

hi-fi

WORLD



APRIL 2004

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DIY SUPPLEMENT NO.78
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Musical Fidelity's stunning new M1



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APRIL 2004



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COMPETITION - WIN CREEK'S SUPERB CD50/II CD PLAYER

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david price

Readers of this magazine are likely to fall into one of two camps. The first is people into using hi-fi that gets them as close to the music as possible. The second is the same, but who also love the rumour, gossip and politics too.

Well, if you're the latter persuasion, then you'll doubtless remember the

1980s - when CD hit the High Street, it was time to wear your audio allegiances on your sleeve. The LP was under siege and if you weren't with vinyl, then you were against it. Indeed, right up to the end of that decade, I frequented specialist dealers who wouldn't even have a CD player in their shop. (The ever-erudite Nigel Pearson - now of Garrard, then of Westwood and Mason hi-fi dealers in Oxford - memorably described digital as, "good for doing the Hoovering to" - his point being it's got a repeat function and when the vacuum cleaner's on, it's noisy enough anyway...)

Twenty years on, and analogue aficionados have won the argument - inasmuch as the new hi-res formats are the material embodiment of what we were saying about CD's poor digital specification all along.

This issue is devoted to getting the best from both formats, and examining the relative merits between the two. To wit, you'll find an in-depth look at Musical Fidelity's epochal M1 turntable on p12, our long-awaited tonearm supertest on p17 and Sony's SCD-XA3000ES SACD spinner reviewed on p34. Then there's a fascinating comparison between Unison Research's tube CD spinner and Pro-ject's ultra-modern RPM9X turntable on p38, a look at the latest Decca London cartridge on p54, and then on p58 four leading audio industry experts join the great debate.

We all love analogue here at Hi-Fi World. But if you're wedded to digital, then we'll happily show you how to get the best from this too. The good news is that there's never been a better time to get into either format. Times have changed, things move on and the war is over.

David Price

how we test the products:

- *Hi-Fi World* has its own advanced test laboratory and acoustically treated listening room.
- *Hi-Fi World* has a dedicated in-house team of experienced listeners. We review thoroughly by extensive auditioning, rather than by quick-fire group listening tests.
- *Hi-Fi World's* engineering team designs a wide range of products in-house. No other hi-fi magazine is so expert and dedicated.

WORLD VERDICTS:

As a rule we only review products we find interesting, so don't expect too many low scores. Likewise, five globe awards will be few and far between because there's only one superlative product of its type. The £ sign denotes great value for money.

- ● ● ● ● **OUTSTANDING** - Simply the best.
- ● ● ● ● **EXCELLENT** - Extremely capable.
- ● ● ● ● **GOOD** - Worth auditioning.
- ● ● ● ● **MEDIOCRE** - Unremarkable.
- ● ● ● ● **POOR** - Seriously flawed.
- £ **VALUE** - Keenly priced.

www.hi-fiworld.co.uk

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visit our website for a comprehensive list of all the products we have reviewed over the past 11 years

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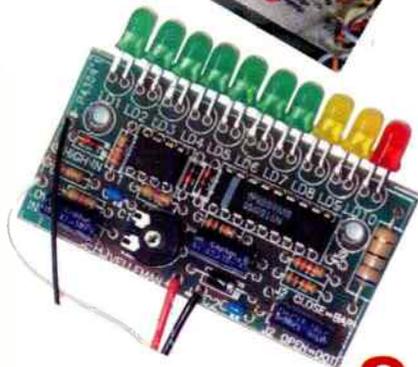
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LINN

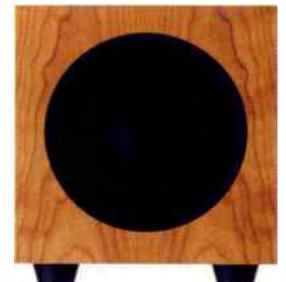
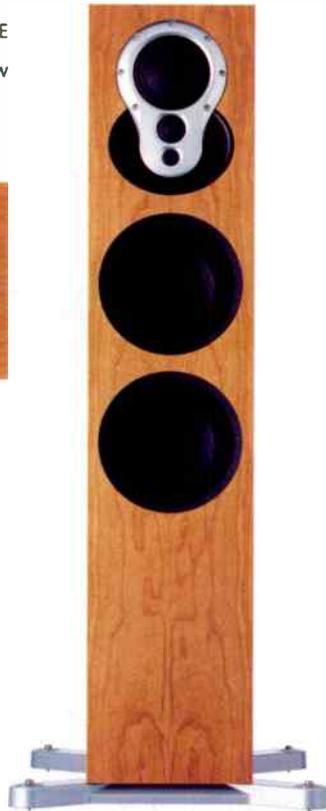
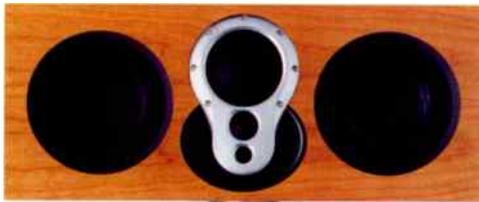
Developed for the music lover and cinema enthusiast who wants to seek out the most accurate and involving sound.

The AKURATE loudspeaker system has four distinct, acoustically matched loudspeakers. Three full range and one for bass reinforcement. They can be simply configured to comprise pitch-accurate, multi-channel sound systems for high performance music and cinema.

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accurate *adj.* faithfully representing the truth; precise.



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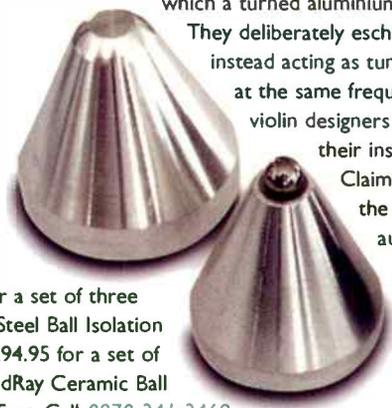
news

MEET ELEGANTE...

Mission has a new range of high end multichannel loudspeaker systems. The elegante's styling has been strongly influenced by Mission's flagship Pilastro, with luxurious Grania cabinets claimed to optimise sound dispersion. All speakers feature a seven-layer highly polished, hand-lacquered anthracite finish with black cloth grilles. Three elegante systems are available, in 5.1 and 6.1-channel home theatre configurations, with a simple option to upgrade to 7.1-channel. The e80 system is the smallest system, consisting of four bookshelf e80 loudspeakers, an e8c centre-channel and a compact e8as1 subwoofer. Price is £2,490 for a 5.1 system and £2790 for a 6.1 system. The e82 is for medium to large-sized rooms, consisting of two slimline e82 floor-standing loudspeakers, two bookshelf e80 loudspeakers, and an e8c centre-channel, plus the e8as1 compact subwoofer. Prices are £3,490 for a 5.1 system and £3790 for a 6.1 system. The largest e83 system has two e83 floorstanding loudspeakers, two e81 bookshelf loudspeakers, an e8c centre channel and a 500W e8as2 subwoofer that features four Pilastro-type 8" bass drivers. The price had not been confirmed at the time of going to press. For more details, call 01480 423700 or click on www.mission.co.uk.

RAY OF LIGHT

ColdRay Isolation Feet are the brainchild of Lars Kristiansen, designer of the acclaimed Nordost Pulsar Points, and extend his design using either a steel or ceramic ball held in a small cup over which a turned aluminium cone is placed.



They deliberately eschew damping, instead acting as tuned resonators at the same frequencies that violin designers look for in their instruments.

Claimed to increase the contrast in an audio system, they cost

£49.95 for a set of three ColdRay Steel Ball Isolation Feet, or £94.95 for a set of three ColdRay Ceramic Ball Isolation Feet. Call 0870 241 2469

or click on www.hififorsale.com for more details.

HI, RESOLUTION!

Christchurch-based Resolution loudspeakers has a new transmission line design intriguingly entitled, 'Resolution'. Claimed to sound, "purer than science can measure" no less, it has high-quality 26kg enclosures with finishes in mahogany and gold plating. A patented single tri-axial drive unit is featured, claimed to use very rigid metallised diaphragms and powerful magnets, supported by an 8 foot sound-absorbent pipe, folded up inside. Price is £1,200 per pair. The company's unprepossessingly named website, www.resolution-loudspeakers.co.uk, has full details – or you can call direct on 01202 470184.



BACK IN BLACK

Black Rhodium's Super Mains Power Management block has an extruded case and an advanced 2-stage high frequency filter for greater attenuation of high frequency noise and a clearer sound. It sports eight 13A mains sockets, and is terminated with 2m of Super Mains 25 high current, low impedance mains cable, made from 19-core stranded wire of 0.45mm diameter silver-plated copper and is insulated to a very high voltage with silicone rubber. The internal wiring within Power Management is of the same high quality silver-plated wires insulated in silicone rubber that are used in Super Mains 25. Additional protection against excess voltages is provided a Voltage Dependant Resistor that clamps the supply voltage to a predetermined level, making the unit very suitable for use with computers as well as with hi-fi equipment using sensitive digital electronic circuitry. Price is £330. For more information on Black Rhodium, call 01332 361390 or click on www.blackrhodium.co.uk





INSTANT REPLAY

KEF Audio has announced its new KEF Instant Theatre (KIT), a new complete DVD-based system with everything required to experience 5.1 digital surround sound from just two compact front speakers and a hide-away subwoofer. Its fascinating speakers are hybrids of KEF's proven Uni-Q® 'point source' driver array with a unique new application of NXT® flat panel technology. The vertical NXT flat panels behind the main arrays create virtual rear effects speakers, while the Uni-Q drivers create a perfect 'phantom' centre speaker right in the middle of the screen. The acoustic illusion of all three virtual speakers, rear and centre is accentuated by the Uni-Q driver front-channel configuration, which spreads the sound image over a much larger area than the narrow 'sweet spot' of a conventional speaker. Hefty bass punch comes from a 250 mm (10") bass driver, and the subwoofer contains the system's five high-power amplifiers, allowing the DVD player to be exceptionally compact.

The head unit is about the same size as the front speakers, and styled to match. Whatever is played - DVDs, CDs or MP3s, it automatically recognises what's been loaded. The decoding circuits also give the full benefit of Dolby® Digital, Dolby Pro Logic® II and DTS surround sound from any other equipment played through the system. With clear VFD displays and intuitive controls, the unit also

has an AM/FM radio with RDS, alarm and sleep functions. With built-in amplifiers for all channels alongside the 250 mm (10") bass driver, the omni-directional subwoofer can be placed wherever it suits the user - behind the TV or next to a wall. KEF instant theatre recognises whatever type of disc is loaded and automatically configures the system accordingly. Complete with a full-function remote control, expect to pay around £1,200. Call KEF on 01622 672261 or click on www.kef.com for details.

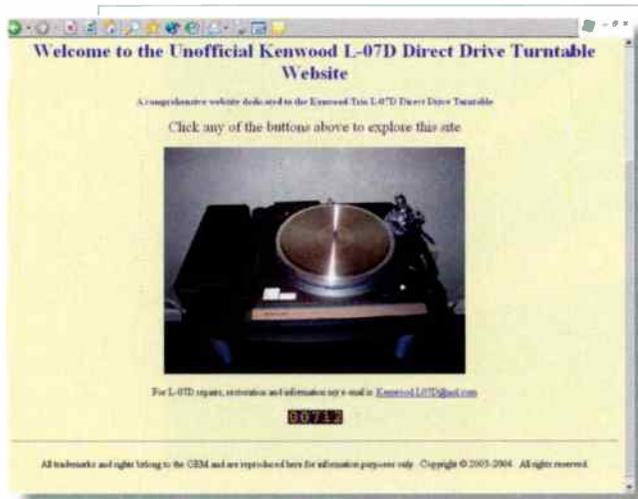
PRETTY AS A PORSCHE

LaCie has got seriously stylish. After years of distinctively styled - if a little wide-of-the-mark - computer peripherals, it has contracted the services of Porsche Design GmbH for its latest range. The result is a range of deliciously crisply styled bits of kit spanning a complete line of hard drives, ranging in capacity from 40GB to 250GB for PC or Mac via USB 2.0 or FireWire, plus CD-RW and DVD+/-RW drives, featuring a mirrored door that opens. For further information, click on www.lacie.com.



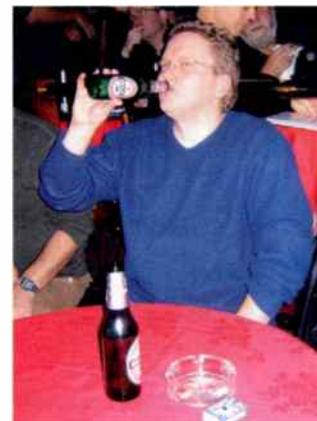
CORRECTION:

The price of the MEL AUDIO RECHAV II CD player reviewed in February 2004's edition is Euros 2,980 £2,091 (Sterling).



WEBWATCH

Aficionados of what many consider to be the very best Japanese turntable ever made - the Trio L-07D - will find this site a 'compulsive click'. Created by a US-based fan, it makes for interesting reading for both the technically and non-technically minded alike. Anoraks will be delighted to hear that at CES in January, an L-07D was spotted in action on the Hovland stand - not bad for a deck that first surfaced nearly twenty five years ago! www.L-07d.com

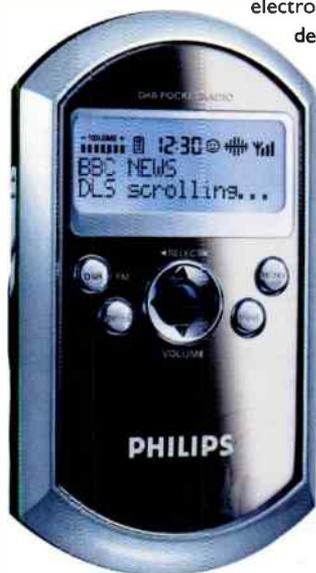


GOTCHA!

Spotted - *Hi-Fi World's* very own high res digital guru Patrick Cleasby, at Ronnie Scott's in early January. "Tired and emotional" after listening to all those freebie discs, PC can be seen unwinding like a spool of Ampex...

GOING DUTCH

Philips is calling itself 'the first major CE brand to launch a portable DAB radio'. The £149 DA1000 is the first portable Digital Radio from the Dutch electronics giant. Weighing in at just 100g, its sleek design incorporates a backlight for clearer viewing, and a joystick for simple control. The dot matrix LC display shows the text that accompanies most DAB broadcasts, including programme information, the latest news and sports scores. Six EQ settings and a built-in FM radio also feature, complete with signal strength indicator and 20 DAB/ FM presets. The DA1000 is powered by two rechargeable AA batteries that offer up to ten hours of playback, or AC mains. A carry pouch is provided for comfortable portability.



Philips also has a new music jukebox to compete with the iPod mini. The £169 HDD060 has a 1.5GB hard disk drive that stores up to 375 MP3 or 750 WMA tracks and can also be used to transport data files. The single lithium ion battery is claimed to give ten hours of listening time between charges, and a large display presents information clearly, even in bright conditions, thanks to a white LED backlight. Music file transfer is done using a single, high-speed USB 1.1 connection. The HDD060 weighs less than 95g thanks to its die-cast moulded magnesium body. For more information, call 0870 900 9070 or click on www.philips.com.



FUTURE SOUND OF IRELAND

Digital Theater Systems, Inc. has announced a major research collaboration with Queen's University Belfast's Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC). Jointly funded by Invest NI, a development agency in Northern Ireland, the project will focus on the development of new multi-channel audio technologies. SARC will conduct joint research and experimentation with DTS' Research & Development facility based in Bangor, Northern Ireland. "SARC is quickly becoming one of the world's leading research institutes in the area of multi-channel audio systems, and DTS has always been a company dedicated to developing new audio technologies," said Paul Smith, Vice President, Research & Development for DTS. "Working together is a natural fit, and we look forward to integrating our resources for this project." Dedicated to the research of music technology, SARC is a newly established facility within Queen's University Belfast. Uniting internationally recognized experts in the fields of music, electronic engineering and computer science, this unique interdisciplinary centre features a 20-person research team and a state-of-the-art sonic laboratory. This auditorium is a highly innovative structure allowing sound to be moved throughout the space, and is the only fully 3D studio of its kind for sonic art performance and experimentation.



SILVER SERVICE

It seems the old days of gunmetal grey NADs have gone for ever, as the company is introducing more 'silver' Titanium finished systems. Latest off the production line is the highly acclaimed £329.95 C542 CD player, which can now match the excellent £349.95 NAD C352 integrated amplifier, also now available in the new livery. The latter also includes some circuit refinements over the original, specifically an improved DC servo circuit, claimed to tighten the amplifier's bass response. For more details, click on www.nad.co.uk



next issue

Which is better - tube or transistor? It's a leading question, and one that May's issue seeks to answer! You'll find it packed with goodies from both sides of the fence, plus:

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-150

At last, Mr Michaelson's new £800 Cyrus beater?

ORTOFON KONTRAPUNKT C

'Pick up a bargain', or 'phono no go'?

SONY SCD-XA9000ES

A brand new SACD spinner to beat the best?

VIENNA SCHOENBERG

A magnificent pair of £1,500 floor-standers for your pleasure?

next issue

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do you really listen to music?

does your system let you:

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- differentiate between transistor and valve amplifiers?
- distinguish between Joshua Bell's and Itzak Perleman's playing?
- determine the sound of a Bosendorfer grand from that of a Brinsmead?

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making transients faster with less overhang, wider and deeper soundstaging and there's even a perceptible smoothing of the sound – it seems more natural and less edgy. At £120 it's a good deal more expensive than our fave

budget buy, the Base SP01, but it really does offer an extra degree of insight. Clever stuff from a small independent British company – call them on 01702 302712 or click on www.crystalcloud.demon.co.uk for details.

IKEA LACK COFFEE TABLE

The princely sum of £19.95 buys you this 95x55x45cm bit of clear lacquered, birch veneered MDF. It looks very neat (far better than the price suggests), has very crisp and clean proportions and best of all, sounds great – particularly when used in conjunction with the Crystal Cloud Isofloat. No matter what you put on it – turntable, CD player, DVD machine, you'll find it a relatively neutral and benign support. You will of course get better results with bespoke hi-fi furniture, but then you'll pay hundreds of pounds more... Check out www.ikea.co.uk



SONY RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES

The problem with rechargeable batteries is that most available in the High Street aren't of the best quality. Sony's NHAAB2C AA batteries are – they're premium priced, but we've found they last nearly five times longer than standard alkalines, and can be recharged 500 times over. The snappily entitled Super Quick Refresher Charger (model: BCG34HRC4-UK) gets the best from them, thanks to its clever 'discharge' function. At the touch of a button, it gradually drains the batteries down to empty before



recharging them, thus countering the memory effect. It charges fast, too, reinvigorating 4 AA or AAA batteries (NiMH 2100 mAh) in just a few hours. Factor in the safety timer, voltage regulator, temperature

monitoring function and automatic shutdown (should non-compatible batteries be loaded), and this is a clever bit of kit. For more information, click on www.sony.co.uk

Going For

Time was, in the late eighties, when many hi-fi journalists found themselves – upon reviewing a new record player – writing things like, "this could be the last turntable ever made". How wrong they were. When a company like Musical Fidelity, with hitherto no immediate association with black vinyl, makes such a resounding commitment to analogue, you just know there's something in the air. David Price goes for a spin...

Musical Fidelity is not famous for its turntables, because – ermm – it's never made any before. Of course, Mr Michaelson is quick to point out that he and his are avowed analogue aficionados, and he is right so to do. (MF has always used vinyl and open reel tape among its source references, and has consistently designed products with serious phono stages, as opposed to token gestures.) Still, unlike Michell Engineering or Clearaudio, the company has not forged its success from any direct association with the black stuff.

To wit, it would be perfectly sensible – given the marque's enduring edge with CD spinners and amplification – to not venture into the viper's den of vinyl. Let's face it, manufacturing consistently successful audio electronics is one thing, but designing and producing top turntables is another. They're an altogether different problematic – that of mechanical engineering down to minute tolerances. I'm not saying there's anything about MF that makes the company unsuited to this (quite the reverse in fact), it's just that if you think you can waltz into the world of high end vinyl with no previous experience, then you're mad as a fish...

Let us consider the evidence. A turntable has to revolve at precisely 33.33RPM. It has to isolate the record, arm and cartridge from as much external vibration as possible, while locking the internal vibrations (i.e. the

groove modulations) in as tightly as possible. Oh, and it has to look good, because no one's going to lavish £3,000 on something that looks like an old Dual 505...

To fulfil the aforementioned design briefs, it has to be [a] intelligently and creatively designed with no weaknesses and [b] manufactured using expensive materials like acrylic, carbon fibre and/or aluminium, and [c] made to exacting tolerances that require meticulous machining and quality control. All of this is flipping expensive, and makes CD player manufacture look like a stroll down the street. That's why I think Musical Fidelity's decision to 'get into the groove', so to speak, is bold and/or foolish.

Well, Michaelson has his reasons. He, like many of us, has sensed something of a vinyl revival in the past decade (yes, really!) and points out that, "Despite huge pressure, the analogue market has survived and prospered. Witness the fact that, in the last three or four years, new analogue vinyl releases outnumber equivalent SACD or DVD-A launches. The big boys in the industry may want one thing, but the consumers want something else... the market's tectonic plates are moving". Enter MF.

THE DESIGN

First things first, and the MF is not a conventional Linn/Thorens-style enclosed subchassis, 'plinthed' design, but close in spirit to SME's Model 30 – with the chassis sitting on a double, decoupled acrylic (nee Perspex) base. Acrylic is brilliantly suited to turntable (and indeed all anti-microphonic) applications because of its very low natural resonance, and MF has taken the idea further by giving each chassis



The One?



plate a different mass, thereby putting their natural resonance points at different frequencies. The double pole isolation system between both chassis plates is both vertically and horizontally compliant thanks to rubber suspension, also with a very low natural resonant frequency.

As for the bearing, MF says it has spent time researching the best way to get an extremely low noise high performance long-life unit, the result being an inverted type manufactured from milspec high carbon steel ground to better than 5 micron tolerance with a 0.1 micron surface finish. At the top of the shaft is a high quality ball bearing in milspec high carbon steel, machined to a spherical accuracy of better than 2 microns. The surface finish is better than 0.1 microns. The outer shell is made from high tensile stainless steel with a milspec brass insert which has a tightly toleranced lubrication spiral. The contact point between the outside shell and bearing is an extremely closely toleranced PTFE pad.

Speed stability is achieved by an impulseless DC motor (what MF calls, "the most expensive brushless (DC) motor available" no less), with accuracy controlled by an optical sensor mounted on the motor which continually monitors the shaft speed. This is fed into a 16bit microprocessor running a 'fuzzy logic' algorithm to control the DC drive voltage. MF claims this guarantees speed accuracy within 0.2%, with excellent longer-term speed accuracy. Interestingly, there's a rotary pitch control fitted giving a semitone (i.e. 6%) of adjustment, with a centre detent to indicate precise speed. As is common practice these days, the power supply is in a separately shielded box, along with the electronics which drive the motor.

And so to the brand new SME

M2-9 tonearm that comes fitted to the M1. Now firstly, let me say that the Musical Fidelity is an 'integrated turntable system', inasmuch as it is not going to be sold as a 'motor unit' without tonearm in the way that Michells, Origin Lives, Linns, etc., are. Antony Michaelson is emphatic about this – he sees the M1 as a package for those who want to play music rather than spend their waking hours wielding Allen bolts, alignment protractors, drills and the like as they bolt and unbolt various arms. As such, the M2 is the ideal companion. This £582 arm has already been spotted on a T+A turntable, so it's not exclusive to the M1, but it seems the ideal – almost the natural - partner.

Put crudely, it's an updated 3009S2. It has a straight, internally damped stainless steel/alloy armtube

NOTES:

- the M1 is relatively easy to set up, but screwing the M2's self tapping arm screws into the M1 armbase is a chore
- the pitch and speed knobs, previously seen on MF's X-CANS v1, are a tad fiddly and don't look the part
- the M1 comes with a beautiful little spirit level and even a soft dustcover sheet
- the height adjustable pillars can prevent the belt sitting in the belt groove cut around the edge of the platter; an annoying foible
- the M2 arm is an excellent performer at the price, with a beautiful fully liquid sound, but is no Series 309, IV or V

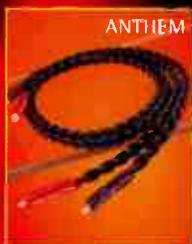
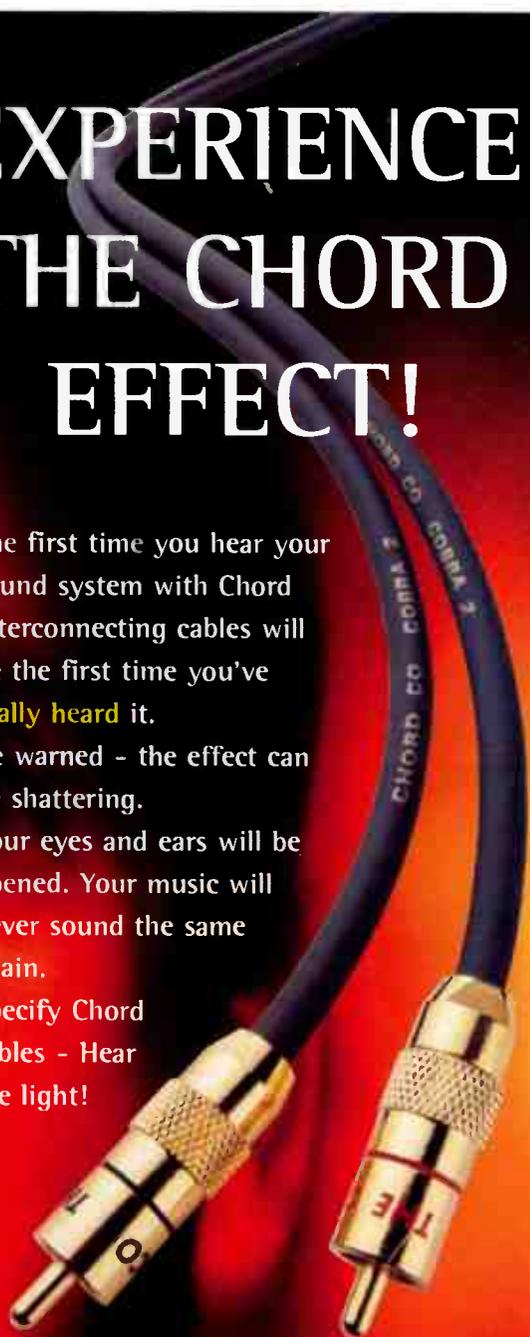
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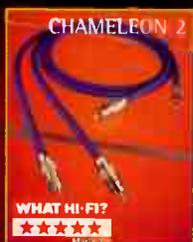
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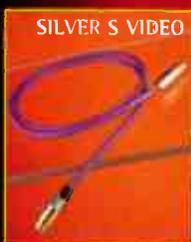
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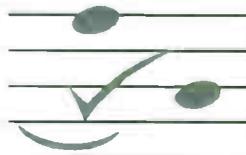
JUST LISTEN AND YOU’LL KNOW

CD: ACCUPHASE, AUDIO SYNTHESIS, Bel Canto, dCS (ELGAR, DELIUS PURCELL, VERDI), SUGDEN, WADIA. **VINYL:** BASIS, CLEARAUDIO, CROWN JEWEL, DNM, GRAHAM, THE GROOVE, LEHMANN, MICHELL, SUMIKO BLUE POINT SPECIAL, TRANSFIGURATION.

AMPLIFIERS: ACCUPHASE, ADVANTAGE, BEL CANTO, CAT, DNM, GAMUT, HOVLAND, NAGRA, SONNETEER, SPECTRAL, SUGDEN. **LOUDSPEAKERS:** AUDIO PHYSIC, BKS,

ETHOS, NEAT, TOTEM, VERITY AUDIO. **TUNERS:** MAGNUM DYNALAB. **CABLES:** ARGENTO, CHORD Co., DNM, NORDOST, SILTECH, VERTEXAQ, YAMAMURA CHURCHILL ETC. **SUPPORTS:** ARCICI, VERTEXAQ, STANDS UNIQUE

The
Right
Note
Music in the home



BATH

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with a new, detachable, angled headshell. Interestingly then, it's not the ubiquitous 'SME headshell' that every Japanese arm of the 1970s (Acos Lustre, Audio Technica AT1010) seemed to use. The machined bearing housing looks pretty familiar to vintage SME watchers, but with height adjustable via a thumbwheel mounted at the ambase, and tracking force set by a calibrated counterbalance weight. The 'weight and pulley' bias compensation system is retained (with 0.25g increments) – some commentators, such as Hi-Fi World's own analogue anorak Stewart Wennen believe this to be the most sonically desirable choice (as well as being the cheapest), although it looks crude. Lift/lower height is adjustable, as is azimuth (SME Series 3-style, at the headshell).

The M1 has an incredible feeling of solidity and engineering excellence. The motor, the bearing, the plinth/suspension isolation system are all spot on. The SME M2-9 is also excellent – finish is up to the company's usual superlative standards, and the arm is a model of user-friendliness and adjustability – it's a sort of 'Series III without SME's moment of 'ultra low mass' madness. By only criticism is the poor quality cartridge mounting hardware supplied – decent stuff is available from the SME parts list, but should have come as standard.

SOUND QUALITY

Out of the box, fitted with the bundled SME M2-9 tonearm, the M1 sounds beautiful. Until the M1, Antony Michaelson used a Thorens TD124/SME 3009S2 in his own personal system, and it's spooky that the M1 sounds very much in the same vein, except with vastly superior transients, detailing and transparency – think of it as a twenty first century TD124.

If you've not heard this Thorens classic, then let me elucidate. Some ten years ago, we put a Loricraft rebuilt TD124 against a Loricraft rebuilt Garrard 301 with fascinating results. The Garrard was all power, muscle, punch, push, drive, guts. The Thorens seemed to be lacking the Garrard's bottom octave of bass, but in other respects had the legs on its classic rival – it was deliciously open, smooth, even, transparent, fluid, beguiling, unassuming and ultimately more charming. It was less hi-fi and more music. This also sums up the Musical Fidelity M1.

Of course, the M1 improves on the TD124 dramatically in all those 'hi-fi' areas of soundstaging, image articulation, low level detail, atmosphere, dynamics, yet its

character – if it has one at all – is very much along the same lines. Simply put, it's self-effacingly musical. It's not a 'character turntable' in the way that the LP12 is, or indeed the GyroDec (for very different reasons, I hasten to add!) You put a record on, and listen to the music. You're not struck by 'that old Linn magic', or 'that amazing GyroDec articulation' – rather, your attention is drawn to what you're listening to – the music. It's that Thorens all over again.

First I put the M1 against my own Michell GyroDec/SME IV. I heard a superior turntable with an inferior tonearm. In a sense, this is stating the bleeding obvious (considering the relative prices), but it's rarely this blatant. The M1 seems even more speed stable, which is saying something against the very 'solid' DC motor-aspired Gyro. This was apparent on two levels; first, that ever-so-slight (and I mean slight) wobble that the Gyro has (but which, trainspotters, the Orbe hasn't) on piano isn't there on the M1. Second, and this is more significant, the Gyro's faintly mechanical approach to making music, is lacking, and in its place, a natural, ebbing, flowing wash of music. The M1 has speed stability approaching that of the very best classic Japanese quartz-lock Direct Drives (Nakamichi Dragon, Sony TTS-8000) or telephone-number price tag Clearaudios or EMTs.

Of course, the Gyro beat the heck out of the M1 in terms of transparency, dynamics, soundstaging etc., but how much of this was down to the SME IV? Well, what followed was several days of yours truly slavishly bolting and unbolting SME arms from variously my GyroDec, my Orbe and the M1. Oh, and then there was the cartridges – I ran the gamut from Shure V15VxMR to the new Ortofon Kontrapunkt C (more of which next month). And to cut a long story short (as someone once said)....

The SME M2-9 is lovely - a direct price rival to the Origin Live Silver, you get a very smooth, lucid, lyrical sound that makes the OL sound fussy and pedantic. But then again, the OL has better grip and insight. (It's almost like a re-run of a A-B I once did of the boggo RB300 vs. SME 3009S2). Suffice to say, the SME is no slouch and is in some respects more musical – certainly in the midband (and that, folks, is why until recently the 3009S2 still sold new – it wasn't as bad by half as many said!). Anyway, it's no SME IV either. The IV (and V) bring masses of grip and attack to frequency extremes (especially the bass), plus better dimensionality and stunning detail and

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

- Michell Orbe/Origin Live Illustrious turntable
- Michell GyroDec/SME Series IV turntable
- Ortofon Kontrapunkt C, Dynavector DV20X-H,
- Shure V15VxMR cartridges
- Trichord Delphini NC phono stage
- MF Audio Passive Preamp
- Quad 909 Power amp
- Quad 989 loudspeakers
- Townshend Maximum Supertweeters

transient attack. Then again, there's really something rather beguiling about that M2-9 midband, almost more so than the 309, IV and V... but that's another story.

Back to the M1, and starting from bottom to top, it's lighter and faster than both Michells, lacking their vast, breathtaking scale and power - but it has less overhang too, making things sound just a tad faster. Moving up to the midband, and it's even-Stevens with the Orbe. I think the M1 is just a touch more lyrical lucid – it has that 'naturalness' that makes everything seem like an effortless flow of music, whereas the Michell is more about scale and image articulation, desperately trying (and succeeding) to convey the last detail of the recording (including stuff which frankly, you don't want or need to hear). The MF has capacious left to right imaging, but doesn't seem to run the recorded acoustic quite as far back behind the speakers as the Orbe. The treble on both decks is superb, open, even, smooth, neutral – enough said.

The quintessence of the M1 is that light, airy, spacious soundstaging and flowing, fluid, liquid musicality. The Orbe is more 'technical', more concerned with forensic detailing – it's Fisher Dieskau to the M1's Frank Sinatra. That's high end turntables – you choose your poison! The point is that the M1 is absolutely and incontrovertibly superb – it gives nothing away to the best of the big hitters at (or indeed above) its price point, and – here's its killer punch – it's a 'plug and play' deck-and-arm package, that requires merely the addition of a decent cartridge to start delivering the goods. It's a viceless, no-holds-barred enthusiast's high end deck, but ready to go with a lovely tonearm and even a pitch control – and it's one of the sexiest turntables ever made too. If you think about it, Antony Michaelson has made his reputation delivering super-fi at merely high end prices, and the M1 continues the theme. Although he's never done a deck before, with the M1 Musical Fidelity has hit the ground running.

VERDICT 

Superbly open, lucid and musical sound allied to beautiful build and an excellent bundled arm makes this the turntable package to beat.

MUSICAL FIDELITY M1 £2,999

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Amplifon WL25 (left): 28W/channel using 6P3, £795
 Amplifon WT40 (centre): 40W/channel using 6C33, £1995
 Amplifon WT30 II (right): 31W/channel using 6H13, £1395

Amplifon is new to the UK, and you will be hearing a lot more about them! These exceptional value for money amplifiers, designed and manufactured in Poland, put to shame more expensive opposition in sound quality, build, and finish. All three models have automatic biasing, so there's no fuss when it's time to change tubes, they all feature heavy toroidal output transformers with a wide bandwidth and 4 and 8 Ohm taps, and the WT30 II and WT40 operate in Triode mode Push Pull, Class A.

They have classic valve amp attributes, sounding sweet and natural, but with enough power in reserve to rock when required!



The Trichord Dino (£299) outsells every other phono stage. Why? It sounds clean and clear, it's fully adjustable to virtually any MM or MC pickup, and when you fancy an upgrade, the Dino+ add-on power supply fits the bill, for an extra £225 (or buy them together from the start for £498).

If you prefer, the Tom Evans Microgroove (£450), suitable for MC pickups, is a worthy alternative, giving a level of detail retrieval difficult to better unless you spend an awful lot more. The Microgroove Plus (pictured above) at £800 is even better, and the famous Groove (£1900), below, has been described in various reviews as being state-of-the-art of phono stages. Like all products of it's standing, don't expect to walk away with one - it needs to be configured by the manufacturer for your particular pickup!



Cawsey (top) may not be the best known cable (others spend more on advertising) but it's quite possibly the best sounding. We have been selling these Australian made silver interconnects for several years and can recommend them without reservation. From £250 to £900 per metre set.



Slinkylinks

Slinkylinks (bottom) are solid silver air dielectric cables with the latest bullet plugs, fantastic sound at an amazingly low price: £195 for a 1.2m set!



The Michell Gyro SE (£895 + arm) remains one of the most successful turntables of all times, and for good reason. Sound is fast, neutral, and open. You have an upgrade route via the HR power supply, and the Orbe platter kit. Popular arms include the Regas, the Tecnoarm, the Origin Live Silver, and of course, the SME.

Compare the Gyro to the Spacedeck and the new Roksan Radius in our studio.



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Black Magic

It's probably because they're so darned hard to organise that you rarely see a group review of top tonearms, but we were hell-bent on finding the best. So our own intrepid Stewart Wennen set about the long, laborious process of listening to seven models from Origin Live, SME, Linn, Hadcock and Roksan. And here, with only one cantilever bent, are our findings...

For something as apparently innocuous as a length of metal that sweeps a stylus across a disc, there's an inordinate amount of interest in the vexed subject of turntable pickup arms. Because they're so rarely compared, there are more myths and legends about these than most bits of hi-fi kit. And they really do excite great debate amongst analogue aficionados, which is curious for something that's – strictly speaking – merely a 'mechanical measuring instrument', designed to let a cartridge trace a record groove with minimal interference.

Of course, it's easy to make a cheap tonearm, but not a good one. In designing and – no less pertinently – manufacturing one, you need real theoretical skill, thousands or hours of listening experience and meticulously tolerated manufacturing facilities. Then there's the question of synergy. Different types of arms suit some decks and cartridges better, and respond differently to the way they're set up. As such, it's a veritable minefield out there for anyone wishing to buy one. How can any analogue addict gauge the relative merits of the models available? Well, we decided to have a go...

The first problem was how to get consistent results using different turntables and pick-up cartridges? It was obvious that I could not hope to achieve any type of consistency if these conditions were left to the manufacturers, as they would prefer their own pick up arms to be used with their own turntables and cartridges, which would make nonsense of an objective review. So, to hear any difference between components, it is vitally important that only one change takes place in the system, otherwise the results will make a mockery of the procedure. To wit, I'd use the same host turntable for the entire pickup arm selection, with the exact same cartridge.

Which to choose? Well, we opted for the Origin Live Aurora Gold, as it's one of the most neutral turntables available right now. OL's Mark Baker

duly agreed to offer us a deck and his engineering support, in the shape of range of bespoke armboards which had to demonstrate identical characteristics mechanically and audibly, and be accurately cut for all arms. Of course, we'd be reviewing OL arms, but I am satisfied that the Aurora is an excellent platform for any arm, such is its innate balance. As for the pickup cartridge? Well, I chose the very well regarded Ortofon MC25FL, which offers an almost flat frequency response works well in a large variety of pick up arms of very different design.

Of course, I am sure there will nay Sayers, criticising the methodology (the choice of deck and cartridge, and invariably my politics too...) But we simply had to draw a sensible, considered line in the sand and find one good deck and cartridge we could get to work with all the arms – and so we did. The debates about synergy, system matching and so on and so forth can be saved for the letters pages next month!

As I would be listening to so many different arms, I'd have to make very careful listening notes, and tabulate the results. I'd also have a 'backup' to both confirm my findings over a period of several days, and to demonstrate them to others! To wit, I used a digital recorder. Now, I know you're going to tell me that 16/44 isn't good enough to intricately assess analogue, and on its own it's not – but it proved an excellent 'backstop', to firm up my findings at the end of the (tortuously long) review period. Enjoy!

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Origin Live Aurora Gold Turntable c/w Upgrade transformer
Ortofon MC 25FL moving coil cartridge
Trichord Dino/ Dino + phono stage
Trichord High performance power interconnect
ATC SCM 35 floorstanding monitor loudspeakers
Crown DC 300A power amplifiers as a triamp rig
Custom built passive preamplifier
Custom built Connectronics Musilex and Miniflex interconnects
all review equipment on individually spiked stands or rack mounts
isolated mains power supply

Hadcock GH242 Export

Linn Ekos

Origin Live Illustrious

Origin Live OL1

Origin Live Silver

Roksan Nima

SME Series IV



HADCOCK GH242 EXPORT £499

Another unipivot design with an effective length of 212.8mm, this latest evolution of a classic tonearm sports an aluminium armtube which is different to all of the other arms in this test, as it is very slender. The headshell is fashioned from cast aluminium and is attached to the arm with a single cap head bolt. This enables the user to change cartridges much more readily. The chromium-bearing pedestal is bur-nished to a very fine finish. The pedestal supports the arm lift assembly (which is one of the best I have ever used!) as well as the anti-skate mechanism. The rear arm stub is of the de-coupled variety and carries two balance weights. These counterweights are also decoupled and have the same finish as the pedestal. The effective mass of the arm is 10g. Pickup arm alignment is accurate and the headshell-offset angle is 23 degrees. At the pivot, the pivot point mates with a special patented housing in the top tube.

The GH242 Export can accommodate almost any cartridge with a weight within the range of 3-12gms. The top arm can be completely detached, because of this feature it is extremely easy to

mount cartridges, and has a rectangular socket that plugs into a corresponding connector in the pedestal assembly. Arm wiring is of first quality with a pair of flying leads equipped with phono sockets so the user can interchange cables between the RIAA and the arm. The arm also has a separate earth lead, which is grounded to the rear of the RIAA. This is a very fine arm as far as aesthetics go, and its build quality is second to none.

SOUND QUALITY

First on the turntable was a mono recording of John Williams playing his flamenco guitar. The arm displayed all of the weight I associate with a well-played guitar. Room size was easy to hear, along with the fingering on the fretboard. The Hadcock tracked the cartridge with ease and displayed a grip of the music that is rarely equalled. It also presented subtle details as well as a very wide dynamic range. James Brown on the track 'Get Up Offa that Thing' was delivered with tremendous clarity and verve. Bootsie's bass playing certainly drove the song along. Stereo imaging was enormous, with the image melting the listening room walls away. Image placement was rock-solid with a

very smooth frequency response, meaning this arm delivers all the musical clues.

Supertramp's 'Crime of the Century' was next on, and it was yet more obvious that I was listening to a very fine piece of British engineering. The GH242 allowed the music to burst from the monitors with tremendous aplomb. Percussion and bass instruments were boldly portrayed with real vivacity and little or no bass overhang. Such seamless transparency is the mark of a top pickup arm - treble to midrange balance was very smoothly displayed. Indeed, an airy spacious sound was evident with all my reference recordings.

Overall then, I was delighted with the Hadcock. It has such a large, feisty and vibrant sound, yet is a natural music maker. It has an ability to get you into the groove - and indeed the ebb and flow of the music - that is infectious. It makes the already fine OLI sound frigid, constrained, pernickety - although the OL did show it as just a tad too warm on female vocals. It's a versatile, well thought out and flexible tool that justifies its price premium over all the cheaper arms here, thanks to an even more expansive sound.



LINN EKOS £1,850

This is the ultimate evolution of what many think 'the original superarm' – the Linn Ittok LVII. It is primarily designed for use with the Linn Sondek LPI2 turntable, and it is to Linn's credit that they were happy for us to try it 'behind enemy lines' so to speak (although they added the disclaimer that they could not guarantee the results). It uses a variation of the Audio-Technica pick up arm mounting plate, and is different to the others in this test in that its effective length is 211mm and has a cartridge overhang of 18mm. It also has a different type of stylus tip pressure arrangement. Stylus tip pressure is achieved by balancing the arm with the counterweight and then dialling in the tracking pressure on the adjuster on the right hand side of the arm pedestal. This "dynamically balanced" system uses a high quality spring to apply the force.

The arm tube and the majority of the components are manufactured in Scotland, and the Ekos is hand assembled at Linn's own factory in Glasgow. The headshell design has strengthening fillets added to the rear sides to avoid the unwanted vibration effect due to the cartridge. All components have been bonded

together using an advanced adhesive technique. The bearings have a tolerance of 1 micron and have all been matched. This latest arm is supplied with Linn's silver 'T-cable', which is terminated with high quality phono plugs. The easiest arm in this test to set up, thanks in no small part to its dynamically balanced design, fixing the vertical tracking angle was an absolute breeze. It's also a joy to use and feels just nicer in the hand even than the Illustrious.

SOUND QUALITY

John Williams was first on the turntable, and the Linn proved quite distinctive. As with many products from this company – especially from the mid-eighties when the arm was originally designed – it was brilliant at some things and quite disappointing at others. It's best described as being 'the antithesis of a unipivot', in as much as it's very tight, taut and grippy with great musicality but poor imaging and lacklustre tonality. Indeed, the Ekos proved almost unmatched in its ability to play tunes, while at the same time making the recorded acoustic in 'Bop Till You Drop' quite curtailed - the width, depth and height of the image were limited to the outer edges of my ATC SCM35s.

Back to John Williams and the guitar was portrayed at centre stage, tonally correct, but with little indication of the scale of the instrument. The reverberation in the recording studio was almost completely absent. As the music moved along, I could not detect any change in Mr. Williams breathing. Johnny Guitar Watson's 'I Don't Want To Be Alone Stranger' (Fantasy F-984A) again revealed a truncated stereo image quality. Surface noise was commendably low in level however, and the cartridge tracked in the usual exemplary style.

Overall, the Ekos proved a disappointment in this context, which is of course outside the one it was designed to work in. Yet on an LPI2 there's no doubt it sings, and the editor reports fine results on a Michell Orbe too. The Sondek doesn't major on spatial articulation and scaling, so maybe the Ekos's performance in this area is less apparent when it's 'au naturel'... What's undeniable is the way it carries a tune, lending an almost supernatural sense of where the song is going. I could hear this via the Aurora too, but there was less synergy. This arm comes highly recommended for Sondek users, but owners of other decks should audition carefully.



ORIGIN LIVE ILLUSTRIOUS £1,570

This is Origin Live's stab at building the finest pick up arm possible. The fundamental design objectives were good old-fashioned strength and rigidity. A static balanced design with bias compensation applied via a weight supported by a fine thread, its armtube is machined from a solid billet of very high-grade alloy. Effective length is 240mm, with an effective mass of 14 grams. Very low friction comes courtesy of bearings of the highest order, sat in an extremely wide yoke made from highly specified material. The Illustrious's arm bearing casing has been designed to offer high mass in the horizontal plane, whilst the mass in the vertical plane is commendably low for good tracking ability.

Headshell design has had the same precise attention to detail lavished on it, with minimal flexure. Arm wiring is similar to the OL Silver, except that the wires have been cryogenically treated and consequently require a longer running in period than normal. The lead out wiring is terminated by Eichman bullet phono plugs. Finish of this pick up arm is exemplary – up there with SME Series V standards, which is no mean feat. It has the strong but precise feel of the very best manual SLR camera or

shooting pistol. Detail has been attended to - even the arm lift lever has been ergonomically designed – although I can't say I thought the finger lift was long enough!

SOUND QUALITY

After the recommended forty hours burn in time (for the arm cables) this arm produced an almost immersive sound experience. All dimensions of the stereo image were clearly described, depth being tremendous. Height of the image was one of the most realistic I have been privileged to hear. The apparent width of the perceived image was enormous, as the image was so large that my living room walls seemed to melt away. This was complemented with a precision of spatial characteristics that made listening to the Illustrious an absolute pleasure. Oh, and surface noise was almost non-existent!

Pink Floyd's 'The Wall' had a character that I have not experienced before. The mixing on this album is such that lesser arms make it sound flat and two dimensional, but the top OL revealed it as vast and panoramic. Moreover, the extra dynamic range over all the other arms here was simply stunning. As a consequence, the level control was set at about a third possible volume and the

system still portrayed this piece of work as, quite possibly, the finest multitracked rock album of the 1970s. Along with firecracker dynamics, something SME V users will know, it possessed a seamless rhythmic ease and flow which SME V users will not! This is a beautifully fluid listen, yet gives nothing away to any other arm in terms of grip, detail and focus.

Ry Cooder has an awe-inspiring delicacy of play, and this arm had the ability to transfer this into my living room. I can hear his band working very hard behind him, the rhythm section driving the music along. Likewise, James Brown came over with a precision that is very rarely heard from any hi-fi component. Image transparency and transient recovery were without doubt very special, while timbral qualities and the breadth of its tonal palette are amongst the very best I have ever heard. This is the big league, where the equipment isn't just 'self-effacing' or 'uncoloured', but literally dissolves before your very ears. It has very little character of its own and presents the music as the musicians really intended. The Illustrious's performance befits its name all right, bringing almost all of the fluidity of the best unipivot with vastly improved grip and incision – the best of both worlds, if you like.



ORIGIN LIVE OLI £449

In the beginning, there was the Rega RB250 - well, actually it was the RB300. Introduced in 1983, it put the cat amongst the pigeons by sounding almost as good as many superarms (Linn Ittok, Syrinx PU3) at one third of the price. Then, some fifteen years later, Origin Live came up with a 'structural modification' that addressed the arm's biggest weakness - its floppy counterweight. Then, OL's Mark Baker correctly 'discovered' that the RB250 actually sounded better than the more expensive RB300, thanks to its lack of tracking force spring and more solid bearing mounting. Thus was born the OLI, a modded Rega RB250 complete with new internal wiring.

The OLI modifications transform the rather sterile standard pickup arm. OL starts by removing rear end stub counterweight decoupling rubber washer, and bolting on a new rear stub in its place. Standard RB250s are dynamically balanced (just like the Linn Ekos) and this type of structure can be deleterious to sound quality, so the spring is removed and the armtube reassembled. The rear weight has also been modified as it is considerably larger than the original and the new counterweight has an offset mounting hole to let

the counterweight present a lower centre of gravity, with the added advantage of lowering the amount of transferred inertia.

The tapered arm tube has been shot peened and then anodised. Standard armtubes have a powder coat finish applied by Rega, which over damps the tube considerably. While the armtube is on the bench OL upgrade the bearings to a much higher standard also allowing the pick up arm to be, mechanically, integrally stronger. Internal wiring is Litz cable with silver plated copper cartridge wire and a very low resistance cryogenically treated cable. Phono plugs are again replaced with high quality connectors.

SOUND QUALITY

The key to this arm is its all round competence, which is remarkable at the price. Although decently neutral by the standards of most tonearms, the OLI is characterised by a little lower midrange warmth. This is a good feature, as at this price most people cannot afford to install a very expensive pickup cartridge. Tracking ability is very good, as my assault course showed - there was no hint of the cartridge letting go at any time. Stage depth and width were wider than the standard Rega arm, which was also tonally more curtailed at frequency extremes and

more one-dimensional.

Solo guitar is reproduced with panache, the arm correctly displaying the size of the room and the timbre of the music. Despite that aforementioned gentle lower midband bloom, the OLI is generally unobtrusive. Multi tracked rock albums are handled in a way that's remarkable considering its budget origins - sounding detailed and analytical but never sterile. This arm captures the emotion and pace of the recording.

It's possible to criticise this arm for a slight lack of charm or character, and curtailed frequency extremes, but then you remember how affordable it is. Its skill is how it does everything so competently, at such a low price. It's less charming and beguiling than the Nima, but a damn sight easier to set up and - most likely - match to cartridges. I was amazed at this humble arm with its ability to replay the music with so much accuracy. Of course, it's a league below the likes of the Illustrious, sounding a vague and two-dimensional by comparison - but its genius is that it never sounds obviously compromised in any way. By contrast, even the tremendously powerful and commanding SME Series IV at three times the price seems a tad over-analytical. Think of the OLI and the phrase 'giant killer' springs to mind...



ORIGIN LIVE SILVER £599

At first sight, this looks similar to the Rega RB300 - but looks can be deceptive. The OL Silver is a complete redesign, and can be substituted for any OL or Rega arm as the designer has used the same geometry. This pickup arm has an effective mass of 13.5grams and has a total weight (excluding pickup cartridge) of a respectable 448g. Internal wiring has seen the use of high quality Litz cable. Headshell wiring uses stranded silver with individual PTFE sheathing, terminated with sprung gold plated cartridge tags.

Mechanical construction sees a variety of changes to the norm. Arm tube material is best quality aircraft alloy. A new headshell has been fashioned which is decoupled and at the same time rigidly attached to the arm tube, although the rear bearing stub is the same as the acclaimed OL RB250 modification. Horizontal bearings have been changed for much higher specification components. The horizontal bearing yoke has also been changed for a wider unit aiming to reduce the mechanical resonance and increase torsional stability. External arm interconnect is of the captive variety (but if you want to substitute arm leads a DIN socket can be

integrated by OL), and uses high-grade cable terminated with quality phono plugs. This is not wired in a semi-balanced fashion but is of the single ended type. An infinitely adjustable vertical tracking angle adjuster is included with this pick up arm.

SOUND QUALITY

This arm has an ability to throw an accurate stereo image into the listening room. Tracking ability was exemplary with no hint of the cartridge leaving the groove at any time even with my audio assault course. It has very little character of its own, so accordingly has lightning transient recovery, although tonally it's very slightly warm.

The music of Donald Byrd's album 'Stepping into Tomorrow' (Blue Note BN-LA368-G) had all the dimensional characteristics I'd expect from a top tonearm. Spatial clues were all there as well as an evenly portrayed frequency balance which bodes well for the reproductive process. Bass instruments had drive and rhythm. The rhythm section kept the band on course with deftness and assured control that is rarely found in modern music. The alto saxophone of Gerry Bart floated majestically, right centre, over the other

instruments.

John Williams' transcription of Suite Number 3 in C for unaccompanied violoncello (Delyse ECB 3149) was on next. Although this piece of work was recorded in mono, in 1958, the spatial characteristic was boldly presented. Guitar was centre stage and the finger work was obviously portrayed. Subtlety was the order of the day with this piece of music and the OL Silver did not disappoint. The acoustic of the recording studio was clearly audible and with very little overhang this music certainly shines.

James Brown's 'Get Up Offa That Thing' certainly had an enormous amount of drive and vivacity. The whistling on the title track was rock solid in the stereo image, with the trumpets accurately to the right of centre, letting the feel of the album shine through. Indeed, the Origin Live Silver coped extremely well with all types of music that was put on the platter, bearing out this magazine's prior opinion that it's a gifted all rounder that's just shy of the very best arms around - but at a dramatically lower price. Still, it does lack that beguiling fluidity of the unipivots, so if you've got £600 to spend on an arm then you'll have to decide whether you ultimately want analysis or swing.



ROKSAN NIMA £350

Conventional pickup arms such as Regas and Linns use three bearings. This type of mechanical structure has many pitfalls for the design engineer, including matching the vertical and horizontal bearings for identical coefficient of friction – which has to be very low to enable the cartridge to track the record. Another way of allowing the arm to pivot is to use only one bearing, such as in unipivots like the Nima, which drops bearing friction to very low levels. This arm has an effective length of 240mm with an overhang of 17.5mm, plus an effective mass of 10grams with a decoupled counter weight. The rear stub is set well below the arm tube level in an attempt to lower the arm's centre of gravity.

Main bearing material is stainless steel and is critically machined to extremely tight tolerances. The unipivot is contained within an acrylic pedestal and the pivot has a fine adjustment available at the top of this housing. Unlike the Hadcock – the other unipivot here – the arm tube is of very wide diameter alloy. Interestingly, the headshell

material is Acrylic, accurately machined to enable the cartridge to sit square to the record. Roksan has included a very flexible printed circuit board (just like the type found in most digital watches) with no less than five tracks on it. The cartridge connectors are gold plated and very sturdy. The arm lift has a well-weighted feel to it and works well. Bias compensation is courtesy of a free weight suspended by fine thread. A little bit of confidence is needed with the set up procedure, which is simple providing you follow the well-laid out instructions carefully...

SOUND QUALITY

James Brown was first on the platter and the reward was an open, airy treble to midrange allied to a very good bass slam. The stereo image had good detail retrieval as well as an extremely wide sound stage. The percussion was striking as the quality of reproduction was of the highest order. The "Godfather of Soul" was singing with his usual passion with his band pushing the music along. Unusually for such an inexpensive arm, this one coped very well with almost all the music

that was put on the platter. Ry Cooder was certainly present with a delicious portrayal of vocal timbre that is his trademark. His band stretched from wall to wall with an extremely realistic portrayal of stage depth and height.

The transient ability of this arm is very good, along with a realistic decay which is very important for instruments like pianos and strings. Low frequencies are of the highest order, with superb lower bass grip. Furthermore, its bass to midrange balance is almost seamless – as is the mid-to-treble transition. So it's a smoothie, but not soft around the edges in any way.

In absolute terms, the Nima is a tad ragged in the high frequencies, and lacks the forensic detailing of the more expensive arms here. But its natural musicality allied to superb soundstaging (by comparison, the OLI sounds shut-in, constrained and generally distant) makes it fantastic value for money. A unipivot such as this is a different way of listening to music than a conventional multi-pivot – a bit like the gulf between tube and transistor, if you will. Setup is a little fiddly, but with care and attention gives super results.



SME SERIES IV £1127

If there is any tonearm here whose reputation precedes it, it is this. The Series IV appeared in the latter half of the eighties, as a slightly cost-cut version of the mighty Series V whose fluid damping system, silver Litz headshell wires and sprung tracking force system it lacks. Interestingly, these are all features of debatable, if not deleterious sonic merit anyway, and there are those who feel that (given the Series V's wiring) the IV is actually superior. The only obvious demerit is the slightly lower tolerance bearings, but the IV's are still so high that again this is an arguing point.

The arm itself was so radical when it first came out that it may as well have come from outer space! Constructed from a cigar shaped, one-piece magnesium tube, it had echoes of Rega's revolutionary RB300, but SME had moved the game along further. The IV boasted a massy counterweight locked close to the arm pivot, easy azimuth adjustment and superb low-friction, high strength bearings. Hand cueing this arm is an amazing experience – it feels like the best Leica camera to the touch. It's also extremely easy to set up very accurately, and the instructions are exemplary. As soon as you unpack this arm, you're aware you're using

a legend, and the sound is no different.

SOUND QUALITY

Best characterised as neutral and self-effacing, this arm brings unbelievable clarity to vinyl replay. Imaging and soundstaging are superb, while frequency extension is unmatched – bass is extremely tight and controlled, treble glass-clear. The only criticism is the rather dry, analytical sound; there's a conspicuous lack of euphonic coloration, and this can be a little stark for some tastes. The upside of this is the brilliant 'deconstructive' talents of this pickup arm – it can scythe through any mix to tell you precisely what's there and how it was recorded.

For example, Supertramp's 'Crime of the Century' gained a mastertape-like quality that none of the others so far possessed. While the Hadcock was deeply impressive in its musicality and the OL Silver commendably detailed, the SME V didn't seem to have any discernable character at all – aside from one foible I shall elucidate upon subsequently. The result is that it gave an amazing insight into all aspects of this classic nineteen seventies recording – from studio effects to multi-tracked vocals to the background train

announcements in 'Rudy'. Bass is stunning. It's rock-solid, vice-like and possessed of tremendous energy and articulation. Midband is three dimensional, with brilliant image placement. Treble is smooth and open and wonderfully extended. Dynamics are gobsmacking, and I found myself looking for big, impressive sounding productions to amaze myself with hi-fi!

The trouble is that the SME Series IV has a certain 'mechanical' nature to the way it goes about making music that actually makes it obviously less listenable than, say, the Hadcock. It's great at giving a seat-of-the-pants, whiz-bang sound, but proved strangely unrewarding just listening to music – much like CD, in fact. To wit, James Brown on the track 'Get Up Offa that Thing' wasn't such a moving moment as it had been on the Hadcock, Roksan or OL Silver. Some folk will think this really is 'the best pickup arm in the world' – it is not an overly ambitious claim – but others simply won't take to it. Whilst (you'll subsequently read that) the Ekos is great in one respect and poor in several others, the SME is great in most but poor in just one – but that particular aspect, many analogue addicts will believe, is the most important. Close, but no cigar.



conclusion

Bringing up the rear of this test was the Linn Ekos, which was one of the very best here in terms of tunefulness, but – on our test deck at least – was unable to correctly describe the soundstage in depth, width or height. It's obviously not an all rounder, and is voiced in such a way as to appeal to a select group of listeners (LPI2 owners) who know what they like and what's not important to them. It's a beautifully made and designed bit of kit, but not right for everyone.

Next was the Origin Live OLI, which has the ability to present an extremely large sound stage, with correct timbral detailing. Ultimately it's a bit warm, a bit tonally and dynamically curtailed, but is brilliant value and streets ahead of a standard RB250. The beauty of this arm is that it's a middle ranking arm at a rock-bottom price – thus letting you spend more on your turntable and cartridge.

Roksan Audio was next with the Nima. This was one of the surprises of this group. At its price point, it's an astonishing piece of kit. It is quite difficult to set up but a little care and attention to detail rewarded me with a panoramic sound stage and superb tonal accuracy. It has a natural ease and grace that only the Hadcock matched – I can see why unipivots are cultish!

The OL Silver had an even wider stereo image than the preceding arms. Timbral detailing was more accurate, along with a much more believable portrayal of the musical event taking place in my living room. The pace of the music was correctly displayed with the panache and passion of the musicians very well displayed. Again, it's much better than it should be at the price – something of a recurring theme with OL. For many, this is all they'll ever need.

The Hadcock GH242 Export, which has been ignored by much of the hi-fi press for years, proved a veritable 'wolf in sheep's clothing'. I did not expect the imaging to be as precise, or transients to be as fast. On solo piano it proved exemplary, adding little of its own character to the overall experience. In many respects like soundstaging and depth

perspective, its performance was right up with the SME IV. Only in the SME's traditional areas of strength did the Hadcock falter, with a slight image foreshortening, an obviously 'warmer' midrange and looser bass. But it had a wonderfully natural, fluid and beguiling character that was never other than charming – something the SME lacks! The downside is that this is the fiddliest arm you're ever likely to own, and requires extreme care and patience to set up properly.

The SME Series IV is next. This is one of the most 'stunning' tonearms I've ever heard, but the initial euphoria settles to leave you rather cold. It is relentlessly incisive and forensically detailed, with firecracker dynamics and almost 'architectural' soundstaging. In hi-fi respects, it will leave the strongest devotee of digital audio speechless – given a serious turntable and arm it sounds ten times crisper than 24/192. Yet it lacks 'that old black magic' – charm, basically. Now, the jury's out on whether this 'charm' is actually 'euphony', or whether it's actually in the groove in the first (I suspect it is), but the point about the SME is that it's more like the ultimate measuring instrument than the greatest musician. In other respects – build, engineering, feel, ease of set-up, packaging, instructions – it is sublime.

And the winner is... the Origin Live Illustrious, a pick up arm that is quite simply breathtaking. Its ability to display a three dimensional stereo image is above criticism, as is its transparency and lack of artifice. It also has amazing tonal accuracy, which lets the 'flavour' of each instrument or voice flood out of the speakers. This is the respect in which it was most obviously superior to the SME. The only area which falls down – if that is the right phrase – is the bass. The latter's lows were just a tad tauter and more 'vice-like', but by any other measure the Illustrious was sublime.

On any deck – OL, Michell, Notts Analogue, Clearaudio – this is surely the best.

Hadcock GH242 Export

Linn Ekos

Origin Live Illustrious

Origin Live OL1

Origin Live Silver

Roksan Nima

SME Series IV



THANKS TO:
Bob Polley at ATC in Gloucestershire, for their loan of the ATC Studio Control Monitors.

For more tonearm talk, including a look at how the tested models relate to other established designs, see DP's column on p83.

Great **HI-FI** WORLD'S COMPETITION Giveaway

WIN CREEK'S SUPERB CD50/II WORTH £850 IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT COMPETITION!



Competition Questions

[1] Creek Audio is named after what?

- [a] its founder, Michael Creek
- [b] a section of water
- [c] the strange noise of floorboards
- [d] the sound of old bones rattling

[2] What does the CD50/II look similar to?

- [a] its owner
- [b] its founder
- [c] its predecessor
- [d] its replacement

[4] The CD50/II has 12 of what?

- [a] arms
- [b] tentacles
- [c] beaks
- [d] regulated power supplies

[4] How did AL describe the player's performance?

- [a] "one of the very best CD spinners at the price"
- [b] "one of the very best CD spinners, ever"
- [c] "now that's what I call music"
- [d] "careful with that axe, Eugene"

April Competition
Hi-Fi World Magazine
Unit G4 Argo House
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Here's your chance to win one of the best mid-price CD spinners on sale, a purpose-designed audio-ophile digital disc player from one of the acknowledged masters of the art. In Hi-Fi World's review last month, Albert Lee opined:

"The new Creek CD50mk2 looks similar to the earlier CD50 but is actually a very different machine..."

Hi-Fi & Computer Audio World Competition rules and conditions of entry

1. Only one entry per house hold.
2. Multiple entries will be automatically disqualified.
3. Purchase of the magazine is not a pre-condition of entry.
4. No correspondence will be entered into.
5. The Editor's decision is final.
6. No employees of Audio Publishing Limited, or of any companies associated with the production or distribution of the prizes may enter.

The mk2 has a new transport and the circuitry is improved and with symmetrical layout and shorter signal paths, and a higher frequency clock oscillator is used that's synchronised with the micro controller and buffer clock to minimise internal interference. There are two discrete transformers for the digital and the analogue power supplies. This feature, along with separate grounding, enables the player to achieve much lower noise performance than the mk1. There are 12 regulated power supplies along with an entirely separate power supply for the CD drive mechanism.

Detailing was excellent – along with percussion, hi-hats, rim shots, cymbal strikes and wood block shots, I was able to tell the difference between the ride and crash cymbals with ease. With many mid-price CD spinners, this disc sounds confused, probably because of the amount of information in the mix, but with the CD50mk2 the sound was extremely well presented. For example, 'Street Scene' saw the flautist was finely etched in space as if it had a life of its own... Through the Creek, the

music had obviously more life in it, and that veil had been lifted... The CD50/II had an obviously better grip of the recorded acoustic, being better able to differentiate the musicians and the instruments they were playing.

It possesses the ability to describe the room in which the performance took place and the musical event itself. To put it in perspective, you'd struggle to find a DVD-A or SACD spinner under £2,000 that comes close to the Creek (on 16bit CD) – which suddenly makes ye olde Compact Disc look a surprisingly worthy format once again. One of the very best CD spinners at the price, this offers a captivating musical performance and clever future-proofed design."

If you'd like to win this superb CD player, then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions, and send your entries to: **April Competition**, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF by **31st March 2004**.

CONGRATULATIONS

...to Mr. Robert Swain of Southampton, the winner of our February 2004 competition. A Sugden Headmaster Headphone Amplifier/Pre Amplifier is on its way to you!

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Product NEWS



ARCAM'S entry-level DiVA DV78 DVD Player

Arcam's latest DVD player in the DiVA range is the DV78. The result of over four years' development, it uses the design team's insight and understanding to engineer their most affordable player ever.

The cost saving is substantial, but Arcam are proud to say that they have video performance which is truly world class. They have also used their expertise to ensure that the audio quality reflects the audiophile heritage, which is at the heart of every Arcam product.

The quality of components is identical to those used in the more expensive models, the DiVA DV88 Plus DVD player and DiVA DV89 DVD-Audio player. What has changed is the simplified construction and assembly techniques, which have substantially reduced both build and test times. The player comes equipped with a new remote control as well as a new navigation button.

Call your local Sevenoaks store for a demonstration and confirm that the DV78 provides reference class performance on both music and movies.



ROKSAN upgrades its entire CASPIAN range

Roksan's CASPIAN range of Hi-Fi and Home Cinema components was originally introduced in 1998 and, having remained almost unchanged since, it was clearly time for an update.

The design aims for the new 'M' series were to improve reliability, enhance the aesthetics and, most importantly,

improve sound quality. And it seems these updates have been successful with What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine concluding: "Roksan's calculations were spot-on... The Caspian M Series-1 is well worth the extra money." JANUARY 2004

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PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
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HI-FI SYSTEM 2

MUSICAL FIDELITY
A3 CD PLAYER & AMPLIFIER
MONITOR AUDIO
SILVER S8 SPEAKERS

One of our most popular systems at an amazing sale price. Full-scale dynamics with a lightness of touch makes this combination stand out.



SYSTEM PRICE
£2399.95

HI-FI SYSTEM 2
NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

SAVE £379

MISSION
780 SE SPEAKERS
£349.95

"The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable: anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider these standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off."



WHAT HI-FI? Feb 03
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

INCLUDES **FREE**
SPEAKER CABLE WORTH £60*



MISSION
782 SE SPEAKERS
£899.95

"Well, with the exception of the alderwood-veneer finish, these floorstanders look identical to the standard model, although there's a new tweeter and crossover design. One of the advantages of the three-way configuration is that each driver deals with only a narrow section of the frequency range, and the designers optimise each unit to perform its respective task. Mission's

engineers have excelled in this area: these elegant floorstanders sound beautifully balanced and few rivals under £1000 can match their wonderful levels of clarity. The 'special edition' tag is overused but these talented floorstanders are bona fide sonic stars."

WHAT HI-FI? June 03
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

INCLUDES **FREE**
SPEAKER CABLE WORTH £120*



SAVE £169

HI-FI SYSTEM 3

ROKSAN

KANDY KD1/III CD PLAYER

KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER

QUAD

11L SPEAKERS

If you're after detail and excitement in your music then this system's for you. Here we've combined the Quad 11L speakers - Product of the Year 2002/2003 - with Roksan's double Award-winning Kandy KA1/III amplifier and its ideal partner, the Kandy KD1/III CD player.

Awarded five stars in a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test, the Kandy KD1/III CD player was described as "offering a great array of talents - team it with its amp s'ablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

But don't just take our word for it, come in for a listen.

HI-FI SYSTEM 3 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

SYSTEM PRICE
£1399.95

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

MONITOR AUDIO

SILVER S8 SPEAKERS

£699.95 SAVE £100



HI-FI SYSTEM 4

SAVE £399

CYRUS CD8 CD PLAYER & 8 AMPLIFIER
MONITOR AUDIO SILVER S6 SPEAKERS

Another very popular combination that's more than the sum of its already talented parts - and that's before you've examined the upgrade options. The CD8 is a magnificent player (Best Buy - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards 2003) and like most Cyrus products its performance can be maximised with the addition of a Cyrus PSX-R power supply.

The beautifully crafted Silver S6 speakers from British speaker specialists Monitor Audio complete the package.

HI-FI SYSTEM 4 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



SYSTEM PRICE
£1999.95

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

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LINN CLASSIK ▽ MUSIC SYSTEM (EX SPEAKERS) £749.95 **SAVE £100**

"The Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to



play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."



YAMAHA CDR-HD1300 CD-RW/HD RECORDER £469.95 **SAVE £60**



PIONEER PDR-609 CD-RW RECORDER £159.95

DENON DM31 ▶ UD-M31 CD RECEIVER £179.95 **SAVE £50**

"The D-M30 was exemplary, as its three What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards clearly show. The D-M31 is even better, making it phenomenal value for money."

OPTIONAL PROCEDES: DMB 101 MP3/ISO RECORDER • SPR 101 CASSETTE DECK
PRICE EXCLUDES SPEAKERS

HI-FI SYSTEM 5 **SAVE £169**

ARCAM CD73T CD PLAYER & A65 PLUS AMPLIFIER MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE B2 SPEAKERS



SYSTEM PRICE £799.95

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

Arcam and Monitor Audio both have an enviable reputation for producing great sounding kit without breaking the bank. This system shows why with a well balanced sound that's both musically involving and enjoyable.

At the front of this package is Arcam's upgradeable CD73T CD player - a What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision 'Product of the Year 2003'. We've coupled this with Arcam's complementary A65 Plus integrated amplifier and Monitor Audio's beautifully balanced 'Best Buy' Bronze B2 speakers. According to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision (Awards 2003), these compact speakers: "Sound superb... Speakers don't get much better than the B2s."

HI-FI SYSTEM 5 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



Sevenoaks

SOUND & VISION



PRODUCT RANGE

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Project Debut III (Colours)	£ CALL
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Project RPM4	£ CALL

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Cyrus FM X	£ CALL
Denon TU26DL MKII	£99.95
Marantz ST4000	£ CALL
Pure Evolve 1 DAB	£89.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£199.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£299.95

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Arcam DVA CD93T	£ CALL
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£ CALL
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Cyrus CB8	£ CALL
Denon CDC485	£119.95
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Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Marantz CD171M	£ CALL
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Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308*	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD	£ CALL
Quad 99 CD-P	£ CALL
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£ CALL
Roksan Caspian M	£ CALL
Rotel RCD02	£ CALL
Rotel RCD4072	£ CALL

RECORDERS

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Yamaha CD14-H1300 CD-RW	£469.95

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Arcam DVA A90	£ CALL
Arcam FMJ A32	£ CALL
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Cyrus 8	£ CALL
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Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	£ CALL
Quad 99 Power	£ CALL
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Roksan Caspian M	£ CALL
Rotel RA-01	£ CALL
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DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
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Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is one of the largest and most successful hi-fi and home cinema retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from Hi-Fi separates and systems to DVD players, widescreen plasma televisions and projection systems, all at highly competitive prices.

Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

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SEVENOAKS WEBSITE

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its stores.

There are regularly updated special offer and stock clearance lists with hundreds of products available and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store. To find out more, click on www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

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www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

Esprit DE LP?



We were most impressed with Sony's budget SCD-XB790QS SACD player a few months back, finding it a beguiling performer with quite an 'analogue' sound. What then of its bigger brother, the entry-level model in the prestige ES series? David Price tried the new SCD-XA3000ES.

It's a sad reflection on the British market that a machine such as this should be labelled 'high end'. In Japan, Sony's ES range forms the mainstay of its hi-fi separates range – it's a sort of 'BMW 3 Series' of audio – classy but commonplace and not regarded as particularly esoteric. Here though, there was a considerable period of time in the mid-nineties when Sony UK was not importing any ES components at all to the UK. Shame! Instead, the company chose to rely on its budget 'Q series' to form the entirety of its separates sales. There was nothing particularly wrong with these, other than that Sony fans had nowhere to go if they (and I count myself in) wanted something more!

Fortunately, we're now blessed with not one but two ES machines – this, the entry level SCD-XA3000ES (which sort-of replaces the 333), and the XA9000ES which has just been launched in the UK as I write this (watch this space for a review). Selling for around £600, the 3000 occupies the classic Sony mid-price CD player segment of yore [see box]. You don't get the stunning copper plated, Black Gate encrusted internals of the top ES models (previously the 777 models, now the

9000), but you get a very nice box and a fair smattering of designer label discrete componentry inside.

This is one of the most attractive Sony digital disc spinners I've seen for many a year. I loved the late eighties CDP-X557ESD and CDP-X77ES era models, which were very clean and purposeful, but for a long time Sony's stylists haven't known whether they're Arthur or Martha – and the result has been variously cluttered or bland boxes. This looks cool, clean and contemporary – and exquisitely well finished. It's only when you open it up that you realise it's a case of 'plus c'est la change, plus c'est la meme chose' for the Japanese giant.

To wit, the casing comes off – rather less neatly than the beautifully hewn aluminium front panel would suggest – to reveal a sight that looks remarkably familiar to the Sony CDP-X333ESD (1990 vintage CD spinner) that I still have in my spare room. On the outside, it looks like an over-engineered Japanese battleship player, but inside it's – well – just a well engineered machine built very carefully to a price. In fact, close inspection reveals it actually has a lot of commonality with Sony's budget SCD-XB780 and XE680 machines,

inasmuch as it shares the same main board! The company hasn't even decided to disguise the fact – as the names of these players are printed on the PCB, while that of the SCD-XA3000ES is omitted.

So the XA3000ES is an extensively 'breathed on' budget machine, getting an altogether larger (430x290x124mm) and sturdier (8.2kg) casing which is presumably less susceptible to sound-degrading resonances, upgraded Twin R core mains transformer (with separate analogue and digital supplies) and peppering of middle-ranking Nichicon and Silmic capacitors all the way from downtown Akihabara.

To this, we can add all the standard bits from the other budget machines – including a reasonably quick access (by SACD/DVD standards) transport that plays CD, CD-R/CD-RW and SACDs, a defeatable fluorescent display complete with CD Text and 'music calendar', the 'Multi-jog' knob for track selection, gold plated headphone jack with volume control, a litany of playback modes including (32 track) program play, random play, all tracks repeat and one track repeat. Round the back there's a coaxial digital output, optical digital



output, six RCA phono sockets (i.e. multichannel analogue output) and one pair of RCA phonos (as a stereo line output).

SOUND QUALITY

This player is an interesting conundrum. Superficially it has quite a bright, punchy and upfront sound – just like Sony ‘three series’ CD players of yore. That means incision, grip, attack and no small degree of listening fun. On another level though, it is not the ‘digi fest’ that earlier mid-price Sony silver disc players have been. Whereas players as far back as the CDP-X33ES (1989, £600) have been very mechanical and obviously digital in their presentation, the SCD-XA3000ES has a fluidity (if not a tonality) that’s quite analogue in its style – precisely what we concluded about the XB970 a few months back, indeed.

When I say analogue, don’t confuse this with soft, warm, mushy, laid-back or any of those other tired epithets. The 3000ES isn’t any of these. Indeed, it’s actually more upfront sounding in both CD and SACD modes than the Pioneer DV-868 DVD universal player I had on hand for comparison purposes. This machine actually sounds more laid back and tonally warmer than the Sony. But the Sony does have a lyrical character in the mid-band which gives it ‘listenability’ that the Pioneer lacks.

In defence of the Pioneer, of course, the Sony doesn’t play DVD

movies, DVD Audio discs, MP3 CDs, VCDs or any of the other weird and wonderful digital Frisbees. This is an out-and-out hi-fi separate with CD and SACD as its sole remit. Although the Pioneer is about £200 more expensive, though, I thought it was a fine comparative tool, as potential Sony purchasers will invariably be thinking ‘do I get a universal player or keep to the SACD straight-and-narrow’.

Of the two machines, I’d choose the Sony. Here’s why: Let’s put aside the Pioneer’s brilliant connectivity (HDMI, iLink, etc.) and DVD-A compatibility for a moment. If you’ve committed to SACD (and CD), then the Sony is simply the better listen. It’s also dramatically better to look at, ergonomically superior, easier to use and has the joyous bonus of not requiring connection to a video display. If you slot in a Roxy Music ‘Avalon’ SACD and you want the 2-channel mix, you press the MULTI/2CH button and it switches to stereo, instead of requiring the negotiation of

seventeen sub-menus (I exaggerate for effect) to get your desired mix. Even the disc tray feels more solid.

Down to the nitty-gritty. I started the session with ye olde 16/44 CD. Steely Dan’s ‘Do It Again’ proved most interesting. The Pioneer was impressive, with a nicely warm and expansive sound and lots of bass energy through the Quads. It was smooth, sweet and frankly much better than any of us ‘purist’ audiophile snobs would expect from something with (shock-horror) video circuitry. Very tidy treble, sumptuous bass and a capacious three dimensional soundstaging (with Mr

THREE IS THE MAGIC NUMBER – SONY £600 MACHINES THROUGH THE YEARS

- CDP-337ES [1987]**
One of the first Philips TDA1541 aspirated machines, this sturdily built 16x4 affair was a deeply engaging listen – albeit sharp enough to slice your ears off at 20 paces. Actually works better in the context of today’s smoother systems than it did back then.
- CDP-X33ES [1989]**
The first of the Bitstream Sonys wasn’t, strangely, as smooth as you’d think – that was left to the top-of-the-range CDP-X77ES. It was very clean and detailed, but a tad cold, just like its forbear, and also quite mechanical. Great late eighties ‘black box’ styling, though.
- CDP-X303ES [1991]**
This was much more like it – Sony produced a very slick sounding machine with fulsome bass, open midband and very couch treble, allied to a hitherto unfamiliar (for Sony ‘3 Series’ designs) musicality. Nice – well worth seeking out even today.
- SCD-XA333ES [1999]**
Sony now had an SACD player to do occupy the role of its £600 mid-price separates machine, and very good it was too. If anything, on CD it was a bit loose and indistinct – obviously poorer than the X303ES, but then it did SACD as well, and decently too.



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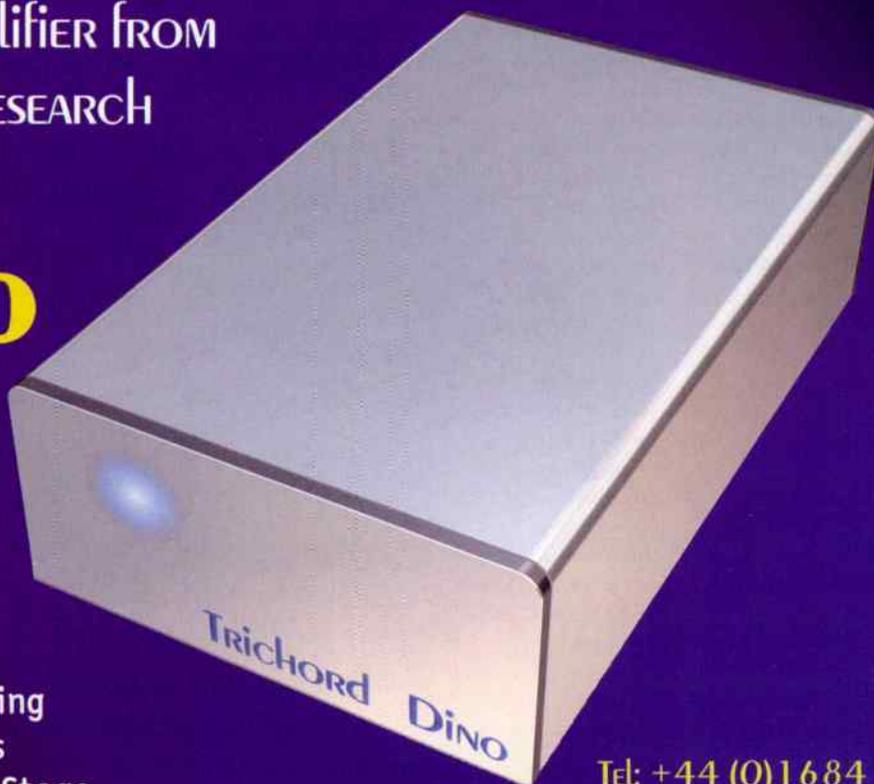
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Fagen located well back behind the plane of the speakers) was all there to be enjoyed. Switching to the Sony, and the bass was a tad drier, the vocals a little forward (coming out in front of the plain of the soundstage) and the upper midband and treble just ever-so-slightly brighter.

Round one to the Pioneer, then? Well no, because the Sony was more engaging. Not only did instruments start and stop with greater precision, making for a punchier and more gripping listen, but the vocals were more believable. The keyboard playing was much more of a 'live event'; you really got the sense of how it was important to the structure of the song, its significance in the great scheme of things. This struck me as more significant to the overall experience than the Pioneer's superficially nicer tone. There was a sense of the Pioneer doing what the Unison Research Unico CD player does [see page 50], albeit to a greater extent, which is appealing to listeners simply by virtue of its sweet 'analogue-esque' tonality. The Sony, by contrast, was altogether more upfront and musically engaging.

Moving to Simple Minds' 'New Gold Dream' on CD, so the pattern continued. The Pioneer conjured a really rather impressive soundstage, with Jim Kerr's ethereal vocals hanging back with admirable reserve (just as they should, if you've got the original vinyl pressing). Switch to the Sony and it was more upfront and in-your-face, although never bright or strident. The vocals shifted forward again, and there was just a hint of upper midband glint that, maybe, shouldn't be there (this album always did sound like it was recorded in a studio lined with cotton wool, after all). But again, the musical performance was more engaging. Tonality aside, the SCD-XA3000ES was better able to convey the song's beginning, middle and end. You got the sense of a musical event, progressing and building to a climax. One could say it was more 'emotionally resolved', conveying the scale and power of the performance. Dynamic contrasts were more explicit. By comparison, the Pioneer was just a little bit too middle-of-the-road. In a sense, voicing a 'universal' player this way is correct – but if you're more into serious, 'take no prisoners' audiophilia, the Sony's presentation was more appropriate.

What then of SACD? Well, both players made distinctly nice noises with Propaganda's 'A Secret Wish'. Their respective characters, that CD had so explicitly signposted, remained

but interestingly there was a narrowing of the gap. The Pioneer remained the tonally richer and rhythmically more louche, whereas the Sony proved more engaging, detailed and incisive. But the superior resolution meant the Pioneer sounded less musically 'plodding' than before, turning in a seriously nice 'hi-fi' sound with oodles of bass weight, treble extension and fine dynamics. Again, the Sony was the more upfront and embracing, with more energy and clarity. Its bass assumed a good deal more weight, and this made for a most enjoyable listen – 'P Machinery' sounded powerful, grippy and dramatic. There was that same fluid midband, that same sense of a musical occasion, but more of the niceties you'd expect from SACD (warmth, space, depth, dimensionality).

Roxy Music's 'Avalon' was no less impressive. This much talked about disc was obviously more impressive on the multichannel mix, but even 2.0 proved powerful and propulsive in a way that the Pioneer was not. Once again, the DV868 relaxed and sat back, happy to give a commendably spacious and atmospheric rendition that the Sony simply couldn't equal. But likewise, the Sony took the music by the seat of the pants and got into the groove. It was 'arresting' and 'emotive' to the Pioneer's 'smooth' and 'sumptuous'. At this point, I thought I'd cue up my turntable (which costs some six times more expensive than either digital disc spinners here) to see how it should be done. And surely enough, we got the Pioneer's depth and dimensionality allied to the Sony's natural musicality and dynamics – and then some. Oh well, you can't have it all for £600, can you...?

Overall, it's a very accomplished machine, the Sony. If you're into music (as opposed to hi-fi) then you'll gravitate to this, much in the same way that you'd take a Naim NAIT 5 CD over the Unison

Research Unico CD for precisely the same reasons. You know it's not quite as 'pleasant' to listen to, but frankly neither is a live concert. In fact, it's actually a little brighter and more bracing than the SCD-XB790QS (at half the price), but altogether more musically coherent. Methinks that with a nicely neutral interconnect (Wireworld, LFD SpiroLink) and some Sorbothane feet to 'tweak' its tone down slightly, allied to a decently smooth integrated amplifier (Roksan M-integrated) and big, sumptuous loudspeakers (Castle Conways), you'd have the ideal mid-price digital system. Recommended.

VERDICT ●●●●£

Not quite as smooth as some, but a very musically engaging and communicative design nonetheless. Brilliant ergonomics, nice build, fine CD playback and great SACD sound make it superb value.

SONY SCD-XA3000ES £599

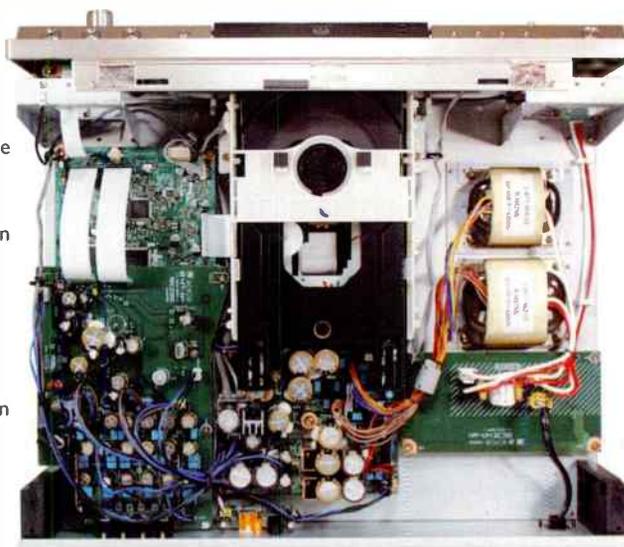
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REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Michell GyroDec turntable
SME Series IV tonearm
Ortofon Kontrapunkt C cartridge
Trichord Delphini NC phono stage
MF Audio Passive Preamplifier
Quad 909 power amplifier
Quad 989 loudspeakers
Townshend Maximum supertweeters



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Sony always engineer CD to a high standard, offering the best specs possible and this player is no exception. With CD it produces little distortion, with SACD it's minimal, our Rohde & Schwarz analyser reading SACD's noise floor. SACD will resolve signals below -100dB and our 5% distortion reading is actually noise.

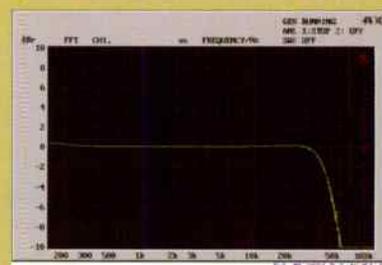
SACD bandwidth reaches 38kHz (-1dB) before output rolls down to -3dB at 45kHz. Although there is output at 98kHz it is low.

CD manages the usual figures, with a super flat response to 21.2kHz (-0.05dB) with continuous signals, but only to 5kHz with an impulse, suggesting digital processing and a softer sound than usual (Sonzs are normally glassy bright). The player had very low distortion of 0.2% at -60dB resulting in large 112dB EIAJ dynamic range value. Output was low at 1.86V. There was a little programme related jitter, peaking at 100ps, not large but not as good as possible.

I suspect this player will sound unusually smooth and easy going. Sony

seem to be trying to tame the hardness of CD to bring it into line with SACD's presentation I have noticed with other players. That seems to be the case here. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)	
SACD	2Hz-38kHz
CD	5-21.2kHz
Separation	
	110dB
Distortion (-60dB)	
SACD	0.08%
CD	0.2%
Noise (IEC A wtd)	
	-104dB
Output	
	1.86V
Dynamic range (CD, EIAJ)	
	112dB



Two Tribes



When the decidedly digital Unison Research Unico CD player met the absolutely analogue Pro-ject RPM9X turntable, it was war – says Dominic Todd.

You have around one thousand pounds to spend on the best sound possible, and no prejudices about whether it's digital or analogue. All you want is the ultimate sonic performance at the price, from the format best able to provide it. So which do you choose? We decided to put two brand new, similarly priced new products from famous and well-respected European specialist manufacturers against one another – the only difference being that one was digital and the other analogue...

UNISON RESEARCH UNICO CD

Just as vinyl enjoyed a revival as Compact Disc became the primary hi-fi source about fifteen years ago, so CD seems to be undergoing something of a renaissance now, with a host of interesting hardware launches and some great value software reissues. One such machine is the newly launched £1,195 Unison Research Unico CD, imported into this country by Italian hi-fi experts

UKD. As one would expect, there's nothing very ordinary or mainstream about this player, and it features everything that you'd expect from a brand seemingly obsessed by the presence of wood and valves. At 11kg, the Unico is heavier than many integrated amplifiers, and the generally solid build quality inspires confidence.

Cosmetically, there's little to get excited about. The slab-fronted panel is sturdy and, the now obligatory, silver. There's a neat wooden badge, and a rather unusual display. Unlike most other displays the Unico uses a large LC Display that features a 64 kb flash memory, allowing it to be personalised. The effect is rather attractive and not unlike using one of the better hard disc recorders. Fortunately, although clear, it's also far from intrusive, which is just as well as it can't be turned off. If you're impressed by the display, then you're even more likely to be bowled over by the remote control. Considering the price of the player, this is one of the nicest I've seen. Fashioned from

solid wood, the effect is extremely high end, and the ability for the remote to "stand up" is a further neat touch!

This is all very well, of course, but if the electronics inside don't match up, then the exercise will have been a waste. Fortunately as much effort appears to have been put into the internal gubbins. Of immediate interest to the audiophile will be the two ECC82 valves. Rather as Luxman did in the early 90s, these are used in the amplifier stage. Fully balanced, and running in triode mode they should offer a considerable input into the overall sound quality. The rest of the machine is less exotic, but well specified. There's a 24/192 Crystal DAC with three digital filters. The CD-ROM mechanism allows the machine to play most copied discs and track access is extremely fast. The downside is that it takes an age to initially read the disc, and then there's the inevitable zoom and whoosh noises that remind you that this transport could also sit happily in a cheapo desk top PC! Perhaps



more seriously is that a digital output is only available as an optional extra. Furthermore, it's only coaxial, so you'll struggle to connect a personal MiniDisc recorder. Overall though, for its £1200 price tag the Unico is a very solid and competitive product. Rivals around this price are many, including the superb Cyrus CD8 (£1,000), Meridian 507 (£1,200) and Naim CD5 (£1,200), so it faces stiff competition.

With the Unico plugged into my reference system, I began by listening to Royksopp's 'In Space'. The analogue quality, leant by the valve output was immediately apparent, and most soothing. Bass had good depth and a reasonable control. However, there are plenty of rivals that would show how it's possible to tighten things up noticeably at the bottom end, whilst throwing greater weight into the bargain to. Still, whilst rivals may have a more convincing bass response, they'd all be rather hard pushed to match the organic flow and relaxed pace of the Unison. Timing and detail retrieval may not have been quite top draw, but there was a measured pace about the Unico that proved engaging to listen to over extended periods of time. Although synthesised the music had a sweetness that was perhaps artificial, yet pleasant to listen to nonetheless. Anyone who finds the opposition too cold and clinical sounding would find

themselves well pleased with the cocooning and soothing Unison.

Norah Jones' 'Shoot The Moon' found this player in its element once again. Solid and well resolved, the vocalist was given plenty of space within the sound stage, and benefited from a fine height of sound to. Compared to my reference CD player I found the vocals to be refreshingly free from sibilance, and quite beguiling to listen to. Less good was the guitar which did lack precision. One couldn't really get a feel for the precise manner in which the strings were being plucked, and it's here that either a Cyrus or Meridian would show the Unison up most. Likewise, the percussion was far from being the sharpest, and would have benefited from a crisper definition. Better, however, was the piano's timbre which sounded natural and, unsurprisingly, rather analogue in its fluid response.

Going back in time, yet up in tempo, with David Bowie's 'Ziggy Stardust' found the Unison less than happy. I had feared that it would be too polite, and so it turned out to be. Bowie and Ronson's guitars were simply far too refined, and subsequently failed to really engage the listener. Similarly the drums lacked impact and there simply wasn't the dynamic scale needed for a song such as this. The effect this has is that the listener will turn the volume higher and higher in order to try and connect with the music, but never quite getting there, even at ear

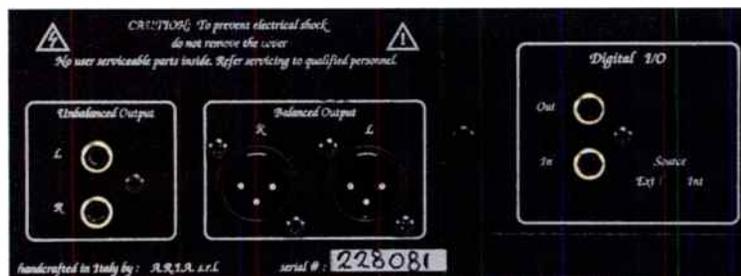
splitting volumes. The timing did rather appear to drag it's feet, and whilst there was little actually at fault with timbre and staging, the over all sound was simply too smooth.

Moving forward to something a little more up to date, The Divine Comedy's 'Perfect Love song' proved more suited to the Unico's presentation. The laid back stance saw the vocals set a little too far back within the sound stage, although the texture was especially good. Those keen to hear detailed nuances from the lead vocal would be pleased by the Unico's ability to portray the details clearly without analytically stripping the voice bear of emotion. There was fine separation of instruments even during the more complex sections, when it can be a struggle to depict details such as a faint violin sound; no problems here for the Unison. Despite the fine resolution though, the lack of drive did once again let the player down. The bass response simply lacked the weight needed to underpin the track.

Much the same balance was evident with Classical music. Vaughan Williams' 'English Folk Song Suite', conducted by Adrian Boult, showed decent timing and some wonderful detailing. The decay of the triangle, for example, was superbly portrayed with the delicate instrument well supported and far from being overlooked. Another strength was the mellifluous string tone that ebbed and flowed in a sweet, almost vinyl-like, manner. Yet these qualities came at the expense of the dynamic scale, which simply couldn't compare to rivalling machines at this price. The brass lacked attack, and the tension and drama in the piece couldn't help but sound somewhat rose tinted and softened.

That the Unico CD player is special at this price point is beyond doubt, but it is not the very best sounding player. The designers have obviously voiced it for a very analogue sound, and the tube output stage is testament to this. As a result, its natural and expressive balance works particularly well with vocals and strings. Likewise, the frequency response appears well covered with no sonic nasties, and certainly no excessive sibilance. This is a player, that with the right music, one could listen to for hours on end without it ever becoming intrusive.

However, you don't get an analogue sound by simply adding few valves to a CD player. This player has an obvious lack of pace and impact that could prove annoying for some listeners, especially if one's system is



Balanced XLR audio outputs shows this player means business...



already biased towards a smooth sound. Detail retrieval can also be patchy, good at times, but slightly stifled at others. There were also times when the generally good sound staging became a little too reserved and recessed. Separation and height of sound, however, never turned out to be an issue. It's an impressively smooth machine, voiced in a very particular way that some will love and others will hate. How then does it compare to its closest analogue price rival, Project's RPM9X turntable?

PRO-JECT RPM9X

As far as the Project range is concerned, this is as good as it gets. It has subtly updated the range-topping £1,000 RPM9 with the effect of making their skeletal deck even more - skeletal. The MDF plinth, as used by the RPM9 reviewed by Hi-Fi World in May 2002, has been changed for a transparent Acrylic. It still houses three adjustable feet and an inverted type bearing, but now has a far more high-end look. Completing this is the existing 3.5kg Acrylic platter, although this is translucent. As before, the AC motor is wisely mounted separately from the plinth. It is metal cased, and sits atop a heavy metal stand not unlike the record clamp. Speaking of which - the brass clamp remains, and can be a real pain to use. Unlike some clamps it doesn't use a screw thread, but doesn't sit straight onto the spindle either. The upshot is that a twisting motion is needed to fit the thing, and if you don't hold on to the plinth hard enough, it can knock it out of kilter with the motor housing. Although the gauge will soon have things lined up, it's annoying none-the-less.

The tone arm is much less

frustrating. This is typically Project in that it offers much for the money, but not the best of finishes.

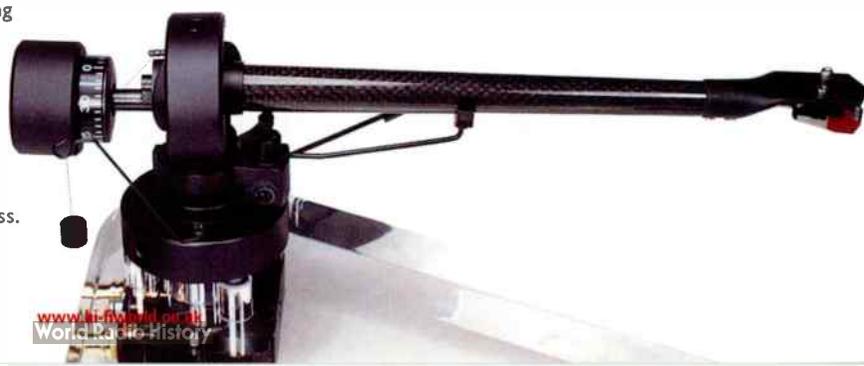
The carbon fibre arm tube adds to the impression of something special, and you can adjust the VTA and azimuth. Anti skating is adjusted by the good old-fashioned (and arguably sonically superior, as there's no spring) means of a swinging weight. Best of all, the good quality tube cable is terminated by gold phono sockets, allowing the listener to choose their own interconnect. The finish is fine, but it's definitely no SME and even struggles to match Rega. Overall though, I found the deck easy to set up, good looking and with a true high end specification and not quite a true high end price. The finish is still not quite in the same league as some rivals, but still a great improvement on Projects of old.

And so to battle. Could the RPM9X work some that fabled 'analogue magic' and better an already very sophisticated CD player? The first disc to hit its twelve inch platter was Coldplay's 'Spies', and it immediately became clear that Project's tweaks have raised the game a notch or two. The precise and bold staging gave the lead vocalist a sense of 'being in the room' that the Unico could never quite replicate. For the price of the player, vocals were as good as they

get, with real presence, texture and coherence. There was a slight touch of sibilance, although this may have been able to be tweaked out by a different cartridge to the Ortofon MC20 Supreme I used. Rather like the vocalist, the guitar was beautifully resolved, with the reproduction being both detailed and precise in timbre. After the Unico, the bass came as something of a surprise. For ultimate weight the CD actually eclipsed it and, perhaps more surprisingly, was warmer in texture too! Yet in terms of timing and tautness, the Project was in another league. Whilst it didn't have the sheer weight of the decks from the class above, it possessed a pace that could really underpin the music, and drive through music in a particularly well integrated manner. In comparison to the Unico it was as though someone had lifted a veil from the speakers...

Grace Jones's 'Pull Up To My Bumper' showed similar control and insight. Bass certainly wasn't the deepest, but the Project made up for it in other respects. The percussion fairly leapt from the 'speakers, yet it managed to pull the whole track together without sounding stilted or disjointed. Key aspects were the fine timing and excellent mid-range clarity that, no doubt, the acrylic platter has done much to clean up. The upper-mid band detail was truly exceptional for a player of this price, despite a new-found alacrity of sound, the texture and involvement didn't suffer.

It was interesting to find that with Donald Byrd's 'Dominoes', the vocals almost sounded a tad too strident. There wasn't the warmth here that I was used to from the Unico. Having said that, of the two it was the Project that was more accurate if not necessarily the more pleasant to listen to. One aspect they had in common was a similarly smooth portrayal of strings. Neither were exactly analytical here, yet both could soothe with a smooth and fluid response. Yet again it was the bassline that showed the real differences between the rival formats. Whilst the RPM9X's proved addictively buoyant,



THE EDITOR SAYS:

Unison Research's new Unico CD spinner is a brave and earnest attempt to make a digital disc spinner that analogue aficionados will be able to live with. And they can. But ironically, it loses much of the grip and speed of digital in the process. It's a lovely sounding bit of kit, but one voiced more for lovers of dinner jazz than thrash metal. On the other hand, Pro-ject's latest RPM9X is vinyl 2004-style – which means light and fast and incisive, rather than soft and fluffy like an old Thorens. The result is that the analog-in disc player for the digital age has, in some respects, more digital attributes than the CD player – and vice versa! Still, the innate irrevocability of analogue wins through, however marginally. These two new products have been noticed. If it's natural sound you're after then, pound-for-pound, we reckon vinyl still wins by a country mile.

although not especially deep, the Unico was far more sluggish in its response.

The Divine Comedy's 'Everybody Knows' had a bite and attack that proved engaging. The key to the Project's success here was that it allowed each type of instrument its own voice, without laying too heavy a colouration of its own across the board. Hence the stringed

captivating and I noticed here, more than with other types of music, the very low levels of surface noise. This no doubt helped the fair dynamic ability of the Project even if the lowest bass notes still didn't sound quite menacing enough.

As a deck in its own right, Project should be very proud of the new RPM9X. It shows a brilliant level of insight into the music and has a

particularly transparent midrange. It never fails to engage the listener, thanks to its fleet-of-foot timing, solid soundstaging and coherent balance. Its bass isn't the deepest and it isn't quite as analytical as some, but for most of the time the listener will be having too good a time to notice, or even care. With the right cartridge I would certainly rank it as one of the best turntables around this price.

Perhaps then it's a little unfair to compare it with the Unico which, in my opinion, isn't one of the best CD players at the price.

Still, it's one of the most characterful and its analogue stance makes it right for this comparison nonetheless. Indeed, in many ways it's remarkably similar to the Project, with a fluid and beguiling sound that could be the perfect tonic to listen to after a hard day at work. Yet in terms of timing, sound staging and sheer presence, the Project is in another league. Both have a likeable and musical sound, but it's only the Project that will keep you up all night rooting through your music collection. Now, just stop and think for a minute. Whatever would we be thinking if, back in 1984, we knew that twenty years later a brand new analogue turntable would have beaten a valve-aspirated digital Compact Disc player? The world is upside down.



instruments were sweet and natural whilst the electric guitar was far more raw with extra stridency and sheer oomph. At times the vocals were almost a little too harsh, but Hannon's vocals stayed just on the right side of brash for me. Had they been any mellower, then they would have somehow lost there intensity and character.

It was with classical music that the two players came closest in character. With Berlioz's 'Symphonie Fantastique' (Jean Martinon conducting the French National Radio Orchestra), the Project ebbed and flowed in a similarly smooth, melodic manner. There was a good balance of analysis and flow, yet it was really no better than the Unico. There are other CD players and turntables at this price that would strip more information off the disc, but whether they'd be as beguiling to listen to is another matter entirely. The RPM9X was never less than

VERDICT ●●●●£
A significant improvement to an already excellent turntable, this sounds unrelentingly musical whatever you play. Only the middling finish detracts from a great package.

PROJECT RPM 9X £1,000
Henley Design
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www.henleydesigns.co.uk

VERDICT ●●●●
An unashamedly analogue sounding digital disc spinner that's as smooth and sweet as they come, but lacks drive and determination.

UNISON RESEARCH
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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

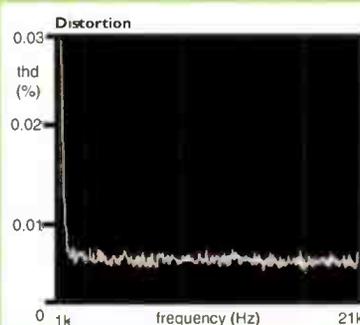
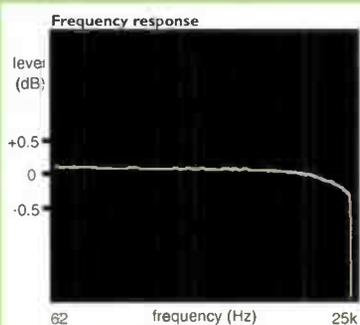
The need to quell CD's oft-cited nature is evident here. Unison gives the player a classic slow response roll off at high frequencies, our impulse analysis shows, damping down any tendency to brightness. As a result the Unico will likely sound smooth and easy going, rather than fast and bright.

Distortion levels were very low, measuring a minimal 0.003% at -5dB. Digital distortion rises as signal level falls however, yet at -60dB the Unico still managed well retaining a low 0.32%. The valve output stage adds a little noise our distortion analysis shows, but at -55dB this will not be audible.

A healthy output of 2.3V will ensure this player makes itself heard in any comparative stem.

The Unico measures well in all areas and will likely sound smooth and open, certainly inoffensive. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)	5Hz-21.2kHz
Separation	111dB
Distortion (-6dB)	0.003%
Noise (IEC A wtd)	-90dB
Output	2.3V
Dynamic range	105.5dB



mail

Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of Precious Metals Interconnects and one years FREE subscription to HI-FI World.



Letter of the Month

LO-FI - MY PART IN ITS DOWNFALL

I am heavily indebted to your excellent magazine, which I started to read regularly in the summer of last year; I quickly realised that Hi-Fi World is in a different league from your many competitors, mainly due to the independence and integrity of your editorial policy and the sound technical knowledge of your contributors. It was with this background established, that my listening world was totally transformed beyond my wildest dreams by the purchase of your October 2003 issue ~ but the story begins forty years ago, when I managed in my early twenties to save up £40 (about one month's net income) as my budget for a new pair of loudspeakers.

Incongruous as it will seem, I was advised at the time by F. Cave & Son, running a very small but well-informed hi-fi dealership over a greengrocer's shop in Putney! When they had established that my main interests were in the fields of classical, operatic and choral music, I was then given the most wonderful piece of advice ~ go away and save up another £20 and then you'll be able to buy a pair of the speakers you liked the most when you listened to them - the Quad ESL57s. So I did just that, and a couple of months later I started my life-long love affair with my Quads ~ mind you, I wasn't too enamoured with the bronze grilles!

A few years later, Quad themselves realised that dull bronze was not the most lounge-friendly colour, and much to my chagrin, changed the grilles to black, which not only looked much better, but stopped friends holding their hands out in front of them on coming into the house in cold weather! A few years later I bought a Cyrus DVD 7 player ~ a superb compromise between the excellent CD7 player and a machine which also gives excellent pictures too! With a large CD collection, the quality of CD sound was vital, which the Cyrus

delivers in spades!

Readers who have followed my story thus far will therefore readily appreciate my great excitement at seeing a picture of my beloved Quad 57s on the cover of your October 2003 issue, with the wonderfully uplifting caption ~ 'Quad's Joyous ESL57 Reborn'. Within a few minutes of buying your October issue, I was reading about the ultimate ESL57s. Sorry to have to launch into superlative-drenched purple prose but, "a good pair of second-hand Quad ESL57s fully rebuilt by One Thing Audio is the best loudspeaker value I've ever come across. For around £1,500 you'll have one of the greatest ways of hearing music yet devised." For those of us reading those words who already owned ESL57s, the investment is even less, since your costing includes the purchase of a pair of used Quads in order to start the process.

Having read three of four monthly issues of your magazine before the fateful October issue in question, I had formed the impression that you were not an Editor to throw superlatives around willy-nilly, and I would have been impressed had you said, "you'll have a great way of hearing music", but it was your choice of, "you'll have one of the greatest ways of hearing music", which really caught my eye. After all, who amongst us who have read in awe of the many tens of thousands of pounds required to buy Linn, Naim, Krell, Macintosh, Wilson Audio, B&W Nautilus, Wilson Benesch, Musical Fidelity, Meridian et al, would ever have dreamt that for about £20,000 LESS, we could own one of the greatest ways of hearing music yet devised!

I can hear many people reading this saying - surely an additional outlay of another £20,000 would produce a better sound, but if your true quest is to achieve the closest approach to the original sound (pace Peter Walker) I think you would be obliged to concede that a top of the range audio set-up costing upwards of £20,000 sounds

different, but it would be a very brave soul to insist on saying that it sounded better than my fully rebuilt Quad ESL57s. (courtesy of first-class workmanship by One Thing Audio of Coventry). I should like to make it quite clear that I greatly respect the manufacturers of all top hi-fi equipment (i.e. all those I have listed above), but Tom Heinitz was right when he said - you don't need to spend a small fortune to achieve a very pleasing result.

For Yes ~ you've guessed it! Just like the man in F. Cave forty years ago, I instinctively felt that you were very sincere in your recommendation to proceed with a rebuild of ESL 57s, and now I can tell your readers that you were right to use superlative-drenched prose when describing the result ~ my rebuilt Quads sound simply state-of-the-art! And of course, my sub-woofer is now totally redundant! But as you might have guessed ~ thanks to your November 2003 issue, I was quite fascinated to read Noel Keywood's article on the Classique Sounds rebuilt Leak Stereo 20 which you yourself said sounded staggeringly good and again, you were spot-on, as I am now the proud owner of the amplifier I really wanted in 1967. I visited Paul Greenfield of Classique Sounds in Leicester, who I found to be very knowledgeable. What's more, I felt him to be completely trustworthy, which was even more reassuring. Anyone who wishes to have reliable advice on pre-owned valve amps, pre-amps and crucially - what goes really well with what ~ should beat a path to his door. In addition to my buying my Leak Stereo 20 from Classique Sounds, he also found me a pre-owned mint condition Rothwell Indus passive preamp (at a £500 saving on the new price!) which is a quite wonderful partner to the Leak. I found Andrew Rothwell of Rothwell Electronics extremely helpful about reasonably priced interconnects ~ I bought Rothwell River interconnects for £85 per pair and a pair of Rothwell

speaker cables for £200 ~ from my perspective, these amounts on cables will buy good quality with excellent sound.

I can promise your listeners that my Quads (£1,175) with my Leak Stereo 20 (£600) and my Rothwell preamp (£350) and my Cyrus DVD 7 (£1,000) set-up sounds like a £20,000 system (obviously without the sheer power available from huge power amps, and without the ability to satisfy headbanger rock music addicts) but for voices, strings, pianos, and orchestral music in an average domestic setting, I would eat my speakers if they were not truly EC-STATIC, as the Oct 03 Hi-Fi World cover put it, with the sound quality! I would be pleased to encourage any of your readers to correspond with me by email to aidanjones@ntlworld.com if they wish to discuss any aspects of my letter.

**Aidan Jones,
Colchester**

Aidan, I'm delighted you're happy with your system. And to everyone else reading this – yes, I know it's a bit of a 'toadying letter', but I just had to make it LOTM because this guy is obviously over-the-moon with his purchases – and it's a 'good news' story in the middle of a grim winter. And I can see why Aidan's so happy - the One Thing Audio modded ESL57s are superb, in my humble opinion. Having moved to a brand new pair of ESL989s (plus Townshend Maximum super-tweeters), I can honestly say that – in some respects – the modded 57s win the day. They certainly sound less clinical and more punchy. (Still, I reckon the 989s are exquisite, all the same). I'm using the NS1000Ms as my secondary reference speakers these days, simply because Noel and I were of the view that I should be running contemporary products as a reference. When I had the One Thing modded 57s (often powered by the Audio Research Vsi55 – "kowabunga!"), I didn't find myself yearning for the Yam's visceral 'thwack'. Now, with the 989s, I do – they're an altogether politer and more refined experience. But I have to say they're the best looking loudspeakers I've ever seen – especially in the 'Granny's Knickers' finish mine are in... Oh, and by the way – Paul Greenfield from Classique Sounds is indeed a diamond geezer, and readers could do with giving him a buzz before bidding on an overpriced bit of tat on eBay! From now on, however, 'toady comes' will automatically be disqualified from LOTM – hit me

with the big issues, guys. Speaking of which... **DP**



**One Thing Audio
modded ESL57s
– sublime.**

MOVING TO MULTICHANNEL

I am considering making the leap from stereo CD reproduction to surround sound, but am having a few problems interpreting some of the jargon despite being technical. I have come across a number of recordings from the 1950s and '60s which were only originally recorded in 2 track (e.g. Miles Davis 'Kind of Blue'), being sold as DTS 5.1 surround sound? How can this be, I didn't realise it was possible to separate sounds/instruments from a single recorded track even in the digital domain! What is the definition of true surround sound and does a recording have to be made with surround sound in mind to produce the proper result? I ask this with respect to the remastering of old multitrack recordings as well as two track.

The reason for my doubts is that I fear the advent of SACD and DVD-A although admirable, will give the record companies yet more opportunities to miss-sell by inaccurately describing the recording or production process. Also, in cases where the original artist cannot be present, remastering for surround sound will require more subjective decisions on the presentation of the music, maybe producing a result the artist would not have liked.

Another problem in the past has been record companies practice of not using original analogue masters to make CDs, even when available. Can we be sure this will not happen again, as this would infuriate the audiophiles they are trying to appeal to. What a cynic, I hear you say - go on take that leap into the 21st century! Some people still swear by 78s! Could the struggling record industry be about to shoot itself in the foot yet again?

Julian Davies

Our correspondent Patrick Cleasby is actually a DVD mastering engineer by trade (eighties music fans look out for his multichannel remastering of John Fox's 'Metamatic', out soon), so I thought I'd defer to his God-like genius on this point. Excuse me while I put the kettle on, and – whatever he says – I couldn't agree more! **DP**

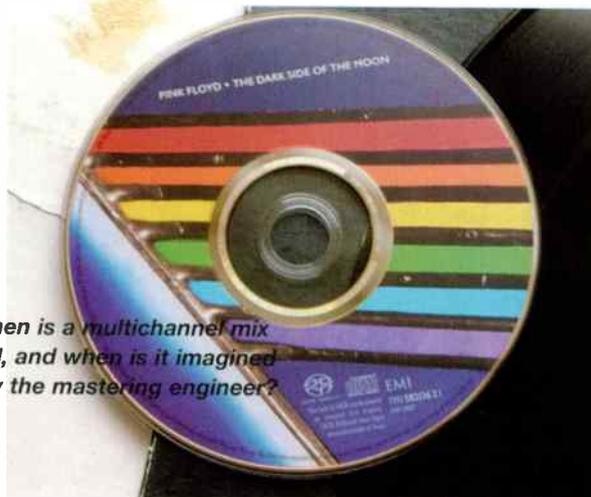
There is indeed a veritable minefield to be negotiated in trying to find your way to a 'true' surround mix. It's one of the reasons that we try to select and review the best examples of the genre for you. With a few exceptions (see this month's Depeche Mode review for a discussion of 'faux surround') we will only present you with true 'discrete-mixed' titles for consideration. In my experience, very pleasing results can be obtained by remixing most multi-track material, even that from before the quad age. Sophisticated surround reverb may well be used in the digital domain as part of the process, most commonly using a TC Electronics TC6000. As you mention, it can be mystifying defining how mid-20th century recordings have been 'expanded' for 5.1, but if you're interested, the Sinatra DVD-A sleeve describes the process from a 4-track start point, or the Beach Boys DVD-A explains the complexities involved in syncing the separate vocal elements to the instrumental from their respective tapes.

'Kind Of Blue' was reputedly remixed from a three-track master, and the assumption has to be that the (minimal) rear channel ambience is artificially created. Who knows what Miles would have said? There are fine examples of surround mixes

based on copy masters through necessity - although the bulk and expense of 2" analogue means that you are much less likely to find a copy master unless a digital safety copy was struck at some point - albums such as 'Aja', 'Forever Changes', 'Close To The Edge' and 'Who's Next' are currently all stuck at the first hurdle with some or all their reels missing. Fear not and join the party! **PC**

Surround sound can be derived from stereo, although not from mono. The process of derivation from stereo is described at some length on the Dolby Labs web site (www.dolby.com), with relation to the workings of Dolby Pro Logic. These days, with the benefit of good steering logic, this processing yields impressive results; I often prefer Pro Logic surround-sound to stereo from CD. What you have to bear in mind here, as wise minds have pointed out, is that stereo is not theoretically perfect. Microphones fold ambient information into the front channel, which strictly isn't correct, and the sound stage is constructed in your head by a trick we all just accept. So there's nothing too perfect about stereo, although it does a fine.

Yes, modern surround-sound schemes are a contrivance, part of the production process - they are not faithful recreations of a sound field. All the same, you'll find most surround mixes are engaging or even dramatic. They are also a lot clearer than stereo. It's best not to get too sniffy about all this and just listen - I think you may well enjoy! **NK**



When is a multichannel mix real, and when is it imagined - by the mastering engineer?

OH, AND ANOTHER (ONE) THING...

I just got finished reading your recent review of the original Quad ESL loudspeaker. Overall, a very good review, however, there are several errors with this review. First, the clamp circuit does not in any way degrade the sound

quality of the speaker. I have allowed literally dozens of ESL owners compare the speaker both ways. No one has ever been able to tell which speaker was clamped, and which speaker was not. All ESL owners should fit their speaker with the clamp circuit no matter what amp they are using.

While the new One Thing Audio panel is very nice, it is a far cry from the original. Sonically it is quite different. Your own tests demonstrate my position, showing an overall efficiency of 82dB. This is far below the original spec of 86dB and this lower sensitivity is typical of after-market panel rebuilds. One Thing, as I understand it, does not use the original nylon coating on their panels.

Secondly, you noted a slight peak at 12kHz. Again, original panels will not demonstrate this peak. This is, again, quite common for panels that are not rebuilt correctly. One Thing is a great company, and does a great job of working with the ESL. Their tweeter rebuilds or new panels do not match what was originally delivered by Quad and sound quite different. There are rebuilders that can provide exact replicas of the original panel using the exact original materials and tensioning techniques. One Thing makes some major changes to their panels and this results in a rather major shift in the overall performance of the speaker. Lower efficiency, peaky top end.

Kent McCollum

*"I refer the gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago". You're right, the One Thing Audio panels do sound - and measure - differently; but better in my opinion. I'd say that your last sentence is a rather 'reductive' appraisal of the mods - things aren't as simple as that. As for the clamp - well, myself and ex-Eds Jon Marks and Simon 'Popemeister' Pope all agree that the clamps don't do the sound any favours, and even the Quad boys themselves mutter the same - quietly, under their breath, strictly off the record, you understand... Still - each unto their own; I'm not claiming my ears are definitive (no more than anyone else's). I stand by my warm words about the modded ESL57s. **DP***

The original ESL63 clamp circuit, which was a self powered limiter in the audio transformer primary circuit, introduced muddle and compression as volume was wound up - I remember it well! Quad acknowledged this and in the end came up with high voltage clamp diodes in the secondary that did a much better job.

I have always measured Quads out at around 82dB, never 86dB. Manufacturers often veer into extreme optimism here!

I personally liked the ESL-57 rebuild and was very impressed by the way it measured. No problems here.

NK



Castle Howard S3 - big hearted, sweet natured.

SAMPLE THIS

It's been some time since you published my ranting as your 'letter of the month', summer of 2003. I still think the same about the Philips Motional Feedback 'speakers, and did buy a second set to keep as spares to keep them going. These came with a torn bass driver and real shabby cabinets. I patched the cone up with wood glue, applied sparingly and teased the fibres out and together, let it dry and tried them. Believe it or not, they not only worked but sounded superior to the other pair by a fair margin! I believe they call it 'product variability' or something like that?

Now if this is consistent with all products, what chance of getting two the same let alone buying something that sounds like the demo model? I wonder how many manufacturers or distributors select the samples they let out for review? Call me cynical but I would guess it's fairly common. Any chance of covering this as a subject in the future and seeing how much a product varies during its production life?

The Philips have been put away while I find time to build new cabinets for them and improve and replace the DIN sockets. I am using a pair of Dalesford Ds, circa 1978, and an old Proton 930 receiver in the meantime.

The *Proton* is truly excellent, if anything warranted inclusion in the classic section, this does. Smooth, detailed and powerful beyond its 30W rating. As you are probably aware it's made by the people who first made NAD gear, just seems to be even better built with more modern components. Same people made the AMC range also I believe?

I bought the Dalesfords after trying to buy a sensibly priced pair of JRI 49s, they aren't half bad and were my other choice way back in 1978 when I did buy a pair of JRs - wish I'd kept them, be worth a fortune now. My free LOTM cables? Not bad, but after a lot of A-B'ing I still prefer the ones I use on the CD player and the jury's still out when used on the other sources. Speaker cables are a home brew version of the many cat5 projects on the 'net - any of you guys tried them and if so what do you think? They successfully outperformed some QED silver coated stuff I bought. Anyway enough of my rambling, work calls. It's the bane of the drinking classes you know! Would appreciate any feedback on the above.

Gary Francks

Hi Gary,

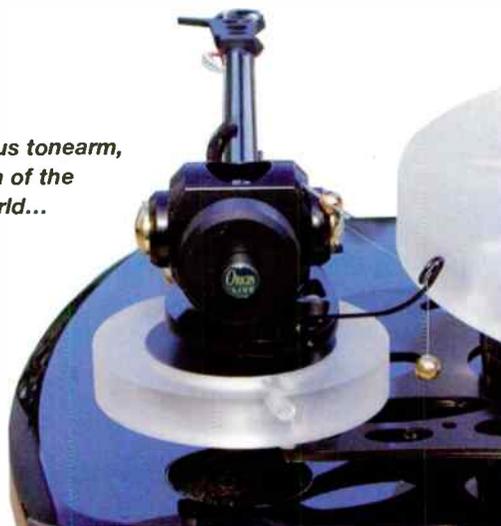
Sample variability? This happens far more than we think. And it's not just between two different samples from the same batch (which will throw up differing component tolerances), but different batches change subtly as component suppliers change or minor mods are made to the design in the name of reliability (or cost saving). For example, I've had several Sony CDP-101 first generation CD players. The first one I bought was one of the best sounding silver disc spinners I've ever heard, bar nothing. The next one wasn't bad, but sounded thin and grey by comparison. I spoke to Eric Kingdon at Sony and he said that they'd changed something minor mid-way through the product's life, and - yes - the earlier ones did sound better.

Does this then mean that manufacturers cherry pick the samples they send to magazines? Well, who knows? But I'll say that it's more often 'cock-up' than 'conspiracy'. If I had a Cliff Richard single for every time we've come across a faulty and/or duff review sample, then I'd be Radio One's very own Mike Read, pop-pickers! As tantalising as it is for us to suppose that nasty, inscrutable manufacturers are constantly tweaking stuff for magazine reviews, in my experience it is not the case. More prosaically, they occasionally hold back review samples to run them in, because certain (other) hi-fi magazines have

been known to review them after having just plugged in brand new, never used products... Ho hum, enough said.

As for JRI 49s - time was when they were fifty quid in second hand shops, and now suddenly everyone thinks they're the ultimate! May I remind folk that they're just re-bodied LS3/5a, which are great little mini-monitors, but not flawless (sorry AL!). Give me Linn Kans any day... **DP**

Origin Live Illustrious tonearm, the JP Montoya of the turntable world...



WAITING IN VAIN

Thanks for putting my query in the February edition of **The** magazine (uh oh - another 'toady alert' - Ed). Since that email, I have been busy listening to many turntables and arm and cartridge combinations:

- [1] Michell Orbe SE + Morch + Shelter 901
- [2] Origin Live Resolution + Illustrious + vdh MC One
- [3] SME 10 + IV + Shelter 901
- [4] Musical Fidelity M1 + Shelter 901
- [5] Linn LP 12 (Akito + Dynavector DV10) & (Ekos, Lingo, Akiva)
- [6] Avid Diva + Rega arm (I think) + Ortofon MC25FL
- [7] Orbe SE + OL Encounter + Transfiguration Temper V
- [8] OL Resolution + Illustrious + Lyra Helikon
- [9] Michell Orbe SE + SMEV

I have come to the conclusion that, as you already mentioned in your response, the Orbe is the best compromise. I am still waiting to hear the Avid Volvere (and or the Sequel) but this will only be possible (in London anyway) at the end of this month and this is probably the only one that could steer me away from the Orbe. Anyway, what I wanted to ask you was what is your opinion of Origin Live (Encounter & Illustrious) and SME arms (IV & V) with regard to their sonic characteristics and their strengths and weaknesses (assuming you've heard them)?

My views on the above combinations are mixed and varied, but I find the Shelter cartridge slightly too soft and warm for me. It does sound very good, but in these combinations, not quite right for me. The two that impressed me most were [7] and [8], with [7] winning due to the Transfiguration cartridge. It is more in line with the balance I prefer, though I wonder whether using the Illustrious or SMEV would produce more bass?

Whilst waiting for your response, I

went on holiday to Hong Kong and bought a temporary cartridge upgrade for my ageing Sansui SR 212 - the Shure V15VxMR came up very cheap and I couldn't not take it up (your Dynavector was double the Shure in price). Anyway, will this Shure serve as a starter cartridge for the Orbe and one of the OL/SME arms until I can save up for something like the Temper? Please do not publish this in the magazine ... I can't wait another 3 months!

Chi

Hmmm. Nice simple query - that's what I like! Right, first things first. OL vs. SME arms. I haven't 'happened upon' the Encounter, so can only speak of the Illustrious. Right now, I have two reference vinyl sources - a Michell Orbe/OL Illustrious/Ortofon Kontrapunkt B and a Michell GyroDec/SME Series IV/Dynavector DV20X-H, both going through a Trichord Delphini NC. The OL arm sounds very different to the SME, although bizarrely quite similar. Both scavenge vast amounts of detail, both have very authoritative and commanding bottom ends and extended highs. Both are highly dynamic, yet very incisive with low level nuances. So they both press all the right buttons, yet their respective characters are so much at odds.

If I may use a Formula One analogy, if ever there was a Michael

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Schumacher of tonearms, it is the SME IV (and V – they're virtually identical sounding). It is so darned efficient – it just goes in and does the job, without complaint, totally consistently, time after time, with dazzling results. Yet you can't help but feel it's all a little, ermm, boring. Now the SME isn't a boring listen – far from it – it's just that its sheer all round ability and general lack of definable character means it not naturally endearing to human beings! The Illustrious, however, is far more of a JP Montoya. It's fiercely capable, yet obviously more emotional in the way it does things. It has a certain swing, an obviously discernable character about the way it plays rhythms – it's very warm and beguiling, where the SME is mechanical. It also has superb tonal colour. Don't get me wrong, it's not coloured but rather boasts an 'inky black' signature that lets the music's own tonality shine through. The SME is a tad more homogeneous – it's full and open sounding, yet doesn't quite dissolve in the way the Illustrious does.

Well, this is my two cents – but for our intrepid correspondent Stewart Wennen's view, you'll have to turn to page 17. Oh, and sorry about the wait. We get a lot of letters from readers saying, 'please help NOW, because I'm just about to buy something tomorrow'. But as we have six week lead times, I'm afraid we can't always oblige. I try to give instant email replies when I possibly can, but you'll have noticed that Hi-Fi World has rather a lot of content compared to certain other publications, and doesn't write itself! I hope you understand. **DP**

WASTING MY MUSIC?

Advice required on speaker choice! My system consists of Arcam 8 SE CD player, Pro-ject RPM4 with Goldring 1042, Croft Super Micro preamp rewired and recently Glen Croft modded, Audio Innovations 800 25w triode monoblocks (again Glen modded) cabled QED 2 interconnects with cheap Cable Talk tri-wired to SD OBS speakers with internal silver wiring. I listen to jazz and soul and will be listening about 7 hours a day, and I like bass but not boom. My living room measures 20x12x8ft. I need to reduce the speaker options down from my list of ProAc D1.5, Spendor SP2, Castle Howard S3, Living Voice Auditorium, PMC FB and IPL S3tm ribbon. I listened to the Perigee FK-1 at a hi-fi show and loved them, but can't afford them. My budget is about £1500.

Alan Cross
Via email

Hi Alan – in a nutshell, I'd go for the Castle Howard S3. If you liked the big 'physicality' of the Perigees, then you'll find the Castles do the same – albeit on a slightly reduced scale, one that should work well in your room. The Howards are also ideal for jazz and soul, as they're full, rich and creamy with what my father would call 'a good tone'. They're easy to drive and with bass aplenty, but shouldn't boom unless you put them too close to a rear wall.

DP



Sony CDP-101 – like many hi-fi separates, not every batch sounded the same...

THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS...

Having recently purchased a Pro-ject Xpression turntable for a mere £190 in the January sales, I feel inclined to write to share how much pleasure this little deck has brought me. Having previously owned LP12s and a couple of Regas, I have to say this deck knocks spots off them! Okay, it may not be built to the same Linn quality but in terms of sound in my eyes and ears it's way ahead. It is crisp, clear, has great imaging and stage depth with low colouration, and it has upgradeability built in, as the arm will take far costlier cartridges than the Ortofon OM10, and it comes fitted with along with electronic speed change if you want it. This deck sings through my Sugden A21a amp and Quad 111 'speakers. I suppose the moral of the story is you don't have to spend serious dosh for great sound.

Tony Hodgkinson
Coventry

Blimey Tony – have you been on the Christmas sherry? A £190 Pro-ject that beats LP12s...? I'm very happy for you, and delighted at your finding a bargain, but am not completely sure that the 1 is a Linn beater... Each unto their own! **DP**

NEW ADVENTURES IN HI-FI

Around 12 months ago I bought a second-hand Thorens TD160 Mk1 complete with TP16 arm, Shure V15 Type 3 cartridge with TP60 head shell alignment device. The whole package was delivered to my door for a total outlay of £160. When I eagerly unwrapped it I was delighted to find it

in pristine order, the cover had never been used as the previous owner had it installed in a cabinet. My new project had arrived. I started to research Thorens turntables using the Internet and found a plethora of useful resources several of which turned out to be invaluable. I would heartily recommend any interested parties visit <http://www.theanalogdept.com>, which has specific pages dedicated to Thorens turntables, <http://www.vinylengine.com> and not forgetting <http://www.tnt-audio.com>, though this page got me

making cables and power leads which postponing the project for several months!

The article that completely grabbed my imagination was in the TD-160 Department, and discussed setting up and tweaking a Thorens TD-160 and creating something to rival the very best suspended chassis turntables available. These were derived from the 'Legendary Chadwick modifications'. I have since learned that this particular gentleman, now sadly deceased, had a formula for modifying Thorens TD-125s which can be adopted for the TD-160. The recommendations are as follows:- Baltic birch plywood 1/2" replacing the existing bottom plate with three spikes or cones underneath.

- Isolation of the 3 suspension springs of the suspension using new gaskets and silicon.
- Dampening the top of the motor plate and the underside of the top plate with 2 kinds of silicon damping material.
- Readjustment of the bearings and selective damping of the arm tube.
- Dampening of the platter hub with silicon and rebalancing.
- Lining the underside of the arm board with cork for further isolation.
- Replacing the rubber mat with a Chadwick "Corktone" mat.
- Replacing the standard interconnect with a Sumiko PIP box and the interconnects of your choice.
- Installing and aligning of the arm and cartridge of your choice.

I am about two thirds of my way through the modifications and there are many more suggestions and set-up techniques throughout these sites which

I hope to try at some later date. I am also scouring and bidding on eBay for a good SME 3009 arm and am considering a cartridge upgrade (advice please). For the moment though my Thorens is spending much of its time on its side or being dismantled while I try to squeeze every ounce of performance from this brilliantly designed turntable. Many of these modifications should work well with any suspended TT such as Ariston, Linn LP12 and Systemdeks as well as most Thorens. Careful experimentation and research will lead you down the path of audio Nirvana. Oh! And by the way, the rest of my system consists of Quad 67 CD player, Quad 34 pre, Quad 306 power and Shahinian Super Elf speakers. All the speaker cables and interconnects bar those used for the turntable are home made using quality components. Finally, thanks to the magazine for introducing me to this fascinating and interesting hobby.

Garnet D Newton-Wade
Wiltshire

Sounds like you're having fun, Garnet! You're right – the Thorens mods should work with any suspended subchassis belt drive (Linn, Systemdek, STD, etc.) as they're all close variations on the same theme! For your forthcoming SME 3009S2, get a Goldring G1042 (£120) MM cartridge, or if you can possibly afford it, a Shure V15VxMR (£350). When all this is finished, you should have a superb sounding deck. Don't forget the support though – you might be interested to see page 72! Do write in and tell us how you got on. **DP**

GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME?

I am thinking of upgrading my CD player. I have a Marantz CD 63 SE, and am thinking of a Marantz CD 6000OSE LE or NAD 541i. Are they significantly better than my '63 SE in their sound quality? Which sounds better - the NAD or the Marantz? I have two Rotel power amps; upgraded B&W 330i floorstanders, valve preamp and Kimber 8TC cable. Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

Steve
Via email.

No, they're not significantly better! Indeed, even the new CD7300 isn't. Don't ever think that just by buying 'the latest version' of your existing machine, you'll get better sound. You'll probably get better ergonomics, more features, a nicer finish in a contemporary colour, etc., but you'll likely not get dramatically better sonics. That's because great sound comes from a mixture of

clever design and high quality components – and whilst the former may be improved slightly, the latter will only have got better if the price has gone up significantly. To wit, if you bought a Marantz SA-1751 (£1,400) you would get dramatically superior sound – but just replacing your '63SE with the latest model would change things – as opposed to improve them. Of the two, I'd say they're pretty evenly matched, with the NAD having possibly just a smidgeon more life and the Marantz just a tad warmer. The cheapest upgrade you could make is a CD6000 KI Signature (under £500 discounted), which would bring greater depth, power and expression – but for a comprehensive upgrade I'd go for a Meridian 507 (£1,100). This will yield an altogether more sophisticated and organic sound, with a rich and warm bass, beautifully lucid midband and smooth and spacious treble – by contrast, your Marantz will sound just a touch mechanical and two-dimensional. Good luck!

of the Nuvista on similar equipment to my own, other than the fact that rather than my budget £25 interconnects, Cardas Cross was used. The difference was quite staggering and I have once again gone down the Nuvista route but using Cardas golden cross interconnects. Not cheap, but the results are well worth it. I am currently experimenting with speaker cable to link to my Kef 405/3s. Generally I believe your system is only as good as its weakest link and that when considering an upgrade all areas need to be considered. Cables, all of them including power, form an equal part of the system and, as a rule of thumb, I would suggest that at least 25% of the total system cost should be invested here. No matter what you spend on your amplifier, CD deck, etc., you are heading for disappointment if you try to use the cables that come with the unit.

Peter Bennett

Hi Peter – yes, I take your point. You're absolutely right that poor cables can spoil an otherwise superb



Audio interconnects – essential accessory or get-rich-quick scheme?

DP CROSS TALK

I read with interest your reply to Ben (May 2003 letter of the Month - sorry I am a little behind with my reading!) and whilst I am sure that your advice is valid there is one vitally important area I feel you have neglected. Some time ago I took the opportunity to purchase a second-hand Musical Fidelity Nuvista CD player at a very good, but still huge, price. This was run bi-amped through a MF F16 and P270-2 (I have been searching for another good 2nd hand F16 for months without success - if anyone has one for sale, please contact me on 07971 445704) which has the same circuitry as the F16. Having forked out the readies I was very disappointed with the result. So much so that I let the CD player go again at the same price I bought it for.

Some time later, I had the opportunity again to sample the delights

machine or system. But my low opinion of cables in general comes from the fact that the cost of manufacturing a £200 1 metre pair of interconnects is, I'd say, about one tenth of that of making £200 CD player, amp or speakers. I have no hard facts to substantiate this, other than anecdotal comments that certain manufacturers mumble to me from time to time. For example, cable manufacturer A will complain to me that cable manufacturer B's cables are cheapo proprietary wire bought from China, given a day-glo dielectric and shiny gold phono plugs – and sold with a massive mark up. There seems to be a lot of this going on. I'm not saying that all cable manufacturers are doing this (absolutely not so), but it happens more than it should, and it's easy to make a fast buck from cables than from most other things in hi-fi, or life

for that matter! So that's why I'm predisposed to being a sceptic. Which is not to say that all cables are rubbish, as there are patently some superb designs out there from established and not so established brands alike. You just have to listen to the cables in the context of your own system, with your music, and your ears – don't just buy on the strength of rave reviews. **DP**



Sony SCD-XB790 SACD spinner – creamier than a bottle of Baileys.

IMPROVING THE TANDY LX5

Some months ago I read a couple of articles on the Internet published by Larry van Wormer and Eric Wallin, regarding improvements to the little Tandy LX5. You remember, the little reflex box with the Linacum ribbon tweeter? I have a couple of pairs of these great little units which, for the price, far outperform any normal box speaker I have heard. The main drawbacks were always an understandable lack of deep bass and a peaky midrange. The Internet articles suggested that changing the bass/mid driver to a SEAS unit worked well and brought about much more detail, smoothness and better power-handling. Additionally, a simple crossover modification could improve things still further.

So I swapped the stock drivers for the SEAS MRCY14P units expecting a minor revelation (they dropped directly in without needing any alteration). Shock horror – smooth yes, but what bass the originals did have has now completely vanished! Tests showed that bass response now falls off a cliff face below 300Hz. The originals got down to about 120Hz before starting to roll off. Now I am no speaker designer and assumed that the crossover, which I have not touched, would simply manage the interface between the bass and treble drivers and therefore make no significant difference to the depth of the bass response. So why has the bass disappeared? The wiring is in phase, the new drive units have been checked out OK. I have no way of contacting the publishers of the articles, despite placing this issue on various newsgroups etc.. Has anyone else tried this upgrade and did they experience similar problems? Any help would be greatly appreciated. **Anon.**

I remember the Tandy LX5s, and recall hearing two completely different speakers in one box – a lovely, sweet and open tweeter allied to a boomy and flatulent woofer with little in the way of midband. But that's just me. If there's any one out there with help for 'Tandy man', please do write in...

DP

(CLOG) COUNTRY LIFE

Due to domestic circumstances, I listen to my stereo through headphones a lot. My dad gave me his Wharfedale Isodynamic headphones because he never used them anymore. They must be some twenty five years old, but still sound nice. But what is Isodynamic, or is (was) it just a marketing thing, and how were they rated in their days? Friendly greetings from clog country, **Hans Bakker**
Nederlands

As I remember it, they used a lightweight diaphragm onto which was printed a conductor that carried the audio current. The resultant varying magnetic field interacted with a static field generated by magnets. It's not a new idea by any means and it works tolerably well, but a step down transformer is often required and the whole is often bulky and expensive. **NK**

NATURAL MAGNETISM?

I've been recently concerned with a number of people reporting problems with their TV picture when hi-fi speakers have been placed next to the TV. I have a pair of floorstanding TDL G30s, and one of the speakers is next to my widescreen Sony TV. I've had these speakers for a number of years and therefore cannot remember if they have magnetic shielding. I've searched the internet and tried to find technical information for these speakers, however have had no luck so far! Can anyone offer any advice?

Prafull

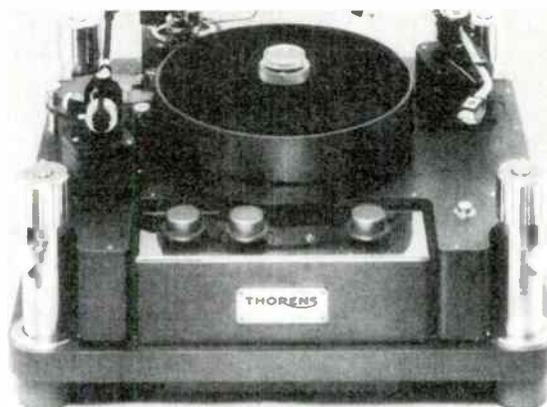
If there is a problem you will see it as distortion of the picture and change of the colours. This is quite

obvious. Try moving the speaker away by 'walking' it and watch what happens to your picture. If it changes then you should move the speaker away. **NK**

BLOW UP!

I was interested in purchasing the Sony SCD-XA3000ESN A SACD player as the reviews rave about its smooth and rounded delivery. I listen to much rock and pop which often doesn't sound too great - thin and bright; and even if there is bass the treble can still be too unruly. Good hi-fi can often ruthlessly reveal these imperfections but it doesn't have to be like this. I have the new Sennheiser 650 headphones and they make everything sound wonderful - natural, warm, and easy to listen to, much better than the 600s. I wish I could find speakers that sound like these. After your fabulous review of the Sony SCD-XB790 I wonder if I might be better off with something like that? Although the SCD-XA3000ESN SACD player may be more revealing I would always prefer something more easy to listen to in the long run - like the wonderful 650 headphones. So perhaps the XB790 may be a better bet. I might have to wait until you have reviewed XA3000ESN A - what do you think? **Kevin Blow**

With an unusually soft and creamy sound, the XB790 is quite unlike any budget Sony CD spinner I've heard, but methinks you'd do better to hold out for the more expensive SCD-XA3000ESN if you can afford it. I've just heard one driving the PA at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in Soho, and it was very convincing indeed. We've got this on order – so watch this space for a full review - and I'm looking forward to hearing the new SCD9000 soon, too. Still, if you want the smoothest and sweetest SACD spinner that mere mortals can afford (just), I'd wager that Marantz's SA17 is it. **DP**



Can TD160 tweaks take it up to Thorens Reference standard?

Hot and Cold



Not to put too fine a point on it, there are two types of transistor amplifiers in this world – those biased towards Class A and those not. Anatek Audio's new A50 integrated is the former, while Roksan's new Caspian M Series-1 integrated is the latter. David Price works up a sweat...

Life is never simple, and in hi-fi this rule is all too apparent. This isn't the story of a 'good' amplifier versus a 'bad' one - George 'Dubyah' Bush wouldn't approve. Rather, it's a tale of two tribes of audio amplifier design, all the more striking because this isn't about a small specialist British manufacturer versus the best a massive Japanese multinational can offer, but of two - ermm - small specialist British manufacturers... In the red corner we have Anatek Audio's A50 integrated. It's from a tiny specialist 'start-up' manufacturer, looks like a bag of bits in a box and gets very warm when switched on, thanks to its Class A design. Opposite, we have Roksan's new Caspian M Series-1 integrated, which is from an established and respected small-to-medium size manufacturer. It looks swish, is beautifully presented and is much more of a Class AB-biased device.

ANATEK

Never heard of Anatek? No, I hadn't either. But pulling it out of the box, I was struck by an uncanny feeling of déjà-vu - as I was magically

transported back to the late eighties, where the likes of Exposure's X and NVA's AP30 'super integrations' reigned supreme. Aside from the blue power LED (which I assume hadn't been invented then), it was pure 1988-style minimalism. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but these days even Naim's NAIT 5 is a sleek and svelte affair with electronically switched volume and inputs. The Anatek, by contrast, is - well - just as amplifiers used to be, with nothing more than a volume control, input selector (at six, thankfully a few more than standard-issue eighties stuff), tape monitor (hurrah!), power switch and err, that's it.

Inside, designer Clive Read has come up with - so Anatek says - patented output topology that 'resolves the performance issues associated with conventional output stages', essentially giving Class A performance without the problem associated with pure Class A output stages, that of excessive heat. Yet still the amplifier is not biased towards Class AB operation, which is cooler but produces sonically deleterious crossover distortion. Still, while it's

true that the A50 runs far cooler than classic Class A designs like Musical Fidelity's A1 and Sugden's A21a, it is not true to say that it 'runs cool', for it does not.

The Anatek's output stage is direct coupled, eliminating the need for sound-degrading electrolytic capacitors in the audio path. The circuitry is designed to have low dc drift, so thermal memory effects - the momentary distortion caused by loud transients - are negligible, and the amplifier has a single low frequency time constant, the input coupling capacitor, for fast bass. A non-invasive electronic protection system is also featured, that shuts down the output stage when the output current reaches 12 amps. Finally, the inputs, outputs and mains inlet of the A50 all have RF filtering, while all amplifying stages have minimal gain at RF. Round the back, it's much of a muchness - save some distinctly poor and weedy looking speaker terminals.

ROKSAN

Now, if the Anatek sports pure unreconstructed Eighties ergonomics



Both back panels are similar, but the Roksan is better finished...



and styling (although, methinks, not self-referentially so), then the Roksan is 'state-of-the-art' late nineties high tech. It's a truly well packaged product that looks cool, feels great to use and never obstructs what the user wants from it. The fascia is silver metal, with a centrally inset display window which subtly shows which source is selected or whether it's muted or not, while the red LED on the volume control tells you how loud it should be. And all this is mirrored on a small, slick remote – which is one notable thing the Anatek lacks. As for the aforementioned heat issue, this amp runs cooler than James Bond in Casino Royale, by which you can infer that it won't provide much of a boost to your central heating.

This, the latest incarnation of the Caspian, is marginally more expensive than its predecessor, but boasts a lot for the money. Aside from the aforementioned swish styling and ergonomics, inside you'll find a new, 'super-quiet' transformer – a massive toroid that puts the Anatek's already decently sized donut to shame, with four regulated supply rails. The PSU makes up much of the 12kg weight, which is a little higher than that of the Anatek. There's also improved speaker switching and protection software, new mains filter circuitry and more efficient venting. Measuring 432x350x80mm, the M-integrated's casing is marginally slimmer than the Anatek. Round the back, you get chunkier speaker socketry than the Anatek, plus five pairs of RCA inputs plus a single tape monitor loop – and an IEC mains input with switch (the Anatek is, in a nod to convenience, switched on and off on the front panel). There's also a handy preamp output – for bi-amp or upgrading, whereas the Anatek is 'like it or lump it!' Upon switch on, the M Series-I goes into mute mode, signified on the front panel by three flashes of

the display and the 'mode' beacon glowing orange. Then, when ready for action, it goes green.

SOUND QUALITY

It's a tricky one, this. Both amplifiers are truly excellent products, giving deeply impressive results, but they're so different that I'm struggling to judge which is 'better'. If that sounds like a cop out, then it's not – and here's why. As with all audio equipment, nothing is intrinsically right. Take the Quad 989 loudspeaker for example – it's so amazingly capable in some respects, but for a £6,000 design is quite mediocre in others. By contrast, my other loudspeaker reference – Yamaha's NS1000M is far better at the frequency extremes, but lacks the

“ When a kettle drum is pounded, it struggles from the speakers

superb across-the-range integration of the Quads. Can I adjudicate which is better? I think not. Same here – these two amplifiers have great abilities, but they don't ever overlap.

First the Anatek. Rumour has it that this is a 50 watter but you could have fooled me. With my two aforementioned reference 'speakers it was out of its depth simply because of lack of power. What these did show, however, was that what little power it has, it uses to great effect. The Yams – with their glass-clear sound, instantly told me it has a generally 'dull' sound. But it's dull only inasmuch as it's not bright, brittle, chrome plated or clanky. Indeed, when you listen at length, it's quite spacious and there's an amazing lack of midband mush. Compared to the Roksan, it's gutless, low on

power, curtailed at both frequency extremes, but boy doesn't that midband impress! Oh yes.

Move to the M-integrated, and it's obviously brighter. Actually, it's by no means bright in absolute terms, because I still had to turn up the tweeter level controls on the Yams a tad to get a good tonal balance, but it has obviously more upper midband and treble energy than the Anatek. Yet most noticeable is the bass – which is dramatically more impactful and better controlled. Essentially, it's like pressing a 'loudness' button compared to the A50. But this isn't because Roksan has voiced the M in a strange way, but more that the A50 is rather soft downstairs and lacking up top – the Roksan is actually a tonally a very well balanced and even sounding amplifier, with just a touch of that trademark transistor 'brightly lit' upper midband.

Corduroy's 'Out of Here' was first on the CD player, and the Roksan sounded obviously more engaging. Bass was fast and powerful – not in Naim NAIT 5 territory by any means, but it was still admirably taut and tight, with plenty of power and real articulation. I'm sorry to say that the Anatek proved completely unable to get any real bass out of the NS1000Ms, so I moved to my trusty Mission 752s for the rest of the review. With these easy-to-drive, high sensitivity loudspeakers (the Yams are the latter but most explicitly not the former), the Anatek really began to sing. Its bass isn't the tightest, nor the most dynamic but it proved even more fluid than the Roksan

- I was impressed. By comparison, the M was stronger, tighter but ever so slightly slower and more mechanical – like a massively powerful luxury coupe compared to a small, light sports car.

Moving up to the midband, and again the Roksan impressed greatly. It's very open and even, with an impressively varied tonal palette. Warm recordings such as 808 State's 'Lift' sound warm; colder ones like Rush's 'New World Man' sound cold. There's also a good degree of timbral and textural detailing on acoustic music, with real rasp to the brass stabs on UB40's 'Love is Alright'. This is all placed into a wide and expansive soundstage, with strongly placed images and fine front-to-back detailing. It's very hard to fault at the price – not far behind Marantz's



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FMJ A32 Int
FMJ CD33 CD
FMJ DV27A DVD
FMJ DT26 Dig Tuner
FMJ 7.7 ch power
FMJ AV8 Pre Amp processor

AUDIO ANALOGUE

Puccini Int
Puccini SE Int
Bellini Pre
Donizetti Power
Maestro Int
Maestro CD
Paganini CD

AUDIONET

SAM V2 amp
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PH3SE Phono Stage
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DVD8
CD8
Cyrus 6 int
Cyrus B int
AV8 Dig 5.1 pre
Pre X
Mona X
FM X
Smart Power
Q Power
PSX-R
Quattro

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Audience 52
Audience 52 SE
Audience 62
Audience 72
Contour 1.8

GRAAF

GM20 OTL Power
GM13.5B II Pre

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HL-Compact 7ES-2
Monitor 30

KEF

Q1, Q3 & Q5

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KAV400xi Integrated
KAV280P Pre
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Response One SC
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PRIMARE

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D20 CD
A30.1 Integrated
A20 Int

QUAD

99 CD-P
99 Pre
99 Power
909 Power
QC24 Valve Pre
Q1140 Valve mono
ESL988
ESL989
Model 11L
Model 12L
Model 22L

SHANLING CD-T100

SME
Model 10A
Model 20/2A

SONUS FABER

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Concerto Home
Grand Piano Home
Wall
Solo home
Gravis
Cremona
Cremona Auditor
Cremona Centre
Cremona Sub
Amati Homage
Guarneri Homage
Stradavarius Homage

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REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Michell Orbe/OL Illustrious/Ortofon Kontrapunkt B turntable
Sony CDP-X77ES/Trichord Clock 4 CD player
Marantz PM17 II KI-M integrated amplifier
Yamaha NS1000M and Quad ESL-989 loudspeakers

listen to A50 at either full tilt or as background music and it always seduces, yet never offends.

found this was extremely impressive when being driven by my turntable [see Reference System box] – being a far more synergistic match to vinyl, whereas the Anatek didn't mind the extra 'zing' from digital in the least.

£1,400 PM17 KI-M at all – until you switch to the Anatek, that is.

Now, the A50 sounds quite anaemic compared to the big, commanding Roksan. It's obviously less muscular, displaying a tendency to sit on dynamic transients that the M simply does not have. When a kettle drum is pounded, it struggles from the speakers, whereas with Roksan it jumps out at you with real resolve. But there's still something very special about the A50 that – to my ears – makes it win the day, and that is the fine and desirable combination of transparency and fluidity. Put simply, it sounds less 'mushy' than the already admirably open Roksan by a very fair way. You can hear right through the soundstage, to the studio itself. The M series has a propensity to make everything sound big, fresh, crisp and punchy – no matter how it was recorded – whereas the A50 does not. If it's fast and clean, that's just how the studio sounded. You find a far greater repertoire of 'sounds' with the Anatek.

The other, and in my opinion more significant, advantage of the A50 is its midband fluidity. Although the Roksan is a very musical amp – thanks in no small part to the grippy and muscular bass – the Anatek is more so, despite its absence of taut, punchy lows. It has a valve-like lucidity that makes listening to the music a more emotional and less cerebral (or physical) thing. It has a brilliant command of the complex rhythms on 'Out of Here', or the lazy but very infectious groove on 'Love is Alright'. Much in the same way that Linn's Ekos tonearm impresses with its speed, control and dynamics, so the Roksan is a commanding and powerful listen. And likewise, just as Naim's ARO tonearm is softer and more curtailed at the frequency extremes with less dynamic light and shade – but far more emotionally engaging – so the Anatek pulls you in and keeps you there. Put simply, it's a hoot to hear – time and time again, you can

the high ranges, and again the Anatek falls behind. It's soft and a bit rounded off. It's certainly sweet, with oodles of gentle, filigree detailing – but simply doesn't project well. This means its suits bright loudspeakers and/or CD players down to a tee – ideal for budget to mid-price stuff but not for extremely neutral reference systems like mine. The Roksan is obviously more 'zingy', but in the great scheme of £1,000 amplifier HF performance is still admirably clean and crisp. It's in no way harsh or hard, but lacks the superb intricacy of the Anatek. I

So which wins? Neither, or both. Give me the bass of the Roksan, the midband of the Anatek and the best aspects of the treble from both, and you'd probably have the best amplifier under £2,000. As it stands, you have two very capable and well executed – but different – solutions to the problem of the £1,000 'super integrated'. So sorry about that – no *What Hi-Fi*-style 'hard-as-nails' conclusion, but what I'm less unequivocal about is that the fine sound, serious power and excellent ergonomics and styling of the Roksan M-series I make it marginally better value for money.

VERDICT ●●●●£

Clean and powerful sound allied to serious power and great ergonomics make this super value for money.

ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES-1 INTEGRATED £1,195

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VERDICT ●●●●

Wonderfully lucid midband, but modest power and uninspiring styling make this the choice for focussed audiophiles only.

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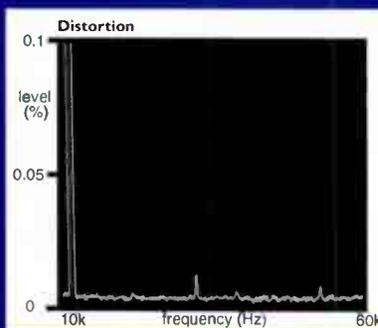
ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES-1

With 84watts into 8ohms and 121watts into 4ohms the Caspian has plenty of power. It delivers it smoothly too, producing very little distortion from low power t full output, right across the audio band. Producing just 0.013% third harmonic at 10kHz when delivering one watt, the Caspian measures well here. It will likely have a sharper sound than the Anatek though, since third-order adds edge.

Input sensitivity was a useful 0.28V, good enough for low output tuners and cassette decks etc. Bandwidth was wide, stretching form a low 5Hz up to 90kHz, ideal for DVD-A and SACD.

The Caspian measures well in all respects and will likely have a well defined and punchy sound. NK

Power (8ohms)	84W
Frequency response (-1dB)	5Hz-90kHz
Separation	86dB
Distortion (1W, 10k)	0.013%
Noise (IEC A wtd)	-103dB
Sensitivity	0.28V
d.c. offset	48/49

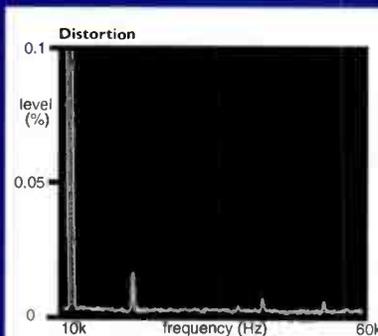


MEASURED PERFORMANCE

ANATEK AUDIO A50

Many new to the market amps don't measure up - literally - in one way or another. Usually, a crucial property like distortion is off target, but the Anatek looks good here. It produces little distortion at all frequencies and power outputs, and what little there was pure second harmonic - a very interesting property. It's also suggests a consistent transfer function which bodes well for sound quality. Other good points were wide bandwidth and useful power output of 55watts, rising to 100watts into 4ohms. The only questionable result was very low input sensitivity of 0.85V - fine for CD but too low for 0.3V-0.5V sources, of which there are many. I would expect a smooth, relaxing sound though, one likely to lack colour or hardness. NK

Power (8ohms)	55W
Frequency response (-1dB)	5Hz-50kHz
Separation	84dB
Distortion (1W, 10k)	0.016%
Noise (IEC A wtd)	-115dB
Sensitivity	0.85V
d.c. offset	9/28



Double Decca

LONG TIME DECCA AFICIONADO STEWART WENNEN TRIES OUT DECCA'S LATEST LONDON SUPER GOLD PHONO CARTRIDGE, COMPLETE WITH DECCA POD MOD...

Now you may think I have completely lost my sanity. After all, Decca cartridges are supposedly rubbish - they cannot track a record and they damage precious vinyl. Well, both of these statements were true, in the past...

To understand a little more we have to return to the 1960s, when to own a serious high fidelity reproduction system was up with owning a Rolls Royce motor car in the 'status symbol' stakes. This was due to the cost of equipment and its relative rarity (it was extremely expensive in relation to the average weekly wage). There were plenty of records being sold but, sadly, very few shops selling hi-fi. A real hi-fi system generally consisted of a turntable, radio tuner, tape deck and amplifiers. Loudspeakers were the size of a small wardrobe and were very efficient but were extremely coloured with an uneven frequency response. The sound quality these systems reproduced was (and still is) magnificent.

PAST TIMES

One of the heavyweight companies at the time was Decca. It recorded on vinyl, marketed it, had a research and development department and even a division that supplied special products - the 'Decca Special Products Division' no less! It produced a range of things, including Decca pick-up heads, pick-up cartridges and ribbon treble units. Unlike modern companies, these products were designed to work at their best with each other. Decca had tight control over the products, as it manufactured all the components

itself. It made and serviced everything, and the service department was unusual in that it turned customers' equipment around in approximately one-week - if only present day manufacturers could do the same! As recently as the nineteen seventies, Decca's re-tip service cost £15, which included post and packing.

The range of cartridges was not large, but included the Mk1, Mk2,

” When Decca released the London in 1976, it was a quantum leap in advance of all other pick-ups. Even so, the cartridge had a few problems

Mk3, Mk4, C4E and the London transducer. The early cartridges were intended to be used with the FFSS or other Decca pick-up arms. The C4E and London cartridges were the only products, which were intended to be used with other manufacturers' pick-up arms.

When Decca released the London in 1976, it was a quantum leap in advance of all other pick-ups. Even so, the cartridge had a few problems. The first was the microphony, which was obviated by painting the body with nail varnish. Second was the tracking ability, which was at best poor. The solution to this was to add mass (adhering a 10p to the headshell) to the pick-up arm certainly improved the sound. Thirdly the cartridges were not all the same, so it became a trial to discover the capacitive loading (Londons require 200pf). I remember Alan Willis and I tried to fill a London with Ferro fluid - we were trying to solve all of the

problems at once. It did not work of course, and cost us a fortune. We did not tell anyone... Still, the Decca's many problems were attended to, the results were stunning - the stereo image was detailed and large enough to walk around in.

PRESENT DAY

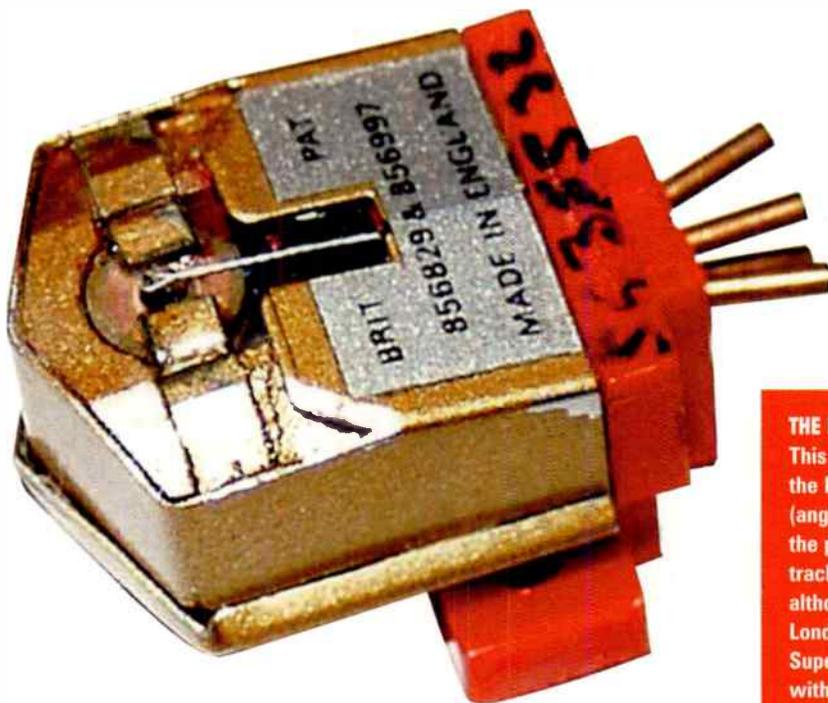
These days, the Decca London is available new in Super Gold guise. My sample arrived from Brian at Presence Audio, and I felt like a little boy as I ripped the packing open to reveal the jewel box snug in its outer packing. As I have done so many times before - albeit many years ago - I mounted the London in my tonearm (in this case an Origin Live modded RB250) and cued up a record in heady anticipation. Unfortunately, this example sounded absolutely dreadful. I rechecked the set up, and there seemed to be nothing wrong - but wait, the pick-up arm lift was (just) touching the underside of the arm tube! The offending lift was dropped to enable the London to track the vinyl, and now was ready to listen to music in earnest.

The resulting sound was glorious, with superb image placement, powerful bass and detail retrieval of the highest order - all achieved at a tracking force of 1.6 grams! My jaw dropped. Believing that London cartridges can't do this, I duly set the tracking force to 1.8 grams and the sound changed to a richer, wider one, with an obviously deeper stereo image. Heaven - this is what I have been searching many years for!

I then duly ran the gamut of my record collection (not inconsiderable, if I do say so myself) and found that John Williams's flamenco guitar sounded superb, with a tremendously solid image and stage depth to die for. James Brown's 'Super Bad' album was wonderful too, with Bootsie's bass really propelling

VERDICT ●●●●£
One of the most musically engaging and characterful performers available, but questions still remain about its technical abilities.

DECCA LONDON
SUPER GOLD £479
Presence Audio
☎ +44 (0)1444 461611



things along in a way that I've heard from few – if any – other pickup cartridges. This pickup also has a tremendous ability to discriminate between instruments - the drum kit is placed at the rear of the recorded acoustic, but I could still tell which cymbal was being used, for example. The difference between the ride, hi-hat and crash cymbals was so obvious that it made me wonder why I've bought so many expensive moving coils and MC step up devices over the years.

On female vocals, this device was chilling in that the sound was so realistic! Natalie Cole's voice was projected into my living room with the warmth she is famous for. The mix engineer did a fine job when he recorded her lush tones. After this session ended, I noticed my jaw was very sore because I'd been smiling all the way through. I have rarely found a pickup that plays records in such a manner. The bass is glorious, with a silky smooth midrange that glides effortlessly into a shimmering treble register.

Contrary to many people's findings, during this listening session the London Super Gold did not mistrack or harden up at all. Indeed, its ability to track even the most demanding vinyl was never in doubt [see Noel's measured performance – Ed]. These cartridges are the result of over 30 years of research and development. Their ability to transport the listener to the recording location is quite disarming at times. All of the orchestra, or rock and roll band, is portrayed with deftness and delicacy. With or without the Decca Pod [see box], this cartridge will suit most pickup

arms and should track like a limpet.

Life can be a circular chain of events, and even more so for audio addicts. After my formative years in love with the original London, I decided to purchase both of these cartridges after listening for three weeks, and Brian at Presence Audio will be receiving a fat cheque from me very soon! These are the Deccas that never were - they do everything I expect a pickup should do, and

THE DECCA POD

This is a solid piece of alloy, which is solidly attached to the top of the London Super Gold. Gone is the rather flimsy looking plastic (angle shaped) mounting bracket. The cartridge is bolted directly to the pickup arm. The cartridge seemed to be at its best with a tracking force of 1.9 grams. Set up is the same as the Super Gold, although volumes could be written about the conditions that suit London transducers best! Surface noise was even lower than the Super with this pickup. Stereo imaging seemed even more precise with an even greater depth, width and height. The overall sound signature is similar but this version has more of a grip on the music. Because of the more rigid mounting arrangement, the Decca Pod afforded the transducer, a slightly better tracking ability. A wonderful pickup! The Decca Pod is certainly worth the extra money in comparison to the Super.

more. And there's one more advantage to using a London, which is that you don't need a step up device. Forget moving coils – in my humble opinion this is the finest cartridge I've heard in my forty years in the industry.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Decca has always been a controversial cartridge. The early London Blue had a great sound but terrible tracking, causing severe groove damage. The London Gold is an altogether more capable beastie, but it still has idiosyncrasies.

The Gold tracks well, but the London was designed for Hill-and-Dale recording (i.e. vertically modulated mono!). The cantilever's geometry is wrong for stereo, a displaced lateral pivot point resulting in severe waveform triangulation on lateral modulation, bringing no less than 10% distortion or more to centre images (e.g. vocalists). This is way above the norm, and will colour the sound. On vertical modulation, for which it was designed, distortion is very low. The vertical tracking angle is right too, so the Decca gets some things right.

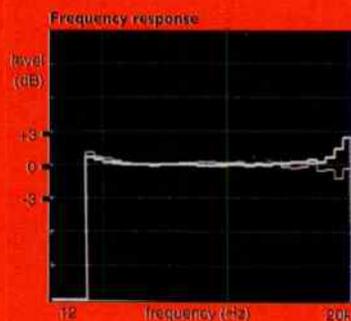
It also gets frequency response right, as our analysis shows. It is ruler flat to 10kHz and there is almost no inner groove tracing loss from the stylus, an excellent performance. This again will be noticeable, impacting the sound.

Finally, the square wave response rings like crazy and spectrum analysis shows a large output peak at 20kHz-25kHz and output is in effect extended to nearly 30kHz by this, making the London the closest analogue equivalent to DVD-A

(96kHz) methinks.

The Gold is very right in some areas and very wrong in others. I know it's a dramatic sounding cartridge; part of which is real and part contrived. Measurement indicates the Gold does not plough up vinyl like the Blue, so it is worth a listen. No other cartridge sounds quite like a Decca - for good reason. NK

Frequency response (-1dB) 20Hz-20kHz	
Separation	18dB
Distortion (-6dB)	6%
Output (5cms/sec)	5mV
Tracking (lateral)	
300Hz	90um
1kHz	25cms/sec
VTA	18degrees
weight	6.7gms
VTF (optimum)	1.6gms



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Cell Phono

Audio Analogue's Aria is a phono stage with a difference, thanks to its 'virtual battery' operation. Dominic Todd gets totally wired...

At first this £500 phono stage appears predictable enough. As you'd expect there's MM/MC switching, good quality internal components and a solid and well finished aluminium casing. Yet the Aria has two further surprises. The first is a 'virtual battery' power supply - the outboard power supply unit supplies banks of power supply capacitors in a double reservoir system. One bank feeds power to the amplifier circuit whilst the other is charged up, and vice versa. This means that the supplying capacitors are never directly connected to the mains, so should reduce mains borne noise and instability. The six Kendeil capacitors offer up 39000uf storage apiece, so should be up to providing the current without undue concern.

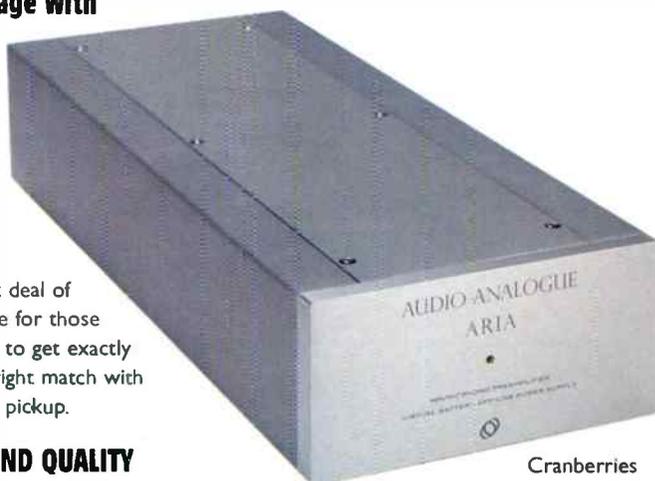
The second surprise is its 'tweakability'. As well as adjustments for MM/MC, there are three other sources of adjustment for perfect cartridge matching. MC gain is set at 27dB but can be adjusted from 22.5 to 33dB. One word of warning here though - changing the gain does involve soldiering resistors so, if you're uncertain of your ability, it's worth consulting your dealer first. The other adjustments are easier to manage. Both the capacitance and resistance can be altered to match your cartridge of choice, done via the simple expedient of plugging different RCA plugs into the rear of the unit. Capacitors values range from 100pf to 330pf and resistors from 100R to 470R. So there's a

great deal of scope for those keen to get exactly the right match with their pickup.

SOUND QUALITY

Hooked up to a Project RPM9X, the first thing I noticed was slightly more noise from the phono stage than expected. Even with the virtual battery power supply it wasn't as silent as some of the competition. Nonetheless, it was quiet enough and better than most inbuilt phono stages. Most striking about its sound was the depth and power of the bass - it really is in another league from the Project Phono Box SE or Musical Fidelity X-LPSv3 - if not the Trichord Dino. It was the sheer depth of sound that impressed. Vocals were extremely well projected, and there was excellent staging and separation of various musicians. Percussion was smoothly portrayed though perhaps a little too much so - at times it felt as though some of the finer detail had been glossed over to achieve first rate refinement.

The acoustic strains of Richard Thompson's 'Fast Food' showed an appealingly musical side. Even though both violin and electric guitar were too refined for my liking they did show excellent timbre, as did the subtly portrayed mandolin. Once again, thanks to the depth of stage, Thompson's vocals were brought well forward from the backing vocals, and each given their proper authority within the song. The strong, powerful bass came to the fore with The



Cranberries

'Linger'. The downside was a slight lack of pace, and there are rivals that certainly would be fleetier of foot here. Certainly the bass has a fragrant 'bloom', which actually suited the guitar, and it took the edge off a vocalist whose performance can err towards harshness on some equipment..

'Rhapsody In Blue' by George Gershwin provided a superb piano timbre that was sympathetic to the key strokes and willing to follow the change in tempo and resonance. When the full orchestra kicked in there was plenty of weight to the sound if not quite the attack. It didn't quite ever make the hairs stand up on the back of the neck, or make the listener jump with surprise. I feel this was probably down to the reproduction of the brass section which lacked a little rasp. Detail ambience, though, was first rate, with subtle decays and strokes audible even when the music was at its densest. Best of all, the sound had an organic and effortless nature to it - in other words, it sounded most un-hi-fi-like, which often is no bad thing at all.

Rather like many of Audio Analogue's other products the Aria is perhaps something of an acquired taste. It lacks immediacy but boasts other qualities that really do give a taste of high end hi-fi, like three dimensional sound staging and instrumental timbre. Anyone seeking refinement will delight in the Aria's culture and polish. Add the superb build and tweakability and it looks as though Aria have got another winner on their hands.



VERDICT

Impressively warm, smooth and dimensional sound, but some will crave more speed and grip.

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the great debate: DIGITAL

Back in the eighties, everyone was talking about the relative merits of LP vs. CD. Most assumed digital was best, and that analogue addicts were old sticks in the mud. Fifteen years later, and the vinyl revival was proof positive with a growing dissatisfaction with digital, and it seemed the vinylistas were winning the day. Now, with SACD and DVD-A, we're into new territory yet again. So we decided to canvass the thoughts of four industry experts, from a variety of backgrounds. As usual, don't be shy about writing in to tell us what you think...

NAME: PETER COMEAU
JOB: Director, Acoustic Design
COMPANY: Mission

Analogue is better because it is an exact trace of the require waveform. However the theoretical justification neatly avoids the problems of the storage medium which inevitably bring in noise and distortion. When these are taken into account the practical advantages of digital (low noise and distortion) begin to outweigh the disadvantage of never being an exact copy of the original waveform. One should always bear in mind that analogue systems mirror nature in the way that distortion increases with level, whereas digital distortion increases as level is reduced. Distortion is therefore of much greater importance to the subjective results from digital systems.

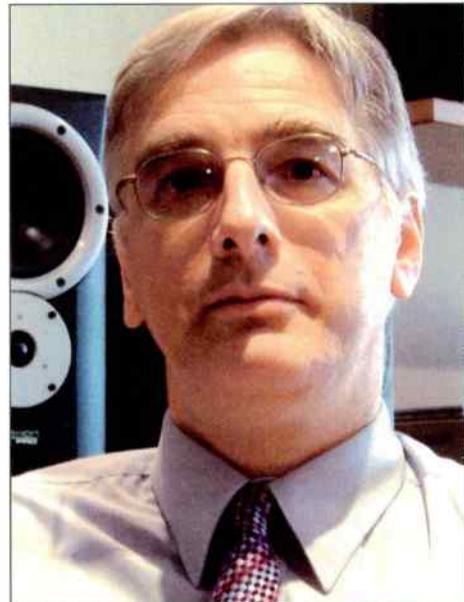
Good analogue still plays 'music' better than digital, so for pure pleasure I still find my turntable indispensable. However, digital is

easier to use and work with, and some systems and discs get close to the finest performance from analogue, close enough to indicate that it may be possible for digital to overtake analogue performance in the future. Analogue has

the advantage of natural, pleasurable sound quality over current digital systems. However, classical music on vinyl is a bind. Putting up with clicks, pops and end-of-side distortion is a pain. As for digital, undoubtedly the advent of CD improved the performance of the average stereo system dramatically. Compared to cheap turntables, low cost CD players offer much better results.

The music industry moved to digital in the eighties because it offers a multitude of advantages to the musical instrument and recording industry. The ability to manipulate and store digital music without apparent degradation is very alluring. The ease of duplication of CD has allowed completely automated manufacture of discs, reducing the cost to the manufacturer to a fraction of the expense of vinyl record manufacture. For the public, the promise of no noise and ease of use was a no-brainer for the purchase of a new format and method of reproducing it, offering a shot in the arm to a declining audio industry.

It is interesting that 'remastering' to digital of analogue studio tapes doesn't often work too well. To understand this one has to look at how records were recorded and mastered to sound 'good' on vinyl, taking into account the warmth, coloration and other idiosyncrasies of the vinyl medium. Remastering to transfer the original master tape sound as truthfully as possible onto CD therefore doesn't capture the result that was available from the



original vinyl record (Fleetwood Mac 'Rumours' is a typical example). Users may be buying turntables just to recapture the musical experience from their existing record collection...

High res digital formats certainly have a future. In stereo the systems offer higher sampling rates and more bits than CD, coming closer to that theoretical ideal of analogue reproduction. But the systems need to be used wisely, throughout the recording, mixing, mastering and duplication chain, if the advantages of high res are to be realised. In terms of popularity things are more difficult for these new formats. Except for hi-fi aficionados, most users do not see the reason for anything better than CD. The high res formats offer them nothing in terms of usability over CD. Only the carrot of multi-channel could persuade the average user to invest in new equipment. In practice the ability of new DVD players to automatically play multi-channel

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"This gets closest to the absolute requirement of analogue replay, its mechanical integrity and simple valve replay system defined the performance of domestic tape usage before the disruptions of Dolby and the cassette medium."

**FAVOURITE DIGITAL:
MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA SACD**

"With a well recorded SACD, this gets closest to a natural performance from stereo digital disc yet, though I'm keeping my eye on DVD Audio as it progresses..."

VS. ANALOGUE

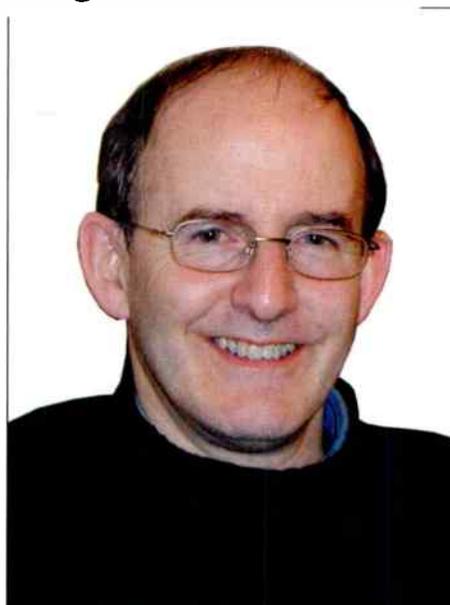
SACD and DVD-A discs may lead to an interest in purchasing discs in these new formats.

DVD-A offers the higher sampling rate and bit allocation that CD should have had in the beginning. Unfortunately the current disc storage limitations mean these specifications are degraded for multi-channel, but this can be solved by new DVD high res formats in the future. SACD is more difficult to sum up. The wider bandwidth than CD, and simpler signal path than PCM, is an advantage, and is not compromised by multi-channel, but the requirement for filtering above 40kHz to avoid a rapidly rising noise floor will prove an irritation, as is the difficulty of mixing DSD in the recording studio ●

sound quality appears to have become merely incidental. In spite of the claims for the new formats it is plain that much is still not understood about the exact nature of digital. Things that look perfect on paper turn out to be far from perfect in practice. CDs were eventually discovered to have up to 30% distortion in the bass which is nowhere near as good as vinyl. This is just one example but there is also a raft of other misconceptions - were the designers not aware of these problems?

At face value it may seem straightforward to translate a digital code into analogue, so where does it go wrong? Is it sampling rates? Even with the new high sampling rate digital formats, the translation from

Which is better depends on the limitations of existing technology and knowledge



NAME: MARK BAKER
JOB: Design Engineer
COMPANY: Origin Live

Theoretically each format could claim superiority if the technology behaved perfectly. However the discussion ultimately boils down to the fact that both mediums have technical issues to overcome. Which is better depends on the limitations of existing technology and knowledge. When CD was first launched, people sided the technical superiority of the medium over vinyl - better dynamic range, lower distortion etc. The same old rhetoric is being repeated for the new digital formats - In the effort to claim technical superiority and the advance of technology, the issue of subjective

digital to analogue is bound to degrade the signal significantly. This is due to the limitations of the devices that read information on the discs - not all the information is read perfectly and disc reading errors occur continuously. The electronics required to compensate for the ensuing mess has a host of side effects that are most unpleasant. Severe and complex problems lie in the multitude of activities that the electronics must perform. The outcome is that the new digital formats are severely flawed as far as the human ear is concerned.

According to a number of expert opinions outside the digital marketing

departments, there are specific technical problems with the new formats which mean that they will never outclass vinyl in terms of sound quality. One easily understood issue is the "watermark" that is put on an increasing number of digital discs to prevent copying. This

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SHANLING CD PLAYER

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Canary Audio 303 push-pull - 300B monos - 22 watts of loveliness - used only once at US hi-fi show - a joy and a steal	£4500	£7500
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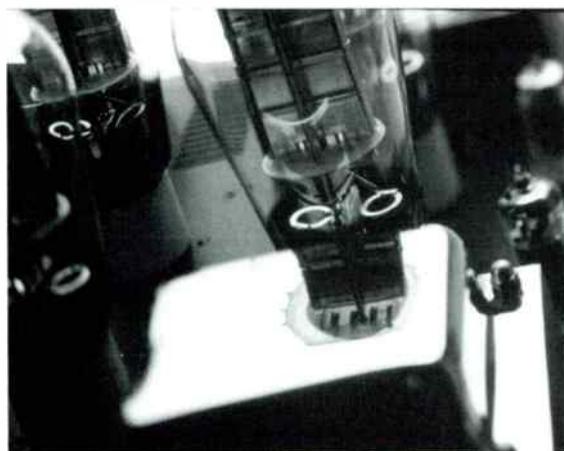
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alone is known to cause significant sound degradation with no solution on the horizon. Yet another issue is the need to rectify disc reading errors - can a D-A converter really take an educated guess to fill in missing information with accuracy? A crude analogy of the problem is that of cutting up a prime fillet steak into tiny chunks - no matter how finely you cut it and try to put it back together, you still end up with a hamburger not fillet steak!

Vinyl analogue replay on the other hand has the following advantages:

[a] No sampling rate, unless you call 'infinity' a sampling rate!

[b] The conversion of an analogue mechanical signal into the final analogue electrical signal is much simpler than a digital to analogue conversion.

[c] The minimal errors of a cartridge do not need 'correction'. Although distortion may be higher it does not have the nasty nature of digital distortion that is thoroughly offensive to the ear.

Unsurprisingly then, I prefer analogue! It has a fluid sound quality as opposed to digital, which can be distinctly edgy at times. The hope is that the new formats will revive sales because everyone is going to rush out and want the best sound quality available. However there are problems with this perception: The improvements are not great and will never surpass vinyl replay. The formats can be pirated - if some form of encryption is put on the format then sound quality is severely degraded and the purpose of the change is lost. The hardware necessary to play all the different formats will mean either several players or a universal player. Having more players gets expensive and space consuming. Universal players mean degradation in sound quality and additional expense.

My honest opinion is that the new formats may have limited success but are unlikely to last for any significant length of time due to the rate of change in the technology of digital storage. Soon there will be further advances in sampling rates and increased storage capacity. However in spite of a number of possibilities the fundamental technical problems associated with digital to analogue conversion are likely to remain unsolved. If the accountants and PR people made a smart analysis there is a great argument for promoting vinyl as 'the new high end format'. The reasons are obvious:

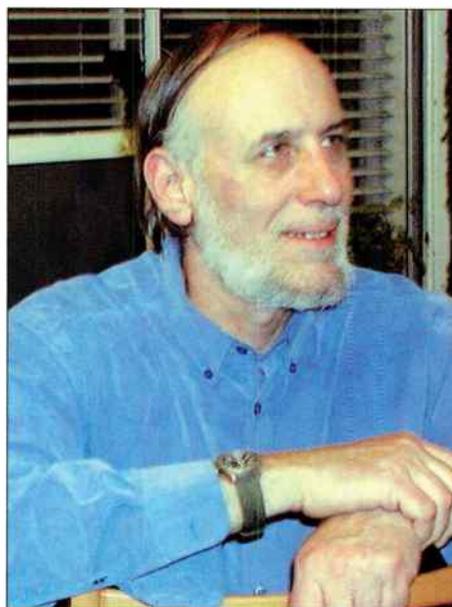
[a] vinyl outperforms the new mediums even on inexpensive turntables like the new Goldring at less than £200. Better turntables simply run rings round most digital players.

[b] vinyl cannot be pirated without the loss of sound quality associated with CDs. People cannot produce another vinyl record whereas a digital recording can be perfectly copied.

[c] in the long term, vinyl will give far more musical satisfaction than digital formats which will mean increased sales of music.

The analogue side of the replay chain can be improved by looking at the phono stage. Listening to the GSP Gram Amp 2 SE was a revelation to me a few years ago. This moving magnet phono stage caused me to realize how many people have never appreciated the quality of vinyl simply because of the dire quality of integrated amplifier phono inputs. Phono stage design has advanced tremendously over recent years and inexpensive but excellent phono stages like the Gram amp 1 at £85 could be much better promoted. As for digital, the transports and mechanisms to read the discs need improvement. At present the need for D-A converters to take educated guesses to fill in the information missed by the laser is a cause of untold sound degradation." ●

scratches or damaged tape - but digital is also prone to the same problems, of course. On the other hand, its advantages are of possessing the ultimate resolution. Digital needs many times the bandwidth to achieve similar results. So it is not actually as efficient. I would have to write a book to explain in detail all my reasons! The advantage of digital is that, simply, it provided a low cost solution to providing sound at a fair standard to the mass market. As a result, low cost analogue tended to suffer. As such, my argument against it is purely on a cost-no-object basis. In the eighties, the music and audio industry moved to digital for cost



NAME: Tim de Paravicini
JOB: Designer
COMPANY: EAR Yoshino

Of course, theoretically speaking, analogue is better! Its disadvantages are the lack of ease of use, and the fact that careless handling produces

reasons, and the mistaken belief that you could not copy it - pure and simple money!

In the nineties, the vinyl revival started simply because a dejected few audiophiles realised what they were missing in sonic satisfaction, and disco DJs being more intimate with vinyl in its handling could still do many tricks that digital does not allow accurately, so they never went away from analogue - and so vinyl became synonymous with DJ culture for this reason. Do the new high res digital formats such as SACD and DVD-A have a future? Well, yes, if they conform to what I proposed in print more than twenty years ago about absolute standards to satisfy the human hearing

FAVOURITE ANALOGUE:
TOWNSHEND TURNTABLE
This is a bit of silly question to ask me, as I have many studio tape machines rebuilt to my own standards, but notwithstanding these then it's got to be the aforementioned record player.

FAVOURITE DIGITAL:
N/A
None - and why? Because there are none good enough, period.

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mechanism; namely 400kHz sampling rates and 24bit words. Analogue vinyl can be improved by the simple and costly expedient of tender loving care in production of records, in the same way that CDs are produced in clean room conditions. Digital can only be improved with my aforementioned specifications – 24/400 resolution, maybe more..." ●

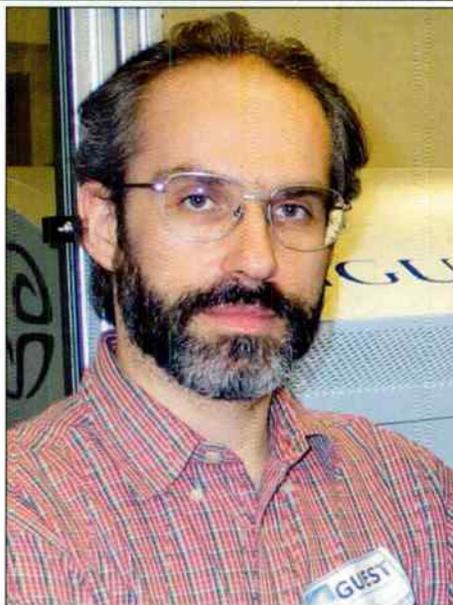
manipulate in the studio as digital. Digital technology allows very sophisticated manipulation such as re-tuning, cloning, re-timing and complex editing that cannot be done with analogue. With analogue you need to have musicians who can actually play the track all the way through. Digital record/ playback equipment and media can be much smaller than analogue equivalent and can also be made much cheaper.

our sacred audio systems! Having done extensive listening in studios to both DSD - the format used on SACD - and all PCM formats up to 24/192, whilst 24/192 is very good, DSD is more transparent and this is after all what the musician wants, so that his creation is faithfully delivered to the listener. Another advantage of SACD over DVD-A is that it is a secure format. You cannot bootleg the discs because of the special

NAME: ROBERT KELLY
JOB: Digital Mastering Consultant
COMPANY: ex-dCS

Analogue is superior, theoretically. A digital system will have analogue front and back ends on the ADC and DAC, and as the digital section cannot be completely transparent, a purely analogue system must be better. So, given the choice I'd rather listen to analogue masters than digital masters. Analogue still has the edge, but this edge is getting smaller and it does require a lot of work to maintain an analogue system in peak condition. Digital playback systems are pretty fuss free in that respect. That said, a lot of care is required to set a digital system up to peak performance. Specifically clocking arrangements need to be properly set up and this is a frequently neglected area.

The advantages of analogue are that it produces a result that is very satisfying musically; is a very well understood and stable technology, does not require specialist equipment to maintain; most parts are easy to multiple source, so legacy equipment is easy to repair; degrades gracefully, so one has plenty of warning when things are starting to go wrong - digital breaks down suddenly with nasty results; storage



Analogue media do not readily lend themselves to multichannel formats, whereas this is very easy with digital as is the achievement of extended playing times.

The music industry moved to digital en masse because they wanted a medium that would be cheap and easy to distribute, and that they thought they'd be able to adapt to prevent illegal copying. Someone also thought that a 20Hz to 20kHz bandwidth and 96dB dynamic range would give the "perfect sound

forever"... In the nineties, people discovered that their CDs weren't so perfect after all, and that despite

the surface noise vinyl still had something that made it a more satisfying experience than CD.

SACD has a long term future as it's very simple. You control what you listen to by pressing buttons on the player front panel or remote, without the need to get involved with complex on-screen menus. No need to have any nasty video clocks near

encoding equipment required at the factory and Philips rigidly controls distribution of the encoders and end users cannot rip the discs. DVD-A is far more complex to use as it can involve use of on screen menus. Contacts in the professional industry tell me that DVD-A disc sales are far lower than SACD disc sales. It looks like DVD-A will eventually whither, as the only strong proponent is Warner Brothers.

We can improve both analogue and digital simply by more care and attention at all stages of production. A lot of the problems with recording these days is that they are subject to too much processing. Making a good recording is like making a good meal - start

with good ingredients and then do as little as possible to them! Over-processing, like over-cooking, just leaves a nasty taste in the mouth..." ●

I'd rather listen to analogue masters than digital...

media have been shown to remain playable over many decades – fifty plus years for tape and I suppose one hundred or more for disc if one considers early cylinder recordings!

The disadvantages are that analogue needs care and attention to maintain peak performance; repeated playback gradually degrades the storage media. Not so easy to

FAVOURITE DIGITAL:

DCS ELGAR DAC

Running with dCS 974 sample rate converter in DSD upsampling mode and dCS Verdi SACD/CD transport, the Elgar is the most argument for digital I've heard so far.

FAVOURITE ANALOGUE:

AMPEX ATR 100 TAPE MACHINE

With electronics by Tim de Paravicini, this produces the most satisfying result from the format.

**DEMONSTRATION ROOM AT 12A SPRING GARDENS, NEWPORT PAGNELL, MILTON KEYNES,
BUCKS MK16 0EE BY APPOINTMENT ONLY - CALL FOR DETAILS ON 01908 218836**

NEW KIT

The Kecl82 is our latest introduction for the true beginner and designed by Andy Grove. A simple and elegant design based on the classic ECL82 valve, a triode and power pentode sharing the same glass envelope. The amplifier consists of two ECL82s per channel, the triode sections work as the input/phase splitter and the pentode sections work in push-pull for the output stage. The amplifier offers 8 watts into an 8 ohm load, the hum level is extremely low, comparison to solid state standards. The chassis is constructed of 1.6mm mild steel with a black powder coat finish. There is only one signal input pair controlled at the front by a volume control for that simple touch. The speaker connects are the standard 4mm banana type, positioned at the rear, as are the mains input which is received through an IEC lead, mains switch and earth post. We have made the construction as simple as is humanly possible with comprehensive instructions. The circuitry is based on a single printed circuit board. Ultimately this kit is for the guy who has always fancied a go at building a kit, but never dared. Simon Pope says, "It's a great introduction to the valve sound. For its humble price it delivers a full and rich sound with great detail and good depth." Kecl82 weighs 9kg. External dimensions are 30cm(w)x23.5cm(d)x11cm(h)

**KECL82 VALVE AMPLIFIER KIT****£195**

These are our new 6550 series amplifiers. A pure class A design providing 40 watts into a 8 ohm load. (available in a 4 ohm version if required) A truly high end design by Andy Grove, using Svetlana 6550Cs in push-pull (any 6550 or KT88 tube can be used with this amp). It features valve rectification (5U4) a choke pi filter power supply and is hard wired. Weighs 19kg with dimensions



390mm(w) x 330mm(d) x 190mm(h) with valves or 220mm(h) with cage. Simon Pope says - "If you favour attack and rhythmic grip, together with a smoothness of sound that's incredibly easy to live with, the Kit6550 could well be the kit amp for you. The 6550 is one for those who like a valve sound married to the attack and clout of a good quality solid state design".

KIT6550 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT £615 KAT6550 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT £580

The Kel84 features a pair of EL84 valves per channel in push-pull configuration. They give 15 watts into an 8 ohm load. The output transformers are Ultra Linear. Up front the ECF80 input/phase splitter valve has an extremely smooth sound. The Kel84 has very low hum, for simplicity the kit is built on a printed circuit board. A strong steel chassis is fronted by a 3mm anodised front panel and attractive chromed custom made knobs. There are five line level inputs, plus one monitor input, with a tape output included, all controlled from the front panel. At the rear is a mains switch/IEC power input, earth post, phonos, and 4mm banana sockets. Simon Pope says, "The quality that can be gleaned from this amp is a fine introduction to the joys of the valve sound. The Kel84 will highlight all the intricacies and depth of detail in your favourite recordings whilst retaining a warmth and fullness that is almost exclusive to pure valve amps and is rare at this price point." Kel84 weighs 10kg. External dimensions with valves are 300mm(w) x 270mm(d) x 150mm(h).

**KEL84 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT****£298**

The 2A3 PSE integrated amplifier offers a seriously hi-end sound, but without the cost usually associated with single-ended amplifiers. The stereo chassis houses, on the output, 2 x 2A3 in parallel single ended configuration and a single 6SN7 as the driver tube per channel. The valve rectified power supply consists of a 5U4 and a 10h choke. This feedbackless design provides 8.5watts into an 8 ohm load, so a good sensitivity speaker is required above 90dB. It can accept 6 line-level inputs fully controllable from the front panel. We provide the excellent Alps Blue potentiometer as standard. The amplifier is hard wired so plenty of scope for tweaking in the future. Simon Pope says, "The 2A3 PSE is extremely impressive piece of kit, good imaging, wide sound stage, nicely extended on the high frequency and tremendous bass thump. Weight - 20kg, external dimensions with valves fitted - 390mm(w) x 360mm(d) x 220mm(h)

**2A3 PSE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT****£570**

The PRE-II is a valve pre-amplifier with six inputs, tape monitor and two sets of output sockets. It utilises a high quality line driver transformer and x5 gain. The PHONO-II is a dedicated valve phono stage that incorporates a step-up transformer for MC users. Finally, PSU-II is a power supply unit that feeds both the PRE-II and PHONO-II.

Power Supply Unit (PSU-II)	£205.00
Pre-amplifier (PRE-II)	£215.00
Phono Stage (PHONO-II)	£110.00
Moving coil step-up transformer	£77.00
Passive pre-amplifier (PAS-II)	£235.00



SERIES II MODULAR PRE-AMP KIT



KIT34 is a 32 watt stereo valve integrated amplifier, featuring a pair of EL34s, in push-pull mode, per channel, plus an ECF80 pentode/triode as input/phase splitter. The power supply is valve rectified (2 x 5U4), using a heavy duty choke to achieve exceptional smoothing. The output transformers are 14% Ultra Linear tapped to keep distortion down to its lowest level and the kit is totally hard wired utilising three tag boards. It has five line level inputs, plus a tape-in and



tape out, all controllable from the front. Simon Pope says, "This integrated brings together the best sonic virtues of our KIT88, kel34 and top of the range 300B PSE in an affordable package. The highlights of the sound are a deep and taut bass response, together with an open and highly detailed mid and high frequency response that only the best valve designs can achieve... a true valve classic." Weight 22kg. External dimensions with valves fitted - 390mm(w) x 360mm(d) x 210mm(h)

KAT34 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT

£480

KIT34 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT

£515

NEW KIT

Our Parallel Single Ended amplifiers offer ultimate sound quality. Each monobloc has two of the beautifully linear 300B directly heated triode in its output stage, producing 20 watts into an 8 ohm load. At the front we have a 6AU6 pentode and an ECC82 as the driver valve. This design utilises a 5U4 rectifier valve in the power supply, in combination with a 10H choke, giving an extremely quiet supply. Both mains and output transformers use E/I pattern.

For purists, feedback is switchable and the kit is totally hard-wired. For those that require valves we provide the superb Tesla 300Bs, Russian SU4s and European 6AU6s & ECC82. Simon Pope says, "Not to put too fine a point on it, the sound these monoblocs create is among the finest that can be encountered in hi-fi." Our 300B PSE kit bears an affordable price of £895.00 (UK price) excluding valves. Each



monobloc weighs 23kgs., external dimensions with valves: 25cm(w) x 38cm(d) x 22cm(h) per monobloc.

The 300B PP monobloc shares the same look and chassis as the 300B PSE monobloc. The 300B PP kit has been created for those who prefer a bit more dynamics and drive to their valve sound. With a pair of 300Bs in push-pull configuration providing 26 watts output, these beauties will drive most modern loudspeakers to perfection. Andy Grove's design is totally feedbackless, using a 6AU6 pentode as the input valve and a 5687 as the phase splitter, the power supply uses

a Russian SU4 for rectification. The kit is constructed by point to point wiring so some experience is required. 300B PSE owners do have the option to buy the conversion kit for £250.00 to turn their monoblocs to push-pull status. Each monobloc weighs 23kg.

300B PSE MONOBLOC KIT

£895

300B PP MONOBLOC KIT NEW

£895

The HD83 headphone amplifier is a beautifully simple design using Mullard ECL83 valves, a triode and power pentode housed in the same envelope. It works directly from any source, be it CD, tape, tuner etc., or from an amplifier's tape out or pre-amp out sockets. The circuit uses high specification E/I output transformers that will drive any headphone load from 16 ohms to over 300 ohms depending on how the secondaries are wired up. The HD83 is a single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added sonic purity, and it is as quiet as a mouse. For sound quality Jon Marks says, "The bass is punchy and controlled without becoming artificial, while treble has the crispness of the best solid-state, with the tonal purity, delicacy and speed associated with valves." External dimensions 18cm(w) x 30cm(l) x 8cm (h) weight 4kg.



HD83 VALVE HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER KIT

£195

DEMONSTRATION ROOM AT 12A SPRING GARDENS, NEWPORT PAGNELL, MILTON KEYNES,
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KIT6550/KAT6550 mains transformers

2 inch stack, 130mm(h)x120mm(w)x135mm(l)
drop through fitting with zinc cap. Secondaries
425V-0V-425V, 350mA, 0V-5V, 6A, 3.15V-0V-3.15V,
9A. Suitable for 120V & 240Vac operation

KEL84 mains transformer

1.5 inch stack, 90mm(h)x 80mm(w)x 95mm(d)
drop through fitting with zinc cap. Secondaries:
0V-240V 300mA, 3.15V-0V-3.15V, 5.5A, suitable for
120/240V operation

KIT34/KAT34/KIT6550/KAT6550 choke

1.25 inch stack, 65mm(h)x105mm(w) with fitting
holes x 60mm(d), clamp fitting, 2.5 H, 350mA

300B PSE mains E/I transformer

130mm(h) x 95mm(w) x 115mm(d).
drop through fitting with zinc cap.
Secondaries: 380V-0V-380V, 180mA/150-0V-150V,
25mA/0V-5V, 1.2A/0V-5V, 1.2A/0V-5V, 3A/3.15V-0V-
3.15V, 0.4A suitable for 120/240V operation

HD83 mains toroidal transformer

80mm dia. x 35mm(h). Secondaries: 0V-
165V, 75mA/3.15V-0V-3.15V, 1A, suitable for
120/240V operation

PSU-II mains toroidal transformer

80mm dia. x 35mm(h). Secondaries: 0V-
270V, 60mA/0V-10V, 2A, suitable for 120/240V
operation

TRANSI mains toroidal transformer

95mm dia. x 50mm(h). Secondaries: 0V-
370V, 150mA/0V-6.3V, 3.5A 300B E/I choke
65mm(h) x 70mm(d) x 80mm(w) open frame
fitting, 10H, 180mA,

KEL84 E/I choke

0.5 inch stack, 40mm(h)x 35mm(d)x 70mm(w)
clamp fitting, 1H, 250mA

PSU-II E/I

40mm(h) x 35mm(d) x 70mm (w) clamp fitting,
15H, 20mA

KIT34/KAT34 mains transformer

2.5 inch stack, 120mm(h)x115mm(w)x95mm(d),
drop through fitting with zinc cap. Secondaries
365V - 0V - 365V, 300mA/0V - 5V, 6A/3.15V - 0V -
3.15V, 7.5A. Suitable for 120/240V operation.

2A3 PSE mains transformer:

2.5inch stack, on a 120 size lamination,
120mm(h)x115mm(w)x95mm(d), drop through
fitting with zinc plated transformer caps.
Secondary winding: 370V-0V-370V, 250mA, 0V-5V,
3A, 0V-4V, 2A x4. Suitable for
110V/120V/220V/230V operation. Can be used
for a valve rectified, dc heater (2A3), dc regulated
heater(input valve) stereo 2A3 PSE/PP amplifier.

KECL82 mains transformer:

1.25inch stack, on a 29 size lamination,
80mm(wide)x70mm(height)x70mm(depth), frame
type 2 hole fixing. Secondary winding: 0V-185V,
200mA, 0V-6.3V, 3.5A. Suitable for
110V/120V/220V/230V operation. Good for low
power amp, solid state rectification achieves a HT
of 240Vdc. Could be used for ECL82 PP/PSE
stereo amp.

MAINS TRANSFORMERS & CHOKES**KIT6550/KAT6550 E/I 16% TAPPED UL**

push-pull output transformer 2 inch stack, 80mm
(w) x 95mm(l) x 100mm(h), drop through fitting
with zinc cap. Primary-secondary 4.5K, 16% UL
tapped. Secondary 4 Or 8 ohm, pls specify on
order. max output 45 watts, max current 180mA,
valves, KT88, 6550 etc

KEL84 E/I Ultra Linear push-pull output transformer

1.25 inch stack, 76mm(h)x 65mm(w)x 76mm(d)
Primary - secondary, 8K with 12.5% UL tap -
8ohms, max o/p-15watts, max current 150mA
valves EL84 etc

KIT88/KAT88 E/I push-pull output transformer

80mm(w)x95mm(l)x100mm(h). Primary-secondary
10K - 8ohms, max o/p-40watts, max current-
160mA valves-KT88, 6550, EL34

Pre-II E/I driver transformer

80mm(w)x60mm(l) x65mm(h). 6:1 step down
transformer, max current-10mA valves-6922 etc
pre-amp stage

KIT34/KAT34 E/I 14% tapped Ultra Linear push-pull output transformer

2 inch stack, 80mm(w)x95mm(l)x100mm(h), drop
through fitting with zinc cap. Primary-secondary
6.4K, 14% UL taps, Secondary 8ohm, max output
34watts, max current 150mA, valves EL34, 6L6,
6CA7

HD83 E/I single ended output transformer

40mm(w)x50mm(l) x55mm(h).
Primary-secondary 4K - 4 x 64ohms
windings, max o/p-1watts, max current-25mA
valves-ECL83 etc

300B PSE E/I parallel single ended output transformer

130mm(h) x 95mm(w) x 115mm(d).
drop through fitting with zinc cap.
Primary 1K5 Secondary 8R, output .

2A3 PSE E/I output transformer:

2A3 parallel single ended transformer, 2 inch stack,
78 size lamination. Primary impedance is 2.5K,
secondary impedance is 4ohm or 8ohm, max
current is 100mA. Output is 8.5Watts.

KECL82 PP output transformer

ECL82 push-pull ultra linear. 1inch stack, on a 29
size lamination,
80mm(wide)x70mm(height)x60mm(depth), frame
type 2 hole fixing. Primary 7.5Kohm, secondary
8ohms. Max current 85mA,
Good for numerous low output pentode valves in
push-pull configuration.

300B PP E/I push-pull output transformers

2.5inch stack, on a size 120 lamination.
130mm(h)x95mm(w)x115mm(d) drop through
fitting with zinc plated cap. Primary impedance 4K,
secondary 6ohm. Will suit 300Bs, 2A3s etc in
push-pull configuration.

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- ECL82 Printed Circuit Board 200mm(w) x 140mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- Kel84 Printed Circuit Board 280mm(w) x 135mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- KT88/KaT88 Printed Circuit Board 140mm(w) x 310mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)
- Kel34 Printed Circuit Board 140mm(w) x 310mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)
- 300B Printed Circuit Board (a pair) 120mm(w) x 215mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)
- HD83 Printed Circuit Board 140mm(w) x 160mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- PSU-II Printed Circuit Board 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- PRE-II Printed Circuit Board 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- PSE-II Printed Circuit Board 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)

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Kec182 (8 ohm)	Kec182 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£195.00	£170.00
2A3PSE with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	2A3 PSE (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£570.00	£485.00
2A3PSE without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	2A3 PSE (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£470.00	£400.00
KaT6550 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KaT6550 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£580.00	£495.00
KaT6550 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KaT6550 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£380.00
KiT6550 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT6550 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£615.00	£525.00
KiT6550 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT6550 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£485.00	£415.00
KaT34 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KAT34(with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£480.00	£410.00
KaT34 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KAT34(without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£415.00	£354.00
KiT34 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT34 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£515.00	£440.00
KiT34 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT34 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£385.00
Kel84 with valves (8 ohm)	Kel84 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£298.00	£255.00
Kel84 without valves (8 ohm)	Kel84 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£268.00	£230.00
PSU II	PSU - II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£205.00	£175.00
PRE II	PRE - II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£215.00	£185.00
PHONO II	PHONO II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£95.00
PAS II	PAS II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£235.00	£200.00
Step ups transformers for MC use with PHONO II	MC - step up (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£80.00	£68.00
HD83 with valves	HD83 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£195.00	£167.00
300BPSE with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	300B PSE (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1197.00	£1020.00
300BPSE without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	300B PSE (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£895.00	£765.00
300BPP with valves (6 ohm)	300B PP (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1197.00	£1020.00
300BPP without valves (6 ohm)	300B PP (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£895.00	£765.00
300BPP conversion pack	300B PP (conversion pack)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£250.00	£215.00

PARTS DESCRIPTION	ORDER NO.	QTY	UK (inc vat & carriage)	OVERSEAS (exc. vat & carriage)
2A3 mains transformer	2A3 PSE mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£115.00	£98.00
6550 mains transformer	6550 mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£120.00	£105.00
34 mains transformer	KiT34 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£100.00	£85.00
kel84 mains transformer	Kel84 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£60.00	£47.00
HD83 mains transformer	HD83 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
PSU II mains transformer	PSU-II - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
300B mains transformer	300B - mains T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£115.00	£98.00
34/6550 choke	KiT34 - choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£34.00	£34.00
kel84 choke	Kel84 - choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
300B choke	300B choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
2A3 PSE choke	2A3 PSE choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
PSU II choke	PSU-choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
6550 output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	6550 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
34 output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	34 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
kel84 output (8 ohm)	Kel84 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£90.00	£78.00
2A3 PSE output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	2A3 PSE O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
HD83 output (multiload secondary)	HD83 - O/P T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£100.00	£86.00
PRE-II driver transformer	PRE-II - driver T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£80.00	£68.00
300BPSE output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	300B PSE - O/P T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£94.00
300BPP output transformer (6ohm)	300B PP - O/P T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£94.00
kel84 PCB	Kel84 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£30.00	£26.00
kel34 PCB	Kel34 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£12.00	£11.00
kel80 PCB	Kel80 - PCB(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£52.00	£45.00
KECL82 PCB	KECL82 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£25.00	£21.00
HD83 PCB	HD83 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
PSU II PCB	PSU-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
PRE II PCB	PRE-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
PHONO II PCB	PHONO-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
tag board	TAG	<input type="checkbox"/>	£4.00	£3.00
ALPS 50K dual potentiometer	ALPS - 50K	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00	£12.00
ALPS 100K dual potentiometer	ALPS - 100K	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00	£12.00
stepped attenuator (10K or 50K)	Attenuator + resistor pack	<input type="checkbox"/>	£75.00	£65.00
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Jensen 0.47uF 630V, aluminium foil	JEN - 0.47U 630V	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
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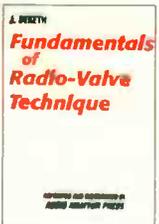
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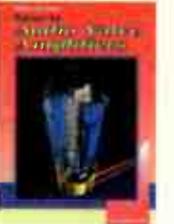
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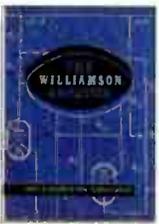
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Board, Rigid

Back in July 2002, Stewart Wennen outlined his idea for a superior quality armboard for the world's most popular turntable, Technics' ubiquitous SL1200. Since then, Origin Live has taken the idea and developed it – so who better than SW himself to assess it...?

A couple of years ago, I discussed the possibility of replacing the very poor standard Technics pick up arm with an Origin Live RB250. This met with a lot of discussion amongst bedroom DJs as to the worth of this butchery, but the professionals in the entertainment industry welcomed this modification with open arms, as it does improve the SL1200/1210 tremendously. Now, Origin Live has made the idea a commercial reality. The princely sum of £39 (inc. P&P) buys you one pick up arm mounting

plate, fixing screws and an instruction sheet.

The first step is to remove the old pick up arm, which is covered in the original article in much more detail than in the OL data sheet. Remember that you can possibly sell the redundant SL1200 pick up arm (God knows why anyone would want one, but try it!), so be gentle with it. One point that is not covered on the data sheet is that the Pocan slab that sits directly under the motor board has to be removed before the arm retaining screws can be accessed. Don't throw these away but, when the SL1200 arm has been removed, loosely screw them into the original armbase.

Do not forget that the earth lead from the pitch control will have to be used to earth the new pick up arm! As modifications go this is an

extremely good one. I modified two SL1200s and I found that it took approximately 45 minutes to mount the new pick up arms into the turntables. There is no need to align the arm, as the plate has been laser cut especially for RB250. There is

” This modification makes a good turntable into a stunning transcription unit

also a spacer ring included with the kit to be used with cartridges like the Stanton 890 series. The only difficult part of mounting the replacement arm is setting the vertical tracking angle. Do not make the arm pillar higher than the headshell. Follow the instructions as they are written. This is very important. When the arm is mounted and earthed and the turntable is completely re-assembled, a break is necessary and after this, the listening can be started.

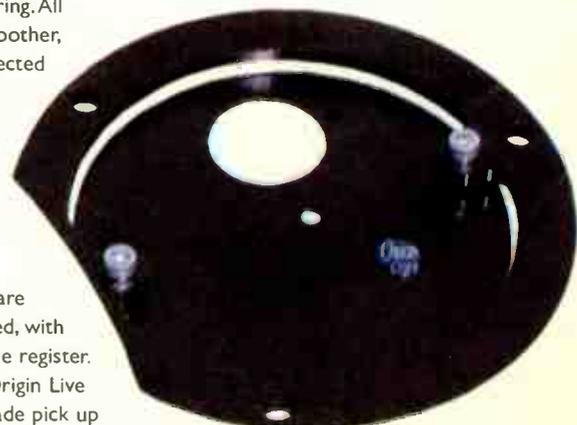
The first thing that struck me was the difference in the stereo imaging. The new pick up arm and plate mod. had an extra four feet of width within the image, and the height was much taller and the image depth extremely deep! I compared the modified SL1200 to a completely standard turntable and the differences were staggering. All frequencies seemed smoother, and the music was projected much more easily. One knows when something is correct and this arm and plate modification makes a good turntable into a stunning transcription unit.

Bass and midrange are extremely well presented, with an almost ethereal treble register. This again proves the Origin Live RB250 is a very well made pick up

arm. And it is extremely easy to 'mix' with, as the original Technics arm tends to jump out of the groove when being back-cued, and the resulting cue point is missed. As an arm for 'scratch mix' DJs, its performance is almost exemplary. OL RB250s let cartridges track much more securely, especially when 'scratching' and it's also easier to visually cue with as the headshell is much smaller than the Technics

variation.

So if you're in the market for any new DJ equipment, I can recommend this new Origin Live armboard without any reservation at all. It's a neat way to fit an RB250 arm, which will dramatically improve your performance as a DJ or your listening pleasure as a music fan. A group of DJs in this country use OL RB250 modified Technics SL 1210s with glee - the mod. has paid for itself many times over and enables the music to be much more easily delivered to the dancefloor. Indeed, there's a competition between DJs and club owners in New York to build the best sound system in a nightclub. A few of these nightclubs use Origin Live equipped Technics SL1210s as their turntables. I think that this is enough recommendation in itself.



VERDICT ●●●●●£

A brilliant tweak for Technics SL1200 series turntables - essential equipment for DJs and music lovers alike.

ORIGIN LIVE TECHNICS ARMBOARD MODIFICATION KIT

£39

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www.originlive.com

Plus Points

Trichord's already excellent Dino phonostage has just been improved with the option of the Dino+ PSU and High Performance Interconnect Lead. Albert Lee tries them for size...

Trichord's new £225 Dino+ power supply is intended as the next logical upgrade from the standard Dino PSU, and contains a much larger transformer to supply the raw AC voltage. The case is crammed with electronics of a very high standard. AC voltage is usually changed into DC voltage with the aid of a bridge rectifier, but designer Graham Fowler has used two, using soft recovery diodes for very low radio frequency generation. These rectifiers are followed by a resistive and capacitive filter. This filter contains no less than four 1800-microfarad capacitors! A pair of further low noise, wide bandwidth, voltage regulation circuits mean that this PSU is very, very quiet.

The new £140 power interconnect is made from an alloy containing copper, silver and gold which has been refined to 99.9999% pure (this figure means that there is virtually no air inside the metal thereby enabling the electricity to continue its path to the Dino almost unheeded). It has a plating of 10 microns of rhodium and each cable is 0.7 mm in diameter. All of the cables are individually insulated using PTFE tube and then are further

encased with an other PTFE tube. The assembly is then covered in a black mesh outer jacket. Cryogenically treated this piece of wire seems to hold a lot of promise. First on was the new PSU using the standard power interconnect.

“ the Dino is still the best at the price and these two mods put it even further ahead

'The Wall' by Pink Floyd saw all the instruments firmly located within the stereo image, with kick drums slamming into me and lead guitars shooting across the living room with a precision and speed I've rarely experienced before. I heard for the first time a Hammond organ in the mix, which was amazing considering my familiarity with this music. Ry Cooder was next, and his guitar work was again tremendously expressive - I felt the raw emotion that the musicians were feeling in the studio.

The precision of the image is simply awe-inspiring. Ditto Bizet's

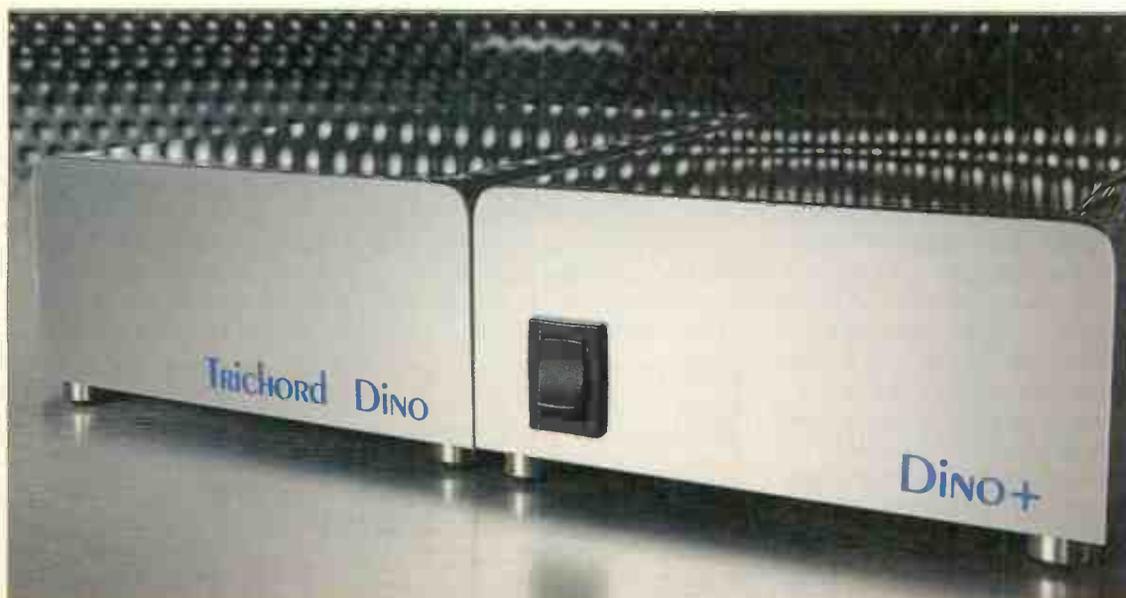
'Carmen', where the stereo image grew wider the orchestra seemed to have the correct amount of 'weight'. Next came the new high performance interconnect, and the difference was staggering. All of a sudden I was involved in the music not just listening to it! Bass instruments had a larger, truer character while midrange became even more believable, with just the right amount of treble definition.

This lead transforms the Dino into something even more special, and with the Dino+ PSU it assumes true greatness. Everything becomes more emotional and profound, with tremendous transparency given the price. If you're not into the soft, mellifluous sounds of the basic EAR 834P valve phonostage, preferring something altogether more neutral and incisive, the Dino is still the best at the price and these two mods put it even further ahead. The only serious improvement is indeed Trichord's own Delphini with Never Connected PSU at well over twice as much. Recommended, then...

VERDICT ●●●●●£

Excellent quality allied to low prices make these mods essential for existing Dino owners and newcomers alike.

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Broke and on

Do you need support, but lack sufficient funds? Well, Albert Lee has the answer – a do-it-yourself turntable shelf that costs under £30 to make!

As any analogue addict knows, structure-borne resonance - or 'footfall' - is a killer. It will ruin the sound of any turntable, but is particularly parlous with non-suspended subchassis decks like Regas. So here's the answer – a DIY turntable shelf for under £30. This stand can be used under any hi-fi separates with excellent results, providing a stable platform as well as being impervious to structure and acoustic feedback. I have built many support systems over the years and this type is the simplest to construct, amongst the least expensive and one of the most effective.

The stand is in two parts. The first is a space frame construction into which is dropped a spiked platform. The materials required are all available from your local DIY supplier, who will cut the timber to size. This service is invaluable because each cut will be square. You'll also need 'T' nuts to suit the chosen spikes (available from Screwfix Direct) and spikes from your local dealer. The platform is constructed from 18mm hardwood ply, and measures 520mm by 475mm.

First, we need to rub the plywood down to a very smooth surface on both top and bottom, and you should also pay great attention to the sides to remove any marks left by the cutting blades. If you want to polish or paint the platform, this should be done at this stage. After we have applied our finish to the surface and let it dry, we're ready to drill the holes to locate the 'T nuts'.

Lay three strips of masking tape at the front top surface, marking this as per the diagram. The drill bit required for the pilot holes is a 3mm type. Drill all of the pilot holes through the platform, and then select the drill bit for the 'T nut' which is 9mm for an 8mm nut, or 7mm for a 6mm nut. After loading the bit into the drill, drill through the top surface but (and this is important) stop at

approximately 10mm then turn the board over and complete the drilling. This is to avoid ripping the ply with the drill. Now insert the 'T nuts' into the holes using a G clamp! Do not use a hammer, as this will mark the surface. Screw the spikes into the nuts and turn over and the equipment platform is complete.

Next, check that there are no pipes or wires at the point of attachment to the wall. There are various devices available to confirm the presence of pipes or cables buried in the plaster. If the chosen position has neither of these we are ready to start. (You will have noticed that the diagrams show the main support rails are 50x25mm, and the timber list has 45x21mm. This is so you can choose either softwood or hardwood - which has to be cut and planed to size - so choose your type of timber at this time.) Now, to construct the turntable wall frame. The timber required is as follows:

- 4 off 2-by-1 (planed all round) – 45x21mmx520mm
- 2 off 2-by-1 pair 45x21x400mm
- 2 off 18mm hardwood ply 550x00mm
- 50 (approx) No 8 by 2 inch countersunk Pozidrive screws
- 10 No 10-by-3inch countersunk Pozidrive screws
- 10 rawlplugs suitable for your wall type. If in doubt ask at your timber supplier.
- A small bottle of PVA wood adhesive (either the water proof or ordinary type will do)

The two main supports are made from the longest lengths of timber (45x21x520mm), and need to

resemble an 'L' shape - for further data see diagram. Pilot drill (3mm) three holes equidistantly spaced from the centre - these should extend into the rear of the 'L'. This is to stop the timber 'creeping' as they are screwed together. A clearance size drill is now used in the front halves of the main support in all three pilot holes. Next, these holes will need to be countersunk 5mm deep. We now glue and screw the two parts together making sure they are flush at the ends. This is repeated for the other main support. If you can see any PVA glue on the work make sure this is sponged off, as it will stain French or button polishes and is impossible to sand these marks out!

Next we need to make the side braces. These are cut from the two 18mm ply sections. It is most important that the marking out is accurate. We will use masking tape to mark onto. It also stops the ply tearing due to the cutting process. Check it out three times and cut once! You will have noticed there is a large hole in these panels; this is to be marked 50mm from all edges. I used a glass to get the curves as I marked them out. We now use a 12mm pilot drill at three positions close to the marked lines. Now use the jigsaw to cut (on the line) the large holes - not forgetting to don a pair of safety goggles and a dust mask! The next stage is to saw the diagonal line using a handsaw, and rub all of the timber down until it is as smooth as glass. At this point, we apply our chosen finish (French polish, paint or varnish).

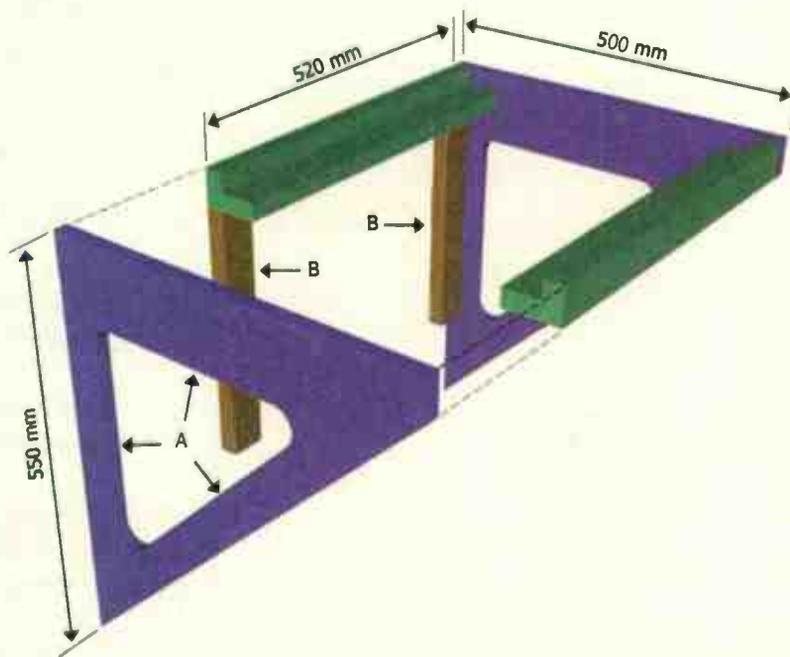
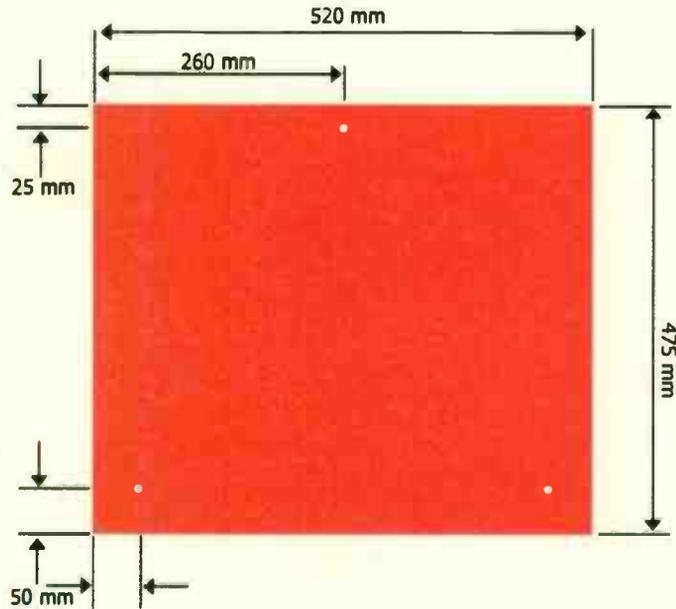
Now have a pile of timber that has holes in it! Firstly, we will mount the rear main support on the chosen

SOUND QUALITY
 Your new shelf should transform your system's sound – underlining the fundamental importance of proper isolation. The main difference is of greater musicality. Things sound smoother, sweeter and more relaxed yet more rhythmic too. There's better focus and dimensionality to the stereo imaging, and a sense of previously unheard cohesion – not bad for the price of a few CDs!

the Shelf

NOTE: USING POWER TOOLS CAN BE DANGEROUS! CARE AND PRECISION ARE REQUIRED. HI-FI WORLD CAN ACCEPT NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERSONAL INJURY OR DAMAGE TO YOUR PROPERTY AS A RESULT OF THIS ARTICLE!

ILLUSTRATION: Peter Vivian



wall. Select the worst 'L' support and drill three pilot holes in the upright section of the 'L'. These holes should be symmetrical around the centre in height and also in width. I have found that the natural height for a turntable is 40 inches from the floor, so mark a line (lightly drawn with a pencil) using the spirit level 500mm long. Now offer the main support to the wall, making sure it is exactly sitting on the line, and pilot drill the wall with the 3mm-drill bit to mark the wall. Load a masonry bit into the drill again - these are to be pilot holes so choose a 5mm bit. Ensure the drill is switched to 'hammer', select the highest speed and now drill to the full depth of the drill bit into the wall.

On most wall plugs there is a gauge to help select the drill size for the plugs. So make your selection, load the drill and then drill to the full depth of the drill bit. Dip the rawlplugs into a little PVA and put them into the wall. They may need a little encouragement so lightly tap with a hammer until they are flush with wall surface. Drill the pilot holes in the main support with a clearance drill to fit three of the No 10 screws. Countersink both sides of the support rail. Screw the rail to the wall making sure that the rail is perfectly flush with the wall. If the rail is level (check to confirm this) and flush we are ready to start the assembly.

Offer one of the side panels against the wall making sure the top of this panel is flush with the rail and then mark around the edge onto the rail. Lay both panels onto the workbench and then pilot drill and clearance drill to suit. Countersink both sides of the panel. Only one hole is to be drilled in the panel. Repeat this with the other panel. Again offer the panels up to the rail and fix into position but not to tight. Next we fix, as the diagrams suggest, the short vertical supports. These as with the main supports have to be very firmly attached to the wall. The spirit level is now sited onto the side panels and two pilot holes are drilled

through into the vertical supports.

We now clearance drill and countersink, and then screw the side panels to the vertical supports. All that now remains to be done is to fix the front main support rail into position, ensuring that the rail is in exactly the same attitude as the rear rail. Now take your electric (or hand) screwdriver and re-tighten all of the screws, and put another screw

next to the top rear and front topside screws to make the structure rigid. Take a step back wards and have a look at the completed structure with the equipment support panel in position. All that is needed now is your turntable or your chosen signal source, a cup of tea (or something stronger) and some time to enjoy your handiwork!

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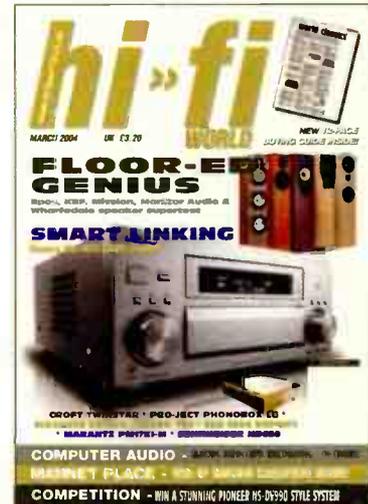
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THE LA'S *The La's* 1990

He we have the defining debut of the nineteen nineties, and probably one of the great career-closing albums too – the last will and testament of The La's. It is an album that thoroughly deserves to be rediscovered by each successive generation: any teenage Coral fan should surely be made aware of the huge influence and timeless rock classicism of their 'scally' predecessors.

There is a curious story about the genesis of this record which will be retold eternally, and at its root is the striving of one individual, songwriter and lynchpin Lee Majors, to recapture the perceived magic of his demos in a professional recording. The fact that he was never remotely satisfied with the end result only deepens his mystery. This is after all a man who, much like Salinger and Barrett, receives the obsessive "where are they now?" pursuit by fans and writers which missing geniuses seem obliged to suffer.

Majors' antipathy to the end result is hard to fathom and makes it difficult to justify the album as a classic, but the quality of the songs is impossible to ignore. 'There She Goes' will be on soundtracks and anthologies forever, and will probably receive ever more horrible cover version treatments every decade from now on, but there are many songs just as enthralling as that one to be found on this record - from the sprightly lead-in of 'Son of a Gun' to the epic closer 'Looking Glass', with its yearning quality dissolving into a cacophonous close. None of us have heard 'The Sound' as it exists in Majors' head, but to these ears the recordings do a reasonable job of reproducing the massive wall of energetic sound which was The La's live experience. You miss Majors' stomping, gum chewing, accelerated live delivery but over and above the still-present huge bass sound and deliberately rudimentary guitar tones the use of vintage microphones lends



a harsh patina to Majors' hollered vocals, which admirably convey the urgent sentiments of escape, drug-based or otherwise, which pervade many of the lyrics.

'The La's' was re-released in remastered form by Universal three years ago, and as my original copy suffered from the dreaded PDO Blackburn blight, the new version couldn't help but sound much improved. As a useful sleeve note from the band's A&R man details, the original album (with the exception of a remixed version of the Bob Andrews-produced 'There She Goes') is made up of Steve Lillywhite-produced versions - which must have been at least the third attempt to get these songs down on tape. Majors would probably have continued, but the record company called time and the album was released. Although the presence on the reissue of the B sides from 'Timeless Melody', the second release of 'There She Goes', and 'Feelin' is a useful round-up of the easy-to-find stuff for the uninitiated, it is a real shame that none of the Bob Andrews material is featured, particularly the superb trio of tracks from the original 'There She Goes' EP. I'm sure there is good reason for this, but it's a missed opportunity just the same...

As I wouldn't mind betting that the very idea of his sound being committed to Compact Disc was anathema to Majors, so it seems pointless to speculate about the possibility of a high resolution digital version of this record, but as the sleeve notes reveal it was recorded on vintage analogue equipment and the incredible enormity of the raw bass and guitar tones here might well benefit from a new transfer. As it will probably never happen we may have to content ourselves with what is a very acceptable CD version, as any brittleness in the sound is concealed by the deliberately primitive recording strategy. Of course if you're hanging on to a pristine vinyl copy you are probably a very happy person.

Even if Majors' never releases another note of music his place in history as the originator of this work is assured. There are many of us who would love to see him return in glory, but whatever came together would almost inevitably fall apart again in a welter of overweening perfectionism, skunk-fuelled sackings and recriminations, so it is perhaps best that things are left as they are, with one indelible monument to enjoy, unsullied by the thought of follow-ups which could never reach these heights. **PATRICK CLEASBY**

The Sun Rising



One of the most fascinating niche audiophile products of the year is surely Fujitsu-Ten's Eclipse TD 307PA active loudspeaker. Golden eared Patrick Cleasby tried these sun-sational Nipponese mini-monitors...

Sometimes big surprises come in small packages. When two strange egg-shaped objects emerged from a nondescript cardboard box, I was prepared for novelty and nothing more. Of course, if I'd read the press release beforehand then I might have had a better idea of what to expect. It seems the 307's bigger brothers - the 512s and 508s - have gone down rather well with some top pro audio types (The Brecker Brothers, Sting's engineer Simon Osborne). Perhaps for this reason Eclipse are also not afraid of having the word "expensive" mentioned in association with the 307s...?

While the bigger eggs are serious recording studio monitoring machines, these are designed for where space is at an absolute premium, and the obvious application being computers. They're also, thanks to the stunning finish, particularly suited to style-conscious buyers. Put

these two categories together and you have Mac users! So it seemed entirely appropriate for a Mac-head like me [and a very stylish one, if I may say so? - Ed] to give them a go. Indeed, Eclipse are either prescient or very well informed, since although the 307s are also available in white and black, the gunmetal grey finish of the amp and speakers of this review sample sit much better next to a G5 tower than they do next to the translucent G4 styling of the current Apple Studio display as featured in the advertising. If Apple G5-ise the styling of their display, Eclipse will be right on the money and Harmon Kardon's transparent speaker/ sub combo will be looking in need of an update! Of course, the Eclipses are a whole order of magnitude more expensive...

Now, before we discuss prices, options and sonics, let's put this 'style' issue to bed. Like many men of similar age I spent my youth (and thankfully only my youth...) with a

serious Dr. Who affliction. Thanks to the wonderful ergonomics of the 307PA amp unit I can feel like The Doctor at the controls of the TARDIS - the satisfying palm-filling feel and dampened operation of the big blue under-lit aluminium volume knob is an old-time joy. Even my wife, who is quite fetishistic and judgmental about the action of computer keyboards and the like [oh yes... Ed] enjoyed a quick spin. There is not much else to the unit: a simple power switch, spring loaded gold speaker terminals, the DC power input (chunky transformer supplied), a crossover switch for when using the sub unit, and 3.5mm input and output (for the sub) sockets.

The speaker units themselves look very swish on their chrome feet, have optional speaker grilles and feel impressively substantial, containing an anchor weight as they do. Optional wall brackets are available for £50, and stands for £199, but these are more suited for

the use of five 307s with a sub in a small room 5.1 set-up, in which context the imaging of the 307s is reputed to do wonders. There is no equivalent of the stereo PA unit in a surround set-up – you just take your 5, 6 or 7 307s and a 316SW sub and use the multi-channel amp of your choice.

SOUND QUALITY

I have to confess that on initially plugging the system up with my G5, I was not turned on by the sonics. This was my fault entirely, however, as I'd left the 'Rock' preset switched on in iTunes (and the 'Sound Enhancer' to boot), and the Eclipses were remorselessly revealing this nasty audio affectation. So, to check that things were set up correctly after defeating the EQ, I tried playing some self-recorded uncompressed 24/48 PCM material - and was rewarded with fantastically dynamic sounds. Lurking in the same vicinity in iTunes was the official 192 kbps preview MP3 of Claudia Brücken (you didn't think a month was going to go by without a mention of my favourite diva did you?) and Andrew Poppy's version of 'Running Up That Hill'

from the forthcoming 'Another Language' album, and the simple piano and vocal are relayed by the Eclipses with lovely clarity and realism.

Deliciously crisp and open in the midband and treble as the 307s are, frankly the bass isn't up to much. To be fair, it's designed for near-field-use and therefore this should be an issue. But there's an optional subwoofer for those with a penchant for low frequencies, and this proved essential for serious listening. Now, I know that Joni Mitchell said, 'New Age rhymes with sew-age', but I happened to put on my encode of a twenty year old Windham Hill disc – Will Ackerman's "Passage", and the simple acoustic and violin formula was conveyed with wonderful precision by the Eclipse ensemble. Real music, real musicians, real musicality – and speakers to take me there.

Imaging is claimed to be the major selling point of the Eclipses, thanks to their small size, rounded enclosures and single, point-source driver - and so it was. They worked best at ear height, but if you're not so fussy you can tilt them back on

the stands so they are firing up to you. Once set up, a quick fix of the gonzo guitar stylings of Ted Nugent's first solo album resulted in quite the most satisfying experience of

that distinctive semi-acoustic guitar tone, tight drum sound and creamily authentic bass I have had for some time. All the detail in this wonderfully engineered classic rock recording was laid out in front of me. The

obligatory Steely Dan test, using the CD layer from the recent SACD of 'Gaucho', generated an almost eerie sense of presence. The Eclipses rendered the layered precision of the Steely Dan sound with considerable aplomb.

How did they cope with the carefully tailored midband of a modern rock record? A blast of Skunk Anansie's still awesome 'Selling Jesus' demonstrated

admirable control of a skittering bass part, and a drum kit being battered to death within sheets of Les Paul rifferama, while preserving Skin's histrionic vocal in the verse and angelic choral backing in the chorus. 'Little Baby Swastika' demonstrated phenomenally the three dimensional imaging too. Switching to Porcupine Tree's recent remaster of 'Signify', the edgy dampened Strat attack of the title track moved with tight efficiency whereas the hypnotic center-piece – 'Waiting' swung through its movements beautifully. Very impressive stuff indeed. This Eclipse

VERDICT ●●●●●

Superb visual and aural complement to the G5 Mac, these desktop speakers make a great show-off purchase for those with an eye – and an ear - for detail.

FUJITSU-TEN ECLIPSE
TD307PA (SEE BOX) £400
www.eclipse-td.co.uk



system made me want to sit in front of my Mac all day, throwing different tracks at it to see how it coped.

Here's a miniature active loudspeaker system with a difference. Its design and build quality are to the very best hi-fi standards, and the result is dazzling sonics (and styling) in a small package – ideal for multimedia and computer use. The only problem of course is that quality costs, and if you're wanting to grow the TD307s out of their desktop domain into a fully fledged, full-range sound system, then you'll need to spend £650 extra on the subwoofer too. This done, the results are remarkable, but even in 2.0 form as tested, this entry-level Eclipse is dazzlingly capable.

PRICING

TD 307PA system	£400
TD 307/316SW 5.1 sat and sub system	£1300
TD 307 Micro Monitor	£130
Eclipse 316SW Subwoofer	£650

SPECIFICATIONS (QUOTED)

DRIVE UNIT:	65mm full range
FREQUENCY RESPONSE:	120Hz-20-kHz (-10dB)
POWER HANDLING:	24W
SPEAKER DIMENSIONS:	120x162x160mm
SPEAKER WEIGHT:	1.2kg (each)
AMPLIFIER POWER:	2x12W
AMPLIFIER DIMENSIONS:	144x150x148mm
AMPLIFIER WEIGHT:	1.5kg





**THE WHO
TOMMY
(HYBRID SACD: STEREO AND
MULTI-CHANNEL DSD)**

Following on from the masterful Deluxe Edition SACD of 'Goodbye Yellow Brick Road' Universal debut another significant Deluxe re-release as an SACD – The Who's classic rock opera 'Tommy', and this one is every bit as excellent as its predecessor.

To get the first piece of good news out of the way first: for the first time ever 'Tommy' is available in digital form as a transfer from the original quarter inch stereo master. As per the previous CD remasters Jon Astley has handled the mastering chores, but as a close Who collaborator his role was always much more than just mastering. The mid-nineties CD actually bore a remix credit so I presume the stereo was recreated from the one inch eight track, but this time Astley's searches have unearthed the tapes which were previously thought to have been lost. Coupled with the benefit of a new DSD transfer this means that a whole generation has the chance to hear 'Tommy' as it was originally intended to be. But over and above that we have the work as Pete Townshend now intends it to be – in surround.

Essentially what Townshend has done is to recognise the individual

brilliance of his rhythm section and push their contributions more to the fore in his surround mix. He has also decided that a much drier approach to the use of reverb is more suited to what is one of the true great rock bands playing great rock music. The original parts were so well recorded that anyone who really appreciates such stellar playing and great sounds should enjoy the new surround imagining as an alternate version of the album. A second disc also gives us the same rich bass sounds and great ensemble playing on twelve alternate versions and outtakes, available in both stereo and surround, while a handful of stereo-only original Townshend demos – cough - demonstrate how complete the tracks were in his imagination before he even presented them to the band.

DVD-Audio fans should once again be aware that US Universal release 'Tommy' in that form in a couple of months time. In either format this makes a great package, and an assured first foray into surround work for Townshend - this one should ensure that future Who surround projects are eagerly anticipated. At the present time work is under way on 'Quadrophenia' - regrettably, as mentioned elsewhere in this issue in a letter response, 'Who's Next' is

currently stymied by the old 'missing, lost or half-inched roll of multi-track' problem. A great shame indeed...

**ELVIS COSTELLO
NORTH
(HYBRID SACD: STEREO AND
MULTI-CHANNEL DSD)**

For another month, new DVD-Audio releases remain thin on the ground while Universal International continue to release fine SACDs in increasing numbers. However it would appear that there are even some within the fold who remain unconvinced that the time for new formats is now, as despite 'North' being available in SACD form in the US and Europe, Deutsche Grammophon have yet to release it here in the UK. Attempts to elicit an official response as to why this should be have not been successful thus far...

The explanation could be the fact that Elvis's latest offering has not exactly set the world on fire, even among the cognoscenti. I like it, which could be because I am not a great lover of the classic Costello style of vituperative wordplay and tightly energetic rock, and this album has almost nothing to do with that. The DG emblem gives the game away that this is one of the long line of non-rock Costello projects – he has been doing it for so long now



that it is impossible to accuse him of dilettantism.

Last year's chat show circuit saw Elvis explaining how he happened to realise that he had written a song-cycle which took him from the dissolution of one relationship (his marriage to Cait O'Riordan) to the dawn of a new one (his recent liaison with Dana Krall). The result is an album of straightforward lovelorn balladry, with a pleasing arc from melancholy to hope. Beautifully recorded and subtly mixed (for both stereo and surround) by long-time studio partner Kevin Killen, the primarily piano and vocal setting foregrounds Costello's lugubrious baritone, but DSD conveys that frail instrument (and some haunting vibraphone parts) with great realism.

Bonus track 'Impatience' reunites Costello with Attractions drummer Pete Thomas and guitar collaborator of some fifteen years standing Marc Ribot, and highlights how fun surround reworkings of Costello's electric band work could be. If Killen can produce mixes like this I would like to hear his re-imaginings of Costello's nineties work, even though I have never been a huge fan. Anyone who is already a fan of this album should definitely seek this SACD out from Europe or the States and upgrade forthwith. However, if you are a DVD Audio fan be advised that

US Universal have a DVD-A of North slated as "Coming Soon".

DEPECHE MODE 101 (HYBRID SACD: STEREO AND MULTI-CHANNEL DSD)

It may not be immediately apparent why Mute decided to launch into SACD with this title, but last year's re-release of D.A. Pennebaker's movie of the same name on DVD must have meant that the time was right to remaster the album too. Bizarrely, although I kept up with DM studio albums both before and after the considerable career landmark of 101 I never got the live album or video, so this is a welcome opportunity to see and hear what I missed.

At the time it seemed strange to see the bunch of gangly Basildon teenagers who had gauchely graced TOTP a mere handful of years earlier turn into stadium-shagging rock gods. Looking back it seems easier to understand, as from the inter-album singles 'It's Called A Heart' and 'Shake The Disease' through the two albums ('Black Celebration' and 'Music For The Masses') which preceded this one, it is possible to trace both increasing class and increasing rock inflections in the songwriting of Martin Gore. It wasn't until after 101 that Gore added significant guitar and

real drums to the mix, but you could see it coming. 101 was recorded at the Pasadena Rosebowl at the end of the US tour Pennebaker followed with his camera. Bereft of the images of white-clad Dave Gahan's gyrations causing teenage screaming, the album still works as a record of the energy the band released onstage and the adulation they received in return.

This double SACD consists of a Simon Heyworth DSD remastering of the original half-inch analogue master for SACD stereo and CD layers, and the results are very pleasing, as DSD seems ideal for conveying the fat synthesised bass and kick drum which characterises so much of this material. The original stereo was also used to create the multi-channel version by treating it with a Z Systems K6 surround processor. This approach is unlikely to generate great results for studio material, but may be deemed acceptable for live material where a "proscenium arch" approach to 5.1 mixing is most common, with the rears only being used for ambience and audience. Many might prefer to use their own surround processing such as Pro-logic II. Most hearteningly the whispers are that true discrete mixed surround versions of the studio albums are in the pipeline – a prospect which should have all DM fans slaving in anticipation.

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Boulder L5AE Pre Amp	£1,750.00	£3,500.00
Klein 7LX 3.5B	£2,900.00	£5,400.00
Audio Research LS3	£795.00	£1,997.00
Cary SLP98L Remote Pre x-dem	£1295.00	£2,794.00

	Our Price	Original Retail Price
LOUDSPEAKERS		
Shahinian Obelisk	£995.00	£3,500.00
Heybrook Sextet (new drivers)	£395.00	£1,200.00
Ensemble PA1	£695.00	£2,000.00
JM Lab Sib & Cub (5.1 spk sys)	£695.00	£859.00

	Our Price	Original Retail Price
CD PLAYERS & DACS/DVD PLAYERS		
EAD DSP9000 Pro Series III	£2,795.00	£8,000.00
Micromega Classic Solo	£995.00	£2,500.00
Wadia No 27 Dac	£3,750.00	£9,000.00
Mark Levinson 31.5 Transport	£3,995.00	£9,600.00
Chord SPM 1600E Dac/ Pre	£2750.00	£6,500.00
Theta Pro Geny	£495.00	£1,295.00

	Our Price	Original Retail Price
TURNTABLES, ANALOGUE, VARIOUS		
Tara Labs 10m Bal The 2 Interconnect	£2,000.00	£5,000.00
Tara Labs Monoblock FGS	£500.00	£1,000.00
Tara Labs The 2 Speaker Cable 4ft	£1,300.00	£3,000.00

Power amplifiers

	Our Price	Original Retail Price
Conrad Johnson MF2500	£2,795.00	£4,000.00
YBA Passion Monoblocks	£5,495.00	£9,500.00
Audio Flight 100	£On Dem	£6,500.00
Audio Flight One Integrated	£On Dem	£4,500.00
Linn Klimax 500 Solo (4)	£3995.00 each	£6,000.00
Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	£2,695.00	£3,300.00
Boulder 500 AE	£2,495.00	£5,500.00
ES Lab DX-54	£1,395.00	£2,000.00
Krell KAV 250A	£1,795.00	£3,650.00
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Plinius 250 mk IV "new"	£On Dem	£6,350.00

AV components

	Our Price	Original Retail Price
AV COMPONENTS		
Linn 5103 System Controller	£2,395.00	£3,285.00
Parasound 2205 - 5 Channel	£1,795.00	£3,000.00
Lexicon MCI	£1,995.00	£5,500.00
Lexicon MC8 Processor	£On Dem	£5,000.00
Lexicon RT10 DVD Player	£On Dem	£2,300.00
SIM 2 HT 300	£7,500.00	£9,000.00
Primare P30 Processor	£1,295.00	£2,000.00
Linn Klassik DVD	£On Dem	£2,000.00
Lexicon MC12 / MC12B	£On Dem	£8100.00/£8900.00
Loewe Xemix DVD "new"	£On Dem	£495.00
PLASMAS/LCD/PROJECTORS		
From NEC/ Panasonic/Pioneer/Sharp from	£4000.00	POA
Electrograph Delphi/Selec/Sony/Sanyo	-	POA
Panasonic TH-42 PWD6 "new"	£4,400.00	-

Pre amplifiers

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Conrad Johnson PV14L	£1,650.00	£2,250.00
Audio Flight Pre	£On Dem	£4,500.00
Musical Fidelity NuVista	£995.00	£1,200.00
Audio Research LS25 mk II	£4,250.00	£5,995.00
YBA 2a Line	£1,295.00	£1,995.00
Tom Evans The Vibe Pre	£On Dem	£2,700.00
Chord DSC 1600E (dac/pre)	£3,250.00	£6,500.00
AVI S2000 MP remote pre	£395.00	£800.00

	£On Dem	£13,000.00
Boulder 1012 (pre amp/ 24.96 dac/ Phono)	£3,995.00	£5,595.00
YBA Passion Pre (inc Phono)	£POA	£30,000.00
Boulder 2010 Pre	£On Dem	£3,200.00
Plinius 16L "new"	£On Dem	£6,750.00
C.A.T. ultimate reference Pre Amp Inc/Phono "new"	£On Dem	-

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Blue Room Minipod Sub	£415.00	£468.99
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Audio Physic Virgo III "new"	£On Dem	£4,000.00
Audio Physic Tempo III "new"	£On Dem	£2,000.00
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Linn CD12	£On Dem	£12,000.00
Linn Karik/ Numerik	£995.00	£3,300.00
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Roksan Caspian CD	£On Dem	£995.00
Theta Data Pro Basic IIIa	£1,495.00	£3,495.00
Trichord PD-S 503	£295.00	£500.00
YBA CD1 Delta (Twin psu)	£3,995.00	£5,500.00
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade	£1,695.00	£3,250.00
Mark Levinson 39	£2,995.00	£5,000.00
YBA CD 3 Delta	£On Dem	£2,200.00
Audiomeca Damnation CD Transport	£750.00	£1,600.00
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Primare V25 CD/DVD	£On Dem	£1,000.00
Boulder 2020 dac	£POA	£24,000.00
Theta Data II Transport AT + link	£1,995.00	£4,000.00
YBA CD Integre "new"	£On Dem	£1,195.00

Turntables & analogue

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Clear Audio Reference Mc phono stage X-demo	£1,695.00	£2,065.00
Rega Planer 3 + Hi Fi News Out Board Power Supply	£320.00	£423.00
Clear Audio Symphono phono stage X-demo MM/MC	£640.00	£740.00

* Reduced this month

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noel keywood



Funny that - twenty years after digital arrived, consigning LP to the great dustbin of history - the old analogue disc soldiers on. Good turntables still sell, and both cartridges and phono stages are in demand. Like most people who were alive when Led Zep roamed the earth, I've got a sizeable record collection. Worse - or should I say 'better' - still, it contains classics from artists like Janis Joplin to Jimi Hendrix that will, with the benefit of hindsight, never be equalled. They've been re-released on CD, but that still doesn't detract from the fact that it was LP where I first heard the original performance and it's LP where the music lies in its original form. A CD will never have the same value, even though it may carry an 'improved' version where the master tapes have been computer enhanced to reduce noise and improve balance.

A retro car that uses modern parts under a repro body would similarly offer better performance and reliability than the original, but museums and collectors wouldn't value it in the same way and for a lot of great music only the LP will do for much the same reason. No matter how convenient and durable the CD versions may be, it is on LP that the music historically belongs. That is how music reached us from the mid '50s to the mid '80s, a span of thirty years during which time some of the world's greatest artists were delivered to us on black plastic. This gives the LP great historical and sentimental value. I for one now treasure early Beatles singles and EPs that in their time were played hard and given little care.

CD 'seemed' to move us on into a new world of improved sound and easier access. I wouldn't deny it. It has proven to be a wonderful innovation, although not quite for the benefits originally claimed. Its laser

optics are a wonder; this part of the CD is in use today. The digital coding scheme used was abysmal though, worse in some crucial areas, like distortion, than the LP it replaced. Comparison of the two has always fascinated me because the LP just isn't the technical abomination it was once made out to be, mainly to further CD's case, and CD isn't the wonder it was originally cracked up

“ A CD will never have the same value, even though it may carry an 'improved' version

to be either.

It was interesting to measure frequency response of the Decca London Gold cartridge this month: it reached 30kHz. That's more than CD by a useful margin, from a cartridge designed for mono! It almost matches the 96kHz sample rate of DVD-Audio, which gives an analogue bandwidth to 45kHz. There is a way of arguing that the Decca tracking an LP likely outputs more above 20kHz than you'd get from much 24/96 digital. It may be peaky and a little artificial, but if there is anything on an LP in this region the Decca will find it! So what we hear from LP may sound good for subtle but real reasons. It's easy but dangerous to underestimate the LP and overestimate the CD, simply because the latter is digital.

LP hides its weaknesses well, unlike CD. The peculiar influence of RIAA correction is a prime culprit in bringing to LP a presentation that no digital medium could ever possess. RIAA boosts bass and cuts treble. It gives disc surface noise a warm quality. Low level noise affects our perception of sound. If RIAA were not there I suspect we would find the LP a lot less pleasant to listen to.

For a start surface noise would take the form of a thin, spitty hiss. Distortion harmonics would seem nastier, likely making the sound more wiry. And there would be less apparent air and space, because strong low frequency noise is the signature of large-space ambience to the brain. For these reasons digital done properly could never sound like LP, the replay processes are so different.

The best we can do with digital is to give it enormous resolution so that as signals sink in level they don't rise in distortion, an unfortunate phenomenon. Hence the decision to use 24bit resolution which, in theory at least, gives minimal

distortion. My measurements show that this is achieved in practice too, from test discs at least, where levels of 0.1% for DVD-A and SACD compare with 7% or more from CD at -80dB. That's a seventy fold decrease in distortion. But then you have to remember that at really low levels a cartridge tracking an LP groove is also very linear; there's little distortion and it is innocuous sounding second and third harmonic, one reason why LP sounds so smooth.

Today's cartridges are coming ever closer to the better technical features of CD, like a flat frequency response, whilst moving farther away from their traditional weak areas. Stylus get ever better at retrieving information and tracking has improved steadily too. Improving CD is difficult, arguably impossible. The 1970s digital coding scheme used by CD imposes a fixed limit upon the information that can be carried. So while CD stagnates and hi res digital struggles to get off the ground, the LP improves steadily - which always was one of the glories of analogue; it can evolve and digital cannot. Don't look at your LP collection as a relic: there's useful life in the LP still. ●

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David Price



When prototype Compact Disc players were first unveiled to the press back in 1982, such a thing as a laser tracked digital disc seemed so esoteric that it was the stuff of science fiction – how possibly could music emanate from a small, silver slice of lacquered aluminium? By contrast, plain old black vinyl records seemed so far behind that most commentators, understandably enough, predicted its speedy demise.

I for one was fascinated with CD theory. At the time of its launch, I was working as a contract programmer for Exxon, using machine code and assembly language on the (then) new 16bit processors in IBM PCs. Digital audio seemed a small step away from my daily travails, and an intriguing one. I soon realised that CD spinners were actually 'mini music computers', number crunching data read off their optical disc drive in real time.

Turntables were a very different kettle of fish. Essentially analogue measuring instruments, they possessed none of that sexy 'high tech' appeal of their new digital cousins. Simple, fault prone and fiddly with a nineteenth century user interface, was it any wonder that the thrusting, fashion-obsessed world of early eighties Britain simply couldn't be bothered with them anymore?

Ironically, two decades on, producing a CD spinner is not full of mystery and intrigue. Digital disc machines come on silicon chips these days. (Look inside a 1983 Sony CDP-101, jam packed with circuit boards and wires everywhere, and compare that to a 2003 Sony SCD-XA3000ES, which is a model of simplicity). Chuck in a 'mech', a display and a

'trannie' and Bob's your uncle...

By contrast, it is vinyl which is now enveloped in myth and magic. Manufacturing turntables is actually a more complex process, as it involves handling materials bigger than chips – and circuit boards, machining them – sometimes to incredible tolerances –

Its fiddly setup and quaint looks will deter some, but its fluidity will amaze

and doing it day in, day out with a supreme degree of consistency.

We're realising that the process of dragging a tiny lump of coal along a small, bumpy plastic groove is far trickier than it seems. Turntables, tonearms and cartridges require tremendously intricate mechanical engineering (especially the latter two), and are unbelievably time and labour-intensive to make relative to a 24/7 DVD player production plant in Shenzhen.

This month's tonearm supertest was a fascinating reminder of this. All the arms involved were quite superb compared to the standards of the nineteen eighties, when vinyl had its last mainstream moment. And so they should be – twenty years of Darwinian natural selection has separated the wheat from the chaff, leaving analogue addicts with a choice of fine, but quite different, sounding products.

The Rega-based Origin Live OL and Silver are now the staple of the modern pickup arm market, and are a dramatic improvement on the original RB300, boasting ease of setup and very high all-round competence. The Linn and SME serve as excellent late eighties reference points – in their respective ways,

they still do what they do better than anything else (i.e. tunefulness and analysis respectively). The Hadcock is stunningly underrated in my opinion – its fiddly setup and quaint looks will deter some, but its fluidity will amaze. The Roksan Nima is a thoroughly modern unipivot with an expansive and organic sound, and the only thing to have at £350.

What then of the others we've left out? Well, the first thing many Hi-Fi World readers will be thinking is, 'why didn't you do the Naim ARO, the Michell TecnoArm

(a), the Graham, the Wheaton Tri-Planar, the Rega RB900, the SME309...?' Well, we had to draw a line in the sand somewhere – and leave the others for next time!

You might have noticed that – while we're fascinated by new digital developments – we take vinyl extremely seriously, and hope to bring you the most thorough coverage of the format possible. Of course, we can't do this all at once, so I'd ask eager vinylphiles to be patient, as we run the gamut of all the goodies on sale, both new and second-hand.

As for digital devotees, we'll still strive to find the most musical MP3, AAC, CD, SACD and DVD-A players around. But don't rule vinyl out as a complimentary source to your CD player. The beauty of vinyl is that you can buy a second-hand Dual CS505 for £20, spend £20 on a new Audio Technica AT110E and £60 on a Project Phono Box LE – and you've suddenly got access to a massive archive of black plastic, much of which still costs 50p from charity shops. On one hand, we have the majesty of turntables like Musical Fidelity's M1, and on the other you can get going in analogue for under £100 – that's the magic of vinyl! ●

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Ijk setright



I have just emerged from an extraordinary musical experience, which has served to remind me (not that I need reminding, but you might) how very important is the radio in our scheme of things. I have been listening to a performance, the like of which I had never heard before, of the tenth symphony of Shostakovitch. It was broadcast by the BBC on Radio 3, and it was not even a live performance but a recording made in May 2003.

To claim that I had never heard its like before might not in itself convey much, until I explain that I have been very keen on the Shostakovitch Tenth since it was new. When the score was first brought to England in 1954. I recall that a hurried preparation of it was performed in Manchester and broadcast from there. Then Sir Malcolm Sargent (or was he at that time still merely Dr Sargent?), who was very good at swotting up new scores for convincing performance, brought it to the Royal Albert Hall. I made a point of being there, having already recognised in the first movement of the symphony a new paragon of symphonic architecture, and I still remember vividly how moved I was by the whole work.

There are now four different versions (Mravinsky, Ormandy, Svetlanov and Rattle) on my LP shelves. Each differs clearly from the others, but they all have one thing in common, giving emphasis to the sheer anguish that pervades the music. That is what distinguishes them all from the performance I have just heard.

It was given by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Ilan Volkov. Some pretty remarkable things are happening in

the supposedly minor orchestras under BBC control, and this is a good example. Whether it be inspired direction or better working conditions I have no idea, but since the coming of young Volkov the orchestra has become really good. I do not believe that it can have anything to do with the ample

“ I do not believe that it can have anything to do with the ample current supply of highly-trained young musicians now available

current supply of highly-trained young musicians now available, because the same thing has happened to the BBC Ulster Orchestra (it seems almost unbelievable that it should have evolved from the old BBC Northern Ireland Light Orchestra) since Thierry Fischer started conducting it – and that orchestra has to its credit a large proportion of long-serving senior players.

What made this Volkov Shostakovitch so wonderful? I do not think he missed giving expression to any of the intense feelings manifest in the music, but he did it with something not hitherto encountered: a kind of restraint or reserve, which allowed the sheer musicality of each line or phrase to emerge, all played with exceptional accuracy and synchronicity because the anguish was not allowed to devolve into mere fury and each of the players could play with a cool head as well as a warm heart.

There was something else. The sound was downright wonderful. As I

noted earlier, this was not a live broadcast but a BBC recording, which must mean that something was inevitably lost. What had been gained is a balance that cannot be heard in the concert hall: every section, every instrument of the orchestra could be heard at exactly the right volume for what it was doing. Nothing was swamped or unduly emphasised: this was a rendition more faithful to the music than anything to be heard in any concert hall capable of housing the necessarily large orchestra and an audience large enough to pay for it.

Here once again is proof that the supposed virtues of directly hearing a live performance can be illusory, and that the music can be assimilated better through that weird collection of electrical boxes that we call hi-fi. I am willing to go further: here, however the BBC engineers accomplished it, was sound better than I have ever heard from any CD, ever, and better than from the majority of LPs: when it is done well, the radio really is superb.

Let credit be given where credit is due. There are some people in the BBC who deserve eternal damnation for the despicable things that they are doing, especially to Radio 3 but probably (for all I know – I seldom watch) also to television. On the other hand, there are evidently some who manage to evade all that political nonsense and to work quietly and expertly to give us a musical service such as probably cannot be matched anywhere else in the world.

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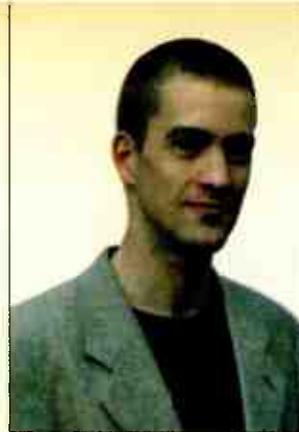
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dominic todd



Sometime ago I was offered a free car. Those sceptics amongst us will immediately be thinking what's the catch and so, in truth, did I. It turned out that by offering to drive a car, wrapped in a huge plastic wrapped advert, whilst going about your daily business, the car would be yours gratis. As with most free lunches, nothing ever came of it. So whilst I now believe there is no such thing as a free car, I still believe in the free hi-fi. Such is the strength of some second hand hi-fi equipment that it is possible to buy and sell hi-fi whilst making a minimal loss. If you're lucky you may even make a small gain.

Before I go any further, let me make it quite clear that very, very few people actually make serious money from buying and selling hi-fi. Although there may be the odd success from the Times Rich List, if you want to make a mint then property, fine art, or even cars are still really the way to go. Yet for the budding hi-fi enthusiast whose constantly changing their system, the hi-fi can be far less expensive than other recreations, and may even end up costing nothing at all.

The advent of the internet has brought about an explosion in the secondhand market place of just about all consumer durables. Hi-fi is no exception, and along with the booming traditional outlets of free ads, audio fairs and the classifieds of magazines such as this, auction web sites are really driving the business. Provided you pick carefully, it's quite possible to purchase a piece of hi-fi, use it for a year or two, and then sell it for near enough what you bought it for. Some items of hi-fi have almost become a currency in themselves such is the consistency of demand. Of course, not every

piece of hi-fi can guarantee you rock solid residuals, but there are some stalwarts. Ever since I've been into hi-fi, items such as Revox reel to reels, early Linn LPI2s and certain Tannoy dual concentrics have depreciated with a glacial slothfulness. Had I purchased any of these some 15 years ago, I'd be very

“ Of course, not everyone wants to buy second-hand, but even brand new equipment can still represent excellent value

surprised if I didn't get at least my money back by selling them today. These days, the number of stalwarts appears to have grown still further. Despite the near invisibility of cassette, Nakamichi decks still command extremely high premiums. Even the now twenty odd year old CR machines are have stiff prices - with even the basic, and not that great, CRI worth well over £100.

Other solid second hand investments include pretty much anything by SME, Quad's ESL 'speakers and early valve amps, and a good deal of Naim gear too. But one needn't necessarily be looking to spend a substantial amount of money to get your depreciation prove hi-fi. There is some excellent budget hi-fi out there that simply refuses to budge in price. If you want proof of this, then look no further than the NAD 3020 amp' which has hovered around the £60 mark for what seems like time and eternity. Older Arcam Alpha amps, and the budget wonder Pioneer A400 are also of the same mould. CD players such as the Cambridge

CD4 SE still make strong money, and if you fancy a piece of audio history, then an early Philips, Marantz, or Sony with a "I" in the name is, provided the laser is in good shape, a very solid place for your money.

Of course, not everyone wants to buy second-hand, but even brand new equipment can still represent excellent value. My parents always told me to buy antiques because, unlike new furniture, if times were hard one could always sell them and recoup a decent amount of cash. In some respects the same is true of hi-fi separates. Provided you pick carefully and go for discounted, end of line, products, a hi-fi

system can prove to be a good investment. The best products to look for tend to be similar the second-hand ones, hence NAD, Cambridge, Naim, Linn and SME are the usual suspects. Also Mission tend to hold their prices extremely well, so much so that a pair of discounted floorstanders can actually rise in value. Recently I've seen a pair of 702's that could have been bought for £120 two years ago, sell for £140. The fact that they were also a pretty decent 'speaker is further icing on the cake, but also the reason why somebody thought they were worth £140 to them in the first place!

Always remember that something is only worth what somebody is prepared to pay for it and, as with art and antiques, one should only really buy what you personally enjoy. The key is to enjoy the hi-fi. The fact that it may make you a little money over time is simply a bonus. Who knows, it might just prove to be invaluable when you can't rent out that buy to let. Happy listening. ●

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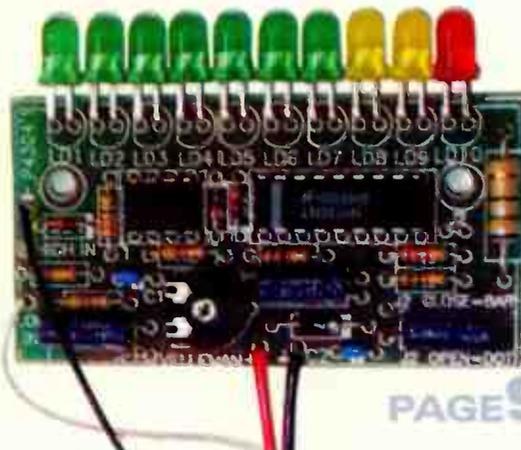
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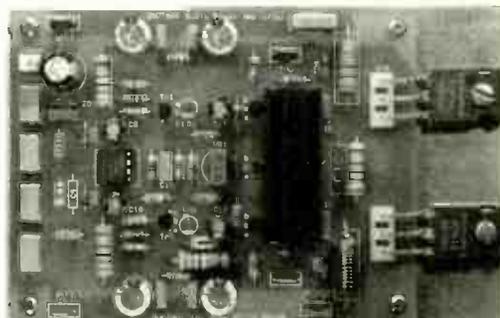
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diy news

LINKS GALORE

The London Live DIY Hi-Fi Circle is a big site with many pages. Members meet in a convenient pub and discuss ways of improving ordinary hi-fi without spending the much larger sums that would be



necessary to replace their kit with top models. There's

many home-made designs here, including big power amps and electrostatic speakers, driven directly from the anodes of the valve power amps. Scary stuff.

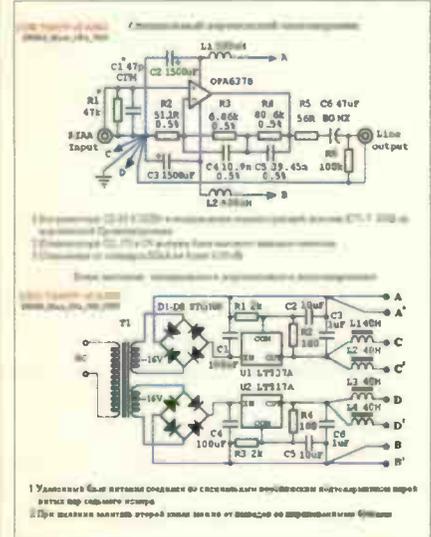
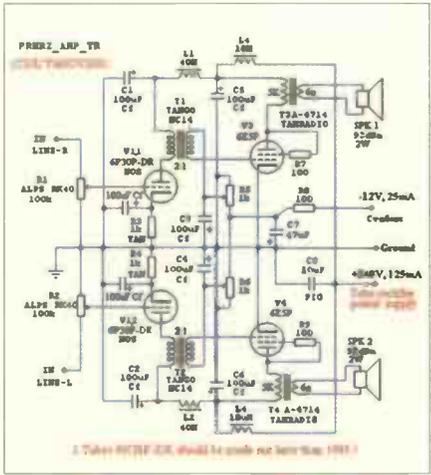
The Links page is excellent. One takes you to a site with more circuit diagrams, including another phono stage using the OPA637, but with completely different values for the RIAA EQ components.

www.londonlivehi-fi.com/



FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

An e-mail from Vladimir in Moscow came with an attached circuit diagram of a power amplifier with no gain. No, this is not an April Fool's Day joke. The circuit is basically an emitter-follower (cathode-follower for you valve fans). There are two of these circuits, each being rather more complicated than the simple theory, having as they do several transistors of each polarity. The gain? Ah yes, that is provided by a step-up transformer between the



two circuits. With enough voltage gain in the transformer, the amplifier needs no feedback. A very clever design.

There's more interesting stuff on his website -

www.fisnet.ru/hi-fi/ which is partly in English and partly in Russian. The English part warns of copyright, but that does not stop the author from showing the reader several interesting designs. There's a phono stage using a single OPA637B op-amp and, of course, there are several valve amp circuits there too. You knew I was going to say that, didn't you!

DECIBEL DUNGEON

Here's a site that also has many sections to it. From starting in hi-fi, through modifying hi-fi, building hi-fi and upgrades, it also includes hints and tips on installation and various mods and upgrades to specific items of hi-fi kit.

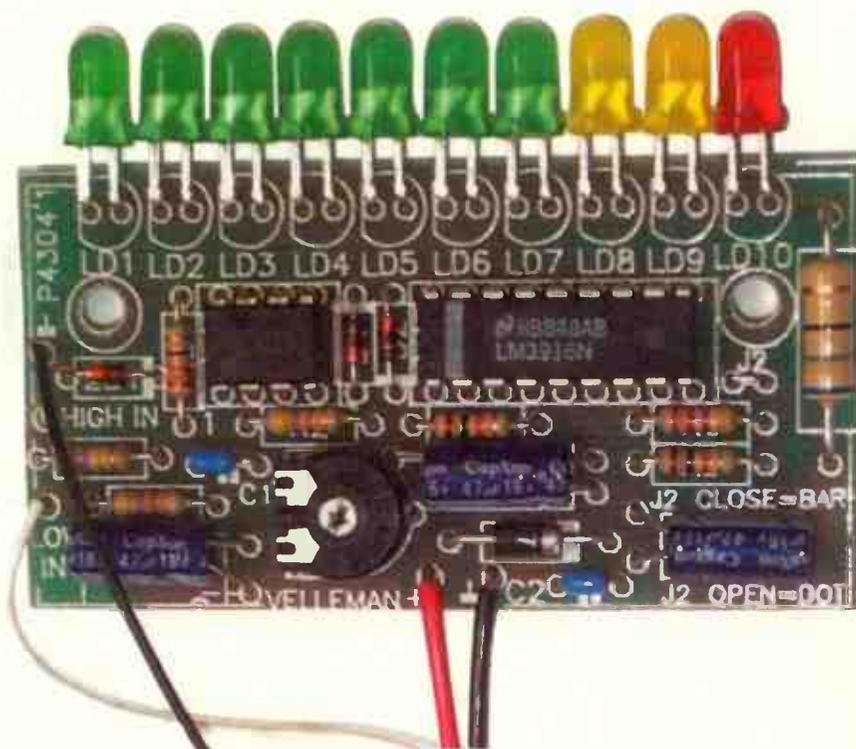
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BULL ELECTRICAL

Be careful of the print button at this site, it gave me 17 pages of valves with prices and the ability to add a quantity to the cart. Types include many CV numbers, but mostly don't state the manufacturer. You can get an EF86 for £3.85 but who made it? An EL84 is only £2.74 which might be a bargain, but all valves are described as "generally in original cartons and sold as-is", so caveat emptor rules here. The picture is of a big transmitting valve, made by ITT and yours for just £88. www.bullelect.co.uk/hi-fi/hi-fi/hi-fi/hi-fi/



LED stereo VU



Mike Ballance warms up his soldering iron and test kit to try out Maplin's 10 LED Stereo VU meter.

Velleman offer a number of kits, including a well-specified FM tuner and even a couple of valve amps, but here we're looking at something rather smaller.

Their kits are available in the UK from Maplin, the mail-order company that now has around eighty shops around the country. Guaranteed to be bad for the wallet if you live near one! The Velleman part number for this stereo VU meter kit is K4305. It becomes part number VF91Y in the Maplin catalogue and the cost is £19.99 inc VAT. There is also a mono (single channel) version at £14.99 and a bigger version with 15 LEDs per channel for £29.99.

A neat little addition to any amplifier, or mixing desk for that matter, the unit includes two circuit boards with ten LEDs on each, and the associated circuitry. The industry standard display driver for this type of circuit is the LM3916 (the LM3914 and LM3915 are similar) but it seems they are becoming harder to buy on their own. The circuit is reproduced

in the instruction book that comes with the kit. The signal passes through one of two resistors, 47k for the 'low' or higher sensitivity input and 470k for the 'high' or low sensitivity input. After that it passes through an op-amp with diodes in the feedback loop to present a DC output that corresponds to the audio peaks. This signal then supplies the LM3916 display driver chip and then the ten LEDs. There are seven green LEDs, two yellow and one red.

CONSTRUCTION

In addition to the two inputs, there is also a small potentiometer mounted on the board. This can be used to adjust the input sensitivity. With this control in mid-position, an input of 450mV (rms @ 1kHz) or -5dB is needed to switch all ten LEDs on. There is an option for the display to be dot more or bar mode, meaning that you can either have a single LED glowing at any one time, or a bar which gets longer with more signal strength. This latter is the more usual approach, so I soldered a link in place

to achieve this. It's easy - leave out this link if you want the bar mode.

The manual runs to many pages in a small booklet. It starts off with the colour code for resistors, so even if you've never made a kit before, you will find all the information you need here. The next page explains the technique of correct soldering. This is followed by a few pages on which each component is shown. There is a small check box to tick when that component is in place. It's obvious that Velleman have been making kits for a long time - they really have thought of everything. Naturally, special note is made of diodes and electrolytic capacitors, those components which must be inserted the right way round.

When all components are installed, the manual goes on to show how the units can be mounted. The board has two holes for fixing. No mounting kit is included, leaving users to make their own choices in this area. Dimensions are given for a fixing bracket, should you need one.

meter kit



The descriptions of possible mountings run to several pages. The only criticism I have here is that the adjustment potentiometer will probably be difficult to access once the boards are fixed in place. Setting up is therefore best done before final assembly.

An important requirement is a power supply. You will need a supply of between 10V and 15V DC with a maximum current requirement of 250mA. I used a 12V supply for the measurements given below. Help is to hand here as well, with circuit diagrams of methods of obtaining this supply from the mains. The instruction book explains that you can either use a transformer with 2 x 12V secondaries, two diodes and a 1000mF capacitor, rated at 25V, or a transformer with a single 12V secondary, 4 diodes (or a bridge diode) and the same capacitor. It's perhaps not as obvious as it should be that you don't need both of these supplies!

The book explains that the 'high' input is for use with speakers and the 'low' input is for use at line level, in other words the output of tuners, CD players, etc. Although it is safe to connect this unit to speaker outputs, you are warned not to connect it to

high power car amplifiers as these often use bridged outputs in which neither speaker cable is connected to the car ground. Doing this would short out the amplifier and probably destroy it, so if you intend to use it in a car, do check the type of amplifier very carefully first! It should be safe to use this unit in a home system, even one with bridged amplifiers, since being powered from the mains, it will be safe, just so long as you never connect any part of the display unit to anything else, other than the mains input to the transformer and the audio coupling. Don't try to get the DC supply for this unit from within the amplifier, as the same problems will arise. In fact it is best from an audio point of view to have a completely separate supply, as noise spikes from the display unit could get into the audio system, increasing background noise levels.

TEST MEASUREMENTS

The claimed frequency response is 20Hz to 30kHz and this was indeed met, although the unit was -3dB at 20Hz and -1.5dB at 30kHz. What this means is that an extra 3dB of input was needed at 20Hz to get the same display as at 1kHz. This is most unlikely to have any noticeable effect

- after all, we're not listening to these units! The maximum sensitivity available was 130mV, or -13dB, for all the green LEDs to be illuminated. This figure increased to 220mV, or -11dB, for all ten LEDs to be on. Considering that a CD player has an absolute maximum output of 2V (ie, 2000mV) this is much more than adequate, giving a very wide range of adjustment in use. A small quibble - the instruction book claims, under "indication range" that 0dB = 0.775mV rms. Ahem. Actually 0dB is 0.775V, or 775mV - only a typo, but don't let it confuse you.

IN USE

Like all good meters for audio work, this display has a fast attack and slow decay. In other words when a peak of sound comes along, the meter responds quickly. However the lights don't extinguish as quickly for two good reasons. The first is you might not notice a very quick flash, or the diode might not respond to one, and the second is that in music some sort of averaging is more helpful in determining sound levels. All things considered this is an excellent little addition to any hi-fi system, tape recorder or mixing desk for recording use.

Pole Position

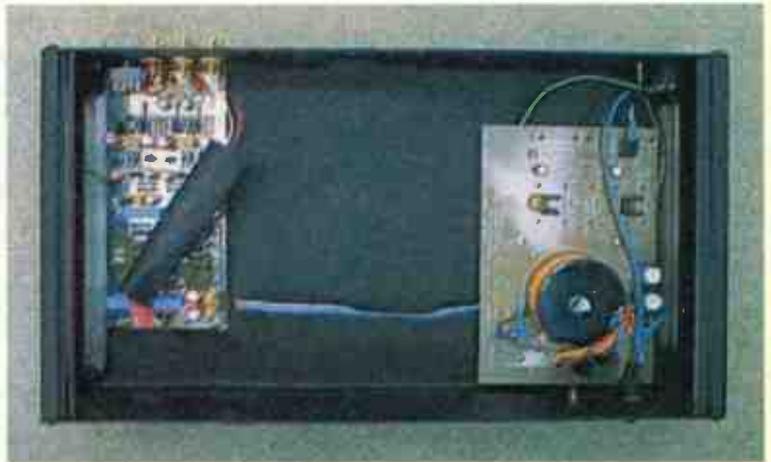
Clive Meakins revisits his Williams Hart Phono Stage

It can be tough if you play records. Some wonder if you're so poor that you have to buy old cast off LP's. Other's think you must have a hearing problem. As for saying you're into vinyl, well this can get you into a lot of trouble as most people won't realise you are talking about records!

Once those shiny bird scarers, normally known as CD's had established themselves it was clear that an outboard phono stage was the way to go. Trying to combine a good amp with a good phono stage was bound to reduce one's options. Enter the Linsley Hood designed phono stage. John Linsley Hood designed various hi-fi circuits and has often been published in the sober but exalted journal, *Wireless World*. John's designs are very much an engineer's, there are no boutique or voodoo components but nonetheless where there are good measurable reasons for using an advanced component, this is advocated. A current designer of a similar ilk is Bruce Rozenblit, though what John Linsley Hood would have to say about Bruce's use of valves instead of much more 'sensible' silicon, I can only imagine.

JLH designed this phono stage using discrete components, not an opamp to be seen as for casework, it's available in one or two-box set-ups. It's over ten years since I built this phono stage so why am I writing about it now? Most importantly it is still available today, a good sign so it's still a current product. It has seen me through a considerable upgrading of my record playing equipment. The fact the I've always been able to hear the improvements from my newer equipment suggests the phono stage is not holding me back.

When I built the kit I was using a Systemdek/Linn LVX with a Linn K9 MM cartridge. I originally road tested the phono stage with a much better deck an cartridge using Naim amplification and was not disappointed. I have now progressed to a Michell Gyro SE with Orbe platter, HR power supply and



Internal view of assembled kit.

Ortofon Kontrapunkt B MC cartridge. The arm is a new acquisition, Michell's latest TecnoArm(a), it sounds every bit as good as it looks, it not better. The Williams Hart phono stage still delivers, letting me appreciate the front-end improvements I have made. This demonstrates that it must be doing something right.

Surely the technology has developed over recent years? In fact Williams Hart have needed to make

only minor changes to the kit. The transistors have been replaced by new versions but these are to all intents and purposes the same as the originals. The other changes comprise lower ESR electrolytic capacitors along with improved regulators. I decided to upgrade my phono stage with the latest capacitors and regulators to bring it up to what is pretty much the latest spec. The first few hours of use were a very graphic example of how



Power supply section as supplied.



Phono section, as supplied.

much components develop as they burn-in. At first I thought I'd made a dreadful mistake. This turned out not to be the case.

The kit comprises two pcb's, black painted aluminium casework and all the components you need. The resistors are metal film, non-polarised capacitors are polycarbonate, the power transformer is thoughtfully a fully shielded affair. There are two 15 volt

are a whopping 670mV and 60mV. This is of course very important for vinyl. Very short duration, high magnitude spikes caused by dirt or scratches can upset a phono stage without a good overload margin. MC loading is set at 100 ohms/0.01uF and MM at 47k/220pf. Of course you can using whatever loading you prefer.

How do the different cases look? The two case version looks very functional, if I were to be a little brutal I'd use the word 'agricultural' but it's by no means unpleasant. The one box case is similar to the Williams Hart Power amp. It's still black but this time rather more professional looking. At £236.69 for the two box and £250.99 for the single box their can be no complaints whatsoever about value for money.

The big question is whether the Williams Hart phono stage is good value not only for the parts count but in terms of its sound. I've

there are compromises between clarity, detail and atmosphere. There's no easy answer to this balancing act, it comes down to your personal preference.

Overall I would say that the Williams Hart is an exemplar of how good design triumphs over the use of exotic components in poorer designs. There is of course scope for experimentation, you could try polypropylene or paper-in-oil coupling capacitors according to your preference. The single box version gives more space for such tweaking. Replacing the electrolytics with Black Gates should be a considerable improvement but at some considerable cost. Schottky diodes in the power supply would be worth a try and finally some really good voltage regulators, sometimes referred to as super-regulators could potentially be big win. Such a fully tricked-up version would be interesting to hear. Clearly the costs

involved would be high. I reckon the design justifies this, mind you the version I have is really very good indeed and is without question very good value. In fact it's so good I'm intrigued to understand just how high-end this design can be made.

Ultimately £250 for a phono kit that delivers such good sonics can only be described as a bargain.

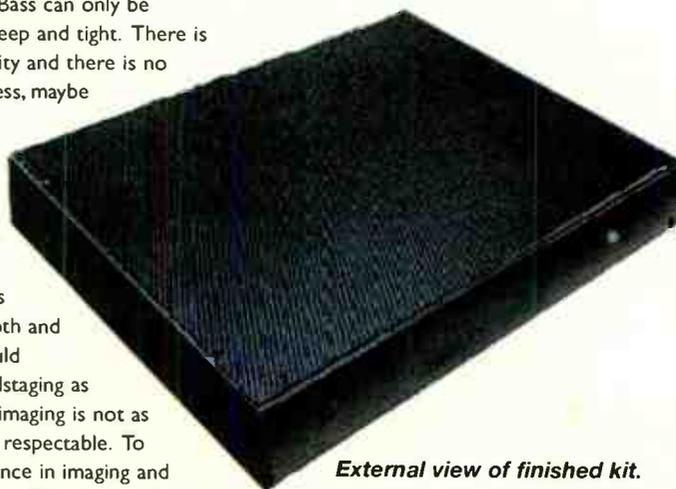


Populated phono PCB.

regulators in the power supply and two 5 volt regulators for the front end of the phono circuit. The regulators are of the 78xx, 79xx variety. The power supply board has a ground lift option via a movable internal link. MM and MC sensitivity is set by flicking a toggle switch. There are AC and DC inputs, AC is for MM cartridges where you might be concerned to block some dc voltage. The DC input does not have this extra dc blocking capacitor and typically sounds better, use it if you can.

The Williams Hart phono stage is a little unusual in that it uses shunt feedback, not the more normal series feedback. The justification is that it is said this circuit topology exhibits a much higher overload characteristic. So what are the specs? MM input sensitivity is 3.7mV and MC is 0.34mV, gain being 134 and 1460 times respectively. Overload margins

already said that this phono stage has seen me through significant record deck upgrades. This suggests that resolution is good, otherwise I wouldn't have heard the benefits of my upgrades. Bass can only be described as deep and tight. There is very good clarity and there is no hint of harshness, maybe this is the payoff from the high overload margin. Fine nuances are easily heard, it's crisp but smooth and detailed. I would describe soundstaging as good, perhaps imaging is not as strong but still respectable. To achieve excellence in imaging and impressive atmosphere you might need to consider a valve phono stage. Then again you might find



External view of finished kit.

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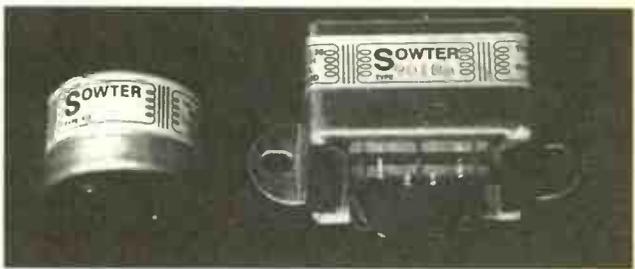


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All new PSU

Neville Roberts plugs into the new Origin Live Ultra Turntable Power Supply.

The latest offering to emerge from the vinyl gurus at Origin Live (<http://www.originlive.com>) is a top-of-the-range power supply to power their improved DC turntable motor that I have reviewed previously. Modestly titled the Ultra Turntable Power Supply, this builds on the success of their Advanced Power Supply as a 'no expense spared' design using the latest and best components currently available.

As with Origin's Advanced model, the Ultra is supplied as a kit that includes the DC motor and standard mains transformer, but with an enhanced price tag of £570 that reflects the design principles of this unit.

Obviously, the Ultra can cope with changes in input voltage from the mains, as well as the back EMF from the motor itself, which is used to control speed accurately. This minimises wow and flutter - a problem not just confined to tape transport mechanisms. As with the Advanced model, the Ultra incorporates a load compensating design that can compensate for the increased load on the motor caused by stylus drag.

However, the Ultra design incorporates features that compensate for the momentary slowing of the motor under sudden changes in load during, say, load bursts of music. Although this effect is very small, the cartridge can amplify this effect 100,000 times resulting in, according to Origin's literature, a loss of dynamic impact, particularly in the bass region. The circuit makes use of low impedance, low leakage capacitors, high power diodes and paralleled and closely matched transistors. All this technology is encased in a sleek, black case and finished off with a blue LED power indicator.

An upgraded transformer is also available for an additional £160 and this is also reviewed here to compare it with the standard offering that comes with the kit. The question is:

can a power supply costing in excess of £700 for a turntable really be worth the expense, or would the money be better spent elsewhere in the audio chain?

The kit is supplied with detailed instructions on how to upgrade virtually any turntable, with a separate section on upgrading the Linn LPI2. It also includes some washers and screws, a 2mm Allen key for use with Linn turntables, and a 'cut out and keep' strobe disc, with the centre hole pre-punched, for setting the motor speed.

I had already built an Advanced power supply into my turntable plinth (the subject of a previous article). The Ultra PSU and the associated mains transformers are housed in totally separate enclosures with the only connection to the deck itself being the output DC feed to the motor. This afforded me the opportunity to rapidly switch between supplies by rigging up a temporary switch on my turntable to connect the motor to either the existing internal supply or the new Ultra external unit.

As I had both the standard and the upgraded transformers available, I was also able to quickly switch between these units by plugging the appropriate transformer into the socket on the rear of the Ultra unit.

The Ultra has a 3-position switch on the front to select Off, 33 and 45 rpm speeds. The unit is designed to be powered continuously from the transformer and therefore the attractive blue LED remains lit, even when the motor is switched off. The actual speeds are set via 2 potentiometers accessed via a small hole drilled into the underside of the unit. The 45 rpm position can be set to provide 78 rpm by appropriate adjustment of the potentiometer if desired, although I would not be tempted to let your prize Hi-Fi cartridge anywhere near a 78!

Incidentally, while I had the unit upside down ready to set the motor speeds, I couldn't resist peering inside to see what components had been used. I was very pleased to see a large Rubycon electrolytic nestling at



Figure 1. The Ultra Kit and the Upgraded Transformer

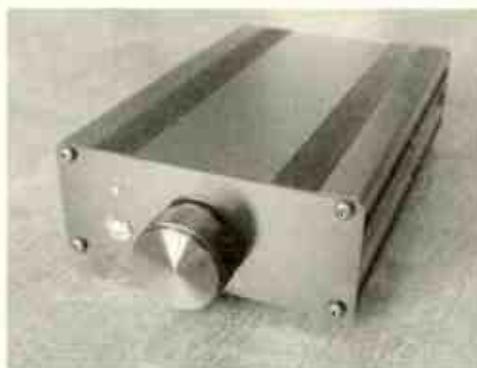


Figure 2. The Ultra PSU



Figure 3. Rear view of the Ultra showing AC Input and DC Output Connections

the far end of the circuit board. As a convert to the delights of Rubycon Black Gates in my amplifiers, I was fully aware of the range of capacitors they manufacture specifically for use in high performance power supplies. When I discussed this with Origin Live, they told me that they had based their choice of the Rubycon on the fact that they simply sounded the best from their trials, rather than other factors. What better reason could there be for their selection?

The new PSU needs to be left to run in for a minimum period of 3

hours, according to the instructions, and about 8 hours of running to sound its best. However, I would recommend leaving it running for at least 24 hours – all of us who have installed Black Gates in our amplifiers will be familiar with them suddenly 'popping' into sounding good after a few hours of sounding rather flat and I didn't want to take any chances with the Ultra. Setting the speed is simply a matter of illuminating the strobe disc from a mains powered light source, preferably fluorescent, and turning the appropriate potentiometer until the correct ring of lines on the strobe disc appears stationary. This should be carried out while playing a record at about half way in to allow for stylus drag. To put all this in perspective, speed variations on most decks is around plus or minus 2% and the Advanced supply provides 0.3%, but the Ultra offers accuracy of about 0.1%.

With the new unit properly calibrated, it was time to conduct the all-important listening trials. Would there be any discernible difference between the supplies and, more importantly, would the Ultra actually sound better?

I started off by installing a copy of "Lincoln Mayorga & Distinguished Colleagues – Volume III", Sheffield Labs SL5/SL6, on the turntable. This is a 'direct to disc' recording and is the closest one can get to a live recording as the disc was cut directly during the recording session in November 1973. When switching between my original Advanced power supply and the Ultra, it was immediately apparent that the imaging and accuracy of placement of the instruments was significantly better with the Ultra. Staying with the Ultra and plugging in the upgraded transformer resulted in a further tightening of the bass. What was particularly surprising was that the percussion was also clearer with the upgraded transformer. The first track on side 2, "You are the Sunshine of my Life", positively sparkled and reverting to the standard transformer was like throwing a cloth over the performers! Going back to my original power supply caused the various instruments to somehow lose their precisely allocated spot on my living room floor!

Switching to a half-cut master recording of "Money" from "The Dark Side of the Moon" (the term 'half-cut' refers to the master disc being cut at half speed, not the alcoholic state of the recording engineer!) confirmed the effects of the Ultra. The bass guitar was more tuneful and the cash registers glittered with clarity! The

vocals were altogether cleaner and their slight raspiness was much better reproduced.

Moving into the classical arena, my recording of Stravinsky's The Firebird Suite (The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra - Telarc digital recording DG-10039) demonstrated the improved clarity with the Ultra with the bowing of the strings more discernible in the opening section. Again, the bass was tighter, especially with the upgraded transformer, and the sound seemed richer, more mellow and open as compared to my original Advanced power supply. The harmonics of the solo harpsichord of J. S. Bach's Partita No. 2 (Trevor Pinnock on Archiv 415 493-1) were somehow more separate and you were more conscious of the strings actually being plucked with the Ultra with its standard transformer. Replacing the standard transformer with the upgraded unit added detail and somehow made the performance more effortless.

I was very convinced of the improvements with the Ultra, but I felt the need to consult with an independent and unbiased listener who has not been bitten with the Hi-Fi bug like me – my wife! I am pleased to report that she too immediately noticed the improvements I had found with the Ultra in a 'blind' test, even when I switched between the supplies and not saying which was which.

Although the Ultra clearly sounded better, this left me with the question of why on earth a power supply for a turntable motor should have such an effect on sound quality. The Ultra is able to respond rapidly to sudden changes in load caused by increased stylus drag on loud passages and thereby keeping the record speed constant. This, in theory, will result in more accurate timing of the various components of the signal from the cartridge, with a consequential reduction of errors, leading to more accurate reproduction. The importance of longer-term speed stability (although I am still referring to fractions of a second) should not be overlooked as this minimises wow and flutter, which will clearly have a beneficial effect on bass response. Given all the amplification of these errors from stylus tip to loudspeaker cone, it is therefore very understandable that minimising these could result in the improvements that were heard.

Having finished the listening tests, it was time to remove the original power supply from my deck and complete the conversion to the Ultra

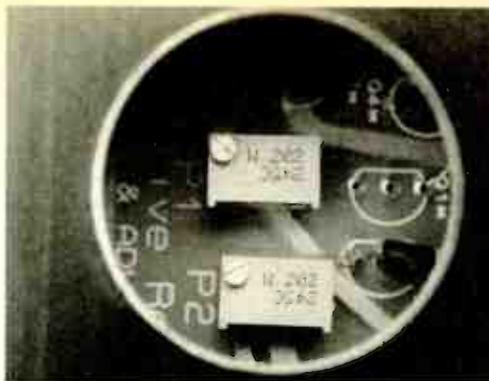


Figure 4. Motor Speed Setting Potentiometers



Figure 5. Setting the Motor Speed



Figure 6. Before (left) and After (right) – Spot the Differences?

external power supply. One of the holes on the plinth that accommodated the original speed control switch was put to good use and I fitted a spindle adaptor for large centre 45s that had been lying around in my Hi-Fi drawer for many years. The remaining holes were blanked off with squares of black plastic that I rebated into the wood beneath the metal cover.

To summarise, this power supply offers a performance that easily rivals top-flight power supplies from other manufacturers costing twice as much. To put this into context, you may spend considerably more on a cartridge, but risk 'cramping its style' by ignoring the record transport. If you want to get the best from your vinyl collection, you should not overlook the importance of the turntable motor and power supply. Incredible as it may seem, it really does make a very noticeable difference. Go for it!

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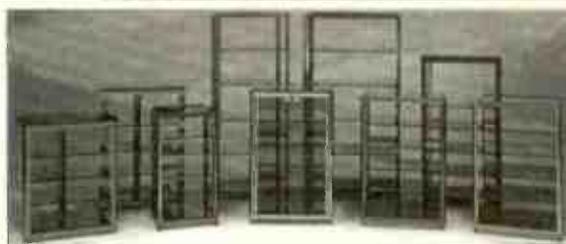
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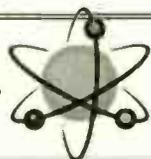
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- Sugden A43 Integrated Amp £95

Turntables

- Mission 77: SM with 774 tonearm £295
- Michell Orto5 turntable £1295
- Michell Gyrodec gold finish mint condition boxed £695
- Michell Focus 1 turntable £195
- Originalve classic turntable acrylic platter £395
- QC power supply phase II model £295
- SME 309 T tonearm boxed £495
- System Dwik IIX turntable ..UPGRADE YOUR REGA from £150
- STD with Mission 774 tonearm £195
- Various Garrard turntables with granite wood marble plinths available POA

Speakers

- ATC SCM 10 Active 10 ex dem new £1750
- ATC Active 20s ex dem new £2700
- ATC SCM 10's Walnut finish £394
- B&W CDM' Rosewood finish £395
- Audiophysik: Spark MK3 latest edition new £1850

- Beaumont B2 loudspeakers x-dem £1500
- Celestion Ditton 44 3 way speaker £195
- Gale 301 speakers £125
- Impulse Horn speakers new £1300
- JM Labs 905 bookshelf spks stereophile recommended £595
- JM Labs Micro Utopia speakers with matching stands boxed mint new £3995
- Linn Isobank £1795
- Musical Fidelity MC2 Bookshelf Speakers £395
- Martin Logans Aenual last and best version boxed mint £195
- OLN Spiffified Signatures £1495
- Quad ESL57 refurbished £895
- Sonus Faber Guinari Homage £595
- Tenney corner Lancaster with 15" Monitor £2495
- Gold's 1968 as new condition
- Spendor BC1 Speakers £POA
- Wilmslow Audio transmission line speakers with volt drive units HI-FI News recommended £175

CD Players, BACs

- Audiolab 8000 DAX F serial number Tag McLaren built HDCD mint boxed £395
- Arcam Alpha 6 new £600 £195
- Arcam CD6: 24 bit text CD Player mint boxed £225
- A&R wedge shaped CD Player mint boxed £95
- Marantz CD17 KI Sgnature mint £795
- Marantz CD63 top loading CD Player £495
- Meridian 604 series transport £486
- Meridian 604 CD DAC £295
- Mission DAD5 CD Player boxed mint £195
- Mission DAC7 boxed mint £75
- Musical Fidelity A3 upsampling DAC as new boxed £595
- Roksan Atessa top loading cd player £1500 new £495
- Sony S55 champagne finish battleship build quality £595

Tuners, Reel to Reel, Cassette Deck, misc

- Cyrus-original Tuner £195
- Leak Troughline Tuner 3 various ..from £50
- Mend an original shoebox tuner £150
- Quad FM3 Tuner (boxed mint) £145
- Quad FM3 Tuner £95
- Quad FM4 Tuner old style £225
- Revox G36 Open Reel Mint £395
- Sansui TU555 Tuner round dial £95
- Tascam 22/2 Open Reel £395
- Due In**
- Quad II Monoblocks 1250
- ATC SCA2 Flagship pre amplifier £2300
- EAR S9 monoblocs £394
- EAR C88 Pre Amplifier £395
- Griffin 85 Active Speakers £395

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There are now four models in the EAR lineup:
 The classic 834P uses the same circuit architecture as its more expensive brothers, and shares the same high quality sound through MM type cartridges, it is enclosed in a tough, rigid metal case and is fully "CE" type approved. price £495.00
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Top to the range, the Deluxe 834P comes in stunning chrome and gold cabinet, and has extra attention and quality control. With different moving coil input options, this unit will fit the most demanding of audiophile systems. For the true vinyl enthusiast. price £895.00

MC3 - The ultimate stage for MC matching with 3 fixed transformer taps to cover all types of moving coil cartridges, and separate left/right grounding. MC3 in used in the new £10,000 312 pre. price £630.00

Selected products from: ATC, Audio Physic, EAR Yoshino, Nottingham Analogue, Dynavector.

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CLEARAUDIO Balanced phono stage	£500	£ 345
CONOISSEUR 8D2	£250	£125
DUAL CS506 (Black)	£175	£ 80
DUAL CS 505 Silver	£150	£ 88
DUAL CS503-1 Concept	£180	£ 88
FIDELITY RESEARCH		
FRT-4 (Phono Trans)	£500	£198
GARRARD 401 / SME 3009 II	£950	£495
GARRARD 401 + SME 3009II		
+ Shure V15II	£950	£595
GARRARD Zero 100S8 + Shure 93E		
GOLDRING LENC0 6L85 white	£175	£ 75
LINN Basik Turntable	£600	£345
LINN LP12 (Black) LVX/K9	£1500	£575
LINN LP12 Rosewood/Akito	£750	£894
LINN LP12 Lingo / Ekos / Archive	£3500	£1998
LINN LP12 Afr/SME3009II	£1250	£ 595
LINN Axis / Akito / K9	£795	£ 445
LINN Akito Tone-arm	£495	£195
LINN LP12 AFR Ittok Blk / X18	£2000	£895
LINN LP12 Anniversary (BLK)		
Ittok/Ortofon Kontropunkt		
Lingo Power Supply	£5000	£2228
LINN LP12 Anniversary (blk) Ekos		
Lyra Claris D.C.		
Naim Armageddon PS	£5500	£2798
LINWOOD 'Equalizer' (phono stage)	£250	£ 95
LORIAN Transformer	£700	£356
LUXMAN PD500 Vacuum (cut for SME)	£1000	£ 375
LUXMAN PD282 (Rosewood)	£595	£320
MICHELL Gyrodec	£870	£740
MICHELL ISO/HERA Phono Stage	£895	£448
MICHELL Gyra/Orbe Update		
OC/MEC/CL AUD	£3000	£1498
MISSION 775 / Goldring 1040	£795	£398
ORACLE Alexandria	£1500	£650
PAUL HYNES Valve Phono stage	£295	£148
PROJECT 6.9	£600	£300
REGA Planor 2 (No arm)	£200	£75
SME 10A with 309 Tone Arm	£3410	£2896
SME20/2A	£5273	£4486
SYSTEMDEK Mission 774/ATOC3	£600	£195
TECHNICS 1Z10 incl. Flight case	£600	£298
THORENS TD 318 (black lacquer)	£350	£195
THORENS TD160 No cover	£279	£160
THORENS TD 166 MK V R8250/ATOC3	£500	£298
THORENS TD150 Rare		£190
THORENS TD 125/SME 3009II		
(Granite Plinth)		
THORENS TD124/SME 30D9II	£875	£495
THORENS TD160 Super		£475
SME Ser III/VMS2DE	£500	£275
TRANSCRIPTORS Ref Electronic		
with SME 3009		
UNISON Phono 1 + PSU	£850	£595
VOYD Reference inc arm	£14,995	£2998
WILSON BENESCH Full Circle	£1995	£1495

● Digital Sources

ARCAM Alpha One CD	£300	£149
ARCAM Alpha 8CD	£450	£245
ARCAM Alpha 9 CD	£900	£ 445
ARCAM Delta 250/Black Box 50	£875	£ 395
ARCAM Alpha 7SE	£350	£ 198

ARCAM Alpha 6CD	£350	£ 125
AUDIOLAB 8000CDM	£1400	£ 595
AUDIOLAB 8000CDM/DAC	£2300	£ 898
AUDIO MECHA Mephisto	£2200	£1198
AUDIO MECHA		
Damnation Tran + Upgrade	£1250	£439
AUDIO SYNTHESIS Transcend	£1200	£596
AVI S2000MC REF	£1395	£598
DCS Purcell	£4500	£2495
DENON CDR-1000 CD Recorder	£250	£145
EXPOSURE CD Player	£999	£629
KENWOOD DP7090 CD Plyr	£399	£129
KENWOOD DP-X9010 Trans	£400	£199
KRELL 300 CD Player	£3750	£2495
KRELL KPS-25 (24 bit)	£24995	£11996
LINN Karik CD	£1850	£998
MARANTZ CDB5	£450	£ 195
MARANTZ CD17K1	£1250	£748
MARANTZ CD94CDA/94	£1500	£ 495
MARANTZ CD75	£350	£ 125
MARANTZ CD-67 MKII OS	£350	£228
MERIDIAN 506 (24 bit)	£1195	£ 695
MERIDIAN 203 DAC	£499	£228
MERIDIAN 207 CD/Pre	£700	£299
MERIDIAN 562 Digital Controller		£450
MICROMEGA Stage 2	£750	£396
MICROMEGA Solo	£750	£255
MICROMEGA Stage 3	£1000	£398
MICROMEGA Micro-DAC	£499	£149
MUSICAL FIDELITY E600	£600	£ 275
MUSICAL FIDELITY		
Nu-Vista 3D CD/Pre	£3000	£1998
MUSICAL FIDELITY A3CD	£1000	£698
NAD CS21i	£200	£ 128
NAIM CDI	£1999	£848
NAIM CD-X2	£3000	£1598
ORELLE DATOT Trans	£900	£375
PERPETUAL TECHNOLOGY		
Upsampling DAC	£695	£496
PINK TRIANGLE DeCapo		
inc: DC power supply	£1500	£ 795
PROCEED PDT3/PDP3 Trans/DAC	£3999	£1800
REGA Planet	£500	£350
SONY CDPXA2ES CD Plyr	£250	£98
SONY SCDX 940 SA CD	£700	£335
SONY CDP313	£125	£ 65
SONY NS900V DVD SADC	£450	£ 298
TEAC P30 Transport	£3000	£1495
TEAC VRDS 10 (CD Player)	£699	£450
TEAC VRDS-T1 Transport	£1195	£598
THETA DATA Basic Trans	£2400	£749
THETA Miles (8al)	£2200	£1298
TRICHORD Pulsa (Series 1)	£1900	£998

● Amplifiers Solid State

ALBARRY M408 Monoblocks	£800	£448
ARCAM P75	£435	£296
ARCAM Xeta 2	£500	£95
ARCAM Alpha 6 Plus Int	£350	£195
ATC SCA2 Inc Phono	£2900	£1498
AUDIO ANALOGUE Donizetti	£650	£455
AUDIO ANALOGUE Bellini (blk)	£595	£355
AUDIO ANALOGUE Puccini SE	£650	£345
AUDIO INNOVATIONS Alto	£395	£148
AUDIOLAB 8000C Pre	£495	£295
AUDIOLAB 8000S	£800	£395
AUDIOLAB 8000M (2)	£1600	£898
AUDIOLAB 8000P	£900	£ 475

AUDIO RESEARCH D400	£3498	£1998
AUDIO RESEARCH LS38	£1300	£696
CHORD SPM900	£1550	£798
CHORD SPM600	£2200	£1195
COPLAND CSA 14	£1500	£745
COUNTERPOINT Solid One	£1950	£595
CYRUS II	£275	£125
CYRUS AV Master	£450	£198
CYRUS Pre	£700	£345
CYRUS Power	£700	£358
CYRUS PSX-R	£350	£ 225
COPLAND CSAB Int	£995	£596
CYRUS One Int	£195	£128
DENON PMA 250	£200	£95
DENON AVP-A1D Digital Pre	£2500	£698
DENON AVP-A1D		
Digital Integrated AV amp	£2500	£895
DNM Pre2/PA1	£2800	£898
ELECTOR MFL Pre	£500	£148
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HARMON KARDON AVR85 AV Rec	£1000	£498
HARMON KARDON Citation Pwr	£1200	£249
INCATECH Claymore Amp	£400	£175
KENWOOD L07C Pre	£500	£155
KRELL KST100 Power Amp	£2995	£1596
KRELL KAV250a	£3495	£1998
KRELL FP8300	£9500	£4495
KRELL KAV 150A	£2250	£1398
LECSON ACT/API		£475
LFD LS1 Pre	£1000	£375
LINN LK1	£450	£194
LINN LK2	£550	£299
LINN Wakanda Pre	£995	£498
LUMLEY A2100 Power	£750	£398
MARANTZ (orig) SM10 Power	£700	£498
MARANTZ PM66SE	£295	£195
MARK LEVINSON No33	£15500	£3495
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MERIDIAN 541 Pre/processor	£1250	£498
MICHELL Argo	£575	£395
MICHELL Argo/Electro Mono's	£2495	£1496
MICHEL Alecto	£1989	£898
MICROMEGA Tempo 2	£750	£398
MUSICAL FIDELITY A3CR	£1500	£678
MUSICAL FIDELITY F22 Pre	£1500	£595
MUSICAL FIDELITY Dr Thomas	£699	£275
MUSICAL FIDELITY P140	£395	£ 195
MUSICAL FIDELITY E10	£300	£ 195
MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 Int	£1000	£648
MUSICAL FIDELITY P270	£1495	£798
MYRYAD A120 Power	£500	£255
NAD 910 AV Pre/902 2ch Pwr	£450	£175
NAIM NAC 42 Pre	£400	£125
NAIM NAIT 5	£799	£595
NAIM NAC 102 Pre	£1200	£ 798
NAIM 140 Power	£695	£ 398
NVA AP30 Int.	£350	£175
ONKYO TX-DS 656	£1500	£395
PARASOUND HCA1506 6 Chn Pwr	£2995	£1296
PS AUDIO IV Pre Incl. MC/MM	£600	£295
QUAD 33 Pre	£200	£95
QUAD 303 Power	£200	£ 95
QUAD 44 Pre (scratched case)	£450	£155
QUAD 405 Power Amplifier	£350	£198

QUAD 34	£400	£198	ROGERS Ravensbrook Tuner	£150	£95	MISSION 751 (Black)	£330	£189
QED A240 SA	£195	£ 95	SILTECH HF-9G3 S.E.DIG. (1M)	£230	£158	MISSION 753 (Rosewood)	£799	£425
RED ROSE Spirit Int (as new)	£1200	£ 896	SONY MDS JD 930	£300	£175	MISSION 771E	£195	£135
ROKSAN Caspian DSPAV Pre	£900	£548	SONY STS 555ES (cabi)	£495	£198	MISSION 7605E (blk)	£149	£75
ROKSAN Caspian Pwr	£710	£498	SONY STS730ES	£700	£295	MISSION 773 (L.Oak)	£295	£195
ROTEL RC1070	£399	£195	SONY JA 20ES Mini Disc Rcrdr	£350	£178	MISSION 733 MkII (Blk)	£295	£145
ROTEL R8985 Power Amp	£900	£498	STAX 3030 Basic L/Phones	£550	£376	MONITOR AUDIO R252 (Teak)	£195	£98
ROTEL R8991 Power Amp	£500	£ 345	TEAC A1500 (Reel to reel - 7" spools)	£400	£198	MONITOR AUDIO Monitor 2 (Rose)	£400	£195
SPECTRAL DAC12 PRE	£4200	2948	TEAC V8030 Cassette Deck	£500	£298	MONITOR AUDIO Studio12	£1200	£596
SPECTRAL DMA 100S Power	£4200	2948	TEAC 3340S	£795	£395	MONITOR AUDIO Studio 14 (Marked)	£900	£299
SPHINX Project 2 Pre	£1600	£798	TRANSPARENT Ref Spkr (0.75M)	£2250	£1495	MORDAUNT SHORT Pageant	£180	£75
SPHINX Project 12 mono,s	£3000	£1495	TRANSPARENT Ref XL SE (3M)	£4611	£2875	MORDAUNT SHORT G (centre)	£295	£145
SONY SDPEP9ES (Digital)	£600	£298	TRANSPARENT Ref XL SE (1M)	£3915	£2295	MORDAUNT SHORT 40i	£650	£295
SONY VA333ES (AV System)	£799	£495	TRIO KT9XL Tuner	£300	£128	MORREL Bass Master Oak (Marked)	£1600	£599
SONY TAE-1000ESD Pre	£495	£248	YAMAHA TC800 GL (classic)	£300	£ 95	MUSICAL FIDELITY Ref 2	£250	£ 98
TAG McLaren F3 Prator	£1500	£648				NAIM Credo (Cherry)	£1395	£696
TAG McLaren F300 Pwr	£1200	£498				PINK TRIANGLE Ventrical	£1500	£750
TALK ELECTRONICS Storm	£650	£375				PMC DB1 incl. stands (as new)	£795	£595
TESSERAC Pre	£1500	£598				PROAC Studio 1 Mk2		£380
THORENS TTA 2000 Power Amp	£1000	£498				PROAC Tablette 50	£600	£395
TOWNSEND Elite 600 Pre	£500	£195				PROAC Tablette 2000	£649	£495

● Amplifiers Valve

AUDIBLE ILLUSIONS Pre	£2500	£1596
AUDIO INNOVATIONS 800 Monos	£1200	£598
AUDIO INNOVATIONS 800 Mk11	£1500	£688
AUDION Premier Pre + HCPS (Gold)	£1250	£ 498
AUDION 3008 monoblacks	£2000	£1398
AUDIONOTE 'ANKORU' (70 Watt S.E. Triode)	£14995	£6998
AUDIO RESEARCH Classic 60	£3300	£1795
AUDIO RESEARCH SP9 (hybrid)	£1500	£878
AUDIO RESEARCH LS7	£1495	£895
AUDIO RESEARCH LS1	£1500	£696
AUDIO RESEARCH LS2B Mk2 pre	£3000	£1295
AUDIO RESEARCH Y1100 Mk1 Pwr	£5500	£2996
BEARD M70 monoblacks	£1800	£996
CARY Pre-amp	£3500	£1296
CARY CAD300SE Monoblacks	£5000	£2998
CONRAD JOHNSON PV 10AL Pre	£1400	£676
CONRAD JOHNSON PV 10 Pre	£1600	£845
CONRAD JOHNSON PV17 Pre	£1950	£998
CONRAD JOHNSON Prem 8 Monos	£16,000	£8995
CONRAD JOHNSON Premier 140SA	£7000	£5248
CONRAD JOHNSON PV14L (Remote)	£2200	£1596
CONRAD JOHNSON PV12L	£2000	£1296
COPLAND 301 Pre	£1250	£798
COPLAND 504 Power	£1995	£995
CR DEVELOPMENTS Carmeto (Pre)	£900	£345
GAMMA Era Reference Pre	£4000	£1998
GAMMA HBC 'The Beastie'	£2000	£1298
GRAAF 13.5 Pre	£3950	£1998
HOVLAND HP 100 + MC Phono	£5750	£3496
JADIS DA30 Integrated	£3500	£1746
JADIS Defy 7 Power		£1998
LUMLEY Ref 250 monoblacks	£6500	£2996
LUMLEY Ref 120 Monoblacks	£3500	£1998
PAPWORTH TVASO	£2000	£998
PM COMPONENTS B45 mono,s	£3000	£1295
UNISON Mystery One	£1750	£998
UNISON RESEARCH Unico	£895	£695

● Tuners Tape Misc

ACOUSTIC RESEARCH RD.06	£200	£48
DBX 118 noise reduction unit	£250	£ 65
DENON DRM 22	£200	£55
DENON TU450L	£150	£ 65
DENON DR-M07	£150	£65
LEAK FM Stereophonic Tuner	£150	£75
LUXMAN S150 (Rare)	£900	£555
MERIDIAN 104 Tuner	£295	£195
MICROMEGA FM tuner	£300	£145
MYRIAD T30 tuner	£250	£128
NAKAMICHI 480 black	£495	£196
NAKAMICHI 481Z (Silver)	£495	£166
NAKAMICHI RX202E	£600	£255
NAKAMICHI 600	£400	£198
NAKAMICHI Dragon	£2000	£1298
QUAD FM2 tuner	£200	£125
QUAD FM3 tuner	£200	£95
QUAD FM4 tuner	£300	£198
QUAD 99 Tuner (Bus)	£695	£495
REVOX S Series System	£1550	£1148
REVOX D36 (Reel to reel)		£348
REVOX E36 (Reel to reel)		£298
REVOX Pro HS77 (Reel to reel)	£950	£398
REVOX A77 2 track (Reel to reel)	£750	£378
REVOX PR9911 2 track (7.5/15ips)	£1500	£595
REVOX B910 Pro cassette deck	£1500	£548
REVOX A76	£500	£295

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE2 MKII	£1500	£795
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE3	£3500	£1495
ACOUSTAT Model 2 Electrostatics	£2500	£674
ACOUSTAT Spectro 1100 Hybrid electrostatics	£1500	£578
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE120	£800	£ 295
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1	£895	£ 295
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE100i	£295	£125
ACOUSTIC PRECISION AE1	£650	£348
AJ ACOUSTICS Ref 1 (active sub)	£700	£495
APOGEE Caliper Signature	£3800	£1998
AUDIOSTATIC ES300 Electrostatics	£1500	£578
AUDIONOTE AN/E (Inc stands)	£2900	£1498
AUDIONOTE ESP (Inc stands)	£1850	£1098
AUDIO PRO 8250 Sub	£1000	£356
B & W CM1 (white)	£195	£ 75
B & W P4 (Cherry but marked)	£700	£349
B & W P6	£1000	£498
B & W Matrix 801	£5995	£1998
B & W CC6 (centre)	£200	£ 75
B & W FCMB THX (R.L. & Centre)	£2400	£696
B & W 601 Mark III	£195	£95
B & W DM1400 (Oak)	£495	£298
BKS 107 II Hybrid ribbons	£1750	£995
CASTLE Chester (Walnut)	£799	£378
CASTLE Durham (Marked)	£230	£95
CASTLE Howard S2	£1400	£498
CELESTION A1 (Cherry)	£450	£298
DALI 400	£1000	£356
DCM Time Windows	£600	£245
DYNAUDIO SDA 2.8	£800	£ 378
ELAC CL310i	£850	£548
ENSEMBLE Primadonna RARE	£10,000	£2,995
GALE 401 With Stands	£500	£196
GAMMA ACOUSTICS Epoch 5	£3000	£495
HALES Signature System 2	£4000	£798
HECO 10 SH	£150	£88
HEYBROOK H82R	£279	£125
HEYBROOK Heystack (Rosewood)	£500	£196
HEYBROOK Prima's	£175	£ 95
IMPULSE H7 (Black)	£1000	£299
IMPULSE H6	£1200	£448
INFINITY Alpha 40 (black lacquer)	£600	£255
INFINITY B Koppo	£1895	£995
JBL TLX12	£250	£128
JBL Century 100 (scratched cabinets)	£750	£195
JBL SVA 1800	£1200	£698
JPW AP3 (Black)	£295	£175
JWS Quinty (Blk)	£300	£175
KEF Reference Model 1 (Burr/walnut)	£1295	£695
KEF Ref 101/2	£500	£155
KEF Ref Mod 1	£1300	£798
KEF Reference 4 (Burr Walnut)	£4500	£998
KEF Ref Model 1.2 (black)	£1500	£898
KEF REF 105 (circa 1978)	£1000	£398
KEF Q35 (Black)	£350	£179
KEF Cube (EQ Box)	£700	£246
LEAK (orig.) Sandwich 12 ohm 12"	£400	£148
LEAK Sandwich 200 Black	£250	£ 95
LEAK Sandwich 2030 Block	£175	£ 75
LEAK Sandwich 250	£200	£ 95
LEAK Sandwich 600	£400	£155
LINN Nexus (Block + stands)	£500	£239
LINN Kaber (Rosewood) ACTIVE	£2500	£896
LOCKWOOD 'Majors' Studio Monitors 15" (with Tannoy Dual Concentrics)	£1500	£898
MAGNA PLANAR 1c Imp	£1400	£595
MAGNA PLANAR MG 2.5 (Oatmeal)	£2950	£1498
MARTIN LOGAN Aeon (As new)	£3200	£2296
MARTIN LOGAN SL III (L.Oak)	£3500	£2295
MARTIN LOGAN CLSII (walnut)	£6700	£2995
McINTOSH ML-1C2 Rare (circa '65)	£500	£298
MEADOWLARK Shearwater	£2990	£1498
MERIDIAN DSP5000 (24bit)	£4200	£1995
MERIDIAN M3 Active	£1000	£ 298
MERLIN TSM-SE (Mini)	£1600	£998
MISSION 733 (Black)	£200	£99

● Loudspeakers

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE2 MKII	£1500	£795
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE3	£3500	£1495
ACOUSTAT Model 2 Electrostatics	£2500	£674
ACOUSTAT Spectro 1100 Hybrid electrostatics	£1500	£578
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE120	£800	£ 295
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE1	£895	£ 295
ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE100i	£295	£125
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AUDIOSTATIC ES300 Electrostatics	£1500	£578
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AUDIO PRO 8250 Sub	£1000	£356
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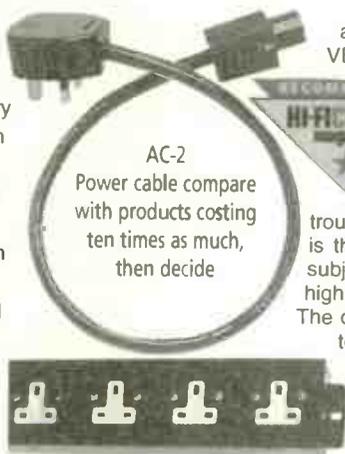
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Logic	lampo Electronic/LVX - vgc 249
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Michel	Orbe SE/VC - Best Trade ins ON DEM
Michel	Mycro RB300 - ex/ex, beautiful 149
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Math	Alomo/Math/RB250/Elektro - ex/ex 129
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Revolver	Revolver/LVX - ex/ex 119
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Marantz	CD005E - ex, remote 35
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Sony	2100 DAC - vgc, remote 129
Sony	CDP333esd - ex, manual, remote 129
Teac	CDP4300 - ex, remote 89
Yamaha	CDC575 - multiply, ex 89

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KRELL KSA 80B power amplifier, immaculate, complete with box and instructions, £1395. Audio Research LS2 balanced pre-amp, excellent condition, box and instructions, £795. Tel: 07973 242 975 or Email: hifibri@hotmail.com (Eastbourne, East Sussex) (Apr/1)

COPLAND CTA 505 power amp, new, matched 6550C's and input valves. Triode mode. Spare 6550B's. Fully serviced 2003. Mint (25kg!) condition, boxed, £1000 ovno. Tel: Chris 020 8543 5531 evenings (Apr/1)

RB300 INCOGNITO rewired tonearm, four stainless steel spacing washers, spanner, with all setting up instructions, vgc, £180. Tel: 01642 456 228 any-time (Cleveland) (Apr/1)

NAIM AUDIO CD3.5 £500. NAC102/NAPSC £800. Flatcap x3 £150ea. HiCap £350. NAP135 x2 £1400pr. Headline amp £200. Credo's (cherry) £650. Mana Sound Frame £130. All boxed, excellent condition. Tel: 01934 511 803 (Apr/1)

FURUTECH FP202 angled locking banana plugs. Rhodium plated, screw fixing - no solder. 3 sets of 4. Mint. Superb. £24 (£50) per set. Tel: 01752 773 369 (Apr/1)

YAMAHA NS1000-M, Orbe DC-NC, boxed. Garrard 301, SME 3009-imp, mint condition. Thornes TD-124, SME 3012-R, excellent. Oracle Delphi - Mk1, good condition. Rega RB-300, ESL-57. Audio Research VT100. Thorens TD166-VI. Tel: 0117 955 6555 or 07979 514 450 (Apr/1)

NAIM CDX £1300. Naim 82 £1200. Naim 180 £600. Naim Hi-Cap £300. PMC 0B1 speakers £2000. All in mint condition with manuals and boxes, leads etc. Tel: 020 8270 9393 (Apr/1)

TANNOY EDINBURGH Prestige loudspeakers, 40" x 26" x 18". Big, bold, dynamic plus crafted cabinets. Expanding family forces reluctant sale. Happy to demo. Looking for 2K. Tel: 01245 251 235 (Apr/1)

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If you are the proud owner of any Rega tonearm, you are now in the enviable position to transform its performance into the league of super arms with our modifications. The OL structural modification at £75 will enable your Rega to perform at a level exceeding that of arms costing over £1500!! High performance rewiring with high grade litz wire is also offered at an additional £70 and external rewiring is also £70 further increasing the performance.

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What Hi-Fi? gave this modification 5/5

- Structural Modification - **£75**
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"The single most important upgrade you can ever make to any record deck concerns the motor drive...nothing can prepare you for the shock of going DC. In a word, gobsmacking."
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Designed as a drop in replacement for almost all turntables, the OL upgrade DC motor kit offers vast improvements to all versions of Linn, as well as: Rega, Systemdeck, Roksan, Rock, Oracle, Michelle, VPI, Clearaudio, Accoustic Signature, etc. The kit consists of a high grade DC motor, aluminium electronic control box and offboard power supply. All this provides an extremely cost effective route to truly high-end audio and is significantly superior in performance to PS upgrades at three times the price.

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TANNOY T225 loudspeakers, 10" dual concentric, glass tops, fine example of Tannoy engineering. Max spl 111dB. So possible studio/home use. Good condition. £250. Tel: 01245 251 235 (Apr/I)

MCINTOSH 6450 integrated amp, 3 years old, mint condition, boxed (£2250) £1200. Rega Radio, mint, boxed, 3 years old (£300) £150. Tel: 0117 305 2563 (work), 07974 176 634 (mobile) or Email: Ray.hamilton@kone.com (Apr/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY
XP100. Bought April '02. Occasional use, excellent condition, virtually half price £375. Boxed as bought. Will pay transit cost for sending this preamp. No time wasters please. Tel: 024 764 16979 (Apr)

SUGDEN MASTERCLASS integrated amp. Class A, 34 w.p.c. R/control. Seductive, full bodied sound with a wonderful midband. Cost new £3150, asking £2250. Tel: 01296 437 314 (Aylesbury, Bucks) (Apr/I)

NORDOST VALHALLA interconnect, 1m, phono terminated. Asking £1400. JPS, Superconductor+ biwire, 5 foot pair with gold w.b.t. banana locking plugs. Asking £550. Tel: 01296 437 314 (Aylesbury, Bucks) (Apr/I)

QUAD ESL 63 plus stand and deliver stands £799. Quad 606 Mark I £325. Rel Strata III £299. Croft Supermicro upgraded to Epoch £299. Meridian DAC 203 £90. Tel: 01706 351 962 (Apr/I)

LINN BASIK turntable with Akito tonearm and Reson Mica cartridge £290 ono. Ring Graham after 6pm 01482 641 261 (Apr/I)

NAIM CDS Mark I £1100. Naim 135's silver £1200. Naim 135's olive £1400. Naim SuperNaxo 3-6 crossover £299. Townsend Rock Mark I, Merlin power supply, Rega RB250 £399. Tel: 01706 351 962 (Apr/I)

NOTTINGHAM ANALOG turntable, 12" Anna arm, Tracer 4 cartridge, PSU, £3200. Croft Absolute pre-amp £1500. Posselt Albatros loudspeakers £1300. All mint condition. Tel: 01604 404 499 (Northampton) (May/I)

ACTIVE LINN System, 6 years old, as new condition. Karik, Numerik, Wakonda with Sneaky tuner, 3x LK100 power amps, Keilidhs on granite base. £4000. Tel: 01305 776 932 or Email: c.cooknell@tiscali.co.uk (Weymouth) (Apr/I)

A.VI. SERIES 21 MC4 Reference CD player, boxed, mint condition, only 2 years old. No remote. £450. No offers. Tel: 01502 518 938 (Apr/I)

CLASSIC ACTIVE system. Nytech CTA 252 XD, MM phono. Spare CTA 252 XD MC phono. Active CXA 252 XD. Arc 101 speakers. All boxed. £199. Tel: 01474 702 939 (Dartford) (Apr/I)

A AND R (ARCAM) SA 200, 100 watt amplifiers. 3no, two bridged £100 each. C200 pre-amplifier £75. Minim AD10 ambisonic decoder £100. Tel: 01642 559 078 (Stockton) (Apr/I)

QUAD ESL63, brown, excellent condition £1150 ono. Upgraded to 988. also JBL 4311 Control monitors, walnut, fair condition £250 ono. Plus Target spiked stands £25. Tel: 07970 575 547 or 01525 371 730 evenings (Apr/I)

NAIM CDS II/XPS Flash
R/C, immaculate, low usage, boxed, can dem, £2900. Tel: 0121 553 1121 or Email: rp.stop@ukgateway.net (Midlands) (Apr/I)

FOR SALE Kef 107/2 speakers in walnut, excellent/mint condition with boxes, manuals and Kube equaliser, £1100 ono. Wanted: Kingston speakers. Tel: 020 7480 7964 or 07932 063 335 or Email: thewaldons01@tiscali.co.uk (Apr/I)

NAIM HI-FI System Sale, CD2 CD player, NAC 82 pre-amp, Hi-Cap power supply, NAP 250 power amp, SBL loudspeakers (cherry), QLN Projekt equipment rack (cherry). Complete system purchased new from Grahams HI-FI in December 1997. Mint condition, very low usage, boxed with manuals. For prices please ring Mark 01708 224 319 or 07813 332301 (mobile) (Essex) (Apr/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3-2 amplifier £499, A3-2 CD player £499. Half price! As new, boxed, and hardly used. Tel: 01335 390 529 (Derbyshire) (Apr/I)

KIMBER SPEAKER cable 4TC 4.5 metres £140 ono. Kimber Classic PowerKord with Wattgate 320 IEC plug £45 ono. Yello power cable £17 ono. Tel: George 01262 606 089 or 07890 933 787 (East Yorkshire) (Apr/I)

NAIM CDX, 18 months old, mint condition, box, manual, remote, £1650. Naim 282 pre-amp, 3 months old & new Hi Cap 9 months £2800. Naim 250 £800. Arcam DAB 10 £320. Contact Richard 07956 594 104 or Email: richard.jones87@ntlworld.com (London) (Apr/I)

LOWTHER ACOUSTAS with remounted PM6A drivers, original plywood cabinets, sound but scruffy. Non-matching pair. £185 ono. Tel: 020 8677 8183 (Apr/I)

MICHELL ORBE full size QC. Black clear silver. As new, boxed, instructions. Upgrading. £925 ono. Tel: 07958 944 424 (Cleveland) (Apr/I)

EXPOSURE 7-8 Pre and Power plus Expander £200.
Thorens TD 124 II, SME S.3 £200. Sony STR-DB 940 D.T.S. surround receiver 6.1 - 110w per channel, mint, £200. Tel: 01273 454 108 (Apr/I)

TAG MCLAREN DPA 32R D and A preamp with DAB (£2500) £1400 ono. G.Tee Oct 05. Myryad MP100 pre £250. Musical Fidelity A300cr power-amp (£2300) £1150. Audiolab 8000 DAC £220. All mint with boxes. Tel: 0121 742 1270 (Apr/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1 amplifier £125. NVA A80 monoblocks £300. Infinity Kappa Reference 5 speakers £225. Marantz CD94 £225. Rotel RCD965BX £90. Manticore Mantra turntable £175. Marantz ST50L tuner FM.AM.LW. Tel: 01224 646 473 (Apr/I)

MERIDIAN 507 CD player,
two months old, £600. Aloia PST II.01i pre-amp plus power unit. Aloia 15.01i power amp plus power unit. Amp power 60 + 60 watts. £2000. 4 box system. Tel 020 8531 5979 (May/I)

QUAD ELS 63's, good working order, boxes. Look good £500 ono. Tel: 01323 737 850 answerphone (Eastbourne) (Apr/I)

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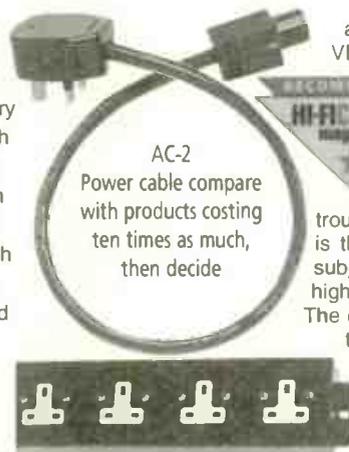
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AUDUSA - OOM Silverlink OCC balanced speaker cable - stranded, silver on OFHC plus three strands of OCC (Ohno Continuous Casting - single crystal copper) for improved bass performance. Mylar infill and with designed in protection against RF and EMI, conductor of 3mm diameter (approx 8 gauge). Cable Overall Dimension: 14.72 mm.

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Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Maringo IEC 320 will be fitted at extra cost.

GNLM 05/04

£58 for 1.0m, £72 for 1.5m, £86 for 2.0m. Also available of the reel.

Both GNLM cables are available for export.

SILVER SILVER - upgrade the cable with silver plated contacts on IEC and and MK plug for £6. AUDUSA - Eupen and LAT AC-2 mains cable available with 16 amp IEC (for certain models of amps by Krell, MF, Levinson etc), Maringo/Wattgate IEC 320, Figure of eight, Bulgin, Hubble, European Schuko, French, Australian, Swiss, Danish, Neutrik and other plugs see our web site for IEC's, MK plugs RCA and Banana connectors with silver plate contacts and other audio and ac mains connectors

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FROM MARCH 2004 ISSUE

AVANTGARDE UNO Horn loudspeaker £3500. Musical Fidelity Tr-Vista SACD Super Audio CD player, mint, boxed, £3000. Tel: 020 8531 5979 or 07903 265205 (Mar/I)

KIMBER SELECT 1011 inter-connect cables. 2 pairs £200 each (£367). 1 Russ Andrews Purifier Block, 8 outlets RA Powercord £300 (£500). Tel: 01604 410726 (Northampton) (Mar/I)

QUAD 988 CEVintage, finish, purchased August 2003, with extended warranty. £2500 (£3750). TacT M2150 digital amp, purchased September 2003, £2300 (£3800). Cardas Golden Cross 0.5m with Eichmann Bullets £300. Tel: 0131 225 9002, Email: S.Hussain@ed.sac.ac.uk (Mar/I)

SNELL J2 speakers (walnut) on 'Pirates' stands. Recent new AudioNote silver drivers - nice! £475. Musical Fidelity X-Dac (HDCD) as new, boxed £150. Both ono. Tel: 07941 923 881 anytime (Sussex coast) (Mar/I)

CASTLE HARLECH floor-standers with plinths, yew finish, mint condition and boxed, £620 ono. Audioquest Indigo+ speaker cable 2x 3.5 metres, offers. Tel: 0 858 462 061 or 525 463 evenings (Market Harborough) (Mar/I)

KRELL KRC3 pre-amp mint £1495. Theta Carmen CD/DVD transport mint £1395. Sonus Faber Signums mint £695. Teac VRDS7 fully Trichord modded £295. Tel: 0121 744 9733, mobile 0775 996 9324 (Mar/I)

COPLAND SYSTEM, CDA266 HDCD CD player, Copland CSA28 amp special order black with Russ Andrews PowerChords, boxed as new with remote control. Cost £3000, sell £1400 ono. Tel: 01224 596 076 (Mar/I)

NAIM AUDIO system. Pre-amp, NAC82 monoblock, NAP135 x2 Super Hi-Cap, speakers Dynaudio Contour 3.0, all boxed and mint condition, reasonable offers. Tel: 01293 886 832, mobile 07977 115 446 (Mar/I)

LP12 (BLACK ASH), lttok LVII, K9 £450 ono. Naim NAP140 £200 ono. Naim NAC 62N £225 ono. All boxed, good condition. Tel: 07931 142 693 (Mar/I)

PAIR QUAD ESLs on matching Gradient subwoofers. Excellent condition, magnificent sound, £2500 ono. Tel: 01227 752 438, Email: BriKelsey@aol.com (Mar/I)

TDL's RTL4's speakers, boxed, manuals, rewired, excellent condition £205 ono. Buyer collects. Pioneer F-91 tuner, boxed vgc £210 ono. Tel: 01934 813 666 after 6pm or Email: jpmc@supanet.com (South Bristol) (Mar/I)

JBL Ti5000 speakers, 3 years old, black, perfect condition £1800 (£4000). Tel: 07773 788 317 (Mar/I)

C.R. DEVELOPMENTS Romulus integrated valve amplifier, 30w per channel, s/steel/black/gold (£1300) £600. Meridian 506 24bit CD player £600. Spendor Prelude speakers £80. Tel: 01205 750 314 (Mar/I)

PRIMARE PHONO Stage pre-amp, Model R-20, vgc, £250. Tel: 01224 483 642 evenings or Email: barmonte@aol.com (Mar/I)

IPLS3TL TRANSMISSION Line loudspeakers. Built from kit (mahogany). Details of model on IPL website. Good condition, excellent sound, £160 ono. Contact Gary 0141 942 9240 or 07789 527 028 or Email: mrwilson24_7@hotmail.com (Mar/I)

LINN SYSTEM for sale. Ikemi, Kudos, Kolektor, two LK140, Aktiv Ninkas. Mint condition. Black. Original packaging etc. £2800. Tel: 07941 175 025 6-7pm only or Email: linnsale@hotmail.com (Kent) (Mar/I)

J R 149 BI-WIRED Speakers £100. Tandberg Series 15 machine £50. Aiwa P22 power amp £25. Crimson 610 pre amp £25. Tascam M106 mixing desk £100. Chilton M12-4 mixing desk £100. Revox G36 £200. Revox A77 £200. Yamaha KX380 cassette deck £30. Aiwa AD F360 cassette deck £25. Marantz CD75 player £45. JVC DD66 3-head cassette deck £45. 7 inch tapes £3. 10 inch NAB tapes £5. Revox NAB hub adaptors £25 pair. Revox A77 acrylic cover £35. Tel: 07710 828286 anytime (Mar/I)

MERIDIAN M60C centre speaker. Black, perfect condition, boxed, two years old. £500. Meridian S41 ProLogic pre-amplifier, £200. Tel: 07976 350 204 (Cardiff) (Mar/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY F22 valve pre-amplifier, lovely sound, as new, mint brushed aluminium fascia, £550. Tel: 01424 431 536 (Mar/I)

TLC MAESTRO 70S stand-mount speakers. 8 ohm 50watt bi-wireable. Solid cabinets in excellent condition and very musical. Two years old. Paid £300 will accept £200. Tel: 0113 273 3744 (Leeds) (Mar/I)

NAIM SBLs, black, boxed, current spec, immaculate, £900. Cyrus tuner, remote, alloy case, £100. Mission PCM 7000 CD, remote, £100. Thorens 160s, Linn LVV, P77, £170. All boxed, will demonstrate. Tel: 01722 334 694 (Mar/I)

LOWTHER FIDELIO speakers, gloss black finish, fitted with PM5A drive units in perfect condition, £1200. Tel: 01293 824 667 after 6pm or Email: JLC@beeb.net (Mar/I)

OFFERS INVITED. Homebound American selling two superb matched James Lansing 2-way speaker systems. Attractive pine finished JBL bass reflex enclosures. Inches 24x19x16 ono. Other components available. Tel: 020 8406 1666 (Mar/I)

MERIDIAN 551 integrated amplifier, Meridian 506 CD player. £650 the pair. Mission 732 speakers, as new condition £65. Tel: 07778 895 257 or 01252 332 097 (Hampshire) (Mar/I)

CASTLE SEVERN 2SE in cherry veneer plus speaker cables £295. Little used as brand new, sale due to new room furniture and decor. No offers. Tel: Tony 020 8743 5690 (Mar/I)

RUSS ANDREWS power block (eight sockets) with 3' Reference Powerkord £175 ono. Tel: 01249 821 288 (Calne, Wilts) Tel: 01249 821 288 (Mar/I)

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Naim Nap 90 & Nac 92 pre/power.New cases £ 495	Pair Leak TL12 + valve amps Grey. Rebuilt by me. £ 599
Crimson Electrik 510/520 pre/power amplifier.Boxd. £ 249	Tube Technology Unisis valve pwr amp. Mint bxd £ 995
Rogers Cadet integrated tube amplifier. 10W £ 175	CR Developments Carmenta Line valve pre-amp. £ 450
Harmon Kardon HK1400 line amplifier.Mint/boxed £ 199	Hart 1100RSA integrated amplifier. 80W.Superb. £ 375
Kenwood KA660D integrated amplifier. Black. £ 60	Sugden A25 amplifier. Excellent condition & instr £ 200
Naim NAC 92 pre amp. SNO 161840. Mint. Boxed £ 299	Meridian Modular pre/power amplifier. Ex cond. £ 249
Magnum MP.125 pre amplifier with MM/MC. £ 250	Quad 77 integrated amplifier. Mint. Boxed. Instr. £ 399
Quad 77 remote control for amplifier etc. Cost £300 £ 149	Musical Fidelity B1 integrated amplifier. Good cond£ 125
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Naim Nap 180 power amplifier. Mint. Boxed. £ 799	Quad 11s in various condition and prices £POA
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Harmon Kardon integrated valve amp.110V. V rare £ 299	Quad 303 power amplifiers from £ 125
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Nakamichi PA5 100W/CH power amp. Cost £1300 £ 650	NVA A80 mono power amplifiers X 2. Good cond £ 799
NVA A60 stereo power amplifier. Good condition. £ 295	Musical Fidelity Pre-8 pre-amplifier. Mint. Boxed £ 150
Arcam Alpha 3 amplifier. Mint.Boxed/ Instructions £ 100	Arcam Zeta 1.Pro logic Cinema amp. Cost £999.00£ 450
Quad 33 pre amplifiers. From..... £ 75	

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Quad ESL57's nice condition. Bronze finish. £703pr	Tannoy Lancaster with 12" monitor golds. £750
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OTHER ITEMS

EAR 834P MM/MC valve phono box. £615.00 new£ 395	Marantz CD63 top loader cd player. Collectable. £ 125
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TRANSLUCENT. (somewhat of a bargain) Hifi World. Jan 1999

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LEAK TL12+ amps, refurbished pair, excellent valve sound £475 ono. Helius Chameleon speakers HC1000 walnut finish including dedicated stands £275 ono. Tel: 01304 823 121 ask for Roger. Email: rog.rem@btinternet.com (Mar/I)

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QUAD 33 pre-amp, mint and boxed. Quad 303 power-amp, excellent condition including leads £250. Tel: 020 8783 1250 or Email: anthonymurphy@blueyonder.co.uk (Mar/I)

4 GOOD USED GEC clear glass KT66 £150. 3 Good used Mullard GZ32 £30. 3 good used EF86 (Z729) £20. GKD Huntingdon cabinet £10. Garrard 4HF turntable/arm £50. Wharfedale Isodynamic headphones £20. Leak TL10 with pre-amp £250. Pair Super 8RS/DD in LNB cabinets £75. Axiom 10 £25. Tel: 0773 309 7673 or Email: nnh@dmu.ac.uk (Mar/I)

QUAD IIL speakers, piano black, little used, boxed, mint (£379) £299. Could deliver E. Midlands. Tel: 0115 960 3934 (Mar/I)

QUAD ESL988 electrostatic speakers, as new £2200 ono. Buyer collects. Tel: 01522 720 389 or Email: nuline.ellis@tiscali.co.uk (Mar/I)

AUDIO RESEARCH CD2, boxed, manuals, factory condition, superb sound, upgrading, £2250 ono. Tel: Keith 07811 272 378 or 07793 388 397 day or evenings (Black)(£3495) (Mar/I)

QUAD ESL63, brown with wood trims and stands. Mint condition £950 ono. Thorens TD150 base, cover, Thorens arm £85. Wanted: Rogers Master Mk One pre-amp. Tel: 07976 904 381 (Mar/I)

MERIDIAN 206B CD player £325. Exposure XX integrated amplifier £250. Rotel RQ970BX MM-MC phono amplifier £45. All items mint condition and boxed. Tel: 01483 855 603 (Mar/I)

MISSION 752 speakers, high gloss black ash finish, mint £235 ono. Origin Live DC turntable motor with custom power supply and oversize transformer £150. Tel: 01244 660 946 (Chester) (Mar/I)

HI-FI SYSTEM, Naim Audio NAC 82 preamplifier, Naim Audio input boards, Naim Audio HiCap power supply, Naim Audio NAPI80 power amplifier, Naim Audio CD1 CD player, Naim Audio SBL loudspeakers, Naim Audio Paxo passive crossover for above, Yamaha DSP E800 processor. (current valuation £4450 ono) Tel: 020 8300 3265 (Mar/I)

KLIPSCHORN CORNER speakers, superb, awesome (£6200) £3000. 1980's B&O system, tuner/amp, cassette deck, record deck, fourway speakers, £200. Bargain. Croft Duo mono preamplifier, recent service £200. Tel: 01202 388 688 or Email: terrymason.innerpeace@cwcrv.net (Mar/I)

MONITOR AUDIO Studio 20 SE speakers, piano black gloss finish, superb condition £850 (£2500) Tel: 07815 153 172 or Email: stephenadolphus@yahoo.com (Mar/I)

RGD 1046, GEL050 EL34 monoblocks. Leak ST60. Troughline, Rogers Cadet2. Quad 33/303, FM3/AM3. Thorens TD124/2 JR149 NOS valves wanted Pye HF25, PF91, Radford MA15/3, vgc, will sway above equipment. Tel: 01842 812 895 (Mar/I)

LINN KABER Floor standing speakers, Linn Klassik CD-amp, Linn LK85 power amp (two). All immaculate Quad tri-wired speaker cables included. Tel: 0151 709 4540 (h), 0151 709 7706 (office) £1600. (May/I)

JBL Ti5000 speakers, 3 years old, black, perfect condition £1800 (£4000). Tel: 07773 788 317 (Mar/I)

AUDIOLAB 8000A late model, vgc, £200. Rotel RCD991 AE, excellent £250. Meridian 207 DAC, vgc, £150. MF X-Act DAC, vgc, £80. Tel: 07887 527 397 (Staffs) (Mar/I)

KIMBER SELECT 1011 interconnect cables. 2 pairs £200 each (£367). 1 Russ Andrews Purifier Block, 8 outlets RA Powercord £300 (£500). Tel: 01604 410726 (Northampton) (Mar/I)

QUAD 988 CEVintage, finish, purchased August 2003, with extended warranty. £2500 (£3750). TacT M2150 digital amp, purchased September 2003, £2300 (£3800). Cards Golden Cross 0.5m with Eichmann Bullets £300. Tel: 0131 225 9002, Email: S.Hussain@ed.sac.ac.uk (Mar/I)

SNELL J2 speakers (walnut) on 'Pirates' stands. Recent new AudioNote silver drivers - nice! £475. Musical Fidelity X-Dac (HDCD) as new, boxed £150. Both ono. Tel: 07941 923 881 anytime (Sussex coast) (Mar/I)

J R 149 BI-WIRED Speakers £100. Tandberg Series 15 machine £50. Aiwa P22 power amp £25. Crimson 610 pre amp £25. Tascam M106 mixing desk £100. Chilton M12-4 mixing desk £100. Revox G36 £200. Revox A77 £200. Yamaha KX380 cassette deck £30. Aiwa AD F360 cassette deck £25. Marantz CD75 player £45. JVC DD66 3-head cassette deck £45. 7 inch tapes £3. 10 inch NAB tapes £5. Revox NAB hub adaptors £25 pair. Revox A77 acrylic cover £35. Tel: 07710 828286 anytime (Mar/I)

PRIMARE PHONO Stage pre-amp, Model R-20, vgc, £250. Tel: 01224 483 642 evenings or Email: barmonte@aol.com (Mar/I)

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Arcam FMJ CD23 Silver S/H	1200	699
Audio Research CD2 S/H	3499	1795
Audio Research CD3 x-demo	4999	4249
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Krell KAV280CD x-demo	3999	3250
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Theta Carmen CD/DVD Transport S/H	3499	1995
Theta Data Basic Transport S/H	2397	995
Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	2799
Thule Sprit CD balanced O/P x-demo	1200	649
Wadia 830 CD Player S/H	3000	1995
Wadia 301 CD Player S/H	3650	2499

Turntables Tonearms & Cartridges

Densen DP0 2 MC Phono Stage S/H	499	275
Gryphon Legato SAP Phono Stage x-demo	7895	5999
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Lehmann Audio Black Cube SE New & Boxed	650	449
Michell Gyro SE DC Turntable S/H	875	699
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Rega RB600 "origin live" Tonearm S/H	460	299
Roksan Artexerxes X MC/MM Phono Stage S/H	450	299
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Well Tempered Ref/Reference Arm "Fountainhead" S/H	6500	3999

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Naim Audio NAC62 (old style) with phono stage S/H	N/A	175
Naim 72 k Preamplifier S/H	789	349
Roksan L2 preamplifier S/H	1295	299
Spectral DMC12 Line New & Boxed	4250	2999
Spectral DMC12 s Phono x-demo	4750	3299

Amplifiers

Audio Research D100.2 x-demo	3690	2799
Cyrus Straightline Amplifier S/H	549	175
Denon AVC A10SE Amplifier Processor DTS/7.1 S/H	1800	999
Graaf GM100 Valve Power Amplifier x-demo	4500	3250
Gryphon S100 Class A power amplifier S/H	6000	2500
Gryphon Calisto 2200 integrated S/H	4800	3299
Linn LK140 power amplifier S/H	799	499
Naim Audio NAP140 (old Style) power amplifier S/H	N/A	299
Naim Audio NAP180 S/H	1199	599
Spectral DMA100s Power Amplifier x-demo	4750	3499

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Indigo Model Two Centre Channel Cherry S/H	199	99
JM Lab Micro Utopia be Classic 6 months old S/H	4300	3399
Living Voice Avatars OBX-R Ebony x-demo	4000	2499
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ProAc Response 1SC Cherry S/H	1299	850
Sonus R4 Stands S/H	329	199
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Cables & Accessories

Acoustic Zen Silver Signature Balanced 12ft S/H	2700	1499
Argento Copper 1m RCA-RCA new & boxed	199	119
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Cogan Hall EM-D 0.6m S/H	199	99
Finite Elemente HD02 MR 3 Tier Reference Table S/H	2300	1499
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Madrigal MDC 1pro 1m AES/EBU		
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Madrigal MDC 2 1m Fatboy Digital cable new & boxed	319	159
Madrigal MDC 2 0.5m Fatboy Digital cable new & boxed	279	139

Nordost Red Dawn 2x3m Speaker cable S/H	920	599
Opera Lux 3 Tier Table Clear/Stainless x-Demo	950	449
Sitech SQ58G3 2x4m Balanced Interconnect x-demo	2370	1499
Siltech LS38G3 2x4.75m Silver speaker cable/WBT S/H	1752	999
Tara Labs RSC Air 0.6 Digital AES/EBU new & boxed	398	199
Transparent Music Link Ultra Balanced 7.26m S/H	2349	1499

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3. Accept no verbal guarantees.
4. Have you heard the item or something similar? If not, why do you want it?
5. Don't pretend to have knowledge - it's your fingers that will get burnt!
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7. Has it been modified and, if so, have notes been kept?
8. Was it any good in the first place?
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10. If you are in the slightest doubt, arrange an audition (see point 5). If it's too far, wait for another time.
11. Either buy it or don't: vendors are excusably impatient with 'consultation' exercises.
12. **Don't send cash!**

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5. The best guide to pricing is last month's Classifieds: that a 'classic' was worth £xxx a year or two ago is no guide. Values fall as well as rise.
6. Amateur second-hand dealing is not a big money game: you win some, you lose some.
7. Be prompt with despatch. If in doubt about buyer's bona-fides, either wash out the deal or send C.O.D.
8. There will always be time-wasters; be tolerant within reason!

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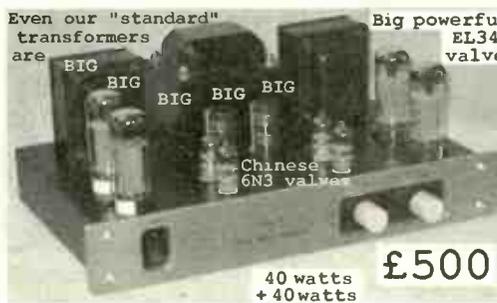
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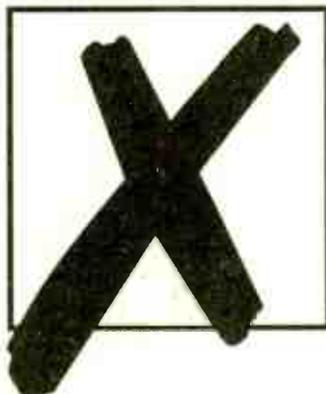
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"Chanting The Mantra"

Vinyl's all the rage right now, but it's still very much a hobbyist thing. The eighties was analogue disc's last stand as a mass music carrier, and spawned a variety of affordable and interesting turntables such as Manticore's Mantra. Dominic Todd remembers it...

The fact that there is nothing outstanding about the Manticore Mantra might make you wonder the reason for its inclusion here. After all, there was nothing ground-breaking, sonically or in engineering terms, about the Mantra when introduced in the mid 1980s. Yet, despite its very ordinariness, it was important at the time.

During the late '80s, turntable sales were still reasonably strong, and there were various stalwarts already well established. Essentially, if you were on a budget you'd get a NAD 5120, Ariston Q-Deck or Dual CS505. A little more would get you a Rega Planar 2 or 3. If you were really into your vinyl then, likely as not, you'd be demo-ing a Linn LP12, Roksan Xerxes or Michell GyroDec. The trouble here is that there was something of a gap between these two latter market sectors, and it's here where Manticore stepped in. Yes, there was the Systemdek IIX and Linn Axis, but neither was really a great step up from the Regas.

The Mantra's construction was

totally conventional. The real wood veneered plinth covered a steel subchassis, isolated by three springs. The Nylatron sub platter sat on a standard, but finely made bearing. On top of this was a glass platter and felt mat. Things didn't get a great deal more exciting with the motor. The Airpax (Philips) 24-Pole AC synchronous motor was standard fare at the time, however it could be upgraded. Indeed one of the best aspects of Manticore ownership was the stream of Linn LP12-like improvements that could be made - for £120 the upgraded motor unit featured improved mountings and was encased in Acetal to reduce vibration and promote smoothness.

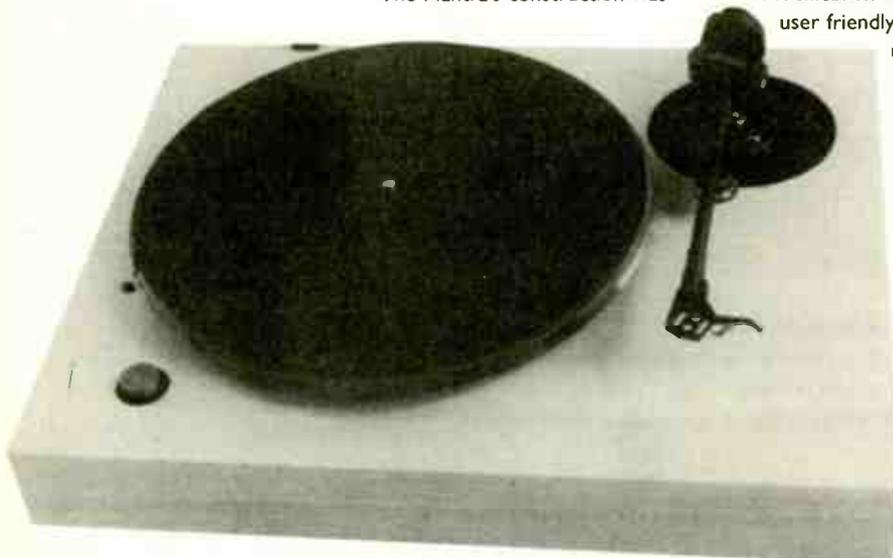
Another upgrade centred around the power supply. For £220, Manticore would supply you with a 'pure synthesised' 50Hz outboard, twin speed, power supply in its very own veneered box, just like the big boys! Unlike most other decks though, the beauty of the Mantra was that the PSU upgrade could be just plugged in without any further modification needed. This was a

user friendly upgrade in a very user friendly deck. Yet, don't for one moment think that this meant average in terms of sound quality. True, the standard Manticore couldn't match the LP12, Xerxes or GyroDec, but it came closer than you might think. With a Rega RB250 or 300 arm the sound was neutral and

detailed. It was only really in the frequency extremes that the Manticore became a little ragged and even then, compared to the brash Linn Axis, was sweetness itself.

Moving to the matching Musician tonearm sweetened the sound still further, yet not in an overly euphonic way. This beautifully made arm was something of a bargain at the time, retailing for just £170 in 1989. The Linn type cut out makes it adaptable to many decks, and today its anonymity makes it, on its own, a used bargain. It shouldn't cost much more than a Rega RB250, yet offers so much more in terms of detail. Feeling a bit flash? If you really couldn't stop upgrading your Mantra, then there was always the Magician arm. At £575 it was far more than the deck itself yet, with its polished silver finish, looked gorgeous. The van den Hul cabling did its bit and this was a very tidy sounding tonearm, but then at nearly £100 more than an SME 309 of the time, it needed to be!

Needless to say a fully spec'd Mantra could happily trade punches with a basic LP12, Xerxes or Gyro. There really was very little criticism that was levelled at it at the time, and its unassuming manner made it a beguiling bit of kit to listen to. I happily lived with one during the late eighties, and was sad to see it ousted by the more 'reviewer friendly' (i.e. taut and precise) Xerxes/Artemiz combo that replaced it in 1992. Yet because it never had the image, Mantras now go for less than their true worth. Get a good basic one for under £200, and you've a decent step up from the Rega standard. If you manage to track one down with all the bells and whistles, then you're in for a real treat, in fact at its likely price now, an exceptional one.





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