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HOT GADGETS TO IMPROVE YOUR SYSTEM

HI-FI CHOICE

THE FINEST HI-FI MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD | JULY 2002 | www.hifichoice.co.uk

GROUP TEST SUPER SPEAKERS

KING CONES

Stunning Dynaudio seizes the crown in our ultimate heavyweight showdown



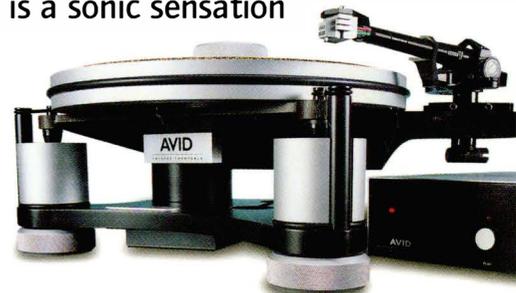
SYSTEM SOLUTIONS

6 ways to build the perfect set-up with Chord, Naim, Sony and more



DVD-AUDIO EXCLUSIVE

Marantz's first DVD-A player is a sonic sensation



VINYL VANGUARD

Why Avid's new deck is a must for fans of the black stuff



GROUP TEST

ONKYO'S STUNNING MULTICHANNEL AMP

Our new Best Buy under £1,000

JULY 2002 £3.50

future pleasure

Media with passion

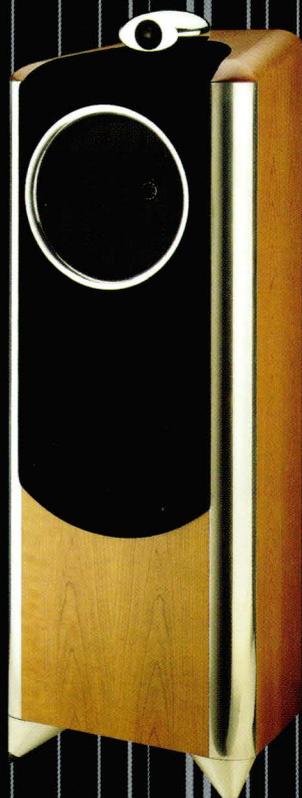
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07

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JULY 2002 ISSUE 229

Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP
Tel: +44 020 7317 2600 Fax: +44 020 7317 2686

EDITORIAL

Tim Bower **editor** tim.bower@futurenet.co.uk
Dan George **reviews editor** dan.george@futurenet.co.uk
Del Gentleman **art editor** del.gentleman@futurenet.co.uk
Paul Miller **technical editor**

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Black, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Paul Messenger,
Russell Moorcroft, Dave Oliver, Alan Sircom, David Vivian

PHOTOGRAPHY

Chris Foster

ADVERTISING

Debbie Maclaren **senior advertising manager**
020 7317 0246 debbie.maclaren@futurenet.co.uk
Emma Lewis **key accounts manager**
020 7317 0202 emma.lewis@futurenet.co.uk
Richard Bennett **senior sales exec**
020 7317 4268 richard.bennett@futurenet.co.uk
Matt Dalton **senior sales exec**
020 7317 2622 matt.dalton@futurenet.co.uk
Richard Dappiano **sales exec**
020 7317 0278 richard.dappiano@futurenet.co.uk
Tom Denning **sales exec**
020 7317 2683 tom.denning@futurenet.co.uk
Ben Shoesmith **classified sales exec**
020 7317 4629 ben.shoesmith@futurenet.co.uk

HFC ONLINE

Lucy Knowles **online editor**
lucy.knowles@futurenet.co.uk www.hifichoice.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

+44 0870 444 8475 www.futurenet.com/subscribe/89
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BACK ISSUES

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LICENSING

Simon Wear **licensing manager**
simon.wear@futurenet.co.uk

PUBLISHING

Andy Sutcliffe **group publisher**
Rob Price **publishing director**
Colin Morrison **chief operating officer
and managing director, UK**
John Bowman **group finance director**
Philippa Montgomery **marketing manager**
Paul Kurzeja **group art director**

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Matt Gregory **production manager**
Craig Broadbridge **senior production controller**
Rob Brock **circulation manager**

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Tel: +44 1225 442244 www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk
Bath • London • Milan • New York • Paris • San Francisco • Wrocław

CONTRIBUTORS

To make sure you get the best advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most talented and experienced writers in the business.



DAVID VIVIAN

A journalist of considerable experience, David's sharp ears and equally sharp powers of description are a valuable mix for *Hi-Fi Choice*. He also writes about cars, but who needs to take the latest Lotus for a spin when you've got the finest hi-fi to test drive?



PAUL MESSENGER

A former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for some 26 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer. He also writes for respected US hi-fi journal *Stereophile*.



PAUL MILLER

Paul is our resident scientist and hi-fi's undisputed king of lab testing. He employs his own specially designed equipment to pull apart every measurable parameter and explain its effect on a product's performance.



ALAN SIRCOM

After a stint selling hi-fi, Alan began his journalistic career at *Hi-Fi Choice* some ten years ago. He finished up as Associate Editor of our sister title *Home Entertainment* before turning freelance, so you too can benefit from his extensive knowledge of both two-channel hi-fi and serious AV gear.



JASON KENNEDY

Jason previously edited *Hi-Fi Choice*, but can now be found swanning about his home town of Lewes indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational (trust us), and his love of music knows no bounds.

intro

The sun's out again, I should be outside. But I'm not. Two reasons. One, I'm writing this intro to the delights about to fall before your eyes across the next 121 pages. Two, I'm having too much damn fun with the products we've been drooling over while putting it all together.

Thing is, I'm serious about my music. Really, truly, deadly serious. It's a passion, and when I get the opportunity to hear it through kit as lush as the speakers in this month's *Group Test* (p28) you won't see me for dust. Products like Dynaudio's Audience 82 can make music sound so solid, so real and expansive, it's hard to tear yourself away.

And there's more. Avid's new turntable (p46) has proved a vinyl revelation, and there's plenty for those enticed by the simmering prospect of high resolution, multichannel digital sound – Marantz's first DVD-Audio player (p42) for example, and our group of serious AV amps/receivers (p60).

Mind you, David Vivian's made me insanely jealous. I'd have killed to play with all that lovely gear in his *Systems Solutions* feature (p21), but there aren't enough hours in the day. I guess a tan's out of the question this summer. Ah well, back to the music...

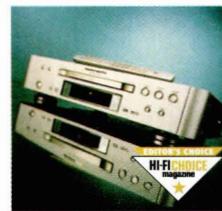


Tim Bower **editor**

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£3.5K turntable



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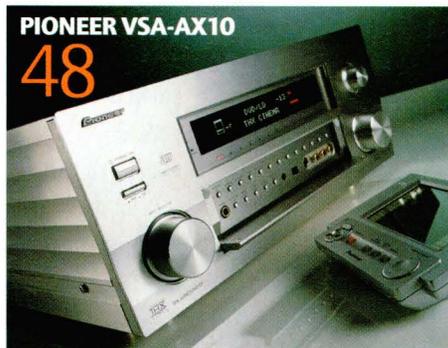
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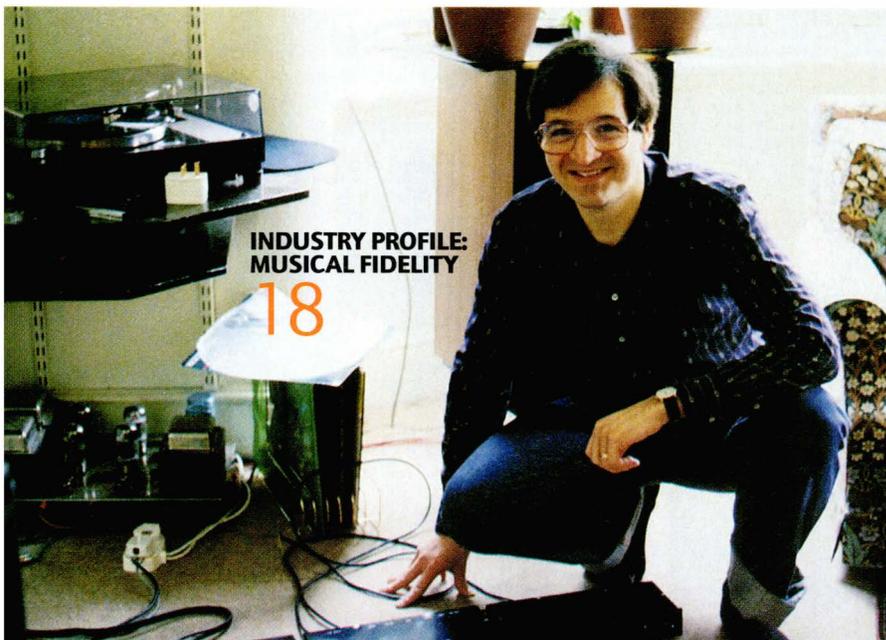
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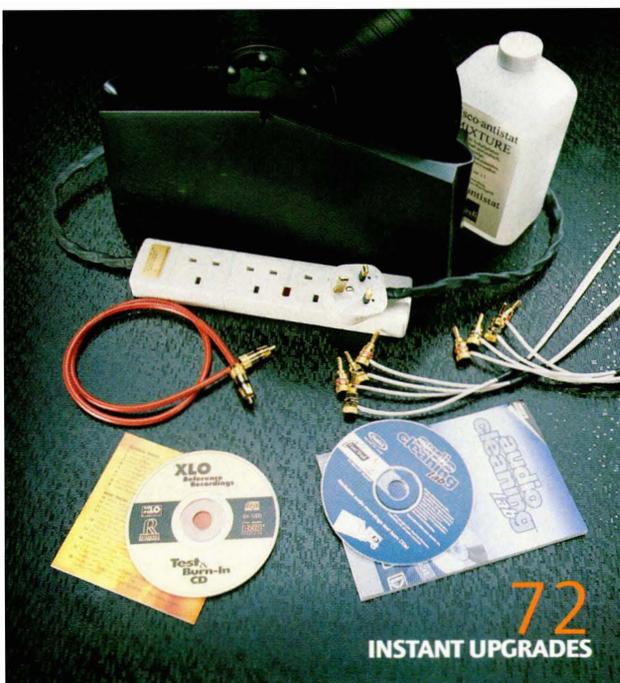
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STAR RATINGS

- ★★★★★ EXCEPTIONAL
- ★★★★☆ VERY GOOD
- ★★★☆☆ AVERAGE
- ★★☆☆☆ SOMETHING LACKING
- ★☆☆☆☆ RUBBISH

AWARD BADGES



Best Buy

The *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy badge is only awarded to products found to offer exceptional performance and value for money in an *HFC Group Test*. Buy this kit with absolute confidence.

Recommended

Awarded to outstanding products in our *Group Tests* that may not offer such exceptional value-for-money as a Best Buy, or may not be suitable for everyone, but still turn in a convincing performance.

Editor's Choice

Products in the *Statements* section that really blow us away are eligible for a special *HFC* Award badge. The coveted Editor's Choice recommendation is reserved for high-end products of exceptional quality.

For 27 years, our unique tests have brought you the most accurate guide to buying hi-fi. Our mix of thorough *Group Tests* and in-depth solo reviews ensures *HFC* is the magazine to trust.



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GROUP TEST: SPEAKERS
EIGHT HIGH PERFORMANCE
FLOORSTANDERS RATED

21 SYSTEM SOLUTIONS SIX WAYS TO BUILD THE BEST



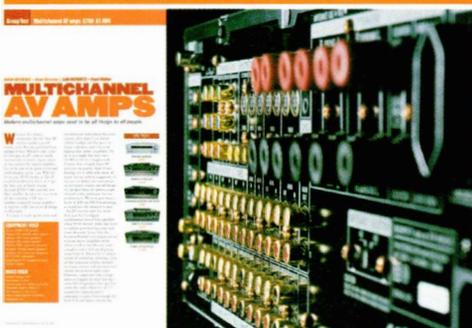
42 DVD-AUDIO EXCLUSIVE MARANTZ'S FIRST DVD-A PLAYER, THE DV12SI



46 VINYL VANGUARD AVID'S VOLVERE SEQUEL TURNTABLE



60 GROUP TEST: MULTICHANNEL AMPS THE BEST SURROUND RECEIVERS UNDER A GRAND



THE COMPONENTS

Roksan Kandy KC-1 CD player based on a Sony transport with a Burr Brown Delta Sigma chipset, the Kandy can be supplied in a broad range of colours. Its sound is pretty colourful too, but when matched with the KA-1 amp the results are engaging.



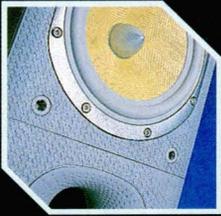
Roksan Kandy KC-1 CD player £550

Heavy-duty alloy-fronted 110 watts-per-channel stereo integrated amplifier. Superb build quality for the money. A six line input model as standard, the KA-1 can be modified to support MM or MC phono cartridges. No tone controls (of course!) but there is a headphone socket... mounted on the back panel!



Roksan Kandy KA-1 integrated amp £550

Entry-level two-way floorstanding loudspeaker from the titan of British speaker manufacture. It features a 25mm metal dome tweeter and 165mm Kevlar woofer and builds upon the DM601 S3, but in more costly and undeniably attractive floorstanding form.



B&W DM 602.5 S3 speakers £400



ROKSAN KANDY KC-1 | ROKSAN KANDY KA-1 | B&W DM602.5 S3

SYSTEM ADDICT

Each month we ask a dealer to recommend a dream system. Then we check it out...

Darby's of St Albans is one of the stalwarts of Hertfordshire hi-fi. Its brief was to produce a system comprising CD, amplifier and (ideally) floorstanding loudspeakers for £1,200-£1,500. Although Darby's toyed with Arcam and Cyrus electronics, the final system hit the end-stops of the budget, with a Roksan/B&W combination that works really rather well.

Roksan's Kandy CD and integrated amplifier have established themselves as specialists' favourites. They are the perfect balance for some of the brighter, more up-front loudspeakers that are commonplace today.

The £550 KC-1 CD player is a simple centre-mounted, Sony be-transported player with a Burr-Brown 96kHz/24bit Delta Sigma DAC. Beneath the shiny front panel, it features six power supply rails and a big toroidal transformer. Similarly styled, the £550 KA-1 integrated amplifier is a 110 watt line-only model with another massive toroidal transformer under the hood and build quality that makes Mercedes look slapdash.

The final part of the Darby's jigsaw was the new £400 B&W DM602.5 S3 entry level floorstanding speaker. This two-way ported speaker is in essence a DM601 S3 two-way bookshelf stretched to be a floorstanding speaker. To cope with the extra volume, the speakers feature enlarged magnets for the bass drivers. It's a reasonably sensitive, not especially challenging speaker to drive, but blends well with the Roksan kit.

A trio like makes a fine 'fit and forget' partnership; it's not a system that the user will be continually tinkering with. Instead, once set up and the speakers positioned a metre or less from the walls, the system will do sterling service unchanged for years.

This is a very easy system to live with, one which covers most of the bases. It has excellent soundstaging properties, portraying the wide studio range of David Gray and the sheer scale of Solti's classic version of *Mahler's Eight Symphony* with aplomb. It also has the

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



£1,500

CONCLUSION

A good basic CD, amp and speaker system that will give years of unstinting service. It's a solid and effective all-rounder, unless you like to headbang a lot, and a fine example of a well matched system both visually and sonically.

sort of tightly controlled bass found in bookshelf speakers, bringing out the dance rhythms of The Propellerheads without overemphasising the bass or ruining the mids and treble. It manages to combine the smooth, graceful piano sounds of Glenn Gould with the swings of more dynamic music while sacrificing little from either. Such a compromise-free system is impressive stuff at this price level.

Almost everything played at all sorts of volume levels passed muster through this tidy Roksan/B&W combo – the only slight failing was a live Led Zep performance that pushed the brashness levels into the red. While this is supposed to be raw and powerful, when turned up to decent levels, it did fall a little flat. Only a minor failing, but headbangers will look elsewhere. Where they'll look at this price, however, remains a mystery...

There is no single component obviously stronger than the others; they all blend in together like a good cocktail. Remove and replace one part of the system and the whole suffers, just like replacing the Lee & Perrins with a splash of cocoa in a bloody Mary. The midband coherence and well-timed bass of the B&W, the dry neutrality of the KA-1 amplifier and the KC-1's slightly rose-tinted, old-fashioned performance perfectly suit one another. It even has room for growth – replacing the QED and Ixos cables we used while reviewing the system with pricier wires would not overawe the performance.

Part of the art of assembling a good system is tailoring it to last. Darby's has done a fine tailoring job here. All three components hang together well, each building on the strengths of the other, adding up to a great performer for anyone – or at least anyone who doesn't want to play guitar rock at ear-splitting levels. For £1,500, this system is hard to beat.



"It's a great performer for anyone, or at least anyone who doesn't want to play guitar rock at ear-splitting levels."

CONTACTS

DARBY'S, St Albans,
Hertfordshire
☎ 01727 851596
✉ Roksan 020 8900 6801
✉ B&W 01903 750750



TAG MCLAREN'S NEW FORMULA

TAG LAUNCHES RACEY NEW HIGH-END AV PROCESSOR

⊕ TAG McLaren has released details of its new 'entry level' 5.1 channel AV processor to be launched this month. The AV30R cuts in under the still current AV32R and is said to provide more features than the '32R did when launched (it

has since seen a number of upgrades). The new model boasts a full complement of processing modes including Dolby Digital, Pro Logic II and DTS, and includes a 5.1 channel analogue bypass so you can hook up multichannel SACD and DVD-Audio

players. Potential upgrade paths include expansion to 7.1 channels, a DAB tuner module, HDCD decoding and future software downloads available from TAG McLaren's website. Price is £1,799. ☎ TAG McLaren 01480 415681

ELAC JETS IN

ELAC EXTENDS THE AUDIOPHILE 5 SERIES WITH NEW COMPACT STANDMOUNT

⊕ ELAC has launched a new stand-mounting speaker that combines its much-praised JET ribbon tweeter with a main driver from the £2,500 CL330. The new 510 is a wide bandwidth design, with a frequency response claimed to extend up to 35kHz. The 180mm mid/bass unit has an aluminium sandwich cone with a 37mm voice-coil and the nest result is claimed to offer a very wide dispersion and superb off-axis imaging. Its MDF cabinet is heavily braced and damped and is available in a choice of real wood veneers. Price is £999 per pair and it's available now. ☎ Sennheiser UK 0800652 5002



17 BIT BEAT

DENON LAUNCHES NEW '17 BIT' CD PLAYER

⊕ Danish high-end manufacturer Denon has launched a new £2,500 CD player. The BEAT B-400XS is built around a Sony transport and is said to be controlled by two micro-processors – one for transmission, another for the fripperies of display, remote etc. Only the second CD player from the company, it is also claimed to

incorporate several new technologies, including some designed from scratch by Denon. Perhaps the most interesting of these is PlusBit, which is said to mathematically improve the original signal by adding digital 'bits'. Apparently, an extra bit is added to CD's existing 16, a process which Denon says "doubles the resolution

of CD". The company also claims that the D/A converter, which is mounted on a separate board and can be relocated externally to provide a two-box transport and DAC upgrade, operates at 25 bits (instead of the usual 24). Sounds interesting – it's available now. ☎ Denon (0045) 75 181214

We can't wait for... UPCOMING KIT THAT'S GOT US CHAMPING AT THE BIT

ARCAM AV8/P37
£5,000 June
Multichannel processor and seven-channel power amp combo could be the perfect meeting of high resolution music and movies.

T+A CRITERION TCI 1RE
£6,000 June
Top of the range speaker from German boys T+A promises

to woo our eyes and ears with its electrostatic tweeter and curvaceous cabinet.

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRI-VISTA INTEGRATED
£3,000 September
A new amp is rumoured for the brand's 20th anniversary that boasts 300 watts of power per channel and uses highly unusual trivista

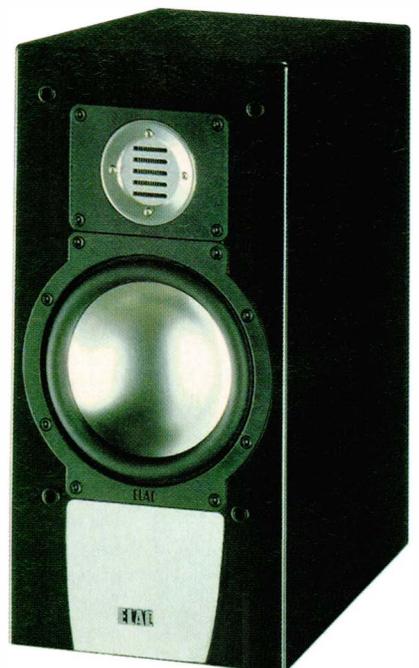
tubes. A matching CD player will follow.

MARANTZ DV8300 July
Hot on the heels of Pioneer, this will be the second DVD-A/SACD 'universal' player to hit the UK market... the best of all worlds?

SONY SCD-XE680 June
Sony's forthcoming entry-

level SACD player, replacing the £300 SCD-XE670. Will it be enough to tempt more punters to sample the delights of SACD?

PHILIPS CDR855M
£550 October
Part of Philip's next generation CD-RW line-up – a three-disc CD recorder that will also rip files into MP3.





PULL UP A Q

NEW TOP OF THE RANGE SPEAKER FROM KEF

⊕ KEF Audio has unleashed a flagship for its high-end Reference Series – the £8,999 Model 207. Special attention has been given to both extremes of the frequency

ladder for the five way design, which incorporates KEF's Uni-Q mid/high frequency combi driver housed in a cast aluminium pod with an extra titanium 'hypertweeter' on top. These

combine with a lower midrange driver and two ten-inch woofers that operate in parallel, but with one rolling off earlier than the other.

☎ KEF Audio 01622 672261

In brief

CD-LIFT is a new Danish gadget that allows touch-free handling of CDs. Looking like a fried egg, the device consists of a semispherical rubber ball set within a plastic ring which uses suction to lift CDs from their cases. Prices start at £6 ranging to £25 for the an aluminium version. ☎ 01256 889880

ECOSSE has developed second generation versions of many of its cables and has also dropped the price of some designs. The price reductions are possible due to improved production techniques, greater efficiency and improved distribution. The new prices come into force in June and will affect both interconnects and speaker cables. ☎ 0141 353 0509

THE ISOTEK SubStation is a new mains conditioner and distribution unit designed to fit into home hi-fi racks. The bespoke specification allows the six outlets to be fed from a combination of filter and isolation modules according to the user's needs. The SubStation claims to dramatically reduce noise and improve dynamic range, scale and definition of the soundstage. The SubStation comes with a lifetime guarantee and prices start at £395. ☎ 01256 889880

KEF has launched a Q Series centre channel speaker. The Q9c claims to combine fast transient speed with wide dispersion characteristics. The unit also employs KEF's new metal dome tweeter, said to be developed directly from the Reference Series unit. The Q9c is available now at £250, in black ash, dark apple or maple. ☎ 01622 672261

MUSICAL NEWCOMERS

NEW PRE AND POWER AMPS FROM MUSICAL FIDELITY HIT THE STORES



⊕ Musical Fidelity has launched a new pre and power amp pairing called the A3.2^{CR}. The pre-amp (pictured above) is claimed to offer almost no distortion up to 100kHz. It is a dual mono design with a choke-regulated power supply and two very large transformers to reduce noise. Meanwhile, the A3.2CR power amp is said to deliver more than 250 watts per channel into eight ohms. Low distortion, a massive dynamic range and high stability over any load range are also claimed. Both the preamp and power amp are priced at £999 apiece.

☎ MF 020 8900 2866



NAD'S MOVIE MACHINE

NAD LAUNCHES NEW DVD PLAYER WITH ADVANCED PROGRESSIVE SCAN

⊕ NAD has a new DVD-Video player winging its way to the shops – the T562. The new £500 machine features progressive scan video and supports both CD-R/RW discs and MP3 encoded CDs.

Claimed to set new benchmarks for sound quality for a DVD player, with music as well as video sources, the T562 incorporates a custom-designed audio output stage using audiophile grade components throughout. HDCD decoding is supplied for discs, and MP3 decoding is handled using the same DACs and associated circuitry as CD

playback, said to deliver much better sound than would normally be expected from an MP3 file.

On the video side, a ten-bit/54 MHz DAC is used and '3:2 pull-down' advanced progressive scan can supply superior picture quality when used with projectors and suitably equipped high-end monitors. The player also boasts a full complement of video connections including composite, component and S-video as well as electrical and optical digital audio outputs. It's available in June.

☎ Lenbrook UK 01908 319360



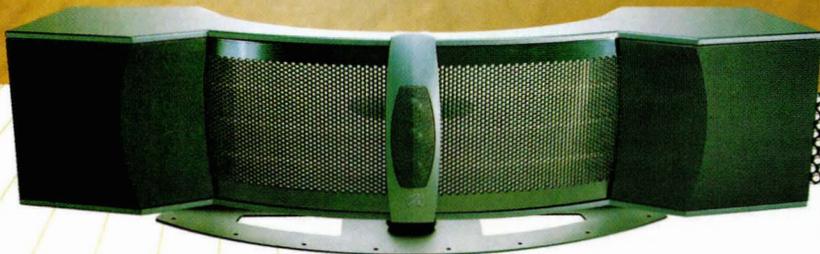
right Descent
Sub Woofer

far right Odyssey
Hybrid Electrostatic Loudspeaker System

below Theater
Hybrid Electrostatic Channel Speaker Center

MARTIN LOGAN

eye to ear co-ordination



ABSOLUTE SOUNDS' commitment to Martin Logan has been rewarded with a line of hybrid electrostatic speakers so comprehensive that it now encompasses every permutation of home theatre, and a price band from entry-level to cutting edge.

Prodigy, Odyssey, Ascent and the best selling Aeon are the models marking a new era for Martin Logan. Having mastered the art and science of creating hybrid systems, with the awe-inspiring Statement Evolution 2, Martin Logan has applied the same skill to smaller systems suitable for a wider range of applications.

All speakers 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, Odyssey, Ascent and also the best-selling Aeon for those purists with limited space as children of the Statement.

To provide a selection for all home entertainment needs have also been joined by the new Theater and Cinema centre-channel models, the Script, the Scenario and the awesome Descent self-powered subwoofer, to create the awards winning Home cinema loudspeaker system able to grace any size or shape of room.

Martin Logan Home Speaker Package
Home Cinema Choice Award Winner 2002
Best speaker package over £1000



absolutesounds ltd.
58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW
T 020 8971 3909 F 020 8879 7962
www.absolutesounds.com
info@absolutesounds.com



PREPARE FOR PRIMARE NEW TWO-CHANNEL PREAMPLIFIER LAUNCHED

⊕ Primare has launched the first of a new range of high-end audio and video products. The PRE30 is a two-channel preamp featuring the firm's traditional understated design. Under the lid, the company claims it benefits from

an enhanced circuit design that is class A coupled and fully balanced with full remote control of all functions including switching of all seven inputs. The PRE30 also boasts individually adjustable input sensitivity and is capable of

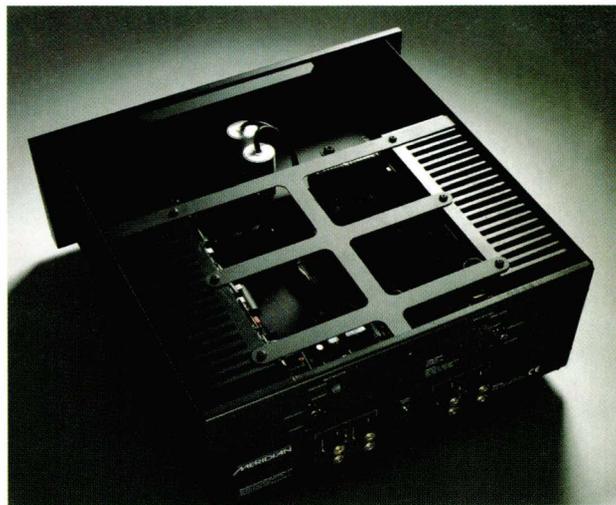
controlling a Primare power amplifier through the remote link system. The next product in the range, a DVD player, is rumoured for next month. The PRE30 is available now priced at £1,200.

☎ CSE 01423 359054

MERIDIAN POWER NEW HIGH-POWER STEREO AMP PROMISES 300 WATTS PER CHANNEL

⊕ Those who crave serious power may find Meridian's new two-channel power amplifier fits the bill. The 559 is capable of delivering 300 watts per channel into eight ohms and can be bridged to provide a whopping 1,500 watts of power. It also sports switchable balanced and single-ended phono inputs for each channel, and uses twenty output devices in a super-class-A output stage. The internal wiring features van den Hul product and round the back you'll find dual gold-plated binding posts for bi-wiring. All that power is yours for a mere £2,550.

☎ Meridian Audio 01480 445678



Hi-Fi diary

JUNE

18-20 **Cedia UK Expo 2002**, Brighton 01462 627377

SEPTEMBER

6-8 **Gothenburg Hi-Fi Show**, Sweden

13-15 **The Hi-Fi Show**, London 020 8774 0847

OCTOBER

3-6 **Stuff Live 2002**, London 020 8307 2300

12-13 **The Practical Hi-Fi Show**, Manchester 01524 36991

19-21 **The VAD Hi-Fi Show**, Netherlands

NEW CONCEPT ATC'S MOST AFFORDABLE SURROUND PACKAGE YET

⊕ Pro speaker specialist ATC has unveiled its latest multi-channel speaker set. Built around four SCM7 passive speakers, the Concept 1 Collection employs a dedicated centre speaker called the C1 and the new 250-watt active Sub 01. The SCM7 and C1 use a 25mm soft dome tweeter together with a 45mm dome that's mechanically coupled to a hand-built 125mm bass cone. Priced at £2,000, the Concept 1 is considerably more affordable than ATC's previous entry-level package, the £5,500 Concept 2.

☎ ATC 01285 760561



In brief ⊕ Continued

SONY has launched two new DVD players said to be its most competitive and feature-packed models yet. Both players use Sony's Precision Drive 2 system claimed to deliver superior picture quality due to a dynamic tilt compensation mechanism that provides faster and more accurate tracking of DVDs.

Both the NVP-NS305 and 405 feature a 24 bit/192 kHz DAC and are compatible with DVD+RW and -R/RW, DVD-Video, CD-R/RW, Video CD and MP3. Prices have yet to be confirmed.

☎ 08705 111999

VISATON has released a new ribbon tweeter available on its own or as part of a Topas loudspeaker kit. The MHT 12 tweeter extends all the way to 40kHz - very high, but still within the bandwidth of DVD-A and SACD. The unit makes claims of low distortion and high efficiency along with a linear impedance response, all for £111 inclusive.

☎ 01455 286603

BUSH has relaunched the TR130 transistor radio, apparently the UK's best selling radio of the sixties (pictured above). Designed by Raleigh Chopper creator Tom Karen, the £40



radio has been re-released to commemorate England's victory in the 1966 World Cup.

☎ 020 8787 3111

THE ACTIVATOR is a new security device that could help prevent the theft of your expensive hi-fi. It deters burglars by turning on any

pre-selected electrical appliance (like your hi-fi) at the sign of a break-in. It works by detecting low-level subsonic sounds caused by the movement of air as an intruder tampers with a door or window. It costs £35 including p&p.

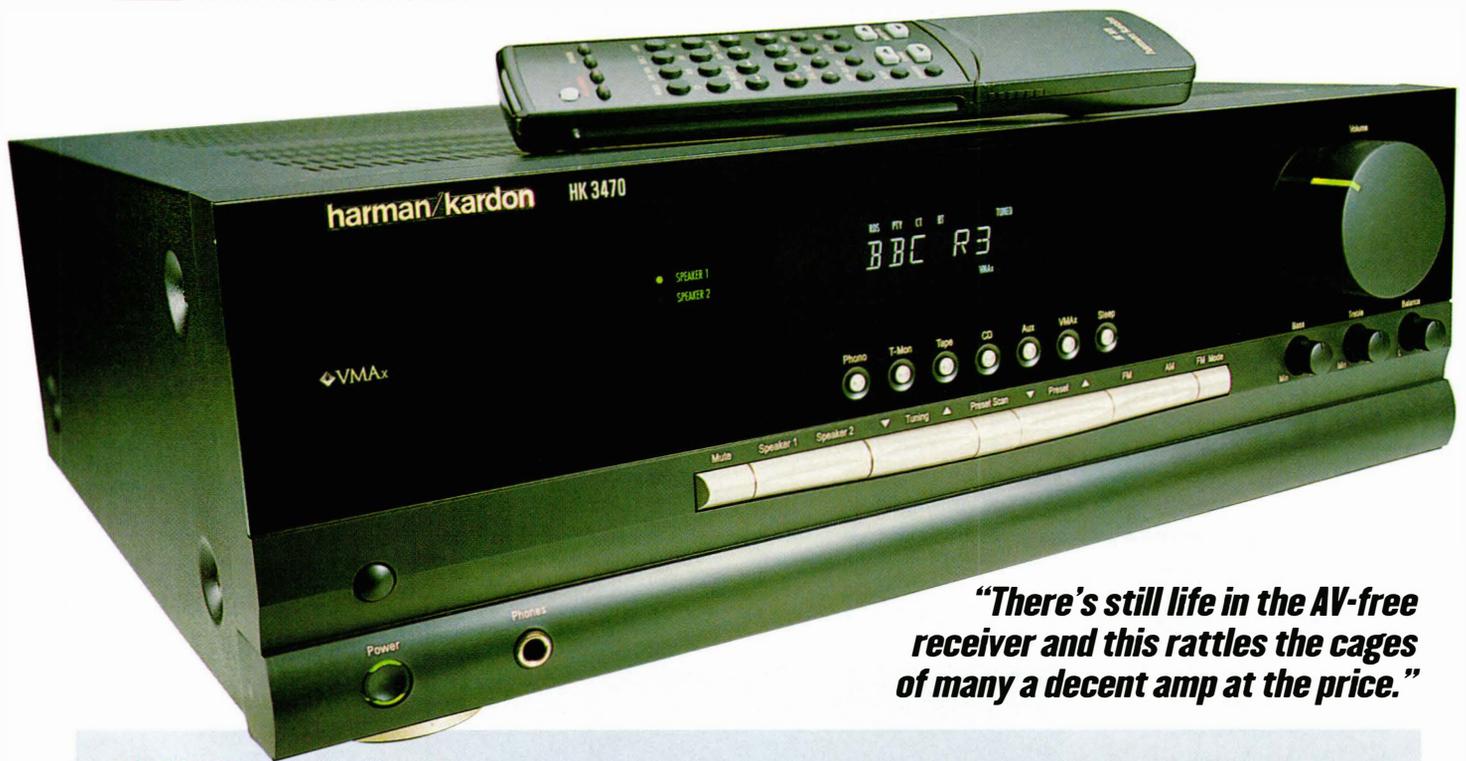
☎ 0800 783 4069

MARKET SQUARE, a small British independent record label has released the world's first single on SACD. *Did I Hurt You?* by Irish singer/writer Eleanor McEvoy will be released on 3 June.

☎ 020 8832 1817

Incoming

➤ First tests of essential new kit from hi-fi's front line



"There's still life in the AV-free receiver and this rattles the cages of many a decent amp at the price."

★★★★★

Harman Kardon HK 3470 stereo receiver **£299** EXCLUSIVE

➤ You don't see the word 'receiver' without that 'AV' prefix much these days. Harman Kardon's HK 3470 is a notable exception. In typical black and gold livery common to modern HK designs (but looking like a scaled-down MacIntosh product in the process), this is the most powerful stereo receiver HK has made in a generation, delivering a suggested 100 watts per channel into eight ohms along with a very healthy claimed 40 amps of peak current.

Although this is not designed to be a multiroom device, it has two sets of speaker terminals, used for bi-wiring or driving two pairs of speakers and a pair of phono inputs and outputs for a remote control. And it's reasonably packed with inputs and outputs too – it has an MM turntable input, a front headphone socket, sleep mode and even VMAx virtual surround sound, for music sources. There are only two line inputs, however, which may prove limiting in the future.

KEY FEATURES

- Stereo receiver, 100 watts per channel
- MM turntable, CD, aux inputs
- AM/FM tuner with RDS and 30 presets
- Two tape loops
- VMAx virtual surround
- A/B speaker switching
- Tone controls
- Remote control

Like most Harman amplifier products, the HK 3470 produces a big and solid soundstage with plenty of dynamic range and a very expensive sounding rich tonality. Better yet, it has the muscle to back up the big sound, even at high volumes. This makes it sound good with Led Zep just as well as pretty sounding audiophile recordings like the acoustic version of *My Drug Buddy* from *Rare On Air*. Even the tuner is good – it may be on the dry and insensitive side, but it is very detailed and with a good aerial, natural and big sounding radio is a distinct bonus.

It is not the most subtle or detailed performer around and the MM phono stage sounds puffy with its mid-bass emphasis, but these sins are easily forgiven when you get this much sound for this little money. Forget VMAx surround though – it sounds synthetic and bloated and is best left well alone.

HK proves there's still life in the AV-free receiver and this rattles the

WHAT IS VMAX?

Harman's proprietary VMAx system has appeared on many Harman Kardon AV products, but this is the first time VMAx has been fitted to a stereo receiver. VMAx is a signal processing circuit designed to produce what Harman calls an "open, spacious sound field when only two loudspeakers are available".

Essentially VMAx is a simple ambience enhancer, a bit like the 'hall' or 'disco' surround sound settings on an AV amplifier, using minute delays and frequency boosts and cuts to change the sound. VMAx is less adjustable than tone controls, however – the user simply turns VMAx on or off. Avoid it!

cages of many a decent amplifier at the price. If you want high-end audio sound without the price tag, the HK 3470 is a laudable beast.

☎ Harman Consumer 020 8731 4670
 🌐 www.harman.com

★★★★★

Rio Riot MP3 hard disc portable £350

► Purists may still scorn MP3 but the performance of today's hard disc players makes them well worth considering. The new Rio Riot boasts an impressive 20Gb of storage capacity – that's 10,000 songs at 128 kbps or 2,500 at the highest quality 320 kbps rate. At the latter level, sound quality really is close to a good CD personal and this makes carting round a pouch of CDs seem silly. The Riot also has an FM tuner, which is a first for this kind of product.

Getting to the music is easy, with album, artist, song and genre categories all indexed alphabetically. During playback you can also create playlists from the music you have stored and the Rio is one of the simplest products of its kind to use. The screen has great resolution and is backlit for

all conditions. The unit connects to a PC or Mac via USB cable and ripping CDs to MP3 and sending them to the device is easy using the simple yet comprehensive Real Player software.

You may find that compressing to MP3 results in some loss of dynamics and a slight edginess to treble, particularly at lower bit rates, but it is a genuine alternative to CD at 320kbps. Even at the highest bit-rates the Riot will hold something like 250 albums inside its impressively portable body. Still want to carry a pile of discs around with you?

☎ Sonic Blue 01189 637420

🌐 www.sonicblue.com

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 20GB drive stores up to 800 albums
- ▶ Built-in FM tuner with custom presets
- ▶ 10 hour battery life
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 140x90x35mm
- ▶ Weight: 280 grams (including battery)
- ▶ 60x40mm LCD screen with 240x160 resolution
- ▶ Supports MP3 (32 kbps-320 kbps) and WMA
- ▶ Real Jukebox 2.0 and Apple iTunes software supplied
- ▶ Rechargeable battery supplied



KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Claimed frequency response: 25Hz-20kHz
- ▶ Recommended amplifier power 10-150W
- ▶ Sensitivity: 90dB
- ▶ Impedance: 8 ohms
- ▶ 25mm silk dome tweeter
- ▶ 2x114mm mid-bass units
- ▶ 200mm bass driver
- ▶ drive units computer-matched to +/- 1dB

★★★★★

American Acoustic Development E48 speakers £599

► British ex-pat Phil Jones cut his loudspeaker-designing teeth with Acoustic Energy before moving Stateside. He worked on Boston's Lynnfield speaker project before founding American Audio Development in 1998. There are several AAD ranges, but none hit high-end prices. The E48 floorstander is the top of the E Series, and yet only costs a quid under £600.

It's a very slim, tall floorstander, sporting a 25mm silk dome tweeter, two 114mm aluminium/polypropylene midrange units and a single 200mm polypropylene side-firing bass unit at ankle level, all pretty impressive at £599 per pair. It's also very heavy – a single E48 weighs in at a truly back-crunching 20kg.

Despite Phil Jones' Brit heritage, this is every bit the American home cinema speaker. It works best in a larger room

than the average British living room, prefers lighter room construction than our bricks and mortar construction and places emphasis on a big sound. All of which weighs against the E48 as a UK sales success. Slap David Holmes on the CD tray and the treble and midband are extremely precise and detailed, with more high frequency extension and vocal articulation than average at the price, but the bass is only loosely associated with the music – it either booms on one note or remains silent. You'd certainly feel plenty of impact in a home cinema environment, but it lacks cohesion with music.

For sure, you get a lot of speaker for the money. Just not the speaker you may want for listening to hi-fi in the average British living room.

☎ Peach Amber Limited 01327 706560

🌐 www.aadsound.com

KRELL

KRELL'S ANGEL'S
NEW CHAPTER

MORE muscle, MORE musicality - and LESS heat: that's what you get as Krell's angels move into a new chapter.

With their unique CAST circuitry, Krell's legendary FPB amplifiers have already shown the massive musical gains of keeping the signal in the current domain. Now developed into CAST-X, these superb new powerhouses will make your system come alive like never before.

And with Krell's new Sustained Plateau Biasing 3, you get an extra 100Wpc from every amplifier - with the bonus of even cooler running!

The full benefits of CAST-X are best heard through Krell's fabulous range of LAT loudspeakers, from the floor standing LAT-1 reviewed by Martin Colloms as having 'exceptionally low coloration, high resolution and very fine stereo imaging' (HFN April 2002), to the compact stand mounted LAT-2.

There's also hot news for movie buffs on a budget with the new Krell Showcase 7.1 THX processor and Showcase 5,6 and 7 channel amplifiers.

Call **Absolute Sounds** for full details.

KRELL
THE LEADER IN AUDIO ENGINEERING

Featured
Speaker_LAT 1

Upper_Showcase Processor
Lower_Showcase Cinema Amplifier

Far right_Krell FPB 750MCX Amplifier



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www.absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com





★★★★★

NAD C541i CD player **£330** EXCLUSIVE

Next to the high-end Silverline series, the £330 C541i is the top of the range NAD CD player. This freshly-revised machine sports a 24-bit Burr-Brown Delta Sigma DAC and Nichicon Muse capacitors, all of which makes for a smoother, flatter frequency response. It also features HDCD decoding and a new, stubby, remote handset that is functional but looks like an early 1990s flip phone. The dark grey styling remains unchanged, however, with a basic functionality typical of the brand. There's a decent

variety of trick play modes on offer, accessible on the remote or via the eight logic buttons on the front panel.

For a 'mere' CD player, the back panel is absolutely stuffed with options. In addition to the regular analogue and both flavours of digital output, the C541i adds an additional two phono sockets for NAD's own link, and 12V trigger sockets for multiroom systems.

Like previous top NAD players, the C541i is extremely rich and smooth sounding, with an almost holographic soundstage and an occasional flash of

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ CD player, supports CD-R/RW discs
- ▶ 24-bit Burr Brown DAC
- ▶ HDCD compatible
- ▶ Analogue, optical digital, coaxial digital outputs
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 435x70x285mm

brightness to stop it sounding too stodgy. Anyone still reeling from the tragic death of Alice In Chains' Layne Staley may find that the C541i sounds a bit on the soft side, and it could certainly do with more treble detail, but it is unbeaten at the price with anything soulful. The NAD C541i makes CDs sound warm, big and musical, so if your collection runs from Motown to Mo Wax, it's a great player to choose below the £500 mark.

Lenbrook UK 01908 319360
www.lenbrook.co.uk



★★★★★

Sony HAR-D1000 hard disc audio recorder **£600**

This is Sony's first attempt to enter the (still rather thin) hi-fi hard disc market. It's difficult not to notice hard disc storage gradually being integrated into music and video products, a trend that's set to grow as we move through 2002 and beyond.

The HAR-D1000 has a 40Gb disc inside, meaning a whopping 20,000 tracks can be stored using the mandatory ATRAC3 compression system. This reduces file sizes down to one tenth of their normal size, allowing mass storage albeit at a cost to replay quality. The

deck has an integral CD drive for playback and twin speed recording to the hard disc, and most functions can be operated by the remote control or by a PC using the USB lead and software supplied. Album and track information must be entered if you expect to find your music in a hurry and the device offers fairly prompt track access using searchable categories. Adding the track info directly is slow, but inputting from your PC's keyboard is quicker.

The HAR-D1000 is aimed at a lounge/hi-fi environment and will

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 40Gb hard drive
- ▶ ATRAC 3 LP2 recording
- ▶ 2,000 album storage capacity
- ▶ 2x speed CD to HD recording
- ▶ Optical digital input
- ▶ Analogue input and output
- ▶ USB terminal
- ▶ CD Text transfer
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 43x82x28cm

accept digital signals via an optical lead along with conventional analogue connections. Sony's copyright system means you can't transfer CD-R/RW discs that are effectively copies themselves, something to bear in mind if you have lots of CD-R recordings.

Playback from the CD drive is OK; similar to an average sub-£300 CD player. From the hard disc things sound flatter – ATRAC compression robs the soundstage of depth and detail leaving two-dimensional music that's lacking in dynamic terms. Interesting technology, the influence of which is set to grow, but it's still in its infancy for domestic hi-fi applications.

Sony UK 08705 111999
www.sony-europe.com



A3.2 SERIES.
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PLATINUM PLATED FITTINGS. REMOTE CONTROLLED. PHONO STAGE.
POWERFUL, ROBUST, BUILT.



Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 3 speakers

£350

Hot on the heels of the little Aegis Evo 1 (a Best Buy in issue 226) comes its larger floorstanding brother – the Aegis Evo 3. In its development, Acoustic Energy has directly addressed some bass driver integration criticisms levelled at the old Aegis 3 it replaces. The new model now features a metal alloy bass cone to match the mid/bass driver along with a new 25mm soft dome tweeter, die-cast driver chassis and upgraded crossovers. The modifications have not upped the price, which remains a tempting £350.

Our mass-filled units worked best with a bit of space behind them; there are reflex ports both front and rear so beware if you are shopping for a small-room speaker. A sturdy plinth screws into the base of the cabinet and carpet-piercing spikes thread into the plinth's bottom.

The Aegis Evo 3 plays music with an authoritative weight. There's plenty of bass clout of offer, though it can tend to rather dominate proceedings – even considerable time spent playing with the speakers' positioning failed to completely alleviate the problem. Fortunately, the alloy drivers provide a speedy transient response, and the midband in particular is fast, vibrant and engaging.

There's enough low frequency depth for bass fiends and the solid, weighty presentation lends itself well to dance and rock. It's an attractive speaker and undoubtedly good material value, but position with care and choose your partnering components wisely if you're going to keep that bass in check.

Acoustic Energy 01285 654432

www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 25mm soft dome tweeter
- ▶ 120mm metal alloy mid/bass unit
- ▶ 160mm metal alloy bass driver
- ▶ 90.5dB sensitivity
- ▶ 8 ohm impedance
- ▶ Bi-wireable
- ▶ Choice of vinyl finish
- ▶ Dimensions (WxHxD): 19x88x22cm

“There’s enough low frequency depth for bass fiends and the solid, weighty presentation lends itself well to dance and rock.”

The world according to Musical Fidelity

Clarinetist Antony Michaelson started Musical Fidelity twenty years ago. It now employs fifty people and turns over £8m a year.

▶ INTERVIEW: Paul Messenger

Unlike most contemporaries who've started successful specialist hi-fi companies, Antony Michaelson is first and foremost a musician rather than an engineer. His prowess with the classical clarinet is legendary, but he's also a successful businessman and dyed-in-the-wool hi-fi enthusiast, who has kept his finger firmly on the



industry pulse for two decades. 2002 will see Musical Fidelity registering twenty years in the business, and launching a range of suitably stylish models in celebration. Indeed, when I sat down to chat with Antony, I was quite startled to discover that the company had actually created no fewer than 140 different products down the years.

HFC: That seems an awful lot of products. Many more than most of your UK competitors.

AM: It's just the fight for survival. And a lot of those were derivatives, sharing the same case-work, say with different PCBs and circuitry inside, so the number is a little bit illusory. But the fight for survival really is the root cause. Just look at the number of times I've reinvented the company down the years.

HFC: I remember your original product, The Preamp. It seems to me you've reinvented the brand every four or five years since then.

AM: I believe that's important. After all, we are in the entertainment business. I think people like looking at and touching new and different things.

HFC: You started with The Preamp, the Dr Thomas power amp, and the Synthesis integrated. Then came the A1, which I believe was a huge commercial hit.

AM: Yes, we sold something like 100,000 A1s, despite horrendous production problems in the early days. However, after the A1 we rather lost our way. Neither the Electra nor the F-series hit the

spot, and by 1995 we were just dying. In that year the turnover fell by 41 per cent. It was a very depressing Christmas, but in the shower on Boxing Day I came up with the idea for the X-10D (a 'signal conditioner' unit in a compact alloy tube).

It just came to me, the whole thing, including how it should be made and put together. I took a chance on the tooling costs, and

when it came out it sold like a bomb, changing everything overnight. We followed it up with all sorts of other X-series components, including the larger lozenge-shaped XAs. I still think the styling is exquisite, but buyers are very conservative, so I decided to have another go at the regular rectangular box format. We brought out the A-series, which has also gone very well.

Next came the Nu-Vistas of course. We were chatting in R&D one day, and I suggested we did a nuvistor preamp. The other guys said: what's a nuvistor? Being an old fart, I knew about these devices, explained it to them, and everyone got very enthusiastic. I bought up what I could of the world stock of nuvistor tubes, and it went from there. It sounded fantastic, was really good looking, with fabulous build quality. Yet in terms of 'high end' prices it was quite cheap.

HFC: So where do we go now you've sold all the Nu-Vistas?

AM: Later this year we'll be doing the Anniversary series, to celebrate the twenty years I've spent in this business. It'll be better than the Nu-Vistas, and I've got a really wild idea which involves lighting up the feet, so the units sit on a glowing bed.

Past Glories



THE PREAMP
The first ever Musical Fidelity product was a very early 'minimalist' preamp. With a non-standard size and a Perspex fascia, it offered something akin to 'high end' performance at a bargain price.



A1
A landmark minimalist integrated amplifier, with 20W of mostly class A sound and a ribbed heatsink case. It got hot and wasn't always reliable, but sounded very good for the price.

X-10D
This 'signal conditioner' is more of an accessory than a component, but it was the first of the vital X-series that transformed Musical Fidelity's fortunes for the better in the mid-1990s.



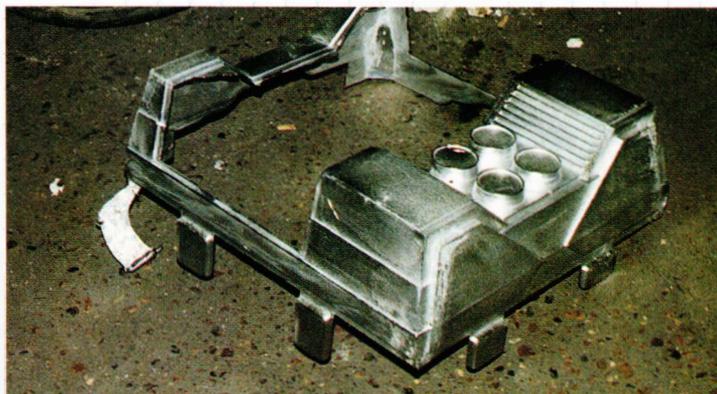
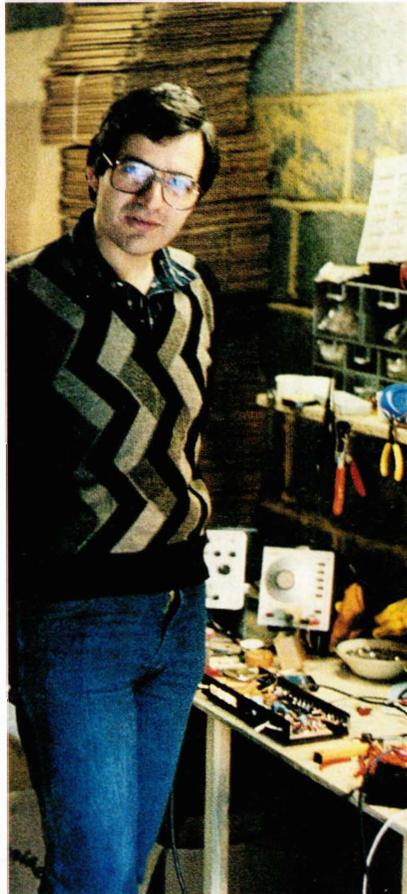
Below: MF's "magnificent failure". While distinctive design worked for the X-10D and its offshoots (far right) – the faux art deco look of the Chronos amplifier kept buyers away in droves.
Right: The casting process for the Chronos.



Industry Profile

Below: Musical Fidelity's MD Antony Michaelson in his garage in 1982 building his first commercial product, The Preamp.

Left: One of Michaelson's most lauded products, the Nu-Vista 300 power amp and PSU.



"The other guys said: what's a nuvistor? Being an old fart, I knew about these devices, explained it to them, and everyone got very enthusiastic."

HFC: That should look great on glass shelving!

AM: We'll use a three-colour LED, fading from one to another as the unit goes from stand-by via warm-up to fully on! One thing I've learned over the years is that although people might not admit they like flashy styling, in practice they do. They want their friends to come in and notice a new piece of kit and ask about it, without needing to be prompted.

We'll also have a completely new circuit design coming along, which will be quite extraordinary. It'll have lower feedback than any circuit we've used before, and dramatically lower high frequency distortion too, which is very important.

HFC: So you're not just putting the existing products on flashy new feet?

AM: No. The feet are just a bit of theatre. But the Anniversary series itself will be something very special indeed. The circuitry will be quite novel, and we'll be using another unusual valve called a trivistor.

HFC: Which is presumably related to the nuvistor?

AM: Yes, but nobody in the business knows about these. Even I'd never heard of them. After the nuvistor project finished, one of the designers apparently went off elsewhere and started working on triodes. The trivistor is the sub-miniature triode tube's answer to the nuvistor, made around 1982 for military

purposes only. They're about 8dB quieter than nuvistors, and do everything just that little bit better than nuvistors. Not dramatically so, but they're just a little bit better in every area.

HFC: Are they still generally available?

AM: No. I've bought what I think are the world stocks, which will do the Anniversary series, with spares for every one we make, just like we did with the

nuvistors. I have enough to do 500 integrated amps, 500 CD players, 300 preamps and 300 power amps. The preamp will be quite elaborate and expensive, with MM/MC vinyl, plus line level analogue and digital inputs, a big upsampling DAC, and will basically

do everything. For the power amp we're just going to build the ultimate power amp... nothing serious... ☺

You can contact Musical Fidelity on:

☎ 0208 900 2866

🌐 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

Turn to page 52 for a review of Musical Fidelity's new CD-PRE[™], a CD player and preamp in one box.

Forthcoming Highlights

Musical Fidelity is celebrating its 20th birthday this year, and will be introducing a new limited edition Anniversary series of components in celebration.

There will be four components in the range: an integrated amplifier; a CD player; a feature-rich upsampling pre-amplifier; and a 'mega' power amp. All will feature new low-feedback circuitry with trivistor 'cold triode' valves, and colour-illuminated feet.



JBL

"A gobsmackingly good pair of speakers that not only sound great but also look the part. Reinforce your floors to handle the weight (and your walls to handle the bass)."

Paul Pettengle on Ti6K,
★★★★★ April 2002

GOB SMACKING

JBL TiK
SERIES



Ti6K



Ti12K



TiK
Centre



TiK Sub



Ti10K

Stunning
loudspeakers
available
in 2 wood
finishes and
5 lacquered
colours



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H A Harman International Company

<http://international.jbl.com>



SYSTEM CITY

There are many ways to build a high performance hi-fi. David Vivian has road tested six. This is his story...

Putting together a hi-fi or home cinema system often seems to be more art than science. The aim is the same as it's always been: to end up with something that – sonically at the very least – is more than merely the sum of its parts.

That's really the point, the reason we burn the effort and cash in the first place. The goal is a certain synergy, a hardware regime that accumulates excellence, conjures up a little magic rather than merely passing muster. Otherwise it's a no-brainer off the peg number, game over.

In one sense, the chances of success have never been greater. Compatibility isn't the issue it once was. Any collection of Recommendations or Best Buys from these pages will do the plug 'n' play thing, occasionally with exceptional results. You might get lucky. But there's no substitute for chasing down components that mesh together like an elite unit of the SAS.

And that, given the bewildering choice of formats now available (everything from a vinyl-spinning, valve-amped stereo to a multichannel colossus capable of handling the new high resolution digital music formats as well as DVD Video) is the considerable can of worms that confronts the hi-fi consumer in 2002.

As ever, we're here to help. On the following pages we've assembled six serious systems that have only one thing in common: they work. The spread doesn't just embrace competing technologies, from ancient to cutting edge, but also explores the potential benefits of ploughing more money into the front end, buying into a whole brand philosophy front-to-back and, indeed, attempting to prioritise style without sacrificing sound quality.

Representing old-school purism – and nicely eclectic – is a turntable, pre/power

valve combo from Audio Note, rounded off with typically unfirilly but deliciously transparent speakers from AVI. The case for one-make Brit-Fi is eloquently put by a sleek yet potent all-Naim system while a canny combination of Arcam and Chord electronics paired with new standmounters from Germany's Elac shows exactly what a splash of hi-tech and front-first budget manipulation can achieve. Style-fi that stuns is definitely where Eclipse's bullet-shaped TD512 speakers and A502 amp are at and, finally, we've lined up a couple of multi-channel systems, one SACD-based and purely for music (Sony, Arcam, Tannoy), the other DVD-A-based and capable of rolling out the whole music/home cinema nine yards (Denon, Harman-Kardon, B&W). Choose your weapon. ➤

“Compatibility isn't the issue it once was. Any collection of Recommendations or Best Buys from these pages will do the plug 'n' play thing, occasionally with exceptional results.”



The System
 ○ Audio Note TT1/Arm One/IQ1 turntable £725
 ○ Audio Note M1 Phono preamp £750
 ○ Audio Note P2 power amp £999
 ○ AVI Pro-Nine loudspeakers £699
 ○ **System total: £3,173**
 ☎ Audio Note 01273 220511
 ☎ AVI 01453 752656

Vinyl valhalla

Defiantly analogue, this digital-free zone has zero bells or whistles, just a peerless ability to play stereo records

WHAT IS IT?

Heading things up is the excellent TT1 turntable package which, with its acrylic platter and sleek Rega-sourced arm, doesn't look old-fashioned at all. The electronics do, though. The friendly glow of tubes can be seen beneath the venting of both gold-knobbed boxes. The M1 preamp incorporates a moving magnet phono stage along with a modest three line inputs. The P2 power amp uses ECC83 and 6L6 tubes in a push-pull arrangement and, as with the M1, operates in Class A.

AVI's Pro-Nine speakers are 'monitor class' two-way standmounters using sealed box construction and very high quality bass and treble units from Vifa and Scanspeak respectively.

WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

Because you like your music to sound natural and emotionally replete. And, quite possibly, because you have a large vinyl collection. In principle, this could be a system from 50 years ago: a digital-free zone, triumphantly trailing-edge. Its beauty lies in its simplicity. It plays records. In stereo. Beautifully. Perfectly aligned with an era when LPs ruled and valves warmed up your living room, its character is cut from the philosophy of Audio Note boss

Peter Quortrup who suggests that modern life hasn't given us much apart from migraine.

Spin up some Eagles or Joe Walsh and you're immediately transported back to the 1960s. This set up doesn't just deliver the music in a wonderfully authentic and richly textured fashion, it also conveys the feel of the period. The experience is transfixing; you're drawn into the music and simply want to let it play on and on... and hang the inability to skip to the next track.

DRAWBACKS

With just 18 watts a side, this system is no powerhouse, but it makes a fair fist of driving the reasonably efficient AVIs (89dB/metre) in a medium-sized room. Audio Note has its own range of high-efficiency speakers if you want to make the most of the modest power. Also, valve equipment, being more microphonic than transistors, needs careful placement. And it would be good to have a remote for volume and input selection at least.

VERDICT

If vinyl matters to you, this system is deeply satisfying. More good news is that it sounds fabulous if you put a CD player through it, too, thus proving you're not a 'flat-earther'.

The Brit award

Our one-make British candidate excels in timing and rhythm

WHAT IS IT?

A Naim CD-based pre/power system. Brit-Fi central, and seriously single-minded stuff. A music system that doesn't communicate the musical message with complete conviction, contends Naim, is pants.

The CD5 is Naim's least expensive CD player but features some traits of the flagship two-box CDS. Its crisp, sleek, second generation Naim styling is shared with the NAC112/NAP150/Flat Cap 2 pre/power/power supply. The remote controlled preamp has three line inputs while the 150 power amp shifts a meaty 50 watts per channel. The Flat Cap power supply is optional but lifts performance to another level – especially recommended when driving the big, revealing, two-way Allae floorstanders.

WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

Because you want to believe that real living, breathing, flesh and blood musicians are performing in your listening room. Naim doesn't give a fig for the traditional tenets of hi-fi. Precise imaging, a spacious soundstage and tonal neutrality are, at best, side issues. It believes that timing and pitch accuracy are the important things. Get these wrong and the musical 'performance' simply won't happen.

And, listening to this combo, you can see its point. The new series 5 components generally sound a little more chilled than their older brethren, but the vividly up-front,



rhythmically solid and sheer fleet-footed style of this system's music making doesn't leave you in much doubt as to its origin.

It isn't that it can't do the slow, slushy stuff – Joni Mitchell's *Voice* on her CD *Both Sides Now* is appropriately intimate and sultry. But you tend to find yourself reaching for faster-tempo material, just to see what this baby can really do.

DRAWBACKS

Obviously, if your idea of hi-fi is recreating the whole 'musical event' right down to the subtlest ambient clues and exact placement of musicians – rather than just the music – then this Naim system won't cut it. It simply doesn't do the forensic analysis, broad bandwidth thing.

Smoothness, control and bass weight occasionally go west, too, the Allaes' presentation becoming a tad lean, aggressive and shouty. And, whatever Naim says about the sonic superiority of DIN plugs, they're a pain in the compatibilities.

VERDICT

No other home-grown hero is quite as uncompromising as Naim. This system is still very much a love-it-or-leave-it deal. If you 'get it', get it.

The System

- ◉ Arcam DIVA CD72 CD player £430
- ◉ Chord DAC 64 DAC £1,900
- ◉ Arcam A85 integrated amp £750
- ◉ Elac Jet 205 loudspeakers £649
- ◉ **System total: £3,729**
- ☎ Arcam 01223 203200
- ☎ Chord 01622 721444
- ☎ Elac 01494 551551



High tech hierarchy

A modern take on 'source first' – a refined congregation is given some miracle medicine by the DAC doctor

WHAT IS IT?

A thumping endorsement for performance technology and a daring allocation of available funds. Most expensive component by a breezy margin is Chord's chunky aluminium 64-bit DAC 64 which claims to be capable of transforming the sound of even a CD player as capable as Arcam's CD72. Some £2,330 of the £3,730 system has been spent on components upstream of the amplifier.

Not that the rest of the line-up looks particularly impoverished. Arcam's A85 is one of the company's best integrated amps for years – fully featured, flexible and toting an impressive 2x85 watts – while Elac's new 205 Jet compact standmounter marries upmarket metal drivers (including the famous folded ribbon tweeter) with a budget vinyl-wrap box.

WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

See a Chord DAC 64 in the metal, with its billet shape solidity and softly glowing port-hole, and you'll want one. Hear what it does in a sympathetic system and you may reach for your credit card on the spot. Actually, this is a fine, well balanced and good looking system sans Chord – refined, revealing and dynamic. Add the DAC 64, though, and the improvement is startling – very much in the order of comparing SACD to plain CD. It

sounds like a different and considerably more expensive system, one with tighter focus, sharper timing, greater insight, darker silences and a sense of enhanced verve and vitality.

The other components pull their weight too. The Arcam CD player makes a superb transport, and the A85 amp is easily transparent enough to convey a good measure of the performance lift offered by the Chord. The Elacs surprise with their bass extension but stun with the openness and finesse of their treble.

DRAWBACKS

With all that processing power, the DAC 64 runs quite warm; its aluminium jacket acts as a heat sink. So ideally it needs some air around it. And for optimum performance the Chord uses balanced connections but the Arcam components have no such provision.

The Elac 205 Jets, as with most metal driver speakers, need a lot of running in. Out of the box, they sound overdamped and unexpressive. After a few days of use, though, they open up to become clear and lucid.

VERDICT

This is strong medicine. Quite a leap of faith is required to build a system around a £1,900 DAC. Actually it's a stunningly cost-effective way of owning a world class stereo.

The System

- ◉ Naim CD5 CD player £1,150
- ◉ Naim NAC112 preamp £645
- ◉ Naim NAP150 power amp £780
- ◉ Naim Allae loudspeakers £1,190 (inc crossover)
- ◉ **System total: £3,765**
- ☎ Naim Audio 01722 332266



The System

- Cyrus CD7Q CD player £1,150
- Eclipse A502 amp £1,175
- Eclipse TD 512 loudspeakers £2,350
- **System total: £4,675**
- ☎ Cyrus 01480 435577
- ☎ Eclipse 020 7431 2305

Style sublime

Bullets for speakers, UFO amp – make a statement about the state of your hi-fi before you even switch it on

WHAT IS IT?

One of the most unconventional and intriguing hi-fi systems you're ever likely to clap eyes on. The TD 512 speaker looks like a black lacquered artillery shell on a pedestal. In fact, it's that mass-loaded, big-footed column to which the single, full-range 12cm glass composite coned driver is bolted, no crossover required. The hefty egg-shaped shell, made out of inert marble-loaded resin, is decoupled from the pedestal column by felt and sealed with rubber to prevent air leakage.

The conically-shaped A502 is simply a power amp with a turret-style volume control underlit by a blue light. It has just one input, to which we've attached the terrific Cyrus CD7Q, no style slouch itself.

WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

Because ordinary hi-fi is too boring, the 502 amp looks a bit like the Luxor hotel in Las Vegas and, well, something as radically different and gorgeous as this just has to sound wonderful, doesn't it?

The bold speaker rethink seeks to eliminate cabinet resonance and the phase and integration problems that can beset multi-driver speakers. And if less is more, the A502 amp is a winner. One knob, one input, one fancy

light on top. It amplifies the signal, that's all.

The Cyrus CD7Q is a particularly fresh, clean and 'alive' sounding CD player and tonally a sympathetic match for the speakers, which have limited top end extension. That's not really the point, though. What this system does supremely well is sound musically coherent. It doesn't go particularly loud, it isn't a crowd pleaser. But it tells it like it is, without smear, blur or exaggeration. Rarely is so much sheer detail so easy to listen to.

DRAWBACKS

Most obviously, the amp's single input. It may be tops for signal path purity but it's a pain if you want to plug in the TV and tuner. The only option is to use the A502 purely as a power amp and attach a preamp. Style-wise that would have to be the Cyrus aCA7.5 which is a fine piece but, at £700, takes the system price over £5k.

The sound won't be to everyone's taste. It lacks conventional 'sparkle'.

VERDICT

This system isn't what it at first seems. It looks too knowingly cute to be serious hi-fi. But it's actually purist-extreme. Brian Eno uses the Eclipses in his studio. Nuff said.

Multichannel music

An SACD based system dedicated to music

WHAT IS IT?

According to some – not least Sony – the future of hi-fi is high resolution, wide bandwidth surround sound; the most serious challenge to stereo since its invention.

In this combo we have a system that plays CDs to a high standard in stereo – the Arcam receiver has gained a reputation for its deft touch with music and the Sony doesn't stint on its CD replay capabilities – but really flies with SACD in two or five-channel mode. We chose Tannoy Eyris speakers partly for their titanium dome supertweeters which reach up to 44 kHz (-6dB) and therefore exploit SACD's upwardly extended bandwidth. They also look rather gorgeous.

WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

There are two new competing high-res, multi-channel formats, SACD and DVD-Audio. Music-only SACD seems to be winning the hearts of the audiophile community while DVD-A players (which also handle CDs) have the potential to better CDs sonically and play DVD Videos to a high standard, too.

At its best, this system clearly makes the case

The System

- Sony SCD-XA333ES SACD/CD player £1,200
- Arcam AVR200 surround sound receiver £800
- Tannoy Eyris 2, Eyris 1, Eyris Centre speaker package £2,100
- **System total: £4,100**
- ☎ Arcam 01223 203200
- ☎ Sony UK 08705 111 999
- ☎ Tannoy 01236 420199



for keeping music and movies separate. Get hold of a decently recorded hybrid stereo SACD – Claire Martin's *Take My Heart* on Linn for example – and you can hear what all the fuss is about. She's in fine voice with the Sony in CD mode, but move to the SACD layer and the leap in realism is shocking. Put simply, less hi-fi, more flesh and blood. The quality of full multichannel experience is largely software-dependent. Some discs will blow you away (DMP's disc of choral music, *Sacred Feast*, for instance), others let off rather too many rear channel fireworks.

DRAWBACKS

Even poorly executed multichannel SACDs are thin on the ground. London megastores stock a smattering of titles but the Internet is currently your best bet – a good site to try is www.vivante.co.uk.

Sony should show more commitment to the 'future of hi-fi' because the shortfall of software is the only major drawback here. If you want video playback with your multichannel sound you'll have to buy a DVD player too.

VERDICT

The 'future of hi-fi' works. This system moves the game on. And while you're waiting for Sony Records to pull its finger out, it sounds great with CDs too.



The System

- Denon DVD-1600 DVD-A/V player £500
- Harman Kardon AVR5500 surround sound receiver £650
- B&W CDM 7NT, CDM CNT, CDM SNT £2,400
- **System total: £3,550**
- ☎ Denon UK 01234 741200
- ☎ Harman Consumer UK 020 8731 4670
- ☎ B&W 01903 750750

A/V heaven

High-spec surround amp puts the emphasis firmly on movies, but can this DVD-Audio and Video system do the music thing too?

WHAT IS IT?

A system for people who like movies as much as music that doesn't compromise either. We thought hard about the best approach. Should we splash out on the electronics and hook them up to one of the many fine budget speaker packages now available in classic hierarchical fashion? What about a subwoofer?

In the end, we placed the budget emphasis firmly at the front end and chose two high-value, plushly-featured boxes: the Denon DVD-1600 and Harman Kardon AVR5500. This left enough money in the pot to buy a cracking B&W CDM speaker package with meaty floorstanding 7NTs at the front, thus removing the absolute need for a subwoofer.

WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

Basically because you want it all. The Denon and HK do their best to please. Although the DVD-1600 didn't exactly cover itself in glory in last month's group test, we felt it deserved another chance in a system context. Despite being Denon's entry-level DVD-A player, it looks great, is a treat to use and comes loaded with Dolby Digital and DTS processing and two Scart sockets. The feature count on the AVR5500 receiver is simply staggering. It does full Dolby Digital, DTS-ES Extended Surround, DTS Neo:6, Dolby Pro-Logic II

and HDCD decoding, as well as LOGIC7 and VMAX virtual surround processing. And that's just scratching the surface.

Five 75 watt channels were enough to drive the undainty but beautifully built B&Ws to fearsome levels in action sequences without the sound becoming hard or ragged. A subwoofer's presence wasn't missed, either, the tall 2.5-way 7NTs handling dino foot falls in *Jurassic Park III* with easy authority.

DRAWBACKS

Music? This system just about wings it but it isn't in the same league as the Sony/Arcam-based SACD multichannel combo. The HK receiver is by no means the weakest link here. Considering that it can be configured for straight stereo and any number of surround modes, it sounds consistently engaging with a taut and tuneful bass. The trouble is that the Denon, while capable of occasionally excelling with well produced DVD-As (of which there are few) is a pretty ordinary CD player.

VERDICT

This system's ambition does exceed its grasp in some ways. It's clearly better with movies, but it is essentially musical too. With hindsight a better DVD-A player would have hit the spot.



ChoiceCuts



Our favourite musical morsels, old and new

Reviews by Tim Bown, Jim Findlay, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Paul Messenger

NEW MUSIC FORMATS



POULENC, PETIT AND BARBER: WORKS FOR ORGAN AND ORCHESTRA

Gillian Weir (organ), ECO
Multichannel SACD

Linn CKD 180

Music: This eclectic selection of music for organ and orchestra is headlined by the Poulenc, which is a brilliantly scored, melodic and constantly inventive work, large scale and ambitious. It is also one of the very few such concert works for organ and orchestra in the repertoire. Along with selections from Pierre Petit (Concertino for Organ, Strings and Percussion) and Samuel Barber (Toccata Festiva op.36), it is performed here with passion and discipline in the lush and spacious but not woolly sounding acoustic of St Augustine's Chapel, Tonbridge School.

★★★★★

Sound: Linn Records' first multichannel SACD really comes into its own in multichannel form, where the disposition of orchestra across the front, and organ at the back of the hall results in a thrilling use of space, and a totally immersive sound. ★★★★★ AG



GROOVE ARMADA

Goodbye Country (Hello Nightclub)
Multichannel SACD

Zomba

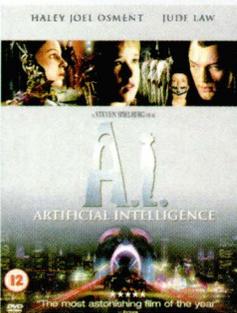
Music: GA's third album has already proved a success in the more familiar formats and is enhanced in no small way by the upgrade to SACD.

A mix of upbeat dance tracks and chilled out vibes of the Ibiza persuasion, this should have broad appeal. Vocals are provided by Jeru The Damaja and Richie Havens among others while disco legend Nile Rodgers plays guitar on *Drifted*. A happier Massive Attack or sophisticated Fatboy Slim, GA are big and this will most certainly make them bigger. ★★★★★

Sound: This Dave Pemberton surround mix is a clean and spacious affair with plenty of energy. You are always surrounded by sound and though there's not much in the way of cinematic style steering there's plenty of FX placement. Bass is particularly juicy. ★★★★★ JK

CINEMA SELECTION

Because these days hi-fi doesn't always just mean music



AI: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Warner

Film: AI isn't a bad film, it's just a bit of a wasted opportunity. Director Steven Spielberg handles the theme of the coexistence of robot and human lives in a post-apocalyptic world with his usual big-bucks panache, but it is impossible to escape the feeling that it would have been a lot more interesting with Kubrick at the helm. It's an intriguing proposition however, and the cast (especially Haley Joel Osment) play it with conviction. The story, about robo-boy David's quest for mutual love, rattles along

nicely, but the contrived, fairy-tale ending is excessively saccharine. ★★★★★
Sound & Vision: The picture is fairly average, which is unfortunate, as the effects are stunning. The sound, however, is wonderful. This disc is a superb showcase for the capabilities of Dolby Digital 5.1 with effects ranging from the subtly ambient to the truly thrilling, chasing each other around your surround speakers. The two-disc set is also very generous with some fascinating extras about the making of this technically peerless film. ★★★★★ JF

CD/VINYL



RICHARD STRAUSS: ORCHESTRAL SONGS, FOUR LAST SONGS

Soile Isokoshi (soprano)

Online ODE 982-2

Music: Few composers ever wrote as well for soprano voice as Strauss, and few sopranos have the sensitivity, purity and beauty of voice of Soile Isokoshi, who has been compared by some to the great Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. These songs were mostly composed for piano and voice, and subsequently orchestrated, which is how they're presented here. The music is consistently of the highest calibre, and certain songs, *Befreit* for example, have an exquisitely sombre, valedictory quality, and are sung with a simplicity that makes them all the more affecting. ★★★★★

Sound: One of the few contemporary recordings of Strauss vocals that is also a genuinely compelling performance. ★★★★★ AG



MASSIVE ATTACK

Blue Lines

Wildunch

Music: The definitive 'trip hop' album from 1991 is only just beginning to show its age, but still retains the freshness of a true classic, and is unusual among dance genre albums in being equally well suited to just sitting and listening. There are so many good tracks, it's difficult to pick favourites. *Unfinished Sympathy*, with its lush strings and Shara Nelson's haunting vocals, is the hit, but also check out the rolling, driving intro to *Be Thankful For What You've Got*, and the punchy off-beats on *Daydreaming*. ★★★★★

Sound: The sound quality's nothing special – the later *Mezzanine* has a touch more class (and a lot more scope) – but it's still a decent enough recording by any standards. ★★★★★ PM



THE CINEMATIC ORCHESTRA

Everyday

Ninja Tune

Music: Not an easy style to categorise, The Cinematic Orchestra covers the gamut from modal jazz to John Barry-style soundtracks. Orchestrated by one man, J Swinscoe, TCO's third album is a real scorcher full of soul and passion propelled by rich, largely acoustic instrumentation and the singing talents of Fontella Bass (of *Rescue Me* fame) and the thinking man's UK rapper of choice – Roots Manuva. With as great an emphasis on double bass as drums for its rhythm, this is a sophisticated yet melodic disc that could well be one of the year's best. ★★★★★

Sound: Its sound quality is rich and warm with reasonable spaciousness. Dynamics are assisted by the real instruments but this is not the most clear-cut of recordings. The feel is late night all the way. ★★★★★ JK



SIX BY SEVEN

The Way I Feel Today

Mantra Recordings

Music: Do you like guitars? The kind that rip the air, melt the ceiling and hurtle headlong for the stars? For sure, Six By Seven's heady brew will send you reeling. These 11 tracks are a mix of ear-singeing distortion and melody, pulsing rhythms overlaid with beautiful, gut-thumping noise. Some are a bruising urban rush, others plough a more seductive furrow, like the hypnotic, driving bass on single *I.O.U. Love*. Knocks nu-metal into a cocked baseball cap, silly shorts and all. ★★★★★

Sound: Too compressed and opaque to capture the taught, visceral rush of the band's live sound, but solid enough to ensure the experience is far from ruined. You'll need a system with punch and grip; avoid hard, bright-sounding set-ups. ★★★★★ TB

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MAIN REVIEWS – Paul Messenger | LAB REPORTS – Paul Miller

HIGH-END STEREO SPEAKERS

It's time for the big boys to come out and show us what they're made of

U pmarket loudspeakers are loads of fun, and much more interesting than the beer budget contenders, with loads of variety. This group test covers a price span from £1,000 to £2,000, which guarantees we're dealing with some very serious engineering here.

Such a generous budget provides ample funds to finance a wide selection of different design approaches, as each brand chooses its own particular way of allocating resources. All are floorstanders, so at least there's no need to spend extra on stands. Happily, all make good use of their large enclosures (unlike many cheaper floorstanders), and most take the floor-coupling arrangements pretty seriously too, which is crucially important.

It's no surprise to find that most go for real wood veneer finishes, though the Vandersteen has very little of it, and both the Dynaudio and Triangle opt for the more mundane vinyl woodprint option instead. It seems quite logical that the savings made here are reflected in expenditure made elsewhere, and it's probably no coincidence that these are the three speakers with four drive units each, and are also among the heaviest too.

Just two of our speakers – the

Spendor and the Naim – are straight two-driver two-ways, and both are relatively unusual in using eight-inch/200mm frame main drivers. The fashion for slim-fronted speakers has made such drive units quite a rarity these days. But there's still something to be said for the sheer simplicity of this approach, where the bulk of the music is created by a single voice coil. The eight-incher gives a worthwhile increase in diaphragm area over the 6.5-inch/165mm unit that is the most popular size today.

None of our group has a single 6.5-incher, but three use them as pairs, each in its own distinct way. Both the Ruark and Castle are straight two-ways, the former following the so-called d'Appolito configuration, the latter pointing one of its drivers upwards in a semi-omni arrangement. Tannoy, meanwhile, opts for two-and-a-half-way operation, using one of the drivers just to reinforce the bass region.

The other three are four-driver three-ways from Triangle, Dynaudio and Vandersteen. By protecting their midrange drivers from bass frequencies, these promise superior power handling to the two-ways, but must pay the price in extra crossover complexity. 

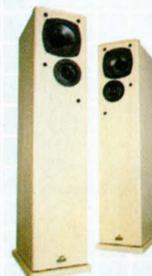
EQUIPMENT USED

Naim CDS II CD player
Rega Jupiter CD player
Linn LPT2 turntable
Naim ARO tonearm
Linn Arkiv B, Dynavector XV-1 cartridges
Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
Naim NAC52 preamp
Naim NAP500 power amp
Naim NACA5 speaker cables

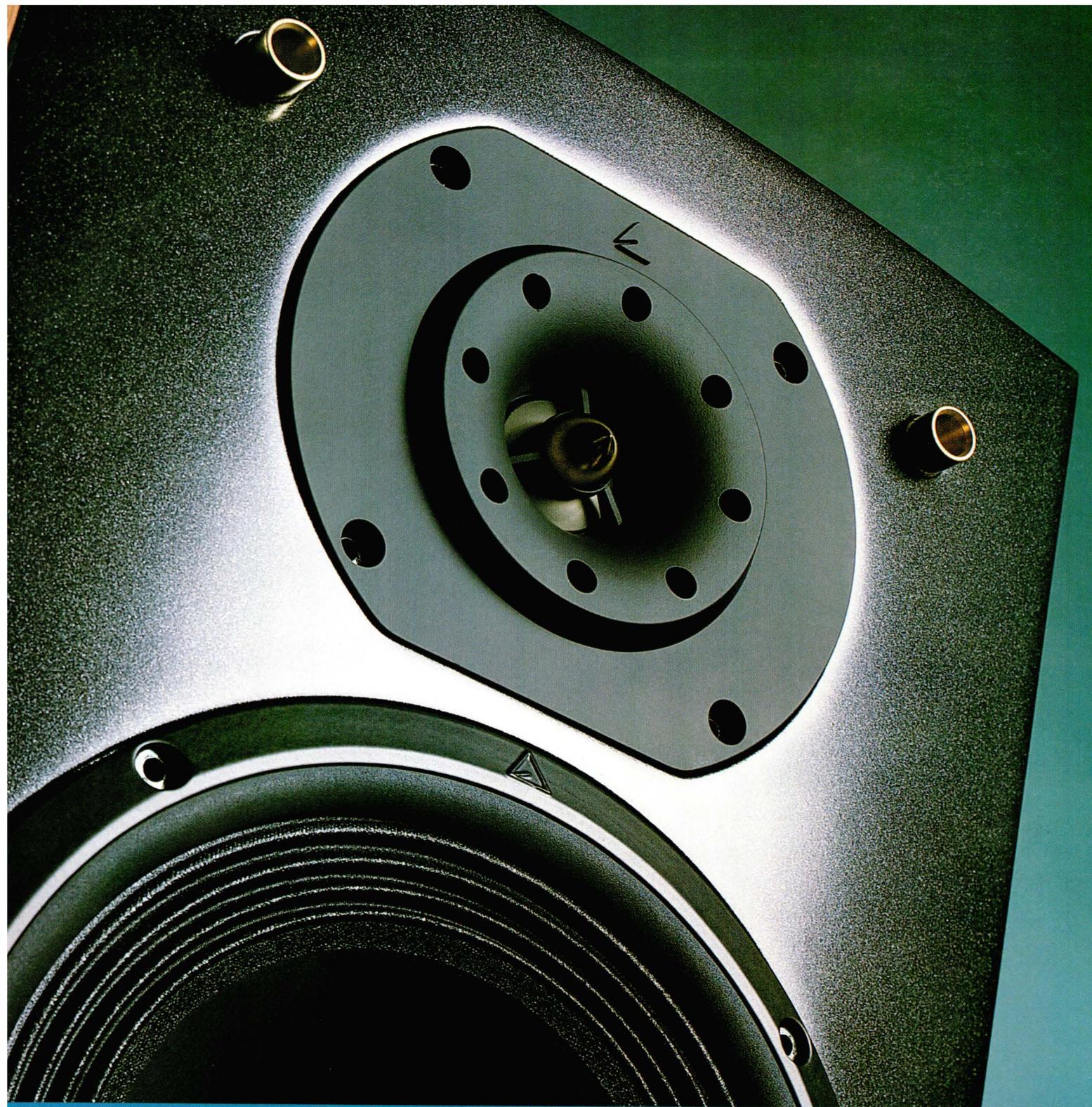
DISCS USED

Massive Attack *Blue Lines*
Christy Moore *Live At The Point*
Nitin Sawhney *Prophesy*
Grainger/LWO/Wick
By plane From Paris/
Tom Waits *Rain Dogs*
Grateful Dead *From The Mars Hotel*
Cambridge Singers/Rutter
There Is Sweet Music
BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used extensively

ON TEST



CASTLE HOWARD S3
£1,350



DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 82
£1,460



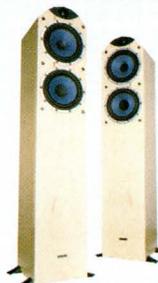
NAIM ALLAE
£1,990



RUARK PROLOGUE 2
£1,250



SPENDOR S8
£1,700



TANNOY EYRIS 3
£1,200



TRIANGLE CELIUS 202
£1,095



VANDERSTEEN 2CE
£1,990





LAB REPORT

- ▶ Possibly as a result of the 'lively' centre cap fitted to both Castle's carbon-fibre drivers, the speaker has a slightly exaggerated midrange output between 750Hz-2kHz, followed by a dip till the 28mm soft dome tweeter gets into its stride above 3kHz or so.
- ▶ At 88.2dB, the forward sensitivity of the Howard is close enough to its 88.5dB specification, but this increases to around 90dB once the upward-firing driver is taken into account.
- ▶ Offset by 90 degrees, the upward-firing bass unit has a 'peakier' roll-off, which can have the effect of adding an extra subjective 'wack' to the bass.
- ▶ This model borrows its twin-pipe quarterwave bass loading from the Harlech, though the close coupling of the pedestal serves to short much of its 35-85Hz output. Bass distortion, however, is far lower at around 0.5-0.6%.
- ▶ With a 12ohm average impedance and an 'easy' 5.9ohm minimum, the Howard S3 is a doddle to drive.

CASTLE HOWARD S3 £1,350 Castle Acoustics 1756 795333 www.castleacoustics.co.uk

Castle's kingly floorstander delivers a spacious musical presence

Best known for its high class real wood veneers, Castle also uniquely makes loudspeakers with quarter-wave-loaded main drivers, operating in pairs pointing upwards as well as forwards to give a semi-omnidirectional effect.

That's the basic recipe behind this £1,350 Howard S3, big brother to the Harlechs which have been carrying *Choice's* Best Buy accolade for the past five or more years. Indeed, put the designs in separate rooms and the only way you'd tell them apart would be to use a tape measure. In reality the Howard stands 5cm taller, is 1cm wider and weighs an extra 3.5kg over its smaller brother. It also uses slightly larger diameter main drivers, and all this puts a serious extra chunk of extra cash on the price tag.

The enclosure is attractively slim, with radiused edges all round, plus a separate veneered plinth which ensures a very stable spike footprint. The main drivers are classy affairs, with 160mm (6.5-inch) cast alloy frames, and carbon-fibre cones 120mm in diameter. One is

VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★☆
BUILD
★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★☆

The Howard costs £350/pair more than the Harlech, which is difficult to justify on performance grounds. That said, it looks gorgeous, and is a solid all round performer too, with uniquely spacious imaging.

CHECKLIST
FLOORSTANDER? ✓
CLOSE TO WALL? ✗
WIDTH 21cm
HEIGHT 99cm
DEPTH 32cm
BI-WIRABLE? ✓

placed conventionally on the front of the speaker, the other fitted into the top surface, and both are 'quarter-wave' loaded – a technique with some similarities to horn loading – by two pipes which exit in a precise slot created between enclosure and plinth. Said plinth is deep, and fitted with chunky 8mm spikes, ensuring fine mechanical stability. High class WBT terminals are fitted, two pairs permitting bi-wire/-amp operation.

The enclosures are made as mirror-image pairs with the 28mm dome tweeter offset from the centre line and mounted beneath the front main driver. The in-room measurements are rather uneven through the bass region, and would seem to favour free-space siting.

PERFORMANCE

Inevitably, the Howard's 'semi-omni' main driver disposition has considerable sonic implications, especially in its impact upon the imaging. The additional upward-facing driver has the effect of diluting the focus precision to a significant degree – but that isn't

necessarily bad news for the listener.

Precise stereo is good at creating a believable 'window' onto the recording session, but the Howard's main strength comes in its superior ability to generate an illusion that the musicians are actually there in the room, delivering a spaciousness and solidity that's its own reward.

The tonal balance is very satisfactory, with a slight forwardness that brings a pleasing openness and projection to voices, with no obvious attendant harshness and only modest coloration. And while I had noted some hardness and aggressive tendencies with the Harlech S2, I wouldn't apply such criticisms to the Howard S3.

However, there is a slight 'thickening' of textures in the upper bass/lower midrange, and the bass proper could maybe go deeper, and with greater authority. But this speaker has a natural agility and freedom from overhang through the bass region that's often more musically informative than the more resonant bass character often encountered elsewhere. Ⓞ

DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 82 **£1,460**

Dynaudio UK 01732 451938 www.dynaudio.com

A magnificently understated speaker that lets the music do the talking

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Provided neither the vinyl finish nor the bulk are seen as a problem, this outstanding speaker offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✗
WIDTH	22cm
HEIGHT	106cm
DEPTH	36cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✗

Denmark-based Dynaudio started out primarily as a drive unit specialist, but has been enjoying considerable success with its complete speaker systems these past few years. Two core ranges include the real-wood Contours, and the vinyl-finished Audiences, even the latter commanding prices substantially above the budget sector, because the vinyl surface is the only economy in a very substantially built range.

This 82 is the new top model among the Audiences, a substantial floor-stander weighing some 27kg, encompassing over 50 litres of internal volume, standing over a metre tall, and carrying a £1,460 price tag. Styling is conventional, plain and sharp-edged rectilinear, though the vinyl woodprint – in black ash, light cherry, or rosewood – is good quality. A chunky plinth is fitted to the base of the enclosure, securely accommodating the substantial 8mm spikes, though not extending the stability footprint in any way.

It's a full three-way design, with two 200mm drivers with 140mm plastic

cone/dome diaphragms plus a generous port supplying the bass, crossing over at around 430Hz to a 150mm midrange with 100mm plastic cone/dome, and thence, around 2kHz, to a 28mm fabric dome tweeter. All the filters operate at a very gentle 6dB/octave.

The enclosure incorporates bracing, a separate cavity for the midrange unit and bituminous damping pads, and the speaker has just one terminal pair, as Dynaudio doesn't believe in bi-wiring. The far field in-room averaged response is very well balanced right across the band, and unusually smooth and extended through the bass region too, provided the speakers are kept well clear of walls.

PERFORMANCE

The Audience 82 provides an impressive and unusual combination of exceptional neutrality with considerable weight and authority. The bass is clean, deep and even, free from any hangover effects and with no tendency to thump or thicken the textures.

Dynamic range is wide, with good resolution of low-level sounds: while listening to Petroc Trelawny's introduction to a Bach/Shostakovich piano recital on Radio 3, I was struck by how delicately the speakers reproduced the 'noises off' of the audience, murmuring quietly away in the background while waiting for the concert to start. Olli Mustonen's subsequent pianistic endeavours came across with fine drama, expression and authority.

This is actually a very difficult speaker to criticise, because a basic lack of character is its most obvious, er, characteristic. Neutrality is of the highest order, and the effectiveness of the enclosure engineering is evident in a lack of any obvious boxy effects. Three-ways often suffer from a lack of basic transparency, but that doesn't seem to be a problem here, the 82 sounding impressively coherent as well as possessing magnificent power handling and loudness capabilities. In the final analysis it could perhaps be a little more romantic, but there's no avoiding its basic honesty. **C**

LAB REPORT

▶ This is a very well integrated, three-way design offering an unusually flat, even and extended response with a generous 89.7dB sensitivity that easily bests its 87dB rating.

▶ Although the 82 is reflex-loaded, its internal wadding is sufficiently dense to damp-out the port action across a broad 20-85Hz (-3dB) and leave the two 200mm bass units behaving as if they were working into a sealed enclosure.

▶ Bass extension remains generous and should reach a low 30Hz in a typical domestic setting.

▶ The custom midrange unit works between 430Hz-2kHz and maintains a low 0.35% distortion through this crucial region, even at sound levels as high as 96dB SPL.

▶ Dynaudio's are not always the easiest speakers to drive, but the 82 is tougher than average with a sub-8ohm load between 65Hz-20kHz, minima of 4.2ohm at 100Hz and 490Hz, yielding a current-hungry mean of just 6.7ohm.



NAIM ALLAE **£1,990**

Naim Audio 01722 332266 www.naim-audio.com

Fearsomely accurate, but its distinctly chilly tone won't be to everyone's taste

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Chunky little real-wood floorstander with complex mechanical decoupling systems has a rather 'cold' overall balance, but its remarkable powers of musical analysis are especially good at dealing with unfamiliar material.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✗
WIDTH	24cm
HEIGHT	94cm
DEPTH	28cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✗

Naim Audio's £2,000 Allae has much in common with two rather less expensive Naim loudspeakers – the Intro (reviewed in *HFC* 164), and the Credo (*HFC* 180). All three feature similar two-way driver line-ups and similarly unusual twin-box enclosures, though this model incorporates various extra sophistications over its less costly stablemates.

It's a chunky little floorstander, finished in real wood veneer (in a choice of American cherry, maple, black ash or Santos rosewood), the squat shape partly a function of the width needed to accommodate a relatively large eight-inch (200mm) cast frame driver with 140mm doped paper cone, housed in its own compact enclosure. This smaller box with curved top sits directly on top of a larger enclosure, which also accommodates the tweeter. The two boxes are acoustically connected through large holes in their connecting faces. Three little plastic

pegs, or PIPs (precision interface pins) decouple and locate the upper box, and are very precisely dimensioned to create a slit gap between the two boxes which acts as a (relatively small) reflex port.

The tweeter is separately mechanically decoupled from the lower enclosure via a leaf-spring faceplate, and another leaf-spring arrangement provides controlled decoupling from the floor. An external crossover is housed in a plastic box fixed onto the back panel, with flying leads that plug into the drivers and just a single pair of input terminals. Bi-wiring is not possible, but removing the crossover completely allows full active drive upgrading.

The room-averaged responses show some lack of upper bass and lower midband, plus some mid-bass emphasis, so the balance is likely to be somewhat uneven whatever the placement.

PERFORMANCE

In practice, free space siting seemed to give the best overall results here, the Allae packing a goodly thump even

though there was a lack of warmth and harmonic richness through the upper bass regions.

Although that remains the source of some criticism and exasperation, in other respects this is an exceptional speaker, with a beautifully judged midrange and top end, which is not only very well balanced but also has great coherence and a notably wide dynamic range.

The Allae's biggest strength is the way it makes sense out of 'difficult' material. Few can better it at grazing the eclecticism of Radio 3, and this was the first speaker that really got properly to grips with Nitin Sawhney's *Prophesy*, sorting out the tonalities and textures on this unusually dense and complex work, and doing a remarkable job of sorting out the various children's voices on *Footsteps*.

I'd strongly advise anyone contemplating the Allae to check that its rather cold tonality is acceptable, but I can't argue with this speaker's remarkable ability to lay bare unfamiliar material.

LAB REPORT

▶ Naim's Allae has some slight upper bass/midrange forwardness that's reflected in the high 90dB sensitivity, a trend that becomes more obvious as the speaker is toed off-axis. A narrowband analysis shows a notch in the Allae's output at 5.7kHz.

▶ Distortion is impressively low at around 0.3% through the bass but increases to >1% as the bass/midrange driver becomes less linear above 2kHz or so.

▶ Although Naim's long-throw bass/mid unit works into the enclosure below, the thin slot that separates the two boxes provides some acoustic resistance and damps its 35Hz tuned resonance.

▶ A nearfield analysis of the bass shows two dips in its LF output at 120Hz and 440Hz that coincide with prominent cone misterrminations revealed on both the phase and impedance plots.

▶ Otherwise, the +30/-20 degree swings in phase are perfectly manageable, if the 7.4ohm average impedance is slightly current-hungry.





LAB REPORT

- ▶ To achieve the smoothest response, the Prologue 2 really benefits from being toed-in by 10-20 degrees. This takes the sting out of the fabric tweeter and evens out a series of peaks just prior to the 2.8kHz crossover.
- ▶ The Prologue 2 bests its 90dB sensitivity with a real-world figure of 91.6dB, making it second only to the Triangle Celius 202 in terms of loudness (or dBs per volt!).
- ▶ Despite the high sensitivity, the Prologue is no devil to drive with its acceptable minimum load of 5.2ohm at 175Hz and an average impedance of 9.5ohm. The +35/-30 degree phase angles are equally manageable.
- ▶ Bass distortion is not high at around 0.6% but port resonances at 220Hz and 650Hz coincide with notches in the nearfield bass response and small misterrminations on both impedance and phase spectra that may well still 'colour' its LF performance.

RUARK PROLOGUE II £1,250

Ruark Acoustics 1702 601410 www.ruark.net

Smaller than most, but the Prologue makes up in smoothness what it lacks in bass weight

Esex-based Ruark has always made some of the better looking speakers around. This new £1,250 Prologue II will undoubtedly appeal to those whose taste in furniture runs along traditional lines, finished all over in high class real wood veneer, with attractively scalloped box edges.

Both the shape and outline configuration show some similarity to the Prologue One R we reviewed in *HFC* 204, but this new Prologue II is really a very different creation, in both size and finish. A very compact and stylish floorstander – the smallest of all those assembled for this group – this two-way design has twin main drivers operating in parallel above and below a solitary tweeter, the so-called d'Appolito configuration.

Unconventionally, the tweeter here is not positioned exactly on the centre lines linking the main drivers, but is slightly offset, laterally and vertically. (The two halves of a pair are mirror-imaged.) Also unconventionally,

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆

Lovely real wood finish, an attractive shape and a compact, discreet enclosure are all bonuses alongside a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness.

CHECKLIST	
FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✓
WIDTH	22.5cm
HEIGHT	96cm
DEPTH	24cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✓

although the two drivers are identical, their loadings are very different: the upper one is backed by a small sealed enclosure, while the lower one has a larger, port-loaded section.

The overall shape is interestingly asymmetric, which should help 'spread' internal standing waves. Internal bracing is also asymmetric, and a separate MDF plinth ensures good stability. The main drivers both have 180mm plastic frames and 125mm profiled paper cones, while the tweeter has a 27mm soft fabric dome. Twin terminals provide a bi-wire/-amp option. In-room measurements suggest that close-to-wall siting is likely to give the best overall balance.

PERFORMANCE

Its compact dimensions probably explain why the Prologue II doesn't have the biggest or the bassiest sound around. But it does have a quite splendid overall smoothness and neutrality, and an openness that is very

engaging and involving.

Some might find it a little too forward and projected. Certainly the sound balance is significantly brighter than average, and this might not suit every system and taste. A bright balance can often lead to a sound which is aggressive, edgy or even harsh, but such is the quality of the top end here that none of those adjectives apply. Provided that the driving system is clean and of good quality, the net result is an openness that tends to make the competition sound a little too restrained and shut in.

This is a punchy little loudspeaker, full of enthusiasm for the music, it drives along with grip and gusto, and with plenty of headroom available to deal with the louder stuff. The sound lacks a little warmth as well as weight, which is why close-to-wall siting is likely to give best results, but as usual this is something of a compromise, limiting the impression of 'hear through' midband transparency and tension. **C**

The only difference between men and boys is the size of their feet and the price of their toys

Sooner or later you'll want to hear McIntosh sound systems. Sooner's better.

For more than fifty years McIntosh has produced world beating hi-fi equipment. Currently that includes state-of-the-art valve combinations, technologically advanced solid state amplifiers (some boasting megawatt power output) highly specified CD/DVD players and hugely expressive loudspeakers.

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There's a very compelling 'retro' feel to all McIntosh equipment which has a tangible authenticity. Materials and controls

feel just right and massive construction suggests a long term investment rather than just an acquisition. In fact it's worth knowing that in the United States McIntosh enjoys the highest level of customer loyalty in the industry.

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McIntosh LS360 Loudspeakers
Majestic soundstaging, musical sensitivity and passion combined with effortless delivery distinguish the LS360's from the 'academic' presentation typical of many 'monitor' speakers. Supplied as a stereo pair or left/right in the multi-channel **Academy IV System**. Available in a wide selection of veneers and finishes.
Size: 125.1(h) x 34.3(w) x 44.1(d) cms
Weight: 80kg (176 lbs)

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Multi-channel Controller/Processor/Amplifier for serious home cinema installations. Powerful DSP engine for decoding Dolby Digital^(R), Pro-Logic and DTS soundtracks. Easy to use, one time "Set and Forget" operating procedure.
Zone A: (Theatre) 6 x 100 watts (4ohms)
Zone B: (Multi-room) 2 x 100 watts (4ohms)



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SPENDOR S8 £1,700

☎ Spendor 01323 843474 🌐 www.spendoraudio.com

A loudspeaker brand with fine traditions, but how will its latest floorstander fair?

My first job in the industry involved helping to make Spendor speakers, so it's no surprise that I have a soft spot for the brand which has always appealed to both domestic and professional customers. Spendor's roots lie firmly in the broadcast monitoring tradition, and it rather lost its profile on the UK hi-fi scene during the nineties, a situation that has been reversed since Philip Swift took over the company a year or two back.

The company has three ranges which include the Classics (eg the SP2/3, reviewed in *HFC* 219), which hark back to an earlier era, but also the newer, more fashion-oriented S-series models. This £1,700 S8 is the middle of three S-series floorstanders, and actually shares the outline configuration of the standmount SP2/3. The key ingredient which both have in common, and that

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
Classic midband neutrality and transparency combined with a good-looking and fashionable floorstanding package. The S8 has great subtlety and delicacy, as well as fine bass grunt and authority.	
CHECKLIST	
FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✗
WIDTH	23cm
HEIGHT	92cm
DEPTH	32cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✓

makes them different from the herd, is the use of an eight-inch main driver.

Where the S8 scores is in providing a package that looks so much more elegant than its SP stablemate. In both style and acoustics, the grille is meant to be left in place here, and despite its eight-inch driver, the S8 still manages to look surprisingly slim. It also comes with a proper plinth, the rear part of which is augmented by an outrigger stabiliser bar.

There's good quality cherry or maple real wood veneer all round, the bass alignment clearly favouring siting well clear of walls. The 'linear-flow' port here is more of a ducted slot, extending the full width and exiting at the rear, close to the floor. Twin terminal pairs provide a bi-amping/-wiring option, but are placed high off the ground. The eight-inch has a cast frame and 150mm diameter polypropylene diaphragm, while the tweeter has a largish (27mm) doped fabric dome.

PERFORMANCE

My first reaction was that the S8 might be a little too restrained, but after a short acclimatisation I found it very well judged indeed, with no shortage of detail, and delightfully easy to live with over the long haul. Some might prefer a sound with a little more 'bite', but that can become a little wearing, and Spendor's more laid-back approach will always be that much easier to live with.

Midband transparency, a traditional Spendor virtue, is in full evidence here. The S8 has an evenhanded and smooth broad midband, with exceptionally well controlled box colorations. Precision stereo imaging with focus and depth is another important part of its repertoire. And if the midband is its major strength, the bass isn't far behind. It goes impressively deep, with considerable weight, power and authority, though slightly 'heavy' tonality. Ultimately, a slight lack of top end openness is our main complaint. 🗣️



LAB REPORT

- ▶ Spendor's S8 loudspeaker might fall 1dB shy of its rated 90dB sensitivity, but the very smooth and extended in-room response, free of any treble 'sting', is recompense enough.
- ▶ An easy 17.6ohm average load dips to a minimum of 8.2ohm – a walk in the park for any amplifier.
- ▶ Move more than 20 degrees off the listening axis, however, and a droopy upper mid/treble and notch around the 3kHz crossover point will quite quickly make themselves apparent.
- ▶ A flat response does not guarantee a neutral sound, as evidenced by the high, but gratifyingly consistent, 1-2% distortion measured through bass and midrange at 96dBA.
- ▶ The bass is clean and accurately tuned with driver null, port and impedance minima all coinciding at 37Hz. The bass driver roll-off is equally civilised and mercifully free of any peakiness despite the slight cone misterrmination at 340Hz.

TANNOY EYRIS 3 **£1,200**

Tannoy 01236 420199 www.tannoy.com

EXCLUSIVE *The Eyris 1's big brother proves that more isn't necessarily better*

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Strikingly unusual and attractive styling, with excellent real-wood-plus-metal finish and a top-mounted supertweeter, the sonic performance shows fine scale, weight and spaciousness, but lacks dynamic drama and excitement.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✗
WIDTH	20cm
HEIGHT	102cm
DEPTH	26cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✓

Something of a niche product from one of the bigger players on the scene, Tannoy's £1,200 Eyris 3 is the big floorstanding brother of the cute little Eyris 1, recently reviewed and Recommended in *HFC* 227, and the Eyris 2 which was given a favourable 'first test' in *HFC* 225. It offers something rather different in both features and style, the latter with a shape which gets away from the rectilinear box (physically rather than acoustically) by mounting the tweeter in an elegantly arched top made from a mixture of cast metal and plastic.

The real wood veneered enclosure – very elegantly finished in sycamore or American walnut – is solidly engineered with a hefty 30mm front panel and internal bracing. Operating as a 'two-and-a-half-way', the main driver cast alloy frames each have no fewer than ten fixing screws, while their 175mm frame and 120mm diameter paper cones are a little larger than most.

The special tweeter uses a thin (25 micron) titanium dome to provide a

'WideBand' frequency response extending more than an octave above the normal limits of audibility (Tannoy quotes a 44kHz upper limit). A unique 'five-way' terminal block incorporates an extra connection which (using special three- or five-way cables) can earth the driver chassis back to the amplifier and avoid the adverse consequences of RF pickup.

Little castings securely accommodate the spikes, bolting in place to extend the footprint laterally and/or lengthwise. Although port-blocking bungs are supplied, in-room traces suggest they'll only be needed if close-to-wall siting is necessary. Fundamentally, the Eyris 3 looks well suited to free space siting, delivering fine ultimate bass extension, free from any midbass boom, with its ports open.

PERFORMANCE

Having much enjoyed the little Eyris 1, I fully expected the 3 to provide rather more of the same. Which only goes to show how unwise it is to make

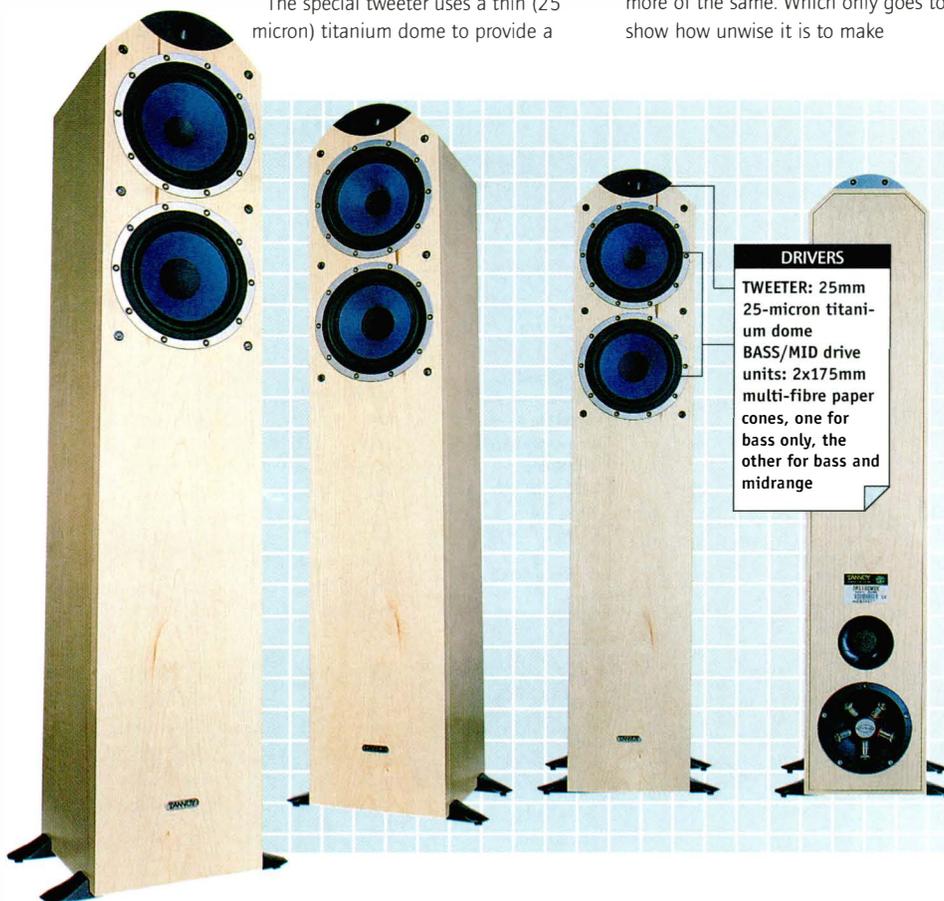
assumptions about loudspeakers. The Eyris 3 is pleasantly smooth and even-handed, but it also seems lacking in the sort of spark and pizzazz that takes a loudspeaker beyond the average, and enhances its communication skills.

This is a speaker that is most unlikely to cause offence, but also one that's rather reluctant to generate excitement. It has no obvious boxiness, and is rather good at generating spacious, airy and well focused stereo images. It also supplies plenty of weight, bringing a good sense of scale to the proceedings, which proved particularly engaging when replaying live recordings in both classical and rock genres.

Ultimately, however, it all sounds a bit cerebral. Voices are a tad laid back and lacking in both projection and grip, so that expressiveness tends to be rather understated. While tonality sounds accurate and the overall sound is pleasantly evenhanded, leading edges could be better defined: limp and weak were two adjectives which sprang inescapably to mind.

LAB REPORT

- ▶ Possibly as a result of the Eyris 3's narrow profile and filter design, there's a 'step' in the speaker's forward response of some -3dB immediately following the 2.2kHz crossover.
- ▶ Any depression of the presence band is more obvious off the main listening axis, though the very high frequency peak (+5dB @ 14kHz) from Tannoy's titanium dome tweeter is equally less obvious.
- ▶ In common with the Eyris 1 (*HFC* 227), bass distortion is a little high at 1-2% despite the added enclosure volume and increased 88.7dB sensitivity of the larger Eyris 3. The speaker offers a moderate 90hm average impedance.
- ▶ Even without the port plug, there's sufficient wadding in the cabinet to resistively-load the two bass drivers, leaving a peak at 80Hz followed by a very steep roll-off. The port output itself remains clean but very broad at 20-110Hz (-3dB).





LAB REPORT

- ▶ Once again Triangle raises the roof with an astonishing 93.6dB sensitivity and a practical maximum loudness of around 112dB in-room. This speaker is quite the loudest in our test and will deliver high sound levels with modest 30W amplifiers.
- ▶ High sensitivity means less stress is placed on the dual bass drivers at moderate levels, resulting in a low 0.3% distortion (re. 96dBA)
- ▶ Unfortunately, the big +60/-50 degree swings in phase, current-hungry 5.35ohm impedance (with an amp-shattering 2.2ohm minimum) makes the Celius a beast to drive.
- ▶ The bass units tend to peak at 100Hz while the port is 'tuned' to a broad 26-112Hz (-3dB).
- ▶ This three-way speaker also betrays some emphasis of (vocal) midrange and high treble frequencies. Off-axis listening will reduce the treble 'sting' but otherwise exaggerates bass and midrange humps.

TRIANGLE CELIUS 202 **£1,095** 📞 UKD 01753 652669 🌐 www.ukd.co.uk

Highly individual French manufacturer delivers a distinctive, if flawed, three-way

One of the more idiosyncratic speaker brands on the planet, the French Triangle (pronounced tree-ngle) operation follows its own philosophies, in both engineering and aesthetics. Previous Triangles, such as the Zephyr II and Antal XS, have done very well in our reviews, delivering fine sonic value for money, though there's no denying their styling and presentation will look strange to British eyes.

Triangle also seems to change its ranges rather often. The Ecran series from 2001 seems to have given way to the Espace 202s for 2002, though the basic models look very similar to their predecessors. The largest of the Espaces, this £1,095 Celius 202 is a full three-way design, combining a pair of port-loaded 6.5-inch bass drivers with another (but rather different) 6.5-incher for the midrange, while the dome tweeter has a pronounced horn and 'bullet' phase compensator.

These four drive units are all mounted on a black-stained, curved MDF front

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆

Very tall and not particularly pretty, Triangle's Celius 202 has magical midrange communication skills, with tension and transparency, but could be smoother, warmer and richer overall.

CHECKLIST	
FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✓
WIDTH	22cm
HEIGHT	113cm
DEPTH	30cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✓

panel, decorated by gilt lugs for attaching the full-height grille. The other five faces of the enclosure have a rather nondescript vinyl woodprint finish, though a real wood 'ebene' option is available at extra cost.

Triangle uses cast chassis and paper cone diaphragms throughout, and while the two bass drivers have regular synthetic rubber surrounds, the midrange driver has a pleated cloth surround – an old-fashioned technique presumably favoured because it has lower hysteresis than rubber.

Underneath, four little brass domes are threaded for 6mm spikes; there are no lock nuts here, and stability isn't great. The rear panel carries twin terminal pairs, and a front port reflex-loads the bass enclosure. In-room measurements indicate that some wall reinforcement is likely to be helpful.

PERFORMANCE

Well matched to close-to-wall siting, the Celius 202 has a quite delightful

midband – lively, coherent, full of dynamic tension and with a good measure of transparency to boot. Triangle's brochure stresses the mid-band's importance in its design philosophy: "within this main frequency zone... virtually everything occurs", and this speaker very much bears that out.

While the rest of the range is pretty competent, it clearly doesn't match up to the midrange magic. The top end is rather obvious, not least because it's also a little untidy and scrappy. And the bass end passes muster, but isn't particularly special, and does seem rather short of drive and authority.

The net result is a speaker that does a very good job of communicating the musical messages, but without quite enough of the smoothness or neutrality needed to create full suspension of disbelief. The sound is just a little thin and lightweight overall, without quite the harmonic richness that makes the left hand of a grand piano sound believable, for example. 🎧

KJ West One - Where 'budget' does not mean compromise!

As hi-fi enthusiasts you all know how easy it is to fall for something that creates an impact during a demonstration but then proves to be tiresome over the longer term.

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So, when asked to demonstrate a system that aspires to the high-end, yet is rather more affordable, what do we recommend?

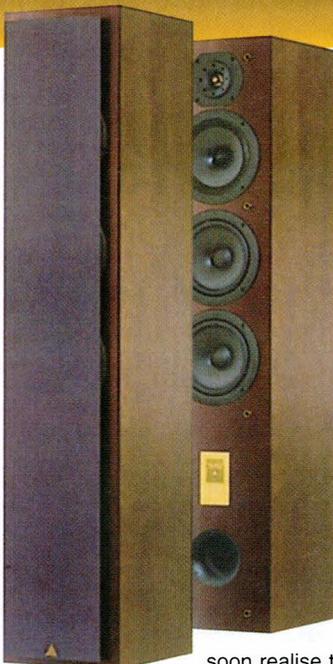
Without question, the finest sounds we can recreate (at any price) are with simple two channel systems. It's the most convincing and natural arrangement for us to make worthwhile judgements on what we know of live music, real instruments, human voice, and the ambience in which they have been recorded.

Just two high quality audio channels, two ears (and the miraculous faculty between them) can help us interpret all of this information to appreciate a most realistic and astonishingly convincing sound stage in all its dimensions.

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Individually, each of the components we're recommending here features tried, tested, even revered technologies that have influenced (sometimes for decades) the high-end of audio reproduction, but it's as a truly compatible combination we've 'lived' with for some time now, that we've come to appreciate the manner in which it can reassert itself in our affections even after an occasional 'affair' with some awesomely convincing (and often hugely expensive) systems.

To arrange your personal demonstration of totally satisfying music reproduction at a realistic price, please phone to make an appointment at any branch of KJ West One.



Copland CDA822 CD Player

£1499



The new CDA822 incorporates a 24bit, high resolution, dual differential DAC with increased oversampling of 96kHz - similar to systems used in some of the most influential components we've heard. 'Upsampling' reveals the transparency of recordings and reduces compression effects - so much so, once you've heard reproduction like this, ordinary digital congestion becomes obvious and intolerable!

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Unison SR2K Integrated Amplifier

£1295

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Phone: 020 7486 8262/3

VANDERSTEEN 2CE SIGNATURE £1,990

Exposure 01273 423877 www.vandersteen.com

EXCLUSIVE A beautifully balanced three-way that combines all the best bits of big and small speakers

A long established US brand, Vandersteen Audio has made sporadic appearances on the UK scene down the years. The news that UK electronics brand Exposure is taking on distribution is particularly welcome, since the radical Model Two is widely recognised as a true classic.

Now designated the 2Ce Signature, with a £1,990 price tag that includes a pair of very serious tubular steel stands, this wide and shallow design hides considerable unorthodoxy beneath a full-height, difficult-to-remove stocking mask grille, its blackness relieved only by a slim little veneered top and bottom end-cheeks. One justification for this approach is to keep the cost of the cabinetwork work low, allowing more money to be spent on the engineering.

Beneath that coverall lies a three-way speaker with four drive units, and a complex 'stepped baffle' arrangement that mounts midrange and treble drivers well clear of the main bass enclosure, in sub-enclosures with minimal dimensions in order to provide both wide lateral distribution and

longitudinal time-alignment.

The 4.5-inch midrange and eight-inch bass drivers both use cast chassis and polymer cones. The bass chamber functions as a form of reflex, with an additional unpowered ten-inch driver mounted on the rear acting as an auxiliary radiator, with carefully tuned electromagnetic damping.

The crossover uses first-order networks to preserve phase integrity, with air-cored inductors, and high-quality film capacitors in the signal path. Preset knobs next to the bi-wire screw terminals allow precise +2/-3dB adjustment to relative midrange and treble levels. The instruction manual is excellent, full of practical advice. The tripod stands allow tilt adjustment to align the forward axis, our in-room measurements indicating siting well clear of walls.

PERFORMANCE

I'd briefly listened to a pair of 2Ce Signatures when the importer asked to exchange them for a pair which had been properly run in. I agreed, but still have rather fonder memories of those

originals than the replacement pair, run in or not. Nevertheless, whichever samples, this is still a very good sounding loudspeaker, notable for its very clear, smooth and coherent midband, which somehow had the knack of revealing previously obscure lyrics in a number of old favourites.

With the preset levels at 'flat', the treble sounds very restrained, even dull, and I much preferred the overall balance with the treble set to +2dB. Voices still sound a shade 'hooded', but the extra sparkle is well worthwhile. At the other end of the spectrum, the bass has good extension, weight and power.

There's a lovely freedom from boxiness here, which would seem to support the theoretical claims for the advantage of the narrow curved, wide-distribution midrange (and treble) baffles. In a very real sense, this speaker manages the very difficult trick of combining the advantages of small and large loudspeakers in the same package, without any serious compromise, and without one getting in the way of the other. **C**

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
Cosmetically weird, but the 2Ce's very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony fully vindicates its multi/stepped-baffle approach. A little old-fashioned perhaps, but a genuine classic.	
CHECKLIST	
FLOORSTANDER?	✓
CLOSE TO WALL?	✗
WIDTH	41 cm
HEIGHT	109 cm
DEPTH	26 cm
BI-WIRABLE?	✓



LAB REPORT

▶ Bass is augmented by Vandersteen's 'active acoustic coupler', which looks to be a rear-firing 10-inch ABR (auxiliary bass radiator) tuned to 40-45Hz rather than the 26-35Hz suggested in its literature.

▶ While a narrowband analysis shows a series of small notches and peaks in the 2Ce's response, an averaged third octave trace suggests that it'll sound far smoother and even-handed in practice.

▶ While the new tweeter has reduced treble distortion to just 0.25%, bass distortion remains very high indeed at typically 4-8% (re 96dBA) from 80-300Hz.

▶ You'll have to drive the 2Ce hard to achieve high sound levels because its sensitivity is the lowest of the bunch at just 87.0dB (re 2.83V/1m).

▶ However, while the mere +/-20 degree phase angles are not troublesome, the 3.6ohm minimum impedance and average 6ohm load suggests the 2Ce is more current-hungry than expected for such a low sensitivity design.

DRIVERS

TWEETER: 25mm metal alloy dome
MIDRANGE: 4.5-inch die-cast basket with linear surround and curvilinear polycone
SUBWOOFER: eight-inch die-cast basket with curvilinear polycone
ACTIVE ACOUSTIC COUPLER: ten-inch unit with damped long-fibre cone

SPEAKER CONCLUSIONS

Paul Messenger considers the evidence

As one might expect, given their relatively high prices, all of these speakers have genuine merit and would be unlikely to disappoint any reasonable purchaser. But they're by no means all the same, and indeed show much greater individuality and variation between models than you'll find at lower

price points, as increased working budgets allow designers to spread their creative wings.

On this occasion, the one thing all have in common is that they're floorstanders, but after that some substantial variations set in. Two (Dynaudio and Naim) have just a single terminal pair, eschewing bi-wiring (though the Naim Allae is

active convertible). Several of the bi-wirable models (Castle, Ruark, Vandersteen), didn't include links for mono-wire connection, which is a slightly worrying trend.

Note the obvious variations in the relative treble levels of the different models, which is certainly a factor to take into account when balancing up a complete system.

However, the weakest spot for nearly all these proved to be at the bass end of things. These are large speakers, and therefore attempt to supply deep bass, but where they often run into problems is a little higher up the band.

With the Castle, Naim (and to a lesser extent Spendor and Vandersteen), there's adequate low



SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

Make Model	Castle Howard S3	Dynaudio Audience 82	Naim Allae	Ruark Prologue 2	Spendor S8	Tannoy Eyris 3	Triangle Celius 202	Vandersteen 2Ce Signature
Price	£1,350	£1,460	£1,990	£1,250	£1,700	£1,200	£1,095	£1,990
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Ease of Drive	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Build	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Conclusions	Looks gorgeous and is a solid all-round performer too, with uniquely spacious imaging.	Bulky and vinyl finished, but impressively neutral, with exceptional bass extension, power handling and loudness capability.	'Cold' overall balance, but its remarkable powers of musical analysis work best with unfamiliar material.	Lovely real wood plus a punchy and unusually open, neutral sound, impressively free from harshness.	Classic mid-band neutrality and transparency in a good-looking floorstander with great subtlety and delicacy.	Strikingly unusual and attractive styling, with fine scale and spaciousness, but lacks dynamic drama and excitement.	Magical midrange communication skills, with tension and transparency, but could be smoother, warmer and richer overall.	Impressively neutral mid-band, superior freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony vindicates its multi/stepped-baffle.

LAB REPORT

Sensitivity	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■
Ease of drive	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■
Bass extension	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■
Low distortion	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■
Overall rating	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■■

bass, ample (often too ample) midbass, and then insufficient output in the upper bass/lower midband. The result packs plenty of thump, but not quite enough punch, warmth and tonal richness. Only the Dynaudio and Tannoy managed to deliver smooth, deep bass under in-room conditions, which remains a cause for concern.

The Best Buy pick of the bunch is Dynaudio's Audience 82. This big, heavy bruiser of a speaker will need plenty of driving, but will deliver marvellous neutrality with deep and even bass.

Among the Recommendations, Ruark's Prologue 2 is physically neat, and sonically very open and neutral, if somewhat lacking in

weight and scale. The Spendor S8 combines weight with a lovely midband transparency and a restrained top end. The Naim Allae might lack warmth, but its clever decoupling delivers an outstanding dynamic range. And the Vandersteen has a beautifully communicative midband, with superior imaging.



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CD PLAYERS

**AUDIO NOTE CDT ZERO/
DAC ZERO 1X £1,300**

This intriguingly different combo, where the DAC avoids digital processing and filtering, gives a very smooth, open, easy-on-the-ear sound.

NAIM AUDIO CDS £1,125

At its best, this smooth and propulsive performer sounds dynamic, vivid and compelling. Can be upgraded with FLATCAP 2.

CYRUS CD7Q £1,150

An exceptionally small and neat player with a sound that's refined and dynamic. A significant step forward from the standard CD7.

AMPLIFIERS

**ELECTROCOMPANIE EC4.7/
120DMB £3,448**

A beautifully neutral and delicate sounding amplifier combo which shows fine consistency and time-coherence across a wide bandwidth and dynamic range.

ARCAM FMJ A32 £1,100

Arcam's top of the range integrated is a subtle, sophisticated and ultimately thoroughly engaging performer. Can be upgraded with the P35 power amp or used in a multi-room system with an additional plug-in module.

SUGDEN A21A £899

This 'classic revival' integrated class A transistorised amp may have limited power but supplies exquisite resolving power and presence.

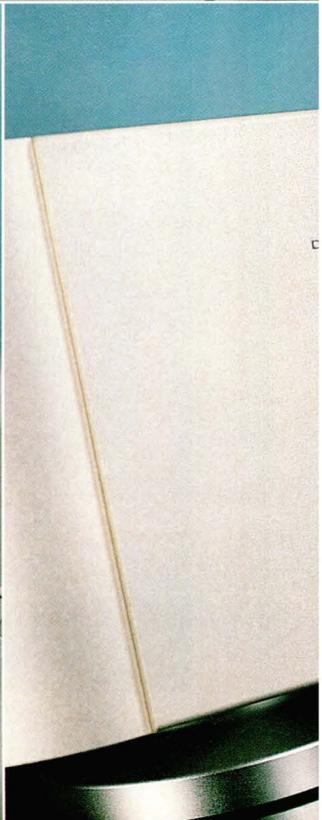
HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ The rules for getting the best out of a pair of speakers are much the same whatever models are involved.
- ⊕ Floorstanders need their spikes fitted very carefully. This is a potential weak spot, especially in models where the spikes fit directly into the base of the speaker (rather than a separate plinth), as the threaded sockets are often poorly fixed.
- ⊕ Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically (with respect to the room walls) is very important. Our reviews include suggestions, but every room is different, so do take time and trouble experimenting. Often, even small changes can have a big effect on the excitation of room modes.
- ⊕ Speakers often take some time to run in. Expect them to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.
- ⊕ Don't forget to use decent speaker cable if you want your system to perform at its best.
- ⊕ Standmounts require proper stands to ensure stable, predictable support and get the drive units the same distance off the floor as your ears.
- ⊕ Choice of stand can have a big influence on the sound, if you feel like experimenting.

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★



"The hi-fi world is littered with the carcasses of components that look a zillion dollars, but which fail to live up to their implied promise. The DV-12S1 is emphatically not one of them."



EXCLUSIVE

Digital magic

Marantz enters the DVD-Audio market with a classy machine that also promises high performance as a compact disc player

VERDICT

MARANTZ DV-12S1 DVD-A/V player
£2,500

▲ Superbly built, smooth, powerful and grounded sound quality – and excellent video performance too.

▼ Nothing – but spending this much for any DVD-Audio player is placing a lot of faith in what is still an unproved system.

CONCLUSION

A very impressive player which is easy to set up, and which has no obvious limitations.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ THX-ULTRA certified
- ▶ Progressive scan
- ▶ Copper-plated chassis
- ▶ Premium component quality
- ▶ All six channels have current feedback circuits
- ▶ High-power toroidal transformer

As a fully paid up member of the Philips empire, Marantz limited its involvement with high resolution audio to SACD. Indeed Philips' top of the line SACD player, the SACD-1000, was in part designed by Marantz on Philips' behalf. But Philips has recently divested itself of most of its equity stake in Marantz, which was a green light to add DVD-Audio to the portfolio. As luck or judgement would have it, the launch model from Marantz (now controlled by Denon by the way) fits in the under-populated slot for high-end DVD-Audio.

The DV-12S1 is a THX Ultra certified player, which in addition to DVD-Audio plays DVD-Video, CD/CD-R/CD-RW and DVD-R/DVD-RW standard discs, not forgetting version 2 Video-CDs. Everything except SACDs in fact. Six discrete channels of analogue audio are available from the internal Dolby Digital, DTS and MPEG processor, and like many DVD-Video players, a pseudo surround signal can be output so that two-channel system users don't feel that they've been cut completely out of the loop. The analogue outputs are also available for DVD-Audio multichannel discs of course. Potentially tricky set-up options are eased by an excellent interactive on-screen set-up (not quite TAG McLaren, but still good), and this feature is complemented by excellent controls, though the loader sounds slightly asthmatic.

The video section, powered by a ten-bit 54MHz D/A processor, produces composite, S-Video and RGB video from PAL sources via Scart with separate phono and Y/C (S-Video) sockets available too. NTSC sources are output in progressive form from the component video outputs, which is a real advantage, but of little use in the world of PAL.

This nuts and bolts description however fails to do full justice to the Marantz, which follows the exacting approach already familiar in the aptly named Premium series. The casework – and this includes all controls, the display, socketry, even the remote control – are to die for,

setting the kind of standard that others struggle to achieve at twice the price. The chassis is copper plated to improve screening, and the audio and video circuit blocks, some of which are fitted with screening cans, have a multiplicity of regulated power supplies driven from a substantial toroidal transformer with a low external hum field, with the kind of drive capacity that would do justice to some integrated amplifiers. Rare indeed with low consumption disc players. Extensive internal screening is used to demarcate different circuit areas, and the base is a heavy duty dual layer design with anti-vibration properties.

The short version then is that the DV-12S1 is drop dead gorgeous, but the hi-fi world is littered with the carcasses of components that look a zillion dollars, but which fail to live up to their implied promise. There have been some examples of this even within the Marantz Premium series, but this is emphatically not one of them.

TECHNOLOGY

There is little here that is truly revolutionary, but the DV-12S1 exemplifies the way Marantz uses high-grade proprietary circuit blocks, notably the HDAM high-slew-rate, discrete output opamp, to partner the 24-bit/192kHz DACs on the front two channels. This is coupled here with elaborate, high capacity power supplies and unrivalled build quality to reduce microphony and the audible degradation that results. The remaining three channels (centre, rear) lack niceties like the HDAM output, which may seem undesirable but these channels only have to cope with lower resolution audio, and the DACs are limited to 24bits at 96kHz, so there is some excuse. Elaborate, almost obsessive means are used to ensure that each major circuit block is isolated electromagnetically from the others on board. The video circuits can be switched off which makes a real, if subtle difference, and the same applies to the display, though any effect on sound quality was vanishingly small.

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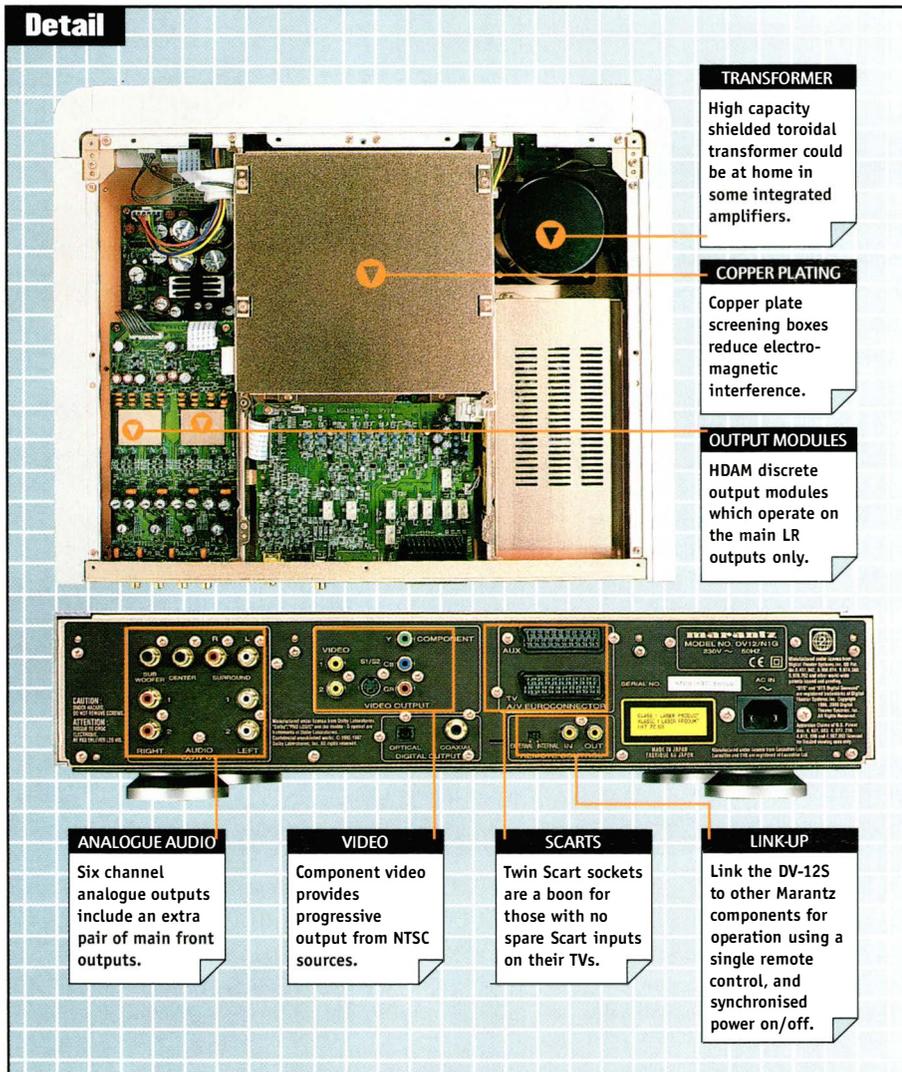
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TRANSFORMER

High capacity shielded toroidal transformer could be at home in some integrated amplifiers.

COPPER PLATING

Copper plate screening boxes reduce electro-magnetic interference.

OUTPUT MODULES

HDAM discrete output modules which operate on the main LR outputs only.

ANALOGUE AUDIO

Six channel analogue outputs include an extra pair of main front outputs.

VIDEO

Component video provides progressive output from NTSC sources.

SCARTS

Twin Scart sockets are a boon for those with no spare Scart inputs on their TVs.

LINK-UP

Link the DV-12S to other Marantz components for operation using a single remote control, and synchronised power on/off.

“The DV-12S1 is one of only two DVD players I can think of that is also a genuinely top flight CD player, and the other, from TAG McLaren, actually a transport, costs nearly twice as much.”

PERFORMANCE

The DV-12S1 is one of only two DVD players I can think of that is also a genuinely top flight CD player, and the other, from TAG McLaren, which in fact is a transport, costs nearly twice as much.

Two examples may help illustrate what kind of stuff the Marantz is made from. The opening track from Lambchop’s *Is A Woman, The Daily Growl*, is a sparse, low-key recording which nevertheless has a spacious, large scale acoustic – more of a brooding presence really – and a mass of very subtle low-level detail. It’s an excellent recording, reminiscent of the Cowboy Junkies’ famous first studio album *Trinity Sessions*, but I quickly discovered that it is unusually reliant on top class replay. On a poor system – in a car initially – it simply doesn’t work, and

on the Pioneer DV-747A DVD-Audio/SACD/CD player, which is even more flexible than the Marantz and costs half as much, it was kind of OK, but nothing to get excited about. Switch to the Marantz, however, and the sound suddenly springs to life. The soundstage takes on a purposefully solid, physical air, the mass of low-level detail (bum notes included) suddenly springs into three-dimensional life, and the whole effect is more vital and dynamic. There are even tonal improvements, though that’s kind of hard to explain.

Similarly, Soile Isokoski’s *Befreit* from her recording of Strauss songs on *Ondine* (featured on page 26) sounded more ravishingly open and beautiful, but it was also more obviously solid, more grounded through the DV-12S1, an effect that may



be related to the Marantz’s extraordinarily (the word is not used lightly) tactile bass.

If there is less reason to be enthusiastic about DVD-Audio performance, it is not because there is anything wrong with the Marantz’s abilities in this area, but a recognition that so far at least there are few good DVD-Audio recordings. One of the best, the EMI multichannel *Mahler’s Tenth Symphony* in the Simon Rattle/Berlin Philharmonic recording, has exemplary panache and range, again with that characteristic Marantz weight and gravitas, and with a well defined and immaculately separated instrumental detail and spacious soundstaging. Even here though there was nothing in the sound that cannot be equalled or perhaps even bettered by a good compact disc. But between this and other recordings I tried (including, briefly, an unlikely candidate in the shape of Fleetwood Mac’s *Rumours*, which comes up smelling of roses in DVD-A) there are more than hints that the DV-12S1 is almost as powerful an exponent of high resolution audio as it is a CD and a DVD-Video player, but that it lacks the edge and consistency that distinguishes the player in two-channel CD mode.

Video performance is top notch. On every count – image stability, chroma range, shadow and highlight detail, video noise – the Marantz scores well. MPEG artefacts following abrupt scene transitions and with various types of motion across the screen are more visible than with some absolutely top ranking players. But overall the DV-12S1 is not far from being as good as it gets given the rotten PAL interlace scan TV systems that the digital TV gatekeepers have saddled us with while the US is busy adopting high definition TV. **Ⓞ**

☎ Marantz UK 01753 680868
 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

TAG MCLAREN DVD32R £3,995
 True high-end, top-loading transport, not DVD-Audio compatible yet, but will be with an upgrade due this year.

TOSHIBA SD900E £1,299
 Mainstream player that is one of the best of its type both as an audio and as a video player.

MERIDIAN DVD596 £2,350
 DVD-Video player with DVD-Audio upgrade potential, with classic Meridian stripped-down exterior and classy engineering.

Vinyl va va voom

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

EXCLUSIVE Avid's latest turntable specialises in exploring the outer limits of what vinyl can achieve

Avid is a small company that's building a big reputation for itself on the turntable market both here and overseas. Despite the slightly Teutonic appearance this deck is made in Cambridge by an Englishman with a slightly Germanic name: Conrad Mas. Conrad's first turntable, the £5,000 Acutus, came to light in 1999 and we reviewed it enthusiastically in *HFC* 194. Last year this was followed by a 'base' model, the £2,000 Volvere, and now we have effectively a synthesis of those two models in the £3,500 Volvere Sequel.

This turntable has the platter and chassis from the Volvere coupled with the external power supply from the Acutus. The Crouzet motor is fundamentally the same as that on the Acutus but in basic unmodified form. Even so it produces a hefty 140mN of torque (note – 140 millinewtons is a lot of torque) with which it spins the heavyweight, cork-matted platter. Drive is via a round section belt, which can be made easier to hook up by fitting a match or similar item into a hole under the platter rim so that you can loop it onto the motor – no need for bent bits of wire here!

Conrad is a big fan of seriously tight record clamping. Unlike the quick-fitting clamp on an SME for example, this deck has a fine pitch clamp thread so that you can get a good purchase on the vinyl without stripping the brass spindle. In contrast, SME uses a harder spindle with a coarser thread. Avid's philosophy is that a brass bearing housing offers the best way of draining the energy created by the vinyl/stylus interface away to a part of the deck where it can then be harmlessly dissipated as heat, in this case the subchassis.

The three silver pots that surround the platter contain springs which are used to suspend the subchassis and effectively isolate them from vibration in the supporting surface – usually created by the loudspeakers. Each of these suspension posts can be adjusted for height with the large knurled feet or by turning the little posts that connect the subchassis to the springs. I levelled the chassis base using the feet and then levelled the platter with the spring posts.

PERFORMANCE

As Avid's own tonearm is not expected until the autumn, I took the estimable SME Model V off my SME Model 20 deck complete with the vdH Grasshopper cartridge and fitted it to the Sequel. The deck can be used with a number of arms and a Rega arm base is supplied but the Model V is a mutual favourite.

This is a very impressive turntable, there's no getting away from it. Put a great record on and you hear everything, or to put it another way it extracts so much more than is usually encountered that you feel you're hearing everything there is worth hearing. The humble vinyl groove has an extraordinary ability to store information, much greater than most turntables will let you hear, in fact. The Avid taps deep into that store.

First impressions were of a bold, powerful and confident sound, with an image that sits in front of the loudspeakers to a greater degree than other sources. There's an architectural solidity to its presentation that you don't get with many analogue or digital sources, in fact hardly any of the latter, but which gives the music being played a presence and realism that is reach-out-and-touch-it real.

The above is actually a description of the music reproduced by the Avid rather than of the deck's character – this is one

VERDICT

Avid Volvere Sequel vinyl turntable
£3,500

▶ Remarkable transparency and resolution to the finest detail plus tremendous coherence and power.

▼ Clamp takes rather too many turns to do up/undo.

CONCLUSION

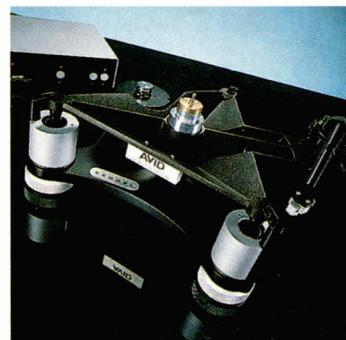
Very impressive heavyweight turntable that will deliver all the passion, grace and fire of your favourite vinyl.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ High mass platter
- ▶ Easily adjustable spring suspension
- ▶ High torque motor
- ▶ Separate power supply
- ▶ Good compatibility with alternative tonearms
- ▶ Optional bent Perspex dust cover for deck and arm (£60)
- ▶ Precision engineered inverted sapphire bearing

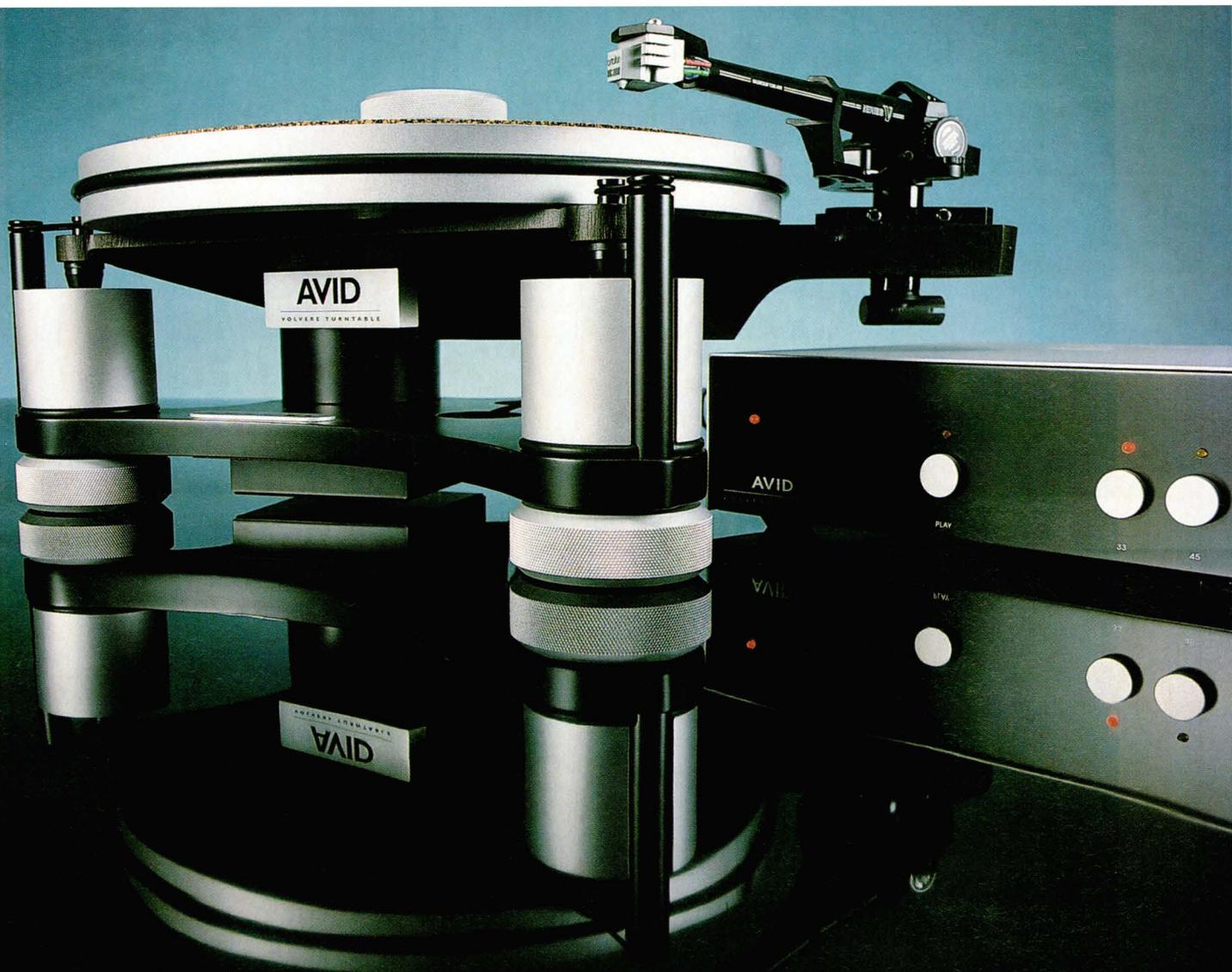


Each of the chassis' three legs can be levelled individually, and the cork-topped platter can be further fine-tuned via the springs in each leg.



The Crouzet external power supply is basically the same as the one in Avid's £5,000 Acutus model, but in a stripped-down, unmodified form.





"This is one of the most transparent turntables I've heard and its sound seems purely to be that of the record you put on it."

We used an SME Model V tonearm for the review, but Avid's own design should be available in the autumn.



of the most transparent turntables I've heard and its sound seems purely to be that of the record you put on it. It reveals huge variations between recordings, to the extent that one selection of discs can leave you thinking it's nothing special while another has you leaping about the room with excitement. The difference between good and bad recordings has

never been starker, so prepare for disappointment and elation, because while it will make the most of a great record it won't enliven a poor one.

The deck's precision is such that even within individual albums it draws out the great tracks from the lesser ones with ease. Take Radiohead's *I Might Be Wrong Live Recordings* – quite a few tracks sound pretty messy but the less complex acoustic guitar-based ones are clear and strong. Which could lead you to imagine that the turntable is struggling with denser pieces but Captain Beefheart's *Floppy Boot Stomp* put paid to that notion, this rhythmically contorted piece sounded supremely coherent and engaging. Other records reveal that different instruments within a piece were clearly recorded separately and in slightly different environments, Anouar Brahem's fine sounding *Barzakh* on ECM being a great example. Featuring only a few acoustic instruments recorded in ECM's characteristically clear style the Avid brought to light a wide degree of

variations in acoustic surroundings of each instrument.

This degree of precision can at times seem a little clinical and there's none of the romance that some turntables add to the musical picture, but if the record is good and if it has emotion in its grooves you'll most definitely hear it. Some might prefer a stronger emphasis on timing for instance but if you want to get to the heart of your music, neutrality is the only real way. 

 Avid 01832 710370

 www.avidhifi.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

SME MODEL 20.2 £3,657

A more compact design with similar aspirations and a slightly higher quality of finish. Highly neutral sound.

MICHELL ORBE SE £1,725

Inverted bearing design with exposed suspension and an external PSU but less substantial build. Great sound for the price.

WELL TEMPERED REFERENCE £5,500

Unusual and heavily damped design with a tonearm that hangs on threads. Very strong on timing.



"This is not a toy, it's everything that Pioneer can do as of February 2002 – which adds up to a lot of tricks and a big stack of cash for a one-box amp. But a glance at the feature list will give you some idea of why."



The Re-Equaliser

Pioneer's new range-topper is a feature-packed movie monster with a particular penchant for high resolution surround sound music

VERDICT

PIONEER VSA-AX10
Multichannel AV amplifier
£2,700

▲ Formidable flexibility and plenty of genuinely useful features.

▼ It does so much you need to spend a week reading the manual!

CONCLUSION

The AX-10 is an extremely refined device that does music and movies with considerable fire and passion – the acoustic calibration could be sweeter but the automatic set-up is a dream.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ THX Ultra2 post-processing
- ▶ MCACC auto-calibration system with high-precision set-up microphone
- ▶ DTS 5.1 and DTS-ES 6.1 formats, plus 96/24 DTS decoding
- ▶ Dolby Digital and 'EX' formats, including Dolby Pro Logic II
- ▶ 8-channel line inputs and preamp line outputs
- ▶ Front Left + Right channels can be bi-amped in 5.1 systems
- ▶ 8 assignable digital inputs
- ▶ HDTV grade video convertor
- ▶ 96kHz/24-bit analogue-to-digital convertors
- ▶ 92kHz/24-bit DACs
- ▶ Backlit LCD touch-screen programmable remote

Merely making an AV amplifier that produces a 'continuous' seven times 170 watts is not enough anymore. The ante has been well and truly upped by Pioneer, which has put all the latest badges on its new flagship and given it the ability to equalise your loudspeaker system to boot. Features sell in this market, but where will the madness lead: the plug and play Empire Leicester Square in a box?

Only kidding. For once we have a new feature that could be genuinely useful for many potential buyers. But you noticed the word flagship? This is not a toy, it's everything that Pioneer can do as of February 2002 – which adds up to a lot of tricks and quite a big stack of cash for a one-box amplifier – £2,700 to be precise. But a glance at the feature list will give you some idea of why.

It's one of those where-do-you-start products, but its most impressive feature is its video convertor which can take any form of video signal, such as composite or S-video and upgrade it to the superior component variety. If you have a projector or plasma screen you'll be able to really take advantage of this. It also allows independent video switching, so you can flick between sources without affecting the sound. A largely US-oriented plus point is the high definition 720P picture quality spec incorporated into THX Ultra2, which, as well as offering the usual cinematic processing now includes settings for seven-channel music.

As well as Pioneer's own two and multichannel algorithms, of which there are plenty, it has Dolby Pro-Logic 2 Music and DTS Neo 6 Music, which offer variations on the theme of turning your regular CDs into surround material.

Being a Pioneer product, DVD-Audio (and by default SACD) sources are well catered for with a 7.1 channel set of analogue inputs.

Setting up the VSA-AX10 is a doddle thanks to the supplied microphone and automated nature of the process. Just hook up your speakers and set the amp

analysing, but either leave the room just after you press start or get out the ear defenders – the noise is nasty. Still, it doesn't merely set delays, it figures out how many and which channels there are and calibrates accordingly. No more SPL meters and test tones – one day all AV amps will be like this.

PERFORMANCE

Looking a little further down the spec list we find a more 'hi-fi' power rating for this amp that claims 2x150 watts into six ohms – the continuous multichannel rating is for one per cent THD (total harmonic distortion) and therefore rather crude. Nonetheless the VSA-AX10 packs plenty of punch for an integrated, and it's even possible to bi-amp the front L/R channels if you aren't using back surrounds (the sixth and seventh channels).

This is the kind of amp that encourages higher listening levels – the inherent character is a little smoother than you get with most stereo amps so you can push the envelope that little bit further before the sound hardens up. It's not soft sounding by the standards of AV amplifiers as a whole but put a stereo ▶

ACOUSTIC CALIBRATION

The Multichannel Acoustic Calibration System uses a supplied microphone to set up levels, delays and even to equalise your loudspeakers in the context of the room. It does this by playing tones through the system and analysing the response of the speakers in the room, then applying a nine band EQ curve starting at 63Hz – so don't expect it to be able to sort out room induced bass problems. That result it seeks to achieve is a notional flat response for either the whole system or by matching the surround channels to the same balance as front left, right and centre, which gave a subjectively 'better' balance than the rather bright response with the whole system equalised. Alternatively you can tweak the balance to taste by adjusting the levels of each band for each speaker.

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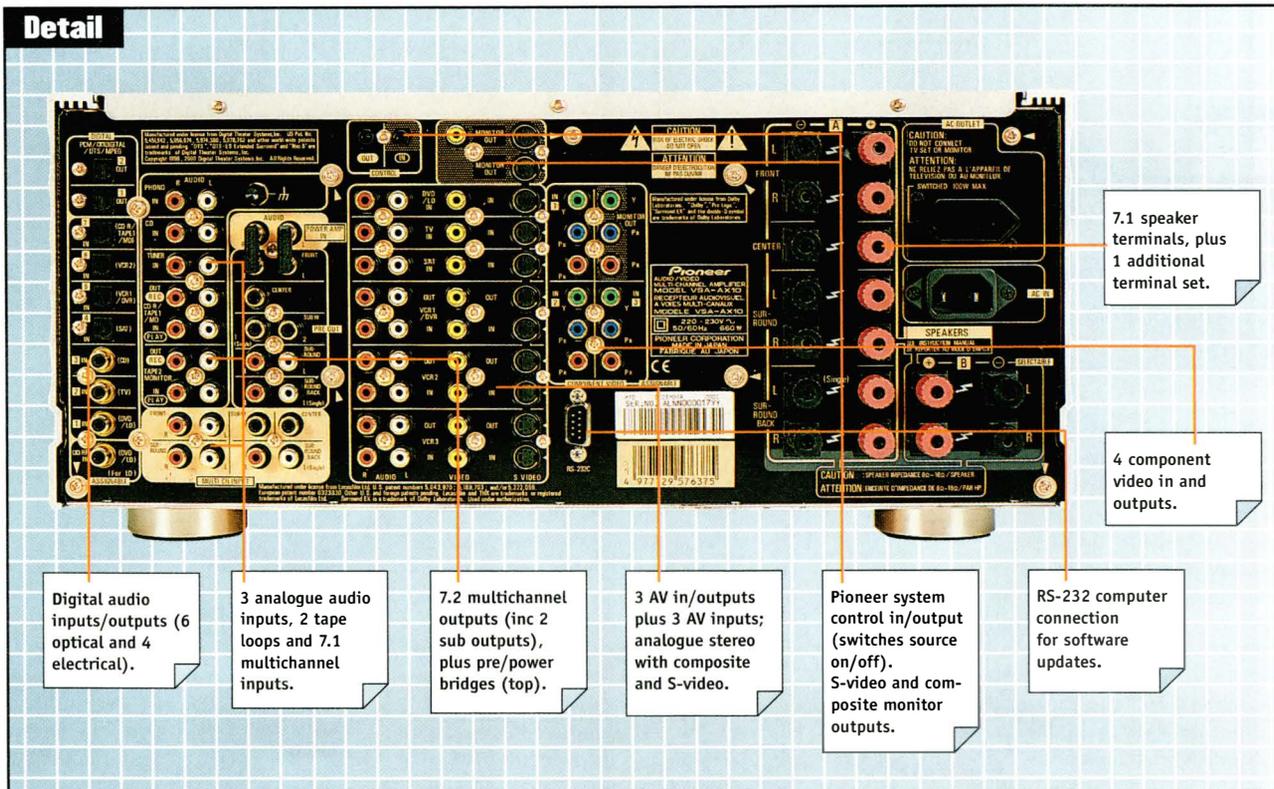
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amp of say half the price next to it and most audiophiles would prefer the two-channel presentation. Yet it does a much better job of imaging with stereo material than usual. Multichannel amps tend toward a rather speaker-centric presentation because they have so many to use that expansiveness is unnecessary, but the Pioneer can reproduce image depth with aplomb. Of the various two to five channel algorithms Neo 6 sounded the most natural, it leaves the L and R as they are and 'extracts' ambience to play through the rears and centre. Pioneer's five-channel stereo has the rears as a reflection of the fronts and gives maximum firepower without messing up the music in any way.

With SACD multichannel music discs the results were impressive, with good image scale and depth. Using the amp in 'Direct' mode, timing is a little relaxed but not slow and dynamics are given due deference if not total freedom. The Gaudeamus choral disc works particularly well, with plenty of height and depth reflecting its ecclesiastical recording venue. It served to illustrate how much proper system set-up can affect results – we've heard worse from more expensive systems that were set up manually.

Comparing Direct with Equalised presentations tended as ever to favour the straightest path through the amp.

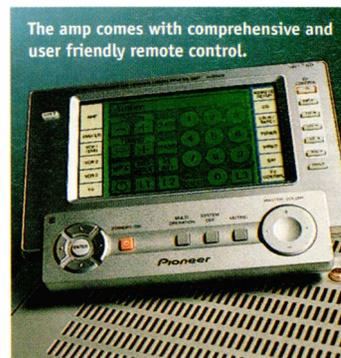
“The AX10’s character is smoother than most stereo amps so you can push the envelope that little bit further before the sound hardens up.”

The EQ'd result tends toward brightness/thinness though not all discs appear to be treated equally. It seems to be highly content-specific, and discs like the Gaudeamus are altered quite subtly whereas James Taylor's *Hourglass* seems to sharpen up in a not unappealing fashion.

The EQ processing seemed to have a far greater effect on the DVD-A discs I played. Missy Elliott's *Miss E... So Addictive* sounds pretty damn fantastic in Direct mode, with juicy bass lines and clear powerful lyrics set against a pumping beat. The use of surround channels on this disc is superb, but the effect of EQ is emaciating and even alters the perceived volume level.

Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now* sounds very fine and subtle – you can hear right into the mix and the emotion, one of the best results I've heard with this disc. It's intimate yet expansive, so that you can hear both the size of the venue and the feeling in her voice.

The acoustic equalisation has a similar treble emphasis with movie soundtracks, but as these are usually of a compressed nature (DD or DTS) they tend toward a slightly dark balance, so a little bit of treble lift can be helpful. However, with both *AI* and *The Matrix I* found myself playing for either plain Dolby Digital or DD/THX, which served the effects and the dialogue well. The results with



both these movies were excellent – plenty of power and drama without a hint of fatigue-inducing distortion. I particularly enjoyed the effort that the engineers had put into the more subtle elements of both movies. **C**

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ALSO CONSIDER

DENON AVC-A1SE £2,500
The product that Pioneer set out to beat is a benchmark that needs a few tweaks if it's to keep its position. Watch this space...

ARCAM AV8/P37 £5,000
The imminent seven-channel processor plus power amp solution from British stalwart Arcam. We can't wait to give it a spin.

PRIMARE SPA20 £2,000
A new five-channel solution from a hi-fi oriented brand that could put the cat among the multichannel pigeons.

Two in one

Musical Fidelity's new CD-PRE²⁴ reduces clutter by combining CD player and analogue/digital preamplification in this single unit

This gorgeous looking package is unique, combining several useful but slightly unexpected features into a single, clutter-free unit.

The CD-PRE part of the name is the giveaway, indicating that this device combines the facilities of a CD player and a preamp. Such a combination is rare but not unknown, featuring in the portfolios of high-end US brands like Krell, albeit at far higher prices than this. But the cunning part about the CD-PRE²⁴ is the way it brings together the analogue and digital domains.

At heart it's actually an analogue pre-amp, but bringing both digital-to-analogue and analogue-to-digital converters into the whole equation enables it to take the digital world on board too. It's therefore a particularly useful device for anyone into using digital recording media, or computers, for music. But it's not only handy for recording digital sources: that A-to-D means you can also use it for conveniently archiving your vinyl onto CD-R, for example.

Physically it's a handsome unit, and a beautifully finished one too, if a little shiny for some tastes perhaps. The style (and much of the internal engineering, for that matter) takes its cues from the very successful limited edition NuVista CD player, though a lack of the latter's gilded embellishments makes the CD-PRE²⁴ just that little bit more restrained – where restraint is a purely relative term. The brushed alloy fascia feels as solid as it is strokeable, and the rest of the case-work just as substantial, with proper screw-together extrusions providing the sort of mechanical rigidity you know will banish any hint of vibration modulation.

Solid audiophile pretensions means that there are no tone controls of any kind, and even semi-useful features like a mono switch and balance control are omitted in the interest of simplicity.

Because the CD-PRE²⁴ has a built-in (single-play) CD mechanism, there's no need for a CD input as such, just an input selection button to choose this

VERDICT

MUSICAL FIDELITY CD-PRE²⁴ CD player/preamplifier
£2,000

▲ Uniquely combines CD player and a flexible preamp in single unit. Looks beautiful, feels solid and sounds excellent.

▼ High frequency fine detail could be more explicit. Handset layout is ergonomically clumsy.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
An innovative product that not only looks good and saves clutter, it also provides some very practical advantages over two box combinations.

KEY FEATURES

► Combines the facilities of a (single-play) CD player and a preamplifier

► CD section/display incorporates CD Text

► Particularly useful for anyone into using digital recording media, or computers for music: the ADC means it can also be used for archiving vinyl onto CD-R, for example

► Very simple interface, with no tone controls at all

► Four straight analogue stereo inputs, all at line level

► Automatically upsamples to 96kHz/24-bits. Re-clocking is used to improve the jitter performance

► Choke-regulated supplies keep noise very low

internal source. In addition there are four straight analogue stereo inputs, all at line level (no specific vinyl provision here). Three can be selected from the fascia as well as the remote, while the 'tape monitor' fourth (partnering a tape-out pair) is only on the handset. There are also two main inputs for external digital sources (on both electrical and optical sockets), plus an in/out pair for digital record/monitor connection.

The preamplifier section is essentially analogue in operation, and controls the system volume via the large and handsome knob at the right-hand end of the fascia, either hands-on or, more prosaically, via a couple of buttons tucked rather awkwardly in the bottom corner of the remote handset.

Said handset doesn't have quite the

UPSAMPLING

▲ Upsampling seems to be a key marketing word for serious digital audio components in 2002. Sceptics might query how it differs from traditional oversampling, which goes back to the earliest days of digital audio – with some justification, since the two are theoretically and conceptually very closely related.

▲ The distinction is perhaps that oversampling was essentially a trade-off, increasing the sampling rate alongside a reduction in the number of bits. Upsampling, however, increases the sampling rate irrespective of (and indeed often while also enhancing) the bit size. Whatever the difference, even those normally sceptical by nature seem to have been impressed by the upsampling approach.

▲ What started out as a relatively rare, esoteric and expensive technique, from brands like Meridian and DCS, is now starting to spread through the marketplace, and Musical Fidelity is one brand making upsampling more affordable. MF's Antony Michaelson acknowledges that upsampling doesn't actually create extra information, but feels it offers a significantly smoother and sweeter sound, with a very worthwhile reduction in unwanted high frequency digital artefacts.



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

"It's particularly useful for anyone into using digital recording media, or computers, for music. But it's not only handy for recording: that A-to-D means you can also use it for conveniently archiving your vinyl onto CD-R, for example."

As well as the input selection buttons on the fascia there is an additional 'tape monitor' selector on the remote control.





The casework is extremely substantial, with proper screw-together extrusions providing fine mechanical rigidity. The brushed alloy fascia feels as solid as it is strokeable.



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Art Audio Concerto - 40w line integrated - black + chrome.	£1500	£2650
Art Audio Concerto - 40w power amp.	£1350	£2250
Joule Electra - 2 box phono pre-amp.	£800	£2000
Linn Classic - CD, amp, tuner, thing.	£500	£1000
Cary '2A3' - 7 watt power amp. 1992	£850	-
Cary 5500 - line pre-amp. 1992	£550	-
Unison Mystery One PR+	£950	£1750
Tube Technology MAC - phono pre-amp - fully refurbished by manufacturer - including Hovland film and foil capacitors.	£900	£1400
Tube Technology line pre-amp with separate power supply - fully refurbished by manufacturer - including Hovland film and foil capacitors and a stepped attenuator.	£850	£1450
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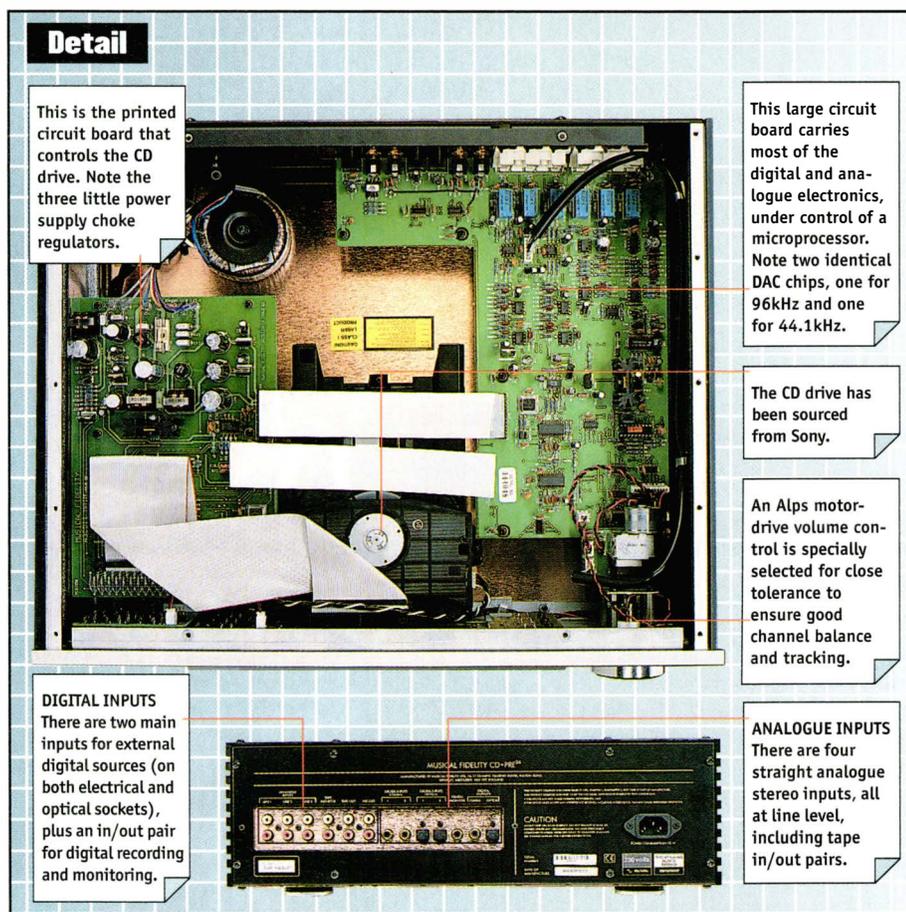
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Detail

This is the printed circuit board that controls the CD drive. Note the three little power supply choke regulators.

This large circuit board carries most of the digital and analogue electronics, under control of a microprocessor. Note two identical DAC chips, one for 96kHz and one for 44.1kHz.

The CD drive has been sourced from Sony.

An Alps motor-drive volume control is specially selected for close tolerance to ensure good channel balance and tracking.

DIGITAL INPUTS

There are two main inputs for external digital sources (on both electrical and optical sockets), plus an in/out pair for digital recording and monitoring.

ANALOGUE INPUTS
There are four straight analogue stereo inputs, all at line level, including tape in/out pairs.

class of the rest of the hardware. I'm all for lightweight plastic remote controls, because they're the easiest to handle. But I can't say the same for an array of 39 identical buttons, where no attempt has been made to distinguish and make the most frequently used (like volume and track-skip) the easiest to access.

It can handle digital input signals with up to 100kHz clock rate, and automatically upsamples to 96kHz/24-bits, a procedure which should move any unwanted digital artefacts well up into the super-sonic regions and out of harm's way. Re-clocking improves the jitter performance.

PERFORMANCE

The sheer simplicity of this piece of kit is a major strength. All you need is a stereo power amp of some kind, plus a pair of speakers (or even just a pair of active, powered speakers), and you're up and playing music. Add extra sources to taste, such as a radio and/or TV tuner of some kind, or perhaps a vinyl phono stage.

For the purposes of this review I simply hooked up the CD-PRE²⁴ to my regular Naim NAP500 power amp, in place of the NAC52 preamp I normally use. Once I'd found the necessary leads (Chord



Company phono-to-XLRs in this case), this took no time at all. I had plenty of suitable speakers available to hang on the end, from the eight examples in this month's group test, and spent some time with each, eventually doing final listening with the Spendor S8s and Naim Allaes. A Marantz DR6000 CD recorder was another part of the mix. And because the CD-PRE²⁴ has a built-in CD mechanism, it takes just a few seconds to get the system playing some music – and doing a very good job of it too.

I gave the unit a few hours to warm up properly, and started digging out some of my favourite CDs. This player's

strength is in recognising that the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. It doesn't thrust detail at you, or ram any sonic extravagances down your throat. Rather, it creates a beautifully holistic experience, which majors on the totality of the music and the way the whole comes together.

Tonality seems particularly 'right', and the claim that upsampling removes unwanted high frequency 'nasties' seems very likely to be true. The CD-PRE²⁴ does seem to have a particularly smooth and 'kind' top end, perhaps rolling off the fine detail here a little in the interests of keeping everything neat and tidy.

I was first conscious of this factor when substituting the CD-PRE²⁴ for my regular (and substantially more expensive) NAC52, so part of this is probably down to the preamp section. However, feeding the CD-PRE²⁴ via both digital and analogue inputs from a Rega Jupiter CD player showed that the upsampling DAC also smoothed the extreme high frequencies by a tiny amount.

I was caught a little by surprise when I inserted Incubus' *Morning View*, to find first the album and subsequently the track titles coming up on the display. Not many discs in my collection include CD Text, but it's a natty little feature nonetheless.

All the line-level type sources I tried also worked very satisfactorily. The blue tell-tale indicator lamps clearly show both the chosen input and the position of the volume control, which has a very practical law and motor action.

The CD-PRE²⁴ looks tasty, sounds good, and above all provides an exceptionally straightforward and practical way of bringing together the analogue and digital worlds that make up today's high fidelity experience.

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🌐 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

Because the Musical Fidelity CD-PRE²⁴ is a unique product it has no direct competitors. However, if you're looking for a sub-£2,000 CD player/preamp partnership try these for size.

NAD S500 CD PLAYER £1,100

A beautiful looking player that sounds as clean and refined as it looks.

NAD S100 PREAMP £600

A remote controllable preamp that matches the S500 both in sound and looks.

CYRUS CD7Q CD PLAYER £1,150

A refined and expressive sounding CD player and recipient of a Best Buy badge in our last CD player group test.

CYRUS ACA7.5 PREAMP £700

The same shoebox size case as the CD7Q and a very capable preamp to boot.

Krell's angel

Krell's integrated amp has had a serious facelift. It certainly looks fantastic but is its beauty only skin deep?

This is Krell's second stab at an integrated amplifier. However, Krell's previous KAV kit was a bit, erm, utilitarian looking. It owed lots to the styling of upmarket Krell kit, but lacked the physical scale to carry the effect off properly and looked a bit drab by comparison. That's all changed with the latest KAV range, especially the slimline KAV-300iL amplifier. It's now all chromed side cheeks, brushed alloy panels and curved edges. Allied to small chrome touch buttons, red and blue LEDs and a large red LED three-figure read-out, this has a cool, purposeful style reminiscent of bits of aerospace-engineering from the glory days of the 1950s, but is also very, very 21st Century.

It's a 200 watt remote control amplifier, and comes supplied with a slimline handset with hermetically sealed soft-touch buttons. It is designed to control the Krell KAV-280cd CD player, but also has controls for a tuner. Apparently, the extra buttons are for a receiver that was planned but has yet to make it to market. However, aside from having to occasionally press the blue 'Pre' key to remind remote and amplifier that they are talking to one another, the excess buttons cause no problems.

Under the hood, the amplifier circuit board has shrunk considerably, now that Krell uses surface-mount components. Previous amplifiers have used circuit boards packed with discrete components soldered by hand. Using tiny components placed by computer and soldered in special tanks makes for improved reliability and – because the path of the circuit is shorter – better sound. The output transistors are all Krell proprietary ones, meant to cope with more power than usual. It also means there is room for a huge 800VA toroidal transformer and 50,000µF (that's a lot of microfarads) of filter capacitance, which helps to smooth out the power supply.

The wide bandwidth signal path is fully balanced from input to output, with low negative feedback. It also uses Class A

circuitry in all circuits up to the driver stage. The big feature in the amp design is Krell's Current Mode. This is a proprietary circuit, where the audio amplifier gain stage works on current instead of voltage. Krell says this improves the transient attack of the amplifier design.

The roll call of inputs and sockets is a bit bare. There's only one balanced line input, three single-ended line inputs and a tape loop. Even channel balance is relegated to the remote control, and as for a phono stage, headphone socket or (God forbid) tone controls... forget it. Still, there is a set of 12V trigger sockets for multiroom systems, a set of phono sockets that effectively turn the KAV-300iL into a preamp and a special

KRELL HISTORY

Remember the 1956 classic movie *Forbidden Planet*? The Krell were an ancient race of super-intelligent scientists and engineers from the planet Altair IV. This film must have had a profound effect on electronics designer Dan D'Agostino, who in 1980 formed Krell Industries Inc, to produce high-end amplification.

The eighties were a golden age of hi-fi. The switch from LP to CD reinvigorated manufacturers to produce bigger and better products and the combination of Reaganomics and Thatcherism meant greed was good and hi-fi became a status symbol. This paved the way for near-impossible-to-drive loudspeakers such as the Apogee Diva. Power amplifiers like the huge, legendary Krell KSA-250 power amp was one of the few that could cope.

In the nineties, punishing speakers gave way to more efficient designs and home cinema systems. Krell has since produced smaller power amplifiers, multichannel designs, processors and DVD players, as well as its more traditional markets of CD players, preamps and big power amplifiers. The company has recently branched out, making big, heavy loudspeakers under the LAT range. Krell continues to come up with new and innovative developments, such as the CAST interconnect system, in the hope of improving the sound of hi-fi.

VERDICT

Krell KAV-300iL integrated stereo amplifier
£3,698

▲ A beautifully made integrated amplifier with a well-balanced sound that is surprisingly funky. Makes your speakers seem bigger and better!

▼ A hint of brightness; needs more single-ended line inputs; remote control crowded with buttons for a product that doesn't exist.

CONCLUSION

Krell's new look is matched by a sound that's great with any kind of music. It's even good for AV.

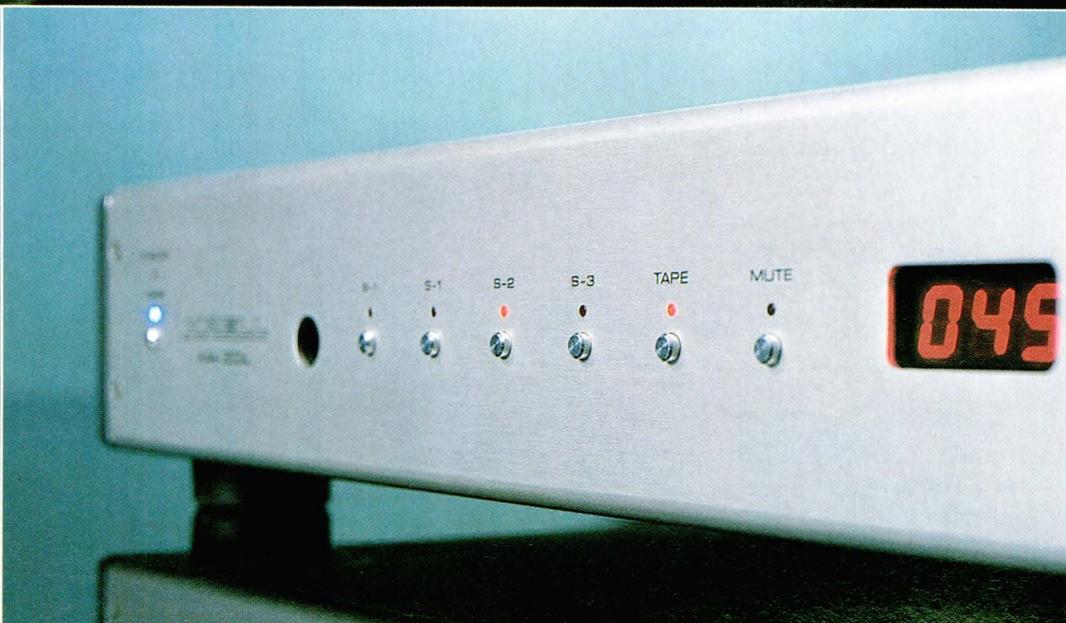
KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 200 watts per channel into eight ohms; 400 watts per channel into four ohms
- ▶ Current gain instead of voltage gain design ('Krell Current Mode')
- ▶ Balanced internal construction
- ▶ One balanced input; three single-ended inputs, tape loop
- ▶ Theatre Throughput mode
- ▶ LED display
- ▶ Touch-button front panel
- ▶ 'Credit-card' remote





"Some valve amplifiers will sound better with jazz; big UK amps often sound fantastic with powerful, driving rock. But the Krell's best asset is its ability to play anything without favouring one genre over another."



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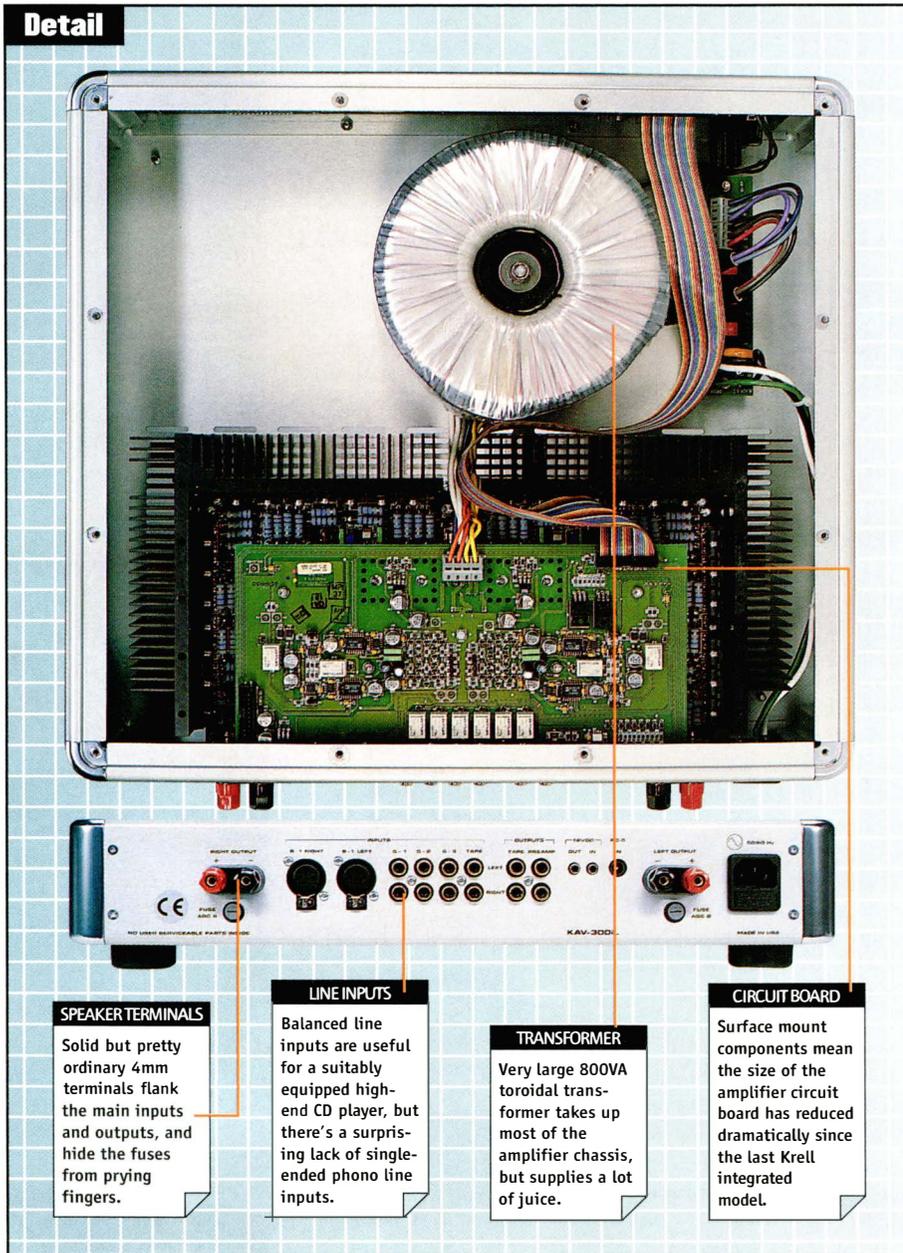


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SPEAKER TERMINALS

Solid but pretty ordinary 4mm terminals flank the main inputs and outputs, and hide the fuses from prying fingers.

LINE INPUTS

Balanced line inputs are useful for a suitably equipped high-end CD player, but there's a surprising lack of single-ended phono line inputs.

TRANSFORMER

Very large 800VA toroidal transformer takes up most of the amplifier chassis, but supplies a lot of juice.

CIRCUIT BOARD

Surface mount components mean the size of the amplifier circuit board has reduced dramatically since the last Krell integrated model.

home cinema throughput mode. This last is interesting – you lose one of the four precious inputs to the AV processor, but it turns the 300iL into a power amp for the front left and right speakers in a multichannel system, putting the AV processor in charge of amplifier volume. It also means you can have decent hi-fi and good home cinema without compromising either.

PERFORMANCE

Good audio is like cooking; sadly, much high-end audio is like cooking without a recipe. A splash of dynamic here, a dash of detail there and bosh in loads of fresh soundstage. Season with warmth or brightness to taste. Pukka! Although this

“Good audio is like cooking; sadly, much high-end audio is like cooking without a recipe.”

often produces great results, plugging in the Krell KAV-300iL is like following Delia to the letter. It bestows on music a reassuring sense of authority and correctness that most integrated amplifiers lack.

Sonically, nothing has been left to chance. The 300iL is crisp yet fluid and clean and detailed, with a very fine 3D soundstage and plenty of dynamic range. It has plenty of tonal colour without being coloured. Voices are articulate and clear. And, except for a hint of brightness that only serves to make it a bit more exciting, it has no personality you can latch on to. This makes the 300iL superb to listen to but extremely difficult to categorise. You can play almost anything through the Krell and it will sound

equally good. Some valve amplifiers will sound better with jazz; big UK amps often sound fantastic with powerful, driving rock. But the Krell's best asset is its ability to play anything without favouring one genre over another.

But it is not bland; in fact, it's is surprisingly funky. The (generally well-founded) criticism of much American high-end gear is its inability to get down; fantastic for pretty audiophile music, but horrific with George Clinton. While the 300iL doesn't have the rhythmic emphasis or sheer timing of a good Naim set-up, it has enough groove to promote mild-to-strenuous booty shaking with David Holmes' excellent *Come Get It I Got It* CD. This entire disc is packed with some extremely fast and funky bass lines, cool Fender Rhodes piano vamps and gnat's-chuff-tight rhythm sections, all of which are mixed up, making it very difficult to pull apart in a hi-fi setting. The Krell 300iL does a great job of delving into this bass detail and clarifying the musical whole, even in the most thick-set northern soul cut.

Then there's the Krell Loudspeaker Improvement Programme. Wire up a pair of cheap and small speakers and they sound bigger and more expensive. As you get close to the sort of speakers expected to be used with an amplifier of this calibre (Sonus Faber, ProAc and Krell's own LAT-2 stand-mount speakers for example) this improvement evens out, but even here there are some surprises to be had. Stand-mounters and small floor-standers seem to add a few extra bass notes to their repertoire, yet this is done without the concomitant desecration of the middle and upper octaves. Even solo piano – Glenn Gould's *Bach Goldberg Variations* – sound as if the piano is more realistic and larger scale than usual. This is all due to the bolted-down solidity of the Krell.

Looks aside, the 300iL isn't a dramatic improvement over the previous model. But it is an improvement nonetheless and well worth the £3,698 price tag.

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ALSO CONSIDER

ATC SIA2-150 £1,984
A very open and detailed sounding solid-state British amplifier design from the professional speaker experts.

SHARP SM-SX1 £3,300
Exciting one-bit digital amp concept can sound magical, but can also run out of steam. A fascinating signpost to the future of audio.

TUBE TECH UNISIS SIGNATURE £2,400
Elegant, British-made valve integrated amplifier. Looks fantastic and has a sumptuous and inviting valve sound.

MAIN REVIEWS – Alan Sircom | LAB REPORTS – Paul Miller

MULTICHANNEL AV AMPS

Modern multichannel amps need to be all things to all people

We have five serious contenders for the 'best AV receiver under a grand' crown, here. But the priorities have shifted of late. Whereas only a year or two ago, an AV receiver could concentrate on home cinema more or less exclusively, today's amplifier has to be able to do good stereo and multichannel music, too. Whether it's to play DVD-Audio or SACD multichannel music discs, or to get the best out of home cinema through DVD-Video and the new Sky+ satellite decoder, or even to do all this and play a CD too, a modern surround sound amplifier or receiver really has to be all things to all people.

It is easy to make good stereo and

multichannel audio from the same system; all it takes is an almost infinite budget and the space to house a decoder and a brace of high-quality power amplifiers. To do it in a single box that costs £1,000 or less is a tougher task. Despite this, we gave these AV receivers no quarter. And, if our findings are at odds with those of home cinema related magazines, it's because we didn't just concentrate on the home cinema side of things; we checked them for stereo, multichannel audio and home cinema performance. We even gave them a burst of AM and FM broadcasting, to check out the onboard tuners.

An AV receiver now has more than just the 5.1 digital multichannel sound first specified when DVD arrived. Now they have to include provision for more and more channels. Some (like the Harman Kardon) can output sound to extra power amplifiers while others (such as the Denon) come complete with a full set of power amps built in. Denon has a unique system of switching, allowing a pair of side-mounted satellite speakers for home cinema and rear-mounted models for multichannel audio. However, unless you have a huge room or happen to enjoy having a room full of speakers, don't get hot under the collar about 6.1 or 7.1 sound; five channels and a subwoofer is more than enough for both hi-fi and home cinema use.

ON TEST



ARCAM AVR200
£800



DENON AVR-3802
£850



HARMAN KARDON AVR 5500
£749



ONKYO TX-DS696
£850



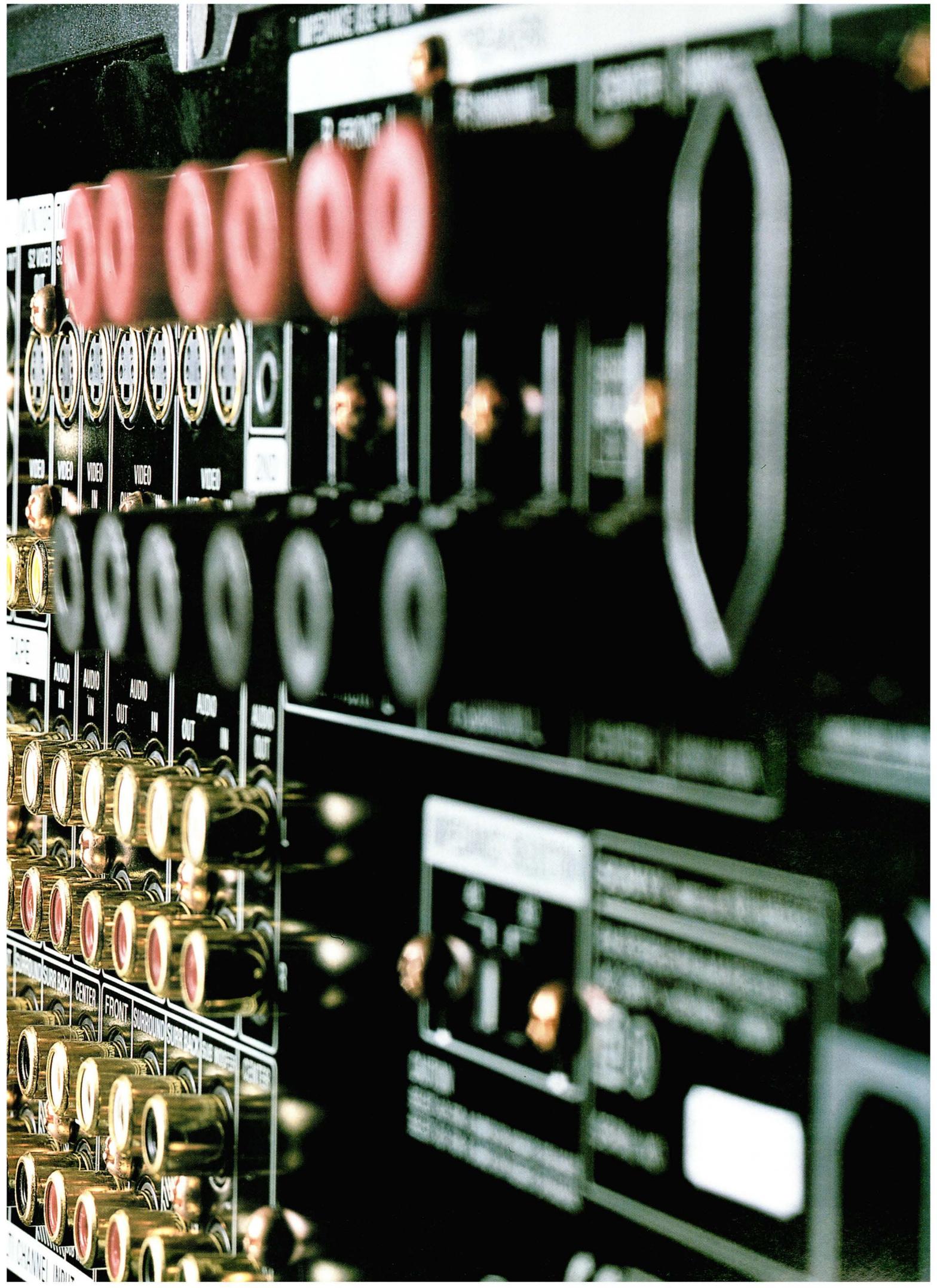
SONY STR-VA555ES
£1,000

EQUIPMENT USED

Arcam DV88 DVD player
Philips DVD-962SA SACD player
Mission 782 main speakers
Mission 78c centre speaker
Mission 78ds surround speakers
Acoustic Energy Aegis Compact speakers (for extra rear speakers)
REL Q150E subwoofer
Quadraspire R4 equipment table
Kimber cables

DISCS USED

Moulin Rouge DVD
Terminator 2 DVD
Frankie Goes To Hollywood SACD
Starsailor Love Is Here CD
The Strokes Is This It CD
Glenn Gould Bach's Goldberg Variations CD





ARCAM AVR200 £800

☎ Arcam 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

'Improved' DiVA is little different from the old one – but that's not such a bad thing

Arcam's first DiVA receiver was the AVR100. It was good, but flawed, especially in the matter of its non-existent bass management. With the introduction of Dolby Pro-Logic II, Arcam decided to subtly rework the 70 watts per channel receiver. Aside from the new DPL II multichannel surround sound for analogue stereo sources, the receiver was internally laid out anew, reverted to 4mm sockets instead of BFA sockets and given an improved bass management system. Well, 'improved' is a polite way of saying it has now been fitted with settings for dealing with a subwoofer.

However, you'd be hard pressed to spot the differences from the outside. It has exactly the same DiVA styling, same ergonomically poor but cool looking remote control, even the same occasionally quirky operating system and on-screen menus. Though the new amp is cosmetically virtually identical to its predecessor, inside the differences are dramatic and sadly you can't upgrade an AVR100 to AVR200 specs.

VERDICT

- SOUND**
★★★★☆
- FEATURES**
★★★★☆
- BUILD**
★★★★☆
- VALUE**
★★★★☆

Home cinema purists may want a bit more low-frequency subwoofer muscle and it hardly bristles with extra features, but Arcam's DiVA receiver is competent with music and movies alike.

CHECKLIST

- DOLBY DIGITAL EX ✗
- DTS ES ✗
- DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II ✓
- MULTIROOM ✗
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
- COMPONENT VIDEO INPUTS/OUTPUTS ✗

PERFORMANCE

Perhaps unsurprisingly given Arcam's heritage, this is a strong contender with unprocessed stereo sound. It also sounds good with CDs playing in Dolby Pro-Logic II Music mode and even the tuner is capable, sounding warm and elegant. Stereo audio and surround sound music takes on a smooth, dynamic character not unlike the lower priced two-channel Arcam amplifiers. *Soma* by The Strokes sounds engaging and upbeat, while Starsailor's *Alcoholic* highlights the warmth of its stereo sound. Best of all, if you don't mind cranking the volume control through about four complete turns, the AVR200 can go seriously LOUD without sounding harsh or thin.

Movie sound is good but perhaps a tad smooth for those more used to the forward, almost bright sound of typical home cinema. Multichannel performance is very natural and easy to listen to for extended periods, but may prove too steep a learning curve to those who expect to hear explosions

each time they turn on the receiver.

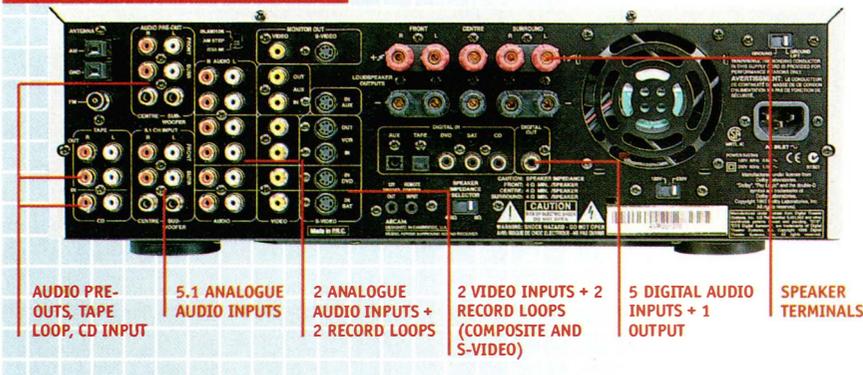
Terminator 2, although detailed and precise from top to bottom, lacks that edge-of-the-seat impact and energy we have come to expect. However, the Arcam portrayal of multichannel music discs (including *Moulin Rouge*) was the most comfortable of the group.

Though never truly outstanding, this Arcam is competent in all areas and better than most with music. Whether you're listening to a CD, a DVD or just watching *The West Wing* on a Sunday night, this is an enjoyable receiver to sit in front of. ☺

LAB REPORT

- ▶ Be sure to use the 'Direct' button to bypass the tone controls. Otherwise, even in the default position, our sample showed big differences (+/-1dB) in response between L and R channels.
- ▶ The 'Direct' response still has a bass roll-off amounting to -2dB at 20Hz in the 'Large' speaker mode.
- ▶ Arcam is one of the few manufacturers to quote a genuine 5-channel power rating (5x70W), which it achieves with watts to spare at 5x85W/8ohm.
- ▶ Under dynamic conditions, the AVR200 delivers a best-case performance of 145W/255W into 8/4ohm and 285W/155W into 2/1ohm, current-limited by protection to 12A.
- ▶ Distortion increases with frequency but is higher on the front channels (0.08%) than the surround channels (0.01%) re 20kHz/10W/8ohm.
- ▶ The noise performance is a little below average but at least it's matched between front, centre and surround channels at 79.5dB (A-wtd, re. 0dBW).

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS





DENON AVR-3802 £850

Denon UK 01753 888447 www.denon.co.uk

Fully featured receiver that's at its best in surround mode

Along with brands like Yamaha and Pioneer, Denon was one of the first to embrace the world of home cinema whole-heartedly. Denon still continues to make high-class stereo hi-fi products, but its emphasis has switched to multichannel of late; DVD players, home cinema mini systems and – Denon's current forte – integrated AV amplifiers and receivers packed with the latest technology like the AVR-3802.

This receiver sports all the latest Dolby Pro-Logic II, DTS ES and Dolby Digital EX multichannel sound formats. It also comes packed with 110-watt

amps for different channels; in addition to the front left, right and centre, the AVR-3802 has provision for side satellite speakers, rear satellite speakers and even two sets of centre rear speakers for EX/ES sound. You can also reassign the rear speakers as amps for a second zone in a small multiroom system.

Denon's years on the AV frontline show their worth on the back panel of the AVR-3802. Despite being the most fully featured amp in the group, the sockets panel is one of the least cluttered. Perhaps too uncluttered – the subwoofer output would be better broken out of the main 'pre out' terminal block, for the sake of clarity.

PERFORMANCE

The remote is a sea of buttons and the manual dense, but the AVR-3802 is easy to set up and use. Most of this is due to the on-screen display with icons representing the speakers – useful when you have eight to choose from. Unfortunately, this doesn't have the most impressive sound in the pack; in

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★☆

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★☆

VALUE
★★★★☆

Despite being packed with the latest AV options, Denon's AVR-3802 sounds even-handed in surround, but that can often hide a lack of power and dynamic range, especially in stereo.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

- DOLBY DIGITAL EX ✓
- DTS ES ✓
- DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II ✓
- MULTIROOM ✓
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
- COMPONENT VIDEO INPUTS/OUTPUTS ✓

fact, it sounds rather bland and weak-willed. It's not entirely gutless – the last chase scene in *Terminator 2* has plenty of energy – but the sound of *Underworld's Everything Everything* is flat and lacks the excitement of the live event. Likewise, the swirling sound of *Moulin Rouge* is missing the dynamic drive that can leave you breathless on receivers like the Onkyo.

This lack of drive can work in multichannel, as it can sound even-tempered, but without the aid of subwoofers and a multitude of rear channels, it sounds very flat in stereo. Although there is a charming, almost disturbing neutrality to Starsailor's *Alcoholic*, once you get past the smooth guitar sound and the unforced vocals, even this can be found wanting in dynamic scale, especially on tracks like *Soma* by The Strokes.

The ability to switch between side speakers for films and rears for music is useful, but a basic, more inspired and lively sound would be better. The sensitive tuner, however, is the best of the bunch, sounding clean and natural. ○

LAB REPORT

Under dynamic conditions, the AVR50 shows its mettle with 165W/285W into 8/4ohm. A heady 400W (14.2A) and 425W (20.6A) is available into low 2 and 1ohm loads.

This amp matches the Onkyo at 5x105W/8ohm in multichannel mode but its higher current delivery makes it the most speaker-tolerant amp in our test, expanding your choice of partnering boxes!

There are differences between front and surround amplifiers. The front pair offers lower distortion (0.004% vs 0.01% at 1kHz/10W/8ohm) together with a lower output impedance (0.05ohm vs 0.13ohm).

The front amps enjoy an 81.5dB A-wtd S/N ratio while the surrounds are noisier at 77.4dB. Front/surround crosstalk is also a little weak at -44dB. Power notwithstanding, this asymmetry may reflect on its ultimate sound quality.

Digital input jitter amounts to over 1000psec with 24 bit data – high but not debilitating.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS

DIGITAL IN/OUTPUTS (OPTICAL + ELECTRICAL)

7 ANALOGUE AUDIO INPUTS (INC PHONO) + 3 OUTPUTS

5 VIDEO INPUTS + 3 OUTPUTS (COMPOSITE + S-VIDEO)

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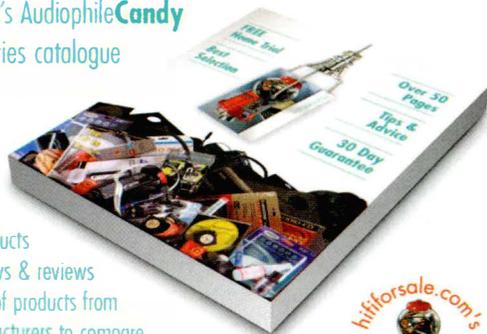
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HARMAN KARDON AVR 5500

£749

Harman UK 20 8731 4670 www.harmankardon.com

EXCLUSIVE Big and brooding receiver delivers plenty of multichannel muscle

One of the best touches of the AVR 5500 is the front panel terminal block. It has inputs and outputs for digital audio or an extra AV source. This is extremely useful for those who want to record onto a MiniDisc portable, as normally these front panel sockets are inputs only.

The parent company also owns Lexicon, which makes both high-end home cinema kit and professional audio decoders. Lexicon's proprietary surround sound system, Logic 7, can expand the sound of a stereo recording to play through to seven channels. The AVR 5500 only has five channels built in,

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



You don't use this AV receiver; you unleash it. It may not be the last word in subtlety, but it delivers enjoyable power and dynamics with both music and video sources.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

- DOLBY DIGITAL EX ✓
- DTS ES ✓
- DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II ✓
- MULTIROOM ✓
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
- COMPONENT VIDEO INPUTS/OUTPUTS ✓

but if you want to hear DTS ES, DTS Neo 6 or Logic 7 at its best, you will need to add some upgrade amps. DTS Neo 6 is comparatively rare at this price (only the Sony has this too), which is an alternative to Dolby Pro-Logic II.

The 85-watt receiver has a very simple text-based screen menu, as well as the unique EZ-Set system on the remote, a two-way communication between remote and amp, with a tiny measuring microphone in the remote, which allows the set-up of speaker listening levels almost automatically.

PERFORMANCE

It needs to have a simple set-up, because the manual is overkill for someone who just wants to set up and play. EZ-Set works reasonably well, although a trained ear can be more precise. Harman must be praised for pushing the second zone options, however. The AVR 5500 even comes with a smaller second remote designed specifically for controlling the second zone.

Like many Harman amps, don't be misled by the relatively modest 85-watt

power rating; this is the most powerful sounding amp in the test. There is a sense of authority from channel to channel that makes *Terminator 2* sound big, expansive and dynamic. That might not appeal to everyone though – it applies the same big, expansive and dynamic sound to everything you put through it. Even *The Archers* on Radio Four sounds beefed up when you catch a broadcast through the built-in tuner.

It's the same on two-channel audio. It's powerful and engaging, with a degree of brute force – the Glenn Gould Bach piano pieces were played with blitzkrieg intent. There's plenty of control, but rather than pinpoint detail it tends to major in balls-out power.

But, despite this steroid-fuelled approach, you can't help liking the Harman sound, especially on tracks like *Barely Legal* from The Stokes (which works exceptionally well in Logic 7, too). It's the V8 muscle car of the test; full of dark, brooding energy, and though £150 more than the Best Buy AVR 5000 it replaces, it does enough to bag a Recommended tag. Ⓞ

LAB REPORT

Under dynamic conditions, the AVR550 shows its mettle with 165W/285W into 8/4ohm. A heady 400W (14.2A) and 425W (20.6A) is available into low 2 and 1ohm loads.

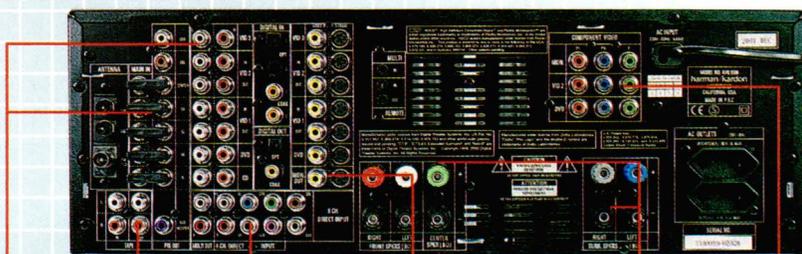
This amp matches the Onkyo at 5x105W/8ohm in multichannel mode but its higher current delivery makes it the most speaker-tolerant amp in our test, expanding your choice of partnering boxes!

There are differences between front and surround amplifiers. The front pair offers lower distortion (0.004% vs 0.01% at 1kHz/10W/8ohm) together with a lower output impedance (0.05ohm vs 0.13ohm).

The front amps enjoy an 81.5dB A-wtd S/N ratio while the surrounds are noisier at 77.4dB. Front/surround crosstalk is also a little weak at -44dB. Power notwithstanding, this asymmetry may reflect on its ultimate sound quality.

Digital input jitter amounts to over 1000psec with 24 bit data – high but not debilitating.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



3 AV IN/OUT-PUTS
PREAMP OUTPUTS

5.1 MULTICHANNEL AUDIO INPUTS

7 COMPOSITE VIDEO INPUTS
7 S-VIDEO OUTPUTS

SPEAKER TERMINALS

3 COMPONENT VIDEO SOCKETS



ONKYO TX-DS696 £850 ☎ 01788 573100 🌐 www.onkyo.net

Distinctively warm character doesn't detract from a superb all-rounder

Onkyo was the first company to bring Dolby Pro-Logic II surround sound to market, but the technology is still very new and the TX-DS696 is one of its first DPLII generation designs. Onkyo adheres to the brute force school of hi-fi. This is a big, powerful model with solid looking knobs, dials and displays.

Under the hood, it's an equally solid design, a 5.1 Dolby Digital/DTS design with a claimed 100-watts-per-channel power amplifier section. These amp modules are given the unfortunate moniker of WRAT, as they are suggested to be wide-range designs and thereby ideal for use with DVD-Audio or SACD. The amplifier also has another pair of amplifier outputs, for multiroom amplification; don't use the Zone 2 amps to biampify your main speakers, though, unless you want to use the TX-DS696 as a stereo-only amplifier.

Like Denon, Harman Kardon and Arcam, Onkyo is part of the THX club. While the TX-DS696 is not a THX product, it does have Onkyo's Re-EQ circuit that re-equalises the brightness of some DVDs that have a sound which

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

An excellent all-rounder that's ideal for music and movies alike. It has a distinctive Onkyo-like warm and powerful character, but that character is one that's very easy to live with.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

- DOLBY DIGITAL EX ✗
- DTS ES ✗
- DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II ✓
- MULTIROOM ✓
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✗
- COMPONENT VIDEO INPUTS/OUTPUTS ✓

is designed to be bright enough to compensate for a softly furnished cinema. This is very similar to THX's own EQ system.

PERFORMANCE

Once set up (an easy process thanks to a decent set of on-screen menus and a good backlit remote), you will notice the volume control needs to turn it through about three or four complete revolutions to get the receiver to a decent volume. It is nicely weighted, however. Also, you cannot assign a default surround setting; it's a minor frustration always having to rack through the surround options every time you select your favourite.

The TX-DS696 has one of the smoothest sounds around, whether in two channels or five. In multichannel, sounds are both solid and lithe, a rare partnership in AV receivers. It may not be the last word in detail, but the sound is warm and rich, which makes *Moulin Rouge's* complex DTS surround mix extremely enveloping, even if swathes of background music occasionally get lost in the melee. It also adds

body and an even more oppressive atmosphere than usual to *Terminator 2*.

This receiver has the most well-balanced sound of the group. The Harman Kardon may have the cinematic edge, but this is the best all-rounder. It has the same warm, powerful quality with two-channel music sources as it does with multichannel, and its dynamic range gives it a palpable power to stereo tracks from the likes of The Strokes. Even the tuner has the same quality, although it does accent the warmth slightly too much, bestowing Radio Four-ness to even the most raw-sounding pirate station. But it's all-around ability makes it a firm Best Buy. 🏆

LAB REPORT

▶ The TX-DS696 meets its 2x100W output at 2x140W/8ohm and 2x195W/4ohm, and even succeeds in maintaining 5x105W/8ohm in multichannel mode.

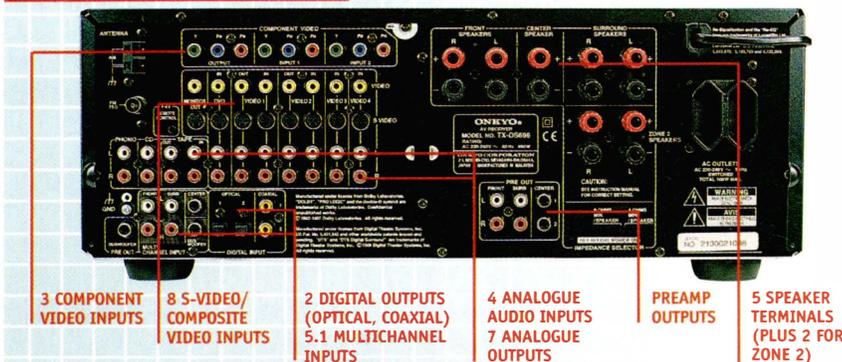
▶ Under dynamic conditions, it'll deliver a maximum of 185W, 318W, 252W (11.2A) and 135W (11.6A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads respectively, the 2 and 1ohm results limited by protection. This shows that high 8ohm power figures are no promise of speaker-grappling 'grunt'.

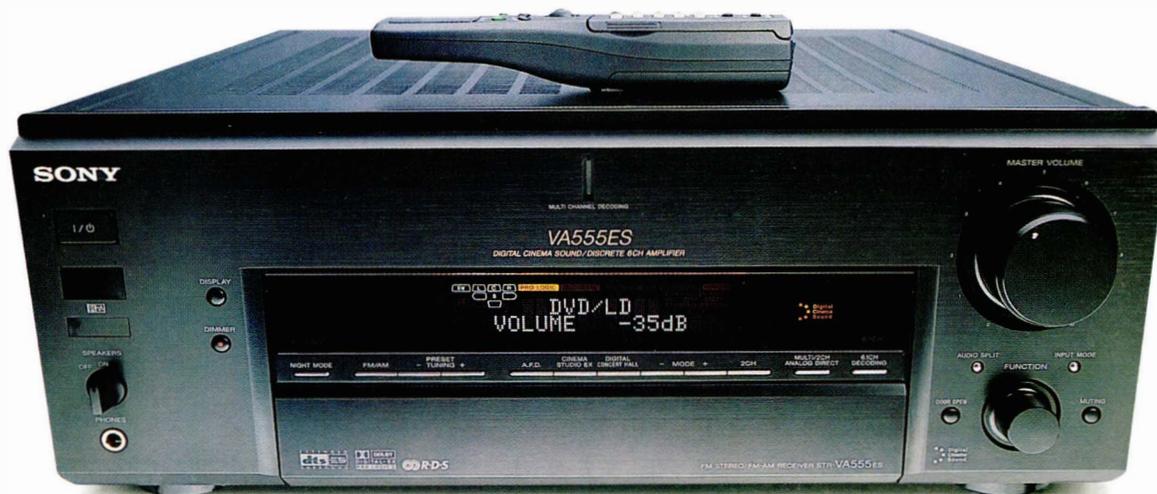
▶ Distortion is low enough at around 0.005% at 10W/8ohm but does increase to around 0.009% in five-channel mode as a reflection of the greater demand.

▶ Interchannel responses are well matched with a mere -0.2dB dip at 20kHz, although the moderate 0.2ohm output impedance may well modify this response into 'real world' loudspeakers.

▶ Dolby bass management is well sorted - the maximum distortion on LFE with all main channels set to 'small' is just 0.01%.

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS





SONY STR-VA555ES £1,000 ☎ 08705 111 999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

Home cinema giant's latest just fails to cut the hi-fi mustard

Sony is in a unique position to improve the lot of the home cinema buff. No other AV manufacturer has a filmmaking division or two (Columbia TriStar and Sony Pictures) with a host of top quality cinemas, concert halls and editing suites on tap. Sony's AV engineers created samples of these studio resources and placed several sound field simulacra to enhance the sound of the STR-VA555ES. Sony calls this system its Digital Cinema Matrix Decoder and it can be used with all the STR-VA555ES' digital surround modes.

And there are a lot of modes. Sony resisted the temptation to go down the

6.1 channel EX/ES surround sound route – until now. The STR-VA555ES is the first Sony AV receiver to offer Dolby EX and DTS ES sound, in addition to enhanced Dolby Pro-Logic II and DTS Neo 6, both of which 'upgrade' stereo to multichannel surround.

The 11-watts-per-channel receiver is relatively difficult to use, but help is on hand from the amplifier's front panel display and an LCD learning remote control, which sends and also receives info from the receiver. It's not the sort of intuitive product that made Sony a giant in the consumer electronics world, however.

PERFORMANCE

The company has feet in both the multichannel music and home cinema camps, and that stance is reflected in the STR-VA555ES.

The keys to good multichannel music chez Sony are loads of detail and good coherence from speaker to speaker. Whether it's an SACD like *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* or a DVD-Video like *Everything Everything* by Underworld, there's a wealth of information on offer

around the entire soundstage. Don't expect a rich sound, though; this is multichannel scrubbed up and polished. It's involving in a cerebral way – but those after a warm cosseted sound should look elsewhere.

It is in home cinema where the STR-VA555ES excels. Those extra sound fields can work to smooth out a bright disc, wake up a dull one and generally make DVD-Video sound more cinematic, even with well-recorded discs like *Terminator 2* on DTS. 6.1 fills in the back wall, albeit subtly.

But stereo sound through the analogue line inputs is a weakness. It sounds clean enough but energy is lacking – the get up and go of The Strokes just got up and went. The only salvation for your CDs is to deploy Dolby Pro-Logic II surround sound in music mode. This fills out the sound nicely, but is inconsistent on simple recordings, such as *Alcoholic* by Starsailor. Similarly, the tuner is detailed and quiet, but generally uninspiring. Given its high price, this Sony's movie talents alone aren't quite enough to earn it a Recommendation. ☹

LAB REPORT

▶ Sony's 2x100W rating is met at 2x125W/8ohm and 2x180W/4ohm and very nearly manages to hold this specification in multichannel mode at 5x95W/8ohm.

▶ Under dynamic conditions, this is stretched to 145W, 260W, 290W (12.1A) and 165W (12.8A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads respectively – par for the course for an amp at this price.

▶ Distortion does increase with power output in multichannel mode, from 0.002% at 5x1W/8ohm to 0.015% at 5x20W/8ohm and 0.065% at 5x60W/8ohm.

▶ Digital distortion also increases from 0.0065% to 0.016% at peak digital levels. Incorrect bass management also increases LFE distortion to around 7% in Dolby Digital mode with all speakers set to 'small'.

▶ Very low noise levels – multichannel A-wtd S/N ratio is 90dB. Equally impressive is the front-centre-surround balance of 0.05dB and front-surround separation of 92dB (1kHz) and 75dB (20kHz).

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE

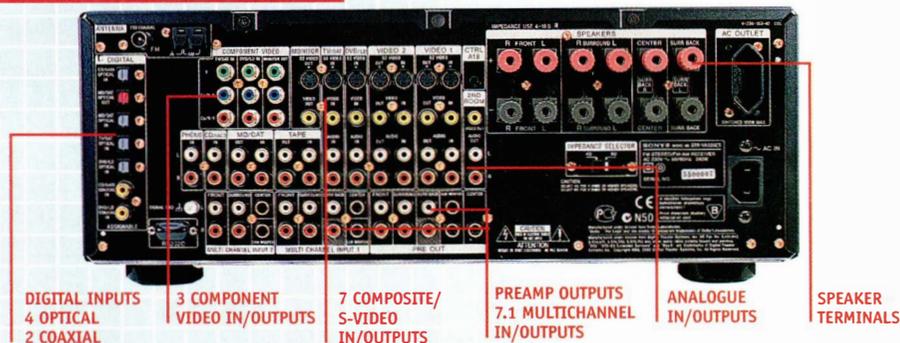


An exceptional AV receiver for home cinema buffs, but stereo sound is lifeless by comparison, unless you insist on using Dolby Pro-Logic II surround.

FORMAT CHECKLIST

- DOLBY DIGITAL EX ✓
- DTS ES ✓
- DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II ✓
- MULTIROOM ✓
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓
- COMPONENT VIDEO INPUTS/OUTPUTS ✓

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



Look Out!

The
Real

BLUE MURDER SALE!

The
Original

Starts Saturday April 27

If you're on the look out for some really special hi-fi or home cinema at really special prices, get hold of the Blue Murder Sale price list from Unilet. It's crammed with bargains on new, ex-demo, factory seconds and second-hand items. Famous brands, famously-low prices.

There's no sale like the legendary Unilet Blue Murder Sale. For years now, hi-fi/home cinema enthusiasts have made a point of getting down to New Malden in Surrey to grab some real bargains. They also know that we know our stuff, so you'll get plenty of informed advice to ensure you get the most for your money.

But hurry - sale starts April 27th and runs until June 1st, and the best bargains go fast.

Top brands: Acoustic Energy (AE), Apollo, Arcam, Atacama, Audio Research, Audiovector, Beyer, Boston, Bryston, B&W, Cable Talk, Celestion, Cerwin Vega, Chord, Chord Cables, Denon, Denon Gold, Ecosse, Heybrook, Insert Audio, IXOS, JAMO, JBL, KEF, Koetsu, Krell, LAT, Lexicon, Marantz, Marantz Premium, Marduant Short (MS), Michell, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, Nakamichi, Nordost, Optimum, Ortofon, Panasonic, Parasound, Pioneer, PMC, Polk, Primare, ProAc, Project, QED, Quad, REL, Roksan, Rotel, Sennheiser, Shure, SME, Sonus Faber, Sonus Systems, Sony, Soundstyle, Spondor, Stands Unique, Stax, Sunfire, Supra, Tag McLaren, Talk Electronics, Tannoy, Target, Teac, Technics, Thule, VDH, VideoLogic, Yamaha.

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HC 0402

MULTICHANNEL AV AMP CONCLUSIONS

Alan Sircom still feels that home cinema enthusiasts with hi-fi ears are getting a raw deal

The AV receiver market is vibrant, but not as exciting as it first looks. Companies have been able to get away with a lot of audio sins because home cinema is considered 'less discerning'. Now multichannel music is starting to become popular, these AV receivers are catching up, but still have some way to go to match good integrated stereo amps.

So, what is a hi-fi enthusiast to do? If you are starting from scratch, choose an AV receiver from this group, but if you already have a stereo amp, an add-on processor with built-in amps for centre and rear (like Yamaha's DSP-E800) may be a better option. It may not be as

readily convenient, but at least your hi-fi will still sound good.

There is one clear winner in this group, however; the Onkyo TX-DS696. This has the best balance between hi-fi and home cinema, sounding smooth and sophisticated throughout. It is packed with useful extras, too, even if it lacks the latest ES/EX 6.1 channel sound.

Otherwise, at this price, you have to make a decision, depending on your personal ratio of music to movies. If you lean toward cinema, then Sony's STR-VA555ES is impressive. It is generally good for multichannel audio and has myriad extra surround settings, but is a bit listless in stereo. Then again, if you

want to replace a stereo amplifier and still plan on a lot of stereo listening, the Arcam AVR200 is a good buy. It is a comparatively minimalist receiver that sounds smooth and enjoyable in two channel, but lacks low end grunt with multichannel music and movies. The same can't be said of the Harman Kardon AVR 5500, its bold and beefy sound keeping you on the edge of your seat with movies and also rather engaging with music, if a touch lacking in subtlety.

Bringing up the rear is the Denon AVR-3802. It's packed with all the latest features but its lacklustre audio side is not as impressive as the spec sheet.



MULTICHANNEL AV AMPS AT A GLANCE

Make Model	Arcam AVR200	Denon AVR-3802	Harman Kardon AVR 5500	Onkyo TX-DS696	Sony STR-VA555ES
Price	£800	£850	£749	£850	£1,000
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Features	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Build	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
	Good stereo sound, but lacks some low-frequency heft for surround sound music and movie use.	Lots of features and a good tuner don't make up for the lack of dynamic range.	Packed with power, this is an enthusiastic and engaging performer if a touch lacking in subtlety.	A characterful all-rounder for music and films alike. Even sounds good in stereo.	Feature-rich home cinema superstar with strong surround sound but pricey and a bit lifeless in stereo.

LAB REPORT

Power output	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□
Speaker load tolerance	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□
Audible distortion	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□
Noise	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□
Overall rating	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□

TRY THEM WITH THESE

DVD PLAYERS
DENON DVD-1000 £300
 A stripped-down DVD player that concentrates on producing good pictures and sounds. An ideal match for a cinematic AV receiver.

JVC XV-SA725SL £350
 Surprisingly good DVD-Audio and CD sound from an inexpensive DVD player. Great choice for a music-friendly AV receiver system.

PIONEER DV-747A £899
 The first player to deal with SACD and DVD-Audio as well as DVD-Video and CD. Excellent for an all-round system.

SPEAKERS
B&W 600S3 PACKAGE £900
 No subwoofer, but a decent sized, well made speaker system that gives high performance sound for music and movies alike.

MORDAUNT-SHORT DECLARATION 500 £1,600
 A fine THX-Select 5.1 speaker system with active towers for subwoofers. Great for home cinema and engaging with music to boot.

TANNOY MXAV4 PACKAGE £500
 A good budget package, ideal for music use thanks to a smooth and seamless sound. Very refined for the money.

HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Unlike a stereo amp, AV amps and receivers have five or more warm-running amplifier circuits inside. Ideally, give the receiver at least 5cm to the top, side and rear.
- ⊕ More than any other product, read the instruction manual very carefully with an AV receiver. Your AV receiver will improve with age, over the first month or so of listening.
- ⊕ Place your AV receiver on a light but rigid shelf, ideally a specialist hi-fi or AV table.
- ⊕ Rear speaker sockets now come with caps over the 4mm connectors. Remove these and use 4mm banana plugs as they sound better than bare wires.
- ⊕ Never let a cable join the positive and negative terminals. If you turn the power on, it could blow the receiver up.
- ⊕ Turn the AV receiver on for at least half an hour before listening to it, to allow it to heat up to the optimal thermal listening level.

AudioVenue

Bespoke Audio Visual Consultants

System 1

Roksan Candy CD Player	£550.00
Roksan Candy amplifier	£550.00
Spendor S3 speakers	£600.00
Atacama SE 24	£80.00

	£1780.00

System 2

Audio Analogue Paganini	£800.00
Unison Research S2K	£1295.00
Sonus Faber Grand Piano	£1700.00

	£3795.00

System 3

Copland CDA 822 CD	£1500.00
Copland CTA 305	£1200.00
Copland CTA 520	£1300.00
Vienna Acoustics Beethoven	£2500.00

	£6500.00

System 4

Musical Fidelity Nu Vista 3D CD	£3000.00
Krell 300iL	£3700.00
Martin Logan Ascent	£4500.00

	£10700.00

System 5

SME IOA	£3400.00
Clearaudio Symphono	£745.00
Audio Research LS 25	£5800.00
Audio Research VT 100 MK 3	£6400.00
Sonus Faber Amati Homage	£11850.00

	£28195.00



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Pioneer Plasma • Quad • Revox • Sonus Faber • Spendor and much more, including equipment supports & accessories.

Bass lines

Paul Miller looks at the advantages (or lack of them) of bass management

A key innovation, and I use the word advisedly, that separates the AV amplifiers of today and those that trod the high street before the advent of Dolby Digital and DTS, is *bass management*. This is the technology behind the various speaker settings available on the amplifier's set-up menu. Options typically include 'large', 'small' and 'none' to reflect the relative stature of your speakers.

For example, if your home cinema or multichannel audio system includes floor-standing stereo speakers with bookshelf-sized centre and surround boxes, then you'll set the amplifier's speaker menu to Front (large), Centre (small) and Rear (small). Bass signals that would otherwise be destined for full-sized centre and surround speakers will now be redirected to the front channels. If the subwoofer channel, used to carry Low Frequency Effects (LFE), is enabled then the bass will be redirected here, instead.

The idea is to prevent smaller speakers from being overwhelmed by the bass-rich content of many DVD movies by shifting signals below 120Hz over to the larger speakers and/or subwoofer(s) used in the same system. Frankly, this seems pretty daft because enthusiasts have been using small, bookshelf speakers quite successfully with 'full-range' CD sources for 20 years now without feeling the need to reach out and turn down the bass tone control. The fact that this 'bass management' can be so easily accommodated in modern AV products is testament to the power of their onboard DSP (required for Dolby and DTS decoding) as much as any real need to protect vulnerable, pint-sized speakers.

DARK DEALINGS

But bass management, as I've suggested on several occasions in the past, is a far from transparent process. Aside from the phase shift that accompanies the digital filtering itself, this redirection often causes

big changes in both the level and distortion of the (music) signals. And this month's selection of AV amplifiers provides ample, never-before-published, proof.

Figure 1 demonstrates two scenarios. In both cases, all front, centre and small speakers are set to 'small' while distortion is measured on the bass signal that's redirected to the subwoofer. Provided there's no LFE signal already being carried (a 5.0 channel DVD) then the worst case example of just 0.05% from the Arcam AVR200 is hardly catastrophic (as shown by the blue trace). But what if there's already an LFE signal present on the sub output? What happens then if extra bass signals are added on top?

The red trace shows clearly enough that some amplifiers, the Arcam and HK especially, are slammed firmly into overload under these conditions. And this result is independent of level, so no matter what position the volume control, you could experience up to 12 per cent distortion from your sub. Which will do neither the sub nor your listening pleasure any great favours.

HAVE IT LARGE

Under the same conditions, both the Onkyo and Denon manage the 'trick' with greater success though, as Figure 2 shows, there's a big difference in the respective levels of these redirected bass signals. In every case bar the Onkyo, as more bass is redirected through to the sub output, the level of this output increases. If you were using either the Denon or Sony amps, for example, and switched from large to small speakers in their respective configuration menus, then the subwoofer feed would jump up by +8dB – an increase of 2.5. Which will either make a mockery of A/B comparisons or clip your subwoofer, depending on its original setting. These seemingly ad-hoc variations in level also contribute to the differences in opinion

Technical Graphics

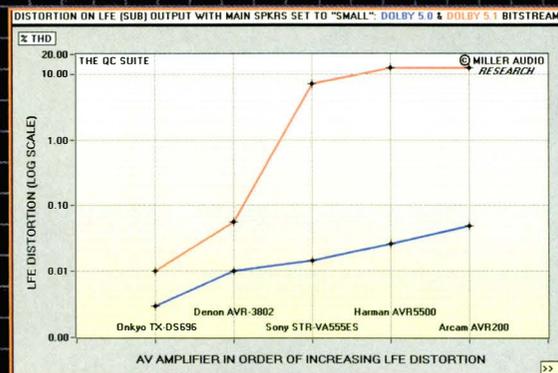


Fig 1: Bass can be redirected to the subwoofer without significant distortion (blue trace) unless the DVD already contains LFE data (red trace).

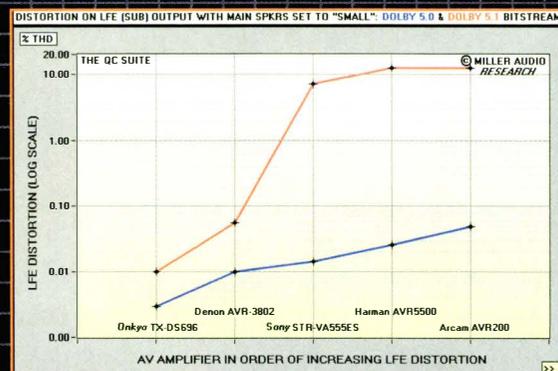


Fig 2: Bass management gives rise to unpredictable changes in the subwoofer level, with potentially disastrous consequences.

"The idea is to prevent smaller speakers being overwhelmed by the bass-rich content of many DVD movies. Frankly, this seems pretty daft..."

voiced by different reviewers who often use very different combinations of speakers...

The moral of this tale? Simple. Regardless of the stature of your home cinema speakers, leave your AV amplifier set to 'large' in every capacity and remember to set the subwoofer channel 'on'. This avoids any bass management and, thus, any additional phase shifts, changes in level or unwanted increase in distortion. Try it right now and, likely as not, you'll experience a quick upgrade to your system's performance. And it won't cost a penny. 

Instant upgrades

Six ideas to improve your system without spending a fortune



Disco Antistat record cleaner £42

Of all the accessories I've ever seen, this is perhaps the most complete no-brainer. You've got LPs? You need this device. Not only is it the cheapest wet cleaner around (the various wash'n'vac devices cost in the hundreds of £s), it is quicker than any of them and frankly 100% as effective. Running costs are around 10p per disc (plus 13p for a new inner sleeve, if you really care). Fit the plastic label clamp, lower the record into the bath, rotate it between the brushes a few times, take it out, remove the clamp and put it in the drying rack, where it sits for 20 minutes or so until dry and sparkling clean. Fingerprints, dust, grime – all gone. Brilliant. One caveat: wear polythene gloves. I part-own a Keith Monks machine, but put it this way: hififorsale.com is so not getting the review sample back.

Hi-Fi For Sale.com 0870 241 2469

hififorsale.com



Ecosse Reference Cables 'The Producer' digital interconnect £20

This is really only going to appear as an 'upgrade' when compared with a giveaway because it's about as cheap as they come. OK, you *could* use a freebie analogue cable in a digital-to-digital link, but don't be tempted: things can go badly wrong, even badly enough to make digital recording impossible. Cable quality matters much less when recording than when listening through an external DAC, but it does still matter a bit and this cable is perfect for that application. But in fact it sounds very nice via a DAC too, only just behind my favourites in truth, and is clearly a strongly recommendable buy. And here's a cheeky hint: a pair of these, at 40 quid, makes a very respectable *analogue* link too. Upgrade or no, a most useful little cable.

Ecosse Reference Cables 0141 353 0509

www.ecossecables.co.uk

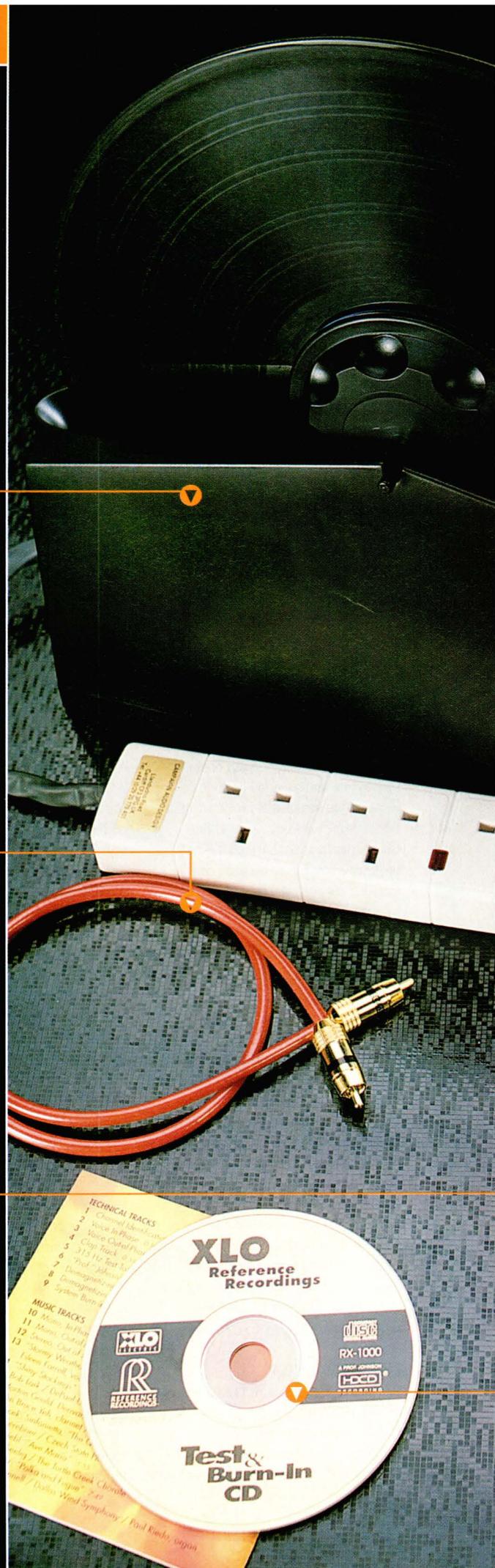


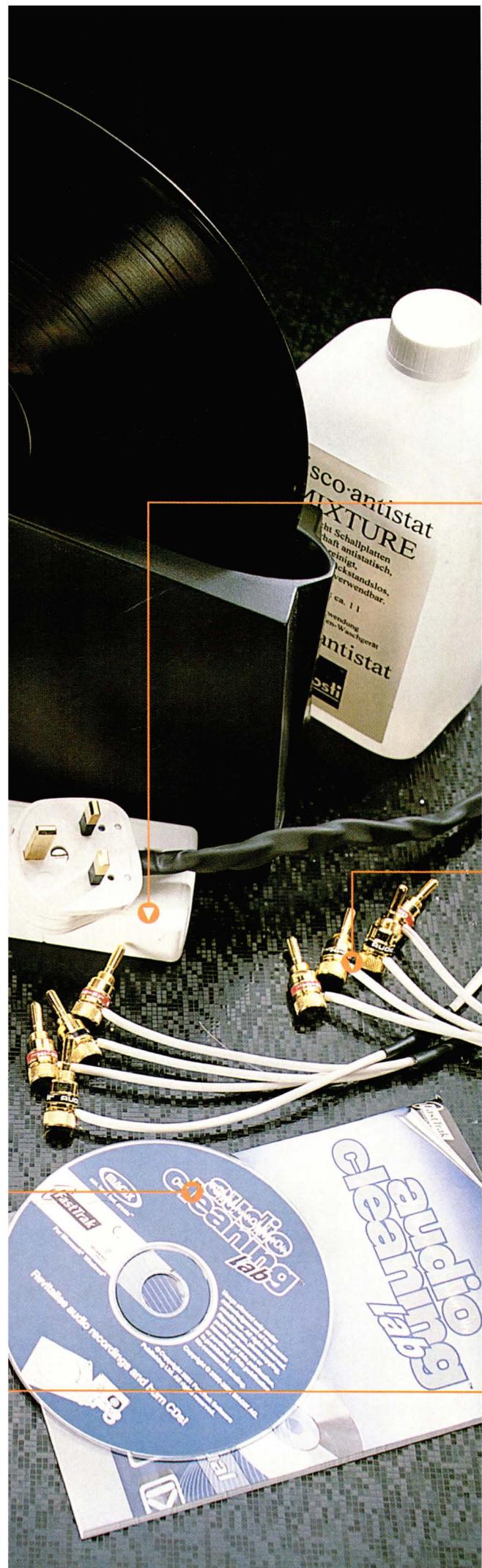
Magix Audio Cleaning Lab £20

We've all heard about the wonders of computer-based sound restoration: now you can have your very own facility at home. This software runs on a PC (so long as its got Windows 95 or later) and provides all you need to record via your soundcard, reduce clicks, crackle, hiss and other noises, perform basic mastering functions and create CDs and MP3s. The restoration functions are attractive, but do they deliver? I've tested nearly a dozen products like this, and in each case one's first reaction is positive: but all too often on sustained listening one comes to feel that too much is lost in terms of ambience and fine detail, while metallic artefacts soon appear as noise. There are reasons why professional systems such as Cedar cost as much as a decent Mercedes! Still, it's very cheap and worth a try if you're curious. Best used in moderation.

FastTrak Software Publishing Ltd 01923 495496

www.fasttrak.co.uk





Campaign Audio Design Conqueror-Elite mains block £100

▶ A ton for a distribution board? The board itself is a basic commercial model, as is the plug on the other end – both good quality but unmodified. The cable, though, is fancy silver-plated stuff insulated with PTFE and sheathed overall in heatshrink sleeving, with a good deal more conductor area than in normal 13A flex. It's also soldered to both plug and distribution board, potentially avoiding contact rectification.

Compared with my regular board (three quid from B&Q) this yielded some decrease in grain and 'fuzz' round the sound, though one can often achieve similar ends more cheaply by fixing rattling windows or furniture in the listening room. But for dedicated tweekers who've done all that already, it's worth considering.

☎ Campaign Audio Design 02920 779401

🌐 <http://business.virgin.net/cad.cables/>



Black Rhodium T200 speaker cable £4.04/m

▶ A simple enough offering from the bottom of the Black Rhodium (formerly Sonic Link) range, with fairly thin tinned copper conductors and low loss insulation. The obvious comparison is with the likes of QED's classic '79-strand' and variants, and it's clear that even for under a fiver a metre you can have a choice of 'flavours'. As with many other BR cables, this one seems to have a character of its own, not truly neutral but energetic and lively, especially in the bass. As a first upgrade option to cables thrown in free with a budget(-ish) system, this should serve well, certainly improving over the utterly basic 42-strand yardstick in terms of basic musical involvement. You'll be lucky to get the chance of a home dem with something this cheap, but who cares? Buy with confidence.

☎ Black Rhodium 01332 361390

🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk



XLO/Reference Recordings Test and Burn-In CD £25

▶ Various tracks here assist with speaker placement, system burn-in, system demagnetising, and general appreciation of what a good recording on a good system can do. Mono tracks, in and out of phase between channels, are one excellent way to judge speaker positioning, and it's only a pity there aren't more of them. But burn-in and demagnetising are a lot more controversial and I'm not sure I could detect any difference before and after. Aural memory is a funny thing and easily misled... I reckon the absolute phase track is invalid, too, since it is not an exact inversion of the original but carries some distortion, albeit low in level. The music extracts, in HDCD by the way, are fun, but do they justify £25?

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HELP

Trouble in hi-fi paradise? Fear not, we're here to help.



Marantz
CD6000 OSE LE

ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

I want to buy my first system and I have about £1,700 to spend. I want a CD player, amp, speakers, cassette deck and tuner. Could you please help with some suggestions?

'Gaj', via e-mail

We'd spend your cash on the Marantz CD6000 OSE LE, which is detailed and refined enough to work well with Tannoy's new Eyriss 1 and Rotel's revealing RA-971 MkII amplifier at £275. This set-up allocates more cash to speakers, but we feel this is a valid system to maximise the capabilities of your electronics. Denon's excellent TU-260LII analogue tuner at £130 is a steal and this should leave enough cash for some good quality stands like the £50 Atacama Nexus 6 plus some speaker cables and interconnects. Try QED for their Qnect 2 at £30 and the Qudos Silver cable at £5 per metre. We haven't tested cassette decks for some years now, but if you can't be persuaded by a CD-R deck, check what's on offer from your local dealers against our ratings in the Directory.

PURE TONES

I want to analyse my room acoustics. My system is in a room with a lot of soft furnishings. The bass is dominant and the sound is woolly and mushy. I want to improve the sound without re-flooring the room.

Any idea where I can get a CD that will produce pure tones, one at a time?

Patrick Hurkeet, via e-mail

There are numerous professional discs that contain series of spot tones, though you may need to shop around to find one at a reasonable price. However, while these discs may help isolate bass resonant modes within your room, without additional equipment there is still a limit to what you may achieve.



Living Voice
Avatar

IN YER FACE

I've recently bought a Cyrus 5 amp, Mission 774 speakers and a Cambridge Audio D500SE CD player. I'm using QED Silver Anniversary speaker cable and QED Qnect 2 interconnects. But the system sounds unusually bright with little bass extension. I realise that the problem may be with the budget priced CD player and I was considering buying the Cyrus CD 7. However, I am concerned that the Cyrus range is perhaps bright sounding anyway?

Graeme Young, via e-mail

Cyrus kit can tend to be upfront at times and if you are finding your system bright already it's unlikely that a CD7 will help. The Cambridge CD player can

be a bit lively too, but the main problem will be your system's integration. The Missions' odd treble response makes them sound bright and upfront which is not ideal for your electronics. If replacing the speakers is impossible, you could try to soften the effect by firing them straight out with the grilles on. Short of damping down your room with heavy furnishings you're faced with trading the speakers in. Look for something more relaxed like the standmount B&W 602 S3 at £300.



MATCHMAKER

Can I match the NAD S500/S300 CD player and amplifier with the B&W nautilus 803? If not what kind of speakers do I need?

Keny from Dubai, via e-mail

The NADs are refined electronics that are relaxed and easy sounding and similarly the N803 has a laid-back balance. This would be fine if your collection consisted mainly of Val Doonican, but if you want some life in your music we'd suggest a more energetic speaker. Try the £2,500 Spondor S9 or seek out the Living Voice Avatar also at £2,500 which we feel is a bit special and should complement your NAD stuff a treat.

SAVOUR THE ULTIMATE WORLD CUP EXPERIENCE



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Enjoy the ultimate World Cup thrill without leaving your front room. In the latest issue of T3 we roundup every monster TV you can lay your hands on, covering everything from CRT TVs to plasma, LCD and projectors. If you ever wanted to impress your mates, you can't go wrong here.

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In this month's
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HELP

SOUND FURNITURE

What's the point of using a hi-fi rack? They just seem like very expensive pieces of furniture.

Derek Duval, via e-mail

Hi-fi circuitry is microphonic, ie very sensitive to vibration and can turn acoustic energy into electrical feedback energy. This means that when your speakers pump out an orchestra in full effect for example, your electronics are being assaulted through the air and through the floor. Electrical feedback can often be heard as time delays and time smear in music, so to combat this it really does help to use good quality racks and platforms to isolate your equipment from airborne and structural vibration. Racks can be bought from around £200, try the five shelf Sound organisation Z560 for an entry-level solution if you're on a budget.



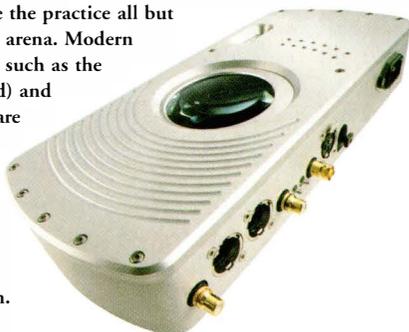
Clearlight Audio
RDC Aspekt

DAC ADEMY

I've been shopping around for CD players recently and have considered buying a cheap, well-made player and running it through a quality DAC. I thought this set-up might provide a budget priced CD player with good sound. What do you think?

Robert Gibson, via e-mail

Undoubtedly running a separate good quality DAC with a budget CD will improve performance, but in most cases the best value solution is to buy a better CD player in the first instance. Two-box CD players were very popular once upon a time but modern one box machines have made the practice all but redundant in the budget arena. Modern high-performance DACs such as the Chord DAC 64 (pictured) and Musical Fidelity's A324 are able to breathe new life into older cherished players but they don't come cheap and with modern machines being so good, it may be more economical to start again.



ON A MISSION

I am looking to buy some speakers and I am hesitating between M73 and M74. Which one would you choose both for home theatre and for listening to music?

Denis Sauvé, via e-mail

For an extra £100, the M74 would certainly add some extra weight to your home cinema sound as well as giving more impact to music in general. The £300 M74 uses twin 160mm bass drivers to pump out the low stuff and is more versatile in both environments. The M73 is an excellent loudspeaker however, and would make for a better choice in a strictly two-channel environment, but for the drama of AV systems, choose the larger M74.



Mision M74

SNAP, CRACKLE & POP

I recently purchased a Teac AH500 amplifier PD-H500C CD player and Acoustic Energy AE505 speakers. At about half volume one of the speakers emits loud crackling sounds which appear to have become progressively worse. Rotation of the cables and the speakers appears to have no effect with the problem remaining specific to one unit. I am convinced that the speaker is at fault – an opinion backed by the shop where I bought the units. What should I do now?

Matthew Bostock, via e-mail

Try the suspect speaker using a friend's system and if the crackle is still there you know the speaker is at fault. At this stage your dealer should be able to help you obtain a replacement item assuming the item is genuinely faulty. If however, the unit is over 12 months old you may have to go direct to Acoustic Energy on 01285 654432. See if you can get your dealer on your side too, as they may offer to handle the warranty claim on your behalf.

QUICK POLISH

I want to buy a cleaning product for my CD and MiniDisc player as I live in the centre of a town where there is a high level of pollution. I have seen various cleaning products made by Scotch, Memorex, BASF, Hama, WH Smith and Allsop. What can you recommend?

Stuart Sugarman, via e-mail

We like the Allsop CarbonEdge Laser lens cleaner at £15 which uses tiny carbon brushes to clean dirty CD player lenses

with extremely good results. For MiniDisc try the Ross Head and Lens cleaner also at £15. It's also worth mentioning again the good results we've had with ROR-1 (Residual Oil

Remover, left), a spray mist product that we use to clean CDs. It's one of our favourite products and can be bought via mail order at £5.95 for a two ounce bottle, which should take care of several hundred CDs. Call Hove Photographic on 01273 777576.





PROJECT



Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DiVA T51 Tuner.....	£279.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£109.95
Linn LP12/Basik/Akito Turntable.....	£1749.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£129.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable.....	£1017.95
Project Debut Phono Turntable.....	£144.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	£129.95
Sony ST-D777ES FMDAB Tuner.....	£429.95
Videologic DRX-601E DAB Tuner.....	£279.95

Debut II Turntable (Black) £114.95

"The original Debut turntable romped away with a Product of the Year Award in 1999, and the MKII version continues the extremely good work. It's a simple affair, that's easy to set up, but don't let the price fool you - it sounds a whole lot more expensive than that. This is a fine turntable, and it clearly reveals the benefits of listening to vinyl, with a rich and detailed soundstage, and a good dynamic response.

It's available in six funky colours, so you should find one to suit your decor, and at just a smidge over £100, you can have no excuse not to keep that old vinyl collection in employment for a good few years yet."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2000

Selected outlets are Project Turntable Centres. Colour Options are available at additional cost



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

A3.2 CD Player £999.95 A3.2 Amplifier £979.95

Replacing the What Hi-Fi? Award Winning A3 CD and Amplifier, the new A3.2 models have been further refined and re-styled. The A3.2 CD Player now incorporates the same DAC, filter assembly and control mechanism as the highly-acclaimed Nu-Vista CD Player. The A3.2 Amplifier draws on experience gained through the development of the Nu-Vista M3 amplifier and as such has inherited many of its qualities, producing a sense of ease and flexibility that is normally only associated with far more expensive designs.



CD Players

Arcam DiVA CD62T.....	£349.95
Arcam DiVA CD92T.....	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD23T.....	£1149.95
Denon DCD485.....	£139.95
Linn Genki.....	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£99.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature.....	£449.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista 3D.....	£2999.95
Roksan Caspian MKII.....	£994.95
Roksan Kandy.....	£544.95
Rotel RCD1070.....	£499.95
Sony CDPXE570.....	£119.95

Recorder Selection

Marantz DR6000 CD-RW.....	£349.95
Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW.....	£199.95
Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....	£229.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....	£119.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....	£199.95

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 5th June 2002, E&OE.



DM601S3 Speakers £249.95

"Ultimately it's the 601 S3s' lack of any weakness that makes them so special. Their talent is so widespread that most of the competition is left reeling. Detail, resolution, dynamics, insight... everything is present and correct, and these speakers rate highly in every area.



What more can we say? These new B&Ws are a terrific buy. The price rise over their predecessors pits them against tougher rivals, but on this showing B&W has little to worry about. Unlike the competition."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? January 2002



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Amplifier Selection

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£349.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£449.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1099.95
Cyrus ACA7.5 Pre Amplifier	£699.95
Cyrus Smart Power Amplifier	£549.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£229.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£159.95
Musical Fidelity A300 Amplifier	£1399.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista M3 Amplifier	£2974.95
Roksan Caspian MKII Amplifier	£894.95
Roksan Kandy Amplifier	£544.95
Rotel RA931/II Amplifier	£189.95



ARCAM

DiVA CD72T CD Player

£429.95

DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

£749.95

DiVA CD72 "The CD72 will have you jumping out of your seat from the very first notes. Both powerful and punchy, it delivers every ounce of air and detail present from detailed midrange to smooth, singing treble. Sometimes a product comes along that sets new standards..." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

DiVA A85 "You'll have realised by now that we rather like this amp. It took us completely by surprise, and further strengthens Arcam's already impressive product range... The A85 is superb, and we can't wait to put it up against its peer in a group test." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? March 2001



MONITOR AUDIO

Silver 8i Speakers £699.95

"No other speaker in this test can match the Monitor Audios when it comes to delivering seismic basslines with sofa rattling power and weight. That this part of the spectrum also enjoys plenty of speed and control confirms the Silver 8is' position as bass kings... A great speaker needs more than simply great bass, however, and the Silver 8is do far more than merely thump. With the likes of Curtis Mayfield's 'Move On Up', they produce a sound of such verve that it becomes hard to sit still... They produce music with plenty of excitement - but don't forget the subtleties too. Add excellent build and an easy load and these Monitor Audios make a formidable case for themselves." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? April 2001

VideoLogic

DRX-601ES Digital Tuner £329.95

"New name, new format, new winner: the VideoLogic story is as simple as that. The £299 DRX-601E digital tuner came out of nowhere to establish the firm as a major player in the digital tuner market. With this upgrade, VideoLogic goes one step further: it's still a DRX-601E at heart, but quite apart from the sleek silver styling and sexy blue LEDs it now has a better, white-on-blue display, and what the company calls 'Psycho-acoustic Compensation' - a form of signal processing designed to make the tuner sound less digital.

And it works: the DRX-601ES has a presentation that's rich, clean and extremely informative. Bass is big and powerful, while the midband and treble are well controlled. The style alone would justify the slight price rise; the sound quality makes it a Product of the Year." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001





CYRUS

CD7 CD Player £799.95
7 Integrated Amplifier £699.95

Cyrus 7 CD "This player is just as convincing with thundering orchestral strings and brass, making a great job of Bernstein's recording of Mahler's Symphony No 5 and it has the definition to unravel the instrumental strands in the Kronos Quartet's disc of Phillip Glass string quartets... It's that that makes it special - and this is a very special player indeed."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? November 1999

Cyrus 7 Amplifier "This is a fabulous amplifier. It's fast, punchy and has bags of power on tap but crucially delivers huge sackfuls of subtlety when the music requires. Some of the other amplifiers in this group may be better with particular genres of music but as an all-rounder it takes some beating." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? November 1999

MISSION

78 Series

782 bases its performance on a 165mm Nomex bass unit fitted to a reflex enclosure ensuring excellent low frequency extension from a graceful and compact cabinet. The **783** houses a larger 200mm bass unit with massive motor system, capable of floor shaking, yet tightly controlled low frequency extension. Both use Keraform midrange drivers for outstanding clarity and midrange detail coupled to superb dynamic range together with Mission's silk dome tweeter.

The **780** and **781** are the pinnacle of Mission's research into creating a three dimensional soundstage, extensive bandwidth and dynamic range from the smallest possible cabinet dimensions. The **780** is massive in its sonic capabilities. Its 130mm Keraform bass unit is carefully matched to a novel reflex enclosure for full bodied bass extension, the qualities of Keraform produce a dynamic and ultra detailed midrange. In the **781** a 165mm Keraform driver takes advantage of a larger cabinet to extend bass performance and increase efficiency whilst maintaining that superb midband transparency and finely detailed treble.

780 "Versatile and with a sound that works well with a wide variety of hi-fi kit, these speakers were worthy of this title last year, and this year have achieved the tough task of making it the double."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

Claim 10% off in-store prices on all Mission 78 Series Speakers. Please call for details.



Q3 Speakers £399.95

Like its award-winning predecessor, the floorstanding Q3 offers exceptional value for money. With the new Ferrofluid-cooled metal dome neodymium tweeter derived from the Reference Series unit, the coincident source 160 mm (6.5") Uni-Q driver creates a spacious and intricate sound image throughout the room, and bass extension from the large front-firing port is accurately controlled to preserve the clarity of the midrange. KEF's unique bracing system increases cabinet rigidity to minimize distortion, and the sophisticated crossovers are connected directly to the bi-wire terminals for optimum signal integrity.

Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM603 S3.....	£599.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Cresta 2.....	£119.95
KEF Q1.....	£249.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780.....	£299.95
Mission M71.....	£119.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale Diamond 8.1.....	£99.95



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System Selection

- Cyrus** Quattro Ex Power Amplifier & Speakers **£849.95**
- Denon** 201 Ex Speakers **£649.95**
- Denon** DM50 Ex Speakers **£279.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 19 Inc Speakers **£599.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 21 Inc Speakers **£699.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 22 Inc Speakers **£799.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 25 Inc Speakers **£899.95**
- Tag McLaren** Aphrodite Ex Speakers **£2994.95**
- Teac** Reference 100 Inc Speakers **£299.95**
- Teac** Reference 500 Ex Speakers **£699.95**
- Yamaha** Pianocraft E150 Inc Speakers **£249.95**



LINN

Classik Music System **£999.95**

The Classik Music System is an alternative to the sound and looks of mass market compact systems. Designed to be useful throughout the home, the Classik is simple and stylish with all the advanced features needed to satisfy the most demanding hi-fi enthusiast or discriminating music lover.

"Since the Scottish company added a tuner to the amp/CD player, mouths have gaped even wider in appreciation. The addition of colour options panders to the public's taste for kit to match their interior design, but it doesn't just look lovely in the lounge: the Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

TEAC Reference 300 System **£549.95**

"Teac's Reference 300 system is an absolute belter. The company's Reference series has won lots of awards and many admirers in the past, and the 300 range at £200 less than the bigger 500 series, is no disappointment. Your £600 buys you everything but speakers: an amplifier, tuner, CD player and cassette deck... As beautifully built as we've come to expect from Teac, this system delivers the goods with style." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001



DENON

D-M30 CD Receiver **£229.95** SC-M50 Speakers **£69.95**

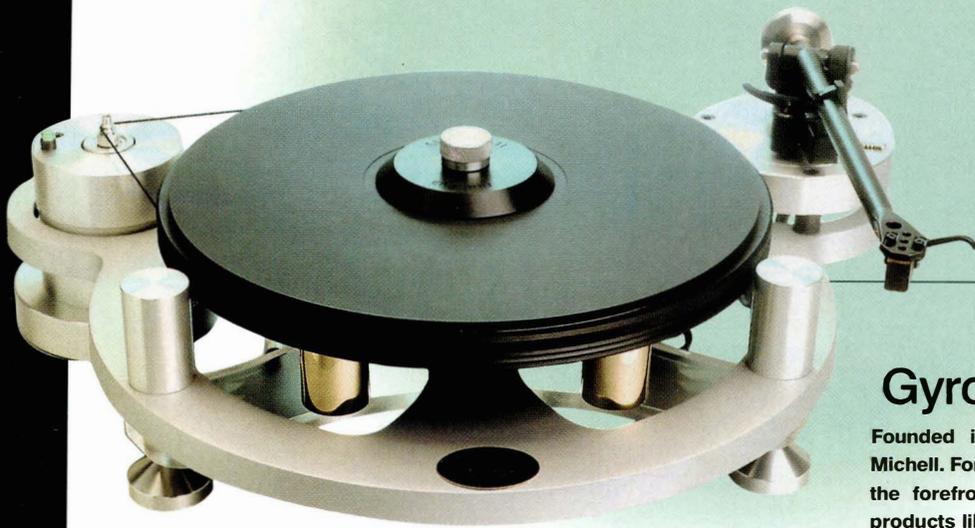
"Denon's gorgeous D-M30 has a fine pedigree - and a record of success. Its forebear the D-M3 kept impressing us with its balance of good looks and great sound, winning two What Hi-Fi? Awards on the trot. Now the latest generation takes home a Product of the Year gong two years in a row. On its own merits, too, as this is much more than a rehash of the D-M3. Upgraded audio circuitry, improved power supply and the Mission-designed speakers all improve the package. The sound is superb, well-balanced and weighty... It's a big system in a very cute box." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

Optional Recorders:

CDR-M30 CD-RW Recorder • DMD-M30 MiniDisc Recorder • DRR-M30 Cassette Deck

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 5th June 2002, E&OE.





J A Michell Gyro SE Turntable **£1017.95**

Founded in Borehamwood by mechanical engineer John Michell. For over thirty years, Michell Engineering have been at the forefront of quality audio, with world-wide appreciated products like the GyroDec and Orbe Turntables.

In the early eighties, the revolutionary GyroDec Turntable, with its elegant and effective suspension system, was introduced. The Gyro SE is a smaller and cheaper package that retains the classy sound of the GyroDec and can be upgraded to the full GyroDec specification by adding a plinth and dustcover.

Price includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm

"The beautifully engineered Gyro SE not only looks the part but has a wonderfully clean and fluid sound." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? July 1999**



LINN

Genki CD Player **£994.95** Majik Line Amplifier **£694.95**

Genki "Tempting though it is to think of Genki as a Glaswegian word, it's actually Japanese, and the nearest definitions we could find involve vitality, vigour and spirit. And used as adjectives, these words go a long way towards describing the sound of the Genki, which always manages to communicate the music first and foremost, and let the rest of the hi-fi thing look after itself.

It's a very well-thought-out player, too, from its clear and simple control layout to the provision of four sets of analogue outputs, two at fixed level, and two with level control. Completing the package is a 24-bit Burr-Brown DAC and Pacific Microsonics HDCD filter. Few owners will worry about all that stuff, however, as they'll be too busy enjoying the way Genki plays music, its purity of tone and sense of drama on Mozart's Don Giovanni being a fine example of its talent. By any standards this is a superb player, and not just one for the army of Linn enthusiasts." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? March 2000**

Majik The Linn Majik is a sophisticated control amplifier complete with on-board stereo power amplifiers. A core entry-level product for powerful and flexible control of hi-fi, video or multi-room installations. "Sneaky" add-on modules expand its functions. It can accommodate many source components. The Majik is available in two versions: The 'Phono' version has five line-level inputs and one Moving Magnet phono input and the 'Line-level' version has six line-level inputs.



MUSICAL FIDELITY

Nu Vista

3D CD Player **£2999.95**

"It's hard to put your finger on exactly why and how the 3D CD Player turns in such a performance and to a certain extent it's a pointless exercise: it just does. OK, so at three grand it's a serious financial commitment, but if you're after a CD player to last 'til you take your final breath it could well fit the bill. Get a move on, though, numbers are limited to just five hundred and they'll sell, believe me. Simply get a listen to one and go back to your reference player - all will be revealed."

HI-Fi World October 2001

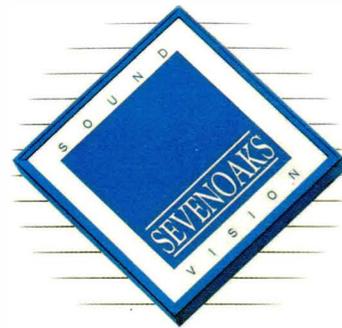
A limited edition of 500

Musical Fidelity has enough nuvistor tubes to build 500 Nu-Vista 3Ds and also to hold a spare set for every unit. (The limited edition Nu-Vista preamp, power amp and integrated are proving to be remarkably reliable, with a tube failure rate of about 0.1%). Music lovers don't need SACD technology, they just need a better CD player. Now a lucky few will be able to own the Nu-Vista 3D compact disc player. Out of the total production of 500, 265 are allocated for sale in England, and of these, 97 have already been reserved.

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 5th June 2002, E&OE.



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- Aberdeen** 491 Union Street **01224 587070**
- Edinburgh** 5 The Grassmarket **0131 229 7267**
- Glasgow** 88 Great Western Road **0141 332 9655** Open Sunday
- Hull** 1 Savile Row, Savile Street **01482 587171**
- Leeds** 112 Vicar Lane **0113 245 2775** Open Sunday
- Liverpool** 16 Lord Street **0151 707 8417**
- Manchester** 69 High Street, City Centre **0161 831 7969**
- Newcastle** 19 Newgate Street **0191 221 2320**
- Preston** 40-41 Lune Street **01772 825777** Open Sunday
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- Bedford** 29-31 St Peters Street **01234 272779**
- Cambridge** 17 Burleigh Street **01223 304770**
- Ipswich** 12-14 Dogs Head Street **01473 286977**
- Leicester** 10 Loseby Lane **0116 253 6567**
- Lincoln** 20-22 Corporation Street **01522 527397**
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- Nottingham** 597-599 Mansfield Road **0115 911 2121**
- Oxford** 41 St Clements Street **01865 241773**
- Peterborough** 36-38 Park Road **01733 897697** Open Sunday

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- Birmingham** 12 Queensway Arches, Livery Street **0121 233 2977**
- Bristol** 92b White Ladies Road, Clifton **0117 974 3727**
- Cardiff** 104-106 Albany Road **029 2047 2899**
- Cheltenham** 14 Pitville Street **01242 241171**
- Exeter** 28 Cowick Street **01392 218895**
- Plymouth** 107 Cornwall Street **01752 226011**
- Swansea** 24 Mansel Street **01792 465777** Open Sunday

london and south east

- Brighton** 57 Western Road, Hove **01273 733338**
- Bromley** 39a East Street **020 8290 1988**
- Chelsea** 403 Kings Road **020 7352 9466**
- Crawley** 32 The Boulevard **01293 510777**
- Croydon** 369-373 London Road **020 8665 1203** Open Sunday
- Epsom** 12 Upper High Street **01372 720720** Open Sunday
- Guildford** 73b North Street **01483 536666**
- Holborn** 144-148 Grays Inn Road **020 7837 7540**
- Kingston** 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
- Maidstone** 96 Week Street **01622 686366** Open Sunday
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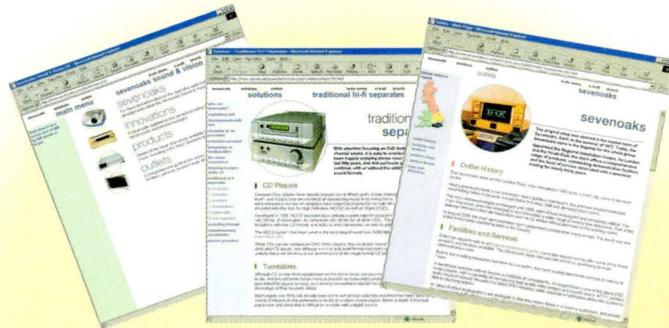
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Dealer Guide

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90% of our customers prefers our "warm and old-valve" sound to their **expensive transistor preamplifiers & power amplifiers**. We have a signed testimonial to prove that one customer prefers £900 "EL34 Lim Signature" to £2,600 preamp / power amp/power supply made by a famous name.

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Telephone 01634 373410 for Mr Andrew Everard review in Gramophone Magazine and Summary of 18 testimonials from satisfied customers + www.affordablevalvecompany.com + Amplifier shown without CE safety cage, to prove that this is a genuine valve amplifier. Customers must not remove the CE safety cage + Reliable. 2 years guarantee

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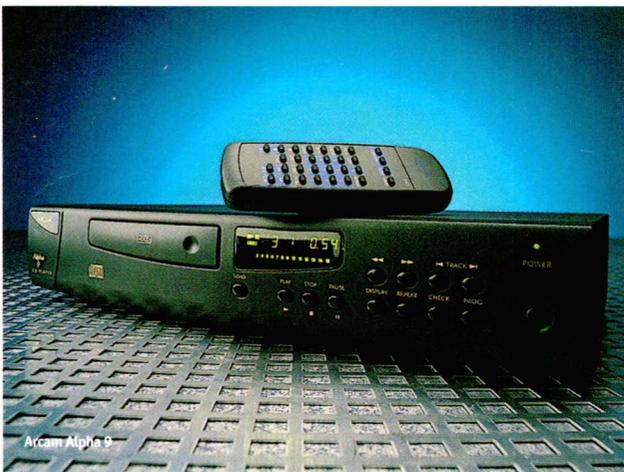
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FOR SALE



ARCAM ALPHA 9 CD PLAYER, £575 and Arcam Alpha 9 amp, £375. Both two years old, mint cond, remotes etc. Call 01633 281436 (Newport).

SPENDOR BC1S, STANDS, £225. Aura Tu80 tuner, £140. Grado SR80 h/phones, £70. Call 0121 246 0486 (B'ham).

MUSIC FIDELITY CD ENHANCER, £50. Marantz CD MkII KI Sig, Marantz amp PM66SE KI Sig, KEF Q35 speakers. £150 each or £400 the lot. Call 01438 221477 (Stevenage).

SONY SCD777ES SACD/CD PLAYER, gold finish, boxed, £750. Also Cyrus APA7 monoblocks, boxed, £950 pair. Call Lee 07967 753509 (Herts).

B&W MATRIX 801S Series III loudspeakers. Ex-Abbey Road Studios, used for Beatles and Floyd remastering. Finished in black, superb condition and stunning performance. Offered at £2,750 ono. Call 07899 808918 anytime or 020 8464 0960 eves (Kent).

COPLAND 289 CD PLAYER, hardly used, £1,500 ono. 2 Cyrus aPA7 power amps, Cyrus aCA7 preamp, PSX-R power supply, £1,500 ono. Call 01732

874689 (Kent, eves).

NAD C360 AMP, few months old, mint cond, £300. Sony STR DB930 A/V receiver, as new £150. Call 01708 452136 (Essex)

HEADPHONE AMP QED MB45 double, £40. QED QNECT interconnects, £15. Sennheiser HD540 reference headphones, £35. Mission 760SE speakers, £75, all mint, boxed. Call 01278 782622 (Somerset).

NAIM NAIT 3 converted to NAC92 preamp. Flat Cap power supply, £400. Call 01792 511517 (Swansea).

NAKAMICHI DR3 CASSETTE DECK. Twin heads, boxed, as new cond, £100 ono. Call 0131 663 8852 (E'burgh).

TANNOY KINGDOM loudspeakers. Immaculate, superb sound, £25,000 new, will sell for £6,000. Steven 07774 703 030 or 020 8203 9099 (N London).

BANG AND OLUFSON 3000 MKM2 receiver, £60. Akai GX77 reel to reel, 50 tapes, £160. 01708 457 691 (Essex).

ROTEL MICH1 (RHA10) preamp, 5 lines in, 2 out, remote, £600. Call 020 8404 7610 (eves), 0781 586 1746 (Surrey).

NAIM NAC42 preamp, £65. Meridian

101 preamp, moving coil input, £25. Marantz CD63, faulty, free to collector. Call 01252 373530 (Farnborough).

SONUS FABER STONEWOOD stands, £250 (£500 new). No offers. Or exchange for Solo centre channel speaker. Call 020 8672 6181 (Tooting).

PINK TRIANGLE EXPORT with SME309 arm and Denon 304 cartridge, £475. Call 01286 870194 (N Wales).

AVI S2000MM monoblock amps (pair). Perfect and boxed, £625 (£1,400 new). Call 01492 516875 (Conwy).

TDL STUDIO 4 transmission line speakers. VGC, walnut veneer finish, £425 ono. Call 07814 027030 (Bath).

AUDIO ALCHEMY DDE V30/ Powerstation IV, superb HDCD, 3 inputs + coaxial output, £250 (£600+). Kenwood DP-X9010 transport, great build, VGC, £200 (£500+). Both for £400. Audio Alchemy vac-in-the-box/Powerstation III, superb MC/MM stage, £250 (£550). Call 07957 344541, 0118 931 2307 (Reading).

HARMAN KARDON "Take Control" touch-screen programmable remote. Cost £289, unused, boxed, bargain, £150. Call 01494 792347, 07876 521724 (Chesham).

LINN AXIS +BASIC PLUS, mint, £210. Linn Index speakers + dedicated Ku-Stone stands, £110. Systemdek IIX

turntable with Alphason Opal arm, mint, £185. Rega Planar II turntable, RB250, £145. Call 01777 700066 (N Notts).

Impulse h7 compact horn loudspeakers, silver wired, black finish. Offers around £450. Call 020 8572 2504 (Hounslow).

QUAD 303/33 AMPLIFIER, controller and FM11 tuner, £350. Call 01252 703086 (Surrey).

RARE TECHNICS TURNTABLE (SGH-10BE) for model SP-10mkII. Own SH-10E power unit. Suit dealer. Owned by John Bowers. Offers call: 01903 206004 (Worthing).

MICHELL TENDERFEET isolation cones, 4 sets of 3, £4 per set. Milty Foculpods set of 4, £8 unused. Call Terry 020 8482 0363 (Enfield).

RUSS ANDREWS SILENCERS, Epos ES14 plus stands. Musical Fidelity A100, Audusa mains cables. Call 01908 630614 (Milton Keynes).

MICROMEGA STAGE 6 CD player. The ultimate stage, Micromega super clock, perfect cond, boxed, £260. Bargain. 01932 782381 (Sunbury).

WANTED

VALVE AMP and Quad 989 speakers. Call 01492 516875 (Conwy).

CABLE TALK BROADCAST II interconnect. Call 01908 630614 (Milton Keynes).

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product 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!

THE DIRECTORY

THE *HI-FI CHOICE* DIRECTORY ROUNDS UP OVER 1,000 PRODUCTS REVIEWED IN PAST ISSUES. HERE YOU'LL FIND OUR OPINIONS ON THE BEST HI-FI COMPONENTS, ALONG WITH GUIDANCE ON HOW TO ASSEMBLE THEM INTO FIRST-CLASS HI-FI SYSTEMS.

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 putting 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? We firmly believe that cables make a worthwhile difference, but if you are sceptical, any dealer should be able to demonstrate this for you.

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 (see glossary) 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 use spade connectors or have both pairs of cables soldered into single plugs at the amp end.
- If a cable has an indication of directionality, ie 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 bypassing it. The former option gives easiest functionality if you use several sources, but by bypassing you are removing a switch and connection which should improve quality.
- Try to avoid laying 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 (unless you use Naim, in which case refer to manufacturer's recommendations).

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 in the high-end *Statements* section. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers an outstanding level of performance.



GLOSSARY

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

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

BASS: The lowest three octaves of the audio band – 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 amp and each driver.

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

CD-RW: Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A: 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 in any digital component at which incoming 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, eg 7.1 EX where discrete side channels are used.

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

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

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.

DVD-A: High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range, discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

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

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

FINALISE (CD-R): The process of copying the Table of Contents from its temporary area on CD-R and CD-RW to

the final position where it will be recognised by ordinary 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 caused by the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio, being imprecise.

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

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

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

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

NETWORK: see Crossover.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE: A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (say, below 100 ohms or so) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even when using long or unusual 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, helping to stabilise the signal.

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.

SACD: High-resolution music-only format developed by Sony/Philips – offers 100kHz bandwidth without digital filtering and its associated ills.

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).

THX: Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. THX Ultra is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK: The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET: the two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

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

TWEETER: Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY: Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a 2-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

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

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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
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful	5			●	●	40	217
BB	Arcam Diva A75 Plus	450	Quick, lively and well presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●		●	●	50	224
BB	Arcam Diva A85	750	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
BB	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
BB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,100	Remarkably flexible and well featured with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
BB	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5			●		150	228
	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
	Audio Analogue Maestro	2,600	Beautiful powerhouse housed in a massively engineered chassis, big sound and silky smooth presentation	4	●	●	●		150	228
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	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
	Chord CPM 3300	5,495	Very powerful yet compact amp with rather complex ergonomics and transparent sound. Oh, and a lovely blue glow	5			●		220	214
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
	Cymbal CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
	Cymbal CA3	999	Great sense of timing and good all round coherence with plenty of get up and go	6			●		60	228
R	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
	Creek 5350SE	799	Smooth, open and articulate sound and quality build, but bass is a tad heavy handed	6			●	●	85	214
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-355UK	230	Detailed, but rather inexpressive sound which doesn't quite live up to the claims.	5	●		●	●	50	217
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●		●	●	70	181
R	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned out amplifier, with mainstream appeal but bland with it	6			●	●	50	214
	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
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
R	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass but excellent mid and treble.	5	●		●	●	50	217
	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
	Linn Majik	845	Slightly rough and ready power amp modules, but capable preamp that can be expanded into a multiroom system	5	●		●	●	33	214
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23	196
	Marantz PM-6010 OSE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	●		●	●	50	196
	Marantz PM7000	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
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5	●		●	●	60	224
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II	999	Big, bold, but over-fruity balance – the 'fat uncontroller' as one put it	6	●	●	●	●	60	214
	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
R	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●		●	●	100	228
	Mark Levinson No383	5,500	Extremely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/power. Sounds superb	5					100	212
	McIntosh MA6900	4,650	Heavyweight design from a classic brand that makes a very easy to listen to sound and will drive almost anything	7	●		●	●	200	227
	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
	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
	Myryad MI 240	1,500	Big and powerful integrated amp sounds clean and neutral if a bit short on musical tautness and dynamic tension	8	OPT	OPT			120	216
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
BB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra-high power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse.	6	●		●	●	120	217
	NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and some finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●		100	189
R	Naim Nait S	800	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	5			●		30	214
	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
	Plinius 8100	1,450	Slightly rough and ready, but plenty of balls from this stripped down antipodean.	6			●		100	214
R	Præcis Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
R	Primare A10	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 balsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●		70	181
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance, and healthy power yield	6			●		100	214
	Red Rose Music M5	8,000	Sophisticated integrated valve amp with powerful, refined sound and beautiful build	4					45	219
	Red Rose Music Passion	2,999	Basically equipped amp from Mark Levinson that has speed and power if not the last ounce of resolve	5				●	100	226
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
BB	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
BB	Rotel RA-931 MKII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●			●	35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MKII	275	Improved RA971 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
	Rotel RA-1070	1,000	Well equipped powerhouse has features designed to support multiroom operation, but sonically it lacks subtlety	7			●	●	100	224
	Sharp SM-SX1	3,300	Jewel-like 1-bit digital amplifier with limited power reserves but offering glimpses of sonic magic	5					50	211
	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
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5	●	●			25	224
	T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	●	100	189
	Tact Millennium MkII	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
	TAG McLaren 60iRv sl	1,000	Highly coherent and solid sound with a slightly loud balance and plenty of features	6			●	●	60	228
	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
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1	850	Not as clear or as lively as some, but essentially musical, and upgradeable for multichannel audio purposes	6			●	●	100	224
	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-A808	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
	Thule IA60B	700	Dry, edgy and glassy sounding amplifier, though the balanced input may appeal to some	6			●		60	214
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
	Unison Research Unico i	800	Open, engaging sound from an Italian charmer with limited bass power but plenty of spirit	5			●		100	228
	Unison Research Aria SR1	1,250	Drop dead gorgeous looks from this valve/MOS hybrid, but sonically it is lumpy and awkward, with poor definition, albeit with good image scale	5			●		80	224
	Yamaha AX-496	240	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough	6				●	85	208
	Yamaha AX-596	300	Clean, agile and lean this amplifier isn't. Bold and powerful, however, it certainly is	5	●		●	●	100	217
R	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6			●		50	214

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	ArcamAlpha 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
BB	Arcam A85 int & P85 pwr	1,249	Well thought through integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A-85 virtues with others, plus extra gravitas and range	7			●	●	85	225
R	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,899.80	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	7	●	●	●	●	100	227
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	5					50	221
	Audio Analogue Bellini/Donizetti	1,155	Curious pre/power amplifier has a number of objective and subjective character traits that make it difficult to recommend	5	●	●	●		60	225
	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
R	AudioNote M2Phono/P2SE	3,198	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	4	●				18	216
EC	Audio Research LS25 /VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	6	●	●			100	216
EC	AVI S2000M	2,348	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	5			●		150	221
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
	Bow Technologies Warlock/Walrus	6,490	Heavyweight dual mono pairing with superb build and rich, refined sound	5				●	150	216
R	Bryton BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	8			●	●	120	212
	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
	Creek P43R/A52SE	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine valve preamp	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Creek P43R/A43	1,050	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●		140	212
	Crimson 610C/620D	775	Limited in what it does, the Crimson combo has real precision, verve and timing within those limits. Preamp is due to be replaced shortly	4	●	●			55	225
	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
BB	Croft Vitali/ Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	3	●				30	216
	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
R	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	7				●	60	212
	Cyrus aCA7.5/PSX-R/aPA7	2950	Very stylish four-box modular system, slight forwardness delivers oodles of clarity and detail	7			●	●	150	216
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●			150	191
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
R	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	6			OPT	OPT	100	216
BB	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful broad-band transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	6			●		120	216
	Exposure 2010 I/2010 P	1,098	Interesting match of integrated and more powerful power amp is not as sure footed or as dynamically consistent as some rivals	6			●		75	225
EC	Gamut D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and dynamics (balanced iunputs). Formerly Sirius	1					200	183
EC	Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	LFD Mistral Linestage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	Linn Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully turned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all-Linn system	9	●	●			62	212
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II/SM-17	1,699	Flexible, beautifully made and as smooth as silk, but ultimately the combination fails to build on the unaided PM-17 II in biamp mode	6	●	●	●	●	60	225
	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	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
	Music Model Three	1,990	Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160W power amp	5					166	
R	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness	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
	Myryad MA120	450	Based on MI120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with MI120	1					60	165
R	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
R	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power	7			●	●	200	200
EC	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,375	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	6			●		50	213
	Naim NAC112/NAP150/FLATCAP 2	1,850	Adding a FLATCAP 2 brings a very worthwhile sonic upgrade to the basic NAC112/NAP150 combo	6			●		50	213
	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	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,699	Powerful, smooth, but slightly uneven performance in some combinations, but excellent control and separation in others	6			●		100	225
	Quad QC-twenty four/II-forty	4,000	A classic valve amplifier in circuitry and sound, but with modern ingredients and gorgeous retro styling	7					40	213
R	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	5				●	178	
	Rotel RC-1090/RB-1090	2,650	Prodigious powerful pre/power combination with a wide range of inputs, but not ideally subtle or uncoloured	7	●	●	●	●	380	225
BB	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	6					10	216
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia – precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●	201	

LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184
	TAG McLaren PA20R/100P	1,699	A blast from TAG McLaren's past highlights how far the brand has developed	6			●	●	100	225
	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
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
	Unison Research S8	2,950	Outrageous Italian styling and an equally melodramatic sound, with splendid voice projection and tension	5			VOL		24	216

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			●				201
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character			●				189
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough		●					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			●				189
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise		●	●				189
BB	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, with any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage		●					189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too		●					189
R	Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist		●	●				201
R	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer		●	●				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		●	●				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		●					189
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components		●	●				189
R	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any LP			●				201



MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR100	800	A solid sounding and well-engineered A/V amp with an affordable price tag. Good with music and well suited to smaller rooms	6			●	●	70	215
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema – what more could you want?	7			●	●	100	210
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights. Currently lacks 5.1 input for DVD-A/SACD	6			●	●	120	219
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multichannel 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 AVR-1602	350	Low-cost home cinema amplifiers don't usually set out to excite, and this one is no exception. Listenable, but dull	6			●	●	80	223
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multichannel sound	4			●	●	75	198
BB	Denon AVC-A15E	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally at home with music and film soundtracks	12	●		●	●	170	215
BB	Harman/Kardon AVR5000	600	Complex and capable home cinema receiver features automatic setup, HDCD and excellent interconnection possibilities	8			●	●	70	223
	JVC-RX-8012R	400	Undistinguished home cinema receiver with USB in, and modestly satisfying sound at lowish power levels	9	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-X9050D	399	There are some benefits from THX Select processing in home cinema mode, but musically this is a rather mechanical, unengaging performer	7	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-V7773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music	10	●		●	●	120	210
	Kenwood KRF-V9993D	1,300	Complex amp that rocks with home cinema but loses out with music	7	●		●	●	110	215
	Lexicon MC12 Pro	9,000	Balanced output equipped behemoth of a 12 channel processor that does everything you can imagine and more	12			●		N/A	227
R	Marantz SR5200	400	Marantz provides undemanding but broadly satisfying listening from a well engineered, near budget home cinema receiver	8			●	●	90	223
BB	Marantz SR-5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR-7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with two-channel music and multichannel AV	9			●	●	100	210
	Marantz SR-14EX Mk2	3,250	A weighty beast, with 7.1 processing but only five channels of amplification as standard. Highly capable with both music and movies, but rather costly all-in-all	8			●	●	140	215
P	Myriad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●	●	120	215
BB	NAD T761	650	First rate home cinema amplifier that sounds more powerful than its specifications imply, and competes with specialist stereo amplifiers	9			●	●	80	223
	NAD S170/S250	5,700	Flexible and fine sounding THX Ultra processor/five-channel power amp combo with great timing	9			●	●	125	225
	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-DS595	450	Unexciting but generally competent home cinema amplifier has some strong ergonomic features	7	●		●	●	70	223
	Onkyo TX-DS787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver	7	●		●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad subtle	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSX-D810S	450	Thin, raw sounding AV receiver fails to stir the right nerve endings, but is materially fair value	7	●		●	●	100	223
	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
	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
	Rotel RSX-972	1,000	Not the brightest tool in the Rotel toolbox, and pricing is surely rather optimistic too	8			●	●	75	217
R	Rotel RSP-976/RMB-1075	1,700	A potent and enjoyable two-box beast that gets to the heart of both music and movie sound	8			●	●	120	215
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
R	Sony STR-B1070	600	Technical intriguing AV receiver which succeeds in extracting detail and space from recordings that sounded coarse and unexpansive elsewhere	10	●		●	●	100	223
	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			●	●	100	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,749	A flexible A/V processor, unusually good with music. Would form the heart of a top-class multichannel system in standard or 7-channel 'EX' form	6			●	●	N/A	215
	Technics DX-950	279	Ultra-low cost home cinema receiver is impressively equipped for the price, but musically it lacks grace and air	5	●		●	●	100	223
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Technics SE-A1010/SU-C1010 x3	1,350	A preamp plus three stereo amps provide a six-channel A/V solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6			●	●	70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	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
R	Acoustic Research Master	70	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection								224
	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
	Cable Talk Professional 3	75	Plenty of bass, but suffers rather from congestion								224
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price								176
	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
	Chord Silver Siren	75	Dry and undynamic, though tonal balance is good								224
R	DND Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried								200
BB	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price								211
R	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass								224
	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 1001	70	Nice and dynamic, and bass is good, but treble disappoints and it can become rough								224
	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
	Kimber Crystal-Cu	5	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness								224
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
BB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound								224
	Neotech NA11085	100	Balance is OK, but detail could and should be better								224
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 S535	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	Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension								211
R	Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price								211
R	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 Qnec 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value								176
R	QED Qnec 45	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
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
R	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass								188
	Sonic Link SG Voices	95	Bass reach is splendid, though there's some coloration: scores highly for emotional impact								224
	SonicLink Violet	95	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 plumminess 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 The Bay C5	39	Terrific detail, nice balance — a great cable								224
EC	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent								188
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
R	Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion — very good value								224



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LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding								168
R	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid-back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●		●			215
	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
BB	SonicLink Rebel	7.50	Plenty of bass, but without sacrificing upper frequency clarity or dynamics	●		●		●			215
	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
	Supra Classic 6.0	4.95	It's all there, but a persistent lack of detail seriously mars the view	●		●		●			215
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
	Supra Octopower 25	77.98	Very low losses over long runs, but essentially sound is lacklustre – sluggish bass and hard treble. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●			227
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board	●		●		●			183
R	Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●		●		●			215
	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
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●		●			215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	●		●		●			203
R	van den Hul D-352 Hybrid	84	Can be a touch dry, and bass is not massively extended, but mid and treble are pleasantly airy and detailed. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●			227
	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music	●		●		●			215

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered					●	●	PLT	218
	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others					●	●		218
	Audiosource bbc	48	Very good value, extremely sharp detailing – maybe too sharp					●	●	PLT	218
BB	Audusa Eupen CSA	48	Reasonable cost, outstanding performance and a strong recommendation			●		●			218
	Clearaudio Accurate Power Gen	1,090	Compact and beautifully finished unit that offers positive sonic benefits that justify the price					●	●		206
	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound					●	●		206
	LAT AC-2	99	Excellent clarity, music sounds clean and easy to follow – enthusiastic recommendation	●		●		●			218
R	Lynwood Electronics Mega Power	295	Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass					●	●		206
	Maplin Bowthorpe ASC 431	50	Excellent mains purifying abilities – including other equipment used elsewhere in the house (Maplin code BJ84F)			●		●			218
	Olson Sound Fantastic	80	Reasonable price, superior build quality – all in all, a bit of a bargain			●		●			218
R	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality					●	●		206
R	Russ Andrews Kimber Power Kord	50	Impressively detailed and crisp, choice of connectors can make even more difference					●	●		218
BB	Russ Andrews Kimber/Power 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 effective solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy					●	●		206
	SonicLink SG Power	80	Bright, open and detailed with sweet and natural treble frequencies			●		●	PLT		218
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise					●	●		206
R	Synergistic Res. Master Coupler	238	Absolutely outstanding performance, but extremely expensive					●	●		218
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

CASSETTE DECKS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●		●		●	●		●	158
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 three 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 three-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-5805E	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●	●		●	●		●	171



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CD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASX/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	169
	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
	Arcam CD72	400	Easy going, slightly soft-centred reworking of Alpha 7 in new, svelte DIVA clothing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Arcam CD92	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	Arcam Alpha CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	Audio Analogue Maestro	1,500	Super smooth CD replica from this CD 'processor'. Fantastic casework compliments a loveable sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	228
	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 Series 21 MC4	999	Solid, if not stolid player designed for a long lifetime, and musically proficient, if lacking in airs and graces	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
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	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
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
	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well built player – balanced outputs too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Cymbal 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 CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
BB	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	Refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range, builds on the qualities of the lesser models	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
R	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
R	Denon DCD-835	230	Refined sound with terrific bass extension. Some slight coloration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	179
	Densen B-400	1,280	Bold, purposeful sound, but lacks subtlety, and has some ergonomic flaws	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	Docet-Lector CDPO.5T	999	Valve powered CD player lacks resolving power, though it musters considerable physical presence	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
BB	Exposure 2010	599	Smooth, restrained but warm and physical balance from this well turned out and well priced player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	EZO Fog Stage 3	1,170	Curious player is difficult to drive, and has sound quality that both enchants and sometimes confounds	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Kenwood DVF-3030	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
R	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright sounding player with strong multi-room appeal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	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
BB	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
BB	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
BB	Marantz CD6000 KI Signature	500	Excellent all rounder, a well-appointed, good-value package	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
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 CD17 Mk II Ki Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Marantz CD-7	3,200	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
	Marantz SA1251	3,500	Highly refined and beautifully built multichannel SA & DVD-V player that doesn't quite match Sony's best	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	223
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
BB	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
	Meridian 588	2,100	Not the most immediately striking CD player, but its neutrality and timing prove beguiling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	Monrio Asty	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
BB	Musical Fidelity A3 CD	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of EHF detail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	Myryad MCD 600	1,299	Abundance of detail and resolution from this 'Super DAC' CD player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
R	NAD C520	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	NAD C521	200	Good timing and excitement, but not good at holding the listener's attention	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	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
R	Naim Audio CD5	1,125	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
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	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
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
BB	Philips SACD-1000	1,300	Not quite a universal disc player, but it does SACD multi-channel, DVD-Video and CD to a universally high standard	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
	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
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	Roksan Kandy	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	Roksan Caspian	895	Improved Caspian (retested for 2001) is still a bold, dynamic player, but rather more subtle and expressive	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped-down RCD-971 – buy the original	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
BB	Rotel RCD-971	450	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
R	Rotel RCD-1070	525	Though technically sound and well equipped, the Rotel failed to generate much excitement or involvement	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
BB	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles			●							195
R	Sony DVP-NS700V	400	Outrageously good value for money DVD-VSA player, though SACD replay quality trails the audio-only Sony SCD-XB770ES	●		●						●	220
BB	Sony SCD-XB770UK	400	Expressive and expansive player in the best SACD tradition, but CD replay is disappointingly lacklustre	●		●							220
EC	Sony SCD-333ES	1,200	Entry-level high-end multichannel SA player is excellent with both CD and the new format, but particularly impressive in surround	●		●							224
BB	Sony SCD-555ES	1,200	Fabulously built with superb sound using both CD and Super Audio software, you'll be hard pressed to find a better CD player at the price	●		●							213
EC	Sony SCD-XA77ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●		●							223
EC	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but it's a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel	●		●							194
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1.1	649	Attractively turned out, with bare bones features (though the power supply can be augmented), the Thunder 1.1 gave equivocal results on test			●							226
	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 the availability of a complete upgrade path makes 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 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 (multidisc)			●				●	●		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
EC	Wadia 301	3,650	Highly insightful player with digital preamp options and very good onboard volume control, try it direct for maximum effect	●	●	●		●		●			228
	Yamaha CDX-596	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW	●		●			●	●			207
	Yamaha CDX-496	180	A rather splashy and approximate sound, further hampered by mechanical noise	●		●			●	●			217
	Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●		●			●	●			184
	YBA Special	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid	●		●			●	●			195

CD TRANSPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audio Note CDT Zero	550	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with DAC1)	●	●								212
	Linn Karik	1,850	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●		●							144
	Roksan Attessa ATT-DP3	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material	●		●							162
	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 OUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	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
R	Audio Note DAC Zero1x	750	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with CDT Zero)			●							212
	Audio Note DAC 5	18,500	Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price			●							203
	Chord DAC 64	1,900	Beautifully encased converter with variable input buffering but inconvenient input socketry and a sound that doesn't quite match the looks			●		●					225
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 OUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam DIVA DV88	1,000	A DVD-Video player built with non-obsolence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player	●		●							213
	Arcam FMJ DV27	1,600	Spirited CD performance and a great DVD-V upgrade path	●		●							219
BB	Denon DVD-1000	300	Fine, stripped down player concentrates on the essentials, and scores a direct hit	●		●							216
	Denon DVD-1600	500	Classy to look at and to use, picture quality is good, but CD and DVD-A performance is a little soft and wayward	●		●				●		●	228
BB	Denon DVD-2800	750	First-rate all-rounder, this is a gimmick-free design that is well-built and offers good CD and DVD sound quality and finely resolved pictures	●		●							221
R	Denon DVD-3300	1,000	Sometimes slightly inconsistent and strident sounding in all modes of use, but it pulls a little more off disc too	●		●			●				213
R	Harman/Kardon DVD25	449	Reasonable DVD-Video player is an excellent CD player, making this a good upgrade choice for buyers who put music first	●		●							228
	Integra research RD-V1	2,700	Refined in use and on audition, but a lack of resolving power and an unbalanced feature set militate against this model	●		●							220
	JVC XV-542	250	Unprepossessing DVD-V player fails to excite with DVD material, or as a surrogate CD player	●		●							221
R	JVC XV-SA72SL	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	●		●							220

DVD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	●	●	●	●					206
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	899	The first multi-disc DVD-Audio player is physically large and ergonomically obstructive, but it is a smooth, slick operator	●				●			●	213
	Marantz DV4100	399	The DV4100 is a DVD-Video player for videophiles, but don't put the CD player out to pasture just yet	●	●							221
EC	Meridian DVS596	2,350	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●	●							218
	NAD T531	330	Standard far eastern DVD-Video player in NAD clothing fails to stir the juices	●	●							228
	Onkyo DV-5939	1,999	Superb build, plenty of features, but more convincing as a video player than an audio one	●	●						●	220
	Panasonic DVD-RV41	300	Well presented DVD-Video player has an attractive, but far from high resolution sound, and picture quality also lacks definition	●	●							221
	Panasonic DVD-RA61	399	A nice DVD-Video player cohabits with a relatively nondescript DVD-Audio section	●				●			●	228
	Panasonic DVD-RA71	449	Well priced, but rather slack sounding with DVD-A material, but CD sounds OK, and DVD-V is excellent	●				●			●	220
	Panasonic DVD-A7EB	699	Chopped down Technics DVD-A10 retains most of the flagship's headline features with well balanced, but less refined and less articulate sound	●				●			●	213
R	Philips DVD-712	200	Rough and ready looking DVD-Video player turns out to be well equipped, and an unexpectedly vital performer, on screen and via loudspeakers	●	●							221
	Philips DVD Q50	£300	Designer DVD player with oddball ergonomics and lacklustre audio performance, but video performance is fine	●	●							218
R	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but a bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince	●	●			●				216
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player is an extremely attractive all rounder	●	●							221
BB	Pioneer DV-636D	400	Bold, dynamic and detailed sounding player, with slightly simplified video feature set, sharper pricing and A1 pictures to match	●	●							216
	Pioneer DV-646A	530	One of the first DVD-RW compatible DVD-Audio players is informative but not the sweetest sounding machine around	●	●						●	220
R	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Fine player with near state of the art video performance and attractive, easy on the ear music making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike	●	●			●				213
EC	Pioneer DV-747A	899	UK's first Universal player, compatible with DVD-A and SACD as well as DVD-V and CD. Remarkably good with every format	●	●						●	226
	Primare V10	700	Beautifully presented DVD-video player gives superb picture quality and so-so CD replay	●	●							221
R	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possesses a strong picture quality and decent CD player	●	●							206
	Rotel RDV-995	700	Bold, sometimes aggressive sounding player needs RGB output to bring picture quality up to scratch	●	●							216
	Sanyo DVD1500	219	Compact, low cost player is a quite strong video performer, but lacks the wherewithal to succeed as a surrogate CD player	●	●			●				216
BB	Sony DVP-NS400D	300	Midrange DVD-Video player has some interesting features that enhance picture quality and usability	●	●							221
	Sony Art Couture DVP-5435	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●	●							216
BB	Sony DVP-NS900V	£500	A great all rounder, and an excellent example of the current strengths of the SACD format	●	●			●				228
	Sony DVP-CX850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	●	●						●	204
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●	●							210
	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player; in this context pricing is competitive	●	●							212
	T+A DVD 1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-audio upgrade path	●	●			●				213
	Technics DVD-A10	899	Well built, early generation DVD-A player with full on-board DVD-Video decoding and a more than workmanlike sound	●	●						●	213
	Thompson DTH-4500	229	DVD-V player comes with an excellent multi-component remote control, but fails to deliver the goods, with bland sound to match the iffy visuals	●	●			●				221
	Theata DaViD	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricy for a DVD transport, but worth it	●	●			●				191
BB	Toshiba SD-510E	£320	Great all rounder DVD-Audio from a slightly idiosyncratic player at a new low price point for Toshiba	●	●							228
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material	●	●						●	213
BB	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player; in this context pricing is competitive	●	●							213
	T+A DVD-1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-Audio upgrade path	●	●							213
R	Yamaha DVD-S1200	700	Clean, agile sound quality, and decent, if unexciting DVD-Audio performance round of a good, if rather costly player	●	●			●				228

DIGITAL RECORDERS



SPECIFICATIONS

CD RECORDERS (CD-R/RW), MINIDISC (MD), HARD DISC (HD)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing a CD player and hard disc recorder. Sign of things to come?	2	CD/HD		●	223
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR-20	499	High jitter player makes quite good recordings that sound less good when played back internally, especially when using the internal record capable transport	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR 30	590	Well built copier capable of good recordings but playback quality is indistinct and the asking price high	2	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Imerge M1000	3,300+	One-box hard disc solution for multi-room installations. Stores 100s of CDs with web-interface but sound is uninspiring. Single-room S1000 also available	2	CD/HD		●	223
	JVC XM-448	220	A hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	1	MD	●	●	205
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, ratty build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	It may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	1	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	1	MD	●	●	191
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
BB	Marantz DR6000	400	Classy CD-R/RW recorder is also a classy CD player, in contrast to most CD recorders	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Mid-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	1	MD	●	●	177
	Philips CDR 600	230	Low cost Philips machine makes great recordings but playback is poor and the controls a mite fiddly	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
BB	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
R	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well equipped, well priced CD-R/RW deck	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that receives its Recommendation due to price	1	MD	●	●	205
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
BB	Sony MDS-JE770	260	Smartly attired, packed with features and capable of recordings closer in quality to CD-R than MD's detractors might think	1	MD	●	●	223
	Sony MXD-D40	330	One half CD player, the other half MD recorder. Functions well enough but CD playback is weak	2	CD/MD	●	●	223
R	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	1	MD	●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JA333ES	650	Serious build, serious features, serious sound. Maybe high-end MD isn't such a peculiar idea after all – but would you pay £650?	1	MD	●	●	223
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Yamaha CDR-D561	449	Twin CD-R/RW burner makes solid, believable discs, but is priced higher than equivalent models from elsewhere	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	700	CD recorder and hard drive in one – save your music to hard disc, edit then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	CD-R(W)/HD	●	●	223a

HEADPHONES

SPECIFICATIONS		ISSUE NUMBER
3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	MASS (g)	CLOSED BACK	OPEN BACK	CIRCUMAURAL	SUPRA-AURAL	ELECTROSTATIC	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain		190	32	●					219
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	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 'phones		250	60	●					186
	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
	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads		295	250	●	1/2				186
	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
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
	JVC HA-G77	40	Too coloured for general recommendation, and lacking detail		260	32	●					219
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design		165	1/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 midrange 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/200	80	Basic sound is OK, but sensitivity is too low to be useful. Features stereo width control		210	60	●					219
	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
R	Philips HP890	66	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone		330	32	●					219
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled midrange and overexcited bass		247	32	●					205
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance – but detailed, and comfortable to wear		210	64	●					219
R	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband		255	150	●					172
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort		270	120	●					205
R	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed: comfortable too		250	40	●					219
	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
	Technics RP-F500	40	Just too bright for general recommendation, though they play along with gusto		225	40	●					219
EC	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
	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
R	Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates		250	32	●					219
	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 infrared design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven		226	1/R	●		1/2			172
R	Vivanco SR950	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

SPECIFICATIONS		ISSUE NUMBER
SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19, 36, 24	86	6	30	●	226
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 300	400	Chunky real-wood stand-mount sounds big, smooth and shiny, but also dynamically limited	21, 40, 30	86	6	24	●	227
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 309	700	Real wood heavyweight with fine neutrality and dynamic range; could have more brio	21, 98, 30	90	5	23	●	224
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone standmount 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
R	AR 520	150	Classic standmount might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20, 37, 28	90	4	28	●	215
	AR 15	275	Neat and chunky wall/standmount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22, 37, 22	90	4	45	●	201
	Arcaydis AKF	299	Budget compact real wood floorstander lacks some warmth; could be better finished	17, 77, 21	88	5	38	●	227
R	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,199	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 T16	1,750	Compact active 'home studio monitor' in colourful cast box, with considerable loudness potential	27, 45, 33	A	A	45	●	214
R	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24, 44, 33	84	5	65	●	219
EC	ATC SCM10A	1,299	Stylish, active power houses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23, 39, 31	A	A	45	●	221
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	350 watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35, 71, 6.48	A	A	38	●	218
	ATC SCM70A SL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127, 40, 46	●	A	20	●	205
R	Audio Note AZ One	449	A fine partner for low power valve amps, it delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23, 83, 29	92	6	30	●	215

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
R	Audio Note AN-ED	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		92	4	20	●		204
R	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,58,5,24,5		90	5	38	●		219
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	559	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
R	AVI Positron	899	Beautifully styled '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
BB	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband, and a restrained top end	20,33,23		88	4	23		●	226
BB	B&W 602 S3	300	Large lively standmount with fine bass and low box colour, comprehensively vindicates a timeless formula	23,49,29		89	3	22			224
R	B&W DM602.5 S3	400	Pretty floorstander sounds rather laid back and lacks the agility of its stand-mount stablemates	20,5,88,29		89	4	38	●		227
R	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89	7	30	●		208
R	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29		91	3	35	●		219
R	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
R	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
R	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	The prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101,5,24,5		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 nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69		91	8	34	●		186
R	Blueroom Minipod	£249	Blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		91	4	50		●	225
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30		94	3	40	●		204
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-her-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32		92	5	28		●	180
R	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-her-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50	●		201
R	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wall-mount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22		90	5	45	●		227
R	Castle Stirling	730	Handsomely veneered compact floorstander with expressive dynamic vigour, but a little hard and unforgiving too	20,88,24		90	6	28		●	224
BB	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33		89	6	50	●		219
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
R	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
R	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
R	Chario Academie Millennium 1	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31		87	4	42	●		219
EC	Chario Academie Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
R	Cyrus CL570	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●		216
R	Cyrus Icon	2,500	First high-end NXT speaker with huge omni-directional soundstage. But they have limited dynamics and unusual imaging	34,125,29		84	8	18	●		216
BB	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
R	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	429	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
R	Dali 8008	540	Deep bass and high sensitivity from a large vinyl-clad floorstander which could have more transparency and tension	25,5,101,35		93	4	22	●		224
R	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23		89	4	41	●		225
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36		93	2.5	20	●		204
R	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding standmount with laid-back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29		85	5	45	●		219
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	Expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but an aristocrat amongst the breed. Is there a better small speaker around for the price?	17,28,5,24		87	4	40	●		215
R	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
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Stand-out performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		88	3.5	45	●		219
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
R	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
R	Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	123,20,8,28,2		86	4	42	●		191
R	Elac CL 330 Jet	2,500	Arguably the most 'technical'-looking speaker in the world. Design matched by an equally explicit and dynamic sound	18,28,35		88	4	40	●		225
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	Energy Veritas 2.2	1,295	Luxury three-way standmount has unusual features, and a very clean, laid-back sound with good bass	46,22,33		88	4	25	●		223

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Bucks SLO 9DA England

Tel: 07000 853443
Tel: 01753 652669
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www.ukd.co.uk

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
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very pro-styling, a compact active monitor in BBC tradition – neutral, unboxy and laid-back	15,21.5,36	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
BB	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act, sonically and aesthetically	20,38,26	●	86	7	40	●	●	215
	Genelec HT206	1,400	Baby active monitor goes very loud for its size. Very neutral but a tad boxy	20,31,24	●	A	A	40	●	●	214
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
BB	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
BB	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 standmount 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
BB	Infinity Alpha 30	300	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression adds up to a great value floorstander	22,86,29	●	89	4	30	●	●	215
	Infinity Alpha 40	500	Cool hi-tech looks and drivers, but sounds closer to competent than emotionally engrossing	22,92,33	●	89	4	20	●	●	224
	Infinity Prelude MTS	9,700	Strikingly slim, elegant 'tower'/subwoofer comb sounds exceptionally clean, neutral and spacious; clever bass tuning	24x94x52	●	88	4	<20	●	●	228
	Jamo E800	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17.5,33,29	●	87	3	30	●	●	207
R	Jamo E 850	300	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	17.5,87,34	●	86	5	30	●	●	224
	Jamo A410PDD	£650	Clean-edged and space-efficient solution with neat wall-mount sub for anyone who wants to move into decent 5.1 channel sound	Various	●	N/A	5	35	●	●	225
	Jamo D830	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24.5,38,32	●	88	5	30	●	●	211
BB	JBL T1200	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
	JBL Xti 80	579	Big and good looking three-way goes loud with beefy bass delivery, but lacks coherence and lightness of touch	23,100,32	●	89	4	28	●	●	227
	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 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
	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
BB	JBL Xti40	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	88	6	40	●	●	210
BB	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28	●	90	4	22	●	●	227
R	JMLab Cobalt 816	860	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	90	3	22	●	●	224
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
BB	JMLab Cobalt 826	1,229	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	91	3	35	●	●	219
EC	JMLab Micro Utopia	2,749	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41	●	89	3	50	●	●	220
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
	JPW 201	150	Looks very sharp with shiny silver front and clever grille, but sound is a bit small and midband coloured	15.5, 26, 24	●	86	4.5	45	●	●	226
	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 Reference One-Two	1,200	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
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 Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23	●	A	A	40	●	●	214
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	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21.5,104,27	●	91	8	40	●	●	218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	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
	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
BB	Meridian M33	1,495	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22	●	A	A	45	●	●	214
	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	18,34,26	●	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
R	Mission M71	130	Neat looking and very discreet sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17, 29, 28	●	88	4.6	40	●	●	226
BB	Mission M73	200	Sharply priced and good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,87.5,31	●	88	3	25	●	●	215
	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
	Mission M74	300	Lots of speaker for the money, and a big, weighty sound, but a bit bright and also dynamically weak	20, 97, 33	●	90	5	25	●	●	227
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 on 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
R	Monitor Audio Bronze 3	270	Very similar to the Bronze 2, though not necessarily better. Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk	18.5,87,24	●	90	3	30	●	●	215
	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
	Monitor Audio GR20	1,500	Solid and confident design with all metal drivers and neutral if slightly uninspiring sound	20,92.5, 30	●	89	6	30	●	●	212
	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget standmount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25	●	87	4	45	●	●	207
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
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	845	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
R	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
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22, 150, 40	●	88	6	20	●	●	226
BB	NHT Super Zero	200	If tiny size is top priority, the Super Zero is worth considering. It looks nice and sounds articulate, but it definitely needs a subwoofer	14,23,14	●	84	8	100	●	●	215
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

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
	Oheocha D2-Iso-5	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn-shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers to make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37	●	89	8	30	●	●	217
	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	190
R	Opera SP-1	525	SP1s make a strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. U-shaped back does wonders for the appearance, sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23	●	86	8	50	●	●	225
BB	PMC TB2	700	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	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact standmount 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
	ProAc Reponse 1.5	1,790	Gorgeous but pricey floorstander has lovely midband voicing but limited bandwidth resolution	19,98,25	●	86	7	35	●	●	219
	Quad ESL-989	4,600	A very 'different' speaker experience, with magnificent midband transparency and imaging, but limited loudness capability	67,134,32	●	83	3	38	●	●	213
	Red Rose Music R3	3,500	Compact two-way with lovely veneer and ribbon tweeter: probably the most sophisticated small speaker out there	20,40,5,26	●	87	4	46	●	●	199
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	●	●	219
R	Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	139
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	85	4	20	●	●	221
R	Roksan Ojan 3X	995	Innovative low-line, two-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	167
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 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 CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	90	5	38	●	●	219
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
	Sequence 400	300	Very affordable pseudo panel offers flexible design options and acceptable sound. Limited bass, though, and doesn't like playing loud	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready standmount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30	●	87	6	25	●	●	190
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	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
	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home	1,589	Classy walnut'n'leather floorstander with fine engineering and lovely midband voicing	23,5,29,108	●	90	3	25	●	●	214
	Sony SS-LA500ED	340	Versatile metal miniatures with integral stands. Given a little more bass and a slightly less excitable treble, they'd be hard to resist	17,25,19	●	89	4	55	●	●	225
	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 S3	600	Beautifully voiced and unboxy sub-miniature lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	16,5,30,5,21	●	82	6	30	●	●	224
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large stand-mount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33	●	88	8	50	●	●	219
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	90	8	37	●	●	223
	Syn Factory U-Vola	1,480	Hefty oval shaped speakers designed to be hung from the ceiling. Sound is tight and detailed but also a little flat	21,42,21	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	92	2.5	23	●	●	225
	Tannoy Kingdome 12	6,000	Something of a throwback, but great fun, with fine dynamics and authority, but a tricky amp load	54,106,46	●	92	3	28	●	●	213
	Tannoy mX1	120	Smooth and very well behaved but a bit dull and unexciting; makes a good surround speaker	16,5,30,22	●	87	4.5	40	●	●	226
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 R1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
BB	Tannoy mX3	230	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
	Tannoy mX4	350	Pretty 2.5-way has a clean and unboxy sound with respectable transparency, but lacks the dynamic grip and drive to make music really involving	18,5,96,26	●	89	3	20	●	●	215
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 Eyriss 1	599	Pricey but very cute wall-mount miniature; oddball but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26	●	88	6	40	●	●	227
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This add-on supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage, but at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
R	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver effortlessly musical results with superb imaging. Great marriage of style and sonics	15,130,17	●	90	4	30	●	●	225
	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
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
BB	Triangle Antal X5	879	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
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
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with absolutely any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way, too, though bass is detached	21,100,21	●	90	4	45	●	●	225
R	Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	150	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money	21,36,5,25	●	86	4	30	●	●	226
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	●	6	45	●	●	212
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	520	●	●	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
	Wharfedale Pacific PI-20	350	Good material value and a decent fun factor, though a somewhat wayward balance compromises neutrality	22,95,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	224
	Wharfedale Pacific PI40	500	A lot of speaker for the money, but bass is unruly, even in a large-sized room. The smaller PI30 might give a better bottom-end balance	22,113,36	●	89	3	25	●	●	215
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/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub which comes with handy infrared remote control	41,37,29,5	●	A	35	●	●	●	225
	Castle Classic 8	800	Adequate performance, but misses the mark at the price	●	●	A	20	●	●	●	225
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,54,45,5	●	A	30	●	●	●	210
	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
	M&K MX700	1,595	Fine dynamic sound with music or movies. Compact unit but expensive and short on features	●	●	A	●	●	●	●	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	●	A	27	●	●	●	225
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 Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	41,6,52,33	●	A	18	●	●	●	225
	REL Q400E	1,000	A class system, and good for movies, but has a tendency to thicken textures and add a bit too much 'thump' to music	39,42,43	●	A	16	●	●	●	217
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	●	A	16	●	●	●	217
R	REL Strata III	800	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33	●	A	20	●	●	●	210

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SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	REL Q50	375	This good-looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31	●	A	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
R	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	●	A					225
R	Soliloquy S10	1,050	Pretty subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong	51,30,5,46	●	A	25				196

SATELLITE & SUBWOOFER SYSTEMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AE Aego2	300	Not quite a serious hi-fi speaker system, but a seriously fun type product for all that (19x35x27cm sub)	7,10,9		A	n/a	45	●		218
R	Bandor Trident II	776	Loudness is limited, but overall sound is impressively homogeneous and coherent (31x46x31cm sub)	12,13,10-12		83	6	25	●		218
R	Boston Micro 90	650	Lacks warmth but the midband is smooth and impressively evenhanded (37x36x39cm sub)	10,17,14		88	4	28	●		218
R	Cabasse Jupiter/lo	1,230	A sub/sat combo that really competes with proper stereo speakers. Striking styling and stereo imaging (40x43x41cm sub)	15 diam		94	2	30	●		218
R	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
R	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, and lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
R	NHT Super Zero/Sub One	1,000	Decent enough, but not the prettiest nor the best value around for music replay – one for movie fans (40x41x42cm sub)	14,23,14		84	8	30	●		218
R	Ruark Vita 100	900	Not the cheapest sub/sat, but certainly one of the most accomplished, sonically and visually (30x42x30cm sub)	11,20,17		86	6	40	●		218

LOUDSPEAKERS

SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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	Acoustic Energy Aesprit pkg	1,230	Could sound more exciting, but imaging, solidity and neutrality all impressive. Poor centre magnetic shielding	var	var	90	5	23	var	var	224
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
R	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. Decent size, high quality drivers in standmount enclosures still make sense, whatever the prevailing fashion	var	var	89	3	22	●		224
R	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
R	Castle package	1,199	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	var	var	85-90	6	28		●	224
R	Dali Blue system	1,007	Incorporates some interesting ideas, and decent value for money too, but a rather movie-oriented package	var	var	88-93	4	22	var	var	224
R	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
R	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
R	Dynaudio LR/C 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
R	Infinity Alpha package	833	Distinctive high tech styling, fine build and advanced drivers. Sounds thoroughly competent, but didn't excel	var	var	84-89	4	20		●	224
R	Jamo E8 package	775	A tad bright for some tastes, and without quite the grip and drive to make the most of multichannel material	var	var	86	5	30	●		224
R	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
R	JBL Xti-series package	1,190	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40		●	210
R	JMLab Cobalt package	1,707	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	var	var	88-90	3	22	●		224
R	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
R	Martin Logan system	9,991	Stunning electrostatic-based multichannel package, as adept with stereo music as it is with surround sound	var	var	89	4	20	●		227
R	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration	var	var	n/a	4	20		var	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
R	Mission M package	480	A very inexpensive and good looking system, but the surround bits are better suited to movies than music	var	var	88	4	25	var	var	224
R	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
R	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
R	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	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,485	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	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
R	Spendor package	1,630	Ultra-tries lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness; best suited to smaller rooms	var	var	82-86	6	30		●	224
R	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
R	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
R	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29		91	4	20		●	198
R	Wharfedale Pacific package	700	Plenty of loudspeaker for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward but unquestionably entertaining	var	var	87	3	25		●	224

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	Tannoy Saturn S6C	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 STEREO

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-PG31	60	'Challenging' looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided	CD						216
	JVC XM-R700SL	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-fer-yace sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
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
R	Panasonic SJ-MR220	180	The smallest MD recorder in the world, at the time of writing. Lacks some oomph but fully featured and good value	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	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
R	Sharp MD-MT877H	230	Pleasantly up-front sounding player in a sexy little package, well worth your attention if you like that kind of thing	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Sharp MD-MT888H	230	An MD personal that's packed with features and delivers a powerful, involving sound	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
	Sony D-EJ925	150	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●				216
	Sony MZ-G750	200	Light, simple to use, and with a relaxed and enjoyable sound, and with a tuner too!	MiniDisc	●	●				216
	Sony MZ-R91	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●	●				204
R	Sony MZ-R900	250	Gorgeous little MD personal with a well-balanced sound. Makes great recordings but lacks a little punch	MiniDisc	●	●				223

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
	Creative Labs Digital Jukebox	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive	●		Agnostic	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
R	Intel Pocket Concert	171	Big, substantial sound and large 128Mb built-in memory, but no expansion slots	Solid State	●		MP3/WMA	USB	128MB	223
	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 A HA-FD770	200	Cassette and solid state personal in one – novel idea, poor execution	SS/Cass	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Logix Ezzone	219	Novell MP3 player that uses omega Click! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Click! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
R	Neo-25	420	Sparsely equipped but efficient hard drive portable with an exceptionally high potential capacity. Average in the sound department	Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	10GB	213
	Philips eXpanium EXP401	150	Neat little personal that plays 8cm CD-R discs, two-thirds the size of regular CDs. Use your computer's CD writer to burn on MP3s	Mini-CD	●	●	MP3/AAC	USB		223
R	Philips eXpanium EXP103	190	The best MP3-CD personal, at least at the time of writing... An effective solution for MP3 on the move	CD			MP3			213
	Philips RUSH SA126	250	Sound is a little thin and wishy-washy, and the fiddly controls and lack of remote make it difficult to use	Solid State	●		MP3	USB/PRL	64MB	216
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
R	Rio 600	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agnostic	USB	32MB	208
R	Rio 800	300	If you're interested in solid state, this player's great sound and ease of use make it worth a look	Solid State	●	●	Agnostic	USB	64MB	216
R	Samsung Yepp YP-30S	200	Tiny MP3 player with a solid, punchy sound. Some limitations but a cool design	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	223
	Sanyo SSP-PD7	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3/AAC	USB	32MB	213
	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/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	208
	Sony NW-MS9	300	It's got size and simplicity on its side, but it's up-front, boomy sound is significantly below par	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	216
R	Sony MDC-PC3	350	A MiniDisc deck which hooks to a PC. Introduces cheap and flexible MD media to the world of MP3	MiniDisc	●		MP3/ATRAC	USB	213	
R	Thomson Lyra Personal Jukebox	300	Neat portable with a big 10Gb capacity – enough for 1000s of MP3 tracks. Some control foibles but sounds good	Hard Disc	●		MP3/MP3Pro	USB	10GB	223

RECORD PLAYERS

TURNTABLES

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CABT	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 best 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
R	Dual CS415-2	160	No denying it's cheap and cheerful, but it does what it's paid for happily enough	●			33/45	●	●	●		214
	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	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
	Moth Alamo	285	Basically a Rega P2 with a Perspex platter. doesn't seem to justify the price difference	●			33/45	●	●	●		214
	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●			33/45	●	●	●		192
	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●			33/45	●	●	●		159

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	TURNTABLES (CONTINUED)							ISSUE NUMBER	
				MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM		SUPPLIED WITH CART
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 P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	●			33/45				●	214
R	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	●			33/45				●	214
BB	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●			33/45			●		203
EC	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter, and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	●			33/45			●	●	228
BB	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with midband 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	Thorens 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 limpid 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

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	CARTRIDGES							ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)			
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 AT110E	28	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●			●	4.5	6	214	
	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	
	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	
	Goldring 1006	70	Disappointing sound, marred chiefly by persistent harshness which affects all but very quiet music	●			●	6.5	7	214	
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	
W	Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative	●		●		6.5	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	
R	Grado Prestige Black	49	Capable of admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●		4	6	214	
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	
	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	
EC	Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●				0.5	8	215	
	Lyra Parnassus D.Ct	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 510P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues — weight, clarity and neutrality	●			●	3.0	5	85	
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	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	42	Can sound a little hard and lacking bloom, though often exciting		●			5	4	214	
	Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●			●	5.0	5	67	
R	Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●				6.5	6.3	192	
W	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	
	van den Hul MC-One	900	his extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale — worth all the extra money		●			0.4	6	60	
R	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. his delicate and subtle performer has great charm		●			0.65	7	175	
R	van den Hul G' hopper GLA III	1,999	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		●			0.4	6	122	
P	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	Rega RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
R	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

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	Apollo Symphony	245	Simple steel and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision	73	46.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193
	Apollo Mezzo Soprano	340	Heavyweight contender packing a big sonic punch. Looks cool, but can contribute a bit of character	68.5	53.5,44			4	Glass	217
R	Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67	48.6			4	Wood	193
R	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		●	4	Glass	217
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 enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well damped design. Its performance makes the price tag seem rather good value	75	53.5,45			4	MDF	217
	Custom design E'lite E4	250	Fairly laid back for a glass/steel rack. Just loses out sonically to the competition	51	62,51			4	Glass	217
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 Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193
	Kestrel Furniture Nightingale	495	Well engineered furniture quality rack with thoughtful extras. Large with pleasing but not winning performance	91	62.5,53.5			5	Wood	217
	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
	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	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5			4	Wood	217
	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206
	Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73	46		●	4	Glass	193
R	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, 5 shelves too! Well balanced and under £200	92	50,40			5	Glass	217
	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar stands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193
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
BB	Towshend Seismic Sink Stand	900	Serious resolution and stunning isolation from air decoupled self levelling design. If you have the cash, buy one	61	53,39.5			4	MDF	217

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good-looking, well-equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
	Alphason HDS	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5,15.5		●			189
	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15,12.5		●			189
	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51,40,51	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
	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine-sounding stand at its price	61	16,21.5		●			220
R	Cyrus CL550 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
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
	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
	Green Apple Diamond Bevel	225	Sounds soft, gentle and somewhat dulled at the top, but takes top honours for style	61	15					220
R	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean, sweet and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20		●			220
R	JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19,21		●			189
BB	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20		●			220
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29,32					202
	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19,15		●			202
	Mission Stancette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
	Mordaunt-Short Atlas	90	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't transcend the very basic engineering	53	17.5		●			220
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than most of the competition	50-100	19,22		●			189
R	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15		●			220
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
	Quadraspire QS speaker stand	150	Styled to match the company's equipment racks, a very decent sounding stand at a fair price	62	14					220
	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
	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 Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16		●			220
	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
	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16,17		●			202
	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

TUNERS

ANALOGUE TUNERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
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
R	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 TU940	179	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●			●	221
R	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
R	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
R	Marantz ST-17	600	Great looks, but sound let down by opaqueness due to pilot-tone breakthrough	FM, M, L	60	●			●	221
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
BB	Marantz ST6000	180	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
R	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
R	NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM,M	30	●				193
R	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●		●	●	166
R	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat facia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50			●	●	184
R	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	193
R	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
R	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M	20					166
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good honest budget tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	●		●	●	221
R	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
R	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
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
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16	●	●	●	●	221
R	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	211
R	Symbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8	●	●	●		199
R	Psion Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●	●	●		211
R	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless	DAB	30	●	●	●		221
R	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
BB	VideoLogic DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10	●	●	●	●	211
R	VideoLogic DRX-601ES	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	DAB	10	●	●	●	●	221



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NEXT MONTH...

AMPS FOR TANKS

We've picked out a bunch of high-quality, high-power amplifiers so tough they could drive a bus! All models have at least 150 watts of power, enough to fill any room with music and drive the toughest of loads. Serious brands such as **Musical Fidelity**, **TAG McLaren** and **Bryston** muscle in on the action.

FREE MUSIC

Can you afford to live *sans* tuner? Bundles of free music and a constant stream of new stations keep radio bubbling, both on the analogue airwaves and across the digital divide. We test the very latest tuners from the likes of **Arcam**, **Naim** and digital specialist **Pure**.

STATEMENTS

We've all been waiting for this one; an exclusive review of **Meridian's** stunning Reference 800 Version 3 DVD, allegedly the most sophisticated disc replay system in the world reviewed and reliably rated by expert ears.

Denon's flagship DVD-A1 DVD-Audio player is put through its paces and **JBL's** tasty top-shelf Tik speaker (below) gets a full, in-depth probe.

PLUS

- Ultimate systems road tested in our extensive quest for the sonic holy grail.
- Are you a secret listener? Six headphones reviewed.
- The hottest new products rated in our thoroughly happening *Incoming* section.

HFC 230 ON SALE 14TH JUNE



Digital delay

Why, oh why is the music industry afraid of digital outputs on SACD players, wonders Paul Messenger

The world of stereo started out simple: two full-range channels, end of story. And as time passed it has tended to become simpler still, ditching tone, even balance controls in the interest of maximising sound quality.

The same cannot be said for surround sound sources, that seem to be forever changing and evolving. Which might be good news for the journalists who get paid to write about this tower of Babel, but is surely a pain in the posterior for the poor punter trying to keep up to date with what's going on.

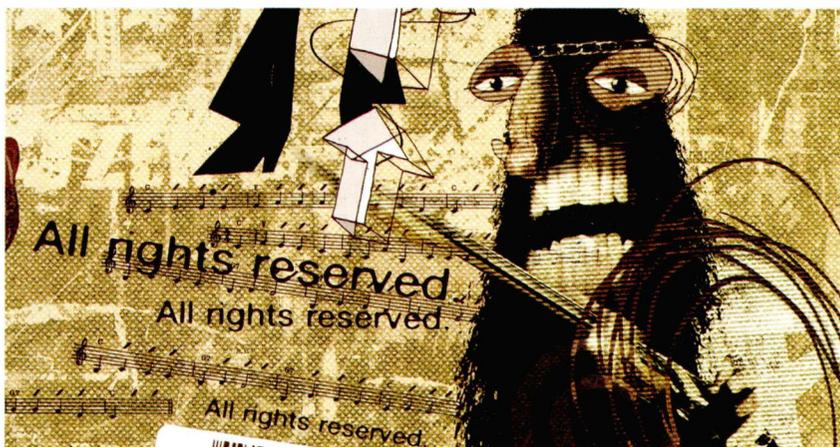
When multichannel surround sound first reappeared as a movie sound source in the mid-eighties, it was based on applying processing to an analogue stereo signal, using the essentially passive Dolby Surround matrix approach, and later the much more elaborate Dolby Pro-Logic.

This set the agenda for the AV processor/preamp, as the central controller for the multichannel sound system, and this role was further reinforced when the discrete digital surround sound systems (ie Dolby Digital and DTS) first appeared in the mid-nineties. This is when the AV processor unit extended its abilities by accepting, decoding and processing the single-wire 5.1-channel digital soundtrack signal delivered from the DVD-Video player.

PIRATE PANIC

However, it's so far been 'all change' for the next development. The music industry has panicked at the prospect of allowing access to the raw digital datastreams for the two rival 'high bandwidth' multichannel music formats, SACD and DVD-Audio, so early players covering both formats come fitted with (six) analogue rather than one digital output.

This represents a major drawback in getting these new 'high band' formats



“The music industry has panicked at the prospect of allowing access to the raw digital datastreams.”

established, if only because it involves the unnecessary and potentially costly duplication of components and facilities. And I don't just mean the need to fit six phono sockets on the SACD/DVD-A player and another six on the AV preamplifier section, or the fitting of 'straight line' circuitry to the latter so that those phono sockets pass only the volume control en route to the power amp.

The real problem lies in the need for some flexibility to fit these multichannel systems into our practical and various day-to-day environments. There's a requirement for something called bass management, to choose the sizes of the various speakers and pass appropriate bass signals onto a subwoofer, and also for some means of adjusting the relative time delays of the different channels, because we don't all sit equidistant from all five main channels.

These two functions require digital signal processing (DSP), and would normally (with Dolby Digital or DTS signals) be carried out on the digital signal within the AV processor. But because the 'high-band' SACD/DVD-A multichannel signals are only available from the player in analogue form, all

their bass management and time delay functions have to be performed in the player, prior to D-to-A conversion.

NEW VIEW

This DSP duplication is not just a waste, it also threatens to undermine the whole multichannel SACD/DVD-A edifice. These new 'high band' formats are intended to set a new standard in top quality sound, but this quality is being compromised by the need to include these necessarily complex DSP facilities in players selling at affordable prices – as I discovered when doing HFC's multichannel speaker group test a few months back.

Hopefully, times are changing. Meridian is already marketing its upmarket 800-series Version 3 models, which includes the MHR SmartLink that transfers 'high band' digital data in a proprietary encrypted form (with approval from the 4C copy protection entity), from the 800 player to the powerful 861 processor. Other brands, including TAG McLaren and Denon, have also announced plans to link players and processors in the digital domain. ☉

Paul Messenger has no intention of making mass copies of SACDs – he'd just like to know that he could.

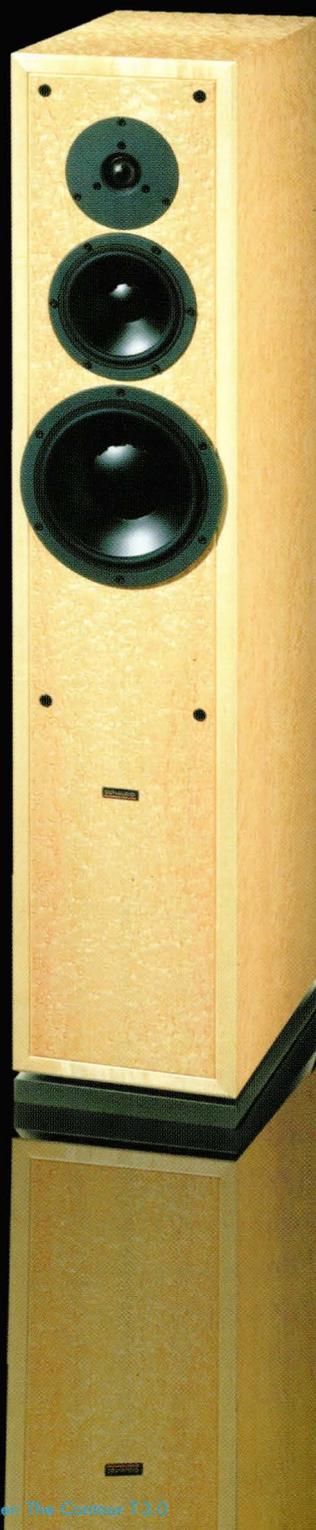


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