

CD Supertest

£1,500 Astin Trew, Cyrus, Micromega, Onix, Shanling and Yamaha CD players

Retro

Sony WM-D6C Walkman: the professional's choice



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

Issue No. 358

£3.99

Top ranking

NEW
7 pages of top tweaks!
See p111

PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium Integrated and JBL Studio 530 speakers make the grade!

Six appeal

Rega's new RP6 turntable will have your vinyl singing



Living by numbers

From iTunes to hi res: your verdict on computer audio

27

top products from Antelope, BitPerfect, Firestone Audio and more...



Grand standers

new Epos Elan 30 loudspeakers



Class act

Tellurium Q's single-ended power amp

9 770955 111090
05
£3.99
MAY 2012

A timeless musical experience



REFERENCE 5
Vacuum Tube Line-stage Preamplifier

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

Ken Kessler | Hi-Fi News | Jan 2010



REFERENCE CD8
Compact Disc Player

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

Roy Gregory | Hi-Fi+ | Issue 64



REFERENCE PHONO 2
Vacuum Tube Phono Preamplifier

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

Jonathan Valin | The Absolute Sound | Jan 2010

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

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

Like all true musical legends, Audio Research creates timeless classics, whichever component you choose, you'll find it's the ultimate sound investment. For details of the full range and your nearest dealer, contact Absolute Sounds.

audio research
HIGH DEFINITION®

absolute sounds ltd
58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW
T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62
www.absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com





40

Living by numbers The *Hi-Fi Choice* hi-res dem



98

Dealer Visit Walrus Systems, London W1

Music reviews



95

Doors *LA Woman*

BADGES EXPLAINED

OUR AWARDS



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



RECOMMENDED:
Products that we feel meet a high standard of performance



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



Sorry for laughing, but I remember a time, not so long ago, when every hi-fi manufacturer who had an opinion was rabidly against computer audio.

How on earth, they'd exclaim, can you get a decent sound from the riot of noise, interference and general electrical scunge that is a computer?

Well, to test their argument, all you have to do is put a portable AM radio next to your prized PC or Mac, and come on feel the noise! As the resultant screeching and buzzing shows, computers are a hotbed of radio-frequency interference, hardly an ideal audio source.

How come then, that at last month's Bristol *Sound & Vision* show, I heard umpteen dems with computers as sources? Suddenly, all those people taking such a high moral stand a few years back had become converts to the joys of WAV, FLAC and (gulp) even MP3!

The truth is that computers are currently very far from ideal for playing high-quality music on; think how many years of work it took to make CD players sound decent, and they're a walk in the park by comparison...

But to be fair, there is a brave new world opening up in front of us, with the prospect of true hi-res downloads finally becoming reality. That's why, at the aforementioned hi-fi show, I set out to dem this to *Hi-Fi Choice* readers, to canvas opinion on whether you think computer audio is a realistic option, or just another load of hi-fi hype.

In this issue, I tell the story of the system, the set-up, the music and your responses to it; it was a memorable moment and I'm grateful to all who attended. We concluded that computer audio *can* be worthwhile, although there were plenty of 'ifs' and 'buts'! Read all about it on p40, then why not tell me what you think?

David Price Editor
david.price@hifichoice.co.uk



HADLOW HOUSE, 9 HIGH STREET, GREEN STREET GREEN, ORPINGTON, KENT BR6 6BG



comes to jordan acoustics



Naim CD555 CD Player & 555 PS Power Supply

Naim's reference CD player, the CD555 with 555 PS delivers the ultimate musical performance from a CD.

Naim NAC 552 Pre-amplifier

The NAC 552 is by some distance the most advanced Naim preamplifier ever and has some claim, therefore, to being the best preamplifier, period.

Naim NAP 500 Power Amplifier

In true Naim fashion, every aspect of their reference NAP 500 Power Amplifier's sound quality is truly world-class.

Full range of Naim products available at Jordan Acoustics.



bourne mouth showroom

telephone:

01202 911 886

e-mail: bourne mouth@jordanacoustics.co.uk

address: *Unit 2 - The Old Cart Building, Parley Court Barns, Parley Green Lane, Hurn, Bournemouth, BH23 6BB*

Open: Tuesday - Saturday. Closed Monday.

website:

www.jordanacoustics.co.uk

glenrothes showroom

telephone:

01592 744 779

e-mail: glenrothes@jordanacoustics.co.uk

address: *20-22 Cadham Centre, Glenrothes Fife, KY7 6RU*

Open: Monday - Friday. Closed Saturday.

Follow JordanAcoustics on



large product range ▶ free parking ▶ 0% flexible finance*



comes to jordan acoustics



Focal Grande Utopia EM Speakers

The Grande Utopia EM is Focal's ultimate reference loudspeaker. More than 2 meters high and weighing 260kg, Grand Utopia uses exclusive technologies and unique design to deliver world-class performance. Grande Utopia EM, the best acoustic loudspeaker in the world?

Focal Diablo Utopia Speakers

While the smallest model in the Utopia range, the Diablo Utopia is just as impressive as the Grande in its own way. Compact, distinguished and captivating, Diablo Utopia is the ultimate vision of the reference bookshelf loudspeaker.

Full range of Focal products available at Jordan Acoustics.



Jordan Acoustics are specialists in *World Class Audio Systems*

Focusing solely on the finest audio products available today, our portfolio has been chosen very carefully. We believe strongly in offering products that you want rather than just ones that we happen to have. Whether you prefer valve or solid-state, CD to vinyl, soft-dome or ribbon, Jordan Acoustics have 'cherry-picked' only the very best. Combine this with our vast experience and industry leading after-sales service and you've got yourself one of the finest high-end consultancies on the planet!

Building a true high-end system is not about collecting brands based on reviews. It is about finding a true synergy between components that sound magical together. That palpable reproduction, full of dynamics and realism just how the original artist intended. Fingers on frets, breathing of vocalists, the tautness of a drum skin... the devil is in the detail. **That's why we love great hi-fi and that's exactly why you should give us a call.**

part exchange* ▶ large selection of used items ▶ home demonstrations*

Hi-Fi Choice Contents

hifichoice.co.uk Issue No. **358** May 2012

NEWS & OPINION

8 Audiofile

The latest developments in the world of hi-fi

71 Hi-fi choices

Have your say on audiophile matters

80 Opinion

The *Hi-Fi Choice* team say it as they see it...

95 Music reviews

Essential new releases reviewed

130 Back chat

Assorted hi-fi hearsay

READER SERVICES

104 Reader classifieds

Buy and sell your kit for FREE here

124 Next issue

What we hope to bring you next month...

FEATURES

40 Living by numbers

Reflections on Bristol's HFC show dem

90 Year in music

1968

98 Dealer visit

Vinyl specialists Walrus Systems

102 Show report

What's new at the Bristol Hi-Fi Show 2012

NEW!

111 Choice extras

7 pages of the latest and greatest gadgets, gizmos, cables, supports and accessories



COVER STORY

16 PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium integrated amplifier



08

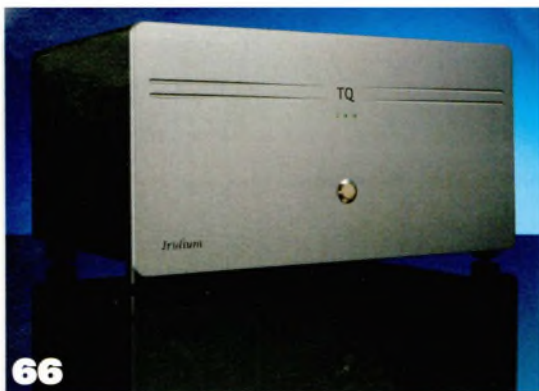


Audiofile Wharfedale Denton loudspeaker

102



Show report Bristol Sound and Vision



66

Tellurium Q Iridium 20w SECA power amp

"A dynamic speaker that makes you want to keep listening until way after bedtime..."

Jason Kennedy: JBL Studio 530 loudspeaker p44

TESTED THIS MONTH



44

JBL Studio 530 loudspeaker



48

Antelope Audio Zodiac DAC



54

Rega RP6 turntable



60

Epos Elan 30 loudspeaker



22 Blind-listening Group Test
CD players

REVIEWS

Kit testing

16 PrimaLuna

ProLogue Premium integrated amp

44 JBL Studio

530 loudspeaker

48 Antelope Audio

Zodiac DAC

54 Rega

RP6 turntable

59 Firestone Audio

iLoveTW USB DAC

60 Epos

Elan 30 loudspeaker

65 BitPerfect

music player software

66 Tellurium Q

Iridium 20w SECA power amplifier

88 Sony

WM-D6C Walkman (Retro)

BLIND-LISTENING
GROUP TEST

CD players
£1,200-£1,725

25 Astin Trew
AT3500+

27 Cyrus
CD 8 SE2

29 Micromega
CD-20

31 Onix
SACD-15A

33 Shanling
CD-T1000SE

35 Yamaha
CD-S2000

Never miss an issue – turn to p39 for our latest subs offer

Back to the future

Back in the late nineteen sixties, Wharfedale Dentons took pride of place in many people's listening rooms. Now, the classic loudspeaker is back, says **David Price**...

PRICE: TBC

AVAILABLE: NOW

CONTACT: 01480 452561

WEB: WHARFEDALE.CO.UK

For audiophiles of a certain age, the Wharfedale Denton was the very epitome of affordable, quality loudspeakers. For the nineteen sixties and seventies generation that could only dream of owning expensive exotica like Teesdales or Dovedales, it proved a satisfying taste of what a high-quality speaker could sound like, at a far more realistic price. The Denton was a big seller over the years; to this day thousands of pairs of them are doubtless still in use.

The Wharfedale Denton was the epitome of what an affordable, quality speaker could sound like...

Now the name is back. To celebrate Wharfedale's eightieth anniversary, the company has resurrected the name – and indeed the look – of the original. As before, it's a compact two-way loudspeaker in the classic bookshelf tradition, beautifully veneered in Vintage Mahogany by Wharfedale cabinet makers, with an inset front baffle and traditional Tungsten cloth grille.

Beneath that trad exterior, however, is some bang-up-to-date engineering. Where once was a simple paper cone,

the new mid/bass unit sports a 125mm woven Kevlar cone mounted on a rigid diecast chassis. Where there used to be a paper cone tweeter, high frequencies are now handled by a 25mm woven textile soft dome with high flux ferrite magnet, engineered for smooth, detailed HF extension, Wharfedale says. A "highly researched" crossover mates the two transducers at 2.3kHz.

The original Denton was a smooth, rich, warm sounding design with what used to be called, "a good

tone", back in the day. The new version has been voiced to reflect the spirit of the original, although of course, is far superior in terms of its technical performance, with a quoted frequency response of 44Hz to 24kHz (± 3 dB). If *Hi-Fi Choice's* memory serves, the original was nearer 65Hz to 16kHz. Power handling is in another league, quoted as 100W, although it's slightly less sensitive at 86dB/1w/1m. Vital statistics are similar to the originals at 320x200x305mm and 7.9kg.

SPOTLIGHT

IT'S HARD TO OVERSTATE

the power of the Wharfedale brand back when the original Dentons were made in the late sixties. The name was synonymous with fairly expensive, high-quality speakers, although also featured on more affordable designs such as the Chevin, Denton, Linton and Glendale. They all offered a big box and a similarly large and smooth sound; for many hi-fi buyers they were a badge of quality in a speaker world that was then highly variable.

Britain's most wanted

HAVE YOU EVER-wondered what the most desirable hi-fi brand is in the United Kingdom? Linn maybe, Arcam perhaps, B&W by any chance? Well, while these are very well known in the hi-fi world, it seems they haven't yet managed to break out into the public's wider consciousness.

According to the 2012 Consumer Superbrands survey, powered by The Centre of Brand Analysis, the only hi-fi name highly regarded by the general public (as opposed to audiophiles) is Bang & Olufsen. The Danish company comes in at number twenty in the Superbrands league for the 'most wanted' brands in the UK, above Facebook, Microsoft and Nike, no less. The only other 'technology' company to rank in the top twenty is – yes, you've guessed it – Apple, two places higher in eighteenth place.

During the voting process, participants are said to have judged three criteria: distinction, quality and reliability. They were also asked to remember that the definition of a Superbrand is one that, "has established the finest reputation in its field. It offers customers significant emotional and/or tangible advantages over its competitors, which customers want and recognise". The results are based on the views of business professionals, marketing experts and over two thousand consumers. The top twenty in descending order are as follows: ROLEX, COCA-COLA, GOOGLE, MERCEDES, BBC, BMW, DURACELL, DULUX, JAGUAR, ROYAL DOULTON, WEDGWOOD, ROYAL ALBERT HALL, JOHN LEWIS, MICHELIN, HILTON, DYSON, MARKS & SPENCER, APPLE, GUINNESS and BANG & OLUFSEN.

**Superbrand speaker:
B&O BeoLab 5**



T+A

Completely new and uncompromisingly audiophile
E-Series *balanced*



The MUSIC PLAYER *balanced* is simply THE audiophile music source. As well as featuring the latest generation of 192 / 24 kHz Streaming Client (LAN, WLAN, USB media storage devices, iPod including control system), a superb 32-bit double-mono DAC, an audiophile CD player, high-quality FM tuner and five digital SP/DIF inputs (coax at 192 kHz), it's fully balanced design offers the very best in audiophile performance right through to the XLR outputs.

The POWER PLANT *balanced* is the ideal integrated amplifier partner for any audiophile source. It's fully balanced design and T+A developed switching output stages deliver a lively and compelling sound capable of a massive 500 Watts. When partnered with the MUSIC PLAYER *balanced*, users will enjoy class-leading performance no matter how their music content is stored.

Hand built in Germany, the E-Series *balanced* from T+A is available in the UK now.

For more information or to arrange a demonstration, please contact:



acoustic brands ltd

Acoustic Brands Limited (ABL) Ltd.

Tel - 07917 431 280

Email - sales@acousticbrandslimited.com

Web - www.acousticbrandslimited.com

First dimension

NAD's new Masters Series DAC boasts several audiophile firsts...

NAD's new Masters Series M51 Direct Digital DAC includes what the company says are a number of 'firsts' for a digital to analogue convertor, including HDMI, USB Audio Class 2 (with support for 192kHz), digital error correction, and 32-bit architecture.

The conversion process from PCM to PWM completely eliminates any jitter present on the incoming signal, says NAD. Because of the very high clock speed and mathematical precision of the M51's reconstruction filters, the audio signal is said to be free of digital artefacts like ringing. A Pure Class A analogue stage with very low output impedance provides the

perfect interface to your favourite amplifier and both balanced and single-ended outputs are available.

Connections include S/PDIF, AES/EBU, optical and coaxial, HDMI and, as already stated, USB 2 compatibility with both PC and MAC, as well as USB flash or hard disk memory devices.



PRICE: £1,500 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01279 501111 **WEB:** NADELECTRONICS.COM

Sound sense

Versatile loudspeaker can be used throughout the home

With Cambridge Audio's new standmounting powered loudspeaker, you can hook-up your TV, iPod dock and other entertainment sources, while a USB audio input allows direct access to a laptop or desktop computer.

The SLA25 features an integrated amplifier, 30 watts of power and a 4 inch mid/bass driver mated to an audiophile-specification tweeter, it's claimed. A front-mounted volume control offers intricate adjustment, whilst the cabinet sports a rear reflex port for optimum bass performance.

Connections include RCA phonos for a CD player, Blu-ray or network streamer, and a 3.5mm input compatible with iPod or MP3 player. The SLA25 has a high-gloss cabinet in piano-black lacquer.



PRICES: £199 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 0845 900 1230
WEB: CAMBRIDGEAUDIO.COM



Box set

PRO-JECT'S ORIGINAL Phono Box found its way into countless people's audio systems and now, hundreds-of-thousands of units later (and updated and improved to MK II and S/E II versions), the company has come up with a further variation on the popular theme with this new budget phono stage.

The Phono Box S benefits from dual-mono configuration for enhanced channel separation and clarity, as well as having RIAA equalisation with a wide range of parameter settings. So the Phono Box S is now said to meet the needs of almost any phono cartridge on the market. By using the clearly labelled switches on the underside of the unit, users can tailor the impedance, capacitance and gain-adjustment to perfectly suit their cartridge of choice. The switchable subsonic filter on the rear panel also prevents rumble below 20Hz getting to the rest of the replay chain.

The Phono Box S is positioned in Pro-ject's current phono-stage line-up above the popular Phono Box 2 (£85), which will soon be sporting a fascia design similar to the Phono Box S, plus a name-change to simply, 'Phono Box'.

The very latest Pro-ject Phono Box S is available now, in a choice of black and silver finishes, priced £150.

hentydesigns.co.uk

Glass sandwich

FOCAL UK HAS ANNOUNCED the launch of a new series of special edition speakers exclusive to the UK market, incorporating W Cone technology. The cone is a sandwich of two very fine layers of woven glass either side of a structural foam. The W cones, says Focal, bring an increase in micro-dynamics and information retrieval, while the attention to detail in drive unit design extends to the aluminium/magnesium-inverted dome TNV tweeter.

The cabinet construction has a non-parallel inner wall structure to reduce internal standing waves and has 25mm MDF sides for extreme rigidity.

Available now, the series includes the 806V W 2-way bookshelf (£799); 816V W 2-1/2 way floorstander (£1,699); 826V W 3-way floorstander (£2,099); 836V W 3-way floorstander (£2,499); CC800V W 2-way centre channel (£549) and SW800V W 11 inch subwoofer (£999).

focal.com





200mm

iota: neat.



130mm

'Fascinating lotas:
minute, cute and jaw-dropping
in their musical ability'

WHAT HI-FI ★★★★★

neat acoustics



www.neat.co.uk

Heavy metal

Arcam's long awaited new FMJ series 'SuperDAC' is launched

Arcam introduces its latest and, according to the company, highest performing digital convertor to date, the FMJ D33 SuperDAC.

Promising a new benchmark in performance, the D33 is fully compatible with Mac, PC, iTunes, hi res files, CD, DVD, Blu-ray, set-top boxes and more, giving every music source a level of performance that, says Arcam, involves, "enthalls and engages from the first note to the last encore".

The D33 also features an asynchronous USB input offering the convenience of computer-based music and the ability to enjoy the very latest 192kHz high-resolution

recordings in, claims the company, absolutely stunning quality.

Two coaxial and two optical inputs, plus a professional-grade AES/EBU connection complete the line-up, while beneath the Sound Dead Steel construction chassis are high-end dual Burr-Brown PCM1792, 24-bit/192kHz convertors (one per channel), twin toroidal transformers in the power supply and "state-of-the-art" printed circuit boards.

Other features include user-selectable filters, ultra low jitter claimed on all inputs, multi-stage regulated power supply and full IR and RS232 remote control.



PRICE: £2,000 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01223 203200 **WEB:** ARCAM.CO.UK

Limited edition

New standmount carries on the Kudos tradition

To celebrate twenty one years of speaker design, the new Kudos Cardea Super 10 two-way standmount is a limited edition, with drive units produced for Kudos by SEAS in Norway – a company with almost sixty years of expertise in this field.

The main drive unit features a copper shorting ring to minimise eddy currents, an aluminium phase plug to act as a heatsink and a hand-treated paper cone.

Designing the drive units to integrate seamlessly allows, says Kudos, the use of a minimal, low-order crossover reducing phase errors, blurring and other unwanted artefacts.



PRICE: £3,495 **AVAILABLE:** NOW
CONTACT: 0845 458 6698
WEB: KUDOSAUDIO.COM

Bass players

New Tannoy subwoofer range makes an impact

Tannoy's new TS2 active subwoofer range marries high-power Class D bridge mode amplification with dual opposing drivers to deliver, what Tannoy calls, "the deepest, tightest and loudest bass response at the price". The new TS2.10 employs two 250mm drivers and a 300W RMS amplifier at around £429, while the larger TS2.12 offers two 300mm drivers and 500W RMS amplification for £549.

Boasting more power, each subwoofer delivers bass and low-frequency effects right down to almost 20Hz, yet is compact enough for easy placement, the company says. Available in a dark-grey satin finish with complementary grilles, the TS2.10 is also available in premium high-gloss black and contemporary high-gloss white. The TS2.12 is available in a dark grey satin finish and high-gloss black as a premium option.



PRICE: £429-£649 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** 01236 420199 **WEB:** TANNOY.COM

Full Montis

MartinLogan's latest electrostatic is a sparky performer!

Housed within an ultra-rigid, extruded aluminium composite AirFrame, the new Montis' CLS (Curvilinear Line Source) XStat transducer builds on MartinLogan's near thirty year legacy of providing, what it calls "the highest quality electrostatic products".

The MicroPerf stator technology gives the latest-generation CLS electrostatic transducer almost twice as much exposed diaphragm surface, translating into higher efficiency and, claims MartinLogan, an effortless and unlimited dynamic presentation. The XStat pulls no punches, says the company.

Montis uses an "extremely precise" 24-bit Vojtko DSP engine, in conjunction with a powerful 200W Class D amplifier, to deliver a "stunningly detailed low-frequency performance reaching down to 29Hz"—uncommon in cabinets this compact.

Additionally, integrated low-frequency equalisation below 100Hz further enhances bass performance, by allowing precise tailoring to adjust for individual room acoustics.



PRICE: £9,800 **AVAILABLE:** NOW **CONTACT:** +44 0 785 749 0133 **WEB:** MARTINLOGAN.COM

Think different

PARADIGM SHIFT, a new brand from Paradigm Electronics will target four product categories; speakers, earbuds, headphones, and gaming headsets.

The first products to be sold will be a range of three new earbuds – the E1 (£49), E2m (£99) and E3m (£129) – and the new A2 powered speaker (£279-£329).

Engineered in the company's Canadian factory, the E1, E2m and E3m earbuds are critically tuned to Paradigm's three main speaker lines – Monitor, Studio and Signature respectively.

Bass performance is enhanced by a rigid connection between the tip and actual earbud, lessening the loss of low frequencies. All three are available in black and white finishes and feature an air-tight seal for noise isolation. The E2m and E3m also feature an in-line remote and microphone that allows users to pause and play music with one click.

The A2 is a powered bookshelf/tabletop speaker designed to be used alone or in stereo pairs with devices such as iPods, other music players and desktop computers. Wireless streaming is available using Apple AirPlay from iTunes-enabled computers or mobile devices.

AVAILABLE: NOW
WEB: PARADIGM.COM



NEWS IN BRIEF

•**AUDIO PRO** announces its IV2e, a simple wireless audio system that offers Wi-Fi functionality and sound from anywhere in the home. Available in white, black or red leather, it comprises a pair of active monitors with built-in Wi-Fi receivers and an easy-to-install multi-source transmitter.

According to Audio Pro, all you need to do is connect the speakers to power, connect the transmitter to a computer or other audio source and you're in business. Price is £700. audiopro.com



•**PSB** launches a new 2-way loudspeaker in the UK through Armour Home (01279 501113). An addition to its award-winning 'Imagine' series, the Mini features a 102mm clay/ ceramic polypropylene-coned woofer and a 25mm titanium dome and ferro fluid-cooled tweeter.

According to PSB, the result is a startlingly big and commanding sound. Price £495. psbspeakers.com



Cable talk

BLACK RHODIUM has announced a new range of cables from Oyaide, which are targeted at cable-detachable headphones.

The new series includes the HPC-35 and HPC-62 (plus 3.5mm and 6.3mm jacks), each of which features ultrafine PCOCC-A conductors which are bigger than regular cables and, say Oyaide, provide a high-speed response.

The HPC-35HD and 62HD cables are designed for use with Sennheiser headphones, including the HD650, and is available in both 1.3m and 2.5m lengths. blackrhodium.co.uk



THE FUTURE OF HI-FI

State-of-the-art solutions for the digital generation

NDX Network Player

Combining cutting edge technology with audiophile sound quality, the NDX represents the next generation of hi-fi. This versatile digital player allows you to stream your network-stored audio and internet radio via a wired or wireless connection. A front-panel USB socket is provided for playback from USB and Apple devices, plus there's an on-board DAC with three high-resolution S/PDIF inputs. An optional FM/DAB tuner is also available, and performance can be upgraded by the addition of an external power supply or DAC.

The NDX is compatible with high-resolution 24bit/192kHz streams and key file formats including WAV, FLAC, Apple Lossless and AIFF. Gapless playback and M3U playlists are also supported. It will integrate with your existing amplifier through any analogue or digital input and Naim's n-Stream control app for iPad and iPhone will take over full system control, placing your system firmly in the 21st century.



The NDX will be on demonstration this spring at our 'The Future of Hi-Fi' retailer events. Find out more and register to attend at www.naimaudio.com/future-of-hi-fi

Light fantastic

PrimaLuna's new ProLogue Premium promises great tube sound for the masses; **Richard Black** warms to its charms...

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
PrimaLuna
ProLogue Premium

ORIGIN:
Netherlands/China

TYPE:
integrated amplifier

WEIGHT: 21kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
370x200x400mm

FEATURES:
• claimed output:
35W

• push-pull circuit
• EL34 valves as
standard; KT88
also usable
• four line-level
inputs

• 8 ohm and 4 ohm
speaker output

DISTRIBUTOR:
Pistol Music

TELEPHONE:
020 8971 3909

WEBSITE:
primaluna.nl

Oh, the allure of valves! Here we are, at least four decades after transistors should have replaced old thermionic vacuum tube technology completely, and yet valve amplifiers

keep coming. And the rate that they come, if anything, seems to be quickening! While there are plenty of excellent transistor amplifiers out there, many buyers simply want glass audio, it seems.



Understandable? Of course there's nothing like their sheer tactility; those glowing bottles make you feel great about your hi-fi before you've even played a note of music. Maybe there's psychology at work here? It's fair to say that whereas thirty years ago people looked at valves in an almost wholly negative light, nowadays they're regarded by many in some kind of awe. Even the naysayers grudgingly admit that tube amps have got "a certain something" about their sound.

Surely there's more to it than that? A global industry isn't kept afloat by the feel-good factor of some dull orange glow at the far end of the room, is it?

PrimaLuna certainly doesn't think so. The company is a relatively new arrival on the valve scene, set up as



recently as 2003 in the Netherlands. From the outset, it has manufactured in China to keep costs reasonable. In the early days of Chinese-made hi-fi, we saw some pretty dodgy examples of construction, particularly in details like finishing of chassis corners, internal cable routing and insulation, and occasionally soldering too. This changed rapidly in the early years of this century, and we don't recall ever raising eyebrows at anything in a PrimaLuna amp.

Indeed this example is built as well as anything we can think of in its price bracket. First impressions on removing it from its packaging are that the chassis is very well finished. There's an easily removed valve cage which fits perfectly in its mountings, and all the corners and surfaces are smooth. The transformer cover (that's the large area of case behind the valves) is apparently hand rubbed and, right enough, it's got a superb sheen to it.

The paint is not quite black, rather a charcoal tint with a little metallic flake in it, while the front panel is black anodised aluminium.

If I have one reservation about the construction, it's the way the transformer cover rings and resonates. This is a common problem with sheet metal parts like this, and is liable to have some sonic effect as it 'sings along' with the music. Indeed, it's a major reason why chassis-

The valves operate in a push-pull arrangement, for lowish distortion and high output power

damping accessories are so successful. Microphonic behaviour of electronics, especially valves, is a documented phenomenon but simple mechanical resonance is often at least as significant. Indeed it's made all the more insidious by the way it carries on after the stimulus has left off – this is what is often referred to as 'stored energy'. Of course, you could put damping pads on a ProLogue Premium, but that would rather spoil the look. A bit of internal damping might be no bad thing then, methinks. PrimaLuna, how about it?

Talking of internal design, build quality inside the amp is the equal of that outside.

Valve amps are often these days built around a circuit board, like practically all solid-state models, but some manufacturers prefer to use old-time assembly methods and that's largely the case here. Underneath, all the valve bases are components – resistors and capacitors – neatly bent into shape, with relatively long leads soldered directly to the valve bases and to a stiff copper earth 'bus'. There

are also some ceramic tag-strips added to support the key passive componentry.

The components themselves are of some interest. PrimaLuna isn't enormously forthcoming about the circuit details, but it's easy enough to trace a valve circuit and this one has plenty of familiar features, topologically. It's implemented with physically large resistors, which not only handle relatively high power, but also work

better with the high voltages inherent in valve operation. They're not all high precision components though; most just don't need to be. It's likely that PrimaLuna has selected the ones that are critical, as in general it's clear they have been chosen for sound performance rather than spec. Capacitors are mostly well respected Solen branded plastic film units directly in the signal path, for example.

Although, as mentioned above, most of the circuit is hard-wired, there are some boards in evidence, the largest one carrying some – gasp! – integrated circuits. These are not used to amplify the audio, but instead to look after the biasing of the output valves. Bias is a long-term bugbear of valve amp design, and although there are many standard approaches, it's fair to say that none is entirely satisfactory.

PrimaLuna is proud of its 'Adaptive AutoBias' circuit, which monitors bias current (the current that flows through the output valves in the absence of a signal, which is critical to adjusting their performance). This isn't entirely a new idea. It is, however, an eminently sensible one. A little tricky to get right, but done well, it can extend the life of valves, accommodate unmatched (up to a point!) valves, and protect against potentially damaging upsets, in addition to its most obvious gain of making life easy for the user.

Here, it even allows the user to fit different valves, KT88s instead of the standard EL34 (if you want KT88 valves from the outset, they cost an extra £300). All one needs to do is flick a switch on the side of the amplifier and the AutoBias circuit is set up for the different type. The valves operate in a classic push-pull arrangement, for lowish distortion and reasonably high output power.

There are other helpful technologies within the ProLogue Premium. The Bad Tube Indicator is an LED in front of each power valve, which lights up to indicate that the valve in question is faulty. A thermal sensor in the power transformer shuts the amp down safely in the event of overheating, and further protection circuits guard against the ill effects of valve failures involving sudden high-current draw, which can damage output transformers. These are usually the most expensive parts of a valve amp, and therefore worth saving!

I remember being told once by a leading maker of solid-state amplifiers that his current models had as many components dedicated to fault monitoring and protection as to actually amplifying audio, and it makes sense for valve amps to be similarly overseen, especially when valves do die as a matter of course (after many years) and plenty of other fault conditions can occur. It's even more important in a 'entry level' tube product such as this.



Q&A...

RICHARD BLACK SPOKE WITH PRIMALUNA'S FOUNDER HERMAN VAN DEN DUNGEN ABOUT THE PROLOGUE PREMIUM...



RB: Are valves still able to offer something that transistors can't?

HD: Certainly, yes! Just use the most important 'measuring tools' you have; your ears! Even people only just introduced to valve sound will notice the relaxed, warm yet detailed sound from a well-designed tube amplifier. We don't claim that solid-state technology can't deliver good results, but in general it's much more difficult to achieve such results!

What about supply of parts? Are valves still readily available?

Yes. PrimaLuna products are designed around valves which are still in production. In addition, there are many NOS (New Old Stock) valves around. There is no certainly need to worry about the availability of valves.

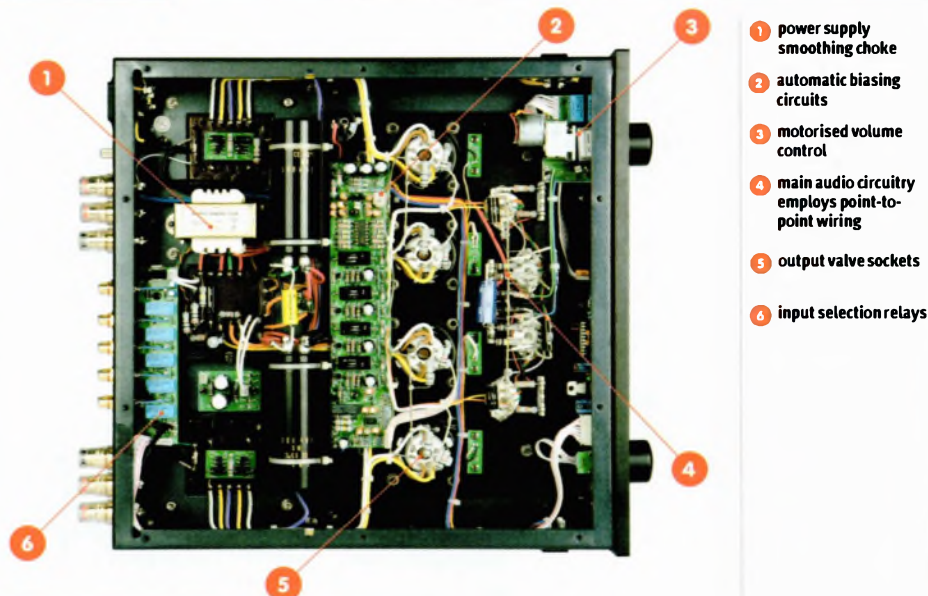
Don't valves wear out and need replacing eventually?

Valves do wear out. But all electronic parts in a circuit wear out, too. The advantage of valves is that you can change them more easily than the tyres of a car; that's certainly not the case with transistors. In addition, you can tune the sound of a well-designed valve amplifier according to your choice of valves – that's another thing you can't do with transistors!

Tell us a little about the automatic biasing circuit. Is this every valve-user's dream?

In the past, valve amplifiers were thought of as products only for technically schooled people. Now, thanks to PrimaLuna's Adaptive Auto Bias circuit, everybody can use a valve amp and change tubes without any technical knowledge. It really is 'plug 'n' play'! Not like in the past, fiddling around with a screwdriver and a meter, with the risk of doing something wrong. It's fair to say that PrimaLuna's Adaptive Auto Bias circuit has made the use and ownership of a valve amplifier as simple as any solid-state amplifier.

IN SIGHT



- 1 power supply smoothing choke
- 2 automatic biasing circuits
- 3 motorised volume control
- 4 main audio circuitry employs point-to-point wiring
- 5 output valve sockets
- 6 input selection relays

ON TEST

The question on every Prima fan's lips will be 'how does the Premium fare against PrimaLuna's earlier DiaLogue Two?' Tested in EL34/Ultralinear mode, our more recent ProLogue Premium is ostensibly less powerful at 2x35W/8ohm and 2x40W/4ohm (8 and 4ohm taps, respectively), but is a little more tolerant of 'difficult' loudspeakers, delivering over 60W under dynamic conditions into very low 2/10hm impedances (4ohm tap). More usefully perhaps, the output

impedance of the Premium, while not especially low at ~30hm across much of the audio range, is still half that of the DiaLogue Two.

So, not only is the frequency response more extended and unaffected by volume position (thanks to its decent buffering), any variations in the amp/speaker system response are less exaggerated. Ideally, it achieves -0.2dB/20kHz into 8/4ohm loads through its 8/4ohm taps and -0.1dB/+0.1dB into 2/10hm loads (4ohm tap).

Despite its proprietary auto-biasing, our sample still showed a larger discrepancy in distortion between channels than I'd expected. Indeed, the difference in harmonic distortion between the right channel (0.1%/1W and 0.6%/10W) and left (0.6%/1W and 1.4%/10W) is rather greater than might be encountered between two different amplifiers. Versus frequency, the Premium shows far greater consistency with distortion between 0.6-1.2% (10W/8ohm) over much of the audioband. **PM**



HOW IT COMPARES

THERE ARE PLENTY of integrated amps around competing in the same price bracket. One fine example is the Primare 132 (£2,200). Electronically, it's as different as can be, with a Class D (switching) solid-state circuit. Sonically, the Primare wins out on detail, although it doesn't quite have the charm of the PrimaLuna.

If you're set on valves, you might also consider the Opera Consonance Cyber 1005 Signature (£1,600-£2,000 depending on valve type). Overall though, the PrimaLuna is the more engaging and communicative amp, its extra cost being obviously justified.

You might be wondering about the name. 'ProLogue' sounds as if the range is a starter range, and that's correct; PrimaLuna's upmarket range is 'Dialogue'. And, yes, 'Premium' denotes the top model within ProLogue. As such, it combines features of both ProLogue and Dialogue ranges.

Basic specification is typical for a modern valve integrated, with four line inputs and a 'home cinema' input, which bypasses the volume control (in other words, a power amplifier input). One input can optionally be converted to phono operation, using an internal module. The output power rating is enough, experience suggests, to drive all, but the least sensitive loudspeakers to satisfying levels in a typical British living room.

Sound quality

I tried various speakers for reviewing purposes, including some with quite low sensitivity, eventually spending the bulk of the time using Bowers and Wilkins 803S floorstanders. That might not seem the most obvious

choice for valve compatibility – it's a slightly tricky load for a start – but I didn't find it a problem and it just confirms the long-held view that in the business of amp/loudspeaker matching, there's nothing like a bit of experimentation.

I actually started off with ATC SCM20 speakers; large standmount models which are a little insensitive but a relatively easy load, not least because they have a sealed box design and hence lack the complicated bass impedance characteristics of bass reflex models. It's proved a popular speaker with our listening panels over the years, who have always appreciated its direct and fuss-free presentation, as well as its good sense of rhythm. The ProLogue Premium integrated certainly made good use of both those characteristics...

Actually 'fuss-free' is a good summary of the amplifier's sound. It has surprisingly good insight and fine extension at both frequency extremes considering its tube design; tonality is commendably even and there is good rhythm. But the most

CONNECTIONS

- 1** pressed steel transformer cover is too resonant
- 2** grounding post useful if optional phono stage fitted
- 3** loudspeaker outputs for 4 or 8 ohm loads
- 4** home cinema input bypasses volume control
- 5** RCA phono line level input socketry

immediately obvious aspect of its performance is the way it gets on with communicating the essential character of the music playing. Be it heavy rock, unaccompanied folk songs, classical chamber music or even grand opera, the music is always convincing, lively and emotionally satisfying.

There's a lot more to a two-and-a-bit-grand amp than just sounding nice, however welcome that may be. To put it another way, I love the absence of hi-fi artifice, but still want to be sure that the hi-fi niceties are well dealt with. Let's take each in turn.

An excellent 'budget audiophile' design; well made and robust when driving loudspeakers

Valve amps are sometimes accused of having rather 'soft' bass. Extension may be okay but probably not seismic, and there's not quite as much grip and control of the speaker as the best solid-state amps can offer. I have heard one or two valve models that justify that comment, but plenty that refute it. This one is interesting, as it comes somewhere between those two poles. Its bass is, in fact, beautifully extended, with any loudspeakers (and in addition to those mentioned above I tried a couple of Spendor models and the original Quad ESL). Real trouser-flapping stuff may simply require more power, and we don't really care too much about that because it's a bit of a party trick. And how many normal music recordings do that anyway?

But with good recordings, both analogue and digital, that explore the lowest reaches in realistically subtle ways, this amp is highly assured. One of the most telling tests is quiet orchestral bass drum, as heard on any good recording of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. The Prologue Premium gave that a lovely sense of body and scale, but didn't unduly emphasise it and also left it in its proper stereo position, at the back of the orchestra. In this sense it didn't do what some lesser or older tube amps do, and give a euphonic, 'larger than life presentation'.

On the other hand, I felt that hard-driven rock could have done with just a *little* more precision in the lowest couple of octaves. You can hear the drum kit, bass guitar and the rest, but they sometimes lack bite. Rhythms are certainly satisfying, but not always the most attention-grabbing, and the precise timing of bass attack isn't always as on the money as with some of the better, similarly priced solid-state rivals.

Treble is simply lovely. I won't dwell on this because there's little to say. It's sweet, open and informative, and just goes on getting better if one changes from a slightly harsh loudspeaker to a sweeter one. Extension seems limitless, but there's never any hint of brightness, at least until one starts overdriving the amp which, interestingly, quickly results in the kind of graininess more often associated with solid-state amplifiers.

Midrange is largely neutral, though I did pick up some tonal highlighting here and there. I'm not inclined to get too upset about that though, as it's minor and very much the sort of thing one becomes accustomed to within minutes.

My reservations centre on its low level detail. It's quite good, but not exceptional. I spent some time swapping it against a couple of solid-state amps, and each time felt that the latter simply offered more precision and resolution. Putting the Prologue Premium back resulted in a sound that one might describe as more beautiful but also less informative, with such aspects as instrumental definition less clearly apparent, and voices not as individually characterised.

Conclusion

Insight versus euphony is the classic trade-off with tube amps. The PrimaLuna Prologue Premium integrated has great strengths, but if you're inclined to listen in an analytical way then it won't be for you. Rather, it majors on music making.

Overall then, it's a well made, fine sounding design that proved an endearing listening companion. It has *just* the right combination of talents to warrant an enthusiastic recommendation. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Gorgeous treble, extended and open with never a hint of harshness

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Detail ultimately limited, making it harder to hear the inner goings-on of a multi-layered recording

BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



WE SAY: Excellent affordable tube amp that does the job asked of it

OVERALL





ELECTRA 1000 Be II

They say perfection is not of this world...

Don't believe what they say. If music is your passion, you should listen to the Electra 1000 Be II loudspeakers. Universally recognized by reviewers, recording and mastering studios, the world over, the Electra 1000 Be II loudspeakers are coveted by the most demanding audiophiles. One aspect of the design is the unique Focal inverted dome tweeter. This has convinced the most renowned recording and mastering studios across the world. This technology - the unique patented inverted dome High Frequency unit - made from rare, aerospace-grade beryllium - a material which is a hundred times more expensive than gold. The High Frequency dome material weighs just twenty-five thousandths of a gram and its material is seven times more rigid than titanium. These characteristics, combined with the powerful motor system, deliver outstanding acceleration, excellent dispersion and a with uniform frequency response from 2kHz to over 40kHz. Performance achievements that we're proud of, but in the end there's only one true measure of performance: trust your heart. Take a listen.

Photo: Matteo Sgiovanni - Modem - St. Etienne

Focal® is a trademark of Focal-JMLab® - France - More information on our website: www.focal.com. Contact: info@focal-uk.com. Tel. 0845 660 2680

How we test

Hi-Fi Choice employs the most rigorous test and measurement regime in the business. Here's how we do it...

HOW WE TEST

Unique group tests

Hi-Fi Choice is the only magazine to offer *Blind-Listening Group Tests*, backed up with an objective lab testing procedure

BLIND-LISTENING TESTS

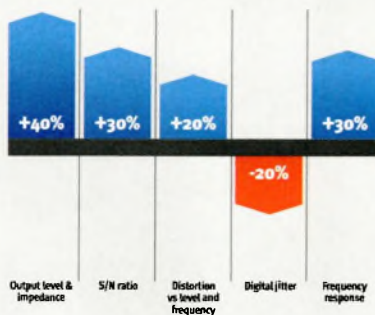
THIS CRUCIAL process, carefully controlled and yet sufficiently relaxed that our listeners do not feel that they're being tested, forms the heart of our Group Test review. Our panel of three listeners are not aware of the brand or price of the product they are listening to, but they are able to choose their own music selection and decide upon the initial listening level at the beginning of the first session.

This level is accurately matched from product to product throughout subsequent sessions so that subjective impressions of 'louder' or 'quieter' sounding separates helps inform us of their inherent character. Regular breaks keep our listeners refreshed while the sessions are

conducted with the minimum of distractions, playing the same programme through each system while they take notes of whatever pleases or bothers them. Our panel are encouraged to discuss their impressions after each session and the consensus, or otherwise, forms the basis of our reported Sound Quality section.

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.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



OUTPUT LEVEL & IMPEDANCE

The typical output level of a CD player is 2V but its ability to deliver this level at all frequencies through long cables or into all amplifiers is indicated by its output impedance.

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

This is a direct representation of the player's A-weighted Signal-to-Noise (S/N) ratio, measured in 3rd-octave bands from 20Hz-20kHz relative to its maximum output.

DISTORTION VS LEVEL AND FREQUENCY

Rather than quote a single figure for distortion at one frequency and level, this value represents a measure of the distortion trend across both the entire audio band and over a full 100dB of the player's dynamic range.

DIGITAL JITTER

Jitter is any uncertainty in the timing of digital audio data as it's recovered by the CD transport and processed by the player's DAC. Once converted to analogue audio, jitter manifests as a very particular form of distortion.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

This is a measure the 'flatness' of the player's frequency response from 20Hz (low bass) to 20kHz (extreme treble) – the practical limits imposed by CD's specification

THIS MONTH'S LISTENING PANEL



MARK BAKER (LEFT)
ORIGIN LIVE managing director and turntable and tonearm designer, Mark has a keen ear for detail, even in the digital domain!

ROBERT KELLY (MIDDLE)
GERMAN PHYSIKS and **dCS** are just some of the prestigious brands Robert has worked with; he has a wealth of industry experience spanning many years.

TIM JARMAN (RIGHT)
ELECTRONICS ENGINEER and historic audio fan, Tim runs great online resources on classic B&O and Sony portables, and is also an avid early CD collector.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Disc player:
 - Oppo BDP-95 (Audiocom modified)
- Amplification:
 - Musical Fidelity AMS35i
- Loudspeakers:
 - Quad 989
- Equipment supports:
 - Quadraspire

TEST MUSIC

THE WHO
GOING MOBILE:
WHO'S NEXT



POINTER SISTERS
AUTOMATIC:
BREAK OUT



MARY BLACK
BABES IN THE WOOD:
THE COLLECTION



FRANK SINATRA
ROAD TO MANDALAY:
COME FLY WITH ME



OUR GROUP TESTS

and Lead Review are subject to exhaustive lab testing by Paul Miller using the QC Suite Functional Testing Station (left). Paul has tested more hi-fi equipment than any reviewer in the world, so you know you're in safe hands.

We don't publish pages of graphs, but we do understand the importance of transparency. So, readers may view full QC Suite test reports for our key reviews by clicking on the red download button on our website.
www.hifichoice.co.uk

Blind-listening Group test

CD PLAYERS £1,200-£1,725

Disc o' tech

Thirty years ago, Compact Disc was *the* cutting edge of consumer technology. Now it's in the twilight of its years but still going strong, finds **David Price**...

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE WATERSHED MOMENTS. Do you remember where you were when Compact Disc was launched? I first heard about it, like a great many people reading this I suspect, on *Tomorrow's World*. It was a heady time, what with new microcomputers being launched every week and space shuttles regularly blasting off. Then, just when we thought life couldn't get any more 'high tech', along came CD...

It introduced two new concepts to ordinary households the world over. Whereas Compact Cassette, for example, was a clever adaptation of an existing technology, CD ushered in both optical disc storage *and* digital audio in one brave go. Not only did we have to familiarise ourselves with the idea of lasers reading shiny silver discs (hitherto the stuff of science fiction), we were introduced to a wholly new way storing and replaying music, no less. The term 'cutting-edge' is often over used, but this time it was true.

Many hi-fi hacks were beguiled by this sexy new technology, although others had reservations. Everyone agreed it was fiendishly clever, but there remained a number of digital audio *refuseniks* who simply didn't think it matched the sonic standards of LP of the day. CD's co-creator Philips calling it "pure, perfect sound, forever" didn't help matters, as neither contentions were demonstrably true!

CD was special because it ushered in both optical disc storage and digital audio in one brave go...

But CD has come a long way in the intervening three decades; no one would seriously claim it is "perfect" now, but it's now palatable. The six players tested show that great results are possible, although there's still a surprisingly wide sonic gulf between the best and the worst, as you'll discover...

ON TEST



Astin Trew AT3500+
£1,495 p25

There are some machines that almost sell themselves; discerning buyers seeking a certain sound tend to gravitate around them. The Astin Trew is precisely this; don't buy it for its incisive detail, but if you want warmth and smoothness it's a persuasive package...



Cyrus CD8 SE2
£1,200 p27

The latest in a long line of Cyrus silver disc spinners features the updated Servo Evolution mech – now slightly tweaked to read problem discs better – in that lovely metal box, sporting a slick slot loader. Factor in PSX-R upgradability and it's a very versatile product.



Micromega CD20
£1,222 p29

This once famous name recently returned to the UK under new management and with a dramatically different range. Quintessentially French, some might say it is charming and frustrating in equal measure. But as this test proves, it's good that Micromega is back...



Onix Electronics SACD15A
£1,725 p31

A kick up the eighties! Onix was a mighty brand twenty five years ago, not in the zillion-selling Sony sense, but as a cult company with ultra loyal customers. Now Chinese built, it returns with similar aesthetics but different design. How will it stack up in the teensies...?



Shanling CD-T1000SE
£1,695 p33

Arguably the best and most accomplished Chinese brand, Shanling has always offered strong sound allied to top value and something out of the ordinary, visually. The T1000 typifies this approach; a long-lived popular favourite, can it beat the best of the rest?



Yamaha CD-S2000
£1,200 p35

'Japanese battleship' is an oft-used cliché but if they will keep making them, then journalists will keep repeating it! The big Yam is a beautifully built behemoth that harks back to the seventies for aesthetic inspiration. But does it have the measure of its rivals sonically?



£700
TRADE-IN DISCOUNT
Roksan CD Exchange Offer



M2
SERIES



ROKSAN

ROKSAN

HENLEY



*Caspian



*Attessa



*DP-1

ROKSAN

£700 TRADE-IN SCHEME

Roksan Audio and Henley Designs are delighted to announce a product exchange program on a scale like no other. In 2009 we showed our commitment to our customers by increasing the warranty term on all products to 5 years. Now we're back with a CD Player exchange scheme that allows existing customers to dramatically elevate their systems in a more affordable way.

Any owners of the Caspian, Attessa or DP-1 CD Player - whether the unit works or not - can return their old model to an authorised M2 reseller in exchange for £700 off the value of a brand new M2 CD Player!* In a market where trade-in values are falling sharply, we are continuing to support our loyal customers.

The Caspian M2 CD Player is a multi-award winning feat of engineering. The stylish and innovative design delights the eyes as well as the ears, and it represents the pinnacle of Roksan's technical prowess.

For more information on your nearest reseller, contact Henley Designs.

Web: www.henleydesigns.co.uk | Tel: 01235 511 166 | Email: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk

* Offer expires: 31st August, 2012



Astin Trew AT3500+ £1,495

An old favourite for those who seek a smooth, sumptuous sound – but how does it stack up here?

DETAILS

ORIGIN:
UK/China
TYPE:
CD player
WEIGHT:
7kg
DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
430x370x110mm
FEATURES:

- switchable upsampling
- coaxial digital output
- RCA phono output

DISTRIBUTOR:
Astin Trew
TELEPHONE:
01491 629 629
WEBSITE:
astintrew.co.uk

There are some players which become cult machines, bought by a certain type of audiophile to do a particular job – and this is one of them. With a reputation for a smooth and slick performance, it has won many friends amongst those who crave a less 'digital' sound.

It's an attractive package; a large, distinctly styled aluminium box with a mirrored frontal display, it feels like you're getting a lot for your money. Inside, there's a standard ROM-type mech and a clock said to be developed in conjunction with Trichord. This 'Plus' version adds 'super pure single crystal copper internal cabling' and damping components bonded to many of the integrated circuits on the DAC board.

Features are sparse, with no balanced XLRs around the back; it's just a coaxial digital output and RCA phono line outs. The front panel sports switchable upsampling to 24-bit/192kHz level. Buttons feel a little clunky, and the disc mechanism isn't the fastest in the world, while the disc tray feels a bit of a let down compared to the sublime item fitted to the Yamaha, for instance.

Sound quality

Here's a CD spinner that I've known for a long time, and liked it for its expansive, warm and luxurious sound. The panelists' general

comments bore this out, with one commenting on its "very nice" bass, which was tuneful with decent separation, making it easy to follow the bassline on the Mary Black track.

Across the midband, the player was described as having an "initially very enjoyable" sound, again quite natural and beguiling sounding. Tonally smooth and soft, it never challenged the listener and delivered the musical goods in a pleasant and unthreatening way. However, in comparison to some other players here, it was described as "ultimately less satisfying" because of its slightly opaque feel. There was less sense of the player delving deep down into the mix than with, say, the Cyrus. Instead the Astin Trew concentrated on providing an attractive face, sugaring the musical pill slightly.

In terms of stereo imagery, it was felt a bit below par; "imaging more diffuse, front to back depth less good" remarked another panelist after hearing the Frank Sinatra track. Another talked in terms of it being a little "smeared" in this respect. Possibly this is a result of the player's overall tonality, which is quite warm. I personally really enjoyed this aspect of the AT3500+, although others spoke of it as being "slightly dull in the midband".

The consensus was that treble was rolled off a little. One panelist said it had a "flat, saturated top end",

which was a little unkind, others felt, but everyone agreed it lost a bit of treble sparkle. With the pop of The Pointer Sisters, there was a sense that the high frequencies were airbrushed; not by any means unpleasant, just not revealing.

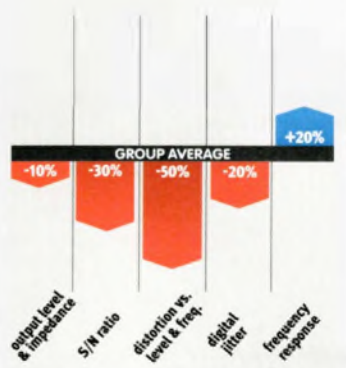
Overall, it's fair to say that the Astin Trew has a distinct sound that some will think works brilliantly in their systems, whereas others will see it as soft, warm and wishy-washy. It's a great machine for those seeking an 'analogue' feel from a format that doesn't by nature provide this.

ON TEST

Our sample was flawed in upsampling mode, exhibiting a uniform 10dB increase in noise on the left channel only. In native mode the player behaved as expected with the 6922/EC88 tube-based output stage dominating its 'colour' over the top 20-30dB of dynamic range. Hence the 0.03% distortion at its peak 2.4V output is higher than predicted from a Burr-Brown PCM1738 DAC in a more conventional application, but at least THD is very steady versus frequency. In listening tests, this is usually a good thing.

The 106.5dB A-wtd S/N ratio is certainly wide enough too, while the mere 50psec jitter is assisted by an increase in high frequency noise swamping any lower-level sidebands. Out of sight, out of earshot perhaps. The frequency response is flat to within -0.1dB but the increase in output impedance from 100ohm midband to 800ohm at 20Hz may well exert some subjective impact in the bass. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big, expansive sound and a big, expansive box

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks grip; opaque in the midband

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Capable silver disc spinner with a certain type of euphonic sound that many digital refuseniks still crave!

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL



Box-Design by Pro-Ject

Where performance meets convenience

Whether you want to add an iPod or computer music library to your existing Hi-Fi setup, or you're starting a main or secondary system from scratch, Box Design by Pro-Ject Audio Systems is a fantastic way for all music lovers to bring more high-quality audio into their lives. Every Box Design product combines premium build-quality and exceptional sound with a small size and an attractive price.

Stream



Stream Box DS

The Stream Box DS is one of the most affordable Streaming Clients available with high-end specifications.

- Stream 24-bit/192kHz HD Music
- Wi-Fi or Ethernet Connectivity
- Play from USB Hard-Drives
- Gold-Plated RCA Analogue Out
- S/PDIF Digital Out
- UPnP and DLNA Compliant
- Built-In Internet Radio Platform
- Play Digitally from Apple Devices
- Solid, Vibration-Free Construction
- Apple Authenticated

Play



Dock Box S Digital

- Take Pure Digital Feed from any Docked Device.
- Built-In 24-bit/192kHz DAC
- Gold-Plated RCA Analogue-Out
- S/PDIF Digital Output
- Apple Authenticated



Tuner Box S

- Low-Noise FM Tuner
- Manual or Automatic Tuning
- High-Contrast Display



DAC Box S USB

- High-Quality D/A Converter
- S/PDIF, Toslink & USB Inputs
- 24-bit/96kHz TI Chip

Listen



Speaker Box 5

- Two-Way Bookshelf Speaker
- Bass-Reflex System
- Three High-Gloss Finishes
- Magnetically Shielded
- Easy Placement Within a Room



Stereo Box S

- Integrated Amplifier
- 30 Watts Per-Channel
- Great for Desktop Systems



Head Box S

- One Headphone Socket
- Rotary Volume Control
- Low-Noise Semi-Conductors

Expand

NOW AVAILABLE

Box Design have just announced a new series of high-end power cables and distribution blocks at surprisingly affordable prices. The Connect-It Power series is available now through most Pro-Ject dealers.



Box Design by Pro-Ject Audio Systems is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.
www.henleydesigns.co.uk | Tel: 01235 511 166 | sales@henleydesigns.co.uk



Cyrus CD8 SE2 **£1,200**

The latest '2' revision makes an already excellent CD player even better, but can it match the rivals here?

DETAILS

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: CD player
WEIGHT: 3.5kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 78x215x360mm
FEATURES:

- PSX-R socket
- coaxial digital output
- RCA phono outputs

DISTRIBUTOR: Cyrus
TELEPHONE: 01480 410900
WEBSITE: cyrusaudio.co.uk

The latest in a long line of Cyrus CD spinners, this sports a tweaked 'Servo Evolution' transport, plus that lovely metal casework and packaging that we're all so familiar with these days.

I really liked and rated the first CD8 SE, but did find the disc loading (and occasionally playing) a little buggy. The new SE 2 is a real step forward, working seamlessly, unlike the two SACD players featured elsewhere. The latest slot-loading mech feels great, works quickly (no waiting for hours for the Table of Contents to load), and the machine imparts a high-quality feel.

The player sports a new optical data control system. Twin toroidal power transformers each feed individual highly regulated power supplies, which in turn power eleven separate sections of the player. A 24-bit DAC is fitted; unlike some here upsampling is not used. Round the back, there's the company's remote control MC-BUS socketry, useful if you're running a full Cyrus system. The front, backlit green LC display is crisp but small, so hard to read at a distance.

Sound quality

Kicking off with the Mary Black track, and one described the Cyrus as having a "very pleasant sound with the best tonal balance". Another

said, "this is the most musical and most coherent of the group". The other exclaimed that "it's the least mechanical sounding, things seem to fit together". And so it was that the Cyrus won high praise from the panel; with other machines, sometimes opinions were divided, but with this they all agreed.

Bass was felt to be noticeably lighter – but tighter – than the Astin Trew's. One panelist said, "there's a lack of bass extension, but you can really hear what's going on". Another remarked that for the first time, "my legs were going up and down"! The Frank Sinatra track took on life and passion, "you could hear what was happening". Although not the warmest or most powerful low down, it was still one of the best.

Across the midband, the CD 8's talents really came out. Clearer, cleaner and with more midband detail, one panelist described it in terms of letting him hear the ambience across the Mary Black track better than any other machine. Another noted that "Sinatra really swung", and the trumpet "had a nice rasp", whereas it sounded quite sandpappy with several other machines.

Keith Moon's machine-gun drumming began to make sense all of a sudden on *Going Mobile* – "very enjoyable, I could listen to that all day", noted one panelist. Another

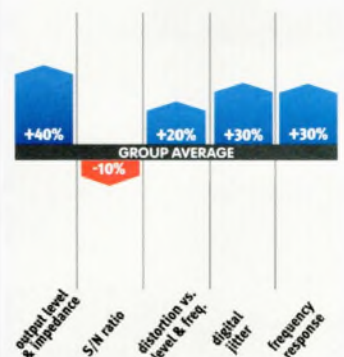
said that there was a superior sense of the progression of the song, with Mary Black's vocal phrasing shining through more than any other player. Treble was universally praised for its insight and "delicious creamy smoothness". This made for very good stereo imaging, and an overall sense of scale and perspective that seemed to snap everything into focus. The Cyrus pulled off the trick of never sounding bright, yet being atmospheric and open. Delicate and never harsh, it was "the most musical and most coherent CD player here".

ON TEST

Despite bearing technical comparison with the Cyrus CD8x from 2007, the CD 8 SE2 remains the very model of a modern CD player. Output is slightly higher than average at 2.2V but the source impedance is usefully low at 45ohm and the A-wtd S/N ratio as wide as practical for 16-bit CD at 107dB. Cyrus has also engineered the DAC and analogue output stage to avoid any increase in distortion at the highest levels – indeed it achieves a vanishingly low 0.0003-0.0008% across the entire audio band.

In tune with the older CD8x, this CD8SE also exhibits a 'kink' in ultrasonic noise output above 60kHz (possibly a function of upsampling and filtering) which notionally increases high frequency distortion at lower signal levels (up to 5% at 20kHz/-60dBfs, for example). Otherwise the player is very clean, the +0.1dB rise in treble inaudible, the 118psec of jitter as low as CD gets. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Animated and engaging sound; tonal refinement; excellent packaging and build

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Bass could have been stronger

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: It's hard to find a reason not to buy this if you're in the market for a mid-price machine...

FEATURES



OVERALL



THE Si 3 RANGE BEAUTY BORN OF PERFORMANCE



WWW.AUDIOVECTOR.COM

Audiovector speakers are available through a knowledgeable dealer network with superlative demonstration facilities:

Acoustica (Chester, Cheshire) 01244 344227

Analogue Seduction (Peterborough) 01733 350878

Audio Destination (Tiverton, Devon) 01884 243584

Audio Emotion (Banbeath, Fife) 01333 425999

PJ Hi-Fi (Guildford, Surrey) 01483 504801

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision (Holborn, London) 0207 8377540

Tavistock Audio (Tavistock, Devon) 01822 618940

Audiovector is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

henleydesigns.co.uk · 01235 511 166 · sales@henleydesigns.co.uk



Micromega CD-20 £1,222

Something of a quirky machine in looks and feel, but sonically this is a far more mainstream proposition...

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** France
TYPE: CD player
WEIGHT: 4.5kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 430x265x69mm
FEATURES:
- R-Core transformer
 - coaxial digital output
 - RCA phono outputs
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Micromega
TELEPHONE: 020 8971 3909
WEBSITE: micromega-hifi.com

Micromega's range of affordable audiophile hi-fi separates has been slowly winning friends for several years now, building a fine reputation for sound quality.

The CD-20 is rather quirky in its appearance and operation. The casework is lavishly finished metal and duly looks glamorous, but is actually rather resonant and insubstantial. The deep blue fluorescent display feels primitive, especially compared to the likes of the Yamaha, while the control buttons feel cheap. Ditto the disc tray which is noisy, while loading is slower than average, again compromising the overall feel.

Inside however, Micromega has obviously spent money; the Sony mech isn't special, but the R-Core power transformer for the digital section is pretty exotic for a player of this price; there's also a specially designed UI type for the analogue section. That's your lot, however; the rear panel is an exercise in studied minimalism, with just a single coaxial digital output as the only concession to luxury of any possible type. Not the Yamaha, then...

Sound quality

The panel agreed that the CD-20 was distinctly different to everything that had come before, offering some of the warmth of the Astin Trew with a

good deal of the insight and grip of the Cyrus, plus a bit of its own magic to boot...

If the Astin Trew was Barry White on a sofa and the Cyrus was The Smiths live in concert, then this was Sade in a wine bar! One panelist said "its tonal balance is almost perfect, but it's not as rhythmically cohesive" (as the Cyrus). Another said that in the bass, it was very similar (to the Cyrus) "but with more bass weight". The other thought it "slightly overblown or flabby in the bass", which just goes to show how preferences differ. Generally though, it was felt to be nicely warm and rounded down south.

Across the midband it was complemented for its fine detailing, but the plaudits didn't flow as strongly as with the Cyrus. "Essentially competent, but rather bland; tried to turn everything into background music, but not in an unpleasant way", said one panelist. Others were kinder; "there's nothing wrong here", one opined, referring to the smooth and sophisticated way it handled the Sinatra track, which frankly had grated via some other machines here. The Who excerpt caused one listener to comment that it had "a better sense of rhythm to all the other CD players here, except (the Cyrus)", no less.

The silky treble certainly helped it; sweet and seductive, it made for a



very moody, atmospheric rendition of the Mary Black track; imaging was spacious and hi hats sparkled in a way traditionally associated with pricier CD spinners. "Not mega punchy or engaging but super smooth with fine tone", one listener reported definitively.

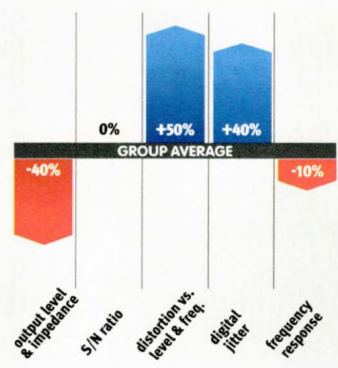
The overall effect was of a highly capable and enjoyable machine, but one that didn't excel in any particular way. No one disliked this one bit, and most felt it close to the top of the tree in terms of sonic performance, if not build.

ON TEST

Comparing our lab data with that on record for Micromega's other players suggests the CD-20 is closer in performance to the top CD-30 model than the entry-level CD-10. The 2.1V output is identical as is the 108dB A-wtd S/N ratio while jitter is at the limit of measurement with 16-bit audio at just 115psec. Distortion is very low at just 0.0003% through bass and midrange and barely increases at the highest frequencies – a rare feat for a digital player at any price.

The rejection of stopband images is an impressive 110dB while ultrasonic noise is very low indeed, reducing the strain on amplifier stages downstream. However, while the player's response is very flat to within -0.2dB/20kHz, the analogue stage's output impedance is a little higher than average at ~480ohm, which might make the CD-20 slightly more sensitive to your choice of interconnect cable and preamp. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Silky sound that charms and beguiles
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks ultimate grip and dynamics; unlively disc loading and control buttons
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Endearing machine with very fine sonics, but fussy to use and patchily built
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



K2 Series

by Roksan Audio

"In short, the K2 system delivers musical delicacy and drama in flawlessly balanced proportion... That it looks so polished and presentable is an added bonus."

- Hi-Fi Choice, January 2009



M2 Series

by Roksan Audio

"The Roksan has solid stereo imagery and helps the ear interpret delicate ambient information."

- Hi-Fi Choice, November 2010 (Integrated Amplifier and CD Player)



ROKSAN

Technology Driven by Emotions

The M2 Stereo Power Amplifier is available in most Roksan M2 Stockists now!

Roksan Audio is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

Web: www.henleydesigns.co.uk - Tel: 01235 511 166 - Email: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk



Onix SACD-15A £1,725

The name is a blast from a once-great past, but can the new Onix deliver like its antecedents used to?

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:**
China
- TYPE:**
CD player
- WEIGHT:**
7.8kg
- DIMENSIONS:**
(WxHxD)
430x376x96mm
- FEATURES:**
- twin R-core transformers
 - SACD capability
 - balanced XLR analogue outputs
 - RCA phono outputs
 - 2 speaker outputs
 - coaxial digital output
- DISTRIBUTOR:**
Onix Electronics
- TELEPHONE:**
01273 782984
- WEBSITE:**
onix-hifi.com

The name will ring a bell for any audiophile who lived through the nineteen eighties, but the company is a very different one now, using Chinese manufacture.

Described as a 'top of the line CD player', it sports steel casework allied to a gloss-black Perspex front panel. Inside there's SACD playback courtesy of a Sanyo mech, plus 'high quality components' and twin bespoke R-Core power transformers for the machine's digital and analogue sections respectively.

While the player feels fairly substantial, it's not particularly nice to use. First, the disc tray seems cheaper than you'd expect on a machine at this price. Second, the display is a dull hue of blue and thus hard to read, especially from a distance. Third, the 'gold' buttons feel cheap and fiddly. And fourth, disc access is too slow.

Admittedly it's an SACD mech, so we'll make allowances, but still the overall user experience is poor. At least the all aluminium remote is decent, and nicer than most here. Round the back, thumbs aloft for the balanced XLR outputs!

Sound quality

While opinions differed from person to person, it's fair to say that this was one of the less explicit-sounding machines; it wasn't terribly

upfront in its presentation, yet didn't beguile in the way of smoothies such as the Micromega.

Bass was unremarkable; the panelists found it hard to comment; it was just "there", and didn't excite in an animated way like the Cyrus, nor did it seduce like the Micromega. It was a little vague, perhaps, but nothing too unpleasant on the Mary Black and Who tracks. One listener called it "a bit rolled off", and that was about as much attention as the SACD-15a's low end garnered.

Moving to the midband, and panelists remarked on it being "a lot less dynamic than (the Cyrus)", "not particularly enjoyable, with veiled vocals" on the Mary Black track. Tom-toms were far more recessed than the Cyrus, for example, and there was little sense that the player was reaching deep into the music. A little opaque and diffuse in terms of inner detail, it made for a very workmanlike rendition of the Pointer Sisters – as for the joy and exuberance of the song, as the Irish would say, "there it was, gone"! One panelist, however, was generally more complementary than the others; "it didn't have the nasty digital harshness of some of the others here", he remarked.

Treble was described by one listener as "dull, recessed and compressed", and this held for the imaging across the midband, too;



"there was a lack of freedom, and the decay of notes was cut short", he said. Generally a little crude and coarse, even if it wasn't particularly bright, the contrast between this and the high-end sparkle of the Micromega and Cyrus was dramatic.

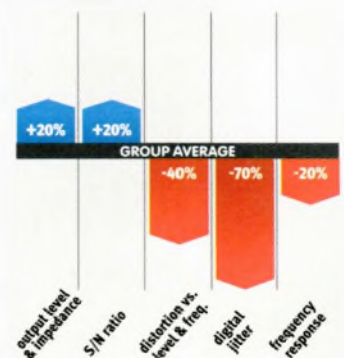
Overall then, the Onix got a mixed reception, one that hardly set the world alight. It generally elicited uncomplimentary remarks, even if it was obviously more to the taste of one of the panelists more than the others. Unless SACD functionality is paramount, this looks poor value.

ON TEST

Tested via its (phase inverting) balanced outputs, the Onix offers a high 4.25V output from a low 96ohm source impedance. An increase in high frequency noise dims the A-wtd S/N ratio very slightly, for although 109dB is excellent, the SACD-15A would otherwise have been capable of 114dB or so. In many respects, the adage 'what might have been' reflects the missed opportunity of the player as a whole, for even its SACD playback is downsampled to 88.2kHz LPCM, limiting its response to -14dB/40kHz.

Distortion is moderate by modern standards at 0.015%, differing between left and right channels by up to 10dB over the top 20dB or so of dynamic range. But it's the surprising levels of digital jitter that ultimately defines the sound of this player – substantial at 4.740psec via CD and distinctly below average at 11.300psec via SACD. The best players offer figures 1000x lower than this. **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★☆
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★
- FEATURES**
★★★★★
- LIKE:** SACD playback, balanced outputs
- DISLIKE:** Lacklustre sonics, fiddly to use, slow disc access
- WESAY:** Disappointing result from a once-great cult nineteen eighties name; overpriced and underachieving

OVERALL



ANTHONY GALLO
ACOUSTICS

ARCAM

ATLAS Cables

audiolab

AUDIOVECTOR

Barristaudio

B&W

Beostereo

CHORD

CHORD
Electronics Limited

CFZK

CRESTRON

CYRUS

DALI

DENON

epos

exposure

GENELEC

Goldring

GRADO

IMAGE

Isotek

JVC

Kohlescap

KEF

kudos

LINN

Lumagen

marantz

MICHELL ENGINEERING

MISSION

MUSICAL FIDELITY

NAD

naim

neat

ONKYO

Panasonic

PMC

ProAc

Project

Q

QUAD

REGA

ROTEL

SOUND

spendor

Trichores Research

Velodyne

Wilson benesch



Visit our dedicated demonstration rooms at:
3 Bridge Street
Guildford
Surrey
GU1 4RY

Opening Hours:
9am-6pm Mon to Sat (later by appointment)

Tel:
01483 504801 or 01483 304756

Email:
info@pjhi-fi.co.uk

Web:
www.pjhi-fi.co.uk

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ The only real hi-fi shop in Guildford



Shanling CD-T1000SE £1,695

Now a veteran campaigner, it remains an impressively versatile package – but can it still compete sonically?

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** China
- TYPE:** CD player
- WBGHT:** 10kg
- DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 430x290x65mm
- FEATURES:**
 - switchable tube output stage
 - 24-bit/192kHz upsampling
 - 6.3mm headphone socket & tube stage
 - coaxial digital output
 - RCA phono outputs
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Real Hi-Fi
- TELEPHONE:** 01257 473175
- WEBSITE:** shanling.com

An evolution of the popular CD-T100, this machine sports a choice of direct and tube output stages, offering two slightly different sonic flavours. It's also possible to 'roll' the valves, substituting the stock triodes for more expensive types, making this an unusually tweakable design as CD spinners go! For the purposes of this review, however, we stayed stock.

Its top-loading Philips mechanism has a flip up lid, and is a lovely way to play CDs – far nicer than the wobbly plastic disc trays seen on the Astin Trew, Micromega and Onix. Track access is swift, and the machine is both well built and very slickly finished, although that brushed aluminium casework is slightly more resonant than I'd have liked. Inside, high-quality components are said to be fitted.

Round the back, there's the aforementioned choice of outputs, plus a coaxial digital out; on the right is the main power switch and a 6.3mm headphone socket. The remote is a classy aluminium affair, with a button to switch on its 192kHz upsampling facility.

Sound quality

Bass was solid, proving stronger in terms of size and scale than several of the other machines here, although it elicited no special comments from

any of the panelists. It was simply workmanlike and got on with the job in a rather methodical way; this held via both the tube and the direct outputs, although in later listening the tube outputs were preferred.

Midband was praised for being "more neutral than the (Astin Trew), but still a bit light and thin, and ultimately less nice to listen to". This said, on specifics such as stereo image localisation, Mary Black's vocals came over well, the player throwing a good bit of detail at the listener. Indeed, in this respect it ranked better than most, with superior focus and a more animated bottom end than the Yamaha, for example. It was also said to "breathe better" than the Astin Trew, and was liked for its expansive left-to-right stereo soundstage, too.

Tonally, the Shanling was judged to be "a bit fierce, even in the lower treble" by one listener. Another concurred, saying that the trumpet on the Frank Sinatra track sounded more like "a child's plastic kazoo" than a real brass instrument. So in the review system at least, the CD-T1000se didn't come over as a smoothie in the style of the Micromega, even with the tube output stage and upsampling selected. All agreed on its explicit tonality, but different people set different store by it – the other listener interjected that, "for all its

faults, it is still more enjoyable than many other machines here".

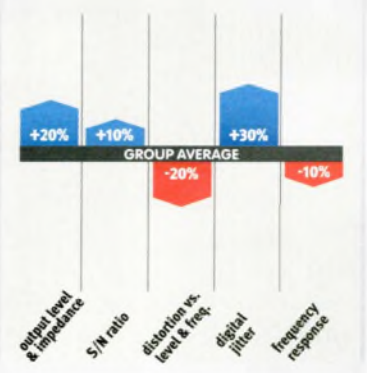
Overall then, the Shanling proved a charismatic performer, perhaps a little more system-dependent than some others. If your hi-fi is over-smooth, then the spry, crisp and dry sound will provide some much needed relief. Musically engaging and never sedentary, it's hard not to like, providing you can match it to your system. Factor in distinctive styling, fine build and a strong feature count and this ageing machine still has plenty going for it.

ON TEST

Tested with the 24-bit/192kHz upsampler engaged, Shanling's player offers a broadly similar performance through 'direct' and 'tube' outputs apart from the top 10dB of its dynamic range where distortion, through the pairs of 6N3 triodes, increases from 0.0004% to 0.2%. At lower (~30dBfs) levels, distortion normalises at 0.004% via direct and 0.006% via the tube outputs. Direct A/B comparisons may be skewed by the different 2.2V and 1.94V output levels, however, just as the A-wtd S/N ratios are 109dB and 104dB, respectively.

Importantly, jitter remains impressively low at ~120psec through both outputs (as it should bearing in mind they share the same digital stages) just as the frequency response is unchanged, both having a late filter cut of ~0.2dB/20kHz. Even the output impedance(s) are matched at ~100ohm. Tube outs are often higher, so kudos to Shanling's consistency! **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Ni-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Peppy, lively sound; super styling; fine build; versatility
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Not as sumptuous as we'd have hoped; resonant case
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** An interesting and charismatic machine, best for those with smooth systems
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



OPPO®



oppo

1 000108

BDP-93EU

oppo

1 000108

BDP-95EU



BDP-95EU

"...OPPO should be congratulated for a remarkable achievement."



BDP-95EU

"...BDP-95EU can be considered reference grade kit."



BDP-93EU

"...one of the best universal players we've seen."



BDP-93EU

"OPPO are to be congratulated for raising the bar yet again."



BDP-95EU

"...you will love the OPPO BDP-95EU. Recommended!"

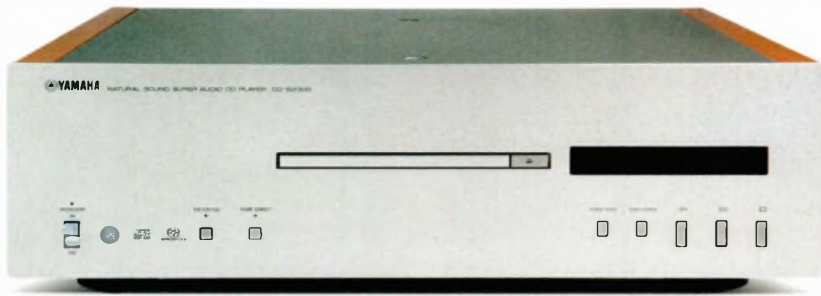


BDP-93EU

"The OPPO BDP-93EU becomes the Blu-ray 3D reference standard."

For movie enthusiasts, audiophiles and those who take their entertainment very seriously.

www.oppo-bluray.co.uk



Yamaha CD-S2000 £1,200

Superlative styling, battleship build and SACD playback make a strong showroom statement; what's not to like?

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:** Japan/China
- TYPE:** CD player
- WEIGHT:** 15kg
- DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD) 435x138x418mm
- FEATURES:**
 - SACD playback
 - Pure Direct mode
 - balanced XLR analogue outputs
 - RCA phono outputs
 - optical and coaxial digital outputs
- DISTRIBUTOR:** Yamaha UK
- TELEPHONE:** 0844 811 1116
- WEBSITE:** uk.yamaha.com

Want to know what Yamaha's hi-fi separates looked like circa 1978? Ermn, look at this and you'll find out! That the CD-S2000 is retro-styled is undeniable, but it's been done very tastefully, with high build quality to back it up.

Indeed, whilst the feel of this machine doesn't quite match that of top notch Japanese build products, it's far closer than any of the other machines here. The alloy disc loading tray is an object lesson in how *not* to ruin the CD ownership experience, being beautifully slick; it's another world compared to the likes of the Onix.

The machine is a combination of a tasteful brushed aluminium fascia, a steel chassis and *faux* wood side-cheeks. Inside, isolated power transformers supply the analogue and digital sections. Circuitry is laid out symmetrically and is a fully balanced design. Round the back, there's a choice of balanced XLR and single-ended RCA phono outputs, plus optical and coaxial digital outs. Everything is done with the attention to detail for which the Japanese are famous; there are no rough edges.

Sound quality

The Yamaha sounds almost as it looks – big, bright and well finished. This made it universally liked, although no one loved it.

Bass was big and powerful; one panelist described it as “humped up”, another called it “bloated, and lacking control”, the other describing it as “flabby” on the Mary Black track. The general sense was that while it conveyed an initially pleasing weight, it was a little disconnected from the rest of the frequency range – it certainly lacked the Cyrus' and the Micromega's ability to give a fluidly musical bassline. One listener said there was almost a lower midband “suckout” just above that upper bass bump.

While the big bass conveyed a sense of authority, the midband was generally agreed to be a tad bland, anaemic even. One listener said the Pointer Sisters guitar lacked “sheen”, another that their vocals were smeared. The other pointed out that they weren't terribly well separated. Mary Black wasn't expressive, with one panelist saying the Yamaha “gave a bit of a one-note midband”, finding it hard to follow the tune in her singing.

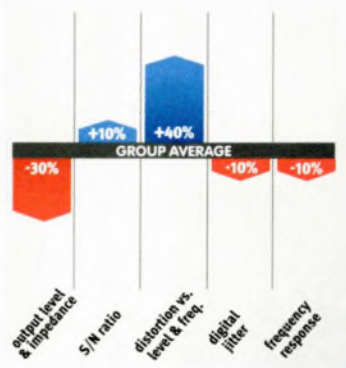
Yet the Yam wasn't bad in absolute terms; the player served up a decent amount of detail, had a reasonably expansive stereo image and never sounded coarse. It's just that it failed to ‘tune in’ to the music and let it soar; “it had a number of good elements to it,” one listener commented, “it's just it didn't really involve you”.

ON TEST

Unusually, both Yamaha's single-ended and balanced outputs deliver a standard 2V output but the overall A-wtd S/N ratio remains very wide at 109dB. Distortion is very low at -0.0006% through bass and midrange at maximum output (0.0004% with SACD), increasing to just 0.0012% at 20kHz. The ultrasonic noise inherent with the SACD format yields a higher 0.065% at 20kHz, but this is *noise* not harmonic distortion. Both CD and SACD responses peak slightly at +0.1dB/20kHz, leaving SACD to extend to +0.2dB/30kHz before rolling away to -2.1dB/50kHz and -26dB/100kHz. Unlike the Onix player, Yamaha does not downsample its SACD.

Jitter is sufficiently low at ~285psec but the spectrum itself is 'untidy', a carpet of granulation noise or 'grass' just poking its head above the more typical white noise of its analogue output stage. This said, low-level resolution is good with errors of just ±0.5dB at -120dB (SACD). **PM**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★☆ **LIKE:** Big sound, fulsome bass; gorgeous looks, build, SACD playback
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks musical cohesion; too big!
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** So near, yet so far; a brilliant package that somehow fails to connect emotionally in terms of its sound
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL



MUSICAL FIDELITY

M1 CLiC Universal Music Controller

iPod digital. USB memory stick. 3 digital inputs. 3 analog inputs.
Advanced internet radio. Streaming. Ethernet. Wireless. Fixed and variable outputs.



Blind-listening verdicts

David Price puts the this month's group testing into context. How do the contenders fare in the great scheme of things?

Unlike some group tests, where panelists are in complete agreement about everything to the point of monotony, this event didn't produce complete consensus. Everyone agreed on their favourite machine, and which players were generally good and which weren't – but the exact rankings of the lower three differed. This reflected the individual tastes of the listeners; while they agreed about what they heard, their interpretation was different.

Overall though, the Onix SACD-15A was the least favoured. It wasn't offensive sounding, just nondescript; not the sort of machine that would inspire you to embark on a marathon

listening session, it proved signally unable to connect you to the beauty of your music. Factor in so-so build and snail-like disc access times and it didn't do well.

The Yamaha was the quintessential middle ranking machine, one that people tended to quite like, but have no strong preference for. It did lots of things fairly well, but didn't shine sonically. In all other respects though it was a revelation – many will buy it just for that superlative build, styling and feature count.

The Shanling and Astin Trew came next; one was a little too explicit and bracing to the panel's ears, and the other the reverse. Yet both were felt to

be appealing machines with real strengths. They're the sort of devices you buy knowing full well *why* you're buying them; to pep up a system or smooth it out. In this context they're very able, and indeed have already won many friends.

Ah, the Micromega! What's not to like? Well, a lot actually. A cheap plasticky disc tray, fiddly buttons and a general sense that this is operationally a long way from a slick Japanese machine like the Yamaha. But it's sonically capable, with a wonderfully charming and seductive sound that we couldn't fail to enjoy. It's got real across the board ability, something that's hard to ignore...



If the panelists expressed one single strong preference, it was for the Cyrus CD 8 SE 2. As soon as it started playing, feet began to tap, smiles appeared on faces and there was a palpable sense of relief in the room. Rhythmic like no others here, yet sophisticated, too, it was a brilliant showing from one of the cheapest machines in the group. Now that's what we call music!

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Make/model	 Astin Trew AT3500+	 Cyrus CD8SE2	 Micromega CD-20	 Onix Electronics SACD15A	 Shanling CD-T1000SE	 Yamaha CD-S2000
Price	£1,495	£1,200	£1,222	£1,725	£1,695	£1,200
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★☆☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Conclusion	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★☆☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
Key features	Big, warm, fulsome sounding machine that's just great for taming bright systems	Musically captivating, yet highly sophisticated, too. This was the standout winner of the group	Smooth, relaxed, beguiling sounding machine with a charm of its very own	Dull and uninspiring sonically, and little fun to use, the panel didn't find this very convincing	A light, bright, spry sound with plenty of pep, this player will appeal to many listeners	Wonderful build and styling, but sadly the meandering sound couldn't keep up
Digital output elec/opt	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Balanced outputs	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Switchable upsampling	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Tube-buffered output	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Remote	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

TRY WITH THESE

AMPLIFIER:
Roksan Caspian M2 **£1,649**

If you're in the market for a seriously smooth and sweet sounding integrated, this is the one. Sonically it's superb, with a wonderfully musical feel and oodles of detail, too. And being a fairly powerful solid-stater it will easily drive most modern loudspeakers.



AMPLIFIER:
Unison Research Simply Italy **£1,500**

Those craving the magic of valves will love this affordable mid-price tube integrated, although you'll have to partner it to sensitive speakers. This done, it will sing with most of the CD players here, even fairly light and bright designs such as the Shanling; the Onix may sound dull.



AMPLIFIER:
Arcam FMJ-A38 **£1,595**

If it's a big, powerful do-it-all integrated you want then this is a great choice. Not the most romantic performer, it's nevertheless open and smooth, and will be a great partner to the warmer sounding CD players here; the Astin Trew, Cyrus and Micromega. And with power to spare it can drive pretty much any modern speaker.



Subscribe

today and **SAVE** up to 25%

**+ Receive
FREE
Gel Pads &
Spike shoes**

**GIFT
WORTH
£30**



**Hurry!
offer ends
26th April
2012**

ISOLATION GEL PADS

Designed to adhere to speaker stand top-plates, these are made from high performance polyurethane elastomer which, as well as being non-slip and non-scratch, gives excellent sound and vibration resistance. Available in black or clear.

SPIKE SHOES

Designed to protect your floor, and to give an extra layer of isolation, Atacama's Spike Shoes are available in standard black or metallic silver, and come supplied as a pack of four.

Subscribe to the Hi-Fi Choice Complete Package and receive:

- + 13 printed issues delivered to your door
- + FREE Gel Pads & Spike Shoes
- + FREE access to the Digital Issue & Online Archive
- + FREE iPad, iPhone and Android access
- + PLUS save up to 25% off the shop price!

FREE
iPad, iPhone
& Android
access



A Digital-Only Package is also available at www.hifichoice.co.uk/subscribe

01604 251 044 quote ref. DS86
www.hifichoice.co.uk/subscribe

Alternatively, you can complete the form below and return, with payment, to the address provided

Please tick choice of colours: Spike shoes: Black Clear - Gel Pads: Black Metallic Silver

CODE DS86

YOUR DETAILS:
Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms.....Initial.....Surname.....
Address
.....
Postcode.....Country.....
Tel.....Mobile.....
Email.....D.O.B.....

DIRECT DEBIT SUBSCRIPTIONS (UK ONLY):
 I would like to subscribe to The *Hi-Fi Choice* Complete Package, paying £9.79 every 3 months by Direct Debit. **SAVE 25%** **BEST OFFER**

Instructions to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit.
Originator's reference 422562

Name of bank.....
Address of bank.....
.....
Postcode.....
Account holder.....
Signature.....Date.....



THE COMPLETE PACKAGE - UK ONLY: **SAVE 20%**
 I would like to subscribe to The *Hi-Fi Choice* Complete Package, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment of £41.49

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE - OVERSEAS:
I would like to subscribe to *Hi-Fi Choice* Complete Package, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment: Europe (inc Eire) £61.26 ROW Airmail £65.00
For all Canadian, North and South American subscriptions please call 001 877 363 1310 or go to www.expressmag.com

DIGITAL ONLY PACKAGE (UK AND OVERSEAS):
 I would like to subscribe to The *Hi-Fi Choice*, Digital-Only Package, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment of £19.99

Sort code.....Account number.....

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay MyHobbyStore Ltd. Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with MyHobbyStore Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Reference Number (Official use only)
Please note that banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.
TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 26th April 2012. Subscriptions will begin with the first available issue. Please continue to buy your magazine until you receive your acknowledgement letter. Refund requests must be in writing to the Publisher and will not be given on accounts with less than £20 credit. A £5 admin charge will apply and will be deducted from any refund. Refunds will only be given at the Publisher's sole discretion. *UK offer only. We will use the contact details supplied to communicate with you regarding your Hi-Fi Choice subscription. Your details will be processed by MyHobbyStore Ltd & Hi-Fi Choice in full accordance with all relevant UK and EU data protection legislation. MyHobbyStore Ltd & Hi-Fi Choice may contact you with information about our other products and services. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by MyHobbyStore Ltd & Hi-Fi Choice please tick here: Email Post Phone If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: Email Post Phone


PAYMENT DETAILS:
 Postal Order/Cheque Visa/Mastercard
Please make cheques payable to MyHobbyStore Ltd and write code DS86 on the back
Cardholder's name.....
Card no:.....
Valid from.....Expiry date.....
Signature.....Date.....

**SEND TO: HI-FI CHOICE SUBSCRIPTIONS,
MCGOWAN HOUSE 10 WATERSIDE WAY, NORTHAMPTON. NN4 7XD.**

Living numbers



Hi res computer audio – a sound salvation or just another busted hi-fi flush?
We set out to canvass your opinion at last month's Bristol
Sound and Vision hi-fi show, as **David Price** explains...

 ver the past year or two, I've noticed ever more audiophiles are 'thinking the unthinkable' and contemplating the idea of a computer-based audio system.

There are several reasons for this. First is that CD player sales are falling, and disc sales have dropped over twenty percent year on year. Downloads are the way we'll surely be buying most music soon, and so we'll require a computer (of sorts) to play them back. Second, DVD-Audio and SACD are never going to liberate us from the tyranny of poor CD sound. While most would agree they're fine sounding, they're niche formats at best. DVD-A has long since gone the way of the dodo, while SACD sails on quietly, making the smallest of ripples on the software sales sea. If you want hi res digital, then it's downloads – like it or not. Third, computer audio can be wonderfully convenient, providing it's done right...

Computer audio seems to be at the stage now where CD was circa 1985. Everyone's heard of it, fewer have heard it, few have actually it – but many are finally paying attention.

This gave me an idea – to do a computer audio demonstration at a forthcoming hi-fi show, and canvas people's thoughts on the subject. The Bristol *Sound and Vision* Show beckoned, so *Hi-Fi Choice* took the plunge and got a room. I then fleshed out the detail – I'd put together a good hi-fi system using a computer as a source, and play music to people in a range of music file formats, to workshop the concept. We'd have regular hourly demos, limited to fifteen people, and I'd get people's opinions. Call it a dem, a focus group or what you will – it would be a great chance to share our experiences on hi-fi's hottest topic.

The system

Any demonstration equipment I used would *have* to be sensibly priced – telephone number price tags need not apply. While I could have made a phone call to any number of high-end manufacturers and negotiated the loan of a lottery winner's system, it would be missing the point. So instead I settled on around £2,000 per component, plus a decent range of ancillaries, cables and power leads.

There was no shortage of contenders, but I settled on Marantz for the following reason. First, the company does a very good affordable network music player/DAC for around £500. The NA7004 has a range of digital inputs, including USB, Ethernet and coaxial electrical, and is stable as they come. The company also does matching separates which I've heard sounding very impressive in previous shows, such as the PM-15S2 amplifier and matching SA-15S2 CD player (something that also, coincidentally plays SACD).

So, the SA-15S2 CD player would be routed into the NA7004 via its coaxial digital input; effectively we'd only be listening to the SA-15's CD transport; otherwise we'd be using the USB input which would be fed by an Apple MacBook Pro notebook computer. I elected to use Audirvana Plus software instead of Apple iTunes as my means of playing the computer music files; this gives audibly better results, not least because it reads all the music into RAM first, so doesn't need to keep polling the hard drive. It also shuts down a number of sub-systems, to reduce the load on the CPU and

power supply. Finally, I'd run the little Mac off batteries for the duration of the dems; no nasty noisy switched mode power supply would get near my precious ones and noughts!

While the tricked up MacBook Pro would supply the hi res datastream, serving up top quality 24-bit/96kHz PCM in WAV file form, I also wanted to demonstrate AAC. Why so? Well anyone who's bought anything on the iTunes Music Store will likely have been sent their music in highly compressed 128kbps AAC format. Frankly I didn't think I could cope listening to this all day, so instead opted to demonstrate Apple's 'audiophile' option, iTunes Plus with its 256kbps resolution. If you subscribe to iTunes Match, 256kbps AAC is what your music will appear as on the cloud.

To demonstrate this, I used precisely what most iTunes users would be playing this sort of music file with – an Apple iPod. In this case it was a touch, streaming to a local network that was feeding the Marantz NA7004 via Airplay (which itself is able to stream at up to 16-bit/44.1kHz Apple Lossless resolution).

I found myself being mesmerised by the 24/96 version, whereas the CD simply hadn't quite done it for me, good as it was...

What loudspeaker to use? Well, I didn't have to scratch my head too long before the idea of the Monitor Audio GX200 floorstander came to me. The successor to GS and GR series which I'd loved, these boasted lithe, fast metal-coned drive units and a delicate ribbon tweeter for £2,300 – just the job for throwing light on the murky world of digital downloads! The sound is extremely open and transparent at the price, and the speaker is compact enough to make a nice noise in the confines of a hotel room.

As any good audiophile knows, just assembling a decent system isn't enough, as the mains power supply and room acoustics are your worst enemy. So the system was placed on an Audiophile Furniture Base isolation system, with additional SP-01 subtable on the bottom level for the amplifier. This is an excellent vibration isolation system, and can work wonders for sound. The mains was filtered by an IsoTek Aquarius and matching mains cables, while the analogue interconnects were courtesy of Missing Link; very smooth yet open sounding designs which matched the bright, spry Monitor Audio speakers perfectly.

The hotel room itself was a shocker, with very poor acoustics. So yours truly plundered the cupboard and ended up lining three corners of the room with fat, plump pillows covered by towels! Additional towels covered the shiny glass surface of the bedside table and the glass in the picture frame, while a big poster stopped the mirror bouncing errant soundwaves all around. Cables were carefully dressed, and Kontak cleaning solution was applied to all electrical connectors. After several hours of tweaking, we'd gone from abysmal sounding

to something I could just about live with. Just as well really, as I'd have to do precisely that for the next three days...

The music

So, what tunes to play? Given that I was going to be doing the dem in a limited time, I couldn't get too diverse or eclectic. So my first track of choice was Wings' *Band on the Run*. Recently remastered on CD, a 24/96 hi res WAV download recently appeared too, so we could compare both. We also ripped 256kbps and Apple Lossless versions. Frankly, *BOTR* isn't the world's most illustrious recording; recorded in 1973 in Lagos, Nigeria, the story goes that half of Wings had just quit, and when the other half got to this exotic location, they were reputedly robbed at knife-point. Later, McCartney discovered the studio to be not much more than an old shed with an 8-track Studer tape deck inside. All this was a far cry from EMI's Abbey Road studio in London that McCartney had been used to working in. Needless to say that – while the music may be seminal – the recording isn't...

What better contrast then, than Steely Dan's *Gaucho*? Whereas Paul McCartney had played most of the instruments on *Band on the Run* himself, Steely Dan hired over forty of the world's greatest session musicians, including Mark Knopfler, and spent over a year in various top New York studios. The attention to detail on this album was obsessive to the point of silliness; legend has it that the fade out on *Babylon Sisters* was done fifty five times before they were happy with it. The album went massively over budget, and reflecting this reputedly ended up costing a dollar more than standard new release albums per copy! It's a sonic triumph; whereas the Wings album was rough and ready, the Steely Dan album is smooth and slick. This, I thought, would be great to showcase the joys of SACD, a potent contrast to hi res via computer.

Finally, if *Gaucho* was state-of-the-art, from the high watermark of nineteen seventies analogue, then we needed something superb sounding yet bang-up-to-date. So I elected to use Kate Bush's *50 Words for Snow* album from 2011. This album is almost unique in being a modern analogue recording, done on to 1/2 inch tape at 30 inches per second. Then it was digitally mastered in 24/96 resolution; as Kate's website 'Fish People' bravely admits, the CD was then downsampled and compressed.

However, those unwilling to submit themselves to such hi-fi heresy now have the option of buying the full 24/96 PCM master in WAV file format (not compacted FLAC) for just £15, a mere £3 premium over the Compact Disc! So I duly elected to dem the difference between CD-quality and 24/96, this time both via the computer, to see if people could spot the difference.

Going live

The dem kicked off with the 256kbps version of *Band on the Run*, after which I stopped and asked people for their comments. "Bright" was a recurring theme, "hard" another. People didn't think it *too* bad, but there was little enthusiasm. Some said it wasn't as horrible as they'd expected, but generally the Apple iTunes-quality file brought no joy. Next, we had a short burst of the Apple Lossless (ALAC) version, and things seemed to get better.

This file format, lest we forget, was described by Apple as being 'CD-quality' at the time of its introduction some years back. It's essentially a compacted version of the full music file; unlike AAC no music data is 'thrown away', instead the pointers on the file are rearranged so it takes about one third less space (as opposed to around five times less via 256kbps AAC).

Certainly listeners found this a sizeable improvement; I could see smiles returning to faces. One listener opined that it was "Cadbury's Dairy Milk chocolate" to the "Hershey Bar" of the AAC. Another said it was



The dem system set-up at the Bristol Marriott hotel; after a bit of fettling it made quite a nice noise!

"like hearing the track for the first time". We all agreed that, while we thought AAC poor, we could now hear what it was doing wrong, whereas before it was just a vague sense of disappointment. One listener said that with the iTunes-quality file, the music had "fallen off a cliff", another that it was a "plastic photocopy of the real thing". Apple Lossless began to sound good, or so we thought...

Next up was ye olde Compact Disc. Given that we were still using the NA7004, we hadn't changed DACs, just the way of getting the ones and noughts. Before hitting the 'play' button, few people expected much of a difference; in some groups I got a sense of restlessness, as if to say "why is he bothering with this?"

The boredom was soon dispelled; the CD version of *Band on the Run* had a number of listeners, previously beginning to slump in their seats, sit bolt upright. The consensus was of a vast difference; the music had more power, poise and precision; a capacious soundstage, a lower noise floor, a more organic feel. One listener said how she'd grown up hearing Paul McCartney's voice all the time, but only really recognised it then via CD; the ALAC sounded

FEATURE DIGITAL AUDIO

THE DEM SYSTEM

Apple MacBook Pro 13 computer £999
Laptop running Audirvana Plus software; battery operation; USB hub configured for best sound



Apple iPod touch portable £169
iPod streaming wirelessly via AirPlay at (up to) Apple Lossless quality



Marantz NA7004 streamer £500
Excellent 'do-it-all' digital hub, using coaxial and USB sources, plus AirPlay via Ethernet-attached router



Niveo Professional NWAR33P router
High-quality, robustly designed unit, giving ad-hoc network for AirPlay



Marantz SA-15S2 LTD SACD player £2,000
Premium quality two-channel SACD player that also plays CD. Used primarily as a CD transport for this dem



Missing Link Silver Link Cryo interconnects; 1.25m terminated with copper Eichmann Bullet plugs



Marantz PM-15S2 LTD amplifier £2,000
High-quality mid-price integrated amplifier giving 90W per channel with a range of inputs

Missing Link Silver Link Cryo Reference speaker cables; 4m terminated 2-2 with silver-plated copper spades



AC mains

IsoTek EVO 3 Aquarius power conditioner £1,200
Mid-priced, six-way mains conditioning component, offering filtered and isolated mains outputs



Monitor Audio GX200 loudspeakers £2,300
Super compact floorstanders with metal-coned mid/bass units and ribbon tweeters, giving very clean and open sound

opaque and mechanical, the AAC just plain fake and farcical. A number of listeners couldn't believe that I hadn't switched DACs, suspecting I was now using that DAC of the (£2,000) SA-15S2 rather than the (£500) NA7004.

"Yeah, that's a big difference, I didn't expect that", said one gentlemen who'd only five

minutes earlier said rather cynically, "bits are bits". Meanwhile, the chocolate man described CD as "the finest Belgian"...

And so to hi res. The USB input was switched in, the computer woken up and the 24/96 file played. Even the opening bars of the song induced some curious facial expressions,

which ranged from surprise to bewilderment. The relatively poor recording that was (is) *Band on the Run* seemed to assume air and space, poise and grace; there was warmth, depth and articulation to the bass, sweetness (of a kind) to the treble. The midband was wider and deeper and more detailed. Fascinatingly, one

listener hit the nail on the head; "it's as if the music's slowed down", he said. I agreed; there were bigger spaces between the notes, you felt like you could almost walk into the song. It was so much easier to listen to than the AAC or ALAC, and also a good bit smoother and more open than CD, too. Suddenly a recording that had seemed dire via AAC had become smoother and more natural. Almost everyone commented that there was a difference, one listener simply saying, "I couldn't live with any of the others, but I could with that", then going on to announce he listened to vinyl exclusively at home. The chocolate man was lost for words; another wag interjected with "cocaine"...

The Steely Dan dem was no less dramatic. Kicking off with the 256kbps version of *Babylon Sisters*, and many listeners were initially amazed. "Wow, that's good", some said. Others noted how they could now see the importance of the recording studio and mastering. Another opined that this new AAC track sounded better than Wings at 24/96. I thought that a tad over the top, but it was certainly an 'impressive' sound – all bangs and crashes, and surprisingly rhythmic too.

As the ascent of digital downloads continues, here's hoping that life will get easier for those of us wanting to buy hi res...

Moving this time to uncompressed CD though, and we had people saying "I take it all back; AAC was rubbish, this is amazing". Another guy said it was the best sound he'd heard at the show. A little optimistic, perhaps, but certainly *Babylon Sisters* via uncompressed 16/44.1 was a big, warm, powerful and captivating experience; you could really begin to discern that distinctive half-time shuffle beat of drummer Bernard Purdie, whereas the AAC just glossed over it. The CD was wide, deep and sweet; even from my sideways listening position I was luxuriating in the electric piano swelling behind the drums, while Donald Fagen's plaintive vocals really began to set the mood in the way AAC singularly failed to do.

An excellent recording, I found *Babylon Sisters* really worked on CD in a way that yours truly – a dyed-in-the-grain LP listener – frankly hadn't expected. Some members of the audience even began to say, "what's the model number of that Marantz CD player, again?", as they pulled out pens and pieces of paper.

What then of hi res? Well this time it was 2001-style – some eleven years ago this format appeared, to generally very high critical acclaim. It's fair to say that playing the SACD layer of *Gaucho* showed that Super Audio Compact Disc still did the job. While most people admitted that the difference wasn't anywhere near as great as moving from AAC to CD, almost everyone said SACD sounded "lovely", or words to that effect. "Organic" keep popping up often, or "like vinyl", or "like the mastertape". SACD had a rhythmic fluidity

that was beguiling, along with a sweeter and smoother midband and treble than we'd heard from CD, plus a more tuneful bass. It seemed to work in a way that even the 24/96 hi res Wings tracked struggled to do, giving a sense of calm and confidence to the proceedings, along with that lovely "walk around soundstage". At this point, almost every group from the Friday to the Sunday then embarked on a discussion about how sad it was that SACD had died. But one listener, who confessed to having just bought a £9,000 Esoteric SACD player new, pointed out that there were large amounts of new releases coming from Japan (SHM SACDs, costing nearly £40 apiece and without a CD layer). Linn, too, are to be congratulated for continuing to support the format.

If *Gaucho* was a seventies audiophile album on a noughties audiophile format, it was time to get back to the present with a brand new recording in an easily playable hi res format. *Snowflake* from Kate Bush was first played on the Mac (at CD resolution), and elicited some extremely positive comments. "That to me is another step-change", said one listener, saying that it was again a big leap up from the already excellent *Gaucho* in recording quality. "I'm amazed at how good that is", said another. Whereas *Band on the Run* sounded thin and steely, *Snowflake* was breathtakingly large in scale and fulsome tonally. A number of participants admitted to being "not a Kate Bush fan" but added that it sounded superb. Several people asked for the name of the artist and/or the album at this point too. *Snowflake* is a beautiful song, and was superbly rendered, even at 16/44.1 via a MacBook. Several people remarked that they just didn't see how 24/96 could improve on it.

And so to business. I hit the play button on Audirvana and it took a couple of the opening piano notes to see smiles appearing on listeners' faces. When the track finished, most listeners were nodding their heads uttering words such as "gorgeous" or "fabulous". The song isn't complex; just a spoken voice, piano and some subtle synthesiser noodling at the back of the mix, but most agreed it appeared profoundly different to the already excellent CD version. Some listeners commented that they now realised that CD was "lopping" the harmonics off the top of the piano, almost as if someone had turned down the top band of a graphic equaliser to zero, cutting out all the air from the recording. Others said that the voice was so much more natural, and that they could hear right into the heart of the song. Others pointed out that they could hear the synth work behind the piano far easier now. Even from my poor side-on listening position, I found myself being mesmerised by the 24/96 rendition, whereas the CD simply hadn't quite done it for me, good though it was.

Before this last dem, a number of listeners had told me they'd *never* bother using a computer to play their music, especially having heard CD sound so good in our room. But now some of them were not so sure. Several folk who'd previously shown no interest in the computer set-up at all, asked me to spell out the name of the computer software player,

others about what type of USB cable I was using. "Would you now assemble a computer-based music system, to get that sort of sound?", I asked each group. The answer was generally a resounding "yes".

And in the end...

We tried a range of very different recordings, and in each instance the 256kbps iTunes Plus-quality files were universally disliked. The Wings one was painful, whereas the Steely Dan was superficially impressive, but ultimately musically uninvolved. Each time we moved up a quality level, it was quite obvious. Most listeners reported the step from AAC to CD as the largest single upgrade, and most listeners seemed to be surprised about how good CD could sound, despite most of them actually owning and using CD players already!

Moving to hi res was almost universally thought to be a good thing; be it SACD or PCM, virtually everyone (except a more senior gentleman with a Bristolian accent, who declared that his son was spending too much on hi-fi!) thought hi res of either flavour was a substantial upgrade. There was no attempt to declare which of the two was better, although almost everyone admitted to being "charmed" by SACD, whereas this was less in evidence with 24/96 PCM. But still, while PCM may have seemed a little more 'matter of fact', everyone warmed to what it did to both the Wings and Kate Bush tracks, particularly the latter which some felt almost revelatory.

While there was strong support for hi res in principle, each group always ended up lamenting the lack of it in practice. There is still relatively little of the sort you're able to download from the Kate Bush website, for example. One or two important artists are paying it lip service, but as a music carrier it's still pretty much as hard to find as SACD.

Paradoxically, many of us concluded that the only easily accessible hi res music source around right now is vinyl, a format many of us know and love. As the ascent of digital downloads continues, here's hoping that life will get easier for those wanting to buy hi res music. For an increasing number of interested audiophiles, it's becoming a true vocation. ●

THANKS TO:

I'd like to thank everyone who was involved in *Hi-Fi Choice's* digital audio odyssey; from those who patiently queued outside the room every hour as we (inevitably) over-ran each session, to the equipment manufacturers who lent not just the kit itself but moral and logistical support. And of course an extra special shout to Roger Bachelor of D&M!







Big sound authority

Not for everyone perhaps, but JBL's new Studio 530 standmount loudspeaker is certainly a commanding listen, thinks *Jason Kennedy...*

Warp back forty years and there was a diverse range of loudspeakers on sale at pretty much every price point, from infinite baffle to transmission line. These days however, most just come with ever more subtle variations on the theme of reflex ports. IB speakers are virtually extinct and as for horn-loaded designs, well you'll have to turn to the likes of JBL for those...

Except, apparently JBL's new Studio 530 is *not* a horn loudspeaker. Instead the company has chosen to call it a compression driver design. You don't have compression drivers without horns in front of them, but the word horn is probably the problem, as it sounds old fashioned. But then so is the wheel and you don't hear BMW rebranding them 'radial ground interface contact systems'!

The Studio 530 is the least expensive compression driver speaker that JBL, or anyone else for that matter, has made for quite a long time. The US speaker giant has been having a fair degree of success with its LS series of compression driver designs which are in the next price bracket up, so it would seem to think that maybe there is an appetite for this technology further down the scale. If the results available from this standmount are anything to go by, they could well be right...

Horn loading was originally conceived to make loudspeakers sensitive enough to use with single figure output valve amplifiers. A big horn has sensitivity in three figures, but it has to be enormous to produce anything akin to the bass extension you get from a reflex-loaded standmount. As a result, full range horns are very rare beasts and most of the companies that make horn-loaded speakers combine a traditional direct radiating bass system with horn-loaded mid and treble.

JBL has taken this approach with the Studio 5 series, of which the 530

is the most diminutive example. In this case a 25mm compression driver covers the range from 1.5kHz upwards, and leaves the mid/bass duties to a 130mm cone. It makes for a remarkably compact and affordable speaker that confers many of the advantages of horn technology, without the drawbacks of scale and price.

The inclusion of a relatively small enclosure for the mid/bass driver does however, come at a cost, specifically in sensitivity, which is lower than average at 86dB with a six ohm impedance. This isn't disastrous, and I got rather good results with a low-powered amplifier, but this isn't necessarily a valve amp friendly speaker.

Compression drivers are capable of producing high sound pressures and as such are commonplace in public address systems and professional

▣ DETAILS

PRODUCT:
JBL Studio 530
ORIGIN:
US/China
TYPE:
standmount
loudspeaker
WEIGHT:
7.7kg
DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
214X467 x222mm
FEATURES:
• HF: 25mm
compression driver
• LF: 130mm
PolyPlas cone
with SFG magnet
structure
• quoted sensitivity:
86dB
• quoted impedance:
6 ohms
• finish: black
or cherry
DISTRIBUTOR:
Harman Consumer
UK
TELEPHONE:
01707 278100
WEBSITE:
harman.com

**Horn of plenty –
the JBL Studio
530's gateway to its
compression driver**



audio equipment. What differentiates them from direct radiating drivers of the sort normally found on hi-fi loudspeakers is that they are used with a horn that has a smaller throat area than the driver itself, and this provides a better impedance match with the air, hence the high efficiency.

The compression driver in the Studio 530 is a flat diaphragm made of a polyethylene naphthalate film called Teonex, a material developed by DuPont that's both very thin and has high rigidity, along with a number of other qualities that are beneficial in this application. It sits in the throat of a bi-radial horn made of glass-filled ABS plastics, the shape of which is designed to maximise dispersion as

A dynamic speaker that makes you want to keep listening until way after bedtime...

well as providing the efficiency enhancing qualities mentioned above. The grille for the main driver curves up to form the lower quadrant of the horn, but JBL supplies a plate to use in its place should you prefer to run the system uncovered.

The cabinet itself is tall for its footprint, but because the compression driver needs to be at head height it requires a 60cm stand in most situations. It is made of 19mm MDF and has a reflex port in the rear above the cable terminals. Here, there are two pairs for bi-wiring.

Sound quality

Given the many advantages that horn-loaded compression drivers have, you might be forgiven for asking why they are not more popular among speaker builders. One reason is that it seems to be almost impossible to produce a totally smooth frequency response.

This is still the case with this JBL, but it's not so severe that you can't get used to it pretty quickly. In fact, the aspect of the sound that sticks out most obviously is the bass, which has a somewhat portly character. Jaco Pastorius' bass guitar lacks the definition and texture that it usually reveals, for instance.

However, it doesn't take long to familiarise yourself with the balance and start hearing the speaker's qualities, which are of a variety that you don't get without compression drivers. The best word to describe what they do so well is immediacy, there's a speed and power to JBL that

Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPEAKS TO MARK HOCKEY AT HARMAN CONSUMER...



JK: What inspired this product?

MH: The Studio Series 5 fits in between the standard ES speakers and the LF speakers which are compression drive unit designs that feature supertweeters. The series 5 brings compression drive units to the masses.

It doesn't seem overly sensitive for a horn; is that because of its size?

Absolutely. The whole thing about big compression drive units is that they can be super-efficient if they're loaded correctly. If it were a single horn it would be very efficient, but when you add that to a mid/bass unit, then that efficiency tips away. If you were just using the compression driver alone it would be about 95dB. The misconception about compression drive units is that they are going to be mega efficient but that's only because the history of horn speakers is that they are thus.

What do you like about the end result?

Compression drive units do give you a window into what the amp's actually doing, which is why when I've tried them with a number of amplifiers some of them have shortcomings that are not usually apparent. The one thing I really like about them is when I'm doing late night listening where you can't listen at high volume, that's when they really come into their own. I was listening to the ballet *Spartacus* by Khachaturian (the music from the *Onedin Line*) and I couldn't believe how detailed it was at low volume levels!

What are your favourite albums?

The Alana Del Ray album I absolutely love. It's a just a really good mix and it's a great recording as well, she's got superb range, a really good voice. I'm also listening to the Kate Bush album *50 Words for Snow* which is equally excellent, my favourite track is *Snowed in at Wheeler Street* with Elton John. I've got a big pair of JBL studio monitors that I'm testing and I've been listening every night to that. Another album I'm really liking is *Best of Sade*, which came out about two or three months ago. It's been remastered and is just adorable, she's got the best voice ever. You forget how good and how jazzy she was!

HOW IT COMPARES

THE COMPRESSION driver and horn make the Studio 530 a very different loudspeaker to its peers at the price. Its imaging style is quite distinct; the sound is placed in front of the loudspeaker and while tall and wide, it isn't as deep as a conventional box. It's more revealing across the midband and treble, but doesn't have the same transparency in the bass. And while it times well, there isn't quite the same coherence as a good two-way.

One example of the latter is the Ruark Sabre III, a more expensive standmount at just under £900 that comes in a real-wood veneer. It produces a far more open and tonally even result that has a better sense of timing, but doesn't deliver the low-level detail that the JBL can, nor is it as easy to drive with a low-powered amplifier. If you like what the Studio 530 does, then there is little to touch it at the price.

IN SIGHT



- 1 unique JBL bi-radial horn
- 2 flat 25mm compression driver behind horn throat
- 3 large rear mounted bass reflex port
- 4 130mm cast frame mid/bass driver under grille
- 5 bi-wire/bi-amp cable terminals

is electric with a good recording. Rainer's *Live at the Performance Centre* is just such a thing, one man and his acoustic guitar delivered with so much visceral energy that it's uncanny. Imaging is slightly odd and the balance not totally neutral, but such factors are a very worthwhile price to pay for the sense of a living, breathing musical performance.

This speed and energy comes from the way that the driver couples to the air; the horn makes it so much easier for a small diaphragm to vibrate the air that it brings sonic thrills that conventional speakers struggle to match. And another advantage that becomes apparent when there is a need to keep the volume level civilised is that the horn allows this speaker to be detailed and involving even when playing quietly.

It is also highly transparent to the source and amplifier. I found that while the Leema Tucana integrated worked pretty well, the less powerful and less expensive TEAC A-H01 was a better match. This pairing produced massive image height and width, throwing sound out beyond the speakers with apparent ease.

While it produces good scale, it doesn't sound open in the way that conventional speakers can, but in some respects it makes that openness sound like a coloration by comparison. It's certainly a very different style of presentation and one that won't be to all tastes, but the aforementioned immediacy does let musicians beguile you in a fashion that few conventional

speakers at this price can match. It is also very nicely paced, there is no emphasis on timing, but you get the sense that things are moving at the tempo that was put down in the studio.

Conclusion

In a world of 'me too' loudspeaker designs, I have to congratulate JBL for building a 'compression driver' speaker at such an affordable price; it means that those of us who are not obsessed with glowing valves can discover how much energy and vitality there is in our music. This in the context of a fast and dynamic speaker that offsets its slightly coloured balance with an immediacy that makes you want to keep on listening until way after bedtime.

The fact that it sounds so beguiling even at lower levels is the icing on an already rather tasty sonic cake. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Tremendous immediacy and energy for the price

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Possibly too revealing for some budget components!

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Highly engaging speaker that does things that non-horns can only dream about

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL





**Expression.
Emotion.
Experience.**

The combination of the iO2 satellite speaker and Santorin 25 subwoofer are a genuine audiophile and aesthetic alternative to traditional loudspeakers; with the advantages of beautiful design, high quality full range reproduction and point source drive unit technology. The co-axial 130 mm mid/bass and 25 mm tweeter provide the benefits of Cabasse's Spatially Coherent System, as found in the flagship La Sphere speakers, in a more compact enclosure - faithful timbre reproduction, no artificial colouration and a soundstage with unrivalled realism and depth. The partnering Santorin 25, 250 watt subwoofer, with its 34 Hz low frequency extension, is available in gloss white or black to match the iO2; which can be specified in black pearl with light oak or wenge stands or white pearl with wenge. Complemented by shelf mounting and in-ceiling and in-wall variants, the iO2 is a truly compact audio and video loudspeaker system with perfect design integration and absolute high fidelity.

www.cabasse.com

Hear them now at: **Audiofile, Cambridge**
Holburn Hi-Fi, Aberdeen
Senso, Truro
Soundcraft, Ashford

www.audiofile.co.uk
www.holburnhifi.co.uk
www.senso-systems.co.uk
www.soundcraftthifi.com

Cabasse



Star sound

Antelope Audio's DAC features some of the technology of its high-end siblings, including an enchanted sound, reports **Richard Black...**

Antelope is one of those companies that seems equally happy serving the domestic and professional audio markets. Rather like the UK's dCS, Bulgarian Antelope specialises in high-performance A-D and D-A converters and specialist digital audio-clocking devices. The latter are interesting, including a rubidium (chemical element) atomic clock, claimed to be accurate to a second in one thousand years.

The Zodiac, as Antelope's base model, doesn't include quite so precise a timing generator (nor can you add one as an upgrade), but there is an 'ovenised' crystal oscillator which offers higher performance than a regular off-the-shelf crystal, it's claimed.

The Zodiac's basic input and output provision is not, you'll be surprised to discover, particularly unusual, with two each electrical and optical S/PDIF inputs, plus

▣ DETAILS

PRODUCT: Antelope Audio Zodiac
ORIGIN: Bulgaria
TYPE: DAC
WEIGHT: 2kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 166x110x170mm
FEATURES:
 • balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (phono) analogue outputs
 • 2 each electrical and optical S/PDIF inputs
 • USB digital input
 • max sample rate 24-bits/192kHz (all inputs)
 • volume control
 • twin headphone outputs with separate volume control
DISTRIBUTOR: Antelope Audio
TELEPHONE: +44 20 8133 8113
WEBSITE: antelopeaudio.com

USB for connection to a computer, and all are capable of working at 192kHz sampling rate. (Antelope is unusually thorough in providing instructions for computer users, helping them avoid situations where the computer sneakily resamples high-resolution material to a lower sample rate.) The fitted balanced outputs are practically obligatory these days, but having headphone outputs is a nice touch.

There's a separate volume control for the headphone sockets, while the large knob operates on the main, line-level outputs. Meanwhile, the clear red display above it shows various things – the selected source, sample rate and volume setting. Source and sample rate are obvious enough, but volume (in 1dB steps) is pretty unusual, I'd say.

The control is a traditional mechanical potentiometer, but with three channels. Two of them attenuate the signal on right and left channels, while the third feeds a signal into a detector which provides the reading for the display.

wish for include remote control (available on more expensive variants) and selectable digital filters, but on the whole we reckon it's a nicely judged bit of kit, at least as far as externals are concerned.

Sound quality

Sonically, it proved similarly attractive. I've had plenty of fun in the last year or three with very good DACs, some of which cost considerably less than this, so expectations are high – particularly so when the price is above £1,000.

I started the listening with good old CD, mainly featuring well-loved tracks that are familiar in both outline and detail. The Zodiac left me in little doubt that I was hearing the full monty, with plenty of detail and insight. I was particularly struck by its bass, which combines precision, control, slam and rhythm in a most convincing manner.

One of the most persuasive traits in hi-fi equipment is the ability to bring together apparently conflicting aspects of performance, and on that reckoning the Zodiac is certainly a contender. Bass precision and slam are not always thought of as compatible, but the best kit can manage both...

What is often thought of as precision is, in fact, just slight dryness, but the real thing has no problem coexisting with genuine weight and attack. The net result is a terrific sense of life and fun in music, such as large-scale rock, but subtler styles are hardly less flattered, and I was greatly impressed, for instance, by a newly-recorded classical track of unaccompanied cello, which seemed to have significantly more insight around the bass end than the rendition heard previously through less exalted replay equipment.

Treble performance is hardly less assured. With one or two vocal tracks, I felt there was just a shade of restriction in the top octave or two, but I'd settle for that any day against sibilant excess and, in any case, it's more than compensated for by the really delightful openness in the upper midrange. This, I'm pleased to say, gave me just as much pleasure as the bass, and was certainly a key feature in prolonging my CD listening from an intended hour or so to a whole evening. You know, that little voice in the back of one's head that says, "Hmmm, I wonder how XYZ sounds via this thing... just one track..." Then suddenly it's midnight.

Hi res delights

Still, I certainly didn't want to miss the chance to listen to some high-resolution material through this unit, especially having recently made a few. I fed it both via the USB socket and via S/PDIF in (with a professional interface box converting a Firewire feed to S/PDIF) and didn't find a huge

I started listening with CD, and the Zodiac left me in little doubt that I was hearing the full monty

difference between the two, so the following comments can be taken to apply either way.

In fact, to a large extent the sound follows the pattern set by CD (and other 44.1 or 48kHz sources), except that you do as usual get a touch more clarity and purity on well-made recordings at higher sample rates. What you don't tend to get is the slightly 'enhanced' quality that

This means that there's an error of typically a couple of dB in the reading, with noticeable backlash, too. This makes the display less than reliable for repeatable level setting, but on the other hand the output is, in fact, adjustable in sub-dB increments so it's not all bad – and, of course, at least there's no digital processing of the signal.

Mention of digital processing brings us on to the digital filtering and final conversion to analogue within the Zodiac. This is done with standard (but high-quality) parts, followed by relatively sophisticated analogue output circuits implemented with very high-quality op-amps.

The USB input doesn't feature any of the usual audio-based parts, instead employing a general-purpose USB receiver, which presumably necessitated a bit more work from Antelope's designers, but which handles high sampling rates.

Build quality of the Zodiac is good, with just enough money spent on look and feel to make it aspirational without costing a bomb. Operationally it's very nice to use, with a few clever touches like ignoring digital inputs which are not connected to a source. Features one might, perhaps,

IN SIGHT



- 1 powerinputwith locking ring for strong connection
- 2 balanced analogue audio outputs are best choice for sonics
- 3 unbalanced RCA phono line outputs give thinner sound
- 4 digital inputs: only those receiving a valid bitstream are selectable
- 5 USB input on mini-B connector, less robust than full-size B type

Q&A

RICHARD BLACK SPEAKS TO ANTELOPE'S MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER GEORGI LAZAROV



RB: In regard to the Antelope Zodiac, what is the significance of high accuracy clocking for sound quality?

GL: This is absolutely key to avoid the loss of musical detail and to prevent poor stereo imaging. An accurate clock creates better timing reference by providing more stable pulses, which determine the exact placement of each sample.

Without the accurate clocking reference, the sample might appear earlier or latter, which results in audio-damaging fluctuations called jitter. Antelope's Acoustically Focused Clocking and Oven Controlled Clock technologies ensure unprecedented stability of the clock and finest sound quality.

What kind of digital filtering is used in the Zodiac?

The DAC chip has various filter options. We'd rather not comment on our choice, but intend to make this user-selectable in a future product revision.

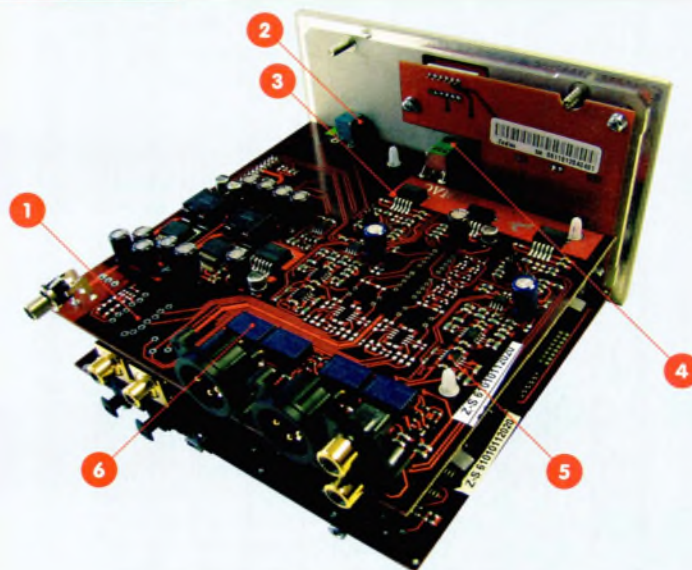
The analogue output stage looks quite complex – is it unusual in anyway?

The analogue output stage is not complex at all. It is entirely designed by Antelope Audio, following the philosophy of having minimum number of stages; thus getting the lowest possible noise and THD levels. What might appear as complex is actually the dedicated dual-stage headphone amp, designed to deliver high-quality sound both in high and low levels.

All else being equal, do you recommend balanced or unbalanced outputs for domestic hi-fi use?

That depends on each individual set-up. The unbalanced outputs suit better for a home set-up, as most of the domestic/consumer products have unbalanced connections on RCA connectors. For a more professional set-up, balanced are more appropriate.

IN SIGHT



- 1 main printed circuit board
- 2 headphone volume potentiometer
- 3 headphone driver stage is complex, says designer
- 4 main volume potentiometer
- 5 line output stage op-amps drive balanced XLRs
- 6 muting relays ensure thump-free power-up



HOW IT COMPARES
IN THE DAC explosion of the last few years, plenty of models have comfortably straddled the border between pro and domestic audio. One of the most successful has been the Lavry DA10, currently selling around the £1,000 mark. It's actually built purely as a pro device, with for instance only balanced outputs, but that hasn't stopped it making inroads in to the hi-fi world. When we reviewed it we found it stunningly neutral, but it is admittedly a little short on the features front and lacks that all-important (these days) USB input.

Perhaps the Zodiac's closest competitor is the M2Tech Young DAC (£1,350), which runs to 3,84kHz sampling rates, in anticipation of software support. It delivers lovely clear sound, but we reckon the deciding factor between it and the Zodiac will most often be the bass. Here, the Zodiac really shines out whilst the Young slightly lacks extension and weight, making it a tad less impressive on audition.

some DACs seem to provide, that larger-than-life sheen that certainly adds a frisson, but can quickly pall as one continues to listen. The benefits of hi res are more subtle than that (all else being equal – which, to be fair, it quite often isn't) and it's to the credit of the Zodiac that it makes no attempt to gild this particular lily.

Specifically, it's worth noting that treble improves a little at higher sample rates, with the restriction mentioned above being less of an issue and, in truth, all but unnoticeable even when the original live sound is still fresh in the memory as a reference.

One of the recordings used was of solo female voice with a simple piano accompaniment, and while it sounded very natural and lifelike at lower sample rates, it was clear that the 96kHz original had the edge in the portrayal of consonants from the singer, and the leading edge of high notes on the piano.

There's very little difference between sampling rates in the bass, but I thought on a couple of occasions that S/PDIF sounded just a little more assured and solid than a USB connection. Any difference there was small though, and we would certainly urge any user of a Zodiac to experiment with any available connection, because we reckon differences could easily tip the balance either way.

Meanwhile, there's the midrange to consider, and it's something you're likely to enjoy considering as it is

uncommonly detailed and open, with superb imaging in every direction. Little more needs to be said really – just lovely!

Though I did most of my listening via line outputs, it's worth mentioning that the headphone amp is clearly much more than an afterthought, detailed and lively with ample volume on tap, though it's not quite as flawlessly neutral as the line output.

Conclusion

As you can tell, I've ended up pretty enthusiastic about Antelope's basic Zodiac DAC. While I wouldn't go so far as to suggest that it tramples all over its competition, much of which is very strong, it certainly gives a great deal of pleasure on audition. The sound stands comparison with machines costing far more just a couple of years ago, and my quibbles are few. As such I'd strongly recommend you to go out and listen to one if you're in the market. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★
LIKE: Nicely extended bass, highly neutral midrange and clean treble
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★
DISLIKE: Lack of remote control; headphone output a little coloured
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★
- FEATURES** ★★★★★
WESAY: Highly capable sonics, fine build and a good feature count make this a worthy contender

OVERALL





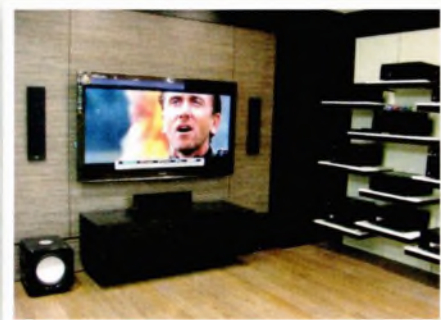
ARCAM adds four **NEW** models to its rSeries

rPAC
USB DAC / HEADPHONE AMP
£149

drDock
DIGITAL DOCK FOR IPOD / IPHONE / IPAD
£199

rLink
OPTICAL / COAXIAL DAC
£149

rBlink
BLUETOOTH DAC
£149



**STORES
NATIONWIDE**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR FULL DETAILS

- Aberdeen* 01224 252797
- Basingstoke* 01256 324311
- Blackpool* 01253 300599
- Brentwood* 01277 264730
- Brighton (Hove)* 01273 733338
- Bristol* 0117 974 3727
- Bromley 020 8290 1988
- Camberley* 01276 685597
- Cambridge* 01223 304770
- Cardiff* 029 2022 8565
- Chelsea* 020 7352 9466

- Cheltenham* 01242 241171
- Chorleywood (Watford)* 0845 5046364
- Enfield* 020 8367 3132
- Epsom* 01372 720720
- Exeter* 01392 218895
- Glasgow* 0141 332 9655
- Guildford 01483 536666
- Holborn* 020 7837 7540
- Kingston* 020 8547 0717
- Lancaster* 01524 39657
- Leeds (Vetherby) 01937 586886
- Loughton* 020 8532 0770
- Maidstone* 01622 686366
- Manchester* 0161 839 8869
- Norwich* 01603 767605
- Nottingham* 0115 911 2121

- Oxford* 01865 765961
- Poole* 01202 671677
- Portsmouth* 023 9266 3604
- Preston* 01772 883958
- Reading* 0118 959 7768
- Sevenoaks 01732 459555
- Sheffield* 0114 255 5861
- Southampton* 023 8033 7770
- Swansea* 01792 474608
- Swindon* 01793 538222
- Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
- Warrington* 01925 632179
- Weybridge* 01932 840859
- Witham (Essex) 01376 501733
- Worcester* 01905 619059
- Yeovil* 01935 700078

**VISIT OUR
WEBSITE**

for the latest offers and news, as well as the convenient option to order many products on-line or click to reserve before you travel.



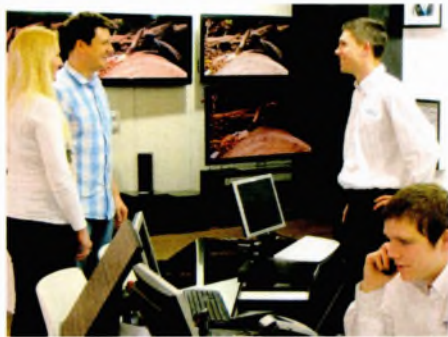
**SOUND & VISION
AT HOME GUIDE**

Visit our website and request your FREE copy.
UK Mainland Only.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 04/05/2012. E&OE
*THESE STORES ARE EITHER LICENSED OR FRANCHISED AND OPERATE UNDER A LICENCE AGREEMENT TO SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION.

REAL STORES

Sevensoaks Sound & Vision have stores nationwide - each carries the very best in home cinema and hi-fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.



REAL PEOPLE

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.



REAL PRODUCTS

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.



REAL VALUE

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you'll be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

FOR OUR LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM



LEEMA ELEMENTS CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER
The Elements Series is the latest in the line of Leema high-performance audio equipment.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD / AMPLIFIER
The M2 amp boasts 85wpc and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC plus dedicated power supplies for the outputs.



AUDIOLAB 8200CD OLED • 8200A CD / AMPLIFIER
The award-winning 8200CD features a wealth of digital inputs that will keep it playing all your music regardless of how it may be stored.



MARANTZ CD6004 • PM6004 CD / AMPLIFIER
This award-winning CD player and amplifier is the result of extensive research and development by Marantz's engineering team, under the direction of Brand Ambassador Ken Ishiwata.



ROKSAN KANDY K2 CD / AMPLIFIER
The award-winning Kandy K2 amplifier and the matching K2 CD player deliver the sort of performance that will satisfy both the music aficionado and the hi-fi enthusiasts.



ARCAM FMJ CD17 • FMJ A18 CD / AMPLIFIER
Arcam's FMJ products combine sleek design, flexible connectivity and sound quality far beyond that of budget separates. Available in a black finish to seamlessly blend with any style of décor.



DENON CEOL RCD-N7 CD NETWORK RECEIVER
This network CD / iPod receiver lets you set your iPod or iPhone in its dedicated dock and enjoy music with high-quality sound or listen to Internet radio.



MARANTZ M-CR603 CD NETWORK RECEIVER
Features CD playback, a DAB/DAB+/FM/AM tuner along with a USB connection and network capability via its ethernet port.



ARCAM SOLO MINI CD RECEIVER
The award-winning Solo Mini provides premium performance in a discrete and stylish unit.



PROJECT ESSENTIAL TURNTABLE

Hear your vinyl treasures in outstanding quality with the Essential turntable. Supplied with a pre-mounted Ortofon OM3e cartridge for fast and simple set-up.



REGA RP1 TURNTABLE

Excellent build quality, reliability and ease of use combine to make the RP1 a product that will offer a lifetime of musical enjoyment.



PROJECT XPRESSION III TURNTABLE

Features an improved, carbon-fibre tonearm, superior isolation feet and comes supplied complete with a factory-fitted and aligned 'Ortofon 2M Red' cartridge.

SPENDOR A-LINE
A3 • A5 • A6 • A9

These high performance, floorstanding speakers combine smart styling with natural veneer finishes. Each model benefits from important advances in Spendor's drive unit technology, cabinet design and crossover engineering.



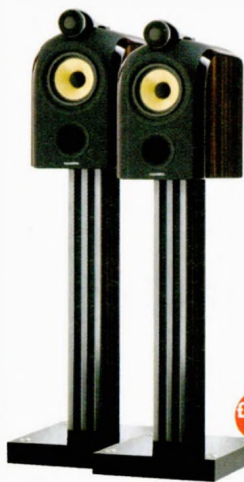
ESSAV.COM

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD GX

Monitor Audio's new Gold GX speakers use technology that has filtered down from their flagship Platinum PL range. The range comprises two standmounts, two floorstanders, two centre speakers, a pair of surround speakers and a single subwoofer.



ESSAV.COM



ESSAV.COM

BOWERS & WILKINS
PM1

This luxury, compact loud-speaker is the latest in a long line of Bowers & Wilkins audiophile mini monitors. It offers an extremely high-quality audio performance and features several technological innovations including a new tweeter and groundbreaking cabinet design.

KEF AUDIO R SERIES

Using trickle-down technology from the company's flagship Blade speakers, the R Series comprises standmount, floorstanding, centre, surround and subwoofer models.



ESSAV.COM



ESSAV.COM

PMC TWENTY RANGE

The twenty series is the next generation of elegant, hand-crafted British loudspeakers that follow in the lineage of worldwide acclaimed PMC designs. The 4 models use PMC's innovative ATL™ technology, providing a supremely rich and detailed performance ideally suited to all styles and sizes of interior.



ESSAV.COM

TANNOY
REVOLUTION DC6T

Award-winning compact, floorstanding speakers featuring Tannoy's unique Dual Concentric™ drive unit along with luxurious real wood finish trapezoidal cabinets.



£699 OR LESS

NEW

£1199 OR LESS

CYRUS **CYRUS 6A • 8A AMPLIFIER**
Part of Cyrus' new range of hi-fi separates. Both the 6A and 8A are also available with the option of a high quality DAC module.



£1999 OR LESS

NEW

ARCAM **FMJ D33 SUPER DAC**
High-end DAC featuring an asynchronous USB input, usable with both PCs and Macs, along with two optical, two S/PDIF electrical and AES/EBU professional grade digital inputs.



£4499 OR LESS

NEW

MERIDIAN M6 DIGITAL ACTIVE SPEAKERS

The new M6 digital active loudspeaker is a real visual departure from Meridian's existing loudspeaker styling, but it is a genuinely high-performance Digital Signal Processing loudspeaker.



Q ACOUSTICS 2020i SPEAKERS

Medium sized bookshelf speaker with extended bass, open mid-range, astonishing transient response and exceptional high frequency clarity.

£145 OR LESS

Gloss Black / White Finish £180

Graphite or Walnut Finish



£249 OR LESS

MARANTZ NA7004 NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER

This AirPlay® compatible player lets you connect to all your favourite music, whether it's from your PC, external hard disc or as an FM / DAB radio station broadcast or even on the other side of the world via Internet Radio.



£649 OR LESS

WHILE STOCKS LAST

DENON DNP-720AE NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER

Enjoy a wide variety of internet radio and on-line digital content. The DNP-720AE also supports AirPlay® so that you can stream music from any compatible device.



ESSAV.COM

YAMAHA NP-S2000 NETWORK AUDIO PLAYER

This Network Player links all your sources - iPod, Internet radio, NAS and much more - with easy access via a web browser or even your iPhone.



£999 OR LESS

ARCAM SOLO NEO NETWORK MUSIC SYSTEM

Combines superb music performance, network audio capabilities along with an internal CD player and radio tuner:



£1199 OR LESS

NAIM UNITI CD / AMP MUSIC STREAMER

Combines an integrated amplifier, CD player; DAB/FM tuner; Internet radio; iPod dock, DAC, music file player and network stream player: PLEASE NOTE: Naim products are not available at all stores.

CYRUS STREAMLINE MUSIC STREAMER

This compact all-in-one music system is the perfect choice for any room. Based upon the Stream XP but complete with a high performance stereo power amplifier built-in. Includes the stylish and intuitive n-remote control.



ESSAV.COM



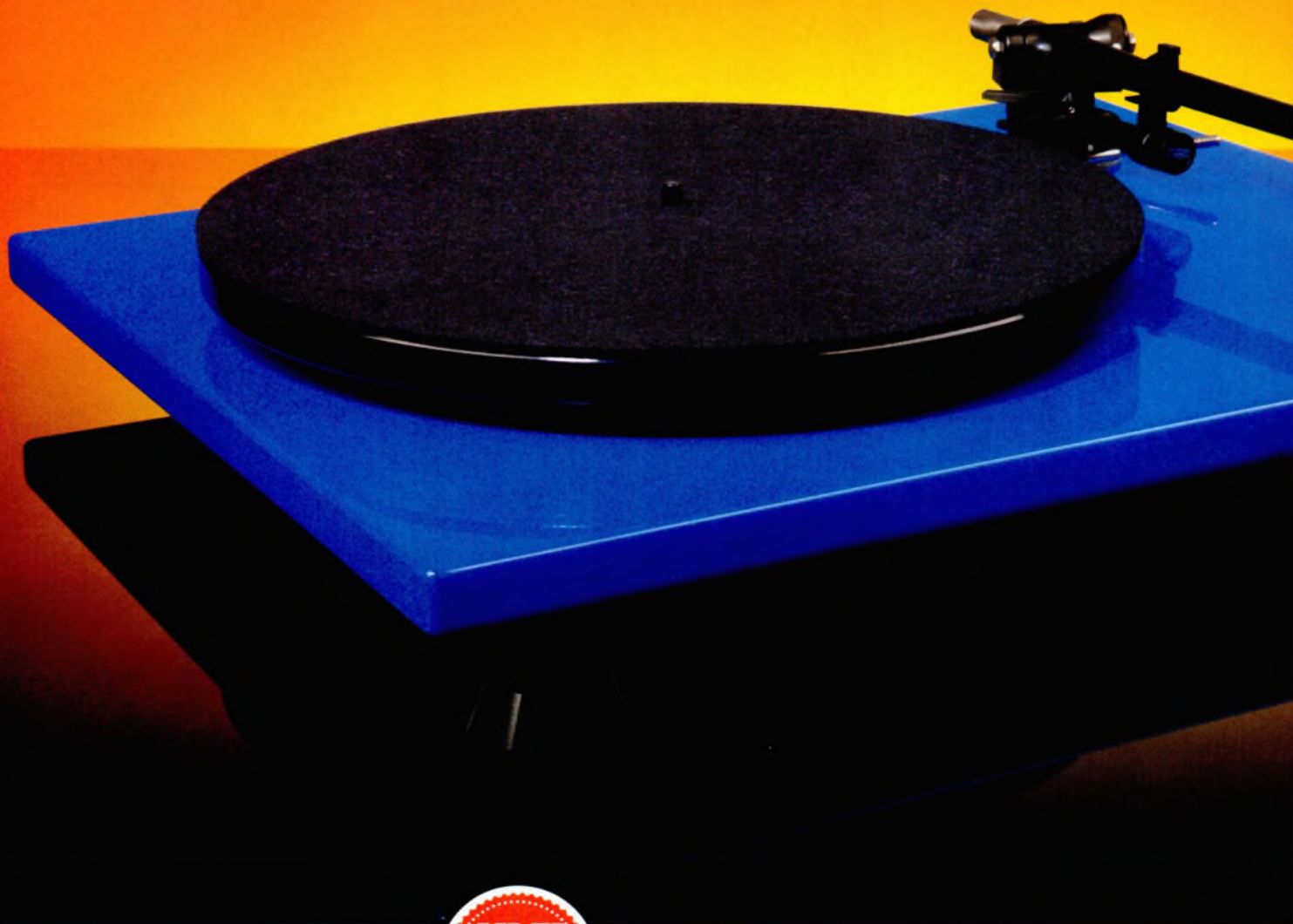
SONOS - THE WIRELESS HI-FI SYSTEM

Play your digital music all over your house without a PC in every room. The award-winning Sonos lets you play your favourite tunes all over the house and control them from the palm of your hand. You can even play different songs in different rooms.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 04/05/2012. E&OE.

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



Six music

Jason Kennedy spins some top tunes with Rega's brand new mid-price RP6 turntable...

Paying a visit to Rega's Southend base last year, I was not only struck by the hive of industry concealed beneath its red brick exterior, but by similarities between its founder and driving force (but not MD) Roy Gandy and James Dyson.

Had Gandy gone into a field like domestic appliances, he could well be as familiar a figure as the aforementioned maestro of the bagless vacuum cleaner. But because he concentrated his efforts on hi-fi equipment, the audio appreciating fraternity gets to enjoy extremely

well thought out, competitively priced British components.

There was a time when you had to wait a few years between new Rega products, but that pace has accelerated in recent times to the point where the company delivers several new components a year. This is the case even on the turntable front; 2010 saw the launch of the P1 and the following year a replacement for the P3-24 appeared in the RP3, now there's a replacement for the P5 called the RP6.

The P5 was a relatively elaborate turntable with a frame surround and

▣ DETAILS

PRODUCT: Rega RP6
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: turntable and arm
WEIGHT: 6.3kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 450x120x365mm
FEATURES:
 • tonearm: Rega RB303
 • speeds: electronic 33/45rpm
 • external power supply
 • 24V AC twin phase motor
 • colours: red, green, white, black, orange, yellow, blue, pink
DISTRIBUTOR: Rega Research
TELEPHONE: 01702 333071
WEBSITE: rega.co.uk

a higher grade tonearm than the P3-24, the RP6 looks like a far closer relation to the new RP3 and, at a glance, all that differentiates the two is the shiny polyester paint job.

But look a little closer and you'll notice that the platter is thicker, at least it's thicker on the edge; take the felt mat off and pick up the glasswork itself and it reveals that a ring of 10mm glass has been bonded to the underside of the 6mm thick platter.

This peripheral weighting, as it's known, is a popular means of adding inertia to a platter without increasing overall weight, as much as thickening the entire platter would. It's a system that I've seen on metal platters like that of the LP12 and is also used on the Rega P9's ceramic platter, but this is the first time its been achieved with glass, to my knowledge.

Another thing you notice when removing the mat is that the subplatter looks like it is metal, but it turns out that there is a machined aluminium 'platter adaptor' on top of the ABS subplatter. This supports the platter on six points with the aim of keeping it as flat as possible relative to the stylus.

The plinth is the same lightweight MDF as an RP3 and the double brace

which inevitably increases mass, it uses phenolic resin plates on either side of the plinth to create a stressed beam. The result with the RP3 was pretty impressive, which is presumably why this big brother design was created.

The RP6 has a low-noise, twin phase synchronous 24 volt motor with an anti-vibration circuit that's hand tuned and driven by a Rega TT PSU external power supply. As this box controls on/off and speed selection, the plinth is devoid of a switch which makes it look very elegant.

The arm is an RB303, the latest and smoothest incarnation of the original RB300. This has sprung downforce, a three-point fixing and no means of adjusting VTA – which is another effort to maximise rigidity. The RP6 can be supplied with a Rega Exact, which is the company's highest spec moving-magnet cartridge; it's differentiated by a vital fine line stylus. This is what arrived with the review sample, and was used for much of the listening.

Sound quality

Shortly after you put a slab of vinyl on this turntable and drop the stylus gently in the groove, it becomes difficult to concentrate on the sound of the player, because the music absorbs your attention. This is a good sign, as it means that the turntable is acting as a conduit rather than a performer. If you start thinking about how sweet the highs are and how thunderous the lows, you know you're hearing the machine before the music, which kind of defeats the object!

As a result, my notes quickly start describing the way the musicians play, how the music is arranged and what the nature of the recording is like. With Al Green's *Sha La La (Make Me Happy)* the string arrangements are revealed to be perfect, despite the fact that I usually hate the things, these ones are of the right timbre, duration and intensity to raise the power of an already fine song.

For the sake of producing an informative review I made an effort to concentrate on the RP6's character, and the first thing that becomes apparent is bass weight. That extra ring of glass seemingly brings depth, body and muscle to the bottom end that the RP3 fails to reach. Because this is a Rega, it's very tuneful, clean and precise bass, but it's nice to have a bit more welly at that end of the scale. The other result of the flywheel effect is a calmer, cleaner presentation that remains consistent, no matter how raucous the material. This means that you can easily hear the quiet notes alongside the louder ones, there is lots of dynamic contrast and very little masking.

The RP6 is highly able when it comes to reproducing the space in a recording; you can hear plenty of reverb on kick drums alongside their intrinsic power. This is apparent on Leo Kottke's *Great Big Boy* album, which also lets the Rega show off its ability to produce a 3D soundstage for your listening pleasure. This in the context of dense music with plenty of energy, a result that betters what I've heard from a number

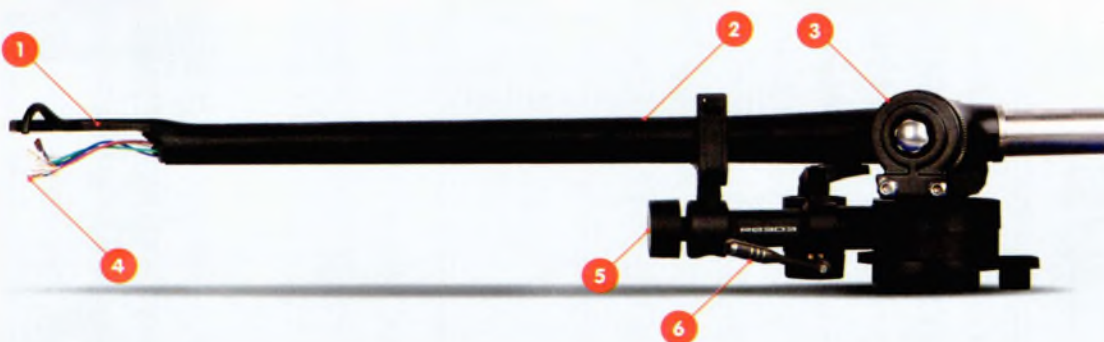
The RP6 is a killer turntable, and it's hard to see why the music lover would ever want for more...

of more fashionable turntables. Moving onto one of the more relaxed pieces, and it's lovely to hear the textural breadth of a fretless bassline under the crisp plucking of acoustic guitar. The combination of effortlessness with resolution is beguiling.

For some reason I felt the urge to hear the Stones' *Can't You Hear Me Knocking* one evening and could only find an ancient 'zipper' cover copy of *Sticky Fingers* which usually sounds worn – I have a more recent and cleaner pressing somewhere. But the RP6 revealed that there's still a ton of top

from the same source, in this case Rega has gone for an aluminium finish which makes it look a bit fancier. This element is pretty fundamental to the whole design, as it concentrates rigidity *precisely* where it's needed between the arm base and the platter bearing with the minimum of mass. Rega's thinking is that 'mass absorbs energy – lost energy equals lost music', so rather than trying to make the whole plinth rigid,

IN SIGHT



- 1 headshell with fingerlift for easy hand cueing
- 2 highly rigid one-piece cast arm tube and headshell
- 3 sprung downforce adjuster; numbers hard to read
- 4 captive cartridge connection wires, so don't break!
- 5 pull-out magnetic anti-skate system nicer than rivals
- 6 damped arm lift works swiftly yet smoothly

Q&A

JASON KENNEDY SPOKE TO PAUL DARWIN AT REGA RESEARCH ABOUT THE RP6 TURNTABLE



JK: Why change the number of this model relative to the one it replaces – P5 to RP6?

PD: It was felt that it was so different to the outgoing P5 that it deserved a new model number (new arm, double brace, new platter, new plinth, sub-platter updated TT PSU).

What does the aluminium disc between subplatter and platter achieve in sonic terms?

The aluminium part of the subplatter assembly brings stiffness, while remaining low mass and ensures the correct height adjustment for the 16mm flywheel effect platter. Coupled together with the platter, the two components offer improved speed stability than the previous design, improving imaging and detail.

What's the difference between an RB300 and an RB303?

Designed using the latest 3D CAD and CAM technology, the new RB303 is the culmination of more than thirty years of tonearm design experience. Due to advances in technology we have been able to fine tune the iconic RB300 tonearm design. Featuring a brand new tube with increased rigidity to the bearing housing, arm carrier and headshell, coupled with intelligent redistribution of mass, this arm will exhibit fewer points of possible resonance. Extreme stability with almost friction-free movement from the bearing assemblies guarantee to gather more information from the vinyl.

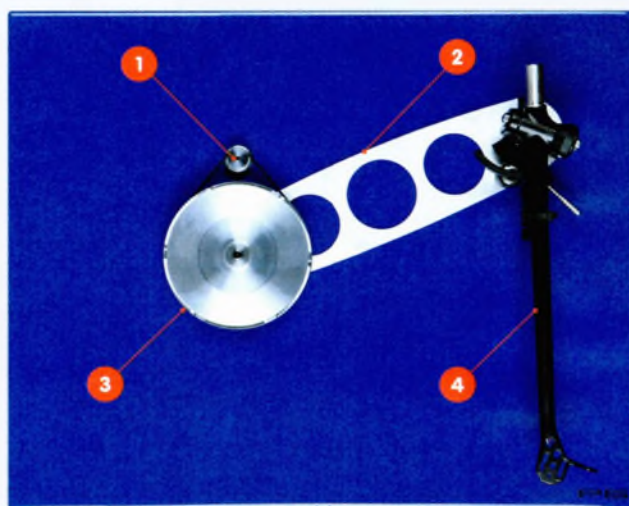
The marks on the downforce gauge are difficult to see, was this deliberate?

We felt it looked nicer than the printing as they were often poorly printed on the curved surface. As it is used so infrequently by most customers, when redesigning the tracking housing we changed the tool to have the markings in place, which saved a printing process and improved the cosmetics of the arm.

How is the prototype carbon fibre turntable coming along?

Nicely, thanks! Can't give a date on this one yet, it's still in development...

IN SIGHT



- 1 24 volt twin phase synchronous motor gives stable sound
- 2 brace between bearing and arm base for maximum rigidity
- 3 aluminium top hub adaptor provides 6-point mounting for the platter
- 4 Rega RB303 tonearm, CAD refined replacement for the RB300



THE RP6 HAS A combination of fine detail resolution, broad bandwidth, good dynamics and high musicality. Its competitors include Michell's entry-level TecnoDec and Project's Experience in either Classic or 2 Pack form.

The latter pair come with an arm and a starter cartridge, while the TecnoDec can be equipped with any of the Rega arms. It's not as entertaining as this Rega nor does it have such a strong grip on timing, but is easily on a par when it comes to detail resolution and evenness of response. The Project Experience designs have not been tested yet, but if other models are anything to go by they will offer slightly more finesse than the RP6, but less of the energy and musicality that it can deliver.

The only other close competition comes from Thorens' TD700. When Malcolm Steward reviewed it a few years back he got a decent, but ultimately less than thrilling result and that clearly isn't the case with the RP6.

notch white blues in the groove. What stood out is the contrast between the thick but multi-faceted sound of Bill Wyman's bass, and the knife-edge of the classic riff that makes the track so instantly appealing. After a while I also started to enjoy the deep groove of the organ that gives the song a swampy feel underneath Keef's spare, but inspired solo.

Don't expect the RP6 to transform a classic Al Green album into something with the sonic properties of one by Patricia Barber, it ain't going to happen. On the contrary, by getting itself out of the picture to a remarkable degree you hear the tape compression on the Al Green, the thick nature of its tonal balance and the soul that he manages to inject into the mix regardless of its technical limitations.

Out of interest I installed the trusty Dynavector DV20X2L on the RP6 to see what a classy, but affordable MC cartridge would bring to the party. It proved a fatal move – you've heard the term 'lost in music'? Well that just about sums up my situation once this giant slaying turntable and cartridge combination got warmed up. Now we had speed, energy and thrill power on top of the aforementioned musical and resolving powers. Not only did this introduce full on engagement but that state of affairs transmuted in to 'air guitar' with unrestrained alacrity.

While this turntable has a remarkable ability to mainline the musical message with all of its melodic and temporal charm, it is also extremely good at differentiating between recordings. If there is not

much dynamic range or a small soundstage you know all about it, equally if the recording, production and mastering have been done well you are presented with a wealth of detail. The amount of reverb, dimensionality and the full extent of the bandwidth that's in the pressing is delivered.

This is a neutral turntable but not a dull one – there are a lot of very even sounding rivals that deliver plenty of detail but fail to pick up the dynamic and timing cues that make the music magical. If you are looking for a cuddly analogue experience choose albums that have this quality because it's not intrinsic to the medium.

Suffice to say that the new Rega RP6 is a killer turntable and arm. Unless you'd rather look at something with springs in or slabs of acrylic, it's hard to see why the music lover would ever want for more. And even if you did crave something better, bank on spending a good few hundred pounds extra. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Dynamic and remarkably revealing turntable, with maximum musicality

DISLIKE: Downforce markings on the RB303 require reading glasses!

WE SAY: Package produces the sonic goods like few others can at the price

VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



OVERALL



A class of its own.

The AMR Premier Class DP-777 Digital Processor
Leading-edge Dual-DAC converter and advanced analogue preamplifier



FURUTECH
PURE TRANSMISSION



WWW.FURUTECH.COM

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

+44(0)1276-501-392
info@soundfoundations.co.uk

The ADL GT40 ...



a master of all trades.

phono stage • USB DAC • USB ADC • headphone amplifier

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2011

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
FURUTECH ADL GT40

TONE Audio
Magazine
2010
Product of the Year
Award

PC ADVISOR
RECOMMENDED

AEX
オーディオ技術賞
Audio Excellence Award 2011

Hi-Fi
Choice
RECOMMENDED

ADL
ALPHA DESIGN LABS

by **FURUTECH** Tokyo • Japan
service@adl-av.com

sound foundations
www.soundfoundations.co.uk

+44(0)1276-501-392
info@soundfoundations.co.uk

Love, factually

An affordable and compact USB DAC with a decent feature count, **Jason Kennedy** reports on this new name to the digital market...

The initials 'TW' in this DAC's name stand for Taiwan, which is not only the world's bicycle factory, but also a hotbed of fervently patriotic audiophiles, or so Firestone must be hoping. Not only does this compact convertor declare its ardour in the name, but also carries a depiction of the island nation's geographical shape on the case. But we should not hold this against it, nothing wrong with a bit of pride after all! It joins the growing ranks of affordable high-sample rate digital-to-analogue convertors aimed squarely at the burgeoning computer audio scene.

There are several DACs in the Firestone range, but this is the most expensive and ambitious of the lot, because it includes optional asynchronous USB operation and upsamples to 192kHz. It seems odd to make the asynchronous function optional because I can't think of a situation in which you *wouldn't* want it. Synchronous USB connections use the clock in the computer, which is highly prone to jitter, while asynchronous systems buffer the signal and use a clock in the convertor. The DAC chip itself is the well-known Wolfson WM8740.

The iLoveTW only has a USB input, but you can select whether it

upsamples to 96 or 192kHz with a small switch on the back panel. If you want to use the latter then the supplied driver needs to be installed on your computer. This is the first time I've had to install a driver on a Mac for this purpose, but it's a straightforward enough procedure and software is provided for Windows as well. The DAC can be used on its own, but I used the Supplier separate power supply, which is reasonably priced and lives in the same size case.

You get a lot of accessories in the box with this DAC, a 1.5m pair of RCA phono interconnects, a USB A to B cable and a short Ethernet cable; they even throw in an Allen key so that you can open the case!

Sound quality

I had a bit of difficulty using this DAC in 192k asynchronous mode with my iMac, but eventually discovered that it doesn't like long (5m) USB cables, a 1.5m run proving rather more effective. The effort was rewarded with a revealing and engaging sound that does little to suggest such an affordable convertor at its core.

As a test of its transparency, I compared a couple of software players in 192kHz asynchronous mode, Pure Music and Audirvana Plus, an experiment that I did not

have to repeat because the result was so clear. Audirvana Plus reveals considerably more shape and body, its imaging is distinctly three-dimensional and makes PM sound flat. A result which suggests that the iLoveTW is pretty transparent.

Using standard CD-quality 16-bit/44kHz material, but selecting the 192k asynchronous setting, this DAC has the classic quality of refinement combined with good definition of leading edges, which produces a lively and timely result, but one that's strong on detail.

It has plenty of dynamic range and a well-extended and open mid and top which gives the music an ease that's very inviting. With high-resolution material these strengths are more apparent, there's greater depth to the acoustic and a lower noise floor, which makes for a very natural sound with acoustic instruments and voices.

I tried the DAC with and without its power supply, an experiment that revealed a greater benefit for higher resolution material and one that increased dynamic range and spaciousness. Indeed, it sounded so good with the fancy power supply that even Arcam's excellent rDac came across as a little bit prosaic by comparison. Although to be fair the rDAC is a bit cheaper than the Firestone twosome, and the Arcam's multiple inputs give it a feature advantage, while the rDAC's build quality is something truly special by any standards, let alone those of sub-£300 designs.

So the iLove is a neat little convertor that's capable of highly musical results. Indeed, I got quite swept up in the Alban Berg Quartet's rendition of Beethoven's late string quartets, and had trouble tearing myself away from Samuel Yirga's *The Habasha Sessions*. Hard not to like then, and anyone who auditions it might just fall in love at first sight. ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Firestone Audio
iLoveTW
ORIGIN:
Taiwan
TYPE:
USB DAC
SIZE:
(WxHxD)
80x50x17mm
WEIGHT:
286g
FEATURES:
• 24-bit/192kHz DAC
• asynchronous USB
• I2S input on RJ45 socket
• analogue outputs:
RCA phono
• DAC: Wolfson
WM8740
DISTRIBUTOR:
ABC Audio
TELEPHONE:
020 8462 1379
WEBSITE:
abc-audio.co.uk



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Open and atmospheric sounding

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Doesn't automatically switch to asynchronous operation at switch on

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Nice little convertor that reveals the potential of computer audio at a nice price

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL





New zeal



Don't be fooled by the trad Epos styling, says **Channa Vithana**, because Epos' Elan 30 is quite different to what came before...

Epos made highly characterful loudspeakers during the nineteen eighties, due in no small part to former founder Robin Marshall, who also created similar sounding designs for Monitor Audio, such as the R852/MD. These speakers had minimal crossovers and metal dome tweeters that allowed wonderfully open, superbly timed music to be expressed, but sometimes at the expense of bass extension – and when badly partnered with the wrong system, somewhat unflattering high-frequencies also!

I was a fan, and regularly saw Epos ES models matched with Naim Audio, Exposure and Inca Tech amplifiers that produced engaging, exciting music in wonderfully characterful systems of that period.

While the designer has changed, and indeed the ownership of the brand, the new Epos Elan 30 loudspeakers hark back in strong visual terms at least, to the ES 22, 25 and 30 floorstanding models, with a very neatly engineered front 'acoustic' grille which hides away all the drive-unit fixings and can also be replaced with a supplied set of cloth grilles.

The resulting design is a minimalist and elegant approach that I find most pleasing to the eye. I also am a fan of the excellent real-wood cherry or oak veneer that wraps around the 18mm thick MDF cabinet. While it's fair to say that the Elans are not 'beautiful' in a Sonus Faber sense, they do have an individual aesthetic that's distinct and confident.

The speakers sport a new soft-dome tweeter, a 25mm doped-fabric dome, short horn affair said to match the speed of a good metal dome, but with superior smoothness. This is paired to two new long-throw 156mm bass/mid drivers built on an open-frame cast-aluminium alloy chassis with polypropylene cones

and bullet-shaped dust caps. The lower woofer is rolled-off above 800Hz, while the mid one clocks off at 3.6kHz – effectively making a true two-and-a-half way design.

The woofers are loaded by a large reflex port at the rear, and the facility for biwiring/bi-amping. The upshot of this is that Epos can claim unusually high sensitivity for the Elan 30 – 92dB/1w/1m. This makes it ideal for valve amplifiers such as the PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium (see p16), or lower powered solid-staters like Tellurium Q's Iridium 20w SECA (p66). High sensitivity marks a departure for the brand, and a positive one at that.

I briefly tried the supplied port bungs in the Elan 30s, but found that in my case they worked just fine without, sited about 500mm away from rear and side walls.

▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Epos Elan 30
ORIGIN:
UK/China
TYPE:
2.5-way
floorstanding
loudspeaker
WEIGHT:
16.9kg
DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
265x915 x330mm
FEATURES:
• quoted sensitivity:
92dB
• quoted impedance:
4 ohms
• tweeter: Epos
25mm soft dome
• 2x mid-bass
drivers: Epos
156mm diameter
polypropylene cone
DISTRIBUTOR:
Epos Ltd
TELEPHONE:
+44 1442 260146
WEBSITE:
epos-acoustics.com

One of two highly efficient 156mm bass/mid drivers



Sound quality

Expecting a fast, thin, sharp sound that was all about pace, rhythm and timing, I cued up the eponymous *Ladyhawke* LP, only to be greeted with a slightly rich tonality that took me completely by surprise! My previous experience with Epos was of loudspeakers with superb timing, but rather subdued in the timbre of music, but what we have here is something altogether different. Richer and more full sounding, bass extension was now prominent, not in an overbearing way, but requiring a little readjusting compared to the leaner, 'flatter' XTZ 99.36MKII, that I reviewed last month (*HFC* 357), which costs a similar amount.

Factor in their ease of drive and they work a treat with a wide range of equipment

Moving on up the frequency spectrum, and the Elan 30 sounded consummately well-balanced. Not shouty, there was nevertheless very good resolution across the midband, which sounded musically exuberant and full bodied. Those throbbing synthesisers mixed with crashing guitars and percussion on *Dusk Till Dawn* enveloped the room with a great sense of drama, and yet with intricate details explicit also, such as Pip Brown's distinctive Americanised New Zealand vocals and expressive, intermittent percussion projecting from the loudspeakers.

Listening to the completely different Kodály: *Háry János* suite (1984), conducted by the brilliant Klaus Tennstedt and featuring the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Epos revealed a smooth, deep musicality, which handled the very quiet passages with ease (and no intrusive background 'noise') and conveyed the fullness of the orchestration at crescendos with no fuss whatsoever.

Handling of classical music was effortless. It was as if the Elan 30s were wishing to be pushed harder all the time – they had plenty of dynamic headroom in reserve should the demands of the music require it. Whereas classic Epos speakers of yore would have given a very explicit string sound, one almost etched on your forehead should the wrong ancillaries be used, it wasn't the case here. Indeed it was practically the other way round, with the Elan 30s

Q&A

CHANNA VITHANA SPEAKS TO EPOS MD MIKE CREEK



CV: What was the rationale for the new Elan range?

MC: It was developed to replace the former Mi range. Technically and philosophically different in many ways, the Elans use a soft dome tweeter unlike the metal dome used on most Epos products to date. In the case of the floorstanding models the mid-bass and bass woofers are wired in a 2½ way configuration. This differs from the Mi22 and 16i, in that two identical drivers produce bass, with the lower one filtered to not play mid, but the upper one plays full-range. This is more efficient and is capable of much higher power handling.

Who did the industrial/visual design of the Elan 30s?

It was a group effort, with Dave Berriman and myself in the UK. It followed the vinyl finished Epic concept, to eliminate all fixings from the front baffle. However, the Epic cabinet created a cabinet maker's challenge as its flush fitting, removable baffle was hard to achieve and also needed a custom tool to remove it when the silk-cloth baffle was fitted instead. The primary aim with Elan was to present a smooth profile free of reflections regardless of whether or not there is a cloth grille in place.

How is the claimed, and impressive, 92dB sensitivity achieved?

The combination of larger-than-average box volume (correct volume to match the woofers' spec, actually), 2½ way design to double the moving piston area for a given frequency and 4 ohm impedance all help to achieve this result.

The soft dome tweeter was chosen because it is intrinsically more sensitive than a normal metal dome tweeter, so matches the sensitivity of the woofers better. It was also chosen for its clear sound, smooth high-frequency response, low-resonance frequency and low distortion. We created a short loading horn to enable the tweeter's output to continue lower and combined with its lower resonance and high-power handling, enabled an even simpler crossover to be used. In fact, the Elan 35, with its large area woofers is even more sensitive than the Elan 30, at 93dB at 1m for 2.8V!

HOW IT COMPARES

THE ELAN 30S couldn't be more different to the similarly priced XTZ 99.36MKII loudspeakers. The XTZ has superior bass tunefulness, while the Epos is superior in bass extension. The XTZ excels at classical music with superb string and wind instrumental timbre, while the Epos has a far punchier, more vibrant acoustic from the intimate jazz of the Antonio Forcione and Sabine Scuibba LP.

Indeed, the Epos has an obviously more open midrange (noticeable on voices), and also comes over as far easier to drive than the XTZs.

In terms of build quality, the Elan 30s are equivalent to the high standards set by Bowers & Wilkins, and the minimalist design is a welcome return of past Epos design styling.

IN SIGHT



- 1 18mm MDF cabinet with real wood veneer
- 2 polypropylene coned 156mm mid/bass drive units
- 3 25mm doped fabric dome tweeter
- 4 large reflex port contributes to high sensitivity
- 5 bi-wirable speaker binding posts

making violins sound a little recessed and over smooth. This wasn't at all unpleasant, only giving weight to the sense that these were big, relaxed music makers that didn't need to throw the midband at you.

With *Could You Believe* from *Meet Me in London* by Antonio Forcione and Sabina Scuibba, the Elans elicited a deep yet explicit rendering of the expressively played acoustic guitar. The blisteringly fast playing was communicated convincingly, I can confidently report having personally heard Forcione play live! The vocals by Scuibba were emotive and nicely layered; the shifts in intonation and her unique vocal tints and accents were enjoyably recreated.

The Elans proved particularly good with the acoustic guitar timbre and the jazz standards on this LP. Highs were smooth and sweet, as well as being nicely extended – again this wasn't quite the classic Epos treble sound, which I think is fair to say was often a little more 'bracing'.

Conclusion

Looking at the new Elan 30s brought back memories of Epos loudspeakers of the past. Seeing the new range, there is a welcome return to the minimalist design aesthetic that I found enticing with those classic ES models. Yet the sound really is quite different now; the openness of vocals remains a delight as with the

past models, but the Elan 30 use a different audio roadmap, in that they're better balanced and sound fuller-bodied and of higher resolution in comparison to their forebears.

Then there's that obvious ease of drive, one of the key primary design goals. Well, I found them comparable to a pair of Waterfall Victoria loudspeakers, rated at 90dB, in this respect, so they should work a treat with a wide range of partnering equipment – from more crude budget stuff where their smoothness will help sugar the pill, to pricier exotica where their detail, subtlety and speed will reward.

So, if you're in the market for a good, versatile and affordable floorstanding loudspeaker, you really should hear this. ●

Mi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Full-bodied, yet high-resolution sound; minimalist aesthetics

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Can sound recessed with classical; needs to be sited clear of rear and side walls

BUILD QUALITY



EASE OF DRIVE



WE SAY: Will suit a wide range of different systems and tastes

OVERALL



More than words



words
that count . . .



'Amazingly clean and transparent sound, agility and seamless integration.'

What Hi-Fi Jun 10 • What Hi-Fi Award Winner 2010

'Excellently engineered and finished, the Spendor A9 is a fine loudspeaker with a thoroughly modern appearance and sound quality, with class leading bass power, extension, attack and speed. Representing good value and overall performance, the A9 deserves HIFICRITIC recommendation.' **Hi-Fi Critic Awards Recommended 2010**

'It presents music with a charm and poise that is rare in audio of any price. I would imagine that in 20 years time, when all the shiny 'must have' loudspeakers of 2010 are long forgotten, there will still be a lot of people happily playing music through their Spendor A9s. That's how good they are.' **Hi-Fi+ Issue 77 Mar 11 • Hi-Fi+ Best of the Best 2011**

'Spendor's new A9 is one impressive loudspeaker.'

Hi-Fi World Mar 11



A3



A5



A6



A9

SPENDOR

www.spendoraudio.com

The Spendor A-line

YOUR MUSIC NEEDS
YOU!



BUY A **LINN DS** TODAY AND GET A
iPod or iPad FREE!

QUALITY AUDIO AND AV SINCE 1985

A SOUND GALLERY EXCLUSIVE!

Buy a Linn Majik DS or Linn Majik DSM and we will put you in control with a brand new Apple iPod touch for FREE! Purchase a Linn Akurate DS or Linn Akurate DSM and enjoy building your ultimate playlist with a FREE Apple iPad on us!



RP6 record player by REGA.

ARCAM cinema systems



SUPERUNITI music streamer by Naim.



PMI speakers from B&W.

Planet of the apps

Jason Kennedy tries one of the best value hi-fi music player apps around, in the shape of BitPerfect's 1.0...

There have been a lot of bargains in *Hi-Fi Choice* over the years, but I'm pretty sure that none of them have ever been *this* affordable. At \$4.99 (now \$9.99) which when I bought it equated to £2.99, BitPerfect is the least expensive audiophile software on the market. There are free players around of course, but BP is intended to compete with the big players in the computer audio scene like Pure Music and Amarra. But how on earth can something so inexpensive be any good, how can anyone with any knowledge of the subject be selling their wares for so little?

The key is that BitPerfect is sold as an app (or application) on the Apple app store, where \$4.99 is a little above the average asking price and creators hope to make money by selling in quantity. Most audiophile products are sold in small numbers and this makes them very expensive, Tim Murison who built BP took the opposite approach.

BitPerfect is a Mac-specific player that you can only purchase through

the app store (accessible under the Apple logo on machines running Snow Leopard). It's a 64-bit device with integer mode operation, sample rate conversion, full memory playback, plus a variety of optimisation facilities for getting the best combination of performance and ease of use from your computer. Functionally it is pretty much invisible, all you see is the usual iTunes interface and a small icon on the top bar of the screen that remains in place whether you are using it or not. Compared to other players I've used, it's simple to set-up and use, in fact once you've specified the output or DAC you want to use, it works just like iTunes.

One critical aspect of this player is its integer mode feature, something that's only found on two other players on the market, Pure Music and Audirvana Plus, both of which are very impressive devices but at rather higher prices than BP. Integer mode bypasses the mixing buffer and float to DAC format conversion stages within the Mac, processes which tend to increase jitter and open the signal up to RF

interference. However, Apple has removed the option to run integer mode players in Lion (OS10.7) so this feature is only of use on machines running the Snow Leopard OS.

BP supports all the formats that iTunes does, plus FLAC via Fluke, or other third party FLAC importers, albeit only up to 16-bit/44.1kHz, which means you need to convert hi res downloads to WAV or AIFF to hear them at their best.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: BitPerfect 1.0
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: software app
PLATFORM: Apple Mac
FEATURES:
• 64-bit, integer mode operation
• sample rate conversion
• full memory playback
• iTunes integration
DISTRIBUTOR: BitPerfect
WEBSITE: bitperfectsound.blogspot.com



Sound quality

I installed BP on both a Macbook Air running the Lion operating system and an iMac with the Snow Leopard system. With the laptop plugged into the Cambridge DacMagic Plus, the result was instantly appealing, BP has a slightly warmer, sweeter sound than Audirvana Plus (1.1.2) – which I usually use – and a great sense of timing; the musical result is unusually organic and natural for a digital source. The word analogue even crops up in my notes and I suspect that the sound has been tailored to produce a classically analogue feel. But it's a lot more refined than most affordable turntables. I couldn't sit still when Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* was playing and had to stick on something more sombre in order to get on with the important business of reviewing.

Although slightly veiled by the aforementioned warmth, BP is very good at pulling out the musical elements that count, the vocals, the rhythm and melody. It's also transparent enough for me to want the original version of *Innervisions* rather than the remastering that I'd got cued up, a version which has clearly been compressed and 'airbrushed' a little too much.

Next to Pure Music (1.82) it's a little more relaxed, if you're playing at high level this is quite appealing, but at lower levels the extra energy of PM gives it an edge. The two are pretty close which can't be bad given the greater than 10x price difference.

BitPerfect is a well thought out and highly entertaining player that dramatically improves on iTunes alone, and makes some of the competition look very expensive. If you want to discover the joy of combing a Mac and a DAC this makes the experience cheap, easy and highly rewarding. ●

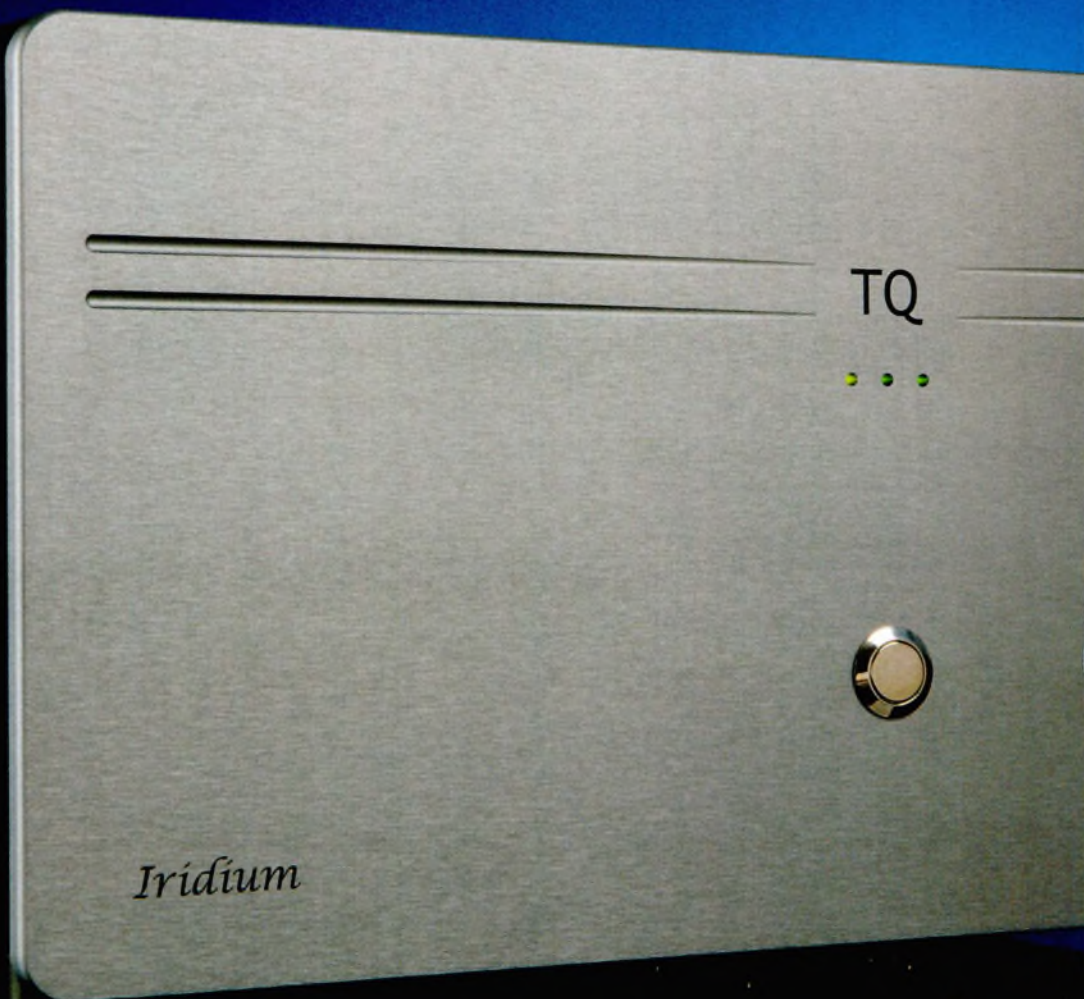
Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Giveaway price, features, ease of use
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** FLAC only up to 16-bit/44.1kHz; no integer mode on OS10.7
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Great value, high-quality music player app
FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL





SECA mega drive



Jimmy Hughes thinks there's little to better single-ended Class A operation, especially via Tellurium Q's new Iridium power amplifier...

Tellurium Q is a new British company, headed by industry stalwart Colin Wonfor of Inca Tech and Magnum fame. It's Colin's first amplifier design for a quarter of a century, so naturally he's tried his damndest to come up with something special! Rather than reinvent the wheel, his new baby features tried and trusted single-ended Class A design. But while most amps of this type use tubes, Colin has opted for

solid-state. He feels that tubes involve too many compromises and limitations.

For example, due to having a transformer-coupled output, most tube amps offer limited bandwidth, especially at the bottom end. Colin wanted an amplifier with wide bandwidth and exceptional phase linearity, so for him solid-state was a no-brainer. True, there are some drawbacks with single-ended Class A – heat and limited output power

► DETAILS

PRODUCT: Tellurium Q Iridium 20W SECA
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Class A stereo power amplifier
WEIGHT: 21kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 430x290x220mm
FEATURES:
• one set of unbalanced inputs
• one set of loudspeaker outputs
• power output (claimed): 20W into 8 ohms (40W peak)
• THD (claimed): typically 10.1% prior to clipping
DISTRIBUTOR: Tellurium Q
TELEPHONE: 01458 251997
WEBSITE: telluriumq.com

being the main ones. But, if you can accept these things, SECA circuit topology still has a certain magic when it comes to absolute sound quality.

Outwardly, the Iridium is a nice simple design. There's just a power on/off button, a single set of inputs and outputs, and, er, that's it! Weighing in at about 21kgs, the amp is reassuringly heavy and very solidly built. The front panel is solid brushed alloy, some 5mm thick. The rest of the casework is made from steel. Each amplifier has its own toroidal mains transformer. There was some audible transformer buzz with our review sample, though this wasn't excessive.

Power output is conservatively rated at 20W RMS into 8 ohms, rising to a claimed 26W into 4 ohms. The Iridium has been designed for exceptional phase linearity, and to this end it offers very wide bandwidth – said to be from 1Hz to 500kHz, at -3dB points. The power bandwidth (at 15W into 8 ohms) is given as 5Hz to 200kHz, +/- 0.1dB, and zero phase shift is claimed between 20Hz and 100kHz. Figures as good as these would be virtually

impossible with a transformer-coupled tube amp. Indeed, it was the lure of much-greater accuracy and linearity (in part, by eliminating the output transformer) that led to the demise of tube amps in the late 1960s. And while there's more to it than that, solid-state does have definite benefits.

The Iridium is a true monoblock design, with two completely independent left/right amplifiers in a single box. Being Class A the amp gets very hot during use (case temperature exceeds 40 degrees C), hence

A beautifully smooth, alluring-sounding amplifier that beguiles and excites in equal measure...

the massive heatsinks. Input sensitivity is quoted at around 1V for full output – a bit lower than most power amps, which are usually about 0.775V or even 0.5V. This means the Iridium sounds slightly quieter than other power amps at any given volume setting. While this is unlikely to be an issue with most active preamps, which usually deliver between 2V and 6V output, there may be problems (lack of gain) with passive preamps. From my Classe CP-800 there was more than sufficient, however.

Sound quality

A hot-running amplifier, the Iridium takes a while to fully warm-up – around an hour and a half. While it sounds good when you first switch on, there's definitely an improvement after an hour or so – the sound becomes even more relaxed and fluid. First impressions were of a smooth, open and very clean sort of presentation, with excellent clarity and dynamics.

Listening to the new SACD recording of

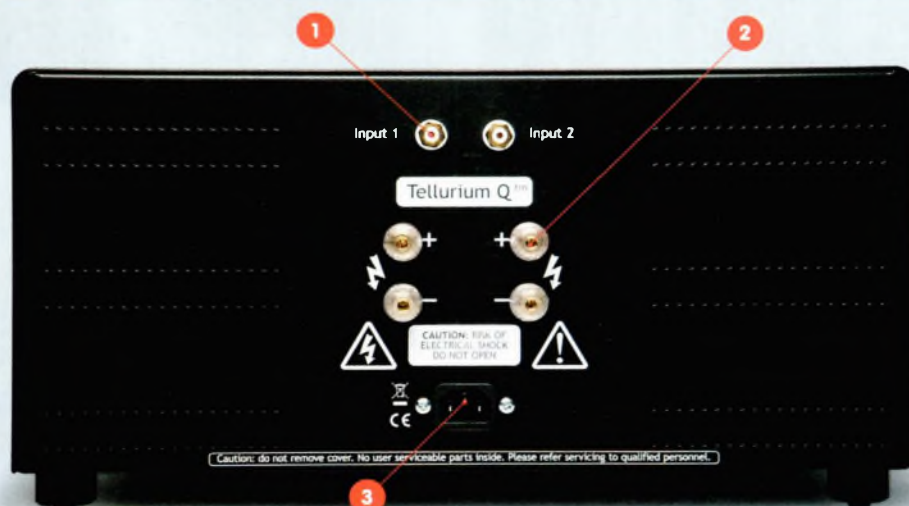
Sibelius' symphonies 2 and 5 with Osmo Vanska on BIS, the brass sounded especially impressive. The loudest passages were handled with aplomb. In the scherzo of the second symphony, the crisp interjections of the brass sounded exceptionally crisp and immediate, showcasing the wonderfully high quality of the splendid Minnesota's orchestra's playing.

Despite its modest power output, in my system the Iridium gave the impression of having power to spare, and big musical climaxes were handled comfortably. It sounded deliciously pure, effortlessly clean, and impressively detailed, with immediacy and presence, plus a smooth open tonality. For any amplifier – especially a relatively low-powered one – this is what it's all about.

Solo voice and massed choral music is another killer of low powered amps, but once again (with certain caveats) the Iridium proved equal to the task. With only around 20W output, I must have been driving the amp close to its limits. But subjectively it didn't feel like that. Unless you push the Iridium excessively hard, the sound stays smooth, clean, refined and dynamic.

It's a 'fast' sounding amp, too – very nimble and responsive, with excellent timing and rhythmic dexterity. Tonally, you're offered an attractive, alluring sort of presentation that's refined and sumptuous, but the music also sounds crisp and alert. The bottom end is firm and tight, with good control and extension. This, coupled with a smooth and 'liquid' sort of midband, and a sweet open top-end, creates a sound that strikes the ear as natural and realistic. Stereo imaging is very good; precise and clear, but not clinical, with good placement of voices and instruments. Ambience portrayal is

CONNECTIONS



- 1 RCA phonoinputs; no balanced XLRs, sadly
- 2 monowire speaker binding posts
- 3 standard AC mains IEC input socket



CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF INNOVATION IN SOUND

Q SERIES

A CLASS ABOVE



The Q Series from KEF represents a quantum leap in terms of listening pleasure.

From compact bookshelf designs to serious hi-fi speakers and dynamic home cinema systems, all available in a choice of beautiful luxury finishes, the highly versatile nine-model line-up will truly satisfy your need for class-leading audio purity.

So whether it's music or movies, Mahler or Massive Attack, what you experience is the captivatingly sweet, accurate and natural live sound of the original performance

'...in many respects it is exceptional at the price in terms of the power and physicality it offers.'

Q700 - Hi-Fi Choice Magazine - March 2012



www.kef.com

Learn about
the Q SERIES
Scan here



Q&A

JIMMY HUGHES SPEAKS TO
DESIGNER COLIN WONFOR...

JH: What inspired you to design a low-powered (20W) amplifier rather than going for something far more powerful?

CW: A single-ended Class A design offering 20W output was the most practical to make in terms of heat dissipation and size, making it more accessible/affordable than a 50W behemoth. We manufacture all our products here in the UK, so it made sense to focus on products where exacting quality of finish and careful choice of components are absolutely essential to the final sound.

What's the 'secret' when making a small amp with limited power that sounds big and powerful?

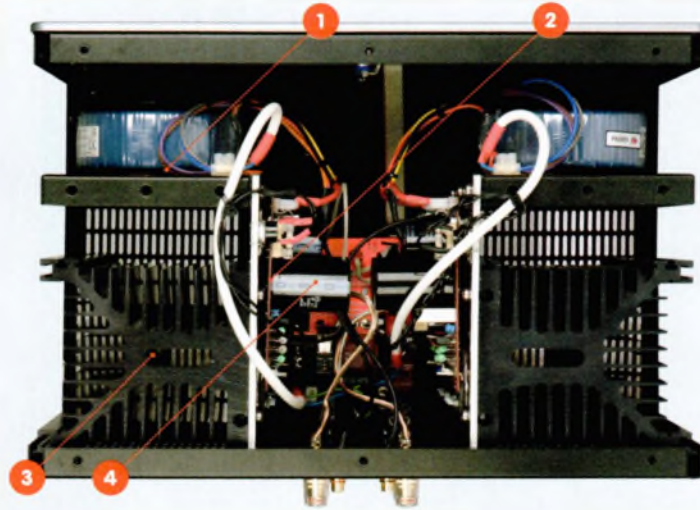
Reducing phase distortion and achieving a wide bandwidth, for starters. Another is controlling the power supply dynamically. The way our power supply has been designed allows the use of smaller reservoir capacitors. Having smaller capacitors means that fewer mains cycles are required to maintain charge at a useable level. As a result, ripple and noise are reduced, and the capacitor can react faster to dynamic change.

Open loop gain is low, reducing negative feedback which helps lower phase shift even more. Two 55A power MOSFETs are used. We could have got away with just one single 12A MOSFET, but having a greater number of larger MOSFETs allows us to drive them more effectively within their linear range. The outcome is greatly reduced distortion.

Why choose solid-state over tubes for an amplifier like this?

People have a perception that solid-state is harsh, while tubes sound softer and more natural. This does not *have* to be the case. Unfortunately, tube amps generally have a comparatively weak bottom end, while the tubes themselves need to be matched, replaced and expensively maintained. So we set out with the intention of designing a natural sounding solid-state amp that is effectively a super tube amp with none of the usual drawbacks; one that sounds incredibly natural, and does bass the way it should be done!

IN SIGHT



- 1 toroidal mains transformer, 1 of 2
- 2 main circuit boards vertically mounted
- 3 massive heatsinks get very hot
- 4 chunky power supply smoothing capacitors



WHILE THE Tellurium Q Iridium offers slightly more power than comparable SECA tube amps, more importantly it actually sounds more powerful. It goes louder, and avoids the slight dynamic compression you get as power limits are reached.

In this respect, it has quite a bit more headroom than, say, the Unison Research Simply Italy, while offering comparable refinement and fine detail. The Simply Italy tends to compress and soften more obviously as you approach its power limits.

However, when you *do* clip the Iridium, it roughens more perceptibly than a typical SECA tube amp. When pushed too hard, there's some breakup. However, prior to this point, the sound remains clean, dynamic, and well separated.

A powerful Class A/B design like Musical Fidelity's M6 PRX offers a lot more output (260W), but misses some of the Iridium's magic. As such, it's a case of deciding whether the Iridium's modest power output is going to be an issue in your system.

impressive, and the sound has plenty of depth on recordings that capture the hall acoustic.

Being two mono amplifiers in a single box, crosstalk between channels is low – hence the good stereo. But there's more to it than that – you get a clear sense of where microphones were placed, and how the recording was produced. You seem to hear a specific acoustic or tonality, rather than a generalised uniform one. This is almost certainly a result of the care taken to ensure phase linearity over the audible bandwidth, and it's an impressive quality. The Iridium sounds so effortlessly natural, you may be tempted to raise volume levels beyond the amp's power limits. Naturally, much depends on the sort of music you listen to, the size of your room, speaker efficiency and how loud you like to listen.

The Iridium is usually not too fazed by pop music, due to dynamic peaks being compressed. But it can be caught out on recordings of uncompressed solo voice (female soprano, especially) and massed choral music. Most of the time the sound is beautifully clean, but things can roughen as a sudden dynamic peak pushes the amp beyond its limits. Choosing sensitive, easy-to-drive speakers ensures you keep within the Iridium's power envelope.

The reward is an unfailingly clean sound, offering excellent clarity and outstanding dynamic separation. The Iridium is an amplifier having the effortless refinement of a proper valve design, but with a tighter and firmer bottom end. On a blind listening test, I reckon most people

would be fooled into thinking the Iridium was a valve powered product. It has that expansive, tube-like openness and liquidity. Yet at the same time it's not falsely euphonic or unduly romantic.

Tellurium Q also offers a range of cables, and naturally strongly recommends them to Iridium amplifier users. In particular, the Black power cable (£798) is worth sampling. In terms of clarity and detail, it made a big difference over the supplied OEM cable.

Conclusion

Summing up, I certainly recommend you audition this new Tellurium Q Iridium amp. Power limits aside, it's difficult to fault – and a great advert for the sonic benefits of single-ended Class A solid-state electronics. A beautifully smooth and agreeable amplifier that beguiles and excites in equal measure, the Iridium SECA is refined and detailed without sounding lacking in bite, detail or rhythmic fluency. ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Very clean, open, transparent, dimensional sound

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Limited power output; runs very hot

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: An indefinable sonic rightness, the amp sounds natural and true like few others; expensive yet great value

FEATURES



OVERALL



twenty series

Platinum
Twenty Year Warranty



The next generation of beautifully elegant,
handcrafted, British loudspeakers.

*"There's a purity to the sound which is simply astonishing
- they're truly fabulous speakers"*

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER MARCH '12

twenty-22
Diamond Black

Ask to hear the **twenty-22** at:

Audio T, Southampton
Audio Venue, Maidenhead
Bartlett's HiFi, London
Basically Sound, Norfolk
Billy Vee Sound Systems, London
Divine Audio, Desborough
Doug Brady HiFi, Warrington

Fanthorpes Ltd, Hull
Frank Harvey HiFi Ltd, Coventry
Home Media Ltd, Maidstone
Lintone Audio, Gateshead
Movement Audio, Poole
Nottingham HiFi Centre, Nottingham
Oxford Audio Consultants, Oxford

Salisbury HiFi, Salisbury
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Yeovil
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Bristol
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Bromley
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Leeds
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Reading
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Sevenoaks

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Witham
Signals, Ipswich
Soundcraft HiFi, Ashford
The Home Cinema Centre, Edinburgh
Unilet Sound & Vision, New Malden
Zinc HT, Borehamwood

○○○ **PMC**[®]
www.pmc-speakers.com

T +44 (0) 870 4441044
sales@promonitor.co.uk



Sponsored by:


 Russ Anderson
Solutions for better music & movies

Hi-fi choices

Email us at letters@hifichoice.co.uk or write to:
**Hi-Fi Choice Letters, My Hobby Store Ltd, Hadlow House,
 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG**



DAVID PRICE
EXPERTISE: EDITOR

DP HAS SPENT much longer than he'd care to admit buying and upgrading his own hi-fi system, not to mention reviewing thousands of separates over the years.



ED SELLEY
EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

FOR THE BEST PART of ten years, ES was developing and supporting products from some of the biggest names in audio. Enjoys blogging about his favourite tunes too.



CHANNA VITHANA
EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

CV GOT LOST in music back in 1980 and has never recovered. With a background in design and architecture, he's been a published journalist for nearly a decade.



MALCOLM STEWARD
EXPERTISE: REVIEWER

MS HAS SEVERAL decades of experience writing about hi-fi for a wealth of mags. Although a long standing vinyl junkie, nowadays he's getting ever more into digital streaming.

Wot next?

I am in a position where I am not sure what to do next in terms of source. My current stereo setup is as follows: PC, Musical Fidelity V-Link; Rega DAC; Maverick Audio Tubemagic D1; Emotiva UPA-2 and B&W 685 loudspeakers. The pre and power is temporary.

I had a Rotel RC-1070 and RB-1080 before, but sold the Rotel gear to upgrade on my HT setup. I am in the process (with lots of help) of finishing a FirstWatt F5 power amp with an accompanying tube preamp. I will decide what I will do in terms of these once the DIY side has been done and I know how it sounds.

My dilemma is with the source. I have a Marantz CD5400 CD player that I can use as transport, so my first question is, does it make sense to still look at this type of upgrade and will another transport make a difference?

If it is worthwhile, what would you recommend? If I were to go for a streaming option, should I look at anything above a Squeezebox Touch? I have a Marantz SR7005 and thus have experience in an HT setup of the streaming of Marantz (if the NA7004 is the same in function to the SR7005).

My expectation is that the Squeezebox with the Rega DAC will do a decent job. What do you think? What would you do in this scenario if you had a budget of up to £1,000 for an upgrade on source?

**Marius Kemp, via email
 (South Africa)**

MS says: Changing your CD transport will certainly make a difference, but the question is will that difference be worthwhile now and in the future?

I have not used a CD player regularly for a couple of years now. I rip my CDs straight to hard disk and play them through my network streamer. The Squeezebox is a very capable device – and a very impressive one given its low price, but you should try aiming a little higher. I suspect the Marantz NA7004 would be suitable in your proposed system.

You are rather restricted by your budget because there is not a huge number of media players around the £1,000 mark. Whichever player you select you will still need to set aside funds for a NAS drive upon which you can store your music. I think that there's little that is better value than the well-equipped Vortexbox XL, which starts with 500GB of

storage for £470. You could even buy two of them and use one as a backup device, which is an absolutely vital requirement.

ES says: My expectation is that the Squeezebox mated to a Rega DAC will banish any thoughts of using a CD ever again, but I find myself saying that a great deal these days!

You're in the privileged position of owning one of the best pieces of digital under £1,000 and connecting one of the best interfaces available at any price, so it seems like a no-brainer. The Marantz remains a fine unit, but bolstered by a Rega DAC, the Squeezebox would be the way forward for me.

CV says: Hi Marius, you don't say how the Marantz with the Rega DAC performs? With recent experience of Rega's DAC, I found it worked superbly through its

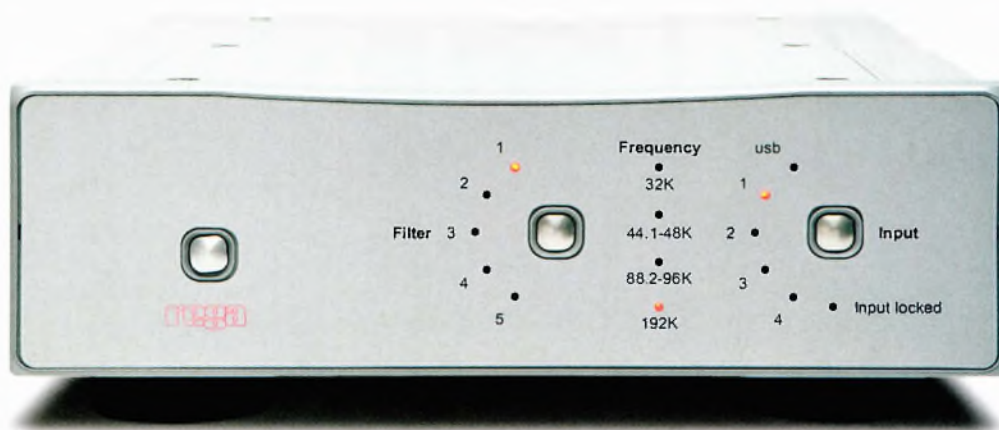
coaxial digital input (phono socket), but less so with USB (which is only 16-bit resolution via USB and cannot currently go up to 96 and 192kHz sampling rates). So if you were to go with a streamer, make sure it has a good coaxial digital output to get the best from the Rega.

My expectation is that the Squeezebox with the Rega DAC will do a decent job...

Intriguingly, I have used a second generation Planet CD player (circa, 2000) as an excellent transport where it outperformed its replacement (the Apollo with full-width case) and equally matched the high-end Chord Electronics Blu transport in sound quality when connected to Chord's DAC 64!

So, depending on how many CDs you have, you might be able to locate a good transport (secondhand) and a Squeezebox within your budget (plus good digital interconnects for both CD and USB), or a better quality streamer to go with your DAC if you are happy with the Marantz and comparisons to other transports don't work out. Needless to say, you should always try before you buy if at all possible!

Wot next?: The Rega DAC is the perfect partner to a Logitech Squeezebox Touch, giving super sounding streaming...



Blind vision

I have been buying audio equipment for more years than I care to remember and have a lot of listening experience. I compare reproduced music to live performances of which I have attended hundreds, although I do not audition equipment using electronic music. Classical, jazz, rock (mainly) are far more useful. I have often been accused of having golden ears and because I can tell, blindfold, identically badged (i.e. same models of the production line) amps apart within seconds of a track starting, and describe how, I guess that's true.

However, I recently had cause to question the performance of my main amp (a heavily refurbished and modified integrated that, in its day, was very favourably reviewed) as another old amp I'd bought sounded far better. This put me in mind of researching today's integrated amplifiers for audition, so your recent issue (HFC 356) was certainly timely...

I was, however, disappointed by your review of these amps. There was absolutely nothing to tell me how the amps sounded. For example, there was no meaningful description of, bass impact,

slam, timing, depth, precision, clarity, treble, soundstaging, transients and so on. Instead we get such nonsense as, "...lost interest and disappeared into the mix..." and "...yet gets the job done in the end...". These comments convey no idea of how the amps actually sound. All told I was disappointed.

Richard Baguley, via email

DP says: Sorry if you didn't get anything from the Blind-Listening Group Test, Richard. As we make clear in the magazine, it's very much a unique event, in which we invite a variety of people to opine on the sound of the products put in front of them. As such, it's

The comments are written down; nothing added, nothing taken away

completely down to the people on the listening panel. Their comments are not made up; they are written down with nothing added or taken away, straight from the horse's mouth, the unvarnished truth!

The result is – as you effectively identify – a very 'impressionistic', subjective sort of review. It's simply the result of recording

the comments of the panel, rather than focusing on an overarching narrative, as per conventional reviews both in this magazine and in others.

Having done umpteen non-blind, non-panel group tests, I can see the benefits in both approaches. The upside is that there's absolutely no 'auto-suggestion' that can happen when reviewers are swayed, subconsciously or otherwise, by the brand(s) in question. The downside is that the test is the hostage of the individuals concerned, and their subjective findings at that time. These may or may not be eruditely conveyed; either way they tend to become focused on the sonic differences of the various products, rather than giving a general overview of a product's performance across the parameters you list.

As such, Hi-Fi Choice's Blind-Listening Group Test system is, I feel, worthwhile – an interesting counterpoint to other types of group tests. In both cases however, I'd strongly urge you to use them as a 'way in' to the selection process, rather than the last word. People have such different tastes, rooms and ancillary components, so you should always try to buy from a good dealer if you possibly can.

Soft machines

One comment I haven't come across in your reviews is 'soft sound'. My old NAD 3020 amplifier produces a 'soft sound', which suits me fine. I have recently tried a Naim Nait 3 and a Roksan Kandy K2, without achieving the audio performance I'm searching for. My budget is £600, please advise!
Dave Powell, via email

DP says: Oooh, that's a tricky one. If you had £1,500 to spend I'd say Roksan's Caspian M2 integrated would be a no-brainer, as it's positively luxurious in its tonality, but your options are less wide at your budget; my choice would be Roksan's Kandy K2, which is still a smooth and decently fulsome sounding performer.

MS says: What exactly do you mean by 'soft' sound? One with poor leading-edge definition? Or one with a skewed tonal balance that accentuates the upper bass and restrains the treble? Either way it is not an accurate portrayal of music and that tends to be what we look for, which explains why you have not seen the term used here often. If you like the sound produced by your old NAD 3020, why are you looking to change it? It is unlikely that you will find a contemporary amplifier that will produce a 'soft' sound to match it. I think you will probably have to scour the second-hand market for an amplifier of a similar vintage.

The other option would be to tape some toilet tissue or cloth over the tweeters in your loudspeaker! That was a common 'softening' practice when studios used Yamaha NS1000 monitors, which could exhibit a bit of a 'sting' at the top end. This dodge might help if you ever decide to replace your NAD with something more modern!

Tape head

I am a student from Japan who is studying international management at Reading University. Having read about the audio jumble in HFC 355, I thought I'd go along and have a look (we have nothing like this in Japan).

I was amazed, so many old things! I even found a Sony 'Sports' Walkman, which plays cassettes under water. I'd never seen anything like it before and can't wait to tell my friends back home about my experiences!

Maki Oyama, via email (Hiroshima, Japan)

DP says: Thanks Maki – Japan has many wonderful things, but as a country it does tend towards the disposable lifestyle just a bit too much in my view, so I am not



Blind vision: Group test panellists should get their fingers out of their ears, says Richard Baguley!

Big wheels turnin'

I read with interest David Price's article, *Reelin' in the years* (HFC 355). I was also in awe of the earlier hi-fi separates, peering in through the shop window at units displaying their large dials and fluttering meters, while wired up to colossal speakers the size of tenement blocks. But I can now afford to walk into a hi-fi shop to look, listen and buy! I also wasn't aware at the time that I was wandering amongst so many vehicles which are now labelled as classic cars...

Fashion dictates our life including hi-fi, where designers start with visual impact. We have already had the 'one-box style systems' following the all-in-one 'music centre' of the late seventies/early eighties. I must say that it wasn't until I shifted to separates that my mates sat around the hi-fi watching the black disc spinning in accompaniment to the large LEDs illuminating the room. I am glad that we have moved away from the 'Humbrol' silver fascias and back to black.

Life is a big wheel and what goes around comes around. I am not a dinosaur and am looking toward the future with downloads and streaming. But the computer wasn't designed for audio/hi-fi and if my computer is anything to go by I will wait for the glitches and gremlins to move out and find somewhere else to squat.

Until the electronics sorts itself out and internet providers offer an improved service, I will keep listening to my CD collection on a modern separates system with its flush front panel and in black. Bring back Oxford Bags!

Chester Curtis, via email

DP says: Thanks Chester. My dem at the Bristol show, where I used a MacBook Pro as a source in addition to a (SA)CD player, elicited a lot of comment from those who attended.

One thing I did was to ask people if they could imagine themselves running a computer as a source, feeding a USB DAC, for example. A sizeable minority said yes, because they were already doing precisely this!

However, the majority in every group of fifteen I asked, said



Big wheels turnin': computer audio is great for internet radio, streaming Victoria Derbyshire on BBC 5 Live...

"no". Or at least they said "no" at first; I'd then ask them the same question after they'd heard Kate Bush's *Snowflake* at 24-bit/96kHz via the MacBook Pro, and then about fifty percent of the computer audio naysayers changed their minds.

Actually, I am with you. I still prefer vinyl as my main source, followed by CD (or SACD if I'm lucky enough to have the

I'm not a dinosaur and look forward to the future of downloads and streaming

music on that format). I mostly use computer audio in the context of streaming BBC Radio 5 Live and/or podcasts. But the quality is getting better, and hi res files more common, and I may find myself hooking my Mac up to my reference dCS Debussy more often. While I have reviewed countless Wi-Fi-enabled network music players, in my experience connecting them up via Ethernet generally sounds better.

So don't feel like you're missing out if you haven't got the latest all-singing, all-dancing networked music machine; if you're happy with what you've got that's just fine. Computer audio is not compulsory, and we all do things at our own speed. My point is simply that there's now another valid and versatile way to enjoy your music, should you so wish.

surprised you don't have audio jumbles! More's the pity, as the sheer quality and diversity of classic Japanese hi-fi from the nineteen seventies is/was staggering. Oh, and as I always ask Japanese people I meet here in the UK – did you come here for our food or our weather?

Round and round

I am in a spin about vinyl. I currently have a Rega Planar 3 of about twenty years vintage, which has given me great service.

About two months ago I decided to get a network music player and started reading hi-fi mags again, and realised I was probably going to have to spend more than my intended budget to get decent sound. Then I realised that this same sort of money would get me a very nice turntable, the sort I've been dreaming about for years.

So now my interest has been rekindled – not in network music players but in turntables! I've decided to drop £250 or so on a Squeezebox Touch, and spend the rest of my savings on a really nice black plastic player! I rationalise it in my mind by saying that I have nearly 3,000 LPs and about 300 AAC files on my iPod, so I suppose it's better to throw the cash where it's going to make the biggest splash!

With that in mind, what's the best turntable I can buy for around £3,000? I know it's a bit of an open-ended question, and I understand that I may also have to buy an arm and cartridge, but I thought maybe I should go for the best deck I can possibly afford and just use the RB300 arm from the Rega, plus a new cartridge (recommendations please?) in the short term, while my bank balance recovers.

Certainly, when I was last really interested in hi-fi, everyone was telling me to put as much money into the turntable as possible, from the outset. Or should I divide things up as £1,000 on the deck, £1,000 on the arm and £1,000 on the cartridge? Frankly I'd like your advice on my priorities, and model recommendations, too. Is the Linn still king?

The rest of my system consists of an eighties Inca Tech Claymore amplifier (remember them) which has a pretty good phono stage built in, and a pair of Mission 752 loudspeakers, both of which I am really happy with for the mean

My interest has been rekindled, not in network music but in turntables!

time, so please don't ask me to change these instead. Basically I'd just like a really smart vinyl front end to go with it. Music tastes: jazz funk, Stanley Clarke, Freeez, Donald Byrd, Alphonse Mouzon – that sort of thing!

Raj Car, via email

MS says: I used to own a Funk Firm modified Linn Sondek and enjoyed it for many a long year, but my favourite vinyl spinner for the past few years has been that wonderfully pragmatic design, the Well Tempered Amadeus G1A, with its integrated WT unipivot tonearm coupled to a Dynavector XX-2 moving coil.

If that exceeds your budget then pick a less costly cartridge

Round and round – which turntable to get for around £3,000? Michell's Orbe is a great starting point...



such as the Dynavector 10x5 high-output moving design. The synergy between this turntable/tonearm and these cartridges is quite magical and well worth exploiting. You might also consider decks from The Funk Firm or turntable packages from Roksan and Clearaudio.

ES says: We generally provide our answers to letters in isolation so I am fairly sure that your answers from the assembled 'experts' will have nothing in common! Page after page of material has been spent on the debate of how to allocate turntable funds and I don't think we are any nearer a definitive answer. I would generally go for 50 per cent deck, 25 per cent arm 25 per cent cartridge, but I'm not so absolute in this as to declare it the only way.

In my visit to Walrus this month (pg8), none of the turntables broke down to this balance and all of them sounded mighty. If I was in your position at this point, I would be looking toward Audio Note's TT-2 (HFC 353) that I reviewed recently. Combined with the Arm One tonearm and you would have a serious music maker that would leave you enough of a budget to choose from a range of cartridges.

DP says: If it's £3,000 you have then there's a vast range of choice in terms of the sound you can achieve. It's actually very difficult to answer specifically, as it's a bit like writing a letter in saying, "Dear Hi-Fi Choice, what kind of tea do I like?". The point is, of course, that only you can really know the answer.

My instinct would be to buy a Michell Orbe SE with TecnoArm and a Lyra Delos moving-coil cartridge, if you can possibly afford it, or an Audio Technica AT-33EV if you can't (the former has a wonderfully delicate and musical sound, the latter has much of this at only half the price).

I am a long term user and fan of the Michell Orbe, and personally love its smooth, even sound, powerful dynamics, wide sound staging and excellent tonal accuracy; it's not the very best deck at the price in any single way, but is nevertheless a superb all-rounder and, to my ears, this is what really makes it so good.



The mains thing: Chris Dixon wants more reviews of mains products like this Isol-8 MiniSub Wave

As such, my suggestion would be to use it as a starting point and audition rivals from Linn, Roksan, Avid and Inspire. Ed's Walrus feature in this issue is interesting reading, too...

The mains thing

The Choice Extras section in HFC 357 was very enjoyable. In an age where tweaking is maybe better value than buying new equipment, could you feature more reviews regarding mains products? Maybe some more from Fidelity Audio, etc., the smaller companies that produce high-specification products, but don't shout about it.

Chris Dixon, via email

DP says: Hi Chris, yes we're going to do more on this. Choice Extras is now a regular feature, and it gives us plenty of scope to review mains products over the coming months and years. The caveat is, of course, that these sort of things are often more system-specific than other tweaks, so it's always best to borrow them from a good dealer and try before you buy. At best, mains filters, cleaners and conditioners can give dramatically better sound; at worst, they can actually sully the sound.

Speak easy

I have a Naim Nait 5 (original model), and Epos ES-11 speakers. I am without a source and recently compared the Quad Elite to the Rotel RCD-1520. The Quad was in another league in terms of bass definition and timing. However, I would ideally like a CD player that I can easily connect digital devices to, most likely an iPod or my MacBookPro.

I am prepared for a total rethink and have been considering either the Aura Note Premier or Bel Canto C5i. What would be a

good speaker match, as I am interested in the Totem Rainmakers or Neat Motive 2s? I certainly appreciate a fast and detailed sound.

Dennis Minnow, via email

MS says: As you like the sound of your Nait 5, why not stay with Naim and try the Uniti? As a CD player, streamer, iPod dock, DAC and amplifier (based on the NAIT design), it ticks most of your boxes. It will drive your Epos ES-11s and also makes an ideal partner for Neat speakers with which it will deliver a suitably fast and detailed performance.

I am not a huge fan of the Mac 'n' DAC approach, but if you are going down that route, to connect your MacBook to the Uniti you will need a USB to S/PDIF convertor (around £100) such as the M2Tech HiFace or a Musical Fidelity V Link 2.

ES says: As a self confessed Neat fan, I believe the Motive range offers excellent performance and compatibility with a wide range of electronics. That said, this price point positively heaves with suitable choices and I would urge you to listen to the Spendor A3 and Kudos X2 as well, especially if you are in the market for a diminutive floorstander.

The Bel Canto is a seriously clever amplifier (HFC 351) and it left a lasting impression on Richard Black. The Aura is spreading itself

over a wider range of features than the C5i and, as such, isn't quite so talented, but is still an impressive piece of kit.

Were it my money, I would be looking at amps with digital inputs and choosing my sources if and when I decided what I needed in addition to the laptop. To this end, be sure to consider the Cyrus 8 XP d and Leema Pulse III, as both are strong performers with digital inputs.

Oppo-tunity knocks

It appears from your April issue (HFC 357), that a modified Oppo BDP 95EU is used as a reference player by your blind-listening test group. Owning such a player myself, I'm curious as to what modifications have been done to your version?

Peter Holm, via email (Denmark)

DP says: Hi Peter – as someone who's tried a lot of Audiocom modifications packages in the past, I was keen to get a tweaked universal BD machine, and the OPPO BDP-95EU Audiocom Signature is precisely that.

The modifications consist of a Furutech FI-10 Rhodium IEC Inlet, an upgraded video/digital power supply, Deep Cryogenic Treatment (DCT) for power and audio PWB, Bybee

Speak easy: Aura Note's Premier all-in-one system offers great style and sound, but its digital connectivity isn't so impressive, says ES



Boxing clever

I've recently bought an Musical Fidelity M6i integrated amplifier, and have been trying to think of a matching pair of floorstanding loudspeakers. I am torn between three choices, namely, the B&W CM9, the Monitor Audio Silver RX8 and the Focal Chorus 826W.

I listen to all types of music, but predominantly classical, pop and nineteen seventies rock. Matching CD player is a Cambridge Audio Azur 840C. Please advise!

Simon, via email

DP says: In a situation such as this Simon – for future reference – it would be good to get a little more insight into your musical tastes and general proclivities. For example, do you like a sweet, smooth sound or a powerful, in-your-face one? Especially in the case of loudspeakers, where personal taste is so incredibly important.

But I digress. First, your source is a clean, punchy and pretty smooth sounding CD spinner, which is just about up to the job of feeding the slightly 'well lit' Musical Fidelity M6i. For this reason, be aware that things might get just a little too forward if you're not careful. So I'd advise you to get the new Monitor Audio GX200 (£2,300) – this speaker will be at the very top of your budget, but I think it will stand you in good stead for the future; you'll likely appreciate its even sounding ribbon tweeters.

By comparison, the MA RX8 will sound diffuse and less refined, lacking as it does the pricier GX200's insight and finesse. The B&W might be rather stark in the upper midband; certainly with the Musical Fidelity you'd be well aware of the sonic footprint of those Kevlar drive units. The CM9 will doubtless seem impressive, but 'glassy' would be the phrase that springs to mind with the Focals, which might shout too much. I've heard 'em sound great, but it would be an uphill struggle to achieve this in your system.

'Super Effect' AC Bullets for AC input (laser welded version), Bybee Slipstream for AC Earth, Audiocom Superclock 4 Ultra-low jitter clock system, Bybee Music Rail for clock supply, Bybee Slipstream purifiers for audio transformer secondary supplies, SteinMusic resonance control for digital/video PWB, SteinMusic resonance control for audio PSU PWB and audio PWB, SteinMusic E-Pad +S for BD Drive, SteinMusic E-Pad +S for IEC inlet, and RF absorbing techniques are employed in key locations.

The result is a very capable player which, I feel, is substantially superior to the original sonically. While it's not the very best CD player I've ever heard, it does well in this respect all the same, and is excellent with the hi res formats and, of course, Blu-ray video.

For more details and the pricing structure you can check out the Audiocom website at audiocominternational.com.

New for old

I am reluctantly giving up on my Leak/Lowther hi-fi system (yes, I am that old) and looking to purchase a mini system. Can you help me?

As for loudspeakers, I have compared the Mordaunt Short Avianos with the Monitor Audio Bronze BX2s and find the former more lively in the treble sector. Perhaps you can advise me on a better setup?

Brian Passey, via email

ES says: Part of the problem is that I cannot think of much in the way of a mini system that is going to sound like a Leak/Lowther combo! Going a bit 'off piste' with this one, might it be worth considering something like a NuForce Icon amplifier

and pairing it with a single driver speaker like the fabulous Eclipse TD models? The results will be compact, but have some of the speed and focus that your old set-up possessed. As a completely secondary, but possibly useful aspect it will look pretty swish too!

Detail desired

I would like to make a request – I would love to have some educational articles added on a more regular basis. For instance, what the advantages of bi-wiring or bi-amping might be; or how rubberised (sorbothane) feet or anti-vibration platform under an amp might make a difference to the sound; how to get rid of reverberations in a room, etc. I think such articles would be extremely helpful for the uninitiated.

Anyway, back to the main reason for writing: I currently have a Roksan Kandy KC-1 Mk III CD player and KA-1 Mk III amplifier, along with its complementary power amp. The system is bi-amped to Bowers & Wilkins 683 floorstanders, using QED Silver Anniversary XT Bi-Wire and connected together with Atlas Navigator interconnects. It sounds great! However, I would like more detail from my hi-fi and would love to get pinpoint imaging and am considering upgrading.

Ideally I would like to have a matching system and my current considerations are:

(a) Roksan Caspian M2 amp and CD (however, Roksan do not currently have a hard drive or streaming version)?

(b) Naim XS system – the attraction here is the 1Tb hard drive on its HDX, but I am unsure about the detail and soundstaging?

(c) Cyrus CD8 and matching amp; Krell or Leema?

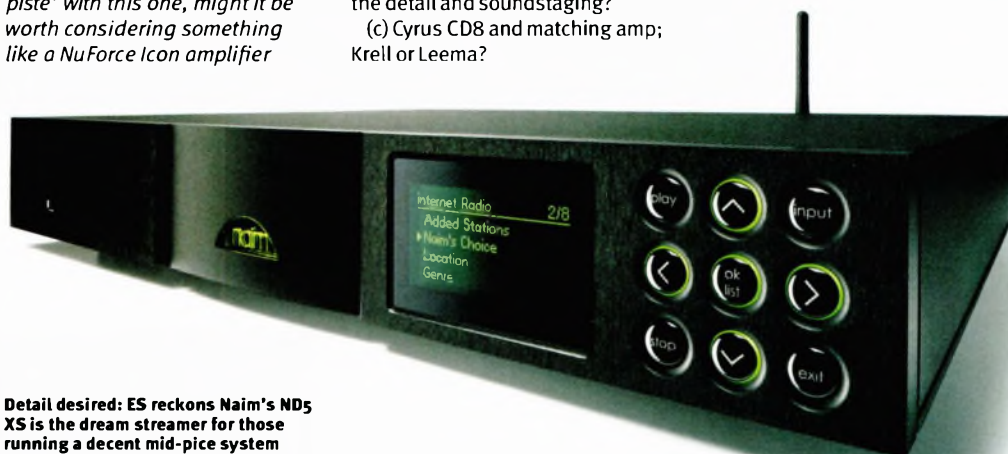
Obviously I would need to dem the systems before making a choice, but your opinion in narrowing down my choice would be highly valued.

Izhar Ul-Haq, via email

MS says: If you enjoy the Roksans and are keen on detail then the ideal solution might well be a Linn DS unit fronting an impeccably set-up system with the Roksan Caspian amplifier and loudspeakers from, maybe, Focal. I have to say that the wait for any streaming product from Roksan might be a long one; the company did not seem greatly enthused by the prospects of streaming the last time I spoke to it.

The HDX is not part of the Naim XS family, but you could use it or a ND5 XS streamer with a NAS drive and the partnering Naim XS amplification without any worries about soundstaging. Modern Naim gear can image as well as its competitors. It is exceptionally musically communicative, but arguably not as transparent as the Linn for those who crave detail and overt resolution.

ES says: There are some very different options on that list. A demo is going to be essential but, more importantly, I think you might want to consider mixing and matching rather than going for 'one-make'. I suspect that combining Naim's ND5 XS streamer with the Roksan Caspian M2 would be worth trying together as the sonics and feature set could be ideal, but equally in your room with your music choices it could fall flat. It is rare and beautiful moment when one manufacturer is the best option for both sources!



Detail desired: ES reckons Naim's ND5 XS is the dream streamer for those running a decent mid-price system

CV says: A low or no-cost first step for better imaging is to experiment with the positioning of the loudspeakers – obvious I know, but small increments in orientation, angles and distance from walls, etc., towards the listener with music arriving at ear height can make surprising enhancements or 'rightness' to the sound quality where vocals, for instance, appear from the centre (or if listening loud or nearer to the loudspeakers – in the middle of your head – just like headphones).

If you are not sure of the imaging position, then you can try the IsoTek Ultimate System Set-Up Disc (p111) which has a section that deals with imaging amongst other system test workouts (isoteksystems.com).

With the cables make sure they are equal lengths, terminated properly and loosely laid (not coiled or bent at awkward angles, and not touching power and interconnect leads) as this can also subtly improve the sound.

Make sure your hi-fi is set-up on stable, level supports, tables or rack and that the loudspeaker is properly sited with no wobbles, once you are happy with positioning. It is worth taking time to sort out your current system set-up to more accurately gauge upgrades.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I HAVEN'T PICKED UP A HI-FI MAGAZINE FOR A WHILE, so was interested to see *Hi-Fi Choice* again, several years on. I do like the letters section and the general debates happening. So in this spirit I thought I would put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard, to be honest) to kick another argument off!

Yes, I know it's a bit of an oldie, but where are we in the great analogue vs. digital debate? I have noticed that *HFC* reviewers who in the past have associated themselves with vinyl sources are now openly admitting to using streamers to listen to digital music. Have they suddenly gone off vinyl? Would they say that nowadays black plastic just can't match the quality of high-resolution digital downloads?

If so, then I disagree! Indeed I'm still trying to get my head around the fact, all these years later, that so many people unquestioningly listen to digital or even accept it at all. For example, how can you seriously review a hi-fi product without recourse to the higher resolution source that is analogue disc?

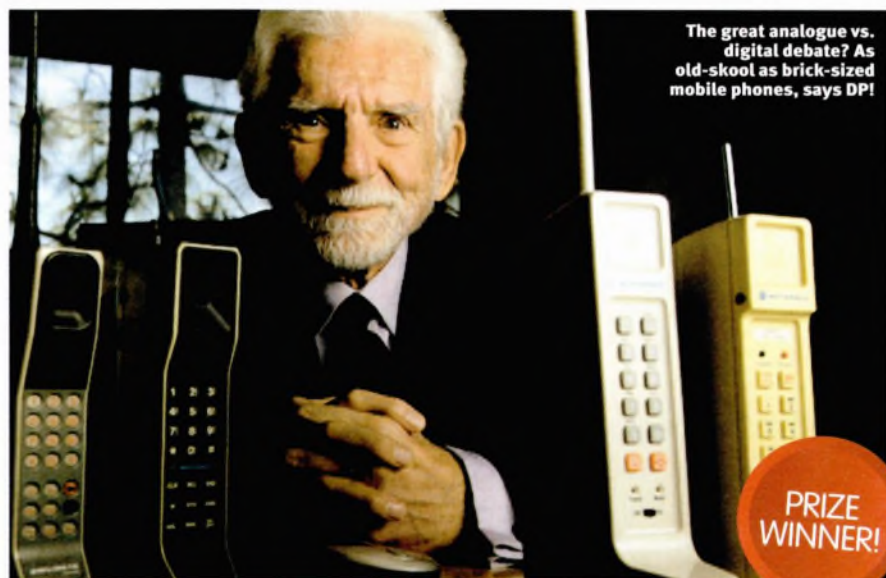
If you listen to an amplifier only via Compact Disc, then surely you're not hearing it at its best, because the actual music format isn't stretching the rest of the replay chain? I haven't heard much hi-res digital, but am sure it can't be as good as analogue done properly, because it still has that extra level of coding and decoding, rather than keeping it pure in the analogue domain – just like real music! So have you guys sold yourselves down the digital river?

John Martinsell, via email

DP says: That's what I like, a combative piece of polemic! You're right to say that in the late eighties and early nineties, there was an awful lot of chatter amongst audiophiles around the respective merits of digital and analogue. I rather enjoyed all the controversy at the time, but I haven't thought about it for years as most of us

have got to the stage where we've ended up with some sort of digital source, and aren't trying to play it off against our turntables. Indeed many are trying to make them complement one another in sonic terms; hence the large number of letters we get asking for 'analogue-sounding' CD players...

My view is that it's almost a false opposition nowadays; vinyl is superb and has improved apace in the past few years, but as our Blind-Listening Group Test this month shows, CD can be very satisfying, too, and indeed hi-res can work extremely well if you take time to set it up properly. Ultimately, it's reductive to think in terms of 'it's got to be good if it's analogue/bad if it's digital'; each format can sound horrid, both can be magnificent. What's needed is care and attention to get it so – and that's where the art of getting good sound comes in. So fun as it may once have been, I think the analogue vs. digital debate should be filed away in some sort of nineteen eighties themed museum somewhere, along with red braces, shoulder pads and brick-sized mobile phones! ●



WIN A RUSS ANDREWS POWERMAX PLUS MAINS LEAD WORTH £50!

Letter of the Month winners receive a Russ Andrews PowerMax Plus mains lead worth £50. Write to us at letters@hifichoice.co.uk





KINGDOM
ROYAL

85 years of audio innovation

Kingdom Royal is Tannoy's flagship loudspeaker. It represents the sum of the British company's rich 85 year heritage, its cutting-edge technical innovation and world-renowned acoustic engineering. Kingdom Royal brings together proprietary components, a radical cabinet design and the finest quality materials throughout, to deliver a true musical reference.

Distilling this high-end expertise throughout our loudspeaker range, everyone can enjoy Tannoy's class leading refinement and performance. From the award-winning Mercury V series to the classic Prestige collection, every Tannoy loudspeaker has Kingdom Royal DNA at its heart.

TANNOY®

For more information on Tannoy's extensive loudspeaker range visit www.tannoy.com

Are You Buying Pre-Ruined

The Music Chain

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

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

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

Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

So why is the hi-fi connoisseur so important to the music industry? By their nature, audiophiles are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best

quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without the audiophile, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the chain. Let's be honest, over recent years the majority of music listeners now settle for MP3 convenience and, therefore, mediocre sound quality, that is 'pre-ruined' music. If the pendulum ever swings so far that all but a few listen to highly compressed formats such as MP3, music producers will not waste their resources on producing high quality recordings because it would be commercially unnecessary, even if their recording engineers wanted to achieve the best they could. After all, an MP3 or AAC file, the iTunes default format, downloaded at 128 kbps (the most popular download speed), is about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track, 1411 kbps, so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It's rubbish quality made louder. Fortunately, there is still significant demand from audiophiles committed to sound quality to sustain the production of high quality recordings, but it would be a tragedy if there weren't. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing that they are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

Just as essential a link in the chain as the hi-fi connoisseur is the specialist hi-fi retailer and the two are rightly dependent on each other. Without the specialist retailer the hi-end hi-fi manufacturer would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits and performance of their products against that of their competitors –

a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding products and combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers are essential to each other.

Future of Recorded Music

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

Music?



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

OUR TOP 20 UK HI-FI DEALERS

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

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

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street.
t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighhi-fi.com

Colchester

NEW TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED
33 Sir Isaac's Walk.
t: 01206 577682
www.newtechnologyunlimited.com

Kingston-upon-Thames

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

Maidenhead

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

Rayleigh, Essex

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

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhi-fi.com

LONDON

Ealing

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

N1

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

SW11

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

SW20

O'BRIEN HI-FI
60 Durham Road.
t: 020 8946 1528
www.obrienhi-fi.com

SOUTH WEST

Bath

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

Exeter

GULLIFORD HI-FI
97 Sidwell Street.
t: 01392 491194
www.gullifordhi-fi.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Banbury

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

Birmingham

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

Coventry

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

Leicester

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

Nottingham

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

NORTH

Cheadle

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

Chester

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

Hull

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

York

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

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Compact Disc, RIP?

If you read the signs, CD is now becoming an obsolete format. About time too, says **Patrick Cleasby!**

It's pretty much thirty years since the Compact Disc we know and love was launched to a disinterested world. I still have the promotional sheet for the first twenty or so Phonogram titles with the ones I aspired to purchase underlined in red ink! It's twenty six years since I started collecting the damn things, thirteen since I started going off them and I now have a loft full of thousands of them. I can't remember the last time I bought one via any form of retail other than the charity shop – all my time is spent on building and maintaining my library's 'digital' (I hate that term – it was digital in the first place!) incarnation as Terabytes of FLAC.

Every year we are subjected to one news piece or another which confidently predicts the death of the venerable CD, whether it be the termination of CD player manufacture by Linn or the death of another high street 'record' retailer. Yet still the polycarbonate peril continues to remain with us...

This year, there is just the *hint* that things may be different – that next January we may be looking back on 2012 as the year that finally killed CD. I am often portrayed as a digital apologist, but despite my early attachment I am now so over CD I can't wait until the predictions of doom are finally proved correct.

The earliest hints in 2011 came around February, when legendary producer-turned-mogul Jimmy Iovine began publicly to make the noises us audiophiles have been longing to hear since we first realised the inadequacies of the CD. He pointed out that the resolution at which we habitually have been listening to our tunes is significantly below that at which the music is made, and opined that the consumer should be made capable of hearing what he heard in the studio.

Goodbye HMV

DVD-Audio (SACD too for the odd album recorded in DSD) offered this ten years ago and was snubbed by nearly everybody, but high-resolution digital downloads offer us the opportunity to make Iovine happy. A lead has been taken with the latest releases by a small coterie of enlightened musicians, including assorted Beatles, Radiohead, Peter Dinklage, Thomas Dolby and Kate Bush as they all peel away from the EMI brand. But the vast majority of legacy major label titles available from HDTracks.com are rehashes of the high-resolution transfers done ten or so years ago, so those of us who bought into those discs get to buy the same titles again.

Then that perennial John The Baptist of better-than-CD quality, Neil Young, made a web posting last May that summed up all our hopes and predicted a 24-bit 2012 for the whole industry (check out neilyoung.com/messagepage.html).

Towards the end of last year, further rumours emerged that the record industry wished to treat 2012 as *the* year during which they would cease Compact Disc production and move to a download-only proposition by December. Contributing to this tide, Linn boss Gilad Tiefenbrun's assertion that this will also consist of leveraging the industry's classic rock 24-bit archive is encouraging, as the average rock punter needs more than the contents of the Linn Studio Master store and sporadic, sometimes hard-to-find 24-bit issues through the likes of 7digital and B&W.

The slice of recording industry revenue which is subscription-based could receive a significant boost this year if wide-scale adoption of iTunes Match by iTunes Music Store downloaders happens. What would be really transformational is if this also became the stealth route to getting the higher than CD quality material to the ears of the mass-market consumer. Until it does, I for one will never be an enthusiastic downloader.

And finally, another piece of UK record retailing bad news, as the only high street record shop (HMV) could just be the last one. Just before Christmas the suffering chain announced heavier than expected losses, and declared with circumlocution worthy of our politicians that there may be 'circumstances affecting its ability to remain a going concern'.

Those in search of the historical physical product will be left with nothing but the real and virtual market stalls, the charity shops or Amazon and its imitators. Maybe I should make my final purchase and forget the physical, but I have the feeling that the collection will continue, even if it's in the rising area of sales that isn't 'digital', namely ye olde vinyl LP!



Those in search of the historical 'physical product' we used to call CD will be left with nothing but the real and virtual market stalls, the charity shops and the likes of Amazon



PATRICK CLEASBY
BBC tech go-to-guy, digital music obsessive and budding record collector

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
How dedicated are you to physical formats?
letters@hifichoice.co.uk

Wireless world?

Is the future of audio enjoyment wi-fi? **Richard Black** thinks so, and is excited about the prospects...

Audio has gone well and truly wireless of late. If it's not your home computer network streaming digits to some suitable bit of wi-fi-enabled kit, it's likely to be something like the NAD wireless DAC we reviewed recently, or one of the nifty wireless dongles Arcam offers as add-ons to its rCube portable music player, or perhaps your phone communicating via Bluetooth with a QED uPlay receiver. Some of this stuff is very high quality, but not all of it, so, how on earth does one tell the difference?

Okay, the obvious answer to that is 'by listening', but that presupposes you've got one at home, which probably means buying it first. And if it sounds slightly sub-par, is that fundamental or just a little bit of setup you're missing?

The good news is that in practically all the current wireless systems there's nothing to set up in the traditional hi-fi sense. You'll probably have to do a bit of work initially to get things to connect and talk to each other, but beyond that the system either works or it doesn't: no tweaking! The bad news is that if a wireless link sounds unsatisfactory, there typically isn't much you can do about it apart from replacing it with an alternative. You may be surprised, though, at just how many alternatives are on offer...

Wireless audio within the home got started with headphones. Being personally wired up to the system is fine as long as you just want to sit still, not too far away, but if you fancy a bit of private music while doing the chores, the cable's hardly convenient. Wireless headphones used (still do use, in many cases) a simple analogue FM radio system which is reasonably wideband and low-noise in audio terms, but a little prone to interference, breakup and, in some cases, random de-tuning, requiring fiddling to get it back on song.

Bluetooth and beyond

The more modern systems are, without exception, digital. Overall, I would say this is very much a good thing. Apart from anything else, practically all of our audio is now stored as digits, so simply moving them from one place to another before converting to analogue seems to make a great deal of sense. This is exactly what a wi-fi system does.

Wi-fi, otherwise known as computer networking, is there to shift computer data around via radio, and as a system it's completely oblivious to what that data represents. It, therefore, makes no attempt to re-code the data, lossily or otherwise, it simply picks it up, modulates it, transmits it,

receives and demodulates it, producing an output which is bit-for-bit identical with what came off the source. Various error checking and correcting schemes ensure that this is the case; if it's not, there will be very obvious symptoms, usually a protracted dropout.

That's not to say that it's perfect. In audio terms there's plenty of scope for the introduction of jitter and interference, but both of those will depend entirely on the detailed implementation of the system and can be dealt with by reclocking and isolation schemes that have been familiar to designers of high-performance DACs for decades.

At the other end of the scale, audio over Bluetooth is invariably recoded lossily, using either the MPEG coder original specified for Bluetooth (subjectively obvious) or the much better, but still not entirely blameless APT-X coder. The next generation of Bluetooth in principle offers lossless digital audio, but we've not seen it in practice yet.

Proprietary systems fall somewhere in the middle. The Arcam rWand dongle for iPods (etc.) for instance, supports full 16-bit/44kHz digital audio, but takes an analogue output from the iPod. That's hardly a crippling limitation, but it means the system can't be truly transparent. Most wireless USB solutions send data losslessly, but often involve a sample-rate conversion within the computer, which is generally done less than perfectly.

So if you're fussy, opt for wi-fi if possible. As for the other systems, I reckon that they are adequate for casual listening, which is fair enough as that's what they're designed for. From a strict audiophile perspective, though, they're not ideal.



The next generation of Bluetooth in principle offers lossless digital audio, but we've not seen it in practice yet



RICHARD BLACK
Prolific musician, talented recording engineer and experienced reviewer

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Any wi-fi converts out there? If so, tell us how you're coping!
letters@hifichoice.co.uk

6 Essential Questions To Ask Before Upgrading

1 Do I need to invest more than the value of my current arm to get an upgrade?

You can actually invest less and still get a massive upgrade. This surprises many, but at Origin Live we think well outside the box - to create both much higher performance and higher value designs than normal. For example one editor stated in a review of the Silver arm "Price tag is laughably low could probably charge 5 times the amount words can't express how good this is ... one of the designs of the decade."

2 Is it worth changing my arm?

Users say they could never have imagined the level of improvement achieved by simply upgrading their arm. The below comment is typical.

"I'm extremely impressed with the sound and happy I made the right choice with your tonearm. I feel there's no other tonearm that could come close to the dynamics it produces. The sound I'm getting now is pure perfection. I am in total analogue heaven and enjoying my vinyl investments for the first time. In the past I was not happy with the sound and not interested in playing any vinyl. Now I'm looking forward to an entirely new experience. I feel very fortunate in discovering your product." Craig Larson

It is worth adding that a tonearm upgrade is far more significant and cost effective than a cartridge upgrade.

3 Who has an arm to suite my budget and needs?

The range of Origin Live arms is probably the most extensive in the world. Designs range from £4500 down to £250 - including a 12" version for every model.

4 What about new innovations and materials – what do I believe?

The need for trusted high performance arms has never been greater. At Origin Live we have devoted over 25 years of continuous development into ultimate sonic performance.

Origin Live arms consistently win awards around the world, year on year, a testament to their leading performance. For example the Onyx arm won "The tonearm of the year 2011 award" in Hi Fi World. In addition to this, review endorsements from respected magazines could not be higher with comments such as;

"So far ahead of the pack...looks about to lap them"
STEREO TIMES,

"The best arm I've heard" HI FI WORLD.

5 Changing a cartridge is easy but I'm not sure about my tonearm?

Arm installation is usually easier than cartridges, with help from adaptors and guidance - Visit our web site for help or phone us.

6 What if I am not happy that the arm lives up to the claims?

You may be apprehensive about an investment of this nature without hearing it in your system first. Every arm ordered through Origin Live comes with a one month, money back guarantee if you are not absolutely delighted (dealers can offer this at their own discretion).

Why not start enjoying an entirely new level of performance?

To find out more, please visit our web site. You can order the arm of your choice either directly or through one of our dealers.



ORIGIN LIVE LTD
Tel: +44 02380 578877
originlive@originlive.com
www.originlive.com



Reproducing the original sound

Close to the edge

Jimmy Hughes says great speaker sound is as much a matter of room measurements as loudspeaker ones...

Look, I know this is a very personal question, but how close do you sit to your loudspeakers? Distance makes a profound difference to the way speakers perform, yet it's a subject that isn't discussed as much as it ought to be.

So-called near-field listening – where you sit about 1 to 2m away from the speakers – enables the ear to detect lots of subtle phase detail between the two stereo channels given a recording that has captured such information. A pair of microphones, optimally sited, is capable of delivering a soundstage that allows the listener to accurately 'place' voices or instruments positioned across a broad left-centre-right arc when the recording is reproduced via two loudspeakers.

With the loudspeakers correctly placed, the ear is able to place sound sources at precise points between the left/right boundary extremes defined by the speaker enclosures. Ah – the splendour of stereophonic sound!

However, this ability to accurately determine placement of voices or instruments is only possible if you sit fairly close to the speakers. As you move further back, the soundstage becomes more generalised and less precisely focused. But while something is lost by sitting further back, you could argue that listening at a greater distance more faithfully mirrors the experience of hearing music played live in a concert hall or venue.

For example, when you're sat in a hall listening to a large symphony orchestra, you still get a sense of 'placement' – even seated well-back. You can usually determine the violins on the left, and double basses on the right. However, it's doubtful you'd be able to aurally 'place' someone speaking (or playing) as they walked from left to right across the stage area with absolute certainty. But a good stereo system (listened to in the near field) could do this.

So while listening at a distance might accurately mirror the way we hear live music in a large hall, near-field listening more faithfully recreates the stereo soundstage as captured by the microphones. Which is 'best' is a matter of personal preference.

Does any of this matter? Well, yes. It certainly matters if your personal circumstances require you listen to loudspeakers in the near-field, and someone (like me!) who reviews speakers from a more distant seating position.

Keep your distance

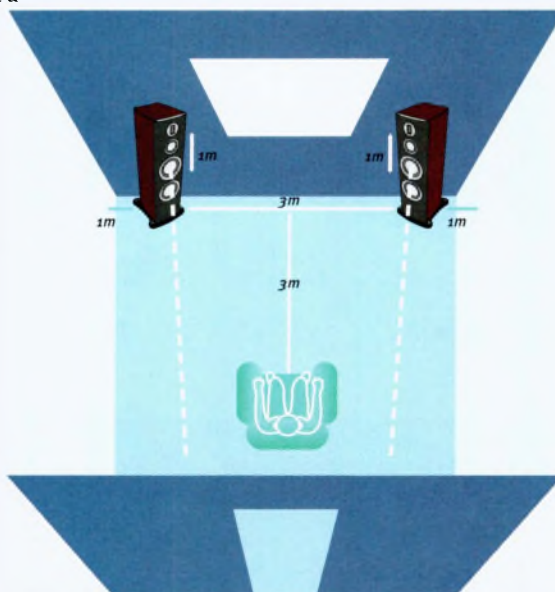
Regarding my home set-up, circumstances more or less dictate that I listen some 5 or 6m back from loudspeakers that are spaced around 4m apart. Things definitely sound best at this distance – more coherent and three-dimensional.

But, when I moved to my present abode, just over thirty years ago, I fully intended to sit much closer to the speakers. Alas, for various reasons, the results were disappointing, so (somewhat reluctantly) I settled for a more distant listening seat.

By its nature, near-field listening is a solitary experience. An acoustic hologram is only created when you occupy the central sweet spot. Sit slightly to the left or right, or move further back, and the effect seems to vanish. Naturally, it's always possible to sit close to the loudspeakers, even in a big room. But for some reason the result obtained is not as intimate and magical as that achieved when the same speakers are used in a smaller room.

Group loudspeaker tests, since they involve several people listening at once, mean the individuals concerned have to listen at a distance. This may undermine those loudspeakers that are basically designed for near-field listening.

So, be aware of all this if your home circumstances compel you to listen in the near-field, and understand that auditioning small speakers in a large room at a distance may not tell the whole story.



Distance makes a profound difference to the way speakers perform, yet it's a subject that isn't discussed as much as it ought to be



JIMMY HUGHES

Classical music buff, sage audiophile and hi-fi reviewer of four decades standing

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How have you set up your listening room? More importantly, is the sound satisfactory? letters@hifichoice.co.uk



NEW PRODUCT



Opera Seconda & Quinta Loudspeakers

Beautiful curved cabinets in luxurious real wood and leather. Finish options include cherry, mahogany, black high gloss & white high gloss.



Thorens TD-2015 Turntable

Thanks to elaborate control circuitry, an extremely stable acrylic plinth and a heavy aluminium platter, the turntables are made to sound as exciting as they look.



THORENS

NEW PRODUCT



Unison Research S6 Integrated Amplifier

"This Unison Research Amplifier is a terrific buy. We defy anyone not to fall for its charms." - What Hi-Fi



Hi-Fi Choice
EDITOR'S CHOICE



Unison Research Simply Italy Integrated Amplifier

"Excellent sound and attractive retro looks from a compact, affordable design."
Hi-Fi Choice / April 2012

Hi-Fi Choice
RECOMMENDED



ONIX IS BACK



Onix XIA-160 Integrated Amplifier

Reference Dual Mono, Class A Integrated Amplifier. Exceptional performance, exceptional value. Check out the range.



ONIX



Pathos Acoustics InPol Remix Amplifier

10 Watts of pure Musical Pleasure.

"A truly brilliant performer." - What Hi-Fi
(note: iPod Touch not included)

PATHOS

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

t. 01753 652 669

e. mail@ukd.co.uk

www.ukd.co.uk



Please check out the UKD web site for information on all of our products and special offers/promotions.

Psycho-delic

In which **Channa Vithana** challenged a musician friend to improve his guitar sound using simple audiophile tweakery...

Let's call the two sides domestic and pro shall we? Because every time I meet a professional musician or recording engineer, and lately film sound engineers (the pros) and they find out I have a more than healthy interest in hi-fi (domestic), and that even worse I am a reviewer, then you can surely cue the familiar refrain of "oh I don't believe in all of that golden ears rubbish"!

Why there seems to be two sides is somewhat pointless to me, but the divisions are there nonetheless. However, instead of fuelling the fires of these separatist movements, I shall explain a few moments when the twains can, shock-horror, meet!

In our domestic arena (that's the living room for most of us), anyone with more than a passing interest in hi-fi – and that's you, dear readers – will be familiar with the use of fancy upgrade interconnect and loudspeaker cables when hooking up separates. Indeed our domestic hi-fi lot is not just about cables, as if for example, you're a vinyl fan, then let the ritualistic process of setting up a turntable bring warmth or dread into your heart! We might even stretch to placing loudspeakers correctly so they sound at their best, and locate separates on a dedicated equipment rack for better support in the pursuit of superior sound quality.

Golden ears

So how do the pros go about things? Well, you might be surprised to find out that they can be just as, if not more, fussy and (for the cynical out there) superstitious about setting up than us domestics. Let us look at electric guitarists. These guys can employ a multitude of tuning techniques and devices in that personalised search for good 'tone'.

Like us, when we consider cables, a guitarist (even the acoustic playing species) can select a variety of different strings to stretch over the fret boards. These strings

come in all sorts of sizes and types, even deep cryogenically frozen varieties! And these different strings afford different or specific or superior sonics towards the instrument or how the player wants to sound.

You can also choose different electronic pick-ups for different and/or better sound, and even go into the quality of switches for better audio and durability when compared to stock items. Just like hi-fi, guitars can be made in different countries, and even the same type (for example, a Fender Stratocaster) can vary in sound, let alone build quality, depending on where it's made. It's not just guitars of course, but most instruments need tuning and maintenance of some sort to maintain optimum or personalised playing quality.

So it was with silent intrigue that I allowed a guitarist friend of mine to try a different type of cable – a Chord Company Chameleon Silver Plus interconnect, fitted with standard-sized jack leads (that I had used previously to review a set of active loudspeakers), to go into the back of a Gibson Les Paul Standard and out to a 50-Watt Marshall combo amp. Naturally, the guitarist scoffed at such a silly idea but gamely tried anyway..

Now, I had no idea how this was going to pan-out, and was ready to hear the howls of derision – 'golden ears' hi-fi rubbish, etc. – emanate from my friend in the event of sonic failure, but instead we both heard deeper, quieter and much improved high-resolution sound. It was actually quite superior to a standard lead. After my guitarist friend lifted his mouth from the floor, he couldn't believe the improvement.

So my friends, if anyone sneers at your eccentric choice of cables or odd ritualistic hi-fi behaviour, then politely inform them that the very music they listen to – played and recorded by those mad-hatter musicians – could well have gone through the same process of psycho-tuning as your domestic hi-fi.

It was with silent intrigue that I asked a musician friend of mine to try a different type of cable with his Gibson Les Paul Standard and Marshall combo amp...



CHANNA VITHANA
Reviewer, design *oficionado* and music fan

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Ever tweaked your musical instruments with hi-fi cabling?
letters@hifichoice.co.uk



SILVER SURFER Mk II

CUSTOM HAND BUILT CABLE

Ultrapure Silver Plated Oxygen Free Copper Conductor & PTFE Teflon Insulator
Very Low Capacitance - Ideal For Long Runs
Fitted With Teflon Insulated Adjustable Reference RCA Plugs

£59 FOR A HALF METRE PAIR - £71 FOR ONE METRE



ALAQEIA Mk II

CUSTOM HAND BUILT CABLE

High Purity Silver Plated Oxygen Free Copper Conductor with PTFE Teflon Insulator
Twisted Pair using a Pseudo Balanced Construction for Superior RFI Rejection -
Fitted with Teflon insulated adjustable Reference RCA plugs

£89 FOR A HALF METRE PAIR - £111 FOR ONE METRE PAIR



LINK CRYO REFERENCE

CUSTOM HAND BUILT CABLE

Highest Purity Heat Treated Silver Conductors with PTFE Teflon Insulator
Cryogenically Treated
Terminated with Eichmann Silver Bullet RCA Plugs

£495 FOR A HALF METRE PAIR - £685 FOR ONE METRE



DARK ART DIGITAL 75ohm

CUSTOM HAND BUILT CABLE

S/PDIF Coaxial 75 ohm Digital Interconnect
Constructed from Silver plated Oxygen Free Copper with PTFE Insulation
Terminated with 75ohm Copper Eichmann Bullets

£75 FOR A HALF METRE PAIR - £95 FOR ONE METRE



FOR MORE INFORMATION PHONE JAN or MARK - 01623 844478 or 07967 859333

www.the-missing-link.net

Watts up?

Just how powerful do you need your amplifier to be?

Tim Jarman ponders the 'power-over-performance' anomaly...

How much amplifier power do you really need? This is a question that audiophiles have debated since the earliest days of hi-fi, but yet when one considers the range of equipment available today it is clear that there is still no definitive answer. From exotic OTL valve jobs driving a delicate fraction of a watt into sensitive horn loudspeakers to multi-kilowatt racks built to thump out the sounds of exploding imaginary spaceships through a home cinema setup, there seems to be something for everyone these days. But for ordinary music listening through conventional speakers, how much is enough?

We are lucky in audio that the ridiculous 'power inflation' that the motor industry currently suffers from has largely passed us by. If it had not, every amplifier would have at least a three-figure power rating (even for headphones!) and the hi-fi equivalent of Jeremy Clarkson would doubtless be strutting around the Sunday supplements saying that, "you won't hear anything unless you're packing at least 500 watts". Sort of similar to the idea that you now absolutely *need* a 100-plus BHP motor car to trundle to the shops in!

Domestic strife

At the other end of the scale, the German DIN standard 45 500 once specified that for 'hi-fi' purposes an amplifier needed to produce 6 watts or more. This made sense in the early nineteen sixties when this standard first came into popular use, as it represented a useful division between the basic amplifiers used in radios, TV sets and record players and the larger type of push-pull amplifier, often using bigger valves or powerful transistors, found only in proper audio equipment.

However, having tried a couple of 6W amplifiers in my system I don't think that this is

really enough, especially with the dynamic range possible with current recording techniques and the needs of modern loudspeakers, which tend to trade off sensitivity against flatness of response.

Equally, I have never found it necessary to have over 100 watts available. It would be nice to be able to make that much noise every now and again but in this crowded island I don't think that I will ever be far enough away from the rest of the population to be able to do it responsibly.

Despite some recent advances, especially in Class D techniques, one doesn't find many amplifiers this powerful that are as sweet and delicate sounding as some of the smaller stuff, and of course big amplifiers tend to mean big loudspeakers which can be the cause of other types of domestic strife...

What all this is coming round to is that for most purposes I think something between 25 and 75 watts is normally about right. Certainly, for a first system or a step-up from computer loudspeakers and iPod docks this is a good point at which to jump in, amplifiers in this range need not be too expensive but will also, if chosen wisely, take you a decent way into the realm of proper hi-fi and last through several loudspeaker upgrades.

In my case my first 'decent' amp was a Nytech CTA-252XD which, when it was working (it was a rather battered second hand example by the time I took ownership), was good for about 25 watts per channel, making it considerably more capable than the combination units, midi systems and well worn low-power vintage gear (unfashionable and therefore cheap back then!), which were the usual preludes to a decent system at the time. These days I tend to pick something with around 50 watts and rarely encounter clipping, or indeed aggro about the size of the loudspeakers!

We are lucky in audio that the ridiculous 'power inflation' that the motor industry currently suffers from has largely passed us by. If it had not, every amplifier would have a three-figure power rating!



TIM JARMAN

Electronics engineer, classic kit collector and author of **Beocentral.com** and **Walkmancentral.com**

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Are you swayed by the number of watts when buying amplifiers?
letters@hifichoice.co.uk

The professionals

Tim Jarman tells the strange story of one of hi-fi's best kept secrets – Sony's WM-D6C 'Walkman Pro' cassette deck...

In the great pantheon of audio equipment we have known, there aren't *that* many products about which hi-fi hacks agree. Lest we forget, journalists in all walks of life tend to crave controversy and don't seek consensus, because it sells magazines and papers. But if ever there's one single product which unites almost every audio writer I've ever read, it is Sony's WM-D6C 'Walkman Professional'.

It proved that if something is genuinely great – as opposed to trendy or well marketed – then it's hard not to deny its genius. This little cassette recorder also showed that serious hi-fi need not be big – well, not if you're Sony. The Walkie Pro wasn't just a great cassette portable; it humbled almost *all* full-sized decks, too. Properly maintained, it's still a top tool today – and indeed several hi-fi hacks I know secretly still use them for serious listening – the iPod's just for show! [Shush! *Ed.*]

Lead in

Even though they look very different, the Walkman Professional shares its roots with Sony's very first ever personal stereo, the TPS-L2. The story of both starts in 1978, with the TCM-600 'Pressman', a pocket-sized mono cassette recorder whose now largely forgotten name gives a strong indication of the target market. This is the machine that the TPS-L2 evolved from, and whose robust transport mechanism formed the basis for the original Walkman Pro, WM-D6. The only trouble was that in its original form, this transport used a belt-driven capstan, which gave acceptable levels of speed stability for the Pressman and the Walkman, but

wouldn't have met the expectations of the professional user.

Sony's answer was the Disc Drive capstan servo, first seen in the TC-D5 of 1978. Instead of a belt, the deck's capstan was driven by a motor acting directly on the rubber edge of a small flywheel which it was mounted at right angles to. A servo pickup on the capstan shaft monitored the speed so that any errors could be instantly corrected, a process that could be done rapidly due to the low weight of all the parts.

The system proved highly effective and at a stroke solved all the stability problems – a TC-D5 can be shaken extremely violently while it is operating with little on no audible change in its sound. Used in a modified TCM-600 mechanism, Disc Drive proved the making of the WM-D6 and soon became a key feature of all top Walkmans.

Quartz lock was also added to the mix, making the little Sony one of the most stable tape transports around. Other changes and improvements included electronic auto-stop for the winding functions and a high-quality Sendust and Ferrite head, a type which gave almost the same wear resistance of ferrite alone, but was also able to record properly on Metal tapes, another first for such a small cassette recorder.

New life

The updated WM-D6C arrived in 1984 and included a host of useful enhancements. Most significant was that it now offered Dolby C, as well as B, for both

recording and playback. At the time, it was an incredible technical feat that was made possible only by the use of special new integrated circuits which Sony had designed themselves.

Another major improvement was the inclusion of line level input and output sockets which made it much easier to connect up external sources and amplifiers. At the same time the S&F head was replaced by an amorphous type which was capable of making truly excellent recordings and yet remained extremely durable. It is in this form that the Walkman Professional became most well known.

Despite its very high price – in the mid-eighties it sold for over £200 when you could buy a good Walkman for around £30 – it became popular with audiophiles and professional users alike. Indeed the BBC employed the WM-D6C as a replacement for its ageing fleet of Uher 4000 series open-reel portables, and no record company executive or serious music journalist was complete without one. So dominant was the little black box that the rest of the industry didn't even try to compete.

The WM-D6 and WM-D6C remained on sale in the UK for nearly twenty years and didn't disappear

Stop press: BBC journalists were issued with Sony WM-D6Cs during the nineteen eighties...





TECHNICAL TALK

One common problem is that the machine runs too fast; this is caused by a defective servo chip which is now getting difficult to source. This usually occurs when an external power unit with the wrong polarity or voltage has been used. So that this never happens to you, never use anything other than the correct Sony AC adaptor (AC-66 or AC-15A). Failing this, AA-sized rechargeable batteries are by far the safest option for powering a Walkman Pro, but do make sure that the holder is present and complete before buying.

Another common fault is the absence of one or both channels through the headphone socket, due to broken connections inside. This is normally pretty easy to fix however, for anyone who is handy with a soldering iron. Weak rewind or the failure of the automatic stop mechanism during playback or record points to a worn drive belt, replacements are available in the normal 'universal' kits. Worn heads are not a major problem with the older models, but are very common with the newer ones; look for a deep groove of the same width as the tape running across the head face.

The Walkman Professional was factory optimised for Sony's own tapes, so if you are serious about getting the very best results then having the machine re-calibrated to match the tapes you intend to use is very important. It is also worth getting the azimuth checked, but the tape speed (being quartz locked) doesn't drift. So any errors here indicate a fault, rather than the need for adjustment, assuming that the 'speed tune' function hasn't been switched in by mistake!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Are you the proud owner of one of these legendary portable beauties?
letters@hifichoice.co.uk

Pro plus: the cassette-playing WM-D6C still fetches a high price second-hand

from the catalogues until 2001. Externally, it had hardly changed at all, but during the mid-nineteen nineties the printed circuit board was revised with surface-mounted components and greatly simplified internal wiring to reduce production costs. Around the same time, the amorphous head was replaced with a permalloy one which gave similar performance, but wore out at a much greater rate, and in quality terms this was a backwards step. The new head can be quickly recognised by its simple cylindrical grind (the earlier amorphous head is parabolic) and that the words 'amorphous head' have been removed from the small name plate next to the volume control.

Sounding out

In sonic terms, the Walkman Pro is somewhat akin to a good direct drive turntable. Speed accuracy and stability, pace and timing are all first rate, not just for cassette but in general terms. Playback of pre-recorded cassettes is bright and clean, although the treble is not quite as vivid as a CD or an LP.

Equalisation is even-handed and balanced; the Compact Cassette was a mature technology when these models were designed, so the 'hit and miss' observation of standards which dogged the machines of the previous decade is completely avoided. It is with its own recordings, however, that the WM-D6C really shines and its ability to soak up and then replay the nuances of high-end sources is quite remarkable.

If you want to take the sound of a top-notch turntable with you then the all-analogue Walkman Pro is the only answer. With a good example which has been carefully set up to match a high-quality tape (TDK SA, for example) the differences between the source and the recording are slight, so why digitise when you don't have to? With Type II cassettes like SA it is best to let the meter peak just before the 4th red LED indicator

lights up, but with a quality Metal like MA you can push things up a bit, peaking just before the 5th LED is normally okay with tapes like these.

Another great thing about the Walkman Pro is the headphone stage; it is powerful, punchy and drives practically any pair of cans with ease. There's no need to carry a bulky separate amp when you walk, man!

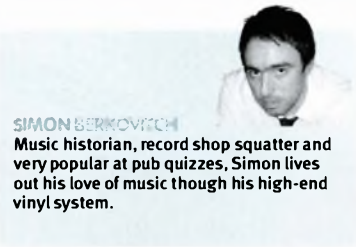
Temptation

The recent revival of interest in cassette has caused the prices of the Walkman Professional to rise. They were never particularly cheap second-hand, and the occasional bargains now appear to have dried up. They now cost roughly what they did when they were new, between £200 and £300, but if you are paying top money expect to get the complete outfit (case, strap, headphones, etc., with a proper Sony AC adaptor as a bonus). You sometimes see machines for around £100, but below this you are mostly looking at projects and non-workers, which are fine if you have the skills, but hardly an ideal way to learn if you don't!

If you want to take the sound of a top turntable with you, the all-analogue Walkman Pro is the only answer...

Beautifully built, immaculately engineered and sublime sounding, the Sony WM-D6 series of cassette decks is one of audio's true greats. Still unsurpassed at what it does, still relevant and still untouchably cool, if you still covet cassettes then you really should try one of these. ●

1968



SIMON BERKOVITCH
Music historian, record shop squatter and very popular at pub quizzes, Simon lives out his love of music through his high-end vinyl system.

The musical road forks in this *year in music*, as key bands either elected to go further out there or back to their rock 'n' roll roots – or, in the case of the Fab Four, attempt both simultaneously. **Simon Berkovitch** checks out the post-psychedelic scene...

After the psychedelic fireworks display of 1967 burned brightly and then turned to ashes, one key question faced the majority of bands in 1968 – ‘So, guys, where do we go from here?’ The key musical players of the decade – including The Beatles and The Rolling Stones – had all embraced flower power, psychedelia and acid rock with the fervour of the born again, and the sign at 1968’s musical crossroads was marked with two directions: back-to-basics or even further out...

Psychedelia’s legacy

More than any genre before (or arguably since), psychedelia tore down the barriers that had hitherto constrained pop music. Inspired by a heady mix of Indian mysticism, import LPs from US underground groups like The Fugs, modern classical works, the writings of Dr. Timothy Leary and the Beats – and not to mention a little mysterious something by the name of lysergic acid diethylamide – the Beatles led the movement’s mainstream charge with two pivotal releases of 1967.

Both John Lennon’s magnificent *Strawberry Fields Forever* (a ‘double-A’ 7-inch single paired with the pop-sike of Paul McCartney’s more conservative *Penny Lane*) and the groundbreaking *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts*

Even The Rolling Stones turned Day-Glo with the classic, snarling *We Love You* single (with backing vocals by John and Paul, no less) and *Their Satanic Majesties Request* LP, a largely unsuccessful attempt to replicate the artistic achievement of The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper*.

By 1968, both bands had travelled far from their R’n’B roots in an insanely compressed period of time, so it was time to take stock and return to the inspirations of their youth, to deliver the records that many consider the apex of their careers.

Back to basics

As the final, rumbling chord of *Sgt Pepper* closer *A Day in the Life* decayed, it’s arguable that The Beatles had hit their artistic peak. Perhaps there was nothing left to prove – and it was time to have some unpretentious fun with the music. As *Pepper* had revealed, everything was now possible and no style of music was off limits – including rock ‘n’ roll’s recent past. The McCartney-penned *Lady Madonna*, The Beatles’ 1968 ‘comeback’ single, sounds positively stark in comparison with the previous year’s Technicolor visions. This stripped-back, uptempo rocker paves the way for perhaps the group’s most enduring single of all, *Hey Jude*, released later in the year; a record that starts with

The Rolling Stones turned Day-Glo with *Their Satanic Majesties Request* LP, a largely unsuccessful attempt to replicate the artistic achievement of *Sgt. Pepper*

Club Band LP defiantly cut themselves loose from pop’s moorings. Suddenly, practically every UK group, known and up-and-coming, followed the Fab Four’s acid-drenched lead – and the ‘anti-Beatles’ were no exception.

unadorned piano and simple, direct lyric. Tangerine trees and marmalade skies are nowhere to be seen...

A Fats Domino-inspired romp complete with brass, *Lady Madonna* was one of the



year’s best ‘back to basics’ records – and in The Stones’ camp ‘The Human Riff’ was about to deliver one of his most direct and rootsy broadsides yet. *Jumpin’ Jack Flash* was the shot in the arm that the ailing Stones needed to re-energise their career post-psychedelia. With that instantly memorable,



An epic drama of adventure and exploration

Being 'spaced out' found new meaning in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 epic, 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Man's colony on the Moon... a whole new generation has been born and is living here... a quarter-million miles from Earth.



MGM PRESENTS A STANLEY KUBRICK PRODUCTION
2001: a space odyssey

Super Panavision® and Metrocolor



▶ BEATLES FOR SALE

The Beatles' domination of 1968's pole position in the singles chart extends beyond hits *Lady Madonna* and *Hey Jude*. Joe Cocker and The Marmalade both scored number ones with Lennon-McCartney covers, and both Apple artist Mary Hopkin and Paul McCartney's brother (under the guise of Mike McGear in *The Scaffold*) climbed to the top of the pops...

Georgie Fame *The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde*

Love Affair *Everlasting Love*

Manfred Mann *Mighty Quinn*

Esther and Abi Ofarim *Cinderella Rockefella*

Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich *The Legend of Xanadu*

The Beatles *Lady Madonna*

Cliff Richard *Congratulations*

Louis Armstrong *What a Wonderful World*

Gary Puckett and The Union Gap *Young Girl*

The Rolling Stones *Jumping Jack Flash*

The Equals *Baby Come Back*

Des O'Connor *I Pretend*

Tommy James and The Shondells *Mony Mony*

The Crazy World of Arthur Brown *Fire*

The Beach Boys *Do It Again*

The Bee Gees *I've Gotta Get a Message to You*

The Beatles *Hey Jude*

Mary Hopkin *Those Were the Days*

Joe Cocker *With a Little Help From My Friends*

Hugo Montenegro *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*

Scaffold *Lily the Pink*

The Marmalade *Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da*

▶ BACK TO BASICS

Bob Dylan's backing band was the unlikely inspiration for UK rockers' penchant for 'getting it together in the country, man' in 1968...

The Beatles and The Rolling Stones weren't the only major musical names striving for an earthier sound post-psychedelia. The Beach Boys scored a UK number one with *Do It Again*, a record that owes much to the band's earlier, carefree surfing numbers.

One of the most significant of the year came from Bob Dylan's former backing band - The Band. Straight out of Woodstock and light years away from the frenetic scene of NYC, *Music From Big Pink* was a back-to-basics, all-American affair that had considerable impact on UK musicians as diverse as The Beatles, Eric Clapton, Traffic and folkrockers Fairport Convention.

The latter set out to create the English equivalent of *Big Pink*, delving deep and delivering 1969's classic *Liege and Lief* in the process.



British artist Richard Hamilton (self-portrait above), whose painting *Swinging London* (1968-69), depicted Rolling Stone Mick Jagger shielding his face in the back of a police car following a notorious drugs raid, also designed the plain white cover for the Beatles' *White Album* of 1968 (below).

energising intro, it was goodbye to the exotic multi-instrumentalism of Brian Jones (soon to get his P45 from The Stones) and a raucous hello to Keith Richards' primal rock and roll vision, his classic riffs stoking the musical engine of the band deep into the 1970s.

Career-defining albums

Both *Lady Madonna* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash* acted as tasters for career-defining long players for The Beatles and The Stones –



The BEATLES

The Beatles (popularly known as '*The White Album*') double album and *Beggars Banquet*, respectively. Tellingly, the sleeves were also free from the lysergic design excesses of the previous year, with both records housed in understated sleeves (although in the case of *The Beatles*, understated meant commissioning 'Father of Pop Art' Richard Hamilton for the job – surely inspiration to both Prince and Spinal Tap further down the line).

Naturally and characteristically, The Fab Four completely ignored the signpost at 1968's musical crossroads and elected to bend the rules by going both back to basics *and* further out. Sprawling is not the word to describe *The Beatles*: music hall melodies (*Honey Pie*) and fragile acoustic numbers (*Blackbird*



The Fab Four ignored the signpost at 1968's musical crossroads by going back to basics *and* further out

and *Julia*) are bedfellows with heavy guitar workouts (*Happiness is a Warm Gun*, *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* and *Helter Skelter*) and even avant-garde sound collages (*Revolution 9*).

If *The White Album* is *The Beatles* at their most eclectic, *Beggars Banquet* is the Stones at their most direct. *Sympathy For the Devil* sets out the album's swaggering stall and the classic songs just keep coming – *No Expectations*, *Parachute Woman*, *Stay Cat Blues*, *Salt of the Earth*... all are vital, primal additions to The Stones' fearsome repertoire. This, their seventh long player, was the first in a classic run (ending with 1972's *Exile on Main St.*) that sealed their reputation as 'The World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band'.

Set the controls...

But what lay ahead for travellers on the road marked – just like the destination on Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters' bus – 'Furthur'?

Pink Floyd delivered UK psychedelia's defining statement the previous year with *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, but the Syd Barrett-piloted incarnation of the band was in decline as 1968 dawned. By now a legendary casualty of the excesses of The Summer of Love, Barrett was replaced by guitarist David Gilmour in early 1968. That year's follow-up to *Piper* – *A Saucerful of Secrets* – was the sound of a group in transition: poppier material written by Rick Wright and Roger Waters rubbed shoulders with more out-there tracks – like future concert



masterpiece *Set the Controls For the Heart of the Sun* and the title track itself, a group improvisation pointing towards the side-long explorations of *Meddle*.

Other groups that swallowed 1967's 'tune in, turn on, drop out' maxim hook, line and sinker continued to craft music with paisley hues in 1968 and beyond – none more high profile than The Moody Blues. A Midlands beat group turned psychedelic evangelists, The Moody Blues nailed their post-LSD colours to the mast with a tribute to Harvard's Dr. Timothy Leary (*Legend of a Mind*) on 1968's *In Search of the Lost Chord*.

This was the first in a lengthy series of albums to explore inner space – albeit in a reserved, quintessentially English manner. The heady, freeform experiments of the likes of the Grateful Dead weren't for this quintet – a peek at the back cover of the lavish gatefold (complete with mandala and suitably of-their-time sleeve notes), revealed five serious looking respectfully dressed men, yet to shake off the last vestiges of the cabaret circuit to which they had recently been consigned by changing musical styles.

The Moody Blues trip may have been a milder strain of embryonic progressive rock, but the success of the group (particularly in America) is testament to the combination of invention and directness that informed the musical landscape of 1968, as pop was beginning to mutate into rock, losing some of its innocence in the process. Things would never be quite the same again. ●

Tellurium Qtm

Audio designed to combat phase distortion



Find out why more and more people are talking about Tellurium Qtm products.

Don't just believe all the incredible reviews, test our products for yourself against any thing else in the same price range.

Find out how your music can **really** sound and talk to your nearest Tellurium Qtm dealer now.

Cables, amplifiers and the unexpected!

www.TelluriumQ.com

01458 251997



2010
2011
2012

hi-fi+

Products of the Year 2010



Jan 2011

Hi Fi World

Cable of the Year 2010

Perform

Outperform

At Vertere our belief is that by identifying the critical components of a Hi-Fi system and improving them across all their key performance areas will allow the music to flow naturally, communicate and have an emotive presence.

Pulse, the ultimate analogue audio cable system is merely the first step towards our realisation of being the closest to audio perfection that is achievable.



VERTERE™

T +44 (0)203 176 4888
E info@vertereacoustics.com
vertereacoustics.com



97 Falla
The Three
Cornered Hat



97 Breabach
Bann



97 Phantom Limb
The Pines

Music reviews

Our choice of the latest music releases...

ALBUM OF THE MONTH

DOORS



L.A. WOMAN

The Doors

LA Woman

warnerbrosrecords.com

★★★★★

Warner

2-CD 40th Anniversary set

LA WOMAN should really be titled 'The Last Will and Testament of Jim Morrison'. After a tumultuous four years at the top, the Doors began recording their sixth studio album in late 1970. By the time it was released at the end of April 1971, Morrison had already left America and would never return.

On 3 July 1971, just nine weeks after the release of *LA Woman*, his lifeless body was discovered in his bathtub in an apartment in Paris, where he was looking to rediscover the poet in his soul. He was just twenty seven years old.

The circumstances surrounding his death have since helped to feed the faux-romantic 'live fast, die young' theory of rock 'n' roll genius – and to enhance *LA Woman's* reputation as not only the Doors' finest hour, but a

record on which Morrison was saying 'goodbye'.

Although it is fanciful to imagine that Morrison had any premonition of his own death, both notions are true and a farewell it certainly was, for he had already decided to close the book on his old life in America. Whether he would have returned to make another Doors album if he'd lived, we cannot know. But of the eight songs he wrote for the album, five are about change and mutability, creating an underlying theme and the undeniable sense of finality enhances both the album's drama and power and helps to ensure that Morrison's last testament was indeed his most potent statement as rock music's ultimate shaman.

LA Woman was conceived as a 'back to basics' album, recorded

From the churning opening of *The Changeling*, to the epic close of *Riders On the Storm*, there's a sense of restlessness...

swiftly and spontaneously in the group's rehearsal space in west Hollywood, without the perfectionist tendencies of long-time producer Paul Rothchild.

The approach perfectly suited the muscular, swamp-blues roots of the songs. From the churning opening of *The Changeling*, which finds Morrison planning to leave town "on the midnight train" to the epic close of *Riders On The Storm* with its "killer on the road" motif, there's a sense of restlessness, of flux and fluidity, which runs through the album's ten original tracks.

It might have been the singer's final testament, but there's so

much life and vibrancy in this music, you can almost feel the sweat running down the walls of the tiny rehearsal room in which the record was made.

Bruce Botnik, who co-produced the original album in 1971, went back to the Elektra vaults to remaster the album from the master tapes and while rooting around in the archives, he also turned up two non-album songs, a joyous full-throttle charge through the blues standard *Rock Me* and the undeveloped jazz-blues vamp *She Smells So Nice*, plus alternate takes of seven of the album's original tracks.

Collected together on a second disc, they offer a fascinating insight into the construction of the Doors' masterpiece, nowhere more so than the inspired, history-in-the-making moment when Morrison is heard suggesting they add the now famous atmospheric thunderstorm effects to the beginning of *Riders On The Storm*. **NW**

Standout tracks: *LA Woman*; *Riders On The Storm*; *L'America*; *Love Her Madly*





Pink Floyd

The Wall (Immersion Edition)

emimusic.com

★★★★★

7-CD box set

EMI

ROCK-OPERA GENIUS

or overblown self-indulgence? Whichever view you take of *The Wall*, expanding the original 75 minutes of music (which appeared in 1979) into a seven-hour, seven-disc extravaganza and chucking in a scarf, set of coasters and an art print or two is probably not going to change anyone's take. But on any objective level, the music – if not the concept – has stood the test of time remarkably well and *The Wall's* status as a (flawed) classic remains intact.

The newly remastered versions of both the studio and live albums boast a pleasingly sharp definition. But the real interest lies in the 'work in progress' discs. Roger Waters' demos are presented alongside the band's own early sketches of his songs to create a fascinating insight into how the work developed from the writer's original vision and how much David Gilmour contributed through songs such as *Comfortably Numb* and *Run Like Hell*. **NW**
Standout tracks: Another Brick In The Wall (part two); Mother; Comfortably Numb; Run Like Hell



Dreadzone

Second Light

emimusic.com

★★★★★

EMI

2-CD (expanded edition)

DREADZONE'S global electro-reggae-trance hybrid made them such firm John Peel favourites that shortly before he died, the great man listed their sophomore 1995 release *Second Light* among his top twenty albums of all time.

Formed by ex-members of Big Audio Dynamite, today *Second Light's* rich and imaginative mix of English tradition and imported rhythms sounds like a major landmark in the emergence of a newly self-confident multicultural Britain.

Now remastered, the original album sounds surprisingly fresh and undated, while a second bonus disc featuring a storming 45-minute set from Glastonbury '95 remind us that there were few better live bands. **NW**

Standout tracks: Little Britain; A Canterbury Tale; Zion Youth



Jerry Lee Lewis

A Whole Lotta Jerry Lee Lewis

universalmusic.com

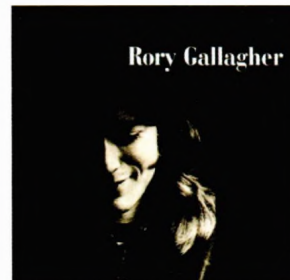
★★★★★

Salvo/Universal

4-CD box set

EVERYBODY KNOWS the classic 1950s hits such as *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On* and *Great Balls of Fire*, which for a while made Lewis the number one rival to Elvis for rock 'n' roll supremacy. But, perhaps, few will be aware of the full picture and the prolific span of diverse recordings he made across the four decades covered by this retrospective.

It's hard to match the energy of his early Sun recordings. But listen closely to the country weepies and you'll hear that Lewis never lost his instinctive ability as one of popular music's great vocal stylists. What's more, his early wildness was never tamed and is liable to bust loose at any moment, whether singing rock 'n' roll, country or even gospel. **NW**
Standout tracks: Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On; Great Balls Of Fire



Rory Gallagher

Rory Gallagher

Rory Gallagher

legacyrecordings.com

★★★★★

Sony Legacy

CD (and vinyl)

AFTER ESTABLISHING himself as a blues-rock guitarist of rare ability with the Irish power-trio Taste, Gallagher launched his solo career in 1971. Starting with his self-titled debut, the six albums he released between 1971-74 are now remastered from original quarter-inch tapes, with bonus tracks.

A blues purist with a hard-rocking edge, the brilliance of Gallagher's guitar playing was matched by the robustness of his singing and classic songcraft. His virtues are perhaps best encapsulated on his 1971 solo debut, but *Deuce* (1972) and *Tattoo* (1973) run it close. For a reminder of what a superb live performer he was, check out 1972's *Live!* In Europe, one of the great concert albums of the era. **NW**
Standout tracks: Laundromat; Just The Smile, Sinner Boy, I Fall Apart

AUDIOPHILE VINYL

The Grateful Dead Reckoning rhino.com

GRATEFUL DEAD



★★★★★ Rhino/Analogue Prod

180g vinyl

THIS IS ONE of the all-time great live albums. Just in case you had forgotten the supremacy of vinyl, Analogue Productions has resurrected this gem

of a double album that gathers the highlights from concerts in New York and San Francisco in 1980. A time when The Dead were no longer out of their heads and had perfected their craft of honing beautiful blues rock songs that make you dance and cry, but mostly keep you entranced with their gorgeous vibe.

Analogue Productions has done a superb job. I have an original pressing and it doesn't even touch this Doug Sax remastering, a process that involved a

valve-powered cutting lathe to create the masters. This makes for a ghostly silent background over which the recording can reveal all of its fine detail, dynamics and cavernous soundstage.

When people talk about the glory of vinyl, this is the sort of pressing they mean – the sound is totally laid back, but you only have to close your eyes and the event is there in front of you. If you're not a Dead head yet this will convert you to the cause. **JK**
Standout tracks: China Doll; To Lay Me Down; Cassidy





HOT PICK

Falla

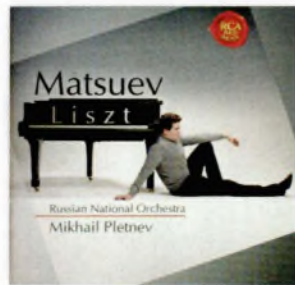
The Three Cornered Hat
Nights in the Garden of
Spain, Homenajes
BBC Philharmonic
chandos.net
★★★★★

Chandos

CD

WITH ITS BRIGHT VIVID colours and wide range of contrasts, Falla's brilliant, vivacious score for *The Three Cornered Hat* has always been a good hi-fi demonstration piece. Conducted by Juanjo Mena, *Nights* receives a subtle evocative performance that shimmers and smoulders, while the disc ends with the rarely-heard *Homenajes*.

Recorded sound is tonally rich and fairly spacious in the Chandos manner. The dynamic range is surprisingly wide, and good use is made of the soundstage in terms of depth. Bass is deep, too – for example, the subtle but floor-shaking bass drum in the final dance of the main work. **JMH**
Standout track: 9

**Liszt**

Piano Concertos 1 and 2,
Totentanz; Tone Poems;
Orpheus and Heroide
Funebre. Russian Nat Orch
rca-records.co.uk
★★★★★

RCA (Sony)

2-CDs

THE PIANIST MATSUEV has a huge powerhouse technique, and gives feisty swashbuckling accounts of the works for piano and orchestra. These are exciting virtuoso performances, full of dash and bravura, though there is no lack of delicacy and sensitivity when this is called for. Disc 2 features two neglected Liszt tone poems, and these are very well-played.

The recorded sound is vivid and immediate, with some brilliantly incisive piano tone. On record, Mikhail Pletnev can be a somewhat bland conductor, but not here. This is the best recording of the Liszt concertos for a good many years; including the classic 1960s Richter recording. **JMH**
Standout track: 3



HOT PICK

Breabach

Bann

breabach.com

★★★★★

Creative

CD

FOR THEIR SECOND ALBUM

Scotland's latest folk heroes have added another piper of the bag variety to their guitar/bass/fiddle/pipes 'n' flutes line-up and sound all the stronger for it. The songs have a degree more refinement and there are a few more original compositions augmenting the traditional mash-ups in which they specialise.

Produced by Andy Thorbrn at the Old Laundry in Glenfinnan, the sound treads that fine line between polite 'coffee-table folk' and serious party atmosphere. Lyrical ballads, such as the plaintive *Farley Bridge* are interspersed with ceilidh-rockin' stompers like *Gig Face*. Thoroughly modern folk that should be in everyone's collection. **DO**
Standout tracks: Gig Face, Farley Bridge, Sorry I'm Late

HIGH RESOLUTION DOWNLOADS**Phantom Limb**

The Pines

naimlabel.com

★★★★★

NaimLabel

24-bit/48kHz



SINGER YOLANDE QUARTEY alone truly makes this album a winner for me. The way she mixes old school R'n'B styling with modern alt.country lends the music enormous emotional power and great aesthetic appeal. Her singing has a heartfelt soul and poignancy that is so lacking among the ranks of young 'pop divas' these days.

The 24-bit /48kHz recording successfully reveals the coherency and integrity the band achieved in the studio, especially notable for the way it has conveyed the vocal stacks. The way it renders voices is quite superb, with a realism that is often uncanny, and the emotional strength lifts these songs into a class of their own. **MS**
Standout tracks: Gravy Train; Angel Of Death

Empirical

Elements Of truth

naimlabel.com

★★★★★

Naim Label

24-bit/44.1kHz



THIS IS ALBUM number three from the MOBO Award-winning quartet of snappily dressed young

jazz troopers. The opening track on this album, however, features a guest appearance by George Fogel adding piano to the regular line-up of bass, drums, alto sax, and vibes/glockenspiel. The music throughout is sophisticated, dramatic, both inventively and inspiringly played.

As such it demands a great recording to do it full justice and this 24-bit/44.1kHz production is just that, unravelling the musical complexity with great ease. The recording also works well to unearth the subtle timing clues in some of the more challenging compositions. **MS**
Standout tracks: Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say; Cosmos (For Carl Sagan)

BLU-RAY DVD**Radiohead** King of Limbs Live From The Basement phonicarecords.com

★★★★★ Tickertape/Phonica

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1,
LPCM 2.0, Dolby Digital 5.1

THIS BOOKISHLY presented double-disc set (a DVD, as well) finds Radiohead performing the entirety of their 2011 album, along with

two extra tracks, *The Daily Mail* and *Staircase*. It was filmed for Radiohead producer Nigel Goodrich's *From The Basement* podcast site and set in a large windowless live room with no audience. The line-up includes the band, plus Clive Deamer on drums and a brass section.

Thom Yorke performs pretty much as he would on stage and it's a live performance. As such it's been hailed in some quarters as being more successful than the album.

More intimate than concert footage and with better

lighting for filmic purposes, Goodrich creates a situation that allows far greater concentration from the band, albeit without the energy that an audience can provide. It makes for interesting viewing, but the sound is not exactly dynamic, but this has long been this band's sound and it's rich with underlying tension. The exception is *Give Up The Ghost*, which stands out for its extensive use of voice which, for once, isn't buried in a sonic mire. **JK**
Standout tracks: The Daily Mail; Give Up The Ghost

See how they fly

London based Walrus Systems has a reputation for vinyl systems second to none, as *Ed Selley* discovered...

Tucked a few streets back from Marble Arch tube station, Walrus Systems is one of London's most highly regarded dealers. Founded by Les Wong and Pete Sanhen in 1997, Walrus initially traded mainly in high-end American brands. This focus changed a few years later towards vinyl front ends and valve-based systems. At the time, Les felt that these were categories that were inadequately supported elsewhere.

This specialisation has led to Walrus being seen as one of the best places in the UK for analogue systems. This is not to say that digital is ignored, though. During my visit, Pete treated me to an enthusiastic demonstration of a Musical Fidelity CLiC and seemed, at least, as keen about the concept of high-resolution digital as I am. Like a number of dealers I have spoken to, Les and Pete are enthusiastic about a post-CD world and the technology required to make the most of it.

Nonetheless it is for vinyl that Walrus is renowned. As such the focus of this *Dealer Systems* visit is slightly different from the normal format. I asked Les to demonstrate three systems as usual, but the focus would be primarily on the vinyl front end. If you were actually in the market for these products (certainly the second and third turntables), you would realistically demo them at home, but the store demo room – filled with some truly fabulous gear old and new – stood in for the day. Settling back in the upstairs area initially, it was time to see what Walrus could do...

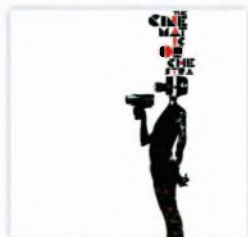


THE EXPERTS



WALRUS SYSTEMS
11 New Quebec St, London, W1H 7RW
020 7724 7224, walrus.co.uk

nottinghamanaloguestudio.com/
ear-yoshino.com/home.php /
michell-engineering.co.uk/
graham-engineering.com/
marshallchoong.co.uk/
stirlingbroadcast.net/
croftacoustics.co.uk/
musicalfidelity.com/
lyraaudio.com/
clearaudio.de/
moerch.dk/
sme.ltd.uk/



**CINEMATIC
ORCHESTRA
MAN WITH
A MOVE
CAMERA**
VINYL



**J.B. LENOIR
ALABAMA
BLUES**
VINYL



**ZZ TOP
TRES
HOMBRES**
VINYL

SYSTEM 1 – SPACED OUT

The first analogue front end that Les and Pete demonstrated is an interesting mix of relatively well known brands working in a combination that is somewhat unusual. The results it produced suggest that it hasn't been done for novelty's sake.

The turntable itself is the £1,230 Nottingham Analogue Ace Spacedeck. At this price point, customers generally choose between this and Michell's GyroDec. Les feels that although the Nottingham Analogue is less aesthetically pleasing, it has superior sonics and the unsuspended design means that once it is set up it tends to stay that way. Ease of use matters at this price point and Les finds that a turntable that is easy to use will likely see more use in a household than one that isn't.

Michell is represented in this system courtesy of the £549 TecnoArm A. This heavily modified Rega RB250 is as happy a partner for the Spacedeck as it is the GyroDec, and is able to handle a wide variety of cartridges. Nottingham Analogue supply armboards for a variety of designs – including its own arms – but Les finds this combination a particular sweet spot.

Finishing off this trio is a £750 Clearaudio Maestro moving-magnet cartridge. Clearaudio is best known for its complete turntables and it is easy to overlook its cartridge range as competitive partners for a number of turntables. The wood-bodied Maestro is beautifully finished and the high output works well with the phono stages that Walrus rate at this price point. In the context of this system, the Sumiko Blue Point Evo III would also have been a viable (and slightly less expensive) option as well.

Immediate case

Partnered with a deeply impressive combination of £995 Croft integrated (also available in line only form for £850) and £1,890 Marshall Choong CM2 speakers, this combination makes an immediate case for itself. This is vinyl playback at a level where no allowances and concessions need be made. The system is incredibly quiet with next to no surface or

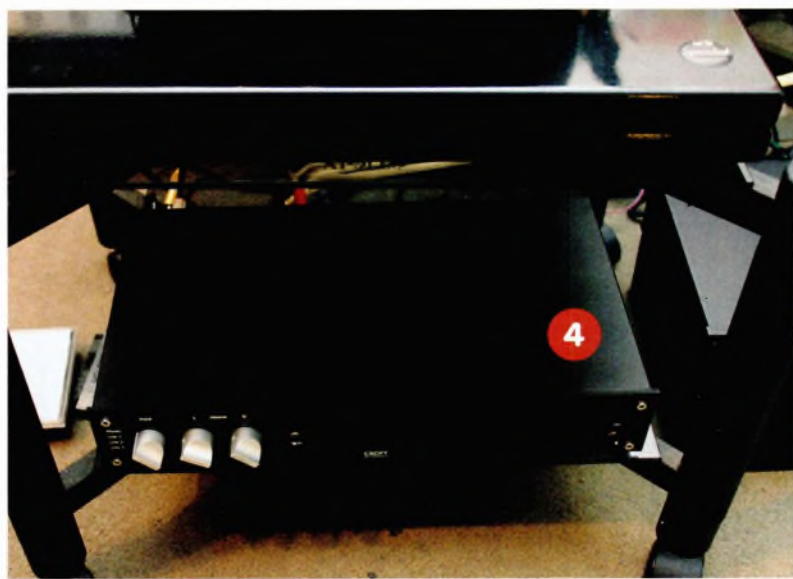
background noise, which allows the performance itself to take centre stage. And it does so in fine style. *The Awakening of a Woman* by the Cinematic Orchestra, luxuriates in the space provided. The upper registers are liquid-smooth and fabulously detailed; all this is underpinned by tight, beautifully defined bass.

Given the challenge of finding the infectious blues rock hiding behind the rough and ready recording of ZZ Top's *Tres Hombres*, the system is more than up to the task. The heavy guitar riffs of *Jesus Just Left Chicago* are captured with a real sense of their raw energy testing the confines of the studio. Balancing detail retrieval and the problems of dissecting poorer recordings, this

system walks a near perfect line. Les is adamant that no music should ever be off limits to a Walrus system and this partnership is eloquent testimony to that view.

It is also a clear indicator that Walrus is more than a turntable shop. The Croft amp and Marshall Choong speakers face no shortage of competition at their price points, but it's apparent that after only a few minutes listening that they are not only incredibly talented units, but form a partnership that is greater than the sum of their parts.

As an *hors d'oeuvre*, the Nottingham/ Michell/ Clearaudio ensemble had been a tasty treat, but it was time to move to the downstairs listening room and sample the main course...



- 1** NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE ACE SPACEDECK
£1,230
- 2** MICHELL TECNOARM A
£549
- 3** CLEARAUDIO MAESTRO MM
£750
- 4** CROFT INTEGRATED (INCLUDING PHONO)
£995
- 5** MARSHALL CHOONG SPEAKERS CM2
£1,890

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:
£5,414**

SYSTEM 2 AND 3 – ANALOGUE MASTERCLASS

Les and Pete had excelled themselves downstairs. The constituent parts of systems two and three were assembled in such a way as to make comparisons of various combinations possible. Given the components on offer, some of these combinations promised to be very exciting indeed...

Unique combination

Les had initially wanted to demonstrate a Brinkmann Bardo as the second turntable, but it was out on demonstration with a customer. I will admit to not being too upset, as the substitute was a combination that you'll rarely hear anywhere other than Walrus Systems.

This combined Michell's £2,649 Orbe SE with a £1,600 DP-6 tonearm from Danish manufacturers Mørch. Les has been importing Mørch arms for nearly twenty five years and for some time I've been told that these distinctive looking designs are some of the best partners for the Orbe.

The accompanying cartridge was a £795 Benz Glider, seen here in high-output form. The Walrus position on phono cartridges is that under £1,000, the best results are obtained from moving-magnet and high-output moving-coil designs. The phono stages that they require are simpler and, in the context of valve based systems (where moving magnet stages predominate), they remove the need for step-up transformers.

Next it was Walrus' no compromise vinyl solution. This was another relatively unusual pairing of a £16,128 SME 30 and a £4,200 Graham Phantom tonearm. SME tonearms have an international following and for the most part, SME turntables are fitted with them as a given. They are capable of mounting a variety of other designs however, and the extraordinary looking Graham is a Walrus favourite. Finished with a £2,495 Lyra Skala, I was in the privileged position of being able to see what a turntable five times the price of an already very serious vinyl offering could achieve!

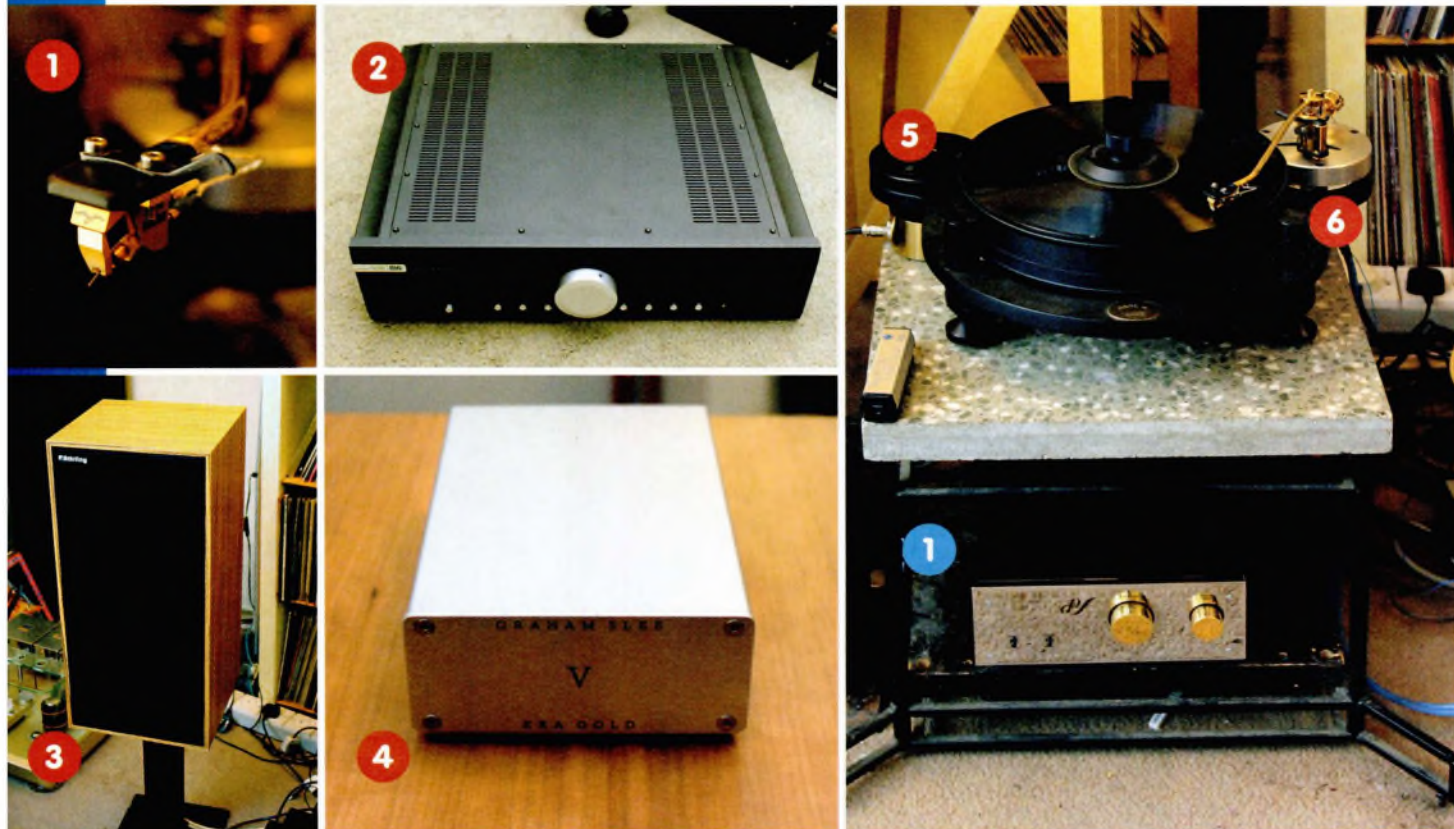
To begin with, I had the Orbe connected to a £595 Graham Slee ERA Gold V phono stage running into a £2,499 Musical Fidelity M6i amplifier and £2,999 Stirling Broadcast LS3/6 speakers. Selecting J.B Lenoir's *Alabama Blues* from the fabulous selection of vinyl to hand in the listening room showed that the proponents of the Michell/Mørch pairing are definitely on to something.

The Orbe never fails to find the rhythm and timing of any piece it is given, then relay it in a vast yet cohesive soundstage, and here was no exception. Where this duo differs over more common Orbe and tonearm combinations I have listened to, is the pinpoint imaging and wonderful dynamics that the Mørch and Benz bring to the performance. Given the more complex Cinematic Orchestra piece to work with,

this insight into the performance was hugely rewarding. There is nothing analytical about the presentation, it is simply the most natural thing in the world to be shown every facet of the performance. After thirty minutes of listening, it seemed logical to ask, "how much better can that SME possibly be?"

Substituting the SME and the attendant £4,188 EAR P88B phono preamp into the same electronics gives you a seemingly impossible answer. Hearing the Orbe side-by-side with the SME is akin to listening to a truly top-notch tribute band and then instantly being given a performance of the same song by the real deal. There isn't much point trying to single out any one area that the SME bests the Orbe, it simply takes every performance parameter and improves on the already very high benchmark. Connecting the Orbe to the EAR improves the Michell, but fails to appreciably close the gulf in performance between the two.

Just how substantial this difference is between the two turntables is a surprise to me. I have long rated the Orbe very highly, and believed the law of diminishing returns was one of the more durable in the industry, but the SME and Graham combo are truly in a different world. Is it four times better than the Michell? Possibly not. Is it twice as good? The gulf in class is so pronounced that it could well be!



Changing from the Stirlings to the £2,700 Marshall Choong CM3s – bigger brothers of the CM2s I listened to upstairs – starts to reveal why the SME has the qualitative edge. The CM3s are sealed designs and while they have less absolute bass heft than the ported Stirlings, the detail their low end possesses is quite outstanding. Play a piece through the Michell and immediately follow it with the same through the SME and the latter reveals detail and texture to low notes that simply isn't present with the Orbe – or much else that springs to mind. The SME hits harder and does so with greater finesse. At the same time, the top-to-bottom cohesion of the SME is outstanding, the bass detail isn't distinct from the rest of the spectrum, merely part of an astonishingly insightful performance.

Exactly what role the components of the trio play in this sublime performance is hard to separate from the whole. Les says the Graham brings a slightly greater sense of agility and nuance to the performance than the SME V does and the Lyra matches tonal accuracy with a sense of life that manages to keep the partnership from becoming a little sterile, which can happen with some other cartridge types. The fit and finish of the deck and arm is outstanding. The SME feels like it is built to survive the end of the world and the Graham is equally substantial.

The most unusual aspect of the Graham is that despite being a unipivot design, it feels absolutely solid while cueing up, which certainly inspires a confidence that some other unipivot designs do not.

The final piece in the puzzle was the addition of a £5,995 Luxman MQ-88 valve power amp, and connecting the EAR directly as a preamp. Returning once again to the Michell, the Orbe still demonstrates that is a very fine turntable indeed. The performance of this system is a magnificent demonstration of vinyl at its best. The timing and agility the solid-state system had is retained, but the tonality and soundstage take another leap forward. Substitute the SME and the result is world class. There is *nothing* you can throw at it that it doesn't have absolute mastery over, and it is never anything other than sublimely musical while it does so.

The turntables – the SME/Graham combo in particular – are the stars of the show, but the journey through amps and speakers had showed beyond doubt that Walrus has a portfolio of amplifiers and loudspeakers – some of which I have never seen anywhere else – that offer sublime performance and uncommon synergy.

Despite the not inconsiderable prices that the latter two systems in this feature rise to, they both have to be considered surprisingly good value, too.

SYSTEM 2

- 1 BENZ MICRO GLIDER £795
- 2 MUSICAL FIDELITY M6I £2,499
- 3 STIRLING BROADCAST BBC LS3/6 £2,999
- 4 GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V PHONO STAGE £520
- 5 MICHELL ORBE SE £2,649
- 6 MORCH DP6 £1,600

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:
£11,062**

SYSTEM 3

- 1 EAR 88PB PHONOSTAGE £4,120
- 2 MARSHALL CHOONG SPEAKERS CM3 £2,700
- 3 LYRA SKALA £2,495
- 4 SME 30/2 £16,128
- 5 LUXMAN MQ-88 £5,995
- 6 GRAHAM PHANTOM II SUPREME £4,250

**TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE:
£35,688**



Les and Pete have an understanding of vinyl playback that fully justifies their reputation. All three turntables are exceptional, but the SME and Graham combination left the most lasting impression. Rarely have I

listened to a piece of equipment that is so decisively better than more terrestrially priced offerings. Against this demonstration, other turntables can seem ordinary but these are some of the best solutions I have heard at their price points. The day also showed that Walrus has an exceptionally

talented portfolio of product beyond turntables. Products like the Sterlings and EAR phono stage put in a deeply impressive performance. If your vinyl days are behind you, there are still products at Walrus that could be exactly what you are looking for.



Sound & Vision

Of all the hi-fi events in the international audio calendar, **David Price** is especially fond of the Bristol show. Here's why...

Maybe it's because I was once studied there, or because I loved the city so much that I returned to it after long spells living in the Far East, but the Bristol *Sound & Vision* hi-fi show will always have a special place in my heart.

My first Bristol show was 1987, where I queued around the edge of the Marriot hotel for what seemed like hours to get in. I'm not sure if it was *quite* that busy in 2012, but certainly it wasn't far off, or so it seemed as I bustled around the labyrinthine corridors of the hotel...

According to the organisers, attendance was up 9 per cent year-on-year, with sales up 14 per

cent (the best sell-through in 4 years, apparently). No less than 192 brands exhibited, which is a record for Bristol. Given the tough economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, these are impressive numbers.

Still, the stats – good as they are – miss the point. Bristol is a show with a big heart; a warm, friendly event with lots of real, dyed-in-the-grain hi-fi enthusiasts, many of whom are actively buying rather than having come just to collect brochures and twiddle knobs. The added attraction of the city outside makes the experience all the more agreeable.

Inside though, a number of interesting new products were being shown, including these...

1 EDWARDS AUDIO APPRENTICE

Just when you thought it was safe to come out, another Rega clone! This turntable looked good though, and should sound the part considering its fine DNA... talkelectronics.com

2 EDWARDS AUDIO SP1

A £550 standmounter, very nicely finished, was another surprise appearance in the bustling TALK Electronics room. talkelectronics.com

3 B&W P5

Considering the company's impressive portfolio of loudspeakers, some of us still wonder why it took B&W quite so long to do headphones. Well, here they are, the beautifully presented P5s. bowers-wilkins.com

4 ISOTEK SUPER TITAN

Described as 'the world's most powerful mains conditioner', IsoTek's Super Titan certainly looked the part, and sounded it too. The smoothness of the music in this room was surely testament to its efficacy! www.isoteksystems.com

5 BLUE HORIZON PROFONO

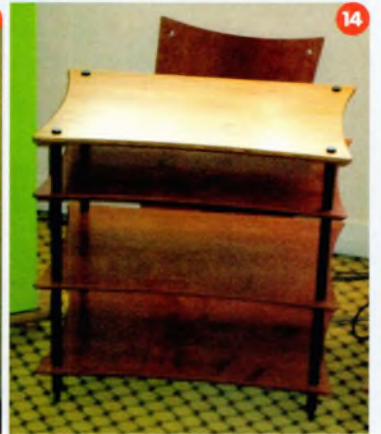
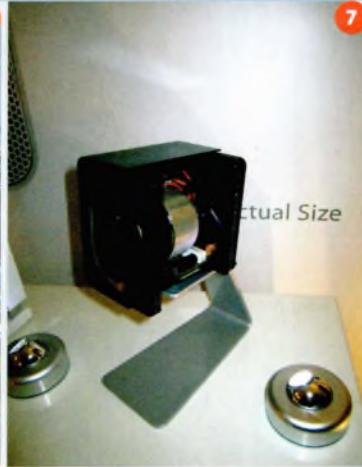
Also spotted in the Isotek room was the sleek aluminium casework of this sleek new phono stage from Blue Horizon, a sister company to IsoTek. That fancy box is designed to reject RFI, not just to get vinyl junkies hot under the cantilever! bluehorizonideas.com

6 MEI XING AUDIO MC805-A

Of all the classic power valves, many rate the 805 as topmost of the poppermost! Chinese tube specialists Mei Xing just *had* to make a place to park one, in the shape of this new monoblock power amp. The room was chaotically busy and packed full of kit, but they still got a decent sound. mei-xing.com

7 ELAC 301.2

One of my personal stars of the show was this tiny bookshelf speaker, complete with KEF B139-style 'racetrack' mid/bass unit, with a silk dome tweeter



piggybacked on top. This cut-out model shows the work that's gone into it...
elac.com

8 ECLIPSE TD510MK2

'Waistcoat of the Week' award went to the charming Hideto Watanabe of Fujitsu Ten, who was demonstrating Eclipse's latest loudspeakers. The TD510Mk2 and TD508MK3 were unalloyed egg-shaped joy.
eclipse-td.net

9 VERTERE ACOUSTICS

It was great to see Touraj Moghaddam in action, but not

– as you might expect – showing Roksan. Instead he was introducing his new cable venture, Vertere Acoustics.
vertereacoustics.com

10 SPENDOR A7

Not so much a big Spendor as a largish one, the impressive new A7 sports the company's phase correcting tweeter and comes in some extremely beautiful piano lacquer finishes.
spendoraudio.com

11 MITCHELL & JOHNSON

One amp that keeps popping up wherever yours truly goes is

this cute little US-designed, Chinese-built integrated sporting Russian 6SN7 dual triode tubes – plus tasteful orange LED backlighting!
sansui.co.uk

12 SANSUI

As someone once said, it's like "d'jà vu all over again"! Sansui, a once-great Japanese audio brand, has reappeared with a range of affordable two-channel separates, sporting strikingly similar design cues to its early eighties hi-fi products, which is no bad thing.
sansui.co.uk

13 REGA RP6

Flying the (Union) flag was Rega Research, with this rather fetching stack of turntable plinths! Elsewhere the eccentric Essex boys were showing off their latest range of superb electronics.
rega.co.uk

14 QUADRASPIRE BAMBOO EVOLUTION

Eddy Spruit's fine furniture was back in Bristol, but now using bamboo. It's a most versatile and hardy wood which should work well in audio applications.
quadraspire.com ●

Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified

Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice* Reader Classified, a free private ads service for buying and selling second-hand hi-fi components.

These pages are a must-read if you're thinking about buying used kit, or if you have hi-fi you want to sell. It's free to place an advertisement – simply submit your ad of up to 30 words, remembering to include your email, phone number and county.

The simplest way to send your ad is via email to: letters@hi-fichoice.co.uk Or mail to: **Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, My Hobby Store Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent BR6 6BG.**

Please note that this service is open to private advertisers only.

FOR SALE

NAD C315BEE amplifier, 40W, 6 line inputs, plus matching C515BEE CD player, Titanium, remotes, boxed, £100 each. Both for £200 and free NAD 4225 tuner. Gale silver monitor bookshelf speakers, (black ash), boxed, mint, £40. **01706 345418** or email: hfc@rodtheobald.force9.co.uk (London).

AUDIOLAB 8000P power amp (silver) and 8000C preamp (black), perfect sound and condition. £495 the pair. **07816 758688** (NE London).

TECHNICS SL1210 Mk2, very good condition, £249; Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200. **0207 499 8729** (London).

MARANTZ PM6004 integrated amp, 2 months old, (£310) £175; Quad 11L (Birdseye maple), excellent condition, £150. **07733428736** or email gill@gillbrears.plus.com (West Yorkshire).

NAD 5320 CD Players x2; NAD Amplifier 302; NAD

tuner C422; Hego bookshelf speakers. £100 or will separate. **01491 628000** or email: brian@bspmedia.com (Oxon).

QED Signature Audio XT, 1 metre, new, boxed, £95; Signature Silver Spiral 1metre £75. **01639774144** or email: alwyn.mackie@ntlworld.com (London).

TIVOLI Model One radio, designed by Henry Kloss, (maple/Hunter Green), with original box and instructions, brand new, £65. **07970142144** or **01745 833183** (Denbighshire).

NAIM CDX2 CD player, exceptional condition, complete with all packaging, £1,650; Naim NAC 282 preamp, complete with Naim NAPSC, exceptional condition, complete with all packaging £2,395; Naim NAP 200 power amp, exceptional condition, complete with all packaging £1,150; Focal Electra 1027 Be speakers, superb sound in exceptional condition, complete with all

packaging £2,200. **07866 423572** or email: adrian.ford@btinternet.com (Devon)

ICON AUDIO Stereo 60 Mk3, KT120 valves, Jensen capacitors. Up to 85W, virtually mint condition, original box, packaging, manual, valve cover, meter for checking valves bias. Buyer collects. £1,400 ono. **01889 575655** or email: derrick@forsters2.plus.com (Staffordshire).

JOHN SHEARNE Phase 6 Reference preamp (with MM phono board), £225, 2x John Shearne Phase 3 Reference stereo power amps, £215 each (£595, if all three amps purchased together). Each amp has received £300 of internal component upgrades carried out by Audiocom and are finished in a high-gloss black with gold knobs, all in excellent condition with boxes. **01202 515474** or email: johnlangley17@talktalk.net (London).

AUDIOLAB 8000P power amp (silver) and 8000C



The glowing warmth of the Icon Audio Stereo 60 valve amp!

preamp (black), perfect sound and condition. £495 the pair: **07816 758688** (NE London).

SUMIKO Blue Point No 2 cartridge, approximately 100 hours use, boxed, £85. **07800 606892** or email: schandler@dopag.co.uk (Worcestershire).

BEL CANTO CD2 (silver), psu, box, manual, excellent condition, £1,195; Avondale Monoblocs, psu (ncc200 boards), built into 3 slim Italian cases, excellent condition £495. **07733174990** or email: paul.57@fsmail.net (London).

MARANTZ CD17K1 CD player, Jamo Concert 8 loudspeakers, Arcam Alpha 8R, 8P amplifiers, rack, stands and cables. Mint condition, offers. **01706 622608** (Lancashire).

ASTIN TREW AT8000 phono stage, 6 months old, 2 year guarantee, (£880) £500. **07729 600847** (West Sussex).

MARANTZ SA1151 CVD player, 1 year old, (£2,000) £400, Yamaha TK781 DAB/FM tuner (£130) £40. Buyer must collect. **01302 538027** (Yorkshire).

DENON D-100 system (tuner, CD tape), with remote and Mission speakers, manual and brochures £225. Buyer collects. **01268 772403** (Essex).

ROKSAN Radius 5 turntable, with Rega RB600 tonearm and Goldring GX1022 cartridge, superb condition,

clear acrylic version £700. **01484 427426** (West Yorkshire).

RUSS ANDREWS HP1/PA1 preamp/power amp, excellent sound, all VGC, interconnect included £500. Will demo, buyer collects. **01483 891925** (Surrey).

KRELL 350m mono amps for sale, £3,500. Drive anything, VGC (black), including brand new 16-amp audiophile power leads. Collection only. **01926 653421** (West Midlands).

PRO-JECT Xpression II turntable, boxed with instructions. Excellent condition £75 inc p/p; Marantz CD-65II SE boxed c/w manual and remote, VG condition, still sounds great. £25 inc p/p. **07514443626** (Cumbria).

SPENDOR SP2/3 speakers (rosewood) £2,000, with very heavy cast AE Stands (£600). In superb condition. All boxes included. **0115 9288006** or rolfjordan@gmail.com (London).

MICHELL Syncro turntable with arm and Ortofon vms 30, £340. Tannoy Cheviot speakers £650. Audiolab 8000a amplifier £160. All in excellent condition: **01708 52788** (Essex).

TECHNICS SL1210 Mk2, very good condition, £249. Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200: **0207 499 8729** (London).

KENWOOD HD-600 HD compact component

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!

system, includes amplifier, tuner, cassette deck and CD player. KEF Coda speakers and IXOS Deadrock stands. Will accept best offer: **07747 864305** or email: behjat.reza@yahoo.co.uk (Surrey).

REGA 3 full ISOKINETIK upgrades without arm £200, with rRB50 Cardis wired Michell weight upgrades £400; arm alone £200: **01606784767** or email: peterscott341@tiscali.co.uk (Cheshire).

KUDOS R23in speaker stands £55. Target speaker wall stands, spiked £30. Bang & Olufsen Beocord 2400 cassette £50. Technics 8020 24-band graphic equaliser £60: **01708 457691** (Essex).

QUAD II classic integrated amp, light use, 2 months only, boxed, excellent phono MM/MC tape loop (£4,500) £2,900. Buyer collects: **01277 841493** (Essex).

AUDION Premier 2-box valve preamp, mint condition, (£2,500) £900. Audio Research D130 transistor power amp, mint condition, (£2,000) £500: **07767 444488** (Bucks).

BOWERS & WILKINS 684 (light oak), mint, boxed £350 plus £20 carriage: **00247636411** or email: tony.hodgkinson2@btinternet.com (West Midlands).

KRELL RFBP 250 watt monoblocks, Audio Research Reference 3 preamp. Gamut L3 speakers with stands, Transparent interconnects and speaker cables. For photos, details, prices: **07899 721899** or email: yatestherapy@googlemail.com (London).

CYRUS CD XT SE transport (black), with remote, £750. DACX (black), £750. Both in excellent condition and boxed with instructions. **01883 741843** (Surrey/Kent).

ROKSAN Xerxes (black ash finish) with XPS7 power supply. All excellent condition, new belt, TMS3 bearing, RMat £450. **07972 533063** or email: g200@gmx.com (Cumbria).

WANTED Complete fluid damper kit for SME series 111s tonearm. **01382 644815** (Dundee).

LEAK Trough Line stereo valve tuner in steel case, with Stereo 30 Plus transistor amp in wooden case £80. Also Goldring Lenco turntable £50. **01474 872863** (London).

TECHNICS SL1210 Mk2, very good condition, £249. Garrard 401 plus power supply £1,200. Can post items if needed. **0207 499 8729** (London).

BOSENDORFER AC1 loudspeakers (black/ivory). Good condition. Boxed. £600. **01926 259022** or email: davidhardy18@talktalk.net (Warwickshire).

GRAHAM SLEE Novo headphone amplifier, hardly used, boxed with manual £130, Pioneer 505 precision CD player, boxed. **07818 658722** (Warwickshire).

BRINKMANN FEIN phono amp 2006, RCA outputs, volume control, separate power supply (black). Superb finish and build (£1,050) £275. **07411 388152** (Herts).

WANTED Marantz DR-17 digital recorder. **01395 576644** or email: jmichaelbrittain@yahoo.com (Devon).

WANTED Ultra High Power Amplifier Construction by Nick Sheldon (Babani Press, 1989). **0859 341984** or email: drzacharysmith64@yahoo.co.uk (Norfolk).

AVI Biggatron standmounts (cherry), Partington stands, Bowers and Wilkins 684 floorstanders (cherry), excellent condition £550. **07982 794884** (Essex).

DYNAUDIO Excite X12 loudspeakers (rosewood), full Russ Andrews upgrade, as new, boxed (can demo) £495 (including p&p). **01524 34627** (Lancashire).

CHORD COMPANY Epic Twin speaker cable, factory terminated, £85. **01986 895940** (Suffolk).

WANTED Pink Triangle Anniversary or upgraded (DC motor) PT Too. **01445 781498** (Scotland).

EXPOSURE 2010S CD player, £190. Roksan Radius 5, clear acrylic version with Rega RB600 tonearm and Goldring GX1022 cartridge, £700. **01484 427426** (West Yorks).

AVI Reference CD player S2000 MC, used as transport with Audiolab DAX, £550. van den Hul Wind speaker cable (5-metre pair) £120 buyer collects. **020 8590 8530** (Essex).

NAIM Fraim. Consisting of a base and a standard shelf. Maple with silver upright. Fabulous condition/like new. Only two years old. (£1,680) £1,100. Includes three floor spike protectors. Collection preferred. **020 8372 8376** or email: gigglesno1@hotmail.com (London).

TAG MCLAREN PA10 preamp (black). Excellent, near mint condition with low usage and original box. Includes MM/MC phono stage built in. (£850) £275. **07854 658 281** (London).

ATACAMA Equinox, two hi-fi bases £50 (each) and one AV base £100. Graphite stand and anthracite glass in good condition. **01253 729944** or email: AtacamaStands@tesco.net (Lancashire).

MONITOR AUDIO (bronze) BR5 speaker package, walnut finish, boxed with instructions and in good condition £650 (pick up only). **07534457859** (West Yorkshire).

SONY ST-S311 FM/AM tuner, mint condition (black). Owned from new with original box and instructions, AM loop aerial

etc., upgraded power lead. £350. **01766 781211** (Porthmadog).

BOWERS & WILKINS 800 Matrix loudspeakers (black), mint condition with Krell bass alignment filter amp, Class A (£15,000 and £1,950) £1,850. Outstanding sound and dynamics. **03531 2014427** or email: booning4@hotmail.com **003531 2014427** (Ireland).

BERNARD EA-230, the perfect valve power amplifier for electrostatic loudspeakers, VGC, very rare and sought after, with circuit diagram. £800, or exchange for DNM PA3DeltaS power amp. elsfan@yahoo.com

MARANTZ PM-11 S1 Premium Series reference integrated amplifier. Boxed and mint (£2,500) £1,295. Marantz SA-11 S1 Premium Series reference CD/SACD player. Boxed and mint. Both in perfect working order. (Cost £2,500) asking £849. **07858 201062** or email: fullswop@gmail.com (Northants).

SONY TC-K 611 Dolby cassette deck, three motors, power door, fully loaded three heads, adjustable bias, etc. Hardly used, excellent condition (black) £49. **01766 781211** (Porthmadog).

SPENDOR S8e speakers, purchased early 2006 (maple) and in superb

condition, £900. Buyer collects. Original boxes, packing and instruction manual included. **01305 263069** (West Dorset).

PLINIUS integrated amplifier 9200 and CD-101 Anniversary Edition manufactured in 2010. Only 75 pairs in the world. 200 watts per channel into 8 ohms. CD-player with balanced XLR output. Both are used, but are in mint condition and still with limited warranty. (£8,400) £6,000. Buyer collects. Email: stmchan@gmail.com (Docklands, London).

ROTEL RA-05 amp and RCD-06 CD player with KEF IQ5 floorstanders. All in excellent condition. £200 each or £550 for the system. **01404891728** or email: AlanwRussell@tiscali.co.uk (East Devon).

CYRUS 7.5 preamp, one Smartpower and PSX-R power supply (black). Good condition £600 ovno **07842 643684** (Tyne & Wear).

GALE 401 speaker, fully reconditioned by specialist with stands and boxes; £475. **01825 722936** (Sussex).

CYRUS 6 XP amplifier in silver (2010 model). As new £595. **01323 440597** (Eastbourne).

MARANTZ CD6002 CD player in mint condition, perfect working order with remote; £150. **02476 467679** (West Midlands).

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR FREE AD

YOUR DETAILS

Name

Address

Email address

Daytime telephone number

Date

YOUR ADVERTISEMENT

SEND YOUR ADVERTISEMENT TO

Hi-Fi Choice, My Hobby Store Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent BR6 6BG

olive[®]

SAVE THE SOUND



Olive O6HD

Designed for Audiophiles.

The Olive O6HD Music Server will turn your stereo into a professional quality HD music system.

- High-Quality Dual-Mono DAC
- 10.1" Touch Screen
- Innovative Power Supply
- Premium Headphone DAC



Olive O4HD

The Gold Standard for Music.

With better sound and more features than any products in its class, the Olive O4HD is a true icon in HD Hi-Fi.

- High-Quality Burr-Brown DAC
- 2TB Storage
- Multiple In/Out Connections
- Exceptional Flexibility



Olive O3HD

Sounds Great. Costs Less.

The Olive O3HD Music Server is the most affordable way to turn your stereo into a digital HD music system.

- Super Simple Operation and Set-Up
- 500 GB Storage
- High-Resolution Cirrus Logic DAC
- USB Digital Out

HD Sound Experts.

All Olive servers benefit from...

Touch Screen Technology - TEAC CD-RW Drives - Network Integration (Wi-Fi on O4 and O6HD)
Intuitive User Interface - Ultra-Quiet Internal Storage - Olive App for Apple and Android
Metadata Editor Software - Stylish Design - Huge Internet Radio Database

Olive Media is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

Web: www.henleydesigns.co.uk - Tel: 01235 511 166 - Email: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk

Ed Selley brings you our pick of this month's top hi-fi websites...



PINK FISH MEDIA

pinkfishmedia.net

Pink Fish is one of the oldest British hi-fi forums, and should you be wondering, the name refers to a child's toy left in a record studio that the forum founder used to work in. Pink Fish is an interesting resource, in particular for Naim owners. There is a considerable cumulative experience of the company's products dating right back to the start of the company, as well as some useful information about pairing it with other company's equipment that is harder to come by on the dedicated Naim forum. Plenty of other brands feature too, and there is a wide spread of experience among members.



Pink Fish's other valuable asset is the music discussion area and the attached record store. This has a constantly updated stock of vinyl and CDs that are usually very accurately assessed for condition and competitively priced.

The general tone of Pink Fish is more civilised than some of the other online forums, which may appeal to people put off by the rather more 'robust' approach seen elsewhere. Pink Fish is also actively involved in the wider online community and users will often put in an appearance at events like the HiFi Wigwam show.

AUDIOGON

app.audiogon.com

If you are increasingly frustrated with some of the recent 'improvements' to eBay that add to the existing foibles, you might want to have a look at this US-based website. Audiogon is a dedicated hi-fi classifieds that has been going for over decade. Some of the equipment for sale is extremely rare and not generally seen for sale anywhere else. If you hanker after a Micro Seiki or TEAC P-70, this is probably the place to start looking! As well as high-end exotica, there is always a healthy selection of more terrestrially priced equipment as well.

Although it is US-based and as such has a great deal of equipment that is 110v and on the other side of the Atlantic, Audiogon has

a strong worldwide following, and it's easy enough to search for equipment on sale in the UK and Western Europe. While my



personal experience suggests that this is a safer trading environment than eBay, you still need to keep your wits about you and remember that if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. Like eBay, I also suggest avoiding using it late at night after a glass or two of something fortifying, lest you wake up the following morning needing to pay for and a ship a pair of Wilson Sophias from Utah!

FRANK'S ELECTRON TUBE PAGES

tubedata.info

The number of valve amps on the market continues to rise and the choice has never been greater. Although the great majority of valve amps on sale generally make use of the same basic valve types, the design and implementation can vary. Into this breach steps Frank Philipse, who has created a website that can provide useful information for anyone confused about what their amp is actually running.

This website will require a reasonable technical understanding of the terminology and measurement units commonly used. The database largely consists of scans of the original manufacturer specification sheets from a time when men were men and graphs ruled the world, although there are some more modern data sheets present as well. The most useful aspect for anyone new to valves are two very large tables that list the equivalent replacements for US and European valves. These will show you at a glance what other valve types can be used in place of a valve present in a circuit which takes the guesswork out of substitution and reduces the risk of you doing your amplifier (or worse, yourself) any harm. ●



BLEEP

bleep.com

The availability (or more accurately, the lack thereof) of lossless downloads remains a personal bugbear of mine, so Bleep are to be congratulated in offering a wider catalogue than most. As the name suggests, the choice of music is based heavily towards the electronica end of the spectrum but within this, there are some interesting and worthwhile albums to choose from – be sure to check out the sublime *Perfect Darkness* by Fink, which is available in either WAV or FLAC. Pricing is also competitive, with most albums being comfortably under a tenner.

One area where I feel that Bleep is head and shoulders above much of their competition is how slick the buying experience is. Managing downloads is painless and easy to do and should you want to buy physical media (of which they also have a wide choice of material), items have turned up when they said they would, and always in excellent condition. If you find yourself looking at the choice of material available and going "I don't know any of this", be sure to listen to the podcasts, which are a great way of learning what you might like.



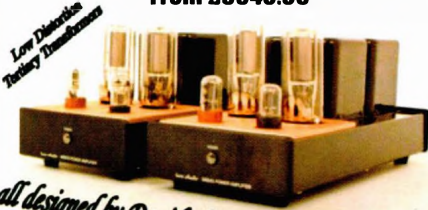


Our Four Cornerstones are: Quality – Performance – Value – Service You won't be disappointed!

Designed in Leicester. Hand built in our factory in China. Finished and tested in Leicester. We design and wind our own transformers using the best copper and iron. Using top worldwide parts from Rubicon, ALPS, Jensen, JJ, SCR, Solen, Full Music. Our commitment to quality and service means you are assured of advice, upgrades, service and spares for at least the 20 year minimum expected life of our amplifiers. You're assured of good performance new or second hand!

NEW MB845 i mono blocks

Fabulous huge 845 triode mono block amplifiers. NEW improved version of the original. Now with "Low Distortion Tertiary" transformers 90+90w. **5 Globes Hi Fi World**
From **£3849.95**



all designed by David Shaw

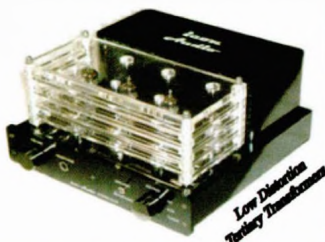
NEW ST20PP 15+15W Amp

Guaranteed to amaze and delight you Mullard's amazing EL84 makes this amplifier perform way beyond its modest size. Now with headphone socket. Not sure about valves? Try this with our money back guarantee.

Only **£549.95**



4+Globes Hi Fi World



NEW Stereo 60 MK III 85+85w

Total redesign with new KT120s New Tertiary transformers New power supply, very low distortion. Huge power in 1 box!
"High power, good timing" Hi Fi Choice Recommended



From **£2199.95**

New Electrostatics KingSound

33% off the whole Range whilst stocks Last Hurry! Outstanding Value! Compact, Efficient & Beautiful The Queen II is a compact efficient 3 way design, less conspicuous than a full range panel needing only 40 Watts to fill the average room with sublime sounds. Stunningly transparent.
Only **£1999.95**



The Icon CDX1 CD Player

Several unique features 3 power supplies. Valve rectifier, valve & choke regulated. Hard wired analogue output stage. With a top quality 192kHz 24bit player. Upgradeable.

From **£1299.95 (upgradeable)**
"Great for any mood or style of music"
Awarded 5 Globes Hi Fi World



LA4 MK II Line Preamp

"...Major on musical flow and attention to detail, Distortion very low 0.0003% Enormous headroom, bandwidth very wide, very low noise..." NK Hi Fi World, **awarded 5 Globes**
From only **£999.95 (upgradeable)**



NEW 150w Mono Blocks

150+150w of pure UL valve power (or 100 + 100w of pure triode). Using 4 KT90, KT88 or KT120. Based on our award winning MB90s. Unlike transistors, these giants retain the Icon warmth and texture at volumes, giving massive headroom and very low distortion. Various upgrades available. Now available with the new KT120!

Only **£2999.00 Pair** **4+ Globes Hi Fi World**



Our Best Ever Mid Range Amplifier!

Stereo 40 MK III our best ever value amplifier. It has everything! 40+40 watts, Triode mode, Valve rectifier. Remote control. Tape loop. Standby switch. KT66/KT88 EL34/6550 compatible. Two rave reviews in HFW and HFN.

From **Only £1399** *New 2A3 Model Now In Stock!*

"...Bristling with musical energy, smooth & sweet..."
P Rigby Hi Fi World
Awarded 5 Globes



NEW ST40 III 6AS7 Pure Triode Amp

30+30w pure triode. No feedback. Created as an affordable alternative to the high cost of 300Bs All the attributes of vintage triodes only £60 for a new set of output valves. Warm creamy sound lots of detail. Astonishing sound stage. All the other features of our Stereo III inc remote control

From **only £1,549.95** complete



NEW MB805 SE Mono blocks

45+45 Watts of Single Ended Heaven
From **£5499.95 (upgradable)**



NEW Stereo 25 MK II

NEW high quality headphone socket for private listening. NEW 6SN7/6SL7 valves for better definition. Upgraded output transformers for better bandwidth. 35+35w. Alps pot, 4/8 Ω outputs, Supplied transparent cover
FREE EL34 UPGRADE WORTH £100 (limited offer)

Still **Only £849.95**



PS 3 All Valve Phono Stage

"Our Fave Affordable High End Phono Stage"
N.K. Hi Fi World. Awarded 5 "Globes"
"Outstanding Product" Hi Fi News

All triode. Passive RIAA. Custom British MC TX option. Very quiet, high output. With the best possible Power supply. Valve rectified & regulated for definition and smoothness, 14kg.
From **only £1759.95** complete (inc MC TX)



Common Features: Icon Designs by David Shaw. Hand built "Point to Point" wiring. Designed and finished in Leicester UK. No printed circuit board. ALPS Volume control. Gold plated terminals. Audiophile components.

Silver Teflon audio cable. Steel & alloy plate construction. Soft start. Comprehensive manual inc DIY valve change info Plexiglas valve cover included. *Proper* valve amplifiers are heavy because good transformers need lots of iron!
See our other models at www.iconaudio.com Buy through your dealer or direct from us. Export no problem! (EU £30 per box) **Want to know more?**

.....Or ring us on +44 (0)116 2440593 email sales@iconaudio.com **icon Audio** 351 Aylestone Road Leicester LE2 8TA (U.K.)
*Whilst stocks last. Conditions apply ask for details Prices correct with 20% UK VAT at time of going to press but subject to change 09.2011. E & O E UK Visa, MasterCard AMEX and debit cards accepted

icon Audio



Our Stereo 40 MK III 6AS7 10th Anniversary Limited Edition



We have a passion for making well engineered Valve Amplifiers.

It is our tenth anniversary. As a high quality integrated amplifier that is within reach of most people is at the heart of what Icon Audio does. We thought we would make something a little special to celebrate this.

Customer feedback tells that the majority of our customers prefer the sound of "triode" valves. Our award winning MB45 and MB805 designs are unique in terms of power and performance but this comes at a price which may be out of reach for some. So a medium powered affordable pure triode amplifier seemed like a good idea. But which valve to use? The 2A3 is expensive and a little low at 17w (push-pull). The venerable 300B (30w pp) is excellent but at £500 per set adds a high premium and maintenance costs to an amplifier. Casting our net a bit wider the 6AS7 (30w pp) is readily available at £60 a set. Seemingly a bargain price! Our existing ST10 III chassis and built in passive preamplifier seemed well suited to the job. Our transformer engineer created some very special Low Distortion Tertiary output transformers and a dedicated power transformer to maximise performance. The driving requirement for the 6AS7 is probably its "Achilles heel" as it is quite demanding, but our experience with other triode amplifiers helped overcome this. In the Stereo 40 MK III 6AS7 we have incorporated everything we consider a good triode amplifier should have with a very solid build quality that we estimate should last at least 20 years.

Performance:

For those valve amplifier fans who want a little more. A rich creamy sound that is very warm and musical. Very relaxed listening full of detail without sounding brash. No feedback ensures that the sound stage is one of the most precise we have ever heard, this amplifier is the antithesis of a "modern" amplifier sound without being as laid-back as the "single-ended" types. Power enough to give high levels of sound with medium efficiency speakers. This is not the most "exciting" sounding amplifier we have ever made, but we think it is one of the most interesting!

Our new series of "Low Distortion Tertiary" output transformers are the best we have ever made, enabling us to reduce global feedback by about 10%. All of our amplifiers are designed in Leicester; they are commissioned and serviced by the people that designed them so you can be sure of long term performance. We incorporate a "standby" switch in order to protect those precious cathodes from ion bombardment until they have warmed up.

All of our amplifiers are hand made using "point to point" soldering without using printed circuit boards. We are convinced this sounds better. It allows for very easy servicing, upgrades and modifications. Remote controlled volume is useful for fine tuning your listening level to match your taste. High quality components are used throughout including an "ALPS" volume control, silver plated Teflon audio cable PCB capacitors audiophile resistors. Power Amplifier operation is possible by selecting a lower "gain" on the rear of the amplifier (this is not done with attenuation which would lose quality). Loudspeakers of nominal impedance between 3 ohms and 10 ohms may be used with virtually no reduction in power or quality. A 270V Valve rectifier and choke regulated power supply adds a richness to the sound quality that silicon devices alone are unable to do. Tape and other methods of recording and playback are catered for by the "Tape Monitor". Also useful for Home Cinema applications.

In short we have created an amplifier of excellent flexibility and quality which retains the qualities traditional of traditional design and performance.

From £1,549.95 (Complete inc VAT) Upgradeable See also our ST10 MK III 2A3 (17+17w) and ST10 MK III EL31/KT88 (40+40W)





High End Cable

www.highendcable.co.uk

Call Dave Jackson on 01775 761880

Top Brands

Acoustic ART
 Acoustic Systems
 Analysis Plus
 Argento Audio
 Audience
 Chord Company
 Dynamique Audio
 Ecosse
 Furutech
 Leif Series
 Michael Green Audio
 Nordost Corporation
 Leif | Norse2 | Reference
 Olive HD Servers
 Quantum QRT
 Raidho Acoustics
 Revelation Audio Labs
 Purist Audio Design
 StereoLab
 Synergistic Research
 STAX
 Telos
 Townshend Audio
 van den Hul

Power Conditioning

Audience
 adeptResponse
 Isotek
 Quantum QRT
 QBase

Power supply upgrade
 Fuses

Telos

Enhancement CDs

Treatment

Room treatment
 Acoustic Art
 Room Tuning Resonators
 DecoTune
 RoomTune RoomPak
 RoomTune Squares
 MiG's
 Sort Kones
 Pulsar points
 Quasar points

Equipment

Raidho Acoustics
 Bel Canto
 STAX headphones
 Olive HD Servers

ACCESSORIES

DIN cables
 Jumpers
 Firewire

Cables for dCS systems
 Chord cables for Naim

Sub woofer cables
 HDMI
 Digital cables
 Optical cables
 S video
 Component cables
 Chord ipod cables
 iPod cables

Get personal

S2



Raidho strives to put as many senses in use, when listening to sound, as possible. That is why the experience of a Raidho loudspeaker appeals to the delicate ear as well as the eyes with beautifully crafted and stylish cabinet design with elegant removable face grilles.

Trade up to Raidho today

Up to 40% trade in allowed on your old speakers Call 01775 761880 for a demo and more information



Technical
 177 x 1140 x 370mm / 240 x 500mm
 24kg each
 >6ohm
 15ohz & 3 Khz 2 order
 Down firing Transmission line
 1 Raidho sealed ribbon
 2 x 115mm Raidho Mid/bass
 Piano Black
 > 50 watts but small tubes produce excellent results



IsoTek Systems Ultimate Set-Up Disc

If you are a regular reader you may well have a version of this disc in your possession. A cut-down version was cover mounted on the November 2011 issue of *Hi-Fi Choice*, so if you missed it this piece might have you kicking yourself because it's choc full of useful material for getting a system precisely set-up. What the full retail version adds are three stereo imaging test pieces and a pair of frequency range test tracks which are very worthwhile features.

Essentially we're talking about speaker set-up here; there are channel and phase tests to ensure that the source, amp and speakers are correctly connected, but the rest of the 'tune-up' tracks are all about achieving true 3D stereo imaging. Of course, you don't get stereo imaging if channel and phase are wrong, so those two are an important part, albeit one that is covered on plenty of previous examples. To be honest this is not the sort of disc I usually try out, but a respected colleague in the industry said that it was very useful for setting up speakers in difficult rooms, so I gave it a spin...

In use

This disc has a number of useful tracks to assist with achieving strong stereo imaging, all of which are preceded by a spoken description of the result you should expect. The first critical one is track four, which is for loudspeaker position and adjustment. It features a voice and castanet to check relative loudness and tonal balance for each channel, and also places the same sounds at a position halfway between the centre line and

the individual channels to assist in achieving correctly symmetrical imaging.

The soundstage test is probably the most useful one for finding the correct position of loudspeakers with, as it's fairly clear whether or not the sound is coming from the various indicated positions, such as outside each speaker or a quarter of the way across the soundstage. In my system I found that one channel needed to be moved slightly outwards to get the right result.

The voice and castanet continues for the rest of the test tracks; first up being a 360-degree sweep where the castanet is walked around the room, albeit without any footsteps. This is a novel effect, if a tricky one to adjust the system for best results with.

An unusual and useful disc, made all the more helpful by the info available on the website...

The stereo image depth tests, numbers one through three, are made in a reverberant acoustic and combine the aforementioned sounds moving together and relative to one another. It's rather like the demonstration records made in the heyday of stereo, but without steam trains or journeys into sound – you can't have everything! At least the chap doing the talking has lovely diction.

The final two test tracks are of tones that slowly increase in frequency for one and decrease for the other; this reveals if there are any significant tonal aberrations in either the room, the loudspeakers or your hearing. It's a bit like the speaker response sweeps that are used in some quarters to measure loudspeakers, except you don't get a readout, and instead have to spot the variations with your ears. These would be useful for finding bass humps that a bit of loudspeaker movement could offset, however sometimes bass requires something more drastic to restrain it.

The final six tracks are samples from different artists in the Opus3 catalogue, these include Eric Bibb, Eva Taylor and the Omnibus Wind Ensemble, whose rendition of Frank Zappa's majestic *Dog Breath Variations* always gets my vote. Opus3 recordings are consistently excellent – I've written about several of the albums that are sampled here in the past and always in glowing terms.

This is an unusual and useful disc, made all the more helpful to the newcomer by the information sheet that is available to download from the IsoTek website. This tells you what to do if the results do not tally with those that the voice tells you should be

audible, which is always the tricky bit and makes this a set-up disc proper and not merely a demonstration of what the system can achieve. **JK**



► DETAILS

PRICE: £20
CONTACT:
01276 501392
WEBSITE:
ISOTEKSYSTEMS.COM

OUR VERDICT



Linn LK Upgrade Promotion

Now is an ideal time to benefit from the latest advances in Linn technology



Replace your existing LK Products &:

Save 15%

on your new Linn replacement
from: 20th March to 28th April

Still own Linn LK-style products? Now is the time to upgrade with our 15% offer
Major benefits include: Huge increase in musical performance and clarity. New full five year warranty. Trade-in allowance against your existing product. Installation service. Deferred and 0% APR options. Please contact us by phone, email or see our website for full details of this time limited cashback offer

Arcam, B&W, Denon, Linn, Naim, PMC, Rega, Quad, Spondor, Sonos
0% APR or deferred payment options available to suit your own budget

Example: Cash Price £1425. 20% Deposit required £285 plus 12 equal payments of £95. Total £1425 0% APR



Come and get to know Naim Uniti - from single to home network music solution
Enjoy an audition in our comfortable listening rooms - Free on site parking

www.billyvee.co.uk

See our website for current promotions, ex-demonstration and special offers



New RP 3
Turntable - Upgrade offer.

Rega - New product range

Outstanding performance and value



Brio-R
Amp - System offer



Rega
DAC - Cable offer

Billy Vee
SOUND • SYSTEMS

020 8318 5755

020 8852 1321

email enquiry: info@billyvee.co.uk

248 Lee High Road, Lewisham, London SE13 5PL (Mon - Sat 10am - 6.30pm Closed Thursday)

Russ Andrews Reveel anti-static cleaner

Russ Andrews has been making CD cleaning accessories for some time, and currently produces two variants, Reeles which is an anti-static cleaner that you spray on and polish off, and Reveel which is supplied in wet-wipe form, a sachet containing a cleaning cloth that's soaked in the solvent.

Reveel was developed to remove the mould release agent found on all new CDs – essentially silicone that's combined with the polycarbonate used to protect the aluminium layer of discs so that they can be easily manufactured.

The Reveel cleaning process involves wiping the disc surface and then rinsing off the solvent under running water; Russ recommends using kitchen roll to dry the disc thereafter. It's a little bit of a palaver, but hardly a big deal and one that proves worthwhile once you put the disc back in the player.

Sound quality

I found that it revealed more of the character in the recording, voices and instruments had more variety and depth than with the standard disc. It seems to do this by increasing transparency, which leads to a cleaner overall sound with greater vitality. Applying it to the same Eric Bibb disc that I'd cleaned with Ensemble it gave the guitar extra zing without making it hard-edged.

There is a distinct improvement in treble resolution, which brings in more of the space in the recording, as well as instruments like cymbals and female vocals. All-in-all it's a highly rewarding result for the cost and effort involved, and each box contains twenty sachets, each being able to clean up to five discs. **JK**



► **DETAILS**
PRICE: £14.50
CONTACT:
0845 345 1559
WEBSITE:
RUSSANDREWS.
COM

OUR VERDICT



Vertere Acoustics Dfi cable

Vertere Acoustics is Touraj Moghaddam's new company; the man behind the Roksan Xerxes turntable (among many other radical products) has now turned his attention to cable. This has yielded three ranges of interconnects, alongside a truly hand-built array of specialised cables.

The Dfi takes a different tack – its aim is to bring great sound to real-world systems, so prices start at £59 for a mini-jack to mini-jack cable for hooking your iPod or computer to a suitably equipped amp. I tried the mini-jack to RCA phono cable between both an iPod and an Apple Mac and a variety of amplifiers and was frankly startled by the results.

Sound quality

In many key respects, the Dfi outperforms affordable USB cable and DAC combos, the latter win in terms of scale and finesse, but this cable proves that when it comes to timing and focus, the 24-bit/96kHz convertors inside Apple Macs are far from shabby. Dfi places the emphasis on the music and the way its played and recorded.

The presentation may not be as expansive as a USB DAC, but the message is no less easy to appreciate and enjoy. Even in the context of a very revealing system I found myself getting involved with the music and cranking it to full on effect.

Next to an iPod Touch in an original Arcam rDock, it's more powerful and open, making the dock sound dull and flat. It also reveals that a MacBook sounds considerably better than the iPod. This new Vertere cable shows you can achieve a remarkably good result with an iPod or computer without going to the expense of a USB DAC. **JK**



► **DETAILS**
PRICE: £95
CONTACT:
0203 176 4888
WEBSITE:
VERTERE
ACOUSTICS.COM

OUR VERDICT



TURNTABLEWORLD

Special offers to celebrate our new website
www.turntableworld.co.uk - the analogue specialists - 01642 267012

WELCOME TO THE NORTH EAST

ANATEK RESEARCH
APOLLO
ATACAMA
AV INTERNATIONAL
CHORD COMPANY
CHORD ELECTRONICS
CLEARAUDIO
DYNAVECTOR
EAR YOSHINO
GOLDRING
GRAHAM ENGINEERING
GRAHAM SLEE
G F HADCOCK
ISOTEK
KOETSU
KUDOS AUDIO
MARTIN LOGAN
LYRA
MAGNEPLANAR
MELODY
MICHELL ENGINEERING
MONITOR AUDIO



NAD
NAIM AUDIO
NORDOST
NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE
OPERA
ORTOFON
PATHOS ACOUSTICS
PROJECT
PS AUDIO
PURESOUND
REGA
REVOLVER
ROKSAN
SME
STAX
SUGDEN AUDIO
TEAC ESOTERIC
TRANSFIGURATION
TRICHORD RESEARCH
UNISON RESEARCH
USHER AUDIO
VAN DEN HUL

HIFISOUND, Castlegate mill, Quayside, Stockton on Tees. 01642 267012

2NDHANDHIFI.CO.UK

Guaranteed used and ex-demo audio equipment from HiFiSound - the UK's premier source

Call : 0845 6019390 Email : News@2ndhandhifi.co.uk

Analogue

Audio Technica AT1100 tonearm, excellent.....	199
Benz Micro Gilder, little use, due in.....	Call
Clearaudio Unify tonearm, brand new.....	999
Clearaudio Concept, mint boxed ex demo.....	875
Croft R1AA mm valve phono ex demo.....	379
EAR 834P Deluxe ex demo.....	1399
Garrard 301, good cosmetics, full working order.....	799
Grado Cartridges, various ex display.....	Call
Graham Slee Era Gold V and PSU 1, nr mint.....	299
Hadcock 228 tonearm, excellent boxed.....	349
Linn LP12, Valhalla.....	399
Linn LP12 with Valhalla & Basik Plus tonearm.....	499
Linn Ittok LV11, vgc.....	399
Linn Ittok LV11, in rare black, excellent.....	799
Linn LP12/Akito K18, excellent boxed.....	699
Linn LP12/Ittok LV11, excellent boxed.....	899
Michell Focus One, excellent.....	299
Michell Hydraulic Reference, SME 3009, new lid.....	749
Michell Gyro SE, RB250, Goldring cart excellent boxed.....	849
Musical Fidelity XLP, vgc.....	99
NAD PP2 and PP3 phono stages ex demo.....	Call
Notts Analogue Spacedeck and Hadcock 228.....	499
Ortofon TA1000 Tonearm, brand new unused.....	949
Project Essential/Genie/Debut all ex demo.....	Call
PS Audio GCPh Phono Stage ex demo.....	Call
Rega RP1 ex demo.....	179
Rega P3, St Georges flag, excellent boxed.....	249
Rega Planar 3, boxed.....	299
Roksan TMS1 & DSU, superb, boxed.....	1749
Roksan Xenex, Kuzma Slogi, new PSU, boxed.....	749
Roksan Tabriz Z, latest version.....	399
Roksan Radus 5 2 ex demo.....	Call
Roksan Nima, unipivot tonearm vgc.....	299
SME Model 10, Kondo wiring, excellent boxed.....	999
SME Model 10, ex demo.....	Call
SME 3009/2, excellent boxed.....	249
SME 3009/2, excellent.....	179
The Source, offboard p/s vgc & new Ortofon TA1000.....	899
Sumiko Cartridges, various ex display.....	Call
Systemdek IX, vgc boxed.....	Call
Technics SL110/SME3009, excellent.....	349
Thorens TD309, ex display bargain.....	799
Thorens T124 mk2, excellent.....	799
Thorens T125, SME 3009, SME plinth, excellent.....	399
Tom Evans The Groove, excellent.....	1099
Townsend Rock 2, Rega tonearm vgc boxed.....	499
Townsend Rock 7, Trough, Rega tonearm vgc boxed.....	1499
Trichord Dino Mk1, excellent boxed.....	199
Well Tempered Reference, superb!.....	1999
Wilson Benesch Act 1 Tonearm, nr mint superb.....	799

Amplifiers

AMR A77, excellent flightcased, REDUCED.....	2999
Amber Series 70 US Power amp, good condition.....	199
Arcam A90, excellent remote.....	449
Arcam Alpha 8R and 8P combo, excellent.....	379
Arcam P1 Monoblocks, excellent.....	1299
Arcam P38 Power Amplifier, excellent boxed.....	599
Astin Trew 2000 Plus Integrated, as new.....	799
Audiolab 8000A, vgc boxed.....	179
Audiolab 8000Q, excellent.....	299
Audiolab 8000S, excellent silver.....	229
Audio Innovations Series 1000 Preamplifier.....	Call
Audio Research VS115, vgc boxed, due in.....	2999
Beard P55mk2, vgc, 2 of.....	799
Bryston 880 Integrated with E500 remote, boxed nr mint.....	199
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A Integrated, nr mint boxed.....	119
Chord CPA5000 preamp, excellent remote boxed.....	4599
Chord CPA2200 Preamp, excellent BARGAIN.....	Call
Chord CPM3300 Integrated, excellent boxed.....	3499
Copland CTA405, near mint boxed.....	1249
Denon DAP2500Pre/POA4400 Monos, good condition.....	799
EAR 890 Power Amplifier ex demo mint boxed.....	3999
EAR 859, excellent boxed, recent service and revalve.....	1199
Esoteric C03/A03 Pre/Power ex demo.....	Call
Esoteric A10, with DAC excellent boxed.....	1199
Esposure 28 Power, nr mint.....	599
Icon Audio Stereo 40 mk2, excellent boxed.....	549
Karan KAS180 Power, crated.....	1799
Krell Evolution 600 Monoblocks £31,000 new! TO CLEAR.....	Call
Krell KAV250, preamp, remote, excellent.....	699
Krell KSA2005, excellent.....	1749
Krell KVA400, excellent boxed, just serviced.....	1599
Linn Kaim, excellent boxed.....	399
Linn Majik integrated with remote.....	299
Linn Majik 2100 Power.....	899
Luxman LV105u, rare integrated, excellent boxed.....	Call
Mastersound 300B pse Integrated, lovely!.....	2499
Melody FM845 Monoblock amps ex demo, save £4000.....	3999
Melody 101 Preamplifier, world renowned ex demo.....	2499
Meridian 201 Preamplifier, vgc with 209 remote.....	199
Micromega IA60, near mint boxed.....	300
Musical Fidelity 3a preamp & P150 Power amplifier.....	399
Musical Fidelity XT100 Integrated with PS, nr mint.....	599
NAD C32BEE ex demo nr mint.....	219
NAD C316BEE ex demo nr mint.....	159
NAIM NAC72/NAP160, excellent, due in.....	799
NAIM NAC152/202/282 ex demo.....	Call
NAIM NAP155/250/NAF300, ex demo.....	Call
NAIM NAC112/NAF150 excellent boxed.....	599
NAIM NAC92/NAP90 Pre Power, nr mint boxed.....	399
NVAP60MC/PS/A40, Pre/PSU/Power excellent boxed.....	599
Puresound 2A3 Integrated, ex demo.....	1299
Roksan Kandy K2 and Caspian M2 ex demo.....	Call
Scott 33/44/303/405 all vgc.....	Call
Raysonic SP100mk2, excellent boxed.....	999
Rega Brio R, mint boxed weeks old.....	399
Rotel RC97, Preamp, remote.....	199
Sugden A21SE, ex demo.....	1099
Unison Research S6, ex demo.....	Call
Unison Research Unico, various models ex demo.....	Call
World Audio Design Kit 34, Due in.....	399

Digital

AMR CD77, excellent flightcased.....	3499
AMR CD777 ex demo.....	Call
ArcamAlpha DV139, excellent boxed.....	199
Arcam Alpha 8R and 8P combo, with remote.....	799
Arcam CD73, excellent remote, boxed.....	199
Arcam CD72, boxed, excellent remote.....	149
Arcam Delta 170/Black box DAC combo boxed.....	199
Arcam Alpha 8 SE, excellent.....	149
Arcam Alpha 9, excellent DCS Ringdac player.....	299
Audiolab 8000CCDM Transport and 8000DAC.....	599
Chord QBD76HD, ex demo.....	2249
Copland CD823, due in.....	799
Cynus DAD 7, excellent boxed.....	249
Cynus CDS5, excellent boxed REDUCED.....	279
Esoteric DV50S, excellent boxed.....	1499
Esoteric K-03, ex demo.....	Call
Linn Mirrik, excellent.....	249
Linn Akurate DS, excellent boxed.....	2249
Leema Pulse 3, nr mint boxed.....	799
Marantz SA7-S1, excellent, remote etc.....	2599
Marantz DR6000 recorder, remote and manual.....	99
Meridian 207 CD/Preamp, good condition.....	249
Meridian 206 CD, excellent boxed condition.....	249
Micromega CD10, nr mint boxed new model.....	599
Micromega CD30, nr mint boxed new model.....	1199
Musical Fidelity A1008 2, excellent boxed.....	1199
Musical Fidelity CDT/early CD player with valves, vgc.....	299
NAIM DAC, as new, weeks old.....	1699
NAIM C545BEE, excellent boxed.....	179
NAIM CDX2mk2, excellent boxed.....	349
NAIM CD3 5, excellent boxed.....	349
NAIM CDS1 original, excellent with remote.....	499
NAIM CDS12, excellent with remote.....	549
NAIM CDSX, vgc boxed.....	699
NAIM iDX SSD as new.....	Call
Philips SACD1000, vgc+ boxed.....	199
PS Audio Perfective Transport/DAC/Bridge, ex demo.....	3999
Puresound A8000, excellent boxed.....	499
Rega DAC ex demo.....	379
Rega Apollo, excellent with remote.....	379
Rega Saturn, ex demc.....	Call
Rega Planet 2000, excellent boxed.....	279
Roksan Kandy K2, excellent boxed.....	549
Roksan Kandy K1, excellent boxed.....	199
Rotel GRD965EX excellent boxed.....	99
Sony SCD XB940, reasonable condition.....	119
TEAC D1 DAC, excellent.....	249
Theta DS Pro Gen 5 DAC, excellent boxed.....	799
Unison Research Unico CD ex demo.....	Call
Unison Research Unico P1mo ex demo.....	Call
Wadia 861b, excellent.....	2499
Wadia Pod dock, nr mint ex demo.....	Call

Loudspeakers

Acoustic Energy AE1 c/w matching stands, boxed.....	599
AVI Neutron 5, ex demo mint.....	349
AVI ADM9 1, ex demo nr mint.....	849
Audiovector M3 Signature Actives, nr mint boxed.....	1249
B&W 602s2, vgc.....	149
B&W DM70 Continental, fair cosmetics, fully working. Offers.....	299
EPoS ES14, excellent boxed with dedicated stands.....	299
Focal Diablo Utopia III c/w stands, nr mint.....	Call
GRIFFIN LOUDSPEAKERS WANTED.....	Call
Indigo Model One, with matching Sub1 units boxed.....	249
Kudos C1, excellent boxed in Walnut.....	799
Kudos C20, due in.....	Call
Linn Kaim, in task, excellent.....	349
Linn Ninka, boxed in Maple.....	599
Linn Keilidh, KuStone stands in cherry.....	299
Magneplanar MG3 6, Ex demo, superb.....	Call
Martin Logan Odyssey, excellent boxed.....	2999
Martin Logan Summit X, excellent!.....	Call
Meridian M20 Active speakers.....	399
Meridian M3 Active speakers.....	399
Meridian M1 Active speakers, boxed due in.....	Call
Mirage OM6 dipoles, excellent sound for peanuts.....	449
Mission 750LE, excellent.....	79
Monitor Audio Radius HD, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio Bonze Ref, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio Silver RX, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio Platinum PL300 ex demo as new BARGAIN.....	Call
Monitor Audio Platinum PL100s with stands.....	1199
Monitor Audio Platinum, various ex display.....	Call
Monitor Audio BX2, ex demo mint.....	179
Opera Mezza in Cherry, nr mint boxed ex demo.....	499
PMC DB1, excellent boxed.....	499
PSB Alpha B1 Stereophile Product of the year BARGAIN!.....	99
Q Acoustics 2000 series, various ex demo.....	Call
Quad ESL57s, good working order.....	499
Rogers LS3a, in rosewood, excellent boxed.....	Call
Rogers LS71, superb condition with target stands.....	299
Ruark Swordsman, good condition.....	49
Sonus Faber Concertino boxed, excellent.....	599
Sonus Faber Concertino Home, boxed with stands.....	749
Thiel CS7 2, vgc, just refurbished.....	2999
Townshend Glastonbury 2, good condition.....	749
Usher S520 and matching Subwoofers.....	799
Usher Be10 DMD Diamond ex demo SUPERB save!!.....	Call
Usher Mini 2 Diamonds, ex demo, call for details.....	2499
Usher 718 Diamonds, excellent boxed, ex demo.....	1399
Wharfedale Diamond Home cinema pack, ex demo.....	Call
Wharfedale 10.1 ex demo, nr mint boxed.....	149
Wharfedale 10.3 ex demo, excellent boxed.....	199
Wharfedale Active Diamond 7.1s - rare boxed!.....	119
Wilson Benesch Curve, excellent boxed, due in.....	Call
Wilson Watt/Puppy 3/2, vgc+, crated due in.....	2249

Special System Deals

Audio Analogue Crescendo Amp & CD, ex demo.....	799
Micromega CD10 & IA60, both new.....	999
Krell Showcase Cinema 7.1 system (HDMI), mint boxed.....	4999
NAIM UniQute & Kudos X2s, ex demo.....	Call
TEAC Mini systems brand new - call for details!.....	Call

Telephone 01642 267012, Tuesday to Saturday 10 'til 5
or email choice@2ndhandhifi.co.uk

Audio-Technica ATH-A700X headphone

The A700X is the middle model in a three-strong line-up of closed back headphones from Audio-Technica that form the new Art Monitor X range. All three feature a 53mm bobbin wound voice coil driver and the company's proprietary Total Ear Fit oversized ear cups. Combined with Audio-Technica's '3D support wings' (instead of a more conventional headband) the range is designed to be as comfortable as possible...

In this, Audio-Technica has succeeded admirably. Although the A700X is quite a large design, the 290g all-up weight and the 3D wings makes it exceptionally comfortable to wear for long periods. I did one stint of about five hours and at no stage did I find them digging in or creating the unpleasant 'hot ear' effect that some over-ear designs can induce. The fit and finish is also very good and they manage the neat trick of feeling substantial despite the relatively low weight.

Sound quality

Sonically, the news is good, too. The relatively large ear cups mean the drivers are set some way back from your ears which aids the sense of space and lends a believable soundstage to proceedings. The 'Monitor' tag is not undeserved either, as the overall balance is commendably neutral. No part of the frequency response seems accentuated which serves them well across a wide variety of music. **ES**



DETAILS

PRICE: £220
CONTACT:
01235 511166
WEBSITE:
EU.AUDIO-
TECHNICA.COM

OUR VERDICT



NuForce Icon iDo DAC/ headphone amp

This is part of the expanding range of compact audio products from NuForce, and is described as an 'Audiophile-Grade DAC and Headphone Amp for iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch'. Translated into English, the iDo is a cross between an iPod transport and a headphone amplifier. It takes the digital output from your iDevice and can either output it to an amplifier or external DAC, or allow you to run headphones that the Apple device might struggle with on its own.

The iDo is small, but stoutly constructed. The metal chassis is well finished and the general attention to detail is very good. The volume display, which consists of a row of blue LEDs, is not the clearest going, but otherwise this is a nice piece of industrial design.

Sound quality

The iDo succeeds admirably in its brief of being able to manage headphones that the internal amp of an iDevice won't do justice to. It worked well with the Audio Technicas tested at the same time, and also achieved good results with Etymotic in-ears. There is a very pronounced jump in performance, once the volume passes a certain point (pretty much as LED number four lit up), which is a little curious. Below it, the iDo is a little polite and smooth. Above it, the performance fills out and has a far greater sense of bite and attack.

The very specific functionality of the iDo means it will either be just what you need or of no use at all. If it had a battery for use on the move it would be an excellent option for long journeys. As it is, if you spend long periods listening to an iPod *in situ*, the performance boost it offers is too good to ignore. **ES**



DETAILS

PRICE: £219
CONTACT:
+1 408 518-0626
WEBSITE:
NUFORCE.COM

OUR VERDICT



Stop strangling your system!

For 25 years our customers have been fitting our PowerKords™ to their Hi-Fi components. With "musicality built in" we believe that they offer the best way to get even better performance from your CD or DVD player and amplifier.



Buy the **Classic PowerKord™** before 26th April 2012 and get a box of 20 ReVeel® CD enhancing wipes (treats up to 100 discs) worth **£14.50 FREE**

The cable



The Classic PowerKord™ is made with eight separately insulated conductors, woven together. The conductors are Kimber's TCSS wire, which uses hyper-pure copper, and is finished with Teflon® insulation.

We believe that this woven cable geometry, coupled with the unique purity, stranding and insulation of the conductors combine to give the best-performing mains cables available and let you experience a new dimension in sound and pictures.

Cable shown has part of the covering removed for illustrative purposes only.



Connecting you to your equipment



We firmly believe the Wattgate™ connectors that we fit to our PowerKords™ are the best equipment connectors available, anywhere! The secret to their performance is the way in which they securely clamp the cable to the plug, and the way the plug grips the IEC socket on your equipment, allowing your kit to perform more efficiently.

Protecting from spikes and surges

As an option we can fit our SuperClamp components to a Classic PowerKord™ that is fitted with Wattgate IEC connectors. They help to protect equipment from spikes and surges and improve sound quality, making it subjectively slightly more detailed and natural.

"we defy anyone not to notice the improvement in performance when you switch from a free cable to a PowerKord™."



What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine Awards 2004

Tech Flex

This tough, flexible covering protects your investment from wear and potential damage.



All PowerKords™ are hand made, by us in the UK.

Connecting you to the mains

The mains plugs we use are carefully chosen to be the best performing and highest quality. Like everything we design, we fully test and listen to them before incorporating them into a product!

Even the fuses in our PowerKords™ are chosen for their performance! We fit our own RA 13A fuses into all our mains cables.



EXCLUSIVE OFFER!

Order a Classic PowerKord™ before 26th April 2012 quoting code **26APR** to receive your free box of ReVeel® wipes

UK Orderline 01539 797300
www.russandrews.com/classicoffer

Russ Andrews®
CLASSIC POWERKORD™



1m cable **£117.00**
1m cable with SuperClamp **£127.50**

including FREE UK mainland delivery
Other lengths available please enquire

Russ Andrews®

Mail Order Direct • 60 Day Cable Home Trial • Cable Upgrade Scheme • Free Delivery (orders over £100 within UK Mainland)

ISOkinetik ISOvert 3P Dynamic VTA Adjuster

The ISOvert 3P is a VTA (Vertical Tracking Angle) adjuster for use with any Rega three-point mounted tonearms, including RB251 and RB301. It will also work with similar Rega derivative arms, of course.

The tonearm is bolted into the ISOvert 3P's threaded top plate. Adjustment of the VTA is made by rotating the stainless steel knurled ring above the plinth and the quick release knurled brass locking nut beneath. There is no need to take the arm off the turntable to audition the effect of various settings.

Many turntables, and in particular Regas, will require the mounting hole to be widened to 26mm (currently 24mm) in order to accept the ISOvert 3P. It's also useful when fitting three-point Rega tonearms to turntables with higher platters, as it can handily be used to provide the necessary height for the tonearm.

In use

Rega are not a great believer in VTA adjustment, apart from what is basically required to suit a particular make of cartridge. However, there are many people who believe (as indeed I do!) that VTA fine-tuning is one of the many essential adjustments required for an optimal tonearm/cartridge setup procedure, which is where this adjuster comes in handy.

When using the ISOvert, adjusting the VTA becomes a breeze. No shims to worry about – just loosen the bottom locking nut, rotate the top ring, retighten the bottom nut and you're away!

The adjuster is a fine example of British engineering at its best. It is supplied together with three fixing bolts and an Allen key for mounting the tonearm. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE: £80
CONTACT:
020 8241 8890
WEBSITE:
CABEZON.EU

OUR VERDICT



Origin Live Upgrade Platter Mat

My turntable has a clear acrylic platter which generally does a very good job of supporting my prized vinyl discs, so I was interested to try out the Upgrade Platter Mat from Origin Live, for which great things are claimed...

The manufacturer says that this universal mat will work well with most platter materials, including acrylic, metal, glass and composite platters. It is about 1mm in thickness, and this should be taken into account when fitting it to a bare platter. The increase in the height of the record will change the VTA (Vertical Tracking Angle) of the stylus, so the tonearm should therefore be adjusted to allow for this.

The purpose of a platter mat is to isolate the record from externally-induced vibration, while at the same time providing effective coupling between the record and the platter that is rotating it.

Sound quality

When substituting the stock mat for the Origin Live design, the differences became immediately apparent. With the OL mat, bass was noticeably tighter and the musicians had a better grip on the performance. The bottom end appeared more extended, while at the top end, strings sounded cleaner and more natural.

This suggests that the mat is effectively reducing unwanted resonance which feeds back into the cartridge. Vocals sounded more involved, and integrated better with instruments. Overall, everything sounded nicely balanced with this mat and, somehow the noise floor appeared to be pushed further down, back from the music. As such it offers clearly audible improvements, and so I'd recommend it as a really great value upgrade at the price. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE: £40
CONTACT:
02380 578877
WEBSITE:
ORIGINLIVE.COM

OUR VERDICT



Mains Cables R Us

Mains Leads | Mains Filters
Interconnects | Speaker Cables
Turntables | Vinyl Accessories
DIY Parts | Computer Audio

Home of The Ultimate Cables

07908 056978

www.mains-cables-r-us.co.uk

Because the Mains Matters...



*Furutech | Oyaide
Isotek | Black Rhodium
Meicord | Vermouth Audio
WBT | Okki Nokki | Tacima
Blue Horizon | Clearlight Audio
Canor | IeGo | Isoclean | HiFi Tuning
Telco | Supra | IsoKinetik | Alexander Acoustics*



THAMES VALLEY AUDIOFAYRE 2012

22ND APRIL 2012

WWW.THAMESVALLEYAUDIOFAYRE.CO.UK

**BUY AND SELL USED AND VINTAGE
HIFI EQUIPMENT!**

See us on YOUTUBE or read the feature in
Sept 2010 hi-fi news

CALL: 07957 173367 OR
EMAIL: audiofayre@aol.com

SUNDAY 22ND APRIL 2012 10.30am
(earlybird 9.30am)
BRACKNELL LEISURE CENTRE
(ON A322)

The New Guru

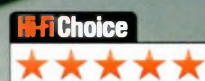
"This remains one of the most enjoyable and engaging little loudspeakers on the market. It has a direct line to the melody, as well as the overall emotion of the musical event. It opens a window on the soul of the creator – which is something that only the best equipment can deliver."

Jason Kennedy, Hi Fi Choice Feb 2012

**CALL 01727 810047 NOW
TO ARRANGE YOUR
DEMONSTRATION**

GURU

www.guruproaudio.co.uk



Ensemble Visio CD cleaner

Those with good memories might remember that Ensemble is a Swiss company that gained traction with standmount loudspeakers in the eighties and nineties. The name is still going strong and turned up at a UK show last year with a complete system including electronics, speakers and cables. All quite pricey stuff, but it also makes a CD cleaner called Visio which consists of a bottle of liquid and three micro fibre cleaning cloths in a plastic container.

It's straightforward enough to use, just rub some into the disc in the time-honoured radial fashion and then polish it off. Visio is designed to provide deep cleaning, which improves reflectivity and thus aids readability by the laser. It is also an antistatic treatment and is said to protect against oxidation, although it's not exactly clear what is supposed to be oxidising!

Sound quality

I used it to clean a couple of discs and found that it was consistently beneficial. It improves high-frequency definition which means that leading edges are clearer and this makes for better image focus. It also benefits timing in a subtle way, because those leading edges are what provide the rhythmic cues. With an Eric Bibb disc it turned a slightly brash sound into a smoother, cleaner more effortless one, which meant that it could be enjoyed at higher levels.

Visio is quick and easy to apply, somewhat more so that the other cleaner assessed this month and useful for those looking to squeeze the best results from their disc collections. However the price, which includes P&P makes it rather less competitive. **JK**



► DETAILS

PRICE: £30
CONTACT:
01572 756447
WEBSITE:
ENSEMBLEVIDEO.
COM

OUR VERDICT



Furutech Formula 2 USB cable

Furutech has established itself as the go-to brand for connectors and is making good headway with its electronics, so it's not surprising that the company has moved into the latest generation of digital interconnect.

Formula 2 is Furutech's entry-level USB cable and comes in three variants depending on which USB plug you need, I had a 5m sample of the USB A to B type that works with most DACs. The cable is built with silver-plated OFC conductors and a three-layer shield with high-density polyethylene insulation, it comes wrapped in a blue braid and the plugs are Furutech-engineered gold-plated types.

Sound quality

Used to connect my iMac to a Resolution Audio Cantata DAC, the Furutech delivers a well-controlled but revealing sound that is strong on detail, dynamics and timing in the context of a relaxed presentation. It's not as sharp at timing as The Chord Company's like-priced competitor Silver Plus, which is also a little better at projecting an image into the room, I feel.

The flipside of this is that when the musical going gets dense the Furutech remains calm under fire; it is intrinsically neutral and there is never a sense of congestion. You can easily follow different instruments in an ensemble, be it a quartet or a brass-backed electric band and this indicates that distortion is very low.

This is a well made USB cable that represents a major upgrade on standard types and will suit those who enjoy their music in full effect. Yes, that means loud! **JK**



► DETAILS

PRICE: £70 (0.5M)
CONTACT:
01276 501392
WEBSITE:
SOUND
FOUNDATIONS.
COM

OUR VERDICT



THE Si 3 RANGE BEAUTY BORN OF PERFORMANCE



WWW.AUDIOVECTOR.COM

Audiovector speakers are available through a knowledgeable dealer network with superlative demonstration facilities:

Acoustica (Chester, Cheshire) 01244 344227

Analogue Seduction (Peterborough) 01733 350878

Audio Destination (Tiverton, Devon) 01884 243584

Audio Emotion (Banbeath, Fife) 01333 425999

PJ Hi-Fi (Guildford, Surrey) 01483 504801

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision (Holborn, London) 0207 8377540

Tavistock Audio (Tavistock, Devon) 01822 618940

Audiovector is distributed in the UK by Henley Designs Ltd.

henleydesigns.co.uk · 01235 511 166 · sales@henleydesigns.co.uk

The Missing Link Vinyl Passion Dust Buster

This is a stylus cleaner and preserver with a difference; not least because it claims to increase the life of your needle by up to 1,000 hours! It uses a specially formulated polymer that is placed under the stylus, into which the stylus is lowered. On raising the stylus, the dust will have been removed!

Apparently it has taken three years to develop the oil polymer hybrid using a specially developed UV bonding process to produce the magic material used in the Dust Buster. Then there was a further twelve months of testing before the product was finally launched...

After a few dozen cleans, you simply wash the Dust Buster under the tap, allow it to dry in the air and replace the lid on the container to keep it as good as new.

In use

To test the cleaner, I played a few records without using a record cleaner beforehand to ensure a nice fluff ball had accumulated on my stylus. I then allowed the needle to descend into the gel and lifted it off. On careful inspection with a stylus microscope, the stylus looked pristine again, showing that the cleaner had indeed done its work.

It is stated that it has a service life of twelve months before the cleaning properties slowly start to decline and, therefore, the DustBuster should be replaced every year or so. Given that it could effectively double the life of your stylus, this represents a great investment. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE: £19
CONTACT:
01623 844478
WEBSITE:
THE-MISSING-LINK.NET

OUR VERDICT



Avid HiFi ISOpuk feet

ISOpuks are equipment support feet that are beautifully made from a Sorbothane compound inserted into a machined solid aluminium housing. They are designed to fit underneath any piece of audio equipment, placed so that they fit directly onto the unit's chassis and not under the existing feet. They're very easy to fit – the equipment simply rests on them. All that may be required is to remove existing feet if they are not lifted clear of the base.

ISOpuks are available in two hardness levels of Sorbothane (Isopuk 5 for 0.1-2.0Kg and Isopuk 7 for 5.0-7.0 Kg equipment) in order to ensure that performance is geared towards the specific weight of the component. Recognising that the weight of equipment is not evenly distributed (especially with valve hi-fi, where heavy transformers are often at the rear of the unit), AVID sell ISOpuks separately to allow firmer ones to be used under the heaviest areas.

Sound quality

When the ISOpuks were placed underneath my turntable, the sound stage opened up, giving more air and space around the individual instruments and vocals. Transient response was also improved as cymbals had better attack, but there was no added harshness to the string section of an orchestra.

The use of these feet with my valve CD player (using 5s at the front and 7s at the back) resulted in similar improvements and, in addition, the overall bass response was cleaner. Removing the ISOpuks gave the impression that I had smeared a thin layer of mud on my CD! These work. **NR**



DETAILS

PRICE: £25
CONTACT:
01480 869 900
WEBSITE:
AVIDHIFI.CO.UK

OUR VERDICT



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.

- Stops transformer buzz, a common problem referred to as DC on the mains.
- 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

To obtain your free IsoTek brochure please call:

01276 501 392

info@soundfoundations.co.uk

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



2007 Hi-Fi Choice
Category Winner
IsoTek Sigmas



2007 Sound & Vision
Category Winner
Hungary
IsoTek Gil/Mini Sub



2008 Hi-Fi Choice
Best Buy
IsoTek Sinus



2008 Hi-Fi Choice
Silver Category Award
IsoTek Sinus



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



2002 Hi-Fi News
Category Winner
IsoTek SubStation



2003 What Hi-Fi?
IsoTek Mini Sub [Mk1]



2003 Hi-Fi Choice
Editors Choice
IsoTek Mini Sub [Mk1]



2003 What Hi-Fi?
Category Winner
IsoTek Mini Sub [Mk1]



2003 Hi-Fi Choice
Category Winner
IsoTek Mini Sub [Mk1]

Tag sbooth

Following on from last month's look at iPad FLAC players, it is worth looking at the tools available to correct various aspects of the metadata tags which may or may not be embedded in the files you have ripped or bought. This enables us to optimise display, search and grouping of tracks in our player of choice, whether computer, network or portable.

We have in the last ten years become accustomed to the convenient, standardised CDDB Gracenote metadata which powers iTunes, and iTunes' own flexibility in the editing thereof. There is no reason that a leap into the world of FLAC should be a step back.

The closest to the iTunes paradigm (group select, command key+i) is found in the Mozilla player Songbird (getsongbird.net). The majority of us divorce playback from the computer by using network players nowadays, so standalone metadata managers are where it's at if this is your way of working.

In the Mac FLAC community Stephen Booth (sbooth.org) has long provided simple native applications to which we have gravitated for our various audio needs. While the rippers Max and Rip may have been supplanted by XLD, I still find almost daily need for the long untouched 0.4.1 version of Tag for textual tagging, so much so that my Mac defaults to opening FLAC files in Tag. It just works, on an album by album basis. If you, wish you can take all the tags off and then create new without damaging the audio in the slightest.

But the one frustration is that the pleasing simplicity of Tag is also its limitation - it has no internet lookup, it doesn't make sense to use it for bulk operations and it doesn't have any serious artwork capabilities, which is where our next program comes in... **PC**



PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE



▶ **DETAILS**
PRICE: £FREE
WEBSITE:
SBOOTH.ORG

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD

Jaikoz Jthink

There are two *de facto* standard approaches to artwork with FLAC - embedded, and having folder.jpg (or similar) in the folder. Mix and matching them can prove counterproductive, and what you decide to use depends on your playback mechanism of preference.

In my case, what pushed me to seek out Jaikoz was the desire to remove the embedded artwork inserted by various ripping NAS systems in the past, so that they wouldn't override improved folder.jpg artwork I was adding using the Squeezebox cover art plugin.

Jaikoz is such a powerful application that it's overkill for this simple task, but if you want a metadata 'swiss army knife' for any of the major PC platforms, you need look no further. It is a Java app, so takes a slight performance hit compared to a native app as a trade-off for multiplatform flexibility. It is also under active development, which is always a good sign!

Usefully there's a thirty day fully functioning trial available from www.jthink.net, the limitation being that you can only write back the metadata to twenty files per session during the evaluation. You will need to do the trial to establish how automated you want your database cleaning to be - I advise caution until you have got the hang of it!

Aside from artwork capabilities, where it scores over Tag, is its fully realised online approach, making full use of the alternative lookup system Musicbrainz; it even uses AcousticID matching for untagged material.

If you're as obsessive as I am about manipulating the shape of your library through metadata, adopting Jaikoz should be an absolute no-brainer. The power you get for the money makes it worth every penny. **PC**



PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE



▶ **DETAILS**
PRICE: £20
WEBSITE:
JTHINK.NET

OUR VERDICT



DOWNLOAD

Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

EDITORIAL TEAM
 Editor David Price, david.price@hifichoice.co.uk
 Art Editor Corin Skeggs, corin.skeggs@hifichoice.co.uk
 Production Editor Richard Holliss,
 richard.holliss@hifichoice.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS
 Simon Berkovitch, Richard Black, Patrick Cleasby,
 Jimmy Hughes, Tim Jarman, Jason Kennedy,
 Paul Miller, Dave Oliver, Neville Roberts,
 Ed Selley, Malcolm Steward, Channa Vithana,
 Nigel Williamson

ADVERTISING
 Senior Advertising Executive Jack O'Sullivan
 Tel: 0844 848 5245
 Email: jack.o'sullivan@myhobbystore.com
 Advertising Manager Sonia Lawrence
 Tel: 01689 869 899
 Email: sonia.lawrence@myhobbystore.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
 Subscriptions Manager Paul Molyneux
 UK - New, Renewals & Enquiries
 Tel: 08456 777 807 Email:
 hifichoice@subscription.co.uk
 USA & CANADA - New, Renewals & Enquiries
 Tel: (001) 877 363 1310 Email:
 expsmag@expressmag.com
 REST OF WORLD - New, Renewals & Enquiries
 Tel: +44 (0) 8456 777 807

BACK ISSUES
 Tel: 0844 848 8822
 From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869896
 Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com

MANAGEMENT TEAM
 Group Editor Paul Miller,
 paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk
 Group Sales Manager Duncan Armstrong
 Head of Design & Production Julie Miller
 Ecommerce Manager Amanda Lee
 Chief Executive Owen Davies
 Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by MyHobbyStore Ltd.
 Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green,
 Orpington, Kent, BR6 6BG
 Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com
 Tel: 0844 412 2262
 From outside the UK: +44 (0)1689 869896
 www.myhobbystore.com

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd.



Published by MyHobbyStore Ltd. All rights reserved. ISSN 0959-1115. Periodicals paid at Green House, NJ. The Publisher's written consent must be obtained before any part of this publication may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, including photocopies, and information retrieval systems. All reasonable care is taken in the preparation of the magazine contents, but the publishers cannot be held legally responsible for errors in the contents of this magazine or for any loss however arising from such errors, including loss resulting from negligence of our staff. Reliance placed upon the contents of this magazine is at reader's own risk.

Hi-Fi Choice (ISSN 0959-1115) is published monthly 12 times per year by MyHobbyStore Ltd, c/o USA & Canada Media Sales, Inc, Corp, at 26 Power Dam Way Suite 5153, Pittsburgh, NY 12601. Periodicals postage paid at Pittsburgh, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Hi-Fi Choice, c/o Leggett Mail, PO Box 3399, Pittsburgh, NY 15230-0399.



When you have finished with his magazine please recycle it.

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask! *Subject to availability*



Please reserve/deliver my copy of on a regular basis, starting with issue

Title First name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Telephone number

If you don't want to miss an issue



Next month

PMC TWENTY.22

A NEW STANDMOUNTER from a famous name, this sub-£2,000 box promises to pack a serious sonic punch!



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 851C & 851A

THE LONG AWAITED replacement for the company's 840 CD player and amplifier gets an exclusive first review...



AUDIOLAB M-DAC

THIS LONG AWAITED NEW DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTOR promises superb performance at a highly affordable price...



ALSO: £500 headphone Group Test, Monrio Asty integrated amplifier, MartinLogan Ethos loudspeaker, NAIM NAT-01 Retro and CHOICE EXTRAS accessories section!

PLUS: your system buying and upgrading queries answered, all the latest hi-fi industry news, views and comment and the month's finest new audiophile music releases!

JUNE ISSUE ON SALE THURSDAY 26 APRIL 2012

REVOX SERVICE

THE MANUFACTURERS' APPOINTED SERVICE COMPANY

REVOX SERVICE

Correct Revox Spare Parts Pricing
 24 Hour Estimation procedure
 Manufacturer Upgrades and Advice
 Delivery and Collection Service
 Comprehensive Guarantees

Factory Trained Engineers
 Rapid Response Turnaround
 Full Revox range serviced
 Written Technical Reports
 Late Evening Opening

THE AR TECHNOLOGY LIMITED

TTL House, Sheeptick End, Near Lidlington, Bedfordshire, MK43 0SF
 Telephone 01525 841999 Facsimile 01525 841009

IAN HARRISON HIFI

SALE! UP TO 40% OFF!!

TEL: 01283 702875 ian.harrison@merclan.myzen.co.uk

SPECIALIST SUPPLIER OF TURNTABLES, TONEARMS, CARTRIDGES AND PHONO STAGES

INCLUDING: AMATEK, AUDIO TECHNICA, BENZ MICRO, CARTRIDGE MAN, CLEARAUDIO, DENON, GOLDRING, GRADO, GRAHAM SLEE, HADCOCK, HEED, ICON, KDETSU, LEHMANN AUDIO, MICHELL, MOTH, DRDFON, PRO-JEKT, REGA, SME, SUMIKO, THORENS, TOM EVANS, TRANSFIGURATION, TRICHORD, WHEST AUDIO, ZYX.

SPECIAL OFFER!!

SPEND £2,000 OR MORE ON ANY TURNTABLE, TONEARM OR TURNTABLE AND ARM AND GET A CARTRIDGE WORTH £500 FREE!!

PLEASE PHONE TO CONFIRM PRICE & AVAILABILITY PRIOR TO ORDERING. ALL GOODS ARE BRAND NEW & BOXED WITH FULL UK GUARANTEES. NO EX-DEM OR EX-DISPLAY GOODS. NO GREY IMPORTS. GOODS ARE NOT SUPPLIED ON APPROVAL. SORRY NO GENERAL CATALOGUES. PLEASE PHONE OR WRITE FOR SPECIFIC REVIEWS, BROCHURES OR PRICES.

ESTABLISHED 1986.

MAIL ORDER ONLY FROM: IAN HARRISON, 7 MILL HILL, REPTON, DERBY, DE65 6GQ TEL: 01283 702875 9am-9pm INCLUDING SUNDAYS.

Front End Problems?

contact:

The Cartridge Man

It doesn't have to cost an arm and leg to get the best
 - listen to my Koetsu - and - Decca - eater.
 Also agents for Croft, Moth, Hadcock & Mitchell & E.A.R. Graham Slee projects.
 Valve equipment re-build service available.
 - Plus cartridge re-tipping service

020 8688 6565

Website: www.thecartridgeman.com

VICKERS HI-FI



High Fidelity Specialists

Since 1967

8 Concorde Park, Clifton Moor, York. YO30 4WT. Tel: 01904-691600

- Audiolab
- Chord
- Cyrus
- Dali
- Marantz
- Michell
- Monitor Audio
- Mordaunt Short
- Pathos
- Pioneer
- ProAc
- ProJect
- Q-Acoustics
- Quad
- Sonos
- Sugden
- TEAC
- Wharfedale
- & Many More...

- ▶ York HiFi Specialist for over 40 Years
- ▶ New Store with Free Customer Parking
- ▶ Qualified Staff - Independent Advice
- ▶ Quality HiFi Separates from £100 to £10,000
- ▶ Widest Choice in the Area - Most items from Stock
- ▶ Open 10:30am - 5:30pm Monday to Saturday
- ▶ Visit our Website or Call for latest offers & promotions

0%

**Up To 36 Months
 0% Finance
 Available***

*Subject to status

www.Vickers-HiFi.co.uk

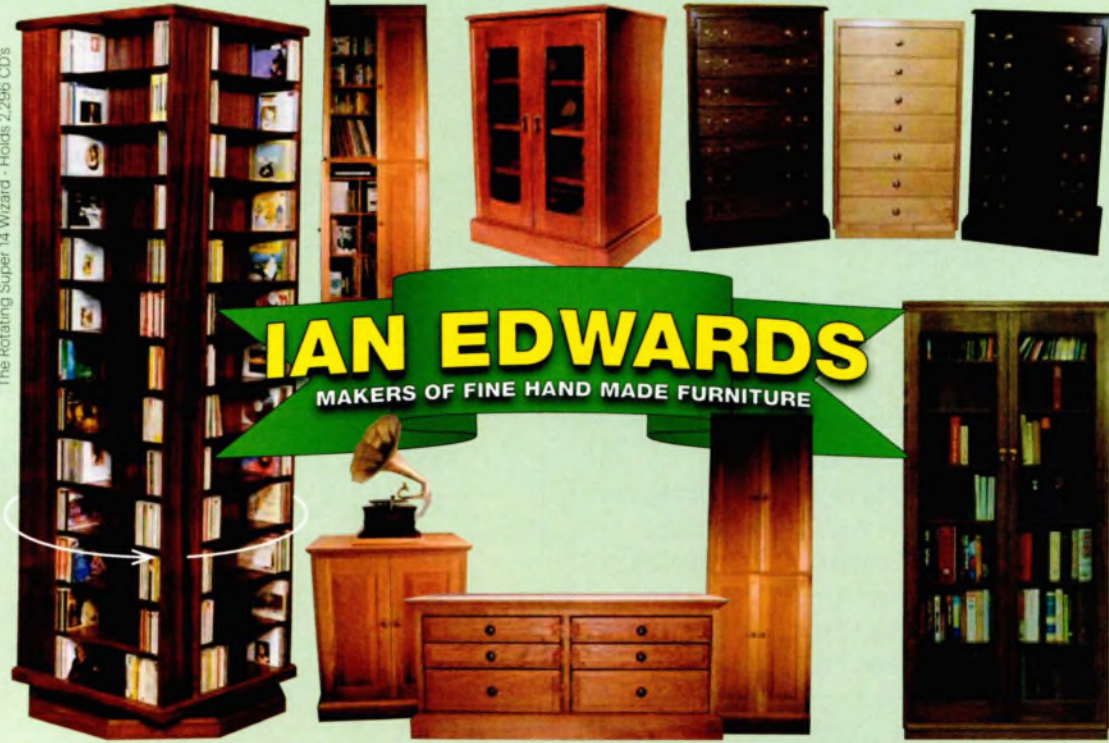
E-mail: VickersHiFi@Hotmail.com



Storage Solutions

Bespoke handmade traditional & modern furniture

The Rotating Super 14 Wizard - Holds 2,296 CD's



The Old Chapel, 282 Skipton Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 3HE
Tel: 01423 500442

Email: info@iansbespokefurniture.co.uk
www.iansbespokefurniture.co.uk

accessories are boring

until you find some that really work.

few dealers take the trouble to demonstrate what a weird looking room tuning device actually does. Or compare of racks which tune with those which dampen. And help you overcome cable confusion with a 'try before you buy' service.

that's what makes soundlocation different; expert in the little things which make a big difference. Give soundlocation a call this week to find out more.

soundlocation www.soundlocation.co.uk t. Paul on 07973-253136

arcam
dynavector
epson
focal
grado
isoblu
hutter
kudos
linn products
lyra
naim audio
neat acoustics
nottingham
primare
ortofon
pmc (including fact)
rega
sennheiser
stax
sumiko

new toys for black stuff: rega RP3



signals
hi-fi for grown-ups

ipswich (01473) 655171
www.signals.uk.com



Outstanding music and video systems from a retail shop established for over 40 years.

O'Brien Hi-Fi

60 Durham Road - London - SW20 0TW

020 8946 1528 or shop@obrienhifi.com

Tuesday to Saturday from 9am until 6pm

www.obrienhifi.com

Come and enjoy your favourite discs and a cup of coffee with our relaxed team.

Every brand we sell is chosen for its spectacular quality, performance and reliability.



Oranges & Lemons
www.orangesandlemons.info

Audio-Visual
Hi-Fi
Multi-Room



020 7924 2040
61-63 Webbs Road London SW11
shop@orangesandlemons.info

020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk



GRAHAMS

“One of the five best hi-fi shops in the world”
ARENA Magazine

Grahams Hi-Fi
Canonbury Yard
190a New North Road
London N1 7BS

Analogue Seduction
where music is our passion



Analogue Seduction are dedicated towards two channel Hi-Fi, specialising in vinyl replay.

As well as our on-line shop we have dedicated demonstration retail facilities based in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire and we can offer our customers home demonstrations.

We stock the finest in amplification, analogue, digital replay and speakers. We also specialise in a cable termination and cable burn in service.

Please visit our website www.analogueseduction.net to browse or purchase products that are not easily available elsewhere.

New vinyl records now stocked

Tel: +44 (0)1733 344768

The Bath AudioFest

with Cool Gales is on Saturday, 26th May

"A special event that really does stand out from the crowd." That's how Alan Sircom, editor of *Hi-Fi+*, described our event last year. And this year, we're expanding!

The AudioFest is fast becoming the high-end show in the UK, featuring brands no longer seen at the crowded "big" shows, brands like Esoteric, Sonus Faber, Aesthetix, Clearaudio, Scheu, Stax, and many others. Several products will be making their UK debuts.



All systems will feature a vinyl front end as well as digital sources. Diverse Vinyl will again join us, with a huge selection of new vinyl for sale.

No stuffy hotel rooms, no shoulder-to-shoulder masses, no home cinema - just high quality two-channel audio, served up with tea and coffee in a very spacious, family-friendly atmosphere.



Venue is the same as last year, the Bath & County Club, Queens Parade, Bath BA1 2NJ, just off Queen Square, right next to the big Charlotte Street car park, and steps away from the sites and shops of Bath. Plus, we're adding a couple of large rooms in the Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, right on Queen Square, a very short walk from the Club.

Doors open at 10 AM, and we'll close at 5:00 PM. The £3 admission includes tea and coffee, with all admission proceeds going to charity.

For more information, visit www.coolgales.com/audiofest



www.coolgales.com

0800 043 6710

The Victoria School House ≈ Bath

15 AUDIO **SE**
 Churchward Court, 15 Western Road,
 Lewes BN7 1RL
 ☎08448 221115
 □ www.15audio.co.uk

NOTTINGHAM HI-FI CENTRE **EM**
 120-122 Alfreton Road, Nottingham,
 Nottinghamshire NG7 3NR
 ☎0115 9786919
 □ www.nottinghamhifi.co.uk

ACOUSTICA LTD **NW**
 17 Hoole Road, Chester, Cheshire
 CH2 3NH
 ☎01244 344227
 □ www.acoustica.co.uk

GRAHAMS HI-FI **GL**
 Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road,
 London N1
 ☎020 7226 5500
 □ www.grahams.co.uk

STUDIO AV **WM**
 44 High Street, Eton, Berkshire,
 SL4 6BL
 ☎01753 631000
 □ www.studioav.co.uk

AUDIO COUNSEL **NW**
 26 High Street, Cheadle, Cheshire
 SK8 1AL
 ☎0161 491 6090
 □ www.audio-counsel.co.uk **BADA**

INFIDELITY **GL**
 9 High Street, Hampton Wick
 Surrey, KT1 4DA
 ☎020 8943 3530
 □ www.infidelity.co.uk **BADA**

SOUND CINERGY **WM**
 37 High Street, Aldridge, Walsall, West Midlands
 WS9 8NL
 ☎01922 457 926
 □ www.soundcinergy.co.uk

SYNERGY AV HI-FI **NW**
 12a West St, Congleton, Cheshire
 CW12 3JB
 ☎01260 280017
 □ www.synergyav.co.uk

AUDIOBOFFS **GL**
 338 Shenley Road, Borehamwood,
 Herts WD 1TP
 ☎020 8177 4095
 □ www.audioboffs.co.uk

VICKERS HIFI **NE**
 8 Concorde Park, Amy Johnson Way,
 Clifton Moor, York YO30 4WT
 ☎01904 691600
 □ www.vickers-hifi.co.uk

ACTON GATE AUDIO **W**
 4 Ruabon Rd, Wrexham,
 Clwyd LL13 7PB
 ☎01978 364500
 □ www.acton-gate-audio.co.uk

SONATA **GL**
 West Hampstead, London NW6
 Appointment only
 ☎0330 111 5653
 □ www.sonatahifi.com

SENSO SYSTEMS **SW**
 Norfolk House, 16-17 Lemon Street,
 Truro, Cornwall TR1 2LS
 ☎01872 273215
 □ www.audio-cinema.co.uk

THE RIGHT NOTE **SW**
 56 High Street, Saltford, Bristol
 BS31 3EJ
 ☎01225 874728
 □ www.rightnote.co.uk

AUDIO IMAGES **E**
 128 London Road North, Lowestoft, Suffolk
 NR32 1HB
 ☎01502 582853
 □ www.audioimages-hifi.com

BASICALLY SOUND **E**
 Calveley Court, Southburgh Rd, Reymerston
 Norfolk NR9 4QD
 ☎01362 820800
 □ www.basicallysound.co.uk

SE - South East,
GL - Greater London,
SW - South West,
E - East,
EM - East Midlands,

WM - West Midlands,
NE - North East,
NW - North West,
W - Wales.

HI-FI CHOICE

**To advertise in the dealer directory,
 please contact
 Sonia Lawrence 01689 869 899
 sonia.lawrence@myhobbystore.com**



WE HEAR...

STILL UNDER WRAPS OFFICIALLY, but *Wharfedale* will be celebrating its 80th anniversary year with something "new and exciting from the famous *Diamond* line". A whole new *Diamond* speaker range perhaps? We might think that, but *Wharfedale* couldn't possibly comment...

WE HEAR THAT TOWNSHEND AUDIO has a brand new version of its excellent Maximum supertweeter available, priced £990. Should be in the shops shortly after the time you read this...

DENSEN HAS A NEW TOP CD PLAYER out any moment now. The *Superleggera* series (super light) B-475 sports fancy power supplies, external clock control, digital inputs, bespoke transport firmware and zero negative feedback analogue output stage.

PARIS-BASED LABEL Heavenly Sweetness is set to reissue a batch of rare jazz LPs on the Blue Note and United Artists labels. The discs are NOT digital remasters, but come direct from original masters on 180g vinyl, in shrink wrapped cardboard or gatefold sleeves. For more details click on www.propernote.co.uk.

OUR SPY AT SCALFORD HALL, at the much loved *Hi-Fi Wigwam 'wring what ya brung'* show, told us that "practically every room had a Squeezebox in it".

A LITTLE BIRD TELLS US that Arcam is in the final testing stage of its £150 rBlink, a new Bluetooth DAC. "It uses apt-X and native AAC streaming to improve the sound quality, and the results will surprise even diehard Bluetooth haters", whispered the aforementioned feathery friend...

THROUGH THE PAST, SMARTLY...



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 227

MAY 2002

'Life on Mars'... well, not quite, but NASA's Mars Odyssey probe did find large water deposits on the Red Planet. Science of a less outer space variety was also occupying 'super tweaker *extraordinaire*' Jimmy Hughes in the May issue of *HFC*, when he invited fellow hi-fi

journalist David Vivian into his 'audio temple' to discuss the 'correlation between 'Quantum Mechanics and Blu-Tack'! Eight loudspeakers were under Paul Messenger's microscope with JMLab's Chorus 715 (£529) being the clear winner. Finally, editor Tim Bower shared his dislike for what he called 'music fascism', "if 19th Century Latvian folk music floats your boat... don't impose it on me!"



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 106

MAY 1992

Space travel was also dominating the headlines ten years earlier when the shuttle Endeavor made a successful maiden flight. If the crew listened to music on their short trip around the Earth, you can bet it was on CD, which would have bothered *HFC*'s Andrew Cartmel, who spent two pages

weighing up the viability of changing from vinyl to CD. Mind you, rather prophetically, as it turns out, Andrew does opine that while vinyl is like "relaxing in warm deep bath, CD is like being held under a cold shower"! Paul Miller was also impressed by just how good CD-R can sound compared to the CD original, a decision that no doubt helped fuel the burgeoning domestic CD recorder market...



HI-FI CHOICE ISSUE 58

MAY 1988

CDs were also the 'talking point' in 1988. While editor Paul Messenger noted that the "DAT threat seems to have fizzled out", the magazine's technical team tirelessly shoved silver platters in and out of forty CD players, in their quest for music perfection. City lawyer and

dedicated *HFC* reader Charles Mitchley, demonstrated that money *can* buy the best and biggest hi-fi kit with a demonstration of his wardrobe-sized Apogee ribbon speakers, part of a £30,000+ home system. In the wider world, the Soviet army finally withdrew after eight years of fighting in Afghanistan, US President Ronald Regan dropped in on Moscow and Microsoft launched Windows 2.1.

Originally known as a founding member of The Pogues, Jem Finer

has latterly turned his talents to conceptual art. *Slow Player* is his latest piece, currently appearing at Newcastle's International Festival of Art, Technology, Music and Film.

Here, a different record is played every day, on a turntable slowed down to fit the length of the gallery opening hours. The music ranges from The Sex Pistols and Kraftwerk to Ornette Coleman. The idea is to use a record player as an object of contemplation, and a meditation on the passing of time. The effect is highly mesmeric and quite fascinating - and well worth experiencing...



BACKCHAT NEEDS YOU!
Got any hi-fi hearsay?

Don't share it with your neighbour over the garden fence, send it to us instead! Do your audiophile duty by emailing news@hifichoice.co.uk

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Craig Milnes of Wilson Benesch selects four of his favourite albums



OTTORINO RESPIGHI THE FOUNTAIN AND PINES OF ROME

Rome is one of the most sublime cities on earth. The influence on John Williams is most obvious in the opening section of *Fountains of Rome* (E.T. theme).



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS FANTASIA ON A THEME BY THOMAS TALLIS

Music that might go through your mind when flying home, as you see the coastline and fields of England come in to sight below.



ELLA FITZGERALD/ LOUIS ARMSTRONG OUR LOVE IS HERE TO STAY

A close friend delivered this beautiful song in the Queen's House for our daughter on her wedding day.



BEETHOVEN NINTH SYMPHONY

Brings back joyful memories of Germany; what a place! UNKLE also did a great job on this, and the Bavarian company has woven *Joy* into its latest advertising campaign.

audioemotion

Music is our Passion

www.audioemotion.co.uk

t 01333 425 999

**NO COMPROMISE
NO EQUAL.**



Hand crafted in
Germany since 1979

WORLD REFERENCE AUDIO

The true definition of 'high-end audio'. Revolutionary product design and technology, with superlative performance, places MBL at the very pinnacle of real music reproduction.



Ⓢ **MBL 6010D
Pre-amplifier**

Customer and critics around the globe have named the 6010D the world's finest sounding pre-amplifier, indeed, it is simply referred to as 'Der Vorverstärker', THE pre-amplifier.



Ⓢ **MBL 111F Hybrid
Radialstrahler**

Often referred to as the reference point in loudspeaker circles. Arguably one of the most musically involving and technically perfect loudspeakers on the market today.



Ⓢ **MBL 116F Elegance
Radialstrahler**

The symbiosis of unique technology and lean, exceedingly elegant design. The 116F simply removes the boundary between live event and reproduction.

Ⓢ **MBL 126 Compact
Radialstrahler**

The journey begins... genetically engineered to evoke the tangibly true, three dimensional portrayal of your music collection.



Ⓢ **MBL 101E MKII Radialstrahler**

The loudspeaker by which all others are judged. The latest version of the world famous MBL 101E, stands head and shoulders above anything else in terms of real and uncoloured music reproduction.



Wharfedale, Britain's most famous loudspeaker brand, celebrates its 80th Anniversary this year.

Founded by Gilbert Briggs in 1932, Wharfedale quickly set high standards for quality and value, so gaining global recognition for its high performance loudspeakers and paving the way for the growth of the prestigious hi-fi industry in Britain.

The Denton, introduced in 1967, exemplified these two edicts, balancing fine craftsmanship, natural sound quality and affordability inside a compact loudspeaker that was bought in its millions right across the globe.

The original Denton went on to father other models based on its highly popular formula, the Denton 3 being the last of the line...

...until now!



Denton - living the legacy...

Wharfedale's 80th Anniversary Limited Edition

...Coming soon!

IAG

IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6XU, UK
Tel: +44(0)1480 447700 Fax: +44(0)1480 431767 www.wharfedale.co.uk