

Rising from the ashes of the 1994 Summer Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the last of the broad-based summer trade fests, the CES Specialty Audio & Home Theater Show in late June was quite small, even rather quaint by traditional CES standards, drawing 119 exhibitors and 2,833 manufacturers, retailers, distributors, and journalists to Chicago's grand old Palmer House Hotel. Pioneer's announcement of a \$2,000 CD recorder and Denon's introduction of the first THX-certified Dolby AC-3 surround processor made the biggest splashes at the show, which was sponsored by the Electronic Industries Association (EIA).

Another hot topic of hallway chatter was 5.1-channel digital audio — especially Dolby's AC-3 vs. Pro Logic demonstration, which left no doubt about AC-3's sonic superiority over its predecessor. DTS Technology also demonstrated its rival 5.1-channel system, DTS Coherent Acoustics, which received generally high marks for overall sound quality. Meanwhile, Pioneer displayed its lineup of AC-3-compatible gear, currently the industry's most formidable, comprising seven CD/laserdisc combi-players, two A/V receivers, and a surround processor. AC-3-compatible combi-players were also introduced by Yamaha, Denon, and Marantz.

In audio electronics, Conrad-Johnson unveiled two "low-cost" preamps, the Sonographe SC26 (\$995 with remote) and SC25 (\$795 without phono stage). Cary Designs turned some heads with its CD-500 CD player

SHOW

Highlights from the CES Specialty Audio & Home Theater Show

(\$1,995), featuring a vacuum-tube output. Newcomer Jolida of Annapolis Junction, Maryland, demonstrated a line of moderately priced integrated tube amps, including the 20-watt-per-channel SJ 101A (\$550).

Digital-to-analog (D/A) converters and other components incorporating the High Definition Compatible Digital (HDCD) decoder from Pacific Microsonics were shown by a number of companies, including Enlightened Audio Designs, Counterpoint, Threshold/P3 Audio, and Sonic Frontiers. Parasound's \$555 D/AC-850HD D/A converter is expected to be the lowest-priced HDCD component available when it hits the market this fall. Only a handful of HDCD recordings are available however, almost all from the small audiophile label Reference Recordings.

In speakers, Kenwood demonstrated its first THX-certified models, the LS-X1F front speaker (\$500 each) and LS-X1S surround (\$600 a pair), and Thiel auditioned the SCS2, a magnetically shielded A/V speaker (\$525) built around a 6½-inch coaxial driver.

Snell announced that the RCS-1000 digital room-correction system it's been working on for four years is finally finished. The price: \$8,900.

In video, Vidikron introduced the "entry-level" TGS301 front projector (\$5,995), which provides on-screen graphics and yields images of up to 15 feet (diagonal). Casio demonstrated an unusual portable front/rear LCD projector, dubbed MegaVision (\$1,995). Although it's said to project images of up to 60 inches (diagonal) with optimum resolution and brightness the picture we saw was dark and grainy.

In the odds-and-ends department, Kimber Kable wooed showgoers with its Shmarkers line of heat-shrinkable wire labels (\$12 to \$24 a package), and Absolute Electronics touted its Video One Touch remote for RCA's Digital Satellite System (\$45), with direct-access buttons for twenty premium channels such as HBO. RCA, meanwhile, previewed its second-generation DSS gear, due out in the fall.

A handful of items that especially grabbed our attention are shown on these pages. —Bob Azzurro



At \$2,000, the Pioneer Elite PDR-99 CD recorder is half the price of its predecessor, the PDR-09, and more user-friendly, too. The write-once deck, which contains the SCMS copy-inhibit chip, offers one-touch synchronized recording from digital sources. We'll be looking for a \$1,000 deck next show.