Talk about ignorance is bliss. What do I know about anything?

One thing which annoys me is that one excuse for not wanting to own CDs any more is because of the time it takes to load one into a player and we've got so many better things to do with our time. How absurd! Aren't we all just falling victim to a throw away society where ring tones sidelined as a minority choice for the eccentric?

I must admit I feel my age when the computer gets promoted as the do-it-all way forward for the new way of listening to music. Then again the Olive 4 is a computer isn't it? And yet that appeals to me, or maybe it's just the mini touchscreen I want to play with! Oh dear, I'm confused!

As you say, why can't the music download sites offer different quality file types to customers just like we have the Hybrid CD/SACD disc where you are able to hear two levels of sound quality according to the SACD/CD player you have.



Olive's 3 music server caters for 'old' tech like CDs and the new

Anyway, I'll probably take the plunge and go for the Olive. At least I'll be able to buy CDs to load into it and upload hi-res music onto it if I can find anything I like which is not available only as an MP3 file. Thank you very much for a great read and a very enjoyable magazine.

Graham Lynn, via email

HFC *Ed Selley replies: There is still a great deal of uncertainty as to what direction digital sources are heading. I do completely agree with you about the reluctance to regard streamers and other media servers as the clear path forward when they are still almost totally dependent on CD to provide good-quality content for them. There are improvements in interface and control that are well worth realising but for as long as CDs keep making it into the house, there is a sense that they are not the finished article. The Olive does represent a good product in the midst of this state of flux as it is well equipped to handle formats (including high resolution ones on both disc and over network).*

What annoys me about the current situation is how record labels cite a lack of demand for downloadable lossless media without actually providing any material to test the theory. It is one of the most cynical self-fulfilling prophecies I have seen in a while. Hopefully, somebody is going to try something vaguely innovative before it is too late.

Dark age of technology

I read and enjoyed the recent reviews of the iPod Touch and Chord Electronics system (HFC 340) with a slight sense of confusion.

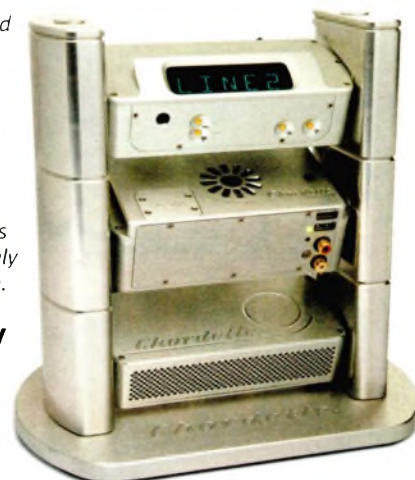
Here we have an MP3 player that does just about everything short of washing the dishes and a £5,400 micro system that features a teeny media PC as the main source. Your reviews were helpful and informative but left me feeling deeply uneasy about the direction that many audio products are heading.

In both cases, we have very clever and extremely talented products but audio seems to be one of the functions they can do rather than its primary focus. At the same time, a £400 Blu-ray player is busy delivering the best overall sound quality in the group test. Is audio performance something that source equipment can now deliver whilst offering multiple other features? I was always keen on the idea of dedicated components performing a single role. Is this view now obsolete?

Julian Vincent, via email

HFC *We have certainly seen an increase in source equipment that can perform more than a single specific function and often can do rather more than*

PC meets hi-fi in milled aluminium – the Chord Chordette Mogul



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just audio – the iPod Touch being one of the clearest examples. We still believe that there is something to be said for a purist approach in audio but equally, that we have reached a stage where it would be wrong to assume that a minimalist component will automatically outperform a more complex one. Equally, we still tend to find that amplification seems to reward simplicity with excellent performance and in this area we do find that products offering to do everything often suffer compared to their simpler competitors. For source equipment, though, we increasingly believe you should embrace the functionality!

On the record

I loved the article on buying vinyl (*Just for the Record HFC 340*). I've recently moved to London and being given some pointers on where I can boost my record collection has been a massive bonus. There has been an awful lot of doom and gloom about the passing of the independent record store and there has been a sad reduction in the number of premises, but my experience over the last few weeks suggests that rumours of its death have been greatly exaggerated. By far and away the most satisfying aspect of bricks and mortar stores is wandering in with the vaguely held notion of buying a particular album and instead leaving with something totally different. Used vinyl is addictive and my record collection is growing apace.

Stuart Hurst, via email

HFC Independent vinyl retailers are still alive and well although as you say, their numbers have declined somewhat in recent years. We felt that it was a perfect time to remind people that there is still a great selection of shops that are bucking the trend and offering competitively priced, good-quality vinyl for a discerning public.

Heavy mettle

I've been an avid fan of hi-fi for over 25 years and I have recently been carrying a substantial set of upgrades on my current system. Whilst I have been actively involved in this process

and few of them weigh much less than 30kg each, and some considerably more. All of them sound fantastic but I cannot believe that this improvement in sound quality can purely be attributed to the fact that they weigh nearly twice as much!

When we start looking at source equipment, the correlation becomes harder still to apply. I can just about understand the 'high mass' argument applied to turntables, but many of the CD players that I have been demoing over the last few weeks have weighed as much as 20kg (or getting on for three times as much as my retiring CD player) and very little I have read about



Weight issues: Denons can be reassuringly sturdy

with home demonstrations and the like, I feel compelled to ask, why is modern hi-fi – especially anything considered remotely high end – so bloody heavy? If we leave amplifiers out of the equation for the moment as good amplifiers have always had a bit of mass behind them, the weight gain of speakers and source equipment seems to be crazy.

As a case in point, my old pair of speakers (Rogers) using 6.5-inch drivers are roughly a metre tall and weigh about 15kg each. I've been listening to a variety of models at the £4-£5,000 point

the fundamentals of CD replay suggest that an armoured box around the mechanism is going to dramatically improve performance.

So after lugging nearly half a tonne of equipment around over the last few weeks, I need to ask, why is modern hi-fi so heavy?

Ian Macfarlane, via email

This is a question that has been asked by more than a few of our reviewers over the last few years as they have struggled to unpack some leviathan that has arrived for review.

Hi-fi seems to be getting heavier. Speaker design has embraced dense non-resonant cabinets which are heavier than older 'thin wall' types. Weight gain is part and parcel of the performance but manufacturers still using the older methods suggest improvements are not definitive.

Source equipment is harder to justify. As you say, a CD player should not have radically different performance provided its isolation is sufficient, whether it weighs five kilos or 50. There is an argument that high-quality components will increase the weight of the unit to a degree but not perhaps to the extent that components

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seem to have gained weight by. We suspect that part of the reason for the weight gain is the pride of ownership that comes with owning something that appears to be made out of battleship spares. Certainly, we are suckers for weighty components – once we have lugged them into place!

Off the Radar

I recently decided to upgrade my kit and after a fair amount of research and listening, I bought a pair of Quad electrostatic speakers and the Bel Canto Pre2P/Ref1000 combination of preamp and power amp. The pairing sounds astonishingly good – as I suppose it should. I was undecided about whether to upgrade my Marantz CD player so I looked at your recommendations. With neither my amplifier nor speakers even

For the love of Quad



mentioned, I began to have doubts about how wide your trawl of kit goes and how reliable your advice is. Is there any reason my superb-sounding equipment is absent?

Michael Becker, via email

HFC Two words really: space and time. We do everything we can to review the most important new equipment at, or as close as possible, to the point of release. With finite space in the magazine and limits to the physical number of products that we can fit in to any given issue. Additionally, some equipment will be

made available to only one magazine in an exclusive agreement which will preclude others reviewing it. It is for this reason that we have always sung the praises of experienced and reliable dealers who are able to “fill in the gaps” between reviewed products. We did review the Quad 2805 in HFC294 (you don’t specify which model of electrostatic you own) and were extremely impressed by it, but it is not mentioned in the buyer’s guide because of the slightly specialised nature of its appeal.

Born without a knob

I was interested in the recent review of the Electrocompaniet EC15 MkII (HFC340). In terms of power output, connections and price this is absolutely where I am looking. I am wondering therefore if I am alone in hesitating before demoing it because it has no volume knob? This is not a phallic consideration either, I assume that if I push the volume up or down button on the front panel, does the volume go up or down at the same speed that it would on the remote control? This would be very annoying. The volume knob is much underrated. I can rapidly adjust the volume between silent and deafening and very accurately fine tune the volume level for the piece I am listening to at the time. I appreciate that it gives the Electrocompaniet a swoopy and distinctive appearance but I can’t help feel it would be easier to use with a volume knob. Am I right to discount what otherwise looks like an ideal product because of one control item?

Josh Crawshaw, via email

HFC This is down to personal preference. We felt that the Electrocompaniet was sufficiently “normal” in use for the lack of volume knob to go unremarked. The speed that the control goes up or down is fast enough for all but the emergency mute (and the remote has a mute button for that) and fine tuning wasn’t an issue. We take your point though that the volume knob is rather underrated and takes some beating. Whether it would put us off buying an amplifier that otherwise ticked all the boxes would be another matter.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The home studio divide



I WAS interested in Richard Black’s article in the December issue (HFC 340) on the differences between professional and domestic audio, because a few years ago I had an acquaintance to lunch who was a retired BBC sound engineer.

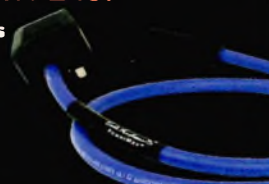
After listening to a CD of Diana Krall on my Roksan Caspian CD player through Caspian integrated and power amplifiers (and these were the original Caspian, not the more recent Mk1 and Mk2 versions), bi-amping a pair of Living Voice Avatar loudspeakers, he commented: “I spent 20 years in studios and that sounds as good as anything I’ve ever heard (in a studio).”

Which either says something about the quality of BBC pro sound or my system – or both! Unfortunately, I never asked him what he listened to at home.

Roy Stockdill, via email

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Knob envy: hopeless longing could be a danger with the EC15

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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



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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

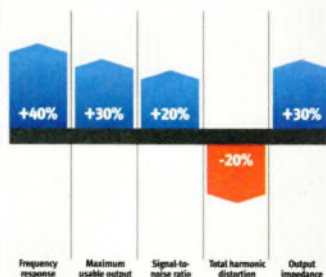
IN ADDITION to the 'blind' test, the author also spends a longer period listening to each system with various items of partnering equipment and a wider range of music. Apart from the obvious fact that this is how most people listen most of the time, this also has the advantage that interesting aspects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



THE POINT OF LAB TESTS is twofold: first, to establish basic operating criteria for the equipment under likely conditions of load, input level, etc. And second, to find out what lies behind the subjective observations noted. To this end, all the units in this group were checked for maximum output power and response flatness using basic analogue test equipment, plus an oscilloscope to look for the onset of overload.

Other parameters were measured using an analogue-to-digital converter connected to a PC, with the data analysed digitally to show distortion, plus intermodulation and digital aliasing distortion. Finally, five basic parameters are summarised for each unit in our unique bar graphs.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Amplifiers should have a response that's flat within a small fraction of a dB. We test this by sweeping a signal across the band and noting the largest deviation.

MAXIMUM USABLE OUTPUT

The basic power measurement is continuous sine-wave power into eight ohms. We also take into account short term delivery into low-impedance loads as well.

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Ideally, amplifiers should have a better SNR than any source they are likely to be fed from. This means the target is about 100dB – noise should be at least 100dB below maximum output at typical volume settings.

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

Each amplifier is driven to produce 10 watts into an eight-ohm load. We measure the distortion levels present at this level. 10W is real world power and represents the average power output consumers will likely use to drive their loudspeakers.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE

A low output impedance means good control of a speaker driver, while a high one can lead to response irregularities. We measure this by examining the degree of output 'sag' when a load is applied to the amplifier.

TESTING EQUIPMENT USED

- Source:**
 •Cambridge Audio Azur 640C CD player
 •Cambridge Audio DacMagic DAC
 •Pink Triangle PT Export/SME309/Highphonic MC-A3
Speakers:
 •ATC SCM20
 •Bowers and Wilkins 803S
Cables:
 Furukawa, QED, Wireworld

TEST MUSIC USED

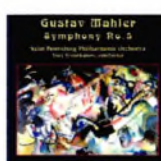
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THE DOCK OF THE BAY



MAHLER:
5TH SYMPHONY



THIS ISSUE'S BLIND PANEL

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



IAN GALLOWAY
JOB: MARKETING/
 PR CONSULTANT
IAN HAS OVER 30 years experience in consumer electronics, including mid- to high-end two channel products



TAMRIKO SAKVARELIDZE
JOB: MUSICIAN AND RECORD PRODUCER
TAMRIKO SPENDS MOST of her working life listening critically as a piano teacher



ED SELLEY
JOB: HFC STAFF WRITER
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.

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Were the 8200CD offering this performance only for CD, we'd have still loved it, but the two digital inputs and 24-bit/96kHz capable USB input

mean the 8200CD has the potential to act as a digital hub for your system and give you a remarkable degree of future-proofing. And this makes us love it even more. Add in clever adjustable digital filters and good build quality and you have a winner.

Thanks to the generosity of Audiolab, you don't need to take our word for it as you can win one of these fabulous machines in this month's competition!

TERMS AND CONDITIONS To enter the Audiolab competition, you can either (a) text your answer to 87474 at any time between 06.01.11 and 02.02.11, or (b) enter online at www.futurecomps.co.uk/Audiolab with your entry being received between 06.01.11 and 02.02.11. 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 tariff rate.

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Blind-listening Group test

INTEGRATEDS £1,255-£1,650

The battle of Britain: UK integrateds compared

Amplifiers are the driving force of a great hi-fi system and Britain still leads the field. We challenged **Richard Black** and his blind listeners to find Britain's best amp

THE ROLE OF THE AMPLIFIER in a hi-fi system hasn't really changed much since the 1950s. It accepts signals from a handful of sources, selects one, boosts it to a suitable level and drives speakers. And yet the odd thing changes, not least the line up of those inputs.

Since about the early 1980s, the most common types of input have been largely standardised line-level inputs with a sensitivity of a bit under 1V and phono inputs to suit moving magnet (MM, high-output) and/ or moving coil (MC, low-output) cartridges.

Phono inputs are now found as standard on only a minority of integrated amps, though a few more offer them as an added-cost option. But something else has started to appear with increasing frequency: the digital input. This is a rather more significant change than the inclusion or otherwise of phono inputs, because the digital input requires more than just level-shifting – there's a whole bunch of digital stuff involved including signal reception and conditioning, reclocking and D-A conversion.

But it has a great deal of sense. A DAC is really quite a simple device and, in most instances, doesn't require a huge amount of circuitry and a small module tucked into the back of an integrated amp can be more than

“As far as analogue design is concerned, these six amps make up a very tight group in terms of price.”

adequate for the task, drawing a negligible trickle of current that's already there and saving a box on the shelf.

We have carefully gathered six of Britain's best integrateds, to find a true home-grown thoroughbred.

As far as analogue design is concerned, these six amps all use Class AB push-pull outputs and linear power supplies. They make up a very tight group in terms of price and as such appear to compete very fairly against each other.



No test of British amps would be complete without the UK's best-known hi-fi brands, Linn and Naim, right? Well, you'll notice that both brands are sadly lacking in this Brit-fest this month. Why? Well, we're sad to report that Linn's PR man said: "Linn doesn't participate in group tests" and Naim has refused so many comparative tests in the past, we've learned not to ask. Make of that what you will. One thing's for sure, most of 2011's award winners will emerge from our legendary **Blind Listening Group Tests**, so you'll know our recommendations are fully backed-up.



ON TEST



Arcam A38 £1,495 P43
Arcam's current flagship amplifier is a powerful and well-featured unit with enough inputs to satisfy just about any user, with a phono stage being an option that, for once, doesn't involve sacrificing a line input. Intelligent use of electronic switching and volume control gives user-friendly possibilities like adjusting the sensitivity of individual inputs.



Creek Destiny 2 £1,600 P45
Another powerful unit, the Destiny 2 has an unusual and attractive feature in its inclusion of both active and passive preamplifier modes, allowing the fussy user to bypass one stage of amplification in normal use. We were very fond of the original Destiny: does the recently-released Destiny 2 add or subtract value?



Cyrus 8xp d £1,550 P47
In terms of raw input numbers, this is the best specified amp in the group, with an impressive 11 inputs. Five of those are digital, and it seems unlikely many users will be adding external selector boxes to this amp! There's no phono input, though. Output power is not far below the group average and there's no reason why this amp should be exclusive to all-Cyrus systems.



Leema Pulse III £1,495 P49
Another amp offering digital inputs alongside the usual analogue ones, the Pulse also features a built-in phono stage suitable for MM and MC cartridges. Its ergonomics are unusual, but take no more than a moment's acclimatisation and its heart is a traditional Class AB amp, but it offers good system integration via LIPS.



Roksan Caspian M2 £1,649 P51
The stainless steel cover and front panel arrangement are distinctive, but this is a classic line-only integrated with a simple, but perfectly adequate specification, enhanced by a single proper balanced input at the rear. Of particular note is the use of two substantial mains transformers, one just for preamp stages.



Sugden Mystro £1,255 P53
Something rather different from the archetypal Sugden, this is a Class AB amp with a healthy 50-watt output. Its provision of inputs and outputs is meagre, compared to the rest of the group, but most music-only systems will be adequately served by three line inputs, plus phono. Internally minimalist, it aims to offer most by doing least.

CREEK

Phones

Standby

Designed in the UK

VOLUME

POWER

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

TAPE

VOLUME

Integrated Amplifier

ISOtek®

The power to deliver 'clean' power

Syncro is IsoTek's latest product and the company's most advanced mains cable – but it's also so much more.

Syncro incorporates innovative electronics, housed in an anti-resonant aluminium case, designed to synchronise the mains supply in order to promote a perfectly symmetrical sine wave, delivering significant sonic improvements.

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- Can be used on all high quality Hi-Fi separates including mains filters.
- Improves sound quality.
- High quality 24ct gold connectors.
- Advanced power cord with active shielding.
- Award winning design team.



"Syncro offers really serious improvements... It's really not a question of whether to purchase, but when."
HI-FI PIAC MAGAZINE

"IsoTek is the leader in mains conditioning products"

HI-FI NEWS

"IsoTek is the UK's biggest name in mains filtration"

HI-FI CHOICE

"IsoTek has built itself a reputation as a purveyor of mains conditioners that actually improve (as opposed to just alter) the sound"

HI-FI WORLD

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www.soundfoundations.co.uk www.isoteksystems.com

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2006 What Hi-Fi? IsoTek Full System Enhancer CD	2006 T.A.S. Editors Choice Nordost Thor by IsoTek	2006 Hi-Fi News Category Winner IsoTek SigmaS	2006 Hi-Fi News Product of the Year IsoTek SigmaS	2006 Hi-Fi Choice Category Winner IsoTek SigmaS
2005 What Hi-Fi? IsoTek Gemini-6-Way	2005 Hi-Fi Choice Editors Choice Nordost Thor by IsoTek	2005 What Hi-Fi? IsoTek Titan	2005 Hi-Fi News Category Winner IsoTek Titan	2005 What Hi-Fi? Product of the Year Hong Kong IsoTek Titan
2003 Hi-Fi News Category Winner IsoTek Mini Sub (Mk1)	2004 What Hi-Fi? IsoTek Gil Vision	2004 Hi-Fi Choice Category Winner IsoTek Gil Mini Sub	2004 What Hi-Fi? Category Winner IsoTek Gil Vision	2004 Hi-Fi Plus Category Winner Nordost Thor by IsoTek
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Arcam A38 £1,495

A favourite among the blind-listening panel in terms of its performance, the Arcam A38 is a solid all-rounder

DETAILS

- Origin:**
UK/China
- Weight:**
9kg
- Dimensions:**
(WxHxD)
430x110x370mm
- Features:**
- Inputs: 7 line level
 - Optional phono stage
 - Separable pre- and power amplifier
 - Dual switched speaker outputs
 - Headphone output
 - Nominal output: 100W
- Distributor:**
Arcam
- Telephone:**
01223 203200
- Website:**
arcam.co.uk

Arcam's amps haven't changed much externally since the introduction of the 'Full Metal Jacket' range several years ago, but their internal design has seen a fair bit of evolution.

In its description of the A38, Arcam draws special attention to the output stage design which, it says, is much less sensitive to thermal conditions than traditional output stages. The issue of 'warm-up' of audio electronics is a long-standing bone of contention, some saying it's of little importance, while others maintain it's crucial for proper performance. What's often forgotten, though, is that the temperature of the output transistors can vary by many tens of degrees during the course of a track, as the music goes from soft to loud and back.

As a result, we've seen amplifiers whose measured performance differs markedly before and after a burst of loud music. Tackling this is possible by various means and many designers are aware of it, but Arcam's approach is one of the most thorough we've seen, using special output transistors which include on-chip temperature-sensing components, thus allowing very rapid response to thermal changes.

Those transistors are fixed to a substantial heatsink which ensures safe operation at high power: this

is quite a meaty amp as integrated models go and it has a large mains transformer to support that. Opposite that, on the preamplifier side of the chassis, there's ample evidence of care taken in the handling of small signals. The main input switching uses reed relays (generally considered the audiophile's switch of choice), which subsidiary switching uses solid-state devices. The volume control is electronic, with step size selectable at 0.5, 1 or 2dB. A phono stage is an option.

Sound quality

With very little said against it and lots of points in its favour, this was one of the best-liked amps of the group among our panel of 'blind' listeners. Two indeed specifically mentioned that it was their favourite or joint favourite.

The A38 also achieves an excellent balance between voices and instruments, something our listeners identified as a tricky area to get right, particularly in the Otis Redding track we used as part of the listening programme. If there's a slight weakness in its presentation it's in the resolution of small incidental details, which can at times seem subsumed into the whole.

On the other hand, resolution is generally very good, in terms of hearing what's going on within a

large and complex body of sound, so one might choose to express things in a more forgiving way and way that this amp is simply not over-fussy.

It's certainly not fussy about the music it plays. In terms of specifics, it has particularly good bass, strong, rhythmic and with good definition of pitch. The midband is neutral and treble is clear and extended, with just a hint of dryness on violins, always one of the hardest sounds to keep really pure.

TECH LABS

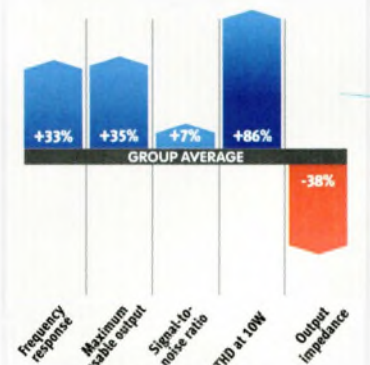
LAB REPORT

In general, Arcam products are no nonsense audiophile products that turn in a worthy performance time after time. The A38 integrated is no exception. We put this amplifier through its paces and found that it offers a commendable performance.

As usual, this Arcam exceeds the manufacturer's listed power output by a good margin. We measured 125W into 8 ohms (Arcam listed it as 105W into 8 ohms). We measured very low distortion (0.003%) at 10W and this contributes to the above average signal-to-noise ratio of -104dB for both channels.

The only kink in the Arcam was its higher output impedance of 0.124 ohms. This isn't a problem as long as you put this integrated with relatively efficient speakers.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Excellent bass, good resolution and clear, neutral midrange
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Can occasionally seem a little casual with fine details
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WESAY:** A fine all-rounder with a well-judged balance of sonic and practical virtues
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



CANTON®

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When the music starts, the world fades into the background.

Why worry about yesterday, today or tomorrow when you can be taken away by the sheer power of a Reference Loudspeaker. Canton's Reference speakers are in a class of their own, making a big impression everywhere and winning admirers.

The loudspeakers in our Reference series restore some of music's magic, bringing you closer to a live experience – goose bumps and all.

"The deep black gloss finish is right up with Bösendorfer pianoforte standards"

"Lower registers were present and well controlled, with the reflex port supporting the manufacturers claims for unfussy room placement"

"The opening acoustic guitar had sparkle and good presence – plectrum, strings and body all having commendable realism whilst the delicate percussion behind the intro was resolved well"

hi-fi news

"Canton has produced a good looking, beautifully finished floorstander that is unfussy about room placement and is free of major tonal aberrations"

hi-fi news





Creek Destiny 2 £1,600

The Destiny 2 is a worthy contender in the upmarket stakes and a sublime performer to boot

DETAILS

Origin:
UK

Weight:
10kg

Dimensions:
(WxHxD)
430x80x355mm

Features:

- Inputs: 6 line level
- Optional phono stage (replaces one line in)
- Preamp output
- Dual switched speaker outputs
- Headphone output
- Nominal output: 100W

Distributor:
Creek Audio

Telephone:
01442 260146

Website:
creekaudio.com

Creek describes this model as its 'high-end' offering: that's relative, of course, but it's certainly true that this is the fanciest and most highly specified model ever made by the stalwart of sensible audio that is Creek.

It's a very solid device externally, quite slimline, surprisingly heavy, and very smart, thanks to its use of brushed aluminium for top, front and side panels. Fit and finish are excellent throughout and although it lacks the super-thick front panel that's the usual fitment for true high-end audio, it otherwise looks the part to an admirable degree.

It's heavy because there's a lot going on inside. A large mains transformer is needed to support the generous power rating and, of course, decent-size heatsinks for the same reason. There's also a remarkably large bank of capacitors, something we've come to recognise as a Creek hallmark: the idea is that ten small capacitors connected in parallel make a more nearly ideal component (lower stray resistance) than one single unit of ten times the value. The circuitry is quite complex, a fair bit of it being for protection against various overload scenarios.

Inputs and outputs are typical, with a phono stage being an optional extra, but there's one feature you don't often find, hinted

at by the front-panel button marked 'Active'. The preamp section of the Destiny 2 can be configured as either passive (no actual amplification) or active with gain of 3, 6 or 9dB. We used passive mode for most listening; active seemed to us a touch brighter, but also very slightly less detailed. No big deal, though.

Sound quality

Over and over again, to an almost comical extent, our listeners commented on how well-balanced this amplifier is. They clearly meant this in more than one sense, both the obvious tonal one and also the subtly different business of balancing the various voices and instruments within a whole. That's a very definite plus, but there are other factors; what of rhythm and pace, dynamics, detail and sheer musical involvement?

Interestingly, only the last of these really got a specific mention at all and that favourably. Otherwise, our listeners' language was rather vague, which we've learned from experience is generally a very good sign – a sign that they're too interested in the music to want to write about the sound it makes!

Meanwhile, hints at the detail and other factors suggest that these are all somewhere between good and excellent. Indeed, our subsequent sighted listening to this amp, where



TECH LABS

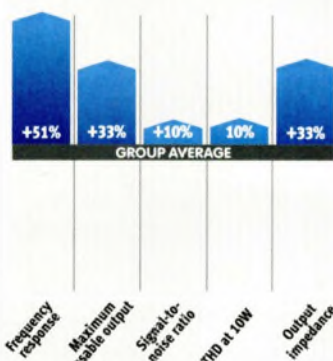
LAB REPORT

Building on the success of the original, Creek Audio has taken this model to a whole new performance level, technically. In every category its measured performance exceeded the group average. While it didn't crush the competition in any one performance area, it did perform well across all five of our categories.

Noteworthy areas of performance – it has a very good signal-to-noise ratio of -107dB. Users shouldn't notice any extreme sound anomalies, because frequency response deviation was relatively moderate at +/- 0.088dB.

Finally, we measured good output impedance of 0.06 ohms. In fact, the Destiny II should work well with most speakers.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

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★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

LIKE: Excellent tonal balance and gorgeous, effortless detail

DISLIKE: Some listeners may find this amp too laid-back, for its own good

WE SAY: A simple, no-frills hi-fi component that gets to the heart of the matter

OVERALL

★★★★★

99 of a kind



Following on from the success of the GyroDec Odyssey, we are delighted to be introducing the new limited edition Gyro SEducation

Finished in the unique 'blue steel' and black finish, the Gyro SEducation combines many of the upgrades offered to the standard Gyro SE such as HR Power Supply, matching record clamp and black TechnoArm.

With only 99 units available world-wide, be quick to secure your unique opportunity to own this Gyro SE Super Deck.

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MICHELL ENGINEERING

Tel: 020 8953 0771 / E: info@michell-engineering.co.uk
www.michell-engineering.co.uk



Cyrus 8xp d £1,550



With its excellent credentials, the shoebox-sized 8xp d is an amplifier to contend with

DETAILS

- Origin:**
UK
- Weight:**
6kg
- Dimensions:**
(WxHxD)
215x75x365mm
- Features:**
- Inputs: 6 line level
 - 2 electrical S/PDIF
 - 2 optical S/PDIF
 - USB
 - Twin speaker outputs
 - Dual preamp outputs
 - Zone 2/tape output
 - Headphone output
 - Nominal power: 70W
- Distributor:**
Cyrus Audio
- Telephone:**
01480 435577
- Website:**
cyrusaudio.com

One of the undeniable advantages of surface-mount electronics assembly is that it allows a manufacturer to get more into a given space. The Cyrus one-size-fits-all case is half-width and of quite modest height, but this amp includes one of the biggest mains transformers we've seen in an integrated amp. Behind it are the output and preamplifier stages and a most impressive array of inputs and outputs. There are six 'normal' analogue inputs, a 'Zone 2' output, two preamp outputs, twin speaker outputs on BFA terminals, a mini-jack headphone output, a socket for connection to Cyrus's popular PSX-R power supply upgrade and no less than five digital inputs: two each optical and electrical and one USB.

We're absolutely in favour of amps growing digital inputs. OK, it may not be the absolute ultimate in audiophile purity, but at this kind of price it adds considerable value and saves hassle and shelf space.

Mention of the large mains transformer and PSX-R give the clue that Cyrus is serious about power supply quality and that theme is followed with extensive regulation inside the 8xp d. The

main amplifying circuitry is fairly conventional, with good-quality modern integrated circuits for most signal-handling functions, including volume control.

Sound quality

It seems the sound of this amp is notably fast and dynamic – and that has both ups and downs, depending, of course, to some extent on the music and each listener's preferences. Not surprisingly, it went down quite a storm in the Led Zeppelin track, with plenty of compliments about its strong sound, wide soundstage and forceful vocals thrown in. At the other end of the spectrum, the Mahler orchestral excerpt was felt a little lacking in drive and excitement, but this particular piece of music doesn't really have much for an amp to get its teeth into: rather, one needs great control and plenty of detail for the track to work well.

The 8xp d does have control and detail, but, perhaps, not quite as opulently as some of the others in this group. It does, on the other hand, have good bass, maybe not the most extended ever but full-bodied and naturally toned. Again, it depends a little on



context, sounding at its best with a rock drum kit rather than an orchestra or church organ in full flow. It made a good job of the small-scale ensemble in our baroque track and one listener described it overall as 'clean, but not beautiful'.

We mustn't pass over the DAC, which is a strong point in this amp's favour, offering clear and very well balanced sound, a clear upgrade over our resident budget CD player and equally assured via all flavours of input connection.

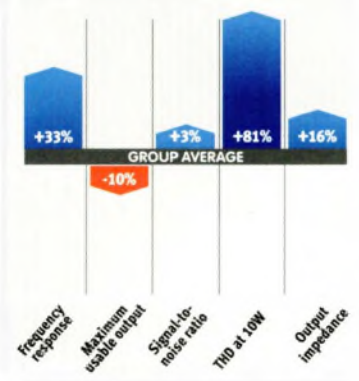
TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

Like Arcam, Cyrus products consistently perform well in our tech lab. The 8XP d is a sophisticated integrated that is packed into a very compact chassis. Across the board, its performance held up against all the competition.

THD+N at 10W was very low at 0.004%. Well laid out internal design contributes to an above average signal-to-noise ratio of -100dB. Power output fell short against the competition, but it does exceed the manufacturer's listed figures. Cyrus lists power output at 70W into 8 ohms and 115W into 4 ohms. We measured an output of 80W into 8 ohms and 129W into 4 ohms.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Fast, dynamic sound. DAC adds value; good upgrade potential
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Sound seems to lack some detail, particularly in complex music
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WESAY:** Probably best heard in the context of a Cyrus system, this amp has some great qualities
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



CYRUS

Superior knowledge, enhanced performance

Do you want great sounding Hi-Fi and also the convenience of listening to music stored on your computer? With this award winning 8 XP d integrated amplifier it's possible to have the best of both.

Cyrus has been developing DACs for nearly thirty years and through this expertise we produce some of the best sounding DACs available. These lie at the very heart of many of our models including the 8 XP d amplifier.



With a host of inputs that includes a USB port, you can connect a vast array of digital sources including digital music files stored on your PC or Mac. With the high quality DAC, lossless formats sound best. The 8 XP d will also transform many other digital sources such as your PVR, set top box and video game console into great sounding Hi-Fi.



SE technology award



SE CD player of the year



CD 8 SE CD player of the year



Cyrus 8 XP, November '09



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.

Designed manufactured and supported in England by Cyrus.
For the latest news on products or to download a brochure, please visit www.cyrusaudio.com
Cyrus sales 01480 435577



Leema Acoustics Pulse III **£1,495**



With its proprietary interface and stylish controls, the Pulse III is the next phase in Leema's enviable amp range

DETAILS

Origin:
UK

Weight:
11kg

Dimensions:
(WxD) 435x90x375mm

Features:

- Inputs: 6 line level (one on front panel mini-jack)
- Phono MM/MC
- 1 electrical S/PDIF
- 2 optical S/PDIF
- 1 USB

- Preamp output
- Single speaker outputs
- Headphone output
- Nominal power: 80W

Distributor:
Leema Acoustics
Telephone:
01938 811900

Website:
leema-acoustics.com

As one of our listeners observed after the veil had been lifted on the amps, "That Pulse looks like a set-top box". Maybe it does, too – and Leema mentions in its literature that the Pulse is intended to be for all the family. Maybe, indeed, hi-fi with the easy familiarity of a set-top box is no bad thing in this day and age. It's a bit of a deluxe STB, though, not least thanks to the milled-from-solid aluminium front panel and solidly made casework.

But it's the navigator-style button array and the blue display that really set the tone. Behind them lurk the clever bits, including an input line-up that features not only phono (MM and MC) as standard, but also four digital inputs: one electrical, two optical and one USB. Further 21st-century convenience is provided by the front-mounted mini-jack input, allowing quick connection of your iThing.

Internal appointments include the inevitable chunky mains transformer and heatsinks, as well as an output stage based on similar temperature-sensing transistors to those used by Arcam.

On the control side, Leema makes much of its proprietary 'LIPS' interface, which helps integrate various Leema products together and construct a full multi-component system.

Sound quality

Our listeners seemed entirely unanimous about the basic character of this amp: it's detailed, lively and quite energetic, but very slightly lacking in bass. Or, at least, it's sometimes lacking in bass. It apparently didn't make this impression in the Led Zeppelin track, where our listeners commented on a rather forceful presentation that suited the music well. Perhaps this masked the bass lightness to some extent, or perhaps it's more to do with the fact that this track, like a surprising amount of rock, doesn't actually do that much with the very lowest frequencies: most of the energy is a little higher up the spectrum.

Otis Redding's *Sad Song* is likewise not particularly bassy, though one listener commented even here that the sound was a little lighter than previous amps had made it. This track benefitted from the good detail and the vocal seemed to be particularly well anchored in the centre – as it ought to be on a mono recording!

It was the classical tracks that most clearly showed up where the Pulse III wins and loses. It is great at separating out discrete instrumental lines and at following a melody through thick and thin and it has real vitality that keeps the listener's interest alive. Stereo

TECH LABS

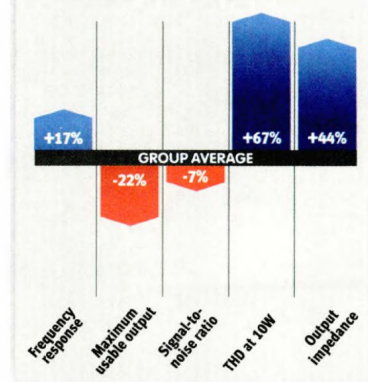
LAB REPORT

Leema's newest family of electronics represents a good mix of style, functionality and good technical performance. On its own this product measured quite well in our tech lab. Distortion levels at real-world power were low (0.007%).

This amplifier should have no problem handling most loudspeakers, because of its relatively low output impedance (0.05 ohms). We measured an average frequency response deviation of +/- 0.15dB. The only area the Pulse III fell short in was its power output and signal-to-noise ratio.

In real-world use, the figures we measured (70W into 8 ohms, and -90dB SNR) are more than adequate to drive most loudspeakers with very little noise created by the integrated.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
- LIKE:** Clear, detailed and lively sound with very good digital inputs
- DISLIKE:** Despite good pace and timing, the deepest bass is a little shy
- WE SAY:** Tonal aberrations are the easiest to live with and there's a lot else to like in this amp's make-up

OVERALL



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.

How much bias do you want? As much as you can get. The amplifier's distortion is inversely proportional to the bias current. Most Class AB amplifiers operate as Class A for a small fraction of a watt. At Pass Labs, the least of our amplifiers operates Class A to 15 watts, and our biggest amplifier peaks the 400 watts in Class A.

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



Roksan Caspian M2 **£1,649**

With its tuneful performance and natural detail, the Caspian M2 is lined up to be the perfect hi-fi partner

DETAILS

- Origin:**
UK
- Weight:**
13kg
- Dimensions:**
(WxHxD)
435x70x330
- Features:**
- Inputs: 6 line level (one balanced/unbalanced)
 - Tape output
 - Dual preamp outputs
 - Single speaker outputs
 - Nominal power: 85W
- Distributor:**
Henley Designs
- Telephone:**
01235 511166
- Website:**
roksan.co.uk

Roksan started out in turntables, but quickly diversified into amplifiers and the Caspian name goes back a long way in the company's history. This particular iteration is in outline specification, your completely average integrated amplifier circa 2010, with six line inputs, an 85-watt nominal output and no funny business at all, unless you count the deeply funky touch-screen remote control. The appearance is distinctive, though, with that stainless steel top panel and as you'll expect if you know the maker, there are a few interesting touches inside.

The most obvious of those, after removing the cover, is the pair of mains transformers which between them take up the left half of the chassis. The big one, of course, powers the output stage, but while plenty of amps have a second tiny transformer to keep remote-control-receiver circuits powered up in standby, the Caspian M2 has a substantial 60VA unit dedicated mainly to powering the preamp portion of the amp. It's a thoughtful touch and apart from any extra quality it may confer on the main (loudspeaker) outputs it should also maximise the quality from the dual preamp outputs at the rear of the unit.

The heatsink is quite big and will manage on its own under most conditions. Beyond it sits the main circuit boards, generously filled with smoothing capacitors for the multiple power supply rails and equipped with relays for input switching. A single balanced input is available at the back, a nice touch.

Sound quality

In what you'll already have gathered was a very strong group, this amplifier seems to have been one of the best liked by our listeners. Significantly, it put the most emphatic tick in one box that some seemed a little reluctant to address: the bass. In the lowest two or three octaves it seems to have the lot, with extension, power, drive and tuning all just where one wants them. It kept things visceral in rock and classical tracks alike and allowed the full character of low instruments to shine through.

That's not to say that the higher frequencies were less than satisfying and the treble was thought very clear and open. The midrange is neutral too, although just occasionally it can be a touch overwhelmed if the bass gets particularly busy. This does have one unfortunate effect in that vocals can sometimes become a little less easy to understand than via other amps. All the same, it's

not so common that vocals are underscored by really heavy bass and under most circumstances this is just not an issue.

Discrimination between different instruments of similar range and weight is excellent. And, perhaps most importantly, there's that essential 'you are there' touch that keeps one listening and enthralled past bedtime. The combination of detail, imaging and overall solidity is a potent one and makes a strong case for the Caspian M2.

TECH LABS

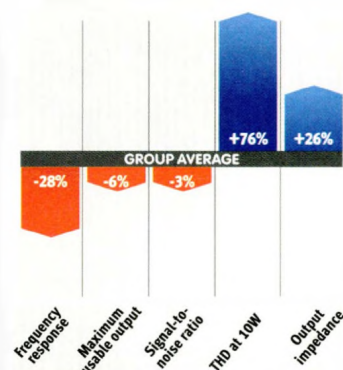
LAB REPORT

The Roksan M2 came in close to the back of the pack, based on technical measurements alone and while good on their own, they fell short against the competition.

Frequency response deviation was below average at +/- 0.23dB. This is nothing to worry about, because these irregularities shouldn't affect overall performance. We measured 83W of output power from this integrated. This was just below Roksan's listed figure, and was below the group average. Nonetheless 83W is decent power from an integrated.

Finally, the Caspian M2's signal-to-noise ratio fell short against the competition at -94dB, but in reality this figure is quite good.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Excellent bass, solid, extended, rhythmic and tuneful; very good detail and imaging
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Midrange can sometimes be subservient to the bass
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WESAY:** Produces sound of almost tangible naturalness
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL





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
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mp3  100% COMPATIBLE



Sugden Mystro £1,255

From a brand with a long pedigree, the Mystro could well be the answer to all your amplifier needs

DETAILS

- Origin: UK
- Weight: 8kg
- Dimensions: (WxHxD) 430x92x310mm
- Features:
 - Inputs: 3 line level, phono MM
 - Single loudspeaker outputs
 - Nominal power: 50W
- Distributor: J.E. Sugden and Co.
- Telephone: 01924 404088
- Website: sugdenaudio.com

We're not sure how to pronounce the name, but we are sure that this is a Sugden unlike those we're familiar with. For over four decades (!) the firm has been synonymous with low-power Class A amplifiers. This one changes everything, offering 50 watts of Class AB power from an all-new circuit. Mind you, in many ways it harks back to yesteryear, offering as it does a mere three-line inputs plus phono, single speaker outputs, no preamp or even 'tape' output, and remote control for volume only.

Not the perfect hub for your budding multi-source, multi-format, multichannel system, then. But if all you want is, as Sugden's motto has it, 'simply more music', none of that will bother you and you're more likely to be interested in the minimalist design which uses exclusively through-hole components on a single-sided circuit board, with no frills, no unnecessary signal buffering, relay input switching, motorised potentiometer volume control and an ultra-simple power amplifier circuit.

The output transistors are mounted on internal heatsinks which, unusually, do not have any vents above them, Sugden

evidently relying on heat dissipation through the thin metal top cover and a couple of small vents at the back. Power is derived from a large mains transformer and is smoothed as usual by the reservoir capacitors, but not regulated for any circuit but the phono stage. Physical construction is simple but the thick stainless steel front panel and large, easily grasped, knobs give the unit an air of class.

Sound quality

Power output may be the lowest of the group, but this amp was still well within its ratings at the loudest levels requested by our listening panel.

Tonal matter was hardly referred to in the listening notes, with just one mention of excellent tonality. Based on our sighted listening, we're happy to concur with that, having enjoyed both the firm bass and the clear, crystalline treble, plus the spring-water-pure midrange in between. There's a lovely balance between vocals and instruments and the very good imaging helps maintain the illusion of real live performers sitting between and beyond the loudspeakers.

As for rhythm and timing, these are also very fine across the board.



The Led Zeppelin track was upbeat and lively, while the classical tracks also had a consistent sense of rhythmic urge. The large-scale Mahler symphony provided the best demonstration of the Mystro's excellent discrimination between instruments, without losing sight of the orchestra in this excellent recording. In the end, the impression everyone seems to have carried away of this amp is of vibrant music-making and a thoroughly captivating experience.

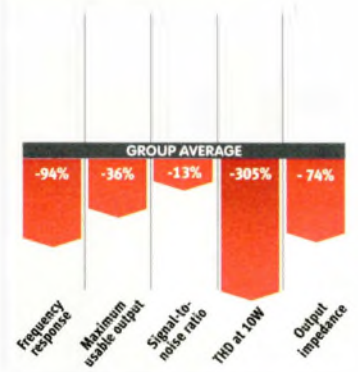
TECH LABS

LAB REPORT

The Sugden was up against stiff competition in this group test. This integrated comes in last place in regard to its technical measurements. It scored below the group average in all five of our categories. Measured frequency response variations were +/- 0.35dB and while this response variation isn't bad, listeners may notice some sound irregularities.

Distortion levels were higher than the group average at 0.085%, but this isn't terrible. This integrated just won't be as quiet as the competition. Based on the low power measurement (57W into 8 ohms, this exceeds Sugden's listed figure) and higher output impedance (0.157 ohms), we recommend using efficient speakers to achieve the full potential of this integrated

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Lively and highly convincing music-making that keeps feet tapping and hearts pounding
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Can fall short of the finest detail
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** We're happy to report that this is one very musically minded amp
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



Lab conclusions

The technical specs on all six amps is impressive enough, but coupled with performance only one is destined to shine above the rest

TECH LABS

This issue's *Blind-listening Group Test* of British-born integrated amps once again shows why technical measurement can only ever be supplementary to subjective analysis when reviewing product.

From a technical standpoint, the majority of these tightly price-grouped amps measured commendably. None of them are state-of-the-art, but equally at this mid-market price point, you don't necessarily get high-end results. Nonetheless, a few of them measured very well and we would be willing to put them head-to-head with much

more expensive integrated amplifiers on both subjective and objective grounds.

From a measurement perspective, it is hard to separate them. They all measured very well, with the exception of the Sugden Mystro. From a technical standpoint, this amplifier was clearly lagging when compared to the others, but this didn't mean much in the most important test – blind listening. Our panel thoroughly enjoyed the Mystro with its firm bass, clear treble and pure midrange. Which again just goes to show, as hinted in the introduction, that measurements sometimes don't tell the whole story.

The Creek Destiny 2 is the winner from both a sonic and technical perspective. In the tech lab, this amplifier edged-out the competition overall and performed exceptionally well in all categories.

Yes, there are integrated amplifiers that measure better than the Destiny 2, but you have to spend a lot more money to get these results.

Sound engineering from Creek Audio has led to a product with low distortion, minimal frequency response deviation, high signal-to-noise ratio, low output impedance and a decent amount of power. Combine this with great sound quality and you have a worthy winner.



TALKING POINT

The time-honoured quote "straight wire from gain" (from the late Peter Walker of Quad) still describes the basic function of any amplifier, but these days amps are doing more than just raising the level of signals and this digital input business is adding a whole new raft of variables. The major difference between the Cyrus (11 inputs, five of them digital) and the Sugden (four inputs, one of them phono) is indicative of how perceptions of what an amp should do can vary. Of course, if you only use two or three sources, none of this matters much.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Make/model	Arcam A38	Creek Destiny 2	Cyrus 8xp d	Leema Pulse III	Roksan Caspian M2	Sugden Mystro
Price	£1,495	£1,600	£1,550	£1,495	£1,649	£1,255
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Conclusion	A fine all-rounder with a well-judged balance of sonic and practical virtues	A simple, no-frills hi-fi component that gets to the heart of the matter in a most appealing way	Has good qualities and excellent flexibility, but doesn't seem to offer the ultimate sound	There's a lot to like in this amp. Particularly adept at rock and other high-energy styles	A highly convincing amplifier that produces sound of almost tangible naturalness	Basic features, but this is one very musical amp. If that's what matters to you, look no further

Key features

Line inputs	7	6	6	6	6	3
Phono input	Option	Option	No	MM/MC	No	MM
Balanced input	No	No	No	No	1	No
Digital inputs	No	No	2 x opt, 2 x elec, USB	2 x opt, 1 x elec, USB	No	No
Headphone output	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Preamp output	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

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

Frequency response	+/-0.12dB BA	+/-0.088dB A	+/-0.12dB BA	+/-0.15dB A	+/-0.23dB BA	+/-0.35dB P
Max usable output	125W (8 ohms) E	116W (8 ohms) BA	80W (8 ohms) E	70W (8 ohms) BA	83W (8 ohms) BA	57W (8 ohms) E
Signal-to-noise ratio	-104dB AA	-107dB AA	-100dB AA	-90dB A	-94dB A	-84dB BA
THD at 10W	0.003% AA	0.019% A	0.004% AA	0.007% AA	0.005% AA	0.085% BA
Output impedance	0.124 ohms BA	0.06 ohms A	0.076 ohms A	0.05 ohms A	0.067 ohms A	0.157 ohms BA

Blind-listening verdicts

So, who deserves the title of best british integrated? Our blind listening panel and our tech labs guru are unanimous – the honour goes to Creek

NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME in recent issues, we're actually devastated at having to rank these amps in any sort of order. Quite simply, we found – and more to the point, our blind listeners found – lots to like about all of them. Yes, there were criticisms, but most of them were often little more than matters of taste in sonic presentation.

If specifications matter to you, there's rather more to choose from. Between the extremes of the Sugden (very limited in and out, lowest power) and the Leema (phono, line and digital in, all sorts of operational options), you can consider details like the programmable volume step-size of the Arcam, the upgrade potential of the Cyrus and the class-leading output grunt of the Creek. Looks vary too, of course, though Cyrus aside, there's not much range in dimensions.

But when it comes to the crunch, most people will consider sound first and foremost and so shall we. We gave full marks to three of the amps here, Creek, Roksan and Sugden. That's not to say they are all perfect, but in the context of affordable integrated amps

they don't leave one much to wish for. Most importantly, they all make real music, of the sort that makes you want more, more and still more.

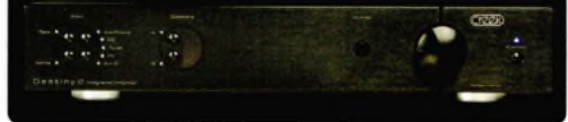
Differences in their presentation are minor: the Creek may be a bit understated for some tastes, while the Roksan is possibly a touch over-enthusiastic in the bass at times, but this is what we mean about personal taste – some listeners will certainly prefer one over the other, but we imagine things will be split each way. The Sugden is very appealing, but occasionally a touch shy on the detail front.

Similarly, we'd be most reluctant to put any hard and fast ranking among the Arcam, Cyrus and Leema models. All three play great music and they're all well-specified too, the Arcam only losing a point on that front because it has no digital inputs. Simplifying horribly, we'd pick the Arcam for tonality and detail, the Cyrus for liveliness and dynamics and the Leema for detail and 'speed'. Frankly, though, we'd give any of the six house-room with a smile. ●

THE WINNER IS...

IF SOUND QUALITY were the sole criterion this would have been even harder, but the Creek just peeps over the high bar set by Sugden and Roksan, by virtue of its enhanced specification. More power (not a lot, but it can make the difference now and then), more inputs than the Sugden and more flexible outputs than either, the active/passive preamp option: all these add value to the overall proposition.

It's very well made, it can be upgraded with a good phono stage and when all's said and done it really is very satisfying to listen to. In fact, once the bulk of the formal listening was done for this test, it was the amp we felt most inclined to stay with.



Richard Black looks at three ideal partners for our noteworthy amps this month, to make a knockout, high-quality system

CD PLAYER: Audiolab 8200CD £700

Not only is this a very fine CD player, it's a very fine DAC with inputs including high-res-compatible USB. It plays astonishingly lifelike music, giving a real feeling that the musicians are right there in front of you and it manages the rare trick of combining superb analytical skills with beguilingly musical presentation.

Detail and imaging are first-rate, while tonality is very even, with beautifully firm bass which never wavers even when the going gets tricky in the midband and treble. You get to hear all the little inner details in familiar recordings, without sacrificing the overall flow and musical communication, while the sense of rhythmic purpose is also excellent. The digital inputs make this a natural for inclusion in a multi-source modern system too.



LOUDSPEAKER: PMC GB1 £1,525

This super-slim floorstanding model effectively takes up less space than most standmount speakers, but the increased internal volume allows better bass extension than most standmounts can manage.

Meanwhile, the narrow front helps the speaker achieve very fine imaging. Like most speakers, it takes a bit of fiddling with positioning to get the bass just right, but once there one is rewarded with good weight and also good low-frequency pitch discrimination. In the mid-band the tonality is admirably neutral and voices are particularly well reproduced as a result. In general there is plenty of detail to enjoy and the sound is never less than musically convincing.



LOUDSPEAKER: Monitor Audio Platinum 200 £4,750

It may seem a little perverse to recommend such an upmarket speaker with relatively modest amps, but we found all six of the models here very happy driving quite fancy speakers. And there's growing support for the 'speaker first' school of thought these days.

This particular model is a substantial floorstander with four drivers in three-way configuration, the tweeter being a ribbon unit. While that's no 'magic bullet', its application here has helped make a speaker with unusually fine midrange and treble voicing. The ingenious cabinet and the curved corners keep off-axis response even, making imaging unusually good, while the large volume assists bass response.





Black beauties



From Germany's number one speaker brand, this Canton standmount, as **Paul Messenger** confirms, boasts some high-class credentials

Despite a number of serious attempts, the majority of German loudspeaker brands have hitherto had very little impact upon the UK marketplace. Canton, however, certainly has the muscle to change that, via its newly appointed UK distributor Computers Unlimited.

The Canton catalogue might be exclusively speaker-oriented, but it's no less comprehensive. The hi-fi section alone comprises no fewer than eight distinct ranges and more than 60 models and the Ventos are close to the top. They consist of five stereo pairs, plus a couple of home cinema extras and sit just below the even more refined Reference models, with which they have much in common.

The company headquarters is located in the small town of Weilrod in central Germany, but much of the production is carried out in its factory in the Czech Republic, helping to maintain competitive prices.

This £1,200 per pair Vento 820 standmount is based on advanced cabinetwork and drive units. The former is nominally available in

four finishes – high-gloss black or white, satin silver and high-gloss veneer – though Computers Unlimited is only listing the high-gloss black and white options.

Enclosure engineering

More important than the surface finish is the way the enclosure is constructed. By curving the sides and making the rear panel much narrower than the front, the enclosure is made inherently much more rigid (the 'eggshell' effect), while reflections are properly dispersed and standing waves in the horizontal plane are well distributed.

The technique used to achieve the curved sides involves shaping six thin layers of fibreboard and gluing them together one-by-one to form a very strong laminated form.

One factor that tends to distinguish the larger speaker brands like Canton is that they have the will, resources and motivation to design and make their own drive units. This doesn't necessarily confer an advantage over those that buy in drivers from OEM suppliers, but it does for one thing guarantee exclusivity.

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Canton Vento 820
ORIGIN: Germany/
Czech Republic
TYPE: Standmount
2-way loudspeaker
WEIGHT: 8.7kg
DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
220x360x315mm
FEATURES:
• Gloss black, white
or silver finish
• Metal diaphragm
drivers
• Rear port reflex
loading
• 1x25mm
aluminium-
manganese
dome tweeter
• 1x180mm
aluminium
diaphragm bass/mid
driver
• One pair socket/
binder terminals
DISTRIBUTOR:
Computers
Unlimited
TELEPHONE:
02082008282
WEBSITE:
canton.de

Canton has long favoured the metal diaphragms used by both drive units in this two-way design. The bass/mid driver used here is a 180mm unit with a 115mm diameter dish-shaped aluminium diaphragm. This shape, with its concave cover over the voice coil region, presents less obstruction to the tweeter output than the more conventional convex dust cover. It also features a radical new double-sinusoidal 'wave' surround.

The tweeter uses a 25mm aluminium-manganese alloy dome under a moulded phase compensator and a protective grille. A key feature here is that the dome and the voice-coil former are fabricated as a single continuous piece, avoiding any glue-joint weakness.

“One was immediately made aware of the bonuses that a compact and well-engineered stand mount can bring to the party.”

A rear port provides reflex loading to reinforce the bass and a single terminal pair is solidly mounted through a metal plate. This leads to a high-quality crossover using tightly toleranced components, feeding the tweeter at 18dB/octave. Although the tweeter has its own mesh protection, conventional fabric-covered, wood-framed grilles are also supplied. These fit neatly into the driver frames, but are probably better avoided on sound quality grounds.

No disgrace

The Vento 820s were 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 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, while the speakers were Blu-tack-coupled to Kudos S100 stands.

It's a tough task to bring a small standmount into the listening room in place of a very large floorstander, so it's very creditable that the compact Canton by no means disgraced itself. In fact, it stood up to such a stern test very well indeed. ▶



A key feature of the 25mm aluminium-manganese tweeter is that the dome and the voice-coil are fabricated as a single continuous piece behind a protective grille



THE TWEETER used in Canton's Vento 820 is an advanced variation on its established ADT-25 theme. Canton has used finite element modeling (FEM) techniques to create a more rigid dome shape and also a new flared tweeter baffle to improve off-axis dispersion characteristics. It also has a 'short coil long gap' magnetic motor for best linearity, while magnetic field simulation software was used to shape the magnetic poles and improve field symmetry.

FEM was again a crucial tool employed in designing the bass/mid driver, helping to shift the breakup modes above the operating range. Arguably its most interesting feature, however, is the 'double-S' surround, which improves both excursion and midrange damping.

FEATURES



- 1 Tweeter has a 25mm aluminium-manganese alloy dome
- 2 180mm bass/mid driver has continuous dish-shaped profile
- 3 Edge of main diaphragm is terminated in a new method
- 4 Curved enclosure sides are crafted by laminating several thin layers
- 5 Single pair of multi-way socket/binder terminals
- 6 Rear port near the top of the back panel is tuned to around 48Hz

Some loss of bass weight and power was of course inevitable, but one was also immediately made aware of the bonuses that a compact and well-engineered standmount can bring to the party.

No stereotyping

Even though the port here wasn't ideally tuned to match the characteristics of our listening room, the bass end of the little Canton sounded clean and agile, while the sound as a whole showed excellent spaciousness and freedom from boxiness. The stereo image was simply spread around and between the speakers, combining good focus and coherence with no tendency to cluster close to the speaker boxes.

Although one is naturally somewhat apprehensive at ascribing stereotypes to nations, German speakers do tend to have a

slightly brighter balance than UK designs. Indeed, it has been suggested that this might be related to the observation that speech in the German language has a rather harder edged character with more consonants than spoken English and the speakers are voiced to maximise intelligibility.

Whatever the reasons, the Vento 820 standmount is indeed a little brighter than average and certainly doesn't take the more laid back approach that some UK brands adopt. However, it has an essentially sweet nature that hangs on in exceptionally well and the net result is that it somehow manages to sound bright and open without becoming uncomfortably aggressive.

That said, wind the volume up a little too high and voices can take on a slightly edgy quality, though that will depend somewhat

HOW IT COMPARES

COMPETITION IS tough around £1,200 per pair, but the Vento 820 stands up to it very well. That said, most of its immediate price competition is likely to come from floorstanders, so a true comparison should also include the price of a high-quality pair of stands.

A major strength of the Vento 820 is its smooth, flat response and in this respect one of its nearest competitors is Canton's own Chrono SL580DC (HFC 336), a slim £1,500 floorstander that has a fair amount in common with the Vento 820. This much larger speaker with twin bass-only drivers naturally has more bass output (below 200Hz), though it does lack the standmount's lightness of touch and all-round sophistication.

Two other interesting and obvious competitors include the PMC GB1i and Kudos X2, both classy and compact two-way floorstanders with lively dispositions, though neither can match the Vento 820's smoothness.

on the ancillaries which are used to drive it from further up the chain. The 820's slight tendency to over-expose the presence and top end might, perhaps, sail a little too close to the wind for some tastes, but to our ears that can be a positive advantage, as it helps to make detail clear and voices very intelligible, even when the system is operating at very quiet, late at night levels.

Indeed, apart from its limited bass weight, there are few grounds for criticising the Vento 820. Colorations are well controlled, so that speech sounds clear, open and free from any boxy effects. The dynamic range is impressively wide and dynamics themselves show a decent degree of expression.

Outstanding imaging

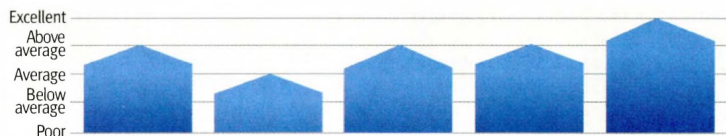
However, its best feature is arguably the outstanding stereo imaging, which seems to make the most of the extra precision that's usually associated with metal-diaphragm drivers. Image focus is particularly good and this helped make it very easy to distinguish the different characters of pre, power and integrated amplifiers.

At one point, during the auditioning, it was necessary to try some different speaker cables. This would normally involve re-introducing a pair of large and costly reference-standard floorstanders to the listening room, but the little Cantons proved comfortably able to discriminate between the cables, rendering the furniture rearrangement quite unnecessary.

This is very fine little speaker, which both sounds and measures rather well. Even though it wasn't ideally matched to our listening room, its sound quality still did a great deal to justify the increasingly popular standmount approach. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



SENSITIVITY: While the manufacturer claims 87dB, our in-room measurement gives a significantly healthier 90dB

BASS EXTENSION: An in-room -6dB at 28Hz sounds respectable, but is largely due to the very generous output at around 50Hz

EASE OF DRIVE: Although the load here is fairly demanding, the quite generous sensitivity rating provides more than ample compensation

FREQUENCY BALANCE: A fine frequency balance, especially through the broad midband, only marred by a rise around the port frequency

RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS: Apart from room reflections and low frequencies, the Vento delivers a remarkably smooth overall frequency response

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Fine freedom from boxiness, a coherent, open sound and superior imaging
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Might be a bit bright in some systems; can get edgy when loud
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Really emphasises the benefits of the standmount approach, with great freedom from boxiness
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

OVERALL



“Hart, We Love Sound!”

The Hart EVO1
Dual Monitor
Modular
Loudspeaker

*“Hart has delivered a true
high sensitivity speaker
without the difficulties
inherent with horn systems.
No wonder the Quad amp
sounded so sweet”*

September 8th, 2010
by Jason Kennedy
Source: HiFi+

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DETAILS

PRODUCT: Michell Gyro SEduction

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: turntable and arm

WEIGHT: 16kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD)
500x170x380mm

FEATURES:

- Speeds: 33.3, 45rpm
- Manual speed-change
- Silver litz arm cable
- DC motor with 0 section belt
- Separate power supply
- Inverted pumped-oil bearing

Blue anodised parts

DISTRIBUTOR: Michell Engineering

TELEPHONE: 020 8953 0771

WEBSITE: michell-engineering.co.uk

Michell has built just 99 examples of what might prove to be the best ever Gyro. *Jason Kennedy* unravels the story of the cool-blue SEduction

The Michell Gyro SE is a classic British turntable that consistently scores well in our reviews, so it didn't take much for the company to tempt us with this limited edition version in a 'blue steel' and black finish. The SEduction version of the Gyro SE is being sold as a complete package with Michell's TecnoArm, HR power supply and matching record clamp. What's more, there's only 99 serial-numbered examples being made.

The Gyro SE has always been a good-looking turntable and this new

finish brings a degree of sophistication that you don't often encounter at the price, but do the extras warrant the price premium over a standard machine?

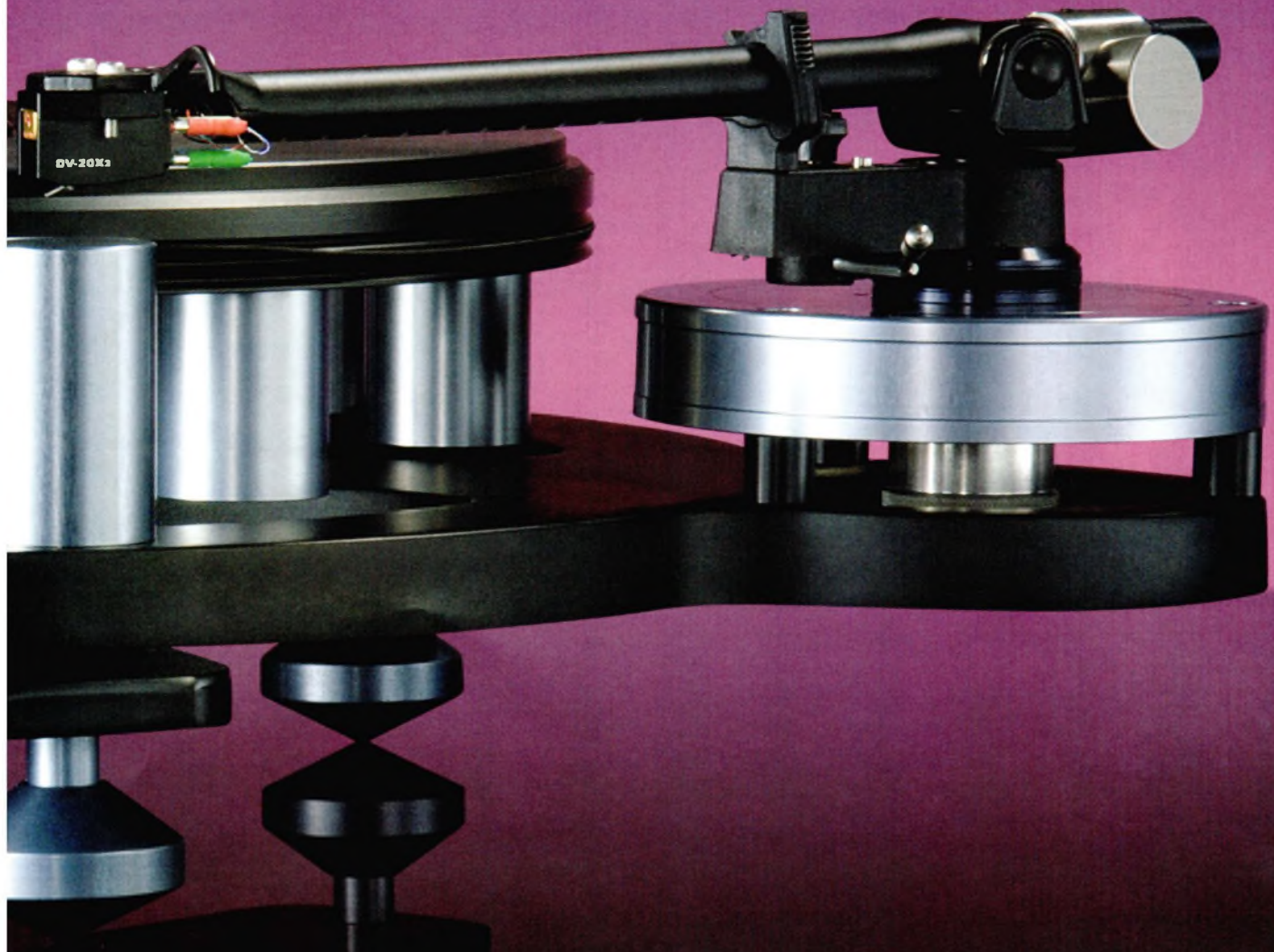
The centre holds

The Gyro SEduction is a suspended turntable with a spring under each 'tower' on the ring-shaped black subchassis that surrounds the platter. The ring is an aluminium casting with weights on the underside to balance the tonearm at back right. Each suspension post sits on an aluminium leg with an adjustable

spiked foot at its base; the set up instructions suggest using these feet to level the turntable prior to putting the subchassis and platter on, but it pays to get your support as level as possible first.

Set up is a little more protracted than with most modern turntables and the box contains a fair number of bagged components that need to be assembled, but the process is pretty straightforward and the instructions reasonably clear. A photographic run-through might help the uninitiated, but this is where the skills of a competent dealer will be invaluable.

We were impressed that the bubble in the spirit level, which sits on the centre pin, remains central when the platter is turning; not many turntables are that well engineered. The platter itself is made of an acrylic/vinyl mix with weights fixed to the underside to give it inertia. These are usually polished brass, but for the SEduction the brass has been sleeved in blue-steel aluminium. The platter is driven via a round section belt and a DC motor in a superbly finished cylindrical case that sits directly on the supporting surface.



The elements that you don't get with a standard Gyro SE are the TecnoArm and the HR power supply. The latter uses the Never-Connected system to reduce the effects of mains-borne noise and has an on/off switch up front, but, as there's a very convenient switch atop the motor housing. One feature that's worth investigating is the speed adjuster. You can use this to precisely set the platter speed if you have a suitable strobe disc.

“This is a polished and revealing turntable that is low on coloration and high on detail.”

The TecnoArm is Michell's variation on Rega's classic RB300 and quite a heavily worked one at that. It has a different counterweight stub to take an underslung weight (two are

provided to suit different cartridges), provides full VTA adjustment with a pair of threaded collars and has the headshell machined to be in line with the bearings. What you can also see is that there are holes in the underside of the armtube which reveal foam inside, the holes are said to increase rigidity and the foam provides damping. The high finish quality is achieved with bead blasting.

SYSTEM BUILDING

MICHELL'S MD Steve Rowland suggested components he would use to build a system around this turntable. His cartridge of choice is the Benz-Micro L2 Wood, a low output MC with a machined Bruyère wood body.

The phono stage reveals Michell's connection with Trichord Research and is the excellent Dino, preferably with its Plus upgraded power supply. As far as amplification goes, Steve thinks that the Sugden A21SE "takes some beating for a single box" and uses it with a pair of ProAc D18 floorstanding speakers. The cartridge and amplifier choice would likely balance the SEDuction's slightly lean balance extremely well.

FEATURES

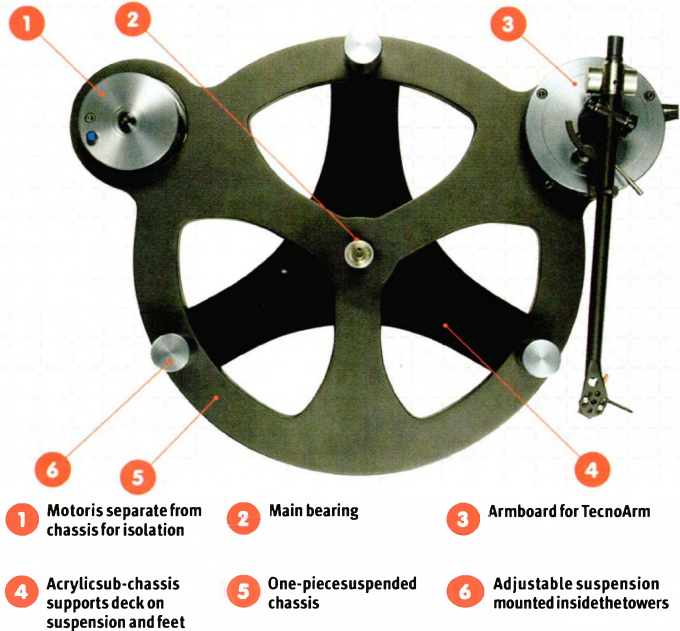


1 Underside of arm drilled to reduce resonance

2 VTA adjuster

3 TecnoArm counterweight

HIDDEN TECH



Built to last and last

The Gyro SE has always managed to combine solid engineering and good looks and the SEducation finish does it no harm in either respect. Build quality is extremely high throughout, the inverted oil-pumping bearing is both very attractive – thanks to its polished brass finish – and rather clever in that it maintains lubrication at the thrust point where any amount of friction is detrimental to sound quality. The trick is to set the suspension up so that the subchassis is very close to the felt washers on the spider and to centre the springs within their cut-outs.

There aren't many suspended turntables around anymore, the Linn LP12 is the most obvious competitor and in its Majik guise hits a similar price point. Avid is another player in this sector, its Diva II model has elastomer rather than coil spring

suspension, an MDF platter and a cast rather than machined finish. If you can provide a well-isolated support for a turntable, then there are a number of very fine solid plinth options around including the Townshend Rock 7 (HFC 324). It doesn't look quite as good as the Michell, but its damping trough gives it a mechanical advantage. Finally there is the standard Gyro SE which can be had with a Rega RB301 for £1,340.

Gripped

In many respects the sound of this turntable and arm reflects its build quality and even its overall appearance, it's open by design and open in sonic character. It's also polished and sophisticated, presenting a coherent and extremely stable soundstage that delivers genuine sonic holography when the right slab of vinyl is on the



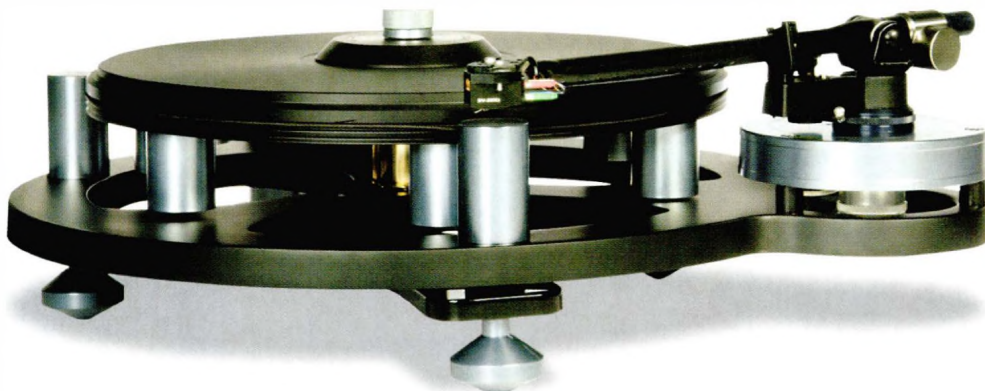
THE MICHELL GYRO SEDUCTION is a refined and revealing turntable and arm combination thanks to the HR power supply and the work that Michell has done on the arm. Its strongest competitor at the price is the Townshend Rock 7, which produces a rather more solid and powerful sound, even with a standard RB301 onboard. The damping trough gives it a greater sense of calm, but the Michell has a stability and openness that puts it in strong contention. Another key player is Linn's entry-level Majik LP12, this isn't as revealing or even-handed, but does have communication skills that many find beguiling. It doesn't have the bandwidth or the precision of the Michell, however. We have also had great results with the Funk Vector turntable which with Funk's FXR tonearm has a similar asking price, this doesn't have the engineering appeal of the Michell, but its musicality is addictive and owners tend to become vinyl junkies.

platter. We started out using a van den Hul DDT II cartridge, a brand that Michell MD Steve Rowland is not keen on, but one that lets the turntable produce a good solid groove thanks to excellent bass definition. We really like the way you can hear what's going on with each instrument in an ensemble, double basses in particular seem more nimble and dynamic than usual. The Keith Jarrett Trio demonstrated this to boogie-inducing effect on the *Changes* album, the way those musicians manage to improvise such a co-ordinated result really transports you when it's reproduced with this degree of clarity.

The quality of temporal and three-dimensional stability is what separates this package from the regular Gyro SE and we suspect that the degree of calm with which the system deals with dense material is also down to the TecnoArm, which helps to deliver impressive depth of detail and the stunning imaging that comes with it. One older LP of Alfred Brendel playing Beethoven was particularly startling to the extent to which you could hear both the auditorium and the nature of the recording itself.

And sorted

It wasn't until we got the set up sorted that such entertaining and impressive results were achieved, if you audition a Gyro SE and it isn't timing well it's probably a fettle issue. In SEducation guise this is a polished and revealing turntable that is very low on coloration and high on detail, the sort of detail that makes you realize just how good vinyl can be and why it is making such a big comeback. With a great slab of the stuff it can place the music in the room in totally unfettered fashion, with instruments and voices placed precisely in the soundstage. Gripping stuff indeed. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Superb standard of engineering and finish, open revealing sound

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not quite as straightforward to set up as it seems

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** This turntable allows all of its many qualities to shine through and that's rare at the price

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

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Analogue appeal

Richard Black discovers a neat little DAC from Furutech which doubles up as a phono stage and A/D convertor, too – enter the GT40

In last month's *Hi-Fi Choice* (HFC 341), our *Blind-listening Group Test* concentrated on a variety of DACs, all of which accomplished hi-fi nirvana in their own unique way. But this month's one-off review of the Furutech GT40 is something different again. Have a close look at the front panel and you'll see mention of 'phono'. That's right, this DAC is also an ADC and a phono stage.

Even as a DAC it's still something of a rarity in offering 24-bit/96kHz support. But, at least, we can expect to see more of this, as the chipsets become available.

The headphone socket and volume control (which also affects the line outputs, by the way) are nice additions. But including an analogue-to-digital converter is a much less common step. It makes a good deal of sense, given that USB is intrinsically a bi-directional interface and plenty of folks will have analogue recordings they may want to digitise for longevity and ease of access.

Computer-handy

But including a phono stage is a touch of genius. All one needs to do

is to plug in a record deck (moving magnet and moving coil cartridges are supported, selection between those and also line level input being via a tiny switch at the rear), connect the GT40 to a handy computer, make at most a couple of minor adjustments to the computer settings and one is off – recording with whatever software one favours at a full 96kHz.

We took a little while to latch on to how best to use the GT40, as the instructions could be more helpful. There's no analogue adjustment of input level, but the sensitivity and headroom seem well judged (headroom is quoted plain wrongly in the instructions) and using the computer's input level control can optimise things. The phono inputs will handle pretty much any cartridge and the line input is good for at least 3V input.

You do need to check level on the recording software's display, though: monitoring via the GT40's analogue outputs suggests there is overload long before it actually happens at the record stage. This also means you can't really use the GT40 as a phono preamp for your line-only integrated.

DETAILS

- PRODUCT:** Furutech GT40
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: DAC/ADC/phono stage
WEIGHT: 1kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 150x65x120mm
FEATURES:
 • 24-bit/96kHz ADC
 • Input selectable as line/phono (mm)/phono (mc)
 • Headphone output
 • Volume control
DISTRIBUTOR: Sound Foundations
TELEPHONE: 01276 501392
WEBSITE: furutech.com

Digital filter

Judged as a DAC, the GT40 struck us as good but not, perhaps, great. At either 44 or 96kHz sampling rate, it gives a basically clean sound with decent detail, but we've heard more precise imaging and also a more neutral balance. The upper bass seems a little more present than it ought to be. Still, timing is good and the sound is always enjoyable. High treble is a touch cleaner with 96kHz recordings and we wonder how much of this is due to the use of a very slow roll-off digital filter, when the sampling rate is 44kHz.

Good detail

As an ADC, performance is broadly similar, though it's harder to compare things to the status quo, as we are really looking at a field of one. Line level inputs are captured well (again with good detail) and we felt that imaging is, if anything, a little better than on the replay side. Deep bass is excellent, a touch better in our opinion than that of the semi-pro (Firewire) ADC we used for comparison and the treble is nicely open and clear.

On the phono

The phono stage is very good with moving magnet cartridges: with moving coil models it struggles a little on the noise front and, as with many integrated amp phono stages, we'd tend to recommend using an external step-up of some sort. But MIMs give clear sound with plenty of excitement and attack and an admirable lack of fuss and bother, especially with slightly worn records.

Overall, we feel this is a very successful device and excellent value. It gives hi-res replay for an already decent price, with the recording and phono abilities thrown in for mere pence. Nice one! ●



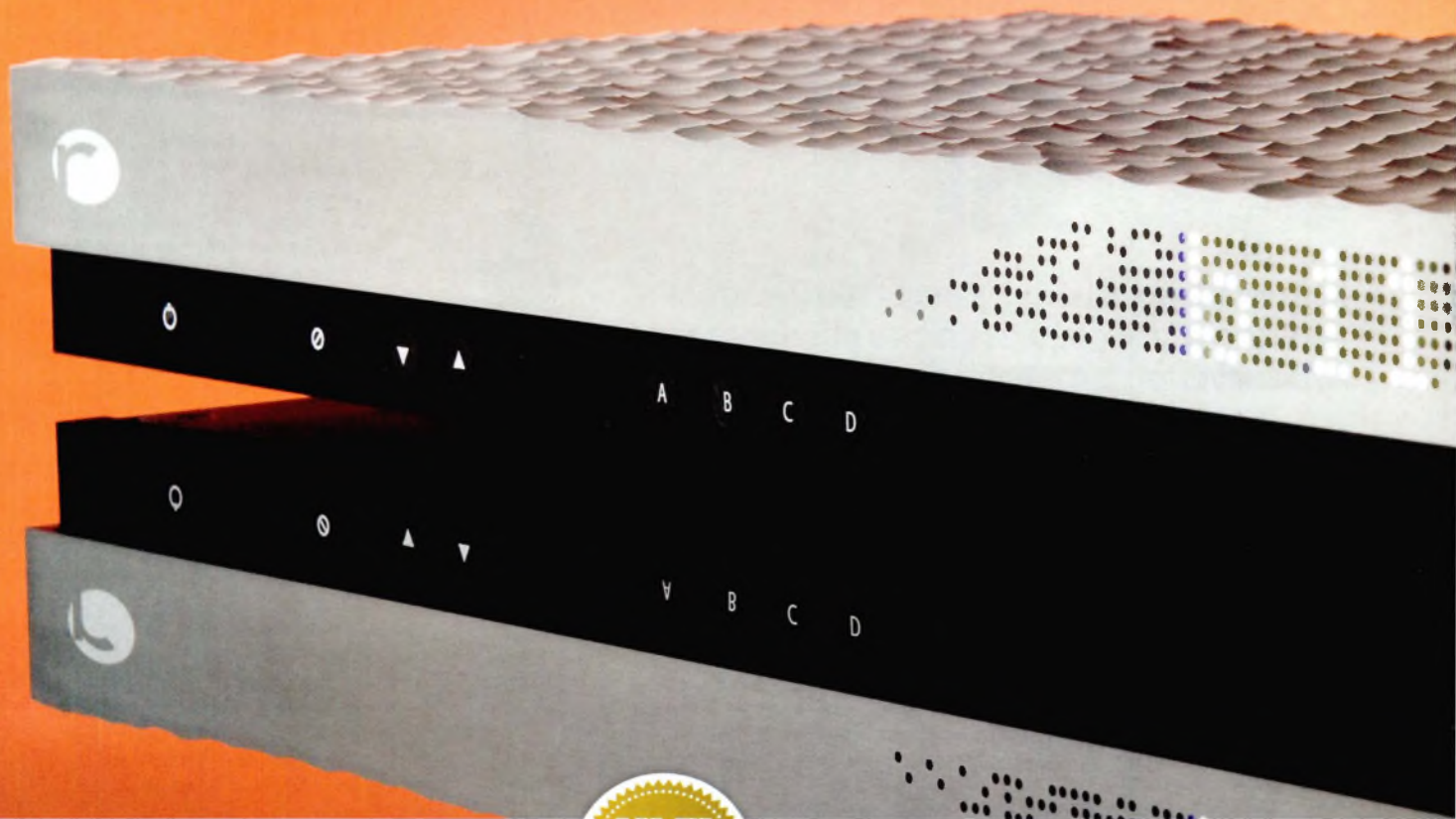
Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
- LIKE:** Hi-res compatible; good, lively sound and a particularly fine bass
DISLIKE: MC input is a little noisy; some slight coloration in DAC mode
WE SAY: The perfect 'missing link' between analogue and the home computer

OVERALL





Count on Cantata

Jason Kennedy looks at the matching 50-watt integrated for our favourite CD player of 2010. Can Resolution Audio shine with its amps, too?

Last year we had some bad news. Resolution Audio discontinued one of our favourite CD players, the Opus 21. The good news, however, was that it replaced it with the Cantata Music Centre, which went on to win several *HFC* awards in our 2010 *Awards* issue. Now we have the follow up, a Cantata amp in a matching box, containing a British circuit design and a less-is-more ethos. The 50 suffix indicates power output, making this the least powerful solid-state amplifier we've seen at this price, so what gives?

Power output

Resolution Audio built the Cantata 50 to be a less speaker-sensitive/

more powerful version of its predecessor, the Opus 21 s30 amplifier and has achieved this by giving it a larger power supply. The new amp has four, rather than two T-network capacitors, a mains transformer that's 60 per cent more powerful and a significantly bigger heat sink – the top of the casework is solid aluminium and performs this function. Why does the heat sink change things? Because it allows the FET output transistors to be run at a higher bias and this means more power output.

The Cantata 50's speaker terminals are a little different. They feature a third terminal for earthing the amp to the speaker, something that DNM Reson cables are designed for, if not

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Resolution Audio Cantata 50

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT: 6kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 50x430x230mm

FEATURES:

- Power output: 50 watts
- Inputs: 2x RCA phono, 2x XLR
- Banana or spade speaker terminals
- Remote control source & volume
- Cantata-link system control

DISTRIBUTOR: Redline

TELEPHONE: 01268858222

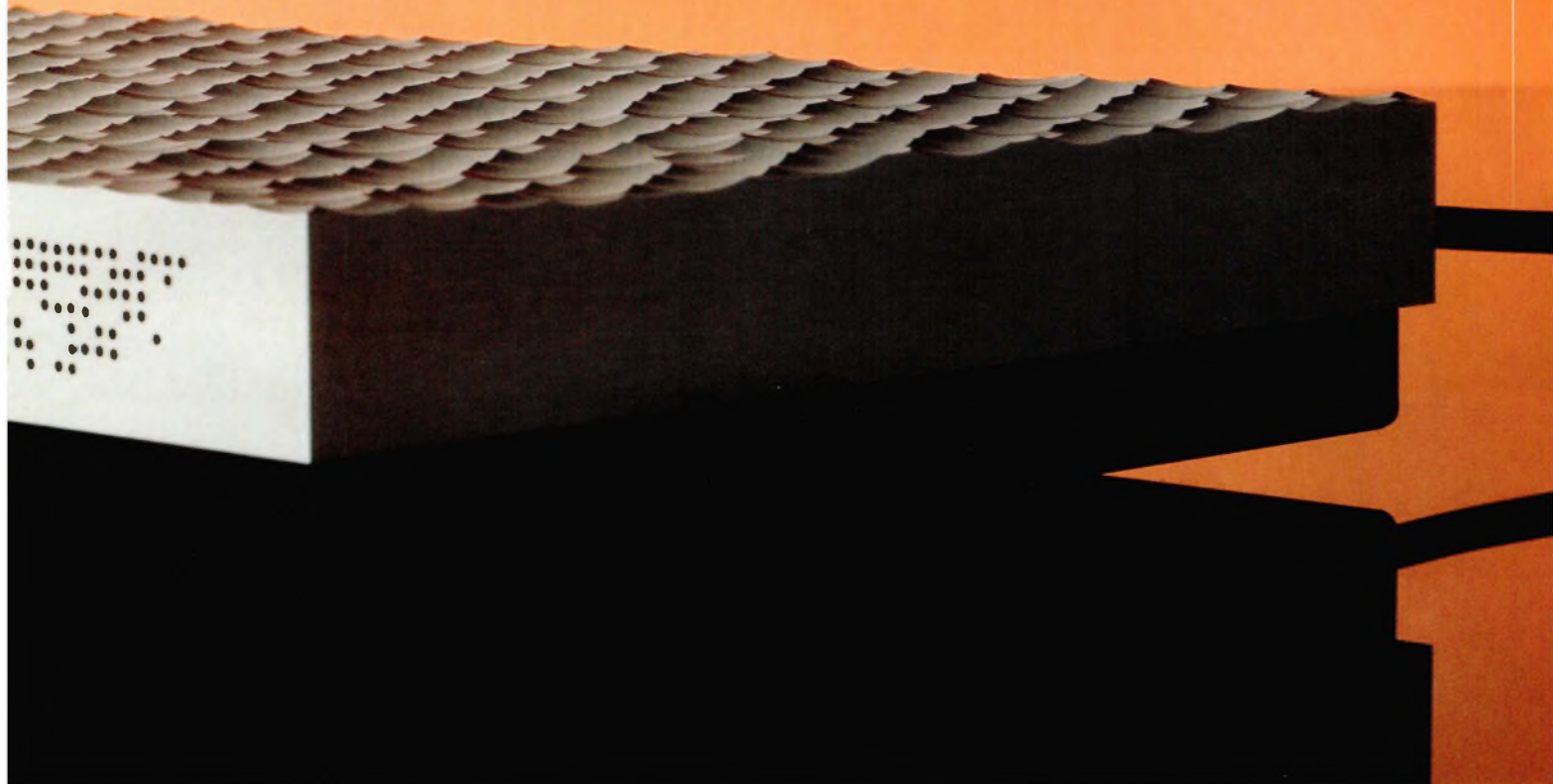
WEBSITE: resolutionaudio.com

many loudspeakers. It requires the speaker to have an internal connection to the drive unit baskets, which are electrically floating. Tannoy has included earth terminals on some of its speakers, because the earthing idea comes from Japan, where the Scottish company have a strong following.

The speaker terminals are in socket rather than binding post form to keep the metal content down in true DNM style (see Talking Point, right). Resolution Audio has not gone to the extreme of using Perspex casework, but does have aluminium oxide spacers on the FETs attached to the heat sink, in order to minimise eddy currents that are induced in metal if there is an AC field nearby.

The Cantata is a class A/B integrated with only four line inputs (the Music Centre augments these with digital inputs). These inputs are indicated by a letter that shines through the attractively retro-style dot matrix display alongside the volume level.

We were a little perplexed that the amp on the promo picture shows a capital letter, whereas our sample displays a lower case one. But it turns out that you can dedicate one input to the Cantata Music Centre which gives it priority over other inputs and displays as a capital for



that reason. Input selection and volume control can be accessed from the front panel, but the system remote is an easier option.

The volume control is a switched resistor network much like that in the Music Centre, but when the two are used together (and we suspect that this is a good idea) the volume control in the player is bypassed. You need to connect the two units with a bus link to achieve full functionality.

Thing of beauty

The most distinctive thing about this amplifier is its beautifully machined shell, this stunning piece of industrial

“This amp is a tremendously effective communicator of the musical message.”

design makes the Cantata products stand out a mile. If there was any justice in the world, then this amp would be on the front of the finest design magazines in the land. It probably also accounts for a fair portion of the final cost, but when you consider its sculptural qualities it's money well spent.

Build quality is very high throughout, not only is the machining on the shell

itself state-of-the-art, but the buttons, display and connections are all top notch. It's not a big amplifier, width is about average but height and depth are petite, continuing the less-is-more theme. The speaker terminal sockets are deliberately minimalist and, therefore, don't look very classy, but there is the option of having conventional binding posts, too.

In terms of value, it's not so obvious what you are paying for apart from the casework, until that is you plug in a great source and speakers and spin some choice tunes. Try as we might, we couldn't think of an amplifier under £6,000 that comes close to the musical



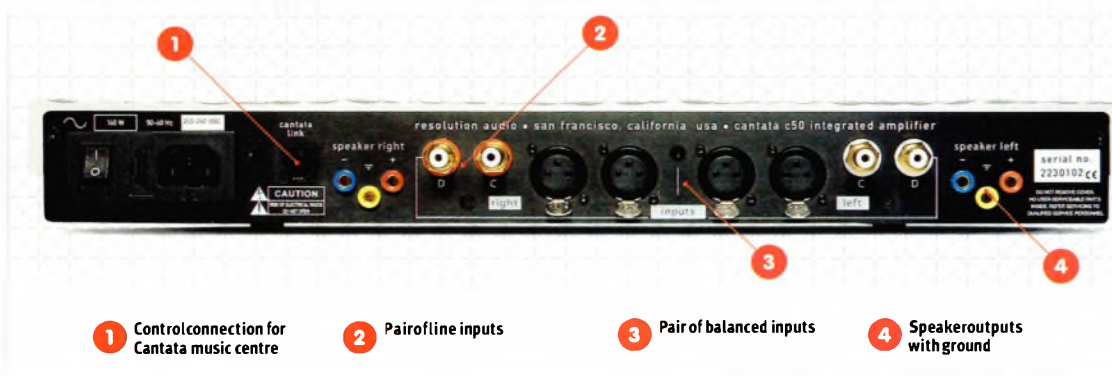
TALKING POINT

THE CIRCUIT that lies within the Cantata 50 is by Denis Morecroft, the man whose initials can be found on DNM's very select range of Perspex clad pre and power amps. Morecroft is a sharp cookie who created the T-Network capacitor and worked for NXT in its prime.

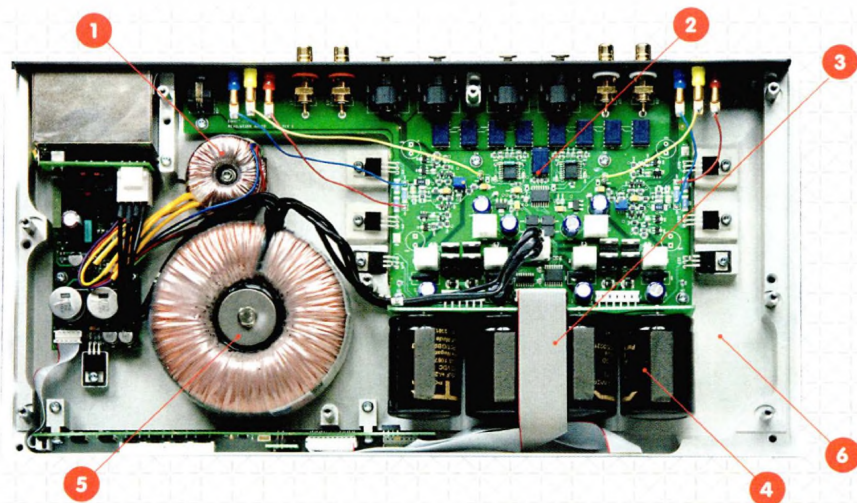
The only DNM product you can easily buy is its solid core cables. Speaker cables are augmented by a third wire for earthing the speaker to the amp. Hence the third connection on the back of the Cantata.

Another DNM idea is that conductors and connectors should use as little metal as possible because of the signal's potential to induce magnetic fields within them which is said to slow the sound down. This explains the minimalist speaker terminals used by Resolution Audio.

CONNECTIONS



HIDDEN TECH



- 1 Smaller power supply for pre amp
- 2 Symmetrical amplifier board
- 3 Control cable to front panel
- 4 Large output capacitors
- 5 Large toroidal transformer for power amp
- 6 One piece milled aluminium chassis

transparency on offer here and that equals great value in our book.

Musically engaging

The Cantata Music Centre made a big impression and so expectations were high for the partnering amp. As it turned out they weren't high enough, as this is the most musically engaging amplifier we've heard in a long, long time. It's hard to pin-down exactly what it does that's so effective but it is incredibly fast; it doesn't increase tempo but it just stops and starts like quicksilver. It also makes most amps sound badly time-smearing and sluggish. This is partly because it's not a powerful-sounding amp, it can deliver good scale, but can't match the room-filling grandeur of real power houses. What it does instead, is let you know precisely

what's going on in the music and if you liked that music before you will be charmed by it through the Cantata. The Opus 21 CD player proved itself to be extremely capable in this regard by providing the signal being amplified, we tried another player for size and quickly went back because this amp is so revealing of a source's capabilities.

On the other end of our Townshend DCT cables was a pair of PMC fact.8 speakers, an 89dB sensitivity floorstander that revelled in the Cantata 50's company.

The way it reflects the original recording is quite startling, the speed factor means that transients can literally make you jump when they strike at the start of a piece. Instruments and voices also seem very real, it's much easier to



BECAUSE IT'S a very fast sounding design, the Cantata 50's competition comes from the key players in the pace, rhythm and timing brigade. It's natural prey would, therefore, be Naim's NAC 202/Hi-Cap/NAP 200 pre/PSU/power combo at a similar price point or a Rega Osiris integrated (£6,000).

While it's less powerful than those heavyweights, the NAP 200 offers 70 watts and the Rega 162 watts, it is more neutral and fleet of foot so long as you use a reasonably sensitive loudspeaker.

The Copland CTA405 would make a very interesting comparison. It has the same power rating, but totally different approach to circuit design.

DNM's pre/power amplifiers are the only examples of the art that are likely to beat the Cantata at its own game, but they are less powerful, more expensive and as rare as rocking horse poop.

understand lyrics and to appreciate just how dirty-sounding an electric guitar can be. More sophisticated material has a beauty that is totally beguiling, melodies are placed front and centre and the whole emphasis is on the music rather than the sound. Rather a lot of amplifiers work hard to deliver an impressive, rich and powerful sound that somehow manages to put the music in second place, but good sound alone is a novelty that wears thin.

This amp is a tremendously effective communicator of the musical message, once an album is playing it's a struggle to take it off unless the house is on fire or you think of another album that can't wait. A good example of the sound/music conflict is Wyclef Jean's *Thug Angels*. This is a well produced and substantial modern recording that can sound glorious with its fast bass line and multi-layered vocals. But, on most occasions, we only listen to the first minute and get the idea. Here we stayed for the full six-and-a-half and enjoyed them to the max, despite the lack of gut-churning bass.

Densely packed

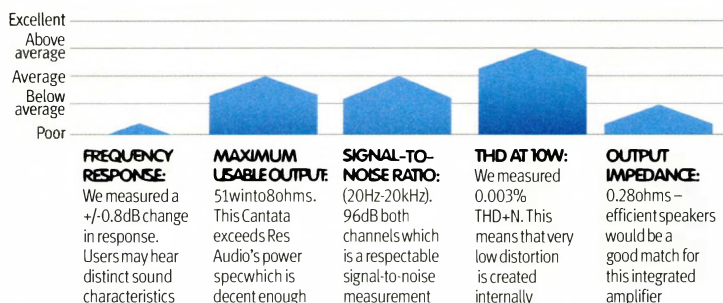
The Cantata 50 is a hi-fi product for the music lover rather than the audiophile. It provides a lot of what the hi-fi nut enjoys in its pacy delivery, very low distortion and densely packed detail, but it doesn't set out to wow with scale or power. Rather it concentrates on getting the music to the speakers without damaging its temporal or emotional integrity.

It's also hi-fi for people with an aesthetic understanding and an appreciation of great design. You only have to look at it to realise it is a thing of beauty, far removed from the dumpy boxes we're so familiar with.

Here's another winner from Resolution Audio, then. The bar has been set for 2011's amp newcomers. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Astonishing speed and life-affirming musicality
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Another input might be useful and it doesn't 'feel' like a £4,000 amplifier
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** This perfectly formed amplifier reveals that the language of music is easy to understand
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



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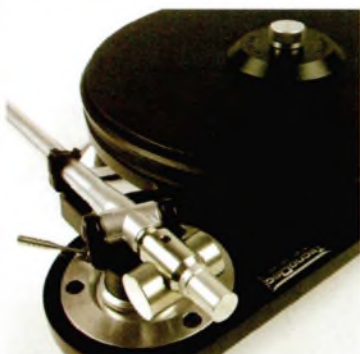
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PURE brilliance

PURE's ground-breaking £80 digital iPod dock brings hi-fi sound to Apple devices for pin money. **Ed Selley** plugs in 2011's super transport

The iPod transport, a dock that extracts a digital signal to output to an external DAC, has been with us for a few years now and the price of models has drifted progressively lower. From the £2,000 MSB iLink (which only worked with a specially modified iPod), we now have the PURE i-20 which will function with any iPod connected to it and will produce the all-important digital signal for a princely £80.

If this was the only feature the i-20 offered, we would be fairly impressed. PURE has other ideas, however. The i-20 will also take the digital signal it extracts from an iPod and run it through an internal Cirrus 4353 24-bit/192KHz-capable DAC to a pair of analogue outputs. PURE claims a 105dB signal-to-noise ratio which is more than respectable under the circumstances. To add a final ribbon to an already appealing bow, the i-20 will output composite, S-video and component video (the latter two formats via special cable) to show video material from an iPod. In short, this is an incredibly well-specified device for the asking price.

Plain Jane

This very comprehensive feature set is concealed within a relatively plain exterior. The i-20 feels solid and well thought out, but it would be stretching matters to call it attractive. The supplied remote is easy to use and works well from reasonable range, but the small size and slim design will likely condemn it to a life down the side of a sofa cushion if you are not very careful about where you put it down.

On balance, these minor aesthetic grumbles are worth the trade-off for the remarkable feature set and the effort that has gone in to making the i-20 as slick to use as possible. We tried the i-20 with a variety of iPods and found connection was instant with all of them. Connecting an

iPhone with the phone network still active produced no cellular ticks and buzzes, even when the phone was called whilst playing back in the i-20. One minor bugbear is that the output level of the iPod in part decides the analogue output of the i-20. Unless the iPod is set to full volume, the i-20 will not produce the posted output voltage. This is not a huge problem when the iPod is in the dock, but unless you remember to correct it before reverting to headphones, there is the potential for a brief but ear-frying burst at maximum volume level.

Assured

These operational gripes can be forgiven because where it matters, the i20 is an assured performer.



DETAILS

Product: Pure i-20
Origin: UK/China
Type: Digital iPod dock/transport
Weight: 255g (less PSU)
Dimensions: (HxWxD) 117x135x75mm
Features: iPod transport with coaxial and optical digital outputs
Internal 24/192-capable DAC
Supports composite, S-Video and Component video
Full remote control of docked iPod
Distributor: PURE
Contact 0845 1489001
Website: pure.com

Initially connected by the analogue outputs, the i-20 produces a clean and engaging sound. Lossless files ripped from CD via iTunes retain the same sonic character as the original and the internal digital to analogue conversion of the i-20 is the equal of a well-sorted, sub-£250 CD player.

Vocals are well presented and instruments sound believably real. Very complex pieces can find themselves becoming slightly muddled with less separation between instruments and musicians, but the i-20 is never unpleasant to listen to.

A no-brainer

Connected to an external DAC – in this case we tried a Cambridge Audio DacMagic and an Audio Note DAC1 – the PURE is essentially transparent and the overall sound quality will come down to the DAC used. As might be expected, both DACs offered greater insight into the same lossless recordings over the analogue outputs but for those on a budget, the i-20 would be a respectable performer on its own before adding a DAC at a later date.

As a final additional talent, the i-20 displays a good-quality video image over component, even when blown up on to a 42-inch screen.

Bargain

In terms of the performance offered and the potential for upgrade, the i-20 has to be considered a bargain. Anybody building an entry-level system around an iPod will find the i-20's ability to perform more than credibly on its own, before offering a simple upgrade via any one of the many DACs now on sale, very appealing. We would have been delighted to see a bare minimum iPod transport at this price, so what PURE has achieved with the i-20 is remarkable. iPod hi-fi has never been so obtainable. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Amazing value for money; strong performance via digital and analogue

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Not the best looking dock; some minor user gripes

BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



WE SAY: Bargain way to get hi-fi sound from Apple devices, the best so far

OVERALL



Just add speakers



Rotel has consolidated its hi-fi know-how into just one £1,200 box, adding streaming for that 21st century touch. **Richard Black** investigates

The term 'all-in-one system' is becoming more and more ambitious as more bits and bobs come to be considered standard parts of a system. With the RCX-1500, Rotel has arguably enlarged the envelope compared with previous products we've encountered under that general heading. The obvious bits are

there – CD player; DAB and FM radio; amplifier; line input and a couple of digital ones – but the RCX-1500 goes a lot further.

Indeed, thanks to the awesome power of the internet, it goes almost infinitely far. The 'killer feature' here is the inclusion of internet connectivity (usually wireless, though you can cable it up to your

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Rotel RCX-1500

ORIGIN: China

TYPE: One-box hi-fi system

WEIGHT: 8kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD)

391x144x343mm

FEATURES:

- CD transport
- DAB/FM radio
- Internet radio
- Network music player
- USB A-socket for portable music players including iPod
- Analogue line input
- Headphone output
- Preamp output

DISTRIBUTOR: Bowers and Wilkins

TELEPHONE: 01903 221500

WEBSITE: rotel.com

router if you prefer) and Rotel has gone to some lengths to make this a very flexible way of accessing music, with value-added bits tagged on along the way.

Wireless down the wires

Internet radio is truly one of the wonders of the age. Where FM is theoretically capable of accessing a few dozen stations in a given location and DAB can manage a hundred or more, internet radio currently offers something in the region of 15,000

of them. At least, that's the official figure. A few are only part-time, some never seem to be accessible and for copyright reasons some are supposed only to be available from certain geographical locations.

But even if as many as half are ruled out on those grounds and half of the remainder are excluded on grounds of abominable sound quality (and there is certainly some of that



out there, sorry to say), that still leaves more stations than you are likely to browse through in an evening or two, especially as more are being added every week.

Obviously this all assumes you're in an internet-enabled household and if you're not, you don't want an RCX-1500. We couldn't actually get it to do anything other than play CDs until we had got its internet connection set up and that caused us to spot one of the unit's (few) operational weaknesses: it needs a 'dongle' to be plugged in at the rear to access wireless computer connections. The dongle is supplied, but one might not spot it at first. On turning on, the unit doesn't seem to realise that the dongle is missing, but just gives error messages about finding no network. Surely a message like 'insert dongle' or 'connect to computer' or something equally helpful could be displayed?

"There is still no single perfect way to play all music sources under all circumstances"

While we're in critical mode, we might mention the rather plain display, which carries four lines of nice clear text, but doesn't make for the most obvious navigation of, well, anything, really. The front panel buttons aren't bad and the remote helps, but again isn't quite the best we've seen. In particular, finding the station one wants, from the however-many-thousand available by the time you read this, can be tricky.

But – and this really is a pretty big 'but' – Rotel has been rather clever and largely pre-empted this problem. In the instructions is a pointer to Rotel's own internet radio website (connected with Reciva, the de-facto homepage for internet radio in



TALKING POINT

INTERNET RADIO makes available the output of most of the world's 'regular' radio stations and plenty more that only broadcast on the internet. To receive these stations, one needs a broadband internet connection and a computer or a device like the RCX-1500. Quality varies, between 22kbps and 320kbps. Sorting and finding stations can be a major headache, but Rotel's use of the Reciva site makes it about as good as it gets.

general), where one can register one's RCX-1500 and also select stations to add to the list of 'My Stuff' which the RCX-1500 itself accesses when it connects to the internet. This effectively populates a list of preset radio stations, with the operational ease that comes from a desktop or laptop computer and all the features of a full-on Reciva web page.

In addition, via the Rotel radio page, one can store music online for easy listening, compile 'custom radio stations' playing music of a style one likes and more, all thanks to various online music services that clever folks have dreamed up. No doubt more will come.

Computer, computer

Now if a bit of hi-fi is connected to the internet via a router it's effectively also connected to your home computer(s). They probably have some music on them, in



Q&A...

WE SPOKE WITH ROBERT BURN, ROTEL'S GROUP SERVICE MANAGER, ABOUT THE RCX-1500



HFC: We're used to Rotel as very much a separates-oriented range. How does this sit with that ethos – is it a full-on change of direction?

RB: Not a change in direction as such – more an extension of what we are about. We recognise that some people will prefer the convenience of a 'one-box' solution that can easily integrate with external sources such as internet radio, home media servers and the iPod.

Is the digital power amplifier technology Rotel's own?

No – we take advantage of the performance of IcePower modules in the RCX-1500.

With all that computer interfacing, there's no straightforward USB input which would probably suit those who like to use their own choice of computer file player. Why not?

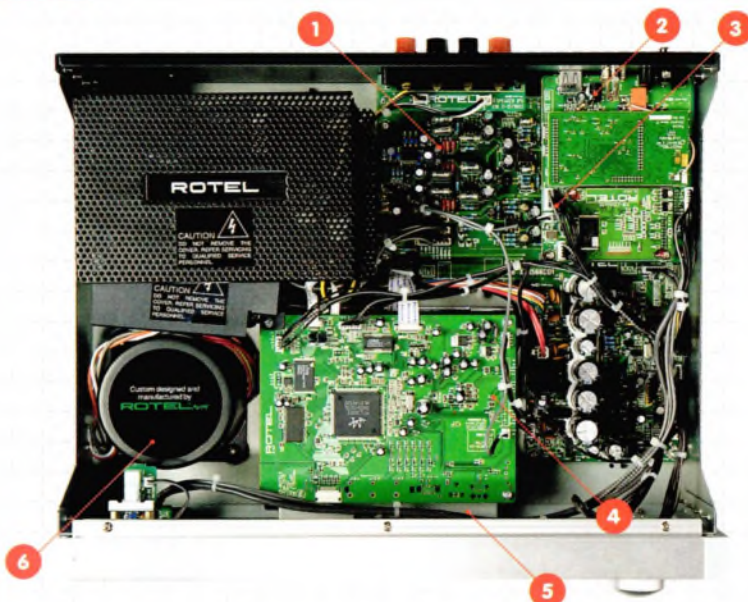
Well, you do have the option of connection to your computer via a network or via the S/PDIF input – fun for the more technical type of person. Network Attached Storage also provides a convenient music file storage medium. As regards the USB input itself at the time that the product was conceived, the iPod lead the field and most do feature a USB interface of some sort. Hence you could argue that the RCX-1500 is geared toward that kind of product.

That said, the product will play music files stored on a regular memory stick, following whatever folder structure that you put on it.

Who do you see as the likely purchaser of this unit?

We hope that it would appeal to the 'newbie' who has little inclination towards digital music storage or internet radio, but wishes to develop an interest in either direction. The functions and method of use are geared towards ease of use. We also hope that it would appeal to the more 'audiophile' type of person seeking a product which can provide excellent sonic performance from radio, CD and networked sources.

HIDDEN TECH



- 1 Amplifier output board
- 2 Tuner board
- 3 Networking board
- 4 Servo and DAC board
- 5 Inhaler CD drive at the bottom of the chassis
- 6 Power supply

iTunes in some folder on the drive.

If you have a recent version of a media player on a computer that's compatible with 'uPnP' and file sharing is enabled, the RCX-1500 can access and play music on the computer. Amusingly, our review sample picked up that we had PURE Digital's 'PureServer' installed on our local PC and so was able to play music via that before we'd even got round to checking if our copy of Windows Media Player was up-to-date and the correct version.

This is a pretty powerful feature, giving as it does access to all the files one might have downloaded or ripped from CD. And the good news is, that it supports practically all conceivable file formats. Of course, the inevitable MP3 and WMA are there, plus AAC, but much more impressively so are FLAC, WAV and AIFF, meaning that you can enjoy full-quality sound, at least to CD standards from your computer. All that's required is for the computer to be turned on. We even got a 96kHz-sampled track to play, though it wasn't entirely stable. Still, uncompressed 16-bit/44kHz audio over wireless is not to be sneezed at.

Not enough for you? There's a USB socket on the front of the RCX-1500, for USB sticks and so on, but in the most modern manner it also supports iPods. Yes, this is a fully digital iPod dock, transforming your iPod into

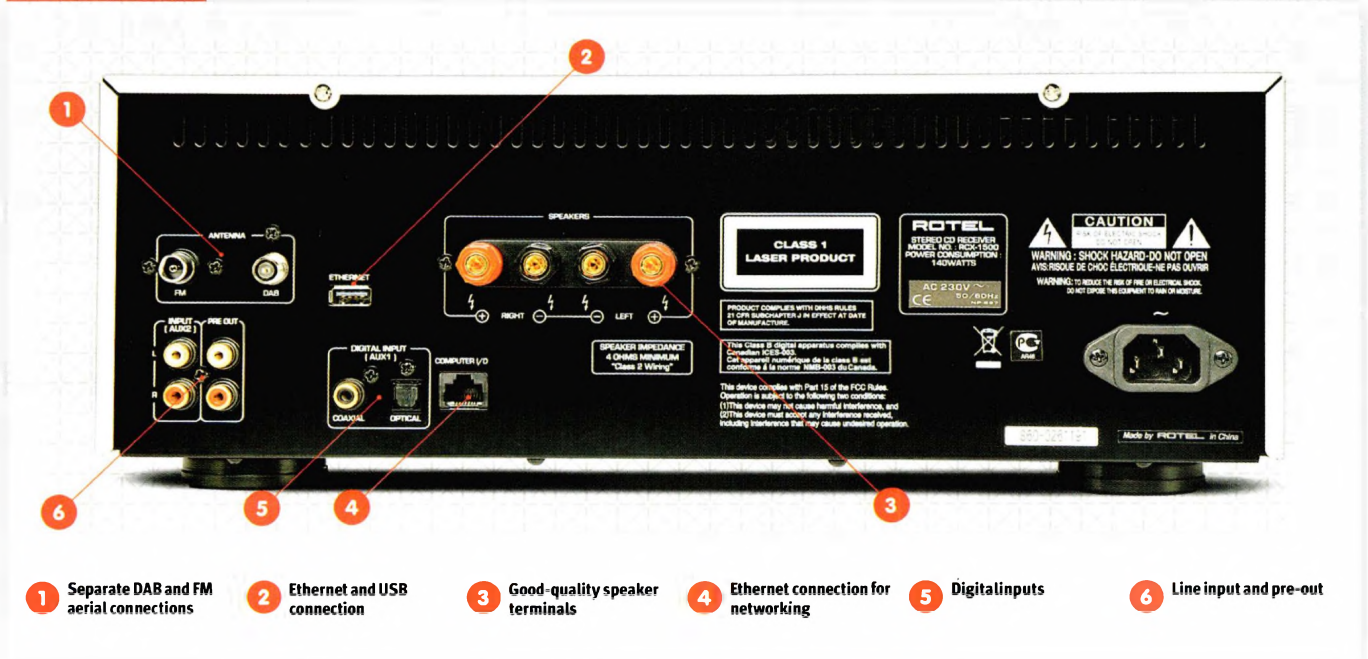
another kind of 'bit bucket'. All the file formats we could think of to try are supported, so again you can have full-CD-format audio, pure and uncompromised. The Rotel's transport controls or those on the iPod than be used.

In practical terms, all this is achieved in a unit which is actually a little narrower than most current hi-fi, about the height of a powerful integrated amp and just a little deeper than most of that breed, if one includes the dongle in the measurement. It has a conventional linear power supply but sports a switching power amplifier, feeding a single pair of speaker terminals at the rear. There's a preamp output for feeding a remote amp. The CD transport is a slot-loader – a bit slow and mechanically noisy – and not the greatest glory of the unit, but it functions just fine. Component quality is decent, with a high-spec Wolfson DAC chip included.

Cheery sounds

With so many options on hand, it seems easiest to fall back on an old favourite – and a comfortably known quantity – and listen first to a few CDs. Rotel, of course, has made some very fine CD players and amps in its time and we hoped some of them would prove to have rubbed off on this unit. In fairness, it's not fully up

CONNECTIONS



1 Separate DAB and FM aerial connections 2 Ethernet and USB connection 3 Good-quality speaker terminals 4 Ethernet connection for networking 5 Digital inputs 6 Line input and pre-out

to the standards of the best, sounding a little closed-in at times. But it's a little hard to know where to set the benchmark, in terms of price: how much of that £1,195 should one allow for the DAB, FM, internet and USB- input stuff? If one judges this as about £700 worth of CD player and amp then it's actually very decent.

Like quite a lot of switching power amps we've heard, it presents energetic and rhythmic music, with a very likeable bass, which may not always be the most incisive but always sounds plausible. There's good detail across the midband and what little coloration we could find is really nothing more than a slight accentuation of the lower midband. Treble is where the RCX-1500 starts to struggle a little, lacking the crystalline purity and insight of the best separates kit, but again it's never less than listenable.

It's a little pointless talking about the sound of DAB and internet radio: being quite heavily data-compressed, they tend to dominate the performance of most replay equipment of this kind. The FM receiver is OK, though not vastly exciting, with a rather rough sound even under near-perfect reception conditions. With an internal wire antenna it really struggles and we imagine it's intended as little more than a fall-back.

Networking

The optical and electrical digital inputs are good, if not amazing and the USB input definitely adds quality to sounds stored on portable players. And then the 'Network' input, which means music on your computer, is also a clear improvement on most ways of connecting a computer to a hi-fi. No, it doesn't sound as good as the best of the USB-input DACs in

HOW IT COMPARES

ONE OF THE MOST popular all-in-ones at present is the Arcam Solo Mini, which we reviewed in our Ultimate Group Test in HFC 333. At £750 it's a good deal cheaper than the RCX-1500, but it doesn't do as much. Specifically, it lacks the internet and network capability of the Rotel. In terms of sound, the comparison is interesting. The Rotel is considerably more powerful, but apart from that, the two share quite a few characteristics, including a slight lack of certainty in the treble.

Where the Arcam scores is in detail. The Rotel has a cheerful and easy-going sound, but it's inclined to be a bit casual with detail, while the Solo Mini is surprisingly precise given its price and features. The Solo is also much smaller, so it will probably appeal more for the office or spare bedroom system. Overall, though, the Rotel seems to be very successful in a field of, currently, just one!

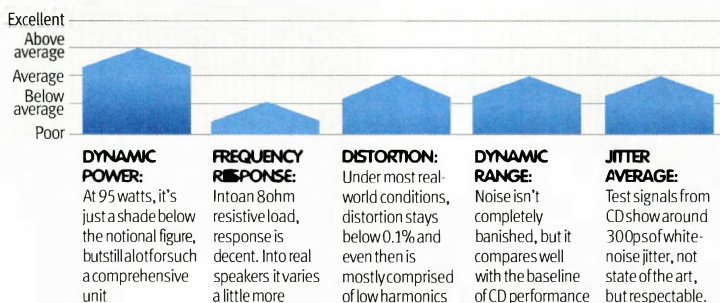
our recent *Blind-listening Group Test (HFC 341)*, but it sounds an enormous amount better than the analogue output of a normal computer (or even a respectable soundcard). And it's wireless!

There is still no single, perfect way to play all music sources under all circumstances, for all users. And this is fast becoming something of a Holy Grail for forward-thinking audio companies, as we shift towards non-physical media on drives.

For some, a laptop computer with a USB-connected DAC may still tick more boxes than this unit. But for those who prefer the straightforward look of a bit of 'real hi-fi', or who prefer a desktop computer to a laptop, the Rotel is one thoroughly accomplished and very neat way of doing practically everything a computer does without actually being a (normal) computer. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Really does do just about everything; lively and energetic sound from all sources

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Noisy CD transport

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Certainly one of the most all-round capable single-box systems we've seen, this unit does an impressive amount of stuff

SPECIFICATIONS ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

peachtree audio



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Hi-Fi Choice 2011



"The Nova is a Joy to operate"

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Needle-sharp



Dynavector has added two new moving coils to its small, but well formed range. **Jason Kennedy** finds out what they can do for your vinyl

We have yet to encounter a Dynavector cartridge that we don't like, but new ones don't come along very often, so when two arrive like buses on a cold night, it's a cause for celebration. As is the Japanese company's style, the new DV-20X2 is available in low and high output varieties, the low output version requires a transistor phono stage or step-up device, while the high can be used with valve and MM phono stages. This, combined with a traditional two-gram down-force, makes the DV-20X2 a very easy cartridge to accommodate on modern turntables, or even older ones so long as they don't have a very low mass arm.

Flux control

As the name suggests, the 20X2 is the second incarnation of the 20X, a cartridge whose lineage goes right back to the eighties. The 20X2 distinguishes itself with a new body, the body in fact from the £1,000 XX2 MkII. It's made in machined aluminium and provides a rigid mounting for the otherwise nude generator and magnets. The flanks provide protection for the delicate innards and make alignment considerably easier. In fact, this is the easiest Dynavector we've ever set up, hardly any kerfuffle at all.

The cartridge benefits from Dynavector's softened magnetism and flux-damping technologies. These are two methods by which the company's founder Dr Tominari, claims to minimise magnetic fluctuation. Something that while only minimal in MC cartridges is, in the doctor's opinion, detrimental to sound quality. It's possible to see the coil winding that is

designed to damp stray magnetic flux on the front pole piece of the 20X2.

The 20X2's stylus is the same micro-ridge as found in Dynavector's 17D3 moving coil. It's bonded to a 6mm-long aluminium pipe cantilever. Signal is generated with the aid of neodymium magnets, the H model producing 2.8mV and the L a more modest 0.3mV.

Solid gone

The new bodywork makes the 20X2 look like a lot more cartridge than its predecessor, but this Dynavector is as solid as anything in the needle world. Value is really down to sound quality for the money, there are no features to consider, but if there were then ease of installation puts this in the top league.

Its competition comes from Goldring's Legacy (£595), the Ortofon Rondo Blue (£525) and the Grado Reference Master (£599), a wooden-bodied moving magnet. The Goldring is probably the strongest, but we didn't find that it has quite the openness and power of this Dynavector.



DETAILS

- PRODUCT:** Dynavector DV-20X2L
ORIGIN: Japan
TYPE: Moving coil cartridge
WEIGHT: 9.2g
FEATURES:
 • Output: 0.3mV
 • Compliance: 12 x 10⁻⁶ cm/dyne
 • Stylus: micro ridge nude diamond
 • Tracking force: 1.8 – 2g
 • Recommended load impedance: >1000ohm
DISTRIBUTOR: Pear Audio
TELEPHONE: 01665 830862
WEBSITE: dynavector.co.jp

On the record

We set the 20X2L up in a Funk FX-R tonearm aboard the trusty Townshend Rock 7 and got the vinyl spinning, a process that continued way longer than the job required, but it was just too good to stop. It took a little bit of fettling to get the best result, raising the downforce to the maximum recommended proved beneficial for instance, but that done there was an awful lot of musical detail flowing from the speakers. It doesn't have the speed of its brother the Karat 17D3 and the bass is a little on the relaxed side, but the midrange and highs are extremely fine. With a great phono stage it achieves a degree of openness that is truly mesmerising. That's with the right record, of course, but that's almost any record that ain't heavily compressed and contains great music as far as we can tell.

The way that the various instruments and voices in a mix are presented in relation to one another is particularly good, as is the ability to cope with denser passages without the soundstage closing up.

Match point

Just to make sure all the bases were covered, we tried the 20X2L in an SME 20 with Series V arm. This resulted in a similarly inspiring result and one where the bass was distinctly tighter. Which suggests that this more conventional turntable is a better tonal match.

We also found that the DV likes a high-input impedance, 47kohm is usually best for MMs, but this MC sounded its best with the phono stage thus set.

This is a powerful, precise, revealing and open cartridge that warrants hi-res ancillaries, but will work a treat in any respectable turntable. In other words, the search for a Dynavector that we don't like will have to go on! ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Revealing and open sound from a well-built and easy-to-align MC
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No stylus guard makes for less than relaxed installation
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** The latest body change keeps Dynavector at the forefront of the affordable MC market
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL





Advance guard

Finding good sub-£1,000 CD players is getting harder. But as **Alvin Gold** discovers, the French have lots to offer UK ears

Established as recently as 1995, Advance Acoustic was originally a loudspeaker brand, which added electronics in 2002. The MCD-204 is one member of its second tranche of electronics components, replacing the MCD-203 M II. The products are designed locally and built offshore. Respectively, this means France – the parent company is Advance Paris – and China, which helps explain the unusually attractive pricing.

For those familiar with the MCD-203 Mk II, the new model has a

'heavier' mechanism, while the D/A converter 'chippery' has been improved to enhance resolution to 24-bit/192kHz (this is the resolution of the chips, not the musical output which by definition is red-lined at 16-bit/44.1kHz).

Monoblock inspired

Other improvements are aesthetic, including a stunning black and silver front panel inspired by the MAA-705 monoblock and the MPP-505 preamp. The remote control is unexciting visually, but it is based on

a die-cast aluminium carcass, so it can't easily be faulted.

The MCD-204 is built around a rigid, partitioned chassis, providing physical isolation between the different functional blocks and reducing the possibility of interference between them. The metal mechanical component is suspended, then fixed on to a double frame to avoid vibrations during playback. The power supply section includes a toroidal transformer driving multiple regulated and stabilised voltage supplies.

The D/A stage uses two analogue devices 24-bit/192kHz Delta Sigma D/A converters. Where other players would interface the DAC to the outside world using a simple microprocessor-based output stage, the MCD-204 uses something much closer to a full-blown audiophile preamplifier output, whose active devices are a pair of 112AV7 low-signal level valves.

The player can read CD, CD-R and MP3 CDs and is also compatible with HDCD-coded discs. There are single-ended and balanced analogue

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Advance Acoustic
MCD-204

ORIGIN:
China

TYPE:
Compact disc player

WEIGHT:
8kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
440x100x430mm

FEATURES:
• Compatible with
CD-DA, CD-R/RW,
MP3-CD

- HDCD decoder
- Hybrid valve output stage
- 24-bit 192kHz D/A converter for each channel
- Available in black/silver finish

DISTRIBUTOR:
Advance Acoustic

TELEPHONE:
01623 517000

WEBSITE:
advance-acoustic.com



outputs and digital outputs in optical, coaxial and AES-EBU flavours.

Kick the tube

What makes the MCD-204 different is that it has a valve output stage at a price that would be typical of a

mainstream solid-state design. We're not fully convinced that the player quite makes the most of what could be a spectacularly good output stage, but it doesn't do badly and the hardware complement under the lid is undeniably impressive.

The MCD-204 behaves like most CD players, except it does take a minute or so before it becomes responsive after you hit the power button. This is the time needed to kick the tube output stage into life – a count-down timer keeps you appraised of the situation. Left to its own devices, the player will eventually power itself down, which is a fashionably green thing to do.

Balanced output

The player was run in and warmed up prior to use, but it went through these standard procedures quickly and without dramatic changes in sound quality. For early listening the balanced output was used (with one-metre Transparent cables driving a Krell FBI, but it no obvious audible benefit in this arrangement, though there might have been had longer cable runs been involved.

Either way, the MCD-204 is a clean, tidy-sounding player, easy on the ear and without obvious vices, though arguably it's slightly 'slow'-sounding (a finding that is sometimes associated with high-jitter levels). It generates a warm, full sound, harmonically rich and to this extent involving and informative. This is the valve heritage.

Imagery was expansive and stable too, in both the width



THE MCD 204 is up against some worthy opposition from the likes of Arcam with the CD 17. At £700, it has an arguably lighter weight sound, but is also a refined, civilised sounding player.

The similarly priced Cambridge Audio Azur 840C is a particularly good all rounder, with the kind of resolution and 'snap' that sometimes seems slightly short changed by the French player.

The other models in this price category that demand to be shortlisted are the Naim CD5i and the Roksan Kandy K2, both of which are heavyweight performers and, like the other named players here, are well turned out and readily available.

and depth planes, but where we feel slightly short-changed with the MCD-204 is with its snap and on-the-ball timing of the very best disc-playing hardware.

The player tends to be most impressive with large-scale material (Verdi's *Requiem* is one example) and with orchestral material generally. It is less impressive with some of the non-classical material. The snap and propulsive timing that can make Mark Knopfler such an exhilarating performer, or accentuate the darkness of Sara McLaughlan's voice seems diluted on the MCD-204.

Nevertheless, this player never ceases to impress us. For example,

“What makes the MCD-204 special is a valve output stage at a price typical of a mainstream solid-state design.”

it does wonders with Christianne Stotijn's stunning mezzo-soprano voice and Fleischer's Beethoven from an old, but vital recording on CBS of the Beethoven Piano Concertos, with the Cleveland Orchestra.

A qualified hit

Dedicated CD players are becoming less common in the headlong rush to compressed audio and iTunes, so this player will be a welcome addition to the ranks of affordable CD players – even without the hybrid technology. But the balanced output doesn't show any obvious advantages over the single-ended and, as with many valve-based designs, there is something slightly lazy about the sound. That said, we don't doubt it is a lot better than its predecessor. Musically, it is a qualified hit, easily good enough for a well-deserved recommendation badge. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

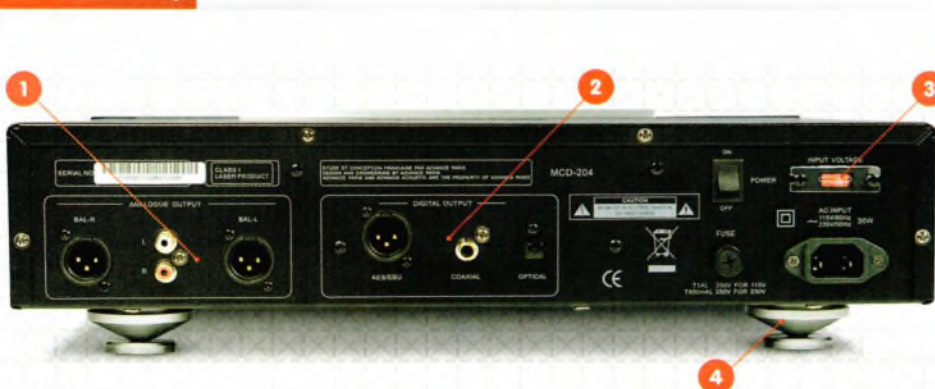
OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Valve output stage gives a full bodied, warm and attractive presentation
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: No headphone socket; lacks the snap and timing of the best players
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: Warm valve-flavoured sound, harmonically rich and inviting
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



CONNECTIONS



- 1 Choice of balanced and unbalanced outputs
- 2 Choice of electrical, digital, optical and AES digital outputs
- 3 Adjustable mains voltage
- 4 Large isolating feet



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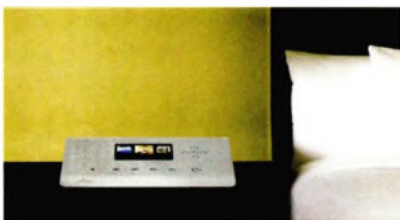
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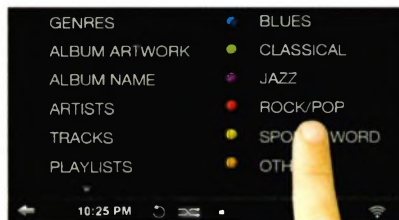
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Total Klipsch



With a sleek line of in-ear earphones, US giant Klipsch is finding favour with discerning mobile music fans. **Dan George** plugs in

We first discovered good things from Klipsch's svelte bullet-shaped in-ears following a round-up for our sister mag *T3*, back in 2010. The company swiftly suggested we try the new X10i, clearly confident that it was a good match for demanding ears. But that's not all. Klipsch also stated that this was the world's smallest and lightest full-range earphone and so naturally we got excited, because small and light so often equates to all-day comfort, a close second to sound quality.

Of course, discerning readers will want an in-ear to do two things: accurate music reproduction and adequate noise isolation and to this end, our long-term reference earphones have been the costly ACS T2 at £500, complete with custom-made moulds. In the real world, however, affordable in-ears can't have such tailor-made luxuries, but the £230 X10i still offers a respectable claimed -21dB noise-reduction and a spec sheet that's certainly audiophile-orientated.

Nuts and bolts

What truly marks the X10i out from its rivals is its negligible weight (10 grams!) and tiny dimensions, which equate to real ear-canal comfort and a sensation of 'nothingness'. To achieve the low weight, the X10i has an aluminium body, nicely finished with copper anodising. The 'tails' – the black sections at the end – are said to serve as an acoustic damper, cutting noise and reducing stress on the cable.

The second rival-bashing feature is the patent-pending bullet-shape ear tips, which not only contribute to the sleek design and low weight, but are arguably the most comfortable in-ear tips we've used. Klipsch has (somehow) packed a full-range, balanced armature-type driver in the tiny chassis and incorporated a bass reflex system, to help with the bottom end.

The package contains: a carrying case/pouch; quarter-inch airline adaptors; five sets of ear tips and a cleaning tool, and the cable is generous at 1.25m. Users of iPhones can also control a range of functions with the inline remote.

Tiny dancer

Like the 'Krells of the ear canal', the X10i is beautifully built. Sleek and free from any kind of protrusion, they appear difficult to snag and are a pleasure to use. The intimate fit is glove-like – the most comfortable we've used and is a credit to the designers. Annoyingly, there's a bit of cable microphony and we've also seen some better looking/feeling wires for the money, but the chosen leads do keep weight down and seem to complement the package, overall.

There are a number of high-quality rivals out there from big-name brands and so value is a tough one to call, especially as the design is intentionally minimalistic. That said, up close, it's clear to see the classy build, and a value judgement would

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Klipsch Image X10i

ORIGIN:
China

TYPE:
Type ear-canal earphone

WEIGHT:
10g

- FEATURES:**
- Balanced Armature Driver
 - Bass reflex system
 - World's smallest and lightest in-ear (claimed)
 - 1.25m cable
 - iPhone controls

DISTRIBUTOR:
Klipsch UK

TELEPHONE:
08450 800 578

WEBSITE:
klipsch.co.uk

also have to be based on sound quality – more on this later.

Close call

We've sampled plenty of in-ears and yet the X10i seemingly gets the balance just right. Although not the easiest to drive, or the most dynamic (not easy for any in-ear), they are natural-sounding, which is all any music lover could hope for. Noise isolation is reasonable: we've heard better and the aforementioned custom moulds are the ultimate if you've the money, but the ergonomic ear-canal fit keeps plenty of noise out by safely going deeper into the ear.

Surprisingly, the X10i has the sonic edge on our reference ACS models in silent background conditions, so how and where you'll use your earphones becomes critical. There's plenty of detail here and it's easy to follow the various tracks in a mix. Vocals have a believable quality, with radio-listening also finding favour.

Nature calls

Klipsch should rightly be commended for the X10i. It is a clever piece of engineering and one that scores points from a design perspective, too. Under silent background conditions, it's a pedigree performer, but the ear tips' ability to suppress more intrusive noise has its limitations. Luckily, the deep, ear-canal fit combats more than most noise-isolating designs, but it won't keep out the worst of the London Underground, for example.

But, if you've been put off by the intimate fit of ear-canal earphones thus far, these would be an easy recommendation, thanks to the ergonomics, lightweight and all-day comfort. For the discerning on-the-go music listener, the X10i is closer to a good, full-size headphone than most and the comfort is simply the icing on the cake. ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

LIKE: Natural sound and fit; lightweight and unobtrusive

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★☆☆

DISLIKE: Fairly costly; cable microphony, look and feel

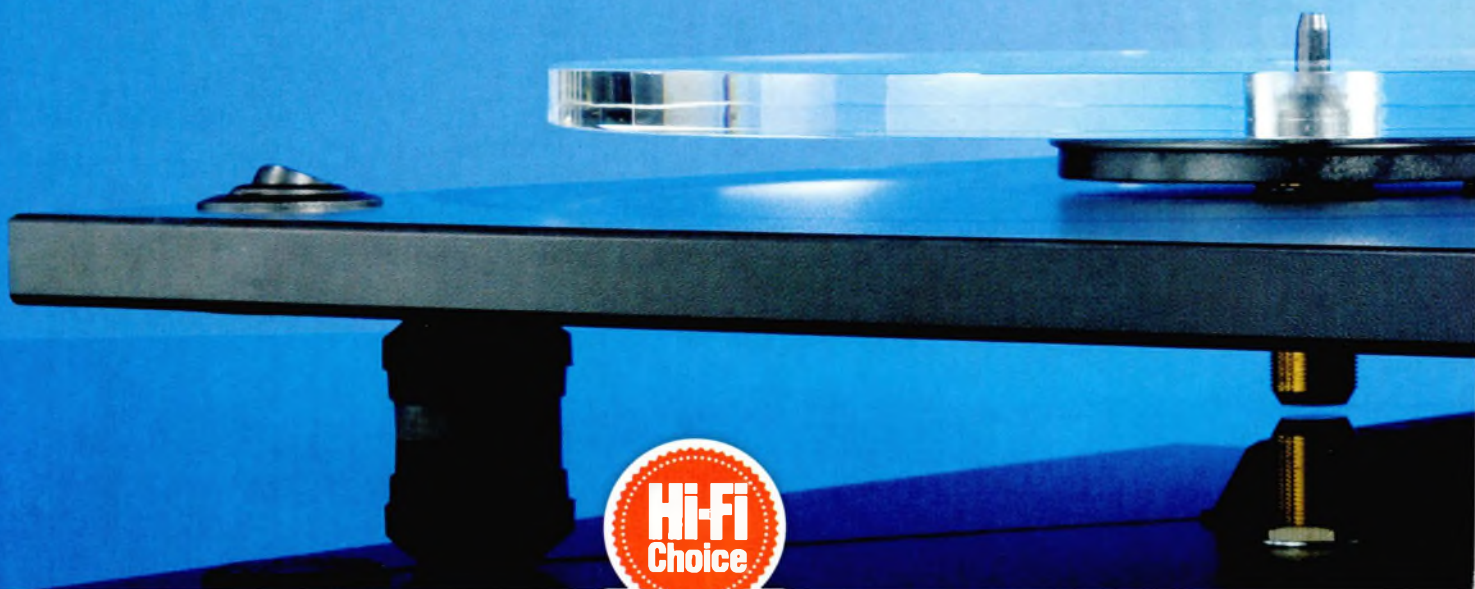
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

WE SAY: Atop buy if you've the budget with welcome all-day comfort for an ear-canal design

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL





RECOMMENDED

Edwardian splendour

Malcolm Steward assesses a Rega-based turntable from Edwards Audio, a new outfit from the Talk Electronics stable

The Edwards Audio TT1 starts at a very reasonable £325 without a cartridge, but is also available with an Edwards Zephyr £60 cartridge for £375 (a £10 saving when purchased with the deck as a complete record-playing package). This cartridge is similar to the popular Goldring Elektra, supplied with this review sample on the highly respected Rega RB250 [OEM] tonearm. Clearly this turntable is targeted at those who want to be able to enjoy their vinyl, without having to remortgage their homes or sell any of their internal organs to fund the investment.

Rega revisited

The TT1 differs from the timeless Rega P2, upon which it is based, in that it features a clear, naked acrylic platter. No mat is fitted nor recommended – “unless you really want to mess up the performance,” says the designer. He continues,

“We tried all sorts of mats and they all made the player sound worse. The core design of the P2 has been fine-tuned over twenty-five years or more and it is hard to improve it now without measures that push the retail price through the roof. Conversely, it is easy to tip the balance and ruin its performance with ill-considered modifications. We thought about modifying the bearing to use ruby, which we know makes a worthwhile improvement, but that costs far too much at this price level. Maybe we will offer it as an after-market upgrade someday. For now we simply use an enhanced grade of oil, which produces a clearly audible improvement in the sound. We will be releasing a power supply upgrade for the TT1, which will also benefit standard Rega turntables and those using the same motor.”

Many modifiers spend vast sums of money tweaking their RB tonearms. But, on an entry-level turntable this makes as much sense as bolting a

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Edwards Audio TT1

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Turntable

WEIGHT: 7.2kg

DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD)
430x111x350

FEATURES:

- Manual speed-change

- Belt drive

- 12V AC synchronous motor

- No provision for adjusting VTA

- Good potential for upgrading

DISTRIBUTOR: Edwards Audio

TELEPHONE: 08456 123388

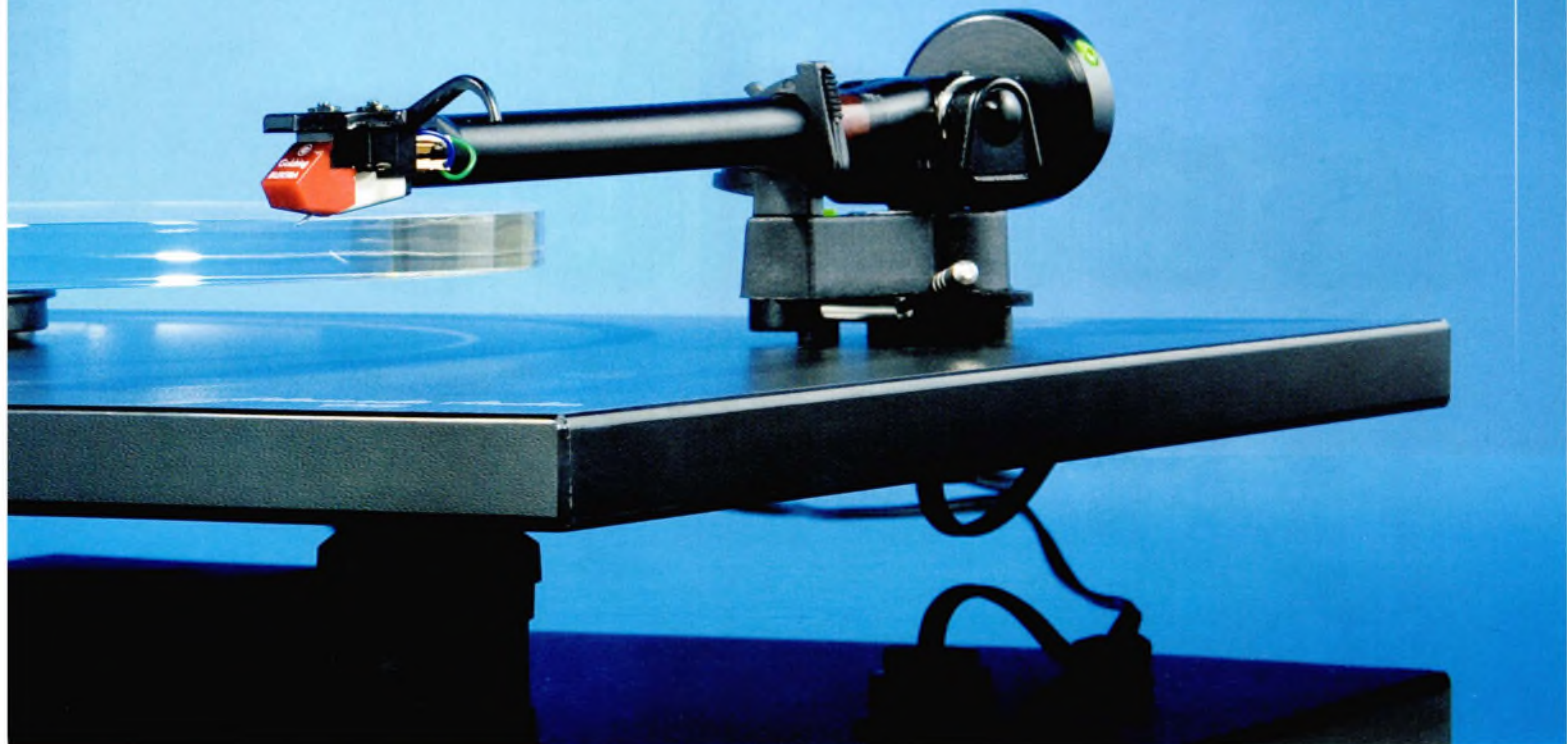
WEBSITE: talkelectronics.com

Formula 1-specification engine into a Toyota Yaris. Having the arm rewired and a discrete earth connection made (about £65 from Audio Origami), and maybe replacing the counterweight and stub (around £30 from Moth) might be sensible limits here. Silver wiring, for example, seems way over the top in this instance, unless you have money to burn and an enormous passion for tweakery.

Revealing performer

The TT1 is a delightfully simple design, which virtually guarantees its build integrity: there is so little to go awry. The platform on which it is based, the Rega P2, or Planar 2 as it was known in its early years, was always the de facto and totally consistent sound-quality benchmark by which other turntables were judged. As far as most people were concerned the question about any other turntable – at any price level – always was, and still is, “Does it outperform the Planar 2?”

A great many turntables, even today, still fail to come near reaching its reassuringly high standards. It might not be the most explicitly revealing performer on the planet, but it has a wonderful overall balance of attributes that make it exceptionally easy to enjoy and appreciate. In short, it communicates music's fundamentals and more with great conviction and ease. The Edwards Audio modifications help it climb a rung or two further up the performance ladder.



Tight bass

The TT1 starts off well by tracking securely and not making a meal of surface noise. It is very quiet even with old and frequently played albums. It further surprises by producing a stable, solid soundstage with a respectable representation of front-to-back depth on suitably recorded albums.

It exhibits a very acceptable, close-to-neutral tonal balance that is fully exploited by the bass, drums, guitars and vocals on Rockin' Jimmy's album *Rockin' Jimmy and the Brothers of the Night*. First off, the bass plays clear tunes with distinct and precisely pitched notes, all perfectly in tune with the lead and rhythm guitars and not muddled or

obscured by the kick drum or any euphonic warmth. Cymbals cut distinctly through the mix and they, the rest of Chuck DeWalt's kit and Gary Cundiff's positively driven bass, urge every track along with real determination. Piano has solid intonation and there is no wateriness or wavering about its presentation.

The 180g pressing of Gwynneth Herbert's *All the Ghosts*, further shows how the bass is tight, tuneful, fast and weighty. Her voice has all the quirky character and expressiveness we heard when we saw her perform live a week or so ago. The TT1 conveys the emotion and humour of her performance with alacrity and never reduces her – or any vocalist – to sounding like a



THE TT1 FUNCTIONS best with optimal set up. To get the maximum performance from it, it first of all needs to be on a stable platform, preferably a dedicated turntable support. Be sure that it is set up to be perfectly level before you even begin to adjust the tonearm and cartridge. The screw-in legs offer a degree of adjustability in this respect.

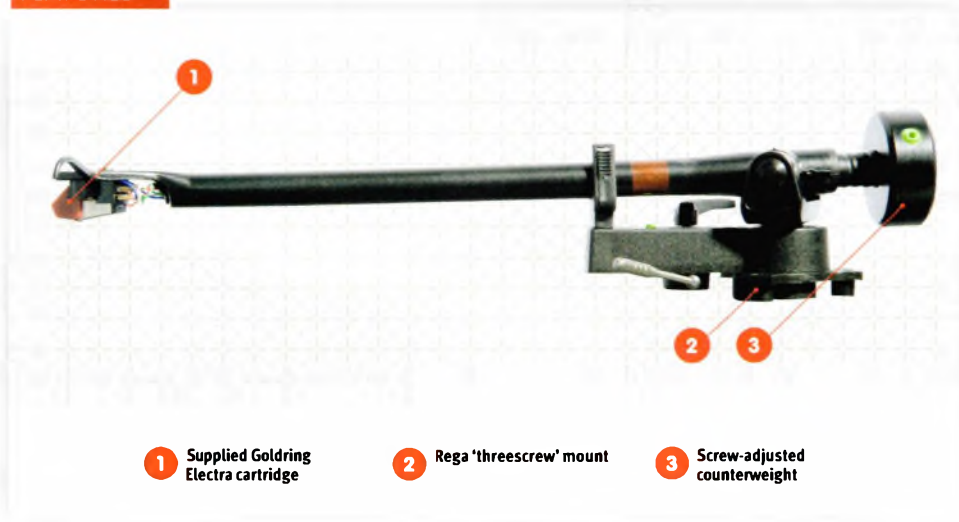
Karaoke performer. Equally, it renders the relationship between the singer's phrasing and the band's playing with true lucidity and precision.

The TT1 sounds characteristically Rega Planar-like, but there is a shade more bite and 'edge' – in a positive sense – that gives music an enhanced vigour and rhythmic urgency.

Tough proposition

Overall, the TT1 has all the positive qualities of the Rega P2 and the Goldring Elektra is a highly complementary choice of cartridge. The combination succeeds in conveying all the attributes necessary to make music engaging: it has dynamism and is secure in its portrayal of pitch information. It is well-balanced tonally and has a pleasing openness about its sound: it lets you listen beyond the first layer of a mix and enjoy, say, the backing vocalists' contributions to a song. At its price it is a tough proposition to beat. ●

FEATURES



1 Supplied Goldring Electra cartridge

2 Rega 'threescrew' mount

3 Screw-adjusted counterweight

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Classic, no-nonsense design, with exemplary performance at the price

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Try a few supports to find the optimum isolation in your room

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: If you want an inexpensive turntable that punches well above its weight this is a contender

FEATURES



OVERALL



Beatles for sale

The Beatles' music is now downloadable from iTunes. And to celebrate the entry of the this legendary pop group into the digital age, we look back at their collectable vinyl legacy. But, as **Simon Berkovitch** reveals, because certain recordings aren't available at the convenient click of a mouse, you could well be sitting on a fab fortune

On the words of Apple's CEO Steve Jobs, it's been a long and winding road. Last November, Apple Corps, EMI and Apple made the announcement that many Fab Four fans thought would never happen: The Beatles' music is now available to purchase and download from iTunes (itunes.com).

The group's 13 studio albums, the two-volume *Past Masters* compilation that hoovers up all the classic singles and the *Red* and *Blue* collections; are all now just a couple of mouse clicks away. Individual songs cost £0.99, whereas whole albums range from £10.99 to £17.99. Or you could go for the one-stop shop: a cool £125 nets you *The Beatles Box Set*, containing all of the group's studio albums and *Past Masters*, as well as the *Live at the Washington Coliseum, 1964* concert film, a worldwide Apple exclusive that captures the Fabs' debut US concert.

Each of the 13 remastered studio albums include iTunes LPs, 'creating an immersive album experience with beautiful design and extended visual features' Apple says, including a unique mini-documentary about the creation of each album. Apple has definitely gone to town on this project and McCartney for one; is delighted with the results: "It's fantastic to see the songs we originally released on vinyl receive as much love in the digital world as they did the first time around," the thumbs-aloft one enthuses.

So, as new generations discover the back catalogue of the world's biggest band for the first time – and older fans rediscover the music that ignited their passion for hi-fi in the first place, this time to be downloaded

and stored in compact music servers – is it game over for LPs, EPs and the 7-inch singles that previously made up a Beatles' fan's collection?

Hardly. We're not here to discuss the audio quality of the downloads themselves (you can tell us your thoughts) – we're here to shine a light on the gems that may well lurk in your music collection. The Beatles are the most collectable band, period – and the (welcome) availability of their peerless back catalogue on iTunes won't change that fact.

Rare UK pressings of the band's records and ex-Beatles' solo work in 'mint' or 'excellent' condition always command high prices among collectors – particularly as it's increasingly difficult to find vinyl in this prized state 40 years after the band's messy break up. We even reveal that some Beatles recordings aren't even available on anything other than flexidiscs and a hen's teeth-rare fan club-only LP!

If your collection houses any of these treats and you're pleasantly surprised at their value, maybe you'll consider parting company with them to fund that next kit upgrade? Or maybe, like us, you'll carefully take that original mono pressing of *Revolver* out of its sleeve, lovingly place it on your high-end turntable and bask in the glory of the punchy, warm sound that only vinyl can deliver. Prepare yourself for Beatlemania all over again...

Please, Please Me/Ask Me Why

(Parlophone 45-R 4983; 7-inch single; January 1963) **£150**

This vibrant 45 and its subsequent parent LP, broke the band in Britain. The Beatles'

second 7-inch was released just before the Parlophone label changed to the well-known black/silver design featured on all subsequent singles. And it's this scarce, red label original issue (rarer even than first editions of debut *Love Me Do*) that commands the high prices, with second editions fetching £15.

With The Beatles

(Parlophone PMC 1206; mono issue LP; November 1963) **£120-£150**

Hot on the heels of *She Loves You*, their first million-seller, came the LP that consolidated The Beatles position as the UK's top group. Original mono (and indeed stereo) editions featured an incorrect 'Jobete' publishing credit for the song *Money (That's What I Want)*, that was finally corrected on all subsequent issues, adding up to £50 to this version's value.



“It’s fantastic to see the songs we originally released on vinyl receive as much love in the digital world as they did the first time around.
–Paul McCartney.”



Corps Ltd.

A massive Macca-style thumbs aloft goes to JT Rathbone, whose cup of Beatles' knowledge overfloweth. His assistance in compiling this feature has been invaluable and also greatly appreciated

Picture credits: Apple © Apple Corps Ltd.

Help!

(Parlophone PCS 3071; stereo issue LP; August 1965) **£120-£150**

After their world-conquering exploits of 1964, the group simultaneously began to expand its musical palette and knuckle down to the task of producing a set of songs for their second feature film. Stereo was still very much a specialist market in 1965 and, as with their previous four LPs, far less time was spent in producing these particular mixes. Producer George Martin was dissatisfied enough with the twin-channel mixes of this LP and its follow-up, *Rubber Soul*, that he subsequently supervised new versions of both for the burgeoning CD market in the mid-1980s. The original stereo mixes, notably different in places, were only made available as part of the remastered series of CDs – and then only as extras in the limited edition mono box set.

Rubber Soul

(Parlophone PMC 1267; original mono issue LP; December 1965) **£140-£160**

The group's most influential album so far spawned an unusual rarity. The original issue, retrospectively dubbed the 'loud cut' and identified by the matrix numbers XEX 579-1/580-1, featured an identical mix to subsequent mono issues (stereo was unaffected), but mastered at a slightly higher volume. Although a minor variation, it's proved enough to add £50-£60 to copies in top condition.



Paperback Writer/Rain

(Parlophone R 5452; 7-inch single; June 1966) **£15**

Among the Beatles collectibles, this is not the rarest 45, but certainly one of the most popular, although sales at the time of issue were notably less than the previous eight single releases. This classic coupling sees the Fab's once more pushing the envelope as far as the three-minute pop single was concerned.

The A-side is far more essential in its original punchy mono mix and *Rain*, with its innovative slowed backing track and backward tape effects, ushers in the band's psychedelic phase.



Nowhere Man

(Parlophone GEP 8948; EP; July 1966) **£80-£100**

The EP format, although comparatively expensive (they invariably cost half the price of a full LP for only a third of the tracks, often heavily compressed), was relatively successful up to the mid-1960s when LP sales belatedly began to catch up with that of singles. As a result of this market shift, the later Beatles' four-trackers were produced in far smaller numbers than most of their predecessors. The *Twist And Shout* EP from only three years earlier reached number two in the *singles* chart and fetches a paltry £10-£15 in comparison to this, their last extended play release in the traditional format.

In the absence of a spin-off from *Revolver* (the first of their albums not to be plundered for EP tracks), this collection of *Rubber Soul* cuts, with a picture sleeve sporting a splendid still from the *Rain* promo clip shoot, has become the most desirable four-track 45.

Revolver

(PMC 7009; original mono issue LP; August 1966) **£320-£350**

It's hard to deny this frankly brilliant collection of songs its retrospective position



as The Beatles' most rewarding album. The perfect cross between the polished pop of *Rubber Soul* and the studio wizardry of *Sgt. Pepper*, it weathers well 44 years on – and it's the key track in that

progression that provides the rarity value here.

Second side closer *Tomorrow Never Knows* was always going to raise eyebrows, but the notorious 'remix 11' of the song – slightly longer, with noticeably louder effects in its middle section – was promptly replaced with the more familiar mix present on most mono pressings (again, the stereo issue remained unchanged). This first issue, identified by its XEX 606-1 matrix on side two, can fetch £200 more than later pressings.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

(Parlophone PMC 7027; original mono issue LP; June 1967) **£120-£150**

It's once again the far superior monaural version of *Sgt. Pepper* in excellent condition or above that is most sought after – even though original stereo copies are scarcer. Apart from the following year's *The Beatles*, popularly known as *The White Album*, this set has the most noticeable differences between mixes than any of their other LPs and, as with the previous year's *Revolver*, it was the mono mixing sessions that the group were most involved in.

Both fans and music historians have long been baffled by EMI's reluctance to make this definitive version individually available in digital form: its inclusion along with the aforementioned 1966 and 1968 sets in the prohibitively expensive 'mono box set' just adds insult to injury.

A truly mint original copy must have the custom inner sleeve and set of cardboard cut-outs, along with the original laminated sleeve to fetch top dollar.

Magical Mystery Tour

(Parlophone MMT-1; original mono issue EP; December 1967) **£75-£100**

Although the band's 'psychedelic home movie' *Magical Mystery Tour* was savaged by critics at the time, the music was far from disposable. The novel double-EP format with its lavish gatefold sleeve, booklet and lyric sheet (the package was expanded into album form for the US market) did brisk business, nestling at number two in the singles chart behind the band's big Christmas hit *Hello, Goodbye*.



The bulk of the Fab Four's back catalogue is now available on iTunes, but some rare mixes are a vinyl-only concern



Picture credits: Apple © Apple Corps Ltd.

Both releases contained the majestic *I Am The Walrus*, one of the group's most enduring recordings. The alternate stereo EP (released simultaneously) was still on catalogue more than 15 years later, but the mono edition disappeared from the shelves within a year or so.

Christmas Time (Is Here Again)

(Lyntone LYN 1360; 7-inch flexidisc; December 1967) **£50-£70**

The Beatles sent seven exclusive Christmas flexidiscs to all official fan club members between 1963 and 1968. Often dry, amusing affairs, this fifth outing is the pick of the bunch. Housed in a 1967-vintage collage sleeve, designed by Ringo along with John and son Julian, nestling within the grooves is a madcap radio programme complete with odd songs and surreal quiz shows, the title tune weaving its way between the various sections. The Goons and The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band are arguably an influence here.

The seven flexis were gathered together for an album in 1970 – again, fan club-only – but have never surfaced officially in any form in the 40 years since, so don't bother looking for them on iTunes.



The Ballad of John and Yoko/Old Brown Shoe

(Apple R 5786; 7-inch single; May 1969) **£15-£20**

Hot on the heels of chart-topper *Get Back* came this hastily recorded, rock'n'roll-flavoured account of Lennon's recent wedding to Yoko Ono, salvaged from the ill-fated *Let It Be* film sessions. Despite the apparent ill feeling between Lennon and McCartney, it's they alone who make up the track's personnel and the old chemistry is almost tangible.

Issued on their own Apple label, the track is often erroneously claimed to be their first stereo single. In fact, it was their last mono 45 and also their last number one single.

Let It Be

(Apple FXS 1; stereo LP; May 1970) **£350-£500**

Released after the band ceased to exist as a functioning unit, this album had actually been recorded more than a year earlier and had gone through at least two acetate versions before being handed to legendary producer Phil Spector for post-production.

Initially arriving in a boxed edition featuring the album and a glossy book of photos (many in colour) from the early 1969 sessions, it's extremely hard to find in perfect condition (the delicate tray that housed the contents is often broken or missing and the book had a tendency to fall apart), it's this first edition, as opposed to the more familiar single sleeve version, that commands the high prices.

SOLO JOHN

John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band

(Apple PCS 7096; stereo LP; December 1970) **£40-£50**

Regarded by many as the finest of all solo Beatle LPs, this is undoubtedly Lennon's masterpiece. Stripped back accompaniment (from Ringo and bassist Klaus Voormann) perfectly complements the soul-searching lyrical content of the album. The printed

inner sleeve, featuring lyrics and a doodled dedication to his wife and muse, appeared only with early pressings and must be present for the LP to fetch a maximum price.

SOLO FAUL

Back To The Egg

(Parlophone PCTCP 257; picture disc LP; 1979) **£600-£900**

Workaholic McCartney has unsurprisingly been the most prolific of all the ex-Beatles. Among the withdrawn records, side projects and designer rarities, there is plenty for collectors to get their teeth into. Projects like *Thrillington*, *The Country Hams* and *The Fireman* have all gained in value over the years, but it is this MPL in-house picture disc of Wings' *Back To The Egg* which is the rarest.

Very few copies made it to the outside world and although the recording is not regarded as one of his most essential, it has been heavily counterfeited over the years, with genuine copies (sporting the stamped matrix numbers YEX 987-2 and YEX 988-4) rarely coming up for sale.

A pristine copy recently realised the *Record Collector Rare Record Price Guide* evaluation of £900 in a well-known London collectors' shop. The standard black vinyl issue can easily be found for well under a tenner.

SOLO GEORGE

Electronic Sound

(Zapple ZAPPLE 02, stereo (only) LP; May 1969) **£130-£150**

The mono edition of Harrison's soundtrack to oddball sixties flick *Wonderwall* stands as his scarcest and most valuable LP, but it's this 1969 follow up which is surely his most unusual recording. A series of Moog experiments, one track per side, it's up there with Lennon and Ono's challenging ventures into the avant-garde on Apple's (short-lived) Zapple subsidiary label.

Heard with 21st century ears, the album sounds breathtakingly contemporary. The LP sold poorly, however, and clean UK copies nearly always fetch high prices.

SOLO RINGO

Steel

(R.O.R. ROR 2001; one-sided promo interview disc; 1972) **£2,000**

Two grand? For a Ringo Starr interview record? The high price of this record lies in its super-scarcity. R.O.R stands for Ringo Or Robin, the company the drummer co-founded with designer Robin Cruickshank in 1969.

According to the *Record Collector RRP*, this one-sided interview disc, consisting of Starr explaining the company's goals atop some abstract synthesiser doodles, was a promotional item for the 1972 R.O.R reception in conjunction with the British Steel Corporation (hence the title) at Liberty's department store, London, and available for just one week.

If you're a Ringo completist, this ridiculously niche, limited edition record is the Holy Grail. Happy hunting! ●



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90 Shostakovich
Symphony No 10



91 The Beatles
Red and Blue Box
1962-1970

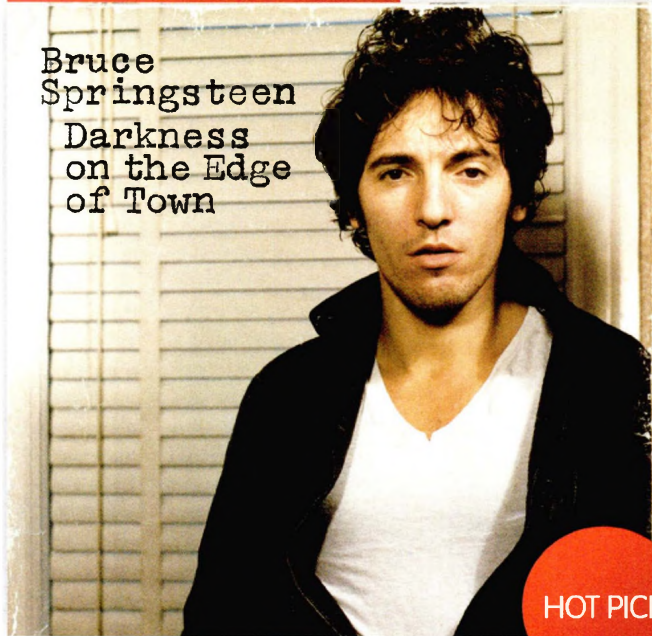


91 The Who
Live at Leeds

Music reviews

Hi-Fi Choice's pick of the latest high-quality music releases

ALBUM OF THE MONTH



Bruce Springsteen
Darkness on the Edge of Town

HOT PICK

Bruce Springsteen
Darkness On The Edge of Town

columbiarecords.com

★★★★★

Columbia

3-CD/3-DVD box set

AFTER THE SPECTACULAR success of 1975's *Born To Run*, Bruce Springsteen was ready to conquer the world – 'the new Dylan', 'the Boss' and 'the future of rock 'n' roll' all in one irresistible, hyper-active package. Yet instead, his career went on a three-year hiatus, while he battled in the courts over contracts with his former manager.

When he was finally free to record again, he had stockpiled 70 new songs, written while holed-up on his New Jersey farm during his enforced exile. His record company's hopes of a swift follow-up to the blockbusting *BTR* dashed, Springsteen was able to take his time and did not re-emerge until 1978, when he finally released *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, cherry-picking ten

exquisite songs from his stockpile, an embarrassment of riches so opulent that there was no room for 22-carat gems such as *Fire* and *Because The Night*, which he gifted instead to other artists.

Darkness wasn't exactly a 'concept' album, but the compositions he selected were all loosely linked by a theme – namely, "Life in the close confines of the small towns I grew up in," as he puts it in an interview in the documentary film that accompanies this expanded reissue. And sympathetic remastering reclaims *Darkness* as one of his most potent albums.

Of even greater interest, though, are the 21 out-takes which present a thrilling picture of mid-1970s Springsteen finding his mature

"Springsteen was ready to conquer the world in one irresistible package."

voice. In effect, these tracks constitute the great lost Bruce album, which should have filled the long gap between the two albums, but which was nixed by unseemly legal wrangling.

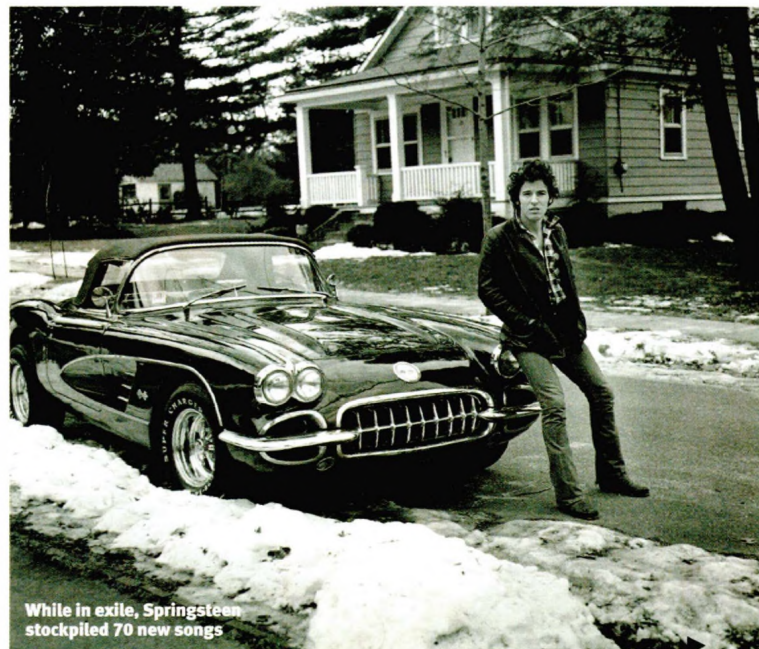
Those wanting *Born To Run* part two must have been nonplussed by the starker, edgier sound of *Darkness...* when it was first released. Yet the remastering emphasises that, despite its sombre tone, it was actually a harder, more guitar-driven record than its predecessor, with a full-bodied roar that represented an epic advance rather than a sonic retreat. It was a more mature and evocative sound, creating the template for much of his future work.

The remastering also ramps up the energy and conviction of his vocals on classics such as

Badlands, *Racing In The Street* and the title track. The real revelation though, comes in the previously unreleased material newly mixed by Bob Clearmountain (released as part of this box set, but also available separately as a two-CD set titled *The Promise*). You can hear why these songs were not included on the original. Many of them lie closer in spirit to *BTR* and a headlong, jukebox rush courses through the big hooks and choruses of songs such as *Gotta Get That Feeling*, *Someday (We'll Be Together)*, the abandoned original version of *Because The Night*, before he gave it to Patti Smith and *Save My Love*.

There's so much here – almost 90 minutes of new music – that it turns out the album that he should have released in 1976-77 would surely have had to be a double LP. And there's apparently still another 40-odd songs we haven't heard. Remarkable stuff. **NW**

Standout tracks: *Badlands*; *Racing In The Streets*; *The Promise*; *Gotta Get That Feeling*; *Save My Love*



While in exile, Springsteen stockpiled 70 new songs



The Jam Sound Affects

polydor.co.uk

★★★★★

Polydor

CD

IN 1980 The Jam were just about the coolest band in Britain with singles gatecrashing the charts at number one and Paul Weller's every surly utterance greeted with reverential indulgence. They were at their creative peak and their fifth album proved to be the icing on the cake. It's packed with three-minute power-pop gems galore and while the actual singles may have been *Tax Man* 'tribute' *Start!* and *That's Entertainment*, almost everything else could have entered the Top Ten on its own, from yearning love paean *Monday* through the sugar rush of *Boy About Town* to the anti-Nazi vitriol of *Set The House Ablaze*.

The remastering for this deluxe edition restores the bright, fresh and infectiously vibrant sound of the original. The whip-like snare crack after the thrumming bass intro on opener *Pretty Green* sets the tone for a powerfully optimistic album that's in love with the possibilities of the studio and of life. **DO**
Standout tracks: *That's Entertainment*; *Boy About Town*; *Set The House Ablaze*



Shostakovich Symphony No.10

Bernard Haitink (cond)
London Philharmonic
Orchestra

lpo.co.uk

★★★★★

LPO

CD

BERNARD HAITINK is an alumnus of a number of world famous orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, as well as a prodigious recording artist. The 10th Symphony is a little over half way through Shostakovich's orchestral oeuvre and its profound sense of pessimism was not best appreciated by the Soviets.

This is an impressive recording, which was made at a Promenade concert in London's Royal Albert Hall way back in 1986, with negligible noise intrusion from the audience and a solid, muscular and weighty balance. As a performance, it is unique, powerful, direct and idiomatic. **AG**
Standout track: Third movement

AUDIOPHILE VINYL

John Martyn Solid Air simplyvinyl.com



★★★★★ **Island/Simply Vinyl**

180g vinyl

WHAT CAN YOU say about John Martyn's 1972 classic that hasn't already been said? Not a lot more than that all the good stuff you've heard is true, as this is an



Handel Water Music, Rodrigo Overture

Marc Minkowski
(cond) Musiciens du
Louvre, Grenoble

naive.fr

★★★★★

Naïve

CD

HANDEL'S WATER MUSIC suite, which consists of about 20 short pieces and an overture, is probably the most famous of all compositions from the baroque, with the arguable exception of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.

The partnering piece here is the Rodrigo overture. It's an opera that, according to the disc notes, may have been the first piece from this composer that the English public ever heard.

Les Musiciens du Louvre are a first-class ensemble and their performance here is characteristically vivid and lively, which complements the varied and energetic nature of the score. **AG**
Standout track: Suite in F



Lambchop Nixon

cityslang.com

★★★★★

City Slang

CD/DVD deluxe edition

TEN YEARS AGO, Kurt Wagner's sprawling, dozen-strong Nashville-based collective of musical misfits and oddballs released an album that both defined and transcended the then burgeoning 'alt-country/Americana' movement.

What made *Nixon* stand out from so many other turn-of-the-century 'Americana' albums was the breadth of Wagner's unique musical vision. Orchestral pop, country, folk and a sweet soul topping all helped make this Lambchop's finest hour.

A decade on, it still sounds remarkable – sophisticated yet off-beat, the restrained elegance brought into even sharper focus by sympathetic and clever remastering. **NW**
Standout tracks: *Up With People*; *The Distance From Here To There*; *Grumpus*.

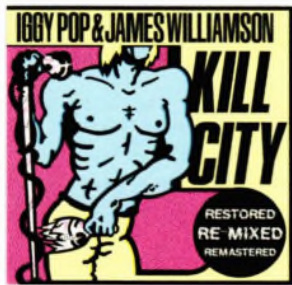
HOT PICK

outstanding and beautiful album. There's more to it than the title track as well, with Danny Thompson's splendid bass and the man's fabulously warm tones, the same could be said of almost any track.

Go Down Easy is beautifully mellow, I'd Rather Be The Devil a great mix of Skip James blues and an extended instrumental workout, the only problem is that there aren't enough of them.

The songs radiate genuine warmth, a feeling that the musicians clearly pick up on during performance and reflect back with superb playing.

This pressing marks the return of Simply Vinyl to the scene, or the name at least. It's a new company and one which, if this superb gatefold sleeved example is anything to go by, knows where it's at. It sounds fabulous thanks to a rich, late night balance that's spacious yet dark. The vinyl lets you hear the quality of playing from the whole ensemble and revels in the tone of Martyn's velvet voice placed deep in centre stage with instruments either side. Totally essential. JK
Standout tracks: *Go Down Easy*; *The Man in the Station*



Iggy Pop & James Williamson

Kill City

alive-totalenergy.com

★★★★

Alive Records

CD

A HALF-FORGOTTEN staging post in Iggy's back catalogue, *Kill City* was recorded in 1975, after the break-up of the Stooges. Supported by guitarist James Williamson, Iggy was so unfashionable at the time that he couldn't find anyone to release the album.

The master tapes were lost long ago and subsequent CD reissues have been copied from the sludgy-sounding, badly pressed original vinyl. This latest version has been restored, remixed and remastered by Williamson.

Although the horn-embellished guitar riffs are over-derivative of *Sticky Fingers*-era Rolling Stones, its period charm has never sounded more vital. **NW**

Standout tracks: Consolation Prizes; Kill City; Beyond The Law



The Beatles

Red and Blue Box
1962-1970

thebeatles.com

★★★★★

Polydor

4-CD box set

RELEASED IN 1973, these monster-selling compilations were the original vinyl entry point for people intrigued by The Beatles' musical charisma, but who didn't know enough or who couldn't afford the original albums.

Experts and fans will argue for years about the different stereo and mono mixes. From the off, *Love Me Do* shows how biting and forward the production was. Ballads like *You've Got To Hide Your Love Away* are more vivid, while the rocking *Paperback Writer* sounds sturdier than ever.

Blue is packed with later hits not banded together on any other disc and while there's no *Rain*, with 54 tracks of such historical magnificence, that's a moot point. **MP**

Standout tracks: All!



The Who

Live At Leeds

telarc.com

★★★★★

EMI

4-CD box set (40th Anniversary)

FOR YEARS THE touchstone of Who legend, *Live At Leeds*, was an album that nearly never happened. High on the success of *Tommy* and *Woodstock*, it was planned to capture the band's high-octane ferocity at Hull City Hall on 15th Feb 1970.

Townshend's guitar shows all the brilliance of a man in thrall to the spirit of Jimi Hendrix and then some. The choice of material, especially *Young Man Blues* and Eddie Cochran's *Summertime Blues* was inspirational.

This ultimate set includes the complete 33-song Leeds concert and the entire *Tommy* performance from the successive night. Blitzkrieg rock and roll at the highest level of fidelity. **MP**

Standout track: Young Man Blues; Magic Bus; My Generation; Tattoo

HIGH-RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS

The Apples

Looking for Trouble

bowers-wilkins.co.uk

★★★★★

B&W Society of Sound

24-bit/48kHz stereo



THIS IS THE MOST unlikely line-up you might imagine for any Israeli jazz-funk band: two saxophones;

trumpet; trombone; drums; double bass and two turntablists. The result is a vivid blend of sound somewhere between Parliament and The Prodigy.

The brass section is as tight as a nut and pleasingly percussive in its playing, while the drums and bass are consistently in the pocket. There is a wealth of texture, tone and dynamics here that the 24-bit recording revels in portraying; a prime example is the title track. In truth, though, there is not a poor – or poor-sounding – track on this album. The mix of innovative playing and hi-res recording generates genuine excitement. MS
Standout tracks: Powder; Looking For Trouble

The Portico Quartet

Knee Deep In The North Sea

bowers-wilkins.co.uk

★★★★★

B&W Society of Sound

24-bit/48kHz stereo



THE SOUND OF this intriguing quartet is dominated by the unusual timbre of the hang, a dimpled,

dome-shaped, tuned metal percussion instrument. What the band plays defies easy categorization but it draws upon a host of musical genres from world, classical, jazz and pop for its influences.

The 24-bit/48kHz recording does full justice to the timbre and dynamics of this music, imbuing it with a beautifully controlled energy and showcasing the skilled and dextrous playing of the four musicians. It also conveys the gestalt of the performances, which meld intensity with ease and joy. MS
Standout tracks: Too Many Cooks; News From Verona

BLU-RAY DVD

Phil Collins Going Back – Live At Roseland Ballroom, NYC eagle-rock.com



★★★★

Eagle Vision

Blu-ray DTS HD Master, Dolby Digital 5.1, LPCM stereo

GOING BACK, Phil Collins' homage to the hits of Motown was supposed to be his last, but he clearly loves the music of his youth

so he took 18 tracks from the album, added eight more and played them live.

This concert was performed in June, before *Going Back* came out and features the same mix of musicians, a line-up which includes Motown vets The Funk Brothers: Bob Babbitt (bass) and guitarists Eddie Willis and Ray Monette. And if that weren't enough, Phil also brought in Darryl Stuermer on guitar and drum maestro Chester Thompson to be part of the 18-strong line-up. While Phil's voice isn't quite Smoky or Marvin, he makes up for it with genuine

feeling and this, combined with the high quality of backing, turns the concert into a real event.

As is Eagle Rock's style, the two worthwhile sound options are LPCM and the DTS high-def multichannel stream, the former delivering dynamics and space while the 5.1 mix is smoother. The instruments sound excellent as do the backing vocals. The extras include the rehearsals and an interview with the one-time drumming supremo turned hitmaker. **JK**
Standout tracks: Papa Was A Rolling Stone; Blame It On The Sun

Naim's the game

Jason Kennedy visits one of Naim's biggest dealerships for a three-way system test with a distinctly Salisbury-based bias

Tom Tom Audio is run from a new showroom that forms part of an old brewery, and from a demonstration facility in a select St Albans's neighbourhood.

You'd never guess from the outside that when new and used equipment sales are factored in it's arguably the largest Naim dealer in the land. Proprietor James Almey started out dealing in second-hand Naim equipment – he loved the company's 'chrome bumper' and 'olive' ranges from the 80s and 90s respectively, and progressed from there to becoming a major player in the 'flat earth' fraternity. Almey also distributes a few ranges of his own including Guru Pro Audio and Devore Fidelity loudspeakers.

Tom Tom is unusual in its dedication to Naim Audio's products old and new and Almey is keen to point out that this breadth of knowledge means that "we are able to offer comprehensive advice and support based on first hand, daily experience with Naim components from the last 40 years."

It's not hard to understand why Tom Tom has been so successful as Almey is one of the most enthusiastic people we've come across in this industry; he clearly loves his job and the opportunity to listen to great music that it affords. We listened to a wide range of material on the various systems he presented and came away with an extensive list of new albums to buy, which is always a good sign.

The systems that Almey had assembled inevitably had a strong Naim content, but by mixing the old and new the sounds they produced were quite distinct and each had plenty to offer even if you're not a Salisbury acolyte.

THE EXPERT



TOM TOM AUDIO
ST ALBANS, HERTS
0845 8855 2500
TOMTOMAUDIO.COM

GURUPROAUDIO.COM
NAIMAUDIO.COM
REGA.CO.UK
DEVOREFIDELITY.COM
ARTEMISLABS.COM
LYRACONNOISSEUR.COM

MUSIC USED



WILCO
SKY BLUE SKY
VINYL
Impossible
Germany



JAGA JAZZIST
WHAT WE MUST
CD
Oslo Skyline



**CROSBY, STILLS
& NASH**
CROSBY, STILLS
& NASH
VINYL
Helplessly
Hoping

SYSTEM 1 – THE FULL MONTY

Almey describes this system as "a truly high-end, multi-source system that brings together the best in cutting-edge digital replay and our old but very dear friend, the black disc." It's not the most ambitious that Tom Tom stocks, because there are 'bigger' components in Naim's 500 series, but it features the company's most serious attack on the digital server when combined with the Naim DAC. Almey says: "It redefines the performance possible from an outboard DAC and is fully upgradeable, making it a great future-proof investment to maximise the performance of hard disk-based sources such as the Naim Unitiserve as well as a very useful upgrade for existing CD replay."

The Artemis SA1 turntable was designed by German tonearm hero Frank Schröder, but made in California. The plinth is made of bamboo and ebony and the aluminium platter is driven by magnetic tape via an idler wheel tensioner. Artemis now makes a matching arm but this example features Naim's ARO unipivot design with a Lyra Dorian MC at the sharp end.

Green DNA

Almey reckons the NAC 252 pre, Supercap power supply and NAP 250-2 power amp are the "modern day classics of the Naim amplification range – you can trace their DNA right back to the amplifiers upon which Naim originally built their reputation." The Devore speakers come from Brooklyn, NY, and have high sensitivity coupled with an even impedance making them an easy load. Almey likes their "natural flow and rich tonal palette,



something that's sadly lacking in many current speakers that major on laser-cut detail above all else."

With a good slab of vinyl, this system sounds spectacular, combining precision and tonal richness in a dynamic and revealing fashion. We picked out Bob Dylan's *The Times They Are A Changin'*, which is hardly audiophile stuff, but it's great music, and the system presents it warts and all. Another 60s' record that caught our eye was the debut Crosby, Stills & Nash album. It sounded sublime; the harmonies of *Helplessly Hoping* were quite beautiful.

Organic

Shifting over to the Unitiserve with a bit of Antony and the Johnsons revealed how well recorded and emotionally charged it is – more organic than we heard on a Linn DS on our last dealer visit. It has a warmth and depth that you rarely find with digital sources proving the server route can produce high fidelity. Finally, we put an old favourite, Gillian Welch's *Time (the Revelator)*, on the CD player and bathed in an open and resolute sound that proved there's still life in the format even against the alternatives in this effortless and highly engaging system. If you wanted to push it for more then Almey suggests replacing the preamp with Naim's top dog the NAC 552.

1 ARTEMIS LABS SA1 TURNTABLE

£6,995

artemislabs.com

NAIM ARO ARM

£1,895

naim-audio.com

LYRA DORIAN CARTRIDGE

£600

lyraconnoisseur.com

2 NAIM UNITISERVE SERVER/DAC/555 PS POWER SUPPLY

£2,000/£1,995/£5,100

3 NAIM CD5 XS

£1,825

4 DEVORE FIDELITY GIBBON 9

£5,495

devorefidelity.com

5 NAIM NAC 252 PREAMP

£5,000

SUPERCAP PSU

£3,450,

SUPERLINE PHONO STAGE

£1,700

NAP 250

£2,895

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:

£38,950



SYSTEM 2 – IN WITH THE OLD

Tom Tom started out selling what Almey calls 'pre-loved' Naim components and he continues to keep a large stock of equipment from the brand.

His take is "Naim gear has a peerless reputation for leading-edge sonics as well as 'bomb-proof' build quality, which with the factory's comprehensive servicing support of almost any item they have ever built, makes a system that was current around 15 years ago a completely realistic proposition today. Sonically, these classic Naim systems are still right on the button and buying pre-loved allows you to achieve a serious high-end sound at a surprisingly low level of investment."

The system that he set up for our visit consisted largely of olive series components – so called because of the colour of the front panel on Naim equipment made between 1989 and 2002. The system we heard is of mid 90s' vintage with the exception of the turntable from Rega's current range.

First rung

The Rega P3-24 will be well known to most of you; it's the stalwart in Rega's respected turntable range and has been refined of late with a 24-volt external power supply and looks great in its Naim-green finish.

Its predecessor, the Planar 3, would have been sold with systems like those assembled here. The Exact cartridge is top-dog in Rega's MM range with a fine line stylus and three-point fixing. The CDX was the top 'integrated' player (it doesn't need a separate power supply) in its day while the pre-amp and power amps represented the first rung of Naim's high-end range. The IBL was the company's entry-level speaker prior to 1996.

The IBLs make this a pretty uncompromising system with a take-no-prisoners attitude to pace, rhythm and timing. In other words, it foregoes tonal niceties to bring you as much of the thrill power of the recording as it can. Not least because the IBL is not all that bothered about bass, so you get all the speed and attack of transients without the lows to smooth things out. This makes for edge-of-the-seat listening, which after the initial shock, is a lot of

fun, and there is some bass to keep things grounded, just not as much as we had with the Guru.

With Avishai Cohen's Trio on CD, it proved that even bass solos can be compelling, which is thanks in no small way to the way that the whole band plays together with such intense synchronicity.

The edge

Moving over to the turntable and spinning Stevie Wonder's *Talking Book*, the same degree of pace was evident in the context of a slightly more relaxed presentation. The olive electronics were developed with vinyl very much the key source and as a result, work a treat with a good turntable. A more up-to-date album, Wilco's *Sky Blue Sky*, further enhanced the appeal of the medium, the sound being considerably smoother and the relaxed pace of the music working well with the system. It let us appreciate the leading edge of electric guitar without it getting too aggressive. Compelling stuff and another album for the list!

We are told that the logical upgrade for this system would be an olive series HiCap power supply.

1 REGA P324 TURNTABLE
£598, REGA EXACT
CARTRIDGE

£199
rega.co.uk

2 NAIM CDX
£795

3 NAIM NAC 102
£495

4 NAP 180
£495

5 NAIM IBL
£395

TOTAL SYSTEM
PRICE: £2,967



SYSTEM 3 – LITTLE BIG SYSTEM

This combination of three components takes up the minimum of space yet delivers a full-scale sound that belies the size of the speakers. The Naim Unitiqute was given a full test in our *Awards 2010* issue, but in brief, it is a 45-watt stereo amplifier with digital, line and USB inputs, DAB and FM tuners, the ability to stream music over a UPnP network and an internet radio to boot. It is Naim's answer to the Linn Majik DSi and aims to provide a one-box solution for the techno-savvy audiophile, who appreciates the Naim approach. We have to say it proved to be a lot easier to operate than anticipated and in the context of Tom Tom's set-up, sounded excellent, too.

The challenge

The Guru QM10 garnered a Best Buy when we reviewed it (*HFC 317*) and has been aesthetically refined since that time. It's unusual in that it's designed to work with the rear wall. Guru recommends placing damping between the speakers and suggests a precise degree of toe-in for best results. It has a 110mm main driver and small 16mm tweeter with a short horn and phase plug, and the box is distinguished by being both deeper and wider than it is tall.

Almey considers that "the combination of the Gurus with a Unitiqute has allowed us to view the whole idea of the compact music system in a totally new light and these components create such a musically compelling, perspective-changing experience that I would challenge any music lover, even coming from a 'high-end' multi box system, not to be totally delighted with their performance."

Stick it in

The most straightforward way to play something on it is to plug a USB stick into the front and scroll through its contents. You can, of course, stream from a UPnP server or listen to radio via DAB, FM and the internet with the Unitiqute. We had been encouraged to bring some music on USB and Almey had some examples of regular and hi-def material

from the Naim Label to compare as well. With familiar music, this system surprises with a ballsy sound that has far more power than expected and also surprisingly extended bass – the little Guru is a remarkably capable speaker, given its scale. It is also an extremely coherent one, or at least that's the way it sounds with the Unitiqute, the pairing delivering Jaga Jazzists *Oslo Skyline* with real power and drama. A track that's aided by some juicy low frequency notes from synth that the speakers are more than happy to let you feel as well as hear.

Contrasting a Phantom Limb track in regular and 24-bit/48kHz hi-def versions made a good case for the latter, which is clearly more refined and smooth than the CD standard alternative, the difference being akin to that provided by HD transmissions on TV. We enjoyed a number of other tracks on the system and each proved engaging and entertaining thanks to a set-up that clearly puts the music first.

If you were to upgrade this system, Almey recommends adding a Naim NAP 155 XS power amp.



1 NAIM UNITIQUETE ALL IN ONE STREAMER/PLAYER

£1,350
naimaudio.com

2 GURU PRO AUDIO QM10

£1,895
guruproaudio.com

TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:
£3,245



Tom Tom may be dedicated to the Naim cause, but that doesn't mean that all of James' systems sound the same. There is an underlying theme to them all and that's musicality. All three systems focus on the music rather than the sound, so while imaging, dynamics

and tonal depth are there to be heard the emphasis is on the message that the various artists are trying to convey.

If you have only heard Naim systems at shows, then you will be surprised how different and frankly, how entertaining they can sound in a good demo room.

We thoroughly enjoyed the experience and listened for considerably longer than was strictly necessary.

Tom Tom makes a very good case for the 'by appointment' retailer, so if this isn't the future of serious audio retailing we'll eat our hats. ●

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 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

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

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Q Which amp and CD player would partner well with my Sendor classic speakers? Also could you tell me what speaker cable is best to get the most out of what I have?

Marc Nijst, via email

A We spoke to Sendor who claims (accurately in our view) that its speakers are not hugely fussy about amplification. This gives us plenty of choices.

You don't specify the model in question but two brands that we would consider a good starting point are Naim and Cambridge Audio.

Both of these offer sufficient power coupled with the timing and drive to really show what the Sendor's can do. A Naim CD5XS and Nait XS combination could be an ideal starting point.

Sendor also says that its range is flexible with regards to cabling but recommend Chord, Atlas and van den Hul as good choices.



Deck Dilemma

Q I'm planning to buy a good quality turntable to use for the next 10-15 years and after spending hours reading on the internet and in magazines, my choice has narrowed to two. I'm also planning to upgrade my current amp/CD player in 12 months or so, to the likes of a Primare I22 or I32 plus the CD 22. I have had my Proac Studio 125 (latest version) for a few years now and am completely happy with them.

My options are: Michell Tecnodec + Tecno arm direct wired and Ortofon Rondo Red or a Clearaudio Emotion SE plus Satisfy carbon arm direct wired plus Aurum Beta-S wood – both of

which are selling for €1,990 each. The decks are sold by two reliable and trustworthy dealers here in Antwerp. So I was wondering which of those two very talented turntables would you go for?

Ronny Dierckx, Belgium, via email

A We feel that both decks have a great deal to recommend them and it is something of a shame that they cannot be easily demoed head-to-head. The Clearaudio is beautifully built and consists of parts that are worth more than the package price. The sound is open and extremely detailed.

The Michell is subjectively worth the value of the asking price rather than being a package but we still think that it is excellent value. We feel the Ortofon Rondo cartridge will significantly outperform the Aurum Beta on the Clearaudio. We are big fans of the Ortofon Rondo range and suspect that this will probably give the Michell package a slight performance advantage. We also find the Tecnodec



Rondo gives Michell edge

and Tecnoarm to be the most simple and intuitive deck and arm combinations to set up. Both decks are extremely well built and should prove long-lived, but we would choose the Tecnodec in this instance because the design has been around for some years and has already proved reliable.

We don't think you would be disappointed with either deck, but for us it would be a narrow victory for the Michell.

Spicing-up

Q Hi experts! I own a Marantz SA-8400 CD player connected to a Musical Fidelity XP100 preamp with Chord Company calypso cable to the preamp; TAG McLaren F3 100P power amp connected with a Chord Company cobra 3 to the preamp; Mirage OM7 speakers with Chord Company Silver Plus bi-wired speaker cable. The speakers stand on spikes on a laminated floor. The electronics stand on a run-of-the-mill hi-fi/electrical store rack with standard power leads throughout. The room is 13ft x 20ft, and I sit 7ft from speakers which are 4ft from side walls and 2ft from the rear wall. Altering the room would be difficult.

My musical tastes range from AC-DC to Chris De Burgh/Amy McDonald and I listen mainly to Radio 2 music. I need my system to grab my attention more after listening to the radio five days a week, 12hrs a day as an HGV driver. My budget is £3,000, but I could go a little more or less depending on your advice.

Rolo Fabian, via email

A There are two different ways of going about increasing the overall excitement that the system can produce. The first would be a change to the amplification. Our recent experience with the Electrocompaniet EC15 MkII was very positive. It has excellent detail and a very involving sound that avoids being bright and harsh at the same time. Another option would be to keep the pre-amp and look at replacing the TAG McLaren with something like the Cyrus Mono X300s we tested in HFC341. We commented on the exceptional resolution and detail retrieval that they possess and this could be exactly what you are looking for in terms of a more attention-grabbing system that at



Neat Momentum 4i floorstanders

the same time is not too fatiguing to listen to for long periods.

The other option is to change the speakers for something more exciting and attention-grabbing. One design that could work well in the setup you describe is the Neat Momentum 4i. This uses a clever isobaric arrangement of downward-firing drivers to give it a very fast and clean bass response, coupled with the standard, highly enjoyable Neat sound. These could offer the excitement that you are looking for without too much danger of the resulting system

being too fatiguing to listen to for long periods. Let us know how you get on.

Power play

Q I am lucky enough to have snapped up a pair of the preceding model of Bowers and Wilkins 803D at a useful price reduction. I have wanted a pair for some time and I am delighted with them.

The situation now is that the 803Ds are showing up some of the limitations in my electronics and I suspect they could do with more power. At present, I have a Marantz SA-15 and PM-15 pairing with Michell Gyrodec and Furutech cabling. I could probably put up to £5,000 together for a significant upgrade of either amp and CD or amp alone, although if I can spend less that would be ideal. I will be keeping the Gyrodec so would need a phono stage.

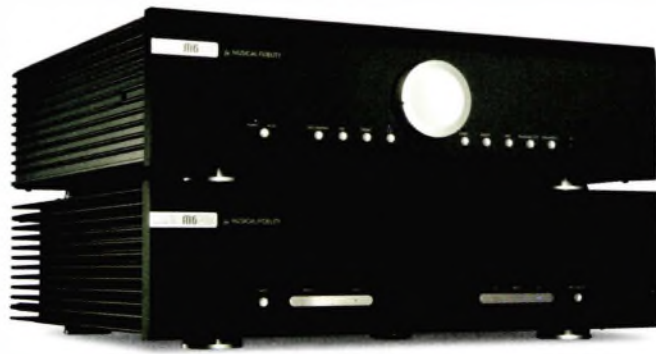
Richard Edmunds, via email

A The 803Ds are a fine speaker and not too insensitive, but they do prefer a reasonably high power output to do their best work. Your choices of high-power amps are pretty good at the moment, however, so you have some strong options for getting the best out of them.

One pre/power combination that we feel is more than up to the job is the Musical Fidelity M6 Pre/M6 Ptx we tested in HFC 340. This is over budget but would be the perfect match for the 803Ds, and retains a high-quality internal phono stage.

Another promising option that retains an internal phono stage is the Marantz SC-11S1 and SM11 S-1 combination that might have more in common with the Marantz sound that you are used

Music Fidelity's M6 will happily partner B&W's 803s



to with a bit more 'oomph' and some useful connection options.

Finally, the Cyrus X300 monos would have the measure of the 803D and matched with the very flexible Cyrus Pre XP d, would be under budget. You would need to accommodate an external phono stage, however.

Flicking the switch

Q Like quite a few people, I am sharing my front speakers between a surround sound receiver and a stereo amplifier. I am concerned what damage may occur if both units are turned on at the same time by accident. Is there a high-quality switching unit available that you could recommend?

Alan Bridgens, via email

A Although we suspect that you are far from alone in doing this, we assume that most people must be chancing it as the number of switching boxes that allows for multiple amplifiers to be connected to a single pair of speakers is very low indeed. Happily, the Beresford TC-7220 is designed to perform this very task and looks to be as sonically transparent as possible.

Value valves

Q I am considering taking the plunge with my first valve system after seeing the Puresound A10 as a runner up in the HFC 2010 Awards issue and listening to one. I only have one source (Squeezebox Touch) so the limited inputs are not a problem, but the limited output worries me slightly. I am happy to dispense with my current Wharfedale Diamonds along with the rest of the system but I need suggestions on partnering speakers for the



Tannoy's DC6s are handsome, expressive and sufficiently sensitive

A10 that will reach a good, healthy listening level in a relatively small (4mx3m) room for no more (and preferably quite a bit less) than £1,000 the pair?

Calum McCrea, via email

A The on-paper Puresound output of 10 watts can seem a bit daunting in terms of partnering speakers, but it is worth considering that the Puresound seems to have plenty of real-world grunt and that even relatively loud listening levels in a room of the size you describe need not require a huge power output. With this in mind, two brands produce speakers that should be ideal for the task. The Tannoy Revolution DC6 has an on-paper sensitivity of 88dB/W, which it comfortably exceeded when we tested it in HFC 307. The impedance is a consistent 8 ohms making them an ideal match for the A10. Equally importantly, we like their open expressive performance and very handsome aesthetics.

Another less expensive option is the Triangle Titus EX (which strangely enough was also tested in HFC 307). While this failed to meet the claimed sensitivity of 91dB/W, it still works out as about as sensitive as the Tannoy and another good match for the Puresound, especially if you prefer a more forceful and upbeat presentation.

Canned heat

Q As a result of moving house and into shared accommodation with a group of people who seem very sensitive to noise, it seems I

need to invest in a good pair of over ear headphones. I have a Yamaha A-S700, which has an internal headphone amplifier of reasonable quality, so I'd like to avoid having to buy a separate headphone amplifier. With a budget up to £250, can it be done?

Calum McCrea, via email

A We think so. You don't specify whether you would also like to use the headphones connected to a portable device but this would probably shape our choice.

If you also want to go out and about with your headphones (especially if you do so with an iPhone), the Bowers & Wilkins P5 will take some beating. They were nominated in the HFC 2010 Awards issue, offering strong sonics with excellent build and a very comfortable listen.

If you are listening purely indoors, we feel the Beyerdynamic DT880 and reviewed in HFC 312 would also be a very strong contender. We found it very comfortable to listen to for long periods and the extremely detailed and neutral presentation made it a very engaging listen.

Beyerdynamic's DT880s are ideal for indoor listening



THE HI-FI CHOICE GUIDE TO: MONOBLOCKS

EXPERT ADVICE



MONO AMPLIFIERS have never been a very mainstream concept since stereo became the default hi-fi medium in the sixties. Despite this, the monoblock – a single channel power amplifier has been part of high-end hi-fi for some time now.

The reasons for designing amplification in this way come down to performance. A monoblock has its own power supply (which in some very extreme cases can be external to the amplification section) that does not have to power any other section of the amplifier. The actual circuitry is simplified as a result of only containing a single channel. This also helps make monoblocks very resistant to crosstalk – the 'bleeding' of one channel of information into another. As monoblocks share no circuitry with the other channel, provided that the preamp is well implemented, channel separation should be nearly total.

The downsides to this approach is that a system with monoblocks will require at least three boxes devoted to amplification – one monoblock per channel and a preamp for collating sources and controlling volume. This usually makes monoblock-based systems more expensive than conventional pre/power ones as well as more space consuming. ●

Minitest

Richard Black looks at four desktop speaker systems – who said work was no fun?

Ferguson Hill FH007

PRICE: £395 CONTACT: 020 7284 0969
WEBSITE: FERGUSONHILL.CO.UK

FERGUSON HILL made its name initially with large horn speakers made predominantly from acrylic (Perspex). It's in the nature of horns that they are large and tricky to optimise in a room, so sales will never be recorded in telephone numbers. It was a stroke of pure genius, though, to scale down the design to the present system, in which the horns stand about 40cm high by 27cm wide and are supplemented by a pair of bass (well, lower midrange really) spheres each 20cm in diameter. Admittedly, you'll need a large and uncluttered desk, but it is a plausible system for computer-side use and it looks simply fantastic – you won't want to keep your office private with this lot for visitors to admire! Drive is from a 14cm metal cube which includes amps, crossovers and input on phono and minijack sockets.

We did expect to be making some sonic allowances for the looks, but in fact the FH007 sounds nearly as good as it looks. Driven hard, there's some thickening of textures, but in a medium-size room one can get quite satisfying volume before that happens. Horns often 'beam' the treble a bit and that's the case here, so bright recordings can sound a little sibilant if one sits bang on-axis. But these are minor points and the overall impression is of very satisfying sound that one is reluctant to turn off. We also tried the FH008 subwoofer (£275), which is a bit of a pain to set up but worth persevering with. Even without it, though, bass is not bad – it just lacks a little heft, as you'd expect.

VERDICT AVISUAL AND SONIC delight that will make you want to stay at the desk long after work has finished



Eclipse TD307IIPA

PRICE: £420 CONTACT: 020 7328 4499
WEBSITE: ECLIPSE-TD.NET

ECLIPSE'S 'TIME DOMAIN' loudspeakers have become a familiar feature of the hi-fi landscape, immediately distinctive by their shape. It's all part of a simple aim: to reproduce audio with accurate phase response – hence the 'time domain' moniker. They use single, wide-range drive units and profiles which minimise resonances, both inside and out (edge diffraction). The cabinet is made of low-resonance materials, while various other techniques are also used to maintain both the frequency response and the waveform of the audio signal.

All these aims scale perfectly well and as a result the TD307 resembles its bigger siblings very closely – it's just smaller. Ultimate bass extension is less impressive and the maximum output is reduced, but on the other hand one might expect that treble dispersion will be improved and imaging even better. The speakers come as a system with the very natty amplifier and basic cables.

With little doubt, the imaging is going to be one of the first things most listeners notice about these speakers: it is absolutely superb (though it can easily be compromised if the speakers are too near large objects – they like a little space). Basic tonality is good, if not great, but this depends on source material: we found ourselves loving the speakers with simple material, especially vocals, but full orchestra sounds a bit boxy and closed-in. Bass is better than one expects, though with the volume turned up high, it becomes rather tuneless. But, overall, this system is lively, informative and, oh, did we mention, it images very well?

VERDICT ALTHOUGH TONAL characteristics are not quite consistent and bass lacks color, the imaging and life in the sound will keep you pinned to your seat



Acoustic Energy Aego M

PRICE: £120 CONTACT: 01285 646580
WEBSITE: ACOUSTIC-ENERGY.CO.UK

THERE ARE SMALL loudspeakers and there are really tiny loudspeakers – these are definitely the latter, with a largest dimension (height) of only just over 10cm, a depth of 9cm and width 7cm. Even the most cramped desk can surely accommodate a couple of those. Of course, you aren't going to get much in the way of bass from enclosures that size, however cleverly designed, so the Aego M system includes a subwoofer, a mono unit some 32cm tall. The sub also includes amplifiers for all channels (including the optional centre) and features just one knob at the front which, like that on a transistor radio, switches on and then increases volume. There are two inputs, phono sockets at the rear and a mini-jack just under the knob. Flat speaker cables are included, generous in length, making this a very easy system to install.

With a crossover frequency of 250Hz, the transition from bass to satellite speakers isn't truly seamless and just occasionally the sound becomes a little disjointed as a result. But, overall, this is a very impressive system when one looks at the value on offer. We turned it up to surprising volume levels and the sound still stayed clean and detailed, with very good neutrality through the midrange. The bass is a little uneven and treble seems slightly peaky, which maybe isn't the best thing to go with MP3 sound, but with good recordings the Aego M is very capable. It's best with small groups of musicians with larger ensembles sounding less real and involving, but for £120 it's frankly a steal.

VERDICT SURE, DEARER systems ultimately offer more but the value here is first-rate, with sound that needs no special pleading: detailed, lively and thoroughly enjoyable



Bowers and Wilkins MM-1

PRICE: £400 CONTACT: 01903 221 500
WEBSITE: BOWERS-WILKINS.COM

The basic size (10cm square by 17cm high) is no great surprise, and the look doesn't give much away. The first hint that this is something a little clever is the inclusion of a USB cable: yes, this speaker system is computer-oriented to the point of having a USB digital input, plus a single analogue input on a mini-jack connector. Indeed, it's very heavily digital, having also a digital amplifier and some Digital Signal Processing (DSP) which is claimed, rather vaguely, to keep music 'sounding rich and detail, no matter how loud you play it'. Some sort of unheralded 'loudness control'? We'll come back to that... The right speaker includes the electronics and connects to the left via a cable, which, if there's slack, can be partly wound out of sight under the left speaker. There's even a remote control, capable of operating as a transport control for suitable computer software.

As luck would have it, this system arrived last of the four, and so had some high standards to live up to when we first plugged it in. Let's just say it opened our eyes to new standards of attainment possible from miniature hi-fi. We don't even want to know whether that DSP is doing some loudness control: the fact is that at any level setting the sound is just astonishingly clear, well balanced and detailed. The deepest bass isn't really there, but even with such torture tracks as full-on church organ, one only notices that at the start. Dispersion is stunning, the sound being highly consistent almost anywhere roughly in front of the speakers and the imaging is excellent. ●

VERDICT EXPENSIVE AT FIRST sight, this is actually a bargain given the quality on offer, and quite redefines the concept of 'desktop hi-fi'



Although these systems are broadly marketed as computer/desktop audio, there's nothing at all to prevent one using them as a second system. Indeed, any of them could show a thing or three to some

of the midi-systems that have sold very well at similar prices in recent years. The portable and computer-friendly connections prompt us to advise that the best way to get the best out of any of

these is to use exclusive uncompressed (or lossless) audio files, rather than MP3 etc. And, as with any speakers, keeping them clear of clutter, as far as possible, is no bad thing.



5

Year warranty

All Roksan electronics and turntables sold through authorised dealers are covered by a free 5 year parts and labour warranty.



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HFC jargon-buster

OUR A-Z GUIDE OF TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz), 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz) and 'upper bass' the top octave (80-160Hz).

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp). Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire). Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion, while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the 217.5-230MHz band. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB. It has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP (digital signal processor). Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors, it separates the left from right and front from rear, while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound. Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced ('AES/EBU') interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier driving it.

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by imprecision in the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a complex psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD, this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W), measured 1m from the speaker.

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. The latest THX Ultra 2 standard is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

WOOFER Bass driver.

GUIDE TO DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and

sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, TRANSPARENT A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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FINITE ELEMENT HD02 maple three-shelf equipment rack, mint, (£3,450) £2,450. Ayre Acoustics Signature 1.5m power cables with Furutech plugs, boxed. £350 (two for £600). **01797 253073 majba13@yahoo.co.uk (East Sussex).**

ARCAM Solo CD/FM/DAB immaculate condition, used as second system, boxed £680. Monitor Audio

Silver RS6 in Natural Oak, immaculate, light use, boxed £380. Sennheiser HD650 Reference headphones, immaculate, boxed, less than 10 hours use, £220. **07786 962373 or email: nick.j.dee@hotmail.com (Warwickshire).**

ROKSAN Radius 5 turntable, in maple, extremely good condition, upgraded with a Tabriz tonearm, £950 or will separate: turntable £550 and tonearm £400. **07725525001 or email: alan.strudwick@googlemail.com (South Wales).**

RUSS ANDREWS Crystal Ag. hi-end interconnect (£850) £299. Same spec as Hero Ag and fitted with WB T Ag Phonos. **07981 025698 (Bristol).**

ROTEL RA-05 amplifier, mint, £220. Rega R200 arm with new spare bias belt, £65. Pair of Rothwell attenuators £25. **07850 775814 or email: Mike.eady@royalmail.com (Midlands).**

ASR Emitter1, version blue, three-box amp, £4,750.

Marantz SA7-S1 SACD player £2,950. Both good condition and 2.5 years old. **07831 500338 (Worthing).**

GRADO SR25i headphones, boxed and mint. Will accept £75ono. **07891 533084 (Swansea).**

SENNHEISER HD650 headphones £175. Creek OBH21SE headphone amp £125. Russ Andrews 4m speaker cables, £75. Alternatively £350 the lot. All good condition and boxed. **07729 600847 (West Sussex).**

REVEL F32 speakers (Maple veneer), unmarked, original packaging, £1,350 **01243 582411 (West Sussex).**

EASTERNELECTRIC M520 valve amp, as new, 12 months old. 25 watts. (£2,000) £1,050. **02920 628861 or 07971 296699 (Cardiff).**

SHANLING CDT 100 CD player. Valve or solid-state output, valve headphone output. Onboard preamp if required. Mint condition, boxed with manual. New (£1,650) £550. Can email

photos if required.

01424 446282 (Sussex).

GARRARD 401 £1,000ono. Turntable power supply £300 ono. Technics Equaliser £150. Class A amplifier power supply £300ono. Arcam 9 power amplifier £250ono. Maplin 50-watt board £25. **020 7499 8729 (Cambridgeshire).**

SME Model 10 precision turntable with Series V tonearm (£5,700) £3,200. One owner, superb condition, will demonstrate, photos available. Original packaging. Buyer collects. **01604 410726 or 07711 702836 (Northants).**

DENON CD player DC D1500mk11, immaculate, hardly used since new, very good sound and build quality, £125 or £200 with my TDL RTL 3 transmission line speakers. **07751 537148 (Oxon).**

DYNAUDIO Master Evidence (Cherrywood and Gloss Black). Very rare opportunity to own a pair of superb speakers. Excellent condition (£78,400) £28,000 ono. Photos available. **07970028771 or email: white-a64@sky.com (South Bucks).**

QUAD II Forty Monoblocks in unmarked, as new condition. Svetlana Cryogenically treated KT88 valve upgrade. Absolutely fantastic condition. Boxed with manuals (£4,000) £1,850. **02380 224003 (Southampton).**

AYRE CX7 silver CD player, very lightly used, mint condition, boxed, looks and sounds wonderful, genuine sale. Latest version costs over £2,400, bargain at £1,200. **07851 715446 (Watford).**

SONY 7.1 AV amp/receiver STR-DN1000, black, 7x85 watts per channel, 4-in-1 out HDMI, auto calibration, tuner, DTS-HD, True HD, DTS-Es etc, purchased Dec 09, hardly used £190. **01843 586261 (Kent).**

DYNAUDIO Contour S3.4, (Piano Black) excellent condition (£5,060) £2,250 ovno. Bower and Wilkins' SCMS surround speakers (Black Ash), perfect condition £850 ovno. Primare amp 30.1, very good condition £500 ovno. Arcam FMJ CD36 silver, excellent condition £575 ovno. **07970 028771 or email: white-a64@sky.com or (South Bucks).**

MERIDIAN 504 FM tuner lightly used, in pristine condition. Complete with user guide. (£660) £350 ono. **07841 011397 (Leeds).**

ART AUDIO Maestro Valve monoblocs x2. 50 watts each and ART valve preamp VP1, vgc, serviced recently by ArtAudio (with new valves). Original around £9,500, only £2,500. Can demo. **01476 579201 (Grantham).**

T+A Pulsar 1230R CD player (silver) immaculate condition, recently serviced

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!

includes remote, (£1,800) £700. Can demonstrate. Also, Exposure 3010 integrated and power amplifiers, condition as above £400 each. **01482 887409 (East Yorkshire).**

BOWERS AND WILKINS CM1, eight months old, mint, original packaging including stands £250. **01757 289375 or email: gregory@469btinternet.co.uk (Selby).**

MERIDIAN 508. 24 CD player, £400. Primare A30.1 100-watt amp, £400. Sennheiser HD595 headphones, £50. Sony MDS-JE780 Minidisc, £50. Videologic DRX-601E DAB tuner, £40. Cash only, buyer collects. **01428 605002 (S.W. Surrey).**

PROAC Tablette EBT loudspeakers with matching sand-filled stands, teak finish. Good clean sound. Excellent value £200. **01923 855359 or email: wombat.jr@tiscali.co.uk (Herts).**

ART AUDIO 'Diavolo' 300B SE amp (11+11w), polished stainless-steel chassis with gold anodised trims £1,600. Sony SACC 555ES SACD player (champagne finish) £350. Can demo. **01454 414361 or email beedeel@yahoo.co.uk (Bristol).**

ROTEL CD930AX CD player. Rotel RA930AX amp. NAD533 turntable. 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 **020 8951 3178 (London).**

SPENDOR S3 in maple £325. Chord DAC 64 mint, boxed £800. Naim NAC 82 plus NAP SC (2001) K boards, mint, boxed, £800. Naim HI-Cap (chrome bumper) mint £300. **07729 620621 (Worcs).**

RINGMAT 330 MK11 XLR 3mm record support £20. **01202 515474 (Bournemouth).**

FERRANTI Type A1016, EKCO Model U363. Phillips Type 151U. Pye Ref069009, Cossor Melody Maker. All valve radios, £40 each. Sharp GF555 twin-tape, radio, speakers, internal amp, battery and mains (silver) £75 ono. Panasonic

RXDS45, CD, tape, radio, mains and battery, £350. **01684 290581 (West Midlands).**

NAKAMICHI CR 7E. Hardly used, cosmetically excellent. No remote. £600 ono. **020 7485 5077 (daytime) or email: peter@ccmusic.co.uk (London).**

WANTED Cyrus CD 6s and Cyrus 6vs2, in mint condition and at a reasonable price **01753 523350 or email: jamesjd@yahoo.co.uk (Berkshire).**

NAIM NaitXS amplifier (£1,380) £880. CD5i CD player (£915) £600, or both £1,450. PMC DB1i (walnut) speakers £600. Equipment purchased March 2010. All mint condition, boxed. **01233 713250 (Kent).**

BLACK RHODIUM Polar Illusion 1m pair stereo interconnect, deep cryogenic conversion. *Hi-Fi Choice* award winner (£250) £125. **01243 528010 (West Sussex).**

SIMON YORKE 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. **01628626085 (Berkshire).**

AUDIOPHILE BASE hi-fi support system, incorporating vibration control technology. Four platforms (£800) £200. **01270624008 or email: janhud16@talktalk.net (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 (rosewood), good condition (£9,500) £2,500. Stax 3050 Mk2 headphones and stand (silver) immaculate (£850) £500. New vinyl at 40 per

cent 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 email: 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. **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).**

ROGUEAUDIO 88 valve power amp, fully overhauled and modified by Definitive Audio two years ago, absolute stunner! £1,000. **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. **0035386 8127103 or email: 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. **07513 039966. (Dorset).**

MONITOR AUDIO Silver RS6 (oak) for sale £300. Just run-in. Tannoy DC6t speakers (oak), excellent £500. **01501820875 (Scotland).**

MJ ACOUSTICS Pro 50 Mk11 subwoofer £1750, excellent condition. **01562 638119 or email: mike222@blueyonder.co.uk (Worcestershire).**

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 TC377 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 80738935 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 or 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. **02476667877/07887 540082 (Coventry).**

PRIMARE CDI10 one-box CD player, 70w amp and DAB. Boxed with manual and remote. Russ Andrews Torlyte platform (£1,320) £650. **017919025005 (Sussex).**

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Terms and conditions

Begin Date: October 15, 2010 at 00:00am BST. End Date: January 15, 2011 at 23:59 GMT. Entry Restrictions: Competition open to residents over 21 years of age in the United Kingdom ONLY. Void where prohibited by law. Prize: A grand prize of a trip to Fiji inclusive of flights and accommodation from 1st-11th April, 2011 for winner and a guest. Full Official Rules apply, go to <http://teva.futurenet.com/>



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/ 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

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Surf the airwaves with any one of these carefully selected tuners

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Badge-winning headphones for your personal listening pleasure



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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



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Our favourite cables for transferring delicate signals are all here

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Priced per metre, these are our top recommendations for home use



LOUDSPEAKERS

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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

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Stands come in all shapes, sizes and prices, so take your pick from our list



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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



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

Up to £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	SACD compatible	ELEC dig output	OPT dig output	CD-RW compatible	BAL analogue out	Headphone socket	Variable output	Issue number
●	Audio Analogue Crescendo	599	Simple player that's clear and communicative with the appropriate partnering equipment									329
●	Audiolab 8200CD	700	No SACD support, but excellent detail, neutrality and communication									340
●	Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD	400	Musical, precise, involving and with great energy at a superb price									340
●	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
●	Moon CD.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 CD5i	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	www.techradar.com	SACD compatible	ELEC dig output	OPT dig output	CD-RW compatible	BAL analogue out	Headphone socket	Variable output	Issue number
●	Arcam CD37	1,300	Excellent detail and imaging, neutral tonality and above-average bass resolution	/395096								340
●	Audio Research CD5	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
●	Icon Audio CDX1 Signature	1,350	Has an open, vinyl sound with a very high listenability factor									341
●	Krell S-350A	2,695	Accomplished CD player with real breeding underpinning its excellent performance									341
●	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 CD5 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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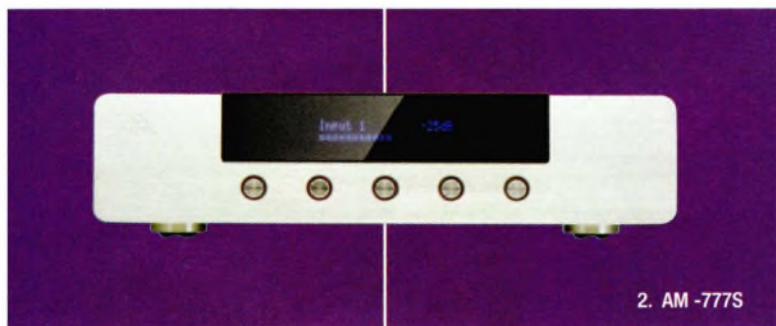
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Diablo PHONO Amplifier



AMR 777 SERIES

1. **AMR** Compact Disk Processor CD-777 2. **AMR** Pre - Main Amplifier AM -777 3. **AMR** Phono Stage PH-77



2. AM -777S

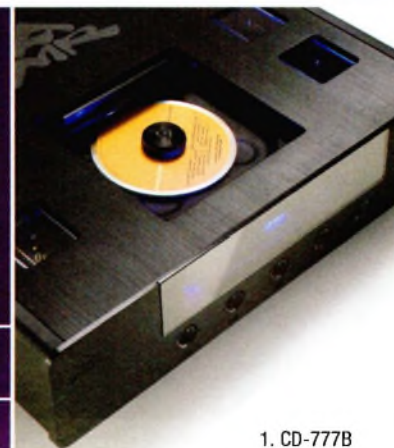


3. PH-77T



Abbingdon Music Research

"Analogue, Musicality, Realism"



1. CD-777B



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"distinctly out of the ordinary offering a very detailed and crisp sonic picture -
leading edges of notes were beautifully precise and forthright with no sense of
hesitancy or blur...the bass end of the spectrum was lithe, tight and focused



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Turntables

The best record players money can buy



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Speeds	Switchable speed change	Suspension sub-chassis	Supplied with arm	Supplied with cart	Issue number
●	Clearaudio Concept	1,100	One of the easiest ways of getting into analogue, with excellent results for the price		33/45	●	●	●	●	338
●	Continuum Caliburn	125,000	Luxury turntable with state-of-the-art design includes Cobra tonearm and Castellon stand	/587169	33/45/78	●	●	●	●	320
●	Dr Feickert Woodpecker	2,995	Offers superb bass, excellent build quality and range of arm choices		33/45	●	●	●	●	335
●	The Funk Firm Funk V2	1,390	Not only as beguiling as those that preceded it, this turntable is also more substantial to boot		33/45	●	●	●	●	324
●	The Funk Firm Saffire	2,450	Individual design and a sound that's refined and neutral with strong timing and dynamics		33/45	●	opt	opt	●	309
●	Hanss Acoustic T-30	3,600	The only multi-armbase deck in its price range, it boasts image stability and precise bass		33/45	●	opt	opt	●	331
●	Lumley Heliosphere	2,495	A distinctive-looking turntable with a unique sound and a performance that reflects your vinyl	/560765	33/45	●	opt	opt	●	319
●	Michell Tecnodec	608	Needs careful partnering but can deliver a very sophisticated result for the money		33/45	●	opt	●	●	309
●	Michell Gyro SE	1,140	A marriage of shot-putter strength, build quality and robust audio		33/45	●	●	●	●	338
●	Pro-Ject RPM-1 Genie 3	190	The Genie is that rare thing of a product with good looks, fine build and excellent sound		33/45	●	●	●	●	332
●	Pro-Ject 6 Perspex	1,280	Plenty of detail and good rhythmic qualities (arm included)		33/45/78	●	●	●	●	338
●	Pro-Ject X-Pack	1,000	Combines very strong elements (Ortofon Rondo Red) a killer package with top sound and value		33/45	●	●	●	●	309
●	Rega P3-24	390	Very competent, uncoloured and musical, improved by £148 outboard electronic power supply		33/45	opt	●	●	●	298
●	Roksan Radius 5.2	1,399	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation		33/45	●	●	●	●	338
●	SRM Arezzo	699	The Arezzo is an excellent source component for those wanting a superb turntable for vinyl replay	/625025	33/45	●	●	●	●	325
●	Townshend Rock 7	1,720	Has the ability to pull detail out of a vinyl groove, making it the most resolute turntable at its price		33/45	●	●	●	●	324
●	Townshend Rock V/Excalibur II	7,000	If you want to hear everything that's on a record then there's no better machine for the job		33/45	●	●	●	●	307

Phono cartridges

MM and MC recommendations



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Replacable stylus	MM	MC	Issue number
●	Dynavector Karat 17D3	699	One of the most thrilling-sounding cartridges on the market		●	●	●	334
●	Goldring Legacy	595	An MC cartridge better suited to the smoother-sounding turntable, it unearths a mountain of detail		●	●	●	328
●	Grado Prestige Gold 1	150	Unusually assured 'presence' region is the basis of a beautifully musical and involving presentation		●	●	●	338
●	Ortofon Rondo Red	385	Delivers detail, power and resolution and makes a good case for its price		●	●	●	307
●	Ortofon Cadenza Red	750	There's much to admire in this cartridge's fine detail and unfussy presentation		●	●	●	330
●	Ortofon Vivo Red	200	Never less than musically convincing, this all-in-one cartridge is remarkably capable		●	●	●	338
●	van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●	●	●	235
●	van den Hul Condor XCM	2,400	A stunning cartridge with stereo imaging, dynamics and resolution to die for		●	●	●	265

Phono stages

Make your turntable sing



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	MM phono inputs	MC phono inputs	Adj impedance	Adj gain	Issue number
●	Cambridge Audio 640P	100	An outrageously good bargain that suits budget systems, but can confidently survive upgrades		●	●	●	●	305
●	Lehmann Audio Black Cube	335	This phono amp is a very distinguished performer with an MM source		●	●	●	●	335
●	Linn Uphorik	1,850	Exceptional sound quality, the Uphorik could easily win over the next generation of LP enthusiasts		●	●	●	●	334
●	Pro-Ject Tube Box SE II	435	The big picture is the most evident thing here, but the finer details are there, too		●	●	●	●	335
●	SoundSmith Strain Gauge	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

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"TEAC has done itself proud"
TrustedReviews.com, October 2010



"The Aurb offers more functionality than the Zeppelin for less cost"
BBC MUSIC Magazine, November 2010



"A kick-ass performer at a fairly painless price"
T3 Magazine, December 2010



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Radio tuners

Surf the airwaves with these carefully selected tuners

FM tuners

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Wavebands	Presets	RDS	Remote control	Rot. tuning knob	Issue number
●	Creek Audio Evolution	350	Sound is detailed, cohesive and extended both tonally and spatially – very classy		FM, AM	80	●	●	●	308
●	NAD C426	220	If you aren't already wedded to DAB, then this is a very attractive purchase		FM, AM	80	●		●	339
●	T+A T1210R	1,200	High-end looks are matched by the sound, which is detailed and sophisticated		FM	100	●			283

DAB/FM tuners

●	Arcam FMJ T32	600	A highly cost-effective way of optimising the airwaves. iPod functionality is a bonus	/559242	DAB, FM	100	●	●	●	319
●	Onkyo T-455DAB	400	Admirably free of grain or obvious tonal blemishes, this tuner achieves a high standard		DAB	40	●	●	●	298

DAB/FM portables

●	Monitor Audio Airstream 10	225	The range of features on this DAB/FM/Internet radio is certainly impressive	/636713	DAB, FM, Web	4	●		●	337
●	Pure Move	80	A feature-packed, beautifully built DAB/FM radio that is a pleasure to use	/608367	DAB, FM	20	●			323
●	Pure Sensia	250	One of the smartest table radios around, offering wireless computer-sourced music		DAB, FM, Web	40	●	●		331
●	Tivoli Networks+	495	FM reception is excellent and a cut above everything else this radio has to offer		DAB, FM, Web	5	●	●		337
●	Vita Audio R1 MkII	160	Limited to DAB/FM and line inputs, but the sound quality is very good		DAB, FM, Web	10	●	●		337
●	Vita Audio R2i	300	Very smartly built with a sound that's full-bodied, neutral and detailed	/611865	DAB, FM	30	●		●	323

SPECS KEY **WAVEBANDS** Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. **PRESETS** How many stations can be stored in memory. **RDS** Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). **REMOTE CONTROL** For the couch potato. **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER** Useful for setting up an aerial. **ROTARY TUNING KNOB** An ergonomic alternative to buttons.



Headphones

Audiophile solutions for home and travel use

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	www.techradar.com	Electrostatic	Supra-aural	Open (Closed back)	Circumaural	3.5mm jack adaptor	Weight (grams)	Issue number
●	AKG Q701	500	A welcome addition to the ranks of the world's finest transducers				●			235	341
●	Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	649	Fine advert for the virtues of closed-back headphones, with great bass and background noise reduction						●	350	334
●	Beyerdynamic DT770	179	One of the most tonally satisfying closed-back headphones around with excellent detail				●		●	270	333
●	Beyerdynamic T1	880	A characterful, enjoyable music-maker with a detailed, weighty sound				●				331
●	Bowers and Wilkins P5	250	A superb headphone with B&W's sound and build quality sealing the deal				●		●	195	333
●	Grado SR60i	100	A strong contender with out-of-class sound in most areas: a brilliant budget all-rounder	/603478	●				●	210	322
●	Grado SR80i	120	A beautifully neutral and open-sounding headphone that's lively and energetic too				●				322
●	Grado GS1000i	1,100	A superb transducer, capable of astonishingly high performance standards	/624782							325
●	Grado PS1000	1,795	Offer excellent detail and effortless dynamics, but they can be heavy to wear after a while				●	●		500	329
●	Sennheiser HD380	140	This model offers good sound and is a worthy alternative to in-ear monitors				●		●		327
●	Sennheiser HD650	330	Clear and detailed, with very natural tonality through bass and midrange with just a little coloration						●	275	312
●	Sennheiser HD800	1,000	These headphones will convert loudspeaker listeners to the delights of personal stereo performance	/619269	●	●	●		●	350	324

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

HFC TOP PICKS



Bowers & Wilkins P5 £250

The P5 is a no-brainer for iPhone users but this well built and attractive design should be able to win friends from outside the Apple camp as well



PURE Sensia £250

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Beyerdynamic T1 £880

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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
●	Audio Analogue Crescendo	599	In a room of appropriate dimensions, this amplifier has real musical presence					50	329
●	Cambridge Audio 840A v2	800	A chunky powerhouse with features aplenty, this amp offers detail and delicacy (silver finish)					120	327
●	Denon DCD-1510AE	900	Offers a taste of high-end excellence at an affordable price			MM/MC		70	335
●	Marantz Pearl Lite PM-KI	899	Great all-rounder and attractively priced, the PM-KI transcends its £899 price			MM		70	338
●	Moon 1.5	999	A likeable amp in many ways, with admirable bass, treble and imaging					60	321
●	NAD C3226BEE	320	Unusually confident into awkward loads and very assured especially in bass. Treble a touch recessed					50	322
●	Puresound A10	685	A superbly involving valve amp at a very competitive price and with genuinely excellent results					10	331

Above £1,000

●	Arcam A38	1,480	A winning combination of sonic virtues including highly developed detail and musicality			opt		100	332
●	Astin Trew AT2000PLUS	1,740	If you prefer timbral and timing qualities of music to its bone-crunching potential, this is a contender					65	332
●	Audio Analogue Puccini Settanta	1,450	Detailed and lively, particularly in the upper octaves, but lacks a little bass extension			MC		160	320
●	Creek 5350 Evolution	1,075	One of the most attractive amps in its price range, with a sound that's immediately satisfying			MM/MC		120	334
●	Denon PMA-2010AE	1,700	High-class, well-equipped integrated, with a performance that is muscular, refined and detailed			MM/MC		80	328
●	Electrocompaniet PI-2	1,600	A superb all-rounder, with insight on one hand and effortless musical flow on the other					100	327
●	Electrocompaniet EC15	2,750	Big, characterful and beautifully built amp, with equally big and unforced sound					120	340
●	Gryphon Atilla	6,995	Exceptional subtlety and definition, has enough power to cope with just about anything musical					100	328
●	Leema Pulse III	1,495	Offers a clean, smooth sound and has an unusually wide array of inputs			MM/MC		150	339
●	Leema Tucana II	3,425	Highly featured, well-built and not short of power, this is a highly resolute and organic amp					148	323
●	Luxman L550A-II	3,000	An accomplished all-rounder that's able to handle virtually any system			MC		20	335
●	Micromega IA-100	1,125	Fast and fluid performer that brings a touch of panache to its role			MM		100	332
●	Mimeisim 15.2	5,415	A powerful amplifier with great dynamics and high resolution that's rare even at this price					180	330
●	MSB Platinum M200	13,656	This amplifier's devastatingly good all-round sound quality sets a benchmark that few will approach						322
●	Musical Fidelity M31	1,000	Extremely engaging performer, this power amp boasts excellent sonics and solid build					70	337
●	Myryad MX12080	1,200	Sound is more assured at the top of the frequency range, though bass is melodious and detailed					80	327
●	Peachtree Audio Nova	1,099	This amp/DAC combi is a fine heart for a computerised desktop system					80	341
●	Roksan Caspian M2	1,600	This muscular-sounding amplifier is load tolerant and more powerful in practice					85	338
●	Unison Research Unico Nuovo	1,650	A truly successful marriage between tubes and solid-state amplification					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
●	Cambridge Audio Azur 840E/840W	2,000	Enterprising technology delivers a pre/power combo that always sounds detailed and controlled					200	309
●	NAD C165BEE/C275BEE	1,550	An alternative to the usual integrated route and one that offers flexibility and fine sound					130	336

Above £2,000

●	Audio Research DS450	7,000	Power amp features a very neutral transparent sound with lots of power and low-running temperature					450	337
●	Bryston BP16/ 2B SST2	5,700	Preamp and power amp combo offers superb sound quality					100	323
●	Bryston BP26	3,670	Cracking preamp brings detailed results						308
●	Chord Prima/Mezzo 140	7,135	Small, muscular, beautifully made and styled, and sounds like a dream					120	269
●	Classé CP-700/CA-M400	9,200	Pre plus mono power combo with superb build, huge power and enormous flexibility					400	293
●	Cyrus Mono X300	2,495	A power amp with a rare combination of speed and resolution					300	341
●	Digital Do Main Ba-1	6,495	By recreating the V-FET, DDM has built one of the most thrilling amplifiers on the market					300	327
●	Mark Levinson No. 326S	8,000	Excellent USB implementation, natural sound and solid build. Excellent performance levels						338
●	Musical Fidelity M6PRE/PRX	4,998	For those wanting a powerful high-end pre/power combo at a realistic price, this is a fantastic package					260	340
●	Roksan Caspian M1	2,800	A powerful and enjoyable-sounding amplifier combo that brings out the strengths of its CD player					85	307
●	Rotel RC158/RB1582	2,100	It looks high-end and it really sounds the part, too					200	336
●	Trilogy 909/990	10,390	Extremely musical valve-based pairing with hybrid power and beautiful finish					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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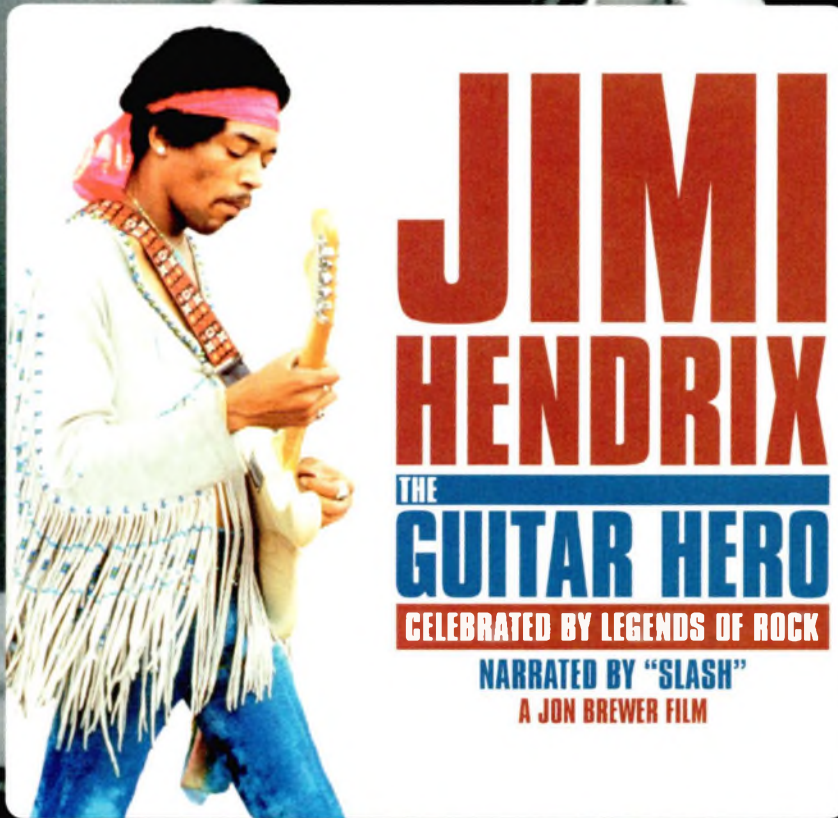
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Cables



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Stranded
Solid core
Copper
Digital cable type
Silver
Issue number

Analogue interconnects

Badge	Product	Price	Comments					
●	Audioquest Sidewinder	45	A detailed cable, with fine tonality and excellent rhythm			●	●	297
●	Black Rhodium Prelude	90	Practical and sensibly priced all-rounder that seems happily compatible with a wide range of kit			●	●	293
●	Black Rhodium Coda	150	Superb bass with neutral and detailed midrange, treble sweet with occasional slight constriction			●	●	298
●	Black Rhodium Polar Illusion	250	A good all-rounder, with clear and purposeful bass and particularly fine treble			●	●	321
●	Cambridge Azur Reference	50	Performance wouldn't shame a cable at twice the price: especially adept in the treble			●	●	296
●	Chord Co. Indigo Plus	995	Costly, and high-class cable needs running in, but this is a finely detailed design overall	/608313	●			323
●	Clearer Audio Silver-line	283	Complex, well-screened cable which offers good sound all round with exceptional bass			●	●	279
●	CrystalCable Piccolo	348	Thin, tougher than it looks, has some qualities of a solid-core type – resolution, focus and articulation				●	294
●	Kimber Timbre	145	A very neutral cable that will complement even very upmarket systems				●	312
●	Monster M350i	45	Few cables at this price reveal so much about the recording space.			●	●	281
●	Monster M1000i	230	Very capable, with only a hint of bass dryness to set against excellent results elsewhere			●	●	284
●	Nordost Wyrewizard Dream	110	Slight lack of precision in extreme treble, otherwise detailed and neutral with authoritative bass				●	303
●	Oehlbach NF214	63	The bass is a matter of taste, but suits many smaller speakers with good mid and treble			●	●	281
●	QED Signature Audio S	190	Mellifluous and rounded, this cable is a great choice for lovers of the human voice				●	332
●	Supra EFF-IX	77	Lively sounding which maintains a high level of detail and neutrality, musically, a great all-rounder			●	●	306
●	Townshend Isolda DCT100	99	Particularly enjoyable cohesion and naturalness that makes for great listener involvement				●	312
●	van den Hul The Wave	125	Neutral, with a hint of upper-bass richness: images seem to reside slightly further away than most			●	●	312

Digital interconnects

●	Atlas Mavros	285	By any reckoning this is a very revealing wire			●	●	E 336
●	Kimber DV-30	59	A superb performer that lacks very little, even when compared to Kimber's high-end models			●	●	E 317
●	van den Hul The Wave	65	The results this cable achieves are excellent and it scores highly for value				●	E 336

Speaker cables (price per metre)

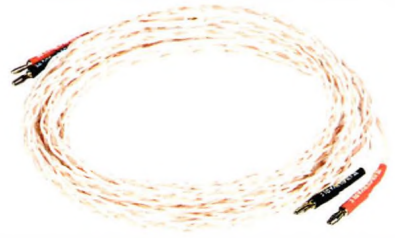
●	Atlas Hyper 1.5	12.5	Don't look to this cable to beef up the bass, but at higher frequencies is revelatory at the price			●	●	299
●	Atlas Ascent 2.0	60	A highly analytical cable and very fine detail across the board			●	●	294
●	Black Rhodium Jive	14	Bi-wire cable which is full of sonic virtues. It's highly practical, too				●	339
●	CrystalCable Piccolo	1,395	A chip off the old block, has a similarly fast, fluid and subtle sound (price -3 metre pair)				●	302
●	Kimber 4VS	155	In the right system, this cable is a good choice (price reflects 2.5 metre terminated pair)			●	●	329
●	Monster MCX-1s	5	Notable for its bass, perhaps a touch overdone at times but could be a good foil to small speakers			●	●	280
●	Nordost Heimdall	185	Alternative to Valhalla, silver-plated, micro-monofilament construction, suitable for exacting systems			●	●	278
●	QED X-Tube XT300	12.5	A natural and controlled-sounding cable that's cost-effective for mid-priced systems				●	310
●	QED Revelation	15	Sensibly priced, this cable offers a performance which is a step-up from budget types			●	●	318
●	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance-matched' cable with stabilising components added				●	241
●	van den Hul The Teatrack	35	A bi-wire cable with a sound that's impeccably timed, neutral and full of detail				●	339
●	Wireworld Solstice 52	25	Rather bulky and awkward, but performance amply justifies it with superb bass solidity			●	●	310
●	Wireworld Oasis 6	40	Excellent bass with tunefulness and extension all first-rate. Awkward to handle, though	/617560	●			324

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

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 Signature Audio S has the rare ability to impart no sonic signature of its own to the equipment it connects to, getting you even closer to the music

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 Size: width, height, depth (cm)
 Floorstander
 Ease of drive
 Bass from (Hz)
 Free space
 Close to wall
 Issue number

Up to £1,000

Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Size	Floorstander	Ease of drive	Bass from (Hz)	Free space	Close to wall	Issue number
●	Acoustic Energy Aegis Neo 3	363	Pretty, neutral floorstander sounds open with wide dynamic range and good bass weight	20,90,5,24	●	A	24	●	●	294
●	Acoustic Energy Radiance 1	600	Limited bass, power handling and dynamics, but exceptional mid-to-treble voicing	18,5,32,25	●	A	33	●	●	325
●	Amphion Ion L	900	Sharp styling, fine mid/treble coherence a sweet treble, but less happy bass alignment	16,2,32,6,26,5	●	A	40	●	●	310
●	ATC SCM11	867	A very fine little speaker t-at its best with natural recordings where it adds little	21,38,25	●	A-	55	●	●	293
●	AudioPro Avanti A.10	350	A tough and effective little speaker – overall balance is quite smooth and even	19,29,26	●	A+	38	●	●	319
●	Bowers and Wilkins CM1	488	Luxury miniature has laid-back sound, low coloration and fine imaging, but weak dynamics	16,5,28,28	●	A-	40	●	●	279
●	Bowers and Wilkins 684	699	A fine all-rounder at a realistic price, has a smooth, even and nicely open balance	/483503 20,91,30	●	A	22	●	●	315
●	Castle Knight 2	400	A true resurgence for the Castle brand, the Knight 2 has a beguiling sound quality	20,38,33,5	●	A+	42	●	●	338
●	DALI Ikon 6	999	Needs care with setup, impressively transparent and obsessively detailed sound	19,100,33	●	A	37	●	●	271
●	EB Acoustics EB2	669	Excellent value speaker, its composite enclosure gives a very clean and neutral sound	22,5,45,30	●	A	64	●	●	341
●	Focal Chorus 706V	389	Advanced drivers deliver an even, healthy dynamic expression and tension	22,39,25	●	A	27	●	●	319
●	Focal Chorus 726V	950	Compact and realistically priced, the Chorus 726V is a good all-round performer	22,99,37,5	●	A	25	●	●	325
●	JBL Studio L880	700	Good value floorstander with neutrality, massive headroom and plenty of punch	22,99,37	●	A	25	●	●	275
●	KEF iQ50	599	Looks cute and very discreet, with spacious imaging, good balance and a sweet treble	/483527 17,5,81,5,26	●	A	23	●	●	315
●	Mission MX5	600	An engaging listen and worth an audition, if you have the room	25,99,5,39	●	A-	●	●	●	341
●	Monitor Audio BR5	450	Not the best dressed in its class, but detailed, bold-sounding and good value	17,85,25	●	A-	36	●	●	293
●	Monitor Audio Silver RS8	850	Bold, dynamic sound, it's an easy load that works well in larger rooms	90,18,27	●	A	33	●	●	276
●	Monitor Audio GS10	900	More neutral tonally than some recent MAs, the GS10 is easy to drive	20,36,27	●	A-	40	●	●	284
●	PMC DB1i	985	Could be more neutral, but a very effective musical communicator	15,5,29,23,4	●	A+	30	●	●	334
●	ProAc Tablette Ref Eight	704	Stunning standmount with electrostatic-like imagery. Its brother is even better!	15,27,23	●	A+	40	●	●	267
●	Q Acoustics 1010	110	Neatly styled miniature has limited bass and power handling, fine midband voicing	15,21,5,19,5	●	A	48	●	●	286
●	Q Acoustics 1020i	140	Outstanding value, t smooth well-balanced and lively sound makes a fine communicator	/516273 17,5,25,26,5	●	A+	60	●	●	318
●	Rega RS1	390	Clever close-to-wall speaker has a fine coherence and good communication skills	15,32,23,6	●	A	23	●	●	319
●	Russ Andrews SP-1	352	This tweaked focal 705V RA has a sound that is immediate, engaging and, and great fun	19,2,31,5,24,8	●	A+	65	●	●	309
●	Spendor S3/5R	750	Lacks dynamic muscle and loudness potential, smooth neutrality and g bass extension	16,5,30,5,190	●	A	25	●	●	310
●	Tannoy Revolution DC4T	599	Ultra-compact, lacks bass weight and dynamic tension, but sounds open and coherent	488857 15,85,16	●	A	40	●	●	316
●	Tannoy Revolution DC6	900	Pretty compact standmount, delivering a lively bass and smooth, coherent midband	23,36,5,23	●	A	40	●	●	307
●	Teufel T500	568	Good value, solid build and an extended warranty	19,5,105,3,32,5	●	A-	●	●	●	340
●	Wharfedale Diamond 10.5	480	Despite the price, the 10.5 ticks many of the boxes, with superior voice band coherence	/636778 22,88,30	●	A-	50	●	●	326

Above £1,000

●	Adam Audio Tensor Delta	8,400	This active loudspeaker brings a powerful range of capabilities to its performance	33,56,34	●	A	50	●	●	329
●	AE Energy Radiance 2	1,000	This speaker boasts fine neutrality, sweet top, fine imaging and wide dynamic range	18,5,92,25	●	A	30	●	●	334
●	AE Energy Radiance 3	1,500	This speaker's effective enclosure ensures a wide dynamic range and a very clean sound	/587236 23,92,29,7	●	A	27	●	●	320
●	AE AE1 MkIII	2,000	This speaker has a lovely midband smoothness and superior image focus	18,5,31,25	●	A	24	●	●	337
●	Amphion Argon 3L	2,300	Solid build ensures an impressively clean sound with loads of bass and fine neutrality	19,92,5,30,5	●	A	44	●	●	322
●	Aspara HL6	4,300	Acoustic material sounds great and there are many strengths in design and performance	18,5,93,34,5	●	A	●	●	●	332
●	ATC SCM16A	2,376	Makes a great case for the active speaker. Includes built-in amps and is good value	27,45,33	●	ACT	42	●	●	300
●	Audioplan Kontrapunkt IVB	2,898	Boasts exceptional stereo imaging and mid-through-treble coherence	16,35,26	●	A	45	●	●	329
●	Audiovector S3 Super	2,600	Useful ability to upgrade, offers good musical communication and stereo imaging	19,103,31	●	A	50	●	●	328
●	Aurousal VS	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	●	●	314
●	AVI ADM9	1,125	Active mini-monitors that are exceptionally accurate and dynamic sounding	20,30,26	●	ACT	60	●	●	301
●	Bowers and Wilkins CM9	1,760	Tall, elegant, expressive midband and expansive, but well-controlled bass	/597244 20,102,5,32	●	A	60	●	●	321
●	Bowers and Wilkins 802	11,500	This high-end speaker has an airy, spacious midband, with clean bass reproduction	36,8,138,56,3	●	A	27	●	●	337
●	Cabasse Bora	2,200	A real enthusiast's choice with high sensitivity, strong bass and powerful dynamics	/618354 33,27,50	●	A	52	●	●	324
●	Focal Chorus 816 V	1,099	Fine, warm balance, superior dynamics and a sweet top end, but could be smoother	28,100,37,5	●	A+	20	●	●	288
●	Focal Chorus 826 V	1,349	Times nicely, goes loud with ease and will produce precise imaging if appropriately set up	28,104,37,5	●	A	45	●	●	287
●	Focal Chorus 816WSE	1,499	The W cone makes some qualities associated with Focal's high-end models more competitive	99,8,28,2,37,5	●	A+	39	●	●	308
●	Focal Chorus 826W LE	1,879	Focal has turbo charged the 826 resulting in lots of energy, excitement and fine detail	28,2,103,8,37,5	●	A	●	●	●	330
●	Focal Electro 1027 Be	4,399	Outstanding mid and top with fine delicacy, low coloration, but lacks some bass grip and drive	26,5,111,35	●	A-	25	●	●	276
●	Free FS1	3,500	An elegant design with the minimum of wiring. Wireless with Sonos or Airport Express	16,87,27	●	ACT	35	●	●	301
●	Gamut Phi5	3,040	Lovely discreet floorstander has excellent sound and several very clever engineering touches	17,100,24	●	A	20	●	●	305
●	Green Mountain Audio Rio	2,000	Fabulously tight timing and coherence makes for a very expressive and musical performer	20,8,40,6,34,9	●	A	80	●	●	332

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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
●	Guru QM10	1,595	A very clever close-to-wall standmount with fine imaging, that sounds a lot bigger than it looks	/465869	30,25,2,23,2	A	26	●	●	317
●	Jamo R 907	6,600	Arguably the more 'chummy' of Jamo's dipole flagships, powerful bass and open midrange	/498515	44,1189,7	●	A	30	●	317
●	JBL Everest DD66000	44,000	Awesome performance in the true meaning of the word & exceptional musical communication		111,96,5,47	●	A	50	●	331
●	Kudos X2	1,350	Attractive presentation alongside a lively sound makes for an involving experience		16,6,78,20,6	●		27	●	337
●	Kudos Cardea C2	1,950	This floorstander is a fine all-round performer with fine voicing and neutrality		20,92,5,27	●		23	●	322
●	Magico V2	18,000	High pricing derives this speaker's superb painstaking engineering & impressive performance	/624700	25,5,115,30	●	A	32	●	325
●	Magneplan Magneplanar 1.6	2,500	Great with acoustic and classical material, this dipole panel speaker has superb sound quality		48,165,5	●	A	43	●	329
●	Mission 796	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
●	Monopulse 42A	1,995	Oddball styling, fine bass-to-mid balance and dynamics and superb voice coherence		26,110,25	●	A	25	●	302
●	Monitor Audio PL200	4,750	A costly, but beautifully presented loudspeaker with outstanding voicing and character		25,5,100,28,5	●	A		●	330
●	Mordaunt-Short Perf 6 LE	4,799	Striking moulded enclosure minimises coloration, overall balance is smooth, neutral and open		24,115,43	●	A	22	●	308
●	Neat Momentum 3i	1,790	Sounds bigger than it looks, with good coherence and an impressively wide dynamic range		22,38,27		A	23	●	302
●	Opera Callas	3,195	Technically innovative multi-tweeter system, this is a grown up and articulate performer	/429144	23,37,5,34			32	●	311
●	Opera Seconda	1,995	Fine styling and finish, plus very superior voicing, if a shade lacking in warmth		24,102,5,31,5	●	A	20	●	314
●	Pioneer S-2EX-W	5,200	This speaker offers superb midband neutrality and exceptional clarity	/587272	29,1,56,5,42,5	●	A	37	●	320
●	PMC GB1i	1,525	Fine voice reproduction, overall agility and well-judged balance		15,5,87,23,4	●	A	40	●	337
●	PMC FB1i	2,100	A floorstander that boasts impressive bass extension and a smooth sweet top end	/429594	20,100,30	●	A	20	●	329
●	PMC fact .8	4,600	Beautiful styling, alongside a superb all-round sound with a notably wide dynamic range		15,5,105,38	●	A	55	●	327
●	PMC IB2i	8,900	Delivers a top-class sound quality, fine imaging and exceptional dynamic grip	/617595	33,74,46,5	●	A	25	●	324
●	PSB Synchrony One	3,500	Slim and discreet floorstander that delivers superb sound quality and flexible bass	/516267	22,109,32,5	●	A	45	●	318
●	Revel F32	3,200	Meticulously balanced, tonally neutral design makes for a taut, well disciplined sound		22,105,39	●	A	20	●	256
●	Revolver Screen 3	2,799	Visually dramatic and very successful in delivering genuine high-quality hi-fi sound		50,140,11		A	35	●	329
●	Roksan Caspian FR-5	2,475	Sharp-looking speaker sounds exceptionally open and lively without aggression		20,100,25	●	A	22	●	290
●	Sonus faber Luito Monitor	1,690	Subtly designed, elegant-sounding package, especially with good recordings	/603221	18,5,35,33,5		A	55	●	322
●	Sonus faber Minima Vintage	2,490	Easy, graceful-sounding compact, a natural for acoustic material at moderate volume levels	/455417	20,33,27,5		A	55	●	312
●	Sonus faber Cremona Audit.	3,350	Open, exciting and with surprisingly good bass, this is 'The Little Speaker That Could'		20,35,37		A	50	●	305
●	Spendor SA1	1,295	Very high quality sub-miniature with notably superior sound		16,5,30,5,19		A	30	●	334
●	Spendor SP3/1R2	1,600	Conservative styling, superb neutrality and coherence with unusually low coloration		22,40,28		A	37	●	317
●	Tannoy Definition DC10T	5,000	Classy speaker has massive base, high sensitivity and precise image focus	/608326	34,112,5,32	●	A+	35	●	323
●	Totem Sttaf	1,695	This speaker delivers good scale with a fine midband		16x85x24,2	●	A		●	340
●	Triangle Genese Lyrr	3,300	A well-balanced speaker with generous sensitivity, fine imaging and good expressiveness		23,30,3,113,3	●	A	30	●	338
●	Teufel Ultima 800	2,498	Exceptional value for money due to direct sales and easy system-matching		22,98,37	●	A	42	●	335
●	Vivid Audio K1	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
●	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,383	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package		23,91,37	●	A	28	●	254
●	Wharfedale Opus	1,500	Great material value and a solid, if bright and forward sound. Has great loudness potential		26,100,5,41	●	A	23	●	314
●	Yamaha Soavo 2	1,200	Cunningly crafted with a beautiful balance that always sounds lively, open and involving		22,38,35		A	28	●	296
●	Zu Essence	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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BADGES KEY: RECOMMENDED = ● EDITOR'S CHOICE = ● GROUP TEST WINNER = ● BEST BUY = ●

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 Welded	Shelf type	Issue number
	Atacama Equinox	409	Stable, modular design with style and excellent bass transients	81 50,50	● 4	Glass	217
●	Audiophile Base Std Supp't	1,200	Expensive and quite bulky, but sound is unusually detailed and resonance-free	57 46,35	● 3	MDF	302
●	Blok Stax 300	180	A simple and effective design that gives some useful isolation across most of the audio band	40,46	● 3	MDF	334
●	Custom Design Inert Matt	70	Isolation platform can improve the sound of hi-fi components, but is a bit small for most kit	40x25		Metal	311
	Custom Design XL4	380	Simple construction pays off in smart looks. Sound contribution is minimal	60,42	● 4	Glass	293
	Custom Design Milan	509	Good-looking stand with nothing more to complain of than slight muddying of detail	57 48,39	● 4	Glass	302
●	Hi-Fi Racks Podium	500	A keenly priced piece of high-class furniture that also happens to sound great	59.5		Wood	320
●	Isonoe Isolation feet	98	A set of four isolation feet that are ideally suited to microphonic kit like turntables			Alloy	327
	Partington Minim	470	Adds its own character to rock, but to the detriment of acoustic sounds	78 45,37	● 5	Glass	302
●	Quadraspire QX25 Support	25	Beautifully simple design, cheap and easy to use. Excellent with CD players			Acrylic	327
●	Quadraspire Sunoko-Vent T	800	The sound is detailed and largely uncoloured, while the design is rigid and beautifully veneered	59,47	● 4	MDF	334
●	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68 54,49	● 4	Torlyte	240
●	Townshend VSSS	1,380	This attractive Seismic Sink retains the same excellent vibration-killing sound quality	76 35,50	● 4	Glass	273

Speaker stands

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



Badge	Product	Price	Comments	Top plate size (cm) Height (cm)	Number of shelves Fillable	Welded	Issue number
	Anvil Sound Display Stand	229	A variety of smart looks available – sound is clear and precise	50 20,17	● 1		293
●	Custom Design RS300	110	An attractive stand whose lack of coloration suits it to high-resolution systems	56 16,5,18	● 1		281
●	Custom Design SQ404	220	Robust four-pillar design gives very low coloration and maximises performance	61 18,16,3	● 4		283
●	Partington Ansa 60	119	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62 18,15	● 4		232
●	Partington Dreadnought BS	299	Sound is better defined in almost all areas than cheaper, slimmer stands can offer	62 17,23	● 5		309
●	Partington Heavi II	499	Robust to the nth degree, this stand helps produce very precise bass and upper frequencies	53 31,22	● 6		287

SPECS KEY **HEIGHT (CM)** Height of equipment support and speaker stand (not including spikes) in centimetres. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform (Speakers generally overhang top plates). **FILLABLE** The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand. **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

HFC TOP PICKS



Partington Dreadnought BS £300
Probably the best speaker stand 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, thanks to a unique shelf design, makes this 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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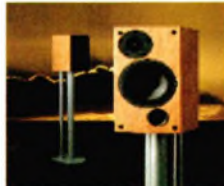
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Tales of the unexpected

Jimmy Hughes takes delivery of Olive's brilliant 03HD 500Gb music server, but is in no rush to start ripping his 40,000 disc collection

One of the dangers for avid CD and LP collectors is the risk of becoming more interested in the artefact itself, than the music/performance it contains. Record companies exploit this skilfully, selling us things we've already got by expanding original recordings and/or making the packaging more interesting with rare photos and new liner notes.

When you keep purchasing new copies of stuff you've already got, you're this kind of collector – constantly tempted to buy remastered versions of favourite albums, or expanded deluxe reissues that bring together mono and stereo mixes, plus out-takes and alternative versions of certain tracks.

I recently got heavily nostalgic about Love's 1967 album *Forever Changes* – buying the deluxe double CD having only bought the expanded single CD version a few weeks earlier. But why the nostalgia? Well, *Forever Changes* is a very late discovery for me; I knew it by name and reputation, but had never heard it until a few months ago!

A marketer's dream

Basically, it's because I'm a total sucker for buying what I already have – purchasing newly reissued editions that promise superior sound, nicer artwork, bonus tracks, outtakes, and alternative versions. My record collection is a bunch of old dearly loved friends, so I grab every opportunity to get closer to them.

This partly explains why some record collectors buy discs and never open them. Possession alone is sufficient. Just having the disc in the house is enough. But, downloads have a different dynamic. Not being physical, they give you custody rather than possession.

Thus far, I've only dipped a toe into the world of downloads. But something I've already noticed is – my urge to collect is not primed by downloaded material. How strange! Downloading music to a hard-drive seems ideal for collecting; everything neatly stored in one place, taking up very little physical space – unlike LPs/CDs.

Many collectors of classical music regularly replace their older recordings as newer or better ones come out. Reviews would describe certain recordings of a work as the 'one to have'. This meant it was the definitive version of a particular piece – best sound, best performance. If a better recording came along, you'd dispose of your old disc and get the new one. But not me: I always kept my older recordings, even when something superior superseded it.

Given this fact, it's curious I feel no urge to duplicate downloaded material by having lots of versions of the same piece.

Faced with a music-streaming/storage device like the Olive OH3D (HFC 341) and its 500Gb hard drive, able to hold 1,500 ripped CDs, my instinct is to choose a definitive recording and stick with it. I feel no desire to fill its hard drive with dozens of different versions of the same piece of music. One is enough.

Wet Dreams and von Karajan

Why? Well, it's partly because LP and CD sets have an individuality that downloads lack. My four Karajan conducted Beethoven cycles are all very different as objects – each has its position in time and space. Especially handsome is the deluxe leather-bound limited-edition 1978 LP set, personally signed by Karajan himself. A collector's Wet Dream!

Downloads simply don't have that sort of tactile immediacy. Consequently, there's less justification for keeping 'second-best' versions when superior ones exist. Of course, that argument also applies to LPs and CDs, but (somehow) having the music in a physical form creates more of a context for it.

The risk here for avid collectors is getting too embroiled in such ephemera and losing sight of the message. Not so with downloads. With everything on a hard drive, you're forced to confront things on a purely musical level. With no fancy packaging or other side-shows to distract your attention, you have to listen to the music...

Hey – maybe that's no bad thing. ●

Downloads have a different dynamic, they give you custody rather than possession



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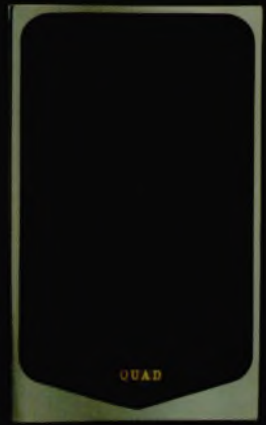
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