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PLUS

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SPACE AGE SPEAKERS

Is the Wilson benesch Discovery the best ever stand-mount speaker?

DVD IN THE FAST LANE

TAG McLaren's new high-end disc drive rated



POWER PACKED

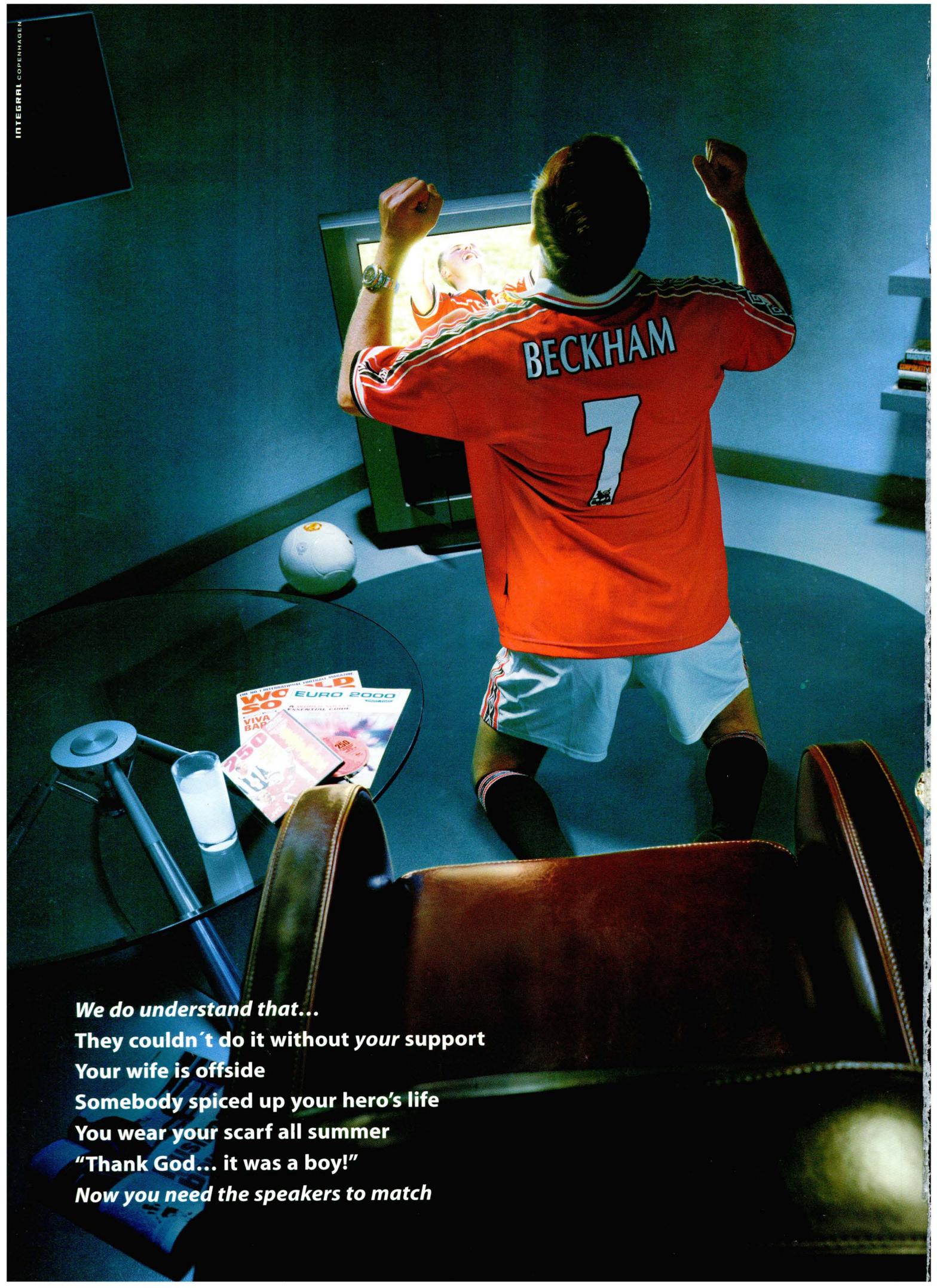
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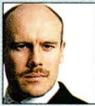
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Alvin Gold prefers serious classical music and has a predilection toward Krell electronics and JM Lab speakers.

HOW WE TEST THE PRODUCTS

Our reviewing process is the most rigorous in the business. We focus on transparency and resolution, mixing traditional hi-fi values with the latest technological developments via a blend of subjective views and scientific analysis.

■ BENCH TESTS Our main group test each month concentrates on a key area, with products from across the separates market. The testing consists of three stages: 'blind' listening, hands-on subjective testing and scientific measuring. The latter phase is conducted by our Technical Editor using computerised measuring equipment custom designed for the purpose. He is recognised as the leader in his field.

■ GROUP TESTS Each issue features a number of additional tests aimed at narrowing the field in a specific product area. Here the testing involves just the reviewer concerned with no lab or panel testing, but plenty of comparisons.

■ SOLO REVIEWS As well as group tests we also review single components. In our First Impression section, you'll find brand new products that warrant early exposure, while High Performance concentrates on the latest aspirational, high tech components.

HI-FI CHOICE BESTBUY

■ AWARD TAGS BEST BUYS are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price. RECOMMENDED products are first class components, losing out to Best Buys only because of a higher price or less competitive sound quality. A third award, EDITOR'S CHOICE, is reserved for those products reviewed solo and awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.

"My first reaction, even though this was my third visit, was that Las Vegas is another planet. Everything lacks authenticity, and it's all larger than life."



Las Vegas is a very strange place. The Strip, the bit with all the casinos on it, is like Disneyland for adults. My first reaction, even though this was my third visit, was that this was another planet. Everything lacks authenticity, and it's all larger than life. The CES show that takes over the place every January is also larger than life, but the kit that's on display at this overwhelming show is a bit more real – a few of the more alarming loudspeaker designs excepted.

CES takes up two large convention centres and numerous hotels, but fortunately most of the hi-fi is gathered in just three locations. These divide roughly into Real World, High End, and Another Planet. Or mainstream, expensive, and obscure to put it another way. There was interesting stuff in each location, including the introduction of satellite radio for in-car use, multichannel SACD and some very new approaches to loudspeaker design.

I took my camera around the lot of them and you'll find snaps and more info on page 20. The full story will emerge as each product finds its way onto the news or reviews pages. But if what I heard in some of those demonstrations is anything to go by, it's going to be a fine year for hi-fi.

Satellite radio in the States is a bit like cable or satellite TV: you're got to pay for it. Over here, there is a wealth of radio being beamed out of the sky and it's yours free, once you've invested in a suitable receiver. New to these pages is Reg Williamson who has given us some insight into what sort of programming is available to the classical music enthusiast (see page 72).

Our High Performance section features some gorgeous kit this month, including what would seem to be another bargain SACD from Sony, the SCD-555ES, which follows in the footsteps of the SCD-777ES as a loss leader for the format. If the latter's popularity among high-end brands at CES is anything to go by, these players are a give-away even if you aren't interested in SACD.

Jason Kennedy Editor

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OUR US CORRESPONDENT WES PHILLIPS
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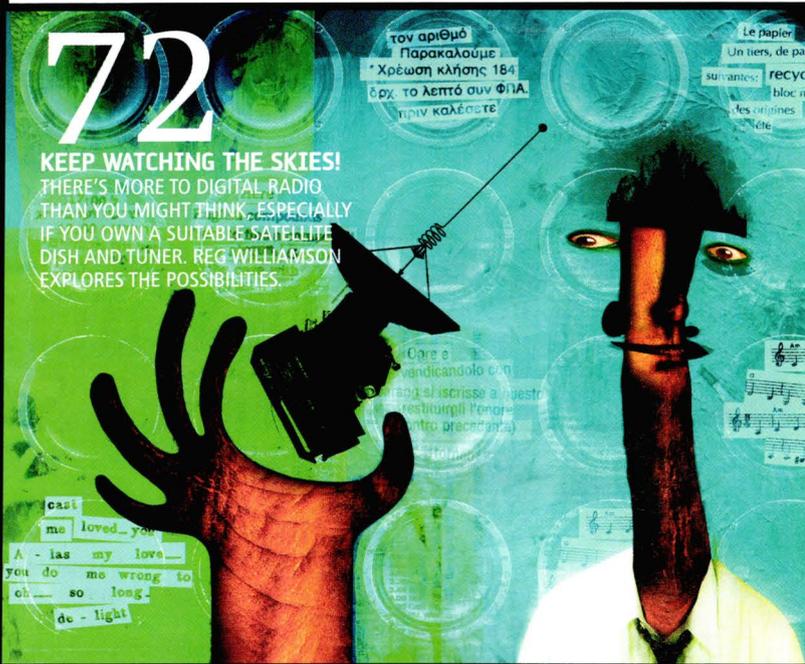
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

TIM BOWERN AND DAN GEORGE GET TO GRIPS WITH SOME OF THE LATEST GEAR TO HIT THE STREETS



NAKAMICHI SOUNDSPACE 9 STEREO SYSTEM

★★★★★ £2,999.99

"IF YOU IGNORE STYLE FOR A MOMENT, IN NO WAY DOES THIS SOUND LIKE A £3,000 HI-FI"

DATASTREAM

3-DISC CD CHANGER; AM/FM radio; subwoofer with 150mm bass cone; two satellites with twin 60mm mid-cones and 25mm tweeter; power to subwoofer rated at 50 Watts, power to satellites rated at 30 Watts per channel; two inputs for additional source components plus one output for recording
CONTACT ☎ 020 8863 9117

Hasn't there been a time when you wished your hi-fi was just a little more... sexy? Perhaps you'd tempted your latest flame back home for the first time, only to open the door and feel a sudden flush of embarrassment as a bank of black boxes hits her squarely in the face. To some, that's as uncool as leaving a pair of baggy Y-fronts swinging from the light fitting. In that instant, you might have wished you plumped for something more stylish. Like a Nakamichi...

The SoundSpace 9's diamond shaped, wall-mountable, jaw-droppingly droolsome centrepiece contains three separate CD mechanisms. At the centre of each is a button. Touch this and the blue backlight begins to flash, the relevant section drawing towards you like a secret panel in some sci-fi fantasy. The disc then glides out vertically.

Unfortunately, this system's other components are less sexy. There's an active subwoofer containing amplification for the entire system and a modest-sized paper bass cone. Two slim satellite speakers link to this via supplied cable; each

sports two tiny midrange drivers arrayed vertically either side of a soft dome tweeter. Frankly, when you pick them up they feel more like speakers you'd get with a Pro-Logic telly than with three grand's worth of 'hi-fi'. But how do they sound?

A dollop of context is needed here. If you ignore style for a moment, in no way does this sound like a £3,000 hi-fi. At least, not a good one. Bass is wallowy and treble rough 'n' ready and, though the whole thing is fairly smooth and well proportioned, it's not the least bit transparent. Vocals are OK – it was actually quite pleasant with Sinatra's *In the Wee Small Hours* – but challenge it with a bit of forceful low or top-end and it really doesn't hang together.

But what you're paying for is style, and though some may consider it a fashion victim it actually sounds more musical than most pre-packaged convenience systems on the market. In essence if not form, it's a mini system. And an eminently posh one at that. **TB**

DENON CDR-W1500 CD-R/RW RECORDER

★★★★★ £449.99

Burning discs has just got easier thanks to those clever types at Denon. The CDR-W1500 is a double-disc offering that follows closely in footsteps of the JVC, Philips and Pioneer models already in the shops. Based on Philips internals for the transport and recording mechanism, the W1500 is a one-stop edit shop. Twin tray convenience eliminates the need for a separate CD player and recorder so, assuming the playback quality cuts the mustard, you can save that space on your rack for your next temptation!

The Denon's busy aluminium fascia really is loaded with features, and it's equally well served by the dual analogue and digital outputs (one set for each tray) round the back. The HDCD-compatible machine will let you play both drawers simultaneously, so you can DJ away with a mixer, if that floats your boat. Bashing out new CDs is facilitated by double speed recording and synchronised recording for disc cloning; the usual gamut of sample rates (32/44.1/48 kHz) are catered for too. The plethora of recording methods, although welcome, can make for slow progress until you have mastered the techniques, and all recording variations can be performed with the comprehensive remote.

Having followed the requisite recording procedure, a freshly burned CD-R emerged with relative ease, and displayed no real audible difference from the master. On the other hand – as is often the case with twin-disc machines – playback suf-

fers a shade compared with standalone CD players at a similar price. Overall, the presentation was slightly reserved and lacked a bit of depth, but it retained a pleasing degree of smoothness and was quite easy on the ear. We're talking a lot of electronics for the money here, and a reputable brand as Denon is well worth putting on your audition list. **DG**

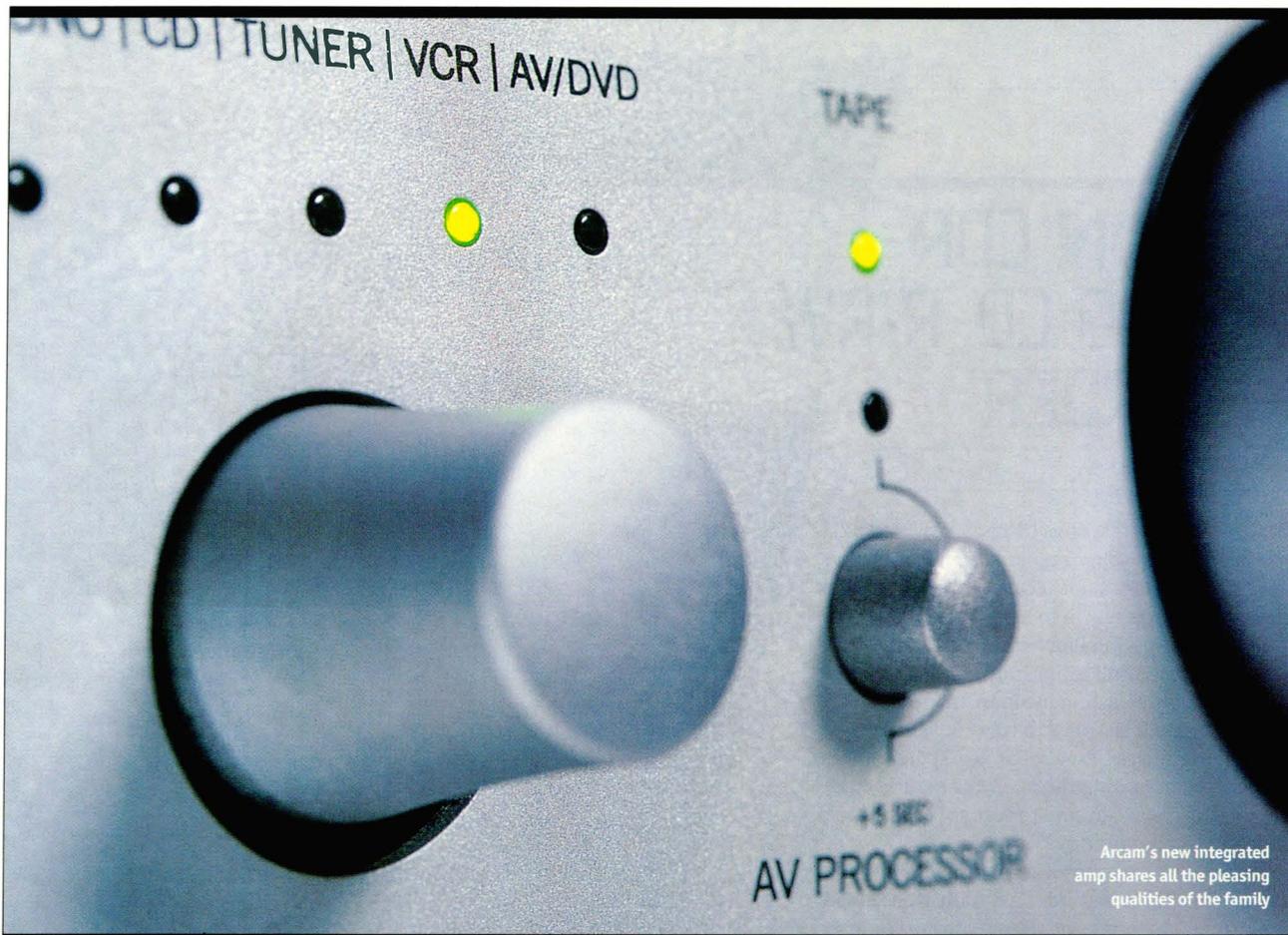
"A CD-R EMERGED WITH RELATIVE EASE, AND DISPLAYED NO AUDIBLE DIFFERENCE FROM THE MASTER"

DATASTREAM

PHILIPS transport and CD burner; 2 pairs of digital outputs (coaxial and optical); 2x analogue outputs. DENON ☎ 01753 888447



Denon's twin-deck CD/CD-R promises stunning ease of use



ARCAM A75 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

★★★★★ £429.90

**"INSTRUMENTS
HAVE DEPTH, AND
THE WHOLE
SOUNDSTAGE
IS THAT BIT
MORE OPEN"**

Those in the market for a new amp will be pleased to learn of this new Arcam. Huddled in the new DiVA range, the A75 is an all-new machine which aims to improve upon the sonic standard set by the Alpha 8R and 9 in every way. Basically Arcam has incorporated audiophile grade electronics in a bid to build on its amplifier's existing strengths. So what upgrades are there?

We're told it features all new circuitry, including higher quality capacitors and more sophisticated protection circuits – features shared with the new A65 and A85 amplifiers in the same range. This remote controlled 50-watt youngster is furnished with preamp outputs, for future power amp adventures. A further set of switchable speaker connections allow you to avoid missing that essential guitar solo when making the tea, by allowing a set of additional speakers in the kitchen or anywhere you like.

A degree of future-proofing is evident in the wide audio bandwidth capability of this amp,

meaning it's ready for SACD and DVD-Audio. What's more, the Arcam chaps have put an AV processor switch into the design, which fixes the gain of the front channels for use with external multichannel processors. This allows you to switch between dedicated stereo amplification and AV, should you want to connect up the rest of your AV equipment.

This newcomer shares the musical qualities with much of the Arcam family: presentation is warm and quite generous. Bass is weighty and appears to offer more control than the nearest Alpha model. Instruments have depth, and the whole soundstage is that bit more open. A thoroughbred Arcam then, and pretty with it. The wide bandwidth and AV compatibility should certainly increase its desirability.



DATASTREAM

POWER IS RATED at 50 watts/8 ohms; six inputs incl. tape loop; MM phono stage; switchable speaker outputs; pre-output; headphone socket.
ARCAM ☎ 01223 203200

mercury mX

E V E R Y B I T B E T T E R



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AWARDS 2000
WINNER
MERCURY MX1
BEST SPEAKER
FRONT - OR - REAR



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For free literature on the mercury mX range from Tannoy, call 01753 680868 www.tannoy.com

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



TECHNICS SA-DA8 MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER

★★★★★ £399.99

If you caught our multichannel issue a couple months back (*HFC 210*), you'll already know about the SA-DA10 – a beastly, brooding A/V receiver that sits atop Technics' range. This, if you like, is the cut-price version, eschewing some high-grade components in return for £100 off the price tag. Ostensibly, that makes the SA-DA8 seem something of a bargain. You lose the bamboo-based TAKEH capacitors, along with some structural damping and a notch or two in the transformer department. But you're still getting a fully specified 5.1 channel receiver with Dolby Digital, ProLogic and dts decoding, rugged good looks and the undeniable street cred of the Technics brand, all for a temptingly affordable £400.

You're buying into impressive acronyms too, like VGCA (Variable Gain Control Amplification); a technology filtered down from the firm's most costly stereo amps, intended to improve signal-to-noise. That at least shows some intent towards high fidelity, but does it deliver?

Well, like just about every integrated multichannel amp to date, and particularly those at lower price levels, its sound is musically compro-

mised. In stereo mode it manages to sound clearer than some of its ilk, without too much grit or grain, but it remains cold and sterile next to a good stereo-only amp in the £200-£300 bracket. Kenwood's KAF-3030R, say.

It makes up ground with multichannel music on DVD, throwing out a leaner, meaner kind of sound than some of its sub-£500 rivals. But given the continued dearth of DVD-Audio software we're only talking data-reduced DVD-Video releases here. Despite Technics' proclamations of suitability, we'll have to wait to see if it does the new music format justice.

It's with film soundtracks that the SA-DA8 is most at home. Effects are thrown around the room with a cool, crisp aim. Dialogue is clean too, and though some might find its performance a little glassy and a touch dry, on the whole its movie sound is well on the money.

Viewed as a budget do-it-all amp for general entertainment media, this is an able contender, despite rather limited connection options – check the Datastream panel to see if it's got what you need. Just don't expect too much sonic refinement, especially with music. **TB**



DATASTREAM

POWER RATED at 80 Watts per channel; AM/FM tuner with RDS EON; bass/treble controls; DD, dts and DPL plus five effect modes; three analogue audio inputs including one phono and a record loop; three audio/video (RCA/composite) inputs including one record loop; two S-Video inputs and one output; three digital audio inputs (optical only)
TECHNICS ☎ 01344 862444

INFINITY ALPHA 20 SPEAKER

★★★★★ £199.90

People are always finding new ways to manipulate music signals as they make developments in amplifiers and CD players, but innovations in speaker technology are relatively rare, so when it does emerge, it's worth taking note. One such deviation from the norm has appeared in a new range of speakers from Infinity, at a price which allows everybody a look in. Specifically the Ceramic Metal Matrix Diaphragms (CMMD) featured in the new Alpha range. This includes two standmount models, three floorstanders and a centre for use in a multichannel system. The range heralds Infinity's return to the UK.

Like Viagra, CMMD is concerned with stiffness. The basic idea is that a stiff driver will produce less coloration and act in a more linear, pistonic way than a relatively pliant one. The two-way Alpha 20 uses a midrange driver that sandwiches a layer of aluminium between two thicker layers of Ceramic Matrix, the result being greater stiffness than aluminium alone.

Continuing the stiffness theme is the MDF enclosure: a whopping 25mm of it grips those drivers on the front baffle, while the radius on the front edge aids dispersion.

The current crop of sub-£200 speakers is an arena brimming with tough competition. The Alpha 20 packs some punch though, with a good construction, considerable mass and sizeable dimensions. For £199.90 these are admirable qualities indeed, and once on song you'll find bass is weighty thanks to the generous box size, and vocals have impressive presence in the soundstage. They are however, slightly forward, particularly in the upper midrange, and overall the sound wasn't as coherent as some of the competition. However, this is a good stab at applying new technology to budget hi-fi. It's well worth taking a peek at the new Infinity range: which is currently available via Harman Consumer International, but will be distributed in the UK towards the end of February. **DG**

"BASS IS WEIGHTY THANKS TO THE GENEROUS BOX SIZE, AND VOCALS HAVE IMPRESSIVE PRESENCE"



Stiff all over: the impressively engineered Alpha 20s

DATASTREAM

MEASURES 38x22x28cm (WxHxD); MDF cabinet; 170mm (ceramic matrix mid driver); 25mm CMMD tweeter; Bi-wirable binding posts; quoted sensitivity 88dB; quoted impedance of 8 Ohms; weight 8.2kg

HARMAN INT'L

☎ 00 33 243 384460



MYRYAD CAMEO STEREO SYSTEM

★★★★★ £1,499.99

“A MUSICALITY AND SUBTLETY OF TOUCH THAT KNOCKS MOST PRE-PACKAGED ‘STYLE’ SYSTEMS OUT OF THE PARK”

DATASTREAM

CD PLAYER: 24-bit/96kHz compatible DAC, coaxial digital output; amp: rated at 50 Watts per channel, four line-level inputs plus phono and two tape loops; tuner: single band (FM), 29 presets, RDS; full system remote control

Style? Pah! Convenience? Humbug! To the hi-fi buff of popular legend, such things are like Christmas to Charles Dickens' Scrooge. But times are changing. Is it possible to get style, performance and user-friendliness in one easy bite?

Ask Myriad. With Cameo, the brand intends to take its tried-and-tested fusion of style and performance into the realms of the upmarket mini system, combining three separate components sold as a single package.

Inside the package are three boxes, each containing a slimline component in a solid, silver-grey case. These are proper separates in every sense, except that they're not currently sold separately – there's a CD player, amp and FM tuner, each a self-contained unit with its own individual power chord. Speakers aren't included, however, so you'll need to source your own.

Aside from being a one-stop purchase, Cameo's mini-style convenience stems from its connection system. Its My-Link bus lets you link all three components so they 'talk' to each other – a signal received from the remote handset by one component is distributed to the others for simple, one-touch operation. If the entire system is off, say, and you press the CD 'play' button, both the CD player and amp will turn on, the amp will switch to the CD input and playback will begin. Trivial? Perhaps, but to the average mini system customer

that kind of smooth operational convenience is a necessity.

If Myriad's aim is to introduce such a customer to real hi-fi sound, then it has succeeded. Armed with a suitably decent pair of speakers – we tried both B&W and PMC – it shows itself to be a clear and articulate performer, if a touch cold and short of weight. Its all-round finesse pitches it firmly in real hi-fi territory, a musicality and subtlety of touch that knocks most pre-packaged 'style' systems out of the park, down the road and way, way out of sight.

On the other hand, with a little careful auditioning, you could pick three £500 components that combine to deliver even more. But that takes legwork. And Cameo most certainly doesn't. **TB**



A ready-made system from Myriad



R-H500 Reverse Cassette Deck



DV-H500 DVD Player



RW-H500 CD Recorder



VRDS-9 Compact Disc Player



PD-H570 Multi-CD Player



PD-H500i CD Player



MD-H500i MiniDisc Recorder



T-H500 FM/AM Tuner



AV-H500D AC-3 Pro-Logic Surround Amp



AG-H500 Stereo Receiver



A-H500i Amplifier

What a pair.

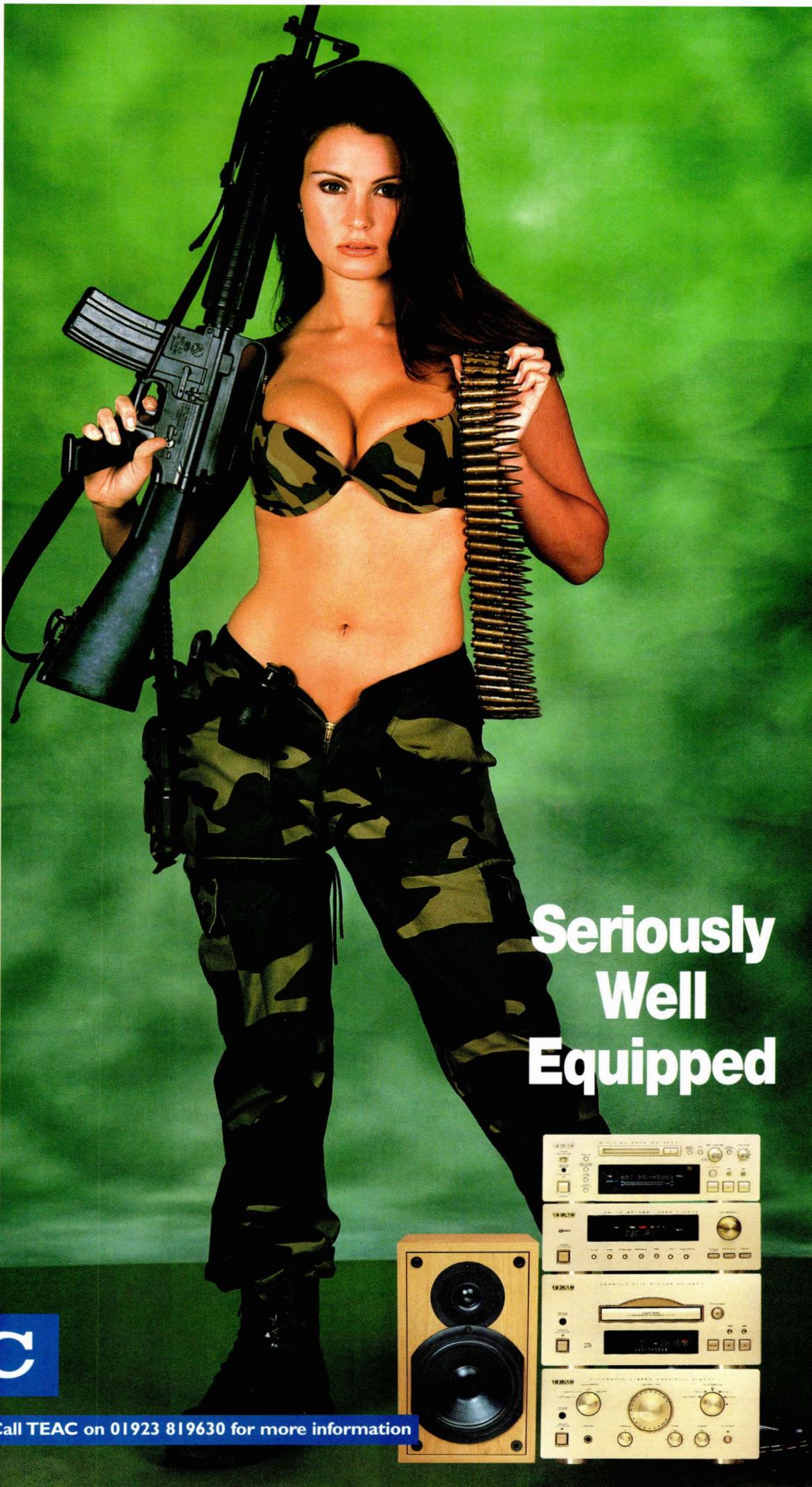
They both mean serious business.

The TEAC Reference 500 now has a choice of eleven separates, from DVD to CDRW, MiniDisc and CD.

You can build your own personal system and discover true separates performance from a mini system.

Or you can try your luck with the girl. M16, quick release hand grenade and 34D cup.

Whatever is your preference, they're both seriously well equipped.



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Call TEAC on 01923 819630 for more information

NEWS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY TIM BOWERN AND DAN GEORGE

CROSS-CHANNEL

ATC LAUNCHES NEW ACTIVE SPEAKER RANGE

ATC has developed a new loudspeaker intended for both stereo and multichannel use. The T16 is an active design, which means it has built-in amplification – 200 Watts for the 150mm mid/bass driver and 50 Watts for the 25mm fabric dome tweeter. The user simply connects each speaker to a suitable preamp or processor, reducing the amount of boxes and wires required while giving each speaker its own dedicated power amp at close proximity.

The speaker is described as compact and “lifestyle”, and is priced at £1,800 per pair. A full 5.1 multichannel package called the Concept 4 Lifestyle 5.1 Collection is also available at £7,500, including four T16s with a matching centre speaker and subwoofer.

ATC ☎ 01285 760561



DRESSED TO IMPRESS

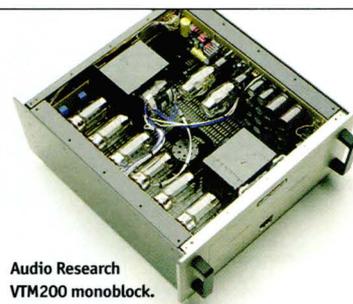
B&W'S NEW SPEAKERS WITH STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

Style conscious music fans who balk at black boxes may seek solace in B&W's new mid-price CM speakers. The range includes a stand-mount model, a larger floorstander and a matching centre speaker, each one “not so much a speaker as a piece of furniture”. However, sonics have apparently not been compromised in the pursuit of style.

The first model is the CM2 at £550, a two-way stand-mount design with a 165mm, Kevlar-coned mid/bass driver and a 25mm metal dome tweeter. The second is the CM4, a 2.5-way floorstander priced at £900 and incorporating an additional 165mm, aluminium-coned bass driver. The £350 CMC centre speaker is also a 2.5-way design, sporting twin 120mm mid/bass units with Kevlar cones.

All three models feature now familiar B&W design tenets like tapered tube tweeter assemblies and dimpled Flowport vents. A choice of maple or rosenut wood veneers is available, and aesthetics are spruced up via brushed aluminium baffle plates with colour co-ordinated cone surrounds and dust caps.

B&W ☎ 01903 750750



Audio Research
VTM200 monoblock.

US BY TUBE

NEW VALVE AMPS LAUNCHED IN THE UK

High-end US brand Audio Research lands back in the UK with a clutch of new and updated valve amps. One all-new product is the VTM200 monoblock, a mono power amp priced at £6,999 and packing a huge 200 Watts.

The results achieved in its development have also led to upgrades to three existing valve-based amps. The LS25 preamp now reaches MkII status with an improved input stage and two twin 6H30 triodes in the driver stage. Price remains unchanged at £4,999.

Also upgraded is the VT100 amp, now at MkII and featuring the same adjustments to its input and driver stages, among other improvements, and priced at £4,999. Finally, the flagship Reference 2 preamp has seen changes to its power supply and analogue circuits, resulting in the £9,998 Ref 2 MkII.

Absolute Sounds ☎ 020 8971 3909

MERIDIAN LINES UP DVD

NEW "AUDIOPHILE STANDARD" DVD-VIDEO PLAYER

Those hankering for a taste of Meridian's benchmark 800 Reference DVD player may wish to investigate a more 'affordable' model set to emerge from the same marque. The 596 is equipped to play DVD-Video discs, CDs, Video CDs and even CD-R discs containing MP3-encoded tracks, and uses drive technology originally developed for the 800 Series.

A key feature is its modular internal construction, allowing the user to upgrade functions like audio/video output or disc playback as technologies arise. Presumably that will include a level of DVD-Audio playback, given Meridian's extensive involvement with the format. Both audio and video sections use dedicated master clocks, with Meridian's own jitter-minimising technology applied for a clearer, more accurate performance. Top-drawer stereo sound is also promised, thanks to 192kHz/24-bit capable DACs and a direct-coupled "audiophile standard" output section. A coaxial digital audio output is provided, one of the few so far delivering data at up to 96kHz/24-bit precision, along with stereo analogue outs and a trio of video options – composite, component and S-Video. Price is £2,350.

Meridian ☎ 01480 52144



BRISTOL'S EXPOSED

GET READY FOR SOUND & VISION 2001

Exposure's imminent 2010 CD player is one of many new products destined for launch at this year's Bristol hi-fi show. It's a c£500 model with a Crystal one-bit DAC, proprietary analogue stage and a typically hefty power supply.

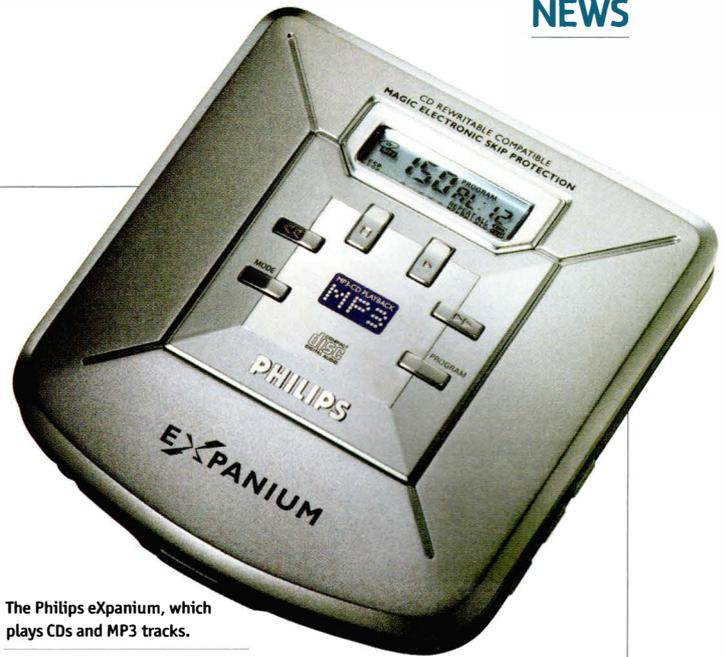
Sound & Vision Bristol 2001 takes place from the 23rd to the 25th of February at The Marriott Hotel, Castle Street. Tickets cost £6 for adults and £3 for students, with accompanied under 16s admitted free. Multichannel sound

and new music formats will be a key focus of the show, offering a first glimpse of products like Arcam's high-end FMJ DV27 DVD player and the latest version of TAG McLaren's AV32R processor, complete with Dolby's new music-oriented Pro-Logic II.

Tickets ☎ 0117 929 4281

Website: www.bristolshow.co.uk

Exposure's new 2010 CD player.



The Philips eXpanium, which plays CDs and MP3 tracks.

MP3x3

PHILIPS UNLEASH THREE NEW MP3 PRODUCTS

Philips has fired its latest salvo in the battle of MP3 with a trio of new products. On the solid state front there's the second generation Rush SA126, a £270 personal with a 64MB SmartMedia card in place of the original's 32MB memory.

More unusual is the eXpanium, a CD personal that plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R via a PC CD writer, along with conventional discs. Though not the first of its kind, as Philips claims, it is the smartest model we've seen so far and sports Philips' 100 second Magic ESP buffer memory to prevent skips on the move. An in-car adapter is also supplied,

so you can plug it through your car's tape deck, and it costs around £190.

Those who want to hear MP3 tracks from the comfort of their armchair might prefer Philips' third product – the M55 mini system. This packs in a three-disc CD autochanger with MP3 playback, twin cassette and radio, and is quoted at kicking out 50 Watts per channel. Price is expected to be £260.

Tune in next month for our verdict on these models as we take you through the hottest happenings in the burgeoning world of MP3 and Internet audio.

Philips UK ☎ 020 8689 2166

IN BRIEF



Stands Unique Klarity

STANDS UNIQUE has added several new products to its range of supports and speakers. Included is a new, larger centre/main speaker, the Klarity, designed to easily incorporate into the firm's own furniture (pictured). There's also a new range of supports called Gemini.

☎ 01933 412227

WADIA'S period of stasis is over, thanks to a buy-out headed by the company's CEO. The US high-end digital audio specialist has now restarted production and the long-awaited W831 CD player should be available soon. See US news for more.

☎ 01992 573030

JVC has launched the first personal MiniDisc recorder to feature a Long Play facility, like that sported by VCRs, allowing disc length to be stretched by up to four times. That means up to 320 minutes of music on a single disc. The XM-R700 is available now.

☎ 0870 330 5000

DIGITAL ONE has relaunched its UK Digital Radio website. Now faster and easier to navigate, the site is packed with info and also has special offers on hardware. There's also a postcode checker to tell you if digital radio is available in your area.

WEBSITE:
www.ukdigitalradio.com

A MORI youth survey commissioned by MP3 specialist Creative Labs says a third of those surveyed between 15 and 24 believe they will stop buying CDs within five years. Also, 33

IN BRIEF CONTINUES ON P.19

*Whatever your
taste in music...*

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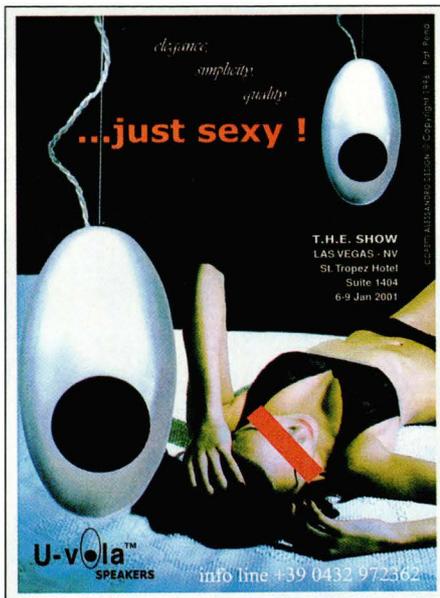
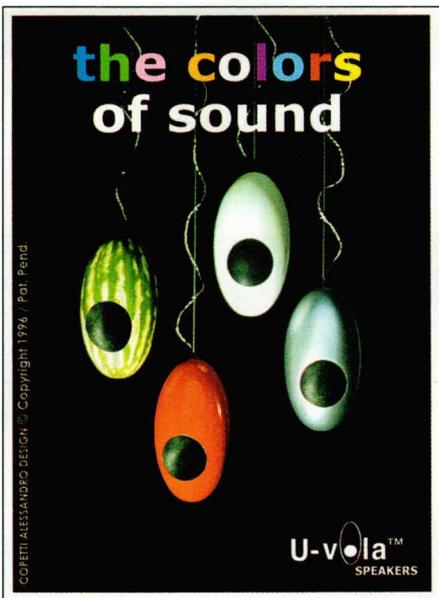


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Tel: (01276) 451166 Fax: (01276) 452211 Email: panic@qed.co.uk Internet: <http://www.qed.co.uk>

AWARD WINNING INTERCONNECTS

SOUNDS SUSPENDED

MORE RADICAL SPEAKER DESIGN FROM THE LAND OF SCOOTERS AND PORN STAR POLITICIANS



We're not quite sure what they're getting at with the lady in lace, but the speakers sure do look "...just sexy!"

Oddball speakers that hang from the ceiling appear all the rage in Italy these days. Hot on the heels of NAC (featured last month) come Syn Factory and its U-vola design, an ellipsoid speaker made from a mineral aggregate mix. It incorporates a 100mm mid/bass driver and a concentric 26mm tweeter and hangs suspended by a steel wire.

Its style has won its maker several design awards in Europe and the US, along with inclusion in The International

Design Yearbook 2000, but apparently its form has sonic benefits too. Its shape helps reduce unwanted reflections, while the suspension system and cabinet material minimise resonance. Three finishes are available as standard: aluminium, white or watermelon, which looks as delicious as its sounds. Other colours are available on request.

Website: www.synfactory.com

E-mail: info@synfactory.com

IN BRIEF CONTINUED

per cent of Internet users can envisage storing all their music on a pocket size portable device within the same time frame.

PSB's new Image 5T speaker.



PSB has unveiled its new Image 5T tower speaker, a floorstander featuring a 25mm aluminium tweeter and a pair of 165mm mid/bass drivers. The result is apparently "great definition with amazingly potent low frequency response". Price is £630 for a pair. ☎ 01908 319360

NXT'S SurfaceSound flat-panel speaker technology has made it into General Motors' new Buick concept car. The car houses five unobtrusive NXT panels, effectively making the dashboard one large speaker. GM joins fellow car giant DaimlerChrysler in adopting the technology. ☎ 020 7343 5050

DVD-AUDIO software update: Warner's initial batch of seven multichannel DVD-A titles have finally hit the streets, a little later than the 7 November release date originally mooted. Other titles apparently now available include Aaron Neville's *Devotion* and a rendition of Handel's *Messiah* by the London Symphony Orchestra. We still await news of official UK release dates...

SACD software update: Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* is out on SACD on 5 February. It's a triple-layer disc featuring a four-channel mix, the first of its kind, along with two-channel SACD and regular CD. More details next month.

CLEARLIGHT AUDIO has brought a new equipment support to the UK. The German company says its Aspekt rack uses a proprietary resin-based compound called RDC, which contains lead, rubber and numerous other materials and permits extremely low levels of coloration. Price for a black four-shelf rack is £500, or £550 in cherry. ☎ 0870 2412469

ROGERS HI-FI, the store, has moved to a new site in Godalming, Surrey. You'll now find it at 18-20 Church Street, apparently complete with an inglenook fireplace and coffee on tap. What's the world coming to? ☎ 01483 425252

PROACTIVE PAIR

NEW PROAC OFFERINGS FOR MUSIC AND MOVIES

ProAc has launched an active subwoofer called the Response ER One. It shares a larger, 250mm version of the carbon fibre composite-coned driver found in ProAc's Response and Future ranges, together with a built-in 200Watt amp. It costs £999 and comes in a choice of real wood veneers.

Also new in ProAc's Response range is the CC Two, a centre channel speaker priced at £999. A pair of 165mm polypropylene mid/bass units and a 25mm soft dome tweeter are featured.

ProAc ☎ 01280 700147

ProAc's Response ER One subwoofer.



AGE OF AQUARIUS

NEW DUTCH DELIVERY OF LIMITED EDITION SPEAKERS

A strictly limited edition high-end loudspeaker has made its way to the UK from Dutch company Vaessen Audiodesign. The tear-drop shaped Aquarius weighs in at £9,995 and is limited to just 100 units. Its fibreglass enclosure houses a 300mm composite-coned bass driver, together with two titanium units – a 50cm midrange driver and 25mm tweeter. It sits on a mighty bonded plinth, which contains the crossover circuitry and two bass ports. Sensitivity is a claimed 92dB, with impedance of seven ohms. They're available exclusively in the UK at central London's Walrus Systems shop.

Walrus Systems
☎ 020 7724 7224

Vaessen Audiodesign
Aquarius speaker.





The Sonority tonearm uses a redwood space-frame beam with phenolic headshell and a cast brass base incorporating twin damping troughs.



Philips had several multichannel SACD-1000s (\$2,000) in the better equipped dem rooms and says that samples will be here in the Spring.



JVC was getting in on the SACD act: this model sat alongside units from Accuphase and Luxman, whose DU-10 also plays DVD-A.

THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW IN LAS VEGAS IS THE LARGEST OF ITS KIND IN THE US AND *THE* PLACE TO BE IF YOU WANT TO SEE WHAT THE NEW SEASON WILL BRING. JASON KENNEDY BRAVED THE SLOT MACHINE PLANET FOR THE FOLLOWING GLIMPSES OF HI-FI 2001

VIVA





The Edgarhorn Vintage Titan horn system uses recycled JBL drivers with alnico magnets and needs more space than most wardrobes.



Sony and Philips put on a serious SCD surround dem using Nautilus 801s and Pass Labs amps. DAC and multichannel preamp by Ed Meitner.



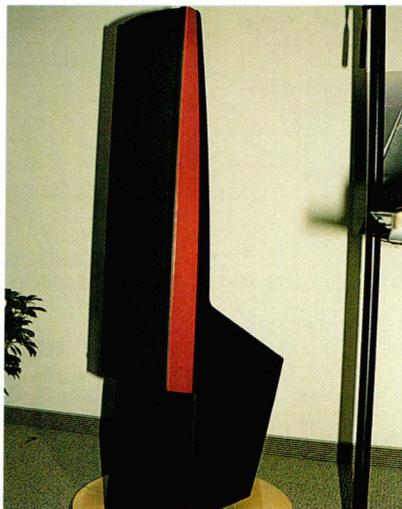
Marantz had samples of its SA14 SCD player (above) due this Spring, c€2,500, alongside a prototype SA12 S1 multichannel player.

LAS VEGAS

“THE AMOUNT OF HIGH END BRANDS USING SACD PLAYERS AT CES SUGGESTS THAT THE FORMAT HAS A VERY HEALTHY FUTURE.”



Linn showed a prototype of its Komri 10.25 floorstander with servo controlled active bass courtesy of Klimax style amps. Price will be high!



Martin-Logan has followed the Prodigy with the Odyssey, which is 40 per cent less expensive but features many of the elements of its sibling.



As featured in News USA this month, main pic is the EgglestonWorks Savoy and inset is the Nova Applause S active design from Threshold.

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www.tagmclarenaudio.com



five channel amplifier 100x5R

av processor AV32R



dvd player DVD32R

dvd player DVD32R

Europe's first DVD player which exceeds the high THX® Ultra standards for PAL and NTSC and allows reference standard replay of CDs.

High-mass Transport for Low Jitter

The DVD32R uses a top loading transport, allowing its drive motor and servo electronics to be mounted to a heavy, mass loaded sub-chassis. The result is improved data integrity and reduced jitter.

Precise Clock for best Sound and Video

The low phase noise single frequency master oscillator ensures that all video and audio clocks are synchronous, with clock signals being transferred using independently buffered and precisely terminated traces.

Field-leading MPEG Decoder

TAG McLaren worked closely with National Semiconductor's field-leading subsidiary Mediamatics, in finding the best MPEG decoder. After long evaluation Pantera-DVD™, the first IC to integrate all back-end functions of a DVD player onto a single chip, was selected.

Test-Patterns

In-built test-patterns and test signal circuitry assist in calibrating the tv for best picture quality.

TAGtronic Link T'L for Minimal Jitter

T'L allows the DVD32R to lock its data output to the low noise, ultra low jitter DAC reference clock in the AV32R.

Multiple Power Supplies

Separate power supplies reduce interference between the processing stages, right down to having separate windings on the large toroidal transformer.



AV32R 'THX Surround EX Plus'

The AV32R can now be upgraded from its standard 5.1 channels to the new 'THX Surround EX Plus' specification, with 7.1 channels.

THX Surround EX™

THX Surround EX™ brings a new dimension of depth, spacious ambience and sound localization. Available exclusively for THX-licensed products, THX Surround EX™ is a process that decodes a back surround signal from the left and right surround channels.

Processing Formats

THX™, Dolby Digital™, Dolby Pro Logic™, DTS Digital Surround™, TMS 5. The '7.1' also supports THX Surround EX™, DTS™+matrix and TMS 7. DTS-ES 6.1 Discrete™, DTS-Neo: 6™ and Dolby Pro Logic II™ are in preparation.

Digital Radio (DAB) Upgrade

The AV32R can soon be upgraded to the very latest Digital Radio (DAB) technology.

Automation & Action Switches

Two rear panel mounted remote control connectors and three trigger switches allow easy system automation.

Latest DSP Technology

The AV32R features the revolutionary, field-leading 32-bit 66 MHz Analog Devices ADSP 21065L SHARC™ Digital Signal Processor.

96 kHz/24-bit DACs

The AV32R is equipped to handle the finer resolution and more spacious sound of high data-rate recordings.

Forget printed user manuals

Setting up your system for optimum performance, without reference to the installation manual, is extremely easy: Simply follow the on-screen instructions of the AV32R's and DVD32R's unique Set-up Wizards.

five channel amplifier 100x5R

The 100x5R is a remote controlled, multi-room capable, powerful, high-performance, five-channel power amplifier with an output of outstanding clarity and purity. It is the perfect partner to the AV32R and DVD32R, delivering the drama and excitement of home cinema without compromising its truly audiophile sound quality.

True Monobloc Design

Experts have long known that for the ultimate in spatial sound reproduction it is necessary to use independent 'monobloc' amplifiers as only these guarantee that the sound of each channel is unaffected by the others. The 100x5R amplifier provides five true 'monobloc' amplifier modules in a single chassis. Each power amplifier module contains its own mains transformer, bridge rectifier and energy storage.

Ample Power

The 100x5R power output is 120 Watts into 8 ohms. This impressive figure is unaffected by the number of channels used as the 100x5R is a true monobloc design.

Fully Remote Controlled

In addition to being able to switch the 100x5R in and out of standby, the user (or the AV32R if the TAGtronic Bus is connected) can switch off any unused channels.

Enhanced TAGtronic Bus

Connect the TAGtronic Bus between DVD32R, AV32R and 100x5R and these products form an information sharing system. Remote commands are exchanged, display brightness and standby status synchronised, and channels not required by the selected decoding format can even be automatically switched into standby.

Growing with your Needs

The 100x5R may be ordered with 2, 3, 4 or 5 channels, with extra modules fitted as required.

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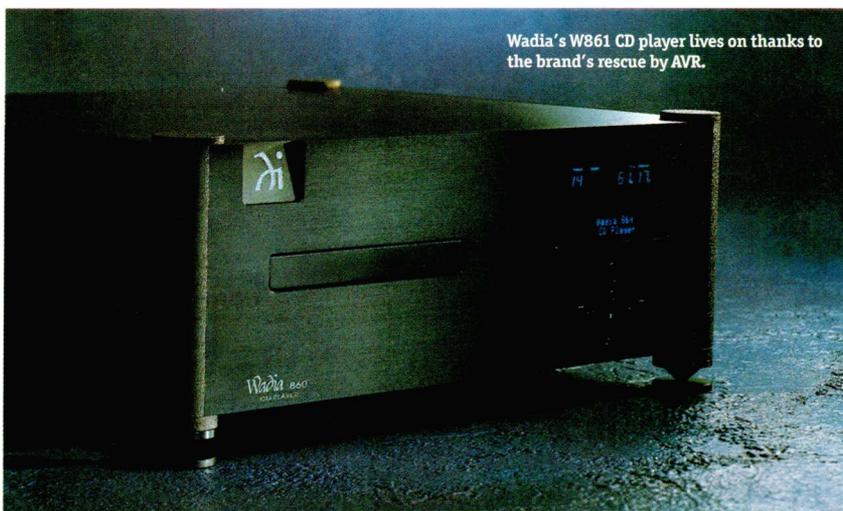
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The Buzz

WES PHILLIPS HAS THE LATEST NEWS FROM AMERICA, INCLUDING THE RETURN OF TWO HIGH-END BIG NAMES



With the Las Vegas Consumer Electronics Show looming as I write, there are rafts of new products being made ready for

public scrutiny. Unfortunately, nobody's talking about most of them for fear of squandering their buzz before the show.

But one company trying to create as much buzz as possible is EgglestonWorks, which is debuting a new Albert Von Schweikert-designed monitor that boasts a frequency response of 16Hz–40kHz (-6dB). The Savoy, as it's called, employs nine drivers per side (four 12-inch woofers driven in a compound push/push pair-configuration, two 6-inch midbass drivers, two 6-inch midrange drivers, and a 1 1/4-inch silk dome tweeter) in what the company refers to as "a pressure release loaded cabinet." The design employs 24dB/octave filters at 100Hz, 400Hz, and 2kHz. Each of the 58-inch tall speakers weighs 475 pounds and the system will retail for \$39,900.

AUDIO VIDEO RESCUE

In a superb piece of brinksmanship, Wadia Digital has been rescued from insolvency by Audio Video Research, Inc. (AVR) a new company formed in December 2000 that combines the assets of Wadia and Digital Imaging Corporation. Wadia will continue to manufacture the 861 and 831 CD players and the 27ix processor, and one of its first new products will be an upgrade package for the 27ix.

Wadia's operations, including current personnel, physical assets, and equipment, will be moved from the current

"IN TODAY'S WORLD OF INSTANTANEOUS MP3 DISSEMINATION OF NICHE MUSIC, IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THE MUSICAL WORLD OF 1965."

location in River Falls, Wisconsin to a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As well as disc players, digital/analog converters, and digital signal processors, AVR/Wadia will produce surround-sound processors and digital amplifiers.

BACK FROM THE THRESHOLD

Another familiar name in the high end is also back. After three-years, the Threshold marque has returned, but a name for its parent company has not yet been announced. The new company will focus on professional equipment with audiophile appeal, said Chris English, Threshold's former national sales manager and a principal in the new venture.

Last winter, English oversaw the setting-up of a service centre that repairs and maintains Threshold components, a move that rescued consumers left in the lurch by the company's 1997 dissolution. His efforts to revive the company have paid off, and its first offerings will include a joint project with Nova Audio, the Applause S speaker. This \$15,000 design is a self-powered monitor featuring twin 7-inch carbon fiber midrange/woofers and a 1-inch dome tweeter. The Threshold contribution is a "backpack," a power amplifier based on the company's respected T200, which features a massive toroidal power transformer, 100,000µF of filter capacitance, and hand-selected bipolar output devices.

TERESA STERNE

10 December 2000 brought the sad news that Teresa Sterne, the pioneering director of Nonesuch Records from 1965 to 1979, had died at the age of 73. During her tenure at Nonesuch, she transformed a tiny label into one of the most exciting companies in the business.

Ms. Sterne championed genres neglected by the major American labels, ranging from contemporary American composers to early, renaissance, and baroque music. She was an astute judge of talent and was courageous in her advocacy of unknown performers. She also created a tremendously popular and influential separate label within the Nonesuch umbrella for recordings of music from the world's indigenous cultures, the Nonesuch Explorer Series.

In today's world of instantaneous MP3 dissemination of niche music, it's hard to imagine the musical world of 1965 – it was a place where there was little to choose from outside the standard repertory. Many of us discovered broader musical horizons through the work of Teresa Sterne. She might truly be said to be the mother of us all.

Wes Phillips is our US news correspondent. Like Thatcher and Reagan, we have a special relationship.

THE JOY OF VALVES

CAVIAR, VINYL AND VALVES – THE THREE INGREDIENTS OF THE GOOD LIFE. AT LEAST, THEY ARE ACCORDING TO AUDIO NOTE'S HEDONISTIC HEAD HONCHO...

"PETER QVORTRUP HAS PROBABLY DONE MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE TO EVANGELISE THE JOY OF VALVES AND THE IDEA THAT MODERN LIFE IS RUBBISH."



We're sitting in a pleasant little Polish restaurant in Hove, sipping ice cold vodka and feeling comfortably Bohemian. Two of us – Peter Qvortrup and I – look the part with our luxuriant beards, slightly dishevelled hair and air of casual insouciance. Keith Haddock, who looks like a cherubic adolescent Viking in a suit, integrates less seamlessly, but his presence is vital.

The alignments and sympathies here are not what they seem. Let me explain. Qvortrup and Haddock are the ones who are close. The Viking lookalike (actually born in Bournemouth) is a cannily wholesome, boy-next-door PR conduit for the intimidatingly incandescent intellect of the bespectacled Dane who heads up that most specialised and esoteric of Brit-fi outfits, Audio Note UK. Qvortrup has probably done more to evangelise The Joy of Valves and the idea that Modern Life Is Rubbish than anyone else in hi-fi.

Keith knows how dangerous it would be to unleash PQ on me without a safety net provided by his own good self. One, I can look as if I've slipped into a catatonic trance if a boff embarks on a technical flight of fancy/doctrinal exposition. And whatever else he may be, Qvortrup is certainly a boff with a doctrine. Two, it would only take a nudge in the wrong direction to make me say my personal take on hi-fi is that valves are rubbish and modern life is brilliant (especially CDs). Three, I've never heard a piece of AN kit that lived up to its price tag. And four, I simply don't understand individual hi-fi components that cost in excess of £100,000, and there are a few of those in the staggeringly complicated AN catalogue. In a nutshell, I don't 'get' Audio Note. For all that, Keith firmly believes that if I meet the man, see the factory and listen to his own system, all will become clear.

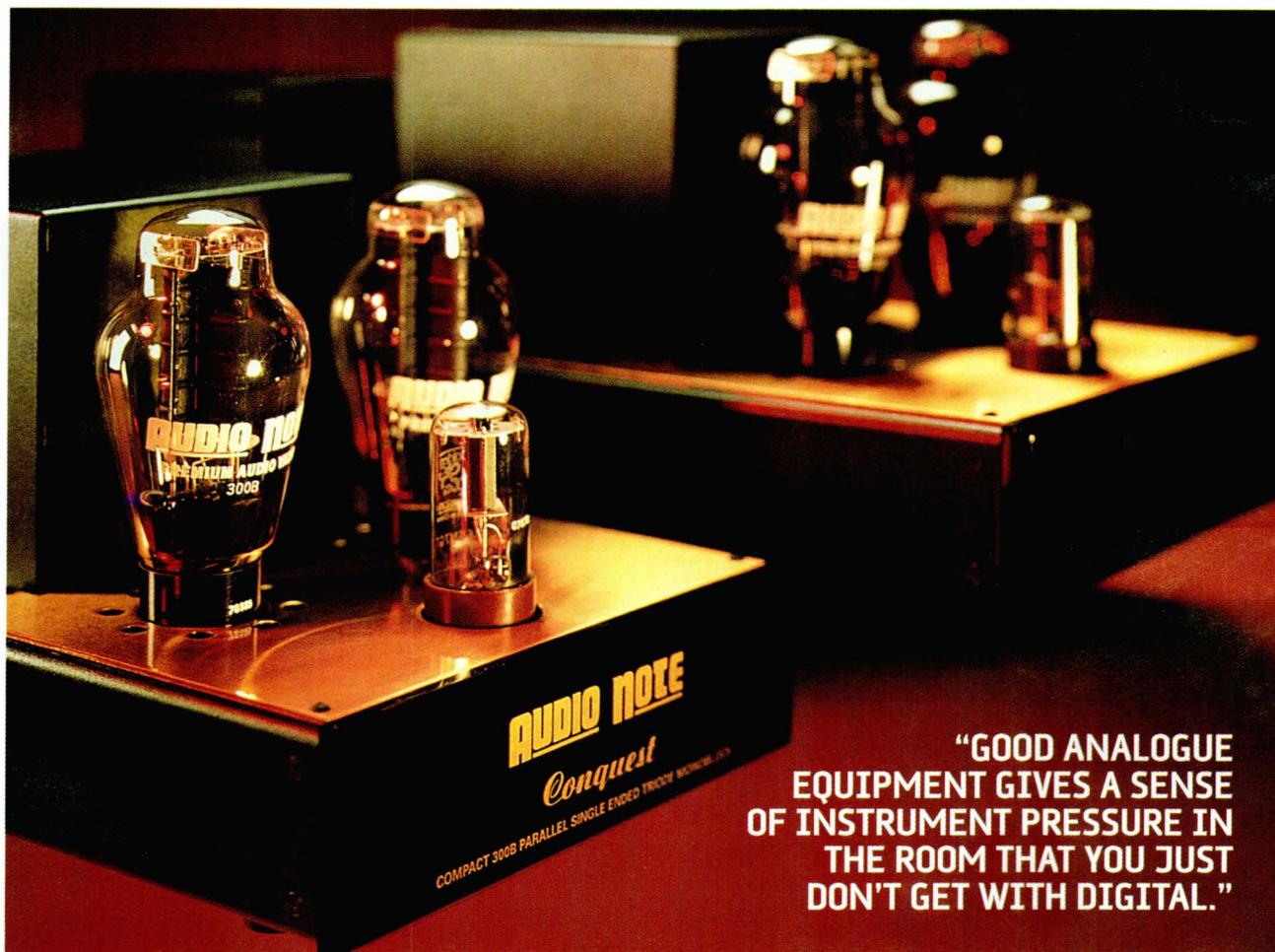
I'm having my doubts, but then Qvortrup hits me with this story. He once ate so much caviar in an afternoon he was ill for the next three days. A little background. PQ is something of a TV cult hero in Russian and well connected. Getting hold of ga-ga-grade caviar isn't a problem. He received

this generous consignment and couldn't resist having a quick taste – a couple of ecstatic hours later, it was all gone. I immediately warmed to the guy's style. The convoluted, chequered history of Audio Note and the Valhalla that is valve technology suddenly didn't matter; I knew where he was coming from. Once you've identified a good thing, it's damn near impossible to ration yourself. The notion informs much what PQ does. This man has 35,000 LPs – some extremely rare and worth a mint – and a stockpile of tubes of all types and sizes that has to be seen to be believed. He doesn't hold back. Witness his collection of big old Mercs (the latest ones, he says, aren't as well built so his next new car will be an Audi). He drives fast because he wants to, and parks where he pleases, too. His hedonism is absolute. It isn't riddled with guilt, but oozing Beluga and parking tickets.

Nothing wrong with that. All he has to do is convince me. The best bit of hi-fi doggerel I ever heard was uttered by Peter (Quad) Walker's son, Ross: "Any fool can build a decent amplifier for £3,000, the trick is to do it for £300". These days, Audio Note can actually do you an entire system that's about £397,000 cheaper than its most expensive – the £3,000 Deluxe Zero CD-DAC/pre-monoblock combo Tim Bower reviewed favourably in *HFC* 211. Keith brought one round for me to listen to before the meeting with Qvortrup. For whatever reason, it doesn't work its magic in my listening room, sounding soft and undynamic. Which is frustrating because, apart from the coffin-like speakers, it looks beautiful. I'm beginning to wonder if it's just me. Maybe I'll take PQ up on his offer to set up the system next time he's passing through Maidstone.

It has to be said, though, that Qvortrup is as far removed from the position of a tweakmeister/set-up guru as it is possible to be. His views on music reproduction are actually very straightforward and pragmatic. A good hi-fi system, he says, allows the real character of individual recordings to shine through – the contrasts, the playing, the emotion – without any impression of overt detail.

David Vivian talks to the movers and shakers in the hi-fi industry about the subject that's close to our hearts.



“GOOD ANALOGUE EQUIPMENT GIVES A SENSE OF INSTRUMENT PRESSURE IN THE ROOM THAT YOU JUST DON’T GET WITH DIGITAL.”



Peter Qvortrup, head of Audio Note. Don't let the understated suit fool you – this man is a hedonistic whirl of caviar-guzzling, valve-loving craziness.

That sense of “detail”, he contends, is nearly always added by the hardware itself – especially as far as digital sources are concerned. And it’s getting worse, with the result that far from achieving higher fidelity, new technology – as espoused and developed by the electronics giants – is actually homogenising what we hear, sapping the message out of the music.

Qvortrup isn’t alone, of course, in believing that analogue is superior to digital but fewer go along with his assertion that it’s incomparably better. It’s not about frequency response, he states, but energy levels and dynamics. Top-flight analogue recreates a sense of instrument pressure in the room you simply don’t get with digital, no matter how far you turn it up.

It helps that we’ve repaired, via an impressively swift trip in a Merc V-class, to PQ’s LP-lined, valve-heated living room. He doesn’t have to explain his point at length, he simply demonstrates it. I

wouldn’t say Qvortrup’s six-figure system, with a Voyd turntable and fabulously expensive Audio Note cartridge doing its bidding, is the best I’ve ever heard, but it is the fastest, most palpable and dynamic which, if I’m honest, is probably the same thing.

Much as he might like to, Qvortrup can’t un-invent CD. So instead he has radically re-thought DAC design to exclude as many of the filtering regimes as possible. This, he says, gives the music its best chance to survive intact. The filterless Audio Note DAC 5 Signature, which costs the best part of £20k, has forced some reviewers to completely re-evaluate their stance on CD’s ultimate sonic worth. Yet, next to the Voyd/AN combo, it sounds comparatively flat and lifeless.

No hope for SACD or DVD-A, then? Peter says nothing but gives me one of his “don’t make me laugh” looks. Actually, he laughs quite a lot. If you were Peter Qvortrup, so would you.

t

he long-awaited partner for TAG McLaren's top-flight AV32R processor has finally arrived in the shape of its £3,995 DVD32R DVD player, THX Ultra approved for both PAL and NTSC. But this is no ordinary player. In fact, it's really a DVD *transport*, for while the DVD32R provides switchable composite, S-Type and compo-

REVIEW PAUL MILLER

nent video outputs there are no comparable analogue audio outputs.

Instead, all linear PCM or multi-channel Dolby and dts data is passed directly to the AV32R processor (or competitive alternative) via an S/PDIF digital link. After all, if the AV32R already offers world-class decoding of all multi-channel

formats, there is no need to re-invent this technology within the DVD32R (for more on the AV32R, see HFC 198). Nevertheless, with the latest THX Surround EX Plus version of the AV32R at £2,774, this takes the full DVD player package to a heady £6,769. And neither SACD nor DVD-A are included...

Then again, the DVD32R looks like no other DVD player. A top-loading transport is specified, suspended at four points and concealed beneath a curved, die-cast lid that glides effortlessly to one side. You load the DVD or CD disc directly onto the laser mechanism, add the magnetic stabiliser puck and remove all fingers before the substantial alloy lid slides back into place with a reassuring 'thump'. TAG has put a lot of work



into the support, isolation and 'tuning' of this floating transport, though the software for its 'adaptive drawer mechanism' needs a little more fine tuning. Analogous to the way that fancy automatic transmission systems 'learn' the footwork of the driver before applying the necessary compensation, TAG's adaptive mechanism is supposed to correct for changes in ambient temperature, for example, to ensure the drawer opens and closes with perfect consistency. Only ours didn't, but no doubt this niggle will be sorted out in final production.

The transport features a dual-wavelength, single laser optical assembly from Takaya in Japan and is compatible with DVD, CD, CD-R and most CD-RW software, though its track access is not as swift as I've seen with the latest DVD mechanisms. Nevertheless, as the DVD32R comes with both its own dedicated remote and a second, fully functional learning remote, the player is not found wanting for features and facilities. Various repeat, random and program play modes are offered together with multi-speed search and go-to (title) modes, access to the disc software menu or the player's set-up menu, plus audio mode, subtitle and picture angle options.

Flexibility is enhanced by the TAGtronic bus that passes commands between the DVD32R and AV32R. The internal video test pattern generator is a real bonus and the perfect tool for optimising the brightness, contrast, colour balance (tint on NTSC), sharpness, geometry and convergence of your TV system. Ironically, this facility was rather forced on McLaren because its MPEG video decoder rejects sub-black video signals (including PLUGE) from DVD test discs. And the ability to output a PLUGE video signal to set the TV contrast and brightness is one feature dear to THX's heart.

Talking of which, the heart of the player is a Pantera-DVD decoder chip sourced from Mediamatics (a subsidiary of National Semiconductor). This one LSI combines MPEG

video decoding, 10-bit video DACs and NTSC/PAL encoders with integral software running on a 32-bit RISC processor. The capability to generate audio and MPEG video clocks has been abandoned, however, in favour of TAG's own, high purity external 27MHz Master Clock. Both audio and video quality is improved by this simple expedient (see *Oasis of Sanity* in HFC 207).

Similarly, TAG deals with the jitter typically associated with the transfer of digital data between one box and another using its 'TAGtronic' Sync Link, which locks the extraction and flow of data through the DVD32R to the Master Clock inside the AV32R. Remarkably, this two-box combination breaks the 200psec barrier for low jitter, with a figure of 135psec even outstripping the very best single-box CD players. Other performance parameters, including S/N (111dB) and distortion (typically 0.0006% at -10dBFs) are about as good as it's possible to get with current technology.

SOUND & VISION

TAG's video test pattern generator proved essential in balancing the brightness, contrast and colour balance of the (Sony) monitor and demonstrating at least the major portion of its potential. Component video is preferred but it's worth remembering that even the S-video connection can be improved by hooking up to the Y (luminance) and Pb (chroma) connectors of the component trio. All the panellists agreed that the subtle shading of bold colours, of flesh tones and even gradation of shadows in dark scenes was as impressive as they'd seen with any DVD source. As far as MPEG video is concerned, the DVD32R is about as transparent and sympathetic a decoder as you'll encounter.

The player's sonic balance is equally well judged, for the bass is extended without sounding too heavy, the midrange is light, transparent and communicative while its treble conveys bags of insightful detail without sounding sharp ▶

AMBITIOUS

TAG MCLAREN'S NEW DVD32R TRANSPORT SETS OUT TO REDEFINE THE STATE OF THE ART, BUT CAN IT DO PICTURES AND SOUND EQUALLY WELL?

"THE MIDRANGE IS LIGHT, TRANSPARENT AND COMMUNICATIVE WHILE THE TREBLE CONVEYS BAGS OF INSIGHTFUL DETAIL."

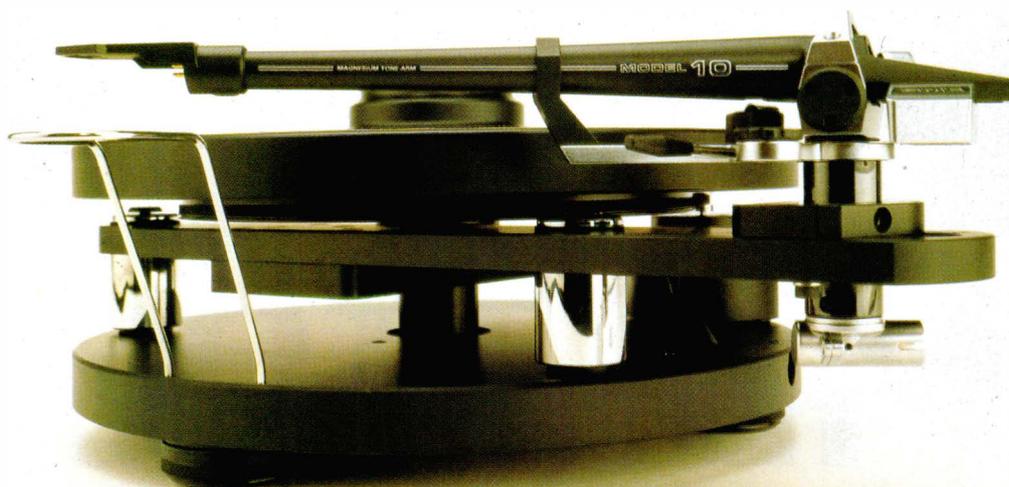


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TAG McLaren's DVD32R/
AV32R combo

◁ or hard. Very demure and cultured, this player can sound detailed and clean but just ever so slightly cool with it. Strings sound colourful and extremely precise; every strum, every pick is relayed with polished accuracy while avoiding the trap of sounding 'highly strung', glassy or cold. "From this point of view," our listeners agreed, "the sound is very well managed and orderly."

It will drag every nuance of detail from relatively simple but elegant recordings like Carmen Lundy's *Self Portrait* without a hint of strain: the vocal phrasing, the circular action of percussive brushwork and the warm, rich intonation of strings are all taken in its stride. Thea Gilmore's *Resurrection Man* on the Naim disc *The Lipstick Conspiracies* sounded slightly compressed or cluttered, but this is a feature of the close microphone technique. Nevertheless, the raw, throaty 'bark' of her vocals never once got out of hand – the energy is obvious but leads, rather than swamps, the backing drums and strings.

With many other players, the words tumble into one another as the track descends into a musical frenzy. But the TAG McLaren kept a tight rein on every aspect of the performance. "There's more under-steer here than over-steer," quipped one listener, comparing the sober luxury of the player to the new Mercedes S Class. If you want more character, "buy a Subaru Impreza".

Our 96kHz/24-bit DVD music selection (DAD rather than DVD-A) typically sounded very clean and articulate but still a little cool. "The pitch and timbre of the gypsy violin sounds astonishingly real," remarked one listener mid-way through a Rebecca Pidgeon track on the Chesky DAD. Her voice was also realistically 'breathy' without appearing either sibilant or bright. On the whole, the 96kHz/24-bit material sounded

that bit warmer, emotive and natural than standard CD, its "extra *souçon* of believability" hinting that the DVD32R/AV32R has yet more to give.

FUTURE PROOFING?

Impressive though it is, the DVD32R/AV32R combination still lacks the ability to handle DVD-A or SACD material. Much of its future proofing is made possible by software downloads via a PC and the TAGtronic Bus Adaptor.

But there's only so much you can do with software. TAG is waiting for silicon support for the Verance watermarking protocol, for example. And when DVD-A is adopted, the AV32R's digital input receiver will accept inputs up to 96kHz but not, without a change in hardware, 192kHz. Instead, TAG intends to transmit 192kHz digital data via an IEEE1394 (Firewire) bus. Furthermore, 192kHz, pin-compatible versions of the 96kHz AKM DACs used in the AV32R will also need to be swapped out. Frankly, keeping track of new developments in AV technology is a nightmare for manufacturers and consumers alike.

CONCLUSION

As a DVD player, the DVD32R/AV32R sweeps all before it and finally demonstrates that dual purpose DVD/CD technology need not sound inferior to plain vanilla CD. Then again, £6,769 is a lot of money, even if the sheer presence, detail and composure of both two and 5.1 channel music is as good as you'll as hear with the DVD format. Picture quality, too, is little short of awesome provided you have the TV or projection system to do it justice. A *tour-de-force* of engineering? Certainly. But as the hub of an AV system of the future, there are loose ends in software, DVD-A and perhaps even SACD that remain yet to be tied.

£3,995.00 TAG McLaren ☎ 01480 415600



Above: When combined with the AV32R processor, the DVD32R becomes one hell of a CD player – but is it worth the outlay?
Below: The TAGtronic bus that links the combo guarantees ease of use, as remote commands are 'shared' between the two units.



"DEMURE AND CULTURED, THIS PLAYER CAN SOUND DETAILED AND CLEAN BUT JUST EVER SO SLIGHTLY COOL WITH IT."



d

described by Sony as a cost-effective entry to its ES component range, the SCD-555ES is still far from a budget offering as its glossy black fascia and substantial 14kg mass will testify. The £1,200 ticket is further evidence of this model's exclusivity, though, as we were to discover, it justifies every penny in

REVIEW PAUL MILLER

performance terms alone. In practical terms, it trades the top-loading mechanism of the £1,700 SCD-777ES for a new, but more traditional front-loading transport. This is equipped with a dual-laser optical block and is the first SACD player, in my experience, to reliably play CD, CD-R and CD-RW media in addition to both single or dual-layer SACD discs. As regular readers will have come to expect, DVD-Audio or Video discs are summarily ejected by the '555 as 'alien media'.

Loading and playing SACD discs is no different to CDs and the fluorescent display even handles text info from both, where available. Track access is still considerably quicker than that achieved by 'comparable' DVD-A players, though you still need to stop play before selecting between the CD and SACD layers of a hybrid SACD disc. As yet, there's no way to flip on the fly between CD and SACD tracks on the same disc because this involves a changeover on the optical pick-up block and a re-read of the disc's table of contents.

All the features familiar to Sony's top CD play-

BLOCKBUSTER

HI-FI CHOICE EDITORS CHOICE IT'S NOT CALLED SUPER AUDIO FOR NOTHING – AND SONY'S NEW SCD-555ES SHOWS EXACTLY WHY.

ers are provided here, including its famous VC or Variable Coefficient digital filter. Set in its standard position, the filter provides a sharp cut-off of all digitally derived 'rubbish' above the audioband, much like any standard CD player. Filter settings 1-4, however, offer a variety of gentler roll-off characteristics that trade an increase in out-of-band distortions for a reduction in the 'ringing' effect that can result in a smeared sound quality. Refer back to *HFC 203 (Oasis of Sanity)* for the full picture!

Because the DSD (Direct Stream Digital) code used by SACD discs is sampled at a huge 2.8MHz, 64 times higher than CD, it doesn't require a digi-

tal filter, so the VC feature is intended for CD only. Similarly, the player's digital output is compatible with CD media only. All other widgets, like the dial-up track selection, program and repeat play modes work for both CD and SACD.

Performance, meanwhile, is determined less by widgets and more by the digital and analogue electronics which, perhaps unsurprisingly, are based on the SCD-777ES. Once again, one of Sony's proprietary current-pulse DACs handles both the CD and SACD bitstream, followed by what is essentially a passive analogue filter stage based around a GIC (General Impedance Converter). Nevertheless, a revised circuit archi-



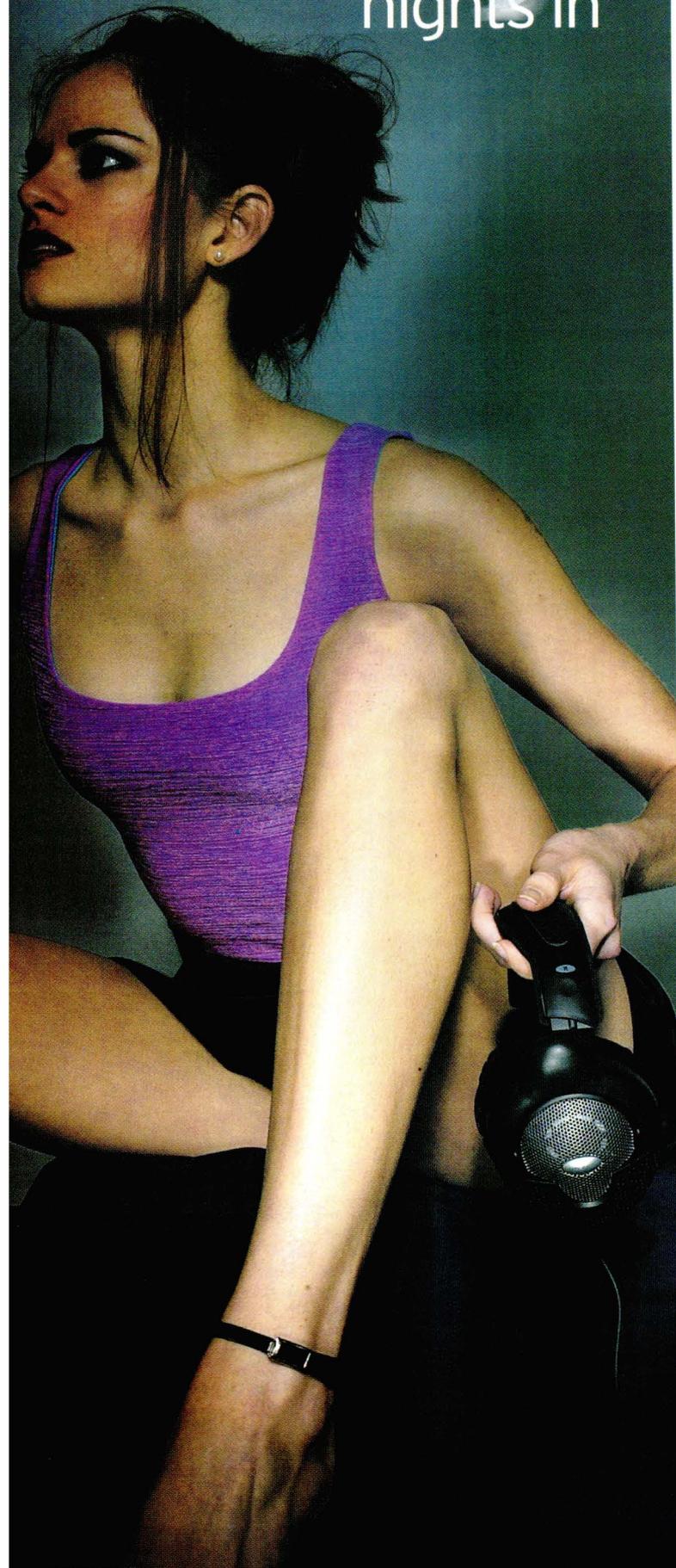
texture takes the SCD-555ES across another technical threshold with distortion as low as 0.0002% at 1kHz/0dBfs, just 0.0004% at -10dBfs and 0.0015% at -30dBfs. The 110dB S/N ratio is short of the potential for SACD but still offers sufficient range for blistering dynamics.

Jitter is just 180psec, and would have been a record-breaking 140psec if it were not for a smidgen of PSU-related jitter. Interestingly, the response is rather flatter with rare, pre-emphasised CDs than with the common-or-garden variety where there's a -0.5dB droop at 20kHz. This is maintained in SACD mode where the HF and ultrasonic response of the player rolls off rather

"THE TREBLE SOUNDS VERY FREE AND NATURAL, AND QUITE DEVOID OF ANY ARTIFICIALITY."



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◁ more quickly than with earlier Sony models and the Marantz SA-1 (-1dB instead of 0.0dB at 30kHz, for example). The effect should be a *greater* compatibility with different amplifiers whose response to strong, ultrasonic signals is uncertain.

SOUND QUALITY

There was no uncertainty on the part of our listeners, however, when faced by the remarkable sound of the SCD-555ES. Indeed, after several months of experiencing what our listeners described as the UJP (Universal Japanese Player, see *HFC* 210), the patently more refined, slick and sophisticated performance of the '555 demonstrated that even the largest Far Eastern manufacturers haven't forgotten the art of musical finesse. While the sound of the '555 is as technically proficient as you could wish, this level of detail is not extracted at the expense of musical spontaneity or, as one listener put it, "vim and vigour". The sound is glossy, but never so bland as to lose the thread of the music.

Shelby Lynne's *Temptation* proved a case in point: instead of descending into a raucous combination of percussion and vocals, it was preserved with a uniform clarity – a strong and rhythmic bass, a natural, free-flowing midband and a sweet, polished treble. Listening to a variety of Christy Moore classics, we were delighted by the rich resonance of bass guitar, an instrument whose texture was reflected in the clean detail and clarity of his voice.

This is never a player to live life on the musical edge, never one to nudge at the extremes of musical dynamics, transient attack or explosive bass. To some extent, the musicians "sound as if they're chaperoned" but the end result is always so much more compelling than the sum of its parts. Importantly, the treble sounds so very free and natural, and quite devoid of that 'artificiality' that, to some extent or other, has afflicted Sony's best efforts so far.

As Marantz has demonstrated with its SA-1 (*HFC* 208), when you've got a good CD player, the move up to SACD is not necessarily monumental. In this case, there's certainly a greater sense of urgency, of foot-tapping drive and detail. Joe Beard's *For Real* bounced along with greater alertness, the vocals and guitar seemingly freer still of the mix with just an extra hint of urgency and insight. Switching to SACD mode tends to answer any questions that remain with CD. If it were slightly bland or 'over-poised' then the SACD version moved up a beat, almost as if the chaperone were given the slip and the player started to have a little fun of its own.

Even with a very simple recording like Flim & BB's *High Wire*, the extra detail, spaciousness, intonation and nuance was immediately obvious via SACD. A remarkable feat, bearing in mind the prime source of the music is a Moog synth! Each element of the performance sounds more natural and effortless – a more believable picture painted on a broader canvas. That's SACD in a nutshell.

CONCLUSION

This player's exceptionally clean but ruggedly textured bass boasts qualities of detail and spaciousness that are perpetuated right up through mid and treble. Importantly, its sound is at once composed and intricately detailed, but also passionate and compelling. It's the riveting read that you just cannot put down, such is the expectation of what's behind the turn of a musical page. In short, it is a quarter the price of Marantz's fabulous SA-1, but delivers 95% of its performance and 100% of its build quality.

Frankly, as a £1,200 CD player, the SCD-555ES already goes a long way in justifying its existence. But with SACD on board, the player comes into its own, delivering a wholly believable presentation that puts it right up there with the very best silver disc machines – regardless of denomination! £1,199.99 Sony ☎ 01932 816000



Top: Eschewing the top-loading mechanism of the more costly SCD-777ES, the new Sony player's simple looks hide a cracking performance. Above: While you can't easily switch between the 'normal' and Super Audio layers of a disc, operation of the SCD-555ES is generally a cinch.

"THE PERFORMANCE SOUNDS NATURAL AND EFFORTLESS - A MORE BELIEVABLE PICTURE PAINTED ON A BROADER CANVAS."

BIG IS BEAUTIFUL

THE NEW AMP FROM LEVINSON IS THE FIRST ONE-BOX MODEL FROM THE BRAND, AND WHAT A HEAVYWEIGHT IT IS.

m

ark Levinson is one of the legendary names in American high end audio, but a name that has now become a brand that is no longer associated with the hi-fi designer that created it. Mark Levinson the man has been running a company called Cello for more than a decade and recently turned to tube amplification for his Red Rose range. Mark Levinson the brand belongs to Madrigal Audio, itself a wing of the substantial Harman empire.

Mark Levinson amplifiers have traditionally been large, expensive things with OTT construction standards and similarly massive power outputs. The No383 integrated is the first single-box amp from the brand, but the word integrated doesn't begin to describe what we're actually dealing with here.

For a start it's as big as most power amps (166x455x496mm, HxWxD) and at over 36kg weighs more than many. In fact, it's so heavy that any notion of sliding it into the rack had to be abandoned in favour of perching it on top. This is where a domestic forklift would have come in handy! Its claimed power output is 100 Watts into 8 Ohms or twice that into four; not a claim that many make and even fewer deliver, but in this instance there's no reason to doubt.

As well as being large it is also highly sophisticated and has a huge range of features to play with. Each of the five inputs, two of which are balanced, can be adjusted in gain and offset, the latter to ensure similar playback levels from sources of varying output. And each input can be assigned one of 14 existing names, or you can

create your own. LP, for instance, wasn't on the standard list – presumably because there's no phono stage – but it was fairly easy to write it in. There is also the option to assign an input to SSP (surround sound processor) mode, which bypasses the preamp and makes the No383 behave like a power amp for the main left and right channels in a multichannel set-up. All of which can be sorted out via the rather attractive remote control.

There's a raft of sockets for system linking and multi-room purposes, the most basic of which being adjustable voltage DC triggers and the most up to date being Mark Levinson's PHAST control port. On a more familiar level, you can adjust the input/volume level display brightness or even run the amp blind, something most of us have been managing for years. Meanwhile, balance can be adjusted in 0.1dB steps, which seems keen seeing as how half a decibel is the best most of us can discern.

The speaker cable terminals only accept spade connectors. Not having that option with my cables, I resorted to spade adapters, but that limited me to single rather than my usual bi-wired arrangement, so I may be yet to hear the full glory of this amp.

I was once shown the construction of the Mark Levinson DAC, or processor as it's known, and it made a lasting impression. These guys don't know when to stop where engineering is concerned, a state of affairs which applies equally to this amplifier. Build quality is second to none, fit and finish likewise – not that such factors equal great sound, but they certainly do no harm to pride of ownership.

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY



“THE LEVINSON IS THE KIND OF AMP THAT MAKES YOUR SOURCE AND SPEAKERS SOUND BETTER THAN YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE”

SOUND QUALITY

I used the No383 in place of a NAD S100 preamp and Gamut D200 power amp, with signal provided by the Acoustic Precision Eikos CD player and SME 20A/van del Hul Grasshopper/Tom Evans The Groove record player. The speakers were the venerable Living Voice Avatar OBX-R. Townshend Seismic supports, and Electrofluidics and Living Voice cables played the supporting roles.

In this context, the amplifier proved quite stunning. It had phenomenal detail resolution and low level resolve, while being unusually dry in the bass. It was, however, an unusually distinctive sound with a little too much emphasis on the upper midrange – so much so that I thought I’d try another speaker cable to see if the low impedance/high capacitance nature of the Electrofluidics might be causing it some trouble. Ten seconds after dropping the needle with Kimber 8TC now in the gap and a problem was indeed revealed, as this new set-up, though not as analytical, had a more familiar balance. I eventually settled on Townshend’s variation on the Electrofluidics cable theme: it uses the same topology and materials but incorporates a small network that allows its use with any amplifier.

Once that was sorted this turned out to be the kind of amp that makes your source and speakers sound better than you thought they were, which is a nice sensation, but also infers that you are hearing a lot more of what the source is producing. So make sure you’ve got a nice, clean-sounding CD player before upgrading to one of these, as some of the more ‘exciting’-sounding players might not benefit from the extra transparency on offer.

The Mark Levinson is very good in all respects; it has good bass extension and excellent control. Its fine definition of leading edges and the decay thereafter means that its timing is bang on the money without having to emphasise certain parts of the range, and its ability to reproduce image scale, solidity and presence is equally engrossing. The variations that you get from different recordings are particularly entertaining; the room-filling expanses of Jan Garbarek and the phase-twisting elasticity of Aphex Twin are equally well produced to stunning effect.

It also sounds unusually good even at fairly low levels – something that is usually the domain of mid-strong tube amps. It shares with the breed a superb grasp of inner detail, inasmuch as each note is reproduced at its correct level, giving a greater sense of dynamics to proceedings and letting you hear into the music. It also exhibits that rare trait of inky black backgrounds – a terrible phrase but one that sums up an even greater lack of noise than usual. No transistor amp has a discernible noise floor, but some are definitely quieter than others are, and this is one of them.

CONCLUSION

The No383 is an extremely flexible, high-resolution amp that has few peers in the integrated market place. There are a few pre/power combos that could compete on pure sound quality, but they couldn’t match the features or possibly even the build. Music lovers who want to hear precisely what’s on the recording should audition this remarkable beast forthwith. Just make sure you choose a muscular dealer!

£5,500 Path Premier ☎ 01844 219000



Above: The amp features a great range of useful features, like the ability to name up to 14 input channels for ease of display. Below: The No383’s classy remote, which features everything you’ll need to operate the amp.



Below, from top to bottom: The GR20's supplied toolkit, for you hi-fi Handy Andys; There's gold in them thar tweeters; the 'golfball' surface of the drivers, promising a better grip on the air.



WORTH ITS WEIGHT...

MONITOR AUDIO UNVEILS ITS GOLD REFERENCE RANGE WITH THE GR20.

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or a speaker range with a strong emphasis on the colour silver, Gold Reference seems a slightly unsuitable name. But Monitor Audio has long held an affection for the material and the striking effect it has on the appearance of its tweeters. And besides, it already has a Silver series.

This chunky floorstander lies in the middle of the new Gold Reference range, above a standmount (GR 10) and below a slightly bigger floorstander. The GR 20 is priced at £1,500 including plinths and some flashy gold spikes. The latter come as part of the supplied toolkit and feature gold plated adjusters and dimpled pucks so that you don't ruin the laminate flooring. Also included is a screwdriver so that you can bolt the plinth to the speaker, allen keys and a spirit level. Clearly this little kit has had some thought put into it and it should do the brand plenty of favours on the customer satisfaction front – even if, like me, you don't actually use the spikes but insert another means of decoupling the speaker from the floor, rather than encourage the bonding effect that (unpucked) spikes tend to have.

“THE GR20s ARE QUITE FUSSY ABOUT THE VOLUME LEVEL, BUT THEY DO GO PLENTY LOUD – AND WITHOUT SHRIEKING AT YOU”

Each 25kg GR20 cabinet incorporates a pair of flush mount, cast iron framed 120mm aluminium cones – one for the midrange and a second for the bass. Each occupies its own ported enclosure, with the treble and midrange port sitting at the top back of the box. These metal cones feature a dimpled, golf ball surface, presumably for the same reason as a golf ball – to get a better grip on the air. Whether this works or not, it makes for an attractive cone. A more familiar but no less pleasing feature is the bullet phase plug on the midrange.

The cabinet is veneered on all but the back surface, a factor that's less apparent with this black finish than it might be with the cherry, black and natural oak or rosemah alternatives. But how often do you have to look at the back of a loudspeaker? If you do, though, you'll see a pair of Michell-style gold plated terminals for bi-wiring, if you take the bridge bars out. The keen cabler might prefer three sets of terminals for tri-wiring, but that degree of enthusiasm is not encouraged here. The aforementioned plinths are optional but recommended for the extra stability that a bigger footprint provides, though this is not a particularly compact speaker at 20x95x30cm (WxHxD) and is unlikely to be topped by any but the most boisterous offspring.

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY

SOUND QUALITY

I sat the GR20s on Townshend Seismic platforms and hooked them up to a Gamut D200 power amp, Bryston BP25 preamp and Acoustic Precision Eikos CD player. At £1,500 these speakers cost a third of what my regular speakers (Living Voice Avatars) go for, so the chances of being overawed by the results were slim. However, under the circumstances it was a remarkably painless transition. The bandwidth is about the same, all but the last octave or two in the bass, and the balance likewise – pretty even and devoid of significant subjective variations. That said, it soon became apparent that dynamic range and imaging were not perhaps the GR20's strongest suit.

What did appeal was the way these speakers seemed to cope with most anything you cared to throw at them. Even with pretty dense material everything seemed to hang together as it should, the fine detail making its way into the picture alongside the power and thrust of bigger sounds. They are quite fussy about the volume level you play back at: they won't go seriously loud without complaint, and music doesn't come across with due gravitas if you go too far in

the opposite direction. You'll find that there's a 'just so' level with each album. That said, they will go plenty loud – and without shrieking at you should some heavy brass come along.

Midrange is probably the GR20's greatest asset. Having a driver dedicated to the job is a luxury these days, but one that's worth making a few sacrifices for. If, that is, you want to hear the depth and passion in voices, pianos and acoustic guitars. Here, it was Richard Thompson singing *Jenny My Love* that proved the point. The soul bar-ing on that track is uncanny. Another moment was the *Don't Fear The Reaper* riff at the end of Radiohead's *Lucky*, an unlikely place to hear that sort of guitar but it lifts the whole song.

CONCLUSION

Over the long term, the GR20's forward presentation does leave one craving the depth that dearer speakers provide, but at the price it would seem a fair trade-off for a speaker that is a good all rounder, regardless of musical tastes. This is a hotly contested sector of the speaker market with some exceptional models to choose from, but I suspect that the Gold Reference 20 will find a niche and end up providing all manner of music lovers with hours of entertainment. £1,500.00 Monitor Audio ☎ 01223 242898



HI-FI CHOICE EDITORS CHOICE

VOYAGE

W

REVIEW PAUL MESSENGER

Wilson Benesch's latest loudspeaker design, the Discovery, is an ambiguous little beast. Is it a stand-mount or a floorstander? A bit of both perhaps, because the speaker proper is essentially

a compact stand-mount, but the stand is a fixed and totally integral part of the whole package, forming the backbone to the enclosure as well as providing support for the whole caboodle.

The first of a number of models collectively known as the Odyssey series (which will include some yet to be finalised multichannel designs), the Discovery is an exceptionally stylish loudspeaker. The whole thing looks much more 'all of a piece' than a conventional stand-mount-and-stand combination, yet without the sheer bulk of a floorstander. It's also unmistakably from Wilson Benesch, with a shape that tapers towards the back, and a tilted 'Bishop's mitre' top plate. The main influence behind the design is clearly Wb's flagship Bishop (HFC 189), but the Discovery has its own neat and unconventional solutions to the perennial speaker engineer's problem of how to get a quart of sound out of a pint pot.

Despite its very compact dimensions, the Discovery uses no fewer than four drive units, and the enclosure itself is very complex too. The front panel is no larger than any regular two-way with a 7-inch frame main driver, but integrating the stand with the 'backbone' allows the base of the speaker to be used for mounting extra drivers and ports. The total enclosure volume is quoted as a very modest 13 litres, and this is subdivided into two separate sections, each individually ported through the base.

Because the main front driver is mounted above the tweeter, it can be loaded by the top half of the box, while the metal tube port for this sub-enclosure passes right through the lower (bass) sub-enclosure. The bass section also has a vertical metal tube port, necessarily rather shorter, and is driven by a pair of the same bass/mid drivers as the one mounted on the front. You can see the back and magnet structure of one of these protruding from the base,

alongside the two ports, because the bass drivers are mounted face-to-face 'clamshell' style, the two operating in 'acoustic series', sometimes known as 'isobaric' mode.

The speaker as a whole operates in a two-and-a-half-way configuration – essentially a two-way with extra driver(s) helping out through the bass region. However, the bass combination here is undoubtedly complex, with four separate elements all contributing – the twin bass drivers, the single main driver, and the two differentially tuned ports. With artful tuning such an arrangement can deliver an even and extended bass balance, though phase relationships will inevitably be compromised.

If the above more or less describes the speaker in outline terms, there's a load of fine detail that is no less interesting, and which shows just how much thought and effort has gone into the design. The enclosure is built from a mixture of carbon fibre composite (CFC), aluminium alloy, and MDF. The curved CFC side sections and pointed back avoid the pernicious effects of parallel sides. The CFC sections in particular are notably stiff, even when the speaker is being driven really hard, though some vibration can be felt in the spine and top sections – and through my suspended wooden floor too.

That's because the speaker comes pre-fitted with a tripod of three seriously sharp and substantial spikes, properly fitted to a hefty silver alloy baseplate. These speakers couple plenty of energy into the floor, since nearly all the bass output is generated by vertical motion. There might be some floors where that energy input proves an embarrassment, but by and large this is a good thing because it avoids generating fore-and-aft rocking forces that could modulate the output of the front-facing drivers.

All three of the Discovery's main drivers are Wb's Tactic units, originally introduced in the Bishop, though the very open, unobstructive profile frames are now cast rather than machined from solid. The motor magnet structure looks small, but that's because it uses ultra-powerful, super compact rare earth alloy magnets (NeFeB). The cone material is a three-

WILSON BENESCH LAUNCHES ITS ODYSSEY WITH THE STAND-MOUNT DISCOVERY LOUDSPEAKER... OR IS IT A FLOORSTANDER?

OF DISCOVERY

WILSON BENESCH DISCOVERY LOUDSPEAKER

◀ layer, selfbonding woven Isotactic polymer. The 25mm fabric dome tweeter has been newly co-developed with Scan, using a number of proprietary Wb ingredients.

The integral alloy stand makes a choice location for the crossover network, well away from the drivers' magnetic fields and the worst of their vibrations. There are two pairs of terminals here, permitting bi-wire connection or bi-amp operation, unusually in this case separating the bass-only section from the full range feed to the two front drivers. To be honest, I'd prefer to see the full flexibility of three terminal sets, or just the one, and also found Wb's supplied mono-wiring links decidedly inconvenient. The short wire links have 4mm (banana) plugs on both ends, so using them blocks up both pairs of 4mm sockets, preventing the use of 4mm terminated cables favoured by yours truly and most of the UK trade. The instructions recommend ring or spade-terminated cables, which rather begs the question why the links don't use ring or spade terminations.

The bi-wiring configuration facilitates analysis of the port tuning, and in fact both are tuned to around 43Hz, even though the 'clamshell' bass has double the moving mass (and motor 'shove'). The combined load, however, is a rather low 3.3 ohms at this frequency, but much easier to drive through the rest of the band. Room measurements indicate a respectable sensitivity of 87-88dB/W, and a pretty good overall balance, with decent in-room extension down to 30Hz. Clearly intended for free space siting, bass delivery is even and full, though there's some lack of output 300-400Hz and in the presence region (2-4kHz).

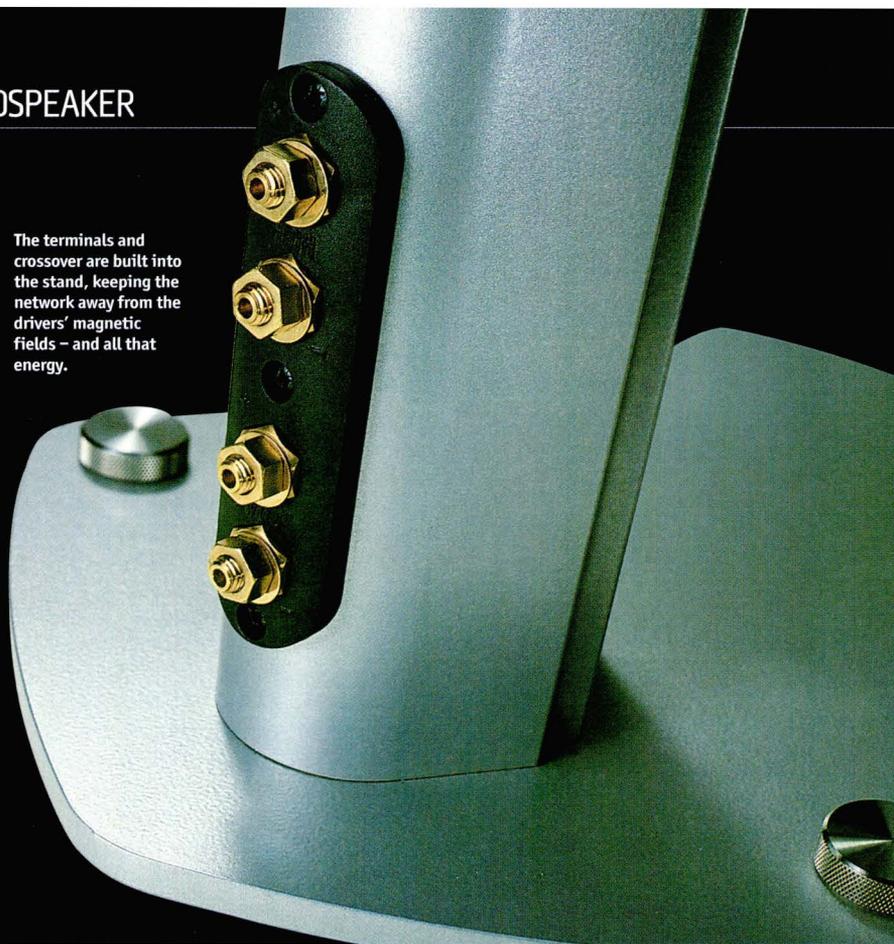
SOUND QUALITY

First impressions are always important, and the Discovery was very easy to like, most obviously for its wonderful freedom from boxiness and a beautifully delicate and sweet top end. The delicate cymbal and high hat work on Nitin Sawhney's *Beyond Skin* was particularly memorable.

Few speakers I've heard are so effective at 'disappearing' themselves, and just leaving a beautifully precise and well ordered soundstage across the space in front of the listener. The bass is just a tad 'fruity', but not in the manner of floor-standers, and getting drivers and enclosure well off the floor brings deftness, agility and a lovely lightness of touch.

The Holy Grail of speaker design is to create a small loudspeaker which sounds big, and the Discovery accomplishes this trick much better than most. It doesn't sound enormous, but it

The terminals and crossover are built into the stand, keeping the network away from the drivers' magnetic fields – and all that energy.



does sound a whole lot bigger than it looks, packing plenty of thump with the sort of headroom normally associated with much larger speakers, while also possessing the delicacy of the small stand-mount.

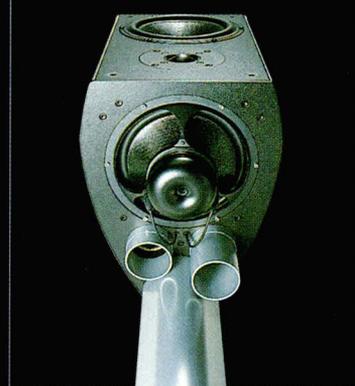
It had the possible misfortune of following a pair of Carfrae Little Big Horns into my listening room, and I have to say the Discovery doesn't have the dynamic grip, scale or tension of this large, high sensitivity design. But in every other respect it proved very satisfactory, and the freedom from boxiness is its own reward.

Having completed the formal listening, I let loose 30 teenagers, with a pile of heavyweight dance CDs and a NAP500 power amp at a New Year's party. Five hours later the NAP500 was well warm, the Discoveries were still thumping out the beats without a murmur of complaint, and the teenagers were fortunately starting to flag. I'd call that bullet-proof.

CONCLUSIONS

The Discovery is a thoroughly impressive loudspeaker. Strikingly good looking with its high-tech cabinetwork and stand, it may lack the dynamic drama and tension of larger designs, but the subtlety and refinement of the well bred stand-mount is its own reward, and the speaker has weight and headroom that belies its modest dimensions.

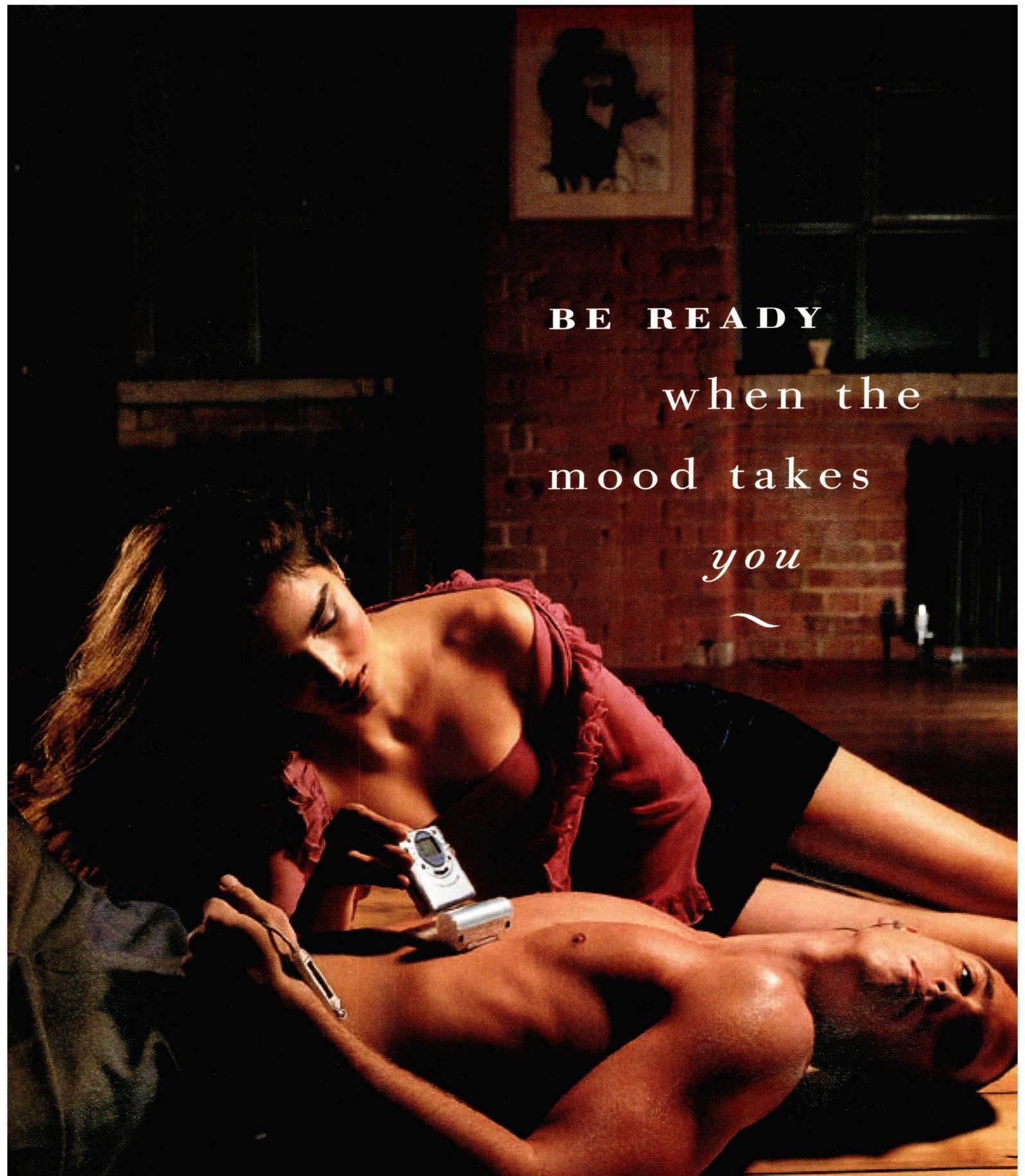
£5,500 per pair Wilson Benesch Ltd ☎ 0114 285 2656



Above: The unusual design of the Discovery speakers means extra drivers can be built into its base. Below: There'll be no balancing plant pots on top of these speakers!



“THE DISCOVERY WAS VERY EASY TO LIKE, AND IT HAD WONDERFUL FREEDOM FROM BOXINESS AND A DELICATE AND SWEET TOP END.”



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FORUM LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS A TDK GOODIE BAG

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**"IF YOU WERE LESS PATRIOTIC
IN YOUR TEST RESULTS, YOUR
MAGAZINE WOULD BE
QUITE GOOD"**

JOERG HISEK – TESTING TIMES

**"YOU WILL NOT BE THE FIRST
ENTHUSIAST TO DISCOVER A
'BUILT-IN' SURROUND EFFECT
WITH CONVENTIONAL TWO-
CHANNEL COMPACT DISCS"**

PAUL MILLER – PONDERING PRO-LOGIC

**"I DO NOT AGREE WITH YOUR
MAGAZINE'S VIEW THAT TONE
CONTROLS ARE UNNECESSARY"**

K. FONSEKA – TONE UP

LETTER OF THE MONTH

PONDERING PRO-LOGIC

I am writing to you as a loyal subscriber of the best hi-fi magazine around. On this occasion I would like to ask a technical question relating to the theory of Pro-Logic coding/decoding... perhaps this question should have been sent to Mr Miller? I would like to read an explanation of what kind of signal we can hear from the four channels of a Pro-Logic decoder when listening to a normal stereo program through it.

I know that stereo programs are intended for stereo replay, but it is intriguing to replay a CD or a stereo radio program through Pro-Logic. You can hear most of the information coming out from the front speakers, but sometimes there is good music from the rears, rather different to that coming from the front speaker. What is

that effect, and what kind of signals are we listening to?

Jose L. Tagarro, Madrid

The Technical Editor replies... You will not be the first enthusiast to discover a 'built-in' surround effect with conventional two-channel CDs. The explanation lies in the rather primitive technology, by Dolby Digital standards, adopted by conventional Pro-Logic decoders. These rely on the relative phase of the two channels (notionally left and right) to steer the sound towards the centre or rear speakers. Even without Pro-Logic encoding, a standard CD will still exhibit differences in phase between instruments on either channel. Pass this signal through a Pro-Logic decoder and a vocalist, for example, in-phase on both channels, will be steered towards the centre speakers just as out-of-phase backing instruments or ambient detail will be steered to the rear. This is unintentional, but it works!

TONE UP

I have been a subscriber to your excellent magazine (the only magazine I subscribe to) for the past year. But I have not seen any affordable pre/power amp combinations reviewed in a while (less than £600 pounds). I have my eye on the Rotel RB971 MkII power amp.

Other than that, I do not agree with your magazine's view that tone controls are unnecessary. That may be true in perfect world, where all recordings are perfectly made. But unfortunately some recordings are unlistenable without tone controls. I think that switchable tone controls are the best, where the only addition to the signal path is

one switch. Keep up the good work.
K. Fonseka, via e-mail

The Editor replies... We are testing pre/power amplifiers this month, but there aren't many in your price range these days. Regarding tone controls, they're still a no-no from a purist perspective, but as hi-fi and recordings do vary in quality a well implemented set may prove practical.



Tone controls? OK, but we draw the line at graphic EQs!

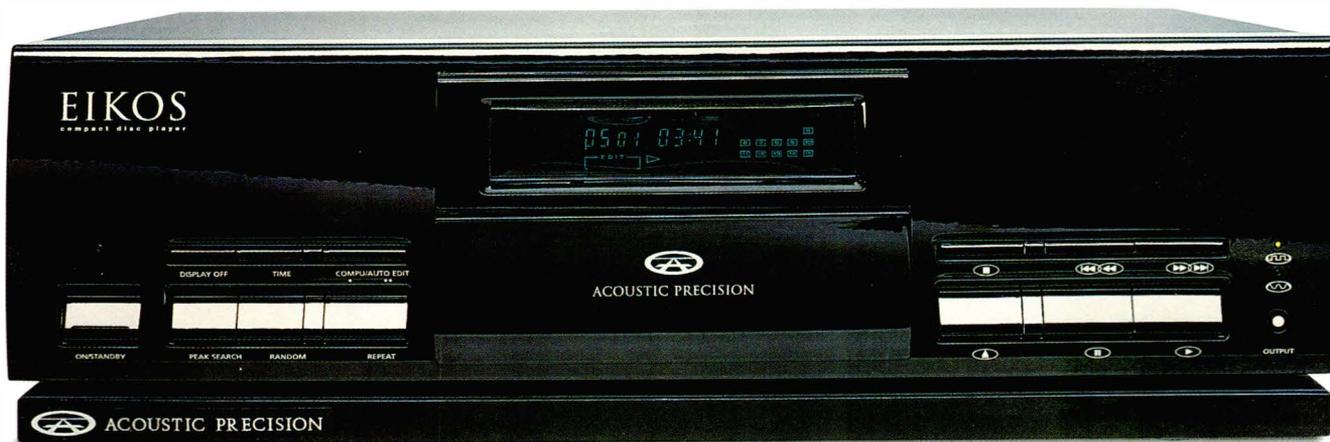


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TDK's audio CD-R range

at the heart of it



The Acoustic Precision Eikos CD player, featuring the magic touch of Tom Evans.

TESTING TIMES

Recently I bought your hi-fi magazine for the first time and there are some points I want to talk about. Over the last ten years I have been reading *Audio*, one of the magazines in my country.

First of all I must say that I like the style and organisation of *Hi-Fi Choice*. You avoid things such as the greatest, the best ever, the most expensive etc. The advertising is not as disturbing as in other magazines and the tests you do are deeply involved.

However, what came to my attention were the test results themselves. If you were less patriotic, your magazine would be quite good. In my opinion, British made separates and systems too often get the best results and therefore a 'Best Buy'. In contrast another well known English magazine has quite different results. A good example was the recent test of the latest Technics CD player SL-PS7. *Audio* gave this player a very high score.

I understand that everyone has a different sense for hearing, but those tests should not bring opposite results. It is surely the best way to go to the local hi-fi dealer and listen to separates and if possible test them at home. But the possibilities are limited. One does not have the chance to combine what one really

wants and therefore the potential buyer relies on the tests done in hi-fi magazines.

The bar graph style you use to illustrate the results from laboratory tests is a bit confusing. As you said, the higher the bar (in the positive) the better. However, when you explain the meaning of the graphs you say that for jitter, the lower the figure the better. Of course the lower the jitter the better, but how is this related to the percentage represented by the graph?

Joerg Hisek, via e-mail.

The Editor replies... If you really think we are biased toward British kit, you couldn't have seen the great reviews we've given recently to models from Sony, Marantz, Rotel, Pioneer, Dynaudio, Copland, Martin-Logan, not to mention a great many others. You are right, however: you can only truly rely on your own ears and tastes in the pursuit of the absolute sound.

On the subject of graphs, take a look at our redesigned bar charts in our conclusions to the tests. These have been simplified so that high ratings mean a good result in any parameter, even when the parameter being measured is something you want less of – such as jitter. Graph fans will soon be able to find what they want when a comprehensive new section appears on our website. So don't forget to keep your eye on www.hifichoice.co.uk/

HAPPY PUNTER

Having been involved in the hi-fi industry a few years back I can understand the difficulties in deciding what path to take, and what we consider to sound good. Ultimately our quest is to bring the original recording venue intact into our homes with minimal loss.

Manufacturers interpret this with varying characteristics and achieve reasonable results, but none seem capable of weaving the magic of Tom Evans. Admittedly, I have not listened to everything on the market, but then again I don't need to.

I have recently sent my Pioneer Precision stuff back to Tom for the Full Monty upgrades and what has arrived back is simply superb. The window is opened further by having FR1 speakers at the end of the chain. I can only conclude that this sort of resolution and imagery for this little outlay is extraordinary value. No other equipment can pull notes from behind your ears or make your room disappear like this.

James Brown, via e-mail

MULTICHANNEL MISUNDERSTANDING

I would just like to say that the new format is refreshingly clear and easy to read. Some editors seem to think that black type on a dark blue background is readable, which shows how much actual reading of the mag they do.

However, there are a couple of caveats – I hope that there is not going to be a big emphasis on home cinema, as this is not my thing, and will result in a cancellation of my subscription; I don't mind reading about a bit of this stuff, but the mag is called *Hi-Fi Choice* isn't it, not *Home Cinema Choice*? There are specific magazines for home cinema fans.

I also hope that the lack of Reader's Classified ads is not a permanent omission, as this is another favourite of mine, both for buying and selling, especially as it is free to subscribers. (Bring back the days of *Hi-Fi Answers*' free ads – loads of bits and pieces!) Don't spoil the new ship for a ha'porth of tar.

Rod Theobald, via e-mail

The Editor replies... Your worries are unfounded on both counts. We have dedicated our January issue to multichannel products for the past two years, but we remain a music-focussed magazine whether the kit is designed for two channels or more. Like music, the majority of what we do is firmly stereo-based. Reader's Classified was 'unwell' last month but is back with us on top form once more – see page 127.

Sound looks

cameo

Inner value



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WHAT HI-FI? August 2000

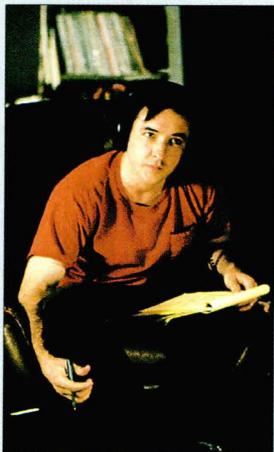
The Myryad is a fine sounding system, as you might expect from this brand."

MYRYAD

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COMPETITION RESULTS

The jury is back from sorting through hundreds of entries to our Vivanco headphone caption competition. The 10 lucky winners will be contacted by email, and all the successful captions will be posted on the site. But we decided a few were so good that we had to give them a nod here. To go with the picture of John Cusack in tape compilation mode, headphones on and clipboard at the ready, one witty reader quipped "Writing Chopin Listz", while another in a moment of minimalist genius went for "da... doum! da-doum-da-doum-da-doum-da-doum!". While the award for most confusing caption goes to the author of the line "Teacher, thinking: I should head for the phone if the Head phones, but will I hear it ringing through these headphones?"



**"DA... DOUM!
DA-DOUM-
DA-DOUM-
DA-DOUM-
DA-DOUM!"**

POLL NEWS

Our latest online poll asked site visitors what type of music they play most on their hi-fi. Rock/indie fans won with 38 per cent of 3,025 votes, narrowly beating the dance buffs who accounted for 33 per cent. The other trailing genres were pop/vocal (11 per cent), folk/jazz (10 per cent) and classical (8 per cent). New online polls are posted fortnightly.

WHEN I WERE A LAD...

THIS MONTH'S HOT TOPICS ON THE CHOICE WEB FORUM

Chat in the forum has turned nostalgic, as members recall their various routes to becoming hi-fi aficionados. "Many moons ago, I won three grand on the pools and just had to get a hi-fi that bettered my mate's," declared one browser. Another blamed post-university flushness when they "had moved out of home and needed something other than my old Walkman attached to a couple of booster speakers." But the list of audio causes is topped by a tale of international defence. "In 1977," one member notes, "an American (air force) friend (full Cold War, there were a lot of them about then in East Anglia) brought his hi-fi over... and I have been hooked ever since."



WEBSITE HI-FIVE

EACH MONTH WE'LL BE LOOKING AT THE BEST HI-FI WEBSITES. THIS MONTH: BOB THE BUILDER...

BOB'S MUSIC

www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/1965/music_etc.html

Extremely enthusiastic, and informative, personal site has just about anything you could want to know about how to build your own valve amp.

LINN www.linn.co.uk

An immensely crisp and clear site adequately details the Linn catalogue of gear. It also provides information on Linn's own record label and their list of classical, folk, rock and jazz titles. Nice!

RADIO 3 www.bbc.co.uk/radio3

This fine radio station has an equally interesting and diverse website, with news of all your favourite programs and listings of the music that has been played on them. You can even join in discussion forums and encourage the station to play your favourites.

MISSION www.mission.co.uk

This well-maintained site works best as a plush, perfectly constructed online brochure. With plenty of rave reviews indexed, awards noted and distributors listed, this is a site that answers the hows and whys of your hi-fi buying questions.

ECOUSTICS www.ecoustics.com

An independent and thoroughly researched resource for all things hi-fi. Whether you want to discuss the latest product releases, get industry news or find links to further hi-fi facts, this is an all-round winner.



FORUM HELP

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AMPLIFIER

MERCURY RISING

Which low-cost amplifier would you recommend for a pair of Tannoy Mercury M3 speakers?

Guzmics, via email

The original Tannoy M3

speakers need a lively and effusive type of amplifier to really get them moving. You need to pick out a few candidates for careful auditioning before you make the purchase. One top option is

Rotel's RA-971 MkII (above), a budget model of exceptional power and clarity. Alongside that, why not give the Kenwood KAF-3030R and Sony TA-FB740R a try? Good luck and happy hunting!

TURNTABLE

DECK DILEMMA

Any advice on turntables, around 200 quid?

Marc Connor, via email

Seeing as you asked so nicely... The prime recommendation at that price is the evergreen Rega Planar 2, recently upgraded to a new spec for the first time in years. It's now priced at £198, including Rega's respected RB250 tonearm, and provided you don't mind its hair shirt operation you won't find a more consistent and involving model for the money. However, you'll need to decide on a cartridge to go with it - we recommend one of the budget-priced Audio Technicas or the Ortofon 510.

Alternatively, NAD's 533 (below) is very similar to the old Planar 2 but with a Goldring Elektra cartridge thrown in for £22 more. You should also check out Pro-ject by way of a comparison - the Czech brand makes some impressive budget decks, well worth a look.



CD PLAYER

WAY DOWN

I want to buy a budget CD player and I'm interested in the Marantz CD4000. What's your opinion?

Gabor Kondor, Hungary

If our group tests are anything to go by - and they most certainly are - it would seem Marantz has struck gold with its latest range of CD players (witness the CD6000 KI review this very issue). The CD6000 OSE and plain CD6000 have also done well, but the budget-priced CD5000 didn't fair so well. We haven't yet checked out the CD4000, but judging by the 5000 you might like to consider the Sony CDP-XE330 instead, or stretch to something like the NAD C520.



CD TRANSPORT

DAC'S THE WAY TO DO IT

I want to update the DAC in my Marantz CD-17 with a second-hand Wadia 12 DAC. Do you think the Marantz's transport is good enough to let the Wadia shine, or should I look for a dedicated transport?

Hessel van der Wolf, Holland

The Wadia DAC should give you a considerable sonic improvement, particularly in terms of dynamics and detail. Assuming it's in good condition and the price is right, there's nothing to stop you going for it now and perhaps upgrading to a top-notch dedicated transport some way down the line. That way you can wait and see what the new optical disc technologies have to offer before taking the transport plunge.

PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

UP THE CREEK

I want to find a pre/power amp combo to go with a Marantz CD-63II KIS CD player and Rogers LS3/5a speakers. My budget is around £600.

Owwk, Singapore

The majority of pre/power rigs in the UK cost considerably more than £600, but there are a few pretty good exceptions from the likes of Rotel and NAD. A touch further up the ladder lies Musical Fidelity's X-Pre/X-A50

(pictured), though stocks are running low. If you can afford a bit more try a Creek combo like the excellent P43R/A52SE.



DIGITAL RECORDER

FORMAT MATTERS

I'm keen to buy a digital recorder and I'm trying to decide between MiniDisc and CD-RW. I read your last group test (HFC 205) but need a few points clarifying. First, does CD-RW have the same editing facilities as MiniDisc? Second, which of the seven CD recorders in your review are CD-R and which CD-RW? Third, can a CD-RW disc be played on an ordinary CD player?

W. H. Jackson, Norwich

1. Aside from portability, MiniDisc's great advantage is its highly flexible editing facilities. You can't chop and change things in the same way with recordable CD; you can only record once on CD-R discs and CD-RW blanks are expensive.
2. All CD recorders now produced for domestic markets are compatible with re-writeable CD-RW discs as well as CD-R. That includes all the models in the review to which you refer.
3. Most CD players will play CD-R discs, but few will play CD-RW. However, the number of new models that are compatible is increasing.

SPEAKERS

LOUDNESS FOR LESS

I've got around £600 or £700 to spend on a hi-fi system. I've already decided to base it on NAD components – either the C520 or C540 CD player and the C340 amp. I want to choose the speakers from a shortlist of three: the Monitor Audio Bronze 2, Tannoy mX2 and KEF Q15.2. My musical tastes vary from classical and opera to jazz and vocal.

James Qin, Malaysia

All the speakers you mention are fine low-cost designs, among the best on the market at £200 and below – they all deserve an audition. However, we can provide a little more guidance to help you on your way... The KEF (right) is the most costly of the bunch and perhaps the best if you need a speaker for a confined space and close to

the wall positioning. Its balance is entertaining and it has a good mid-band, which would suit your musical tastes. The Tannoy is £50 less and also gives a good mid-band performance, though if you've got the extra fifty quid we would be tempted to go for the KEF with your NAD gear. However, you may find the Monitor Audio to be the pick of the bunch – its balance of virtues is really quite special.



CD PLAYER

CDEFINITELY

My system consists of a Primare A20 amp and B&W CDM 1NT speakers with Townshend Isolda speaker cable, coupled to a Marantz CD-67MkII CD player. I know the CD player is the weak link and I want to replace it. The obvious thing would be to buy the Primare D20, but I'm also considering the NAD S500, Musical Fidelity A3 or perhaps a Meridian. Or should I think about DVD?

Simon Conroy, via email

If music is your first love you won't regret spending the money on a dedicated CD player. The Primare provides a good visual match and is a solid performer, but the NAD would give you more weight and the Musical Fidelity greater clarity. Meridian has a new player on the way, which may be of interest, and there are several models reviewed this issue that you should audition: Arcam's supremely subtle CD92, or the engaging Naim CD5.

SYSTEM

RUNAWAY BRIDE

My wife and I recently split up and she ran off with our mini system. I'm a single parent and money is scarce – can you recommend a separates system to replace it consisting of CD player, turntable, amp and speakers?

Barry Bate, Lancashire

A safe bet would be to couple budget components from the likes of NAD or Denon with a good pair of low-cost speakers – Tannoy's mX2 (right) or Mission's M71. Or visit a discount hi-fi store like Richer Sounds and see what package deals they can come up with.



“MY WIFE HAS RUN OFF WITH OUR MINI SYSTEM. CAN YOU RECOMMEND A SYSTEM TO REPLACE IT?”

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Fannyng about by gaslight

FIRST IT WAS VINYL. THEN IT WAS CD. NOW IT'S DVD-AUDIO AND SACD.
WILL THIS SEARCH FOR PERFECTION NEVER END?

“HI-FI IN THE 1950s WAS ALREADY THOUGHT TO BE CLOSE TO THE ABSOLUTE. WITH LITTLE IMPROVEMENT POSSIBLE, PEOPLE FELT THERE WOULD SOON BE NOTHING MORE TO SAY ABOUT IT”



“All else is gaslight!” – conductor Herbert von Karajan’s oft-quoted remark on hearing digitally recorded sound for the first time in 1979. It was an unfortunately hasty assessment: only when the dust settles will the truth emerge. Hindsight is an exact science.

Perfection has often been claimed for sound reproduction. When Miles Henslow launched *Hi-Fi News* in the 1950s, it was considered a risky venture. Why? Unbelievably, because hi-fi at that time was already thought to be very close to the absolute. With little if any further improvement possible, people felt there’d soon be nothing more to say or write about.

It’s easy to look back and scoff at such naivety. Although there have been many advances in sound reproduction over the years, it’s tempting to retrospectively dismiss earlier stages on the road to perfection as overrated. It was only people’s low expectations at the time that made them think it was good; in reality, it was terrible.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HI-FI

Which begs the question – when precisely did quality sound reproduction finally come of age? Was it, as Karajan implied, when digital recording arrived? Or did the introduction of stereophonic sound in the late 1950s mark the turning point? Maybe the invention of the vinyl LP in 1948 was the true watershed. Or perhaps it was the use of magnetic tape to make recordings from the 1940s onwards?

The change from acoustical to electrical recording in the 1930s was regarded as a massive breakthrough. Yet even then there were dissenting voices who felt that a certain ease and natural mellow warmth had been sacrificed for increased brilliance and detail. Sound familiar?

Actually, the real answer may well lie not so much in technological advances, but in something less tangible. Satisfying recreation of music occurs when all the various aspects of sound reproduction are brought into balance so that everything pulls

together. When this happens, the results are greater than the sum of the parts: strengths are highlighted, weaknesses minimised.

SOUND STAGE

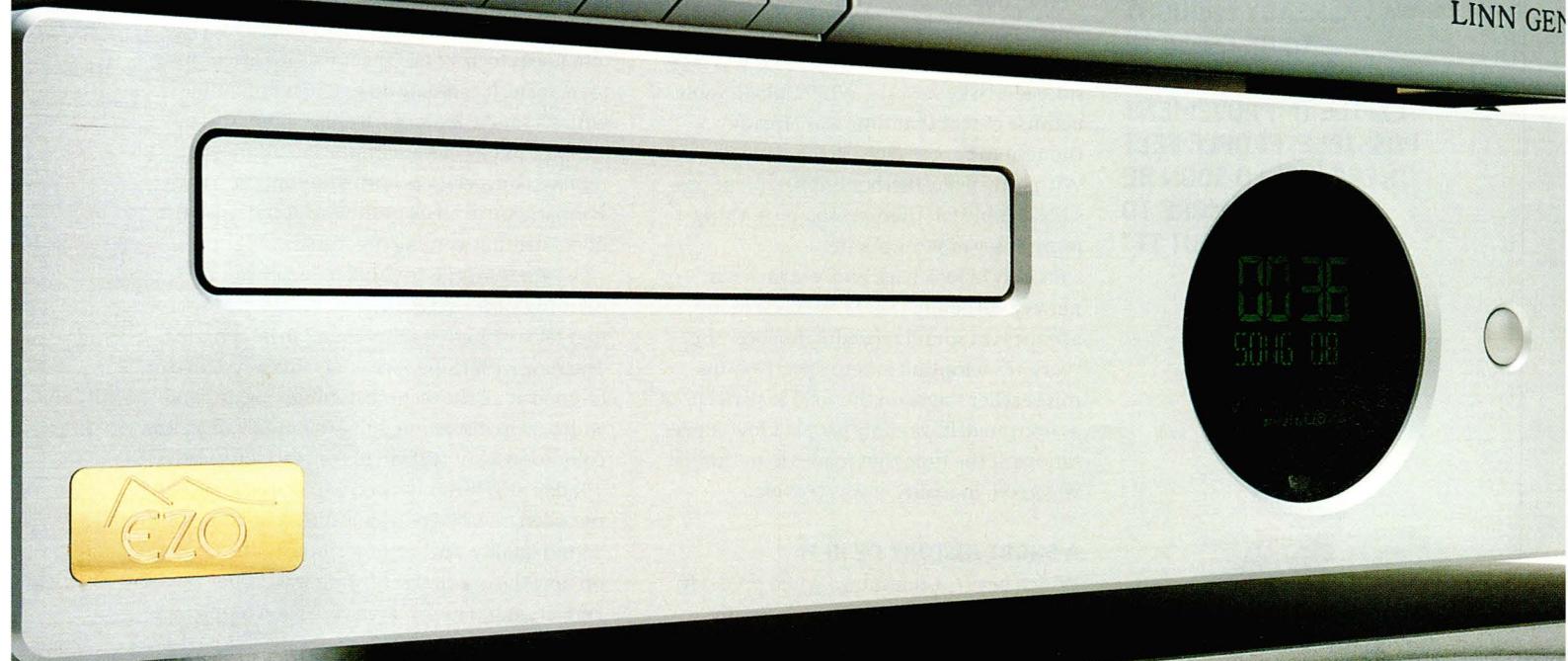
A great actor functions by getting the audience to suspend their disbelief. In doing so, the actor goes beyond portrayal and actually ‘becomes’ the person they’re playing. Likewise, a hi-fi system needs to ‘become’ the music it’s attempting to recreate. It can only do so if it’s compatible with its source material. By hi-fi standards, old shellac 78s have severe limitations. But, when replayed on a vintage horn gramophone that’s sympathetic to all its positive aspects, it can produce thrilling, convincing sound.

The alternative is to think in technicalities, defining various parameters that need to be met for true high-fidelity sound to be achieved. The flaw with this approach is that a system can be good at all the technical things – wide bandwidth, zero distortion, huge dynamic range, low coloration – but still fail to convince musically.

Today’s CD buyer is faced with a vast choice of recorded material of widely different vintages. Sound quality can vary enormously, depending on how the original recording was made. Perfection has many facets. Is a good mono jazz recording from the 1950s really any less perfect in terms of musical communication than something more recent? Stereo eclipsed mono when it came out, much as colour photography eclipsed black and white. To the partisans of the time there seemed no comparison. But that isn’t how it appears to us now – today, the validity of monochrome images is unquestioned.

No doubt, in the coming months, we’re going to be bombarded with claim and counterclaim regarding the new DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD formats. And doubtless some will feel that one (or both) blows everything else away – the Audio Messiah cometh at last! They may well be right. But for myself, I’ll still be enjoying music recorded over a vast span of time in a variety of different ways, taken from a diverse range of sources. Even, dare I say it, some of Karajan’s old ‘gaslight era’ recordings!

Jimmy Hughes is the king of hi-fi tweaks, and knows the perfect sound when he hears it.



COMPACT DISC PLAYERS

ALVIN GOLD AND PAUL MILLER PUT A CROP OF HIGH-END CD PLAYERS THROUGH THEIR PACES

This month's Bench Test is of a serious group of CD players, most of which cost close to £1,000. Bear in mind that you can buy a CD player with similar features for as little as one tenth as much, or pay little more for a DVD-Video player that will play CDs in its spare time. It follows that anyone interested in buying a CD player that costs the better part of a grand (or even more) places a substantial premium on sound quality.

If you listen to some cynics, you might even question whether you get value from such expensive hardware. The reality is that not only do most expensive CD players sound better than cheap ones, the differences are all too obvious in the context of well-recorded music and good quality replay systems.

These caveats are the key to appreciating what these players are about. If music is recorded with no regard to high fidelity attributes, then it really doesn't matter much what you play on it, and high quality CD players are simply a waste of space. I've got a certain weakness for some of Whitney Houston's music. She really can sing, and the Fender Rhodes, for example on *Didn't We Almost Have It All?* is to die for, but the recording (from early in her career) has a screaming top end that makes a nonsense of good CD players. Indeed trying to find a combination of hardware that can play such discs adequately runs the risk of biasing the system away from achieving good results with ordinary discs – but it is probably a doomed exercise anyway. You can't make silk purses from sow's ears.

So, if you're as serious about music as you are about the high fidelity reproduction of it, then you're going to want to consider splashing out on one of the high-end CD players in this test.

THE PLAYERS

ARCAM CD72	£399.99
ARCAM CD92	£849.90
AUDIO NOTE CDT-ZERO + DAC ONE.1X	£2,440.00
CYRUS CD7	£800.00
DENSEN B-400	£1,280.00
EZO FOG STAGE 3	£1,170.00
LINN GENKI	£995.00
MARANTZ CD6000 KI	£499.90
NAIM AUDIO CDS	£1,120.00
ROKSAN CASPIAN	£895.00
ROTEL RCD-991	£825.00

OTHER EQUIPMENT USED

Lavardin IT amp
Densen Beat B200/B400 pre/power amp
Marantz PM7000 amp
JMLab Mezzo Utopia speakers
Mission 781 speakers

MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

James Taylor - *Hourglass*
Les Arts Florissants/William Christie/Handel - *Acis and Galatea* from *The flocks shall leave the mountains*
Diana Krall - *When I look in your eyes*
Budapest Festival Orchestra/Ivan Fisher/Bartok - *Danse des garçons* from *Concerto for Orchestra*

THE LISTENING PANEL

Rowena Pratt (Rotel)
Alan O'Rourke (Ruark)
Mike Martindale (Arcam)
Russell Kauffmann (Classé)
Colin Hinkins (Mirage and Energy)
David Inman (Castle)





ARCAM CD72

CONTACT 01223 203203 www.arcam.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£399.90**

No longer will we be able to complain, as in the review of the Alpha 7SE, the CD72's older brother, that 'the exterior decorations are well past their sell-by date'. Work was already underway on new, sexier replacements for the Alpha series, which have been duly launched under the DiVA umbrella, though the 7SE remains available for now.

This new CD72 uses much the same kit of bits as the less expensive Alpha 7SE internally, including a Burr Brown PCM1716 DAC and a Sony mechanism. The casework draws on the senior FMJ range, and is similarly cleanly cut and finely finished, with a new clock circuit to control jitter, a higher grade transformer, and extra internal damping to reduce mechanical resonances. The analogue stages have also been redesigned for lower distortion.

The domed, shiny buttons of the initially impressive remote control seem purpose-designed to reflect light sources in the vicinity, and so obscure the view of control legends.

SOUND QUALITY

The panel described this model as "smooth and well rounded" with Diana Krall, though there were

reservations about leading edges, which seemed muted at times. The Bartok, however, sometimes sounded frenzied with the player apparently struggling to keep up. The James Taylor track "lacked transparency", but was also "even handed", and compared to the Rotel reference player, it was deemed "less splashy".

As with some of the other players, there was some variation in performance with the three amplifiers. The Marantz PM7000 proved to be easily the best match, yielding the most consistent musical results and none of the nasties that afflict some at this price. Smoothness and consistency are the keywords, and any player with these qualities will tend to disappear into the woodwork in the long term, leaving the music to tell its own story. By comparison, timing and dynamics are relatively weak.

CONCLUSION

The price hike to £400 from the Alpha 7SE's £300 can be justified by the CD72's better build and other improvements, but on balance we suggest that the premium is on the high side. Judged in isolation, the CD72 is very competent and credible newcomer. At the very least, it is neutral and tidy sounding, though one



Simple and class: the new-look DiVA range from Arcam brings them into the 21st Century.

wag described it as "the one in the grey suit". As a way of protecting your investment, it can even be upgraded to full CD92 status, which should be applauded. But in the context of this test group, and in particular the impressive showing of the Marantz CD6000KI Signature, neither the panel nor I felt it was quite good enough to warrant formal

Recommendation at the price. In its relative inability to handle transient leading edges clearly, it seemed to us to lack the essential liveliness and vitality of the less costly Alpha 7SE on which it is based.

THE LAB REPORT

ALTHOUGH THIS LOOKS LIKE a new player, the CD72 behaves like a third-generation version of the older Alpha 7SE. Still equipped with the popular PCM1716 '24-bit' DAC, revisions to the analogue filter stage have reduced distortion further to 0.0006% at 1kHz/0dBfs (0.003% in HFC 195 and 0.0009% in HFC206). Jitter is also much improved, with all PSU-related problems entirely removed, leaving a mere 150psec of data-induced jitter. In practice, it's the increase in high frequency noise

and distortion that comes to dominate the player, though this is still significantly better than the performance offered by the original Alpha 7 (HFC 179). The increase from 0.0075% at 0dBfs to 0.15% at -40dBfs and 1.5% at -60dBfs (all re. 20kHz) reflects this increase in ultrasonic noise as does the relatively weak 79dB rejection of digital images. Otherwise, the in-band 103.5dB S/N ratio is good, as are the mere +0.0/-0.4dB errors in linearity over a full 100dB dynamic range.



ARCAM CD92

CONTACT 01223 203203 www.arcam.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£849.90**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

DiVA – Digitally integrated Audio & Video – is Arcam’s most proactive move on the mainstream market so far. It follows the flagship FMJ range by about a year, borrowing some of its construction and styling cues, and drawing technology directly from the Alpha range.

DiVA includes two new CD players, one the entry level CD72, reviewed opposite. The other is the CD92, which though similar in many ways benefits from a more sophisticated digital engine – namely a proprietary version of the RingDAC which premiered in the Alpha 9 CD, and which was developed by Arcam in co-operation with dCS. Apart from an extra set of analogue outputs, there is little external evidence to distinguish the two DiVA players, and it is possible to upgrade the CD72 to CD92 specification at a cost not far removed from

the difference between the two – around £500 in all.

Included with the CD92 is the mildly confusing system remote control also found with the CD72. Optical and electrical digital outputs are available, and the player will cope with CD-R discs, but not CD-RWs.

SOUND QUALITY

The difference between the CD72 and this more sophisticated CD92 is all too clear. As one panellist noted, the CD92 “doesn’t swallow its vowels”, and indeed this was how it was perceived in the hands-on testing too. The player was notable for its open-mouthed articulation, which had the effect of taking the guesswork from vocals, and which delivered fine tonal discrimination and control – if not quite in the FMJ CD23’s class in overall weight and perceived bandwidth. Individual panel members noted

some harshness and forwardness with orchestral strings (Bartok), though it remains controlled through the more high octave passages, studiously avoiding the frazzled quality sometimes heard here. There was a feeling from a couple of panellists that, although the CD92 sounded strong and bold, and although it delivered large scale and well-focussed stereo imagery, there was some “metallic” colouration. This quality was especially noticeable in the closely miked Diana Krall recording, where another panellist thought it was “shouty – and in yer face”.

These criticisms were not levelled by the whole panel, and indeed there were only hints of these problems in

The CD92 is a step up from the CD72 – and only a few simple upgrades away.

the subsequent hands-on tests with the Marantz amplifier. But there was an edge of discomfort to the sound, the music failing to mesh quite as seamlessly as with some of the Arcam’s rivals, though overall Recommendation is still warranted.

CONCLUSION

The new senior DiVA player is visually almost identical to the CD72, but the digital converter is a proprietary implementation of the dCS RingDAC, and it delivers a sharper and more lively sound than the junior model.

THE LAB REPORT

ON THE FACE OF IT, ARCAM’S CD92 might seem technically inferior to the cheaper CD72 with its poorer 96.6dB A-wtd S/N ratio. Data-induced jitter is lower than that managed by the CD72, but the overall figure of 245psec is higher thanks to a pair of very low-rate sidebands at 19Hz. This same foible was noted with the FMJ CD23 (HFC 206) which registered some 265psec of low-rate jitter, both figures being sufficiently low not to cause any grievous subjective impact. Nevertheless, the dCS Ring

DAC used within the CD92 (and Alpha 9, see HFC 188) offers a significantly improved performance at lower signal levels and higher frequencies where much of the musical action takes place. For example, 0.0065% at 20kHz is very low indeed while at -40dBfs, it’s 10 times lower than the CD72 at 0.01%. This is assisted by the very low levels of ultrasonic noise associated with the Ring DAC, giving the partnering amplifier an easy ride and contributing to the characteristic smoothness of its sound.

“THE CD92 WAS NOTABLE FOR ITS OPEN-MOUTHED ARTICULATION, AND FINE TONAL DISCRIMINATION AND CONTROL”





AUDIO NOTE CDT ZERO + DAC ONE 1X

CONTACT 01273 220511 www.audionote.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,298.00**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

A two-box player, the headlines of late have focussed on the oversampling filter-free DAC, which is available in two identically priced versions: the DAC One 1x under the microscope here, and a larger version which doesn't physically match the CDT Zero transport, our other test subject. The units measure 220x120x300mm (WxHxD) and are available in black or natural aluminium finished extrusions and fascia panels. The two communicate via standard phono connectors, but the 6DJ8/ECC88 valve powered D/A converter also has an XLR option.

The DAC dispenses with all 'corrective' measures, and presents the digital signal directly to the converter after reformatting, which Audio Note claims means that you hear what is actually on each disc, and not a "technically and cosmetically altered" version. But this is a rather subjective, pop version of the technology, and should be taken with not just a pinch, but huge buckets of salt. In particular, the absence of digital filtering means that there is a lot of digital noise in the area above 20kHz; this could have undesirable effects on sound quality, depending on the design of the amplifier. In practical day to day use however, the

Audio Note's Sony mechanism provides smooth, rapid disc handling. The remote control is functional but not very pretty, and there is a surfeit of information in its display but no controls on the fascia.

SOUND QUALITY

The essence of the thinking behind this combination seems to be the pursuit of maximum resolution alongside the minimum of unwanted digital artefacts. Subconsciously, I think I was expecting something rather different to what emerged on test, which turned out to be surprisingly prosaic. The combination has an open, civilised sound, and it's quite detailed, though not extraordinarily so. It's somewhat easier on the ear than most CD players – but not soft or overtly valve-like – and enjoyable without being in any way obvious. Vocal quality, notably in the Diana Krall recording, was attractive and refined.

From the panellists there came some isolated complaints that the sound became mushy and confused when it got busier (Bartok), and of a somewhat "pedestrian" quality (Handel). On the whole, though, this player emerged well from the panel tests – significantly better in fact than some of the other expensive



The Audio Note two-box set up claims to deliver music to your ears in a very pure form.

players in the test group. "[This player has an] engaging quality, with lots of detail," said one panellist in après-listening discussion, and another agreed, while a third felt that it was a touch "self-effacing". During another presentation, the Audio Note was described as "easy going, but undramatic" in the Bartok, but generally "easy to follow".

CONCLUSION

Not half as oddball as it comes across on paper, this combination proved an easy, vivid and open performer, and was almost equally happy with the three amplifiers used on test.

THE LAB REPORT

WHAT AUDIO NOTE DESCRIBES as a "1x oversampling circuit" is actually a DAC without any digital filtering. The result of this is little or no suppression of the digital images customarily avoided by just about every other player on the market (see *Filter Tips* on p92 for the full story). The measured 104dB S/N ratio is very respectable and the 150psec of data-induced jitter extremely low indeed. But these benefits are swamped by the very high levels of distortion from the player's high output imped-

ance valve stage. Around 0.6-1.25% THD is produced from 20Hz-20kHz near its peak output, while also furnishing a midband-rich response that's around 5dB shy in both bass and treble. Low-level linearity was not found to be especially good, with errors around 1dB at the -80dBfs level and 3dB at -90dBfs. Meanwhile, the exceedingly high 3.5V output level will confuse any non-matched A/B comparison, swinging the results firmly in Audio Note's favour...



CYRUS CD7

CONTACT 01480 435577 www.cyrus.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 YEAR

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£800.00**

Replacing the now discontinued dAD3, the CD7 is built on an all-new Cyrus platform which can be developed further using the PSX-R bolt on power supply, or using a port for add-on new technology DAC modules which are set to follow. The new design is more highly integrated, with the 24-bit/96kHz DAC now included on the main PCB. The mechanism is described as a 'tuned' CDM12.1, improved over the existing versions, and it is one of the few in the test group that is CD-RW compatible. The player is said to offer better earthing, superior levels of information retrieval and reduced jitter compared to its predecessor; enhanced suppression of stop band images is also claimed for the four pole analogue filter. What has not changed is the trademark Cyrus non-magnetic diecast chassis in its familiar

'shoebbox'-size format. Measuring just 78x215x360mm, it is easily the smallest player in the test, scarcely big enough to accommodate a pair of dinky size sixes.

Socketry includes two sets of analogue outputs, an electrical digital output and proprietary MC bus connections for linked operation of complete Cyrus systems using a single handset. The one supplied with this player, however, is the deeply mundane standard CD-only handset that has been supplied with Cyrus players for some time.

SOUND QUALITY

Cyrus has a record of some distinction with previous players, at least in their better incarnations, and this provides the cue for the new model. The biggest classical music fan on the panel conceded that the player was "fit to rock", though in a different

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

session, one listener marked the player down for a "slightly compressed" sound and an "overblown" bass.

On the whole though the CD7 had a positive reception. "As soon as the slightly distant, reverberant opening to the Handel starts, you are transported there," one panellist commented, and another remarked on what he heard as "good instrumental positioning" and on the strong timing that gave a fine impression of the quality of the playing.

Hands-on testing confirmed that this is a strong performer, with a clean overall tonality, adequate if not overwhelming dynamics, and an ability to maintain its focus in complex musical passages. And this is what's

It might look like traditional Cyrus design, but this player is built on an all-new platform.

required of any player to be transparent in day to day operation. The Cyrus moulds itself well to the character of the music, and largely avoids a mechanical edge to its sound.

CONCLUSION

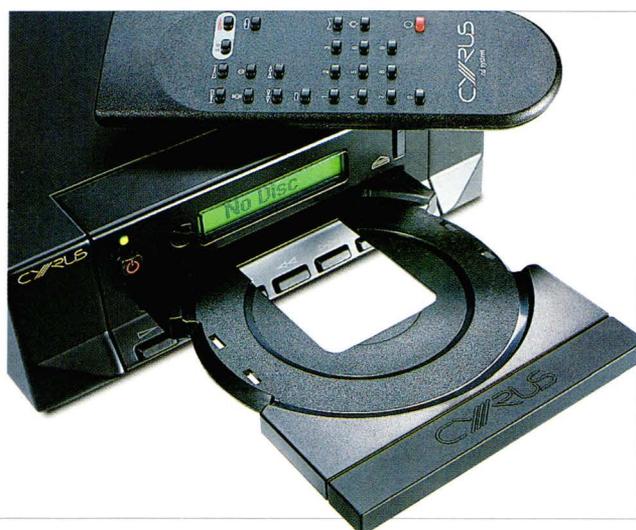
The new CD7 is a smooth, articulate and transparent player, one with quite bold dynamics, though it stops short of frightening the horses. The upgrade potential is another feather in its cap, and build quality has long been an acknowledged strength of the Cyrus range.

THE LAB REPORT

CLOSELY ALLIED TO THE Cyrus dAD3 Q24 player reviewed in *HFC* 200, this CD7 model is also equipped with Burr-Brown's '24-bit' PCM1716 DAC. The output level is unchanged at 2.1V but the S/N ratio is improved by 2dB to 103dB. This is comparable to Arcam's CD72 (which also uses the PCM1716), though Cyrus's implementation shows a better control of spurious ultrasonic noise. On the other hand, the CD7 shows a slight increase in distortion from 0.0008-0.0015% (-10dBfs to 0dBfs) through increased stress on

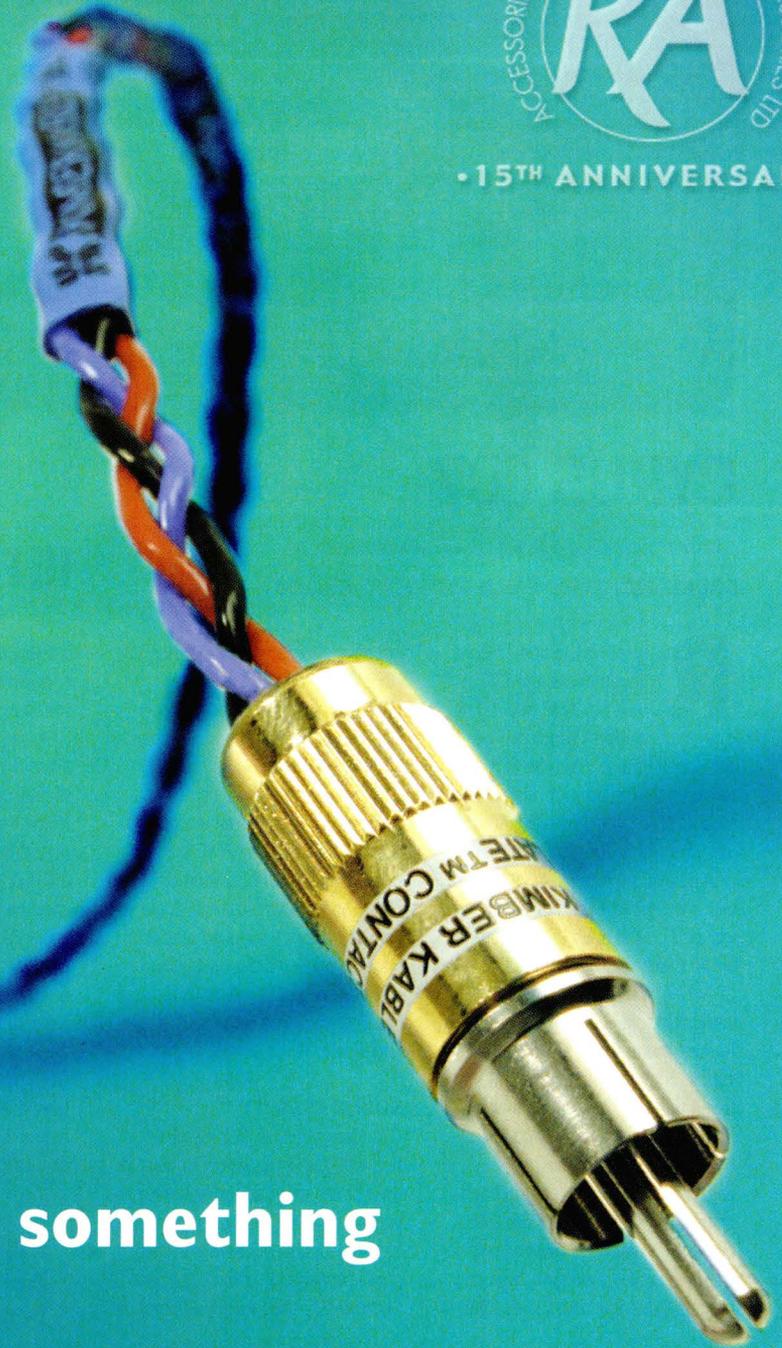
the output op-amps. Otherwise, at moderate signal levels, distortion is markedly lower than with the CD72 at both low (0.007% vs. 0.05% at 20Hz/-40dBfs) and high frequencies (0.04% vs. 0.15% at 20kHz/-40dBfs). Ordinarily, the response is very flat but there's an error with pre-emphasised discs causing a -0.6dB sag through the upper midrange. Minimal errors in low-level linearity (+0.0/-0.5dB over a 100dB range) and very low 155psec jitter complete an impressive little package.

"THIS IS A STRONG PERFORMER, WITH AN ABILITY TO MAINTAIN ITS FOCUS IN COMPLEX MUSICAL PASSAGES"





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DENSEN BEAT B-400

CONTACT 00 45 75 181214 www.densen.dk **GUARANTEE** 3 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,280.00**

Prototypes of this player have been on show at various public events for about two years, and development apparently stretches much further back. Unusually, the B-400's transport is customised for Densen, and is specifically designed to reduce susceptibility to airborne feedback. The motherboard firmware is upgradeable – perhaps this means CD-RWs will eventually be usable – and the proprietary bus is claimed to have no measurable jitter (see *The Lab report*). The dual D/A converters are upgradeable, and the digital filter is HDCD compatible, with output from a non-feedback Class A amp.

There are some curious and irritating oversights, one of which being the display, which uses relatively poorly formed red LED characters, and turns on slowly when the player recognises a disc. More seriously, the

display runs the track numbers and timings almost together. Because track timings don't suppress leading zeros, it can be difficult to interpret what the display is trying to say. The control system will also raise a few eyebrows, though there are no insuperable problems. The controls are ranged each side of the centrally mounted display and loading drawer, and include a phase invert feature and a switch to change the mode of the display. Around the back is a selection of computer-type interfaces for various Densen combinations.

The player was supplied with a heavy diecast remote control called Gizmo (available as an optional extra at £300). A feature of Gizmo is its 'burst mode' which enables it to operate over extended ranges, while not having to be pointed directly towards the product being addressed.

SOUND QUALITY

On the whole, the panel was a little disappointed with this player. They recognised its big, muscular sound, which perfectly suited the Handel and the James Taylor recordings, but there was also criticism of a lack of delicacy. Both qualities are needed, and few of the players tested excelled in both areas. In this case, the panel felt that voices tended to get lost in the mix with the Handel, and another, also referring to vocal reproduction, pointed to what he perceived as the "cardboard cut-out" character of the player. A third panellist talked in terms of a sound that was "not harsh or bright, but lacking a degree of body and warmth".

It might look quietly understated, but the Densen is capable of impressively big sound.

These qualities were confirmed in later hands-on testing, which also pointed to some upper midband harshness with some material, a loss of depth, and a generally rather hard-nosed presentation which worked with some recordings, but which sounded out of place with others.

CONCLUSION

Big sound from a big player with a big price tag, the B-400 appears to be a little under-developed and in need of refinement. The optional Gizmo remote control is good, but expensive.

THE LAB REPORT

DENSEN CLAIMS that its advanced circuitry has "no measurable jitter". In practice, the 1910psec of hum and data-related jitter emerging from the B-400 is perfectly measurable. In other circumstances, this jitter would also impact on its sound quality, but here is likely to be swamped by high harmonic distortion and the effect of excessive ultrasonic and RF noise on partnering equipment. The top 10dB of the player's dynamic range is dominated by a very strong 3rd harmonic distortion, accounting for

some 0.42% at 0dBfs (which is itself a non-standard 2.7V), 0.3% at -1dBfs and 0.16%, 0.075% and 0.03% at -3dBfs, -6dBfs and -10dBfs, respectively. Filtering of noise is limited, compromising the performance of amplifiers or, indeed, op-amps within the B-400, encouraging the sort of "harsh and hard" sound reported by the panel. The bitstream DACs used by Densen switch-off during a S/N test, delivering an apparent 104dB, though without this 'digital kill' circuit the result falls to a far poorer 88.6dB.

"THE DENSEN HAS A BIG, MUSCULAR SOUND, BUT IT ALSO SUFFERS FROM A LACK OF DELICACY"



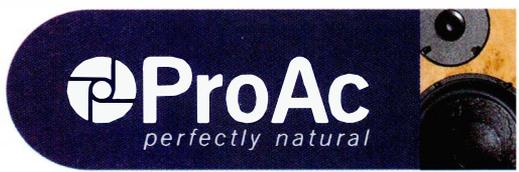


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EZO FOG STAGE 3

CONTACT 01753 542761 **GUARANTEE** 3 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,170.00**

We looked recently at the Ezo Aria amplifier, and despite the disparity in pricing, this is the obvious compatible CD player. It's dressed to the nines in a finely finished aluminium alloy case with a slab alloy extruded front panel, a circular display, a single button and a large multifunction rotary control.

The basic version of the player, which bears the wholly inappropriate name Fog, costs £575 (very close to the Aria's price), while the version we're looking at here is unofficially known as the Stage Three. 'Three' because it consists of the Fog, adapted with two internal upgrade boards: Easy and Soft. (No, really.) The Easy board performs reclocking of the digital data, and is designed to reduce jitter, while the Soft board is an adjustable digital filter with upsampling capabilities. After upsam-

pling the 16-bit/44.1kHz data to 24-bit/192kHz, it optimises the signal in the time or the frequency domain, applies a compromise setting or provides a full bypass, and in each case dither can be switched on or off – a total of eight sound-tuning settings. Balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs are available, and so is a digital output in electrical form only.

SOUND QUALITY

The panel heard this player in the compromise time and frequency mode, with dither, and at first it acquitted itself well. Diana Krall's voice was described as "absolutely beautiful", and though the depths of bass were not plumbed fully, it came across as very controlled. The James Taylor recording was also praised for its good overall projection, achieved without sounding too forward, and the general consensus was that

instrumental and vocal separation was particularly keen. The Bartok too had a strong feeling of urgency, which is as it should be.

Day two, and a change from the Lavaridin to the Densen amplifier, bought a sharp change of tack, and now the player was described as "congested and muffled" with an "overblown bass". A ringing quality was identified in the midband, and the Bartok became "congested".

So it was all left to the hands-on tests. Although there was some phasiness that would not be acceptable in long term listening, advice from the importer was that the dithered time domain mode was best overall. So it proved, with a lighter,

The Ezo Fog's reasonably unassuming fascia hides two impressive upgrades.

but more focussed result and better timing, seeming to work well with just about all music types – but some amplifier dependency remained.

CONCLUSION

This oddball player can sound anything between poor and excellent, depending on filter setting, and it's hamstrung by poor ergonomics. Our advice is to avoid the front panel controls if you want to retain your sanity, but at the end of the day we are not convinced that the positive outweighs the negative.

THE LAB REPORT

THIS FASCINATING PLAYER

takes the concept of switchable digital filters a stage further than pioneers like Sony and T+A. The 'Easy' board contains a new AD1853 DAC designed for use in DVD-A players up to 24-bit/192kHz. This DAC is used directly in 'bypass' mode, otherwise a secondary 'Soft' board carries a SHARC 21065L DSP processor that runs proprietary digital filter and dither algorithms. Jitter varies slightly from 255psec in bypass mode to 395psec with the SHARC processor used in 'Time Res' mode

where the digital filter is optimised for minimum ringing at the expense of a -2.5dB cut in its treble response. In all modes, the peak output is -10dB under par at a very low 0.6V while the response is some -1.6dB in the low bass. Despite the use of '24-bit' DACs, the A-wtd S/N ratio is just above the 16-bit level at 99.5dB while peak level distortion is higher than average at 0.02%. This falls to 0.004% at -10dBfs. The Ezo shows great promise but remains technically unfulfilled.

"THE EZO HAS A LIGHT, FOCUSED SOUND, AND SEEMS TO WORK WELL WITH JUST ABOUT ALL MUSIC TYPES"



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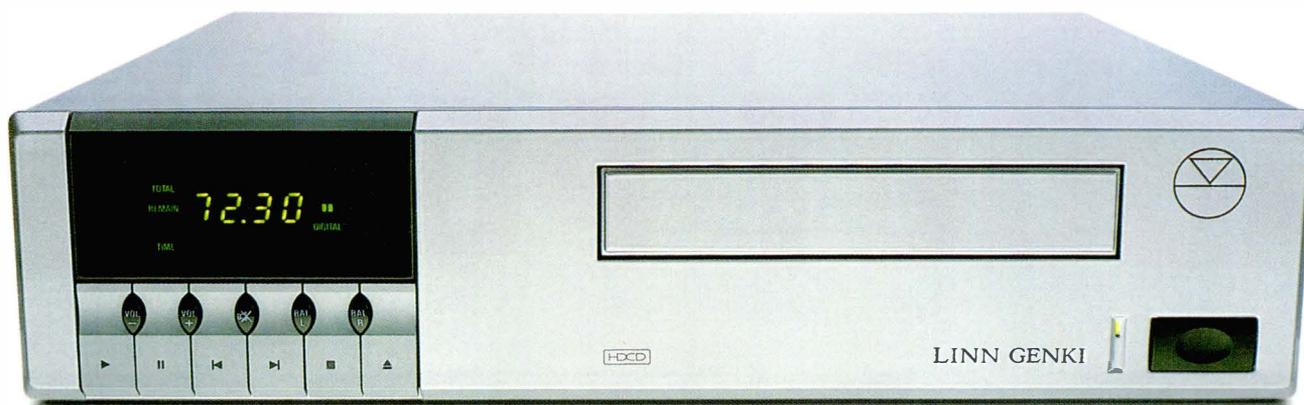
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LINN GENKI

CONTACT 0500 888909 www.linn.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£995.00**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

The Linn Genki is both more and less than it seems. Less because, although fit and finish are good, the player is lightweight, and the CD-R/RW friendly mechanism has a clunky loader, which doesn't enhance first impressions. But there is no reason to doubt what lies under the skin: its internal engineering includes a switch mode power supply, a 24-bit Burr Brown Delta Sigma D/A converter and an HDCD digital filter. However, the display shows either time or track details, but not the two together, putting it alongside the Naim Audio CD5 in the Singularly Unhelpful category.

But we've already hinted at this player's hidden depths. In addition to an electrical digital output, there are four analogue outputs: two fixed and two variable. These are fed by what seems to be a better-than-average

quality ladder network, which could be used in place of a full preamplifier in a bare bones CD player and power amp system. The extra outputs can also be used for multiroom applications, assisted by a proprietary remote in/remot out facility (for use with Linn Knekt systems) and an optional RS232 data interface which allows for firmware updates and external control.

SOUND QUALITY

To say the panellists found this player a tad contrived is not the damning criticism it might seem in raw print. In actual fact, the Linn Genki was generally well liked for its explicit quality, its sharp instrumental focus and separation, and its liveliness. But it was also variously felt to be rather hard and relentless at times, and forward in its balance – these comments could be seen as

reflecting different manifestations of the same thing. One commented on the Genki's explicit character, and on very powerful cymbal sounds. Others too were drawn to the Linn's strong showing with percussion, and described being "forced to listen" thanks to the up-front nature of its sound. There was mention of some splashiness, especially in the normally mellifluous James Taylor tracks, and of a lack of smoothness in the Bartok.

I am certain the panellists got it right on the button: the prominent percussion and slightly edgy quality seemed to arise from a lean, bright and rather breathy balance. This is not a super-sophisticated sounding

The Genki may be rather plain to look at but it's well equipped and has a winning way with music.

CD player but, for all that, it is a good one. It pulls an awful lot of detail from a disc and presents it intelligibly, though the Genki's strong character means that system matching is more critical than it is with some of its rivals.

CONCLUSION

Although it's practically self-recommending by virtue of its unusual flexibility in multiroom systems, the Genki is good enough to stand the heat as a standalone player – and as such is warmly Recommended.

THE LAB REPORT

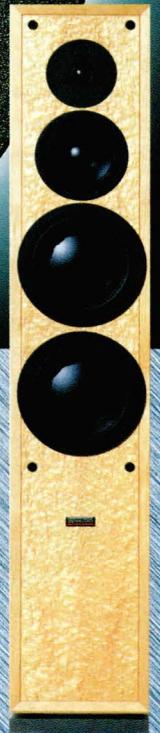
IN ALMOST EVERY RESPECT, the Genki is the very model of modern CD player design, right down to the extensive use of surface-mounted components. The singular blot concerns its 560psec of jitter (comprising data-induced and other peaks specific to the player design) which is higher than expected. Then again, Linn is using the Burr-Brown's PCM1723 DAC which includes on-board HDCD decoding and filtering, offering about an 8dB improvement in stopband rejection over the PCM1716. Interestingly,

the in-band S/N ratio of 100.5dB is rather closer to the sort of figure obtained with earlier CD players using the PMD100 oversampling filter, almost regardless of DAC. Otherwise, the player offers very low distortion (0.0008% at its 2V peak output), a very flat response (just -0.3dB down at 20kHz), excellent low-level linearity (+0.0/-0.4dB to -100dBfs) and wide 100dB channel separation. Linn's choice of a good quality master crystal is also reflected in the minuscule -2ppm clock error.

"THIS IS NOT A SUPER-SOPHISTICATED SOUNDING PLAYER BUT, FOR ALL THAT, IT IS A GOOD ONE"



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MARANTZ CD6000 KI SIGNATURE

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SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£499.90**

HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY

The CD6000 is now available in three versions: the standard cooking-quality CD6000, the enhanced CD6000 OSE and the subject of this test, the top spec CD6000 KI, the Ken Ishiwata Signature version. In common with the other variants, this is an attractive, well-finished player, with a smooth and quiet mechanism and excellent controls and display, which help give it an operating feel that transcends its class. The mechanism is also CD-R/RW compatible, and the player will show CD-Text displays.

Under the skin, this is largely a Philips technology player (Philips is the parent company). It has a dual differential mode Bitstream engine partnered with a version of the HDAM (Hyper Dynamic Output Module) – a discrete low output impedance, high slew rate output buffer. KI enhancements include a

new toroidal transformer and mains capacitors, and better quality coupling caps. The chassis is now copper plated, and has a reinforced bottom plate and damping of the cover, and there are a number of other component changes to suit. External fixtures and fittings include a headphone socket, optical and electrical digital outputs and external bus connections which will be welcomed by Marantz system owners, as they provide a unified remote control system.

SOUND QUALITY

There is a Marantz house sound, which is not quite consistent: it manifests in different ways at different price levels, but it could generally be described as full, smooth and open, with a perceptible though not excessive warmth. At its best, it is a sound that invites protracted listening and the CD6000 KI is undoubtedly such a

player. It is inherently musical, a fact that was as apparent to the panel as it was in the hands-on testing.

As one commented, "I like this player a lot. The male and the female voices in the Handel are particularly likeable, and although there is a certain stridency in the Diana Krall recording, it is both engaging and involving". Orchestral separation in the Bartok received considerable praise, and the intelligibility of vocal lines was clearly a strength, although there is no obvious or unpleasant emphasis. More general comments singled out solid imagery, explicit positioning within the soundstage and a full-bodied balance overall

The Marantz features excellent controls and display, and an admirable all-round build quality.

There is little else that needs to be added. This is a player so obviously right in its balance that it raises few questions about fidelity at the price.

CONCLUSION

The KI version of the CD6000 is considerably more expensive than the base version of the player, which puts it in quite a different area of the market. But it turns out to be such a well-developed and well-rounded package that it sustains this higher price without raising any hackles over value for money.

THE LAB REPORT

REVISIONS TO THE CD6000'S power supply coupled with running production enhancements have boosted the S/N ratio to a very respectable 103dB. Hum and PSU-induced jitter is also reduced, squeezing the 350psec total to just 260psec. Distortion is very low at 0.0009% (re. 0dBFS/ 1kHz) and lower still at -10dBFS where just 0.0005% was recorded. Importantly, distortion remains low at very high frequencies (0.0065% at 20kHz/0dBFS) and at low signal levels (0.05% at 20kHz/-40dBFS) where, at HF in particular,

ultrasonic noise ejected from the DAC confuses matters. The dual-SM5872 differential DAC combo plus Marantz's HDAM filter stage helps reduce any such ultrasonic noise very effectively. What's left are the stop-band images (<-54dB) that escape the DAC's integral oversampling filter. The response is also pretty flat and low-level linearity good with errors amounting to +0.2/-0.6dB over a full 100dB range. Output level is spot on the 2V target but this sample showed a poorer than average 0.2dB channel imbalance.

"THIS PLAYER IS SO OBVIOUSLY RIGHT IN ITS BALANCE THAT IT RAISES FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT FIDELITY"





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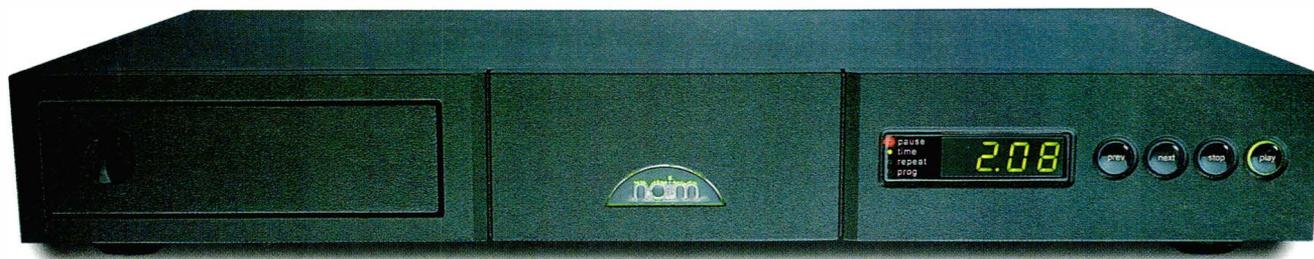
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NAIM AUDIO CD5

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SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,120.00**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

The CD5 is Naim Audio's new entry-level CD player, based loosely on the CD3. A one-box design, the transport mechanism and 18-bit D/A converters are from that well-known electronics megalith, Philips. As usual Naim Audio eschews off-the-shelf solutions, so there is no motorised loading drawer, just a finely engineered swing out loader that contains the mechanism and a small magnetic puck which is manually positioned on top of the disc. Other idiosyncrasies include a DIN output socket instead of phonos (adaptor leads are available), a stripped-down display that shows either track numbers or timings, and no digital output. The CD5 is incompatible with CD-RWs, and I had a spot of trouble playing some of my CD-Rs, which probably has more to do with their condition than the Naim's abilities.

Faced with all this idiosyncrasy, it almost comes as a surprise to discover that rudimentary remote control is available using a system handset supplied. Less surprisingly, an upgrade path is available with the ability to plug in Flat-Cap, Hi-Cap or Super-Cap power supplies.

SOUND QUALITY

Previous experience of the Naim has proved its musical value in various surroundings, but there is no pretending that it is as strictly neutral as many will feel entitled to at this price, though cost is merely moderate by Naim standards. In fact, the CD5 is slightly but unmistakably coloured and lacking transparency, and there are players with greater resolution at half the price. But where this player scores is in its ability to deliver a musical result with untrammelled physical structure and vitality, and with the kind of three

dimensional attributes that are more normally associated with the analogue high-end.

But in the cut and thrust of a comparative test such as this, where departures from neutrality tend to be quickly homed in on, the CD5 was identified by the panel as "unsubtle" and as producing a "commercial sound" (Handel and Diana Krall). Another panellist, while praising the CD5's weighty sound, also pointed to rush through the Diana Krall track in particular. In another presentation, the player was accused of "midband congestion" and of a "lack of control", though one dissenter described it as "very communicative".

The Naim features a slightly idiosyncratic design, and an equally characteristic sound.

CONCLUSION

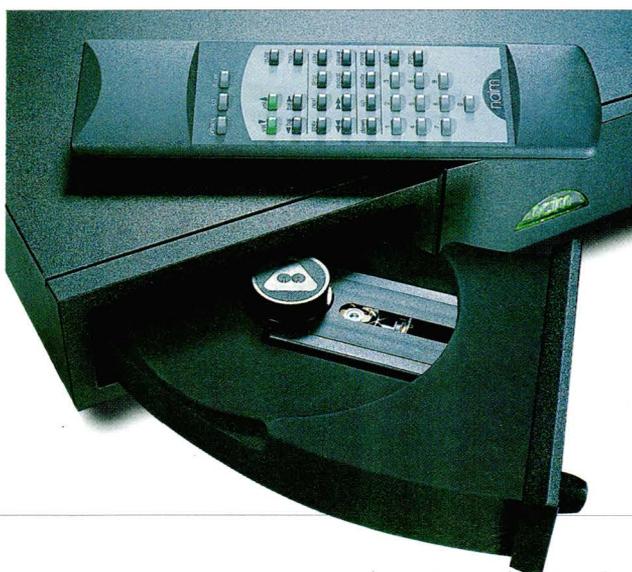
There is clearly more than one view on this player, and we would argue that there is merit on both sides. There are players out there with more accuracy, clinical or otherwise, and some of the physical limitations – the basic display, the lack of a digital output and so on – will be significant in many situations. But its train-like inevitability and the enormous dynamic certainties it brings to its task provide an authentic glimpse of what it is all about. Recommended, subject to audition.

"THE NAIM IS ABLE TO DELIVER MUSIC WITH UNTRAMMELLED PHYSICAL STRUCTURE AND VITALITY"

THE LAB REPORT

THE GUTS OF THE CD5 ARE clearly based on the earlier CD3.5 (see *HFC* 188). Indeed, though both Roksan's latest Caspian and Naim's CD5 are based around the same hybrid technology TDA1305 DAC, Naim appears to have the upper hand in its implementation. Roksan wins out with a 107.5dB S/N ratio over Naim's 102.5dB, but the CD5 has lower distortion through the crucial midband frequencies at all signal levels (including 0.0008% re. 1kHz/0dBfs). Low-level linearity is about

as good as it gets with the TDA1305, with errors of just +0.0/-0.5dB over a full 100dB range. Jitter, too, is squeezed to an insignificant 180psec while its proprietary analogue output stage is capable of driving the wildest of interconnect designs. Indeed, Naim's special 7-pole filter not only provides a slight (-0.6dB) treble roll-off but it also bites very deeply into the sort of ultrasonic noise that can cause an unpleasant harsh and grainy sound with some amplifiers.



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Hi-Fi Plus Editor's Review

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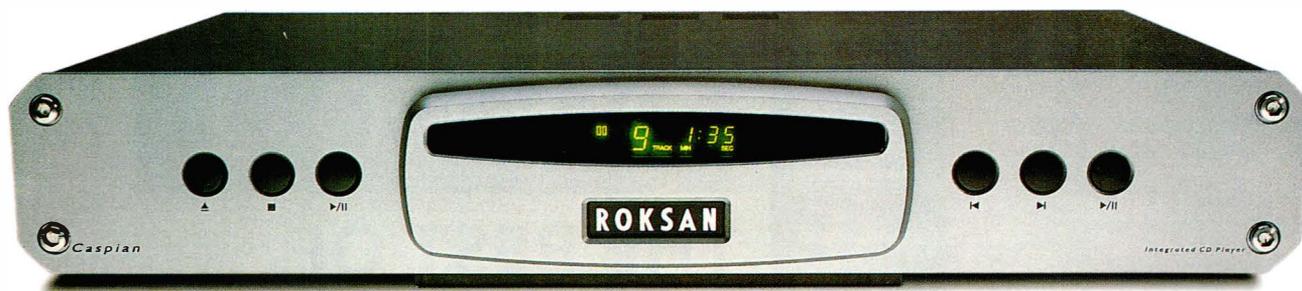
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ROKSAN CASPIAN

CONTACT 020 8900 6801 www.roksan.co.uk **GUARANTEE 2 YEARS**

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£895.00**

A recent upgrade has further aligned the Caspian towards the audiophile market. It remains unfeasibly heavy, and its articulated door mechanism still slides out to allow access to the loader. But there have been some minor improvements to its operation, and the suspension has also been softened. There are new, higher quality capacitors and resistors, but the main change is to the D/A board. Still based on the Philips TDA1305 hybrid DAC, this is a new, double-sided version with its own rectification and power supplies – the original received power down a long, shielded cable. Finally, the analogue filters have been improved, with a faster output attenuation starting a little later above 20kHz to reduce its effect on the audio band, and produce smoother stop band attenuation.

Other improvements include some to the master clock, which is said to be more stable and to produce faster leading edges in an effort to reduce jitter, while the output op-amp has been changed from a Philips-sourced NE5532 to an apparently superior quality part from Burr Brown. The player, which will reproduce CD-R discs but not CD-RWs, has an electrical digital output and remote control.

SOUND QUALITY

Something of the character of the original Caspian survives in a strong, bold musical presentation, though one listener felt it was “a tad sterile”, another that it made music “by rote”, and a third that it was “over-lit, antiseptic and scrubbed”. On the other hand, it was also decreed to be “really good to listen to: well defined, with tremendous voice reproduction and separation of instruments”. The

criticisms were mostly related to its use with the Lavardin, and make points that could be laid at the door of the amplifier itself, suggesting a lack of mutual synergy.

From listening during the hands-on tests, the Caspian is indeed a bold, dynamic sounding CD player, and it has what appears to be a new-found subtlety and expressiveness – though it doesn’t quite match the best of breed, like the less costly Marantz CD6000 KI. For all its undoubted strengths, the Caspian still sometimes seems to be doing things by numbers, no pun intended. It has indeed improved over the years since its launch, though not quite in step with the marketplace as a whole.

The new audiophile-friendly Caspian features a host of circuit upgrades to improve the sound.

CONCLUSION

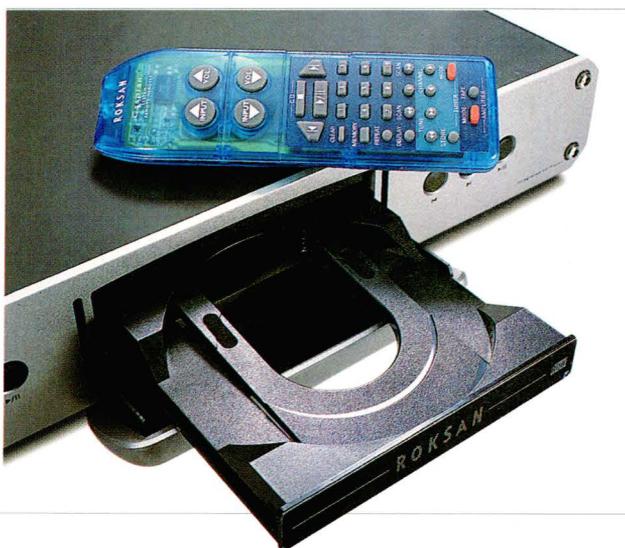
The iMac-like translucent coloured remote control looks out of place with a product that is otherwise as sober as a judge, but this shouldn’t deter owners of original specification Caspian players, who can upgrade for about £180 plus carriage. These people will certainly be well-served by doing so. For those purchasers starting from scratch, the new Caspian costs the same as the original, disproving the maxim that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

THE LAB REPORT

DESPITE SHARING THE same chassis and hybrid TDA1305 DAC as the Caspian tested way back in *HFC* 169, this latest issue utilises a new power supply, analogue board and filter stage. The power-supply and hum-induced jitter that boosted the earlier model’s jitter to 650psec is removed, cleaning up its bass performance, though the overall figure of 685psec is just as high thanks to an *increase* in data-induced components! New op-amps have not reduced the wide 107dB S/N ratio, though distortion has increased

very slightly from, typically, 0.002% to 0.008% at 20kHz. Otherwise, the low 0.0015% THD at 1kHz is slightly better than that obtained with the earlier Caspian. The 2.0V output and channel balance are improved while the response is also slightly flatter with a -0.4dB dip at 20kHz instead of -1.0dB. Other parameters, including the 63dB rejection of stopband images are defined by the DAC, though the relatively poor +1.0/-2.1dB errors in low-level linearity could be improved.

“FOR ALL ITS STRENGTHS, THE CASPIAN STILL SOMETIMES SEEMS TO BE DOING THINGS BY NUMBERS”



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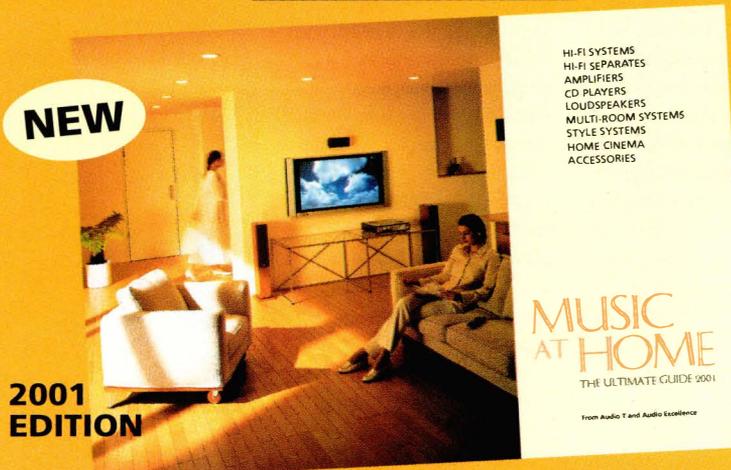
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ROTEL RCD-991

CONTACT 01908 317707 www.rotel.com **GUARANTEE 2 YEARS**

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£825.00**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

This is an imposing, heavy-weight unit, with a sober but businesslike appearance.

The digital clockwork includes a 20 bit Burr Brown PCM-63P D/A converter and an HDCD-compatible Pacific Microsonics PMD-100 8x digital filter. In addition, the RCD-991 includes switchable dither levels, a feature it shares with the Linn Sondek CD12 which happens to use the same digital filter, though many Sony players have a variable coefficient digital filter which has a similar effect. Intriguingly, the optical and electrical digital outputs can be switched off, and the analogue output is available in standard unbalanced form, and also in AES/EBU balanced form, presumably to satisfy US market requirements. Although not officially compatible with CD-RWs, the test sample had no problems with them, along with standard CD-Rs.

The RCD-991 was tested in issue 195 and has been included again as a reference player, though this time we're testing the newer, slightly altered AE version, re-voiced for continental Europe (see *The Lab Report*). Like the other models in this test, it was auditioned 'blind' during the listening sessions

SOUND QUALITY

The last time we looked at this model, it emerged largely unscathed from the listening tests and received a Best Buy commendation. This time, in the context of a stronger group, there was some toning down in the panel's level of enthusiasm. When it was used with the Densen Beat pre/power amplifier, it was written off by one as "muffled, boomy and ill-defined" and by another as "powerful, but with little bass discrimination". Working on the rule of thumb

that perceived bass problems often have their roots in treble shortcomings, there was an edge with some of the dither settings when used with the Densen amplifier that was less apparent with the Lavardin. This edge was virtually absent with the Marantz PM7000 used for much of the hands-on testing, which in essence confirmed the panel's view, and underlined the importance of choosing the matching amplifier with some care.

The other issue that needs exploring is the choice of an appropriate digital filter setting, which can yield subtle but worthwhile differences in the personality of the sound, helping it fit the system it is used with. As before, I'm predisposed to the lower

The Rotel has a number of digital filter settings to enable you to find your perfect sound.

numbered settings, the higher ones generally sounding a little uneven and sometimes edgy. The standard setting, the default, is audibly the most balanced, and the one that works most transparently with the widest range of material. But remember to turn the digital outputs off.

CONCLUSION

On balance, advancing standards undermine the case for a Best Buy. But under favourable conditions it is still a Recommended player, one of the heavyweights in every sense.

THE LAB REPORT

RE-VOICED FOR THE continental European market, the AE version of Rotel's RCD-991 still employs Burr-Brown's costly PCM63P 20-bit DACs with a separate HDCD filter and programmable dither facility. The specific jitter sidebands that afflicted the RCD-991 (see *HFC* 193), albeit at a very low level, are now removed by the RCD-991AE, reducing the total jitter to 160psec. Dither setting No.4 is appropriate for these multibit DACs where THD is reduced from, for example, 0.25% to 0.13% at 1kHz/-60dBfs.

There is a decrease in S/N ratio from 113dB to 111dB in-band as a result of the applied dither. However, there is a more significant increase in ultrasonic noise that may well outweigh the positive effects of lower THD with some amplifiers. Compared with the original RCD-991, the AE's response is marginally flatter but channel balance and separation are no less impressive. DAC and filter-related parameters such as the 106dB stopband rejection and +0.0/-0.8dB errors in low-level linearity are unchanged.

"IN THE CONTEXT OF A STRONGER GROUP, THERE WAS SOME TONING DOWN IN THE PANEL'S LEVEL OF ENTHUSIASM"



CONCLUSIONS

Our 11 players represent a fair cross-section of the action in upmarket players. Without the budget and high end, what's left belongs broadly in the mainstream, though one or two models are pushing the boundaries. The absurdly named EZO Fog Stage 3 is a case in point, with a level of almost wilful idiosyncrasy that is normally exclusively associated with the esoteric elite. The Marantz CD6000 KI and the Arcam CD72 on the other hand are relatively affordable, and are clearly aimed at the broadest possible market.

Nearest to the budget sector, the Arcam CD72 is basically an Arcam Alpha 7SE decanted into new packaging. There are some technical improvements, and

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

MAKE MODEL	ARCAM CD72	ARCAM CD92	AUDIO NOTE CDT ZERO + DAC ONE.1X	CYRUS CD7	DENSEN B-400
PRICE	£399.90	£849.90	£1,298.00	£800.00	£1,280.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	A credible newcomer, but by no means the best in the group.	Sharper and livelier than the CD72, and altogether more sophisticated.	An easy and vivid performer that worked equally well with all our reference amps.	Smooth and transparent player, with bold – but not too bold – dynamics.	Needs refinement, but gives an impressively big sound nonetheless.
GUARANTEE	2YRS	2YRS	2YRS	1YR	3YRS

THE LAB REPORT

LOW DISTORTION?	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
LOW JITTER?	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE?	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FILTER?	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL RATING	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████

MEASUREMENTS

CHANNEL SEPARATION @ 1KHZ	102dB	106dB	85dB	107dB	113dB
FREQ. RESPONSE @ 20HZ/20KHZ	-0.1dB/+0.5dB	0.0dB/+0.1dB	-4.6dB/-5.75dB	0.0dB/-0.3dB	+0.1dB/-0.6dB
THD VS. LEVEL, -90 DBFS @ 1KHZ	3.2%	2.5%	26.5%	2.8%	12.5%
OUTPUT LEVEL, L/R	2.24V/2.23V	2.35V/2.34V	3.5V/3.6V	2.11V/2.09V	2.68V/2.68V
S/N RATIO (A-WTD)	103.5dB	96.6dB	104dB	103.1dB	88.6dB
TOTAL CORRELATED JITTER	150psec	245psec	150psec	155psec	1910psec

ALVIN GOLD COMES BLINKING INTO THE LIGHT, BEARING HIS TEST FINDINGS...

performance is much as you might expect, except for a certain energy that made the Alpha 7 buzz. Our guess is that it was toned down to suit likely amplifiers and speakers it will be used with, and to make room for the RingDAC-equipped CD92, an altogether more analytical animal calculated to appeal to the audiophile. The Marantz treads a middle path here: it has a refinement quite unusual at the price, without much loss of analysis – a great all-rounder. The Cyrus CD7 and Rotel RCD-991 also slot into this territory, with the Cyrus offering similar virtues to the Marantz, and the Rotel delivering something bolder and sometimes brasher.

Next come the recently improved Roksan Caspian and the Linn Genki. While neither is as immediately

likeable as the Marantz or the Cyrus, both offer a vital, engaging standard of music making.

Further honours are shared between four talented and variously oddball models. The Ezo model offers some wonderfully subtle music making if care is taken over set-up, combined with an almost unusable user interface. The Densen is almost as odd, but its performance is too uneven to recommend wholeheartedly. The Naim Audio CD5 is wonderfully eccentric, but despite some coloration it comes across, at least to some, as one of the liveliest and most realistic sounding players around. Finally, the Audio Note is technically very odd indeed, but comes across as the unlikely straight man: it's just a thoroughly likeable player.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED		HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY		HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED		HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED		HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED		HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED				
MAKE MODEL	PRICE	SOUND VALUE	CONCLUSION	GUARANTEE	MAKE MODEL	PRICE	SOUND VALUE	CONCLUSION	GUARANTEE	MAKE MODEL	PRICE	SOUND VALUE	CONCLUSION	GUARANTEE
EZO FOG STAGE 3	£1,170.00	★★★★★	Oddball player's sound depends on its filter settings, and fails to impress.	3YRS	LINN GENKI	£995.00	★★★★★	Flexible, powerful player which extracts the best from CDs.	2YRS	MARANTZ CD6000 KI	£499.90	★★★★★	Well-rounded package sustains its high price through impressive performance.	2YRS
NAIM AUDIO CD5	£1,120.00	★★★★★	Characteristic sound, but generally impressive performance give this Recommendation.	2YRS	ROKSAN CASPIAN	£895.00	★★★★★	Bold, dynamic player, but no match for the best in this test.	2YRS	ROTEL RCD-991	£825.00	★★★★★	A heavyweight player in every sense, but not quite one of the best here.	2YRS
THE LAB REPORT														
LOW DISTORTION?		LOW JITTER?		WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE?		EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FILTER?		OVERALL RATING						
102dB		104dB		104dB		105dB		103dB		104dB				
-1.6dB/-0.1dB		0.0dB/-0.3dB		0.0dB/-0.25dB		-0.1dB/-0.6dB		0.0dB/-0.4dB		0.0dB/-0.35dB				
4.0%		3.5%		2.9%		4.5%		12.0%		2.5%				
0.639V/0.636V		2.03V/2.05V		2.01V/1.97V		2.16V/2.14V		2.0V/2.0V		1.96V/1.96V				
99.5dB		100.5dB		103.3dB		102.5dB		107.5dB		111-114dB				
255psec		560psec		260psec		180psec		685psec		160psec				
MEASUREMENTS														
CHANNEL SEPARATION @ 1KHZ		FREQ. RESPONSE @ 20HZ/20KHZ		THD VS. LEVEL, -90 dBFS @ 1KHZ		OUTPUT LEVEL, L/R		S/N RATIO (A-WTD)		TOTAL CORRELATED JITTER				

KEEP WATCHING THE SKIES!

REG WILLIAMSON EXPLAINS WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT TO HEAR FROM THE NEW WIRELESS FRONTIER THAT IS EUROPE'S DIGITAL SATELLITE RADIO NETWORK.

One of the best kept secrets from all who enjoy music is the vast selection of high quality radio stations accessible to anyone with a suitable satellite dish and tuner. (And

I don't mean a Sky digibox, which for most folk in the UK means 'digital TV' and radio and a subscription to Sky.) What's more, all of it is free and in most cases, not too far removed from CD quality. Not one penny do you have to pay other than the initial outlay on a suitable receiver.

GETTING SET UP

Digital radio uses a so-called lossy digital compression system known as MPEG Layer Two, usually referred to as MP2. Most of the time it is excellent and will satisfy all but the dedicated enthusiast. A few satellite radio broadcasters cling on to good old analogue, which isn't bad since it uses a noise reduction system similar to Dolby B, called Wegener Panda. But where are these stations? Have your dish point towards 19.20 and 130 degrees East and there, largely neglected by radio and TV listeners and viewers in the UK, is a complex of satellites, 12 in all, pouring out goodies from all over Europe and parts of the Middle East.

These are the Astra 1 and Eutelsat Hotbirds. Astra also carries its own unique digital radio system called Astra Digital Radio or ADR, in addition to the accepted standard for DVB sound, MPEG2. Designed largely for the German market, it does nevertheless carry up to 86 stations covering all musical tastes. A tuner exclusively for ADR can be purchased direct from Germany for about £100, but I would recommend a tuner that is more versatile, one that will receive all types, analogue as well as digital TV and radio. One such does exist, but we'll get to that in a minute. First, you have one problem to overcome

before starting on this adventure. You can't just set up your own satellite dish from scratch and hope for the best. It is essential to find an experienced dish rigger – and that isn't as easy as you might think.

LEMON FRESH RADIO

Once equipped, the next choice is a tuner and there is only one worth considering for this job – the Lemon Volksbox. It is still the only one that covers everything in all broadcast formats, including ADR. Unfortunately, the company ran into financial problems last year, but it has since been bought out by a company in Luxembourg and a new model is due on the market at some point this year. More importantly, whilst in Munich in September last year I made contact with possibly the largest supplier of satellite hardware in Europe (www.satshop.de) and discovered to my delight that it had a large stock of the company's latest model, the Volksbox 2000. Not only is it willing to supply any-

“THERE IS ONLY ONE TUNER WORTH CONSIDERING - THE LEMON VOLKSBOX, THE ONLY ONE THAT COVERS EVERYTHING IN ALL BROADCAST FORMATS.”

one in the UK but they'll also give a year's guarantee. The Volksbox is designed purely for what is known as Free to Air transmission or FTA, but the new model will contain provision for cards, via what are known as Conditional Access Modules. The price of the 2000 is around £335, including VAT and carriage. (Payment must be made by electronic transfer – your bank should be able to help.) It is beautifully designed, fully microprocessor-controlled and it may be updated by programmes published on the Web. The Volksbox also has its own club with enthusiasts offering their own update

information on the club's webpages (members.nbc.com/volksbox).

A CLASSICAL SELECTION

So what delights await the music lover once the system's all set up? At the risk of offending those interested in more contemporary material (whose tastes are well catered for as well), my own leaning is for the classics. As I write this, we have reached the end of the Festival season in Europe – and what delights there have been. Dominant amongst the major festivals is the one in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. It began early in July with what appears to be a tradition, a performance of Bruckner's *8th Symphony* conducted by Gunter Wand, who I regard as the greatest interpreter of the composer. It was relayed live on TV as well as radio from Lubeck's magnificent concert hall. Sadly, it was a disappointment. The North German Radio Symphony Orchestra was playing on autopilot most of the time, Wand's considerable years probably being to blame.

The final concert was also carried live on TV, but it was a complete contrast. The same orchestra, playing in the sumptuous surroundings of Keiler Schloss, was this time under a conductor I increasingly admire – former pianist Christoph Eschenbach. The programme began with a performance of Strauss' *Four Last Songs* by American soprano Renee Fleming, who performs under the

same conductor on a CD of *Strauss Heroines*. This was a real emotional experience and, clearly, Fleming will go on to become one of Richard Strauss' great interpreters. The rest of the concert was composed of Mahler's *5th Symphony*, conducted by Eschenbach. A memorable end to a fine festival.

There were, of course, many other visits to concerts and recitals held at various venues throughout the region, some live, some recorded. Particularly impressive was a concert performance of Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, with the MDR orchestra under Fabio Luisi from the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. As always



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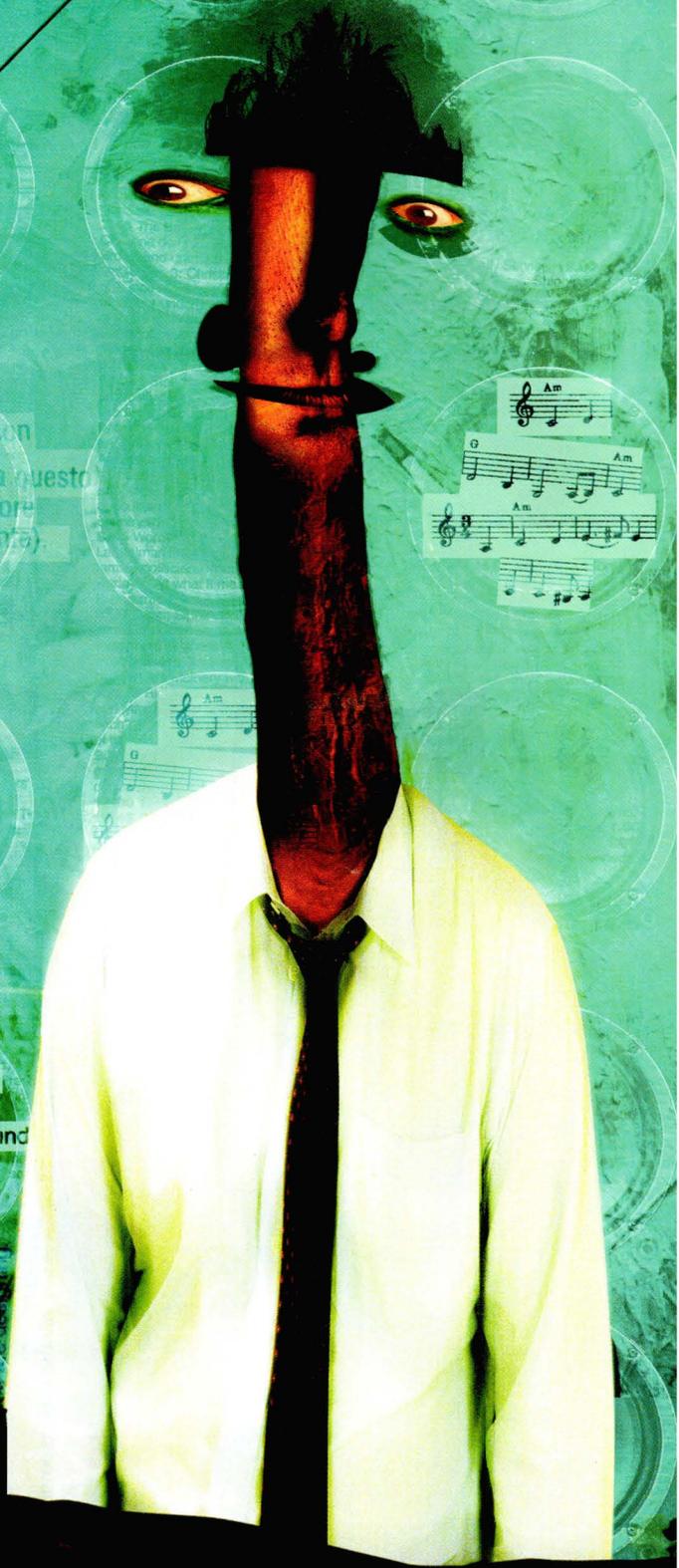
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◁ there were visits of foreign orchestras, including our own BBC Symphony. However, we also had the chance to hear (and see, on occasion) the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the Houston Symphony Orchestra, the latter also conducted by Eschenbach.

These visitors also appeared at other festivals, such as the Rheingau. This gave the keen music lover the opportunity to hear new music, such as a remarkable performance by Emmanuel Axe of the Piano Concerto by John Adams – now, without doubt, the doyen of American composers.

Aside from the European Festivals, which were broadcast almost every day on digital radio, the Italian channel Radio Due has been occasionally broadcasting operas at the weekends. The Salzburg Festival got regular radio coverage, mostly live, on OE1, the main Austrian public service channel. While on Austrian TV, there was a fine performance of Berlioz' rarely performed opera *Les Troyens at Carthage*.

Then there is the famous Bayreuth Festival, for lovers of Wagner. Every opera has been broadcast, including *Parsifal*, and the whole of the *Ring Cycle* went out live. Apart from the final opera *Götterdämmerung*, all were magnificent. *The Twilight of the Gods* demonstrated once more that the world is badly in need of 'heldentenor'. Even so, Wagner fans, make sure you don't miss out on any more!

CHOICE STATIONS

What stations would I rate the highest? Certainly, Bavaria's Bayern 4. The programme output is usually of high quality and it features the most live (ubertragung) concerts. There is also the fine Bayern Rundfunk Orchestra, which plays to a very high standard. The transmissions are available on both ADR and the standard DVB. Not far behind is Deutschland Radio Berlin, which car-

ries not only selected transmissions from throughout Germany but also regular broadcasts – both live and recorded (aufnahme) – from the Berlin Philharmonic. Again, this channel is available on both ADR and DVB. I rate West Deutsch Rundfunk 3 equally highly, along with Nor Deutscher Rundfunk 3. Again, all are accessible on DVB as well as ADR. The remaining 24, a list of which I keep beside my tuner, are not to be sniffed at. Whilst many are virtually wall-to-wall CDs, ideal for background listening, some like France Musique or Swiss Classics, also do regular concerts. Most of these are only accessible on DVB. You will soon discover that Friday night is music night, and you'll be spoiled for choice.

But how do you find out what's on? In the case of most foreign transmissions, especially German radio, you can call up the teletext for the associated regional TV transmission. Most details are given by the day. The Web is also a good source

Amongst them are gems, such as every broadcast concert that Celibidache conducted; but often due to age, one has to accept a lower 'fi' for the programme content. Personally, I am more than willing to do that. The MPEG Layer 2 encoding format is, at its best, more than adequate for me.

POINTED QUESTIONS

And so for the last question: "If I have a system pointing at Astra 1 and Eutelsat Hotbird satellite complexes, what do I have to do if I want BBC R3? Do I need a Sky Digibox?" The answer to the first part is to add a third offset universal LNB to the dish and point it at the Astra satellite carrying Sky programmes at 28.0 East – a competent rigger can do this using a device called DisEqc (which is needed if more than one LNB is fitted). To the second part, the answer is a definite No. Digiboxes are notorious for being difficult to programme to anything other than Sky stations, so avoid

"THE WHOLE OF THE RING CYCLE WENT OUT LIVE, AND ALL WERE MAGNIFICENT. WAGNER FANS, MAKE SURE YOU DON'T MISS OUT ON ANY MORE!"

and a listing of sites is available from me by e-mail (but don't all ask at once, please!).

STEAM-POWERED RADIO

There is also a weekly magazine called Dampf Radio (Steam Radio) available by mail order from Germany. This covers all the German stations, one Swiss and one Austrian. It's costly, but I find it worth it at DM174 for six months; that's about £58 at the current rate of exchange. Payment has to be by electronic transfer again.

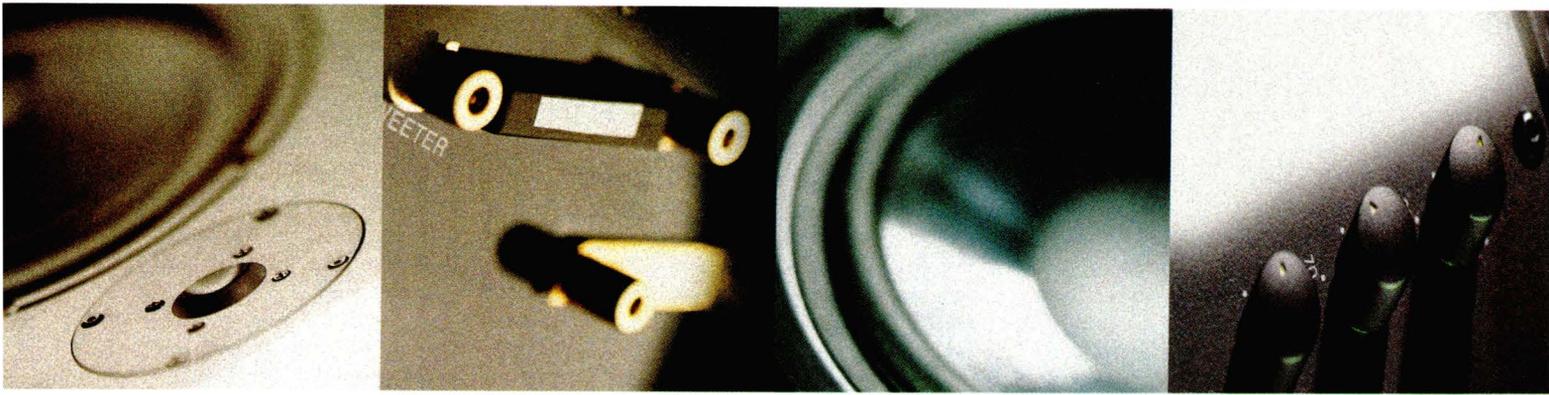
Sound quality? Well, like any broadcast signal, it is never wholly consistent and depends upon whether the transmission is home-grown or has to travel through the inter-Europe programme network (which is, of course, fully digital now). It also depends a great deal on the original source material. Generally, though, the occasions when things are not quite right are relatively rare. So, one has to make allowances. All the German stations have exceptionally large archives, which they draw upon frequently.

them. Most other tuners can be programmed to get all the public service radio stations that are not encrypted (as is the case with some TV stations). The Volksbox is exceptionally easy to programme, and it features an autoscan feature to look for any new stations. If BBC Parliamentary coverage turns you on, you can get that. But for everything else, you need a smart card, which is free – for the time being. But sadly, to the best of my knowledge, even though you might eventually have a tuner with a Common Access slot, a Common Access Module (or CAM) is not available to take Sky's Videoguard de-encryption cards. All other encryption systems throughout Europe have CAMs freely available. You even need them for public service stations such as the BBC. I gather from the ITC that legislation is being sought to get around what is a monopolist situation.

So, does all this whet your appetite? Watch this space for more! In the meantime, if you have any questions, then feel free to contact me via email: regwilliamson@beeb.net



The Lemon Volksbox 2000 receiver is not in Dixons but its the best one for the job.



Five Stars For Value

Paul Messenger explains why you should visit an independent specialist dealer if you are searching for real hi-fi satisfaction

Why use a specialist hi-fi dealer? The short answer is because he knows one hell of a lot more about hi-fi than you do. And if you've gone to the trouble of picking up a specialist magazine on the subject, you're obviously interested in something rather more than a mini system from the nearest electrical superstore.

You've probably bought this magazine for one of two reasons. You're looking for advice (presumably unbiased and good) on choosing and using your hi-fi system, and/or you're checking out the ads to decide where to go and buy it.

The independent specialist dealer doesn't know everything, and he doesn't know much about you, but if music's an important part of your life, he's the only guy around who's able (and hopefully willing) to help you choose the equipment which will give you the best long term satisfaction.

Power of the Press

Dealers sometimes moan to me about the power of the press, and the disproportionate influence of its 'Best Buy' and multi-star ratings. Well, I've been in the press for twentysomething years, and still feel more ignorant than powerful.

The more I mess around with hi-fi gear, the more I become aware of our lack of real understanding of the subtleties involved, and the more I appreciate the importance of the dealer's skills and experience, in bringing together components so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We hacks get paid to write words, often about components in isolation, because individual product reviews are still the staple diet of the press. They can sometimes provide a useful guide to the way a product performs, but only under the particular

circumstances in which the review was conducted.

The hi-fi reviewer attempts, with varying degrees of success, to evaluate a particular component, and find something interesting (and hopefully positive) to say about it. That's about the end of it, and it's on to the next product.

The magazine prints the review, and that very process magically confers a measure of authority. Experienced hi-fi enthusiasts, who read reviews over a period of years and try out various products themselves, soon start to realise the limitations of that approach. Some reviews are better than others, but none can get to grips with the real heart of the problem - whether a given product will improve your musical satisfaction, in your system and your room.

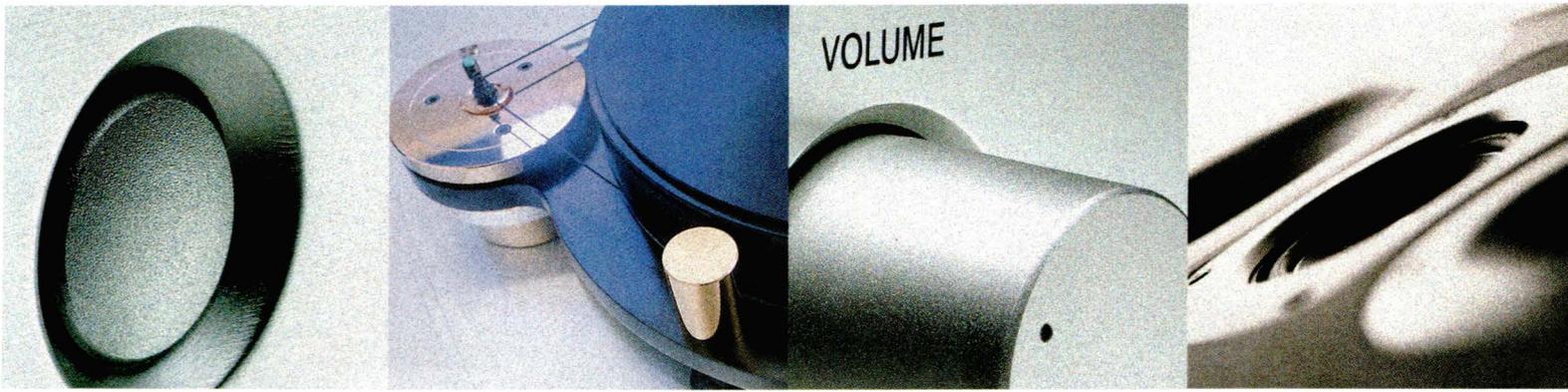
The Role of the Dealer

The dealer's role is very different, and potentially much more valuable. He has the chance to talk one-on-one. If he's good at his job, he'll use that opportunity to find out what you as an individual are looking (or listening) for.

His motivation is very different too. Sure he wants to make a sale. That's the lifeblood of any shop. But he also knows that if something he sells really does deliver long term satisfaction, there's a very good chance you'll come back again to see if he can repeat the trick some time in the future.

STAR QUALITIES

value for money	★★★★★
service	★★★★★
facilities	★★★★★
verdict	★★★★★



If you go into a shop and demand a particular CD player, on the basis that it got seven stars (out of five) in last month's magazines, the shop will probably simply take the line of least resistance and sell it to you. (Or switch-sell you to a similar price alternative, if he's fresh out of stock of that particular flavour-of-the-month.)

If you go in and say you're looking for a CD player, and want his advice on what to choose, things are liable to become more interesting. The onus is now on the dealer to show what he can do. His first task is to ask the right questions to try and get some idea of what you might be after.

Asking the questions is the easy bit. The real skill comes in using the information to come up with a shortlist of likely contenders, and then conducting a demonstration so that you have a real chance to play a central role in the decision making process.

Putting together a successful hi-fi system might not be as difficult as it was twenty or thirty years ago, but it's just as easy to make a mess of things. Put the 'wrong' combination of components together and it'll still sound a lot better than any cute little mini system package. It might even rate a five star review. But it won't match the potential of a carefully balanced and properly installed system, and it

certainly won't cater for your own particular preferences and personality.

We British are notoriously indiscriminating consumers, at a mass market level at least. The majority of the population don't even bother to drive a car they're thinking of buying, never mind take the trouble to listen to hi-fi equipment.

The majority will therefore end up with hyperstore mediocrity, and hi-fi that's about as tasty as supermarket bread. But if music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet, you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority.

You know full well that your music collection is as individual as your wardrobe, and just as precious too, so it's worth taking the time and trouble to search out the dealer and equipment that will make that collection come alive, and give you a new buzz every time you play your favourite discs.

The independent specialist may not beat the chain store on price, but he continues to thrive in a hostile environment because real hi-fi is so much more than a matter of price. The people who work in these shops are themselves enthusiasts, often with many years of experience in meeting customer's needs, and the very necessary expertise to ensure that the whole thing is properly set up to deliver the best results.

The better the hi-fi, the more important it is to get the fine details right at the installation end of things, but even the least expensive equipment can be made to sound a whole lot better if good care is taken over the fine details - the support furniture, the cabling, the positioning of speakers and so on.

Without expert assistance even high class hi-fi can give mediocre results. With it you'll stand a very good chance of ending up with something rather more than a consumer durable - something which will be a source of considerable pleasure and genuine emotional satisfaction for decades to come.

I agreed to write this signed piece, irrespective of the specific sponsors, because I believe the independent specialist dealer plays a vital role in giving customers long term hi-fi satisfaction. The views and opinions expressed here are my own and not necessarily those of Hi-fi Choice.

Paul Messenger

[The specialist Dealers listed here are professional and enthusiastic. Give your nearest a ring for a demonstration.](#)

TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

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190a New North Road
020 7226 5500

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
020 7924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER
109 Chiswick High Road
020 8400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High St. 01233 624441

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead
AUDIO DESIGNS
26 High St. 01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
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Lakeside Retail Park

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Furniture World
01708 680551

Rayleigh, Essex
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High St. 01268 779762

Ringwood, Hampshire
PHONOGRAPHY
Star Lane 01425 461230

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Uxbridge
MARTIN-KLEISER
278 High Street
01895 465444

Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI
213-217 Tarring Road
01903 245577

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE
3 Church Lane
01295 272158

Birmingham
SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich
01922 493499

Leicester CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754

Northampton LISTEN INN
32 Gold St. 01604 637871

Shrewsbury
CREATIVE AUDIO
9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

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0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL
12/14 Shaw Road
0161 633 2602

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam St
0114 275 6048

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

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34 Northumberland Street
0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO
260 St. Vincent Street
0141 248 4079

N. IRELAND

Belfast LYRIC HI-FI
161 Stranmillis Road
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BRVSTON

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SOURCE

MONO
STEREO

AUX CD
BAL 2
BAL 1
SOURCE

BALANCE

VOL



PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

IN THIS WORLD OF INTEGRATION, SURELY THE TWO-BOX AMP COMBO HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A POINTLESS ODDITY? WELL, RICHARD BLACK DOESN'T THINK SO, AND ROUNDS UP FIVE PAIRINGS TO PROVE IT.

You might be tempted to think that the case for separate pre and power amplifiers has become weaker since the demise of the LP as the primary source component. A sensitive phono stage is not necessarily the ideal bedfellow for a high-power output stage, and is likely to benefit from being physically separate. By contrast, a modern line-level-only integrated amp is little more than a power amp with a selector switch and volume control – so why bother splitting the functions?

For a start, even those simple selector and volume functions have the potential to pick up hum and interference from a large mains transformer (relatively) nearby. But quite apart from electrical reasons, there's the simple question of practicality and appearance: a high power, high quality integrated amp is almost inevitably going to be a large item and not everyone wants something like that right in their line of sight. A power amp, which has no controls apart from a mains switch, can be hidden away while a smaller and much more elegant preamp controls everything. And although that requires an extra set of interconnect leads from pre to power, speaker cables can be shorter – very much shorter, if single mono-block power amps are used close to each speaker.

There's also the issue of upgrading by adding a second power amp, be it for bi-amping, bridging (using stereo amps as monoblocks) or driving remote speakers, which is a doddle with a standalone pre-amp. And of course there's the flexibility of buying pre and power amps from different manufacturers if you wish.

This can result in time-consuming experiments in partnering, and for this review we've elected to keep single-make pairs together, since that tends to be how the majority are used. All the same, input and output levels from different makes are quite well standardised so it's usually fairly straightforward to mix and match. The usual advice about a helpful, well-informed specialist dealer certainly applies here, and such folks will usually have selected a handful of brands to stock, and will probably have tried most of the possible combinations already.

THE AMPLIFIERS

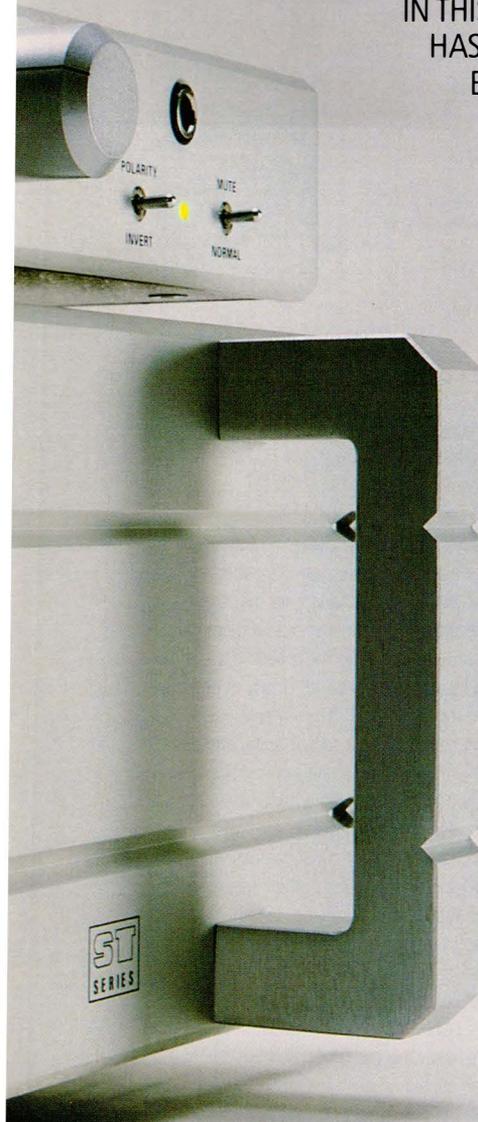
BRYSTON BP20	£1,325.00
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CREEK A43	£798.00
CYRUS ACA7.5	£700.00
CYRUS SMART POWER	£550.00
LINN KOLEKTOR	£495.00
LINN LK85	£495.00
MYRYAD MP100	£599.95
MYRYAD MA240	£999.95
THULE SPIRIT PR150B	£699.95
THULE SPIRIT PA150B	£899.95

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Rotel RCD-971 CD player
 Pink Triangle PT Export/
 SME309/Highphonic MC-A3 turntable
 ATC SCM20 loudspeakers
 Goertz speaker cable
 Custom interconnect cables.

MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

Mahler/Russian State Symphony
 Orchestra/Svetlanov - *Symphony
 no. 8 Pallavicino: Madrigals -
 The Consort of Musicke*
 Ian Dury and the Blockheads -
*The Bus Driver's Prayer
 and Other Stories*





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SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £2,850.00

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

“THERE’S A ‘SO WHEN DOES IT START TO GET DIFFICULT?’ ATTITUDE THAT CERTAINLY ENCOURAGES THE LISTENER TO PLAY JUST ONE MORE TRACK BEFORE BEDTIME.”

These base units in the Bryston range offer build quality that should last a lifetime.

Bryston is one of those manufacturers that straddle the pro/domestic divide with ease, and apparently little in the way of compromise to either camp. Like any rack-mounted kit, the power amp looks a bit industrial, but its modest depth makes it quite lounge-friendly. The preamp is very smart and the controls very business-like.

No studio power amp will get far with limited power, and the 3B-ST (the smallest in the range, mind) is rated at 120W per channel. In practice I got a comfortable 140W out of it and a rather scary 500W when running it as a bridged mono unit. It has unbalanced and balanced inputs, and output terminals that will accept two sets of cables if you want to do some bi-wiring. The preamp has eight line inputs (two of them balanced) and three outputs (one balanced) plus tape out. It also features switchable mono operation and polarity reversal, and a balance control, and employs relatively high-power output stages capable of delivering about half a watt – a few yards of cable will present it no problems at all. The pre-amp’s power supply is in an external box.

Everything is very solidly constructed: Bryston offers a 20-year guarantee on its amplifiers, evidently no empty boast since the company has been around for nearly twice that long. From an engineering point of view these are very fine amplifiers, a fact confirmed by their almost unmeasurably good performance – for instance, the 3B-ST has a flat

frequency response from practically DC to Radio 4 on Long Wave and exceptionally low distortion.

SOUND QUALITY

For all that, the Brystons wear their engineering lightly. Some studio amps of past decades were renowned for their ability to deliver vast power while leaving the listener musically unmoved. But your average studio owner is a lot more discerning these days, and amps such as these have risen to the challenge with a clarity and subtlety which is fully at home in high resolution domestic hi-fi. With practically any music, there’s an air of quiet competence, a sort of ‘so when does it start to get difficult?’ attitude that certainly encourages the listener to play just one more track before bedtime.

The key to this trick seems to be largely in the way the Bryston siblings combine a very even tonal balance with plenty of detail, from the quietest passages to the loudest. The delivery of detail, though, is so unassuming, self-effacing even, that one doesn’t always notice it consciously. What gives it away is when one suddenly starts humming along with an instrumental line that previously wasn’t even audible with most amplifiers. For instance, I happened to be editing a new recording while reviewing this group, so I listened to a few bits of it through each amp pairing. Only with the Bryston was I convinced that the pianist had actually played all the notes in a particularly dense and rapid passage. Clearly that kind of ability is as welcome in the home as it is in the studio.

Also group-leading is the bass, which has effortless depth and copes equally with the quiet heartbeats at the start of *Dark Side of the Moon* and some of the more extrovert moments later in the same famous album.

CONCLUSION

It’s hard to identify limitations in these amps, and I had to haul out some much more expensive units for comparison to find any. They aren’t cheap, but for the performance they offer they aren’t expensive either, and can be warmly Recommended for pretty much any demanding application.





CREEK P43R/A43

CONTACT 020 8361 4133 www.creekaudio.co.uk GUARANTEE 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £1,148.00

HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY

“THE MOST IMPRESSIVE AREA OF THE CREEKS’ SOUND IS DYNAMICS, WHICH IT POSITIVELY RELISHES”

It’s a bit of a wolf in sheep’s clothing, the little A43 – at least in the guise seen here. You see, it’s been set up as a monoblock unit, capable of putting out a steady 140W (possibly not quite forever, given the size of the heatsink, but certainly for any domestic duty). The review samples came factory-modified to that form, but it could also be achieved by using the plus and minus phase outputs of the P43 preamp if you have an active P43 with the relevant module installed. However, in standard form the P43 is a passive unit. The P43R is the remote control version (reviewed here) which needs power only to operate the remote control (which by the way only controls volume, not input selection), and further upgrades give it gain, an active headphone output and MM/MC phono input capability. Confused? You certainly will be when you find that the labelling on the back of the P43 assumes all options are installed, and one might wish that Creek had blanked some of it off. All the same, the concept seems to provide a neatly planned upgrade path. Six inputs and separate record and listen selectors are standard across the range.

As for the A43 power amps, Creek’s modification is slightly more sophisticated than just inverting the gain of one channel, but it comes to much the same thing in practice. The only drawback is that loads of less than eight ohms are likely to result in premature meltdown, so loudspeakers with a low *nominal* impedance must be avoided. Both units are tidily built with decent enough components given the modest price, and both comfortably meet Creek’s published specifications – except for output power, which is just fractionally shy of the claimed 150W. Power amp distortion remains low over a wide range of output, while the passive preamp avoids excessive treble loss with long cable runs by using a fairly low resistance volume control. Theoretically this loads down the output of equipment connected to it, but not to an extent that will worry any modern source components.

SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps ‘wolf’ in sheep’s clothing wasn’t quite right – the

sound certainly won’t howl at you or bite you in the ankle, though it can sure pack a punch. Maybe a brown bear would be a better animal metaphor – it’s generally quite peaceable and doesn’t get in the way, but you don’t want to mess with it. Actually the most impressive area of the Creek combo’s sound is dynamics, which it positively relishes: intimate moments stay that way, but big climaxes really get fired up without ever becoming frantic or hoarse. The result is a high degree of listener involvement, which as in all the best hi-fi products can transcend any minor weaknesses. Yes, there are a few of those: a touch of ‘sheen’ on orchestral violins, occasional deviations from absolute tonal purity, most obvious as a slight thinning of male voices, and to be brutally honest perhaps just a little more character than perfect hi-fi should have.

But it’s not the sort of character that ever gets in the way. Bass is strong, stopping just short of truly fruity, and treble is clean, clear and remarkably pure. All the difficult sounds, like muted trumpet or quiet plucked bass, are very much themselves and not some wishy-washy impersonation. And finally, there’s plenty of detail and all that usually implies – good stereo imaging, nice ambience, clearly defined textures.

CONCLUSION

This combo is one of the cheapest in a strong group, and still puts in a performance in the top three. All things considered it seems to be a clear Best Buy.

Creek’s answer to the need for more power is to bridge its A43 power amplifiers.



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★★★★★ Awards '99

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★★★★★ Hi-Fi Choice (sound quality)

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CYRUS ACA7.5/SMART POWER

CONTACT 01480 435577 www.cyrus.co.uk **GUARANTEE 2 YEARS**

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,250.00**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

Yet more tasteful Cyrus boxes: the usual metalwork, though this time in a silvery light grey rather than the more familiar black. And despite the modest dimensions of each unit, the company manages to keep the features a-coming, with no less than twelve pairs of phono sockets, a pair of XLRs (balanced output), a quarter-inch headphone jack and a socket for the PSX-R power supply upgrade. Admittedly it makes the phono plugs hard to grapple with once they're all inserted, but you can't have everything. Of the phono sockets, seven pairs are for line inputs, two for tape outputs and two for main outputs, with the last pair for MC-BUS system remote control in and out.

The power amp is likewise well featured, with two sets of outputs, PSX-R socket, remote control connection and 'chain' line outputs for connecting a second (remote or bi-amped) power amp. It can be bridged for increased power (in mono), though the increase is limited by the power transformer to about double the 60W stereo rating. Both units are very well built, with fairly conventional circuits that make use of both discrete transistors and a few integrated circuits. The aCA7.5 preamp has an electronic volume control, which gives excellent channel tracking and also offers programmable input sensitivity and balance. Although such devices can sometimes result in limited input headroom, Cyrus has cracked that problem and also avoided any excess noise so that the device's advantages are fully realised. Measurements on both units show well-controlled distortion and wide bandwidth. Note that the preamp has unusually low gain: with Cyrus's own power amps it's more than adequate but with some power amps one might occasionally wish for more on recordings at a generally low level.

SOUND QUALITY

These are certainly very civilised amplifiers. The choice of words there is deliberate: if you find the thought of 'civilised' hi-fi about as appealing as cold lamb stew you might not go a bundle on these amps. Although the tone is consistently even and honest, and dynamics do not seem unduly constrained, the sound cannot truthfully be said to 'kick arse' particularly, nor does it major on raw excitement. On the other hand there is much to praise, particularly the timbre of the treble, which is completely free from glare and screech and as such is exceptionally friendly to sounds such as orchestral violins, always a tricky point for any hi-fi components with any tendency to brightness.

Bass lacks a small degree of extension but is still solid and tuneful. Detail seems just a little veiled, and a certain amount of swapping between different makes of pre and power amps suggested that aCA7.5 may be the dominant factor here. Despite that, stereo imaging is particularly good, with really pinpoint positioning side-to-side and good front-to-back discrimination too. The only rather odd exception to that is in the case of solo voices with instrumental accompaniment, where the voice often seems to come unusually far forward.

CONCLUSION

This is probably not the all-time great combination for rock-'n'-roll or dance music, but it has many qualities which suit most types of classical music and, on the whole, much jazz too. In absolute value terms it's rather hard to assess, since the main appeal is clearly to those who own a Cyrus system, and at its price the preamp is not quite as value-rich as the power amp. But as a combo a Recommendation seems fair.

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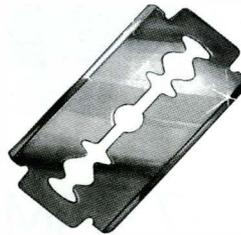
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LINN KOLEKTOR/LK85

CONTACT 0141 307 7777 www.linn.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 5 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£990.00**

Far and away the best-featured amp in this group, the Kolektor is the only one with a phono stage and the only one with tone controls, offering ten inputs and all sorts of useful extras. Surely most useful among these is the ability remember volume, balance and tone control settings for each input individually, but inputs can also be renamed and the phono input can be reconfigured as a line input. You can even, with an optional module, control the whole amp from your PC. Very high-tech. The construction is pretty high-tech too, with an eco-friendly switch-mode supply in the preamp (the power amp uses a conventional PSU), mostly surface-mount construction and, perhaps surprisingly, integrated circuit power modules providing the output stage in the LK85.

Given that list of features, it's no surprise that Linn has made use of an electronic volume control and electronic input switching and, as usual, that imposes limits on maximum input voltage, in this case only 2.7 Volts. That's fine for the majority of sources but a very few CD players (and certain combinations of phono cartridges and head amps) can exceed that – there really should be a little more headroom. That apart, operation seems trouble-free and the Kolektor's carefully tailored tone controls are very much of the useful sort. The proliferation of inputs is welcome, and three outputs facilitate multi-amping. The LK85 has automatic signal detection, going into standby if no music is played for a while. It's no vast powerhouse, but its 60W output should suffice in many cases and is delivered with low – not quite vanishing – distortion. The Kolektor also suffers a little distortion, due apparently to the input circuits, but both units offer low noise and nicely flat frequency responses.

SOUND QUALITY

Not so much in the way of seat-of-the-pants excitement here, on the whole, but a generally relaxed listening experience. The main rider to this is that detail seems all too often to be a touch vague, which can be frustrating at times. It depends a lot on what you're looking for: if you're not listening too

intently, the neutral balance, extended and solid bass and lack of overt grain make for a pleasing overall effect. It's really only when you start trying to hear all the inner details, the subtler timbres of individual instruments within a mix, that it becomes hard work.

These amps seem to like voices, both solo and massed, and achieved some lifelike results with them and good imaging too. Imaging seemed just slightly less clear on instrumental material. Major climaxes can be a bit undramatic, the sound seeming to slip from your grasp even as it gets louder – this is more obvious in particularly bright climaxes, i.e. those where cymbals dominate over drums! Ambience is quite good, but again if you listen carefully it often seems just a little curtailed.

CONCLUSION

It's hard not to reflect on how unlike the Linn of old these amplifiers are. Linn was the brand above all others that excited passions, be they pro or anti: these amplifiers don't really seem to be much about passion. They're beautifully turned out, very professionally presented, essentially competent – and ever so slightly bland. They never quite achieve either the effortless detail of, say, the Briston amps in this group, or the emotional touch of the best valve amps. As with the Cyrus units they're clearly aimed first and foremost at those buying a complete matching Linn system, but in the broader scheme of things, even at their admittedly modest price and with all the features too, they seem to fall just short of recommendable standard.

“THESE AMPS SEEM TO LIKE VOICES AND ACHIEVED SOME LIFELIKE RESULTS, AND GOOD IMAGING TOO”

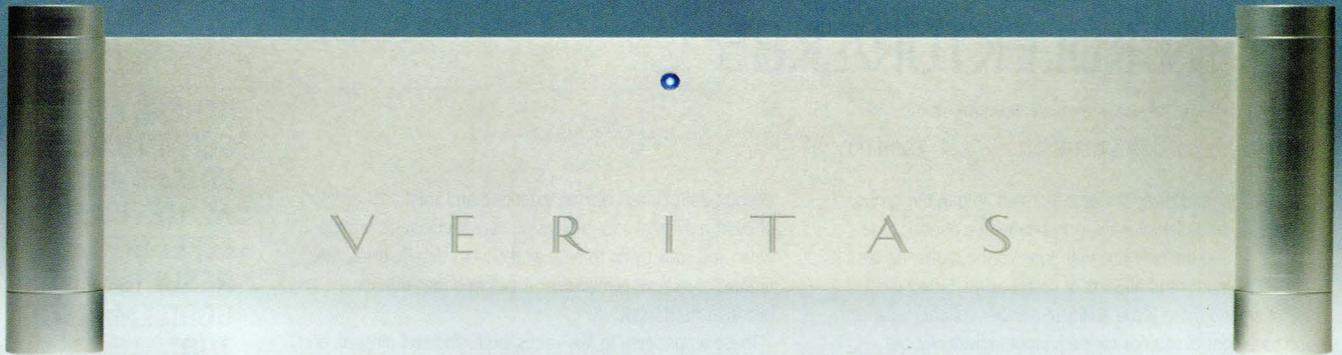
Linn's Kolektor preamp is the most flexible in this group and you'll not run out of inputs quickly either.



Question: Is this the best amplifier ever built?

Answer: oui, si, ya, nai,
ja, igen, yes,
haan, ken, evet,
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MYRYAD MP100/MA240

CONTACT 023 9226 5508 www.myryad.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 3 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,599.90**

HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

You'll want to use the remote control with this one – the illuminated knob on the preamp is a neat idea but awkward to handle. But that's about as much of a criticism as one can reasonably level at the looks and ergonomics of this no-nonsense duo. OK, the power amp is certainly a hefty brick, but that's the price you pay for high output power and the heatsinks and power transformer to sustain it. And it's a very well put together brick: assembly is very neat and tidy in both units, with clear evidence of thoughtful, cost-effective component selection too. The circuits are based mostly on discrete transistors, with a very few integrated circuits mostly handling functions like the DC servo, which allows frequency response to extend effectively to DC in practical terms (that is, without phase shift at low frequencies) while still blocking any actual DC offset.

The preamp offers four inputs plus a tape loop, but is uncommonly well provided on the outputs front, with two unbalanced outputs and balanced pair too. Correspondingly, the power amp has balanced and single ended inputs, plus 'loop-through' line outputs for bi-amping. The arguments for and against balanced operation are many and varied, but it's nice to have the option and it can certainly help when very long leads are used. Which brings up the question of cable driving ability by the preamp: there's lots of it, enough in fact to drive very sensitive speakers to at least background-music levels! It will certainly rattle headphones. In fact on the engineering front I couldn't really find any way to trip up either unit, and both put out a very impressive set of figures in the lab. If you really want to get heavy, the power amp can be bridged to give over 400W out with low distortion.

SOUND QUALITY

Within seconds of starting the first track through these amps, I wrote "very engaging and immediate" in my listening notes – and that's not a bad summary. But please don't think that the sound is only "immediate": it stands up very well to the long-term test too and with a most gratifying absence of grain or harshness it positively encourages protracted listening

sessions. There's just the slightest hint of fruitiness in the bass, which makes for a sound in which one can really wallow, especially when the volume is turned up. 150W (the actual maximum) is enough to make even my inefficient ATC speakers shift a fair bit of air, and a wide variety of discs, from Mahler to Pink Floyd, benefitted from it. At the same time, though, there's a terrific depth of detail to be heard, complete with very decent imaging (not quite the best of the group, but close) and very clean, neutral midband and treble.

At the other extreme, the subtler musical shades of a simple ballad or a string quartet can be just as convincingly portrayed, the sound assuming a mellow sweetness that is the exact counterpart to the clarity at higher levels. It's easy, too, to appreciate the acoustics and ambience of the recording venue in minimalist recordings, with a very smooth, natural decay to percussive sounds, and naturally-miked voices are well rounded and unforced.

CONCLUSION

Such smooth, clean performance won't be to everyone's taste, admittedly, and those who like their 'oh-so-hi-fi' aggressive dynamics will probably find themselves right out of phase with Myryad's approach. Too bad. But if you value real accuracy to the musical event, plus smart finish and impeccable manners, this duo should be high on your auditioning list. Firmly Recommended.

"THERE'S THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF FRUITINESS IN THE BASS, WHICH MAKES FOR A SOUND IN WHICH ONE CAN REALLY WALLOW"

Myryad's rear end may not be as sexy as the fascia but it's got everything you might need.



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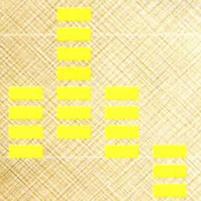
Both Prodigy and Ascent are immediately recognisable as Martin Logan products because of the peerless, room-friendly appearance, with the captivating see-through panels and furniture-grade finish. But it is sound as clear as the panels themselves which mark the Prodigy and Ascent as children of the Statement. Also available is the best-selling Aeries 2 for those purists with limited space.

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THULE SPIRIT PR150B/PA150B

CONTACT 01483 575344 www.thule-audio.dk **GUARANTEE** 2 YEARS

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,599.90**

A The exterior of these units is about as minimalist as it gets. There aren't any functional frills either, unless you count the 'standby' output of the pre-amp – this, Thule claims, may be used to put the power amp into standby mode from which sound quality revives faster than if the mains has been switched off completely. Actually the power amp is somewhat unusual in that each channel is effectively a bridged pair of amplifiers, and hence the black output terminal is just as 'live' as the red. Beware! External speaker switching systems, carelessly installed, can be the death of such amplifiers.

The preamp has six line inputs, including one balanced, and three outputs, again one of which is balanced. Naturally, the power amp has a matching balanced input. As with many modern amplifiers, practically all the components are surface-mount types, but one aspect of the circuit is surprisingly anachronistic: the inputs are all switched via a type of electronic switch which has been well and truly supplanted in most designs by more recent types with lower levels of distortion. As a result, there is a small but arguably not insignificant distortion residual at any volume setting (the power amp has its own sources of distortion, not drastically high but still well above state-of-the-art levels). Apart from that there is little remarkable inside either unit. The volume control is an electronic type, and that and the input switches limit input handling to 5V, which should be adequate for most duties. The internal heatsinks in the power amp are a bit marginal for continual high power operation, but normal music duty, even very loud (and with 150W available on each channel we're clearly talking *loud*), should be no problem.

SOUND QUALITY

Rather mixed results here, but its generally best in the bass and less assured in the treble. In fact the treble never quite manages to shake off a certain artificial quality, a kind of distancing which makes it harder to follow. It's a lot less worrying when the treble is plentiful and prominent, for instance in a bit of good ol' glam rock where the solidity of the bass and

the unflustered power delivery are welcome and the midrange and treble seem much better integrated. hEven there, though, there's some excess roughness in evidence especially on difficult sounds like hi-hat, which sounds less like a carefully crafted metal instrument and more like a sudden burst of electronic noise. Simpler textures fare less well – for instance solo voice and a few instruments, or a string quartet – and orchestral music seemed most affected, with the dreaded 'violin haze' rearing its ugly head and making the whole musical event that much less believable.

In view of that, it's perhaps not surprising to find that imaging is somewhat lagging behind also. Depth is not well portrayed in most cases and while there certainly is side-to-side information, it's a bit 'ping-pong' rather than seamlessly continuous. As for acoustic ambience, it's rather variable: solo piano seemed to do quite well, but delicate percussion instruments decayed rather fast and a familiar choir recording seemed rather closed in.

CONCLUSION

These are nicely presented amps and at first glance look like good value. All the same, there are limitations in their sonic performance (and testing each amp alone suggests that they must share the blame), confirmed by measurements, sufficient to constitute a serious drawback. They may be worth a try, but alternatives – such as the Myryads in this group – offer similar features at a similar price, and better sound.

"RATHER MIXED RESULTS FROM THE THULE COMBO: BEST IN THE BASS AND LESS ASSURED IN THE TREBLE"

Thule's PA150B contains a pair of bridged amps which makes it functionally similar to the Creek.



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CONCLUSIONS

RICHARD BLACK RUNS DOWN THE WINNING COUPLES IN THIS TWO-BOX AMP TEST

The high standard of this group are easy to see. Four of the six products received gongs, and each of those commended products has its own particular appeal. Of the ones that didn't make it, Linn's amplifiers only just missed the mark and certainly come top in the features stakes, being the only combo to offer a phono stage (perfectly respectable too). On the other hand, the other amps are not so completely devoid of inputs, and Creek and Bryston offer a phono stage as an option. For both Linn and Thule, however, the battle was lost largely on the detail and insight front. Neither is bad, but competition is fierce and they were simply outclassed.

There's been nothing particularly revolutionary in amplifier design in a while – evolution has been much more the order of the day. It's a pretty steady evolution, however, and a simple yardstick like comparing distortion performance of these amps and those I was recommending in reviews ten or so years ago, shows clearly that progress has been made. Yes, it's official: today's amplifiers are a lot closer to the ideal 'straight wire with gain', even if no two audiophiles can agree on what a piece of wire should sound like!

Do the amps here justify their price hike over the top rung of the integrated amp ladder? Perhaps the Cyrus has a harder time of that than the others, not least because its maker also produces some very nice integrated amps (with a bit less power, admittedly) in the exact same box. But this two-box solution offers not only more power, but also more refinement and subtlety.

As for the Creek, Myryad and Bryston offerings, their sheer

power puts them a cut above the vast majority of integrated amps, only a few of which crack the magic 100 Watt threshold. And even if you never use half that power, their authority and detail easily raise them above all but the most esoteric integrated examples. The choice between them is principally down to budget – you get what you pay for – and a few niceties of tonal character, but they all represent fine value.

“YES, IT'S OFFICIAL: TODAY'S AMPLIFIERS ARE A LOT CLOSER TO THE IDEAL 'STRAIGHT WIRE WITH GAIN'.”



PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE

	HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED	HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY	HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED		HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED	
MAKE MODEL	BRYSTON BP20/3B-ST	CREEK P43R/A43	CYRUS ACA7.5/SMART POWER	LINN KOLEKTOR/LK85	MYRYAD MP100/MA240	THULE SPIRIT PR150B/PA150B
PRICE	£2,850.00	£1,148.00	£1,250.00	£990.00	£1,599.90	£1,599.90
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Not cheap, but for the performance offered, not expensive either – warmly Recommended	One of the cheapest in the group, and one of the very best-sounding	Perhaps better with classical and jazz (and other Cyrus components), but still a strong combo	A little bland and uninvolved, and seemingly aimed mainly at Linn lovers	Smooth and clean performance with buckets of detail and accuracy – heartily Recommended	Mixed results, and bettered by other models in this test for a similar price
GUARANTEE	20 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	5 YEARS	3 YEARS	2 YEARS

Filter Tips

PAUL MILLER EXAMINES HOW TWO DIFFERING APPROACHES TO CD PLAYER ENGINEERING CAN GREATLY AFFECT THE FINAL SOUND.

“THE MARANTZ AND THE AUDIO NOTE PROVE THERE’S ALWAYS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN THE DIGITAL CAT”



Proving that there’s always more than one way to skin the digital cat, two favourite CD players from this month’s test could not be further apart in terms of design and implementation. I refer, of course, to the top iteration of Marantz’s popular CD6000 series and the ‘low cost’ execution of Audio Note’s “1x oversampling circuit” – the CD6000 OSE KI Signature (£500) and the Audio Note CDT Zero transport/DAC One 1x converter combination (£1,249), respectively.

The different engineering decisions favoured by Marantz and Audio Note in creating players to do essentially the same job are reflected in the two big plots, Figures 1 and 2. What these images mean and how they relate to the design and sound of these players is at the core of this month’s column, as we explore the subjective trade-off of one distortion versus another.

The Marantz is certainly the more conventional of the two – although, even here, there are no less than two of NPC’s SM5872 bitstream DACs (Marantz’s choice for years) in a new, dual-differential configuration. This technique reduces certain even-order harmonic distortions while improving the S/N ratio. Nevertheless, the increase in ultrasonic noise (1), caused by the noise-shaping action of the DACs, cannot be wholly disguised. Marantz also specifies its own HDAM (Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules) for both the analogue filter network and as a buffer to drive the player’s 2V output.

This is key in tailoring the ‘sound’ of the player because it guarantees a moderate 200 Ohm output impedance while suffering no additional distortion from the ultrasonic noise. Previously, I have suggested that high levels of inaudible ultrasonic noise may prompt an audible distortion from the partnering amplifier. The same is true of the op-amps used in CD player filter stages, though Marantz is one of the few to tackle this scenario with its discrete op-amp modules.

The consistent orange-brown colour (2) of the lower plot on Fig 1 demonstrates an unchanging level of noise right across the audio band. This plot is an expanded, overhead view of the first 25kHz (the first fifth)

of the 3D plot above, the bright ‘streak’ representing a sweep (3) from 20Hz to CD’s upper limit of 22.05kHz at -30dBfs. Any noise-like distortion within this area would be visible as brighter-coloured region(s). As it stands, the CD6000 OSE KI is evidently free of both noise-like and harmonic distortions (typically 0.006%) though, as we can see from the 3D plot above, what remains of a rippled stopband image (4) still escapes the combination of both its 8x digital filter and final analogue stage.

THE MIRROR CRACK’D

In *HFC 188 (Oasis of Sanity)* we discovered that, during D/A conversion, the original music signal is reconstructed along with a mirror image that is ‘reflected’ either side of the 44.1kHz sample rate and its harmonics. Almost all CD players use some sort of digital filter to remove these reflections and recover the music signal intact. The SM5872 DAC used by Marantz employs an 8x oversampling digital filter to increase the internal sample rate from 44.1kHz to 352.8kHz and push the first of these ‘images’ out way beyond the audio range. The fact that part of the image reflecting back from 44.1kHz is still visible (4) demonstrates that the process is not perfect.

The engine room of the digital filter creates an impulse (5) for each 16-bit sample, though its effectiveness or the steepness of the filter action, must be traded against the severity of the echoes that appear before and after the impulse. The pre-echo (6) is unnatural because it occurs *before* the musical event, but without it the filter simply would not work. In practice, the ‘echo’ is not *directly* audible, though by smearing the signal in the time domain either stereo imagery (or ‘timing’) could well be affected.

Nevertheless, 99.9% of CD players opt for an approach like the CD6000, while Audio Note represents just part of the disaffected 0.1%. Abandoning what most engineers see as a vital construct, there are, in fact, at least three specific sources of distortion that ‘collide’ within the DAC One 1x to produce a very colourful sound (Fig 2). AN’s traditional 18-bit DAC is unusual itself these days, but while the wide 104dB S/N ratio and very low 150psec of jitter are very impressive, the 3-4dB errors in low-level linearity are less so.

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THE LAB REPORT

Then there's the valve output stage set to a non-standard 3.5V (+4.9dB) at peak output where, depending on the load it's driving, harmonic distortion also increases from 0.04% (7) at -30dBFs to 1.25% at 0dBFs. From a digital point of view, where higher levels are coded with more 'bits' at lower distortion, this is the opposite of what's normally expected. Passive I-to-V conversion and filtering with a choke network, as in previous AN CD players, also increases the output impedance to 40 times that of the CD6000. Connected to a typical solid state amplifier (where input impedances are often well below the 47 kOhm norm) this tailors both the bass and treble response, leading to a sound that's rich in midband detail.

WARTS AND ALL

Finally, there's the fact that the AD1865 DAC is not prefaced by any sort of oversampling filter. On the one hand, the player's impulse response is accurate (8) and quite free of the artifact of either pre- or post-echoes. Subjectively, this is a firm plus in AN's favour, if only we could overlook the strident digital images (9) of the audio sweep (3) that reflect off the 44.1kHz sample frequency (10) and its harmonics (11).

Left exposed, these ultrasonic patterns are likely to cause intermodulation distortions within the partnering amplifier, which typically is unable to 'amplify' these spurious frequencies as cleanly as those at lower, audible frequencies. Then there's the question of what the loudspeaker, especially those equipped with metal-dome tweeters, will make of this extended HF output. Indeed, such distortions are clear enough from the 6111WA-based valve output stage used within the DAC One 1x itself as they radiate (12) right through the audioband. You may also notice that the inconsistent background colour of the lower plot on Fig 2 suggests that the nature of the DAC-One's noise also changes across the 0-25kHz range.

Each player embraces forms of distortion that are certainly not present in either the time or frequency domain of raw music. Both represent some sort of compromise, providing an illusion of the 'real thing' that's both colourful and entertaining. How you wish to enjoy the performance remains a matter of taste.

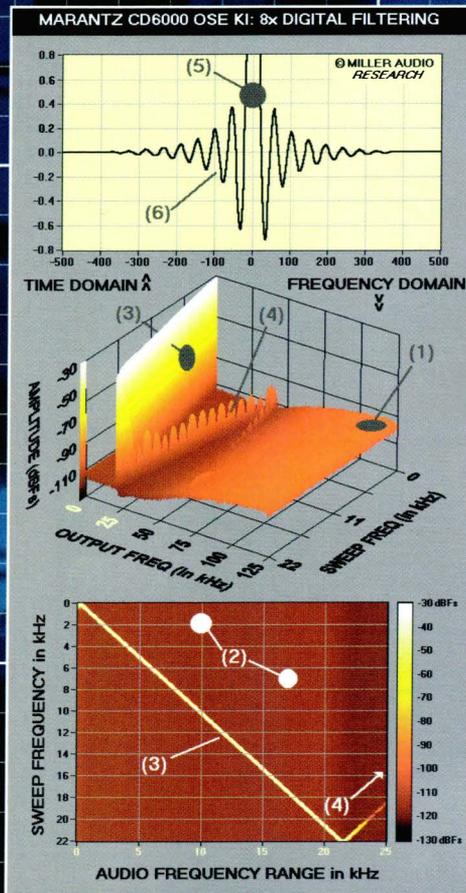


FIGURE 1
A digital filter adds an 'echo' but largely dismisses any digitally-derived 'images' of the music signal.

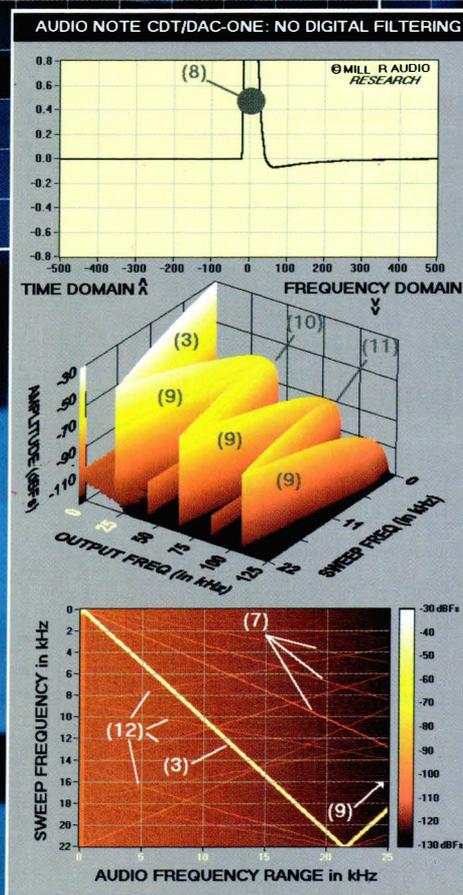


FIGURE 2
Losing the digital filter leaves digital 'images' to reflect back and forth from the CD sample frequency but leaves no footprint in the time domain.



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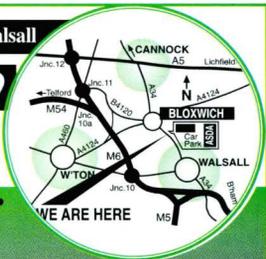
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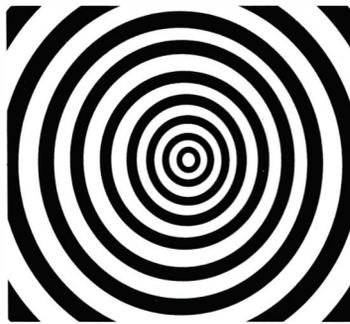
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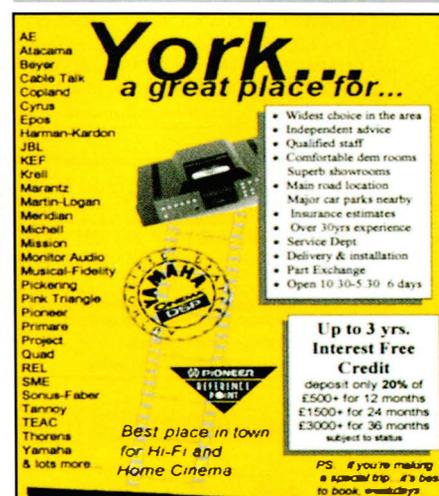
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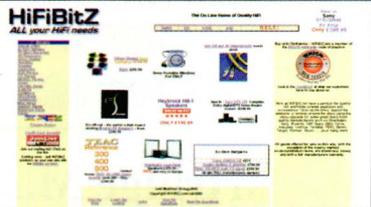
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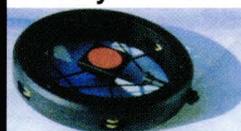
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THE DIRECTORY

THE *HI-FI CHOICE* DIRECTORY ROUNDS UP 1,000 PRODUCTS REVIEWED IN OUR PAGES. HERE YOU'LL FIND OUR OPINIONS ON THE BEST HI-FI COMPONENTS, ALONG WITH ALL THE INFORMATION YOU'LL NEED TO DECIDE WHICH ONES ARE RIGHT FOR YOU.

THE ART OF SYSTEM BUILDING

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT BRINGING TOGETHER AN IMPRESSIVE HI-FI SYSTEM? IT GOES A LITTLE LIKE THIS...

When it comes to getting together a great separates system, identifying decent individual components is fundamental, but it isn't the whole story. There is the business of system synergy to consider, which put simply means how well your components gel as a whole. The degree to which this can affect the end result tends to increase with price, thus budget components are relatively immune (a competitively priced Best Buy disc player, amp and loudspeaker pairing of almost any hue will combine to make a good system). When considering a purchase it's always good practice to listen to alternatives. It's the only way you can learn what different components sound like and find out which ones appeal to you.

So once you have shortlisted some components, the next step is to track down a knowledgeable dealer to take you through the options available. As well as getting the basic hardware right there is the question of which cables to use; should you stick with what comes in the box or pay extra for interconnects and speakers leads? Once you've established that the latter is the way, listen to a dealer's recommendations as to the right cable for your system.

And don't skimp on supports. The temptation is to use any old shelf or sideboard for system and speakers, but it's worth the outlay for speaker stands and proper system support.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

WIRING UP A SYSTEM IS REALLY QUITE STRAIGHT-FORWARD IF YOU FOLLOW A FEW BASIC GUIDELINES.

- When bi-wiring with speaker cable you will sometimes need to connect two plugs to one socket on the amp. If the amp has a binding post connection you can usually put one plug through the hole that goes across the post and one in the end. If this is not possible you may need to get both pairs of cables soldered into single plugs at the amp end.
- If a cable has an indication of directionality, i.e. if there are arrows on the casing, use these with regard to the way the signal travels. If there are no arrows you can try it both ways and see if you hear a difference or just route the signal in the direction of the writing on the cable jacket.
- In multichannel AV systems you may have the option of routing video signals via the amp, or you can bypass it. The former option gives easiest functionality if you use several sources but by bypassing you are removing a source of distortion and thus improving sound quality.
- Try to avoid lying mains cables across or beside signal cables as the field they produce can have a negative effect.
- Try to keep all cable runs as short as possible.

AWARD TAGS

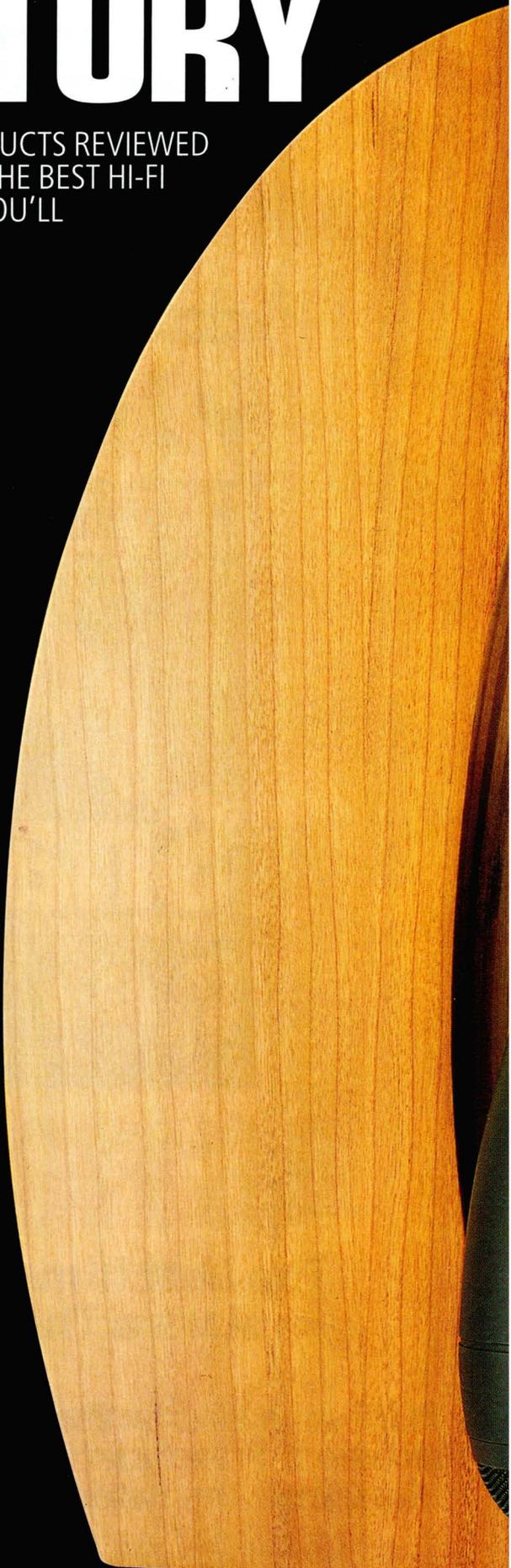
Whenever HFC reviews a group of like components we have the opportunity to give the best products a Best Buy or Recommended award. Best Buys are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price. Recommended products are first class components losing out to Best Buy status only because of a higher price or less competitive overall sound quality.

A third award, the Editor's Choice, is reserved for those products reviewed solo, such as you see in the First Impressions or High Performance sections. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.

BB HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY

R HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED

EC HI-FI CHOICE EDITORS CHOICE



GLOSSARY

5.1 CHANNEL AUDIO: Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects).

AC-3: Audio Code number 3, the compression algorithm that lies behind Dolby Digital.

BALANCE: Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS: The lowest three octaves of the audio band – hence 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz); 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz); and 'upper bass' the 80-160Hz octave.

BI-AMP: (sometimes tri-amp): Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE: (sometimes tri-wire): Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each driver can be driven by separate cable runs between the power amp and each driver.

CD-R: Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have more tracks added later until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW: Recordable/erasable and re-recordable CD, discs must be unfinalised before they can be re-recorded.

CLASS A: Operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to give lower distortion.

CLASS AB: Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING: An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK: Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal.

CROSSOVER: A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAC OR DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTER: The stage at which incoming 16-24 bit digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL DD (AC3): A compressed (10:1) digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC DPL: Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER: A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg main driver, tweeter.

DSP OR DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR: Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

DTS OR DIGITAL THEATRE SOUND: Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL: Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

FILTERS: Intrinsic to digital audio is the extensive use of filters, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FINALISE (CD-R): The process of copying the Table of Contents from its temporary area on CD-R and RW where it is ignored by CD players, to the final position where it is recognised by CD players.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE: With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier which is driving it.

JITTER: An insidious distortion specific to digital audio whereby the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio, carries a degree of uncertainty.

LINE-LEVEL: Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) give an output in the region of 1-2V, commonly referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are usually interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION: A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION: Reduction in data density by recourse to a psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MAIN DRIVER: A drive unit which reproduces both bass and midrange frequencies.

MASKING EFFECT: The audibility of distortion and/or quieter instruments in a mix depends upon the intensity of the music as whole.

MIDRANGE: The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

NETWORK: see Crossover.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE: A measure of resistance to alternating current, a low output impedance (say, below 100 ohms or so) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even when using long or unusual designs of interconnect cables. A high impedance, especially in conjunction with an amplifier with a low input impedance (some are as low as eight kOhms, although the standard is 47 kOhms) can result in audible treble losses.

PLL OR PHASE-LOCKED LOOP: A technique by which a clock of defined characteristics is used to generate a new clock at a different frequency from the original.

PRESENCE: Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE: A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SAMPLE RATE: The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY: The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W).

TOSLINK: The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications. The system includes dedicated connectors, transmitters and receivers.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET: the two main types of power semiconductor used in amplifier output stages. Differences are subtle and much argued over!

TREBLE: High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, eg above 3kHz.

TWEETER: Treble driver.

WATTS (PER CHANNEL): the watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output in many cases.

WOOFER: Bass driver.

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AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Affordable Valve Co. EL34	650	A real bargain on the face of it, but the sound is oh so soft, warm and old-valve. Too much of a good thing	4					40	202
	Alchemist Kraken APD6A	599	Compact, with Darth Vader styling, yet sound quality is meek and mild, despite strong midband dynamics	5	●				55	175
R	AMC 3025a	140	Surprisingly potent and easy on the ear, if not especially analytical — classic bargain-basement material, in fact	4	●	●	●	●	30	171
R	AMC 3050a	170	Tremendous value for money, and a full, big, if rather uninformative sound	4	●	●	●	●	45	167
BB	Arcam Alpha One	230	Rather like an Alpha 7 but without the remote control and what appears to be better sound quality still	6				●	35	186
	Arcam Alpha 7R	300	Decent, if slightly system fussy amplifier that no longer pulls all the right strings	5	●		●	●	45	196
	Arcam Alpha 8R	350	Workmanlike amplifier is well thought through, but is now beginning to show its age	5	●		●	●	50	208
R	Arcam Alpha 9	500	Not quite a match for the Alpha 9/9P combo, the solo integrated is nevertheless colourful and explicitly detailed	7			●	●	70	168
R	Arcam Alpha 10	800	Although not the best sounding in its class, the Alpha 10's modular nature demands it be taken seriously	5			●		100	181
BB	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
EC	ATC SIA2-150	1,984	An impressive sounding integrated amp with a dynamic, open and detailed sound	4			●		150	192
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12	190
BB	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40	181
R	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5			●		100	175
	Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5			●	●	60	175
R	Cambridge Audio A500RC	200	Solid valve, decent build and a surfeit of watts make this an attractive proposition, but it can sound slightly loose	6			●		50	196
R	Canary Audio CA-608	1,495	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4					24	202
R	Copland CSA8	945	Sophisticated yet transparent, this is one of those amplifiers that sounds good even when the gloss has worn off	5					60	168
R	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●		●		60	189
	Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●		●		35	193
	CR Developments CR324	569	Solid and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5					150	181
R	Cymbal CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
	Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but classy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	●				40	192
	Creek 4330SE	499	Somewhat perplexing, though always interesting, miniature audiophile amplifier, needs careful system matching	5			●		50	208
R	Cyrus 5	500	A enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7			●	●	45	205
	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6			●	●	60	196
BB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5				●	30	208
	Denon PMA-725R	350	Warm, bold, up-front presentation, but musically unexciting	5	●	●	●	●	97	157
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
R	Densen Beat B-100 MkII	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5					60	175
	Electrocompaniet EC1-3	1,000	Basically good, but too many rough edges to warrant recommendation	6			●		75	201
	Ezo Aria HE	449	Quick, detailed but aggressive and sometimes coarse sounding amp. Beautifully turned out, though	5				●	40	208
	Graaf Venticinque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
R	Harman/Kardon HK630	200	Sharp, clean but sometimes slightly raw-sounding budget amp	4	●		●	●	40	192
	Harman/Kardon HK690	530	Bold, dynamic amplifier with plenty of balls, but not the most sophisticated sound on earth	6	●		●	●	100	196
	Hofli Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	●				65	181
	Jolida 202	695	Well-built and technically accomplished, affordable valve integrated with subtle refined, if not quite gripping sound	4					40	168
	JVC AX-R5	200	Versatile, and lots of even-handed, articulate detail; but let down by superficiality	5	●		●	●	45	149
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
BB	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Highly capable amp with good treble, bass and fine detail	5	●		●	●	65	205
	Kenwood KA-5090R	300	Large, well equipped and high tech integrated, but TRAITR output still gives a harsh, unsubtle performance	5	●	●	●	●	65	171
	Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5			●		250	192
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23	196
R	Magnum IA120	265	Mirror finish amplifier with bold, colourful delivery, but needs careful system matching to avoid loss of clarity	6				●	65	171
	Magnum Class A SE	795	A MOSFET amplifier drawing inspiration from the world of valves, this is an erratically refined, detailed amplifier	5	●				80	175
	Marantz PM-6010 OSE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	●		●	●	50	196
	Marantz PM7D00	300	Lots of power for the price, but detail and subtlety seem to have been sacrificed	6	●		●	●	115	205
	Marantz PM6010 OSE KI Sig	400	Well-made, but somewhat ill-balanced amplifier that doesn't slot into most systems comfortably	6	●		●	●	50	208
	Marantz PM-17	900	Probably worth it for the WBT terminals and other build features alone, but this model doesn't sing as it should	6	●	●	●	●	60	181
	Marantz PM-17 KI-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	●	●	●	●	60	189
	Monrio Asty	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5					55	178
R	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6					75	208
	Musical Fidelity A3	849	Similar to the XA-100R internally, and a little too relaxed for some	5	●	●	●	●	85	196
R	Musical Fidelity X-A100R	999	Sings like a thoroughbred, but better with Mozart than Mötörhead	6	●		●	●	75	189
	MVL A2	970	Curiously designed, and curious sounding amplifier with Sound Sentinel circuits to address perceived weaknesses	9	●			●	100	201
	Myryad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	●		●	●	50	192
R	Myryad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6			●	●	60	175
BB	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	●	40	186
R	NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●	●	50	192
BB	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7			●	●	60	208
R	NAD 317	400	Build quality aside, the current improved version is a real powerhouse, but smooth and detailed too	6			●	●	80	196
	NAD 5300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and no shortage of finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●		100	189
	Opera Aida	795	Low power (in practice) minimalist integrated amp, but the mahogany wings don't help it to fly	5	●	●			60	201
	Pathos Classic One	995	Unusual looks and even more unusual electronic design, but compromised musical potential	5			●		55	202
R	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●		●	●	45	186
R	Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●		●	●	60	192
	Pioneer A07	999	Curious blend of high-end attributes and inconsistent, though undeniably detailed sound	5			●	●	80	175
R	Pracisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
R	Primare A-10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
R	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but ballsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●		70	181
BB	Primare A30.1	1,499	Superb build and aesthetics, and undemonstrably musical down to its smallest screw	6			●		100	189
	Rega Elex	398	Minimalist amplifier, derived from Elicit, is a little uninspiring, although at least it is well behaved	4	●				50	162

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Restek Fantasy II	1499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	6			●		100	189
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
	Rose Scion	615	Unique two-box integrated gives real subtlety and low level resolution, but the sound lacks scale and weight	5	●	●			65	168
BB	Rotel RA-931 Mk II	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●			●	35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MkII	275	Improved AR971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6				●	60	196
	Rotel RA-972	400	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6			●	●	90	205
	Sharp SM-SX100	10,000	The world's first stable, 1-bit digital amplifier is a technological milestone that should go from strength to strength	n/a					110	200
	Sharp SM-SX1	3,300	Jewel like 1-bit digital amplifier with limited power reserves but offering glimpses of sonic magic	5					50	211
R	Sony TA-FB740R	200	Very open and clear sound, comfortable with a wide range of musical styles	5	●		●	●	60	205
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208
	T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	●	100	189
	Tact Millennium Mk II	7,000	This digital class D amplifier represents a bold declaration on the future expansion of digital audio in the home	n/a			●		150	194
	TAG McLaren 60i	500	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6				●	60	189
	TAG McLaren 60iRv	1,000	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	●	60	184
R	Talk Electronics Storm 1	500	Good soundstaging and strong detail are provided by this unassuming and not especially powerful model	6					50	162
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			●		65	196
R	Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			●		50	175
	Teac A-E2000	180	Has the potential to cause significant damage in the budget amp sector once the wrinkles are ironed out	6					50	195
	Technics SU-A660 Mk 3	200	Plenty of wobble for the price, but the sound can be a tad coarse and lacking in fine detail	5	●			●	37	186
	Technics SU-A808	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
R	Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5					50	186
	Tube Technology Unisis Sig	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	●				30	202
	Yamaha AX-392	170	Standard budget fare, and it's easy to pick holes, but in undemanding surroundings it works creditably	6	●		●	●	60	192
	Yamaha AX-496	179	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough	6			●	●	85	208
R	Yamaha AX-492	220	Powerful, well equipped amplifier at an attractive price, offers powerful and engaging music-making	5	●		●	●	85	178
	Yamaha AX-592	280	Fine, middle ranking amplifier, with a detailed midband but performance declines at frequency extremes	5	●	●	●	●	100	171

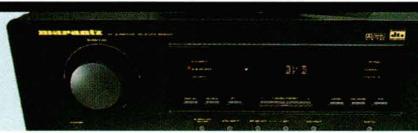
STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Amp Flux System 2	3,000	Three-box affair with a clean, spacious sound and plenty of slam. A touch steely, but undeniably potent	5			●	●	50	187
	Alchemist Kraken APD7A/8A II	1,098	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6					55	187
R	Arcam Alpha 9C/10P	1,000	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1					60	165
	Audio Note M Zero/P Zero	998	Neat shoe box-size components. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5					8	191
EC	Border Patrol 300B SE	3,995	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot	1					8.5	186
	Cary CAD 2A3SE	1,575	Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency	1					5	196
	Chord SPM-4000	8,500	Sound is as stylish as its appearance is bold. Probably one of the best amps you are likely to hear	1					410	202
	Copland CTA-301MkII/505	2,498	Sweet sounding, but never gets bogged down in audio treacle. Refined yet never over civilised	4	●				67	151
BB	Creek P43R/A52SE	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine value preamp.	6			●	●	100	187
	Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1					50	181
R	Crimson CS610/CS630	1,250	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited. Slimline monoblocks with grunt and finesse	3	●	●			100	187
	Cyrus Power	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-soft	1					50	183
	Cyrus aCA7/aPA7	2,694	Low feedback power amp design that's a positive departure from the transistor norm, preamp is functional but not as impressive	5			●	●	150	190
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●				191
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
EC	Gamut D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and timing (balanced only). Formerly Sirius	1					200	183
EC	Levinson 380/334	9,490	Preamp combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	LFD Mistral Linstage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	Miridian 502	1,295	Extremely sophisticated analogue controller with tremendous flexibility and a fast and tidy presentation	7			●			162
	Michell Orca/Alecto mono	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6			●		100	187
R	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1					100	155
	Moth 30 Active LS/60 Stereo	948	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp, power amp lacks finesse and control, however	4					60	165
	Muse Model Three	1,990	Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160 power amp	5			●			166
R	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness (tested with X-A200 power amp)	6	●		●			200
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
	Mryrad MA120	450	Based on M1120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with M1120	1					60	165
R	NAD 114	270	Beer-budget preamp which sounds focused, detailed and consistent	6	●	●		●		165
R	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power	7			●		200	200
	Naim NAC92R/NAP90	1,080	Upgradeable preamp uses proprietary socketry. Power amp from Nait integrated with some improvements	5			●		30	165
	Naim NAC102/NAP180	2,122	More of a 'character act' than a neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of subtlety	6			●		60	200
EC	Naim NAP500	10,000	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading edge definition	1					140	208
R	Rega Hal/Exon	2,194	Passive line stage dedicated to Exon monoblock power amps, bold outgoing, in-command sound	6	●	●	●		125	165
BB	Roksan Caspian Power	595	Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mind	1					70	183
	Rotel RC-971	150	Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music. (Tested with RB-971 power amp)	5				●		178
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia - precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●		201
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184
	Talk Hurricane 2L/Tornado 2	1,249	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6					65	165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●					188
	Technics SU-C1010	300	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less	6	●		●			200
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1					100	187

PHONO STAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Symphono	740	Slightly inconsistent balance mars the performance of this lively performer	0		●			201	
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character	0		●			189	
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough	0	●	●			189	
	Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	350	Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality	0		●			189	
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise	0	●	●			189	
BB	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, in any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage	0	●	●			189	
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too	0	●				189	
R	Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	0	●	●			201	
R	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer	0	●	●			201	
R	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	0	●	●			201	
R	QED Discaver DS-1	35	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refined	0	●				189	
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components	0	●	●			189	
	TAG McLaren PPA20	1,500	One of the best-equipped phono stages available. Resolution is excellent, but timing is marginally behind the best	0	●	●			187	
R	Tom Evans The Groove	1,500	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any LP	0	●	●			201	

AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P	2,500	Packed with a diversity of electronics that against engineering odds sounds extremely good	5			●	●	110	198
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema - what more can you want?	7			●	●	100	210
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multi-channel solution for music fans	4			●		N/A	201
	Cyrus AV5/SmartPower	2,650	Refined, detailed and attractive, but ultimately lacking in balls.	3			●		60	210
	Denon AVC-A150E	1,200	State of the art sound quality, a strong feature set and reasonable pricing. What more could you want?	11	●		●	●	125	210
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multi-channel sound	4			●	●	75	198
	Kenwood KRF-V7773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music.	10	●		●	●	120	210
BB	Marantz SR5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with 2-channel music and multichannel AV.	9			●	●	100	210
	Musical Fidelity HTP/HT600	3,998	A very well matched pairing with considerable musical talents	8			●		100	207
BB	NAD T760	650	More than adequate home cinema receiver that unusually doesn't muck up the music	7			●	●	60	210
	NAD T770	1,000	Lacks both transparency and subtlety while the omission of dts will be a drawback for some at this price	5			●	●	90	198
	Nakamichi AV-10	1,000	A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set-up with a civilised and subtle performance	4			●	●	140	198
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle.	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSA-E08	1,300	THX circuitry gives home cinema material a boost, but this is not an obvious first choice for music.	10	●		●	●	100	210
	Pioneer VSX-908RDS	1,000	A flexible heavyweight AV receiver whose sound is just a little too stodgy and lacking in crispness	4			●	●	80	198
	Primare P30/A30.5	3,700	No 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD but capable of almost uncomfortable realism with real solidity and drive	8			●	●	120	210
R	Roksan DSP/5 ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels.	4			●	●	80	210
R	Rotel RSP-985/RPB-985 MkII	2,400	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	3			●	●	130	198
	Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	2,300	Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	5			●	●	110	198
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all rounder 9	9			●	●	100	210
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	1,600	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210

CABLES



SPECIFICATIONS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction		●	●		●			188
	Audio Note AN-A	18	Not especially impressive: warm but well-rounded balance that restricts 'air' but is quite clear	●		●		●			108
	Audio Note AN-C	35	Neutral but lacking in subtle texture and unable to distinguish fine detail					●	●		131
R	Audio Note AN-S	99	Up-beat and enthusiastic sound with satisfyingly deep and grumbly bass	●				●			131
	Audio Note AN-V	179	15 individually insulated silver strands make up this very clean and dynamically unchallenged cable	●		●			●		131
	Audioquest Sidewinder	40	Suppresses the sound. At this price it's a disappointment		●		●	●			211
R	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail	●		●		●			200
R	Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	●		●		●			211
R	Cable Talk Studio 2	65	A first-class performer from tonal, dynamic and rhythmic standpoints	●		●		●			160
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price		●	●		●			176
R	Cambridge Audio Studio Ref	40	Dynamic cable with strong soundstaging and only a slight lack of detail		●	●		●			160
	Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments	●		●		●			188
R	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●		●		●			211
	Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces	●		●		●			176
	Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance	●		●		●			188

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Connections Midas HD	39	Canary yellow cable with excellent plugs and an open sound. Slight treble glare	●		●		●			160
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	●			●				200
BB	Ecosse The Composer	29	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price		●	●		●			211
	Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)	●			●	●			176
	Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness			●		●			176
R	Insert Audio Image 5.1	85	Very good detail and imaging; perhaps a touch bass-light		●			●			200
BB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●		●			211
	Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though	●		●		●			176
	Ixos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price	●		●		●			200
BB	Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble — excellent performance all round	●		●		●			188
R	Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed	●		●		●			176
R	Moth Ley Line Black	100	Offers a full sound, neutral yet very solid and confident in delivery. Expansive imaging retains music's energy	●		●		●	●		108
	Moth Ley Line Grey	200	Detailed, but there's a sense of distance between music and listener: vocals are coarse rather than liquid	●		●		●	●		108
	Nordost Black Knight	60	Flat black cable that is distinctive but slightly coloured — but not in a wholly negative manner	●		●		●			160
R	Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music	●			●	●			188
R	Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable	●			●	●			176
	Precious Metals SS35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic		●	●		●			188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy		●	●		●			211
R	Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price		●	●		●			211
	Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness		●	●		●	●		176
R	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables		●	●		●			211
BB	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value			●		●			176
R	QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	●		●		●			188
R	QED Qnex Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds	●		●		●			200
	Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes	●		●		●			188
	Silvertone Ex-Static	35	Pleasantly unfatiguing and competitively priced cable that lacks detail and insight		●	●		●			160
BB	SonicLink Silver Pink	35	Dynamically sensitive and muddle-free. We're unsure about the flesh-coloured finish, though...	●		●		●	●		160
R	SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integration	●		●		●			176
	SonicLink Lilac	65	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	●		●		●			188
	SonicLink Violet	85	Better bass than treble — a little dry in the upper octaves	●		●		●			200
R	Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss		●	●		●			176
R	Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable		●	●		●			188
	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable	●		●		●			200
BB	Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas — nothing to criticise	●		●		●			188
R	Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plummy offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results		●		●	●			188
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material	●			●	●			200
BB	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value	●		●		●			200
BB	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent		●	●		●			188
R	van den Hul Source HB	65	Price for 0.8m. Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness		●	●		●			160
R	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack	●		●		●			200

DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound		●		●	●		E	207
	Chord Optilink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslink leads				●	●		O	207
R	Chord Prodac	50	Price for 0.6m length. Lively detailed treble, drives music along confidently with no hint of fizz		●		●	●		E	131
	Ixos 1051-100	39.95	Plenty of bass, and detail seems good, but there's a loss of involvement		●		●	●		E	207
	Moth Leyline Datalink	140	A thin, coaxial version of Leyline Black with a rather hard and unforgiving character. Too expensive		●	●		●		E	108
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced		●		●	●		E	207
R	Ross OP004	19.99	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value				●	●		O	207
	SonicLink Digital Optical	30	Possibly slightly more detailed than other opticals, but still no match for a decent electrical digital link							O	207

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Richard Black, Hi-Fi Choice, Issue 203, June 2000. ★★★★★

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SYMMETRICAL
COAXIAL
STRANDED
SOLID CORE
COPPER
SILVER
DIG CABLE TYPE
ISSUE NUMBER

DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	SonicLink Green	60	Spacious, positive and engaging if a bit over-crisp at times — very compelling, however		●			●	●	E	131
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes		●		●		●	E	207
R	van den Hul Optocoupler	49.95	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types							O	207
BB	van den Hul The First	140	Exceptionally natural albeit slightly cautious compared to some. Plenty of subtle information and integration		●	●				E	131

LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●		●			●		183
R	Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical			●		●			133
R	Audio Note AN-L	29.50	Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel, which was happy to accept its foibles	●			●		●		133
R	Audio Note AN-SP	150	A calm and civilised presentation, very quiet in the way it reveals subtle low level detail. Great poise and clarity	●			●		●		109
R	Audioquest Slate	15	Capable across the board, with just the smallest degree of dryness, but very listenable				●	●			203
R	Bandridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings			●					157
R	Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	●		●		●			168
	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained					●			157
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices	●				●			203
	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass	●		●		●			192
	DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension	●			●	●			168
R	Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	●		●		●			192
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area	●			●	●			203
BB	DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire				●	●			133
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere - one of the best cables available all round	●			●	●			203
	Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	●			●	●			168
	Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value				●	●			157
R	Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative				●	●			157
R	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	●			●	●			168
R	Hitachi LC-OFC	7	Very crisp, very clear and very confident. In the right system would be very expensive to better	●			●	●			109
BB	Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent	●			●	●			203
R	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant — though only slightly	●			●	●			192
BB	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right		●		●				192
R	Kimber 4VS	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	●		●		●			183
R	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	●		●		●			168
BB	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●		●			203
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unobtrusive music — can be dry and edgy				●	●			183
	Naim NAC A5	5.5	A 'dinosaur of a cable', this stiff wire rod doesn't belong outside Naim systems, where it works a treat				●	●			109
	Nordost Octava	3	Fair bass but confused treble and some coloration	●			●	●			168
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-her-face', and bass is not always even	●			●	●			92
	Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey-sounding — strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, too				●	●			133
R	Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	●		●		●			183
R	Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass — if slightly bright at times				●	●			133
	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	●			●	●			183
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	●			●	●			203
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board				●	●			203
	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound — but too messy and bloated for its own good	●			●	●			183
	Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	●			●	●			157
	QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel				●	●			57
BB	QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●			●	●			192
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding				●	●			168
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging: good, but not the best at its price	●			●	●			203
	SonicLink 5300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces	●			●	●			168
R	SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced				●	●			157
R	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plenty of bass	●			●	●			203
R	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together				●	●			157
	SonicLink AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details	●			●	●			192
	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style	●			●	●			203
	Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	●			●	●			192
BB	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	●			●	●			183
R	Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass — perhaps a touch of treble restriction	●			●	●			183
R	Supra Ply 3.4/5	7.95	Good in all areas with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●			●	●			203
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues — and very minor vices — across the board	●			●	●			183
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	●			●	●			203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●			●	●			203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor				●	●			203
	van den Hul The Clearwater	7.99	Despite its evocative title, the Clearwater turns out to be a disappointingly murky-sounding cable				●	●	●		109
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	●			●	●			203

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Cleaudio Accurate Power Gen	1,090	Compact and beautifully finished unit that offers positive sonic benefits that justify the price								206
R	Lynwood Electronics Mega Power	295	Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass								206
R	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanliness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality								206

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound								206
BB	Russ Andrews KimberPower Block	350	Improved version that elevates music to a cleaner and more three-dimensional experience with greater stereo imagery								206
	Russ Andrews The Purifier	250	More ambitious version of the Silencer that gives a cleaner, quieter background, allowing more low level detail								206
BB	Russ Andrews Silencer	40	A cost effect solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy								206
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise								206
R	Trichord Research Powerblock500	300	Isolation transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound								206

CASSETTE DECKS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Aiwa AD-F450	120	Basic but well-designed deck. Astonishing value; only the poor metering gives the game away	●								136
BB	Aiwa AD-WX727	170	High-class twin for those who want bells, whistles — and music	●								146
	Harman/Kardon TD420	250	Minor inconsistencies detract from a well-conceived, minimum features design	●								140
	Harman/Kardon TD450	350	Draw loader with poor tape navigation features; good midband but shallow bass	●								164
BB	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●								158
BB	JVC TD-V662BK	270	Assured, clean and agile-sounding recorder, if not quite the most refined in its class	●								146
	JVC TD-W718	300	Twin deck. Good for creative live recording, but no timer standby. Respectable performance	●								171
R	Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass	●								171
	Marantz SD455	170	Works well as a single deck, especially on replay, but dubbing at high/low speed compromises sound	●								184
	NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise	●								158
	NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use	●								171
	Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD	●								195
R	Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with 3 heads and dual capstan transport	●								146
R	Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●							164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●								171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest 3-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●								184
BB	Technics RS-AZ6	200	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7; clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head	●								164
BB	Technics RS-AZ7	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art	●								158
R	Yamaha KX-490	200	Electrifyingly transparent and capable deck whose only flaw is a trace of audible wow and flutter	●								158
R	Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●							171

CD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMB ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acurus ACD11	899	First-rate if costly player, which combines a delightful transparency with an uncontrived naturalness	●									166
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	1,850	Seriously customised Pioneer with extraordinary resolution and world beating imaging and bass	●									165
	Advantage CD15	3,995	A CD player of some stature — what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●								193
	Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●									190
R	Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined, articulate yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●									169
	AMC CD8A	150	Has balanced output, but is otherwise rather grey and unremarkable	●									172
BB	AMC CD9/DAC8	200	Beer-budget two-box system (player plus DAC) is smooth, attractive and easy on the ear	●									179
	Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●								178
BB	Arcam Alpha 7SE	300	Sharper, clearer Alpha 7 SE, and more affordable than before	●									207
R	Arcam Alpha MCD	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	●									178
BB	Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●									176
R	Arcam Alpha 9	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	●									188
R	Arcam FMJ CD23	1,100	World class presentation allied with innovative technology to deliver an engaging standard of music making	●									206
	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●									191
	Audio Note AN-CD1	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	●									188
	Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system fussy	●									195
	AVI S2000MC2	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-ye-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	●									176
R	AVI S2000MC Reference	1,399	Lean, dry, high resolution player, built to outlast most of us. A fine performer in a sympathetic system	●									169
	Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●									194
	Cambridge Audio D100	120	Hard, clangy and coloured sounding, and with suspect control logic	●									200
BB	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use	●									202
R	Copland CDA 266	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●									176
	Copland CDA 289	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●									194
R	Symbol CDP12	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●									176
R	Cyrus dAD1.5	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●									191
R	Cyrus dAD3 Q24	900	Bold, lean and lively player demands sympathetic system matching	●									200
R	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●									191

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems	●					●	●			200
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●		●			●	●			179
	Harman/Kardon HK720	230	Sometimes aggressive and ill-disciplined player, but at least it's well built	●					●				202
R	Harman/Kardon HD740	300	Powerful but subtle and involving player: welcome back, Harman/Kardon	●					●				191
	Harman/Kardon HD760	500	Sophisticated internally, but mildly disappointing when treading the boards in anger	●					●				195
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	●		●	●						206
A	Kenwood DVF-3030	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features	●		●			●	●			207
	Kenwood DP-4090	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music — and has CD Text too	●		●			●	●			172
	Kenwood DP-5090	300	Disappointing senior brother to the excellent DP-4090, but surface interface is good	●		●			●	●			179
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	800	Kenwood's first DVD-A player suffers from a mild compression of dynamics resulting in a polite yet matter of fact sound	●		●	●	●	●		●		206
	Marantz CD5000	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times	●		●			●	●			202
	Marantz CC3000	150	Ragged sounding multisc player, but it is cheap and well equipped	●					●		●		204
	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	●					●	●			207
	Marantz CD6000 OSE	300	Superbly constructed, slightly emasculated sounding, but smooth and articulate	●		●			●				200
R	Marantz CD-17K1 Sig	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland	●					●				176
R	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new found bounce in its step	●		●	●	●	●				206
R	Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●					●	●			194
EC	Marantz SA-1	5,000	The brand's first SACD player is a stunning machine that's equally as strong with conventional CD	●		●		●				●	208
R	Meracus Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics — but it's not cheap	●					●				169
	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new DIA chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●		●			●				176
	Monrio Asty	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	●					●				200
	Monrio Privilege	995	Costly and well-engineered, but ultimately rather heavy-handed and dull, if refined player	●					●				166
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●		●			●				184
	Musical Fidelity A3 CD	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of EHF detail	●		●			●				200
	Myryad T-10	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings	●					●				184
	Myryad T-20	600	Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems	●					●				195
	Myryad MCD500	1,300	Well-built, attractive player, showing much promise, but can be a little heavy-going on audition	●					●				176
R	NAD C520	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●					●				202
R	NAD 524	250	Clean, clear and essentially musical player in the NAD mould	●					●				191
	NAD 523	250	Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test; so was the absence of a digital output	●					●			●	204
	NAD C540	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression	●					●				200
R	NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	●	●	●		●					195
	Naim CD5	1,125	Smoother than the CD3.5 but retaining the Naim character of excellent drive and attention grabbing busyness	●					●				207
R	Naim Audio CD2	2,000	Provides bags of detail with a solid stereo focus but not all the romanticism we know to be possible	●					●				163
R	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●		●			●		●		204
EC	Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●					●				188
R	Onkyo DX-7222	150	Competitive following recent price cut, and on the whole a strong performer musically	●		●			●				200
	Onkyo DX-7511	300	Earthbound mid-price CD player fails to excite	●		●			●	●			207
	Parasound C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●					●				184
	Philips CD751	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie	●					●				172
	Pioneer PD-5507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●		●			●				191
	Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●					●				188
	Revox Exception E426	2,250	Very stylish with a light, agile sound that extends superbly and has fine timing	●				●					182
	Roksan Kandy	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes	●		●			●				200
R	Roksan Caspian	895	Solid, articulate, and fundamentally well-engineered player, but with some subtle low-level limitations	●					●				169
	Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped down RCD-971 — buy the original	●					●				191
	Rotel RCD-971	450	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●					●				184
	Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●		●			●				163
	Sharp DX-SX1	2,700	Stylish player with a slightly forward but extremely nimble sound. Connects to matching digital amp via dedicated umbilical	●		●			●	●			211
R	Sony CDP-XE330	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable	●		●			●	●			202
	Sony CDP-XE530	140	Well equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight	●		●			●	●			200
	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●		●			●				195
R	Sony SCD-XB940	550	First mainstream SACD player that easily outstrips comparable CD players at this price	●		●	●	●	●			●	206
EC	Sony SCD-777ES	1,700	Beautifully built SACD player that looks like a bit of a CD player bargain	●		●			●			●	198
EC	Sony SCD-1	2,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but there's not much competition and limited software as yet	●		●		●				●	194
	T+A CD1210R	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	●		●			●				188
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1	550	Entry level upgradeable Talk Electronics player sounds slightly muted	●					●				200
	Talk Electronics Thunder 2	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradable in various ways	●					●				191
R	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and availability of a complete upgrade path make this a good long term proposition	●					●				195
R	TAG McLaren CD20R	1,249	Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence — recommended with caution	●					●				188
	Teac CDP-3450SE	200	For once a budget player where gadgets take second place to respectable, budget amp-friendly sonics	●		●			●				166
	Teac VRDS-8	600	Superb build quality is matched to good, but not exceptional sound quality	●		●			●				184
	Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	●		●			●				176
	Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	●		●		●	●				195
	Technics SL-PG390	90	It's very cheap. Very, very cheap	●		●			●				202
	Technics SL-PS7	200	Strong, but ultimately rather opaque and hard-sounding, high tech CD player	●		●			●				207
R	Technics SL-MC7	300	Maximum storage capacity for a minimum price, and presentable sound too (multisc)	●		●			●		●		204
	Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	●					●				188
	Trichord Genesis	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority	●					●	●			169
	Trichord Revelation	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●					●				166
	Tube Technology Fusion MkII	1,350	Improvements over the original model but still remains too inconsistent for its own good	●					●				206
	Tube Technology Fulcrum	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	●	●	●			●				194
	Wadia 830	3,000	Envelope busting dynamics, power and imaging in a rather unexciting box (digital volume control)	●					●				183
EC	Wadia 860x	7,450	If you want to discover what CDs are really capable of, this has few peers	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			199
	Yamaha CDX-493	180	Open and lively, but this player is also messy and lacking resolving power	●		●			●	●			191

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Yamaha CDX-596	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW	●	●				●	●			207
	Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●	●				●	●			184
	YBA Spécial	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid										195
R	YBA CD 1a	3,895	A remarkably fluid and graceful sound – one of the best we've heard below £5,000	●									194

CD TRANSPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio Note CDT Zero	399	Neat shoe box size transport sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with DAC Zero)	●									191
	Linn Karik	1,850	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●		●							144
	Roksan Attesa ATT-DP3	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material			●							162
	Teac VRDS-T1	550	Superb quality engineering is mated to tidy and composed sound. (Tested with D-T1)	●	●								144
	Theta Carmen	3,299	A well equipped and extremely upgradable CD/DVD transport. Right now, the finest of its type	●									203
	Theta Data Basic II	2,397	Uses a Philips CDM9 Pro mechanism and works a treat with more lively DACs	●									130
	Thorens TCD2000	999	Lively presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble. (Tested with TDA 2000 DAC)	●	●								162
R	Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	●	●								162

DACs

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alchemist TS-D-1	300	24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit/96kHz DVDs										187
	Audio Note DAC Zero	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)										191
	Audionote DAC 5	18,500	Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price										203
EC	dCS Delius	5,000	State-of-the-art resolution with considerably greater flexibility than anything else, hard to beat	●	●		●	●		●		●	207
	dCS Purcell	3,500	The first upsampler on the market adds significant depth and increased bass resolve with a suitable DAC	●	●		●					●	207

DVD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVA COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Denon DVD-1500	400	Colourful and engaging (if lightweight) sound, with excellent picture quality	●	●								207
	Denon DVD-3300	999	Similar to the slightly cheaper Technics DVD-A10: listenable and clear, but lacking a little excitement	●	●							DS	211
R	Denon DVM-3700	1,000	One of the first multi-DVD players, and a fine all rounder, with average to good pictures, and better sound	●	●						●		204
EC	Denon DVD-5000	1,600	The first DVD-V player that ain't bad as a CD player. A fine musical device	●	●								187
R	Encore DV-450	200	Superb value for money, though mainly of interest to the videophile on a shoestring	●	●								207
	Hitachi DVP-505	300	DVD player has rather dark, unexpansive sound, but good picture quality	●	●								207
	JVC XV-D701	500	Good video player, but rather undeveloped musically – CD Text is neat, though	●	●								198
	JVC XV-523	280	Looking impressive on screen, but lacks resolution and consistency when pushed hard	●	●								207
	JVC XV-515GD	300	Musically soft as a baby's bottom, and as surprising as yesterday's news	●	●								202
	JVC XV-D723	500	The first DVD-A player is more of a DVD-V with A added rather than the next generation of hi-fi	●	●								205
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	900	Kenwood's entrée into DVD-A is a multi-disc machine with great potential (pre-production)	●	●								206
R	Kenwood DVF-9010	1,000	DVD player with brilliant picture and clean, lively sound	●	●								190
	NAD T-550	500	Soft-centred but likeable player in the classic NAD mould	●	●								202
	Nakamichi DVD-10	800	Not the most compelling model in the resurrected Nakamichi line-up	●	●								198
	Panasonic DVD-RV40	350	Modestly equipped, gives good pictures, but is musically unengaging	●	●								207
	Panasonic DVD-A360E	580	Powerful equipment, and unthrottled digital output notwithstanding, sound quality is modest at best	●	●								198
BB	Philips DVD750	400	Clever DVD with CD-R/CD-RW compatibility and surprisingly keen sound	●	●								198
BB	Pioneer DV-525	399	Lean, clean and lively sound quality. CD-R and 24/96 compatible, too	●	●								202
BB	Pioneer DV-626D	450	Superbly equipped, and more than respectable sound quality	●	●								198
	Philips DVD960	530	DVD-V player has strong sound quality and good, though slightly washed out, pictures	●	●								207
BB	Pioneer DV-717	550	Superb DVD player with good picture quality and which really knows how to play 24/96 discs	●	●								190
R	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possess a strong picture quality and decent CD player	●	●								206
	Samsung DVD-907	500	DVD player with below average picture, and lacklustre sound quality	●	●								190
	Sony DVP-CX850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	●	●							●	204
R	Sony DVP-S7700	950	Powerfully endowed player offers articulate and believable sound	●	●								198
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●	●								210
	Sharp DV-760	500	Reasonable picture, but sonically brings new meaning to the term rough and ready.	●	●								202
	T+A DVD 1210R	1,699	Operationally quirky but an excellent DVD player that does a decent if not spectacular job with CD	●	●								210
	Teac DV-1000	400	Blowsy, and occasionally astringent sounding, but otherwise straightforward and reasonably priced	●	●								198
EC	Technics DVD-A10	900	The best Technics CD player also plays both varieties of DVD with some skill. A little cool sounding but in a class of its own for the moment	●	●							●	210
	Theta DaVID	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricey for a DVD transport, but worth it	●	●		●						191
	Toshiba SD-100E	250	Mainstream player offers so-so features, performance and pricing	●	●								207
	Toshiba SD-3109	380	Defocused and soft-edged, this is more attractive for its picture than its sound quality.	●	●								202
	Toshiba SD9000	800	Costly, high tech player with stunning pictures and crisp, slightly lightweight sound	●	●								198
	Yamaha DVD-S795	529	Fare price, and an unconstrained digital output, but otherwise unexciting	●	●								198

DIGITAL RECORDERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MINIDISCS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	FORMAT	PORTABLE	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XM-448	220	An hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	MD		●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	MD		●	●	205
R	Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	MD		●	●	191
	Marantz CM635	500	CD player and MD recorder in one box: a practical idea but sound and features don't really match the asking price	MD		●	●	191
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Midi-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	MD		●		177
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that deserves its recommendation due to price	MD		●	●	205
R	Pioneer MJ-D707	250	A handy set of features for the price, though sound is not outstanding	MD		●	●	191
	Sharp MDR3H	300	Nifty machine combining a 3-disc CD changer with a MD recorder. Sound on both is rather below par, though	MD		●	●	184
R	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	MD		●	●	205
	Teac MD-8	600	Womanlike choice, but sound-wise it is middle ranking, despite the price	MD		●	●	205
	Yamaha MDX-793	300	Nice machine to use and has some useful features, but sound quality a little wanting	MD		●	●	191

CD RECORDERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	FORMAT	PORTABLE	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, ratty build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	CD-R(W)		●		205
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
	Marantz DR700	600	Dearer than Philips and Traxdata equivalents, with apparently only a smarter front panel to show for it	CD-R		●	●	191
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
BB	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
R	Pioneer PDR-509	300	Straightforward design and excellent recording properties that are slightly dulled by the replay chain	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
R	Traxdata Traxaudio 900	399	Identical to Philips and Marantz models: it makes bit-perfect copies of CDs and has perfectly acceptable replay	CD-R		●	●	191

HEADPHONES



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	MASS (g)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AKG K100	36	Leather clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		●		●		190	100	●	205
	AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight			●	●		230	100	●	194
	AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt			●		●	240	600	●	186
R	AKG K1000	700	One of the best dynamics on the market, hooks directly into speaker outputs			●	●		270	1200		99
R	Audio Technica ATH910PRO	80	The closed back 910s are an improvement on the 909s, with a nice rhythmic quality rarely found		●			●	280	40		55
R	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250	66		194
R	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phone			●		●	250	60		186
	Beyer DT311	50	Uncharacteristically tight, unrefined sound quality from this otherwise well engineered 'phone		●		●		124	40	●	133
	Beyer DT411	63	A reasonable but not very thrilling headphone that doesn't really offer enough at the price		●		●		120	250		111
	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass			●	●		210	40	●	194
	Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent			●	●		210	40	●	186
	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite			●	●		245	250	●	205
R	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor			●	●		200	250		172
BB	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads			●	1/2		295	250	●	186
	Beyer DT100	160	Rugged, modular professional design, but bass is woolly and treble lacks detail			●	●		350	600		157

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STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	HEADPHONES (CONTINUED)											
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable						120	32		172
BB	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	32		194
	Grado SR-80	100	Open and dynamic with pedantically open mid-band. Crude physical design, rough frequency extremes						60	8		157
R	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality						200	32		186
R	Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music						200	32		163
	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design						200	32		205
BB	Jecklin Float Model 1	79	While very unusual in appearance, the Floats give remarkable sound quality and openness						400	200		55
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design						165	I/R		172
R	JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard						280	20,000		186
R	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful mid-range and high comfort factor						340	90		205
	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing						250	60		194
	Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement						215	60		186
	Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top						380	100		163
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled mid-range and over excited bass						247	32		205
	Sennheiser IS 380	55	As close as you'll get to real hi-fi with infra-red phones at this price. Inevitable hiss spoils the illusion						192	I/R		172
R	Sennheiser HD 570 Symph	90	Comfortable, light-weight 'phones with a detailed and open sound but lacks bass depth on weightier music						210	64		194
R	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headphone						255	150		172
BB	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable						255	150		157
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort						270	120		205
	Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy						260	N/A		163
	Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass						300	24		194
	Sony MDR-CD 2000	200	Large pads make for sweaty listening. Pure mid-tones, but weightless bass						300	32		205
BB	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics						160	40		205
	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof						230	32		172
R	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way						295	50		205
BB	Stax Lambda Nova Basic	395	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence – and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards						347	N/A		163
	Vivanco SR322	30	Weak design and uncomfortable, but redeems itself with substantial sound quality						248	32		205
	Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner						210	FM		172
	Vivanco IR5800	50	Consistently musical infra-red design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven				1/2		226	I/R		172
R	Vivanco SR650	50	Unusually comfortable 'phone with excellent detail resolution but aggressive						175			157
BB	Vivanco SR750	60	Cossetting physical design, attractive sound, though suffers overhang and lacks ultimate dynamics						188			157
R	Vivanco SR 950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones						252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable						280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss						240	9,000		186

LOUDSPEAKERS

STEREO SPEAKERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis One	150	At a new low price, this has a very natural and transparent midband, erring a little on the dull side	19,36,5,24		87	6	40			187
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Two	250	Floorstanding variation on the Aegis One theme, with a neutral, even and detailed if slightly shiny sound	19,87,24		89	8	40			201
	Acoustic Energy AE120SE	500	Attractive styling and good sonic headroom, but a heavy, uneven overall balance, and a difficult amp load	18,97,28		89.5	10	25			199
R	Acoustic Energy AE520	1,000	Could be more neutral, but high-class build is reflected in a high-class sound. Very elegant too	21,98,30		91	3	25			190
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone stand-mount has a generous performance envelope, but sound quality was controversial	20,33,29		90	4	22			201
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,000	Very substantial, with tuneable ABR for better room matching. Sounds good but could be more neutral	24,5,37,32		89	5	30			211
	ALR Jordan Note 7	2,500	A beguiling Anglo-German collaboration delivers metal-cone precision with fine dynamic range	25,107,32		92	4	25			196
	AR 15	275	Neat and chunky wall/stand-mount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22,37,22		90	4	45			201
R	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,200	Solid oak floorstander is a little lazy sounding, but is well balanced and smooth with modest coloration	19,90,26		86	7	25			211
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but lightweight bass	18,38,25.5		80	8	65			192
	ATC SCM70ASL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46		A	A	20			205
R	Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty, compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound	18,94,21		87	6	40			164
R	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large stand-mount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional allround sound	36,79,28		92	4	20			204
	Audio Physic Tempo	1,999	Tall and unusually-styled floorstander has stunning stereo but suspect bass tuning	22,107,47		88	8	28			143
R	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little underdeveloped	19,106,27		90	4	20			190
R	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30		89	4	22			180
R	AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86	4	50			190
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	600	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		88	7	30			211
	AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small-scale way	17,5,74,24.5		85	6	40			174
R	B&W 601 S2	200	A smooth and sophisticated stand-mount combines good drive with fine neutrality	20,5,36,23		89	4	30			207
BB	B&W 602 S2	300	Large stand-mount has fine dynamic literacy and good communication skills at a very competitive price	23,5,49,29		90	5	28			201
R	B&W 603 S2	550	Capable of being driven seriously loud, but the cautious balance seems less happy playing at low levels	23,5,87,29		91	4	22			193
	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing stand-mount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89	7	30			208
	B&W CDM-7NT	1,250	A very classy floorstander, in sound as well as looks, with fine bass drive, authority and overall neutrality	22,95,29		90	6	20			208
R	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		89	12	28			199
	B&W Nautilus 803	3,500	Classy looking three-way with impressively deep bass, wide dynamic range and a laid-back balance	29,108,42		89	3	20			210
	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	The prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101,52,4.5		89	8	38			200
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,55		91	8	34			183
R	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69		91	8	34			186
R	Blueroom Minipod	249	The Minipod can show its competitors a thing or two about freedom from boxiness and looks fab	18,34,17		91	4	50			193
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short of deep bass grunt	21,92,30		94	3	40			204

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)		PRICE (£)	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-er-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32	●	92	5	28		●	180
	Carlsson OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37	●	90	8	20		●	195
R	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-er-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50	●		201
	Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking standmount is a good all-rounder, commendably free from boxiness	22,42,25		91	4	30		●	193
R	Castle Severn ZSE	700	Pretty little floorstander is lively and communicative, if a little coloured in the voice band	21,84,24	●	88	6	28		●	204
FR	Castle Harlech	880	Handsome big-sounding floorstander, great value and dynamic midrange	20,96,33	●	88	8	28	●		160
	Castle Inversion 100	1,975	Large semi-omni design with gorgeous Art Deco styling, sounds open but bass alignment is ill-tuned	26,5,111,45	●	91	8	20		●	195
R	Celestion A Compact	600	Provided the room isn't too large and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90	3	45		●	193
BB	Celestion A1	899	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35		88	6	25	●		164
R	Celestion A2	1,500	Full-scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,93,39	●	89	6	22		●	180
	Chario Syntar 100	249	Pretty with a pleasantly easygoing balance, but not the most communicative or exciting sound around	18,32,27		87	6	45	●		170
R	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy looking standmount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28		87	4	45	●		187
	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40	●		190
EC	Chario Academy Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
	Cyrus CLS70	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●		211
SS	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●		174
	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	400	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87	3	50		●	190
S	Dali Evidence 870	1,300	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36	●	93	2.5	20	●		204
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29	●	85	4	20	●		167
	Dynaudio Audience 72	1,100	Very competent in most respects, but doesn't quite grab the attention, could be more communicative	20,97,26	●	89	3	20	●		211
	Elac CL102 II	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28	●	88	9	23	●		199
	Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	12,3,20,8,28,2		86	4	42	●		191
	Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25	●		187
	Eltax Linear Response	249	A curiously dumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40	●		177
	Eltax Chroma Front	300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28	●	87	4	25	●		201
R	Energy e:XL 25	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31	●	90	4	25	●		201
	Epos ES12	499	High quality luxury standmount has great midband and stereo imaging	20,38,25		85	8	45	●		160
	Epos ES25	1,655	Handsome floorstander with a rather uneven and bass heavy balance	24,90,35	●	88	6	22	●		143
	Gale 2i	140	Unspectacular sound and appearance fail to help this solid little miniature stand out from the crowd	22,40,27		88	7	40		●	170
R	Heybrook Prima 2	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18		87	6	50	●		179
	Heybrook HB1	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	21,38,25		88	3	50	●		207
SS	Heybrook Heylette	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22		88	4	45	●		187
FR	Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	●	94	4	30	●		193
BB	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled stand-mount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23,5,36,27		89	6	25	●		201
	Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29	●	89	6	45	●		174
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		88	11	27	●		199
	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●		180
R	Indigo Three	500	Cute 'n' chunky standmount is an entertaining communicator. Great fun, despite some sonic weirdness	23,30,5,32		86	17	24	●		189
	Infinity Delta 60	700	Striking and massive floorstander, lots of speaker for the price, but seems a victim of its own complexity	29,115,41		90	4	25	●		193
	Infinity Kappa 70	795	Fine material value. Sonically big, smooth and even, but lacking in coherence and dynamics	26,96,27	●	87	4	25	●		204
	Jamo E800	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29		87	3	30	●		207
	Jamo D830	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	25,5,38,32		88	5	30	●		211
BB	JBL LX2	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27		87	8	40	●		170
	JBL Ti200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●		193
R	JBL L20	700	Pricey, heavy and a bit laid-back, but this is a fine rock'n'roller which is dynamic and communicative	26,42,28		86	8	30	●		138
	JBL SVA1500	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump	17,5,51,31		86	8	40	●		174
R	JBL L40	1,000	Classic, large, three-way standmount is full of vim and vigour, with a superb sense of balance	30,65,31		88	4	23	●		167
R	JBL 4312 II	1,000	Crude but startlingly effective dynamics. The original party animal knows just how to rock'n'roll	36,60,30		94	4	25	●		190
R	JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52	●	91	8	<20	●		180
BB	JBL L90	1,500	A classic monitor which communicates with gusto and enthusiasm, though it can sound a bit crude	24,94,35	●	91	6	23	●		143
	JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy, scratchy treble	26,5,94,30	●	91	4	33	●		183
FR	JBL Xt140	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	88	6	40	●		210
R	JMLab Cobalt 815	999	Hefty real-wood floorstander has a slight 'boom'n'tizz' character but delivers big speaker grip and dynamics	22,100,31	●	90.5	9.5	22	●		199
R	JMLab Electra 905	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28		90	4	40	●		204
	JMLab Electra 915	1,795	Fine headroom and bass, and classy engineering too, but also a tricky amp load which lacks delicacy	26,5,106,36	●	92	4	20	●		195
R	JMLab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●		186
BB	JPW ML510	130	Lots of good quality speaker for the price, but not an ideal match for cheap budget components	20,34,22		88	5	50	●		169
	JPW ML910	330	Loads of speaker for the money, plenty of headroom and loudness capability, but sounds dull	23,104,30	●	91	4	43	●		183
R	JPW ML1010	400	A seriously substantial speaker for the price, and an obvious choice for those who like their music loud	22,5,115,40	●	91	6	25	●		170
	KEF Cresta 2	149	A good looking/value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24		91	4	40	●		195
R	KEF Q15.2	200	A vigorous and entertaining compact speaker that remains particularly well aligned for close-to-wall siting	20,5,31,27		89	3	30	●		207
	KEF Q-55.2	500	Beefy vinyl-finished UniQ delivers loads of bass, but might have more control	21,87,29	●	90	4	25	●		210
R	KEF Reference One-Two	1,350	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	22,5,87,35	●	89	3	40	●		211
	KEF RDM Three	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●		189
	KEF Reference Model 2	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34	●	89	4	30	●		167
SS	Keswick Audio Aria II	379	Confident and dynamic sound, if a little crude and shut in	21,42,24		89	8	20	●		148
R	Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26,93,28	●	90	4	20	●		167
R	Linn Kan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45	●		187
R	Linn Keilidh Passive	750	Stunning timing and coherence, awesome bass drive	20,83,28	●	87	4	22	●		138
BB	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21,5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●		180
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with valves	21,5,104,27	●	89	8	45	●		196
	Magnat Vintage 320	350	Loads of speaker for your money, but the sound is thick, heavy and lacking in presence and authority	25,102,30	●	90	4	20	●		201
	Magnat Vector 77	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29	●	89	5	30	●		183
	Magnat Vintage 710	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shiny sound	20-27,42,32		90	5	25	●		211
R	Magnat Vintage 720	1,200	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity	29,113,32	●	88	4	20	●		180

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Martin-Logan Prodigy	8,967	Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	42,179,71	●	91	4	28	●	●	204
	Mirage FRX7	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17,5,95,32	●	90	4	25	●	●	204
	Mirage OM-5	3,000	A meaty model that goes loud without distortion, digs deep with aplomb and creates plenty of depth of image	133,30,42	●	90	6	22	●	●	206
	Mirage OM-10-1	2,000	Tall black omni-bi-pole has plenty of bounce and dynamic vigour, but is more room sensitive than most	23,118,30	●	88	4	20	●	●	210
R	Mission 700	130	A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease	18,44,26	●	87	8	40	●	●	179
R	Mission 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22	●	86	6	45	●	●	207
	Mission 780	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16,5,28,27	●	86	6	40	●	●	201
R	Mission 773e	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	17,5,88,26	●	92	4	30	●	●	193
R	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	183
R	Mission 782	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	16,5,82,28	●	86	9.5	25	●	●	199
R	Mission 775e	800	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short of serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	93	3	25	●	●	204
	Mission 783	1,000	Plenty of bass weight, and a clean, articulate midrange, but the two don't quite seem to gel	20,5,97,33	●	87	5	20	●	●	211
BB	Monitor Audio Bronze 2	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all round sonic performance	18,5,35,27	●	89	3	30	●	●	207
	Monitor Audio Silver 5i	450	Great looking, sharply priced real wood floorstander, but bottom end lacks drive and tension	20,81,21	●	87	5	30	●	●	210
	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget stand-mount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25	●	87	4	45	●	●	207
BB	Musical Tech Kestrel Evolution	315	Cutely styled, cleverly compact and a smooth, subtle and coherent performer, best suited to smaller rooms	20,85,19	●	86	4	40	●	●	201
R	Musical Technology Harrier	400	Very pretty package, good measured performance and even sound. Sensitivity is low, and dynamics limp	25,80,23	●	86	8	25	●	●	152
BB	Musical Technology PM15	450	A subtle, understated but very involving example of the 'classic' luxury-finish compact standmount	20,41,27	●	88	5	38	●	●	183
BB	Musical Technology Falcon	680	Big speaker has a big but also surprisingly smooth and civilised sound. Fine material value too	33,117,30	●	89	4	22	●	●	190
R	Musical Technology Condor	1,000	Lots of clever ideas in a floorstander, which places transparency and smoothness ahead of dynamic drama	25,91,23	●	85	4	28	●	●	174
BB	Naim Intro	660	Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth	24,89,27	●	89	6	30	●	●	164
R	Naim Credo	1,060	Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness	24,89,30	●	88	8	28	●	●	180
R	Naim SBL Passive	1,970	Lively and punchy – smoother but more upfront than before	27,89,27	●	88	6	25	●	●	143
EC	Naim NBL	6,648	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	89	4	20	●	●	200
R	Neat Critique 2	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24	●	86	6	50	●	●	183
BB	Neat Mystique Mk2	575	This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality; some might find the top end too insistent	20,86,18	●	85	6	23	●	●	177
R	Neat Neat Petite III	795	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,30,5,20	●	86	5	30	●	●	211
BB	Neat Elite	1,195	A highly entertaining all-rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth	20,88,18	●	88.5	6	25	●	●	195
BB	NHT Super One	250	A fine compromise between size and performance, sensitivity and hence loudness capability is modest	18,5,29,5,23	●	85	8	30	●	●	170
BB	NHT 1.5	400	This compact standmount sounds much bigger than it has any right to. Good timing and communication skills	18,42,26	●	85	6	40	●	●	177
R	NHT Super Two	550	Black and shiny compact three-way floorstander has marvellously even balance and good coherence	18,5,100,26	●	87	8.5	25	●	●	199
	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	190
	Origin Live Conqueror	1,650	Chunky floorstanding three-way has lovely cabinetwork and lively sound, but limited deep bass	24,94,27	●	88	8	30	●	●	167
R	Orelle Swing	1,200	A superb example of what an essentially small loudspeaker can do, with bags of brio and enthusiasm	18,101,28	●	87	8	45	●	●	195
BB	PMC TB2	600	A worthy and prettier successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type class for neutrality and transparency	20,40,5,31	●	88	8	30	●	●	211
R	PMC LB1	999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26	●	87	6.5	40	●	●	199
BB	PMC FB1	1,275	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	88	6	20	●	●	204
R	Polk LS50	800	No enthusiast tweaks here, but powerful and beautiful balance	27,83,29	●	89	8	25	●	●	138
	Polk RT16	799	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and nct very pretty	22,105,39	●	91	4	22	●	●	160
	ProAc Response 2.5	2,700	For aspirant high-enders looking for seriously good boxes, this speaker should be first port of call	22,107,25	●	86	8	30	●	●	149
	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact stand-mount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	204
	ProAc Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	●	87	8	28	●	●	192
	QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal standmount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●	167
R	Rega Jura	450	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●	193
R	Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty and smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	139
R	Rehdeko RK 115a	1,700	Single-driver system has limited bandwidth and obvious coloration, but wondrous dynamic coherence	34,42,27	●	95	8	55	●	●	167
	RMS Revelation Series 1	1,299	Innovative metal-box compact with integral port/stand – clean with good timing but very laid-back balance	20,99,24	●	81	8	22	●	●	167
	Roksan ROKone	595	Large standmount is musically very communicative, if a little coloured	21,45,33	●	89	6	30	●	●	160
R	Roksan OJ3X Black	995	Innovative low-line, two-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	167
BB	Royd Doublet	485	Great value compact floorstander: lively and very informative, if a little uneven	18,93,19	●	90	4	28	●	●	160
R	Ruark Epilogue	269	Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	17,29,23	●	87	8	47	●	●	183
	Ruark Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with classy veneer and shiny gilt fixings, hampered by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31	●	87	8	40	●	●	174
	Ruark Prologue One R	949	Strikingly contemporary compact floorstander is well voiced but a little lean in overall balance	17,5,93,28	●	88	5	25	●	●	204
R	Ruark Excalibur	7,000	A big, handsome speaker with a big, laid-back but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	●	90	4	30	●	●	186
R	Sequence 400	329	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	164
	Silverado Raider	695	Beautifully built audiophile compact: neutral if bright, tough work for amps	20,40,25	●	83	3	30	●	●	164
	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready stand mount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30	●	87	6	25	●	●	190
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	89	4	20	●	●	211
	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration.	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
	Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30	●	91	8	45	●	●	196
	Sonus Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,32,29	●	87	5	30	●	●	193
	South Coast Speakers Lancelot	895	Pretty compact standmount has nice ribbon tweeter but sounds a bit soft and lacks dynamic vigour	19,36,26	●	84	8	45	●	●	199
R	Spendor 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	●	87	8	30	●	●	160
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
BB	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	18,5,33,25	●	89	4	45	●	●	207
	Tannoy Revolution 1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
EC	Tannoy mX3	300	A great all-round compromise at a very modest price, combining good looks with fine midband voicing	18,5,87,26	●	90	5	40	●	●	201
R	Tannoy mX4	350	Lacks dynamic grip and authority, but delivers great bass extension and a classy overall balance at a sharp price	18,5,96,26	●	88	4	20	●	●	210
BB	Tannoy Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	●	90	4	20	●	●	193
	Tannoy Revolution R3	550	Handsome real-wood floorstander does a decent job, but lacks the evenness of its smaller R2 brother	18,5,103,28	●	89	8.5	28	●	●	199
R	Tannoy D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. At a fine all-round performer, too	24,85,23	●	87	6	26	●	●	167
	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
	Technics SB-M500	450	This model offers a clean, open sound, offset by midbass, heavy balance and low sensitivity	25,78,37	●	85	8	25	●	●	152
	Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative standmount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29	●	91	4	42	●	●	193

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Triangle Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,94,29	●	91	4	25	●		190
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	104	4	50		●	191
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid-back but very charming, and musically literate	17,97,30	●	88	7.5	25	●		199
EC	Wilson benesch Bishop	20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity; lovely open midband too	23,161,561	●	89	4	S20	●		189
	Wharfedale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29,5,23		88	4	45	●		169
	Wdale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24		88	4	40	●		187
R	Zingali Overture 2S	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38		90	8	25	●		195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy AE108S	299	Lots of loud subwoofer for your money, though ultimately more film than music oriented	50,42,43				20		●	179
R	B&W ASW1000	499	Bulky heavyweight is a high quality item, able to generate more bass output than music is likely to need	54,47,50	●	A		A20	●		198
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,5,41,45,5		A		30			210
R	JPW SW60	349	A real heavyweight, sounds clean and transparent, if perhaps a little understated. Usefully flexible	55,47,39				20		●	179
	KEF Model 30B	499	(Active) Commendably discreet with good sense of timing but limited extension	38,5,37,43	●	A		45			154
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A		25			210
	Mission 7AS2	399	Ugly if very effective at supplying very low bass, but filter could do with more flexibility higher up	56,30,31	●			<20	●		198
R	Paradigm PDR-10	150	Not much grip, drive or authority, but it doesn't get in the way and it is very cheap	34,5,36,42	●	A		25			210
	Polk PSW430	400	A lot of subwoofer for your money, but lacks deep grunt and is more movie than music oriented	38,5,45,46	●	A		25			210
R	REL Q50	375	This good looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31				20			210
R	Ruark Log-Rhythm	775	Adds weight and scale with commendable discretion, making a positive contribution to the whole musical exposition	43,43,43	●	A		<20		??	210
	Soliloquy S10	1,050	(Active) Pretty subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong	51,30,5,46	●	A		25	●		19

LOUDSPEAKERS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES



SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE WxHxD (cm) | FLOORSTANDER | SENSITIVITY (db/m) | IMPEDANCE (Ω) | BASS FROM (Hz) | FREE SPACE | CLOSE TO WALL | ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	High value floorstander has deep and even bass and a smooth neutrality thereafter	19,90,25	●	90	5	22	●		198
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,5,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
	B&W Nautilus package	6,500	This classy, laid-back package is arguably too good for current programming. Very bulky centre speaker	var	var	n/a	3	20		●	210
	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	●	91	5	28	●		198
	Dynaudio LRC 120	439	Slim centre and front standmount, has an evenhanded but rather laid back balance but lacks drive	16,5,57,31		89	5	25	●		198
	Jamo Concert package	2,500	Lovely main speakers sonically overshadow the centre, while surrounds are a bit obvious too	var	var	n/a	5	30		●	210
BB	JBL XtI-series package	1,100	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40	●		210
	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goodly thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration var	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120		●	198
	Mission Cinema 8 package	1,400	Beautifully styled and cleverly designed package, but could have more grunt and drive for the price	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
	Polk RTE 1000p	1,300	Tall elegant tower with built-in powered bass 'subwoofer' that needs using with discretion. Bright but engaging	20,110,35	●	91	4	25	●		198
	Monitor Audio Silver series	1,000	Great looking conventionally styled package lacks something in dynamic drive and tension	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1-connected var	var	var	n/a	3	25	●		210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,200	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
R	Rega Ara/Ara/Senta	920	Classy real wood package does a good all round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	var	var	n/a	4	25		●	210
BB	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6LCR	400	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	21,38,29		89	6	25			198
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29	●	91	4	20	●		198

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Centre	140	Good value centre-front speaker but a tad shut in and with a slightly obvious top end (price per speaker)	46,17,20		89	5	50	●		198
	B&W Nautilus HTM1	1,500	Very bulky for a centre speaker, though very capable too - a little less laid back than its siblings	76,37,30		89	4	30		●	210
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
	Jamo Concert Center	550	A decent balance match but lacks the class and grip of the Concert 8s, and is bulky and pricey too	55,22,30		87	5	100		●	210
BB	JBL XtI10C	200	An elegant, cleverly designed centre and a good match for the 40s. Better value than most too	51,19,5,27		88	5	50		●	210
	KEF Q95C	200	This artfully designed UniQ centre looks much better than most on top of the TV set	40,17,17		89	3	120		●	210
	Mirage OM-C2	600	Large but discreet omni-bi-pole matches OM-10-1 well but lacks tight focus, and seems expensive	64,18,5,31		88	4	50		●	210
R	Mission 77C	199	A good centre-front match for 77-series, the triple tweeter might be a curiosity, but voicing is very good	42,17,21		91	4	100		●	198
	Mission 78C	350	Makes a good visual and sonic match for the 782, but quite pricey by comparison, given the ingredients	45,17,19		86	3	100		●	210
	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good looking partner to the Silver 5is, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120		●	210
R	PMC TB2M/C	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50		●	210
	Polk CS 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35		92	4	25	●		198
R	Rega Senta	185	The very compact Senta is sensibly priced, a bit bright maybe, but articulate and expressive	32,16,21		89	4	120		●	210

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Tannoy mXC	100	Could be more exciting, but a very impressive centre speaker at an unusually reasonable price	42,16,21		88	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn 56C	200	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	38,21,29		89	6	25	●		198

PERSONAL / INTERNET

PERSONAL STEREOs

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
R	Aiwa AM-HX50	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc			●			204
	JVC XL-PG7	100	Undistinguished CD model, with tacky build and below-par sound	CD			●			204
R	Panasonic RQ-SX71	70	A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features	Cassette			●			204
	Panasonic RQ-SX91	80	A super-slick personal for well-heeled cassette users. Sound is rather bright	Cassette			●			204
	Panasonic SJ-MR100	250	Well built and nicely appointed, though performance is unremarkable at the price	MiniDisc	●		●			204
R	Philips ACT7582	115	A splash-proof body and an entertaining sound – the perfect CD personal for holiday japes	CD						204
BB	Sharp MD-MT831H	250	Smart design, sprightly sound and a well featured package	MiniDisc	●		●			204
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
R	Sony D-EJ815	140	High-tech build and features, including super-effective shock protection. Sound is soft but substantial	CD			●			204
BB	Sony D-EJ915	150	A beauty to behold – the most portable CD player yet and a good performer to boot	CD			●			204
BB	Sony MZ-R91	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●		●			204

INTERNET AUDIO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa MM-VX100	130	Aiwa's expertise in the personal stereo field is visible, but performance is only average	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing CD player, hard drive and PC connection. Sign of things to come?	CD/HD	●		MP3/WMA	APR/USB	17GB	208
BB	Creative Labs Digital Jukebox	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive	●		Agostic	USB	5.7GB	208
R	DigMedia Music Store	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/HD	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
	JazPiper MV32P	125	First wave player that looks good but sounds bright. Includes voice recording and phone book features	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	LG MF-PD360	130	Good looking and temptingly affordable, but features and performance are nothing special	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	208
	LG AHA-FD770	200	Cassette and solid state personal in one – novel idea, poor execution	SS/Cass	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
R	Pine D'Music	120	Good build, solid sound and a voice recording mode make this a good first-time buy	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Pontis SP504	158	Not the best aesthetically, but exceptionally good MP3 sound	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	204
R	Rio 500	190	Well featured and a strong performer, though new generation Rios have now arrived	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	195
A	Rio 600	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agostic	USB	32MB	208
	Schneider MPMan F20	99	The world's first MP3 personal. Basic but still good value	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Smart Portable MP3 Disc Player	119	CD personal that also plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R discs	CD			MP3			208
	Sony NW-MS7	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC	USB	64MB	208

RECORD PLAYERS

TURNTABLES

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP. SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high end performance at an affordable price	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Avid Acutus	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	●			33/45	●	●	●		194
	Clearaudio Reference	3,990	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail, but can sound bold	●			33/45	●	●	●		144
R	DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	●			33/45	●	●	●		144
	Dual CS 455.1	220	Neat record player with automatic convenience (and 78rpm), but doesn't match simpler manual rivals sonically		●		33/45/78	●	●	●		203
R	Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph			●	33/45	●	●	●		103
R	Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended	●			33/45	●	●	●		91
R	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank	●			33	●	●	●		103
R	Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains	●			33/45	●	●	●		91
R	Michell Gyrodec	875	Sweet and natural-sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm	●			33/45	●	●	●		55
EC	Michell Gyro SE	775	A stunningly desirable combination of looks, solidity and sound make this a tempting turntable	●			33/45	●	●	●		190
BB	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A Superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●			33/45	●	●	●		192
	Moth Kanoot	329	Rather coarse-sounding deck that requires decent isolation and comes with a Rega RB300 arm	●			33/45			●		164
BB	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	●			33/45		●	●		203
BB	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●			33/45		●	●		159
R	Pink Triangle Tarantella II	850	A turntable that looks unlike any other, with rare ability too. Quirky, but sound is immensely likeable	●			33/45	●	●	●		192
BB	Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●			33/45		●	●		164
	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	●			33/45	●	●	●		192
R	Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi – it's that good	●			33/45	●	●	●		138
BB	Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident	●			33/45		●	●		48

THE DIRECTORY TURNTABLES / CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL		AUTO		SEMI-AUTO		SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
				●	●	●	●	●	●						
R	Rega Planar 3	274	Sounds musical in a balanced manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	164
BB	Rega Planar 25	619	Great looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	203
BB	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	159
R	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	159
EC	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V309 hybrid arm, superbly built	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45/78	●	●	●	●	186
BB	Thorens TD166 VI/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	103
	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	203
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limp quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	205
BB	Wilson benesch The Circle	795	A beautiful turntable with a sumptuous sound, all at a very reasonable price – a clear Best Buy	●	●	●	●	●	●	33/45	●	●	●	●	192

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford	●	●	●	0.5	●	203
BB	Audio Technica AT-95E	20	Clear and dynamic, though richly balanced	●	●	●	2.8	●	48
	Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting	●	●	●	0.4	8	192
BB	Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy	●	●	●	0.55	11.5	175
BB	Denon DL110	70	A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well	●	●	●	1.0	6	48
	Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life', is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail	●	●	●	0.1	6	103
BB	Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price	●	●	●	●	●	103
R	Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high quality turntable and arm	●	●	●	0.25	8.6	192
	Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent	●	●	●	0.15	5.3	158
R	Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20KHz seems to do no harm	●	●	●	0.25	12	84
R	Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698	A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk	●	●	●	0.25	8.5	175
EC	Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,500	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining	●	●	●	0.3	13	208
R	Goldring Elan	19	A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body	●	●	●	5.0	7	67
R	Goldring 1012GX	79	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent	●	●	●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved	●	●	●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative	●	●	●	0.5	8	84
	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●	●	●	6.5	6	91
	Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest	●	●	●	0.5	8	103
	Goldring Excel VX	525	Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end	●	●	●	0.45	8	175
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●	●	●	4	6	158
	Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users	●	●	●	1.7	6.5	175
BB	Linn K9	125	Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus	●	●	●	4.5	5	Col
	London Decca Maroon	259	Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconoclastic as ever	●	●	●	5.0	6	67
	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●	●	●	5.0	6	84
	Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge – smooth, agile and dynamic in character	●	●	●	0.5	8	192
R	Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed	●	●	●	0.3	7	158
BB	Lyra Clavis Da Capo	995	A stable tracker, and one of the finest cartridges we've heard	●	●	●	0.1	7	143
	Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak	●	●	●	0.22	10.5	175
BB	Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues – weight, clarity and neutrality	●	●	●	3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon 520/P	65	Sensitive to load capacitance, but the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound	●	●	●	3.0	5	67
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes	●	●	●	3.3	4	103
BB	Ortofon MC15 Super II	130	A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up	●	●	●	0.35	7	103
	Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable	●	●	●	0.5	11	139
	Ortofon MC25FL	250	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP	●	●	●	0.5	11	139
BB	Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings	●	●	●	0.5	10.7	192
	Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings	●	●	●	0.5	10.7	158
BB	Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound	●	●	●	0.25	8.5	175
R	Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere – one of the very best	●	●	●	0.12	10	84
	Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo	●	●	●	0.12	10	91
	Rega Bias	39	Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound	●	●	●	5	4	67
R	Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●	●	●	5.0	5	67
R	Reson Reza	250	If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●	●	●	6.5	6.3	192
R	Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●	●	●	6.5	5	91
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300	●	●	●	2.5	9	192
R	van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●	●	●	5.5	6	103
	van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy	●	●	●	0.35	7.6	158
R	van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass	●	●	●	0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale – worth all the extra money	●	●	●	0.4	6	60
	van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal	●	●	●	0.4	6	72
R	van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm	●	●	●	0.65	7	175
R	van den Hul G' hopper IIIGLA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse	●	●	●	0.4	6	122
R	Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive	●	●	●	0.58	6	158
R	Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound	●	●	●	0.45	7	175

TONEARMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●			79
R	Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths	Med		●		229	67
BB	Moth/RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low		●		240	91
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

STANDS & SUPPORTS

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
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STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Aavik C4	200	Attractive wood finish stand with a very large footprint but sound is a little coloured	77	47			4	MDF	206
R	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47			4	Wood	193
R	Alphason GR 17/17-AS	275	Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money	36	60,39			4	Glass	181
R	Apollo Symphony	245	Simple steel and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision	73	46.5		●	4	Glass	206
R	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193
R	Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67	48.6			4	Wood	193
BB	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193
R	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiasts equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
R	Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46		●	4	Glass	206
R	Elemental Isotube x 4/Ref	1,199	Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality	92	45,49		●	4	Marb	181
R	Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193
BB	Frameworks H500/H175	404	Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel – made a spectacular impression on audition	70	52,34		●	3	Glass	166
R	Ixos Deadrock 704	250	Looks unassuming but sound is full and inviting		46,39			4	Resin	181
R	Mana 4-tier	500	The ultimate statement in steel and glass; adds resonance in a way you'll love or hate	87	45		●	4	Glass	206
R	Optimum Int 2000 OPT490	299	25kg stand with shelves between variable-height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass	50	60,40			4	Glass	166
R	Optimum Int 2000 OPT660	349	Glitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome	82	60,52			5	Glass	181
R	Projekt Furniture A4	215	An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound	56	48			4	Wood	193
R	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49			4	MDF	206
R	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206
BB	Sound Organisation Z560	160	Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value	90	46,36		●	5	Wood	166
R	Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73	46		●	4	Glass	193
R	Soundstyle X100	230	Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright	64	49,28		●	4	Glass	181
R	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar stands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206
R	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193
R	Soundstyle Finewoods W105	320	Veneered shelves clamped between tubular uprights. Delivers with classical material	82	48,27			4	Wood	166
BB	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8		●	4	Glass	193
R	Townshend Seismic Sink AV1-4	600	Gives significant isolation for turntables and seems to add little character otherwise	74.5	45			4	Glass	206
BB	Townshend Seismic Stand	1,245	It's big, it wobbles and it's pricey. But this is the ultimate equipment support	72	58,45			3	Wood	181
BB	Wilson benesch Asside	590	Sounds even better than it looks. And it looks wonderful	72	37,50			4	Wood	181

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Alphason Akros II	65	A well-specified budget stand but the sound is as subtle as a house party	60,45	16.5		●			202
R	Alphason HDS	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5,15.5		●			189
R	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15,12.5		●			189
R	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51,40.5	18		●			202
BB	Atacama Nexus 6	50	An excellent all round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18		●			202
R	Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60	15,17		●			189
R	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18		●			202
R	Elemental Isotube S2se	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61	23,27		●	●		189
R	JPW H51	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19,21		●			189
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29,32					202
R	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19,15		●			202
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than almost anything below £150	50-100	19,22		●	●		189
R	Partington Dreadnought Ult.	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	20.5,23.5		●			202
R	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33.5,24					189
R	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65,45	20,22.5		●			202
R	Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16,17					189
BB	Sound Organisation Z522	89	Easy going and likeable performer straight out of the box	59	16,17		●			202
R	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16,17		●			202
R	Target HM60	106	A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma	40-70	16.5,19		●			202
R	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48					202

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TUNERS

ANALOGUE TUNERS



STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						ISSUE NUMBER
				WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	
R	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			●	●	193
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64		●	●	●	193
R	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			●	●	211
BB	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40				●	193
R	Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM,M	40	●			●	184
	Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3			●	●	184
BB	Harman/Kardon TU950	200	Bulky but effective, delivering fine RF performance and good sound for the price	FM,M,L	30	●			●	166
	Leak Trough Line - GTA	300	A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance	FM	0				●	206
	Linn Pekin	545	Smart and high-tech tuner which integrates well with Linn systems but offers less appealing performance out of that context	FM, M	80		●	●	●	211
R	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●		142
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
	Marantz ST6000	150	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●			●	211
R	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		●	●		193
	Myryad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20			●	●	184
	NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM,M	30	●				193
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●		●	●	166
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●	●	●	184
	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	193
	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM, M	20					166
	Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	157
R	Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packed tuner	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	184
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

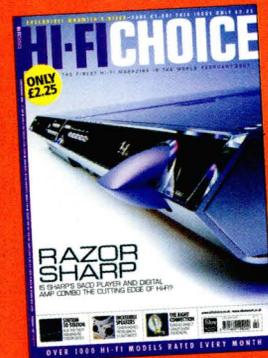
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						ISSUE NUMBER
				WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	800	The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's still not perfect	DAB	7		●	●	●	199
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7		●	●	●	211
	Cymbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8		●	●	●	199
	Psion Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB			●	●		211
	Sony ST-D777ES	550	Smart and useful with DAB and FM in one box, but neither band really shines	DAB, FM, M, L	99		●	●	●	211
R	Technics ST-GT1000	500	Handy tuner that combines DAB, FM and AM in one unit and substantially lowers the price bar for DAB entry	DAB,FM,M	97		●	●	●	199
	VideoLogic DRX-601E	299	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10		●	●	●	211

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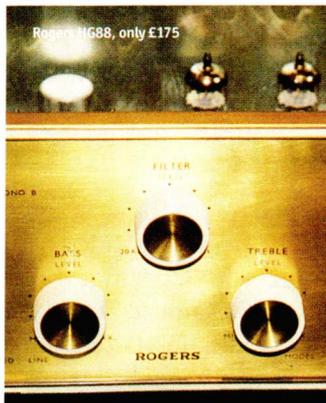
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BUYING TIPS

Buying secondhand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand new product engineered down to a price. Do some research on which brands and products have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a second-hand hi-fi dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty. So it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. Products such as speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amplifiers, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be troublesome — have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

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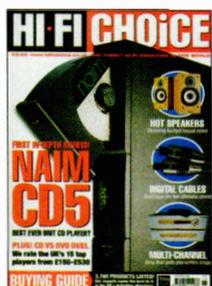
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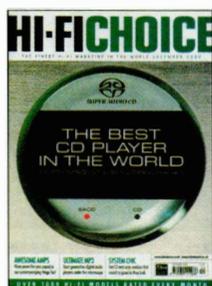
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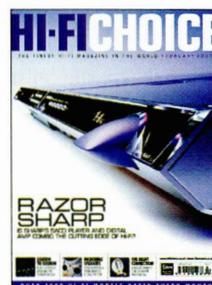
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NEXT MONTH...



A NEW TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL! DIGITAL DISCS: THE NEXT GENERATION

This month it's CD players, but where next for the optical disc? In the most comprehensive group test yet assembled, we compare the latest optical disc players from Arcam, Denon, Sony, Technics, Toshiba and more. Which is the best new high-resolution music format, DVD-Audio or SACD? What about DVD-Video, and how well will these machines handle your existing CD collection? For the answers, see next month's spanking new edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

MP3 AND THE STORAGE REVOLUTION

Digital codecs like MP3 have made music distribution through the Internet a reality. They've also made it possible to squeeze vast quantities of audio data into a small space, which in turn has opened the door to countless possibilities for music on the move, and also in the home. Next month we round up the latest happenings, from solid state and hard drive-based portables to the latest units for home-based recording and playback. You'll see them here first...

FOR THE RECORD

We're all being seduced by the lure of digital recording. Whether you like the bit-perfect accuracy of CD-R or the powerful flexibility and portability of MiniDisc, make sure you hang around for our review of the best recording media for both formats.

PLUS...

The old school: Quad valves amps and electrostatic speakers, classic technology reborn. Naim's latest pre/power amp reviewed and rated. The optical disc – past, present and future.

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PLEASE PHOTOCOPY

Three's a crowd

THAT'S WHAT THEY THOUGHT IN THE 1950S. BUT PAUL THINKS WE SHOULD MODERNISE THE PHRASE: 5.1'S A CROWD, ANYONE?

I'm coming to the conclusion that the most important issue facing hi-fi today is not the arrival of 'high band' formats such as SACD and DVD-Audio. Rather, it's the transition from stereo to multichannel sound systems. The two are closely related of course, inasmuch as it's necessary for either of the new formats to become established if we're to enjoy a multichannel source of better-than-CD quality. But even though no such source is yet available, multichannel sound systems are already selling in copious quantities through hi-fi dealers, driven mainly by the success of DVD-Video.

Few people have separate rooms for hi-fi and home cinema systems, so the vast majority of those AV systems will also be used for stereo music replay. However, as I discussed in last month's column, those for whom music remains the prime source could well end up disappointed if they trade in a good stereo hi-fi for a multichannel rig. In my view it's better to keep focused on the stereo bits, treating the extra channels rather less seriously until appropriately high quality source material is established.

MIND THE GAP

I can't claim personal recollection of the mono era, but those who do tell me there was resistance against the transition to stereo. This wasn't just because of the awkwardness of finding room for an extra loudspeaker, but also because of the considerable extra cost involved, in an era when hi-fi was considerably more expensive in real terms.

During the original shift from mono to stereo, US company CBS promoted an alternative proposal for a three-channel system, using the front left and right channels further apart, plus a third centre channel to avoid a 'hole'. I was reminded of this about 10 years ago, by the late Raymond Cooke (founder of KEF). I asked him why we had ended up with two rather than three channels, and he reckoned it was mostly a matter of cost. In his view, a three-channel stereo format wouldn't have got off the ground.

Although multichannel systems are now 'affordable', those cost factors are still just as relevant at the serious end of today's hi-fi scene. Take a hypothetical £5,000 stereo system, consisting of a pair of £1,500 speakers, £2,000 worth of stereo amplification, and £1,500 worth of sources. Adopt the 'ideal' approach with five identical channels, and you're looking at finding another £4,000 just for the extra power amps and speakers, never mind the cost of a processor and extra sources.

Today's multichannel systems usually have to put a screen where the centre front loudspeaker ought to be. It's a scenario which nearly always involves compromise, and it's the loudspeaker that inevitably gives ground, suffering the indignity of being rotated through 90 degrees, and usually lacking the proper means of support provided for the left and right channels.

KILL THE CENTRE

This opens a real can of worms. While I'll agree that the centre channel makes sense for movie dialogue, and that mono speech sounds better reproduced by a single central speaker than by a stereo pair (in 'phantom' mode), do we really need a centre channel for music reproduction? This would seem to be matter of some debate.

Peter Thomas, the main man at PMC, is a confirmed multichannel enthusiast – including the centre channel. He told me about an interesting technique. By overlaying both 'phantom' and 'hard' centre images, engineers can create a 'layered' front soundstage that is very effective in adding extra 'three-dimensionality'.

However, leading UK classical recording engineer Tony Faulkner advocates "killing the centre", partly because of the problems of centre-channel reproduction quality, but also because doing so frees up data capacity which can be used to improve the other channels. It seems we're all on a multichannel learning curve, enthusiasts and professionals alike.

Paul Messenger's no Luddite, but he's not leaving his cave for anything less than hi-fi perfection.

"WHILE I AGREE THAT THE CENTRE CHANNEL MAKES SENSE FOR MOVIE DIALOGUE, DO WE REALLY NEED IT FOR MUSIC REPRODUCTION?"



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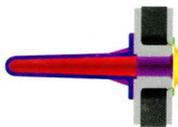
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