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and BUDGET CD PLAYERS FROM DENON, MARANTZ, NAD, ONKYO, SONY, AND YAMAHA

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- Sony TA-FB940R amplifier
- Kef Reference One-Two speakers
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Next to the death of a close relative, moving house is the most stressful experience known to mankind. Two weeks ago I'd have said this was poppycock, but not so now. I recently experienced my first move into what estate agents call a 'project', one which will no doubt have me very busy at weekends for the next five years, and that's just the kitchen! For the dedicated audiophile at least, moving home is more stressful than even the demise of your nearest and dearest, the last squawk of your parrot or perhaps the end of humankind as a whole. Forget the travails of leaky roofs, dry rot and dodgy plumbing - I now have the horrors of suspended wooden floorboards to deal with. Convincing my other half that this is more important than the other aforementioned domestic catastrophes is tough. My recommendation that I should place some tasteful paving slabs in the bay window proved as popular as suggesting a four year stretch in Holloway.

Then, of course there's the problem of where exactly to put everything. Weeks of trying new listening positions and equipment placement will doubtless prevent me from picking up a paint brush while I deal with far more important matters. And then there's fitting it all in - the lot's already full with hi-fi boxes. (No matter how many times you view a place before buying, it always looks bigger before the damn thing is yours to live in.) Once in, your previously spacious accommodation fast becomes a rabbit hutch and your quest for musical enjoyment ends up blocking out the daylight. Two things have now dawned on me. One, hi-fi and family homes rarely harmonise, and two, much of it is bloomin' ugly. I've finally realised that great snakes of cable, industrial stands laden with smoking 40kg valve amps, esoteric turntables and all manner of gadgets hardly contribute to a happy, orderly home. Apologies then to those readers who've written to us in despair asking for solutions to their domestic hi-fi problems. Sorry for ignoring you! In our defence though, it was purely down to ignorance. Now I too may have to face a few hours a day in a sturdy locked shed to save my marriage.

Okay, I'm exaggerating to make my point (not much though - the roof and windows are horribly real!) but it's one that surely rings true on a daily basis all around the world. It's also why the likes of Bose and Bang & Olufsen have stayed firmly in business. Fortunately I have the advantage that hi-fi is my living, which helps when choosing interior decoration, but (in the words of Paul Daniels,) "not a lot. So moving house has taught me one important lesson - to pay far more attention to certain readers' letters in future!"
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TURMOIL HITS MUSIC BIZ

To the obvious consternation of many corners of the music industry, the Napster saga continues. The online music file swapping site set up by Shawn Fanning has been an enduring thorn in the side of the recording industry, and its fate could well affect prices of music CDs in the US and Europe, as well as the cost of downloadable songs from Internet music portals.

In a San Francisco appeals court last month, Napster was given a last minute reprieve after having been ruled illegal and told to shut down. Napster’s stay of execution was granted until early September, when it will appeal against the injunction granted against it by US District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel back in July. Judge Patel had ruled that Napster be closed from July 28, saying it encouraged copyright infringement.

Several major labels plus musicians including Metallica claim the site, which lets people download music for free, encourages piracy. Rap artist Dr. Dre called it, “an heroic and historic decision”.

Other musicians, though, like Radiohead’s bassist Colin Greenwood, believe it’s an inevitability and accept the likes of Napster as the future. Further support comes from Public Enemy’s Chuck D, who reportedly said “Trying to stop the process of file sharing is like trying to control the rain.”

CLASSIK ROCKS?

Linn’s latest Classic combines the electronics from its last-generation entry level separates (the well reviewed MIMIK CD player and Majik-I amplifier/tuner) in one sleek box for just £995. You get stacks of features from a packed remote control (imagine the worst excesses of Japanese MIDI systems and double it), including Bass and Treble controls, independent Listen and Record switching, and even a timer activated switched AC mains supply. This, Linn point out, means the Classic can wake you up with music and freshly brewing coffee - assuming you plugged in a coffee maker the night before, that is! Coming in five colours (silver, black, Artik White, Pacifik Blue and Atlantik Green), it’s an interesting package. Look out for a full review in Hi-Fi World soon, plus an in-depth Linn special later this year. For more details contact Linn on 0141 307 7777 or point your web browsers at Linn

HACKER FIGHTS BACK...

The Motion Picture Association of America last month filed a lawsuit against a US journalist who distributed computer code that can be used to crack DVD’s copyright management system. The MPAA argued that it illegally circumvented DVD’s vital copyright protection system. David Touretzky, an artificial intelligence researcher at Carnegie Mellon University countered that computer programs are expressions of thought and free speech, and therefore demand full First Amendment protection, like any other language. He is reported as saying that as a scientist, “My theories are expressed as computer programs.” The judge, Lewis A. Kaplan, said the argument was “persuasive”, but that it may not be relevant to the legal question at hand. This law court drama will doubtless continue, graphically illustrating the problems the ‘entertainment industry’ is now having with copyright policing in the digital age.
CHIC PHILIPS DVD PLAYER LEAD THE WAY

The news that Philips has launched a new DVD-Video player aimed at audiophiles may come as a surprise to many. Over the past few years the brand has pretty much deserted the high end to concentrate on entry level hi-fi and all-in-one audio systems. The new DVD-960 marks an interesting change of direction then, featuring 'the highest performing video and audio digital-to-analogue conversion processing systems' (i.e. decent DACs!) and luxury build with white anodised aluminium metalwork.

There's also a constantly powered-up Standby Mode, plus optical and coaxial digital outputs for MPEG, Dolby Digital and DTS outboard decoders. It's an interesting product but still something of a halfway house, because while it should play 24/96 audio discs (thanks to its DVD-Video compatibility), it lacks the full 24/192 DVD Audio package but, being Philips, will play CD-R/RW discs.

Philips Consumer Electronics
Customer Information line
Philips UK Tel: 020 8689 2166

LECSON RETURN WITH DVD

The name Lecson may be familiar to many readers. Back in the seventies they produced a stylish range hi-fi to many a discerning audiophile. The name is to soon reappear in branches of Debenhams throughout the UK in the form of a budget DVD player, exclusive to the store. Sound familiar? Well, the new name behind Lecson is none other than Stan Curtis, late of Wharfedale and Quad, one of those responsible for bringing Wharfedale's budget DVD to Tesco's shelves.

He states that during his time in Wharfedale he "was able to deliver a new standard in high quality affordable electronics". Knowing the potential of supplying exclusively to mass market chain stores, he's hoping sales of the Lecson DVD-900 will emulate the success of Wharfedale's DVD-750, this time in a department store rather than a supermarket. The DVD-900 features on-board Dolby 5.1 and DTS decoding and can be periodically loaded with a CD-R disc which will re-write internal software for future format features and progress.

Expect to see the Lecson DVD-900 on the shelves of your nearest Debenhams from September, priced at £199.95.

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Philips have announced that they’re to planning to double production capacity of CD-RW drives due to growing demand. By the end of next year they intend to produce an output capability of twenty million units per year. As well as the success of CD recorders in the UK and USA, Philips intend to expand this success by increasing production from plants in Belgium, Hungary and China, as well as joining up with Iomics EMS in the Philippines to open a new production facility.

Taco Gerbranda, General Manager of Philips’ Optical storage CD-RW Business Line notes that, “CD-RW has struck a responsive chord among manufacturers and consumers alike.” This would appear to be true, as in the UK alone, three of the top ten selling players are recorders (two from Philips), so consumers are welcoming CD-RW technology with open arms and it doesn’t appear to be letting up. Many more manufacturers are producing CD recorders as opposed to player-only models, so expect to see many more models cropping up over the next year or so, with Philips mechanisms!

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**DVD MULTI ANNOUNCED**

In order to ensure the future compatibility of all DVD products, the DVD Forum recently announced a plan to prevent conflicts between the many differing DVD formats. At the moment DVD comes in a number of different flavours, including DVD Audio and DVD Video.

The new DVD Multi name incorporates all DVD’s disparate hardware formats into one single specification, giving consumers a reasonable chance of buying what they wanted. There will also be a special DVD Multi logo applied to hi-fi separates, consumer electronics and personal computers, guaranteeing universal compatibility. The specifications will be finalised this Autumn and the first DVD Multi products should be ready for sale early next year.

It looks likely that domestic DVD Multi players will be able to read the DVD-Video and/or DVD-Audio recorded on DVD-Video discs, DVD-Audio discs, DVD-RAM discs, DVD-RW discs and DVD-R discs, but DVD Video-only players cannot read DVD-Audio discs, and DVD-Audio-only players cannot read DVD-Video discs. DVD Multi Recorders will be able to read in the same way as DVD Multi Players. DVD Multi Recorders will be able to write on DVD-RAM, DVD-RW and DVD-R discs.

Acting Chairman of the DVD Forum Koji Hase is reported as saying, “This is good news for consumers. The introduction of DVD products bearing the DVD Multi logo means that consumers will be able to buy virtually any DVD product without worrying about its compatibility with another type of DVD disc or DVD machine.” He added that, “with the global DVD market valued at around $10 billion at the end of 1999 and forecast to double by the end of this year, and with new formats and products in the manufacturing pipeline, it was time to take action”.

**next issue**

Here’s a selection of some of the delights that we hope to bring you next month

**SUPER SYSTEMS**

We select some of the best one-brand systems that money can buy from names such as Sony, Roksan and Musical Fidelity.

**Computer Audio World**

**New Media**

The Lowdown on all tomorrow’s music carriers

**Rio’s Return**

s3’s latest Rio PMP 600 reviewed in depth
Hi-Fi World gathers together six of the latest budget CD players to assess their worth. Will the rapidly changing world of digital audio challenge their capabilities?

With the stratospheric rise in sales of DVD-V players over the past year manufacturers are becoming loathe to launch yet another CD player that may not sell. This is especially the case in the ‘mid price’ £300-500 market. People looking for players here are often young, high-disposable-income gadget freaks that want to buy the latest technology. Since DVD will play CD, the market for dedicated CD players is fast disappearing.

There will always be those who want better audio quality than that available from cheaper DVD players and this is where manufacturers have turned their attentions. Presuming that the one area of likely continuing sales in CD players lies in the budget market, production at the cheaper end continues. Players at this level are affordable enough to act as a ‘bridging’ product until the market, currently in a state of turmoil due to the promise of recordable DVD formats, as well as DVD-Audio and SACD, sorts itself out, or until DVD players with required audio abilities become cheaper still.

Budget CD spinners are also improving in sound quality. A model that will cost you, say, £150 today isn’t sonically far off a £300 player of two years ago, making them exceptional value for money in the sound stakes.

Here we’ve gathered six of the best current players between £100-£200 and given them our usual tough and thorough review procedure. We’ll tell you the best to buy for sound and facilities and whether, if music’s your priority, they’re a better purchase, for the time being at least, than a DVD machine.
Always to the front where value for money is concerned, Denon have again cooked up a solid sound-for-pound mixture. The DCD-435 has a slightly greater quoted S/N ratio than some at 103dB; the front panel proudly proclaiming an '8 times over sampling' filter, so we ought to be in for a smooth ride. The spartan back panel has only analogue phono and digital optical outputs - no 'system connectors here - but at least the mains lead is detachable, a convenience often forgotten with budget gear. 'Any colour so long as it's black' just about sums up the front. The buttons are all familiar and common sense in operation and all the accustomed functions are present. The supplied remote control duplicates all of these functions.

Beginning with the Telarc 'authentic' recording of Porgy and Bess, it was apparent that the Denon had been carefully trimmed to avoid extremes of muddiness or over-sharpness. There were places where the solo vocals could have been a bit more forward, but this was balanced by the rich clarity of the chorus. Cincinnati's well-known Pops orchestra was similarly well-portrayed along this middle path.

Having established that the Denon is careful to avoid muddiness, it was interesting to compare its playing of the Glazunov symphonies with the Onkyo. Certainly the Denon gave more detail and distinctness, if lacking just a fraction of the richness.

Benny Waters is not lacking in richness but it is the incisive warmth of his playing which makes this Opus 3 record so satisfying. The Denon played everything in trumps, with excellent stereo spread and depth, including the glass-clinking audience. Tell-tale points were the attack of certain phrases in Out of Nowhere; the saxophone kept its point without shrillness, yet Waters' ever-agile playing seemed ready to leap out of the speakers into the room.

Denon's DCD-435 steers a sensible middle course, offering both clarity and body but can sometimes err on the bright side. Unless your system veers markedly one way or the other, it is a safe and good-value choice.

In the world of budget CD players, Marantz have all to play for. Their current reputation, founded on excellent mid-price players a few years back, is not unassailable, so it benefits the company to make good, inexpensive models. The CD5000 is provided with analogue stereo, optical, co-ax digital and headphone outputs, making it one of the best equipped of our group. In view of the nice things we have to say about the sound, perhaps it is not too harsh to say that the machine looks and feels a bit cheap. The control buttons and drawer trimmings are plastic in a big way, although of course they work as efficiently as any other. In common with most current-generation machines it will also play CD-R/RW discs and there is a host of facilities for recording output: fade, peak monitoring etc.

If the get-up is unexciting, the CD5000 more than makes up with its sound; this is obviously where the money goes. For its combination of different instrumental sounds, plus the necessity for the full details, Beethoven's E flat major Septet is useful. With the Marantz firmly in the driving seat, this recording was a genuine pleasure, with the unusual combination of instruments 'working' well. Whilst the clarinet kept its fluidity, there was plenty of body to the horn and lower strings. Best of all the bassoon cut through everything with its harmonically rich mid-register.

Away from classical subtleties, the CD5000 gave an agreeably broad spectrum to Sorry Seems To be well recorded by Madeline Bell. In this golden oldie, the brassy shimmer of the percussion blended seamlessly with the bass guitar; all frequencies - and cymbals can be extreme - came off the disc nicely. Stereo placement and soundstaging were above average - indeed excellent - for the price.

For extremes of power, we get tired of citing Stravinsky's Firebird, but there it is! The Marantz seemed almost to throw the orchestra through the speakers, with the huge sound of the bass drum well to the fore. Altogether exhilarating.

If you can live with the budget build, the CD5000 compensates with a very rewarding all-round performance.
NAD's C520 is as neat as could be wished for and finished as usual in 'NAD grey'. The spartan feel to the machine is continued on the back, where there are only three sockets: standard analogue stereo output and digital (standard phono). This puts the NAD in a slightly different category. Despite the lack of optical output, the C520 is better fitted for out-board DACs than many of the group.

Buttons on the fascia provide for all the usual functions including random play and repeat. The LCD display uses the same 'brick' indication for total tracks and tracks to play. Unusually at this price there is no headphone socket. The drawer incidentally - never the most robust feature of budget machines - is unusually slow, giving a touch of smoothness to operation.

We began listening with Chandos' Matthias Weckmann CD. As well as being an early music treat, it is a good indicator of any inherent harshness of reproduction. All-in-all the NAD gave little reason for complaint here. The authentic string instruments retained their bite without giving way to harshness and the stylized vocals were acceptably clear without grating. Certainly stereo placement was of a high order although, on this record at least, the soundstage did not seem particularly deep.

Next to the impeccably recorded but rather unadventurous sound of Louis van Dijk, 'Cocktail piano' surged from the loudspeakers with a richness of texture that comes from this player's impressive midrange. Percussion accompaniment may have been a touch forward but it remained easy to live with nonetheless.

For touching off the big guns, Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture has few peers. On this budget CD, it was noticeable that the NAD's broadly good-mannered approach was less tolerant of sub-standard material recordings. The workings of the inner parts particularly benefited from this treatment and the 'cello retained a sonority which made for soothing listening.

Cross-checking this with a larger ensemble showed the downside a little. Where the filigree work of the Haydn gained in naturalness, the big Romantic orchestra of Glazunov leant towards the muddy. I am well aware that this Russian State Symphony Orchestra recording is not the clearest available but it seemed that the player was adding to the general murkiness of the sound. Instead of sounding part of the whole, the solo woodwind parts tended to stand out as oases of clarity in the dark brown ensemble.

The Glazunov is an extreme case, however. Playing Diana Krall's Love Songs, the Onkyo's smooth approach did much good work in ironing out the at-times grating edge to the vocals. Stereo placement was maintained whatever the tone values, with a real depth to the sound picture as a whole.

With its good looks and solid build, the DX-7222 gives a lot of value for money. It is possible that the brushed alloy with its pale champagne colour makes for quite a classy presentation at the price. Like the Sony, no digital coaxial output is provided, though analogue phono, optical digital and headphone outputs are standard. The player may be woven into a complete controlled Onkyo system via the RI connections on the back. The remote provides full services and a few which the manual buttons don't, such as repeat and shuffle. All the fixed controls on the machine's front panel are solid and sensibly laid out. The golden display makes a pleasant change, although the 'not more than twenty' track indicator is a mild disappointment.

Inexpensive CD players tend to sound their most characteristic with open-structured music, so I kicked off with the Naxos record of Haydn's Prussian Quartets. Here I was quite surprised to note the apparent sprite of the Onkyo; the two violins had a sound much closer to 'life' than the craggy performance of cheap CDs a few years back. The workings of the inner parts particularly benefited from this treatment and the 'cello retained a sonority which made for soothing listening.

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With its good looks and solid build, the DX-7222 gives a lot of value for money. It is possible that its smooth sound is calculated to sound 'more expensive than it is'. For most smaller scale music this works well.
Sony's CDP-XE530 is a neat-looking box with all controls available on the front panel. This is handy compared with some, where some of the more refined functions are only available through the remote - if you can find it! Analogue phono, optical digital and headphone outputs are provided but no digital phono. As is common nowadays, the player can be linked to other Sony components to make a complete controlled system via 'S-link' sockets on the back.

Many of the player's gadgets are of use principally when recording CDs to another medium, hence the provision of fade in/out and pre-play peak measurement. A Music Scan facility allows you to dip into ten seconds' worth of each track before you press Play to fix your choice. This seems to me to be a laborious system which the rotary track skipper would accomplish in less than half the time. The display assumes a CD of not more than twenty tracks; this assumption is more often than not correct but is not ideal.

Sound quality of Sony products is generally good and the XE530 is no exception. Given the essentially intimate sound of the Rio Trio jazz ensemble, the player gave a full-bodied sound to the acoustic guitar while retaining the right 'bite' on the saxophones. Only on vocals did a slightly papery sound occur.

With larger forces, the Sony warmed to its task nicely. Opus 3's beautifully recorded disc of the Omnibus Wind Ensemble gives a peculiar end-of-the-pier feel to most of their numbers but their Carmen Overture suits this well. The Sony gave a broad sweep of colour here with an openness to the sound most welcome at the price. Woodwind sounded plaintive but fully formed - about right for this recording.

The CDP-XE530 does a very workman-like job at the price and will compensate admirably for some of the inherent defects of budget 'speakers and amps. If you prefer your Martinis dry, give it a listen.

The new CDX-496 is priced at £180 (the middle model of three new players), pricing it in the upper echelons of 'budget' and into the nether regions of mid price. The looks are the same as previous models; Yamaha sticking to the 'if it ain't broken don't fix it' policy. Like most new models the CDX-496 is CD-R/RW compatible and it features a single-bit digital to analogue converter. Round the back we have the usual phono outputs but the only digital output is via an optical socket, which at this price is a bit poor.

On the plus side, the servo control system alters the pickup tracking in reaction to damaged or warped discs, which is a nice touch. Facilities are good, including manual and automatic random sequential tape programming for recording tracks and CD synchronised recording when used with a Yamaha recorder. A headphone socket with output level is also located on the no-fuss front panel. A slimline full remote control finishes off the package in a discreet fashion.

Everything, including the drawer mechanism, is so fast on this machine that you expect the sound to match, and it does. Classical music in the shape of Tchaikovsky's Fifth symphony played by the Oslo Philharmonic on Chandos sounded rich and full, if a bit muddy. The Yamaha picked up all the best points from a performance which is rich in musicality but a bit lacking in the engineering stakes. The CDX-496 reacted like many good players do to this recording, picking out instrumental phrasing well. Woodwind, whilst not the most transparent I've heard, was still involving and both bass and treble were well controlled.

Supergrass' eponymous third album was next in the drawer and here the lack of clout of the Yamaha was heard. Whilst, again, the balance and performance was near perfect, it needed that final ounce of sheer grunt to carry off the driving grooves in this music. Vocals were clean and warm and the overall performance pleasing but the many layers of production here failed to separate.

This is a no-frills sound that can be bettered at the price but is nonetheless fairly involving and easy to match with virtually any similarly-priced equipment. It all results in an unfussy, warm and user-friendly CD player that deserves a listen.
Clearly we've moved on

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group test

conclusion

All of the players in this group will play CDs to a more than satisfactory standard. After all, there's only so much you can do with Red Book Standard sound quality. The differences come in the facilities available, build and subtle differences in sound quality.

Pound for pound the best sounding machine here was Marantz's CD5000. It would be very hard to better the exciting yet sophisticated sound of this player at its £150 price tag. The build is slightly flimsy but features are good and it will play CDR/RW discs. Next comes NAD's CS20. This player is in the solid tradition we've come to expect from NAD: good rhythmic sound, solid build and everything you need to make listening a pleasure. It gets our vote for the best all rounder and value for money, although it's by no means the cheapest here.

Sony's CDP-XE530 came very close to the top two. It offers excellent value for money and it's well put together, but sounded a trifle harsh compared to the players from Marantz and NAD. One surprise outsider was from Onkyo. This player had good build and facilities and a pleasant sound. The only gripe came in the form of its dated appearance.

Of the remaining two players we'd have to plump for the Denon DCD-435 above the Yamaha CDX 496. The Denon has a good, if slightly bright, sound, the build could be better but it's good value for money. Unfortunately, although it's not bad, the Yamaha player suffers from being slightly over priced. There are equally as good sounding players around for, say, £50 cheaper. If it were priced at £130, it would appear higher up on our list.

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farewell to the silver disc?

Rapid technological advances in consumer electronics have left CD looking more obsolete than ever. Is it really the end for Philips ageing format, and if so, what's next?

First it happened to Shellac, then open reel tape, vinyl and Compact Cassette. Now it seems MiniDisc and - gulp - CD are soon to suffer the same fate. In this new millennium, technological development is moving apace, especially in consumer electronics.

Although popular, MP3 still isn't exactly a household name, as any OAP in Woolworths' will confirm. However, we're now being told it's heading for the knacker's yard with the introduction of Microsoft's Windows Media Audio format. Factor in the looming presence of SD card (see our Malaysian Audio Show report on p.66), not to mention MP2 and MP4, and it's all getting a bit too much! Confused, frightened, sick to the back teeth? You should be. And there's more to come.

Let's consider the immediate future of mainstream digital audio. After nigh-on twenty years the CD player is beginning to look fatigued. Compact Disc's only saving grace is now its vast catalogue of software and the low cost of pressing discs.

But there's also another trump card this 'pure, perfect' sounding music carrier holds for the time being - CD recording. The burgeoning popularity of hi-fi CD recorders, in America especially, but also in Europe, suggests there's life in the old dog yet.

However, new advances in technology mean we can now have something more than just an audio player. Enter DVD, sales of which have exceeded all expectations since last October, when Wharfedale's £175 DVD-750 appeared between the fresh fruit and veg at Tesco. Apparently, well over 100,000 units of this cleverly marketed machine have been shifted - a figure that's believed to represent over 50% of all UK DVD player sales.

A little further away lies the prospect of recordable DVD, a development threatening to give recordable CD a short life. But even boxes of cogs and wheels, with the odd laser or two, will become extinct if Panasonic and Toshiba can be believed; computer memory will take over. Sony think so too.

Next month we'll venture into this debate a little further with a dedicated multi-page feature.
A lot of changes—and still rather a lot of money.

Speakers as universally revered as our Reference Series are a tough act to follow. After all, what can you do to improve on excellence?

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Like all the best things in life, they still don't come cheap—but to anyone who really appreciates sound, they're better value than ever.
NAD's 'audiophile' T550 DVD player threatens to put its CD playing brethren to bed.

Noel Keywood listens in.

Word has it that DVD is taking over, but the audio quality of most players is pretty mediocre. With a reputation for sensibly priced, serious audio, NAD are well positioned to step into the DVD market with the promise of serious hi-fi quality from a sensibly priced player. Enter their new T550, price £499.00, reviewed here - a machine that plays DVD video discs, Video CDs and audio CDs.

The DVD market is a bit of a tangle, so before going any further here's what the T550 can and cannot do. It will play audio CDs like a CD player, hooking into the hi-fi in an identical manner. It should also play 24-bit/96kHz digital 'sound track audio', where "audio quality exceeding that of CDs is possible" the handbook states. Unfortunately, our tests showed it did not output audio information above 20kHz, a problem that exists with some DVD players, so there's no point trying to play 24/96 discs (e.g. Chesky) because sound quality will not exceed that of CD, contrary to what the handbook says.

Don't confuse this 'sound track audio' with forthcoming DVD-Audio though, which has an even higher 192kHz sampling rate spec. Players meeting this specification are only just appearing in Japan, at a cost of thousands, and we are probably some time away from seeing commercial DVD Audio discs in UK shops.

Against a similarly priced Sony DVP-S725D the T550 lacks quite a few facilities, notably an audio setup menu and a loudspeaker surround-sound setup menu. However, individual loudspeaker level settings can be adjusted in an external surround-sound amplifier. All the same, the T550 lacks the multitude of bells and whistles crammed into the Sony, including the very convenient jog wheel on fascia and remote control.

The T550 is aimed at the less committed surround-sound user, but that's not to say the less fastidious. NAD have a lot to say about audio quality from this machine, a topic that would be a side issue with the Sony. Here's what NAD have to say:

"The NAD T550 employs separate power supply regulators for the digital, servo and analogue circuitry. The regulators for the analogue section are designed to provide very low noise and low impedance supplies. Apart from a "clean" supply, this measure also helps keeping RF contamination by the many, very high frequency sections inside a DVD player at bay."

Many DVD players use relatively mediocre multi-channel D/A converters for their audio sections. The NAD T550 uses a Burr-Brown PCM1600, a superior chip with true 24-bit resolution. Knowing the
importance of D/A converters particularly in the context of 24bit/96kHz audio, but also for good old-fashioned 16bit/44.1kHz CD audio, the NAD engineers choose a separate D/A for the Left and Right channels. The Burr-Brown used here, the PCM1716, is a D/A converter that can be found in NAD components with true high-end, High-Fidelity aspirations.

D/A converters aren’t the only critical components when it comes to performance; the analogue sections of the T550 make use of OPA2134 op-amps for Left, Center and Right. These provide a clean, open and detailed sound in the NAD C540 CD player as well. In important places, close tolerance metal film resistors and selected capacitors have been used”.

Perhaps it is a bit technical, but this does show NAD have put some effort and resources into the audio side of the T550. The question is, did their efforts pay off?

In a nutshell - yes. Connected into a TAG MacLaren 60i amplifier driving World Audio Design KLS-9s, representative of a conventional hi-fi system, it was interesting to pit the NAD against the Sony. Sony’s player offers good quality audio, albeit a little incoherent against the NAD. Bass lines exist in broad outline from the Sony, as a good but subtly bland representation. Across the upper midrange though it has a glare that makes it sound detailed and insightful, these properties being a little at odds with each other. In contrast NAD’s T550 delivers bass lines with power, fluidity and grip. The deep, walking bass on Angelique Kidjo’s Fifa came through with no hint of weakness, nor any loss of expression.

Further up the audio band the T550 lacked the glare of the Sony, but offered lucidity and a convincing sense of balance. Whilst not holding a spotlight to the curious audio effects on Santana’s Supernatural like the Sony, the T550 revealed them with superb insight. It has fine retrieval of detail and a fairly sweet nature, shown by the jangling strings of Steve Earle’s guitar on You Belong to Me.

I hooked up to a Philips television using a SCART lead (Europe model only) and had no problem running films like The Matrix. Euro players also have S-Video and Composite video out. The display doesn’t identify Dolby Digital recordings, which is a pity. The player will handle discs from all regions. It’s a bit slow to read a disc and start, but this shouldn’t be a bother in practice.

Does NAD’s T550 deliver it’s promise of better audio quality? It certainly does, from normal CDs. Capable of sounding detailed, cohesive and well balanced, CD sound quality reached a high standard. It’s no bland CD player, and audio buffs will appreciate the bass grunt of this machine - something of a hallmark with NAD. Pity it won’t play 24-bit/96kHz audio too, but these discs are rare. Dolby surround-sound is output and DVD video of course - quite a formidable list.

Although NAD’s T550 lacks the bells and whistles of Japanese players it still has the formidable array of functions to be found with DVD. This player is a good choice for audio enthusiasts who intend to hook up a DVD to their hi-fi system in order to play CDs.
With the launch of Sony's mid-priced SCD-XB940 SACD/CD player in their QS range comes two matching amps. Simon Pope integrates well with the TA-FB940R 'UK Special Edition'.

High resolution audio formats such as SACD and DVD-A contain high frequency musical information out to 100kHz. Compare this to CD's brick-wall limit of 21kHz and you can see that these new formats test power amplifiers and tweeters to the full. As most amplifiers reach 50kHz or so, they won't fully reproduce all information from either SACD or DVD-A. Sony have solved this problem with the launch of the TA-FB940R and TA-FB740R stereo integrated amps.

These amplifier's wider frequency response increases their 'rise time' (sound attack). They also have more stable phase characteristics, due to use of the Linear Phase Circuit found in their high-end amplifiers, Sony tell us. It is capable of meeting the demands of SACD.

Because most amplifiers are deliberately designed to go no higher than 50kHz or so, there's some truth in these claims. Amplifiers with 100kHz bandwidth are available though, from Harman Kardon for example - and it isn't difficult to design them. But we can expect a wave of new amplifiers from Japan claiming to be uniquely suitable for DVD-A and SACD all the same. It represents a good marketing opportunity.

The TA-FB940R model available in the UK has been 'tuned' according to the requirements of the Brooklands Sound Project (named after Sony's UK audio HQ in Surrey), hence the 'UK Special Edition' badge found on the fascia. The UK model has different grade power supply capacitors, the power supply voltage has been changed and the open loop gain has been adjusted by further component change. As a result the UK edition has a higher output of 95W/channel as opposed to the 80W of the version found overseas.

Sony have given this amplifier a good range of facilities. Tone controls give a small amount of lift and cut at frequency extremes, acting subtly to alter tonal balance. There's a loudness button and even a disc stage for LP!

We set up the FB940R with the SCD-XB 940 SACD/CD player and initially tried it out with run-of-the-mill 44.1kHz (sample rate) CD material in the shape of the Foo Fighter's 'There Is Nothing Left To Lose' album. The amplifier gave a rumbustuous reading of this powerful and tight recording. Drums were fast and detailed and the bass, whilst not quite as refined as you'd find in something twice the price, was none the less deep and well-focused, albeit with a bit of colour. This slight colour in the bass actually adds a little bit of warmth to the overall sound, which although not strictly 'purist' in hi-fi sound, is quite pleasant!

The FB940R has commendable sound staging which gleams the best from well-mixed recordings such as this, creating depth and space in the listening environment. Dave Grohl's vocals, for example, were perfectly placed. It's by no means a subtle and analytical sound of the sort expected from high-end equipment, but it can deliver the goods with power and speed.

Turning our attention to SACD, Hue And Cry's latest opus was inserted into the XB940 and here the amp showed its audiophile mettle with a more sophisticated sound than heard with CD. OK, so SACD is bound to sound superior anyway, but it was given extra breadth and space by the FB940R as confirmed by an A/B demo with TAG McLaren's excellent 60i £500 integrated. Admittedly the differences are subtle - for example there was slightly more airiness, and sometimes sharpness, at the top end with the FB940R. The 'cleaner' sound of SACD held some sibilance which had been present with CD. But although the sound was still bright and forward its refinement and control balanced things out nicely.

Like the SACD players available, there's no point in buying the FB940R solely for SACD. You'd become a little fed up with the limited number of recordings available. If you like a bright fast but powerful sound, albeit one without high-end subtlety, the FB940R has plenty else to offer, including the ability to play LP and, of course, normal CD. This wealth of facilities makes it a well featured product, one that can cope with any situation, at a keen price 🎁

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Measured Performance at page 111
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There's real wood finish and there's real wood finish
Hi-Fi Choice, April 2000 (Mozart)
We've encountered Dali's products a couple of times in the past, most recently in a round up of mid priced standmounts earlier in the year. Their Royal Menuets achieved distinction in the midst of some stiff competition, showing a remarkable amount of mid and upper range detail with a solid and tuneful bass.

The Royal Scepters represent the next step up from the Menuets, priced at £650. Although still only the size of your average budget bookshelf, the dimensions are larger than the Menuets to accommodate the larger (120mm) bass/mid drive unit.

First indication that the Scepters are no run of the mill boxes is shown in the exquisite finish. The 22mm MDF enclosure is veneered in a luxurious cherry veneer, apparently polished and buffed by hand prior to the final lacquer being applied. Add to this the fact that they weigh a lot for their size and you could easily mistake them for a solid hardwood construction. Our review pair were light veneer, a darker 'Rouge' finish being also available.

The 130mm paper coated bass/mid driver (of light construction to ensure a fast response) is held in an aluminum chassis and uses the same 'Low Loss' system as used in the Menuet. This is the result of a combination of special suspension and the 'focussed magnet field'. A tuned bass reflex port is housed in the rear of the cabinet, as well as two sets of binding posts for bi-wiring. A ferrofluid-cooled, coated silk dome tweeter completes the appointments.

The hard-wired crossover is soldered by hand and eschews the use of printed circuit boards. Each component is bonded to the board in a bid to reduce resonance. These components are selected for their neutrality and the chokes are wound by Dali in-house. Further care has been taken to present a linear impedance to the amplifier, including small phase angles to minimise amp distortion. This, claim Dali, makes the Scepters ideally suited to Class A or valve designs.

Taking note of this advice, I hooked up the Scepters to our World Audio Design KIT98 valve integrated (also used was Audio Analogue's Puccini SE), with NAD's 5500 Silverline CD player as a source, and set the musical ball rolling with Talk Talk's 'Spirit Of Eden' album. After a few hours burning in I was greeted with a very neutral yet warm sound, which is what you should expect considering the upper-midrange price. There's some good engineering going on here. Vocals are especially clean, with little sibilance and a pleasing amount of roundness which is rare with 'speakers of such detail, especially at this price. The experimental mix of electronic and acoustic instruments and voices used in this album (including a just about pre-wally Nigel Kennedy on violin joined by Chelmsford Cathedral Choir') showed the finesse and control that the Scepters bring to reproduction. At no time did the sound become muddled and every phrase and tune was easily discernable.

Although the Scepters are a bass reflex design there's no whiff of bass boom to be heard. Low piano notes had a natural tone to them and electronic bass thumps remained clean and fast.

Like the Menuets, it's hard to find fault with the Scepters. Maybe the extra £250 is pushing it a bit, but then I've heard more expensive 'speakers sound vastly inferior. Treble is smooth and detailed, bass firm and tuneful and the imaging and sound stage give a beautiful out of the box sound. What else do you want from a standmount? Highly recommended.

Dali Royal Scepter £649.95
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Moridian is famous for combining pioneering technology with stunning aesthetics. David Price traces the rise of this great British company through the years to the present day.

Meridian launched in 1977, the result of a partnership between one-time Lecson technical director Bob Stuart and industrial designer Allen Boothroyd. Having jointly penned one of Britain's most striking looking hi-fi products, Lecson's ACI/AP1 pre-power, Bob decided that he wanted to start an audio company. "We both felt we had skills to produce fine sounding electronics with uniquely housable designs". The Lecson duly went on permanent display in the New York Museum of Modern Art, and brought Bob and Allen their first British Design Council Award in 1974.

The Meridian M1 loudspeaker was the company's first product, a radical active design featuring power amps installed inside the cabinets, driven by electronic crossovers. Bob's academic background in human psycho-acoustics and electronics convinced him that active speakers were the way ahead, thanks to the far greater control they gave designers over the problems inherent in loudspeaker design. Sadly the M1's high price made them prohibitively expensive for many audiophiles, and thus was born the smaller, simpler M2. This loudspeaker remains a favourite of Bob's to this day thanks to its ability to make, "a convincing sound from such a small package".

Back in the seventies, brashly styled separates dripping with brushed aluminium were all the rage, so the subsequent arrival of Meridian's first electronics range must have raised an eyebrow or two. The svelte looking 101/105 pre-power amplifiers comprised five diminutive 140x50x300mm boxes painted a dark olive green/brown colour. Compared to Japanese high end, their stark minimalism was almost as striking as their hefty £600 price tags. The 101/105 proved a highly capable amplifier, winning over the hearts of the British hi-fi press and proving a big hit with dealers too. Although tonally dry, it sounded extremely detailed and refined by the standards of the day, with a fantastically capable 110w RMS power amplifier section capable of driving even the largest, power-hungry monitor loudspeakers.

The 100 series was soon augmented by Meridian's new 103 power amplifiers pushing out 50W per channel for £490. Then the 104 tuner appeared, with house styling to match the 101 preamplifier: A £225 FM-only design offering six screwdriver set presets with a small analogue tuning meter, it was another beautifully understated affair with fine...
sound quality. The range was subtly refined and improved over the years, and became ever more popular. Recognising this, its designers received their second gong from the Design Council in 1982.

Around this time Bob found himself involved in the early stages of development of Compact Disc, through his technical connections with Philips in Holland. For this reason, Meridian was the very first British hi-fi company to launch its own CD player, barely a year after the format had started back in 1983. Called the MCD, it’s one of Bob’s all-time favourite Meridian products, “it really demonstrated that digital audio had a very serious future”. Although obviously based on Philips’ first generation CD100 - sharing the same CDM1 Pro laser transport, diecast metal chassis and fourteen bit, Philips 1540 four times oversampling chipset - it featured a thorough reworking of its audio electronics to great effect.

The MCD proved a tremendous sales success and a big hit with the world’s hi-fi press, winning awards for the best sounding CD player in seven major countries including Japan and the United States. The MCD Pro followed in 1985, adding a number of features and taking the sound quality to an even higher level. £675 bought you the original MCD with beefier power supply, fully balanced preamp, discrete transistor phono amp and a power amp running complementary transistor output stages in dual mono configuration. With hindsight Bob is equivocal about the MCA-I, describing it as, ‘quite an advanced concept and rather harder to make than we had thought’.

The next year Meridian surprised everyone by launching a completely revised range of electronics, the 200 Series. Visually quite different to the 100 Series ‘mini-components’, this new range was both physically larger and functionally far more versatile than the range it replaced. At the time, some fans of the earlier separates lamented the unspectacular styling, but some fifteen years later the 200 Series, complete with its pinstripes and shift key operation, looks no less radical! It was Meridian’s most comprehensive product line up yet, and included CD players, radio tuners, pre- amplifiers, power amplifiers, digital converters and multiroom components.

Meridian’s 207 CD player was one of the best selling products in the new range. A characteristically radical design, it offered a number of features completely unavailable from the company’s British or Japanese rivals. First was its two-box design which physically separated the transport and DAC, allowing you to stand them side-by-side or on top of one another. Another was its integral preamp which provided electronic volume control and source switching for two other line level inputs. This enabled CD fans to drive the player straight into a power amp or pair of active loudspeakers, the latter proving an enduring fascination for designer Bob Stuart.

The 207 proved a superb performer, offering a musical and articulate sound despite its humble electronic origins. In fact it wasn’t too dissimilar to the original MCD, sharing as it did the Philips transport and fourteen bit chipset. Its superb build reflected its high £850 selling price, boasting a beautifully engineered transport housing complete with metal sleeve and glass front plate, pinstriped of course!

Unfortunately its control system - which included a programming feature for the first time - was an utter chore. This fact was obviously missed by Britain’s Design Council, who gave Bob and Allen their third bauble in 1988. This, Meridian points out, is the only time a design team has won the award on three separate occasions. The CDR followed next. Although CD recorders are pretty run-of-the-mill these days, in the late eighties it was a staggeringly advanced piece of kit. Costing £5000, the CD-R wrote onto £30 blank discs with remarkable fidelity to the original.

In 1989 the company stamped its name on the super-fi scene with dramatic effect, with the introduction of the world’s first digitally-driven loudspeaker, the £7,650 Meridian D6000. At the time it was arguably the most radical speaker ever. A fully active design with built-in electronic digital
converters, preamp, digital signal processing crossovers and amplifiers, everything upstream of the power amps (and drive units) worked in the digital domain. Using an 'intelligent' remote commander, the D6000 even offered complete control of other suitably equipped Meridian separates, from source, track and channel switching to volume levels.

Each speaker comprised two units, a bass enclosure containing four 210mm woofers running in parallel, plus electronics which ran an umbilical up to the upper trapezoidal cabinet containing a 170mm mid/bass driver and SEAS metal dome tweeter. Fascinatingly, no attempt was made to engineer the driver/enclosure combination to give a flat response. Instead, all the equalisation was done actively in the digital domain. The result was an amazingly open sounding loudspeaker with Herculean amounts of control, if a touch dry and hard sounding. Twelve years on, the idea of 16bit digital speakers might sound questionable, but the D6000 is nevertheless an engineering tour de force which looks destined for a place in history.

Bob counts it as one of his all-time favourites, arguing that, "for the first time a speaker system was able to place instruments in space and reproduce dynamics". Meridian was no less busy innovating and launching new products in the nineties, after a management buyout in 1992 supported by Bob Stuart, The Meridian Group was formed, comprising Meridian Audio Limited, Digital Gramophone & Wireless Ltd, and Meridian America Inc. The new company immediately set to work on the new 500 Series, which was finally launched in July 1993. Despite more sober, conservative styling, the new twelve-strong product range had vastly improved features and ergonomics which effectively brought the brand into the Home Entertainment market. With products like Meridian Digital Theatre, based on the 551 Surround Sound Processor and a range of DSP loudspeakers, the brand is spreading its wings further afield.

Despite branching out to over thirty products, the company has also remained true to its hi-fi roots. The £1,200 Meridian 506-24 CD player carries on the original MCD's tradition of sweet, smooth, clean sound from silver disc, while the 551 integrated offers much of the magic of the MCA-1 but with even greater flexibility and superior sound. As Meridian's entry-level pre-power the £1445 501/555 pre-power is a high quality multi-purpose amplifier ready for all manner of applications.

**MODERN MUSIC**

These days, Meridian is a mature British high end specialist with about 80% of its products sold overseas, much of this going to North America. Currently employing over 100 people in the UK and 11 in the USA, it is based in Huntingdon, the UK's 'hi-fi Silicon Valley' in Cambridge, in a 25,000 square foot factory.

The story doesn't stop here though, because the company wrote itself into hi-fi's history books once again when Meridian Lossless Packing (MLP) was incorporated in the DVD-Audio 1.0 specification. This is soon to become a subset of DVD Universal (also incorporating DVD-Video, DVD-ROM, DVD-RAM and DVD-R) which all next generation DVD players will use, and puts Meridian on the world's hi-fi map once and for all.

A clever way of storing more digital audio data in a limited space, MLP enables standard DVD discs to offer over one hour of six channel audio at up to 24 bit, 96kHz resolution. Crudely put, it permits better sound for a given 'bit budget', something digital audio devotees should be very thankful for! Bob cites MLP as another of his favourite Meridian products, thanks to its superior efficiency to rival coding systems. He says that without its dramatic technical superiority, he would have failed in his "David and Goliath" struggle to convince the Japanese electronics giants in the DVD Forum to adopt it.

The future promises more "high resolution audio rendering systems" (as Bob calls them) and the presence of Meridian Lossless Packing in the forthcoming DVD Audio-Recordable specification. Watch out also for a growing presence in Home Theatre, digital video and multimedia, and even a commitment to support the new compressed audio formats like MP3. After nearly a quarter of a century in the audio business, Meridian remains a consistently innovative and charismatic player. Few others have combined aesthetic beauty, ergonomic excellence and excellent sound so successfully.
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Tuners and Turntables are often sadly overlooked. However, there is a wealth of entertainment available through Radio broadcasts and with the advent of Digital Audio Broadcasting, background noise and other distortions are a thing of the past. The Turntable, once the main source component in the very best hi-fi systems, still provides excellent sonic performance and with many recordings only ever issued on this medium, how about re-discovering those irreplaceable records in your collection?

Sevenoaks Selected Tuners and Turntables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuner/Turntable</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arcam Alpha 7</td>
<td>£229.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denon TU260/II</td>
<td>£129.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michell Gyro SE (RB300)</td>
<td>£919.95</td>
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<td>Musical Fidelity X-Plora</td>
<td>£599.95</td>
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The ultimate buying guides

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World Radio History
I knew it would happen. After the temporary respite provided by Bitstream, the bit wars are raging again. Anyone into hi-fi at the end of the eighties was constantly assaulted by '18bit, 8 times oversampling' (or whatever) legends plastered all over the fascias of Technics, Denon, Sony, et al. Now the 'bit race' is back on track, so prepare yourselves for a Spinal Tap-style 'my amp's louder 'cos it goes to II' world!

In truth, using 24bit DACs to play 16bit CD is rather like buying a Ferrari with a Fiesta engine. Compact Disc simply doesn't have any more information than can be described in 16bits, so longer digital word lengths simply should not be necessary. When they introduced the 506.20, Meridian argued that its extra internal resolution allowed more accurate handling of the least significant bits of the 16bit word, plus better accuracy from any subsequent digital signal processing. Maybe so, but it still smacks of tinkering around at the margins. As I'm sure Bob Stuart would agree, the big gains will be when 24bit digital audio discs hit the market a proper...

Well, I'm not going to level this accusation at Meridian. The black textured enamel and glass finished 506.24 looks and feels classy, and is surprisingly heavy considering its compact dimensions (6.4kg, 88x321x332mm) and modest £1 195 retail price. Compared even to Marantz's CD-7 (costing three times as much) it seems better screwed together. One of the most pleasing aspects is Meridian's trademark glass and carbon fibre-damped disk tray, which gives the high precision data-grade (i.e. CD-ROM) Focault-focus linear three-beam laser pickup an easier time of reading the disc. Add custom servo software from Meridian and it's a very capable transport indeed. Inside you'll find a smattering of audiophile components, a generous toroidal transformer and conscientious attention paid to smoothing the mains. The 24-bit dual differential Delta Sigma converter, apparently developed in conjunction with Burr Brown, feeds a discrete class A output stage.

Outside it's the usual Meridian look with a row of slimline transport controls running across the bottom half of the fascia, plus a purposeful eight character dot-matrix LED display showing track, time and index. Round the back you get fixed line phono outs, plus optical and coaxial digital outputs. Last is the communications link, which lets you run any combination of Meridian kit from the single, rather swanky looking Meridian System Remote. More than just a standard plipper with a few extra buttons, it actually lets you extend the system into two or three rooms. In an increasingly multi-room world, this facility could be more useful than it first appears.

The bit question will run and run, but the real answer lies in the listening. After a few days intensive burn in, the Meridian went into my reference systems (KLP-P1, KS881,
Yamaha NS1000Ms) via LFD's Spirolink 3 and we were away. I kicked off with 4 Hero's 'Cosmic Tree', a beautifully recorded slice of acoustic drum'n'bass including violins, viola, cello, Fender electric piano, Oberheim bass synth plus a fantastically recorded acoustic drum kit. To its credit, the Meridian conveyed the distinctive textures of all these instruments with tremendous accuracy. Rather than sounding airbrushed and artificial, the opening violins had wonderful lustre. The Fender Rhodes was rich and resonant, and the drums kicked in with machine gun speed and attack. The singer's voice was powerful and grainy, just like the gig I went to last year.

A real festival of the senses then, but this is no Japanese-style 'hi-fi sounding' silver disc spinner. Indeed the 506.24 had a nicely unforced musicality about it - not quite as beguiling as a good moving coil cartridge but not far off. It was able to excavate vast tracts of detail and string it all together very coherently, making for both a relaxing and engaging listen.

Moving on to Mercury Rev's 'Goddess on a Highway', the Meridian's performance proved all this sweetness didn't come from coloration. On this rather sterile rock recording the 506.24 didn't add a thing - gone was the sumptuousness of the 4 Hero track and in its place a clean and dry recorded acoustic. This track also showcased the player's tremendous ability to resolve low level detail - there's a lot of weird, multi-tracked production effects going on over the main vocals, guitar, bass and drums and they shone through far more than with the Naim CDX I recently reviewed. Nothing added, nothing taken away.

Moving on to a bit of old school rock'n'roll in the shape of Rush's 'Fly By Night', I was better able to identify the essence of what is by any standards a highly neutral and self-effacing player. Compared to the aforementioned Naim, plus the new Linn Genki I'm currently trying out, the Meridian sounded slightly slow. Being so even-handed, it isn't set up for playing one particular type of music - rather, it's a great all rounder. By contrast, the Linn and Naim both seemed to live or die by their ability to resolve attack transients and dynamics, leaving things like low level detailing and accurate soundstaging for the birds. They both made a better job of this track, pushing it along at double quick speed, whereas the Meridian was just a tad more sedate and polished in its performance.

Indeed, 'polished' is the Meridian 506.24 in a nutshell, and I mean this in the best possible way. Like Arcam's FMJ CD23 (one of its closest rivals), it's an extremely capable all rounder with an infectiously sweet and musical sound. Feed it anything from Debussy preludes to David Sylvian and you'll get a spacious, open acoustic with great stage depth, excellent low level detail resolving capability, a pleasantly sweet tone, grippy rhythms and strong dynamics - and it all hangs together superbly.

Another fine slice of British 'budget esoterica' then, and superb value at under £1200. It's also a welcome challenger to the previously peerless Arcam FMJ, with a marginally slower but weightier sound. Match it to open, transparent ancillaries and you'll have a peach of a system. If CD sounds this good fed by 16bits, the sky's the limit for Meridian's first 24bit DVD Audio player. ■ ■ ■

Tidy rear panel offers a host of analogue and digital audio outputs plus a COMMS link to connect to other Meridian electronics.
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Meridian's earliest products showed the company's distinctive approach to hi-fi design. David Price revisits the 70s with the 101/105 pre-power combination.

Compare Meridian's very first 100 series pre-power amplifiers to the current 501/555. Both are subtle but elegant examples of industrial design, with an economical feature count allied to flexible connection options. Both have a characteristically smooth, self-effacing and even-handed sound, and both are built to last. You could also go on about the classy, albeit oddball finish, the modular construction, the top quality matching tuners that partner both combos, the fine phono inputs and the muscular power amp sections. Despite the twenty years that separate them, neither combos could be anything but Meridian.

It's a testament to the design and engineering partnership of Messrs Boothroyd and Stuart that the 101/105 seems so damn modern even today. Aside from its DIN sockets, limited inputs and lack of remote control, it could almost be an early twenty first century design. Indeed, give the beautifully hewn slabs of aluminium alloy that encase the power amplifiers a splash of silver paint, and you'd think they were the latest brainchild of some esoteric hi-fi audio brand! In truth though, we're talking matt dark brown - well it was the seventies!

£700 bought you these five little boxes, each measuring 140 x 50 x 300mm. The idea was that you or your dealer connected them up by their DIN umbilicals, configured the 101 preamp for whatever cartridge you were using in your LP12/Ittok at the time (well it was the only turntable back then, especially if you believed what you read in hi-fi magazines) by changing a natty little disc module inside, and switched the whole lot on via the single rotary volume control. A couple of dinky little LEDs would light up from the separate monobloc power supplies to signify motive power, and then it was time to spin that new Steely Dan or Doobie Brothers LP and revel in the sound issuing forth from your imperfectly large and inefficient monitor loudspeakers... Kef 104abs, perchance?

The 105s drove power hungry seventies speakers with relish. Punching out well over 100 watts per side, they were substantially more grunty than even Naim's NAP250. True, they didn't have quite the same fearsome low frequency grip, or brightly lit midband for that matter, but they could certainly do any job asked of them without drawing attention to themselves. In a hi-fi world offering the choice of a full-on Naim pre-power or any one of a number of ludicrously over-sexed Japanese super amps (Rotel RA1312, anyone?), the Meridians were an extremely welcome new option.

Like its NAC32 rival, Meridian's 101 wasn't exactly overburdened with facilities. It was one of the first preamps to follow the minimalist school of audio design, whereupon filters, variable frequency tone controls and balance controls were dispensed with in the name of straighter signal paths. Nowadays it seems bloody obvious, but in a world where most amps' front panels looked like something from a power station control room it was pretty radical stuff. Three toggle switches to switch between mono and stereo and 'disc', 'radio' and 'tape' were your lot.

Although Meridian's latest fare sounds considerably better than the 101/105s, it's still not a bad performer. Fans of classical music will particularly enjoy its dry, even presentation, with strong stereo imaging, confident (if a touch loose) bass, good detailing and crisp treble. True, you could say this combo sounds a tad unengaging by today's standards, but many will like its seventies-style big hearted, effortless character. Showy it is not.

So if you're looking for a classy sounding piece of kit that's also a design classic and a slice of British hi-fi history to boot, you could do far worse. The only trouble is that many 101/105s around are a tad overpriced - sellers delude themselves that they're worth over £500, whereas £350 for a mint boxed set is closer to the mark. Find a decent example though, and you'll come to love and respect Meridian far more than you do now. And who knows, you may just by some new stuff to partner it?
NAD invites you to listen to its new 5.1 channel home theatre components in plain boring old stereo.

There is a rule in hi-fi that says ‘AV is only for movies’. NAD is about to re-write that rule. In fact, over the years, NAD has pretty much thrown out the rule book altogether and made home theatre components that also form the heart of audiophile stereo systems. Now, using the same revolutionary Impedance Sensing Circuitry as the award-winning NAD C320 and C340, the new NAD T760 combines razor sharp Dolby Digital and DTS decoding with advanced stereo sound processing features. Add to this our new NAD T550 DVD player, which delivers startling picture clarity and the kind of sound previously only found on quality CD players.

You may never use more than two speakers again!
KEF have "re-worked and improved" their classic Reference Range.

Simon Pope spends some time with the 'baby' Model One - Two.

With the runaway success of their current budget models it would be easy to forget that KEF have more arrows in their quiver than just the Cresta range. A long and proud history of 'speaker making has produced many a gem from the Kent-based manufacturer and one of the highlights of the past was the excellent high-end Reference range. Realising the further potential of this most sophisticated-looking loudspeaker ranges, KEF have re-vamped four new models in the range which all carry new finishes and features.

All four new models boast new improvements in the crossover in the form of polypropylene capacitors and have KEF's Boundary Compensation Device (BCD) fitted. Intended to allow for easy room placement, the BCD compensates for the bass lift when the speaker is placed close to a wall. The electrical filter that controls the low frequency section of the speaker is adjusted to cause an approximate 2dB reduction in the level of the bass below 200Hz.

The smallest model in the all-floorstander range is the One - Two, a three-way "compact" design measuring 864 x 238 x 359 mm (H, W, D). The One - Two employs KEF's classic Uni-Q driver array (now in its fourth generation) in which the tweeter is mounted at the exact centre of the midrange cone. The 160mm mineral filled polypropylene midrange unit surrounds a centrally mounted 25mm fabric dome, ferrofluid cooled tweeter. These units are partnered by a 160mm pulp-cone unit on low frequency duty in a coupled-cavity configuration in an aid to extend bass response.

The One - Two certainly has a look of high-end refinement about it. The baffle has an organically contoured appearance and the finish (available in Black Ash, Cherry and Rose nut) is excellent. This 'speaker is, aesthetically, very room friendly. It would look equally at home in a Clerkenwell warehouse pad as it would in a Grade-II listed house in Tunbridge Wells. To complete the luxury there are four heavy brass terminals at the rear making bi-wiring an option.

Linking up the One - Twos to an Audio Analogue Puccini SE integrated, NAD's Silverline S500 CD player and a Michell Gyrodec SE I started the musical ball rolling with some Cocteau Twins on good old vinyl. One of the traditions of KEF's uni-Q sound is its ability to deliver an out-of-the-box sound stage and this continues into the new generation. The Cocteaus' enormous sweep of soundscapes wafted through the room with an unusually detailed performance. There's so much going on in the music that only the best equipment will pick up on each layer of the structure, which the KEFs did with aplomb. What I found most impressive (with the speakers very close to the back wall) was their excellent tonal balance. Bass boom was non-existent and the treble unobtrusive and very natural, it's not over-smooth or sickly sweet, just simply there...

Tchaikovsky's Fourth symphony conducted by Mariss Jansons with the
Upgradable from one to five channels, it uses good, solid engineering to produce a good, solid sound that is alive with detail and a sense of space that will show many a well-respected amplifier a clean set of heels. It also manages to sound more powerful than it actually is, yet does not require the listener to crank the volume to the max to get a decent sound. In short it never draws attention to itself, no matter how complex the sound. - HOME ENTERTAINMENT January 2000

One of the most elegant amplifiers around. If you want to upgrade an amplifier in stages, or start from scratch with five channels of the BEST POSSIBLE sound without spending a fortune the EZO K5 is hard to better. It sounds BIG, BOLD and CONFIDENT.

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e-mail vandenhukuk@hotmail.com or visit our website vandenhul.com
Oslo Philharmonic on Chandos is a very fine reading and the KEFs played it with fire in their belly. The descending sweep of orchestral strings in the last movement was lightning fast and the battery of percussion sounded tight and controlled. So often this can sound like a playschool let loose in a music shop with inferior kit. The full frequency range of this piece hinted that the One - Twos don't have a neutral or analytical sound, but then again it's not over-coloured, merely full, exciting and also subtle when needed.

Playing through a wide selection of material it was obvious the KEFs disliked bad recordings, and could sometimes sonically suck them in but this is very often sign a of good gear. With everything I played the KEFs showed a remarkably good soundstage, both deep and wide but well controlled. I have the feeling they would work a lot better in smaller rooms than any equally priced floorstander due to this control and subtle use of bass frequencies.

From both our listening and measurement it's obvious that the One - Two is a gem of a 'speaker, well designed and built. Despite being a floorstander, the bass is remarkably even with no boom, and the overall sound, whilst not uncoloured, is as good as you will find at the price. They undoubtedly benefit from good recordings but will play any type of music, in virtually any environment, with equal expertise. Highly recommended.

KEF Reference One - Two £1,350
KEF Audio Ltd.
Tovil, Maidstone
Kent ME15 6QP
Tel:01622 672261
www.kef.com

WHERE'S THE TWEETER GONE?

KEF's special Uni-Q drive unit puts the tweeter at the centre of the bass/midrange cone. It lies hidden behind a protective but acoustically transparent cover and fires out through the cone.

Why? With separate treble units performance differs from above, either side and below the loudspeaker. Phase error produces response asymmetry. Ideally the tweeter should be as close to the radiating centre of the midrange cone as possible, but physically the closest it can get is hard against the chassis edge. This also puts it forward of the radiating centre, which lies at the base of the cone. All in all, a separate tweeter is a bad thing.

Long ago it was noticed that single cone drivers have a cohesive and natural sound. The problem with simple units like this has been to get smooth output right up to the highest frequencies, to avoid rough sounding treble. Tannoy produced their famous dual-concentric to overcome such problems, but its complexity made cost excessive.

What KEF have achieved with Uni-Q is a drive unit with central tweeter that is simple and cost effective. It gives symmetrical results, so it sounds the same all round. This means it interacts with reflective room surfaces consistently, something KEF have always promoted. Uni-Q also eliminates crossover phase errors, giving a cohesive sound. It's got to be better than a separate tweeter and it is.

Uni-Q solves a lot of problems elegantly, giving KEFs Reference loudspeakers a useful advantage.
Denon's classic PMA-250SE amplifier has been given a new number, a 'UK' badge and a re-vamp. Richard White listens for the differences.

Denon were the first Japanese company to produce a 'UK Version' product, tuned to British expectations. It was back in 1986 when the PMA-707 was tweaked by a British designer to improve its sound. This tradition has carried on. The new PMA-255UK and the more expensive PMA-355UK replace the old 250SE and 350SE but the prices remain the same at £140 and £180 respectively.

When it comes to styling, little has changed. In the case of the PMA-255UK reviewed here, it is fair to say that your £140 doesn't buy style: the same all-black box as the 250SE is used. All the changes are on the inside. The transformer is bigger and beefier, the ELNA power supply reservoir caps are custom made for Denon and feature direct hard wiring from the power amp section to the speaker terminals.

All the weight of this amplifier is at one end, by the power switch. This betrays the position of the power transformer, which is a hefty one. A delay circuit prevents switch-on thump. The amp delivers 45W into 8Ω.

The PMA-255UK has inputs for CD, tuner, tape/MD, plus two auxiliaries, one ear-marked for DVD. A large volume knob gives a usefully sensitive sweep of gain. Although tape is nominally provided for - indeed the recording output level is very healthy - there is no monitor button. I guess people who intend to use an expensive three-head recorder won't be buying a budget amp to go with it.

Like the 250SE, there is no phono stage and associated input. Other controls provided are balance knob and defeatable ±8dB treble and bass controls. The operating leaflet warns that the effects of the tone controls lessen as volume is advanced, and indeed they behaved more like loudness controls than fixed EQs. Regardless of the position of the 'source direct' button, the recording output is 'flat'.

Input and output terminals on the back are 'serviceable' rather than rugged. There is no 'pre-amp out' so the unit is not readily usable for biamping.

The biggest clue to the sound quality of the amplifier lies in the use of the letters 'UK' in the model code. Judging from past experience, this is likely to mean that the manufacturers have selected their circuits and components with a view to satisfying the presumed tastes of the British market; in other words it's likely to err on the warm side rather than sounding bright and analytical, but bass will be solid.

To see whether this would be the case, I began my listening with a sharpish recording of Haydn's Prussian Quartets, on Naxos. That's not to imply that the tone is unbearably harsh but rather hyper-detailed! True to its UK badge, the Denon made rather mild work of this, with much of the top-end sizzle perhaps suitably tamed. Rather than this record's usual urgency, the amplifier put me among friends. Although I don't believe that dimming down is a necessary attribute for the UK market, there is no doubt that the sound is pleasant, if somewhat uninvolving.

Diana Krall's Love Songs have rather fallen from my wish-list lately but I used them because they too have a biting mix, coupled with some odd stereo placings. Whatever tweaking had been applied to the top end, the explosive power of the double bass came through the amp completely unimpaired, with quite exhilarating drive and speed. Electro-acoustic guitar always sounds dull to me, so the flatness of this instrument showed nothing one way or the other. It was on Miss Krall's vocals that the real difference made itself known. To my surprise, I found the change to be for the better! Gone was the go-getting sibilant edge, in its place a warmer, more feminine sound.

It's difficult to pronounce on whether a manufacturer should give a tweak for a particular market, especially such a noticeable one. It has proven successful in the past for Denon though and will likely be again I believe. In any case, the PMA-255UK is an easy-to-use package at a very reasonable price. It is easy listening as well.
Richard White meets some of the larger kings of the Castle family, the Severn 2 SE floorstanders.

Despite the growing lack of British manufactured specialist hi-fi, a few existing companies harken back to the heyday of the seventies, where successful independent manufacturing was rife. Castle Acoustics are one such company. Still very much at the heart of Great British manufacturing, they feature two full ranges of loudspeakers (Classic Range and Inversion Series - with tapered cabinets) with a total of twelve models.

Part of the Classic range, the Severn 2 SEs are quite striking, serious-looking 'speakers of fairly substantial build and size - 81 cm x 21 cm x 23 cm (h,w,d). Castle's own drive units are employed and are housed in a 18mm MDF, wood veneered cabinet. The 150mm mid/bass unit is a carbon fibre cone housed in a convex roll surround unit, with a 'pole piece' (or phase plug) attached to the magnet central pole in a bid to improve dynamics and reduce distortion. The 19mm soft-dome tweeter is mounted off axis, underneath the main driver. Bi-wire terminals are sturdily mounted at the back, placed sensibly near the base of the cabinet.

When we listened to the Pembrokes, we felt that they were better suited to classical and acoustic material than any other. The Severns displayed a broader taste in more music. Despite the excellent recording, there's not much acoustic sound on van den Hul's CD with Madeline Bell. Processed or not, the Severns made the amplified vocals and bass guitar blend seamlessly with the virtuoso cymbal playing which is such a feature of these tracks. Stereo imaging was less hard-edged than with some 'speakers but nonetheless satisfying. Particularly pleasing was the practically boom-free sound - bass guitars can play all sorts of tricks with ordinary reflex arrangements, one-note bass being the worst of them.

Hearing passed them for use with the classical orchestra and studio groups, I chose some live recorded jazz to see just how natural the Severns were prepared to be. Benny Waters still had plenty of music left, even into his eighties, and he was fortunately recorded live in Stockholm towards the end of his life. As far as the loudspeakers were concerned, the event was passed on with its best qualities intact. Principal among these is the degree of attack which the old master gave to his alto: breathy, curiously delicate and yet able to drive the small band along like nobody's business. Large 'speakers can give a big sound and this is just what's needed to relay live performances like this. The excellence of the recording helps but the solidity of the loudspeaker soundstage materially assists as well.

Overall the relaxed and warm sound is very inviting - but at a price. Unless you have both the money and the space, the smaller Pembrokes may be a more logical answer. The new Severns are good items for those who like their loudspeakers to look the part. With their imposing finish and big sound, they have a lot going for them. One thing, make sure you have room; these 'speakers work best with plenty of air to push around.

**World Verdict**

Commendably natural sound with plenty of power.

Measured Performance see page 111

**Castle Severn 2 SE**

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Dear Editor

I would be grateful for any advice you can offer on the following problem that has recently clouded my audio pleasure. My young son has just passed his first birthday and discovered the concept of simple harmonic motion, i.e., if you rock Dad's TDL RTLs at just the right frequency they fall over and crush you. So far we've managed to catch them before they squash him but for the time being it realistically spells the end of floor standers.

So, I need some bookshelf speakers (which sadly may well actually end up on a bookshelf - near a wall, maybe quite high up!) I require something that offers the depth of image and detail my beloved TDLs gave me. Bass extension isn't necessarily a problem as I could use my REL Strata subwoofer (which can be hidden away from little 'cone poking' fingers); I don't normally have this connected but it's an option.

My amp is an Audiolab 8000S with Arcam 6 CD. Budget is up to £500.

What do you think?

Mike Yenno
Newbury, UK

This is a very common problem that many manufacturers ought to appreciate a little more. Tall heavy things with spikes aren't ideal with the patter of tiny feet. Hi-Fi and families, ironically, rarely live in harmony. It could be one of the reasons why hi-fi is commonly a pursuit of the committed bachelor!

As bookshelf speakers go, it must be remembered that not all of them sound so good up among the novels. For optimum performance, as we mentioned in last month's group test, you need good, sturdy stands. However, if you (sensibly) regard the safety of your offspring above sonic edification, stands still pose a hazard. In this case I'd plump for the best sounding and best built bookshelf you can afford. £500 is a bit of a grey area for quality bookshelf speakers, but one example that immediately springs to mind are Dali's excellent Royal Menuets at £450, which deliver a high-end-like neutral sound and are heavily-built, with real wood veneer finishing that ensures a classy look. Also, they should be a great match for your Strata.

Another good choice could be Dynaudio's Audience 50s, which at £577 per pair may just scrape within your budget. These have recently had a revamp and we hope to have a pair in for review soon. Even going on past listening with the older models, these are full sounding and very dynamic but lack the visual sophistication of the Dalis. You'd be well advised to give both a listen.

Mike Yenno
Newbury, UK

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THE BENDS

Salutations Hi-Fi World residents a reader craves advice: I have a Gyro SE with an Audio Technica 1005/II (remember it?), and a DNAM Rica aboard. The amp is a 1995 Arcam Alpha, but the speakers may interest you At the end of my DNAM speaker leads are KEF Kefkit 3 jobbies - 3 way with 10" oval bass units bought in 1974. Question: What sort of CD should I consider which will fit in, and more importantly, hold its own? I would appreciate guidance on the interconnect as well. My taste extends from classical through 70's progressive to indie - I will be using 'OK Computer' as my test CD. I value musicality, naturalness and truth and I'm intolerant of minor exaggerations for overall effect no matter how exciting or dynamic. What do you advise?

Phil Baker

Indeed I do remember the AT tonearm - I've got one on my Gyro SE at this very moment! ('What are the chances of that happening', as Harry Hill would say.) As your speakers (complete with classic KEF B139 oval bass units) have a quintessentially '70s rich, warm, fruity sound and your amp isn't the most forward either, you should aim for a crisp, dry sounding silver disc spinner. Sony's CDP-XB930E is the obvious budget choice at around £300 as is Arcam's Alpha 7SE which is a really fun, musical listen. With more cash to spend, Naim's CD3.5 at £1000 would be a synergistic match - the Cyrus dAD3Q and particularly the Arcam Alpha 9 are better rounded but could sound too rich through those big old KEFs of yours. After you've sorted your source, look to the likes of a Sonneteer Alabaster or LFD Mistral pre-power to replace your overburdened Arcam amp! As for using 'OK Computer' as a test disc, remember to have the laughing gas at hand.  ■

DP

LONG TIME GONE

I am looking to upgrade my hi-fi system, and need your help as to what to do as it's been a long time since I was in the market. My current system is record-based: PT Too, SME IV, with fluid damper and Decca London Gold, Naim NAIT 1, ProAc Tablette 50 Signature and Super Flatline cable. Is the amp the obvious weak point? My budget is limited to about £500? Should I consider the second-market? Please advise.

Martin de Rose

You already have an impressively well balanced system - you obviously did more than your fair share of listening to get to where you are today. Judging by your choice of cartridge and amp, you obviously like a fast, forward sound - and presumably crave more of the same. If you're prepared to buy second-hand you could just about scrape a Naim NAC32.5/NAP160 for £500, which would grab those hard-to-drive ProAcs by the short and curlies. When more cash came along it would be HI-CAP time, and possibly a factory service for your amps back at the Salisbury ranch. Then, go see Len Gregory (aka The Cartridge Man) and ask him to work his magic on your Decca - he's just done one for me and did a storming job. An additional small but worthwhile tweak is to buy SME's top silver litz headshell wires for your Series IV - your standard ones are rougher sounding LC-OFc copper.  ■

DP

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Some use non-magnetic alloys while others believe that only non-metallic materials work.

"You hear hi-fi and forget music.

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They are many different ideas on how amplifiers should be built – and that's just the box!

The question is: How can we help you?

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CD: ACCUPHASE, ADVANTAGE, AUDIO SYNTHESIS, BALANCED, PAS"
I have a hi-fi dilemma that you may be able to advise me on. My amplifier is a John Shearne phase 2 integrated, connected to Rega ELA speakers. Front end is an ageing Marantz CD65DX and Ariston Q Deck. A few weeks ago whilst playing music, the J.S. amp set alight, blowing one of my speakers in the process. A quick trip down to Griffin Audio soon sorted out the damaged speaker, however, Shearne advised that a repair to original spec. would cost £450 or £490 to upgrade to reference standard. What would you suggest as the best way forward? Risk nearly £500 on an amp that has a tendency to self-destruct for no apparent reason, (Shearne say it was due to age and treatment) or start again? Musical taste is loud punk rock. Many thanks, Dave

I'm not sure if I'm more surprised about your Shearne amp catching fire, or the fact that you listen to loud punk rock through it! It certainly doesn't strike me as the obvious way to go given your music tastes, spontaneous combustion or not!

Whatever the reason for it blowing in such spectacular style (be it component failure or faulty workmanship - it's impossible for us to speculate), maybe you should think about re-focussing your system. As you need an amp whatever you decide, consider Naim's excellent NAIT 3 - it's a fantastically punchy and grippy integrated that's easily upgradeable when you want more wallop, and it's got a superb (optional) phono stage. I lived with one for three months a few years ago, and didn't want to give it back. With powerful rock and pop it's a really involving listen. Next upgrade would then be your source - only you can decide whether you want to prioritize vinyl or CD, but spending either £260 on a Rega Planar 3 or £775 on a Michell GyroDec Spider Edition would dramatically improve your analogue sound. Arm/cartridge would be the Original Live Rega RB250 (or 300 if you get the P3), and a Goldring G1042. CD-wise, the Arcam FMJ 23 CD is the pick of the £1000 players so to my ears at the moment, but with your musical tastes your ultimate aim should be a Naim CDX at £2335 - then you'd really have to hold on to your safety pins!

Dear Sir,

My system consists of the following:

Amp: Audiolab 8000a
Speakers: Monitor Audio 20SEs
DVD/CD Player: Pioneer DV-717
Tuner: Denon
MD: Sony

I recently bought the 20SEs from a friend, and have decided I would like to bring my system more in line with these fine speakers. I think my starting point would be the CD area, as I use the Pioneer DVD to play both music and movies. The CD players I have tested so far include the Arcam Alpha 9, Musical Fidelity A3 and the Linn Genki. Out of that batch I think I favoured the Linn although it was a bit more expensive than I had hoped to have spent. But after speaking to Sevenoaks Sound and Vision, Birmingham, they said the amp (8000a) should be the first thing to replace.

I was some what surprised at this, as I have always regarded the Audiolab as a fine amp. He said that it did not produce enough current to do the speakers justice but did say the first upgrade should be to a secondhand Audiolab power amp or the new TAG version, and only then should I go for a new CD player.

Could you please advise me on this matter?

DS

Your Audiolab amp should not have any difficulty driving the Monitor loudspeakers; Audiolab were noted for their 'grunt', if for nothing else, so if you're happy with it, I should stick with it. However, the new £500 TAG McLaren 60i, is - as we found out last month - a very competent and detailed amp that has the ability to drive virtually anything with its solid 60W/channel of power. Forget fancy facilities though, this is a bare bones amp.

The trouble is that high spec. stand-alone CD players are beginning to look a bit over-priced compared with something like Sony's £500 SCD-XB940 SACD/CD player or the better-sounding DVD players such as the one you own. One way in which you can truly upgrade the sound of your current system is to add a 24bit/96kHz MSB Link DAC (HW Nov 99) to your DV-717. Pioneer's DVD players have a 24/96 output and this combination will deliver a truly high-end sound for relatively little cost.

But hi-fi has so many variables, it is impossible for anyone to be entirely right when it comes to choosing a system for you. Hold on and look to the future - if Sony have a £500 SACD/CD player, you can bet that others will not be far behind - it may well be best to hang on just a little longer for a wider choice of what shows signs of becoming the next 'industry standard'.

RMW

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All the latest from the brave new world of online music distribution...

David Price takes a close look at Uncle Bill's new baby.

Alan Seddon goes for a spin with Hewlett Packard's latest CD burner.

Virgin say that they will soon close all their Our Price music stores, and replace them with V-Shops which have direct music downloading facilities into the company's new MP3 mobile phone. This will be a £300 Samsung unit marketed under the Virgin brand as the SGH M100. It features 32MB of memory for storing music, backlit remote control and all the software needed for transferring MP3s from PCs built-in. Soon after it will be possible to download music over the phone directly. Keep your browsers pointed at www.virgin.com/mobile.

Virgin's Ultimate Music In Your Pocket!

The new Waveterminal U2A from Egosys is the answer to many notebook-using computer audiophiles' prayers. A USB stereo audio interface with 24 bit A/D/A converters, it taps directly into the digital audio running around your computer's motherboard and ports it to the outside world where you can get at it. Working at 32k, 44.1k and 48kHz sampling rates, it offers a choice of gold-tipped S/PDIF coaxial or optical digital inputs and outputs, plus a 10dBV unbalanced quarter-inch analogue phone jack. You also get an internal digital mixer with simultaneous monitoring of all outputs, plus real time hardware sample rate conversion. Available for Windows 98 and Mac platforms, it costs £199.99. The new WamiBox is the PCEMCIA solution and features 20bit converters, 2 in/4 out unbalanced analogue connectors, plus S/PDIF coaxial & optical digital ins and outs. There's also a Mic preamp with built-in effects processor which includes reverb, delay chorus, flanging and multi-band parametric EQ. With full MIDI and 64 voice synth, it will set you back £399.99. www.egosys.com

PONTIS SP504

From Germany comes Pontis' latest £210 MP3 walkie, looking something like a late eighties handheld games machine. The fact that it comes with a miserly 32MB of RAM - when its price rivals have twice that - suggests that it could be a fairly old design. Facilities are good, with a comprehensive LCD display, adjustable treble and bass controls, bundled LED ripping software and speedy USB connection Twin AA batteries give a respectable 10 hours of playing time between changes. Sound is better than expected, with powerful bass, clear midband, crisp treble and plenty of volume and clarity from the supplied phones. It's a strange but engaging player that will probably grow on you - if you can bear to look at it, that is! www.pontis.de

AIWA'S ICEY MP3

It was bound to happen - an in-dash car MP3 player: Awa introduce the CDC-MP3. It's serious, having a fully specified variable bitrate MP3 CODEC that can play MP3s to the top 320kbps resolution giving better than MD sound. Based around a CD-ROM drive it plays good old fashioned CDs, CD-Rs, CD-RWs and data CDs encoded with MP3 music files. You also get 4x45W output, a swanky steering wheel remote and the usual CD text and MP3 ID3 tag support. www.aiwa.co.uk

SMALL TALK

Panasonic's SV-SD70 is a digital music player with a difference. No, it's not just a new feature here or a bright colour there - this one uses MP3 AAC (Advanced Audio Coding), which gives even better sound than top bitrate MP3 thanks to its lower compression ratio. The 43g 'SD Audio' portable runs off a single AAA battery and comes complete with a wristband so you can wear it, watch style. This Japan-only model is a great player, but we reckon traditional MP3 walkies like Samsung's YP-E64 are a better bet until the technology settles.

www.panasonic.com

CD - THE FINAL CUT?

Warner Music Group's new merger partner EMI Recorded Music became the second major label to start selling downloadable music on the Internet last month. EMI is selling over 100 albums and associated singles through numerous online retailers, from artists including Pink Floyd, Bonnie Raitt, Frank Sinatra, Snoop Dogg, Spice Girls and Tina Turner. HMV.com is charging $15.99 for a downloadable edition of Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side of the Moon' in Microsoft Windows Media format. By 2001 Warners should have downloadable albums and singles available using Sony's ATRAC3 format. The merger with EMI should see the two giants consoli-date their digital music delivery strategies into a formidable force. Between them, they already have stakes in musicmaker.com, Liquid Audio, Preview Systems and Digital On-Demand, sanity.com and Launch Media.
Windows Media Player is the culmination of several years of hard graft on Microsoft's part, and can be regarded as the company's most serious attempt so far to embrace computer audio and multimedia en masse. It's both a fascinating piece of software to use and an extremely important development in the new politics of online music distribution.

Make no mistake, it's going to tread on a lot of people's toes, and start a format war the like of which we haven't seen since the early days of DCC vs. MD. In truth though, WMA (Windows Media Audio, as it's called) versus MP3 (Motion Picture Experts Group Layer-3, natch) could be a whole lot bigger, rather like the mid nineties' Internet Explorer v. Netscape browser wars. This is because Windows Media Player is in Microsoft's own words, "a premier feature of the forthcoming Microsoft Windows Millennium Edition".

There you are then - Big Bill reckons it's one of the main reasons for buying the new version of the world's most popular computer operating system! And not only is it to be bundled by the billion with the next Windows OS, but you can also download Beta versions for Windows 95 and 98 free from www.microsoft.com/windows/WindowsMedia. (The final release of Windows Media Player 7 is scheduled for next month). It's certainly proving a popular piece of freeware - Microsoft say it's the fastest-growing digital media player, is available in 24 languages and has had over 100 million licensed copies distributed so far, which is more than one every second!

**GOING FOR THE ONE**

Windows Media Player's master plan is to seamlessly integrate all the audio and video functions modern multimedia PCs perform. Microsoft claims it, "sets a new standard in ease of use and extensibility for consumers", and that it, "removes the barriers for mainstream consumers by offering an all-in-one, customisable player that provides them with one place to find, organise and play digital media on their PC".

The idea is to move away from the hobbyist, make-do-and-mend approach to computer audio and multimedia that's prevailed to date - with this new application Microsoft would like to bring the days of downloading your own MP3 ripper, player and even codec firmly to an end. Simply, WMP brings everything you ever wanted to do with audio together, then adds video and radio too.

It also forms part of what Microsoft calls 'Windows Media Technologies', a package of Internet-ready platforms designed for the creation, distribution and playback of broadcast-quality digital media. In plain English, Microsoft plans to move in on the home entertainment market by letting Windows, via this new Media Player, handle the downloading, storage and playing of music and movies into your home. Put crudely, now Big Bill's gunning for your CD, MP3 and DVD players.

'Broadband' is the word on everyone's lips right now, and it's immensely significant for the world's music buyers. Instead of going into High Street CD retailers (record...
Windows Media Player is here. David Price takes a close look at Uncle Bill's new baby and pits it against its arch rival, good old MP3.

shops, as we used to call them), the idea is that you download music and video via your cable modem in a matter of minutes and pay for it with your credit card. The UK isn’t quite wired for broadband cable access yet, but well within five years most people who want it will have it. Windows Media Player, say Microsoft, is the first (and only?) platform ready for this new way of getting our home entertainment. And crucially, WMP also addresses the thorny music and video piracy issues.

Its new Windows Media Rights Manager means you get to enjoy “broadcast-quality” video and “CD-quality” audio with “end-to-end secure content distribution”. This means that if Microsoft has its way at least, then gone are days of unlimited free CD copying.

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR ME?
Lots, actually. After downloading Windows Media Player from Microsoft’s website, it auto-installs in no time and places a little Media Player icon on the desktop. Click on this and the first thing it does is look around your hard drive for anything that might be construed as music (i.e. anything in an MP3 or .WAV file). Then it launches properly, displaying a neat little menu bar running down the left side of the screen with buttons for Now Playing, Media Guide, CD Audio, Media Library, Radio Tuner, Portable Device and Skin Chooser.

CUM ON FEEL THE NOIZE...
Ergonomically, Windows Media Player is a tour de force. The way in which it blends all the different facets of audio in one easy mix is a joy. It’s comprehensively smoother and easier to use than even the best MP3 packages like MusicMatch Jukebox - you really couldn’t ask for more in any way. That isn’t where the story ends however, because WMP is the user-interface in front of Microsoft’s new coding technology known as MS Audio. Uncle Bill pulls no punches about this, calling it the “best audio” format, one which “provides CD-quality music in files half the size of MP3 files, doubling music storage capacity and reducing download times for CD-quality digital music”.

That’s no small claim. As enlightened audiophiles know, MP3 done properly is a serious music format in its own right. Based on the heavyweight academic research done into psycho-acoustics that Philips used for its late (and for some, lamented) DCC format, MP3 can sound superb with the top quality Fraunhofer CODEC running at a high (256kbps or above) bitrate.

Last summer saw the spectacle of Microsoft launching MS Audio to a waiting world. Presented as the natural successor to MP3, Uncle Bill’s press launch wasn’t without its critics. After a live demonstration of its new CODEC, one key US music industry figure famously said, “Bill needs to go back to the audio lab”... We decided to put the two rival formats up against each other, with interesting results...
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To test WMP's Windows Media Audio CODEC, we put it against the Fraunhofer IIS MPEG Layer-3 Codec (advanced) which comes bundled with MusicMatch Jukebox 5.0. (Fraunhofer do an even better sounding one - the Fraunhofer IIS MPEG Layer-3 Codec (professional) - but it's a specialist product that comes with its MP3 Producer Pro software). While Fraunhofer's Advanced CODEC allows up to 320kbps encoding, the Windows CODEC's maximum bitrate is a mere 160kbps, so the tests had to be done at this low rate. For the sake of fairness, your average cloth-eared user with a middling 32MB equipped MP3 portable probably wouldn't venture higher than this quality level anyway, so it's a good practical line to draw in the sand.

The tests were conducted as follows: with just a touch of irony your reporter encoded Slade's 'Cum On Feel the Noize' from his PC CD-ROM drive, using both Windows Media Player (set to its maximum quality setting with digital error correction on) and Music Match Jukebox 5.0 (set to 160kbps, digital error correction on). The two files, called TRACK07.WMA and TRACK07.MP3 were compared for encoding time, length and sound quality. This was repeated with various other songs from artists as diverse as Miles Davis and Brian Eno. Both formats encoded the 4 minute 31 second song at around one and a half speed. Both encoders made faultless jobs, with no glitches audible at all. Amazingly, the MS Audio file actually turned out to be 0.05MB longer than the MP3 at 5.22MB, something that will bring smiles to the faces of anyone who's read Uncle Bill's PR blurb. If the stats make interesting reading, the listening tests are even better. The music files were played back using their respective players (i.e. Windows Media and MMJ5.0) via the coaxial digital output from Digidesign's excellent ToolBox PC soundcard, driving the DAC section of Marantz's superb CD7 CD player. This fed my reference valve power amp and Yamaha NS1000Ms.

Even at this lowish bitrate the difference between the formats was obvious from the first bar of the song - the WMA made singer Noddy Holder's voice sound congested and muffled whereas the MP3 was appreciably clearer and more atmospheric. Then the band kicked in and the differences were like night and day. Most noticeable was WMA's lack of definition given to the percussion work on the right channel. Noticeably suave 4iiids dynamic, there was not a sense of the physicality of sticks hitting skins. MP3, by contrast made a better - but not perfect - job of it, with superior dynamics and better clarity. Its downside was that ride cymbals sometimes sounded slightly slurred, whereas WMA seemed more consistently smooth.

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Down in the midband Bill's new baby got a severe thrashing, with MP3 proving clearer, crisper and more detailed. Both dynamic peaks and silences between notes were easier to discern with MP3, while WMA made everything blur into one big wall of sound. In its defence, this wasn't wholly unpleasant to listen to, just rather uninvolving and inaccurate. The recorded acoustic stretched further back with MP3, whereas with WMA it just hung around the plane of the speakers rather dispassionately. Vocals and lead guitars really projected into the mid-stage with MP3, with WMA they meekly held their own in the middle of the soundstage.

The difference was no less marked in the bass, either. MP3's low frequencies were powerful and confident, with nicely articulated bass guitar playing and easily discernable kick drum work. By contrast WMA's bass sounded enjoyably warm but breathless - weight and drive were lacking. Once again the effect was pleasant and inoffensive enough, but less musically involving. This pattern was repeated pretty much regardless of source material. Each time MP3 sounded clearer and more rhythmically engaging, with sharper, faster attack transients and the occasional slurring of cymbal decays.

**THE FINAL CUT**

So there you have it. It's a fascinating and beautifully crafted bit of code that manages computer audio better than any other software package to date, but is let down by the Windows Media Audio format it introduces. For the moment at least, the sound isn't as good as MP3, and in our limited tests we couldn't even back up Microsoft's claim that it uses less memory.

Whatever the politics of Big Bill's new audio format, one thing's for sure - it isn't the last word in digital sound. In fairness though, Windows Media Player is aiming far more into the mainstream than rival MP3 packages, which seem to bask in their hobbyist orientation. Politics and sonics aside, it's well worth a download. ■

Microsoft Windows Media Player £ Free  
www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/

...quality time: not much in the way of tweaking to be had - 160kbps is your lot...

- **PORTABLE DEVICE**

This option gives lets you transfer files from the Media Library to a portable music device. Windows asks if you want to use a Windows Media Player to play music.

- **SKIN CHOSER**

A clumsy name for quite an elegant feature. Clicking on this option gives you a menu of skins (or 'on-screen looks') you can select instead of the standard one you start with. The bundled skins in this Beta 7 issue of WMP are going to win any prizes, but there will doubtless be countless sites with all sorts of wonderful designs by the time this magazine hits the newsstands. Maybe the same enterprising individual who did the NAD skin for WinAmp would like to do the same for WMP? And why not a Naim skin, or even an Audio Note Ongaku?
From across the pond comes Hewlett Packard’s latest ‘all-in-one’ CD writer. Alan Seddon takes the IP9310i out for a burn.

Although not a name familiar to British audiophiles, American-based Hewlett Packard are an old hand at the computer peripherals game. Seems like they’ve been doing everything from laser printers to personal electronic organisers since the year zero. They’ve also made quite a name for themselves in CD burners, having proved very popular among American aficionados.

The £170 HP9310i reviewed here is more than ‘just’ a burner. It’s actually a package that includes all you need to get going, including the drive itself with the associated mounting hardware (nuts, bolts, cables etc.), a CD-ROM of set up software, a kind of ‘idiots guide’ poster explaining how to install it, a free CD-R and another CD-ROM featuring some bespoke HP software including HP Simple Backup and HP Fast Format (for using it as a data store), Adaptec’s Easy CD Creator 3.5 and Direct CD. There’s also Sonic Foundry’s ACID, which is an all-in-one hard disk recording package with simple sequencing thrown in, and even a Neato CD Labelling kit too!

Sounds great, I hear you say, so what’s the catch? Presumably the actual drive is a bargain basement unit, or last year’s model? Wrong on both counts. It’s actually a cutting edge design (32x CD-ROM, 4x CD-RW rewriting and 10x CD-R burning) with no less than 4MB of data buffer memory. This is a mighty impressive spec, meaning buffer underrun (where the CPU sends data to the burner faster than it can cope with) is virtually eliminated.

This drive was easy to set up thanks to common-sense design and high quality instructions, and proved faultless in use. This surprised me somewhat, using as it does the old fashioned E-IDE interface which feels positively Stone Age compared to modern SCSI types. With decent CD-R blanks like the Philips CD-Rs I used, the HP9310i made extremely neutral and uncoloured recordings which were very hard to distinguish from the originals, save a very slight flattening of dynamics. Can’t say fairer than that, especially at this price!

Overall then, thumbs aloft for this new package from HP. Only grumble is the old version of Adaptec’s Easy Creator. The latest 4.02 version is streets ahead of the Neolithic looking 3.5 version the 9310i ships with. Still, you can always upgrade at a later date.

HEWLETT PACKARD HP9310i £175
www.hewlett-packard.com

SPECIFICATIONS

- Interface: E-IDE, 4MB
- Software: Adaptec Easy CD Creator 3.5, Sonic Foundry Acid, HP data storage applications
- Accessories: Installation guide and CD-ROM, E-IDE cable, blank CD-R, mounting hardware
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Here's the amazing KT88. The circuit is similar to that of the ever popular KEL34 with a few changes to incorporate the Tesla JJ branded KT88 power tetrode. This is a pure Class A push-pull design providing 36 watts into an 8ohm load. The KT88 has come up with a gem of an output transformer (E&I). Combined with the KT88 it offers a virtually unmatchable result for a valve amplifier. Frequency response starts at 10Hz to 75kHz, sensitivity 217dB, noise 98dB, sensitivity 400mV and distortion 0.03%. As value amplifiers go, the KT88 is one of the best measured performances I have ever come across," says Noel Keywood. Jon Marks says, "the KT88 pulled a series of surprisingly fast, meaty basslines out of its trickbag when dealing with Suzanne Vega's Nine Objects Of Desire album. As if this wasn't enough, the mid and treble were nice too - cymbals had a deliciously natural, golden shimmer without sounding soft, and vocals were extremely transparent and crisply defined. KT88 didn't hang around when it came to exploiting the virtues of its four output valves on numbers such as 'Leaves' and 'Suspicious Sustain' from Cirrus Land's End Jazz CD. Saxophone had a wonderfully smooth, realistclly characterised, and guitar music moved speed with harmonic richness to very impressive effect. Asian Dub Foundation and Molokai showed no sign at all of the sluggish, woolly bottom-end and poorly-delineated bass beats that most valve amps are to blame for. Which makes the KT88 an all-round, high-end bargain." Weight 16kg, external dimensions with valves are 300w x 300mm(d) x 190mm(h).

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

KEL34 EAI VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT
The KEL34 E&I version is our second generation budget stereo integrated valve amplifier, providing a massive 40 watts of pure valve sound. With 4 line level inputs at one amp output. The KEL34 E&I is a simple and elegant circuit design giving a full stereo mode output transformer. The KEL34 E&I will work its magic into 'bigger brother' design. The output stage utilises two pairs of TESLA EL34 pentodes in parallel-push-pull mode, allowing KEL30 to turn out 80 watts into an 8ohm load. Heading up the input stage we have the wonderfully linear Russian 6AU6 working into an American 5678 phase-splitter. KEL30's output transformers are 4ohm and 8ohm tapped. With an input sensitivity at around 380mV for full output, it says, "tonally the KEL34 E&I is a bit of a smoothie. It has a fast, dynamic sound, puckered guitar strings and bass drum enjoy crisp leading edges and great impact. Detailed imaging and spacious sound staging mean vocals and instruments really patriotic out of the solid state. Clean, bass tight, and overall the KEL34 E&I is a beautiful power amp. "At the price, this kind of performance will happily partner both passive and active speakers, of average sensitivity too."

KEL80 MONOBLOCK AMPLIFIER KIT
Following the success of our budget KEL34 40watt power amplifier, we have come up with a 'bigger brother' design. The output stage utilises two pairs of TESLA EL34 pentodes in parallel-push-pull mode, allowing KEL80 to turn out 60 watts into an 8ohm load. Heading up the input stage we have the wonderfully linear Russian 6AU6 working into an American 5678 phase-splitter. KEL80's output transformers are 4ohm and 8ohm tapped. With an input sensitivity at around 380mV for full output, it will happily partner both passive and active pre-amps. It is easy to assemble. Simon Pope says, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the KEL80 is a feast for the ears, with solid bass attack, lightening fast reactions, that emphasises musicality as well as power, at 590.00 GBP a pair, a definite valve winner. Each monobloc weighs 12kgs., external dimensions with valves: 14cm(w) x 8cm(h) x 43.5cm(d).

HD83 Valve Headphone Amplifier KIT
The HD83 is our new headphone amplifier, a beautifully simple design using Mullard ECL83 valves, a triode and power pentodes housed in the same envelope. It works directly from any valve amp, beautiful simple design using Mullard ECL83. The HD83 E83 is our new headphone amplifier, a 'bigger brother' design. The output stage utilises two pairs of TESLA EL34 pentodes in parallel-push-pull mode, allowing KEL80 to turn out 60 watts into an 8ohm load. Heading up the input stage we have the wonderfully linear Russian 6AU6 working into an American 5678 phase-splitter. KEL80's output transformers are 4ohm and 8ohm tapped. With an input sensitivity at around 380mV for full output, it says, "tonally the KEL34 E&I is a bit of a smoothie. It has a fast, dynamic sound, puckered guitar strings and bass drum enjoy crisp leading edges and great impact. Detailed imaging and spacious sound staging mean vocals and instruments really patriotic out of the solid state. Clean, bass tight, and overall the KEL34 E&I is a beautiful power amp. "At the price, this kind of performance will happily partner both passive and active speakers, of average sensitivity too."

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Designed to compliment KLS10 Gold stand mounters by providing a deep and open bass. The subwoofer is inexpensive, easy to build, comprising a simple crossover network to a high quality 8 inch Aerogel dual voice coil unit. A must for all KLS10 Gold customers. Sensitivity 89dB 1W/1m, 15mm MDF, external dimensions 26cm(w) x 31cm(h) x 23cm(d). Drive units & Crossover KIT £149.95 Drive unit only £71.00

KLS9 TWO WAY FLOORSTANDER

I have a storm for you - KLS9, with its 88dB alignment bass cabinet and Audax High Definition Aerogel 8in bass/midrange unit. Designed by Noel Keywood to possess optimal bass damping and a clean step response. Aided by a teensy bit of bass lift, KLS9 really thunders; alone, they are suited to near-wall mounting and can be tuned by port adjustment to suit personal taste and location. They are easy to drive and need just 30-60 watts. KLS9 is detailed, evenly balanced and images superbly. It is an easy 120w load and is 88dB sensitive. For amps up to 60w. Easy to build and great for beginners. Internal volume 70Ltrs, 18mm MDF, external dimensions 25cm(w) x 30cm(h) x 40cm(d). Drive units & crossover kit £230.00 Drive unit pack £160.00

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KLS3 uses extremely light and stiff carbon-fibre cone drive units for a fast, accurate sound. A dedicated 8inch carbon-fibre midrange drive unit provides the clean, smooth and detailed midrange characterised by superb projection. Its high 90dB sensitivity and near flat 80Hz impedance make it one of the easiest loudspeakers to drive. An ideal loudspeaker for high-end valve amplifiers. 25mm MDF, internal volume 60Ltrs, external dimensions 26cm(w) x 100cm(h) x 35cm(d). Drive Unit & Crossover kit £350.00 Drive Unit Pack £230.00

KLS3 Gold Mk II

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

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a. ALPS blue audio grade 50K or 100K dual log potentiometer
b. AEROVOX 150uF 500Vdc x 2 high quality electrolytic (solder tag radial) 55mm(h) x 35mm diameter
c. AEROVOX 220uF 500Vdc x 2 high quality electrolytic (solder tag radial) 90mm(h) x 35mm diameter
d. TROBO 470uF 450V high quality electrolytic (snap in radial) 50mm(h) x 35mm diameter
e. TROBO 100uF 450V high quality electrolytics (snap in radial) 40mm(h) x 20mm diameter
f. LCR 22.5uF 440Vdc polypropylene capacitors (wire leadouts radial) 85mm(h) x 45mm diameter
g. ANSAR 22.5uF 630Vdc polypropylene capacitors (wire leadouts radial) 85mm(h) x 45mm diameter
h. AMPH0m 0.47uF 630Vdc paper in oil 55mm(h) x 35mm diameter

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KLS10 chasis 70mm(h) x 400mm(d) £450.00 ideal for hobbyists, has punched holes for 4 octal & 8 B9A valve bases, 2 x 78 lam and 1 x 120 lam. Front has switch holes, has been spk. sockets & photo socket panel.
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These are expert kits, not for the inexperienced. You must be able to solder and read a circuit diagram. The valve kits contain initial voltages. We cannot be held responsible for any errors arising from the construction of these kits.

### Amplifier Kits Description

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<tr>
<th>Order No.</th>
<th>Kit88 Valve Integrated Amplifier Kit (with valves)</th>
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<th>Kit88 Valve integrated amplifier kit (with valves)</th>
<th>Kit88 Valve integrated amplifier kit (without valves)</th>
<th>HD83 Valve headphone amplifier kit</th>
<th>Ke180 Valve Monoblock Amplifier Kit (with valves)</th>
<th>Ke180 Valve Monoblock Amplifier Kit (without valves)</th>
<th>WAP surplus toroidal valve mains transformers</th>
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<th>KLS9 Drive Units</th>
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<th>Ke134 mains toroidal transformer</th>
<th>Ke180 mains toroidal transformer (encapsulated)</th>
<th>HD83 mains toroidal transformer</th>
<th>PSU-II mains toroidal transformer</th>
<th>TRAN51 mains toroidal transformer</th>
<th>KIT88/KaT88 EI push-pull output transformer</th>
<th>Ke180 EI/parallel-push-pull output transformer</th>
<th>HD83 EI/single ended output transformer</th>
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Please note that other cable lengths are available:

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MP3 wrong footed the Japanese. It came from nowhere (i.e. not out of Japan) to grab headlines around the world. Suddenly, MP3 was threatening to be the format of tomorrow, to the consternation of majors like Sony, who have been patiently throwing millions at MiniDisc since 1992 in an attempt to capture the portable music market. MP3 threatened to wrench it away, but now Japanese companies Panasonic and Toshiba are fighting back with a rival technology that to me looks like a good contender for the future - SD Card.

Whilst MP3 is fine in itself, it isn't going anywhere. I test players regularly and they are proving to be much of a muchness. Most come from small Korean companies and comprise a bundle of chips that by today's standards are simple technology. There's been little advance in quality or performance over the last year or so.

MP3 files give good quality when encoded properly through a Fraunhofer engine, but this takes time. Most MP3 rippers are too fast, which limits quality my measurements show. Associated software isn't changing either. So-called 'Juke Box' programmes are quite crude, poor rippers giving mediocre sound quality.

Players and software like this were fine as initial offerings: they were of their time. Time and expectations have moved on quickly however; MP3 players have not.

By way of contrast, Toshiba and Panasonic in alliance have both published developmental road maps for their new SD Card system that clearly show they intend to develop it into something quite formidable over the next few years. Looking at what they propose to achieve offers tentative answers to questions about where audio is going today, in a confusing market full of technological change.

SD Card is set to offer a massive 1GB storage capacity by 2003, which raises some fascinating possibilities. I note the system accepts standard CD audio, in addition to AAC (Advanced Audio Coding to MPEG 2) files and - surprisingly - MP3 files. Japanese Panasonic executives told me when I questioned them at the Malaysian launch, 1GB will easily accommodate an entire CD. It will also accommodate DVD Audio compressed by a 5:1 ratio, using MPEG2 compression. It would give 15 hours of AAC encoded music. Will we have wristwatch DVD-Audio in a few year's time?

I couldn't help but notice at the Malaysian show debut of SD Card that it got pride of place in Panasonic's giant exhibition space, DVD-Audio being consigned to a small demo room. Quite obviously Panasonic and Toshiba see card-memory audio as the way things will go in the mass market, with DVD-Audio occupying a small high-end niche for those who want ultimate quality. Since 1GB can handle DVD-Audio they will eventually merge, however.

If the idea of wrist-watch DVD-Audio seems stunning, there's more! The SD alliance and Sony are working on wireless connection, based upon Bluetooth digital RF transmission technology. Intended for computers, it's coming to audio.

There are many ways to load flash memory, apart from today's slow and clunky system of hooking up to a computer and fiddling with a Juke Box programme. Panasonic are looking to TV set top boxes, then there are music kiosks and mobile phones.

Flash memory is expensive but SanDisk say 64MB should cost around £6 in five years time, giving one hour of AAC encoded music. Toshiba say they are reducing cost 30% per annum and are acutely aware of the need for the $10 chip. Will people be buying music on a chip instead of a CD soon? If these prices are achieved, it is possible.

What a fascinating future scenario! Although MiniDisc is inexpensive it looks technologically archaic against flash memory portables, including Sony's own Memory Stick Walkman. MP3 and the internet started it all but the Japanese are about to fight back with their version of future audio: SD Card. I can't help feeling that this is the way audio and true hi-fi, in the form of DVD-Audio, are going.

Quite obviously Panasonic and Toshiba see card-memory audio as the way things will go in the mass market.

Noel Keywood
bumped down a day early to get
some rest before the Malaysia
Audio Show started - but it wasn't
to be. Panasonic had something new
to reveal and were holding a lavish
day-early press conference. Lasers
flashed, music thumped and onto the
stage walked two slender Malaysian
girls to introduce to us a brand new
technology: SD Card. Strapped to their
wrists were wristwatch style hi-fi
players; around their necks dangled
pendant players. The scale of the
presentation gave me the impression
that SD Card looms very large in
Panasonic’s future plans - larger than
DVD Audio.

SD Card is a solid-state memory
card of 64MB capacity that stores up
to one hour’s worth of music for
miniature audio players little larger
than a matchbox. If it sounds like MP3,
it is - in ‘commercially correct’ form
and with better sound quality. The big
Japanese companies have been slow to
tack onto MP3, largely because of
copying problems. Panasonic’s card
memory is SDMI compliant, hence the
name SD Card, offering serial copying
protection. I was fascinated by other
features though. The coding scheme
(AAC/MPEG 2) offers higher quality
than MP3, leading Panasonic to claim
they offer higher audio quality than
MP3 players. Demo units I listened to
suffered from tinny sounding earpieces
- always a limitation with portable
audio.

The “road map” for SD Card also
cought my attention. Panasonic,
working in conjunction with SanDisk
and Toshiba, expect to produce 256MB
cards by 2001 and no less than 1GB
cards by 2003, with a 10MB/s data
rate. This raises some awesome
possibilities. The company showed
video cameras, still cameras, portable
telephones and even microwave ovens
with SD Cards. My Far East press data
also noted that rice cookers will come
with SD Card! Since a CD stores
600MB and SD Card can store CD
audio data (as well as MP3), it will
soon be able to store an entire CD,
uncompressed. So by 2003 we’ll be
able to play CDs from a ‘wristwatch’ it
appears.

Panasonic were also demonstrating
a DVD-Audio micro system, the SC-
HDA710, comprising neat mini
components coupled to attractive
conventional loudspeakers. A sequen-
tial demo of CD followed by DVD
Audio clearly showed DVD Audio had
a perceptibly more open and spacious
quality, lacking the enclosed and
constrained character of CD. Even
from a micro system I was fascinated
to hear notes die away smoothly
instead of suffering the sudden truncation
imposed by CD coding.

Another upcoming technology
Panasonic obviously wanted everyone
to see was their fantastically impres-
sive Tau Plasma screen. At 9cms deep
and 33kgs it can be hung on a wall.
Picture quality was breathtakingly
sharp, bright and colour rich. Pity that
the price, in Malaysia at least, amounts
to £10,000, albeit for a very large
panel of 106cms (42in) diagonal. The
days of the conventional TV are
numbered.

So are video recorders using VHS
cassettes. Panasonic want us to record
to 4.7GB DVD RAM cartridges, which
accept audio and video, using their
new DMR-E10. Although on display it’s
currently for the Japanese market only.
Pioneer were showing their alterna-
tive, the new DVR-I000 DVD-RW
recorder, only available in Japan at
present. It records direct to DVD-RW
discs, also with 4.7GB capacity. Both
these recorders could of course
record DVD-Audio in future. At
present they are expensive but cheaper models will doubtless become available soon. All the same, don’t expect DVD recorders to reach the low, low price of below £200 being asked for DVD players at present.

Sharp had an interesting display of headphones that use a 64MB MagicGate (Sony Memory Stick) solid-state memory card to store up to one hour of MP3 audio at 128kbps. Again for Japan only, the quoted Malaysian price was 1710RM, or £285.

At the other end of the audio scale, with China so close, valve amplifiers get a good airing in this region, in spite of year-round temperatures that hover around 32 degrees centigrade. Beautifully built and finished were the Audio Space range from Hong Kong. I spotted a new model, the AS-8P with 6550 output valves capable of delivering 45W per channel. It can be run in triode or ultra-linear mode and has adjustable negative feedback. The 6550 is very popular in America, at which market this model is undoubtedly aimed. Price was equivalent to £983. Audio Space have a model for everyone, also offering the AS-8i fitted with KT88s. This valve is popular elsewhere around the world. Being one of the last power valves ever made it offers a great performance. Audio Space also make 845 single-ended amplifiers, EL34 and 64 types, plus a 300B amplifier - quite a range.

In from China came loudspeaker designer and founder of Acoustic Energy, Phil Jones. Now behind the U.S. brand American Acoustic Development, based in North Carolina but manufacturing in China, Phil brought with him a wide range of new loudspeakers, including a fascinating single-driver miniature that he claimed worked from 150Hz up to 20kHz. Phil handles every aspect of design, from drive unit through to cabinet, making AAD loudspeakers better optimised than those based upon OEM drivers, yet priced lower than possible because of China manufacture. Expect them in the UK soon.

As they say in the West, “early bird catches the worm”. Flying into this year’s MAS2000 show early I caught SD Card. Japan has finally got to grips with the alien idea of MP3 (European file format played on Korea hardware) and is bringing its industrial might to bear. This looks like the future of audio.
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"M
P3. I heard that's going to be obsolete soon", said the marketing manager of one of Britain's biggest hi-fi companies to me on the phone last week.

Well, it looks like Big Bill Gates' PR men are doing their jobs better than I thought. This statement wouldn't have mattered so much if it had come from some bloke down the pub, but for a well respected audio industry professional to have got the impression that Microsoft's new MS Audio format is the end of MP3 is alarming.

It speaks volumes about how a few carefully arranged press demonstrations and some off-the-record briefings to the right computer journalists can sway public opinion. Suddenly, thanks to a nod and wink, MP3 is on its last legs, facing imminent death at the hand of MS Audio.

For those audio freaks who've yet to hear Microsoft's mantra, MS Audio is the new compressed music format Bill Gates & Co. developed last year as a rival to MP3. It isn't actually that dissimilar, being another variation on the theme of psychoacoustic digital audio coding. Like Sony's ATRAC, Philips' PASC and the proprietary MP3 format it's simply a way of throwing away music data intelligently, so you can store more in a given amount of space.

MS Audio forms the mainstay of the new Windows Media Player, soon to appear bundled with Windows Millennium Edition, which is the latest and greatest (?) of Microsoft's home user PC operating systems. This fact alone means it will fast become a common occurrence simply through sheer volume of numbers. We music buyers will be ripping our CDs to WMA files and squirting them to Microsoft's new Winjam portable digital player (yours for £129 from this Autumn - yes, they've thought of everything) simply because there's a WMA ripper free in our Operating Systems. If we want to use MP3, we'll have to either download some software or buy an all-in-one like MusicMatch Jukebox. Not particularly difficult or expensive of course, but still more fussy than using Windows' built-in freebie...

Just think what this will all mean. As soon as the new Windows arrives in people's homes later this year, MS Audio becomes a serious global music format! So slow was CD's adoption that it took three years for it to look like it had any future, but thanks to the scale of the global PC industry MS Audio is going to achieve a massive market presence overnight. Now that's what I call monopoly politics...

Some UK hi-fi magazines were initially very sniffy about MP3, possibly due to a lack of understanding about its potential. Well this time it's our turn to put the downer on a new compressed digital format and declare that MS Audio is A Bad Thing. As you'll discover when you read our exhaustive review in this month's issue, at its best quality setting its sonics don't hold a candle to MP3 running at just medium resolution. And that's only the start of our objections.

You could argue that anything which gets people into music can only be a force for good - which is how I feel about all those millions of awful sounding low bit-rate MP3s up on the Net for free downloading. But why replace a universal, freely distributed, non-aligned music carrier with another from the world's greatest private monopoly? This fact alone gives me the heebeegeebees: it just can't be good for music (and music buyers) in the long run.

Take this to its logical extreme and think ten years into the future. Given that computer power doubles - and prices halve - every eighteen months, we'll soon be finding everything we do involves computer chips. (If Pentium P10,000s cost 1p each, why not put them in everything?) This means computers will dominate music and home entertainment, so if Microsoft continues to dominate computers, it could theoretically get to the point where you'll need a Windows Media Player to play any kind of recorded music anywhere on earth...

On the grounds of music (and computer) industry politics alone, Big Bill's innocuous little MS Audio format suddenly looks scary. And then there's the sound quality issue. Enjoy page 52!
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When a new format hits the hi-fi scene, there's usually one of two courses it will take. Either the market will accept it, ensuring initial steady growth, or alternatively the technology simply falls upon deaf ears and fades away within a year or two. Compact Cassette and Disc are typical examples of the former, Digital Compact Cassette an unfortunate example of the latter. There's always an exception to the rule though, and, in terms of hi-fi, the exception comes in the form of MiniDisc.

The progress of MiniDisc has been far from predictable and has had most of the pundits baffled at some point or other. When I began my column seven years ago, MD was in its infancy. Generally praised for its portability and editing features, the format received a lukewarm (to put it mildly) reception from most of the specialist press in terms of sound quality. It looked for sometime as though Sony's creation was doomed to follow DCC into obscurity. The arrival of cheaper CDRs and imminent MP3 during the late 1990s looked set to seal the fate of MD. Unlike CD and latterly DVD, which firmly established themselves within the first five years of production, it took MD eight years to really get to grips with the U.K. market. Even then the product was not - and still isn't - a true global medium. Immensely popular in the Far East and Britain, not so popular within Continental Europe and hardly even recognised the other side of the Atlantic.

Even after eight years the future of MD is still difficult to predict. However, after three strong years the format appears at last to be suffering slightly. Sales of the machines, in the UK at least, have appeared to reach a plateau. Some of the major hi-fi retailers are even reporting a slackening of demand. Looked at in the cold light of day, this wouldn't come as a surprise to many CDRs are now cheaper and better value than ever, and many of those who don't have a hi-fi separates system are utilising the computer versions instead. MP3, whilst far from booming, is beginning to gain firmer ground within the market place. So the competition is stronger than ever. What's more, outside of portables and hi-fi separates the medium hasn't been so well received.

There are a number of mini systems incorporating MD, but not as many as you'd expect for a format now eight years into its life cycle, and trying to find a car on the market with a standard fit MD is nigh on impossible.

Perhaps it doesn't help that finding pre-recorded material is a similarly thankless task. Yet there are other, less apparent, reasons for MiniDisc's current state of malaise. The first is that studies have shown that there's a group of consumers that will always buy the latest technology whether it shows practical benefit or not! It could be that MD is no longer the 'in thing', with the gadget freaks attention now turned towards the likes of DVD, WAP phones and MP3. Secondly, and rather oddly, Sony still has strong control of the rights to the technology. Even after all this time, to my knowledge, there's still only Sharp and Sony licensed to make the mechanisms. This, and the high license price Sony charge to other manufacturers to use their mechanism, goes some way to explaining why such manufacturers are reluctant to enter the MD arena. In these times of competition and supposedly open markets it seems odd that Sony pretty much still has a monopoly with MiniDisc.

More extraordinary still, is that those expecting MD bargains for the new hi-fi season could find themselves disappointed. Retail industry sources have told me that Sony trade prices for many of their MD players have increased by around 20% or more. With profit margins already low with most discounted machines (eg. the Sony MDSJE530 at around £150), high street MD player prices look set to rise, if anything, over the coming months. Hardly what you'd expect from a medium at this stage in its product life. But then Sony no doubt have their reasons. I believe an interest in raising the profile of the brand has been touted as being one of the possible reasons for the move.

Of course there's still Sharp and the brands, such as Technics and Kenwood, that use Sharp mechanisms. Yet think MD and one naturally thinks Sony. Sales figures reflect this too. Without Sony, MiniDisc would sink without trace. Perhaps Sony realise that MiniDisc's future isn't so bright and that they might as well charge as much for it as they can in its twilight years. One thing's for sure though. Don't discount MiniDisc as a dead duck just yet. If there's one thing the last eight years have shown me, it's to be wary of making predictions! MD has risen from impossible odds.

Perhaps Sony realise that MiniDisc's future isn't so bright and that they might as well charge as much for it as they can in its twilight years.

 Dominic Todd
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The theory and design of loudspeaker enclosures are examined in this comprehensive guide. The book covers the principles and practice of loudspeaker design, from the selection of materials to the construction of cabinets. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the design of loudspeaker enclosures.

Back To Basics Audio by Alanathan Latham

A detailed examination of the LP and its role in the modern high-end audio market. The book covers the history of the LP, its design, and its influence on the development of modern high-end audio systems. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the LP and its place in modern high-end audio.

Electrostatic Loudspeaker Design and Construction by Ronald Wagnerr

A step-by-step guide to the design and construction of a full-range electrostatic loudspeaker. The book covers the principles and practice of electrostatic loudspeaker design, from the selection of materials to the construction of the loudspeaker. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the design of electrostatic loudspeakers.

Testing Loudspeakers by Joe D’Appolito

A comprehensive guide to the testing of loudspeakers. The book covers the principles and practice of loudspeaker testing, from the selection of test equipment to the interpretation of test results. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the testing of loudspeakers.

This is a classic reference handbook for all who are interested in the design and application of audio amplifiers and radio receivers, and deals with basic principles and the practical design of all types of audio amplifiers, radio receivers with valves and transistors, and goes on to the invention of the transistor, covering tubes, valve testing, general theory and components, antennas and audio and radio circuits, power supplies, design of complete AM and FM receivers, and reference information.

Principles of Electronic Tubes by Herbert I. Reich.

This book covers construction projects for preamplifiers, power amplifiers and two amplifiers for moat musical instruments aimed at the practical audio/electronic enthusiast, it offers useful information on the operation of electronic tubes, while the first chapter gives a short history of the thermionic valve.

Build your own Audio Valve Amplifiers: in. The Beginner's Guide to Tube Design

This book covers construction projects for preamplifiers, power amplifiers and two amplifiers for most musical instruments aimed at the practical audio/electronic enthusiast, it offers useful information on the operation of electronic tubes, while the first chapter gives a short history of the thermionic valve.

Audio Reality by Bruce Rozenblitz

A fine read that investigates conductor, skin effect, impedance, interconnects, speaker cables, balanced lines, transmission lines, power cords, isolation transformers, grids, tubes, acoustics and much more. Also, includes a 4-pole diplexer design project, 80watt OTL,25 watt TL, grounded grid pre-amp, 15Watt 6B4SE amp, and a grounded grid cascade phone preamp.

The Williamson Amplifier by J. E. Rodenhinse

This is a classic reference handbook for all who are interested in the design and application of audio amplifiers and radio receivers, and deals with basic principles and the practical design of all types of audio amplifiers, radio receivers with valves and transistors, and goes on to the invention of the transistor, covering tubes, valve testing, general theory and components, antennas and audio and radio circuits, power supplies, design of complete AM and FM receivers, and reference information.

Radio Amplifier Project Books

Outlines the revolution of radio receiving tubes and the part they played in the domestic radio receiver. A reference for those interested in the history and development of radio, including amplifiers after 1954.

Electronic Universal Vade-Mecum

This book covers construction projects for preamplifiers, power amplifiers and two amplifiers for most musical instruments aimed at the practical audio/electronic enthusiast, it offers useful information on the operation of electronic tubes, while the first chapter gives a short history of the thermionic valve.

OUTLINE OF ELECTRONIC DESIGN

Build your own Audio Valve Amplifiers in. The Beginner's Guide to Tube Design

This book covers construction projects for preamplifiers, power amplifiers and two amplifiers for most musical instruments aimed at the practical audio/electronic enthusiast, it offers useful information on the operation of electronic tubes, while the first chapter gives a short history of the thermionic valve.
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welcome to
world favourites

Here’s a list of products that are a good buy. We’ve tried to cater for a range of tastes, identifying strong products in every area. We’re agnostic so you’ll find a wide range of products, from valve pre-amps through to MiniDisc players. Products marked * are recently out of production but make a good second-hand buy.

Prices shown are those at the time of the review

Roksan Caspian CD player
Sold as a ROK

**COMPACT DISC**

ARCAM FMJ CD33 £1100
This British-built player is extremely versatile. Controlled and detailed with a musical insight that few match. (Jul 2000)

CAMBRIDGE CD4SE* £200
A touch soft in the treble but outstanding in every other respect. (Feb 98)

KENWOOD DP-3080M* £180
Has great clarity and presence for the price. Not as naturally expressive as the CD4SE though. (Feb 98)

LINN KARIK II* £175
Under rated and overlooked, the final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, gritty dynamic sound, albeit tonally rather dry. (Sep 98)

MANTZ CD-17 K1-S £1100
The Mantz excels in all areas. Without doubt this is one of the most involving CD players on the planet. Build quality is also exemplary. (Sep 97)

MANTZ CD-63 MIKI K1-5F £400
Very detailed and revealing player. More cerebral than visceral sounding, however. (May 95)

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-RAY £800
Commonsense sturdy CD player of exceptional ability. Clear and detailed with high quality external processing system. The X-Ray is inclined to show up poor record- ings, but it’s only doing its job! (Feb 99)

NAD 550 £1600
This dynamic top of the range Silverline spinner delights with any type of music. Exciting, sophisticated sounding and highly recommended. (Jun 2000)

Roksan Caspian £895
The Caspian has a smooth, slightly bright sound with some of the clearest treble in the business. Very engaging, dynamic character. (Aug 97)

ROTEL RCD 951 £300
HDCD capability at a midrange price. Plain Jane looks but solid construction. There is some higher than average measured distortion which may take the edge off this otherwise tempting product. (Aug 99)

SONIC FRONTIERS TRANSPORT £6999
Cutting-edge design and technology combine to make this one very desirable product. The only problem is the fantasy hi-fi price. (Sep 98)

TEAC P-30 £2500
Cheap it isn’t, but then it sounds like a million digital dollars. Nothing short of superb. (Jun 97)

TEAC VRDS T1 £800
Excellent mid-price silver disc spinner with a powerful, expansive and warm sound. Easily beats most sub-£1000 designs. A good choice for the budget conscious who want the best. (Feb 95)

**CD TRANSPORTS**

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 3* £99
Superb value for money with extensive facilities and solid, detailed sonics. Upgrades any sub-£300 player. (Jan 98)

DCS ELGAR £8500
Future-proof convertor which will handle 24/96 and 24/192. Extremely open and natural performer. (Nov 97)

DPA LITTLE BIT 3 £299
A taste of the high end on a budget. Rich, clean, punchy sound transforms budget CD players. Excellent mid-price silver disc spinner with a powerful, expansive and warm sound. Easily beats most sub-£1000 designs. A good choice for the budget conscious who want the best. (Feb 95)

**HDCD TRANSPORT**

MICHELL GYRODEC SE £775
Exquisitely built, infinitely upgradeable deck that gives true high end sound at mid-fi prices. (Aug 97)

MICHELL ORBE £2000
Fantastically capable all rounder with commanding, powerful, detailed sound that gets the best from almost any arm and cartridge. Supreme build, brilliance. (Apr 95)

ORIGIN LIVE STANDARD (KIT) £145
Good in standard form with AC motor; frighteningly good with a DC motor and battery PSU. (Sep 97)

PINK TRIANGLE TARANTELLA £680
Not only does the Tarantella have more style than a catwalk full of models, it also combines PT’s usual clarity with real authority. (Oct 97)

PROJECT DEBUT £110
Straight out of the box and onto the shelf! Nothing short of a bargain. Vinyl’s never had it so good, so cheaply! (Jun 98)

REGA PLANAR 2 £214
Brilliant starter deck with extremely polished manner. Better built. £274 Planar 3 is a great, all-in-one package that eats mid-price CD players for breakfast. (Sep 97)

ROKSAN XERXES X £1295
DSU or XPS 3.5 power supply £150/170 extra. Excellent pitch stability from a new Swiss motor and outboard power supply. Very tight bass, fine dynamics and revealing clarity. (Jan 97)

**TONEARMS**

HADCOCK 242 SE £649
Latest of a long line of unipivot arms.Admass mass makes the 242 suitable for both low compliance MCs and straw-in-the-wind high compliance types. Revised geometry and chromium plating completes a first-class job. (Jun 2000)

NAIM ARO® £1975
Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.

REGA RB300 £180
Some may prefer the simpler RB250 at £130. Detailed, tight, rhythmic sound but tonally rather grey and cold-sounding. Still excellent value, though.
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The best performance / value cables - Quiet, dynamic and natural, with incredible imaging and detail!

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MI 2 "Veracity" speaker cable, superb performance at only £16.95/meter, choice of termination.
MI 3 "Divinity / Big Boy" speaker cable, fabulous high-end performer at £32.95/meter.
AG 1, AG 2 and AG 3 Solid! Fine Silver Cables also available

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All Goertz Cables offered on 21 day trial basis subject to normal conditions (exc. MI 3/AG1,2,3).

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Silver Note - multi purpose paralleled pair 8 nines copper/silver 20 AWG cable with pure Teflon dielectric £6.95/meter

Silver Night - full copper braid twisted variant of Silver Note with black overall outer sheath £13.95/meter.

Blue Vulcan - screened twisted pair with drain wire, 8 nines copper/silver 26 AWG cable with pure Teflon £14.95/meter

Blue Diamond - screened quad, 8 nines copper/silver/cable, with pure Teflon dielectric and outer sheath £24.95/meter

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Five models covering 2 to 30 lbs.each. Outstanding value at only £3.95 each Unbeatable value - these really work!

New Audio Direct Cables - a superb range of cables that genuinely perform way above their price!

Powerlinx Power cords designed specifically for Audio and manufactured from the best available materials.

They have a full Mil. Spec screen and feature top quality hardware & non-invasive noise and surge protection.

Red Baron 1.2m/15 amp cord for preamp and CD etc. £69.95

Blue Max 1.5m/25 amp cord for preamp and CD etc. £149.95

The Red Baron cords are quiet, dynamic and transparent, and will outperform anything up to £400.00!

The Blue Max cords are simply astonishing and will outperform anything else on the market today!

Audiolinx Interconnects to rival the very best! Made from hyper-pure copper & silver & pure Teflon.

Alfa-max Four woven conductors sheathed in Teflon with a Mil Spec. screen. 0.6m/£125.00 1.0m/£195.00

Ultra Max Eight woven conductors sheathed in Teflon with a Mil Spec. screen. 0.6m/£245.00 1.0m/£395.00

Digi-max Superb high-end 75 ohm screened digital cable in black protective sleeve. 0.6m/£64.95 1.0m/£99.95

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**Arcam Alpha 8 Tuner** (2Yr G'tee) £199.00

**AVI Neutron Speakers** £369.00

**Cyrus 2/PSX Amplifier S/H** £299.00

**Linn Wakonda Preamp S/H (1Yr G'tee)** £399.00

**Linn LK140 Power Amp** (2Yr G'tee) £469.00

**Linn Kaber Passive** (Black - 2Yr G'tee) £995.00

**Linn Kaber Aktiv** (Walnut/Grey) inc cards £795.00

**Linn Isobarik Active Speakers** £675.00

**Linn Helix 2 Spkrs inc stands S/H** £995.00

**Mission 772e Speakers** (As New) £229.00

**Mission 773e Speakers** (As New) £399.00

**Naim NAC92/NAP90 Combo** (S/H) £575.00

**Ortofon MC 7500** £2000

**Ortofon MC 15** £140

**Goldring 1042** £130

**Mission 773e Speakers** (As New) £219.00

**Rega Brio Amplifier** (2Yr G'tee) £225.00

**Rega Luna Amplifier** (2Yr G'tee) £375.00

**Tag PA10 Pre Amp** (2Yr G'tee) £899.00

**Rega CD3.5 CD Player** £899.00

**Naim CD 3.5 CD Player** £1087.00

**Naim NAP140 Power Amp** (1Yr G'tee) £815.00

**Naim AV1 Surround Processor** (1Yr G'tee) £1835.00

**Naim NAP155 Power Amp** £995.00

**Askott alan Condenser** £30

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**Mission 773e Speakers** (As New) £399.00

**Naim NAC92/NAP90 Combo** (S/H) £575.00

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANES** £160

**Warm, sumptuous, sweet sound hi-fi amp.**

**NAIM NAIT 3** £575

**Superb rhythms and dynamics make for great music making, but tonally monochromatic.**

**Super-optimal phonostage makes it ideal for vinyl junkies.**

**ROKSAN CASPIAN** £695

**Smooth, warm integrated with remote control that works happily into most speakers.**

**SONNETEER ALABASTER** £995

**Builds on the strengths of the Campion with ample control, colour and drive.**

**PHONO STAGES**

**CREEK OBH-8 SE** £180

**Punchy, rhythmic character with Hodiles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile product.**

**LFD MISTRAL**

**PHONO STAGE** £300

**The Mistral has a warmth and involvement that make many pricier stages sound overpriced.**

**MICHELL DELPHINI MONOBLOCS** £1995

**Analogue tour-de-force gives supremely clean, detailed and finely resolved sound with breathtaking dynamics. Great value, even at this price.**

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-LP** £125

**One of the famous MF X series. Full marks throughout for clarity and detail. Switchable between MM and MC. Indestructible build!**

**PRO-JECT PHONO BOX** £39

**Not the last word in many respects but a thoroughly honest piece of work. Inexpensive introduction to all that vinyl has to offer. MM and MC provision plus choice of two impedances.**

**ROKSAN ARTAXERXES X** £590

**With the Atessa PSU the Artaxerxes X MM/MMC stage still shines. Great stage depth, neutrality and tonal colour.**

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**AVI Neutron Speakers** (499.00)

**Cyrus 2/PSX Amplifier S/H** (649.00)

**Linn Wakonda Preamp S/H (1Yr G'tee)** (750.00)

**Linn LK140 Power Amp** (2Yr G'tee) (750.00)

**Linn Kaber Passive** (Black - 2Yr G'tee) (2000.00)

**Linn Kaber Aktiv** (Walnut/Grey) inc cards (2850.00)

**Linn Isobarik Active Speakers** (Latest spec) (3500.00)

**Linn Helix 2 Spkrs inc stands S/H** (449.00)

**Mission 772e Speakers** (As New) (229.00)

**Mission 773e Speakers** (As New) (399.00)

**Naim NAC92/NAP90 Combo** (S/H) (995.00)
SONNETEER SEDLEY £399
Combines transparency and fine dynamics with excellent rhythmic ability. (May 98)

PRE-AMPLIFIERS

AMC 1100 £150
Suffers from un-defeatable tone controls but an extremely good value piece of kit. Partners the similarly budget level AMC 2200 power amplifier, also at £150. Comfortable beginners' choice. (Mar 99)

AUDIO ANALOGUE BELLINI £475
Showcases AA's characteristic mix of clarity and musicality and blasts the competition. (Apr 98)

CHORD CPA1800 £1800
Clarity, insight and control are second to none - an addictive mixture. (Mar 98)

CROFT VITALE £350
A modestly priced valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance. MM phono stage plus three line stages are standard. Volume controls are separate for each channel, thus giving balance adjustment. A remarkable item in all respects. (Feb 2000)

XTC PRE-1 £1000
Almost valve-like in its smoothness, the line-level Pre-1 is warm and seductively clear. (Nov 96)

POWER AMPLIFIERS

ARCAM £400
With 70W on tap, the 99 will drive most loudspeakers with a spacious and detailed sound. Good bass welly too. (Dec 96)

CHORD SPM400 £1400
There's a sense of effortless power to the Chord that gives music real scale and presence. (Mar 98)

MARANTZ MODEL 9 £8000
Authentic reproduction monoblocks still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after. (Mar 97)

MICHIEL ALECTO £1989
Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this is a superb winning combo. (Oct 98)

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-A200 £1000/pair
200W of high-end monobloc power in a grooved tube. (Aug 98)

NAIM NAP180 £1060
Partnered with a NAC282, this has classic Naim control, and a superbly rhythmic presentation.

TUNERS

CAMBRIDGE T500 £180
An extremely engaging tuner with a performance at odds with its low price. Not exactly a Troullfino, but you may not notice. (Feb 99)

CREEK T43 £399
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics. A great little tuner and unbeatable at this price. (May 98)

MARANTZ ST17 £600
A positive dreadnought of a tuner. Sweet and articulate midrange and sparkling treble. (Oct 99)

MISSION CYRUS FM7 £300
Clear and lucid sound puts it up with the best. Superb build too. (Apr 94)

NAIM NAP03 £595
The NAP03's warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners. (Sep 93)

SONY ST-SA3ES £399
A very musical sound. (April 2000)

AUDETTE AD-S950 £200
Sonicity a very decent machine at the price. Comes fitted with Dolby B, C and the dead handy Dolby S. (Apr 96)

AUXIA AD-S950 £300
A stable transport, superb head and Dolby S make the AD-S950 an excellent all-rounder. (Feb 95)

KENWOOD KK-3090 £160
A simple deck, but excellent-quality head and transport give top quality sound. (Oct 96)

PIONEER CT-S7405 £430
A great piece of engineering from Pioneer, with first-rate sound. (Jun 96)

YAMAHA KX-805E £250
The SE tag is more than a marketing gimmick. Sound is solid and clear with Dolby S. (Sep 97)

LOUDSPEAKERS

CASTLE EDEN £699
Impressively vice-free 'speakers that offer great transparency and involvement. One of a select band that simply makes music regardless. (Mar 97)

EPSON ES12 £495
Strong, punchy bass is allied to finely detailed, articulate midrange and sparkling treble. (Oct 96)

KEF CRESTA 1 loudspeakers
A very musical sound

KEF CRESTA I £100
Delightfully sophisticated presentation for the price. Won't blow the roof off, but will deliver a very musical sound. (April 2000)

KLIPSCH HERESEY II £1100
An outstanding high sensitivity loudspeaker with midrange and treble horns coupled with infinite baffle 12" bass driver. Effortless, fast and accurate. (May 99)

MISSION 752 £495
Cracking mid-price mini towers combined HD drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Beryll load characteristics makes them great for values. (Sep 99)

MISSION 771 £170
Characteristically fast, punchy Mission sound from the Aerogel mid/bass and silk-dome tweeter. (Jul 98)

What is true hi-fi performance?
Here's a simple truth. You can believe what you read but you will never really know how good something is until you listen. A demonstration is worth a thousand words and our hi-fi systems all have one thing in common. we guarantee you will get more from your music! When you hear what we mean, you will never look back. Honest!
KENWOOD DHF-9620 £500
An excellent tool for home recording, combines convenience, superb sound and a fair price. (Aug 99)

MARANTZ DR-17 £1100
Probably the best sounding CD recorder on the market. Built like a brick out house with a true audiophile sound. HDCD compatible. (July 2000)

PHILIPS CDR-765 £360
One of the first twin deck recorders/players that boasts high speed dub facility. Playback could be warmer, but still a bargain. (Oct 99)

PIONEER PDR-555 RV £480
Excellent mid-priced CD recorder that both plays and records with equal panache. (Oct 99)

SONY TCD-8 DATMAN £599
Super clean and detailed sound makes this an amazing portable. Not as robust as it should be though.

DENON DVD-5000 £1600
Monster build, as you’d expect at this price. Facilities and gadgets galore and drop-dead accurate sound, although not as good as similarly-priced CD players. (Mar 99)

PIONEER DV-717 £700
Well built and a solid performer, with a ‘true’ 24/96 digital output. Facilities in abundance and a controlled, exciting way with CD replay. Shame it lacks a Dolby Digital decoder! (Sep 99)

SONY DVP-5725 £490
One of the best buys in the DVD market. Available in a dodgy white case, but the facilities and performance more than make up for this. Excellent with both music and visuals, and a whole host of up to the minute facilities to keep you occupied. (Mar 2000)

JECKLIN FLOAT MODEL TWO £99
Wonderful panel-like and open sound from these esoteric-looking headclamps. Do not wear in public unless you like being mobbed by fools!

SENNHEISER HD-490 £50
Good value cans with an exciting and bassy sound. Everything one should look for in headphones at a sensible price.

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DARC 20s 1 £1249.00
T20 Tuner £1099.00
PPA 20s 1 Remote Preamp £1499.00

**150m**

MIRACULOUS TRANSPARENCY

The Rumour is our reference at the price. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

**Money Saving**

This cable has a transparency of sound that’s rarely heard at the price. Excellent value for money.

**200m**

This isn’t cheap, but it sounds absolutely fab. An open and spacious sound that simply carries music.

**300m**

Some of the fastest and most transparent cable around. A simple and effective upgrade.

**500m**

Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency.

**Chord Company**

**Blue Heaven** £150m

Some of the fastest and most transparent cable around. A simple and effective upgrade.

**Nordost**

**Chameleon 2** £90m

One of our favourite favourites, the Chameleons are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.

**DNM Reson** £40m

Neutral and transparent, and a steal at forty quid!

**Nordost**

**Blue Heaven** £150m

Some of the fastest and most transparent cable around. A simple and effective upgrade.

**Alesis Masterdsk**

A glimpse of the future

**Chord Company**

**Rumour** £9.95m

The Rumour is our reference at the price. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

**DNM Reson** £6.95m

This cable has a transparency of sound that’s rarely heard at the price. Excellent value for money.

**Nordost**

**Blue Heaven** £375/3m pair

This isn’t cheap, but it sounds absolutely fab. An open and spacious sound that simply carries music.
CASSETTE

NAKAMICHI DR-2
A great machine with Nakamichi's legendary heads. The lowest cost 'true' Nakamichi at the time, retailing for £600.

NAKAMICHI CR-7
The last of the great ones, and definitely the best Nakamichi ever (yes, better than a Dragon)

YAMAHA TC-800G
Early classic in serious cassette. Its ski-slope looks got it a cult following once it had ceased to be simply ugly.

CD PLAYERS

MERIDIAN 207
Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output.

PIONEER PD-91
Built-to-last player with easy upgrade routes for modifiers. Not knockout as it stands but get one cheap and have a go!

CAMBRIDGE CD1
The first two box player with weighted mechanics and even an optional Dropout/error counter. Radical and effective at the time - a classic.

AMPLIFIERS

LEAK POINT ONE, TL12 & TL10
Ancestors of hi-fi, consequently expensive nowadays. As with all vintage valve stuff, overhauling is de rigueur before use, using original parts if possible.

LEAK PRE-AMPS
Line of 'good for their time' pre-amps. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fi.

LEAK STEREO 20
Excellent workaday classic valve amp. In good order the 20 will not disgrace itself. Various upgrades are available from specialist repairers.

LEAK TL12+

NAD 3020
You can't argue with success! NAD's budget transistor integrated gave thousands their first taste of hi-fi and remains great value.

QUAD 33/303 PRE/POWER
Great style and construction, also bullet proof. Warm and wooly sound, but easy going. A good introduction to early transistor audio classics.

QUAD 22/11 PRE/POWER
One of the all-time classic valve amplifiers. Unusual circuit but it works beautifully. 22 pre-amp not up to today's standards.

SUGDEN A21
Seventies transistor integrated has an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

TECHNICS SE-A5 Mk2
Nice transformer and electronics, shame about the casework. With tweaking, this 150watter can sound sweet.

LOUDSPEAKERS

KLIPSCHORN
Not exactly plentiful or cheap but a splendid beast. For efficiency they have seldom been equalled. Space hungry!

LEAK SANDWICH
Rather warm sounding big infinite baffle but cheap with it. With a reasonably powerful amp can sound quite satisfying.

LOWTHER PM6A
High quality full-range driver; still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGa
Touch dry in the bass but a technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities.

MISSION 770
Father of the 77 range which continues to this day. Well mannered with a warm sound and a kind load to amplifiers.

QUAD ESL57
Unrivalled. Properly serviced there is nothing like them. Their natural presentation may make them caviar to the general.

YAMAHA NS1000M
Hi-tech favourites of the Japanese and Americans. Viewed more warily in the UK but can give excellent results.
TANNOY GRF & AUTOGRAPH
Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. For Tannoy vintage see HFVV November 1998.

WHARFEDALE SUPER 8 RS DD
Ideal experimenters’ driver. High sensitivity ~14,000 Gauss magnet and extended frequency range. Inexpensive too!

TANNOY YORK, LANCASTER ETC.
Many similar models of infinite baffle or reflex design. Not the last word in tautness but the drivers work well in modern cabinets.

VINYL
ACOS LUSTRE
Very honest piece of kit, well made and easily adjusted. Vinyl beginners could do very much worse.

ALPHASON HR100S
First class arm, up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there’s no service available now.

ARISTON RDII
A one-time king of turntables very similar to the Linn LP12. Now deposed but worth a look at the right price.

LINN AXIS
Uncomplicated, lower-price version of the famous Sondek. Less expensive than some of its stablemates.

GARRARD 301 & 401
Legendary turntables, once fairly plentiful. Excellent back-up available; many different custom plinths available. High quality.

GOLDRING LENCO 88 & 99
Great deck for the kitchen table enthusiast. Garrard fans won’t look at ‘em but cheap and capable. Servicing available.

HADCOCK 228
Recently out-classed by Hadcock’s updated 228 Special Edition but a proper hi-fi arm for all that. Makers still service.

MICHELL FOCUS ONE
20 years and still going strong. Early runner in the ‘modern’ turntable cycle with a first class arm. Factory servicing available.

SHURE M75
Recent line-contact improvements have left the M75 behind but the wide range of needles make it a handy tool.

SME 3009 II
Everlasting classic tone-arm. Spares permanently available from SME. No longer the last word but peanuts second-hand.

THORENS TD124
Best classic deck ever? Judging by the prices they fetch it’s possible - 78rpm too!

THORENS TD150
Mid-price deck with a keen following. No real difficulty with servicing - novices may find the suspension system unnerving.

TRIO L-07D
Knockout heavyweight from 1980 with stainless bearing and 11lb platter! Not a give-away and beware! - spares scarce.

TUNERS
LEAK TROUGHLINE (ORIGINAL)
Interesting ornament but no longer hi-fi. Limited coverage of 88MHz to 100MHz only.

LEAK TROUGHLINE II & III MONO
Arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket.

LEAK TROUGHLINE III STEREO
Excellent tuner with indifferent stereo decoding circuit. Best when adapted to use modern outboard decoder.

MARANTZ ST-8
Possibly the ultimate Tardis console, including an oscilloscope for checking the strength of signal. Expensive even now.

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Tannoy 609 2 X 100 Watts / Dual-Concentric / Stands VGC (Reduced)

Mission 762 GC (Reduced)

Sequence 300 (Wall or Floor-Mount Flat) VGC / Boxed

Sony SS-Al L Mini-Monitors MINT (Similar To LS-35a's)

Musical Fidelity MC-5. (5-Driver/3-Way Monitors And Stands) 300 Watts

Kef 0-35 100 Watts / Uni-Q Drivers VGC

Castle Chester 1/4-Wave Horn-Loaded MINT / Boxed (Oak) With Plinths

Also any interesting Vinyl Accessories. Clamps, Protractors, Stylus Scales, Cleaning Devices etc:

Nakamichi BX-2 Fair Condition

Denon DAM 550. HX-PRO Etc: MINT/AS NEW

Denon DRM 550 VGC

Q.E.D. T-231 VGC

Your Records Cleaned to Perfection on Moth Machine For £1.00 Each Including New Inner-Sleeve

Lecson FM1 F.M. Tuner (Very Rare) VGC

Sugden FM VGC

Arcam Delta 60. 60 Watts Int. / Phono-Stage GC

Arcam Delta 90.2 Int. / Phono-Stage Mint / As NEW

Revox B260 FM MINT / As New

Quad 405 Mk.I Power Amp. 2 x 100 Watts

Pioneer A-300 X Int. MINT / As New

Musical Fidelity B-1 2 x 40 Watts Int. (Another One) VGC 300.00

Musical Fidelity 8-1 2 x 40 Watts Int. VGC 300.00

Art Audio VPI Valve Pre/w M.M. Phono-Stage MINT/As New/Boxed/Manuals 500.00

Naim Nait II High-CURRENT Int. With Phono. MINT

Musical Fidelity B-12 x 40 Watts Int. VGC

Mission 85-9 Remote MINT / Manuals / Out

Audio Lehmann Data-Stream Transceiver (Powered C.D. Connection) AS NEW

T.D.S. Harmonic C.D. Image Enhancement Unit MINT / Boxed

Amcar Alpha 6 Full Remote (MINT / Boxed)

Sony CDP-XE 900 Remote MINT / AS NEW

Naim Monitor 5000 VGC / Out

Nad 5420 VGC

Tri-Lo-7D / AR / PSU / Audio Technica Cartridge VGC / Boxed / Manuals. (Very Rare & Very Good)

Notes. Analogue Parallel-One Linear Tracking Tonearm. V.G.C. (Due to Colour/Design/Quality it is Absolutely Stunning!)

Rega III / RB-200 / Audio Technica AT-13E MINT

Dunlop Systemdek (Original & The Best) / Rega RB-300 VGC

Dunlop Systemdek (Superb Spike System at a very good price) Set of 4 19.95

Monacor SPS-20 Anodised Adjustable Polished Cone Equipment Supports NEW

Prowire Silver Incon (1/2 Metre) MINT / Boxed 60.00

Ron, Optical Linc Cables (C.D / Minidisc to D.A.C. Etc:) NEW 10.00

Roni 4 m.m Banana Plugs (Gold Plated)(Screw-Type, No Soldering) Per Four NEW 6.95

Technics SA-EX 310 Dolby-Logic R.D.S. Receiver VGC / Boxed / Manuals 420.00

Technics SA-EX 310 Dolby-Logic R.D.S. Receiver VGC 249.95

Sony TA-E1000 Full Remote Dolby-Pro Logic Pre-Amp. MINT / AS NEW 600.00

Sony TA-E1000 Full Remote Dolby-Pro Logic Pre-Amp. MINT / AS NEW 369.95

Audio Innovations Series 800 M.C. Step-Up Transformer VGC

Linn K79 M.C. Cartridge MINT (M.C M.C( SWItchable Irnpedence)

Musical Fidelity XL-PS Phono-Stage NEW and Much Improved!

Audio Innovations Series 800 M.C. Step-Up Transformer VGC

Linn K79 M.C. Cartridge MINT (M.C M.C( SWItchable Irnpedence)

Dunlop Systemdek (Original & The Best) / Rega RB-300 VGC

Dunlop Systemdek (Superb Spike System at a very good price) Set of 4 19.95

Monacor SPS-20 Anodised Adjustable Polished Cone Equipment Supports NEW

Musical Fidelity XK-122 Mono-Block-Phono Stage X/PSU NEW and Superb

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D.P.A. Renaissance Int. / Phono-Stage VGC / Manuals 600.00 299.50

L.CD7Friedman Line-Level Int. MINT / LIKE NEW Boxed Manuals 230.00 149.95

Craft Valve Valve Pre-Amp. The NEW pre-amp!(Superb at this price) Available to Special Order Only (Call us Now on 01604 231261 For a True NEW Standard)

Aquaphonic D-900 VGC

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Here you will find a variety of stalls offering you a wide range of products.

Look out for our regulars, some of which have sales on this issue with some real bargains to be had.

So if you’re looking for a great deal this summer then look no further.

HAPPY HUNTING!!!
### Previously Cherished Items; Or something new from Choice

**POWER AMPLIFIERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
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<td>Naim M55 Super Cap</td>
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**QUALITY SPEAKERS**

- **Spendor A1000:** £1500.00
- **Spendor A1001:** £1700.00
- **Spendor A1002:** £2450.00
- **Spendor A1003:** £4600.00
- **Spendor A1004:** £8995.00
- **Spendor A1005:** £14950.00

**Pre Amplifiers**

- **Musical Fidelity X-Plora:** £2200.00
- **Musical Fidelity X•Plora:** £2500.00
- **Musical Fidelity X•Plora:** £3000.00
- **Musical Fidelity X•Plora:** £3500.00
- **Musical Fidelity X•Plora:** £4000.00
- **Musical Fidelity X•Plora:** £4500.00

Choose hi-fi makes it easy for you to fulfill your sonic dreams. Quality hi-fi is not just about expensive brandnames, it's about aspiring to the very best sound, about choosing your ideal system from the widest selection in the country, in a unique no-pressure environment. It's about taking advantage of our unrivalled knowledge and being given the freedom to choose and upgrade the audio equipment you want, whenever you want. Others may sell you hi-fi, Choice hi-fi will sell you solutions.

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- Bryston
- Cary
- C.A.T.
- Chord
- ClearAudio
- Denon
- Dynavector
- Egglowstone, Graham
- NAD
- Michel
- Musical Fidelity
- Oracle analog and digital
- P.M.C.
- Plinius
- Rockport
- Shahinian
- S.M.E.
- Tara Labs
- Target
- Tober
- Trichord
- Trichord, Trilogy
- Van den Hul
- VPI
- XLO

**DVR Players now available from Sony, Panasonic, Audio Physics, and Pioneer, and many more.**

**Clearance Items**

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<th>Item</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oracle analog and digital</td>
<td>£1000.00</td>
<td>£1500.00</td>
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**Choice Hi-Fi**

**World Radio History**

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**October 2000**

**Hi-Fi World**

**All previously cherished items in mint, second hand or as new condition - guaranteed.**
CLEARANCE BARGAINS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
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- Snell MK2 Loudspeakers/Black Huygens Stands
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- Magnan 1m Balanced Interconnect
- Madrigal HPC 2m Balanced Interconnect
- Madrigal FM 3m Ribbon Speaker Cable
- Mana Acoustics Sound Table
- MIT 330+ MK2 1m RCA interconnects
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- Tice Mains Lead IEC/MK 3ft
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- Shakti Stones (New & boxed)
- Shakti On Stands (New & boxed)
- Symco 2x3.5m Bi-wired Cables

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- Audio Alchemy DDE 1.1V D/A Converter
- Audio Note CD2 (New & boxed) Valve CD
- Audio Note CD3 (New & boxed) Black Gate Valve CD
- Audiocontrol 8000 DAC D/A Converter 20 Bit
- Densen Beat 400 CD Player (New & boxed) HDCD
- DPA Enlightened DX3
- Helios 2 CD Player
- Lab 47 Flat Fish CD Player/ Dumpty
- Lab 47 Progression DAC
- Monito 1882 DAC
- Monito Bit Match Transport
- Monito Privilege 20 Bit CD Player
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- Resolution Audio CD50 HDCD CD Player (with volume)
- Resolution Audio D92 24/96 DAC/Processor
- Resolution Audio VT960 DVD Transport

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- Basis 1400/RB250 Ex Demo
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- Naim Armstrong
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QUAD 33 Pre £169 £120
QUAD 34 Pre £159 £120
QUAD 77 Integrated £699 £499
QUAD 3205 Power £349 £220
QUAD 405 Power £499 £220
QUAD 405 Mk2 Power £499 £220
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BEARD Hybrid Integrated £959 £650
CONRAD JANTZEN 753 (Black) £1600 £999
CONRAD JANTZEN 752f (Rosewood) £600 £498
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COFT Episode £750 £499
COFT Super Micro 4 Pre £570 £240
EAR 802 Mk2 Power Amps (Pair) £570 £240
EAR 802 Mk2 Pre £859 £739
EDISON TECHNOLOGY HFA12 Power £500 £229
ELECTOR ME1 Pre £1200 £499
GMMA Apex 20w SE Tride Mono's £499 £1750
GOLDEN TUBE SEPI Pre £1100 £608
GOLDEN TUBE SEPI + 2X SE40 £329 £199
MICHAELSON Odyssey 40 Integrated £1510 £899
PAPWORTH TVA.50 £2700 £1948

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ACOUSTIC PRECISION Elko6 (new version) £800 £499
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APOGEE Stage (Rosewood Trim) £700 £499
ATC SCM20-25 (Rosewood) £2300 £1298
AVI Newton (Cherry) £499 £328
B&W DM601 (Black) £199 £114
B&W P4 (Cherry) £750 £448
CASTLE Chester (Mahogany) £750 £479
CASTLE NINE (Cherry) £550 £348
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HEBROOK HB200 (Teak) £249 £139
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SONY T-55 £1200 £699
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AUDION Sterling Amp £428 £298
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CONRAD JANTZEN 753 (Black) £1600 £999
CONRAD JANTZEN 752f (Rosewood) £600 £498
COUNTERPOINT SA12 Hybrid Power £1400 £999
COFT Episode £750 £499
COFT Super Micro 4 Pre £570 £240
EAR 802 Mk2 Power Amps (Pair) £570 £240
EAR 802 Mk2 Pre £859 £739
EDISON TECHNOLOGY HFA12 Power £500 £229
ELECTOR ME1 Pre £1200 £499
GMMA Apex 20w SE Tride Mono's £499 £1750
GOLDEN TUBE SEPI Pre £1100 £608
GOLDEN TUBE SEPI + 2X SE40 £329 £199
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<table>
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<td>PROAC Studio 125 (Other shades, slightly imperfect)</td>
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<td>PROAC Studio 100 (Black) Both left handed</td>
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<td>B&amp;W THX Speaker System</td>
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<td>CASTLE Avon (Cherry)</td>
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<td>DENON DCD-S10 CD Player</td>
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<td>MERIDIAN 563 D-A Converter</td>
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<td>AVI NuNeutron Speakers</td>
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<td>HELIOS Model 3 CD Player</td>
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<td>MARSTON AUDIO Silhouette CD Player</td>
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<td>MARSTON AUDIO Silhouette DAC</td>
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B&W CD1MSE Cherry £ 449.00
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<td>AE2 Black</td>
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<td>Alpha 901</td>
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£1699 £899
£3500 £1999
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LINN LP 12 VALHALLA EKOS
MARK LEVINSON NO 39 CD
MERIDIAN DPR
MERIDIAN 506 MONOS
MERIDIAN 602
MERIDIAN 563 DAC
MUSICAL FIDELITY NU VISTA PRE
MUSICAL FIDELITY P180 POWER
MUSICAL FIDELITY XAS 100 POWER
MUSICAL FIDELITY XAP 100 PRE
NAIM 52 + SUPERCAP
NAIM 135 X 2
NAIM SBL WALNUT ( LATEST DRIVERS )
NAIM HI CAP
NAIM 52 + PIS
NAIM 135 X 2
NAIM 135 X 1
NAIM CD2
NAIM CD 3.5
NAIM 180
NAIM FLAT CAP
NAIM 140
NAIM 42.5
NAIM 32.5 (72 UPGRADE)
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QUAD 405/2
QUAD FM 4
QUAD 66 CD
REVOX G36
ROKSAN ARTEMIZ
STANDDESIGN 5 TIER
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PIANO BLACK
SONY ESPRIT TAN 900 MONOS
SPENDOR L55A BLACK
TAG MCCLAREN PA 10 PRE
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**Measured Performance**

**AMPLIFIERS**

**DENON PMA-255UK**

I was surprised at the sophistication of the tone controls on this inexpensive amplifier. Not only do they offer very tightly tailored 8dB boost and cut at spectrum extremes (i.e. below 50Hz and above 2kHz), but boost decreases as volume is turned up, giving flat response much above 3 o’clock on the volume control.

Response was flat at their detent zeros, but an over-ride button can be used to bypass the circuits to purify the signal path.

Power from the PMA-255UK measured 55W into 8Ω and a healthy 80W into 4Ω. There’s plenty of muscle here for low impedance loudspeakers and enough power to get good volume from reasonably sensitive modern designs.

Distortion was low in the midband and at high frequencies - a good sign. What little there was comprised of second harmonic - even better.

With wide bandwidth of 5Hz-50kHz, low noise and good sensitivity of 200mV on all inputs, the Denon measured really well in all areas. Like it predecessors, it’s a neat piece of design work that will give good results. NK

- Power: 55Watts
- CD/tuner/aux.
- Frequency response: 5Hz-50kHz

**SONY TA-FB94OR**

Both SACD, Sony’s new audio format, and DVD-Audio deliver information up to 100kHz, assuming it has been recorded in the first place of course. With solid-state amplifiers 100kHz has always been reasonably easy to reach so I wasn’t surprised to note Sony’s TA-FB94OR reached exactly 100kHz before starting to roll off gently, the -1dB limit measuring 116kHz.

Power output was a modest 66W, rising to 100W into 8Ω. Although distortion was low into 8Ω loads, with the heavier 4Ω current draw it rose considerably, reaching 0.09% at 10kHz, just below full output. Although the absolute distortion values were low, the distortion behaviour of this amplifier was a little suspect.

Sony have fitted tone controls that give just a few dB of tonal trimming at spectrum extremes. They’re good, but might surprise some. A loudness button similarly applies just a little bass and treble lift. Perhaps surprisingly, the amplifier has a phono stage (MM only) too. Bandwidth was good, measuring 13Hz-20kHz, but slow low frequency roll off will give it a bright sound.

Sensitivity was normal at 3mV and overload high at 150mV. There was no hum and little hiss at -84dB. Sony fit a subsonic filter that applies bass cut below 20Hz to lessen cone flap from warps. It’s a comprehensive package.

The TA-FB94OR measured well, but I’d expect a bright sound, possibly with some harshness. NK

- Power: 66Watts
- CD/tuner/aux.
- Frequency response: 7Hz-116kHz
- Separation: 107dB
- Noise: -105dB
- Distortion: 0.012%

**GROUP TEST CD PLAYERS**

**DENON DCD-435**

Denon’s DCD-435 looked disappointing under test. It produced quite strong distortion until it had warmed up, then the converters settled down to give reasonable, but not exceptional results. Levels of 0.05% at -30dB and 0.47% at -60dB were significantly worse than the other players, although down at -90dB things were normal enough.

Unfortunately, this player also had steeply rising treble, which in conjunction with distortion usually results in a bright and gritty sound. They are not good partners. Placed in a bright system with peaky loudspeakers this player will likely make CD sound none too pleasant. NK

- Frequency response: 4Hz-20kHz
- Distortion: 0.09
- Separation: 116
- Noise: -103dB
- Dynamic range: 110dB
- Output: 2.14V

**Table: Measured Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Denon PMA-255UK</th>
<th>SONY TA-FB94OR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>55Watts</td>
<td>66Watts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD/tuner/aux.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency response</td>
<td>5Hz-50kHz</td>
<td>7Hz-116kHz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>52dB</td>
<td>107dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>-101dB</td>
<td>-84dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>0.046%</td>
<td>0.018%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>200mV</td>
<td>130mV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dc offset</td>
<td>0.2/1mV</td>
<td>1.18mV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency response</td>
<td>13Hz-120kHz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>90dB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>-84dB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>0.018%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>3mV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overload</td>
<td>150mV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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**Table: Power**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Denon PMA-255UK</th>
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<td>52dB</td>
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<td>Disc</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Frequency response</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>90dB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overload</td>
<td>150mV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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MARANTZ CD5000

Frequency response shows a slow roll-off at high frequencies to smooth treble, a normal enough Marantz characteristic. Frequency response limits of 5Hz to 21.5kHz are those expected for CD, being much like the other players in this group.

Marantz use linear convertors, the CD5000's showing little sign of distortion on both channels except below -60dB where, as always with 16-bit, levels rose as fewer bits became available to represent signal level. A figure of 28% at -90dB was normal enough.

Channel separation was adequate, output level normal at 2V and noise very low at -112dB. In every area the player gave a good measured performance. NK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency response</th>
<th>5Hz-21.5kHz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-6dB</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-30dB</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-60dB</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-90dB</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1kHz</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20kHz</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>-112dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with emphasis</td>
<td>-112dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic range</td>
<td>109dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>2.2V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NAD C520

NAD's C520 looks quite well tailored, having an unusual frequency response characteristic, together with low noise and distortion right through the audio range. A small amount of controlled treble lift is likely to enhance detailing without making the sound overly bright. The C520 may well seem a little forward at times, or perhaps a little more lively than is common for CD, if this lift balances the strong bass NAD commonly manage to give their products.

Low levels of distortion and quantisation noise should help toward a smoother, more open sound than is common with CD. With normal channel separation, low noise and standard output of 2.1V the NAD C520 measures well all round. NK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency response</th>
<th>4Hz-21kHz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-6dB</td>
<td>0.004</td>
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<td>-30dB</td>
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<td>0.45</td>
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<td>left</td>
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<tr>
<td>1kHz</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20kHz</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>-111dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with emphasis</td>
<td>-111dB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dynamic range</td>
<td>110dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>2.12V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ONKYO DX-7222

Onkyo's DX-7222 was notable for its treble lift on both channels, something our frequency response analysis clearly shows. This will give at least a sheen to the treble, possibly a little spit with some discs, when played through loudspeakers with emphasised treble. A player with a response like this needs to be treated with care since it can tip the balance when paired with a bright amplifier feeding peaky loudspeakers.

Distortion from the Onkyo was well suppressed and although the noise and separation figures do not look too good they are perfectly adequate.

Measurement shows the Onkyo is likely to sound a little bright. It may also seem a little more detailed too. NK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency response</th>
<th>4Hz-20.3kHz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distortion</td>
<td>left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-6dB</td>
<td>0.006</td>
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<tr>
<td>-30dB</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-60dB</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>-90dB</td>
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<tr>
<td>1kHz</td>
<td>96</td>
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<td>20kHz</td>
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<td>Dynamic range</td>
<td>106dB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>2V</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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SONY CDP-XE530

Sony are pretty consistent in giving their CD players an immaculate measured performance. As co-developers, alongside Philips, they seem to consider themselves technological standard bearers so, although inexpensive, the CDP-XE530 measured well in all areas.

Flat frequency response should give it a bright-ish presentation, although not so forward as the Denon or Onkyo. It will not sound as smooth or neutral as the Marantz though. Distortion was reasonably low on both channels, noise very well suppressed - likely due to muting at digital zero - and output absolutely as per standard at 2V. It is a neat player in terms of measurement.

YAMAHA CDX-496

This player was characterised by distortion at low levels. Denon have shown that linearising low level performance, using their Delta Sigma processing scheme, markedly improves sound quality. So there is a penalty to be paid, even though the CDX-496 otherwise measures well at ordinary music levels (between 0dB and -30dB) where distortion hovers around 0.02% worst case.

Distortion figures apart, the player produces a good set of figures, frequency response measuring flat out to 21.1kHz, although audio output was a little low at 1.9V.

The Yamaha may well sound a little coarse or grey as a result of distortion.

CD PLAYERS

MERIDIAN 506

Meridian CD players consistently turn in a superb set of performance figures. The 506 is very linear throughout the dynamic range, within the limits set by standard 16-bit coding. Distortion figures on both channels of 0.35% are as low as they come, helping toward an excellent 110dB dynamic range figure.

Our analysis at -30dB shows an absence of distortion harmonics and low quantisation noise. Frequency response has a slight roll down at higher frequencies, but not so much as to produce softness. The upper measured limit was 21kHz, comparable with most players.

Channel separation was wide and noise low. Audio output was a little above average, measuring 2.6V.

The Meridian 506 gave some of the best performance figures possible from CD.

NAD T550

The T550 refused to play a Philips distortion test disc, so the distortion figures are a little higher than usual, coming from a sub-optimal Technics disc. All the same, at -30dB our analysis shows there's little sign of distortion harmonics. On rare occasions Philips disc is rejected by players but this seems to have no bearing upon behaviour with ordinary discs.

Frequency response from CD was flat, ensuring accurate tonal balance. Channel separation was wide and noise low. Output measured a normal 2V.

This player would play 24bit/96kHz coded audio recordings, but with CD quality only, output cutting off sharply at 21kHz.

The T550 provided a normal set of test figures for CD and looks good in this area.
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LOUDSPEAKERS

CASTLE SEVERN 2SE
The Severn 2SE looks impressive for a small floorstander. It’s unusual but effective damped porting system returns low frequencies in phase with forward cone output to give a measured forward response that reaches right down to 40Hz. Below 40Hz the port falls to -6dB at 25Hz, so I’d expect good, deep bass from this loudspeaker. It doesn’t peak up so there’ll be no boominess; in fact it may sound dry, even a little lean. Tweeter integration was excellent and the tweeter itself gives a very smooth output up to 20kHz. As a result the Severn 2SE will seem tonally accurate, quite explicit and well detailed. This is an accurate and wideband loudspeaker.

Sensitivity was high at 88dB. The Castle will seem quite loud compared with other loudspeakers. It is an efficient design since the bass unit doesn’t rely on low impedance (DCR 5.7Ω) to draw current, its impedance reaching down to 6Ω or so with reactive component added. The gives the loudspeaker an 8Ω nominal impedance. Unfortunately, a massive drop in impedance at 8kHz, probably due to a notch filter, makes the load very reactive and may not induce the best performance from amplifiers. Raised current draw also increases amplifier h.f. distortion. These factors will likely make treble quality amplifiers er sensitive.

The Severn 2SE should offer a big sound with a good sense of accuracy and control. Amplifier matching needs care, though. NK

DALI ROYAL SCEPTER
Our response analysis shows the Scepter has a raised midband, which is likely to push vocals forward a little. It may add other effects: for example the pink noise test signal sounded a little coarse compared with ‘usual’ responses. Lumpiness in the response characteristic also contributes to this.

High frequencies are depressed by around 3dB, likely to add a little warmth, but not dullness in this case because there’s plenty of output up to 20kHz, with no crossover suckout. Integration of tweeter to bass/mid was good technically, although there may be some subjective disjointedness because of the peculiar step in frequency response.

The port is centred at 45Hz and works over the entire bass range, reaching up to 100Hz. Since it gets down to a very low 25Hz the Scepter should produce good quality low bass, depending upon how port output integrates with forward cone output in a room.

Dali resort to low impedance to boost sensitivity, squeezing 85dB SPL from one nominal watt of input. Since overall impedance measures 6Ω with the bass unit dipping down to its DCR value of 4Ω the Scepter draws current and will benefit from a beefy amplifier. The load is mainly resistive however, which helps toward consistent behaviour between amplifiers.

The Royal Scepter will have a strong character, likely sounding a little coloured. Bass will be strong and firm though. It has merits and weaknesses. NK

KEF REFERENCE ONE-TWO
Misled by the appearance, some might think the Reference Series have just one drive unit. In fact the visible unit is co-axial, a tweeter lying behind the dust cap of the woofer. Its central position reduces phase errors and gives broadly symmetrical radiation right through the audio band. Frequency response of this combination unit is smooth and flat, although there is a small dip at 10kHz on-axis due to symmetrical cone reflection. Kef suggest listening a little off-axis to ameliorate this.

The third drive unit is hidden inside the cabinet in a “coupled cavity” arrangement. It works from 40Hz up to 160Hz, output through the large front port being in-phase. Kef cut off output fairly hard below this frequency by the use of a series input blocking capacitors - another unusual idea. It raises impedance progressively below 100Hz, as our analysis clearly shows. The speaker will not absorb subsonic power nor be affected by d.c. offset. Unfortunately, the Reference One-Two hits a low 3.5Ω from 100Hz up to 400Hz, an area where it will stress an amplifier. Big impedance swings indicate heavy reactance and energy storage, also not too good. The coupled-cavity unit seems to produce plenty of bass in spite of high overall impedance. With impedance measuring 5.7Ω overall, the Reference One-Two isn’t too difficult a handful, especially since strong deep bass signals do not draw heavy currents from an amplifier. A healthy sensitivity of 88dB means there’ll be plenty of volume from amplifiers of 60-100W, or even less.

The Reference One-Two should sound cohesive, weighty and smooth too. As a load it is a bit difficult, but a loudspeaker like this demands good amplification in any case. NK
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To increase your satisfaction, all the records sold are cleaned and audibly checked before being sold, free of charge, as well as a guarantee. The records are also supplied with a new innersleeve, as well as the old, to ensure a high standard. In addition, if you have any classical LPs or CDs you wish to sell or want a free catalogue, please write, phone or fax to:

3 Naseby Rise, Newbury, Berks, RG14 2SF, England
Tel: 44 (0) 1635 40242 Fax: 44 (0) 1635 524239

www.multiplex.co.uk/Records
SPENDOR BCI speakers with custom stands, one owner £150. Albarry M408 monobloc power amps plus matching pre-amp £150. Kimber high current power cords £165 each. Tel: 0161 485 1693 or 07889 113 950 (Oct/I)

REL STADIUM black excellent condition, manuals £300. Pioneer Reference amp. M73, pre-amp C73, Pioneer Reference CD PD73, battle-ship build all mint, boxes, manuals £800 (£2700). Tel: 01453 346 191 (Oct)

KEF 105/3 rosewood immaculate £1100. Michaelson Odysseus valve integrated £600. Meridian 200/203 £2000. All with boxes, receipts - fabulous! (cables also available). Tel: 01527 543 753 (Worcestershire) (Oct/I)

TANNIOY ORIGINAL 12 inch Red, dual concentric speakers, (original cones), with crossovers, in 'Lancaster' corner cabinets for sale. What offers? Also 1 M.F. professional floor-standing monitors, offers. Tel: Roy 01253 875 194 (Oct/I)

SONUS FABER Concerto’s + offers. Tel: Roy 01253 875 194 (Oct/I)

JAMO CONCERT 8 (2 pairs), 1 pair in piano black with stands £850 (£1600). 1 pair in maple £700 (£1500). Jamo Concert centre speaker £225, £500. All mint & boxed Tel: 0116 271 5439 (Oct/I)

AVI ‘REFERENCE’ 20 bit CD player £475. Linn LKI pre-amp £195. LK2 power £225. Sara 9 £325 including stands. Nordost Blue Heaven XLR 1m pair £100. Little Bit DAC £100. Tel: 020 8948 0899 (Oct/I)

NEAT MYSTIQUE speakers, cherry, V.G.C. Boxed, £325. £500. Aromatic arm lift £20. Linn Lingo, boxed £300. Tel: 01638 668 299 (Oct/I)

CELESTION SL600’s boxed £200. Heybrook Integra amplifier 70wp £160. Arcam Alpha 5 5 £120. Power amplifier 100 wp fixed and variable outputs (built from Crimson kit) £70. Tel: 01621 772 884 (Essex) (Oct/I)

CHEESE S 10 inch drive units; 25F-EWRX, 91dB; brand new; cost £60 each; £35 or £130 for the lot. Tel: 020 8883 5618 (Oct/I)

REVOX B260-T tuner £500. Revox B-150 amplifier £125 both mint condition. Ron Smith Galaxie 23 Ariel (dis- mantled, two sections). Tel: 024 7667 9165 or mobile 07989 559 129 (Coventry) (Oct/I)

TOWNSEND ROCK fitted Rega RB300 Roksan Chorus Black £399 ono. Dynavector D17 MkII moving coil (boxed) £250 ono. Sony TC-KX15E three head tape deck £100 ono. Tel: 0115 989 0116 (Oct/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1 amplifier, final edition £175. Leak Troubridge tuner Croft modified £110. van den Hul The First 0.5m single cable £45. Deltaic mains filter £35. Tel: Nick 01889 584 241 (Oct/I)

LINDSONDEK LP12 Itok LV II arm. Good condition £450. Celestion CSB floor standing speakers, very slight damage, hence only £100. Tel: 01252 375 482 (Farnborough) (Oct/I)

ARAGON 24K pre-amp 5 line inputs plus MM/MC phonostage designed by Krell (£170 new) accept £450. Alphason Symphony turntable with Atlas power supply black and gold (£1800 new) accept £795. Tel: 01634 387 686 (Oct/I)

B&W DM 14 floor standing speakers. Teak. Perfect. £185 or S.A.O. for review copy. Tel: Mr Fletcher 01323 485 654 (Oct/I)

JOHN SHERNE Phase 3 Reference amplifier 18 months old, immaculate (£800 new) £425. Nordost Solar wind biwire speaker cable terminated 2 x 6m (£335 new) £135. Tel: John 01425 489 196. Best. (Oct/I)

VOIGT FULL size corner horns. Fitted new Lowther PM2C's £1200 ono. Delivery possible. Can be heard working in West Dorset. These are rare as a pair! Tel: 01935 850 375 evenings best. (Oct/I)

CYRUS pre-amp ACA7 tuner FM75 CD DAD3 + Q power supply PSXR 2No power amps DPA7 2No pair KEF Reference Fours leads £4500 bought 1999. Tel: 01743 792 555 (Shrewsbury) (Oct/I)

YAMAHA NS1000 M's black £500. Nakamichi cassette deck 2, vgc (£350) £110 Akai GX95-B Reference 3HD remote classic £250. Quad II's working £230. Studer: A80 reel £300, A710 cassette £290. Tel: 0161 764 8888 or 0161 762 9884 (Oct/I)
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Hi-Fi Choice magazine, Nov 1999.

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CAN YOU LIVE WITHOUT IT

I spend a lot of time evaluating all items of hi-fi (and home cinema), from turntables to cartridges, amps, speakers, interconnects, speaker cables, stands, and equipment racks. Sometimes things can be extremely close, and I could happily live with any of those items that I stock, otherwise I wouldn't stock them.

Occasionally, however some item or system is so overwhelming that you couldn't bear to be without it. There isn't a perfect speaker, each having an individual signature, which is why I find speakers so fascinating. Even one particular piece of music can sound absolutely right on one given speaker and not on another. A live recording by the BBC of Tchaikovsky's Manfred by the B.S.O. under Silvestri only worked 100% on the passive ATC 50's with AVI cd player, preamp + monoblocks, one particular interconnect and Sonic Link AST 200 speaker cable. It doesn't strangely work quite so well on the ATC 50 actives although basically a better speaker. I wouldn't want to live without that sound. But one of the things I miss most when I have loaned it out, is the Townsend Seismic Sink stand or the Arcici stand, both using air suspension. You get so used to the sound you get when setting your components on these units and you forget how much contribution they are making, until you take them away. I referred to this 2 months ago, but as there isn't much new around at the moment, I thought I'd remind you. They aren't cheap, but can be far more worthwhile an upgrade than changing amp or speakers. So do come and hear how dramatically they can change a fairly modest system.

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ARCAYDIS ASC

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Hi-Fi World June 99

ARCAYDIS AS2

As reviewed by Simon Pope
Hi-Fi World October 99

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Tel: 01562 865 788  Fax: 01562 865466

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Special Internet offer see page 130 for details

SONAB OMNI directional speakers Model 22-12 two bass two midrange twelve tweeters in each cabinet refurbished mahogany, need a large room £900. Tel: 01244 533 970/836 131 (Oct(I))

ROKSAN XERIES rosewood Artemiz arm new black Chorus £495. Harbeth Compact 7SE speakers, 6 months old, mint £625. Atacama 12" stands £25. Creek OB95SE MC phono stage unused £85, Sporolink 1 metre interconnect £35. Tel: 020 8952 2044 (Oct(I))


WANTED: QUAD 66 pre-amp and remote. Must be excellent condition. Tel: 01947 810 035 (Oct(I))

NAIM AND Linn complete system LP12 Ittok Asak 42/110 Snaps Linn Saras stands cables leads £650. No offers. Tel: 01908 691 941 (Milton Keynes) (Oct(I))


AUDIOLAB 8000 CD and Audiolab 8000 S amplifier 1998 CD TagMclaren serviced both boxed v.g.c. £800, may sell separately. Tel: 01382 520 316 or Email: gh3210aoa.com (Scotland) (Oct(I))

QUAD 33, 303 & FM3 tuner. Excellent condition. Quad serviced. £300 ono. Tel: 01763 848 871 (Oct(I))

MERIDIAN 508 20bit CD. New laser & recent service by Meridian. Boxed and in pristine condition. £795. Tel: 020 8293 3185 (work) or 020 8925 8586 (home) (Oct(I))

AUDIO RESEARCH CD 2 £1550 (£300). Audio Research LSSMk2 pre-amp £1500 (£5600). Mark Levinson 333 poweramp £4000 (£8500). All Stereophile Class A. All mint, manuals, boxes. Tel: Bill 01993 851 508 or 0468 660 697 (Oxford) (Oct(I))


GARRARD 401 deck - SME arm/diamond stylus £150 ono. Leak 2000 tuner/amp £100 ono. Par Celeston Ditton 44 speakers £150 ono. All perfect working order. Tel: 01959 700 386 evenings (Oct(I))

B&W CDM2 speakers, rosewood finish, excellent sound and condition, complete with Atacama 20 sand filled stands, £170. Marantz CD67SE, Trichord re-clocked, excellent sound, very good condition £150. Tel: 01689 830 282 (Oct(I))

ROGERS CADET III valve amp plus fixed station tuner BBC,R2,3,4 and stereo decoder £80. Rogers Cadet II amp plus Rogers Ravensbrooke stereo tuner £80. Garrard 301 deck with Ortofon arm £130. Tel: 01379 898 676 evenings (Oct(I))

LINN KARIK III CD Player, Linn Numerik, Linn Kairn Pre-amplifier (pm) Owner upgrading Linn system. £600.00 each. Tel: 0161 280 5115 (Oct(I))

AUDION SILVER KNIGHT 300B valve monobloc power amplifiers, together with matching Silver Knight single-ended pre-amp with phono stage and separate power supply. Bargain at £1750. Tel: 01703 711 778 (Horsham) (Oct(I))

THORENS TD124/2, SME 3009/2, set in oak plinth £150. Technics SP10 with massive BBC PSU £200. Monitor Audio D-Drive turntable, SME 3009/2 Linn KS, separate PSU £65. Leak TL-12 plus £50. Shackman electrostatics £65. Tel: 07974 657 885 (Oct(I))

KEF RDM 2, cherry, cost £700 accept £250. KEF Reference Model 1 black, cost £1100 accept £500. Both perfect condition. Tel: Andrew 07967 646 089 (Oct(I))

B&W NAUTILUS 803, red cherry finish, with the essential H.N.E. granite plinths (£400). Total cost new £3900, asking £2800. Triangle Antal speakers, cost new £750 asking £400. Tel: 01296 437 314 (Aylesbury, Bucks) (Oct(I))

MUSICAL FIDELITY MC6 speakers rare floor standers, top of the range £2500 new. Phone for spec £850 part ex. Luxman integrated Classic Mosfet amp £110. Kelvin Labs integrated Croft valve 4, great condition. Tel: 01626 774 246 (Oct(I))

LOWTHER ACOUSTA PM6, nice condition. £300. Tel: 0161 720 7245, Fax: 0161 795 6432 (Oct(I))

NAIM NAT01 £600, Quad 33, 306, FM3 £250, 33, FM3, 405 £250, 2, 22, AMII, £300. Radford STA25, SC22, FM2 £500, ZD100, ZD22 £250, Art Audio VP1 pre-amp £250. Rotel Rhia RHA10 pre-amp £250, Sugden SDA1 D/A £250. Tel: 01704 530 928 evenings (Oct(I))

MUSICAL FIDELITY A270 power amp, new board and power supply £600. Croft Epoch upgraded internal wiring £350. Ear 834 deluxe pre-amp £350. Quality interconnect silver plated OFC screened Teflon dielectric. Tel: 01443 423 402 (Oct(I))


PIONEER A400 amplifier with F656 tuner. Rotel RCD-965BX CD player. YAMAHA K-320 cassette deck. Monitor Audio R300/MC9 speakers with target stands £475. Tel: Baz on 020 8925 8546 Email: bdurrent@lineone.net (Oct(I))

WELL TEMPERED turntable £995. 'Super' deck 'Reference' arm, Dynavector DV-20X cartridge. Fantastic sound and looks. Tel: Alex King 07884 313 778 or Email: alex_king39@hotmail.com (Oct(I))

MUSICAL FIDELITY Rainbow preamp 2 x Typhoon power amps £340, Audio Analogue Puccini SE £300, Pioneer PD9700 CD player £80. Mission Cyrus 3 amp £230. All boxed with instructions except Pioneer. Tel: 0114 221 5271 (Oct(I))

The DESKADEL range of Hi-Fi interconnect, speaker cables, hook-up wires and tone arm wires are precision manufactured featuring PURE SILVER conductors insulated with PTFE in a variety of designs to suit all applications. Using only the finest materials and the latest manufacturing techniques we aim to provide a selection of quality products for superb natural sound reproduction on a scale previously unheard.

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CYPUS FM7 tuner £200. Mission 731 speakers £60. van den Hul 'The First' ultimate IC £140. All packaged and mint condition. Tel: 01482 644 727 (Oct(I)

KEF Q15 speakers, brand new, boxed, acclaimed Uni-Q design, black ash, can be used on bookshelf or stands. Only design, black ash, can be used. Tel: 01406 719 (Sussex) (Oct(I)

LOWTHER DX3 drivers, 200 hours use, mint, boxed £375 pair. Bicor 200 folded horn cabinets built Lowther drawings £60 pair. Pioneer CT91A cassette deck, mint, boxed £250. Tel: David 020 8444 8591 (Oct(I)

BEARD B100 Mk2, int. amp, excellent condition ( £1400). Cyrus Discmaster/Dacmaster, A I condition (£1800). Rogers Studio 9 speakers, rose- wood, as new (£1500). Cable Talk 3, bi-wire, terminated (£90). Yours £1400 ono. Tel: 01252 659 058 (Oct(I)

REVOXX A77 quarter track reel to reel. Excellent condi- tion. Recent professional re- alignment. 10 1/2” reels. Looks the business! £250 ono. Tel: 01903 247 779 (Sussex) (Oct(I)

NAIM SYSTEM for sale: Hi- Cap, NA-1X0, Super Cap, NAP-250 x 2, NAC-82, NA-CDPA, NA-CDS, cherry- speakers, plus accessories. Boxed, excellent condition £7500. Not for sale separately. Tel: 07957 266 676 (Cardiff) (Oct(I)

VALVE CLASSICS. One Thing Audio serviced Rogers HGB8 integrated amplifier, revalved £150. Pye Mozart FM tuner, adapted to use modern out- board decoder £95. Decoder £50. Delighted of refund. Tel: 01202 481 386 (Oct(I)

LOWTHER INTEGRITY transport and DacMagic 2 DAC and Soniclink Green digital interconnect (new £60). Fantastic trans- port, good with other DACs. £160 for everything, will split. Tel: Martin 0208 800 6124 (North London) (Oct(I)

WANTED: TOWNSEND Glastonbury speakers and Merlin psu. For Sale: Leak Troughline 3 Stereo valve tuner £60. Leak Stereo 30 £20. Tel: Alan 01661 852 874 or Email: alcv@yahoo.com (Oct(I)

WANTED: INTERCON- NECT. Nordost Blue Heaven, Red Dawn, Audio Note AN/ANV. For Sale: Kimber 4TC, 4.5m pair £90. Nordost Flatline Gold 5m biwire pair £100. Kimber Select KS1020 0.75m £20. Tel: 01429 429 953 (Hartlepool) (Oct(I)

AUDIONOTE OTO SE single- ended integrated valve amp with phono stage £600 ono. Musical Fidelity X-Tone £60 ono. Tel: 01407 765 294 (Oct(I)

AUDIONOTE MEISHU, mint, 300B valve amp, awesome sound, worth £3500, sell £1750. Also Audionote AN/ANV speakers in rosewood and MAF stands, worth over £2200, sell £1200, mint. Tel: 0777 559 1014 (Oct(I)

COPLAND CSA14 £600. Oxford Crystalite turntable, Rega 300, Corus black £350. Stand design five tier £100. Rei Strata £150. All excellent condi- tion. Can demonstrate. Tel: 01727 855 036 (St Albans) (Oct)

TUBE TECHNOLOGY Unis integrated amplifier with phono stage and new valves, in perfect condition £870. Musical Fidelity E10 as new £260. Thorens TD1050 £60. Will demonstrate. Tel: 01708 250 572 (Upminster, Essex) (Oct(I)

MISSION 780 Argonauts, large three unit black real veneer super efficient with awesome bass attack cost £600 ten years ago, now £200 ono. Tel: Chris 01457 765 292 before 9pm. (Oct(I)

NAKAMICHI DR-2 three head tape deck £350 ono. Nakamichi LX3 two head tape deck £250 ono. Both machines mint condition. Tel: (home) 0113 235 9614, (work) 0113 222 5590 (Oct(I)

MAGNAPLANAR 2.7 SE speakers, almost new, amazing sound £1800 (£2650). Pair Denon 4400 monobloc power amps £350. All in mint condition with original boxes and manuals. Tel: 01257 277 857 (Lancs) (Oct(I)

WORLD AUDIO K5881 parallel single-ended amplifier. Upgraded with Black Gate and Audio Note copper paper in oil capacitors. Set of matched Swetlana 6L6GC valves. £500 the lot. Tel: 01383 722 642 (Oct(I)
Most cables have a sonic signature or tonal character to match specific components. In well-matched systems these cables are often found to be harsh or dull.

Petros cables were designed for AudioSource to complement transparent components in a well-matched system: the goal was neutrality - musical flavour transmitted as water flows along a smooth pipe. If our cables sound bright or blurred, be confident that it is the equipment that you are hearing! Stratos cables have the greatest differentiation of all interconnects we have compared, that is to say that different recordings and different components just yield their own characters, transparently.

The design is the attention to many details, based on simple physics and many listening tests. We are now so far ahead of the game - and still moving the goal posts - that we will disclose the basic principles. The two major principles are conductivity and contamination. Conductivity: low resistance, capacitance, etc, using the highest purity copper (silver content acid-free solder) in very fine but many strands. In outer space, such cables would transmit Nothing But Signal (hence the esteemed American NBS brand! Incidentally, we have some of their amazing components use twin axial (quasi-balanced) plus and minus wires, inside a triple-shielded braid earthed at source only and taken through to the plugs. We also disposed of major brands now shamed by Stratos II because our cables are sold direct to end-users without marketing costs. This saves at least 75% when you consider that packaging and promotion double the cost of cables and dealer margins and vat double it again. One stereo metre of Stratos II thus sells for only £125. Stratos II Digital costs £59. Terminations are RCA or Neutrik Black Gold XLR from stock; others to order.

"These cables are everything you said they were ... this has been the cheapest and by far and away the most significant upgrade I've done to my hifi in years.

Dirty mains has been neglected for too long in the UK but conditioners can be confident that it is the equipment that you are hearing! Stratos II is a major leap forward in interconnects which exceed the sonic performance of all but one extremely expensive (NBS) digital and stereo interconnects we have tried in a wide variety of equipment. Series two features our own RCA state-of-the-art phono plugs which use our tried materials (solid phosphor bronze, not bent copper) for enhanced contact and noise rejection. Do not judge the performance by the price. Customers are aware that your wires act as aerials. Designers cannot eliminate this in the equipment and by far and away the most significant upgrade I've done to my hifi in years is between your wall and the equipment. We are the (able bargain of the decade." - Mr E.H., Aberdeen, 12/08/99.

Dirty mains has been neglected for too long in the UK but conditioners can degrade sound by limiting speed and power. The best place to clean up your mains is between your wall and the equipment. We are at beta test stage on effective AC mains cords, and can advise you on high-end products from America before you invest advice on speaker cables freely available.

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E-MAIL: jack@audiosource.co.uk The web is at www.audiosource.co.uk.

**ENGLISH audio**

All the following new, ex demo or second-hand (S/H) Mostly mint condition but please enquire

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<th>AMPS</th>
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<td>Cyrus AC7 Pre</td>
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<td>Dynaudio 1.8 MKII (cherry)</td>
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<td>Naim INTRO (black, old model)</td>
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www.sales@englishaudio.com


REVOX P99 Mkll £500, G36HS £560, B77 £500, EMT 448 £450, 950 £700. Studer B67 £450, A810 fourspeed £400, A710 £500, A800 £650, Nagra stereo £1200, T-Audio £1500. Tel: 01246 275 479, Fax: 01246 550 421 (Oct)(i)

ATTENUATORS FIXED £25/pair! Variable £45/pair. Give improved volume control and remove input overload. Highest quality components used. Tel: Grant 01752 202 841 (Oct)(i)

EX-DEM EQUIPMENT at half price. Classe amplifiers and Mirage loudspeakers. Phone for details. Interconnects and mains leads made to order for home trial. Tel: Audio Visual Concepts 01634 373 410 anytime (Oct)(i)

INTERCONNECTS. FED up with howling you must spend £500 for a decent cable? Two types available - The Blue £45 or The White £95 per metre stereo pair. These cables put other brands to shame! Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back. Tel: 0141 569 1069 (Glasgow) (Oct)(i)

STONEAUDIO UK Limited, a fresh new high-end audio company offering you the very best value and advice on everything audio. We invite you to visit our website for our latest special offers: www.stoneaudio.co.uk (Oct)(i)

ROGERS £400 pure Class A' valve amplifiers - Brand New and boxed. Very latest improved version (by Audio Note), 40 watts per channel. High quality phono stage plus four line inputs. Great styling, superb sound and very rare. Sold with 12 months warranty. Only £998 Tel: Sorirling Broadcast 01256 851 001 (Dec)(i)

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