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HI-FI CHOICE

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Editorial Editor-in-Chief ATW "Stan" Vincent ☎ 0171-917 7747 • **Deputy Editor** Jason Kennedy ☎ 0171-917 7746 • **Reviews Editor** Alan Sircom ☎ 0171-917 7751 • **Art Editor** Del Gentleman ☎ 0171-917 7748 • **Production Editor** Christina Bunce ☎ 0171-917 7745 • **Consultant Editor** Paul Messenger • **Technical Editor** Paul Miller • **Editorial Fax** 0171-917 5512 • e-mail 100433.1130@compuserve.com • **Contributors** Richard Black • Alvin Gold • Jimmy Hughes • Brett Ryder • Malcolm Steward • David Vivian • **Photography** Chris Foster • Chris Richardson • **Advertising Group Ad Manager** Rob Debenham ☎ 0171-917 3834 • **Deputy Ad Manager** Sean Gibson ☎ 0171-917 3932 • **Sales Executive** Gina Cady ☎ 0171-917 3935 • **Advertising Fax** 0171-917 5555 • **Production Manager** Simon Maggs ☎ 0171-917 7676 • **Advertisement Controller** Jane Shepherd ☎ 0171-917 3885 • **Production Fax** 0171-580 6430 • **Circulation Director** Sean Farmer ☎ 0171-917 7654 • **Manager** James Burnay ☎ 0171-917 7810 • **Marketing Director** Alison Townsend ☎ 0171-917 7675 • **Manager** Amanda Decker ☎ 0171-917 7742 • **Co-Operative Marketing Executive** Paul Smyth ☎ 0171-917 3946 • **Circulation & Marketing Fax** 0171-917 7677 • **Men In Suits Publisher** Simon Davies ☎ 0171-917 7718 • **Advertising Director** Ian Westwood ☎ 0171-917 7618 • **Publishing Director** Eric Fuller ☎ 0171-917 7686 • **Managing Director** Alistair Ramsay ☎ 0171-917 7661 • **Chairman** Felix Dennis • **Film Output & Image Manipulation Elements**, London W1 • **Web Offset Printing St Ives (Plymouth) Ltd.** • **Distribution** USM Distribution Ltd, 86 Newman Street, London W1P 3LD ☎ 0171-396 8000 Fax 0171-396 8002 • **Published by** Dennis Publishing Ltd, 19 Bolsover Street, London W1P 7JH • Company registered in England, number 1138891 • Entire contents of this issue © 1997 Felden Productions • ISSN 09551115



We were honoured to be voted Hi-Fi Magazine Of The Year at the CETI Industry Awards, Harrogate, May 1996.

Hi-Fi Choice is the UK hi-fi magazine representative of the European Imaging & Sound Association (EISA). Every year EISA honours the finest hi-fi and home cinema products throughout Europe.



Editor's Notebook



PHOTO BY SEAN BLOOMWORTH

Stan Vincent offers a short course in 'how to be a smart consumer'. It's as easy as putting the batteries back in your brain!

How many times have you bought something, congratulated yourself on acquiring it at a keen price, then on discovering a niggling fault, come to regret the fact you lost sight of reality while pursuing the ultimate deal? There's one saying we could all afford to remember: the age-old chestnut "you only get what you pay for".

As modern, supposedly sussed customers, we pay our money and make a choice. Surely we know when we buy ultra-cheap steak for example, corners must have been cut all the way down the manufacturing line? That if we seek a more reliably-manufactured burger we should pay more for organic meat? Apparently not. So total has been our brainwashing by television and the powers that be, we now believe we can have our tuppenny T-Bone and eat it without risk of jellifying our brains. And, dear readers, this incomprehensible naïveté is as much a problem for hi-fi buyers as it is for supermarket shoppers.

The grey area

Recently I had correspondence with an aggrieved reader who'd purchased a CD player from a well-known cut-price retailer. On receiving the product our reader had become worried it was a grey import, i.e. one that has been unofficially imported into the UK. This he believed because the box had been opened, an after-market mains plug had been fitted and there were instruction manuals in both German and English.

Being a good consumer in the modern mould he'd raised hell with the retailer, which to its credit immediately offered him a full refund. Convinced he'd discovered a rip-off scam, however, our reader had sent his letter to BBC TV's Watchdog and was poised at the post-box.

The reality of the retailer's stance was prosaic. EC trade legislation permits retailers in member countries to buy stock wherever they can purchase it at the lowest price. In this case the CD player had been sourced in Germany, but the retailer was an authorised UK dealer for the brand and therefore it was not selling grey imports.

What intrigued me most, however, was the fact that the CD player in question was

offered for two-thirds the recommended retail price. There was bound to be a string attached to a price so low — hi-fi dealers like to make healthy profits per sale, but not on budget CD players. If a retailer offers a low price, it means only that the price *they* bought at was lower than usual.

Put your feet back on the ground

In days gone by, before we got a taste for conspicuous consumption, we regarded low-priced goods with justifiable suspicion, in case they were stolen, counterfeited or substandard. "I consume, therefore I am" is the modern-day corruption of Descartes's famous utterance, however; and unthinking reliance on legislation and litigation have displaced traditional street nous in the collective consumer consciousness. Folks seem to believe that low prices are a God-given right — no longer does the end justify the means; now the deal justifies the meanness!

Worried about this? It's quite simple to avoid. Just don't fall into the trap of believing you can let other people do your thinking for you. That's especially true for hi-fi, and one reason why this magazine refrains from merely telling its readers what to buy. We want to empower readers to be good hi-fi customers, and that means encouraging people to think for themselves. We never offer panaceas, only pointers.

Old-fashioned value reigns here

Hi-Fi Choice is not the cheapest hi-fi magazine in the UK, even though the price you pay today has only increased by fourpence since 1985. We cost a little bit more than our rivals because we believe in doing things properly. Our 'blind-panel' listening tests and detailed lab reports do not come cheap. But maybe in our buoyant sales figures, the best we've enjoyed since 1994, I detect welcome proof that hi-fi buyers are coming to see the wisdom of our editorial policy: inform, but do not dictate. There's hope yet that the Great British Consumer will not end up a spongy-brained, writ-waving twit like his American cousin.

Happy listening this month. But don't let anyone tell you what to enjoy...

Stan Vincent



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Is that a tube in your cone, or are you just pleased to see me? Secrets of Aeon Acoustics' Liner revealed!



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Two of the £200-£1,000 players we're testing this month.



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Check out this fabulous Muse pre/power combination!



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WIN!WIN!WIN! 10 Superb Soundstyle Finewoods tables!



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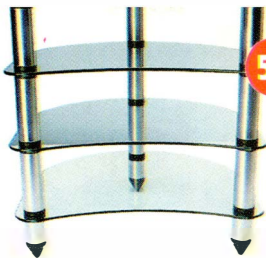
The airwaves are alive with the sound of free music... all you need is a decent tuner. Paul Messenger listens to half-a-dozen new models.

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Malcolm Steward takes a stand — in fact he's taken five upmarket, stylish models and run off into the hills. Thankfully he filed this report before leaving...

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Alvin Gold and his dedicated listening panel pick the winners among 10 hot new CD players, at price-points from £200 to £1,000. Paul Miller supplies objective test results from his state-of-the-art laboratory.



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A vision in glass and steel: this and four other stands compete to prove their uprightness...

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WIN!WIN!WIN! A pair of Celestion's cosmic A3 floor standing speakers, worth £2,900!



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Update

JUST IN THIS MONTH... SONY'S TEENY WEENY MD-MAN... ROTEL'S BUDGET KILLER AMP... JBL'S PLETHORA OF SPEAKERS

In brief

Acoustic Precision, maker of the Eikos CD player, has launched the Inertial Slab CD isolation base at £149. This is a self-damped, high-mass polymer-concrete slab that can be bonded to the base of any CD player, and isolates it with Pneumosphere feet. ☎ (01483) 267516

Any graduates who fancy joining Malcolm Hawksford in the gritty world of hi-fi electronics could do worse than investigate the new University of Essex MSc in Audio Systems Design & Research. ☎ (01206) 872419

A giant step for cordless headphones from Philex.



Philex has launched a cordless headphone which operates on radio frequency signals. This gets round the line-of-sight limitations inherent to infra-red technology, and means that you can listen in rooms separated from the transmitter. The Select SLR-600 headphones cost £79.99. ☎ (0181) 202 1717

A team of employees from now defunct Onix, including designer Tony Brady, has formed a new company to produce a complete range of electronics. ☎ (01273) 517358

The last weekend in May sees the 'Home Theater & Specialty Audio Show' set up camp at the Westin St Francis hotel in San

MD shrinks again

While announcing a plethora of widescreen and digital TV products, Sony celebrated MiniDisc's fifth birthday by launching the 'world's smallest' MD Walkman, the £280 MZ-E30. This 76-gram player claims to be the thinnest and lightest MD player on the market, and features a mini LCD display on both player and earphone remote. Sony claims it will run for 10 hours on the internal 'gum-pack' rechargeable and an external AA battery.

Not quite so small but still pretty compact is the 'jacket'-size MZ-R30 personal MD recorder at £300. This is approximately 8cm square and 2.5cm deep and features a scrolling display for song titles, not to mention a metallic case which changes colour depending on the viewing angle. The MZ-R30 will play back for 15 hours on two AAs and the supplied lithium battery.

As well as some stylish and increasingly diminutive new systems Sony launched an AC-3 Dolby Digital decoder for surround sound enthusiasts. Topping up its widescreen TV range to 10 models it promised to launch a super-flat Trinitron (28inch, widescreen) in the Autumn. Computer users can now join the widescreen revolution with the W900 monitor (£3,000) but there's still no sign

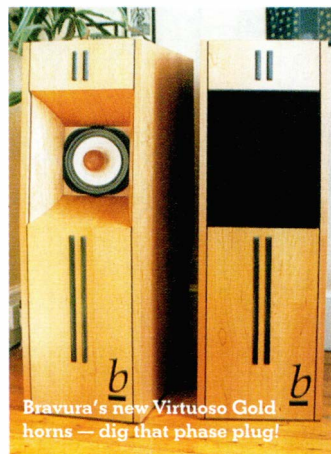


Sony MZ-E30: Somewhat smaller than a very small thing.

of the Sony PC currently on sale in the US. Sony UK ☎ (01932) 816000

All hail the Horned One

Not content with being the leading horn-speaker manufacturer for valve aficionados, Bravura has announced a Gold version of its latest speaker, the Virtuoso. Priced at £3,395, the new speaker has been considerably modified internally to allow the use of Lowther's top Hi-Ferric PM2C drive unit, instead of the PM6C and PM7C units deployed in the Standard and Silver Virtuosi.



Bravura's new Virtuoso Gold horns — dig that phase plug!

This has no effect on the size and weight of the Virtuoso, but it does bring up the sensitivity to a suggested 106dB. Meanwhile the bass is claimed to reach down to 50Hz, which helps to bring its performance closer to Bravura's up-market Accelerando horns. Thomas Transducers ☎ (01732) 851408

JBL speakers out

JBL has a gaggle of new 5.1-channel surround speaker systems. The £499.99 Control 42 system uses five CM42 satellites and a 6.5inch active Sub 6 for the bass. The £699.99 Control 52 ups the ante with a 10inch active Sub 10, and CM52 sats with higher 100 Watt power handling.

Improvements in the exchange rate have led to price reductions across the JBL range. Models including the L series, Control series and TLX home-cinema models have come down by approximately 20 per cent.

First in a range of JBL lifestyle AV systems is the £299.99 ESC200. This is a compact home cinema system that includes a remote-control Pro-Logic AV amp, five shielded satellites and a triple chamber sub. All you need to add is the telly. Gamepath ☎ (01908) 313425



JBL's new Control series in its restyled cabinets.

Compact Creek

Creek Audio is consolidating its ranges of hi-fi electronics beyond the integrated and pre/power amplifiers which the company has become known for. Recent arrivals on the price-list have included a number of amplifier accessories, such as the OBH-11 headphone amplifier and OBH-12 passive preamplifier.

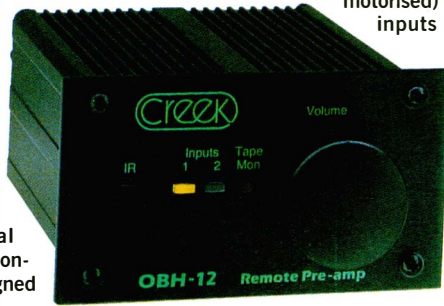
The £129 OBH-11 headphone amplifier is essentially a complete single-source amplifier, dedicated to the driving of low-to-medium impedance headphones. There is a pair of line-level phono inputs and a high-quality, close-tolerance dual potentiometer that acts as a volume control. The bi-polar output stage is designed

to drive almost any dynamic headphone.

The £199 OBH-12 passive preamp (left) is even more sophisticated. It utilises a high-quality passive (but motorised) potentiometer, allied to a set of inputs that are switched using high-grade relays. The circuits controlling these functions are totally divorced from the audio sections, and normally lie dormant until activated by the remote control.

Last but not least there is a mute facility, which previously has been unheard of in passive preamps.

Creek ☎ 0181-361 4133



RA931: a thoroughbred integrated.

Rotel's X change

Rotel's new budget integrated amplifier, with nary an 'X' suffix in sight, is the £149.95 RA931. Developed from the popular RA930AXMKII and RA930BX models, this new 30 Watter has inputs for moving-magnet phono, plus three line inputs and one tape circuit. It also has provision for driving two sets of speakers and a pair of headphones.

Under the hood it features a custom toroidal mains transformer that, it is claimed, has given Rotel's designers the freedom to 'introduce many other components new to Rotel in this model'. But the precise identity of these components has yet to be revealed...
Gamepath ☎ (01908) 317707

Euro friendly Cerwin



Master of loudness Cerwin-Vega has introduced a touch of sophistication in its latest £299.99 CT 330 floor-standing loudspeakers. The European-designed CT speakers are claimed to be less 'in your face' than the American-designed HED range they replace.

The three-way CT 330 sports a 19mm polycarbonate soft-dome tweeter and two 170mm bass drivers, in a bass-reflex design with a rear-firing gas-flowed port. Naturally, efficiency and power handling are high, with claimed 100 Watt continuous power handling and a suggested 91dB sensitivity.

This is all said to make the Cerwin-Vegas curiously well adapted for dance and modern pop music with a European flavour — Army of Lovers sing Sabrina's greatest hits, anyone?

CSE ☎ (01423) 359054

More bang for your euro with Cerwin-Vega.

Bound for Bollywood

Video CD and CD-i failed to ignite in the UK, thanks to LaserDisc's stranglehold on high-end disc-based vision replay, and all the anticipation surrounding the arrival of DVD. In both mainland China and the Indian subcontinent, however, Video CD has been a roaring success, which is why the Leicester-based 1452 Limited design consultancy has announced a Video CD player range under the 'Bollywood' Indian-language movie scene.

The range comprises a basic audio CD, video CD and CD-i player; a mid-range player with Dolby Pro-Logic preamplifier plus audio and video switching; and a high-end player with all of the above and a Nicam stereo TV tuner. The prices of these elegant chrome-plated units range from £399 to £995. A matching 4x75 Watt power amplifier and audio-only CD player are in the wings.
☎ (0116) 234 0731

Icon's sub-continental CD-V player and amp.



WIN! WIN! WIN!

Absolute Blues is the blistering new blues compilation CD from Jazz FM records. Compiled by Jazz FM's resident blues expert Paul Jones — yes, he sang with Manfred



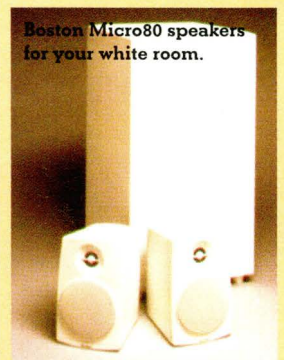
Turner married to? Write to Absolute Blues Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Dennis Publishing Ltd, 19 Bolsover Street LONDON W1P 7HJ. Remember to catch **Jazz FM** on 102.2 MHz in London or 100.4 MHz in the North West.

In brief

Francisco USA. For more info check out the Hi-Fi 97 home page at www.hifishow.com/hifi.

Acoustic Solutions, a new name on the hi-fi circuit, has launched the £1,000 Eight, a ported two-way bookshelf loudspeaker. This speaker is claimed to be a four-ohm impedance, 100 Watt handling, 86dB efficient design that reaches right down to 52Hz — pretty bold for a speaker standing only 300mm high and weighing in at 8.5kg!
☎ (01245) 252825

Dolby Labs has certified Intel's new MMX multimedia enhancement technology for Dolby Digital AC-3 applications, bringing the potential for high quality surround sound to the PC user. ☎ (01793) 842100



Boston Acoustics has a new satellite/subwoofer loud-speaker system called Micro80 and priced at £369.99. The Micro80 sats combine a 19mm dome tweeter with an 89mm bass unit in a 2kg polymer case. The sub uses a single 180mm unit in a compact ported enclosure.
☎ (01489) 795519

ALBUMS PLAYED IN THE HI-FI CHOICE OFFICE THIS MONTH

- Jeff Beck
Blow By Blow
- Belinda Carlisle
Runaway Horses
- Lou Reed
Walk On The Wild Side
- Beck
Odelay
- Dr Octagon
Instrumentalyst:(Octagon Beats)
- Cream
Disraeli Gears
- Frank Zappa
Sheik Yerbouti
- Coldcut Vs DJ Krush
Cold Krush Cuts
- Adam/Tilson Thomas/LSO
Giselle ou Les Willis
- Ray Barretto
Acid

Bristol Show Report

This year's Sound & Vision show was one of the most successful ever. Jason Kennedy and Alan Sircom reveal the hot new products on display.



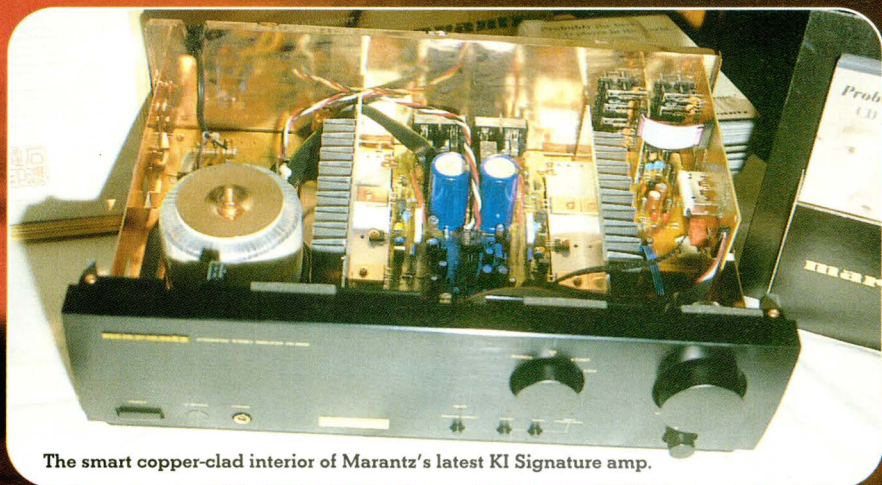
With a plain case and no remote control, the Cyrus SL is an affordable new contender.

CYRUS SL (Above)

Cyrus has reduced the entry price of its electronics range with the new £398 SL integrated amplifier. The Cyrus SL (Straight Line) achieves its price point by leaving out some of the luxuries of the Cyrus III, such as remote control and fancy casework, to concentrate on the bare necessities. Casework is still die-cast alloy to retain the familial heat-sinking, low-resonance and RF shielding properties, but the cosmetic design is

relatively plain. Inside Cyrus has used surface-mount components, patented slit-foil capacitors and a 180VA toroidal transformer to produce a claimed 50 Watt output/30 Amp peak-current capability.

There are five line inputs and a tape loop, all of which are relay-switched to eliminate cross-talk. Outputs include a buffered pre-out, enabling budding bi-ampers to combine the SL with external power amps. Cyrus ☎ (01480) 451777



The smart copper-clad interior of Marantz's latest KI Signature amp.

MARANTZ PM-66 KI SIGNATURE (Above)

Marantz finally unveiled a Ken-Ishiwata-tweaked Signature version of the PM-66. Featuring extensive use of copper in the chassis, audiophile components and a new

toroidal transformer, this £400 turbo integrated has been created to complement the CD-63mkII KI Signature CD player. What next — the Tannoy 631SE KI Signature loudspeakers to complete the package? Stranger things have happened...

PINK TRIANGLE/NCT (Below)

Pink Triangle formally launched the delightful Tarantella turntable at Bristol. This £589 player is an elegant combination of shapes and materials — clear acrylic features heavily. Despite its simple appearance the deck has a suspension derived from previous PT designs, and likewise a DC motor driven by an outboard power supply called the Hornet. The latter, in machined aluminium, is probably the most attractive part of the package. At the show a Wilson benesch ACT Two performed arm duties, but PT has a parallel tracker in the pipeline called Brava, which should make Tarantella the most radical



Pink Triangle's minimalist Tarantella.

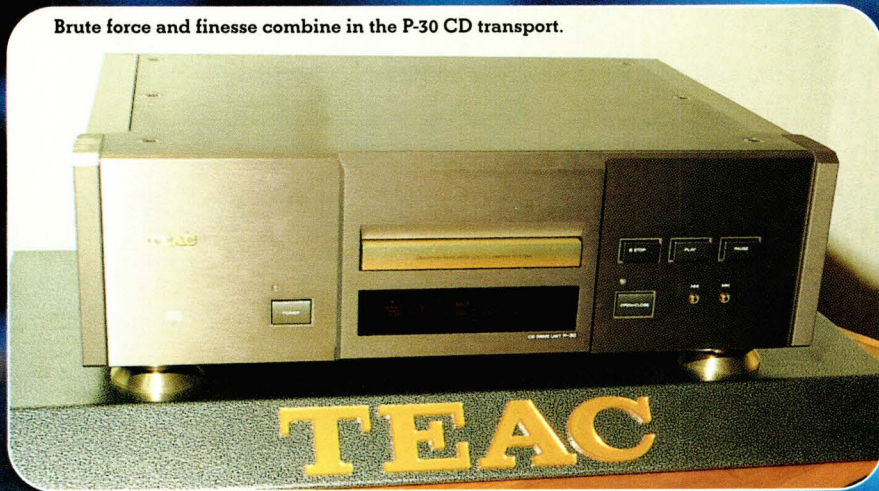
sub-£1,000 record player on the market. There's already an upgrade package available for the deck: £409 buys you a heavier platter with bearing-spindle tapped for a record clamp, and a battery power supply.

Pink Triangle ☎ (0171) 703 5498

Sharing PT's room was an adjunct of flat-panel speaker purveyors NCT, called Ceramic Sounds. This company's unusual selection of framed paintings in the room turned out to be — you guessed it — flat loudspeakers, albeit prototypes. However, the lack of any apparent movement and the sheer subtlety of these speakers could transform living rooms across the land. Price and availability have yet to be announced.

NCT ☎ (01223) 424898

Brute force and finesse combine in the P-30 CD transport.



TEAC (Above)

TEAC has built upon the twin strengths of its Vibration-free Rigid Disc-clamping System (VRDS) and the critically-acclaimed Reference 500 mini system, with no less than five new Reference series products. In the standard-sized range is the battleship-built, £2,499.95 P-30 CD Transport. This uses the very latest CMK-3 version of the VRDS mechanism, with the new digital servo ratio-locked loop and three digital outputs. This is complemented by the hefty £1,799 MD-801R MiniDisc recorder, from TEAC's professional arm, Tascam.

On the Reference mini side, VRDS and MD also make an appearance in the new £700 VRDS-9 CD player and £650 MD-H500 MiniDisc recorder. Finally, the £370 AV-H500 AV amplifier adds Dolby Pro-Logic into this mighty mini's repertoire. Teac ☎ (01923) 819630



EXPOSURE CD PLAYER (Above)

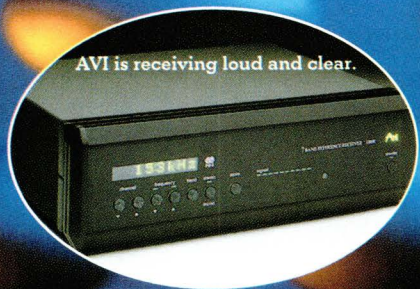
Exposure's wittily-named CD Player (£1,050) is the company's first venture into digital audio. Inside is a Philips CDM12 CD-ROM transport, allied to 16-bit D-to-A circuitry from Philips, of relatively straightforward configuration. This was chosen for its musical qualities in preference to more contemporary chipsets.

Exposure's goal was to make the player sound more analogue than most. This avowed intent might explain the discrete components used rather than ICs in several vital areas, such as the current to voltage conversion stage. And Exposure's amplifier reputation is also invoked by the toroidal transformer and the company's own reservoir capacitors in the massive power supply. Exposure ☎ (01273) 423877



REL Q100E (Above)

Bass mongers to the audiophile community, REL Acoustics launched its all-singing Q100E subwoofer. Replacing the Q100 this new £500 sub has more than the usual gamut of 'how low can you go' features, designed to suit both the quality-oriented audio maniac and the action-oriented telly fan. The sub is switchable between Slam mode for the latter and Depth mode for the former. Slam increases output between 40 and 120Hz at the expense of absolute depth. Harman Audio UK ☎ (0181) 207 5050



AVI (Above)

Iconoclastic technologist AVI had its new £699 S2000MT AM/FM reference receiver on show at Bristol. Replacing the company's tuner, this device is three-band, fully synthesised and uses RDS.

From the same stable, the tiny Neutron speakers are joined by the floorstanding Positrons. In sub-atomic physics a Positron is considerably less massive than a Neutron, but this new ported floorstander, previewed in Update last month, uses a long-throw 130mm doped paper woofer and a 28mm doped-fabric tweeter. These drivers are claimed to be considerably more exalted than usual, yet to offer an easy eight-Ohm load. Price has still to be determined. AVI ☎ (01453) 756682



SENNHEISER (Above)

If you want true home cinema sound but have neither the space nor the deaf neighbours to accommodate a room full of loudspeakers, Sennheiser's £280 Lucas system is the perfect answer. It contains all the Dolby Pro-Logic decoding and amplification needed for home cinema, but drives the surround signal to as many as two pairs of conventional headphones.

The processor/amp allows the user to custom-tune the headphones' output to suit their ears. What's more, the clever digital circuits can simulate moving closer to or further away from the screen. The unit can even operate as a preamp/processor for five-channel speaker systems.

The combination of Lucas and HD 580 precision headphones is available for £455, saving £25 on the separate prices. Sennheiser Lucas Helpline ☎ (01494) 551533



RATA (Above)

A rave from the grave! RATA has just re-introduced Torlyte turntable, equipment and speakers supports. These lightweight legends are made from wooden grids with skins of ultra-thin birch ply. In complete contrast to most stands which attempt to decouple or isolate hi-fi equipment, Torlyte is a coupling system.

For those with short memories, RATA's Torlyte was one of the legendary turntable supports of the '80s. Today's £399 turntable stand is radically different from the original three-point table, but the concept remains the same. Newcomers to the RATA range are the £99 coupling platform, the modular £500 rack system and £600 loud-speaker stands. RATA ☎ (0800) 373467

Systematic!

Alan Sircom gets back to basics, with two £300 budget-system candidates looking for your vote!

It's back to the budget ballpark this month, with a pair of hi-fi trios putting the accent on quality without incurring heavy cost. There has never been a better time to buy a budget hi-fi system, as the multiple specialist stores like Richer Sounds, Hyper-Fi and Sevenoaks Hi-Fi have started to compete successfully head-to-head with High Street chains like Dixons. The choice is wider, the prices are lower — the entry-level hi-fi market is more buoyant than ever before.

Why? Simply because companies like Richer Sounds and Tangent Acoustics offer complete solutions from CD to speaker, allied to the buying clout that results from shifting big volumes. Thanks to such heavy-weight purchasing power it's still possible to buy amps and loudspeakers at prices not much steeper than they were a decade ago. How's that for inflation busting?

The systems chosen reflect the sort of options a hi-fi newcomer is likely to be confronted with. On one hand there's the sort of system at which Richer Sounds excels: a combination of bulk-bought brand-names and lesser-known own-brands at bargain-basement prices. On the other hand there are products from two companies under the Tangent Acoustics banner, of which the CD and amplifier are imported while the speakers are home-grown.

As I say, someone getting started in hi-fi will gravitate straight to this kind of outfit if he or she has a decent but restricted sum of money to spend. Many, many potential audiophiles will go no further than this level, but let's get one thing clear: no matter how good these systems get, there is better sound to be had with the simple addition of extra cash. Upgrading either system in future will be a doddle, but the same is never true with a packaged mini or micro.



SYSTEM A

AMC CD8 CD player	£149.95
AMC 3025a integrated amplifier	£129.95
Tangent Monitor Three (Rosewood) loudspeakers	£69.95
System price (discounted)	£299.95

TANGENT ACOUSTICS SYSTEM

This first trio comprises a CD and amplifier from the pan-global AMC empire. By remaining in the budget domain we plump for the £129.95 AMC 3025a remote-control integrated amp, a 25Watt integrated design that claims to be capable of driving even quite difficult speakers. Offering both line and phono inputs, it comes complete with a fully-featured remote control handset, and hi-fi veterans will not fail to notice a certain cosmetic similarity to classic NAD products like the 3020 amplifier.

Likewise the £149.95 CD8 CD player. This one-bit MASH-based player is stripped to the bone, with only a remote control and a digital output on the luxury list. Under the bonnet is a touch of class, however, in the shape of AMC'S own filter module.

Completing this package is a pair of £69.95 Tangent Monitor Three Rosewood bookshelf loudspeakers, as previewed favourably by David Vivian in *HFC* 164. These diminutive 5.3-litre, two-way, sealed-box speakers sport simple yet solid bass and

treble drivers. They need good supports to give of their best — it's handy, then, that Tangent offers the £50 SE6 Atacama-clone stands! The trio of components may be purchased together for an extremely reasonable £299.95, shaving exactly enough off their separate prices to pay for the stands.

I must say this set-up does sound a bit old-fashioned, reminding me of a Dual turntable, NAD amp and AR18 speakers from 15 years ago — and all the better for it! Eschewing the shiny digital hi-fi sounds so often associated with budget separates, the AMC/Tangent combo is rich, warm and portrays an excellent sense of musical flow.

It would be nigh on impossible for this budgeteer to blend warmth and detail like a much more expensive hi-fi system. But this rig almost pulls off that coup, evincing audiophile aspirations towards imagery and a sense of space around instruments. Tonally, too, the combination fares well:

thanks to a sealed box, the speakers are not plagued by woody port resonances; and both CD and amp are essentially neutral. But everything is a little too rosy, meaning that music appears groomed by a beautification filter. If you play Metallica, it's arranged by Vaughn Williams; if you play Underworld, you get the Elgar remix. The AMC/Tangent trio is as refined as a Devonshire cream tea, but with half the fat. It is possible to crank more energy out of these components, but it emerges in a torrent as the speakers turn brash and the amplifier sounds ragged.

Yes it can be rough-edged. Also, it is not the most bass-heavy system around. But there is a holistic rightness to the sound that's very alluring. This kind of warmth has largely been forgotten in other marques as they quest for digital purity, so if you hanker after that good ol' audio sound on a shoe-string (or if you'd care to experience it for the first time), this is a perfect starting point. ▶▶



SYSTEM B

Technics SL-PG480A
CD player, as sold by Richer.....£89.95
Cambridge Audio A1mk3
integrated amplifier.....£119.95
Gale 4i loudspeakers.....£139.95
System price (discounted)£299.95

RICHER SOUNDS SYSTEM

Chances are, if you walk into Richer Sounds this spring in search of a cheap system, this is what you will buy. Two of the three products are from Julian Richer's own brands: the newish £119.95 Cambridge Audio A1mk3 amplifier and the really brand-spanking new £139.95 Gale 4i loudspeakers need little introduction to regular readers. The former was a part of an all-



Cambridge Audio system only two months ago and stunned us with its neutrality, its brisk musicality and its lively nature.

The A1mk3 is a back-to-basics 30 Watt design with audiophile pretensions, thanks to a toroidal transformer, high quality volume/balance pots and the like. As its name suggests, it is the latest arrival in a Cambridge Audio family whose products change with alarming regularity. Its prede-

cessor barely made it past a first birthday before being put out to grass.

The Gale 4is are also beefed-up versions of a predecessor. The old Gale 4 floorstanding speakers had existed for nearly 18 months before the chop — a good innings in Richer-land. The improvements to the new model include a modified bass port, a new 25mm tweeter and a fancy new crossover circuit — and a shaving of 60 notes off the price of the original in the process.

Technics, too, has gone through some healthy price-trimming. When we looked at the SL-PG480A CD player back in November 1996 it was priced at a bold £140. At that time we felt this well-built, easy to use MASH player-on-a-chip CD machine was beset by competition at an increasingly competitive price-point. The Richer team obviously gave the '480 a stiff pep talk and put it onto a diet and exercise regime, as the SL-PG480A is now down to a lean fighting weight of only £89.95. This means that, with the discount from Richer (excluding cables and equipment supports) the entire system comes to a ludicrously cheap £299.95 — exactly the same as the AMC/Tangent system.

Given that there is nothing between the two price tags, the difference in sound is staggering. This system is bang up-to-date sonically. It plays music with all the hi-fi bells and whistles we have come to expect from our audio systems of late. The bass is big, full and powerful, the treble soars up into the highest registers, indeed the sound

is as clean and as punchy as the very latest chart material demands.

Consequently, if you seek the last word in relaxed refinement, you won't find it here. This is a get-up-and-go system for those who like their music fast and furious. Naturally, there are flaws and limitations to the package (especially its soundstaging), but the trio seems to balance well. The Technics lacks bass drive and the Gale 4i has too much, but bring the two together through a neutral Cambridge amp and the result is more than acceptable. ▲

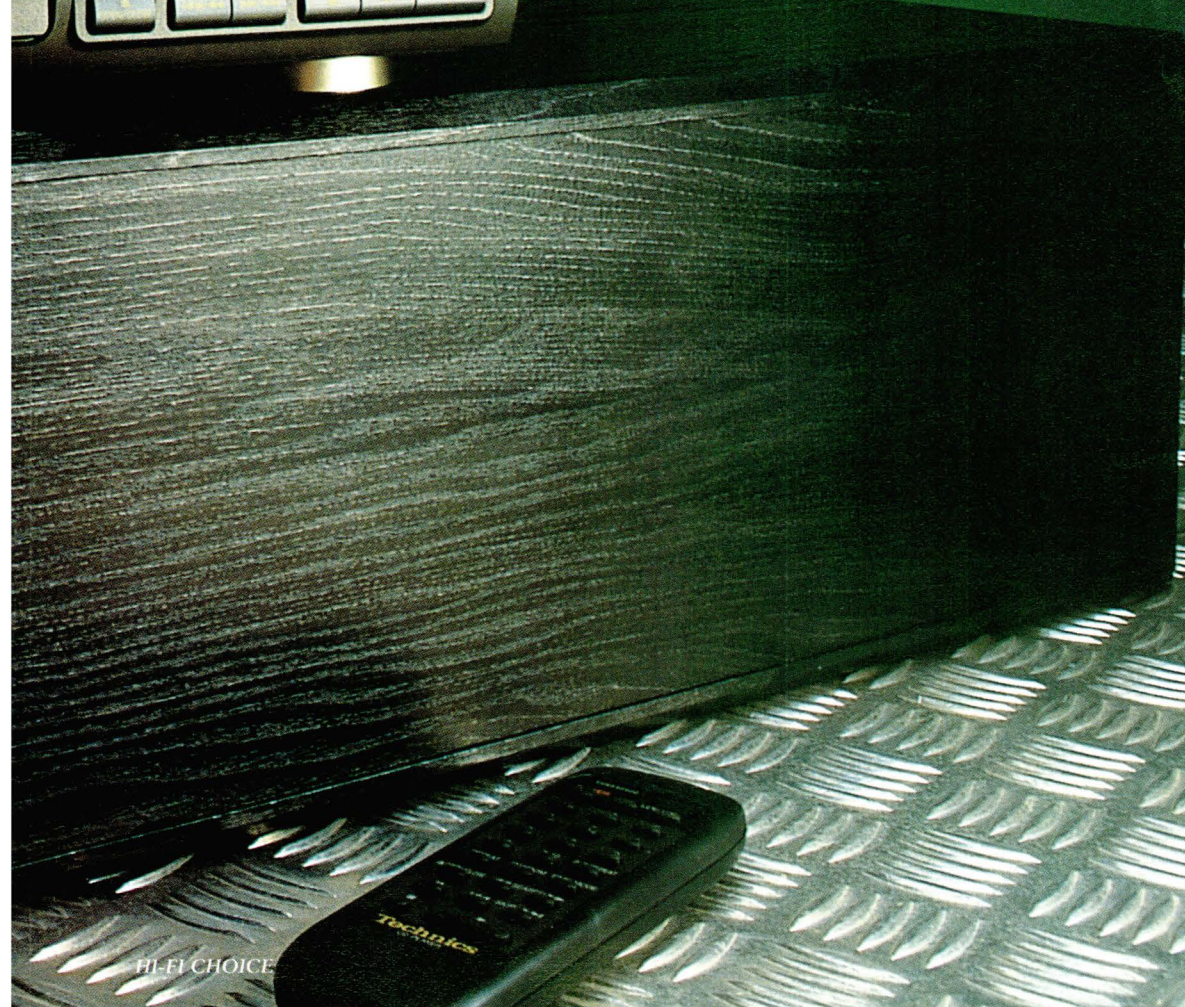
CONCLUSION

The budget separates market is more fluid and more fiercely-fought than any other part of the entire business, and it's not hard to see why when you dive into the thick of it. These two virtually-identically-priced systems offer the listener radically different perspectives on music; these perspectives, it could be argued, are not as distinct again until you reach the high-end.

This is the time when a reviewer's personal preferences should be put away for a moment; my own favourite here really is immaterial. If you like music vivid and fresh and will even tolerate it a bit bright and shiny, go for the Richer Sounds system. If not, opt for the more peaceful pastoral view proffered by the AMC/Tangent kit. If you want a bit of both, you'll have to spend more. It's as simple as that.

MANUFACTURER CONTACTS

Richer Sounds (0500) 101112
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Ear Waxings

Jason Kennedy investigates a new cylindrical miniature from Musical Fidelity, and reveals a radical speaker from Aeon Acoustics that suggests amps should not have a monopoly on tubes.

Simon Carrington is an inventor in the classic British mould. Singlehandedly he created the 'starform tube' loudspeaker cone that I described way back in issue 123, and reviewed in the Aeon Acoustics Signet (*Sessions*, HFC 155). This is a small floor-standing speaker that's remarkable for its clarity and depth of bass. The 'tube-cone' won a major technological award, but in the meantime Simon has another patented design in the form of the acoustic lens 'resonator'. Both innovations are part and parcel of the distinctive Linear loudspeaker (£1,495) under scrutiny here.

The intention with both the drive units and the resonator is to sell the technology to a loudspeaker or drive-unit manufacturer, but in order to drum up interest in the design, Simon has had to go into small-scale speaker production himself.

To explain the function of the starform tube-cone would require more words than I have available here, but if you saw Fisher Dilke's BBC2 program on air turbulence (*The Numbers Game*, February 25), you may have gained an idea of the principles involved. In simple terms the claim runs as follows: there is a tube built into the cone, which vents internally in the centre of the drive unit and externally near the circumference. This, allegedly, increases the effective area of the cone by 100 per cent, has a beneficial stiffening effect and in turn makes the drive-unit more efficient, despite the fact that it increases the diaphragm mass.

The sonic lens 'resonator', on the other hand, is a flat bun-shaped device with two internal skins. It claims to equalise pressure within the cabinet without incurring the 'tuned' effect of a reflex port. In essence it is a broad-band port that, in the case of the Linear, is claimed to increase efficiency by 6/8dB to 96/98dB. Apparently it does this by "neutralising the vacuums that form either side of the voice coil as it moves". Hmmmm...

Only thorough laboratory analysis could prove or disprove these claims, but the performance of the Linear is decidedly unusual.

It does two things that are rare in loudspeakers of this size. Most uncanny is the way it will play extremely loud without the usual signs of distress. Any distortion is so benign as to be almost irrelevant. There is extraordinary extension and control at low frequencies, offering bass that eschews box boom and port resonance for the clarity and control one expects of the midrange.

Regrettably the Linear is not sufficiently finely tuned to make the most of its technology. The Visaton ribbon tweeter needs to be

among *Hi-Fi Choice's* contributors. First came the X10-D tube CD enhancer, then the X-DAC on which David Vivian is opining this month (p. 130). So perhaps it was inevitable that eventually I would feel the force of the X-factor, and so it was with the £200 X-PRE, a four-input tube pre-amp with the absolute bare minimum of controls.

How has MF managed to get a valve pre-amplifier into an extruded aluminium tube with a diameter of four inches and a length of seven. A peek under the hood I could not resist, and lo there's a pair of triode tubes and numerous other components leaving barely a cubic centimetre to spare. There are two circuit boards, the lower one housing the tube bases, and the upper one featuring cut-outs for the tubes to poke through.

I tried this gizmo in two different ways. First I stuck it between the CD player and an integrated Pioneer A-300R Precision amp, as one would use an X10-D. This resulted in a slight enriching of tone and a fine degradation of precision. Then I tried it more conventionally with a Roksan power amp, compared with an ECA Vista (about three times as expensive) and a QED Vector (of equivalent cost before it was discontinued).

On its own the X-PRE had a little too much gain for the speakers in the system, but produced a natural, dynamic sound that lacked a little control in the bass but stayed clean and sweet at high frequencies. The ECA was more precise and energised, but also slightly grainy as transistors can be when compared with tubes. The QED seemed to have a wider dynamic range and better spatial resolution, but combined this with a synthetic tonal character that left the X-PRE sounding remarkably pleasant.

The question is: in what type of system would the X-PRE excel? There are few power amps to match, but a lot of Pioneer A-400s whose slightly brash treble might benefit. In addition, come Autumn, MF is promising a range of matching MOSFET power amps. Remember where you read it first! ▲

Musical Fidelity ☎ (0181) 900 2866



blended a little more seamlessly into the overall response (apparently resistors are available to pad down its output), and despite the claimed efficiency the overall sensitivity of the speaker seems a little low, which has a negative effect on low-level dynamics.

The Aeon Linear is a technological showpiece, of the sort very rarely encountered in the loudspeaker field. It may need a little refining, but is potentially a major contribution to the cause of high fidelity.

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The Jimmy Hughes Experience

Jimmy Hughes falls in love at Sound & Vision in Bristol...
with a pair of Shahinian Diapason speakers from Pear Audio!

If I won a vast sum of money, what upgrade would I buy? Though I'm happy with my Impulse H1 horn speakers, I could easily be tempted to replace them with Shahinian Diapasons. I heard the latter at Bristol's Sound & Vision show in February, and thought they sounded fabulous. I first heard them a year earlier at Grahams Hi-Fi's Shahinian Open Day. I was impressed, but their tonal balance was simply too bright and forward to be completely convincing.

At Bristol the sound was again immediate, but without the treble sting I disliked before. Tonal balance was still forward, but this was a function more of fast transient response than tweeters working overtime.

I thought Shahinian distributor Pear Audio made the best sound at the show, though a couple of my hi-fi friends disagreed, opining that the Diapasons were too forward and aggressive. This observation may be explained by the fact that my pals sat at the front of the listening room, while I stood at the back.

Agreed, the sound wasn't what you'd call beguiling. It was forward and immediate, and Pear's John Burns was playing music at volume levels that even my colleague Malcolm Steward would appreciate. Even so, I found the results impressively clean and surprisingly spacious. The music had impact, but was also very clear and easy to follow.

It's not always easy to analyse why one prefers a particular sound. In this case I simply felt this system sounded very real. Drums sounded like they were being hit; the transient attack was almost palpable. And clarity was excellent, with no upper-bass hang-over, just clean tightly-focused music.

Yet despite the immediacy there was real depth and space around voices and instruments. Such opposing qualities can only be achieved with direct/reflecting loudspeakers in my view. The sound didn't seem to come from speaker boxes; it emanated from a space between, behind, and beyond the confines of the enclosures.

As is always the case at hi-fi shows, especially on busy public days, the sound you hear in each room is often down to luck. Sometimes everything gels: music, recording, volume. At other times the combination is

mismatched and disappointment results.

I visited Pear Audio's room twice, and on both occasions I was impressed by the sheer energy of the music. No matter what was being played, whether CD or vinyl, it had the pace and attack one hears from live music. It produced a feeling of 'being there' no other system quite approached that day.

Yet it's one thing to be impressed at a hi-fi show, another to be able to live with something at home in the long term. With the Diapasons my worry would be sustaining the love affair in the long term. It might be the hi-fi equivalent of marrying a nymphomaniac: great for the first few months, but exhausting subsequently!

In fact I could live with Diapasons in the long term. Like most show exhibitors Pear went all out to make bold, impressive noises. But the Diapason has subtlety and delicacy when these qualities are required.

DVD movies with Meridian

Another system that really impressed me, for totally different reasons, was the £25,000, DVD-based, active home-cinema set-up in Meridian's room. Blockbuster movies created some awesome effects — and I do not use that adjective lightly.

Meridian has demonstrated variants of this system before, but with DVD source material it really shines. Even in a big, full room it had power to spare, and the deep bass rumbles and grunts were mightily impressive. The music excerpt also sounded realistic, creating the space of a large venue.

During the long drive home there was much animated argument on the merits of Meridian's system. Could one live comfortably with something so large and powerful-sounding? Wouldn't the experience be too intense? And most important — how would *Coronation Street* take advantage of wide-screen and sub-bass facilities? Despite the objections, I know we were all impressed.

Returning to my system after the visit, I could not help but report mixed feelings. I felt my home setup was more natural and easy-on-the-ear than anything I'd heard earlier that day, but I also found it lacked the same feeling of space and attack evident from the Shahinian Diapasons. I found it hard to 'hear' my system: the music was easy to focus



Shahinian Diapason: Jimmy's objet d'amour!

on, not the mechanics of reproduction, which is good. Even so, I made one or two adjustments, and tried some small alterations to help liven things up. (I effected much the same tweaks after hearing Diapasons at Grahams last year, only to reverse the changes some weeks later. The extra impact made the sound aggressively 'hi-fi'.)

What a paradox. We need to strike a balance between a system that's so laid-back and refined it fails to impress, and one that's assertively 'hi-fi' and unpleasant. When I'm at home relaxing, listening on my own, I want the former; but when friends come over, I sometimes need the latter.

How do you reconcile such opposing requirements? Well, one possible way (with a two-box CD player) is to use Meridian's 518 digital processor and put it into Emphasis mode, but with the output set to P rather than C. This gives a digital treble boost, but (naughty) doesn't tell the DAC to switch in its de-emphasis. The result is brighter, sharper sound, with greater forwardness and attack. Though not ideal on every recording, it's impressive at best.

In an ideal world the 518's treble boost would be variable to suit different recordings and rooms. Perhaps a digital tone control is one for a future Meridian magic box... ▲

Pear Audio ☎ (01665) 830862

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Paul Miller's Oasis of Sanity

How load-tolerant is your amplifier? Paul Miller explains why power ratings don't tell the whole story. . .

The question of an amplifier's 'load tolerance' is one that crops up throughout our group tests, and it's an important consideration that I promised to cover in greater detail following the grand pre/power amplifier test we published last month. Quite simply, an amplifier's 'load tolerance' defines its ability to maintain a given level of performance into as wide a variety of speakers as possible. Due to reasons of design, the nature of their crossover and system sensitivity, some speakers will present the amp with a lower impedance trend than others, meaning they're rated at four or six rather than the statutory eight Ohms.

Often, the more sensitive a speaker seems, the lower is its modulus of impedance and the more difficult it is for the amplifier to drive, though such a correlation is not set in stone. To understand why a lower impedance speaker is a trickier proposition we need to think of the amplifier as a source of Volts and not power (Watts). To illustrate the point, I've provided us with two amplifiers, models A and B, which are both real world designs nominally rated at 130Watts into eight Ohms.

The graph below shows us how the Voltage output of amplifier A varies as it's asked to drive eight, four, two and one Ohm loudspeakers under dynamic (i.e. transient or music-like) conditions. The graph is derived from a new and unique DSP-based VI program written in my laboratory, which allows us to profile the dynamic behaviour of any amplifier into any loudspeaker load. And though your speaker may be rated at eight or even four Ohms, you can bet that its

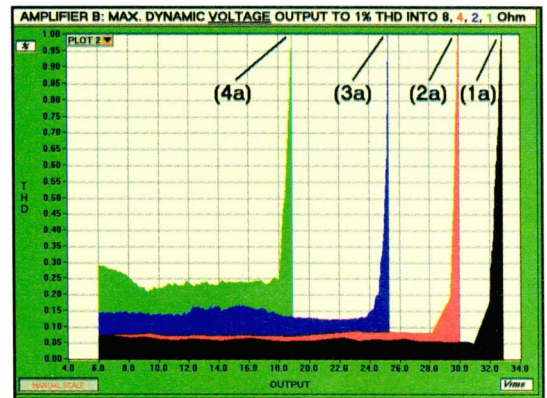
impedance drops lower than this at certain frequencies. While under dynamic conditions, the impedance 'seen' by the amplifier drops even lower still. Hence our use of what might seem, at first sight, to be unrealistically low two and one Ohm loads.

The area under each curve has been filled-in for greater visibility, with the black trace representing amplifier A's dynamic Voltage output up to one per cent distortion into eight Ohms, the red trace showing its output into four Ohms, blue for two Ohms and green for one Ohm, respectively.

At the point marked (1), amplifier A can deliver 33V into eight Ohms at one per cent distortion. This would represent a *dynamic* power output of 136 Watts into eight Ohms. Now, if the amplifier was perfectly 'load tolerant' it would have sufficient current (Amps) to maintain the same 33V across progressively lower impedance loads, theoretically doubling its power output as we dropped from eight to four then two and one Ohm.

In practice, of course, we see that it does not. Into four Ohms it will only support 29.7V to one per cent distortion (2) which is equivalent to 221 Watts and not the $2 \times 136 \text{ Watts} = 272 \text{ Watts}$ of the 'perfect' amplifier. Only 17V is supported into two Ohms (blue trace) at no greater than one per cent distortion (3) which is equivalent to just 145 Watts. The amplifier's power supply is clearly collapsing, running dry of current and unable to sustain anything close to the original 33V (or 545 Watts) into this load. As we hit one Ohm, no more than 8.3V (4) is maintained — that's just 69 Watts output.

Now let's compare the performance of amplifier A with amplifier B, which is also capable of delivering 33V into eight Ohms (1a) and, therefore, would also be rated at precisely the same 136 Watts.

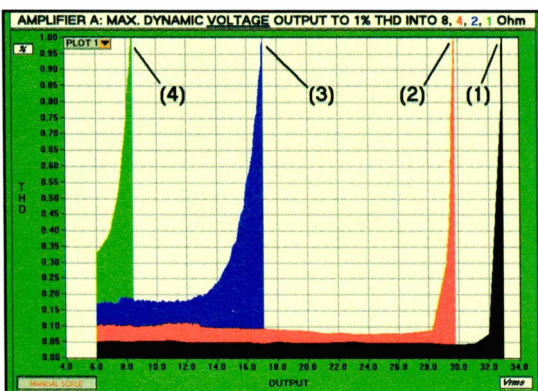
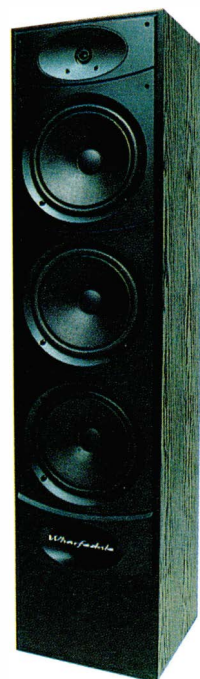


In this case there's not a great deal of difference as amplifier B drives the four Ohm load (red) and sustains 30V under the same dynamic conditions (2a). This would be equivalent to a dynamic power output of 225 Watts into four Ohms, very close to amplifier A's 221 Watts. Into the two Ohm load (blue), however, there's clearly a significant difference as amplifier B's superior power supply provides sufficient current to support a full 25.2V (3a) — equal to 317W into two Ohms. Into one Ohm (green), amplifier B makes a mockery of amplifier A, sustaining a full 19V (4a) or 361 Watts.

From this evidence we can predict that amplifier B will be significantly more tolerant of difficult speaker loads than amplifier A, despite both models being rated at precisely the same 136 Watts into a nominal eight Ohm load. In real life, amplifier A would simply run out of puff driving a B&W DM302, a KEF Reference, a Linn Kaber or a Wharfedale Valdus, when amplifier B would continue to take the speaker, and the music, comfortably in its stride.

Evidently not all 100 Watt (or 50 Watt, or 30 Watt) amplifiers are created equal. Now, fortunately, we have the technology to sort the men from the boys and recommend those amplifier truly capable of grappling with 'real world' loudspeakers. ▲

Do you have a subject matter for the Oasis? Please contact Paul Miller via e-mail on 100576.3021@compuserve.com



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Personal Messages

Paul Messenger is shocked to discover convenience features in modern tuners. Another rent in the hair shirt. . .

My last tuner group review for *Choice* occurred three years ago, so this one was a bit of a shock to the system. Whereas groups of loudspeakers tend to whizz past me every four months or so, my prolonged absence from the world of tuners has supplied a rather more useful perspective on the way the market sector is evolving — or not, as the case may be.

Tuners don't really need to evolve at all. The FM stereo broadcast format was set back in the '60s, and the only change since then has been the introduction of RDS (Radio Data System). This is the radio equivalent to teletext, sort of, but its main features are much more strongly oriented towards mobile receivers rather than domestic ones. And that's even more true of the new digital radio network known as DAB.

Both radio itself and the receiver technology we use have changed rather dramatically over the past 30 years. Airwaves are considerably more crowded, with a greater range of programmes available, both official, and piratical especially in large cities. Signal strengths and coverages are up too, to reach all those little personal stereos.

Perhaps most significantly, the BBC has abandoned its policy of 'simulcasting' the same programmes across FM and AM wavebands, so now an FM-only tuner misses out on a lot. Connoisseurs of that apotheosis of the live talk-radio dramatic art, the ball-by-ball cricket commentary, now need access to long wave, while Radio Five Live and daytime World Service are only on medium wave (unless you want to pull them off the Astra satellite, which has its own inconveniences).

Today's tuners, bar the odd exotic exception, have now all gone over from analogue-variant to digital-synthesis tuning, which has a number of implications. Digital tuning makes it easy to incorporate pre-sets, auto-scan tuning, digital display readouts and

potentially remote control, but virtually impossible to implement traditionally continuous manual tuning. (The transmitted signals themselves remain analogue of course, even though much of their origination and distribution is likely to be in the digital domain these days.)

The half-dozen tuners reviewed in this issue may be too few to form a truly representative group, but as a snapshot sample the mix and prioritisation of features on offer leaves me rather perplexed. The audiophile might assert that all features are inessentials liable to distract and potentially compromise the ultimate sound quality, and as one who's suffered 10 years of asceticism with an FM-only, analogue, hands-on, manual-only,

which appeared on two of our review samples, is by far the most tempting yet for the domestic user, especially when browsing between Radios 3 and 4. Only a few stations carry or make much use of RadioText yet, but the best examples operate a bit like a paging system, delivering a full line of scrolling information about the current programme soon after you tune in. Very useful, though after you've digested the information it can be sufficiently distracting to require a 'display off' button on the handset.

For me, RDS's nemesis is its language, or rather its perversion thereof. Acronym-anxiety comes just behind PIN-paranoia in diseases responsible for the decline of Western Civilisation. Much of the blame lies with the broadcasters, and RDS is a major source of infection. You have to master at least seven new abbreviations, several of which already have alternative meanings in common usage. Life is too short, and radio insufficiently important to strain the brain in such an unpleasant way.

If you're contemplating a new tuner, work out for yourself which features matter to you most, because it's highly unlikely that you'll get all of them. In our group of six, not one had everything you might want. All had medium wave AM, but

only two had long wave too.

Most surprising of all, only one model — ironically the cheapest — came complete

with its own independent remote control — something the CD player purchaser takes for granted. True, the Denon has a built-in sensor and optional handset; the Arcam is available as the remote-operable Alpha 8 at a penurious extra £50, and two others incorporate system-based remote alongside partnering amps. But it's ludicrous, here in 1997, that remote control is not as universal among tuners as with CD players — the implementation isn't difficult, and the facility is arguably even more useful. ▲



Benevolent button or wicked widget? Paul can't make up his mind about RadioText! (Turn to page 40 for our six-tuner test.)

zero-preset Naim NAT01, who am I to dispute that argument?

But I am increasingly missing the AM wavebands, and find the lack of remote control increasingly irksome, simply because all my other audio and video equipment (bar the record player) is handset-driven. On the other hand, I don't particularly miss the high sensitivity and variable selectivity useful for capturing weak, out-of-area signals.

And I reckon I can survive without the debatable delights and concomitant complexities of radio data (RDS). I've got to admit that the latest RadioText feature,

Krell's Angels prize possessions

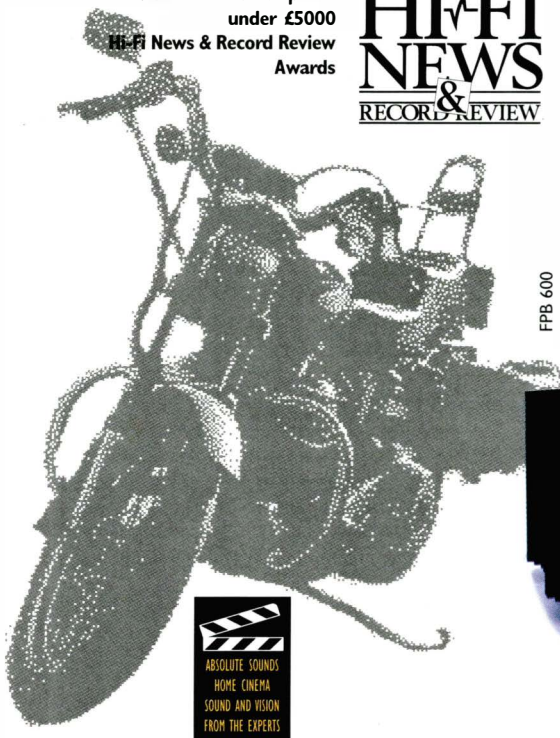
AAHEA Golden Note Awards '96
Krell Reference 64 — Best digital
converter design
Krell KPS 20i — Best digital
source design



Krell KAV-300i — Winner EISA
European High-End
Audio '96-'97



Krell KAV-300i — Best amplifier
under £5000
Hi-Fi News & Record Review
Awards



The **Krell Playback System KPS 20i** sets a totally new standard in digital playback. The KPS 20i is the reference standard integrated transport/digital processor that beats the performance of separates. With balanced DACs, fully discrete output stages and a true high-end line level stage, the 20i brings the highest degree of musical integrity to CD playback. The Krell Playback System is also available in transport only (**KPS 20t**) and full remote control integrated transport/processor versions (**KPS 20i/I**). Requiring no preamplifier,



KPS 20i

the KPS 20i/I can be partnered with just a Krell power amplifier for the ultimate in high-end performance. The **KPS 30i** high-quality integrated CD transport and convertor is the latest addition to the Playback System. Krell amplifiers are known the world over as the very finest solid-state designs. The new range of **Full Power Balanced** designs looks set to re-write history. First implemented in the KRC-3 preamp, current mode gain design has led to the Full Power Balanced amplifiers. Unique in the audio industry, current mode gain is a faster, more linear method of amplification achieved by designing gain stages that operate in the current and not the voltage domain. With fully regulated outputs, pure Class A operation, true balanced configuration for a cleaner, more secure relationship between the loudspeaker and the amplifier's driving force, Sustained Plateau Bias II, direct coupled signal paths and full complementary circuits the FPB amplifiers stand at the very edge of musical technology. Available in 600, 300 and 200-watt outputs each power amplifier (**FPB-600**, **FPB-300** and **FPB-200**) uses output devices manufactured exclusively for Krell by Motorola. The result is an unprecedented level of speed, current drive and musical accuracy, in other words the FPB amps are musical, fast and incredibly strong. Martin Colloms, reviewing the FPB-300 in **Hi-Fi News** (Dec 1996) said it 'must be regarded as a reference, regardless of considerations of price and power'. He concluded that Krell's zero feedback design carries with it 'greater neutrality and musicality' yet making no concessions to the 'traditional amplifier virtues of blockbuster bass, huge power and adverse load driving muscle'.

The natural partner for the FPB range is the Krell **KRC-HR** High Resolution Remote Controlled Preamplifier which offers uncompromised audiophile sound with ease of operation. Digital logic circuits operate gold-contact relays for positive switching with absolute signal integrity. Power supply and gain stages are refinements of classic Krell Class A complimentary circuits with extraordinary levels of transparency and resolution.

Supporting Krell's outstanding **AV Cinema System Controller** (Dolby Pro-Logic, THX, AC-3) are Krell AV amplifiers — a range of 100 watt per channel multi-channel amplifiers (the **KAV-500/3**, **/4** and **/5**), the 2, 3 and 4-channel amplifiers can be extended with an optional add-on channel (the **KAV-500 Rail**).

The **KAV-300i** an integrated two-channel 150 watt amplifier — Krell's first integrated — was launched alongside the AV power amps and has been wildly received, cleaning up awards around the world. This fully discrete, wide-bandwidth, low-feedback design features full Class A dual mono output stage. Its supplied remote control give access to the basic functions of Krell CD players. In fact, a matching CD player is shortly to be launched. The **KAV-300cd** (hoped to retail at £3499) features a Teac CMK-4 drawer loading mechanism, HDCD, 2 x 20 bit Burr-Browns DACs, with Class A direct coupled output stages feeding balanced and single ended outputs.

A stand alone power amplifier the **KAV-250a** will be available April/May '97 offering 250 watt with at a projected price of £3290. A matching preamplifier, designated **KAV-250p**, will be available at the same time at the fantastic price of £1990. The KAV 250p features one balanced input, three single ended inputs and one tape loop.

One single ended input can be configured as a theatre throughput for use in surround sound applications. Single ended and balanced outputs are offered.

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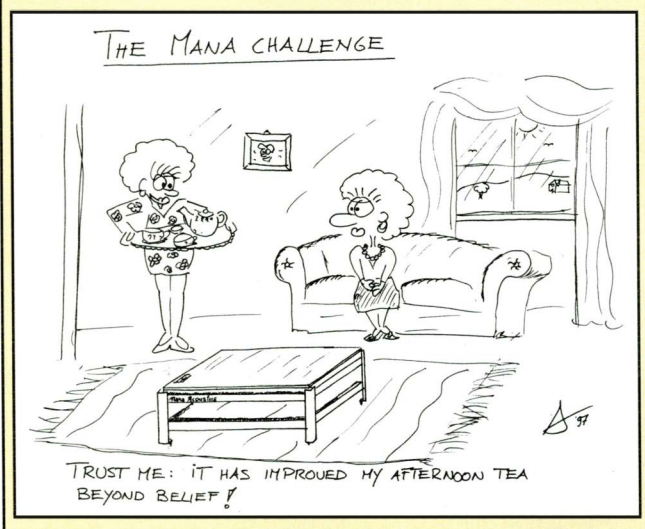
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Cartoon Of The Month

I could not help drawing a humorous cartoon (below), in response to some of the enthusiastic pro-Mana-Acoustics letters published in issue 164. Of particular inspiration was the letter from Mr Richard Majlinder claiming that Mana supports improve "anything and everything"!

Simoncelli Andrea, St Aubin, Jersey CI

P.S. Just for fun!



More Mana morsels

I'd like to join the Mana debate... if only because all your letters in the March issue were very pro-Mana and I, like your reader Mick Sissine, have my doubts!

I bought a Reference table some years ago to support my LP12/Lingo/Ekos/Troika, at the time hooked up to a

medium-priced Naim system with a pair of IBL speakers. I have always preferred the Naim sound to anything else, but as with all systems it had a couple of niggles: the sound was occasionally too forward, and sometimes just a bit too lean in the middle and top — though at its best it was unbeatably exciting.

I bought a two-part 'Reference' Mana for the LP12, and took my time setting it up. I started by listening to it in 'standard' form. There was a distinct difference in the sound; it was more spacious and the bass was somewhat richer. Adding the 'Reference' plat-

form yielded another change in sound, albeit less marked.

The more I listened the more I got the impression that the things I didn't like about my system were still there, just that they were differently portrayed. After listening with and without the top frame over a period I decided to do without it.

Over the years I have gradually moved up the Naim ladder to the point where I now own a very high-end active Naim system. I still have the Mana Reference table and I still don't use the top platform. In fact I now prefer the sound of the turntable when it's sitting on the board rather than the glass. The few things I didn't like about my earlier Naim system have disappeared, simply because I've graduated to the uncompromised Naim top end. This, I believe, has very little to do with the Mana table.

M Kent, Sydenham, London SE

Stan Vincent adds... We received two more letters on the 'Mana Controversy' this month, one from Roger Ward, the other from Guy Curtis. Though both provided interesting evidence for the prosecution, I shan't print them as neither bore address/telephone number details and therefore I cannot be confident they are genuine. Messrs. Ward and Curtis are welcome to resubmit if indeed they are bona fide readers. Remember we will always withhold names and/or addresses if requested.

Vanishing point

My current system, now 17 years old, requires urgent replacement. I had hoped to purchase neutral components that would portray music

as it had sounded when recorded.

I assumed designers of higher-priced products had transparency as their goal, but after listening to several such systems what really struck me was the variety of interpretations available. My subjective opinion of a Linn Mimik, which I had intended to avoid because of your review, was that it sounded incredibly natural compared to the stark, etched quality of a Naim CD3.

You may say that the whole point of hi-fi is to find the balance and form of presentation that an individual prefers. But I would not choose to view a painting through a colour filter just because I preferred a bluer tint. What I want is a replica of the original sound.

I am aware that room acoustics will exert a unique effect on every system, but I would like to think that the electronics themselves exert the minimum of artifice. After all, if I cannot be sure that a system is neutral, why bother with expensive hi-fi at all?

C Wood, Croydon, Surrey

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L O U D S P E A K E R S

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Nauti but nice

B&W's Nautilus is more than just an exercise in design: it's a technological tour de force! **Jason Kennedy** and **Paul Messenger** get inside its shell...

Earlier this year I got chatting with Marantz's electronics guru Ken Ishiwata about loudspeakers. What sort of enclosures grace the inner sanctum of Europe's most famous hi-fi designer? It turns out Ken's designed and built his own relatively conventional speakers, confounding my secret hope that he would own up to even a small pair of horns! But when the conversation turned to the question of which commercially-produced speakers have earned the utmost respect in Ken's personal hi-fi hierarchy, with no hesitation the answer came back: B&W's extraordinary £35,000 Nautilus.

Cue feature idea! Despite articles in the January and March 1992 issues of *Hi-Fi Choice* introducing the Nautilus and the men behind it, we have never enjoyed an audience with the speaker at sufficient length to form a worthy opinion of its acoustic talents. This encounter was thus long overdue, and to execute it in 1997 involved a pan-European trek between Brussels, Brighton and Milan.

Perhaps it *would* have been easier if I'd manhandled these 60kg lettuce eaters and their 50kg bases into my listening room. But I'd have needed to beg, borrow or steal four very-high-quality stereo amps, and I would have missed the opportunity to hear the Nautilus in two very different environments that could do justice to this design's prodigious low-frequency capabilities.

But what makes the Nautilus cost £35,000? It's arguably the most elegant high-end loudspeaker available, and appears utterly transparent to the signals it transduces, but I was intrigued to learn about the technologies that underpin its performance.

There seems to be one fundamental

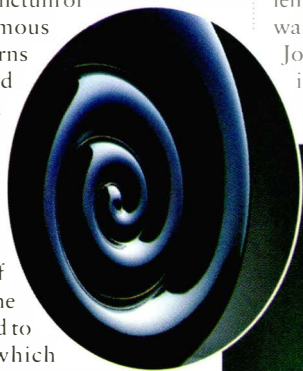
acoustic challenge embodied in the Nautilus, which led engineer and designer Laurence Dickie to the numerous engineering solutions that ended up in the speaker. The problem was how one should deal with the rearward radiation of a drive unit. B&W founder John Bowers had attempted a solution involving infinite baffle designs, where the forward and rearward output was

structuring a 2.7m tapered pipe! At the conceptual stage the snail-shell you see now was accompanied by a 'cobra'-style design that had the advantage of supporting itself.

Of course, there were many other issues to surmount between the original idea and a working prototype, let alone a finished product. Dickie spent a year on the former and another two to achieve the latter: 33 per cent inspiration, 66 per cent perspiration — a luxurious ratio in this day and age! One of the more significant development steps was selecting dome drive units for their piston-like behaviour below break-up frequency. None of the commercial units then available performed adequately, so Dickie started making his own, and deduced that their problems could be ascribed to airflow constrictions created by the coil/magnet assembly. This discovery resulted in the creation of domes with external ring magnets.

The Nautilus is ingenuity personified, for example in the way that the drive unit fixing method is impossible to ascertain at first sight. There are no visible bolts and access is impossible from the rear. It turns out that the top three units fit into tapered seatings fitted with 'O' rings — there are indeed no bolts. The hefty 300mm bass unit consolidates this interference fit with extra compliant fixing behind the magnet.

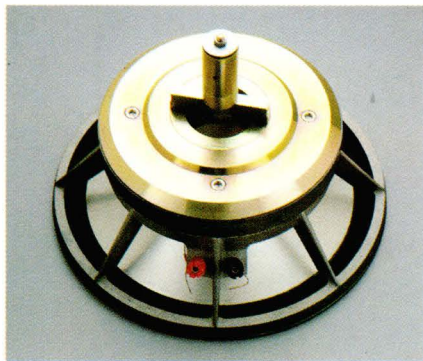
Getting to the heart of these fascinating speakers proved quite a challenge. At first we planned to visit B&W's Belgian distributor: his Mark Levinson amp is allegedly Nautilus's perfect partner, and his Marantz CD23 would have closed the loop nicely with the guy who put us on this trail in the first place. Regrettably this trip proved impossible to organise, and instead we threw ourselves on the hospitality of B&W's Italian



The mighty mollusc uses damped transmission pipes to absorb rearward radiation.

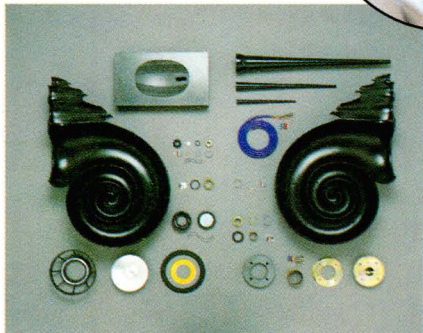
released into the room dipole-style. Dickie boiled the issue down to a simple fact: an exponential horn behaves as a plane waveguide, or tube, when sound waves 'see' it from the throat (where a driver would normally reside) or the mouth of the horn. This realisation led him to the exponentially-tapered transmission line pipes that protrude behind each of the four drive units in the Nautilus. The coiling of the bass tube was a very neat way of con-





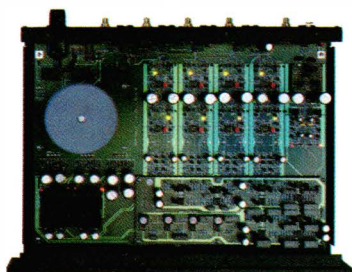
Above: the 300mm metal-coned bass driver is fixed in a gel damped tube. Right: layering up the GRP moulds. Below centre: an early prototype model with flat sides and the so-called pixie cap. Bottom: fully adjustable cross-over.

distributor Guido Baccarelli. His Nautiluses (Nautili?) fire across an irregularly-shaped, highly-reflective room with a high ceiling and solid floor. On hand was blue-blooded partnering equipment in the form of Jadis CD and preamplification, VPI TNT/JMW Memorial turntable, and four Jeff Rowland stereo power amps. And it proved immediately how incredibly transparent the Nautilus is to its ancillaries and surroundings. Did I mention that the speaker's external shape has incredibly low diffraction, allowing for maximum dispersion and thus a lot more 'in-



room' sound than usual? After a few recordings it became clear why Guido so fastidiously attends to his LPs' cleanliness: the system highlighted surface noise just as much as musical information. The turntable sounded very sweet, though, and I almost wished I'd taken some vinyl down with me.

What I had lugged along, and eventually managed to try out, was the Acoustic Precision Eikos CD player (*Statements, HFC 165*). The result was worth the effort, even though I suspect this speaker can out-resolve anything else on the market. The depth and clarity of bass produced with the Eikos was pretty impressive, and I mean impressive in the sense of effortlessness, not slam or wow factor. It's more like the ease with which a racing car will corner compared to a regular car:



understated and precise. Which means that potential purchasers of this product will have to educate themselves about the potential of very-low-distortion audio, as opposed to the impressiveness of big raunchy boxes.

The sound in Lawrence Dickie's fascinating living room was distinctly different. This is a large, highly-dispersive room with a wooden floor and low seating. And it sounded very laid-back when combined with prototype B&W amplifiers and a Trichord Digital Turntable transport/Pulsar DAC. Dickie himself uses a Sony Discman and



clearly finds the results quite adequate! Eek; what if he's right and it's only the speakers that matter?! In his room the speakers offered an effortless, superbly-resolved portrayal in which only software dictated the shape and

colour of emanating sound. With well-recorded discs possessing depth and ambience, that's what came out; when the disc had grunt and power in its pits, that's what we heard. Never have I encountered a speaker so much at the mercy of what it consumes. Rarely have I heard a product that I wanted to own so much. After all, it would be the ultimate reviewer's tool — provided I could get four samples of each amp that came along!

Because of its transparency and the adjustability of its active crossover, the Nautilus has the potential to be all things to all men. Nautilus simply produces greater fidelity than I have ever been treated to previously — I'd love to try it with other amplifiers. I can't imagine that its 87dB sensitivity would be a problem for a decent push-pull tube amp without a crossover in the way. Or what about eight Michell Alectos? You'd end

up torn between trying favourite records and equipment. Nautilus is a tantalising product, and anyone considering a Porsche should hear a pair of these first... ▲

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**B&W NAUTILUS...
NOTES FROM 20,000 LEAGUES**

When they created Nautilus, B&W's most beautiful and expensive loudspeaker, the inspiration for engineer Lawrence Dickie and designer Alison Risby was the beautiful cephalopod of the same name.

Photographs do it scant justice. When you see a real Nautilus in its shiny fibreglass carapace, it's not only exquisite in its own right (thanks to the innate elegance of an essentially natural form), but it's also surprisingly compact for a serious speaker.

The biggest surprise of all comes with the realisation that there's nothing whatsoever fanciful about this extraordinary shape. Believe it or not, it sticks very closely to that most rigorous of all design disciplines, form following function. The drop-dead-good looks follow almost as a matter of course.

Going for a four-way design has the benefit of ensuring that each driver only operates over a narrow frequency band, and is rolled off at least two octaves above or below any break-ups or resonances. Also, the consequent progressively narrowing profile keeps lateral distribution consistently wide up to high frequencies, ensuring that the sound balance of the speaker changes little across a wide listening zone, with help from the softly-contoured mouldings around and between each driver diaphragm.

Besides smoothing the distribution of the sound created by the outside surfaces of the diaphragms, the flexibility of fibreglass allows an ingenious solution in dealing with the unwanted (because it's out of phase) equal-and-opposite sound generated from the back-side of each diaphragm.

The driver loading adopted here is a species of sealed box (four of them), but one which neatly side-steps the 'boxy' standing-wave character of rectilinear shapes and parallel flat panels. A tapered and damped exponential tube is an ideal way to absorb the rear radiation from the drivers progressively and without any reflective surfaces. The shorter wavelengths generated by the three smaller drivers can be absorbed by the straight

tapered tubes, while the (not quite) Nautilus-type spiral gives sufficient length to cope with the much bigger waves generated by the bass driver. Form follows function.

The proof comes in the listening. I've heard Nautili on two occasions recently, both times in entirely unfamiliar surroundings and systems. For that reason I'm still not sure what they do sound like. They're exceptionally transparent to driving equipment, and clearly capable of reproducing a remarkably wide dynamic range, to the point where source and amplification quality are the more likely limiting factors.

The tonal balance can of course be tweaked to some degree in the electronic crossover, but what I heard was essentially neutral, smooth and uncoloured through the midband, with precise and generous stereo soundstaging. The only minor reservation is that sensitivity is modest (around 87dB/Watt), a mite frustrating for the triode valve fraternity and serious headbangers alike. The much more major gripe is that I'll never, ever be able to afford a pair!

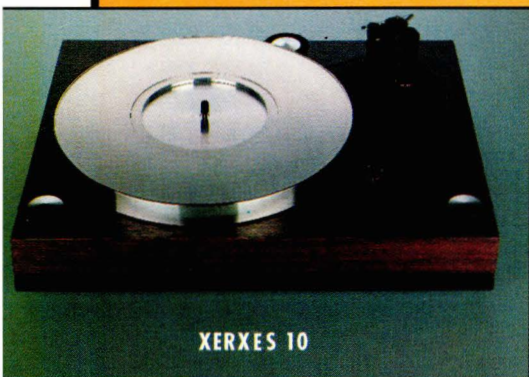
Paul Messenger, Consultant Editor

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Most Amusing

Alan Sircom extols the virtues of a power-packed US amplifier, whose £27 Watts will grace any music . . .

There really is such a thing as a high-end bargain. And the perfect embodiment of this paradox is the Muse Model Three/Model One Hundred Sixty pre/power combination. Even though the combined selling price of this combo is £4,280, it works out at under £27 per Watt. These are big American Watts, the kind of Watts that scare most Anglo-Japanese Watts into submission. Therein lies the secret of this pairing's innate good value, and the reason why it will make many a high-end amplifier switch off in jealousy.

The £1,990 Muse Model Three preamplifier, however, is certainly not meant to be switched off, as it takes a few days before the true Muse character emerges. Ostensibly the Model Three is a straightforward line preamplifier, with three single-ended and two balanced inputs, a tape loop and both balanced and single-ended outputs. It has balance and volume adjustments, a remote and little else — at least on the surface.

Inside the Model Three lurk a variety of options rarely found on preamps at the price. First there's the fully-adjustable gain on each input, to prevent there being massive jumps in volume levels when switching from a low-gain phono stage to a high-output CD player, for example. Then, there's the polarity inversion button, for phase-inverted inputs. Naturally, this can be assigned to any input and adjusted 'on the fly'.

Already on the drawing board is a home cinema processor, that may be able to link with and be controlled by the Model Three. And if talk of future-proofing alone is insufficient to thrill you, perhaps the exemplary build-quality will set your pulse racing. The casework is solid aluminium; the front panel is half-an-inch thick. Inside there are four circuit boards virtually welded to the preamp. The main board itself uses Muse's distinctive wide-circuit tracks, making the PCB look like a Kit-Kat wrapper.

The £2,290 Muse Model One Hundred Sixty power amplifier is a more conventional design. It has a balanced XLR input, which must be shorted out with plugs supplied when it's to be used in single-ended mode. However, as the Model Three preamp has balanced output, and the combo sounds slightly better in this mode, I doubt if many people will use the phono sockets.

Under the neoprene-damped lid lies a pretty hefty 160 Watt power amplifier. It has some 40,000µF of reservoir capacitance and eight FET output devices a side, together with a massive toroidal transformer hidden beneath a screening can. Once again, the fit



Built like a Sherman tank but shod in winged sandals: Muse combo is a classic in the making.

and finish is first rate, with thick aluminium everywhere. The stick-on feet are a clever touch, though to account for the burgeoning after-market in special cones and the like, Muse supplies the adhesive feet unstuck.

While the electronics components and internal cables within both amps are nothing special in audiophile terms, I'll defend Muse against any charges of penny-pinching. The stuff Muse uses is of the highest grade, but lacks the famous-name cachet that can double the list price of many an amplifier. One thing's for sure, though: both amplifiers are built to last and last.

Muse travels fast

Used together or separately, in balanced or single-ended mode, the Muse duo was remarkably transparent. It simply took hold of the loudspeaker drive-units and made them respond precisely to the waveform demands of the signal source. Rarely did this equipment stamp its own character on the sound produced. In truth, having experimented with the Muse DAC in the past, I

expected such performance from the preamplifier, but it was the power amplifier that impressed me most.

I expected either the stormy darkness or the zingy bright detail normally associated with big American iron. Instead, what I heard was inherently natural in both size and tone. Imagery, too, was staggeringly three-dimensional, with a soundstage on simple acoustic music that stretched back into next door's living room. Yet this Muse rig never succumbed to the temptation of highlighting its potential, even when really wiggling out with full-on Mahler Eight — or Bush for that matter.

The preamp has a naturalness that neither romanticises nor lays music bare. Its power amp stablemate is one of the few big 'uns that can swing quicksilver dynamics like a three-Watt triode amp, while exercising the control and unforced power reserves of the serious behemoths. It even has rhythmic strengths to rival the best of British. An all-round duo that won't break the bank? You'd do well to spend money on Muse. ▲

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Help!

Malcolm Steward and Jason Kennedy answer this month's hi-fi queries.

Send your hi-fi queries to 'Help!' at Hi-Fi Choice, 19 Bolsover Street, London W1P 7HJ • fax on 0171-917 5512 • e-mail on 100433.1130@compuserve.com

Query of the month

Creating the third dimension

My system at present is a Marantz CD52mkII, Denon TU-260L tuner, Pioneer A300X amp, Mission 760i speakers (on Atacama SE24 stands), Ixos 104 interconnect and Cable Talk speaker wire.

The problem is that I don't really experience the magical three-dimensional imaging that I've heard about, unless it's a particularity good recording, like Prefab Sprout's *From Langley Park To Memphis*. If I listen to something like Radiohead's *The Bends*, at high volumes it starts to sound uncontrolled and can get tiring. It just can't seem to cope with certain types of music, notably rock guitar.

I've read your reports on the Pioneer A-300R Precision — notably "it produced a full-size, speaker-independent image that conjured up instruments and voices in the room. It took the music out of the speakers like a valve amp..." Is this what I need?

Do you think the Cambridge Audio CD6 would be a good partner for this later? And will my speakers be up to all this upgrading?

They're little crackers and I love their sound, but I suspect that to present a good 3D soundstage they may be a bit lacking — should I tackle them first and if so what should I listen to?

I can afford to spend £400 now, but I might be able to stretch that to £800 in a month or two.

Chris Totten, Randalstown, N. Ireland.

Not all recordings have a great sense of three dimensionality, but there are plenty with a great sense of depth, especially if you listen to acoustic material. To hear this depth will require quite a thorough re-working of your system, and the speakers may well prove to be unsuitable in the long term.

*I suggest you start with a Pioneer A-300R Precision amp and start saving for the PD-S505 Precision CD player reviewed in this issue (p.75). This combination will give you genuine stereo as well as fatigue-free listening; all you'll need is a pair of speakers beloved of the 'phase linear' crowd. Bandor's Trident combo and the forthcoming Acoustic Precision speakers should do the trick for around £700. **M***

The magic of DAC

My Marantz CD-63SE has smooth, rounded-off treble for classical piano. Will the addition of Cambridge Audio's DACmagic 2 mkII open up the treble and help generally? Can you suggest any other cheap options and recommend a cable for the DAC?

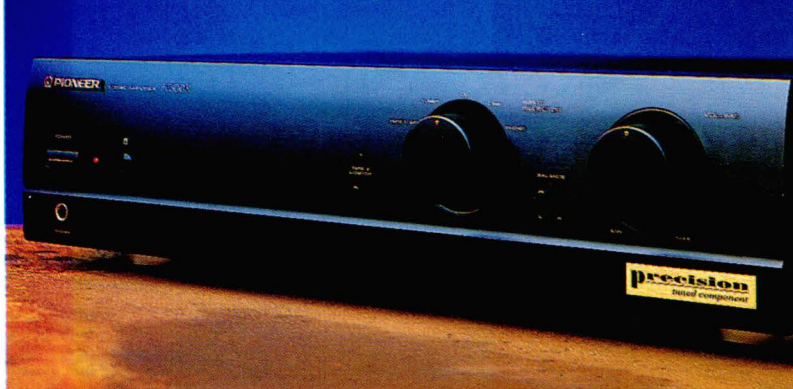
Nick Spear, Gateway

*The answer to this is a qualified yes. That is, the DACmagic will improve matters provided your amplifier and speakers aren't contributing to the problem. The DAC comes with a BNC output connection and I would recommend using this wherever possible. Your CD-63 has only a phono output but you could easily use a BNC-to-phono lead or a BNC-to-BNC connector with an adaptor. Cable suppliers such as Cable Talk or the Chord Company will be able to provide whatever terminations you require on a suitable grade of lead. This might seem a small consideration but on players that have phono and BNC outputs, the BNC connector always sounds better to me — clearer and more musically cohesive. **MS***

Can DACmagic 2 relieve treble claustrophobia in a Marantz CD-63SE?



Pioneer PD-S505 Precision: a crucial step on the ladder to 3D sound.



As mad as a lorry

I have a Marantz CD-52mkII SE, Arcam Delta 290 and 290P with Mission 780SE speakers. In your last edition, you mentioned that the Marantz was out of balance with the Delta 290. I use a Theta TLC, a DACmagic 1 and a Musical Fidelity X10-D. Do they balance up the system or am I mad?

Frank Hynes, London

*Frank, you're as mad as a lorry. What you have done equates to bolting a Garrett T3 onto a Ford Fiesta with bald tyres. Sorry to be all automotively analogous, mate, but you have to sort out your chassis before you can start adding go-faster bits. That means welding up a better grade CD transport. As a starting point, go listen to a Trichord Digital Turntable or a Teac VRDS T1. **MS***

Critical Tannoy

I currently have a Pioneer PD-9700 CD player, Pioneer A-400 amp and Tannoy 609 speakers. The sound I am getting, although warm, tends to be dull — almost muffled. I am thinking of replacing the A-400 with something to make the system sound more exciting, with sharp treble and fast bass. I want to spend between £300 and £500.

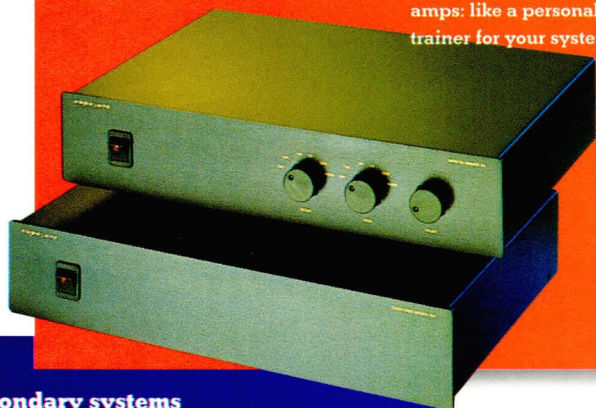
Stuart Galt, University of Portsmouth

The Tannoy 609 can be a highly critical speaker and, in my experience, likes as big an amplifier as you can throw at it, along with precise positioning in the room. Inches and degrees count! Set this speaker up poorly and it will punish you.

Given your budget, one option would be to seek out a second-hand pre-power combination. Something will muscle and grip from, say, Exposure or Acurus would suit. However, you'll be lucky to find one under £500. Otherwise, try to stretch your budget a little and look at the Moth Thirty Series. In my opinion the Passive preamp and Stereo 60 power amplifier are a superb value-for-money choice.

If your budget is inflexible, check out the new Storm 1 integrated from Talk Electronics. As I've noted, something bigger and beefier would be better, but this amplifier will provide more excitement than your A-400. MS

Exposure pre/power amps: like a personal trainer for your system!



Secondary systems

My system (Musical Fidelity Dr.Thomas, MF Preamp II, Arcam CD, Infinity 7 Kappa) sits in a dedicated listening room, and I'm happy with it.

I'm thinking about a second, budget system, mainly to listen — in another room — to classical, stereo radio programmes broadcast without advertisements around the clock.

I would add a CD because my children might be interested, and the speakers of my choice are Sonus Faber's Concertino.

There seem to be few hi-fi receivers I could use for this system. Would it be a shame to drive the Concertinos with a receiver such as NAD's 71.2? But if you praise NAD's budget integrated amp, why should its receiver sound any worse?

A Musical Fidelity amp should be a better choice, but how much better, considering the limits of radio broadcasting?

GianLuca Sarto, Milano, Italy.

To which limits of radio do you refer? A decent tuner with a good aerial can work wonders.

The consensus is that a separate amplifier and tuner will sound better than an equivalently-priced receiver. Two explanations are that tuners and amplifiers don't especially like sharing power supplies, and that tuners generate high-frequency garbage that is best kept away from sensitive amplifier circuits. Besides, your Concertinos really deserve a quality amplifier.

I would suggest adding a tuner such as Naim's NAT02 or Micromega's Tuner to your existing system and running a long interconnect from your preamp to a separate power amplifier — possibly second-hand to keep costs down — which can drive the Concertinos. MS

A temporary fix

For some years I endured a system I had grown to dislike, and eventually I decided that it had to go, albeit in stages. The guts of the rebuilt system are now an Arcam Alpha 8 Amplifier, Alpha 7 CD player which may be upgraded to an 8 in due course, Mission 731 speakers and a REL Strata subwoofer, all wired up with good but not silly-money cables.

The Mission 731s were always going to be a temporary fix, and while okayish in the short term, now they have to make way for something better. But what? I listen to a wide range of music, and crave not very high volumes but good integration and dynamic range. The REL helps here and I suspect that the main problem at the moment is one of scale: I have a listening environment around nine by four metres and the Missions tend to get a little bit "lost".

I now know that choosing loudspeakers with care is an odious task and would welcome any suggestions in the up-to-£500

range, maybe with a splurge to £750 if it's going to make a significant difference.

Steven Purvis, Wilts

If your only problem with the 731s is that they don't have the wherewithal to fill your stadium-sized listening room, I suggest you investigate their bigger brothers, similarly-voiced models such as the recently upgraded 733i, 734i and 735i. You shouldn't have problems with multi-driver speakers like the 735i failing to integrate — which can happen in some situations — in a room as large as yours.

Alternatives providing a different balance that you

might like to audition as well are the Castle Chester and

Harlech, and Tannoy's 635. One thing to be wary of, however, is that many speakers at this price level — and there's no shortage of valid choices available — really demand more than a modestly powered amplifier to exploit them. MS



Tannoy 635s: should be at home in the larger living room.

◀ **Curing an upgrade gone awry**

Currently I own a Naim NAIT3 amplifier, Rega Kyte loudspeakers (which to me sound better on Kudos 50 stands than on open frame alternatives), Micromega Stage 2 CD player, Chord Company interconnects and AudioQuest Indigo Blue speaker cables. My system is located in a room approximately three by three meters. For the most part I listen to blues, bolero and classics, but I also enjoy my Prince collection and other rock music.

I was very satisfied with my set-up but I had an opportunity to upgrade at approximately £2,000 per item. I thought that the weakest items were the loudspeakers, so I changed them first. After listening to many models from ProAc, Castle, Naim, and Epos (the last two only up to £800) which didn't come anywhere near to what I wanted — they sounded dull — I decided on Sonus Faber Minima Amators.

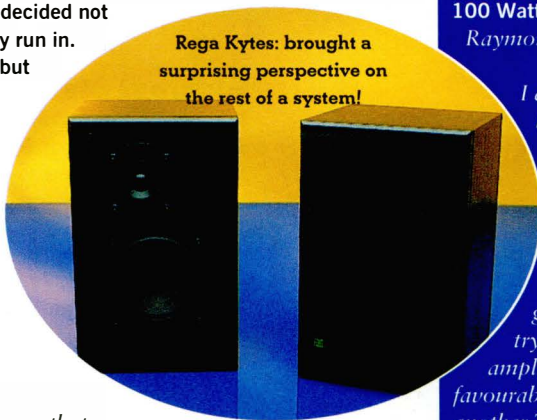
Initially the sound was so bad that I decided not to listen to them until they were properly run in. I was becoming quite happy with them but when I brought in my Kytes I realised I wasn't pleased with the sound. The Kytes sounded extremely fast, open, detailed and dynamic, with great rhythm and timing, while the new speakers sounded slow, blurred and shut in.

What can I do? Will a Krell KAV-300i help? If not, what loudspeakers should I listen to?

Marin Pavlic, via the Internet

Your original system clearly had a balance that suited you, so go back to the dealer who provided it and ask for directions towards a system that will give you more of the same. Don't be in a rush to make a purchase — listen to a few different systems to get a feel for what's available within your budget. And please, don't upgrade your speakers until you've decided upon your CD player and amplifier, in that order.

Given your tastes I would suggest you start by listening to a Naim CD2 with a pre-power combination such as the NAC102 and NAP180, which provides a fast, orderly and exciting insight into music. It also opens up a coherent and cost-effective upgrade path for the future. MS



Rega Kytes: brought a surprising perspective on the rest of a system!

More power for the Totem

My system consists of Totem 1 speakers on Target R4 stands (sand-filled), Tara Labs Quantum 3+ speaker cables, Teac Esoteric P700 transport, Monarchy Audio 22A DAC, Naim NAIT3 amplifier, MIT Terminator 3 interconnects via a 5-pin to female RCA jumper, and Premiere equipment stand.

The sound has an up-front, aggressive quality. I want to stay with the Totems and I am considering replacing the NAIT3 since I suspect that this is the culprit. Have you heard about the brand Plinius? It's from New Zealand and its electronics are supposedly impressive sounding. It has an integrated amplifier at 100 Watts per side which is what I'm leaning towards.

Raymond Afan, Vancouver, British Columbia

I can't comment on Plinius since I've not heard its products but I agree you need a more substantial amplifier to drive the Totem 1s. I've had good results using big Naim amps and the muscular but graceful Acurus RL11/A150 pre/power combination with them. The Totems appreciate a power amplifier with a tight, grippy sound. I would also suggest that you try to hear the preamplifier/monoblok power amplifiers from Rega, about which I have heard favourable comments from Paul Messenger — another Totem 1 fan. By the way, ditch that adaptor in your interconnect and replace it with a DIN-to-phono cable before I come to dinner. MS

Acurus RL11/A150: plenty of grunt and remote to boot!



Decisions, decisions

My system, which consists of a Marantz CD-63SE, Audiolab 8000A and TDL RTL3, is bright and lacks a soundstage. I'm considering upgrading but what should I do first? Should I buy a DAC, have the Trichord modification fitted to my CD player or buy new speakers?

If I have to upgrade my speakers, which brand would you recommend? My priority is a wide soundstage and detail, and I listen to all kinds of music.

Muz Ahmad, Sheffield

People seem to be unshakably attached to the notion that adding DACs and tweaks to budget CD players will transform them into the sort of machines that can rival a well-sorted £500 player — which is what their system really needs. Your

CD-63SE and a DACmagic won't deliver the same performance as a Micromega Stage 4, Orelle CD100SE, Trichord Genesis or any other player that receives consistent praise in these pages. Would that life was that accommodating! But it isn't.

A more sophisticated CD player will give your system the chance to spread its wings and reveal more of what's on your discs — and be more suitable for subsequent upgrades such as outboard DACs. Then, a night or two spent tweaking your speaker positioning should improve your soundstaging. Remember, though, that spatial information is often subtle and extracting it requires painstaking system set-up. Stands, supports and cables all need to be set up meticulously to optimise this aspect of performance. MS



Trichord Genesis: a worthy upgrade for Muz Ahmad.

Forward with Britain

I have just read your speaker review with great interest. I am about to purchase a CD-based system with a budget of about £1,500. Of those I have auditioned, the closest to what I'm looking for is the Naim CD3/NAIT3/Intro combination. The only problems are that this is over my budget and maybe just little too bright/forward sounding.

I was intrigued by your comments about the Naim Intro with a Rega CD and amplifier, which sounds like it could address both issues. I assume the CD is the Rega Planet but don't know much about Rega amps. Alternatively do you think a Planet/NAIT/Intro would work?

Chris Davis, Maidenhead

Rega's amplifiers are certainly competitive and worth auditioning. I find they have a distinct flavour and this may or may not be to your taste. Only a demonstration will reveal if they're right for you.

A word of caution is due, however. When you plan to listen to a system, forewarn the dealer that you're coming and ask that he only plays you components that are thoroughly run-in. Naim gear, in particular, can take weeks to bed down and loosen up properly — and I speak from considerable experience of the stuff. Straight from the box it can sound bright and forward as you describe. A second audition of that original system might prove enlightening. MS

Lie back and think of Britain (and Denmark)

My system consists of Acoustic Energy 100 speakers, Atacama SE24 stands, Cable Talk 3 bi-wire, Rotel 970BXII power amp, QED Vector One preamp, Arcam 5 Plus CD player, Pioneer F-204 tuner, and IXOS 104 and Cambridge Audio Atlantic interconnects.

It sounds too laid-back for my liking. As I like to listen to a wide range of music, I want a more versatile system. It's okay for rock but when I try to listen to classical or jazz it just doesn't have the oomph.

I have a budget of £400 only, and I like to keep my separates slim-line — so don't ask me to buy a bulky CD player such as one of the TEAC VRDS models.

Amir A. Shafie, Dundee

I'm not familiar with your preamplifier but I have found that Rotel's power amplifiers can sound laid-back in a system that isn't inherently forthcoming. You certainly shouldn't think about changing your CD player; there's nothing wrong with it. I would simply listen to some alternative amplifiers, being sure to audition them with your CD player and speakers.

If you like slim-line components I would suggest models such as the Audiolab 8000A, Aura VA100, Densen Beat B-100, and Naim NAIT3. All of these bar the Aura are over budget, but it would be worth saving for them to avoid a wasteful sideways upgrade. MS

Aura VA-100: worth saving for.



Judging books by covers

I have worked in a hi-fi shop for five years and have always tried to sell the best products I could. Our lines include Rega, Quad, Cyrus, Denon, Yamaha, Sony, Rotel, B&W, Castle, Mission, and Energy. My system includes a Rotel RA-930AX, RCD-965BX, Denon TU-280, and DRS-640 with B&W 601s and QED 79-Strand wire.

Anyway, I have completely changed my hi-fi philosophy. Since I've worked at the shop I have had access to much finer equipment that I can afford. I have therefore decided to change all my equipment on the basis of looks rather than sound.

I want to buy Blue Room House Pods (no problem since we are a B&W dealer) with Kimber Kable KCAG interconnects and an Audio Innovations Alto amp in chrome finish (hopefully with matching CD and tuner).

My problem is that I can't find Audio Innovations anywhere! I really have my heart set on that equipment. Can you please tell me where I can get my hands on the stuff?

Keith Garipey, Montreal, Canada

Thanks for keeping me in business, Keith. I look forward to your next letter, which will start "I bought my system because it looked great but its sound is driving me mad". You're running the risk of buying a system that's a total waste of money — not because the components have no merit but thanks to the illogical way you're putting them together. I would look instead at the Aura range of electronics, which, incidentally, B&W manufactures. It's available in a chrome finish and should conceivably suit the Pods better than the Alto.

Talk of the Alto is, however, academic because Audio Innovations is not distributed in Canada or the USA. MS

Bi the way

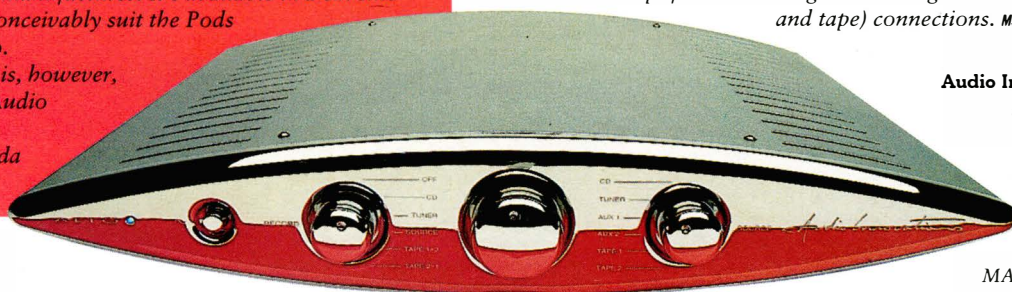
I am interested in bi-amplifying my system. Currently it includes the following equipment: a Rotel RA970BX amplifier, Micromega Stage 2 CD player, Sony SS-176E speakers, Aiwa AD-WX727 cassette, Kimber Silver Streak interconnects, Link Monitor S3 speaker cable and Transcabaudio AC cables.

I want to buy a pre-power combination. Unfortunately, the RA970BX sounds so good, selling it seems such a waste. So, my idea is to buy another RA970BX and to use them both separately for the tweeter and the woofer. They will be linked through the tape-out and CD inputs. Furthermore, I can adjust the tweeter and the woofer output level freely. Any comment?

Sulaiman Mahmood, France

This arrangement sounds convoluted and unpredictable to me. Why not hang on to the RA970BX for use in a second system one day, and use a dedicated bi-amplification set-up for your main system?

You could look towards manufacturers such as Arcam and Myryad who can offer amplifiers designed for this purpose — the Myryad MI 120 integrated, for example, has dedicated outputs to drive one or more MA 120 power amplifiers. Alternatively, buy a preamplifier with connections for multiple power amplifiers. If you like your Rotel integrated, go for more of the same with a set of 970 series pre and power amplifiers. Any of the set-ups suggested will out-perform a system of two budget integrated amplifiers lashed together through unmatched (CD and tape) connections. MS



Audio Innovations' Alto: sounds good but shouldn't be purchased just because of its looks!

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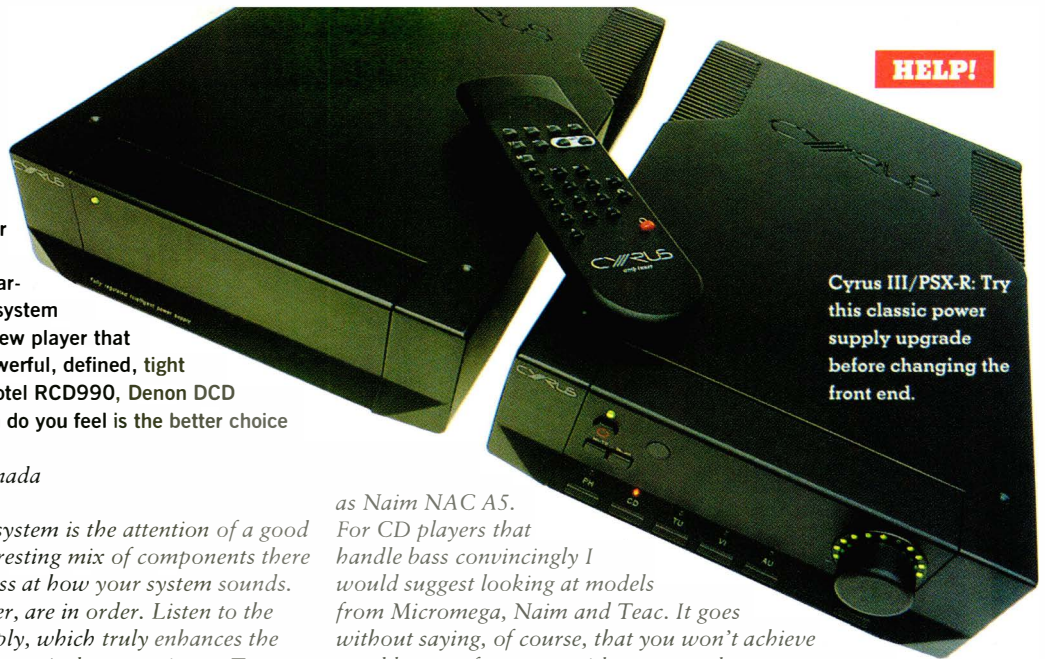
◀ **Smooth CD sound**

I have a Denon DCD-1100 CD player, Cardas Quadlink 5C interconnects, Cyrus III amp, Monster Powerline 2 speaker cables and KEF 104/2 speakers. I feel that my 11-year-old CD player is the weak link in the system and I would like to replace it with a new player that plays detailed, smooth highs with powerful, defined, tight bass. Between the Marantz CD17, Rotel RCD990, Denon DCD 3000 and Micromega Stage 6, which do you feel is the better choice for my system?

Nick Papadopoulos, Montreal, Canada

The best thing for improving your system is the attention of a good specialist retailer. You have an interesting mix of components there and I wouldn't like to hazard a guess at how your system sounds.

One or two suggestions, however, are in order. Listen to the Cyrus III with a PSX-R power supply, which truly enhances the amplifier's performance and fleshes out its lower registers. Try some alternative speaker cables — I've never got on well with Monster cable and prefer to stick to plain old dumbbell types such



Cyrus III/PSX-R: Try this classic power supply upgrade before changing the front end.

as Naim NAC A5.

For CD players that handle bass convincingly I would suggest looking at models from Micromega, Naim and Teac. It goes without saying, of course, that you won't achieve good bass performance without scrupulous system set-up, including the provision of decent supports for your electronics and fine-tuning of your speaker positioning and installation. MS

HINTS AND TIPS
TWEETER TWEAKERS

JIMMY HUGHES TEACHES TITILLATING TWEAKS TO TRANSFORM TRILLING TWEETERS!

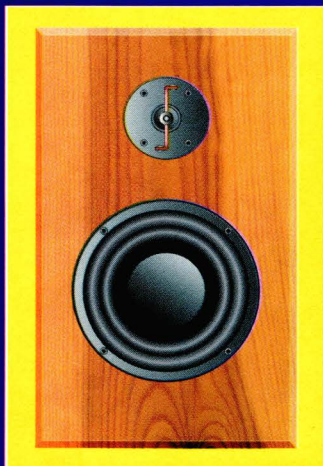
Put your ear right up close to most conventional dome tweeters, and as music plays you'll hear a ragged spitty sort of sound that lacks smoothness and refinement. Welcome to the vibrating tweeter diaphragm with its residual breakup modes! Far from nice, isn't it?

What saves the day is the distance between you and the tweeter when you sit in your listening chair. As you get further away, the dome-instigated ill effects become subjectively less annoying. That's why most systems sound much cleaner and better integrated when you listen outside the room.

But supposing space constraints make it impossible to put sufficient distance between you and the speaker, and you can't bring yourself to try speakers reversed JMH-style. How, then, can you tame this harshness without losing bite?

Well, if you think of a dome tweeter as something akin to a car headlight producing a sharp concentrated beam of sound, one way might be to place something over its centre. I actually saw a dome tweeter at the Bristol hi-fi show with just such an addition. And it seemed to work...

Basically, the manufacturer had put a curved bridge running vertically in front of the tweeter dome, with a circular button of about 6mm diameter in the centre. This effectively 'blocked' the centre of the dome, subjectively lowering HF nastiness. Note, nothing actually touches the tweeter dome itself.



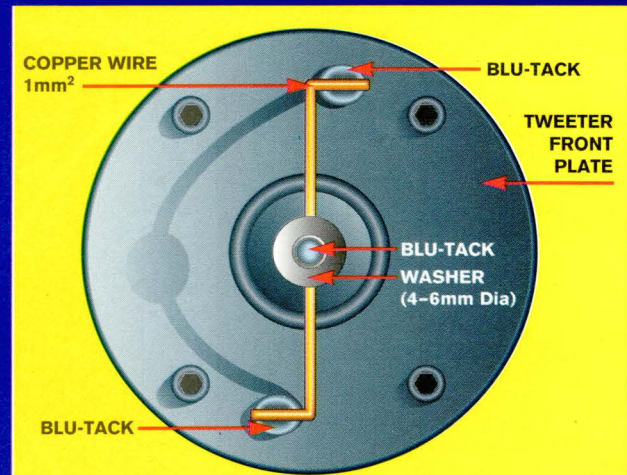
The tweeter in question looked like a Focal and had an inverted dome. My Impulse H1s use Focal tweeters, but have nothing in the way of the dome. No matter; it was simple to make an effective substitute using some 1mm diameter solid copper wire, and a washer held in place by some Blu-Tack.

The size of the washer

and its proximity to the dome will greatly alter the result you get. Make it too big, and/or too close, and the sound will be tonally hard and less open. I'd suggest a spacing of about 4mm from the dome, with a diameter of 4mm to 6mm for the washer itself.

As well as lessening the beaming effect of the tweeter, this improvement may act as some form of mechanical load, helping improve impedance matching between air and diaphragm.

It certainly worked for me, giving a slightly cleaner and tidier presentation with better pitch definition, more detail, and reduced HF glare. For just a few minutes' work it's got to be worth trying!

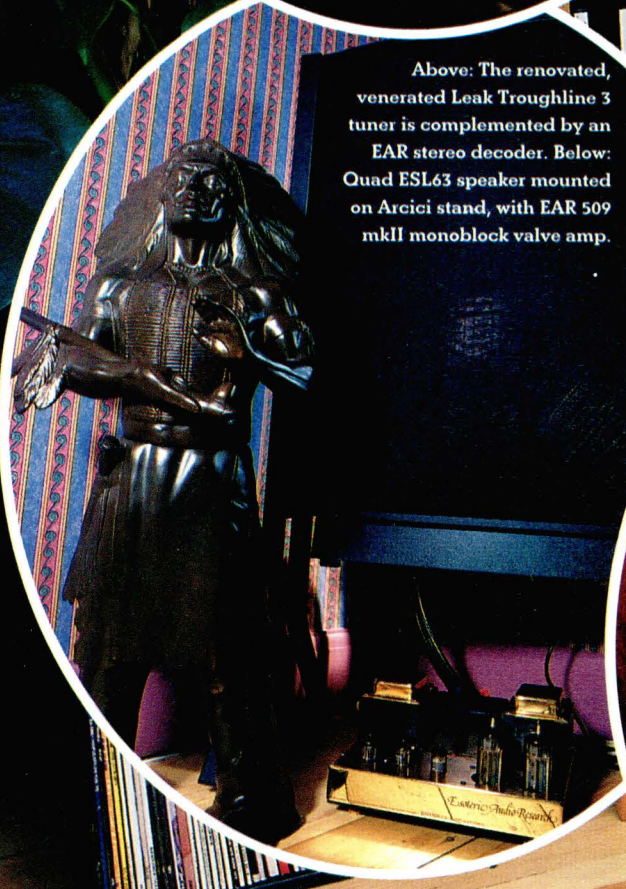


Above, below: modify your tweeter in the name of mellifluousness!





Above: The renovated, venerated Leak Troughline 3 tuner is complemented by an EAR stereo decoder. Below: Quad ESL63 speaker mounted on Arcici stand, with EAR 509 mkII monoblock valve amp.



Luigi's home-made subwoofer is driven by a Quad 306 using a very simple crossover.

Three colours pink

Luigi Papagno has spent years building his system. **Richard Black** judges it one of the finest he's heard!

The creator of this month's Inspirational hi-fi system, Luigi Papagno, admits to an unfair advantage. For nearly a decade he's been professionally involved in hi-fi, first in retail at Sevenoaks Hi-Fi, then with various other retail, distribution and manufacturing capacities. During the last few months he's been on the road for Pink Triangle; but 'twas not ever thus: "I got my first turntable, a Goldring Lenco GL75, while I was at school!" he reveals. "It was rather let down by its arm, so when I began working at GEC and had access to machine-shop facilities, I punched out a hole in the top plate to accommodate an Audio Technica arm. Later that was replaced by an early Rega arm. At the time, I used the deck with a Sony amplifier and some Mordaunt Short loudspeakers given to me by an uncle."

Apparently a Leak Stereo 20 valve amp featured briefly, although in retrospect this was probably in need of a very thorough service. It was advertised for sale and bought by a true British eccentric, who explained that he wanted it to play music to the plants in his greenhouse. No doubt the warm thermionic vibes helped the sap rise...

Employment also allowed an upgrade from the Lenco to a Thorens TD150, but that didn't remain untweaked for long either. "A hi-fi magazine carried an article on rebuilding this deck, which gave me some ideas," says Luigi. "The pressed-steel sub-chassis was replaced by one made from MDF and aluminium. I fitted some Linn springs and a Linn felt mat, and a neighbour who worked in a timber yard made a solid ash surround. After this the deck looked remarkably like a Linn LP12!"

Upgrading by tweaking remained a theme with amplifiers too, as Luigi explains. "I owned, briefly, a set of Meridian 100-series amplifiers which I never really warmed to. I then had a classic Quad setup, the 33 pre-amp and 303 power amp. I fitted upgraded plug-in boards to the 33 and altered a few component values inside the 303, including the output coupling capacitors. This was later replaced by a 34 and 405, and in due course a pair of 606 power amps, bi-amped into Spendor SP1s."

By this time Luigi was working as a sales

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- and Many More



Beneath the turntable lurk a Pink Triangle turntable power supply and The Pip preamp, and treasured Nakamichi ZX-9 cassette deck. Sited left are the PT Cardinal CD transport, Ordinal DAC and The DC power supply.



Pink Triangle's Anniversary turntable (with SME V arm and Ortofon Rohmann cartridge) was acquired in 1991.

assistant at Sevenoaks Hi-Fi, then on the path from its beginnings as one small shop to its present status as a major chain. "Sevenoaks was expanding vigorously and of course all manufacturers were dead keen to have their products taken on there. This meant that pretty much any high-end component was mine for the loaning!"

One such product was a Pink Triangle Pip preamplifier, which "blew away the other models I had tried, including some highly-respected names." The Pip is the longest-standing component in Luigi's current system, and dates from about 1988. Its purchase marked the beginning of a long friendship with PT, culminating in Luigi's current position with the company.

The Spondor SP1 speakers were in due course replaced by Quad Electrostatics, the original (ESL57) model. "I've seldom heard any box speaker that can match the balance and lack of coloration of electrostatics," he relates. "The ESL57s I used with a Gradient subwoofer, just touching in the bottom octave or so." Two years ago the ESL57s were replaced with ESL63s that are raised about a foot from the floor on Arcici stands. These too are supplemented by a subwoofer, which in this case is a home-made experiment with a very simple crossover and a dedicated Quad 306 amp.

Meanwhile the Quad 606 power amps were replaced by a pair of EAR 509 mkII valve monoblocks, which are still doing sterling service connected to the speakers with short pieces of Townshend Isolda speaker cable — nearly as thick as they are long!

There have been changes in the turntable department, too: a Roksan Xerxes figured briefly around 1989, only to be replaced by a PT T00. Each in turn carried an SME V

arm and Ortofon MC3000 cartridge. The current deck, a PT Anniversary, was added shortly after its arrival in about 1991. It still sports the SME V but recently the cartridge has been changed for an Ortofon Rohmann, the current flagship model which is similar to the MC3000 but gives double the output.

CD comes home to roost

How about CD? "I had a very early Philips CD104 and didn't like it," says Luigi. "For a long time I had no CD player at all. Then I had a Marantz CD-63 for a while, followed by a Pioneer PD-75." Now, however, it is not too surprising to find a top-of-the-range Pink Triangle Cardinal transport driving a PT DaCapo DAC, with a battery power supply (The DC) that also powers the Pip. One feature of the DaCapo is its interchangeable filter blocks, and the filter in use when I visited featured a new 24-bit HDCD chip.

Luigi makes relatively little use of cassette, so it is surprising to find a Nakamichi ZX-9 gracing his system. This model was apparently never officially sold in the UK but features in cassette-deck lore as one of the greats (along with Nakamichi's 1000ZXL and Dragon, the Akai GX-95 and a handful of others). Acquired secondhand at a bargain price, it's clearly too precious to replace!

Radio is served by a Leak Troughline 3, a classic valve model of almost legendary status, serviced and aligned by Tim de Paravicini of EAR/Yoshino and used with an EAR stereo decoder. A Revox digital tuner once featured in the system, but apart from its ability to pull in stations that its owner didn't even know existed, it sounded less lifelike and musical than the Leak.

If that sounds like a lot of components to go through one system, I could also mention

the Manticore Mantra turntable, Rotel tuner, Sony Pro Walkman cassette deck, Musical Fidelity 3B preamp and Wharfedale 708 speakers, all of which did brief service at some point; but Luigi clearly feels he has found something satisfactory. "As a basic analogue system, nothing has changed in it for five years except the loudspeakers and cartridge — both fairly minor changes in sound. I want a hi-fi to sound real, as simple as that, and I think this one does."

My own impression was that this system, despite the constraints of Luigi's small (11 by 15 ft) listening room — which by the time you read this will have been supplanted as he is packing up to move house — really does achieve something quite special in the lifelike reproduction of music. As most of Luigi's own record collection was already packed into boxes for the move, I took along some of my own LPs and CDs and was most impressed by the way in which everything from solo piano through string quartet to the huge forces of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony* was reproduced effortlessly and cleanly, with the absolute minimum of intrusion from the equipment. There's no feeling of strain.

This is not the sort of system one feels the need to turn up super-loud, as everything is clear at apparently moderate levels. The degree of solidity behind the sound is really remarkable. No artificial quacks, zings or honks intrude between music and listener. In fact, I have to say that this is probably the single most lifelike domestic hi-fi system I've heard. A tribute to its owner's perseverance and dedication! ▲

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In search of free musical entertainment? You need a tuner! **Paul Messenger** (listening test) and **Paul Miller** (lab test) rate six affordable models.

A radio tuner is the only hi-fi source component that doesn't require you to buy software. The music it reproduces comes effectively free of charge, and the UK radio-waves have never been more crowded, nor offered a greater choice of programming.

The medium may lack the dominance of 50 years ago, but it still has a bright future, irrespective of televisual developments that are hogging the headlines right now. However radio is increasingly the poor relation to TV in the domestic environment. This is why developments like DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting — see box) are being pitched at mobile applications.

In theory, choosing a hi-fi tuner involves weighing up price against different aspects

DON'T FORGET THE AERIAL!

Why go to all the trouble and expense of putting up a huge FM roof aerial, when your portable and personal radios function perfectly well indoors, using cheap telescopic wands and headphone leads?

Getting good signal strength is only one reason you should use a proper directional roof aerial for FM reception. Arguably it is rather more important for the hi-fi listener to pick up a top-quality clean signal that's as free as possible from mucky reflections. So get your 'twig' as high up as possible, pointed in the right direction and with a clear view towards the stations you require.

Conventional FM aerials are all roughly the same width, but come in dramatically different lengths according to the number of rods (or elements) in their 'array'.

These act like a zoom lens on a camera: the more elements, the greater the gain, but the narrower the angle over which it is effective. A thin beam is a positive advantage in cutting down on unwanted reflections, but can be a nuisance if you want to pick up good signals from transmitters that lie in different directions.

The best of all worlds combines a high-gain multi-element antenna with a remotely driven rotator. The majority of us settle for something a little simpler and less costly, chosen as a good overall match with the particular requirements of both reception site and listener.

THE CAST LIST

AMC T7	£129.95
Arcam Alpha 7	£229.90
Denon TU-425RD	£199.99
Harman/Kardon TU950	£199.99
Pioneer F-50	£249.95
Rotel RT-935AX	£159.95

of performance and capability, which depend on individual preferences and physical location. In practice, your key decision is whether to plump for a tuner from the same stable as your amplifier.

We tend to take tuners for granted, as essentially simple and easy-to-use devices. In fact they're quite complex, both from a technical design point of view and, increasingly, from an ergonomic perspective too.

Half of our test group incorporate RDS (Radio Data System), which is a major feature aimed primarily at mobile users. Some of its capabilities — especially the nascent RadioText implementation found on the Denon and Pioneer models here — can be handy. But the extra complexity of needing to learn a string of obscure acronyms, and squint at the front panel to select the right one, does sometimes make one wonder whether the game is worth the candle.

Technically there are at least five distinct signal processing stages between aerial input and audio output. Simplistically, however, it's easier to consider the tuner as a game of two halves. The task of the 'front end' is to capture the wanted station from the whole mess of radio flying through the ether. The rest of the circuits process this RF (radio frequency) signal to extract the maximum stereo audio fidelity.

The tuner designer, especially one on a fixed budget, faces a number of dilemmas. Should the tuner be as sensitive as possible, at the risk of overload on strong signals? Or should it have a more robust front-end which is ultimately a little more 'deaf'? Should the IF bandwidth be wide for best stereo and lowest distortion on strong sig-

nals?; or should it include a narrower option to dig out weak signals next to strong ones, at some expense in sound quality? Should the signals be rigorously filtered to avoid interference, or is a gentler approach more sonically acceptable?

Whichever choices suit your needs will depend on what sort of listener you are, from strict audiophile through to long-distance radio enthusiast; also on what sort of RF environment you live in, from urban jungle (crammed with high-level signals and multi-path reflections) to rural idyll well away from transmitters.

DIGITAL AUDIO BROADCASTING

No longer merely an under-sized species of flatfish, DAB is another in a long line of ghastly BBC acronyms — though it is more pronounceable than RDS or PTY. DAB stands for Digital Audio Broadcasting, which is a fairly self-explanatory, if long-winded description of a new form of radio transmission.

It's already started in the Greater London area, and should gradually spread across the majority of the country over the next couple of years. The trouble is, no-one's making receivers for it yet. (Not quite true, but effectively so, as the only ones available are bulky, power-hungry in-car units from Blaupunkt and Grundig, which cost more than £2,000).

Hardware will start to become more available and affordable when the transmission area begins to grow. But don't hold your breath waiting for domestic DAB receivers — the latter part of 1998 is the earliest projected arrival time. So DAB isn't necessarily a replacement for traditional FM radio (except perhaps in the very long term), any more than the satellite radio transmissions which have been around for some years. And though its progenitors are making bold claims for its CD-quality sound, no-one knows how good it will sound in comparison with a domestic FM receiver fed by a proper fixed-site, directional antenna.

Instead, it offers worthwhile benefits over FM for mobile/in-car and, ultimately, portable/personal applications, so this is where initial chip-reduction and power-saving effort is currently directed. In due course domestic DAB might be packaged alongside FM, just as many current FM receivers have AM capabilities.



AMC T7

AMC is a brand of the multi-national IEEE group. Thanks to a UK distribution deal signed last November by Tangent Acoustics, AMC is back in the UK after an initial foray in the early '90s. Its Taiwanese manufacturer has been building hi-fi equipment for other brands (such as NAD) for a number of years, while US corporation Weltronics is a major design inspiration behind a wide range of hi-fi and AV electronics, embracing everything from home automation to valve amps.

Like Tangent Acoustics loudspeakers from the same distributor, AMC's main thrust is towards the beer-budget sector. At £130, this T7 tuner is comfortably the least expensive in our group test. It looks like standard budget tuner fare, with a neat full-width case, a height neither tall nor short, and a fascia which is close to black. The point is emphasised by a small but adequate display window. Features include coverage of the FM band and AM's medium wave, but no long wave reception.

One bonus makes this tuner a particularly attractive prospect as a standalone device. It comes complete with remote control, which at this price level is usually only available via a partnering amplifier. Remote

control is arguably the most useful feature of all, for making the full range of programming as accessible as possible for the couch-potatoes.

The hands-on manual-tuning buttons were a bit of a pain, scanning frequencies so quickly that it was difficult to stop without overshooting — tricky to track back, too. Curiously, this was not a problem when using the duplicate up/down buttons on the handset, which worked fine.

More serious, perhaps, was a mild mechanical transformer hum, sufficient to be slightly audible when background noise was low (e.g. late at night). This might just be a sample fault, but it's not unknown in products adapted from 60Hz US mains to 50Hz UK. If this is a general fault, it should be easy to rectify on future production.

Internal components are mounted on a compact board, with a three-stage front-end and three FM ceramic filters — adequate for most purposes but not ideal for digging out weak and distant signals.

The sound quality, too, is adequate rather than inspired: the midband is a bit time-smearing, leading to slightly 'shut in' vocals, while the balance is a bit bright. It's not very tidy nor transparent either, losing some of the tension and contrast of orchestral dynamics, but for the most part passes muster on less demanding material.

Conclusion

The hum remains a mild worry, and performance elsewhere is a bit below par. However the inclusion of remote control at this low price point is sufficient to merit a cautious Recommendation for AMC's one and only tuner. *PMc*

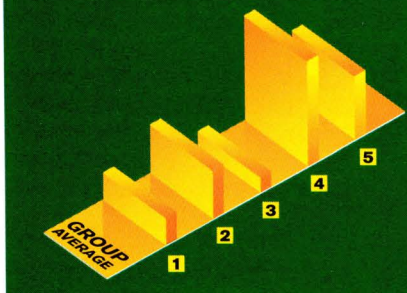
THE LAB REPORT: AMC T7

This tuner has no distinct muting threshold, for signals just emerge from background hash, achieving a useable 50dB mono S/N at 8µV (18.1dB/µV) RF. Otherwise, the T7 really appreciates a strong dose of RF, demonstrating gradual (albeit practically inconsequential) increases in its ultimate stereo S/N from 72 to 73.3dB, from 1mV to 20mV (86dB/µV). Image stations are rejected to the tune of 73dB, while any AM interference on FM stations is suppressed by a good 62dB (over 1,000:1).

The FM response has a mild -0.4dB depression through the mid-treble but otherwise extends very firmly to 15.6kHz before bumping into the mpx filter. Distortion is low at <0.1 per cent, as is IM distortion at 0.11 per cent, even though there are higher order products within the audio range (caused by 'beating' between the pilot/subcarrier and treble range) at some -40dB.

This is equivalent to 0.5 per cent distortion — higher than the basic figure but still better than the 1 per cent or more recorded with some of the 'fancier' tuners in this test. Stereo separation is merely adequate at 33-28dB across the audioband. *PMi*

1	SENSITIVITY	20%
2	ULTIMATE SIGNAL TO NOISE	35%
3	SUPPRESSION OF ADJACENT FM CHANNELS	12%
4	AUDIBLE DISTORTION	75%
5	SUPPRESSION OF AM INTERFERENCE	45%



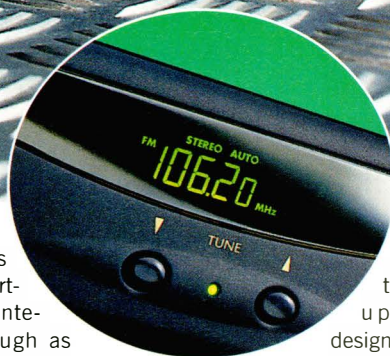
AMC T7 - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £129.95

▲ Very good price for a tuner with independent remote control.

▼ Below-average performance rather reflects the low price.

✉ Tangent Acoustics UK, 115 New London Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0QT.
 ☎ (0500) 828620

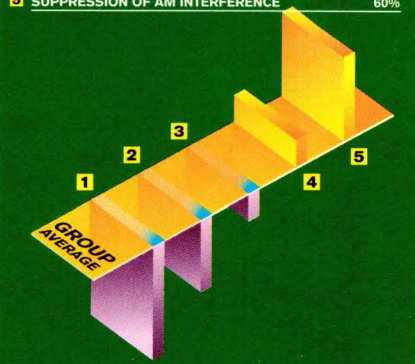


THE LAB REPORT: ARCAM ALPHA 7

Arcam's auto-scan facility is a little quirky, reliably picking up modest stations in the 100µV signal strength range but routinely skipping over far stronger 1-3mV broadcasts. Otherwise it's universally less sensitive than the other tuners in this survey, requiring a full 500µV for a stereo signal of 60dB S/N and 780µV (57.8dB/µV) for a broadcast-specification 65dB. The tuner even shows a 3dB improvement in S/N between very high 3mV-10mV signal strengths, though the ultimate figure of 70.3dB is hardly mind-boggling stuff. At full modulation, however, the tuner's audio output is a very high 1.66V.

Oddly enough, its suppression of second-channel interference is only 49dB, which means a mono image station at 6mV would break through with a loud-and-clear 50dB S/N of its own! Rejection of AM interference is much better at 63dB while conventional harmonic distortion remains a low 0.1 per cent. In-band FM IM distortions are typically no greater than -42dB (even-order) and -34dB (odd-order). Its response is flat and extended with a mild +0.4dB boost in the mid/high treble (5-10kHz) before it drops sharply away beyond 16kHz. *PMi*

1	SENSITIVITY	-80%
2	ULTIMATE SIGNAL TO NOISE	-50%
3	SUPPRESSION OF ADJACENT FM CHANNELS	-18%
4	AUDIBLE DISTORTION	18%
5	SUPPRESSION OF AM INTERFERENCE	60%



ARCAM ALPHA 7

Arcam's Alpha-series tuners are intended to partner its popular Alpha integrated amplifiers, though as independent standalone devices they're equally well suited to use in anybody else's hi-fi system. This £230 Alpha 7 is the cheaper of two models — the Alpha 8 is nominally identical, but features remote control at a £50 premium.

Though not the slimmest tuner around, it's nevertheless a good looking unit, thanks to the sculptured contours of its charcoal-grey front panel, and the tidy, logical disposition of its buttons and display.

A 'made-in-UK' badge proudly displayed on the front panel says much about the priorities. The feature count is relatively low, especially as the price is somewhat higher than the test group average. But it does include long wave as well as medium wave AM bands. And after wading through the acronym-ridden complexities of the latest RDS implementations, the sheer simplicity of this Alpha 7 seemed very refreshing. The display area may look small and unprepossessing, but it provides all the important information clearly and concisely.

Removing the lid reveals a rather rudimentary 'front end', with just two FM ceramic filters, and this is reflected in below-average performance on both sensitivity and selectivity. Like previous Arcam designs, the Alpha 7 is not oriented towards the radio enthusiast attempting to pull in weak, out-of-area signals. While it's great to have long wave made available here, it would be better if it sounded cleaner and was more effectively shielded from synthesiser interference.

The Alpha 7 does score, however, with its FM sound quality under favourable con-

ditions in a high quality system. It doesn't match the capabilities of more upmarket audiophile designs, but does capture some of their flavour. The sound is commendably free from the slightly 'processed' quality that afflicts the budget tuner breed.

Good coherence and some dynamic expression is developed across an impressively broad midband, with the essential sweetness, naturalness and transparency that encourages long-term listening. The bottom-end could be firmer and deeper, and adds a bit of chestiness and muddle, but for the most part results are very inviting, provided one sticks to strong, high-quality signals.

Conclusion

This is not a tuner for all seasons, nor is it of particularly good value from a superficial inspection. The 'front end' selectivity is decidedly mediocre, which could well compromise its suitability to the busy metropolitan environment, and those wishing to tune in to weak, distant stations should look elsewhere. If, however, you feed the Alpha 7 with a clean signal from a good aerial, it will reward you with more audiophile magic than the others assembled here, so qualified Recommendation seems appropriate. *PMe*

ARCAM ALPHA 7 - VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£229.90

- ▲ A touch of genuine audiophile sound quality at a reasonable price.
- ▼ Below-par radio reception capabilities, ill-suited to digging out weak stations.

✉ A&R Cambridge Ltd, Pembroke Avenue, Denny Industrial Centre, Waterbeach, Cambridge CB5 9PB
 ☎ (01223) 203203



DENON TU-425RD

Denon has dominated the British tuner market for some years, simply because the £119.99 TU-260 is something of an automatic choice at the budget end of the market. Long after the rest of the world has moved onto newer models, Denon's German factory is still churning out 260s for the UK. It's a fine all-round performer at a sensible price, and a very pretty slimline package which will blend discreetly with any partnering amplifier.

Similarly classy and compact packaging is a major plus-point with the new and more upmarket TU-425RD. The £200 price tag is reflected in a fairly generous feature count, especially in terms of the advanced RDS implementation, but there are a couple of notable omissions. The TU-425RD is remote-ready, incorporating an infra-red sensor, but unless you've got one of Denon's recent amplifiers, the RC158 handset will cost an extra £22. There's FM and medium wave AM, but no long wave reception.

I remain somewhat ambivalent about RDS in a domestic receiver context. Its main benefits are directed at mobile listeners and have much less relevance to the fixed, directional aerial situation, and all those extra buttons and acronyms add significantly to

the complexity. This was my first encounter with scrolling RadioText programme information, which the BBC and others are now transmitting, and it will prove quite handy for inveterate station-hoppers.

Full RDS — and the accompanying large display — is only part of the TU-425RD's accomplishments. There are 40 presets, grouped in five sets of eight stations, and good reception flexibility is promised by the combination of a wide/narrow RF selectivity switch and an aerial attenuator.

Denon has done well to keep the button-count modest — but not without setting some traps. I twice found myself unwittingly listening to mono because this mode is automatically selected alongside manual tuning. There's no mono display flag as such, and no mention on the front panel either.

Four FM ceramic filters ensure fine 'front-end' selectivity, and the practical real-world sensitivity is good here, making the '425 an attractive prospect for the radio enthusiast.

Sound quality is good too, with a notably neutral balance and a very 'clean' delivery. Erring a little on the side of caution, it's not the liveliest sound around — one remains aware that the music is undergoing some electronic manipulation — but little is lost along the way, and the net result remains entertaining and informative.

Conclusion

A fine all-rounder at the price, and in a very neat and pretty package — the TU-425RD earns a Best Buy rating. Note, however, that you don't get long wave, the remote handset is an optional extra, and the ergonomics (with RDS) aren't the slickest and most intuitive around. *PMe*

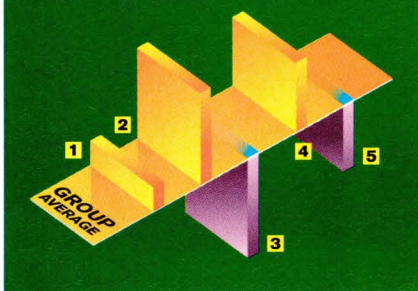
THE LAB REPORT: DENON TU-425RD

All else being equal, the TU-425RD will sound louder than every other tuner in this test, thanks to its 638mV output (1kHz @ 75kHz deviation, 1mV RF). Output levels closer to 400-450mV are more typical. The FM response begins rolling gently off beyond 10kHz, reaching -1dB at 13.3kHz before falling sharply away beyond 16kHz as the mpx filter bites.

The tuner also has a rather indistinct muting threshold with the 'tuned' indicator lighting above 3µV and a mono 50dB quieting achieved with just 9µV (19.1dB/µV). Fortunately, there's a massive 105dB rejection of FM image stations together with a good 60dB of adjacent channel protection (falling to 50dB in wide IF mode). The wide IF setting yields the lowest 0.05 per cent distortion (0.13 per cent in narrow mode) but results in a particularly 'cleaner-looking' spectrum, with less of the pilot/subcarrier rubbish (-43dB) that's apparent in narrow mode (-25dB).

Unusually, there's no appreciable deterioration in stereo separation in narrow IF mode, though with figures close to 38dB (1kHz) and 33dB (15kHz), this is adequate, not state-of-the-art. As with the Pioneer, little practical advantage results from curtailing very high RF levels with the in-line attenuator. *PMi*

1	SENSITIVITY	17%
2	ULTIMATE SIGNAL TO NOISE	65%
3	SUPPRESSION OF ADJACENT FM CHANNELS	-70%
4	AUDIBLE DISTORTION	50%
5	SUPPRESSION OF AM INTERFERENCE	-46%



ARCAM ALPHA 7 - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★☆
PRICE £199.99

▲ Fine and versatile RF performance, decent sound quality and fancy RDS.
 ▼ A bit complex, handset costs extra and there's no long wave access.

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HARMAN/KARDON TU950

Originally reviewed in issue 157, Harman/Kardon's £200 TU950 set a fine Best Buy standard in that earlier test, and so provides a useful transfer standard between the two groups, not only as a subjective reference point but also as a means of comparing the averaged lab test results.

Its external bulk is somewhat unnecessary given the amount of unused space inside, but these dimensions are a fundamental pillar of the credo that amplifiers and tuners must preserve symmetry whether stacked vertically or placed side-by-side.

The feature count is fair enough for the price. Highlights are the inclusion of long wave alongside medium wave AM, and the provision of basic RDS functions (no RadioText here, though). However, there's no remote control as such, unless you happen to be using one of H/K's partnering remote-control amps alongside.

There's something reassuring about a proper rotary tuning knob, even if the modern digital execution of such devices never quite matches the intuitive usefulness of their analogue forebears. This one is slow, has no flywheel action, and mutes everything (including, alas, the signal strength meter) when you use it. The generous display area provides RDS readouts alongside a wide-ranging digital signal strength meter, plus a string of status flags.

The 10 pre-sets (accommodating 30 stations) are only the start, as there are 14 others to contend with, giving useful flexibility in a number of areas including RF sensitivity and selectivity. However, since labelling and layout for the most part are obscure, in the short term the first 10 presets will get the heaviest usage, I suspect. The ergonomics of our sample weren't exactly enhanced by a dry solder joint, which left us lacking one



display digit — presumably just an isolated fault.

The three-stage 'front end', with four ceramic filters, gave a fine combination of good sensitivity and high selectivity for those intent on long-distance reception. This task is further assisted by fine metering and good internal line-up. AM sounds rather dull due to its restricted pass-band, but the separate IC used does give a cleaner sound than usual, and even long wave was listenable.

FM sound quality is good too (assuming you're operating with wide selectivity), with a crisp, clear midband, and a slightly bright but essentially sweet overall balance, bringing a welcome openness despite a touch of phasiness. Time-coherence and dynamics could be tauter and more explicit, and it falls a little way short of total transparency too, but overall this unit has pretty good all-round sound for the money.

Conclusion

This re-examination only serves to confirm the TU950's Best Buy status as a fine all-rounder. It combines decent sound with flexible radio reception. Its AM section includes LW and performs adequately, the signal strength meter is accomplished; and

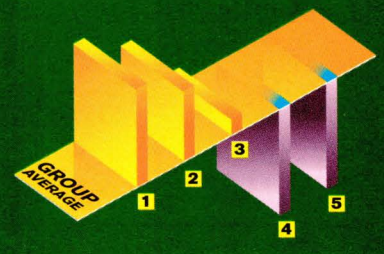
the only detractors are the lack of independent remote control and RadioText on RDS, and an unenlightened tuning knob. *PMc*

THE LAB REPORT: H/K TU950

Eight months and 3,000 units later, H/K's TU950 may still warrant a Best Buy, but it has witnessed a variety of technical revisions. It's still the most sensitive tuner in the test and, yet, at 220µV (46.8dB/µV) for a broadcast-specification 65dB S/N, it's only half as sensitive as before. Pilot and subcarrier filtering has been improved as, most significantly, has the ultimate stereo S/N ratio — from 71.8dB to 73.8dB — in response to very high signal strengths (5mV).

The effect of H/K's pilot filtering is still felt on the tuner's FM response which has a 'brightened' mid-treble (+0.5dB at 7kHz). Distortion remains higher than average at 0.5 per cent and though the figure remains pretty consistent in both wide and narrow IF modes, the former is now dominated by a strong second harmonic while the latter betrays more extensive, harder-sounding odd-harmonics. Much the same effect is prompted by suppressing very strong broadcasts with H/K's 'local' RF mode, though this provides no protection from momentarily over-modulated signals (>75kHz deviation), where distortion climbs quickly from 0.5 to 2 or 3 per cent. *PMI*

1 SENSITIVITY	70%
2 ULTIMATE SIGNAL TO NOISE	50%
3 SUPPRESSION OF ADJACENT FM CHANNELS	12%
4 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	-75%
5 SUPPRESSION OF AM INTERFERENCE	-75%



HARMAN/KARDON TU950 - VERDICT

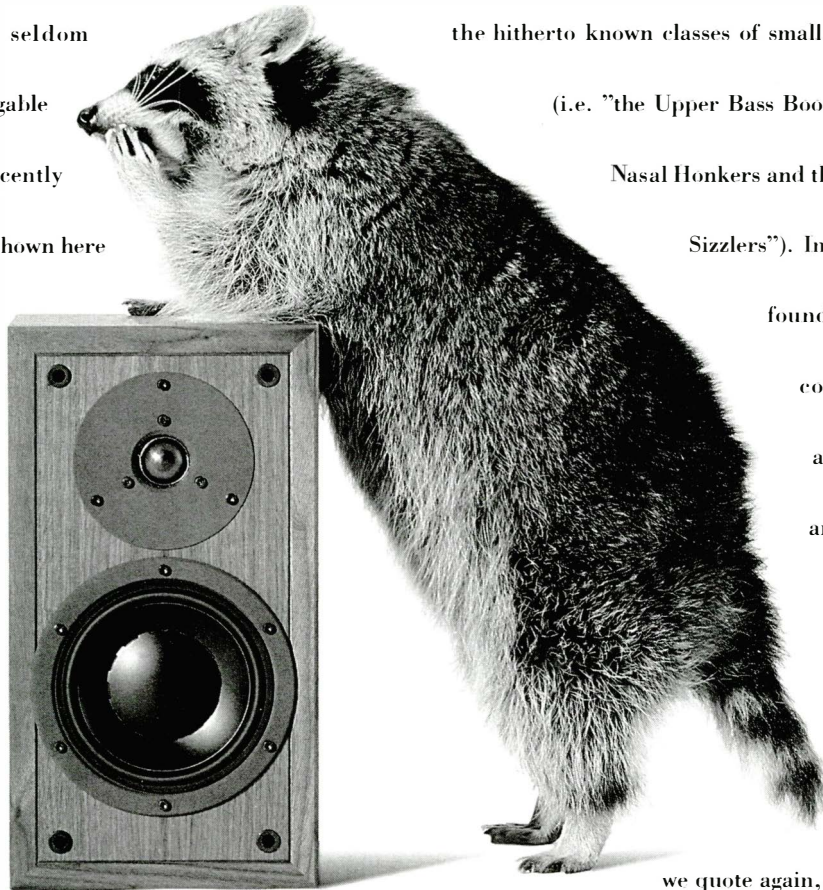
SOUND ★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★☆
PRICE £199.99

▲ Fine sound quality and RF performance; decent long wave.
 ▼ No independent remote, bulky box; no RadioText on RDS.
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As you know, we were never, ever willing to revel in test results. But after more than twenty years of stubbornly ignoring undanish views on our legendary Danish speakers, we will make an exception. Partly due to the fact that we have seldom encountered such a knowledgeable fellow as the writer who recently acclaimed our Contour 1.3 (shown here with our musing company raccoon, Knudsen) in a review in the leading American HiFi magazine. And partly because our copywriter is still suffering from yesterday's 85' "La Tache" (enjoyed in front of his Confidence 3, Rubinstein performing), and couldn't possibly find better words of praise anyway. What amazed the abovementioned critic most in listening to our small monitor, he writes, was that he should be so amazed. Right, we say: Sadly, people still just aren't prepared for the near absence of coloration

in a speaker. Nor for a manufacturer wisely refraining from bumping up the upper bass in psychological compensation. In months of eager listening, our reviewer then ruled that the Contour 1.3 does not belong to one of the hitherto known classes of small speakers (i.e. "the Upper Bass Boomers, the Nasal Honkers and the Greasy Sizzlers"). Instead, he found it to be completely accurate and totally natural. While, and here we quote again, "imaging like a bastard!" Up to the point where a lesser audiophile "could miss the beauty of this baby." To prevent this, call us for your free personal copy of our "Book of Truth" at (0171) 378 975 0. You may, of course, even visit your nearest true dealer. Enough said.





PIONEER F-504RDS

Top model in a three-strong tuner line-up, Pioneer's £250 F-504RDS is definitely the business as far as front-panel button'n'feature count is concerned. A goodly number of the former, together with a purposeful looking tuning knob, are spread across a decidedly busy — not to say mildly intimidating — fascia.

There are a couple of notable omissions nonetheless. Remote control is only available via a partnering Pioneer amplifier, and the AM side covers only the medium and not the long wave band.

It's the only tuner in our group with two independent relay-switched aerial inputs. Sometimes it's handy to use two aerials, but this feature will be a real boon for those living in cabled areas and wanting both broadcast and cable sources.

Another unique feature is that the FM band tunes in 25kHz increments, which is not strictly speaking necessary, but a 25kHz offset can occasionally be useful when you're trying to pull in a weak distant station close to a strong local one.

You get the complete RDS package here, including RadioText, presented on a decent-sized, if elaborate display section, with copious flags, scrolling characters, a semi-permanent (if coarse) signal strength bar-graph and even a backup frequency readout.

PIONEER F-504RDS - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £249.95

- ▲ Fine and flexible RF performance; advanced RDS with RadioText.
- ▼ Cautious sound; no LW and no independent remote.
- ✉ Pioneer High Fidelity GB Ltd, Pioneer House, Hollybush Hill, Stoke Poges, Slough, Berks SL2 4QP. (01753) 789500

The instruction manual is truly daunting, page after page delving into all manner of operational minutiae, the sum total of which detract from the essential simplicity of the medium. Do we really need four (at least) different methods of tuning in? Great for gadget freaks maybe, and for those keen to form an emotional relationship with their hardware, but intimidating for anyone who simply wants to listen to the music.

Mimicking the simplicity of manual analogue tuning, the rotary knob is regarded as a prestige feature on any tuner. In the transfer over to digital architecture, however, many benefits are lost. The knob here has no flywheel action, and scanning the FM band manually is an exercise in tedium, compounded by the fact that the signal strength meter becomes inoperative when you do.

That said, the innards here are ample to ensure first-class radio reception even under the most awkward conditions. Extensive IF filtering gives good selectivity, and sensitivity is high too, even to weak RDS signals. Good mains filtering is fitted, but AM has a limited bandwidth and sounds rather dull.

As often tends to be the case, top-class radio reception is not necessarily the best recipe for sound quality. The F-504RDS steers well clear of any sonic unpleasantness, but ends up sounding slightly dull and shut in, a little lacking in top-end transparency, and a bit mechanical in character.

Conclusion

This Pioneer is unquestionably a fine radio receiver, albeit at a price. The twin aerial input will be useful for cabled households, and the RDS features are comprehensive, if a little intimidating. The down side is the lack of LW and independent remote control,

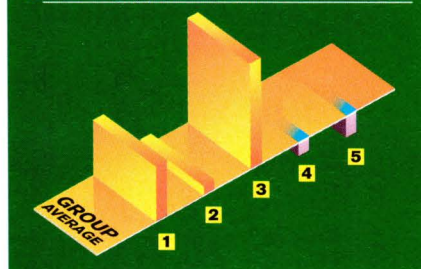
and the feeling that the sound-quality side is begging for some of the Precision treatment handed out to the A-300R amplifier. *PMc*

THE LAB REPORT: PIONEER F-504 RDS

Pioneer's small six-step signal-strength indicator is actually rather useful. The first two points light at 10 and 19µV, respectively, and the third at 44µV, by which time you're guaranteed a good 50dB stereo S/N ratio, then 230µV (around 62dB S/N), followed by 500µV and a thumping great 1.3mV (62dB/µV). If you see the last slice illuminated then the F-504RDS is likely to be close to its ultimate stereo S/N of 72.5dB — a full 7-8dB ahead of the broadcast spec!

Its FM response shows a mild -0.4dB kink at 11kHz but is otherwise good to 15kHz beyond which the pilot (and subcarrier) tones are massively suppressed (>75dB). However, this cannot remove the in-band distortions caused by beating between these signals before they were filtered out, distortions that amount to some -32dB (1.3 per cent). The in-line RF attenuator, meanwhile, has little practical effect on FM distortion which is influenced principally by the IF bandwidth: in narrow mode it reaches 0.25 per cent, falling to a very low 0.08 per cent in wide mode. This remains unaffected by ridiculous RF levels (500mV and beyond), regardless of the RF attenuation. *PMi*

1	SENSITIVITY	40%
2	ULTIMATE SIGNAL TO NOISE	7%
3	SUPPRESSION OF ADJACENT FM CHANNELS	75%
4	AUDIBLE DISTORTION	-8%
5	SUPPRESSION OF AM INTERFERENCE	-14%



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◀ ROTEL RT-935AX

Justly renowned for its popularly-priced amplifiers, Rotel also offers a number of tuners, by way of accompaniment or of course as standalone devices in their own right. This £160 RT-935AX is the budget baby of the range, a relatively simple hands-on device with no remote options. Couch potatoes should check out the similar but remote-controllable 940AX, at £40 extra. Rotel has one other current model, the upmarket, luxury-finish Michi RT-990BX (£500), but also has plans to replace the now-discontinued £250 RT-950BX shortly.

Styling and presentation are top class, especially around the awkward fascia edges of this delightfully slim and relatively discreet package. Unlike most of its multinational rivals, Rotel has clearly decided not to pursue the RDS (radio data system) route to tuner enhancement. Whether this constitutes a competitive disadvantage might be more of a moot point. For domestic hi-fi tuners, RDS offers rather modest benefits at

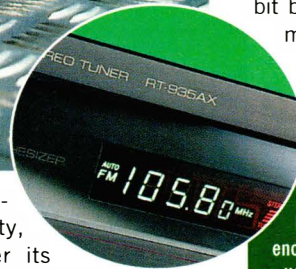
the expense of significant extra complexity, casting doubts over its effort/benefit ratio.

More serious, in my view, is the absence of long-wave AM. It's not a vital weakness, true, but an omission that some will find inconvenient now that AM/FM simulcasting is very much a thing of the past.

The rest of the feature landscape is pretty sparse, while clear, logical button grouping/labelling, and intelligent tell-tale flags, all make for easy and straightforward operation. A rudimentary signal strength indicator is incorporated in the display, and 20 presets are available, which should be ample.

The three-stage FM front-end gave high sensitivity but could be prone to overload, so in strong signal areas some form of aerial signal attenuation might prove helpful. There are just two FM ceramic filters here, so selectivity is relatively weak, and no 'birdie' filtering is provided (apparently in the interests of sound quality), despite the relevant holes in the circuit board.

Sound quality is pretty good. Basically clean and neutral, with only slight evidence of congestion, it also seemed a little dull around the presence region in our reference system. A criticism of sorts — but I suspect this could easily prove more of a benefit than a problem in the context of typical budget amps and speakers, though at the same time the treble proper did seem to be 'disconnected' from the body of the sound.



Conclusion

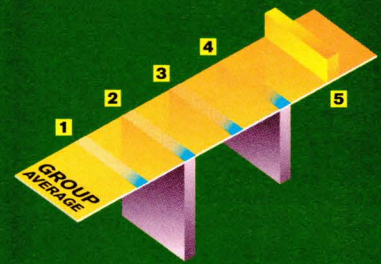
On balance, the good-looking RT-935AX comes out as a respectable rather than exceptional performer. The £160 price tag is comfortably below the group average, while sound quality is a little above. Simplicity can be its own virtue, but the feature count is modest, and radio reception performance a bit below par, which tends to suggest its major rôle will lie in partnering Rotel's amplifiers. *PMe*

THE LAB REPORT: ROTEL RT-935AX

This tuner's ultimate 69.6dB stereo FM S/N ratio is below average by modern standards, but it's still above broadcast quality and close enough to Rotel's own 70dB specification to make no difference. Distortion, however, at 0.18 per cent, is lower than Rotel's figure of 0.3 per cent even though, in practice, this performance is 'muddled' by relatively high (typically -27dB) levels of IM harmonics caused by 'beating' between the pilot/subcarrier and high frequency audio signals. This would be equivalent to around 2.2 per cent distortion.

The tuner's FM response is slightly droopy, sagging by 0.5dB around 4-5kHz, recovering slightly at 8kHz before dropping away to 12kHz (-1dB) and cutting-off entirely above 16kHz. Meanwhile, the 'tuned' indicator looks to have four segments but these are, in fact, all one single beacon that lights above the tuner's 3µV muting threshold. Quite frankly, Rotel needn't have bothered. Its sensitivity figures are a little optimistic, with a figure of 30µV for a 50dB stereo quieting turning out closer to 58µV in practice. This is well-built, and reliable, but ordinary fare. *PMi*

1 SENSITIVITY	0%
2 ULTIMATE SIGNAL TO NOISE	-70%
3 SUPPRESSION OF ADJACENT FM CHANNELS	0%
4 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	-52%
5 SUPPRESSION OF AM INTERFERENCE	17%



ROTEL RT-935AX - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★☆
PRICE £159.95

- ▲ Good sound quality for the price; easy to use, neat package.
 - ▼ Short on features and facilities; unexceptional RF performance.
- Gamepath Ltd, 25 Heathfield, Stacey Bushes, Milton Keynes MK12 6HR.
(01908) 317707

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Most hi-fi customers tend to try and purchase the tuner to match the amplifier. The two will look good, presumably work well together sonically, and increasingly these days, will provide integrated remote control.

This is ironic, given a tuner's dual rôles of both receiving radio transmissions and reproducing them with maximum fidelity. Invariably this leads to a trade-off between the two priorities, which really does matter in the real world — much more so than, say, the differences between any two similarly-priced CD players.

When I review tuners I do so primarily from an audiophile perspective. I assess sound quality in the context of a high quality Naim/Rehdeko/Tannoy system, using national network programmes direct from the main Wrotham transmitter, and a high-gain direc-

tional aerial with good line-of-sight, from a cliff-top coastal site which has inherently 'clean' radio conditions.

But I also take the test tuners down to my mate Norman McLeod, who's a dyed-in-the-wool radio nut. I get him to check out the radio frequency performance and the ability to dig out weak, out-of-area signals from a more 'difficult' urban site, surrounded by hills and structures. That way we get a good balance between the two extremes of performance, compounding the cliché that the cleanest and most delicate sounding tuners tend to underperform in RF terms.

The feature mix is also pretty crucial in the tuner market, and in the £130-£250 group tested here, none of the models actually provides everything. The rational choice therefore

ought to take account of personal priorities and circumstances. Good RF flexibility tends to be more important in dense urban environments.

Our two Best Buys clearly illustrate these trade-offs. The £200 Harman/Kardon TU950 and Denon TU-425RD both have fine RF performance, good sound quality and 'system remote'. The Denon offers more advanced RDS complete with RadioText, plus independent remote control (for an extra £22). But the H/K has long wave. The choice is yours.

The two Recommended models are less well-balanced, but still interesting. The AMC T7 is a little off-the-pace, but at £130 it's cheap for a tuner offering an independent remote. The more expensive Arcam Alpha 7 (£230) is no great shakes in RF performance, but offers greater purity of sound.

Take a stand

The right support is vital for a good-sounding hi-fi, and the options available today are limitless! **Malcolm Steward** tries out five new designs.



furniture-like, clearly aiming to slip more surreptitiously into a regular domestic environment; while two stick to traditional black tubing. Even one of these, however, looks far funkier than previous generations of MIG welders' offspring.

Testing tables isn't problematical but coming up with hard and fast judgements is. As with loudspeaker stands, there's a whole lot of interaction going on. The hi-fi components interact with the stand, while the stand interacts with the floor; then these two interactions interact with each other. At best you can only establish comparative levels of

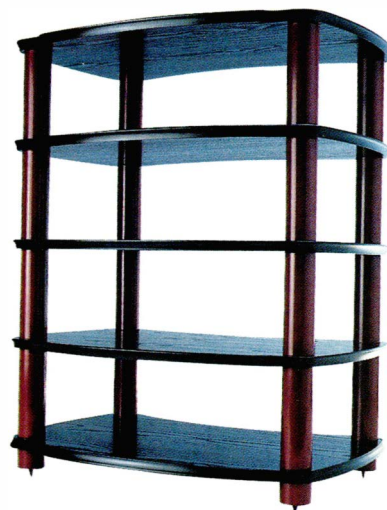
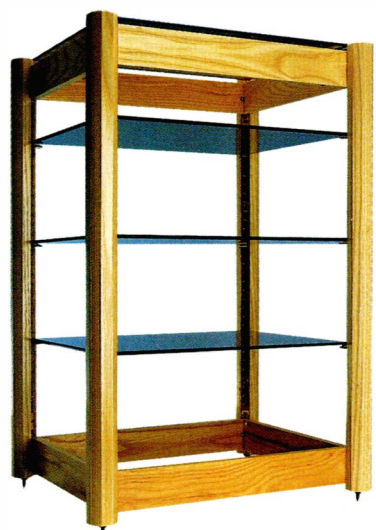


performance in a given set of circumstances. So read the review, pick the models that sound promising and appeal to you, then get out there and listen to them. For the record, all the tables were tested on a sturdy, suspended floor, with the main test component being my Naim CDS CD player. The 'reference' stand, upon which the CDS sits when it's not testing other tables, came from Mana Acoustics. The rest of the system was a Naim tri-amp set-up driving active DBLs.

I didn't use a turntable in this test because I don't think that anyone seeking optimum performance from vinyl should even consider stacking his deck on top of a heavily-laden, multi-tier rack. A separate, dedicated table or wall-shelf is the only answer for components as sensitive as turntables.

A couple of years ago, stands that weren't made from square-section steel and finished in black were exceptions. The temptation was to look upon such designs as being less than serious: not frivolous but certainly not aimed at the 'hard-core, let's-extract-the-last-ounce-of-performance-from-our-hi-fi' brigade. The mentality of hardened audiophiles accepted that performance and good-looks were seemingly mutually exclusive.

How times change. Even valve amplifier manufacturers, the General Custars of the hard-core hi-fi army, have had to acknowledge that appearance matters. Aesthetics are now playing a much bigger part in buying decisions than they did in the boom years. Take a look at the five new tables gathered for this review: three are decidedly



THE CAST LIST

Custom Design Classic Four.....£269.99
 Frameworks H500 and H175 £265/£139
 Optimum International
 2000 OPT 490£349
 Sound Organisation Z560.....£160
 Soundstyle Finewoods W105.....£320

THE MUSIC WE USED

Reef: *Glow*
 The Fugees: *The Score*
 Iona Brown and the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra: Grieg, Tippett, Beethoven.
 Portishead: *Dummy*

CUSTOM DESIGN CLASSIC FOUR

Many people are happy to use black steel stands, some of which, it has to be said, are excruciatingly unattractive. There are, however, a large number of folks who would never entertain anything that looked remotely so industrial in their living rooms. Their hi-fi is only going to be parked on a custom stand if someone provides them with one fashioned from a more domestically appealing material. Wood seems the obvious choice.

And wood is what Custom Design has used to construct the frame of its self-assembly, glass-shelved, multi-tier Classic Four. The basic structure consists of four octagonal uprights that bolt top and bottom to rectangular frames.

The uppermost frame is upwardly spiked to provide isolation for the top shelf. The top of the stand is neatly arranged to prevent the shelf Torville-and-Deaning off into the sunset if you knock the table. The lower shelves sit on clips that you can position at appropriate heights in metal 'ladders' affixed to the inside edges of the stand's uprights. The whole assembly couples to the floor through adjustable spikes inserted into the uprights.

So far so good, then. However, the fundamentally attractive-looking review sample's design was let down by its execution. Its fit and finish left room for improvement, with gaps in both the permanent (i.e. factory-made) joints and those where I bolted the uprights to the frames. The lower shelves also wobbled when they weren't loaded. Now, I'm not the guy who presents *The New Yankee Workshop* on the Discovery Channel but I do know that in these days of computer controlled and laser guided woodworking machinery it's possible to build a simple structure such as this accurately with neater joints.

Despite this, the stand managed to deliver a reasonable performance that had some appealing qualities — with the right music. The most apparent was an easy-going rhythmic flow allied with an overall openness that invited you to listen into the recording. Some of the heavier tables in this test tended, by comparison, to sit on the music slightly, but the Classic Four gave voices and instruments room to breathe and expand. It didn't offer the substance or slam in bass lines that others provided but it compensated by rendering them with agility and speed. Tracks such as The Fugees' *The Beast* had reduced visceral impact but retained their musical integrity.

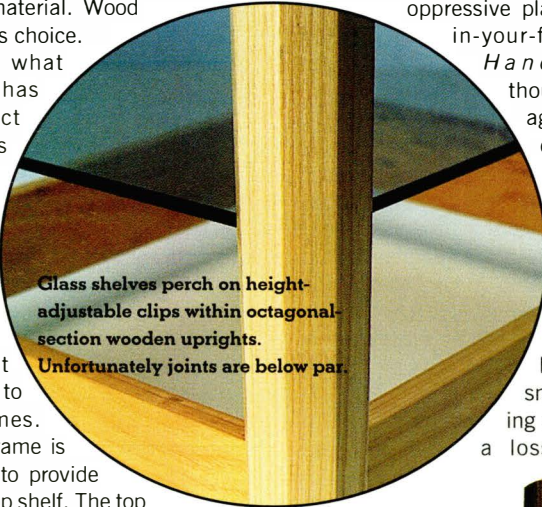
The lightweight balance was, however, more noticeable and less agreeable on Portishead's *Numb* and *Mysterons*. The vocal and drum patterns predominated, accompanied by a forward shift in the soundstage that made for a presentation too conspicuous for my tastes. This is music into which you should peer, not music to have thrust in your face.

Interestingly, the table didn't sound oppressive playing Reef's very in-your-face *Place Your Hands*. Neither, though, did it manage to keep a sufficiently tight hold on the upper end of the spectrum on this recording. Percussion detail, that was absolutely clear on the reference Mana, sounded smeared, and timing seemed to suffer a loss of precision.

Despite an outwardly feisty demeanour, the track simply didn't sound as lively.

With classical recordings the table continued to produce curate's egg results. Tonal colour, for example, was fine until the string section indulged in a bout of heavy bowing. It seemed, in general, that the table responded most favourably to music that was neither too demanding nor too enthusiastically played — which rules out most of my current playlist!

In a less demanding, lower-resolution system I could imagine this table fairing better, but with a CDS pumping information in and DBLs taking it out, the rough edges were a little too conspicuous.

**CUSTOM DESIGN - VERDICT**

SOUND ★★☆☆☆
VALUE ★★☆☆☆
PRICE £269.99

- ▲ Not my first choice for a revealing system; its performance varied according to the music played.
- ▼ Review sample's fit and finish was below par. Not the most rigid stand tested.
- ✉ Custom Design, Unit 11, Bath Street Industrial Estate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE6 3PH
- ☎ (0191) 262 4646



FRAMEWORKS H500 AND H175

Frameworks' contribution to this test differs from the others in two respects: it's not trying to plough a new aesthetic furrow — at least not as far as I can tell — and it's not a straightforward multi-tier support. This is a support and separate isolation platform, which provides, in this instance, three shelves. The designers recognise that adding more layers to any support reduces its performance to some extent, and determined that, for this range of stands, three shelves was the practical limit. If you need further shelves, it is preferable to add them as discrete, spike-isolated units. If I remove my practical hat and don the headgear of a true blue audiophile I can easily empathise with that approach.

On test we had the £265 H500, a two-shelf stand, with a £139, H175 single-level isolation platform perched on top. The construction looks as though it follows the traditional pattern established by countless incarnations of the light-but-rigid tubular steel design philosophy. There's a mix of tubular and square-section ironmongery, neatly welded together and finished in textured black paint, upon which sit spike-supported, 10mm thick, toughened glass shelves. What distinguishes it from the less expensive mainstream tables are the rods that provide triangulated bracing for the frames — providing, according to Frameworks, rigidity without excessive mass — and the simple but effective support for the shelves.

Glass on spikes equals lateral insecurity: the shelf can slide, in other words. Glass on compliant, tacky substances is more secure but shelves and spikes have traditionally gone hand-in-hand in the audiophile arena. Frameworks has used a neat scheme in which three



spikes support each shelf but rubber rings around the spikes provide a degree of adhesion and resistance to lateral movement. Neat. Both audiophiles and concerned home-makers alike can relax.

So this table conformed to my preconceived idea of how a support harbouring audiophile intent should present itself. But this didn't, I'm at pains to emphasise, influence my reaction to its performance. Quite simply, this table, rocked, boogied, and kept itself out of the music's path better than any other here. I cranked up Reef's *Place Your Hands* to an indecent level and sat back while the table allowed music to do its stuff without introducing any unwanted artefacts or weakening its impact. Its handling of leading-edge information was clearly superior to the rest, which lent the mix a welcome clarity and precision. Detail abounded but there was none of the information overload or muddle I've heard from some lighter tables. Bass lines were appropriately balanced, with a fitting mix of substance and agility imparting a sense of drive and solidity that the other tables couldn't match.

Even the truly weighty lows of Portishead's *Numb* didn't faze this support. It simply demonstrated that the Frameworks combo followed the Mana low-frequency discipline: let it flow but keep a tight rein. It delivered the lowest of lows with a tautness that didn't entertain any dryness or paucity. Notes developed and blossomed fully but overhang was completely absent.

Overall, though, what I found outstanding about this table's performance was the ease with which it allowed me to listen into the music. I'm not talking about detail and 'air' in isolation here; the Frameworks just cleaned up the listening 'window' dramatically, providing a coherent, musically-faithful insight into recordings.

Normally, because there are other tables here that cost less and provide more shelving real-estate, the Frameworks rig would be looking at a Recommended flag. However, in light of its musical performance, which was well ahead of the competition, I'm going to dip into the Best Buy bag for a sticker.



OPTIMUM INTERNATIONAL 2000 OPT490

I remember the pre-Mana days when law decreed that all equipment supports should be rigid but light, after the fashion of a small coffee table. Optimum's OPT490 fulfils two of those criteria — it's rigid and it looks a bit like a coffee table, albeit one inflated by steroids. It is not, however, anything remotely resembling light. The four-tier tested here weighs about as much as a small child... sitting astride a large horse. Or 25 kilos, if you prefer metric measurements. If it turns out to be anywhere near as strong as it is heavy, you could stack a few Krells on it without cause for concern.

The stand is a self-assembly design that follows the principle established, I believe, by Alphason, and used subsequently in tables such as the Soundstyle Finewoods, also reviewed here. The support shelves are sandwiched between the tubular, screw-together sections that form the uprights, of which, in this design, there are three. Being modular, the OPT490 allows you to distance the shelves to suit the height of the equipment you elect to house on it. The support rods come in 60mm, 130mm and 150mm lengths and are available in two finishes: stainless steel or gold. The shelves are 8mm glass and come neatly printed with Optimum's logo, which gives a better impression of quality than the usual transfers that are programmed to peel off at the first whiff of furniture polish.

The fully-assembled stand rests on adjustable cone-shaped feet, which apparently provide greater stability and rigidity than carpet-piercing spikes. The standard Optimum support comes with a cable management system — each shelf has a hole at the rear through which you can thread cables rather than dangle them off the back of the rack. Some customers, though, like to place antiques, plants and other sundry household items on the top shelf, so Optimum will supply racks without the pierced shelves. The company clearly aims to satisfy the demands of folks living in the real world as well as those of audiophiles!

So how close does the OPT490 come to



FRAMEWORKS - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★☆
PRICE H500: £265; H175 £139

▲ One of the best supports I've heard in a long time; outstandingly communicative.
 ▼ Appearance is rather functional ... but suffer that for the sound.

✉ Arrow Consultancy Ltd, Unit 1, Priory Works, Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 6LD
 (01702) 611451



Support rods, available in three different heights, sandwich 8mm glass shelves in this self-assembly design.

SOUND ORGANISATION Z560

The second 'conventional' table in this round-up, the Z560 uses the familiar materials and self-assembly construction that typifies the Sound Organisation's business-like approach to making stands. This stand is designed to support your hi-fi, not to be a poor man's *objet d'art*.

Two broad pillars, formed in the shape of inverted Ts, act as the primary supports. The inside faces of these are pre-drilled to accommodate the fixings that hold the unit's five shelves in position at a variety of selectable heights. The shelves are glass and sit upon rectangular, tubular steel frames. Sticky domes, securely attached to the frames, prevent the glass from sliding with surprising efficacy. Spikes anchor the whole assembly to terra firma.

As I've noted, this unit isn't aesthetically spectacular but it is quite pleasing to the eye. It has a rewarding sense of form following function, and the gloss paint job and darkened glass shelves give it a pleasant visual homogeneity. Setting-up poses no problems: the unit's weight drives its four floor-spikes home and the mix of welded and bolted members provides good overall structural integrity.

The absence of bits bending and rattling was evident on energetically recorded albums such as Reef's *Glow*. Compared to the reference Mana, the Z560 sounded less well controlled but it resisted any temptation to sound ragged or confused. The music's verve came across clearly, with what appeared to be a little added thrust in the mid and top-end imparting an appropriate sense of punch and enthusiasm. The choppy chords that open *Place Your Hands*, for instance, had a rewarding sense of snap, the starts and stops of the chords being clean and well defined.

The table did, however, seem to take a degree of edge off timing information. It didn't sound especially slow but the drive of Reef's music was slightly diminished. A more relaxed feel was also evident on The Fugees' reworking of Bob Marley's *No Woman No Cry*. The leading and trailing edges of acoustic guitar, drums and bass all sounded precise but the music had an easier-going gait than it did on the Mana reference stand. However, while this was noticeable in an A/B comparison, it wasn't immediately apparent when listening to the table in isolation.

The Reef CD had sounded a bit light-weight on the Z560, although it's fair to say that the disc doesn't have a floor-shaking bottom end in the first place. The Fugees' *Manifest* and *Fu-gee-la* demonstrated that the table was quite capable of supporting serious lows when they were present. As



The weight of this fully assembled table will rapidly impress its spikes upon your carpet!

well as supporting them it also managed to control them. The bass on these tracks will break for the border if the system doesn't keep a tight grip on it.

Although the Sound Org's presentation was clearly pepped up — the way it presented the dynamic contrast of Portishead's *Dummy* was nothing short of dramatic — it wasn't hyped or grossly exaggerated. Vocals had a natural quality but projected with a touch of extra zeal, which isn't a bad thing if you wish to avoid a BBC-style, so-natural-you-doze-off type of sound. There was no overt coloration evident on orchestral music: no screech or steely quality to strings, no unnatural sheen to horns, nothing to make one wince. As this test's least expensive combatant, that's admirable and highly praiseworthy.

Ultimately, there's no question that the Z560 deserves a Best Buy rating. Its performance doesn't match that of the reference table but it only costs about a quarter of the price of a five-tier Mana. At £160, the end result is excellent and the table represents outstanding value for money.

satisfying performance-hungry music lovers? Well, if your system is a little too revealing for comfort at times and your record collection includes a host of fierce albums, this stand seems worth a listen. The fully Mana'd DBL test system vividly showed up the none-too-tender quality of Reef's *Glow*. One visitor noted that the presentation was cosmetically more appealing with the CDS moved to the OPT490. The table toned down the forwardness of the guitar and vocals, and took the sting out of the cymbals. The price of this more palatable sound was the sacrifice of a little detail. To put this into perspective, though, the Mana retrieves far more subtle strands in recordings than any other table I've tested.

This wasn't so apparent on the more restrained-recorded Fugees' album. Here the Optimum's weight seemed to transfer to the musical presentation, the bass on *Manifest* demonstrating impressive solidity and grip, a fulsome quality that didn't come at the expense of added warmth. Timing information emerged cleanly, possibly as a result of the table's obviously tight grip on this music.

Tonally, the OPT490 seemed to add or subtract little. Classical recordings displayed a very natural balance, which provided an easy view into what was happening within orchestral sections. Dynamic contrasts, although not as vividly etched as they were by the reference Mana, were convincing.

Overall, the Optimum performed well: its ability to handle all manner of material — including thrash metal and hard-core indie — with ease, and communicate its message without inducing fatigue, is a strong selling point. Recommended.

OPTIMUM INTERNATIONAL - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £349

▲ Good performance over a wide range of music; sturdy bass.
 ▼ Modernistic appearance, as ever, won't appeal to everyone.

✉ Optimum International 2000 Ltd, P.O. Box 108, Shipley, West Yorkshire BD17 6UP.
 ☎ (01274) 583249

SOUND ORGANISATION - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £160

▲ Modern but unobtrusive appearance and a lively but not over-etched sound.
 ▼ It would be churlish to complain at this give-away price.

✉ Sound Organisation, 8 Greyfriars Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7DX
 ☎ (01284) 701101

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T&A EQUIPMENT RACKS

A highly adaptable, low cost, self assembly system which is easy to put together and rigid in construction. Comes with spiked top shelf and foot spikes. Shelf size 465mm x 355mm (w x d)

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	No. of Shelves	Distance Between	Price
TT2SA	490mm	2	380mm	£81
TT3SA	795mm	3	325mm	£102
TT4SA	620mm	4	155mm	£123
TT5SA	795mm	5	155mm	£139
TT5TSA	995mm	5	205mm	£154



TT 2 SERIES EQUIPMENT RACKS

Welded racks featuring slim tubular supports giving excellent rigidity. Comes with spiked top shelf, lower shelving sited on rubber dampers and floor spikes. (Optional castor kit £12.00 extra). Black finish. Shelf sizes 465mm x 355mm (w x d)

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	No. of Shelves	Distance Between	Wood Shelf	Glass Shelf
TTW1	Wall	1	---	£65	---
TTW2	Wall	2	305mm	£80	---
TT2/2	435mm	2	380mm	£88	£102
TT2/3	730mm	3	325mm	£129	£150
TT2/4	560mm	4	155mm	£149	£177
TT2/5	730mm	5	155mm	£175	£210
TT2/5T	930mm	5	205mm	£190	£225



AER 2 SERIES EQUIPMENT RACKS

The popular AER series has been restyled and provides improved sonic isolation. The rigid framework is of welded construction and has two slim tubular supports on the front section. Comes with spiked top shelf, lower shelving sited on rubber dampers and floor spikes. (Optional castors kit £12.00). Shelf size 465mm x 355mm (w x d)

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	No. of Shelves	Distance Between	Wood Shelf	Glass Shelf
AER2/2	460mm	2	380mm	£134	£148
AER2/3	460mm	3	180mm	£154	£175
AER2/4	605mm	4	165mm	£190	£218
AER2/5	790mm	5	165mm	£205	£240
AER2/6	975mm	6	165mm	£230	£272



BETA SERIES EQUIPMENT RACKS

Offering the strong rounded lines of black tubular welded construction with black ash effect or tinted toughened glass shelving. Comes with spiked top shelf (except with glass shelving) and floor spikes. (Optional castor kit £12.00) Shelf size 465mm x 355mm (w x d)

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	No. of Shelves	Distance Between	Wood Shelf	Glass Shelf
B1	65mm	1	---	£72	£80
B2	455mm	2	380mm	£103	£117
B3	430mm	3	155mm	£135	£156
B4	620mm	4	155mm	£159	£189
B5	810mm	5	155mm	£185	£220
B5A	810mm	5	110(2)/200(2)	£185	£220
B6	1035mm	6	155mm	£210	£252



DELTA SERIES EQUIPMENT RACKS

A three pillar rack that is an extremely rigid design, yet still has the highest degree of shelf stability. Shelving is black ash effect or tinted toughened glass. Comes with spiked top shelf (except with glass option) and floor spikes (Optional castor kit £9.50) Shelf size 465 x 400mm (w x d)

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	No. of Shelves	Distance Between	Wood Shelf	Glass Shelf
D3	620mm	3	250mm	£142	£163
D4	620mm	4	155mm	£165	£193
D5	810mm	5	155mm	£192	£227
D5A	810mm	5	110(2)/200(2)	£192	£227



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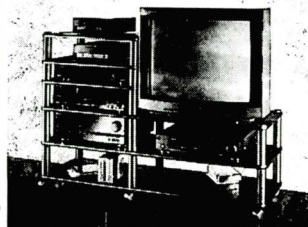
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M SERIES Modular Equipment Rack System

A versatile system with options allowing modules to be added to suit varying equipment heights. Finished in black ash effect or glass shelves. Select the base module and shelf modules as required. Supplied with spiked feet unless otherwise stated. (Optional castor kit £12.00 extra). Distance between columns 465 x 395mm depth. Supplied in flat pack for easy assembly.

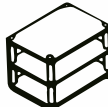


M B3/125



Shell spacing 125mm

M B3/165



Shell spacing 165mm

M B3 TV/230



Shell spacing 230mm

M B3 W/165



Shell spacing 165mm

BASE UNITS

Type No.	3 shelf spacing	Wood Shelf Price	Glass Shelf Price	Type No.	Usable Width	Wood Shelf Price
MB3/125	125mm	£128	£154	MB3W/165*	465/600mm	£195
MB3/165	165mm	£128	£154	MB3PS/230	540mm#	£139
MB3/230	230mm	£132	£160	MB3TV/230*	900mm#	£195
MB3/330	330mm	£132	£160	* MB3W & MB3TV supplied with castors. # Depth 525mm		

SHELF UNITS (Add on modules)

Type No.	Shelf Spacing	Single Shelf Price	Single Shelf Glass	Type No.	Double Shelf Price	Double Shelf Glass
M1/90	90mm	£51	£61	M2/90	£92	£110
M1/125	125mm	£51	£61	M2/125	£92	£110
M1/165	165mm	£51	£61	M2/165	£92	£110
M1/230	230mm	£53	£63	M2/230	£96	£114
M1/330	330mm	£53	£63	M2/330	£96	£114
M1W/165	165mm	£70	---	NB. Glass shelves are not available for MW, MPS or MTV models		
M1TV/230	230mm	£72	---			
M1PS/230	230mm	£58	---			

SPEAKER STANDS (Priced in Pairs)

TR SERIES (Self Assembly)

Medium mass double pillar stands with adjustable spiked feet and isolation studs on the top plate. Can be sand or shot filled. Black finish.

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	Top Plate (w x d)	Price
TR30	300mm	240 x 240	£67.50
TR40	400mm	190 x 190	£67.50
TR50	500mm	160 x 160	£67.50
TR60	600mm	150 x 150	£67.50
TR70	700mm	150 x 150	£67.50

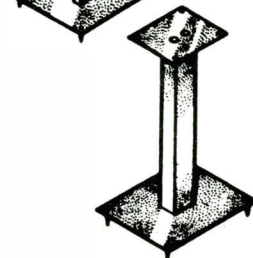


HS SERIES (Self Assembly)

Medium mass single pillar stands with adjustable spiked feet and isolation studs on the top plate. Can be sand or shot filled. Black finish.

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	Top Plate (w x d)	Price
H58	200mm	240 x 240	£77
H512	300mm	240 x 240	£77
H516	410mm	200 x 200	£79*
H520	510mm	165 x 190	£79*
H524	610mm	165 x 190	£79*
H528	710mm	160 x 160	£79

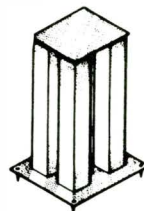
* Asterisked models can be supplied with TannoySixes mounting top plate for £8 extra - please state model number when ordering.



R SERIES

Top of the range high mass stands with a no compromise four pillar design to support the very highest quality of speakers. The pillars are pre-filled with high mass aggregate and sealed in the factory. Supplied with adjustable spikes and finished in black.

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	Top Plate (w x d)	Price
R1	535mm	153 x 215	£280
R2	535mm	200 x 240	£310
R3	600mm	190 x 160	£260
R4	610mm	153 x 215	£284
R5	710mm	153 x 215	£334
R6	610mm	200 x 240	£320



HJ SERIES

These high mass stands have a multi-pillar design. Welded steel construction to maximise rigidity with high mass. Filling is provided for the steel pillars and the top plate has studs to isolate the speakers. Supplied with adjustable spikes and finished in black.

Type No.	Height (exc. spikes)	Top Plate (w x d)	Price
HJ10/3	250mm	280 x 280	£135
HJ15/3	380mm	240 x 240	£135
HJ16/2	410mm	200 x 200	£125
HJ20/2	510mm	165 x 190	£125
HJ20/2T	510mm	152 x 215	£125
HJ24/2	610mm	165 x 190	£130
HJ24/2T	610mm	152 x 215	£130



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SOUNDSTYLE FINEWOODS W105

Two tables in this test have forsaken the traditional rectangular shelf in favour of a more adventurous shape. The Optimum OPT490 has rounded, shield-shaped, glass platforms while the Finewoods W105 from Soundstyle uses kidney bowl-shaped, bevelled, veneered medite shelves. The curved lip at the front of the shelf adds a distinguishing touch to the rack's appearance, making it look more furniture-like than most. The gentle cutaway at the rear matches this aesthetically and provides a practical benefit: you can place the W105 close to a wall because the contour creates a gap through which you can route cables.

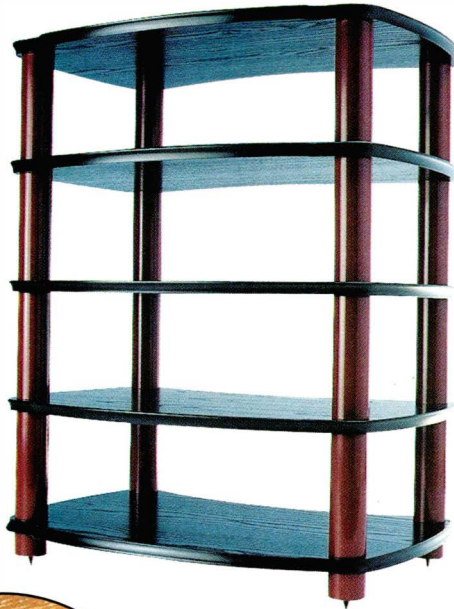
Another similarity (apart from its weight) between this table and the Optimum is its use of threaded mild-steel columns, painted in this instance, to support and clamp the shelves. This construction technique makes the W105 easy to assemble and, once built, a very stable structure. Adjustment is equally simple using the four floor-spikes inserted in the short legs at the base of the unit. Castors are an option to spikes and both come supplied in the flat-pack kit.

At nearly 66cm across, the W105 is also the widest of the units tested. That's bad news if you're short on space but a positive bonus otherwise. Each shelf will accommodate a standard width hi-fi component along with a handful of useful widgets such as remote controls, stylus cleaners, ashtrays, tobacco tins...

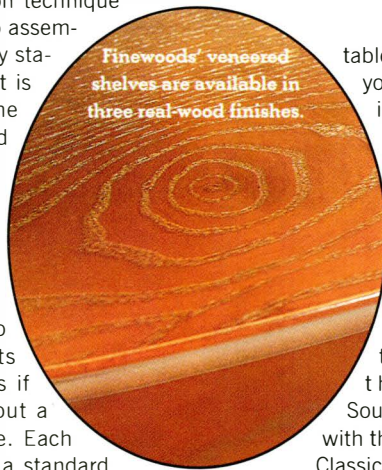
Tested with spiked feet, the stand's solidity and weight seemed to manifest themselves resolutely in its presentation. Bass lines, particularly those with real extension, plummeted earthwards laying a solid, tangible foundation for the music. Because the bass was allowed to distance itself properly from the midband, and was free from cloying bloom, the mid and top could project distinctly from the mix. So, while the music's weight impressed, the generous low-end didn't unduly hinder its rhythmic flow. Some tracks with particularly muscular bottom registers seemed subjectively a bit relaxed but not sufficiently to warrant adverse comment.

One area in which the W105 struck a well-judged balance was at the top-end of the spectrum. With tracks such as Reef's *Place Your Hands*, the table managed to keep the high-frequency energy under tight control without severely diluting its impact. Consequently, cymbals splashed and crashed with appropriate vigour but didn't appear exaggerated as they can on some tables.

As I've observed elsewhere, when you compare the performance at the frequency extremes of this or other similarly-priced



Finewoods' veneered shelves are available in three real-wood finishes.



tables to the reference Mana you discover that the latter is able to exert greater control and still sound extremely vibrant. In an A/B it's apparent that the W105 does sap a little of the music's energy and doesn't sound as explicit as the costlier Mana. However, the Mana is around twice the price, and the Soundstyle is comfortably up with the best of its peers.

Classical music fared well on this table. The Iona Brown Greig recording enjoyed rich tonal colour, fine dynamic scope and an appreciable sense of scale. The music emerged from a wide, deep acoustic space, one with a distinct character. Also clearly evident was the orchestra's spirited playing, and the interplay between the sections. Spatial information, in fact, seemed a forte of the W105. Portishead's *Mysterons* cast a very sharply-delineated image with each instrument in the mix occupying a distinct spot in a three-dimensional soundstage, which made for a fittingly trippy portrayal of the track.

To summarise, the Soundstyle Finewoods W105 offers an aesthetically and sonically interesting alternative to the ranks of industrial-looking tables. Recommended.

● Turn to page 86 for a chance to win one of 10

Finewoods turntables in a choice of styles and finishes!

SOUND ORGANISATION - VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £320

▲ Well balanced all-round performance from a support with traditional furniture appeal.

▼ Timing and dynamics are a bit relaxed compared to the best.

✉ Soundstyle, 8 Greyfriars Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7DX
 ☎ (01284) 701101

CONCLUSION

Most supports show their sonic weaknesses at the frequency extremes. Bass is too dry, too fat, too slow, or otherwise impaired, while high frequencies are dulled, emphasised or sound out of control. The only support here that was not guilty in some degree of one or more of these aberrations, apart from the Mana used as a reference, was the two-part, **H500/H175** from **Frameworks**. I'm not saying that the other tables got things totally wrong: far from it. But when you hear a support that gets things right, all the way across the spectrum, it's hard not to start rejoicing.

In practical terms, the Frameworks support falls behind others here if you're seeking a single stand to accommodate several components. It's a shelf or two short of a regular full-system, multi-tier model and, unless you're an old-fashioned audiophile fogey, it probably won't have the visual appeal of some of the more furniture-like designs. That said, it's not unsightly or intrusive.

If you're searching for a stand with plenty of space and furniture appeal you should certainly check out the modernistic **Optimum International 2000 OPT490** and more traditional-looking **Soundstyle Finewoods W105**. Their sonic performance isn't on the cutting edge but they strike an eminently respectable balance between accommodation, appearance and musical fulfilment.

To put that last remark fully into context, do remember that these stands were tested using a cruelly-revealing system with a variety of music, some of which stretches every component in the reproduction chain to near breaking point. In other words, records that you probably won't enjoy unless everything is working and tuned to perfection. Any misdemeanour, however slight, is going to stand out markedly under these circumstances. Used in a more modest system, many of the criticisms made in the reviews might be less relevant. For example, if your speakers' output tails off below 60Hz, you're not going to be worried if a table loses a little grip in music's lowest reaches.

If you're after performance on a tight budget, the **Sound Organisation Z560** takes a lot of beating. It looks good in a high-tech sort of way, is adjustable to accommodate a range of differently proportioned components, and you can't fairly criticise the sound it delivers at the price, giving excellent value.

The **Custom Design Classic Four**, an attempt to blend the visual appeal of wood and glass with hi-fi support duties, falls at the first hurdle of build-quality. Fans of undemanding music may find solace in its laid-back presentation.

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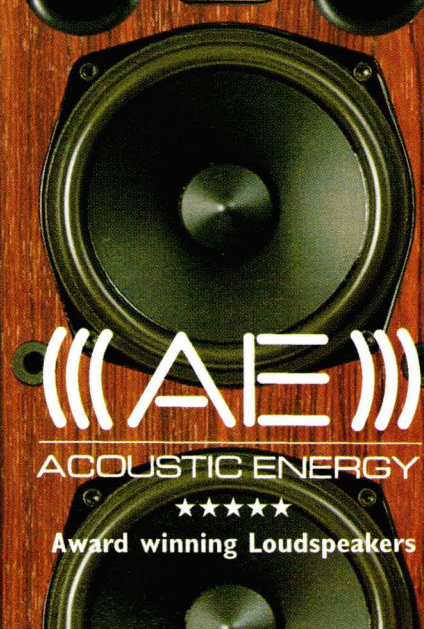
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CD Power

Alvin Gold (listening test) and Paul Miller (lab test) separate the men from the boys, among 10 players priced from £200 to £1,000.

Our group of CD players covers most of the bases. At one extreme there's a simple unit costing just £200; at the other there's a CD machine that's almost as simple but bears a price-tag of almost £1,000. Few players below £200 are worth the consideration of those whose systems deserve the soubriquet 'high fidelity'; while the £1,000 price-point marks the approximate dividing line between integrated one-box players and separate DACs, which are a whole different ball game.

Sometimes it seems like an Herculean task to decide which CD player will suit a particular system or situation. Reviews help by weeding out the weaker performers, but there's little they can do to inform individual owners how much of their budget to allocate for a CD player. In days of yore it was simple: you decided how much to spend on individual components on a percentage basis, but these days that would be considered too arbitrary.

Furthermore, unlike cassette decks or even amplifiers, CD players these days have little to choose between them by way of specifications or features. In fact, as a general rule, the best-equipped players are the cheapest, but as always it is dangerous to generalise. Two rela-

THE CAST LIST		
MODEL.....	PRICE....	PAGE
Teac 3450SE.....	£199.95	65
Musical Fidelity E60	£299.99	63
Harman/kardon HD730	£299.99	60
Marantz CD-67SE.....	£349.90	61
Yamaha CD-X890	£349.95	67
Pioneer PD-S505 Precision.....	£460	75
Orelle CD100E	£649	73
Trichord Revelation	£799	77
Acurus ACD11.....	£899	69
Monrio Privilege.....	£995	71

tively-costly models tested in this group are based on the same low-cost mainstream player which happens to be equipped with just about every gadget under the sun.

While we will always do our best to advise you, the CD conundrum poses no problems that a little audience participation can't solve. Take note of the review findings, draw up a shortlist, and then find yourself a specialist dealer and book an appointment to hear two or three players from the top of your list. Compare your findings with ours, but always trust your own instincts. If all the players sound the same, choose the cheapest one. Herein lies the path to intrinsic hi-fi happiness. *AG*

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

The pattern for these tests is now well established. We gave each of the 10 CD players a thorough work-out, including a physical examination and functional testing, hands-on listening and most importantly a panel audition in which the listeners were kept from knowing which CD player was being auditioned. All equipment was positioned out of sight in an adjacent area, and each player's output was normalised to a standard volume level using test tones. Finally, each player underwent a detailed technical appraisal in the laboratory of our Technical Editor, Paul Miller.

During the listening-panel tests we hooked up each tested CD player to a high-quality, full-bandwidth hi-fi system comprising Copland CSA-14 integrated amplifier, Definitive Technology BP2002 floor standing speakers with integral active subwoofers, and a REL Stentor II active subwoofer to fill out the octave below the main speakers' passband. Cables were Nordost Flatline Gold and Ixos 103. Mana equipment supports completed the system. In the hands-on listening I employed a Denon PMA-450 integrated amp and Tannoy Mercury 2 speakers. *AG*

WHAT MUSIC DID WE USE?

Robert Schumann: *Zart und mit Ausdruck from Fantasy Pieces Op. 73.*
Charles West, clarinet; Susan Grace, piano; on Wilson Audiophile WCD-9128.
Richard Hygons: *Salve Regina* (choral) on *The Sixteen at 16*; on Collins 16002.
Alison Krauss: *I Will from Now That I've Found You*; on Rounder CD0325.
Donald Fagen: *Trans-Island Skyway* from *Kamakiriad*; on Reprise 9362 45230-2.

THE LISTENING PANEL

Our unsighted listening tests were conducted by a team of 'golden ears' drawn from the ranks of the hi-fi industry.

We extend our thanks to:

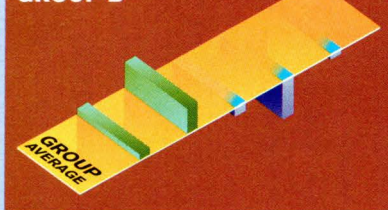
David Inman (Audio Marketing Department)
Jonathan Jordan (Audio Partnership)
Robin Marshall (Mission)
Russell Kaufmann (Densen)
Alan Sircom (Hi-Fi Choice).

UNDERSTANDING OUR BAR-GRAPHS AND GROUP AVERAGES

GROUP A



GROUP B



There are significant differences between a CD player that costs £200 and one that costs £995. For this reason we have divided our 10 CD players into two groups to extract meaningful 'group averages' for our bar-graph lab-test summaries. The two groups (A and B) are overviewed in our conclusion (pages 78-79), but just so that you can tell which player is in which group throughout the reviews, here is the key to the colour codings shown above:

Group A (Up to £400)
Group B (Over £400)

Using this information, you can work out with which of its peers each CD player is being compared. Our aim is to assess every product's measured performance in the context of its closest rivals.

The bar-graphs themselves are derived from measurements performed by our Technical Editor, Paul Miller, using instruments controlled by his own award-winning, PC-based 'Virtual Instrument' software. Actual measured parameters are weighted and statistically processed to give the bar-graph values, relative to the group averages explained above. For more information, e-mail Paul Miller at 100576.3021@compuserve.com .

GROUP A (BELOW £400)

harman/kardon HD730, p60



Marantz CD-67SE, p61



Musical Fidelity E60, p63



Teac CD-P3450SE, p65



Yamaha CDX-890, p67



GROUP B (ABOVE £400)

Acurus ACD11, p69



Monrio Privilege, p71



Orelle CD100e, p73



Pioneer PD-S505 Precision, p75 C M Y K



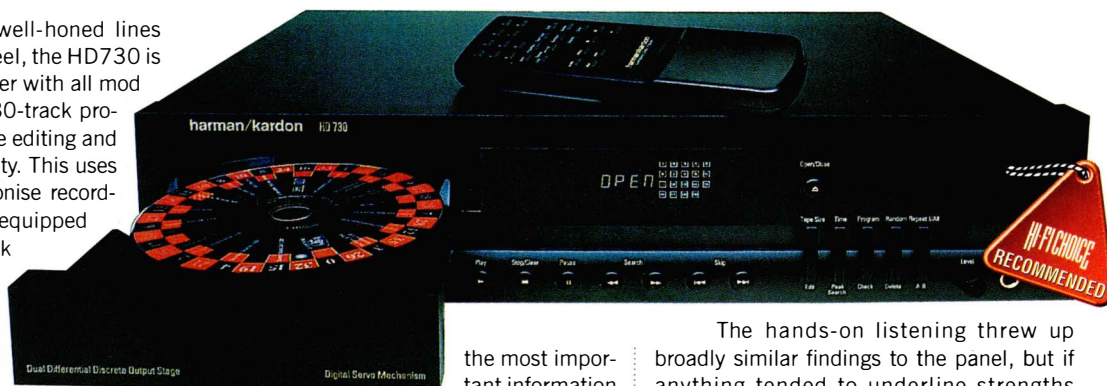
Trichord Revelation, p77



harman/kardon HD730

A sharp dresser, with well-honed lines and a contemporary feel, the HD730 is a PDM Bitstream player with all mod cons. These include 30-track programming, multi-mode tape editing and a hard-wired CD-copy facility. This uses a rear-panel link to synchronise recording starts with a suitably-equipped harman/kardon tape deck (e.g. TD450, HFC 164). For those with complete h/k systems, rear-panel 'bus' sockets can be interconnected to allow full system control from a single handset.

The HD730 has an electrical digital output socket rather than the inferior optical counterpart often fitted to inexpensive players. On the front panel, programming controls jostle with the main play-related features and a volume-controlled headphone socket; you will only require the remote-control handset to access the random track-access keypad or the display dimmer/off switch. The player looks and feels good; even the remote control has had a little more care lavished on it than usual. The display, however, is probably the best single feature, since it is a quality component that gives just



the most important information without clutter or glare. It is an object lesson in clarity and a God-send for information-fatigued owners.

Sound quality

This player emerged fairly well if not totally unscathed from the critical attentions of the listening panel, with an average score of 5.5 out of 10. One panellist found it unatmospheric and lacking in detail, with what he memorably described as a "horn-loaded" quality, along with a slowing of tempi, and a more general feeling that there was some coloration and harshness in the upper mid-band and treble. On the other hand, stereo presentation was praised for its depth and distinctiveness, and dynamics attracted general praise. The HD730 was felt to have a solid, meaty quality, with good projection. "There's a real sense of life here" was one comment on the subject, while another wrote of the player's "good sense of instrumental textures". "The piano and clarinet are clearly differentiated in space" wrote a third panellist of the Schumann, which is a notably well-recorded disc that didn't always fare well in the other players on test.

The hands-on listening threw up broadly similar findings to the panel, but if anything tended to underline strengths rather than weaknesses. The HD730 was generally felt to be a less than exciting player, with some loss of detail and a perceptibly 'dark' sense of tonal colour. Nevertheless, it is obviously the most successful of the lower price models. It has a solidity and strength that distinguishes it from much of the rather lightweight, thin-sounding competition around at this price level, and although the middle and high frequencies are decidedly CD-like in the pejorative sense of the term, the HD730 still manages to make the musical point, often with real power and conviction.

Conclusion

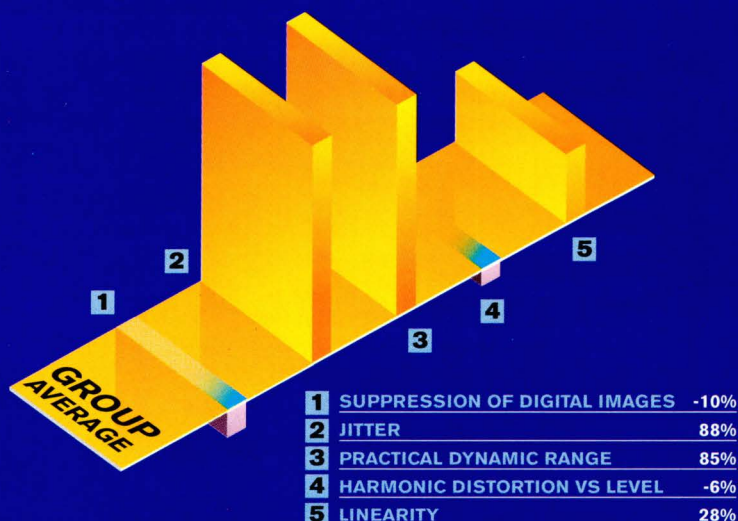
This player is easy to like. Its well-organised features don't get in the way as they do in some players, and this unit is powerfully equipped, not least with its useful tape editing features and headphone monitoring facilities. Musically too, the strengths tend to outweigh the weaknesses, and the bold dynamics and inherent spaciousness of the sound have many attractions, though the player is neither as neutral nor as explicitly detailed as some. Recommended. *AG*

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £299.99

- ▲ Bold, assertive and dynamic-sounding player that is also well-endowed and presented.
 - ▼ Loss of detail, tends to be rather dark tonally, and some mid/treble colorations.
- ✉ Gamepath Ltd, 25 Heathfield, Stacey Bushes, Milton Keynes MK12 6HR
 ☎ (01908) 317707

HOW IT COMPARES



THE LAB REPORT

Despite sporting Harman's familiar '3D Bitstream' logo, this HD730 doesn't employ the MASH/PWM DACs of older h/k players. Instead, the HD730 is equipped with a fairly unusual combination of Yamaha's YM3433 8x oversampling filter and one of Philips' SAA7350 Bit Stream DACs — a duo last seen in Sherwood's CD-4030R (issue 159). Otherwise, HK's entirely discrete, differential output stage helps suppress ultrasonic requantisation noise, enhancing the HD730's compatibility with different amplifiers.

Midband distortion is increased to 0.03 per cent (-30dB) and 0.7 per cent (-60dB) by various characterful harmonics rather than the usual background 'noise' normally associated with bitstream converters. And yet, the combination of a healthy 101dB S/N ratio and — importantly — a very low +1.1dB noise modulation gives this player a usefully wide dynamic range. h/k should still tighten up on its crystal selection (our test sample had a 365ppm error) but this still has no influence over digital jitter which clocked in at a low-ish 307psec.

Disc tracking performance is poor, however, and this sample proved unable to reach tracks situated very near the outside edge of the disc (i.e. the highest numbers). *PMI*

Marantz CD-67SE

The CD-67SE replaces the CD-63SE.

The SE suffix indicates the model is aurally tailored for the UK market and has audiophile pretensions. Derived from the basic CD-67 (HFC 159), the SE version has been extensively revamped. It sports a later-spec CD7 decoder IC (the CD-63SE used the CD6), plus new servo and drive-control circuits that are said to offer improved tracking and disc-reading performance. Transformer windings are now oxygen-free, and there are new, discrete HDAMs (Hyper Dynamic Output Modules). Marantz claim these proprietary output filters (as used in earlier players like the CD-63SE) have a much higher slew rate than typical output op-amps, and lower than usual output impedance (see Lab Report for measured performance).

Other improvements include a more substantial base and extra internal bracing. In external dimensions the player has been increased in width from 420mm to the industry standard 435mm.

By the look of it this is a typical Marantz



product, with a slim, slightly curved black fascia enlivened by a multiplicity of well grouped if rather small controls, and the unmistakable Special Edition logo. CD-to-tape editing features are included, along with a display dimmer, though you can't fade all the way to black. Standard electrical and optical digital outputs are fitted, and remote-control sockets allow full system operation from a single handset. Headphones are controlled via the remote control, which simultaneously controls the main line output. The loading tray action is smooth and quiet.

Sound quality

The Marantz was assessed twice by the panel, the repeat presentation resulting in a somewhat higher score than the first — 5.5 instead of 4.4 out of 10 — but the picture of its music-making abilities was broadly consistent between presentations. In particular, the descriptions of the CD-67SE were of a player that was low in coloration and generally easy on the ear — “more together than previous players; the clarinet in particular plays with gusto” as one wrote of the Schumann. Nevertheless it was somewhat uneven in its behaviour, with a noticeable ‘loudness’ contour resulting in a slightly

over-cooked bass, that caused the music to sound rather distant and vague in some cases. The treble sometimes seemed to lack “air and sparkle”.

“A very small soundstage, and the individual voices aren't really separated out” one panellist wrote of the Richard Hygons choral piece from *The Sixteen* recording. Another noted that “the vocals are easy on the ear, but are lacking in detail”. A third commented that the same recording had a “nice” vocal quality, but there was no sense of “being there”. He went on to praise the player for its ultra-fast transients and its ability to “start and stop quickly” in the Allison Krauss track. The latter is a sharp, clean-sounding recording that always shows up players unable to change gears in a hurry.

My own listening confirmed this is a generally well-behaved player, though it lacks grip. Despite the warmth of its presentation, the sound generally lacked authority and a sense of musical sparkle was missing.

Conclusion

Though it engendered mixed opinions on audition, the CD-67SE is a warm-sounding player that does most things well. It can be detailed and relaxed, and sustains fatigue-free extended listening. It worked well-enough with moderately-priced equipment to earn a Recommended flag, but nevertheless often failed to excite its audience, and sometimes sounded underpowered and a little flat in top-class systems. **AC**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆
VALUE ★★☆☆☆
PRICE £349.90

▲ Open, clear and lacking the mechanical qualities that undermine some at the price.

▼ Rather soft and distant, lacking the ‘architectural’ virtues that characterise the finest players.

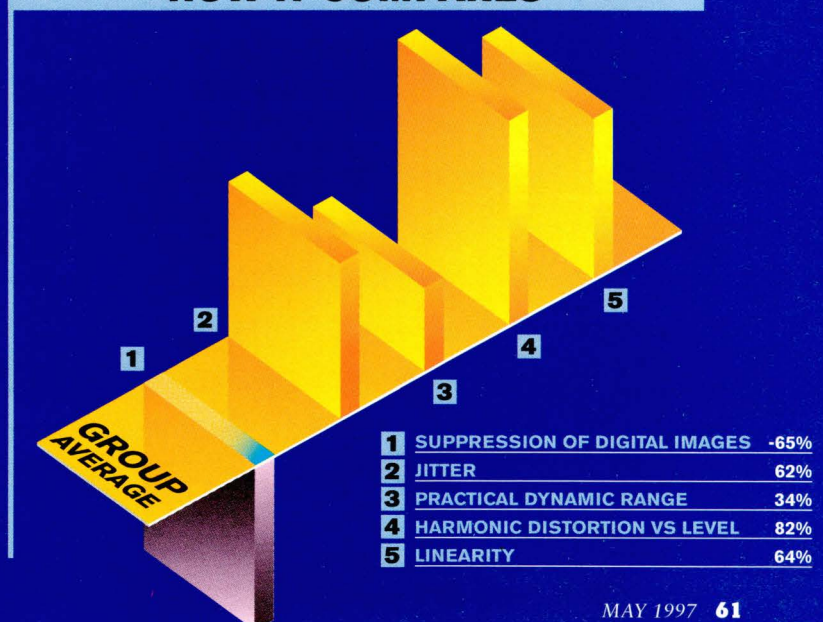
✉ Marantz Hi-Fi UK Ltd., Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks, 581 Bath Road, Longford, Middlesex UB7 0EH (01753) 680868

THE LAB REPORT

Although Marantz's new CD-67SE is based upon the same ‘core circuitry’ as the earlier CD-63mkII (issue 151) and CD-67 (issue 159), with its CDM12 mechanism, NPC's combined 8x oversampling filter/bitstream DAC and screened HDAM output buffer, the three players' respective technical ‘fingerprints’ are so close as to be uncanny. Distortion, almost regardless of frequency or level, differs by less than 1dB across all three samples (0.0007-0.018 per cent at peak output), low-level linearity by less than 0.2dB (+0.0/-1.3dB over a 100dB range) and the 103dB S/N ratio by just 0.1dB. Figures for stereo separation, channel balance, stopband rejection, output impedance (2150hm) and output level (2.347V) are identical.

The CD-67SE does benefit from new transport servo and driver ICs so the end-of-side track access has reduced from 3.5secs to 2.2secs. The jitter spectrum, meanwhile, is composed of the same complex and highly specific components that populated the CD-63/67 series of players. In this instance it amounts to some 551psec rather than the 498psec recorded for the CD-67 and, because of its unique and extended structure, is likely to account for much of the 63/67 ‘sound’. In the light of a measured performance almost identical to those of its forbears, it comes as no surprise that our listening test results also echoed comments made in former reviews. *PMI*

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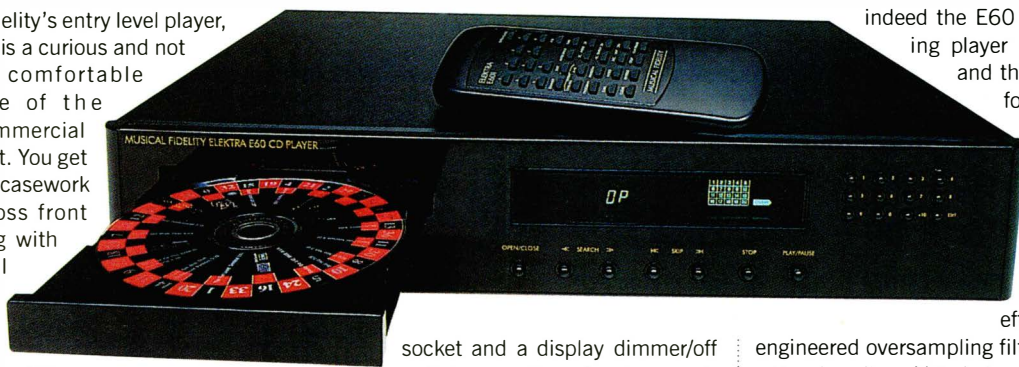
listen and believe

Mission Group Huntingdon PE18 6ED England

Musical Fidelity E60

Musical Fidelity's entry level player, the E60, is a curious and not entirely comfortable mixture of the mainstream commercial and the specialist. You get solid, attractive casework and a black-gloss front panel in keeping with other Musical Fidelity E series components; and a full set of controls including a cramped random track-access keypad. (The display frantically flashes 'over' if a disc has more than the 20 tracks accommodated by the calendar display.) The unit has a large footprint, but is slimline in profile. Electrical and optical digital outputs are fitted.

On the whole, the controls are useful and helpfully grouped. There are even basic tape editing features, though there is no opportunity to establish a synchronised-record link to other components. This is less than surprising given that Musical Fidelity is not in the cassette deck market! Though the remote control is attractive and well furnished, some users will miss a headphone



socket and a display dimmer/off switch on the front panel.

Furthermore the asthmatic drawer mechanism is not one of the E60's highlights.

Sound quality

The E60 signally failed to impress the panel, with an average score of just 3.2 out of 10. Referring to the exquisite Schumann recording, one commented that "the clarinet could be absolutely anywhere in the soundstage", later describing it as a "lazy, hazy, summer's afternoon type of product". This diffuseness and phasiness was a feature of most comments. One described the E60 as "uninvolving... mundane... and lacklustre". On the plus side, the E60 was absolved from sounding actively unpleasant. Typical comments here included "a fluid bass with good extension" (Donald Fagen); and "this player bobs along quite well, and is far from unpleasant". Another interpreted the lack of clarity as having a "hard, clangy" quality. He praised the player's timing, especially after hearing the Donald Fagen track, but his sum-up comments also left a question mark over stereo image stability and placement.

It would be hard to take issue with the above in the face of such unanimity, and

indeed the E60 is a disappointing player in group terms, and the lack of central focus was a feature. Oddly it was reminiscent of an earlier generation of CD hardware; could this be a side effect of a poorly-

engineered oversampling filter? My listening notes describe a Villa Lobos orchestral piece as having a "woolly bass and an indistinct treble", though midrange definition was categorised as 'good'.

The player's strong sense of timing and bass control were also confirmed, and it seems to selectively favour studio-recorded rock music over live classical recordings. It appeared that the player worked better with some amplifiers than others, sounding more or less congested depending on the model selected. However this shortcoming was pretty hard to pin down definitively.

Conclusion

The E60 is a great looking player with sufficient versatility for most requirements. Although its musical character has some merit, this player is far from being the strongest performer at the price.

The lack of stereo integrity is a pretty obvious detraction, and regrettably this player is easily bettered by other contenders at the £300 level. Interested readers are referred instead to the souped-up E601 version, which at somewhat greater cost provides the life and vitality missing from this base-level player. **AC**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆
VALUE ★★☆☆☆
PRICE £299.99

▲ Well turned out, expensively finished player; good bass and timing.

▼ Phasiness, lacking in stereo focus and detail; some mains hum.

✉ Musical Fidelity Ltd., Musical Fidelity House, 15-17 Olympic Trading Estate, Fulton Road, Wembley Middx. HA9 0TF
 ☎ (0181) 900 2866

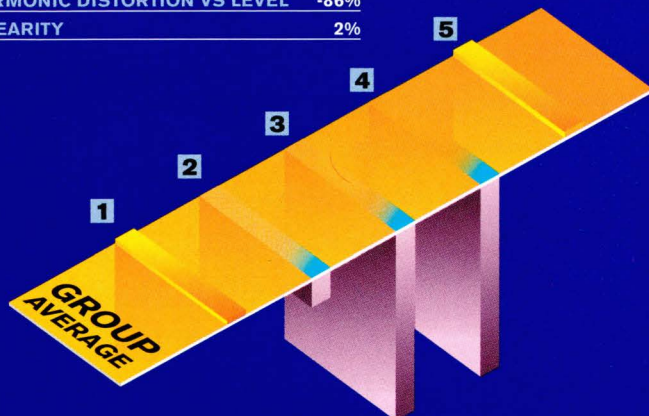
THE LAB REPORT

Behind the E60's glossy façade lies our old friend the YDC-103, a 'CD-player-on-a-chip' first used by its parent company, Yamaha, in the CDX-670 (issue 124); and latterly by TEAC (this issue, page 65). This busy little LSI offers the services of CD transport and laser servo control, digital decoder, error correction, digital output, 8x oversampling filter, 3rd-order noise-shaping and a bitstream DAC all on one substrate. The performance of this chip is potentially rather impressive, though MF's implementation seems to have gone awry. Either that, or this E60 has a dose of 'CD flu'.

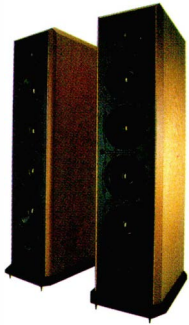
Distortion, for example, amounts to 0.014 per cent at 0dB/1kHz and 0.05 per cent -30dB/1kHz where 0.002/0.01 per cent, respectively, is more typical. Deviations in low-level linearity of up to 4dB are around eight times higher than normal while the 14-bit 84dB S/N ratio is a good 17dB off the beaten track. CD tracking performance deteriorates at the disc edge while uncorrelated (i.e. noise-like) jitter is substantially higher on the player's left channel (6dB). A best case jitter figure of 1125psec was recorded from data-induced, PSU and transport-related phenomena — this cannot help but add a bloated coloration to the player's sound. *PMi*

HOW IT COMPARES

1	SUPPRESSION OF DIGITAL IMAGES	1%
2	JITTER	-10%
3	PRACTICAL DYNAMIC RANGE	-74%
4	HARMONIC DISTORTION VS LEVEL	-86%
5	LINEARITY	2%



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Teac CD-P3450SE

Teac is best known in the UK for its high-end CD players and VRDS player mechanisms, which have found homes in some very prestigious third-party machinery. Though its profile is different to that of most Japanese companies,

Teac produces budget players too, of which the CD-P3450SE (a 'tweaked' CD-P3450, now discontinued) is a good example.

For once, here is a budget player that's been kept purposefully free of gimmickry, and the result is a control layout that could hardly be bettered. The game is only given away by a cheap-looking plastic fascia moulding and a messy track calendar read-out on the otherwise excellent display. But at £200, who cares? The remote handset is also simple but well designed, and the control logic is intelligent enough, for example, to allow direct access to the last tracks on a disc by pressing the back-skip key. Track access is slow, but the tray action is neither as tardy nor as asthmatic as some. Despite its simplicity, the player includes a headphone socket (but no volume control), basic



solid-sounding (some would say bass-heavy) Donald Fagen track was felt to have a "curtailed" and "slow" underpinning, while more positive descriptions included: "neutral sound", "some depth", "smooth" and "good separation". One listener described the

Hygons choral piece as "smooth and spacious; choir tutti works

really hard", while Schumann's clarinet was "too legato, and the piano stresses upper registers but the music is otherwise graceful".

Not as straightforward as some, then. This is an inexpensive player, and in the end its faults (typical of inexpensive players in general) included a rather thin, though still tuneful and articulate bass, some hardness, and a rather erratic sense of image depth.

On the whole, though, the ultra-critical panel rather approved of this player (it scored 4.6 out of 10 on the first presentation, 5 on the second). My own listening pointed to a consistent, amplifier-friendly performance in different systems, and a combination of clarity and refinement unusual at the price.

support for tape editing and an optical TOSLINK digital output.

Built around the highly integrated Yamaha YDC-103 LSI (which combines most of the functions of a complete player, including a Bitstream DAC and eight-times oversampling filter), the SE has also benefited from UK design input that is manifested in the Burr-Brown op-amps of the output buffer, a DC-coupled, servo-controlled output, and perhaps most significantly a new analogue filter designed to reduce ultrasonic and RF noise.

Sound quality

Although various complaints were voiced about this player, they were mild and random gripes, the only consensual objection being an absence of bass weight and presence. The insubstantial bass was interpreted in the Allison Krauss track, for example, as an overall feeling of "forwardness and a little hardness". But although instrumental textures were described as "congested" by one, another wrote that the same piece sounded "airier and fresher than many". The more

Conclusion

In a sense, both the best and the worst that can be said of this player is its inability to surprise. "Honest and decent, like a maiden aunt on a bender" was the way one of the unpaid golden ears put it, but far worse can be said of a £200 CD player. Bearing the giveaway price very much in mind, Best Buy seems the only just verdict for Teac's digital spinster. *AG*

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £199.95

▲ Impressive value, and a genuinely articulate, musical sound.

▼ Has a number of minor aural blemishes, notably a rather thin bass.

✉ Teac UK Ltd, 5 Marlin House, The Croyley Centre, Watford, Herts WD1 8YA
(01923) 819630

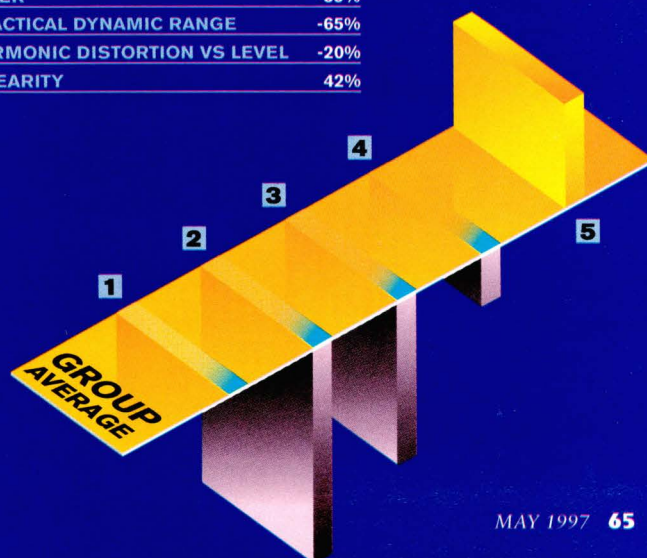
THE LAB REPORT

Teac's modifications to its older CD-P3450 CD player are entirely analogue in nature, for the digital heart remains quite unchanged. So the CD-P3450SE still beats to the tune of Yamaha's highly integrated YDC-103 (see Musical Fidelity E60, p. 63) even though in this instance Teac's UK-designed filter — with its own regulated supply, superior Burr-Brown OPA2604 op-amps and DC-coupled output — cuts down dramatically on the fog of RF and ultrasonic noise that once clouded portals.

This is crucial, for though the basic spec of the player remains unchanged, reducing RF noise (from 27mV in the CD-P3450 to <1mV in the CD-P3450SE) can only help reduce the fatiguing coloration caused by RF IMD in the filter op-amps and, subsequently, the partnering amplifier. Otherwise the high-ish peak-level distortion (0.02-0.1 per cent) and poor 86dB S/N ratio puts the CD-P3450SE in the same ballpark as MF's E60, even though its >3000psec of jitter is somewhat vaster. If only Teac had paid additional attention to its digital circuitry, perhaps the analogue tweaks that distinguish the 'SE' version might not have been so desperately required. A step in the right direction, nonetheless. *PMI*

HOW IT COMPARES

1	SUPPRESSION OF DIGITAL IMAGES	0%
2	JITTER	-85%
3	PRACTICAL DYNAMIC RANGE	-65%
4	HARMONIC DISTORTION VS LEVEL	-20%
5	LINEARITY	42%



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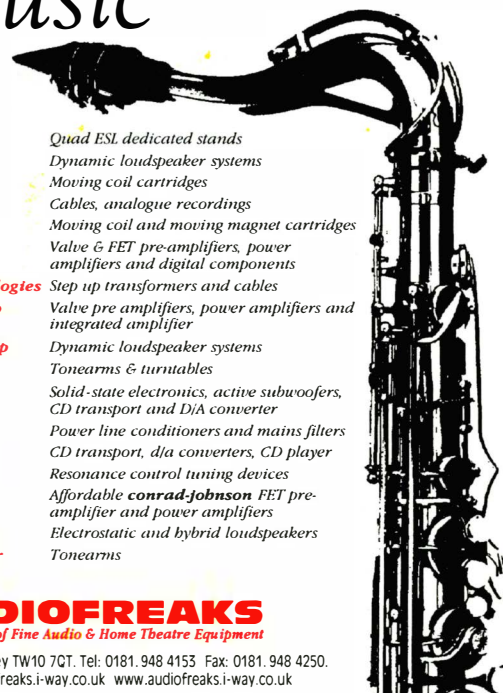
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Yamaha CDX-890

Compact and solidly built, the Yamaha CDX-890 feels physically taut, and with the exception of a rather rattly top pressing, appears unusually well-engineered and finished. Yamaha has also managed the contradictory tasks of ensuring good ergonomics with the maximum of features, by using a fold-down panel to hide minor controls.

Open the panel, and you're presented with a row of track-access buttons, programming and tape editing controls, even a peak button to help establish record levels, plus the obligatory search and track-skip keys. Flip up the panel and only buttons for play, stop, play/pause remain visible, alongside the headphone socket with its output level control. Best of all the flip-up panel points diagonally upwards, so the controls are easier to read and use than normal, particularly if the player is positioned below eye level and the lighting is from above.

The anatomically-shaped remote handset adds a display off/dimmer switch, and



cluding there was a hint of edginess to an otherwise enjoyable performance. Another described the player as "refined and subtle, just a little distant", and later as "the

perfect antidote to close miking", adding that it sounded "natural, but a little untidy at times".

an output-level control that acts through the motorised volume pot. The display, a typical Yamaha fluorescent yellow item, is clear and attractive, and includes a calendar-style read-out which manages to avoid looking cluttered. Around the back you'll find fixed and variable analogue outputs, optical and electrical digital outputs and a CD sync socket to support tape editing features. The loading drawer action is very rapid, but track access times are slow.

Though it is modelled on the CDX-880, the player it replaces, early prototypes of the '890 were mildly modified in the UK to give a shorter output signal path and improved earthing. These changes which have been incorporated into production, and the price-tag has ended up smaller than anticipated.

Sound quality

The fixed-level outputs were chosen in preference to the variable-level output, which sounded noticeably less transparent. All but one member of the panel reacted favourably to this model. "Suddenly an extra layer of detail becomes audible" was one comment on the Richard Hygons choral piece, the first item to be presented. The listener continued by drawing attention to the good imagery and vocal separation, before con-

cluding there was a hint of edginess to an otherwise enjoyable performance. Another described the player as "refined and subtle, just a little distant", and later as "the

perfect antidote to close miking", adding that it sounded "natural, but a little untidy at times".

In the author's hands-on listening, the Yamaha also impressed with its precision and fluidity, though it was felt to be slightly recessed and less three-dimensional than some of its rivals. The powerful opening bars of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* quartet (BBC *Music* magazine cover disc, March '97 issue) were reproduced with a strong, refined string tone, and a somewhat calmer, fuller-bodied sound than most; this counts as a success.

On the other hand the Yamaha could be provoked into misbehaving: the powerful percussion entry from the *Danza* section of *Bachianas Brasileiras No 4* by Villa Lobos (Michael Tilson Thomas/New World Symphony on RCA Red Seal) sounded jangly and out of control; occasional flashes of brushness were noted elsewhere, too.

Conclusion

This review is the story of a consistently refined and capable player, which can sound a little distant and edgy when stressed, but which generally serves the music well. Clearly the best around this price point, its good sound and excellent presentation add up to a solid Recommendation. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
PRICE £349.95

▲ Relaxed and natural sounding; a coherent performer.

▼ Could sound better organised, especially at higher levels; needs sensitive speakers.

✉ Yamaha Electronics UK Ltd, 200 Rickmansworth Rd, Watford, Herts WD1 7JS
 ☎ (01923) 233166

THE LAB REPORT

Though an evolution of earlier players like the CDX-880 (issue 141), this player still employs Yamaha's in-house YAC-514 bitstream DAC, though this is now driven by a derivative of the Technics signal processor previously used in its cheaper players. Nevertheless, certain quirks that surfaced in the CDX-880 are also manifested in the newer CDX-890.

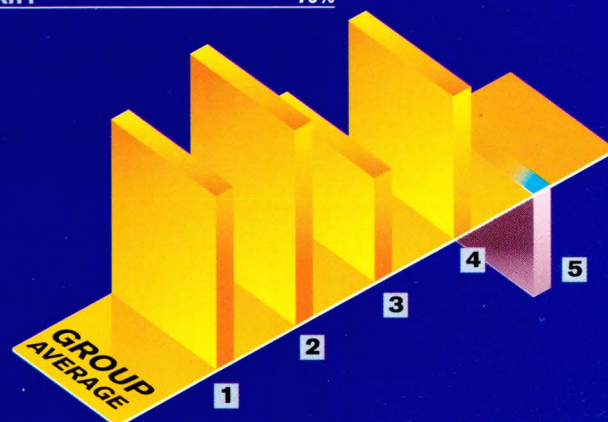
Oddities like the sudden -11dB drop in output at 20kHz/-100dB, for example, are retained while the MN662720 signal processor and digital filter seem responsible for a slightly 'dirty'-sounding midband/mid-level THD spectrum (0.35 per cent at -60dB) and an excessive leakage at 4Fs (176.4kHz) of 14mV.

The rejection of digital images, however, is very good indeed at 102dB. Incidentally, the distortion bargraph looks good only because the 'average' figure for this group is crushed by the MF and Teac players.

On a more positive note, improvements to the transport have reduced end-of-side track access from 4.5sec to 3.5sec, while the A-wtd S/N ratio has improved from 96.8dB to 97.8dB. Jitter is also reasonably low at 354psec, being composed of PSU-induced and high-rate, unknown components at 1694Hz and 3155Hz. *PMI*

HOW IT COMPARES

1	SUPPRESSION OF DIGITAL IMAGES	75%
2	JITTER	84%
3	PRACTICAL DYNAMIC RANGE	45%
4	HARMONIC DISTORTION VS LEVEL	64%
5	LINEARITY	-79%



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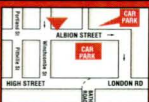
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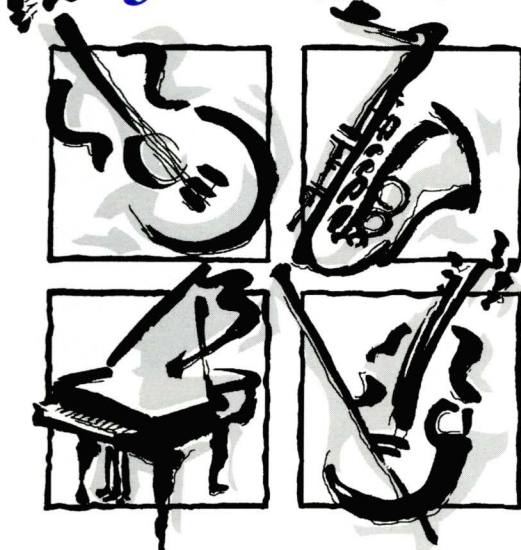
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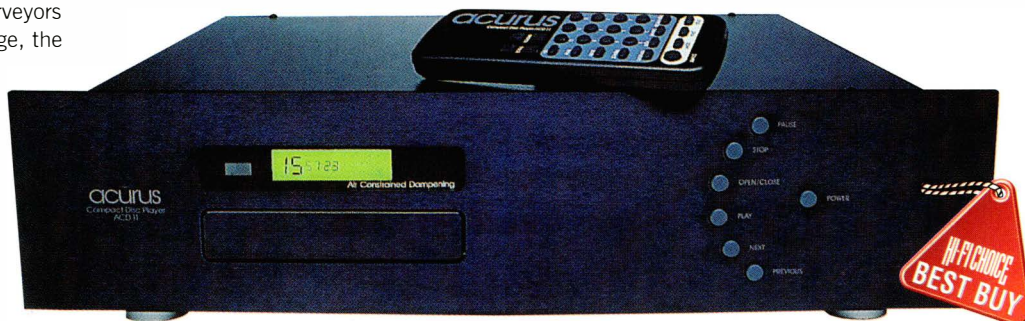


Acurus ACD11

Distributed in the UK by the purveyors of Classé Audio, EAD and Mirage, the ACD11 is the only CD player from Acurus's eclectic but relatively affordable range of stereo and AV components. (This brand, linked to Mondial Designs of New York, enjoyed short-lived UK distribution via Richer Sounds last year. We reviewed the RL11/A150 pre/power in Sessions, HFC 151. Ed)

Build quality is good; the overhanging front panel is well finished. Just below the display there's the legend 'Air Constrained Dampening', which might hint at some form of isolation system to prevent the disc or laser tracking arm from being affected by acoustic feedback or other environmental noise. (In fact, the mech is a three-point Far-Eastern affair with a larger-than-average but still plastics-based disc clamp; the player is certainly not air-tight. Tech Ed) At the digital heart of this player beats a one-bit DAC with 32-times oversampling.

Bells and whistles aren't the name of the game at this price level, but key playback features are all accessible from the crescent formation of front panel controls. Central is the power switch, to either side buttons for play, stop, draw open/close, next and previ-



ous track skip. The remote control adds the usual ergonomic enhancements, including alternative display modes (e.g. display off), and track programming. The back panel has an IEC mains socket, and you may wish to upgrade the supplied wire; improvements in transparency were noted with XLO mains cable. Standard analogue output sockets are supplemented by a coaxial digital S/PDIF output, and the player offers a polished drawer action and rapid track access.

Sound quality

With an average score of 6.8 out of 10 from an unusually unforgiving listening panel, this was the highest-scoring model on test, and a resounding success in the context of the high-resolution system used. Its talents may be wasted on a less able outfit, however: there was an indication that this player suits quality medium-sized or compact speakers.

This precise point was made by one panel member, who suggested that the Acurus is an ideal choice for owners of high-quality mini monitors: "what's there is very good indeed, but there's no substance to the bass". Others, too, commented on a somewhat washed-out bass quality. Referring to the Schumann piece, one listener wrote of

the player's "tonal purity", but that the piano left hand "seems a little blurred". But this LF deficiency should not be taken too seriously: comments were made in the context of comparisons to other good players, and even the worst CD does pretty well in the bass. CD problems of a more endemic nature tend to crop up elsewhere.

The Hygons piece from *The Sixteen* was variously described as "well defined", with "strong clarity", a "natural (tonal) balance", "secure" and as presenting a "believable image" — or as one put it, "stereo at last!" Some listeners also noted a slight sweetening of the sound, which was curiously but not inappropriately described in one case as a "slight feminisation of the sound". Adjectives like "seductive" were used of the Allison Krauss, and indeed this track really did pull all the right strings.

Conclusion

This excellent player that boasts a winning combination of refinement, resolving ability and naturalness. It's always tricky to grade an expensive player like this, but after comparing the ACD11 with costly players both within and without the test group, I have no hesitation in awarding a Best Buy. AG

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★☆
PRICE £899.00

▲ High resolution player, which brings music to life in a winning way.

▼ Contrived styling — but is that a problem?

✉ Audio Illusion, 23 Langley Broom, Langley, Berks

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THE LAB REPORT

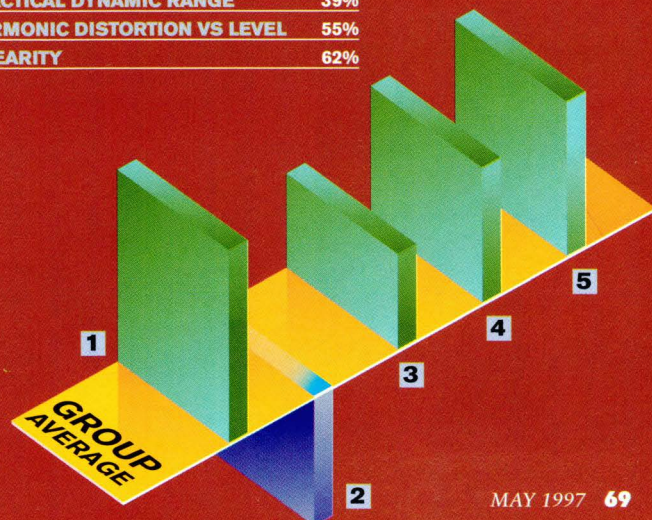
No technical details were provided, but my lab results suggest the ACD11 is employing some sort of highly-integrated signal processor and MASH/PWM-style of bitstream DAC from Technics, of the kind last seen in budget players like the Yamaha CDX-490 and CDX-480 (issues 159 and 147 respectively). Stopband suppression is acceptable at 63dB, but the bargraph is thrown completely off-course by the two Pioneer-based players in this group.

Distortion at 0.013-0.03 per cent (re. -30dB) is entirely typical for this sort of MASH/PWM device, as is the just-about-16-bit 96dB S/N ratio and errors of +1.0/-2.0dB in linearity over a 100dB range. Once again, the distortion bargraph suggests things are better if only because the 'average' for the group is pushed down by the Monrio.

The strong, fundamental data-induced jitter (1045psec total) is also characteristic of this device and often leads to a slightly anodyne sound, though with extra emphasis clearly placed on Acurus's analogue output stage and its independent regulation, dual op-amps and high-quality decoupling capacitors, there's plenty of opportunity for some extra sonic 'colour'. This seems especially likely, judging by the tailored separation figures of 66-57dB (mid through treble) in a situation where 110-90dB would be more typical. PMi

HOW IT COMPARES

1	SUPPRESSION OF DIGITAL IMAGES	78%
2	JITTER	-50%
3	PRACTICAL DYNAMIC RANGE	39%
4	HARMONIC DISTORTION VS LEVEL	55%
5	LINEARITY	62%



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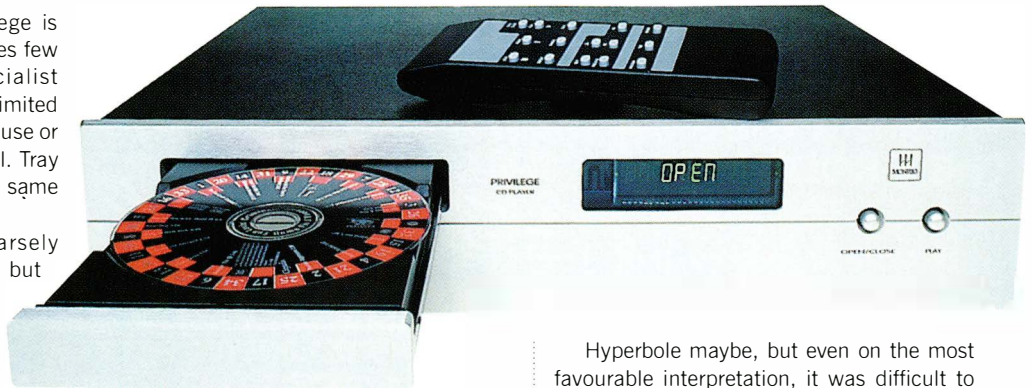
Monrio Privilege

The Italian-made Monrio Privilege is unusually solidly built, and makes few concessions to the non-specialist buyer. Front panel controls are limited to play and open/close — you can't pause or skip tracks without the remote control. Tray operation is unusually rapid, but the same can't be said of track access times.

The handset is big but sparsely equipped. You can program tracks, but there is no numeric keypad and so no random track access. It has all the visual grace and distinction of a house-brick, but a redesigned and more-comprehensively-equipped handset is said to be in preparation. I noted that the player will respond to some Philips (RC4) commands from a third-party handset, but not the random access track keys.

The back-lit green LCD display includes a calendar-style read-out, and the rear panel uses high-quality socketry for the analogue, coaxial and BNC S/PDIF digital outputs. Mains flows in through a standard IEC socket with adjacent switch. Casework is simple, but panels are heavy-grade (10mm brushed aluminium on the front) and well damped. No fixing screws are visible when the unit is installed.

The Privilege uses an Analog Devices 18-bit DAC, and other quality internal compo-



nents, such as a glass epoxy circuit board, and a separate power supply board. This, claims Monrio, reduces noise and makes the player modular and upgradable. An alternative output stage called The Tube Connection will be available shortly, with an intended price of £395.

Sound quality

There appears to have been a concerted attempt here to design a player with an approachable, analogue-flavoured sound. Sometimes this attracted mildly negative comments from all panellists, who variously described the player as “muffled and indistinct” (with) “voices that tend to merge”, though the same track (*The Sixteen*) was interpreted by another as “ambient, spacious and large in scale”, and by a third as “smooth... with lovely four-part tutti”. With surprising prescience, and with no foreknowledge of what was included in the tests, one of the panel members described it as typical of “cheap high-end. It's powerful, gives a great stereo image” he said, “but can be a little soporific!”

Hyperbole maybe, but even on the most favourable interpretation, it was difficult to escape the conclusion that the Privilege lacks the authority and liveliness of, say, the Acurus ACD11, or even some of the cheaper models. Musically it is somewhat stodgy, which led to unusual panel comments such as a “curious blurring of piano and clarinet, rather like heavy-handed DCC-or-MD-style data compression”, as one put it on hearing the Schumann. Even the Donald Fagen track was described as “ploddy and bland”, though it was also praised for its good timing, strong sense of depth and body, and powerful bass performance. Treble performance was always smooth and cultured.

Conclusion

“You are entering an excitement-free zone”, was one panellist's despairing complaint, and it is true that the Monrio Privilege errs on the side of heavy-handed sobriety rather than spontaneity or vitality. At the same time, this player has considerable integrity in many ways, and hands-on use disposed me favourably towards it. The possibility of upgrading (see above) may be attractive to some, though adding a valve output sounds like gilding an already over-dressed lily. **4.6**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆
VALUE ★★☆☆☆
PRICE £995

▲ Superbly built, solid sound of some integrity, upgradable.

▼ Musically rather heavy-handed, poor remote control, no track access from front panel.

✉ UKD, 23 Richings Way, Iwer, Bucks SLO 9DA
☎ (01753) 652669

THE LAB REPORT

In this case, the barchart tells us all we really need to know. On the basis of test results from this sample, cynics might suggest that the Monrio Privilege does not really live up to the second part of its name. It's based on a CDM12 transport, servo and decoder package from Philips, with Monrio's own power supply and glass-epoxy analogue board featuring an AD1865N dual-channel 18-bit DAC and PMI op-amps.

It's an unusual but high-quality partnership, so it's possible that our test sample was not at the peak of health. Of concern were the substantial increase in noise, distortion (0.8 per cent, 1kHz/-30dB and a crazy 57 — yes fifty seven — per cent at -60dB), and jitter (1198psec) via the left channel. Not that the right channel is anything to write home about, with its 0.14 per cent distortion (1kHz/-30dB), composed almost entirely of strong odd-order harmonics. Low-level linearity is also way off-beam with vast errors of -7dB/+1dB (-60dB) and -12dB/+2dB (-80dB) L/R channels respectively.

The 82.6dB S/N ratio implies a sub-14-bit performance, while stop-band images are only quelled by 30dB or so. All in all, it looks as if the Privilege's digital problems could not be surmounted even by the trendiest analogue stage! *PMI*

HOW IT COMPARES

1	SUPPRESSION OF DIGITAL IMAGES	2%
2	JITTER	-85%
3	PRACTICAL DYNAMIC RANGE	-90%
4	HARMONIC DISTORTION VS LEVEL	-90%
5	LINEARITY	-80%





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Orelle CD-100E Option A

Orelle describes the CD-100e as a CD engine, which in plain English means it's a modular player; here we test it in basic 'A' trim. A higher-spec version with an 'SA' suffix is also available at £999, while a 'V' version with a valve-based output stage is due for release shortly at £1,149. We mention these options since the basic unit can be upgraded to either for the difference in retail price. BNC or AT&T digital output boards can also be added after purchase, at a surprisingly reasonable £29 and £199 (fitted) respectively; or the player can be supplied thus equipped for the same premium. Altogether there are 11 variants of the CD-100e: some transports, some players.

Orelle's association with Philips technology continues with a CDM12 transport and CD6 decoder, the latter resolving tracking problems sometimes exhibited in early CDM12 equipped players. Even on base-level versions of the player tested here, there are separate dedicated transformers for the



digital and analogue circuit areas, a fast rise-time master clock, and a single-ended discrete Class A output stage with claimed high current capabilities. Output impedance (measured at 65 Ohms Tech Ed) is low enough to drive most amplifier inputs properly.

The CD-100e looks neat and straightforward, the brushed-alloy front and engraved name-plate adding a touch of class. You'll find all the features you'd expect short of a headphone socket or, in this version, a digital output.

Sound quality

This player scored an average 6.1 out of 10, which is towards the top of the score band — it scarcely put a foot wrong. The player was judged to be light and bright; only one listener felt that it went over the top, describing the recorded triangle as “emasculated” (Allison Krauss). The phrase “sharp and metallic” made an appearance too, though this pair of ears also summed up succinctly with the remark: “yes, it works!”

Other comments were even more positive. “Very distant perspectives, but the voices are well defined, and there's a general

sense of clarity and transparency” said one; another echoed with “clarity and definition on a scale not experienced so far from the other players. There's plenty of information yet it remains easy to listen to”.

The Orelle does indeed work. It is not quite as fluid nor as tonally colourful as some of the alternatives, but it has a bold, dynamic and outgoing sound quality, with excellent stereo focus, and well articulated ambience and sound-staging around voices and instruments involved. A red-blooded recording of *Villa Lobos Bacchanals Brasileiras No 4* (New World Symphony/Michael Tilson-Thomas on RCA) sounded particularly striking, with an almost palpable sense of solidity and presence, and it didn't take too many jazz and rock recordings to find oneself revelling in the Orelle's tidy, constrained bass and excellent, well-paced timing.

Conclusion

One of the key attractions of this player is its almost Lego-like versatility. It can be reinvented in various forms, and could even have a fling as a valve CD player while retaining the option of changing back to solid-state when the love affair cooled. Configured as tested the CD-100e exudes class, and even if it doesn't have the most expensive sound in the world, its combination of discipline and transparency takes it a long way. It also worked consistently well in a wide range of systems, and thus comes highly Recommended. AG

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★☆
PRICE £649.00

▲ The CD-100E offers an unusual blend of upgradability and musical excellence at a reasonable price.

▼ A treble-led tonal balance means the Orelle can sound lean and edgy at times.

✉ Orelle Hi-Fi, Unit 12 IMEX House, 6 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex UB6 7JJ
 (0181) 810 9388

THE LAB REPORT

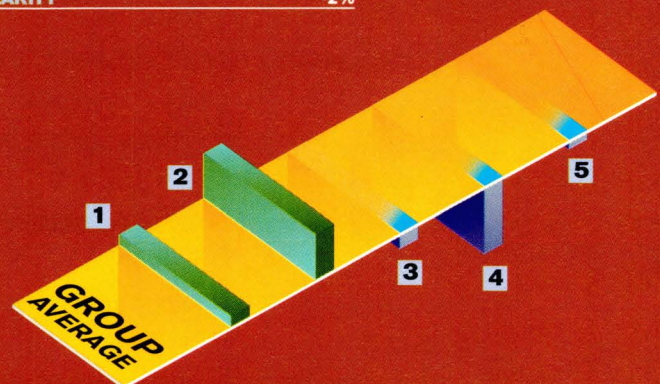
Previous Orelle players have been based on the classic 16-bit 4x oversampled chipset from Philips, and typically have employed an existing PCB/transport assembly. This CD-100e is an evolution of the theme with a CD 'package' from Philips including the CDM12 transport, servos, decoder and one of its TDA1545A 16-bit Continuous-Calibration DACs. Orelle adds its own power supply, off-board crystal clock and discrete Class A analogue I/V and filter stage. Bob's your uncle, you've got a CD player.

Philips' own specification for this package includes distortion at 0.004 per cent and an S/N ratio of 101dB, though Orelle's implementation actually yields figures of 0.08 per cent and 95.3dB respectively. Coincidentally this is the specification for Philips' low-cost TDA1310 Continuous Calibration DAC. The substantial low-level errors of -5.1/+4.5dB would have looked worse on the barchart if the results were not skewed by the unfortunate Monrio Privilege.

Otherwise, Orelle's FRTB (Fast-Rise Time Buffered) clock seems a good idea, for though the modest crystal with its +46ppm error is not a patch on those used by Pioneer and Trichord, the highish 627psec of data-, PSU- and transport-related jitter is likely to originate elsewhere in the player. PMI

HOW IT COMPARES

1	SUPPRESSION OF DIGITAL IMAGES	5%
2	JITTER	19%
3	PRACTICAL DYNAMIC RANGE	-5%
4	HARMONIC DISTORTION VS LEVEL	-25%
5	LINEARITY	-2%



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Pioneer PD-S505 Precision

Pioneer's Precision series is designed to exploit the continuing interest in tweaked variants of existing commercial product lines, exemplified by the likes of Marantz's Special Edition range and counterparts from Denon, Sony Teac etc. 'Precision' products are designed by a UK-based team on a sound-first ticket, being modified and tested at Pioneer's PTK facilities in Yorkshire. Naturally they benefit from Pioneer's substantial buying and manufacturing power.

The PD-S505 'P' starts life as a standard PD-S505, but the platter assembly is the 'diamond-turned CD turntable' mechanism from the PD-S705 and PD-S904. The remaining changes include a proprietary IC output stage which is claimed to run into Class A; a master reference clock with its own dedicated supply, bigger than the one used to drive the player in standard form; and a display driven from the main master clock to reduce potential interference. The circuit boards have been upgraded, too.

Visually, there is little to distinguish the Precision from the standard article apart



from a metal nameplate and a slightly different loading-drawer moulding.

The player remains fully (if untidily) equipped, with a full range of track access and trick-play modes, plus a 'display-off' switch, variable-level headphone monitoring, and full CD-to-tape editing support including a rear-panel 'sync' socket. As usual with a Pioneer player, the disc is supported by a full-size disc-diameter platter, and Legato Link digital filtering is included.

Sound quality

There are players that elicit a single response from the listening panel, but this wasn't one of them. One listener for example described the Pioneer as "the best so far — light, fast and extended" (Donald Fagen), though he warned against partnering it with a bright amplifier. Another thought the PD-S505 "squashed individual voices" (*Hygons* from *The Sixteen*), while a third pointed to a "lack of precision and leading edges" which led to a "release of tension". One even described the player as "dreary". Common

to all the comments, however, was the feeling that the player has a big, open voice, and a fluid, highly articulate delivery which is a thousand miles from the etched sharpness and sterility of some.

My own assessment agrees with the first panellist: I found this player offered at best an almost physical sense of presence and strong resolving power, combined with the organic strengths already described. Overall it played in the same ballpark as the better top-price players in this group, and was clearly superior to even the strongest models at the low-price end of the field. In a direct comparison with the more costly Trichord Revelation (a comparison that wasn't included in the panel sessions), the Pioneer impressed with its extra presence and projection. Although it lacked the Trichord's weight and treble purity, the Precision was unmatched in this group for its coherence and timing. It brought music to life, often in a remarkable way, and sounded on top of the music, no matter how complex.

Conclusion

The lack of agreement in the panel comments means this is one player you must audition in your system prior to purchase. There was a suggestion of amplifier dependency in the hands-on testing, with some amplifiers (e.g. the Thorens integrated) failing to let the player perform at its best. However on song the PD-S505 offers unique strengths that, at this price, must attract a Best Buy rating. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★★★
PRICE £460

▲ Excellent timing, and a real sense of occasion with good recordings.

▼ Some felt the player lacked dynamics and openness; messy control system.

✉ Pioneer High Fidelity (GB) Ltd, Pioneer House, Hollybush Hill, Stoke Poges, Slough, Bucks SL2 4QP
(01753) 789500

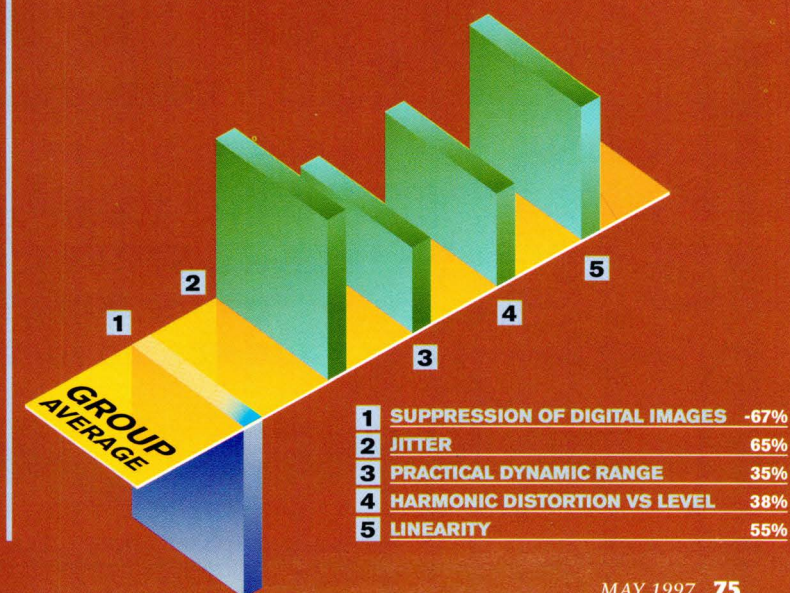
THE LAB REPORT

Detailed modifications aside, the performance of this PD-S505 Precision is still dominated by the Hi-Bit PD0236AD processor and PD2029A Legato-Link filter/DAC used in the standard PD-S505 and PD-S705 (issue 163). The 95.7dB S/N ratio and +1.5/-1.5dB errors in low-level linearity for example, are comparable with other players using the 2029A (including the Trichord) while the Legato-Link filter, with its deliberate manipulation of digital stop-band images, forces the barchart downwards.

Pioneer's adoption of a new master-clock assembly is not unlike Trichord's strategy, though the additional ferrite-ring RF countermeasures are worthwhile. In practice, however, digital jitter has actually deteriorated slightly with 303psec of the 401psec total ascribed to a single 'unknown' component at 567Hz. Otherwise the revised analogue stage seems responsible for a substantial reduction in treble distortion from 0.01 to 0.003 per cent in the new model, even though the high 2.4V output level and disappointingly high 1.1kOhm output impedance remain unchanged.

This could lend the player an advantage in comparative listening tests where levels are not accurately matched, while also rendering it susceptible to the low input impedance of amplifiers from Arcam and MF, for example (see issue 165). *PMI*

HOW IT COMPARES



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Trichord Revelation

Pioneer is not alone in offering special audiophile versions of CD players from its range (see the PD-S505 Precision review on page 75). As it happens, Pioneer wasn't even the first. Trichord has for a long time sold a re-engineered version called the Genesis, originally based on the PD-S504 and later the PD-S505, whose key selling point was an uprated master clock and improved output stage. The Trichord Revelation is essentially an enhanced Genesis, and Genesis owners can upgrade to the full Revelation spec for the difference in retail prices (currently £250).

The Revelation additionally features totally separate analogue and digital power supplies. The display is now synchronised to the master clock to reduce interference, which Trichord claims has had a strong impact on detail resolving ability. The Pioneer's original output op-amp is replaced by a superior component, allegedly biased into Class A. The lab report shows a ten-fold drop in output impedance.

Physically, the Revelation is identical in



features and presentation to the standard Pioneer PD-S504/5, except that the cheesy plastic baffle has a grey textured paint finish; which does as little to help as the stuck-on Trichord badge. The player is fully featured, including disc to tape editing (there's a rear-panel sync-socket for the purpose), random track access and programming controls on the front panel, and a display-off switch, which explains why it looks so messy. Operationally, the player is smooth and quiet.

Sound quality

The channel balance of this player was poor, which may have prejudiced the panel results to an extent, as the apparent width of the image shrank and drifted to the right hand side of the room. Even so, the player tended to sound diffuse rather than properly focused, with a noticeably de-emphasised treble. "The clarinet is sickly-sweet, and the music is not as open or as transparent as it could be", complained one listener of the

Schumann, but later in the Allison Krauss song he praised the "nice vocals" before adding that it was "a shame about the bathroom they were recorded in". Other similar comments were made by others, of which "a bit heavy on the reverb" was typical.

The unkindest cut of all was a suggestion that the player was "just the thing for lifts and shopping malls" — ahem... The Revelation attracted its share of praise too, one sum-up comment described the player as "successfully reproducing the fine interplay between instruments... subtle". Parallels with the Monrio are hard to ignore, though it is largely a matter of temperament: they don't actually sound the same.

My own listening confirmed most of the plus and minus points, and the point here is to find a complementary system that sounds sharp or brittle with other CD players. The sophisticated upper-mid and treble led to a fine, strong string quality, and excellent results with instruments possessing difficult upper harmonic spectra, like woodwind. Even so, it is hard to completely ignore the rather distant presentation of the Revelation.

Conclusion

It's a subtle, often engaging-sounding player, but the loss of high-frequency harmonics, and some smearing of what remains, was more noticeable here than in other Legato-Link-equipped players. This is an interesting unit, but definitely one that must be auditioned in a system context. At the price, Recommendation is not appropriate. *AG*

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆
VALUE ★★☆☆☆
PRICE £799

▲ Sophisticated Pioneer variant, with a solid bass and midband.

▼ Technically proficient maybe, but a bit dull; exhibits unnatural ambience around instruments.

✉ Trichord Research Ltd, 73 Church Street, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 2AE
 ☎ (01684) 573524

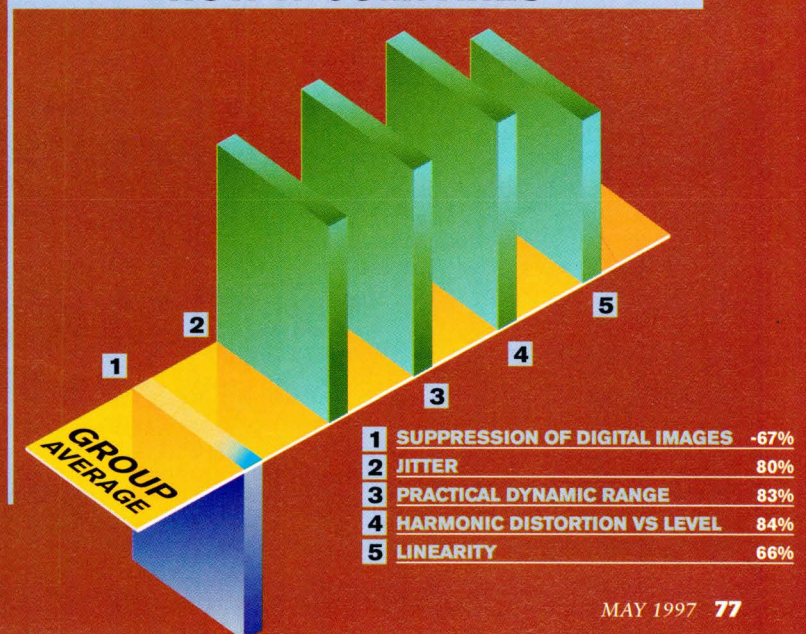
THE LAB REPORT

As the highly-evolved form of Trichord's Genesis CD player (itself based on Pioneer's PD-S504), the Revelation benefits from a beefed-up analogue stage with separate supply regulation for its two AD817N op-amps. So though the 97dB S/N ratio has witnessed no improvement, and while the 2.4V output is as high as ever, at least the 1050hm output impedance renders the player less susceptible to low-input-impedance amps (like the Arcam and MF) than Pioneer's standard PD-S series.

Furthermore, there is none of the specific high-rate jitter incurred in the Pioneer Precision as the Revelation's spectrum is composed of relatively mild PSU and data-induced components at 331psec. In practice, this is the sort of level typically achieved by an unmodified PD-S504 even if it's still the lowest recorded for any of the five players in this top-end group.

Otherwise, the +0.0/-1.2dB errors in low-level linearity, the low 0.0025 per cent midband distortion and, of course, the heavily 'sculptured' digital images are all par for the Legato Link course. In this instance, the separately-regulated master oscillator, rather clumsily glued atop Pioneer's PD2029A PulseFlow bitstream DAC, appears to exert little influence. *PMI*

HOW IT COMPARES



Conclusions

CD players as a breed have long suffered from that dreaded hi-fi wasting disease: anonymity. Conceal the manufacturers' names on any typical group of players and it can become quite difficult to distinguish one from another. It's also quite likely that within this group, most players will offer similar musical attributes, for

good or ill, though of course there has always been a strong minority of players that attract special technological and musical interest.

Though a more numerous-populated test of players might have given a more thorough cross-section of the market, our choice of contenders does show you how build-quality and looks improve as you spend more money —

even if the digital innards of more exotic units often turn out to be surprisingly prosaic!

Overall, however, this was a remarkably strong group of players, and by any viable criteria for musical reproduction abilities, only three members of the test group fell short of the standards necessary for our formal Recommended or Best Buy awards.

GROUP A (BELOW £400)

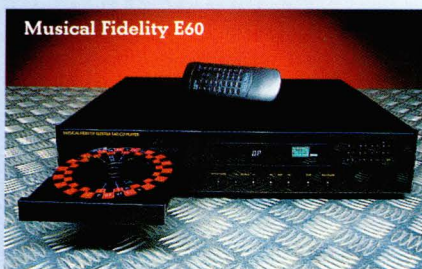
harman/kardon HD730	£299.99
Marantz CD-67SE	£349.90
Musical Fidelity E60	£299.99
Teac 3450SE	£199.95
Yamaha CD-X890	£349.95

Looking at these players in ascending price order, the **Teac CD-P3450SE** is out on its own. As yet another model following the value-added formula of making UK modifications to an off-the-shelf player, the '3450SE scores a notable success for a company whose budget models have enjoyed less favourable reviews in recent *HFC* tests. The SE model was derived from the basic CD-P3450 (now defunct); the new player differs from its predecessor mainly in the provision of higher-spec output filtering. (The digital innards remain unchanged.) A simple, effective control layout is also in its favour, and the player deserves to take its place in the budget hi-fi hall of fame.

More attractive in appearance but more difficult to pin down was the Musical Fidelity E60, currently the company's entry-level CD player. It has a very

distinctive quality that can be summed-up as a lack of definition and rather loose, bloated bass. The effect could be described as analogue-like, but only in a negative sense, and the panel was unanimous in its thumbs-down verdict.

Just now, **harman/kardon** is on a roll. Several of its recent models in various categories — not just CD players — have demonstrated real talent, and the **HD730** is no exception. It's not an unequivocal success story because it can sound a little coloured and lacking in fine detail, but it has a bold, architectural quality with strong reproduction of recorded dynam-



ics and image space. At the price it represents excellent value.

The **Marantz CD-67SE** is the latest in a line of Special Edition UK-tweaked players that have generated phenomenal sales revenues for the company. This new model is based on the popular CD-63SE, but has been increased in width to an industry-standard 435mm. Internally it has benefited from a smattering of improved components, which yield a sound that is polished and euphonious but somehow lacking in 'grip'. Nonetheless this player is always a pleasure to listen to, even if it can't offer the 'must listen' quality that some die-hards crave.

At exactly the same price as the Marantz, the **Yamaha CDX-890** turns out to be an attractive proposition in both looks and sound quality. Physically it is smaller and better finished than most units of equivalent price, and Yamaha's unusually effective cosmetic treatment of minor controls can only broaden the player's appeal. Overall we rated it a fine sounding machine, albeit a little untidy when pressed hard. Otherwise you can look forward to an open, spacious presentation.

GROUP B (OVER £400)

Acurus ACD11	£899
Orelle CD100e	£649
Monrio Privilege	£995
Pioneer PD-S505 Precision	£460
Trichord Revelation	£799

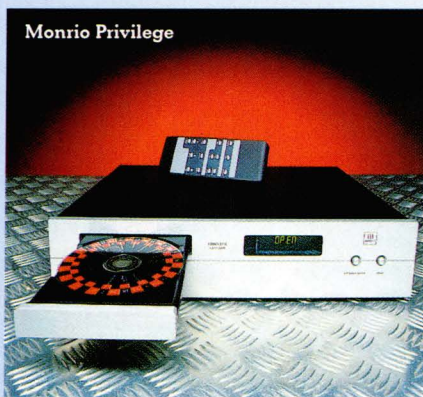
There are some exciting designs in the £400+ group, two of which cry out to be considered together: the **Trichord Revelation** and the **Pioneer PD-S505 Precision**. Both are now derived from an off-the-shelf Pioneer player, the PD-S505, and both command a considerable premium over the standard article. In both cases the premium price results from the incorporation of improved components selected on the basis of fine-tuning by expert listeners, the aim being to attain clearly-perceived improvements in sound quality. Many of the ideas that inform the modifications in both players are similar, but one is by no means a clone of the other, and each will appeal to a slightly different constituency.

The Trichord is a slightly soft but refined and enticing player, which will hold special appeal for members of the 'analogue is best' club. This author felt, however, that sometimes the Revelation seemed unduly constrained by what was taken to be the aural fingerprint of Pioneer's Legato Link digital filter. In this case the sound was a little too soft and phasy to be completely convincing. The Pioneer is rather different, being

less obviously 'Legato' flavoured. It remains considerably sharper and more solid in the way it projects musical events.

Of course you pay your money and takes your pick with these two, but don't forget Pioneer's advantage over Trichord when it comes to economies of scale. As a multinational company Pioneer can buy in bulk very cost-effectively; and inevitably it must benefit from being able to manufacture both this Precision CD player (and the amp we tested in *HFC* 162) at its UK factory in Keighley. There's nothing like keeping it in the family...

The **Orelle CD100e** is a worthy successor to its antediluvian progenitor, the CD100. It looks



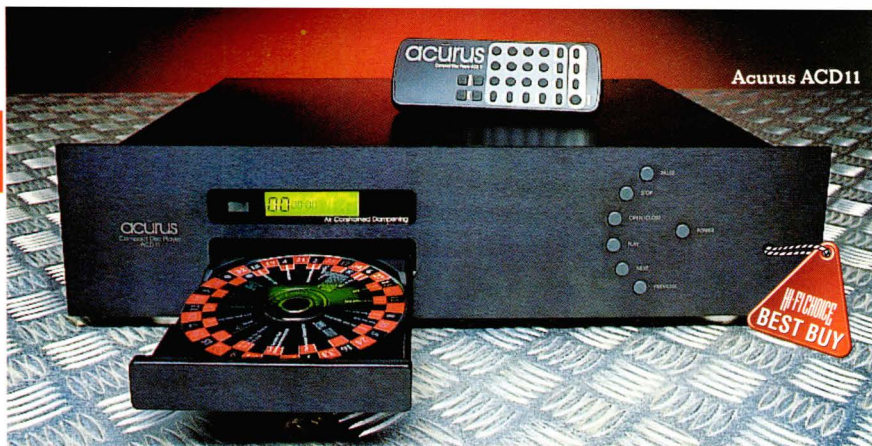
much the same, but has been thoroughly re-engineered with a new mechanism. (Stocks of the excellent but venerable CDM4 mech have finally run out.) By way of further enhancement the CD100e has been rejigged as a modular design: it can be configured as a transport or a player, into which a variety of digital interfaces and output stages may be installed. Here we tested the basic version of the complete player, which was well liked in our tests thanks to its combination of taut control, a solid sense of presence and secure timing. Other variants are keenly anticipated.

The final two models in our group were complete unknowns at the start of the tests. Both are limited-feature models aimed at the purist audiophile market, and claim extravagant engineering under the hood. The Italian Monrio Privilege is a minimalist model with stripped-down remote control (dealers should offer free upgrades to a more comprehensive handset that is promised soon.) In practice it belied its audiophile claims with an underplayed, rather soft-sounding character that failed to impress the panel at the end of a solid day's listening.

The American-made **Acurus ACD11** was just the opposite. Though only a little more lavishly equipped than its Italian competitor, it was a whole lot more vivid and detailed in sound. This was the player to a desert island with which eight of our 10-strong panel expressed a desire to retire. In a manner of speaking...

BEST BUYS

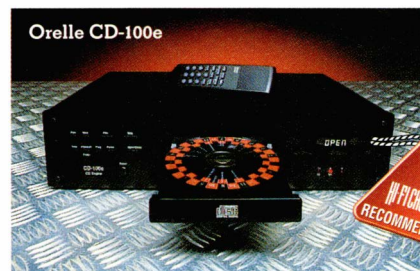
In the final analysis, three of the 10 models were judged worthy Best Buys. The most predictable was the **Teac CD-P3450SE** (£200), which showed itself to be musically articulate at a thoroughly affordable price. The **Pioneer PD-S505 Precision** (£460) is the second in the Precision series (which also includes an amplifier), and is a striking-sounding player at a reasonable price. It will make quite a mark as it becomes more widely distributed. The **Acurus ACD11** (£899) was the single most impressive-sounding model on test, but its charms are not dispensed for peanuts.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In ascending price order, our Recommended category starts with the **harman/kardon HD730** at £300. This stronger-than-average performer is also attractive in looks and makes an excellent addition to a recently rejuvenated range. **Marantz** has added to its SE range with the new **CD-67SE**, which should be on any sub-£350 shortlist, and brings a lot of positive qualities to the party. All it lacks is a

little presence and solidity. **Yamaha** players have enjoyed mixed fortunes in our tests of recent years, but the £350 **CDX-890** is a star performer that is also an unusually presentable looking unit into the bargain. Finally, for £649 you can buy the excellent **Orelle CD-100e** that can be upgraded as required with improved solid-state or even valve output stages, at surprisingly little extra cost.

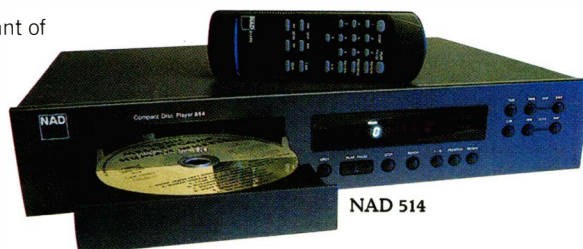


BEST OF THE REST

Those on a very tight budget should consider the **Philips CD-723** (£130), the **Kenwood DP3080** (£170) or the **Cambridge Audio CD4SE** (£200): all are strong, mainstream performers of considerable ability. The **Sony CDP-XE900E** (£300) and **NAD 514** (£370) stand out as lively and entertaining midfield players,

though the Sony tends to be intolerant of poorly-tuned systems.

Finally, anyone in the market for a CD player in Acurus territory should be sure to audition the **Naim Audio CD3** (£978) and the **Quad 77** (£900), and prepare to be amazed at the differences.



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Both the titanium-dome tweeter and bass drivers incorporate Faraday rings to reduce distortion levels. More importantly, the drive-units have been designed specifically for the A-Series, using Celestion's unique Finite Element Analysis techniques. Laser Interferometry, meanwhile, has helped produce low coloration cabinet designs.

Like its sibling A2 and A1 (Best Buy, HFC 164), the A3 is available in three real-wood finishes: Black Ash, Santos Rosewood (as pictured) or Cherry.

Celestion claims the A3 is equally at home with home cinema material and music, meaning that these speakers will grace any modern system. We have one pair of these fine enclosures to give away, so send in your entry form today!

HOW TO ENTER

Answer the question below by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and day-time telephone number in the spaces given below. Please remember to tell us whether you are over 18 years of age.

POST THIS ENTRY FORM TO:

Hi-Fi Choice Competition (CHFC705A)
Bradley Pavilions,
Bradley Stoke North,
Bristol BS12 0BQ

All entries must arrive by first post, Friday 16th May 1997.

THE QUESTION

What type of rings are incorporated in the Celestion A3's drive-units?

- a) Diamond
- b) Doorbell chimes
- c) Faraday
- d) Hula Hoops

YOUR DETAILS

Name _____

Job Title _____

Company Name _____

Address (inc. postcode) _____

Day-time Telephone Number _____

- Please tick here if you are under 18
- Please tick here if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Are you a current subscriber? **OR**
- Are you a regular reader? **OR**
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COMPETITION RULES

- The Closing Date for this competition is Friday 16th May 1997.
- The winner of the Celestion Competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the Closing Date.
- The winner will be notified by post.
- The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- The Celestion Competition is not open to employees of Dennis Publishing Ltd, Celestion International Ltd, nor their suppliers, agents or associates.
- We regret this competition is open to UK residents only.
- No cash alternatives will be offered.
- By entering the competition you agree to be bound by the rules.
- For a list of the winners of the Celestion Competition, write, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, to: Hi-Fi Choice Winners, Dept 166/1, 19 Bolsover Street, LONDON W1P 7HJ.
- All entries must be on this official entry coupon. If you do not wish to cut your magazine, you may send a photocopy of the page instead. Please note: only one entry form per household.

CHFC 705A

Glossary

Baffled by hi-fi jargon? Confused by technical terms? Fear not: **Paul Messenger** has the answers to your lexicographical questing, in the all-new Choice glossary.

A

ACTIVE: Loudspeaker systems that contain, or partner, dedicated electronics — power amplification plus electronic cross-overs and equalisers.

AFC: Automatic Frequency Control. A feature found in audio and TV/video tuners to ease station tuning and stability.

ALC: Automatic Level Control. Used in audio recorder circuitry to avoid unwanted overload, usually by sacrificing much of the available dynamic range.

AM: Amplitude Modulation. This is a broadcasting technique used for medium- and long-wave radio transmissions, and for television pictures.

AMP: 1) Ampere. A unit that measures the amount of electrical current flowing. 2) Diminutive of amplifier.

AMPLITUDE: Size or magnitude, hence loudness or level.

ANALOGUE: Signal-modelling technique using a directly analogous and continuously varying medium.

AV or A/V: Audio Visual. Software/programming in which audio and visual content is of similar importance.

AUTO REVERSE: Audio cassette tape transport, which changes direction at end-of-side.

AZIMUTH: Alignment of (audio cassette) tape-head gap with respect to tape path; inter-deck variations compromise high-frequency performance.

B

BALANCE: 1) The relative loudness of the left and right channels of a stereo system. 2) The relative loudness of different parts of the audio spectrum (for example, bass and treble) with respect to each other.

BANDWIDTH: The range of frequencies with defined upper and lower limits over which a system operates.

BASS: The lower part of the audible frequency range.

BIAS: 1) Lateral force applied to tonearms to assist tracking. 2) Electromagnetic preconditioning of audio tape recording; some cassette decks provide adjustable bias to 'fine tune' tape and machine co-performance.

C

CASSETTE: Convenient system of housing, protecting and using magnetic tape in a plastic case.

CD: see Compact Disc

CD-R: Relatively new, pricey, but rapidly growing recordable-CD system; discs record once only; particularly useful for personalised compilations.

CD-ROM: High-capacity optical discs based on CDs but configured as flexible computer



A coaxial KEF drive unit featuring a concentric treble unit.

read-only software; many applications including some AV potential.

CLIPPING: The consequences of over-driving an electrical circuit, resulting in waveform distortion and loss of control; especially common in power amplifiers.

COAXIAL: Made symmetrical about a common core — for example, shielded aerial cable or loudspeaker drive units.

COLORATION: A general term used to describe the audible effects of a whole range of different distortions in various hi-fi components, but especially record decks and loudspeakers.

COMPACT CASSETTE: World standard for consumer tape recording/playback. Originated in the '60s and still going strong(ish).

COMPACT DISC (CD): World standard for laser-read digital-stereo music discs.

COMPATIBILITY: From the basic ability of different items of equipment to work together, to the subtleties of their interaction and optimisation of same.

CONVERTER: DAC, digital-to-analogue converter.

CROSSOVER: More precisely described as a dividing network, the electrical circuitry inside a loudspeaker that apportions the drive signal to the individual drive units.

D

DAC: Digital-to-analogue converter. This is used to change digital-audio code to analogue, prior to amplification.

DAT: Digital Audio Tape. A digital cassette tape format that uses CD-type signals and is incompatible with compact cassettes. Used by the music business, but rare in the consumer marketplace.

DCC: Digital Compact Cassette. A medium launched in the early Nineties to little effect.

DECIBEL (dB): A logarithmic unit used to express relative loudness.

DIGITAL: Digital audio uses a variety of approaches to represent the essentially analogue music signal in digital code, for storage and/or transmission — for example, CD, DAT, NICAM stereo, MD, Dolby Digital.

DIN: German standards body, responsible for a popular range of standard plug/socket specifications widely used in Europe.

DISTORTION: Literally any deviation from the original, though often specified to particular mechanisms. Hence, non linearities.

DITHER: Low-level noise added when digitally encoding a signal to randomise quantisation errors.

DOLBY B: Original domestic noise-reduction system for audio cassettes, now ubiquitous.

DOLBY C: More extreme but less popular extension of Dolby B.

DOLBY DIGITAL (aka AC-3): Multi-channel surround sound system for movie soundtracks. To date, software is only on imported laser discs.

DOLBY S: Complex 'smart' noise-reduction system, which should help the compact cassette survive beyond the millennium.

DOLBY EX: Record-only system that increases high-frequency headroom, especially with cheaper Type-1 tapes.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC: Technique that extracts additional centre-front (dialogue) and surround channels from stereo movie soundtracks, for home cinema reproduction. Used almost universally on movies.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER: The sources of acoustic output in a loudspeaker; includes woofers, tweeters and so on.

DUB: Copy — for example, on tape.

DVD: Digital Video Disc. A nascent high-density optical disc format intended to squeeze complete movies onto compact-size discs, with potential for better-than-CD sound-only applications. Still to be launched (and it's taking a time).

DYNAMIC RANGE: The ratio (dBs) between the loudest and softest sounds a system or component can handle.

E

ELECTROSTATIC: A principle employed in some exotic loudspeaker and headphone transducers.

F

FILTER: An electrical circuit used to limit the bandwidth of a signal.

FM: Frequency Modulation. A widely used method of encoding signals for transmission or recording.

FREQUENCY RANGE/SPECTRUM: This can refer to any spread of frequencies, but most commonly the audio band of human hearing, from 20 cycles per second (20Hz) in the extreme bass to 20,000 cycles per second (20kHz) in the highest treble.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: The variation in output across a specified range of different frequencies.

G

GAIN: The amplification ratio of electrical signals.

H

HARMONIC: Harmonics are the whole number multiples of a base frequency called a fundamental.

HARMONIC DISTORTION (THD): The addition of unwanted harmonics to a signal.

HF: High frequency, such as treble.

HI-FI STEREO: Name specifically given to stereo FM soundtrack system used on upmarket domestic VCRs.
Hz (HERTZ): Unit of frequency of vibration, 1Hz equals one cycle per second.

I

IMPEDANCE: Measure of the electrical resistance (and reactance) of a component's inputs and outputs.
INTERMODULATION (IMD): A form of distortion whereby a high and a low frequency interact to produce sum and difference signals that are not harmonically related to either.

J

JACK: Connector standard used for headphones and microphones; Walkmen begat mini-jacks.
JITTER: Perturbations in the timing clock used to reconstitute an analogue signal from digital data.

K

kHz (KILOHERTZ): 1,000Hz or vibrations per second (1kHz actually corresponds to a tone nearly two octaves above middle C).

L

LED: Light-emitting diode, usually a red indicator bulb.
LF: Low frequency, such as bass.
LINEAR: A linear device that produces an output that exactly mirrors the input over the required operating range, and so is distortion free.
LONG WAVE (LW): Low-quality AM radio band, loved by housewives, old dears and cricket fans.
'LOUDNESS': A switchable equalisation sometimes fitted to amplifiers, which boosts low and high frequencies. Intended for low-level listening but scorned by enthusiasts.

M

MD: see Mini Disc.
MINI DISC: Sony-led compressed-digital audio record/replay format on tiny optical discs. Happening in Japan but not much UK activity yet.
MEDIUM WAVE (MW): Low-quality AM radio band loved by sports fans.
MIDBAND, MIDRANGE: The middle range of audio frequencies, where the ear is most sensitive.
MODULATION: In whatever medium, the variations or coding that describe the programme signal.
MOL: Maximum operating level, of audio tape, usually referred to five per cent mid-band distortion.

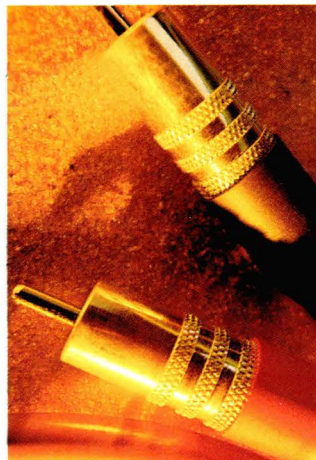
MONITOR: High-quality loudspeaker.
MOVING COIL: A transducer system, which changes mechanical energy into electrical energy or vice versa; used in high-quality pickup cartridges and in conventional loudspeaker drive units.
MOVING MAGNET: Inverting the moving coil technique, a transducer system whereby a magnet (or induced magnet) moves within a (relatively) static coil. Widely used in low-cost pickup cartridges.
MULTIPLEX FILTER: Device fitted to some cassette decks to avoid interference from stereo pilot tones when recording from stereo FM radio.

N

NICAM: Acronym for digital-stereo-sound-with-TV system, currently widely available in UK terrestrial TV broadcasts.
NOISE: Random, unwanted low-level signals.

O

OCTAVE: Span of frequency or pitch that represents a doubling or halving of frequency.
OHM (Ω): Unit of electrical impedance or resistance.



Get plugged in with a phono.

P

PHONO: The most commonly used plug/socket system for audio signals; also abbreviation for record deck.
PICKUP (CARTRIDGE): Device with cantilever and stylus at the end of a record-playing tone arm.
PORT: In reflex-loaded loudspeakers, the opening that is 'tuned' to the box size and main driver characteristics, to improve output at low frequencies.
POWER AMPLIFIER: The final stage of an amplifier, which provides the urge to drive the loudspeakers.
PREAMPLIFIER: The first part of an amplifier, which accepts, switches and routes the signals from and to other components, applying any equalisation and adjusting volume prior to feeding the power amplifier(s).

R

RF: Radio Frequencies. Used for the transmission of radio signals. Sometimes cited as a cause of distortion within audio kit.

S

SENSITIVITY: 1) In loudspeakers, the amount of output (loudness) for a given electrical input (usually one Watt).
 2) The electrical signal input required by an amplifier or tape recorder to deliver full power output or recording level.
SCART: 21-pin Euroconnector standard widely used for audio/visual applications, especially the connection of television to peripheral devices (aka Peritel).
SEPARATION: The separateness of the left and right channels of a stereo audio system.
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE, S/N: The difference between the maximum level of a signal and the background noise left when the signal is removed.
STEREO: Literally 'solid' — a system that uses two loudspeakers (or a pair of headphones) to create solid, spatial sonic images.
STYLUS: Carefully shaped piece of diamond that rides the extracts information from a vinyl record's groove.
SUBSONIC: Below the audible-frequency range — for instance, below 20Hz.
SURROUND SOUND: Systems that go beyond stereo in attempting to envelope the listener in sound from all around (see Dolby Pro-Logic/Digital AC-3).

T

TREBLE: The upper part of the audible frequency range.
TWEETER: Small loudspeaker drive unit used for higher-frequency (treble) sounds.
TYPE I: Basic ferric audio cassette tape.
TYPE II: Premium chrome or superferric audio cassette tape.
TYPE IV: Upmarket metal-particle audio cassette tape.

U

ULTRASONIC: Frequencies above the limit of human audibility — for instance, 20kHz.
UNIT: Loudspeaker drive unit.

V



The valve aka the vacuum tube.

V

VALVE: Early thermionic electronic device, still highly regarded by many enthusiasts.
VCR: Video cassette recorder or video recorder; sometimes VTR (video tape recorder).
VOLT: Unit of electrical potential difference; a varying voltage is used to 'model' audio signals in transducers and electronic components.

W

WATT: Unit of electrical power (the product of voltage and current).
WEIGHTING: Equalisation applied in measurement techniques to improve relevance.
WOOFER: Loudspeaker drive unit that handles lower-frequency (bass) sounds.
WOW & FLUTTER: Low- and high-frequency pitch variations due to poor mechanical performance in tape transports and turntables.



MiniDisc has its sights set on replacing the compact cassette as the mass market medium of choice.

Looking for the

Paul Messenger explains why you should visit an independent

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

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

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

Power of the Press

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

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

We hacks get paid to write words, often about components in isolation, because

"I appreciate the importance of the dealer's skills and experience, in bringing together components so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts"

individual product reviews are still the staple diet of the press. They can sometimes provide a useful guide to the way a product performs, but only under the particular circumstances in which the review was conducted.

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

The magazine prints the review, and that very process magically confers a measure of authority. Experienced hi-fi

enthusiasts, who read reviews over a period of years and try out various products themselves, soon start to realise the limitations of that approach. Some reviews are better than others, but none can get to grips with the real heart of the problem - whether a given product will improve your musical satisfaction, in your system and your room.

The Role of the Dealer

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

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

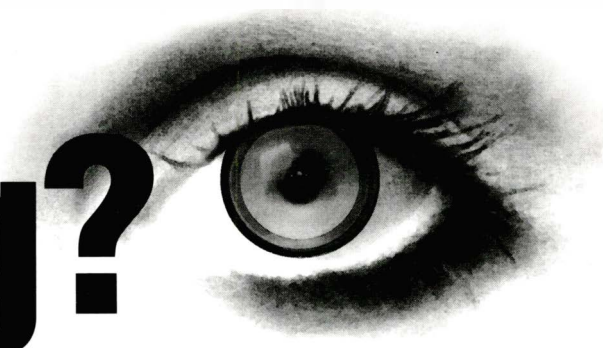
If you go into a shop and demand a particular CD player, on the basis that it got seven stars (out of five) in last month's magazine, the shop will probably simply take the line of least resistance and sell it to you. (Or switch-sell you to a similar price alternative, if he's fresh out of stock of that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

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

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

Putting together a successful hi-fi

real thing?



specialist dealer if you are searching for real hi-fi satisfaction

system might not be as difficult as it was twenty or thirty years ago, but it's just as easy to make a mess of things. Put the 'wrong' combination of components together and it'll still sound a lot better than any cute little mini system package. It might even rate a five star review. But it

“if music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet, you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority”

won't match the potential of a carefully balanced and properly installed system, and it certainly won't cater for your own particular preferences and personality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Paul Messenger

The specialist Dealers listed here are professional and enthusiastic. Give your nearest a ring for a demonstration.

STAR QUALITIES

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

TOP 20 SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK

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Grahams Hi-Fi
190a New North Road
0171 226 5500

SW11

Oranges & Lemons
61/63 Webbs Road
Battersea
0171 924 2040

W4

Martin-Kleiser Ltd
108 Chiswick High
Road
0181 400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
Soundcraft Hi-Fi
40 High Street
01233 624441

Chelmsford

Rayleigh Hi-Fi
216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead

Audio Designs
26 High Street
01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames

Infidelity
9 High Street
Hampton Wick
0181 943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex

Rayleigh Hi-Fi
44a High Street
01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea

Rayleigh Hi-Fi
132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Uxbridge

Uxbridge Audio
278 High Street
01895 465444

MIDLANDS Banbury

Overture
3 Church Lane
01295 272158

Birmingham

Sound Academy
152a High Street
Bloxwich
01922 493499

Leicester

Cymbiosis
(Formerly known as
Listen Inn)
6 Hotel Street
0116 262 3754

Northampton

Listen Inn
32 Gold Street
01604 37871

Shrewsbury

Creative Audio
9 Dogpole
01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle (Stockport)
Audio Counsel
14 Stockport Road
0161 428 7887

Oldham

Audio Counsel
12/14 Shaw Road
0161 633 2602

Sheffield

Moorgate Acoustics
184 Fitzwilliam St
0114 275 6048

SCOTLAND Edinburgh

Russ Andrews Hi-Fi
34 Northumberland
Street
0131 557 1672

Glasgow

Stereo Stereo
260 St. Vincent Street
0141 248 4079

WIN!

COMPETITION

FINEWO

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£3,200**



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(PICTURED IN OAKDALE)
WORTH
£320**



**W100
(PICTURED IN MAYDALE)
WORTH
£285**

SEE THE W105
TABLE REVIEWED
ON PAGE 55 OF
THIS ISSUE!

ODS



Each Soundstyle Finewoods support consists of a real-wood-veneered shelf and precision-engineered mild-steel columns.

W310
(PICTURED IN ROSEDALE)
WORTH
£320

Soundstyle's latest range adds a touch of real-wood-veneered class to the business of hi-fi support! There are three styles of table designed to complement all manner of hi-fi and AV gear, and three real-wood-veneer finishes, Maydale (mahogany style), Oakdale (oak style) or Rosedale (rosewood style). We have no less than 10 tables to give away, and each winner can choose both table style and wood finish from the options shown. The units are supplied flat-packed with height-adjustable floor spikes for mechanical decoupling, plus castor kits if mobility is the key priority.

Both the W100 (four-shelf) and W105 (five-shelf) supports measure 655mm wide, while the W310 has three shelves of 1140mm width, making it suitable for use with TVs and the like in an AV system. Don't delay; enter today!

HOW TO ENTER

Answer the question below by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and day-time telephone number in the spaces given below. Please remember to tell us whether you are over 18 years of age.

POST THIS ENTRY FORM TO:

Hi-Fi Choice Competition (CHFC705B)
Bradley Pavilions,
Bradley Stoke North,
Bristol BS12 0BQ

All entries must arrive by first post, Friday 16th May 1997.

THE QUESTION

What is the name of the Finewoods mahogany-style veneer?

- a) Maydale
- b) Mayday
- c) May Bank Holiday
- d) Mae West

YOUR DETAILS

Name _____

Job Title _____

Company Name _____

Address (inc. postcode) _____

Day-time Telephone Number _____

Please tick here if you are under 18

Please tick here if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.

Are you a current subscriber? **OR**

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Are you an occasional reader?

COMPETITION RULES

- The Closing Date for this competition is Friday 16th May 1997.
- The winner of the Soundstyle Competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the Closing Date.
- The winner will be notified by post.
- The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- The Soundstyle Competition is not open to employees of Dennis Publishing Ltd, Goldring Products Ltd, nor their suppliers, agents or associates.
- We regret this competition is open to UK residents only.
- No cash alternatives will be offered.
- By entering the competition you agree to be bound by the rules.
- For a list of the winners of the Soundstyle Competition, write, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, to: Hi-Fi Choice Winners, Dept 166/2, 19 Bolsover Street, LONDON W1P 7HJ.
- All entries must be on this official entry coupon. If you do not wish to cut your magazine, you may send a photocopy of the page instead. Please note: only one entry form per household.

CHFC 705B

Dealer Guide

BIRMINGHAM

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Birmingham B17 8DL
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FAX: 0121 434 3298

93-95 Hobs Moat Road, Solihull
B92 8JL (near the ice rink)
Tel: 0121 742 0254
FAX: 0121 742 3471

156-157 Lower High Street,
Stourbridge DY8
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62 Northbrook Street, Newbury	Tel: 01635 32474
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11 West Street, Marlow, Bucks SL7 2LF	(01628) 483555
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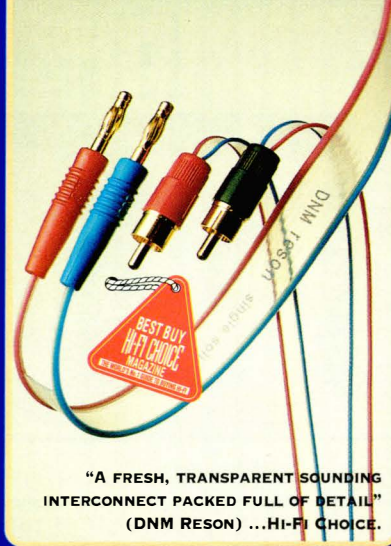
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Zen And The Art Of Hi-Fi

Zahir Jafferji reveals his personal philosophy of hi-fi buying. Do not adjust your karma. . .

Music carries you out of 'present time' and into another state of awareness. It takes you away from the day-to-day stresses of life. Listening to music is a rewarding and relaxing experience, whether you're sitting down after a day at work or doing your best *Saturday Night Fever* impression in the local night club. Music communicates directly to the spirit within — so obviously that often it goes unnoticed. If you do experience musical communication this deep, that's when hi-fi becomes a passion, since everything you do will be geared towards trying to increase the clarity and intensity of the communication from the artist to the listener.

The meaning of hi-fi

The hi-fi galaxy is studded with hi-fi dealers, myriad brands of equipment, and just as many subjective opinions on what constitutes the ultimate sound. But perhaps the ultimate goal is to buy hi-fi that presents an artist's musical communication at your own reality level. Hi-fi equipment is generally of good quality these days, so prices and subjective opinions are an important factor even in budget systems.

As you travel further into the Milky Way of high-end equipment, personal opinions become much more important. Don't denigrate your own ability to hear the difference! My experience of purchasing hi-fi equipment and upgrading my system is that what's true for you is what you have observed yourself, and when you lose you have lost everything.

Yin and yang hi-fi buyers

Most modern societies brainwash individuals into believing they have no control over their own actions in life, and belittle the spiritual side of existence. This is true even for an apparently mundane act like buying hi-fi equipment. Individuals will audition equipment and even venture to buy it without actually analysing how it sounds. Their only touchstone is probably a favourable review in a magazine, which carries the subconscious implication that any reader who dissents from it is wrong.

Another kind of hi-fi customer will buy hi-fi based on its financial significance, as a bulwark against personal emotional insecurity, or as the 'safe' option that will guarantee a good sound. I fear this type of person is allowing judgement to be coloured by unpleasant events they have experienced in spheres of existence unrelated to hi-fi — confrontations or humiliations they have not resolved internally.

I would split these two types of hi-fi buyer into those who are motivated by 'cause' (the former) and those who are motivated by



'effect'. Where do you stand? Was your most recent hi-fi purchase made with absolute self-determinism? Of course, the answer to that question depends greatly on your hi-fi dealer. A good dealer should simply counsel and offer time to customers.

The buyer should simply turn up and be willing to experience anything the dealer wishes to demonstrate, understanding that the dealer's purpose is to increase awareness of the type of equipment available and what system matching factors come into play. A dealer and manufacturer are only as valuable as their ability to produce or sell to you products that will be cherished.

Support your local dealer

The evaluation process is a team effort: the dealer kicks things off by setting up and demonstrating equipment, but then the listener must use his or her innate abilities to assess

the sound. You need to remember one thing: it is impossible to experience a decrease in your ability to hear differences. What can be reduced is the exercise of this ability, or the listener's willingness to exercise it. So you, the individual, are important; and when you walk into a hi-fi demo make sure you know what kind of product you want at the end of the day — define that to the dealer at the start. You have found a good dealer when after a number of listening sessions you can see your 'ideal scene' clearly in terms of what you want to achieve with your potential set-up (purchase); and be able to compare it to your 'existing scene' (your current set-up).

Hi-fi is simply an electronic communication line for musical information, so when you get more interested in hi-fi than music you have caught the virus HFP: Hi-Fi Psychosis! If you have purchased many systems and still are not happy with what you hear, ask yourself if you are really listening to your system or to the latest high-end review that says Product X is best — which in turn will have sown the fatal seeds of doubt in your mind. Become determined to cut free, and understand that a free spirit adapts the environment to himself. He does not adapt himself to the environment.

The test of your spirit is to buy a hi-fi system on the basis of your own independent thought-processes. If you have purchased equipment that's failed to give satisfaction, the ultimate test of the spirit is to start over and take whatever steps are necessary to find hi-fi happiness.

Finally, remember what Oscar Wilde would have said about buying hi-fi equipment: "A cynic knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

Zahir Jafferji's 'cure for hi-fi psychosis' was featured in our March 1997 edition's 'Inspirations' feature.

THE DIRECTORY

Our Three Step Guide to Buying Hi-Fi

The legendary *Hi-Fi Choice* Directory is now simpler to use than ever before, but contains all the information you need to select and buy the perfect hi-fi system.

STEP 1 Discover which products fall within your budget by using our Price Guide (starts on page 96). This listing is updated monthly and includes all hi-fi products currently available in the UK. It is organised by product type, then by price band, and is sorted alphabetically. Products whose names are printed in **red** are those that we have reviewed. Which leads us to...

STEP 2 Read about the hi-fi equipment that we have reviewed in the Directory (starts on page 106). Here you will learn which items have been singled out for our famous Best Buy and Recommended awards that denote products of exceptional quality and value. The Directory is sorted by product type and listed alphabetically, and the beginning of each section provides essential information about each kind of hi-fi component.

STEP 3 Find your nearest hi-fi store in our Dealer Directory (starts on page 123) to book a demonstration of the products you are interested in.

Best Buys and Recommendations

If you see a Best Buy (**red**) or Recommended (**blue**) flag at the beginning of an entry in our Directory of reviewed products, the item concerned is particularly deserving of your attention.

B **Red** signifies the Best Buy swing-tag, which indicates products of the best quality and superb value for money in their price category.

R **Blue** Recommended products offer excellent quality and value, but not the same cost-effectiveness as a Best Buy.

Please note that an expensive Recommended product will nearly always perform better than an inexpensive Best Buy.

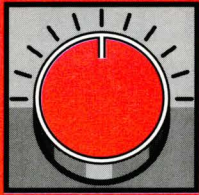
Using Best Buys and Recommendations to buy hi-fi.

Do not commit the cardinal sin of dashing into your local dealer, magazine in hand, demanding to purchase Best Buy CD player A, Best Buy amplifier B and Best Buy speakers C. This is unlikely to result in your long-term satisfaction. Our belief at *Hi-Fi Choice* is that you must consider the hi-fi system as a complete entity, not as a collection of components. While a superb system might well contain Best Buy and Recommended components, one cannot lump together Best Buys and Recommendations in the hope that they will automatically perform superbly. These ratings make a useful guideline for short-listing components worth trying, but only by hearing them for yourself can you draw meaningful conclusions about what suits your taste. Furthermore, don't panic if the dealer offers you equipment that we have not tested. At the end of the day, what matters most is that your hi-fi system fits your tastes like a glove, and it is the dealer's challenge to ensure your satisfaction by any means – and components – necessary!



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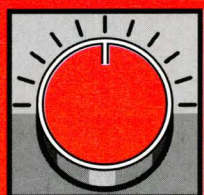


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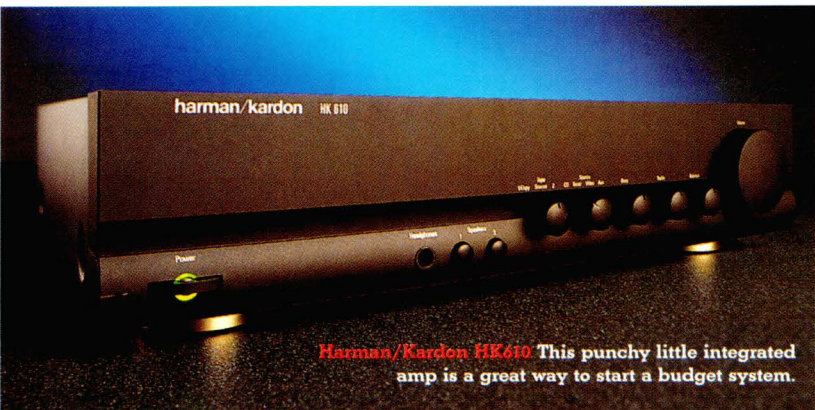


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Lumley Reference PP1	325
Magnum MP330	475
Michell Iso	420
Moth 30 Passive	149
Moth 30 Active	249
Moth 30 RIAA	249
Moth 30 Active 100VA	349
Moth 30 RIAA 100VA	349
Musical Fidelity E20	399
Musical Fidelity F2	500
NAD 114	270
NAD 116	430
Naim Audio Prefix	334
Naim Audio NAC92	448
QED Vector	199
Rega EOS	398
Roksan Artaxerxes	395
Rose RV-23	450
Rotel RC970BX MkII	175
Talk Electronics Hurricane 1	500
Technics SU-C1000	350
Unison Research Simply Phono	500
£501 to £2000	
Adyton Chorus	1,995
Alchemist Forsetti Pre	919
Art Audio Headline	700
Art Audio VPL	741
Art Audio Conductor Phono	750
Art Audio VP1	952
Art Audio Conductor	1,250
Art Audio Conductor Export	2,000
Audio Research PH-3	1,550
Audio Research LS-7	1,598
Audio Research LS-3	1,845
Audio Synthesis Pro Passion	595
Audio Synthesis Passion	695
Audio Synthesis Passion 6	1,195
Audio Synthesis Passion 8S	1,295
Audio Synthesis Passion 8M	1,695
Audiolab 8000C	550
Audiolab 8000PPA	900
Audiolab 8000QQ	1,100
Aura CA-200	700
Aura CA-200C	750
AVI S2000MP	849
AVI S2000MP + P	1,049
Bryston 4	546
Bryston BP1	673
Bryston BP5	757
Bryston BP4	802
Bryston BP20	958
Bryston BP-25	1,129
Bryston BP-25P	1,355
Bryston 4B-ST PRO	1,495
Bryston BP-25MC	1,580
Chord CPA 1800	1,730
Concordant Exhilarant	900
Concordant Exquisite	1,950
Copland CSA-303	1,155
Copland CTA-301MkII	1,349
Counterpoint SA-1000E	1,195
Counterpoint Solid 8E	1,195
Counterpoint SA-2000E	1,695
Credo CMP004	1,246
Credo CMP005	1,876
Dawn Audio Prelude + 50	951
DNM 3 Start	950
DNM 3A Start	1,500
DPA Enlightenment	695
DPA DSP500S	2,000
Dynavector L200	1,195
Dynavector P100	1,495
Dynavector L100	1,995
ECA Vista S	760
ECA Vista HD	880
ECA Prisma	800
Electrocompaniet ECP-1	580
Electrocompaniet ECP-1 SF	675
Electrocompaniet EC-4.5	1,200
Electrocompaniet EC-4.5SF	1,343
Electrocompaniet EC-4 Line	1,466
Electrocompaniet EC-4 SF Line	1,648
Electrocompaniet EC-3MC	1,953
Exposure XIX	800
Exposure XVII	850
Fase Evoluzione Controlsourc 2.0	625
Fase Evoluzione Controlsourc 1.0	1,395
Gamma Acoustics Era Std	999
Graef WFB Two	1,195
Graef WFB One	1,895
Heybrook Signature II	1,600
Jadis DPL2	1,790
LFD MC1 Phonostage	949
LFD LS1 Linestage	999
LFD MC2 Phonostage	1,499
LFD LS2 Linestage	1,599
LFD LS2P Linestage	1,750
LFD LSB Linestage	1,999
Linn Wakonda/L	750
Linn Wakonda	900
Linn Kairn Line	1,400
Linn Kairn Phono	1,700
Lumley Reference PS1	795
Lumley Reference WAP1.5	895
Lumley Reference LVL1.5	895
Lumley Reference LVL1	1,000
Lumley Reference WAP1	1,150
Lumley Reference L/R PV1.5	1,350
Lumley Reference PVL1.5	1,500
Lumley Reference PV1	1,700
Marantz AC-500	700
Marantz EC-500	900
Marantz SC-23	1,000
Mcintosh CT712	1,479
Meracuz Ingredi	925
Meridian 501	695
Meridian 562	765
Meridian 501V	875
Meridian 562V	995
Meridian 502	1,295
Michell Iso/Hera	575
Michell Argo	730
Michell Argo/Hera	885
Michell Iso HR	895
Michell Argo HR	1,339
Michi RHC-10	795
Michi RHQ-10	1,150
Michi RHA-10	1,150
Micromega Tempo P	1,250
Monrio ADN	625
Monrio PLUR1-L	960
Musical Fidelity F25	1,500
NAD 118	1,000
Naim Audio NAC92R	599
Naim Audio NAC72	690
Naim Audio NAC 102	998
Onix OA36L	999
Onix OA36	1,100
Quad 77PR	850
Rega HAL	998
Roksan ROK-L2.5	1,250
Rose RV-23S	525
Shearne Phase 6 Pre	895
Shearne Phase 1 Pre Ref	1,399
Sonic Frontiers SFP-1	1,095



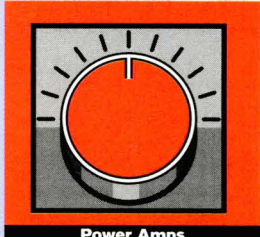
Harman/Kardon HK610 This punchy little integrated amp is a great way to start a budget system.

Sonic Frontiers SFL-1	1,395
Sonic Frontiers SFP-1 Sig	1,495
Sonic Frontiers SFL-1 Sig	1,795
Sumo Ulysses II	629
Sumo Athena II Line	767
Sumo Polaris III	950
Sumo Athena IIB/II LS	987
Sumo Athena III	987
Sumo Artemis UP	1,595
Sumo Artemis OP	1,695
Sumo Audiomedia III	1,810
Sumo Model Five	1,975
Talk Electronics Hurricane 1 P	550
Talk Electronics Hurricane 2	650
Talk Electronics Hurricane 2P	730
Talk Electronics Hurricane 3	900
Talk Electronics Hurricane 3P	1,000
Technics SU-C2000	700
Tesseract TAADA	1,500
Tesseract TALA	1,500
Tesseract TAHA	1,800
Thorens TTP-2000F	650
Thorens TRP-3000	1,500
Thule PR200	699
Tube Tech Seer Line	575
Tube Tech Seer Phono	649
Tube Tech Prophet	1,199
Unison Research Mystery One	1,750
Unison Research Phono One	1,995
Woodside SC27 Line	949
Woodside SC27 Phono MM	1,099
Woodside SC27 Phono	1,249
Woodside SC26 Line	1,557
YTC PRE-1	1,000
Yamaha CX-2	650

Over £2000

Adyton Temper	2,495
Adyton Modus	2,695
Alchemist Control	4,995
ATC SCA2	2,499
Audio Research LS-3b	2,250
Audio Research PH-2	2,895
Audio Research LS-2 II	2,997
Audio Research SP9 III	3,290
Audio Research LS-2b II	3,398
Audio Research LS22	4,125
Audio Research LS-5 II	5,690
CAT SL1 Sig line	5,500
CAT SL1 Sig phono	6,000
Chord CPA 2200	2,298
Chord CPA 2800	3,090
Chord CPA 3200	3,352
Chord CPA 4000	6,025
Counterpoint SA-3000E	2,195
Counterpoint SA-5000E	3,995
Counterpoint SA-9	3,995
Credo LPR 001	2,815
DNM 3B Twin E	3,050
DNM 3B Primus E	3,630
DNM 3B Six E	4,780
EAR 802MC	2,599
EAR G88	6,999
Electrocompaniet EC-3MC SF	2,135
Gamma Acoustics Era Ref	3,999
Graaf GM13.5B	3,950

Jadis DP60L	2,800
Jadis DPL	3,190
Jadis DPMC	3,190
Jadis DEFY-P60	3,774
Jadis JPL	4,720
Jadis JPP-200	4,998
Jadis JP-30MC	5,978
Jadis JP-S2	7,900
Krelli KRC3	3,198
Krelli KSL-2	3,331
Krelli KRC-2	4,190
Krelli KRC-HR	6,949
Krelli KRC	6,949
LFD Disc Preamp	4,499
Linn AV5103	4,950
Lumley Reference L/R M100	2,250
Lumley Reference L/R LS2	3,250
Lumley Reference L/R PS2	3,550
Lumley Reference L/R M140	4,250
Lumley Reference ST150	4,350
Marantz Model 7	3,500
Marantz SC-5	7,000
Mark Levinson 38	3,995
Mark Levinson 38S	6,495
Matisse Fantasy	2,300
Matisse Reference	3,500
Mcintosh C38	2,095
Mcintosh C22	2,099
Mcintosh C39	3,129
Mcintosh C40	3,239
Meracur Pretare	2,195
Meridian 601	2,750
Naim Audio NAC82	2,058
Naim Audio NAC52	3,190
Roksan ROK-L1.5	2,250
Sonic Frontiers SFL-2	3,795
Sumo Model Ten/M	4,200
Tesseract TAP-A	5,300
Woodside SC26 Line & Phono	2,233



Power Amps
Up to £500

AMC 2445	299
AMC 2030	449
Arcam Alpha 9P	400
Arcam Delta 290P	400
Creek A42	335
Crimson CS620C	450
Denon PMA-250SE	160
Harman/Kardon PA2100	400
LFD PAO Powerstage	499
Marantz MA-500	250
Marantz SM-500	400
Marantz MM-500	450

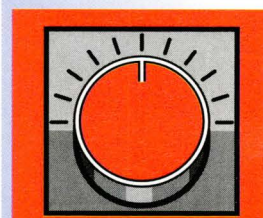
Moth 30 Series Power	249
Moth 30 Mono/40	469
Myryad MA 120	450
NAD 912	199
NAD 214	370
NAD 916	500
Naim Audio NAP90/3	428
Rotel RB970BX MkII	225
Rotel RB980BX	450
Talk Electronics Tornado 1	450
Technics SE-A1000	400
£501 to £2000	
Alchemist Forsetti Pwr	1,309
Art Audio Quintet	1,393
Art Audio Quintet SE MB	1,500
Art Audio Concerto	1,669
Audio Innovations Ser 800	999
Audio Innovations First Audio	1,749
Audio Innovations Ser 1000	1,799
Audio Synthesis Desire	1,695
Audiolab 8000P	750
Audiolab 8000M	800
Aura PA-200	1,200
Aura PA-200 C	1,250
AVI S2000MA	849
AVI S2000MM	1,249
Bryston 2B-LP	639
Bryston 3B-ST PRO	987
Bryston THX3B	1,074
Bryston 3B-NRB	1,159
Bryston 7B-ST PRO	1,545
Bryston THX7B	1,605
Bryston 5B-ST PRO	1,610
Bryston 4B-NRB	1,756
Bryston 7B-NRB	1,815
Bryston THX4B	1,858
Bryston 8B-ST PRO	1,868
Chord SPM 400	1,290
Chord SPM 600	1,680
Copland CTA-501	1,599
Copland CTA-504	1,999
Counterpoint Solid 1EM	995
Counterpoint SA100E	1,495
Counterpoint Solid 1E	1,495
Counterpoint NPS-100E	1,995
Credo PMP 804	1,876
Crimson CS630C	800
Dawn Audio CMD 2 by 200	890
DNM PA1	1,750
DPA Enlightenment	995
ECA Lectern S	880
ECA Lectern HD	1,480
Electrocompaniet AW60B	1,185
Exposure XVIII Super	850
Exposure XVIII (pr)	1,599
Fase Evoluzione Powersource 2.0	860
Fase Evoluzione Powersource 1.0	1,670
Fase Evoluzione Powersource 1.0	1,670
Harman/Kardon PA2200	700
Harman/Kardon PA2400	1,000
Jadis DA5	1,997
LFD PA1 Powerstage	999
LFD PA2 Powerstage	1,599
LFD PA2M Powerstage	1,999
Linn LK100	650

Linn LK240	700
Lumley Reference ST40	1,250
Lumley Reference ST70	1,950
Lynwood Ruby	985
Magnum MF330	685
Marantz MA-23	1,800
Mcintosh MC7100	1,259
Meracur Ciere	1,095
Meridian 555	750
Meridian 505	795
Meridian 557	1,400
Michell Alecto Stereo	1,150
Michell Alecto Mono	1,989
Michi RHB-05	1,100
Michi RHB-10	2,000
Micromega Amp	1,250
Monrio Cento	1,495
Monrio HP1	1,995
Moth 30 Stereo/60	599
Moth 30 Mono/100	879
Musical Fidelity FX2	800
NAD 218THX	850
Naim Audio NAP140	722
Naim Audio NAP180	1,016
Naim Audio NAP135	1,576
Naim Audio NAP250	1,576
Onix OA601	699
Onix OA801	849
Onix OA701	899
Papworth TVA50	1,425
Quad 77SA	600
Quad 707	800
Rega EKS	598
Rega Exon	598
Roksan ROK-S1.5	1,495
Rose RP-190 (Dual Mode)	550
Rotel RB990BX	625
Shearpe Phase 3	619
Shearpe Phase 3 Reference	689
Shearpe Phase 5 Mono	879
Sonic Frontiers SFS-40	1,695
Sumo Ulysses	629
Sumo Polaris III	950
Sumo Andromeda III	1,975
Sumo Model Five	1,975
Sumo Andromeda III	1,975
Talk Electronics Tornado 2	600
Talk Electronics Tornado 3	750
Talk Electronics Tornado 4	1,100
Technics SE-A2000	1,100
Thorens TTA-2000	550
Thorens TRA-3000	2,000
Thule PA200	1,798
Tube Tech Unisig Pwr Amp	1,099
Woodside SA240	1,199
Woodside MA100	1,733
Woodside STA50	1,880
YTC POW-1	2,000
Yamaha MX-2	750

Over £2000

Adyton Cordis 1.6	3,495
Alchemist Stereo	3,995
Alchemist Mono	8,995
Art Audio Tempo	2,499
Art Audio Quintet SE	2,500
Art Audio Maestro	3,524
Audio Innovations Ser 1000SE	2,499
Audio Innovations Second Audio	3,299
Audio Research D130	2,497
Audio Research VT60	2,645
Audio Research VTM120	2,645
Audio Research VT60SE	3,190
Audio Research VTM120SE	3,190
Audio Research D-200	3,248
Audio Research V35	3,355
Audio Research V70	4,480
Audio Research D-300	4,800
Audio Research VT130	5,994
Audio Research D-400II	6,600
Audio Research VT150	7,200
Audio Research VT130SE	8,145
Audio Research VT150SE	8,400
Audio Research V140	8,960
Bryston THX8B	2,030
Bryston 8B-NRB	2,195
Chord SPM 800	2,155
Chord SPM 1000B	2,650
Chord SPM 1200	3,840
Chord SPM 200	4,890
Chord SPM 1600	4,890
Chord SPM 3000	7,960
Copland CTA-505	2,099
Counterpoint Solid 2E	2,495
Counterpoint NPS-200E	2,995
Counterpoint SA4	3,575
Counterpoint Nat Progress	4,125
Counterpoint NPS-400E	4,395
Counterpoint NPM-E	8,995
Credo LPO 804	2,456
Credo PMP 155	2,676
Credo LPO 155	3,714
Credo LPO 455	4,975
DNM PA2BE	4,250
DNM PA2BS	5,250

DNM PA2BS-1	5,650
DPA DP4500S	3,000
Dynavector HX75	2,195
Dynavector HX1.2	3,995
EAR 509 Mk II	3,499
EAR 519	4,699
EAR 549	6,999
Electrocompaniet AW1000MB	2,115
Electrocompaniet AW1000MB-SF	2,298
Electrocompaniet AW2500MB	3,983
Electrocompaniet AW2500MB-SF	4,215
Electrocompaniet AW180MB	4,673
Electrocompaniet AW180MB-SF	4,910
Exposure IV	2,199
Exposure XVI	4,000
Gamma Acoustics Aeon 211/VT4C	4,999
Gamma Acoustics Space Ref	5,999
Graaf 5050	2,150
Graaf GM 100	4,490
Graaf GM200	8,000
Jadis JA-30	2,880
Jadis DA8	3,333
Jadis JA300B	4,500
Jadis JA-80	4,956
Jadis DA7	5,290
Jadis DEFY-7	5,290
Jadis JA-200	7,759
Krelli KSA-50S	3,690
Krelli KSA-100S	5,843
Krelli KSA-200S	7,987
Krelli KSA-300S	9,500
Linn Klout	2,400
Lumley Reference M120	3,200
Marantz Model 8	3,500
Marantz Model 9	4,000
Marantz SM-5	5,000
Mark Levinson 29	3,450
Mark Levinson 331	4,495
Mark Levinson 331	5,399
Mark Levinson 27.5	6,495
Mark Levinson 332	7,399
Mark Levinson 23.5	8,495
Mark Levinson 333	7,800
Matisse Ref Monoblocks	2,249
Mcintosh MC7108	2,295
Mcintosh MC7150	2,729
Mcintosh MC7104	2,855
Mcintosh MC150	3,195
Mcintosh MC7300	3,425
Mcintosh MC7106	3,595
Mcintosh MC275	3,765
Mcintosh MC300	5,395
Mcintosh MC2600	6,265
Mcintosh MC500	2,245
Meracur Tentare	8,995
Meracur Cantare	2,500
Musical Fidelity F16	4,000
Musical Fidelity F19	2,645
Papworth M100	2,645
Papworth M200	2,250
Roksan ROK-M1.5	2,199
Shearpe Phase 1 Pwr Ref	2,995
Sonic Frontiers SFS-80	5,495
Sonic Frontiers SFS-160	4,200
Sumo Model Ten	7,350
Tesseract TAMP-60	2,599
Tube Tech Genesis	3,250
Unison Research Smart 845	3,250



Surround Sound
Amplifier/Receivers

Arcam Xeta One	1,000
Audio Research SDA1	4,391
Denon AVC-1800	550
Denon AVC-2800	800
Exposure XV	1,000
Grundig V1000DPL	360
Harman/Kardon AV1100	300
Harman/Kardon AV1150	400
Harman/Kardon AVR-21	500
Harman/Kardon AV1200	500
Heybrook 806	1,495
JVC AX-V6BK	230
JVC RX-416VBK	270
Krelli KAV500/2	3,485
Krelli KAV500/3	3,985
Krelli KAV500/4	4,485
Krelli KAV500/5	4,985
Marantz MM-500	400
Marantz PM-711AV	450
Mission AV-Master	650
NAD AV-316	450
NAD 216THX	470

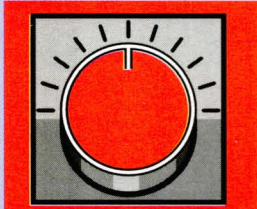


Meridian 502 preamp and 557 power amp Smooth operators from a company at the technological leading edge.



NAD ASV 620	700
Onkyo A-SV610	600
Onkyo ASV 620	700
Parasound 806	1,495
Pioneer VSA 303	300
Pioneer VSA 805S	450
Rotel RB956AX	350
Rotel RSP960AX	400
Sony TA-VE700	350
Sony TA VE 800G	400
Sony TA-AV590	400
Sony TA VA 8ES	700
Sony TA-AV790	800
Yamaha DSP-A590	349
Yamaha DSP-A780	599
Yamaha DSP-A970	799
Yamaha DSP-990	900
Yamaha DSP-A2070	1,099
Yamaha DSP 3090	1,700

Pioneer VSP-200	250
Pioneer SP-D07	800
Sanyo HT F450	180
Sherwood ES5030R	200
Sony SDP E300	230
Technics S-H-AV500	280
Yamaha DSP-E390	250
Yamaha DSP-E580	450
Yamaha DSP-E1000	70



Surround Sound Receiver

Denon AVR-600RD	300
Denon AVR-900	350
Goodmans Delta 801	200
Grundig R14DPL	280
Grundig R1000DPL	400
Harman/Kardon AVR-10	380
Harman/Kardon AVR-20	499
Harman/Kardon AVR-25	699
Harman/Kardon AV-30	1,000
JVC RX-416VBK	270
JVC RX-616RBK	350
Kenwood KR-V5080	280
Kenwood KR-V6080	330
Kenwood KR-V7080	380
Kenwood KR-V990D	1,300
Marantz SR-66	300
Marantz SR-770	700
Marantz SR-96	1,300
NAD AV713	400
NAD TXSV 424	450
NAD 917	550
NAD TXSV 535R	600
NAD TXSV 525R	600
NAD AV716	600

Surround Sound Processor

Arcam XETA 2	650
Audio Research SDPI	3,293
Exposure XX111	750
Exposure XX1	1,050
Heybrook 1000	995
Marantz AV-1030	330
Marantz AV1040	400
Marantz DP-870	600
NAD 117	470
NAD ED 901	700
Naim Audio NAV1	1,600
Onkyo SR211PRO	340
Onkyo ED 901	700
Parasound 1000	995

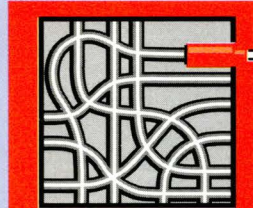
NAD TXSV 727R	800
NAD TXSV 828THX	1,300
Onkyo TXSV 434	400
Onkyo TX-SV424PRO	450
Onkyo TXSV 424	450
Onkyo TX-SV525PRO	600
Onkyo TXSV 525R	600
Onkyo TXSV 535R	600
Onkyo TXSV 636	800
Onkyo TXSV 727R	800
Onkyo TX-SV727PRO	900
Onkyo TXDS 838	1,300
Onkyo TXSV 828	1,300
Onkyo TX-SV919THX	2,000
Onkyo TXSV 939THX	3,000
Philips FR731	250
Philips FR751	300
Pioneer VSX-405RDS	250
Pioneer VSX-505RDS	300
Pioneer VSX-804RDS	399
Sherwood RV4050R	120
Sherwood RV5050R	300
Sherwood RV6030R	400
Sherwood RV7050R	400
Sony STRD E405	280
TEAC AG-V600	400
Technics SA-EX300	250
Technics SA-EX500	350
Technics SA-EX700	450
Technics SA-TX50	1,000
Yamaha RX-V390RDS	299
Yamaha RX-V590RDS	449

Chord Chrysalis	30.00
Chord Cobra	49.00
Chord Siren	65.00
Chord Chameleon	68.00
Chord Solid	99.00
DPA Slink	41.00
DPA White Slink	75.00
Heybrook Inter/BS Blue STRK	49.95
Ixos 104	19.95
Ixos 103	44.95
Ixos 102	59.95
Ixos 101	99.95
Ixos 100.X03	149.95
Kimber Cable Illuminati DX50	350.00
Kimber Cable Orchid	750.00
Kronos Konnekt 3	49.00
Kronos Konnekt 2	99.00
Kronos Konnekt 1	199.00
LAT International IC-50	37.00
LAT International IC-80	60.00
LAT International IC-100-D	89.00
LAT International IC-200-D	151.00
Naim Audio SNAIC-5	47.00
Nordost Magic	30.00
Nordost Black Knight	50.00
Nordost Blue Angel	80.00
Nordost Blue Heaven	120.00
Nordost Red Dawn	250.00
QED P2 Gold	20.00
QED Incon P2 Screened	23.00
QED Incon P1 Screened	26.00
Roksan High Def 0.6M	75.00
Roksan High Def 1.0M	85.00
Roksan High Def 1.5M	95.00
Silver Sound SS3	49.00
Silver Sound SS2	99.00
Silver Sound SS1	199.00
Sonic Link Bonus 1m	15.00
Sonic Link Silver pink	30.00
Sonic Link Black	45.00
Sonic Link White	50.00
Sonic Link Brown	60.00
Sonic Link Violet HPMC	65.00
Sonic Link Violet	85.00
Sonic Link Violet HPMC	100.00
Sonic Link Blue Nickel	105.00
Sonic Link Vermillion	170.00
Sonic Link Red earth	260.00
Sonic Link Black earth	350.00
Sonic Link Blue earth	495.00
Sonic Link Rare earth	1,200.00
Sumo IC-50	37.00
Sumo IC-80	60.00
Trichord Pulsewire 75	150.00

Chord Codac	33.00
Chord Prodac	50.00
DPA Digi-link	28.00
Ixos 105	24.95
LAT International DI-20-D	79.00
Monster Datalink 100	45.00
Moth Leyline Datalink	140.00
Nordost Moonglo	135.00
Nordost Moonglo-XLR	165.00
QED DigiFlex	20.00
QLN Nordost Moonglo	130.00
QLN Nordost-XLR	165.00
Roksan High Def 0.6M	45.00
Roksan High Def 1.0M	55.00
Roksan High Def 1.5M	65.00
Sonic Link Silver Pink	15.00
Sonic Link Green	50.00
Sonic Link Green Earth	110.00
Sumo IC-100	73.00
Sumo IC-200	151.00

Speaker Cables

Art Yam Church M2000	470.00
Art Yam Church 5000	795.00
Bandridge LC7409	4.00
Bandridge LC4110	28.00
Bandridge LC3410	40.00
Bandridge LC3210	75.00
Bandridge LC3219	90.00
Bandridge LC3220	95.00
Bandridge LC3310	95.00
Bandridge LC3240	125.00
Cable Talk Overture 2.1	4.00
DPA Black Sixteen	345.00
Electrocompaniet EC-K2	119.00
Gale XL315	2.00
Gale XL160-2	3.00
Grado 450CM	25.00
Ixos 607	1.99
Ixos 605	2.99
Ixos 606	7.99
Ixos 605/5	14.95
LAT International SS 80	21.00
LAT International BIWIRE	27.00
LAT International SS 1000	42.00
Linn K20	4.00
Linn K400	10.00
Linn K600	15.00
Lumley Reference Silver	35.00
Naim Audio NACA 5	5.00
Puresonic 7845	2.00
QED Qudos Bi-Wire	4.50
QED Profile 4x4	9.00
QED Profile Silver 12	15.00
Rega REGA	2.00
Silver Sound 12 Gauge	15.00
Silver Sound 10 Gauge	35.00
Silver Sound 8 Gauge	75.00
SME S2LB-4	37.00
SME S3LB-4	42.00



CABLES

Analogue Interconnects

Art Yam Church 5000	515.00
Cable Talk Improved 2/CD	26.00
Cable Talk Advanced 2	35.00
Cable Talk Improved 2/T	50.00
Cable Talk Studio 2	65.00
Cable Talk Professional 2	85.00
Cable Talk Broadcast 2	130.00
Cable Talk Reference 2	180.00
Cable Talk Signature Gold	300.00
Cambridge Audio Atlantic	10.00
Cambridge Audio Arctic	20.00
Cambridge Audio Pacific	30.00
Cambridge Audio Studio Ref	40.00

Digital Interconnects

Art Yam Church 5000	275.00
Audioquest Video 2	50.00
Audioquest Digital PRO	90.00
Cable Talk Digital 2	75.00



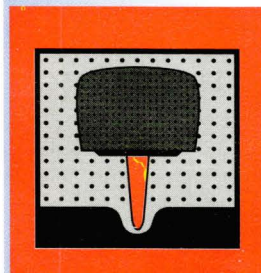
Sony CDP-KES00 CD player, NAD 314 amp and Jamo Model 38 speakers
Just one of the many interesting combinations available to the beginner.



Pioneer CT-S830S This impressive recorder is expensive but still great value for keen recordists.

SME 4900A	62.00
SME 5900A	83.00
Sonic Link Nickel plated	3.00
Sonic Link Gold plated	5.00
Sonic Link Silver aero	18.00
Sonic Link Silver aero SX00x2	35.00
Sonic Link rare earth metal	90.00
Sumo SS-1000-D	323.00
Trichord Pulsewre 75/D	64.00

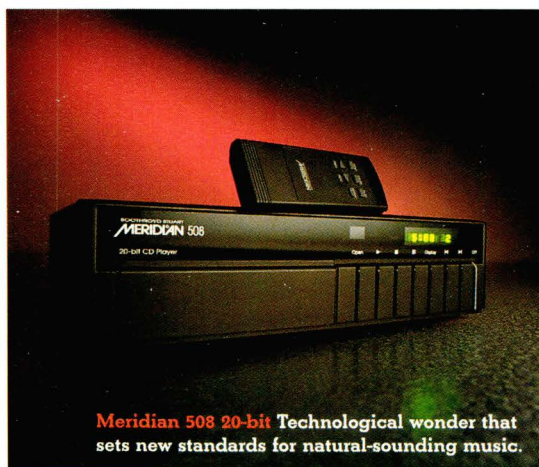
Ortofon OM-5E	20
Ortofon OM10 Super	30
Ortofon OMPRO-S	38
Ortofon OM Pro S	38
Ortofon 510	38
Ortofon OMDJ's	50
Ortofon OMPRO-S + 2	60
Ortofon OM Night Club S	65
Ortofon 520	65
Ortofon OM20 Super	70
Ortofon OM Night Club E	70
Ortofon MCL Turbo	70
Ortofon Concord PRO-S	70
Ortofon Concord DJ's	80
Ortofon OM30 Super	90
Ortofon Concord PRO-S + 2	95
Ortofon OMNC + 2	100
Ortofon MC10 Super	100
Ortofon 530	100
Pickering TL-15	20
Pickering VE-15	25
Pickering T-E	25
Pickering V15-DJ	28
Pickering TL-E	35
Pickering TL-2E	45
Pickering XV15-625E	50
Pickering XV15-150-DJ	50
Pickering TL-2-S	55
Pickering XV15-757S	60
Pickering XV15-625DJ	60
Pickering XV15-1800S	70
Pickering TL3S	80
Pickering XEV-3001E	95
Pickering XLZ-3500	100
Pickering TL-4-S	100
Pro-Ject 78rpm Kit	20
Rega Bias	39
Rega RB78	39
Rega Super Bias	59
Rega Elys	85
Shure SC35S	29
Shure ME95ED	38
Shure M708X	38
Stanton 500AL II	34
Stanton 500EL	37
Stanton 800AL/X	56
Stanton 800EL/X	70
Sumiko Oyster	30
Sumiko Black Pearl	50
Sumiko Pearl	70
Sumiko Blue Point	100



CARTRIDGES
Up to £100

Audio Technica AT-91	13
Audio Technica AT-95E	19
Audio Technica AT-110E	24
Denon DL110	70
Denon DL160	90
Denon DL103	100
Goldring Elan P	17
Goldring Elan	19
Goldring Elektra	29
Goldring 1006	59
Goldring 1012GX	65
Goldring 1012 GX Cartridge	79
Goldring 1022GX	99
Grado ZTE + 1	27
Grado ZCE + 1	37
Grado Z3E + 1	47
Grado Prestige Black	49
Grado Prestige Green	59
Grado Prestige Blue	69
Grado ZFI +	82
Grado Prestige Red	99
Nottingham Analogue Tracer I	98
Ortofon VMS2	14
Ortofon OMP-5E	20

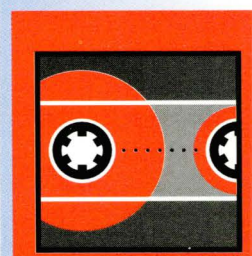
Ortofon OM-5E	20
Ortofon OM10 Super	30
Ortofon OMPRO-S	38
Ortofon OM Pro S	38
Ortofon 510	38
Ortofon OMDJ's	50
Ortofon OMPRO-S + 2	60
Ortofon OM Night Club S	65
Ortofon 520	65
Ortofon OM20 Super	70
Ortofon OM Night Club E	70
Ortofon MCL Turbo	70
Ortofon Concord PRO-S	70
Ortofon Concord DJ's	80
Ortofon OM30 Super	90
Ortofon Concord PRO-S + 2	95
Ortofon OMNC + 2	100
Ortofon MC10 Super	100
Ortofon 530	100
Pickering TL-15	20
Pickering VE-15	25
Pickering T-E	25
Pickering V15-DJ	28
Pickering TL-E	35
Pickering TL-2E	45
Pickering XV15-625E	50
Pickering XV15-150-DJ	50
Pickering TL-2-S	55
Pickering XV15-757S	60
Pickering XV15-625DJ	60
Pickering XV15-1800S	70
Pickering TL3S	80
Pickering XEV-3001E	95
Pickering XLZ-3500	100
Pickering TL-4-S	100
Pro-Ject 78rpm Kit	20
Rega Bias	39
Rega RB78	39
Rega Super Bias	59
Rega Elys	85
Shure SC35S	29
Shure ME95ED	38
Shure M708X	38
Stanton 500AL II	34
Stanton 500EL	37
Stanton 800AL/X	56
Stanton 800EL/X	70
Sumiko Oyster	30
Sumiko Black Pearl	50
Sumiko Pearl	70
Sumiko Blue Point	100



Meridian 508 20-bit Technological wonder that sets new standards for natural-sounding music.

Audio Technica AT-0C9	245
Audio Technica ART-1	944
Audioquest MCS	250
Audioquest 404L	599
Audioquest 404IMH	899
Audioquest 7000NSX	1,495
Denon DL304	200
Dynavector 50X	159
Dynavector 10X	189
Dynavector 23RS	375
Dynavector 17D2	450
Dynavector XX-1L	998
Dynavector XX-1	998
Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698
Goldring Eroica LX	110
Goldring Eroica	110
Goldring 1042	120
Goldring Elite	220
Grado Prestige Silver	119
Grado Prestige Gold	149
Grado Signature Junior	149
Grado Signature 8M2	250
Grado Signature MCZ	375
Grado Signature TLZ	650
Grado Signature XTZ	975
Koetsu Red T	1,550
Koetsu Red K Sig	1,998
Koetsu Urushi	2,297
Koetsu Signature	3,218
Koetsu Gold PR	5,498
Linn K9	125
Linn Klyde	500
Linn Arkiv	1,000
London Decca Maroon	259
London Decca Gold	299
London Decca Maroon Dp	339
London Decca Gold Dp	379
London Decca S Gold	399
London Decca S Gold Dp	479
London Decca Jubilee	999
Lyra Lydian	699
Lyra Clavis Da Capo	1,069
Lyra Parnassus	2,295
Nottingham Analogue Tracer II	175
Nottingham Analogue Tracer III	350
Nottingham Analogue Tracer IV	550
Ortofon Concord NC S	110
Ortofon OMDJ's + 2	115
Ortofon OMNC + E	120
Ortofon Concord NC E	120
Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130
Ortofon MC15 Super II	130
Ortofon 540	130
Ortofon Concord NCS + 2	150
Ortofon Concord DJS + 2	150
Ortofon Concord NC + E	165
Ortofon Concord 2	170
Ortofon MC25E	180
Ortofon Concord 4	230
Ortofon MC25FL	249
Ortofon MC10 Supreme	300
Ortofon Concord 6	330
Ortofon MC20 Supreme	425
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525
Ortofon MC2000II	525
Ortofon MC Rohman	1,000
Ortofon MC3000II	1,100
Ortofon MC5000	1,500
Ortofon MC7500	2,000
Pickering TL-3003	145
Pickering XLZ-4500	150
Pickering TL-4004	175
Pickering XSV-5000U	200
Pickering XLZ-7500	200
Pickering TLZ-7500-S	200
Pro-Ject 6/A30	1,000
Pro-Ject 6/A35	2,350
Reson Mica	150
Reson Aiore	199
Reson Recla	225
Reson Etile	299
Reson Lexe	899
Roksan Corus Black	130
Roksan Shiraz	970
Stanton 890AL/X	118
Sumiko BPS	250
Transfiguration SPIRIT	1,000
Transfiguration AF-1 MkII	1,595
Transfiguration TEMPER	1,950
Transfiguration Supreme	1,995
Van Den Hul MM-1	250
Van Den Hul MM-2	299
Van Den Hul DDT-II	699
Van Den Hul MC-10	799
Van Den Hul MC-One	999
Van Den Hul MC-One Super	1,150
Van Den Hul MC-Two	1,349
Van Den Hul The Frog	1,700
Van Den Hul Grasshopper IISLA	2,200
Van Den Hul Grasshopper IIIGLN	2,999
Van Den Hul Grasshopper IIIGLA	2,999
Van Den Hul Grasshopper IIICMN	3,000
Van Den Hul Grasshopper IIICHN	3,400

Van Den Hul Grasshopper IVGLA 3,450

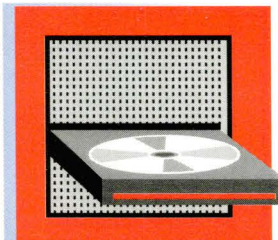


CASSETTE DECKS
Up to £200

Aiwa AD-F450	120
Aiwa AD-WX727	170
Denon DRM-550	160
Denon DRW-580	200
Denon DRS-640	200
Dual CC8000 RS	200
Goodmans Delta 801	130
Grundig CCF3	200
JVC TD-W218BK	170
JVC TD-X372BK	170
JVC TD-R472BK	200
JVC TD-W318BK	200
Kenwood KX-W4080	160
Kenwood KX-3080	160
Kenwood KX-W6080	200
Kenwood KX-5080S	200
Luxman K-322	200
Marantz SD-53	200
Marantz SD-555	200
NAD TARW 311	20
Pioneer CT-S250	150
Pioneer CT-W205R	160
Pioneer CT-W505R	180
Pioneer CT-S4500	200
Sony TC-KE200	120
Sony TC-WE405	150
Sony TC-KE400S	180
Sony TC-WE505	180
TEAC W-416	100
TEAC V-610	100
TEAC W-780R	170
TEAC R-560	180
Technics RS-TR373	200
Technics RS-BX501	200
Yamaha KX-390	150
Yamaha KX-W392	180
Yamaha KX-490	199

Over £200

Aiwa AD-F850	230
Aiwa AD-S950	300
Denon DRM650S	230
Denon DRM-740	270
Denon DRS-810	310
Harman/Kardon TD420	280
Harman/Kardon TD450	350
Harman/Kardon TD470	450
JVC TD-V562BK	220
JVC TD-W178BK	250
JVC TD-V662BK	270
Kenwood KX-7060S	330
Luxman K-373	400
NAD TA 6210	230
NAD 613	230
NAD 614	270
NAD 616	299
NAD TARW 411	370
Onkyo TA6210	230
Onkyo TARW 211	270
Onkyo TARW311	320
Onkyo TA 6310	330
Onkyo KR-609	350
Onkyo K-W606	370
Onkyo TARW 411	370
Onkyo K-611	460
Pioneer CT-S55S	250
Pioneer CT-W803RS	300
Pioneer CT-S830S	500
Pioneer CT-95	1,000
Sony TC-KE500S	230
Sony TC-WE80S	250
Sony TC-KE600S	300
Sony TCK-661S	300
Sony TC-KA6ES	550
TEAC W-850R	250
TEAC V-1030	250
TEAC W-6000R	450
TEAC V-6030S	550
TEAC V-8030S	650
Technics RS-TR474	220
Technics RS-A26	230
Technics RS-TR575	280
Technics RS-A27	300
Yamaha KX-W592	280
Yamaha KX-690	400
Yamaha KX-W952	599



CD PLAYERS
Up to £250

Aiwa XC-300	150
Cambridge Audio CD4	150
Denon DCD-625	200
Denon DCD-715	235
Denon DCD-825	240
Denon DCD-825	240
Dual CD1135RC	140
Dual CD1150RC	150
Dual CD1000RS	170
Dual CD1180RC	180
Eclipse Model 30	50
Eclipse model 50	50
Eclipse CD101	80
Grundig CDII	170
Harman/Kardon HD710	250
JVC XL-V184BK	120
JVC XL-V284BK	140
JVC XL-F116BK	180
JVC XL-F216BK	200
JVC XL-V574BK	250
Kenwood DP-M5570	250
Kenwood DP-5060	250
Luxman D-322	200
Marantz CD-57	230
Marantz CC-47	250
NAD 510	199
NAD 512	250
Onkyo DX-710	200
Onkyo DX-703	240
Philips CD711	120
Philips CD721	130
Philips CDC751	180
Philips CD741	200
Pioneer PD-104	130
Pioneer PD-204	150
Pioneer PD-M603	200
Pioneer PD-S505	200
Pioneer PD-F605	230
Pioneer PC-F25	230
Rotel RCD-930AX	180
Sony CDP-XE200	120
Sony CDPM-303	130
Sony CDP-KE300	140
Sony CDPCE-105	150
Sony CDP-XE500	160
Sony CDP-CE405	180
Sony CDP-XE700E	200
Sony CDP-C325M	200
Sony CDP-761E	250
TEAC CD-P1800	130
TEAC CD-P3450	150
TEAC CD-P3450SE	200
TEAC PD-D2200	250
Technics SL-PG380A	120
Technics SL-PG480A	140
Technics SL-PG580A	160
Technics SL-PG570A	170
Technics SL-PS670A	200
Technics SL-PS770A	250
Yamaha CDC-555	199
Yamaha CDC-655	249

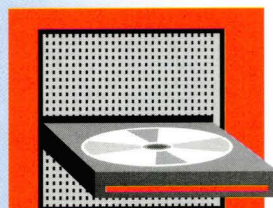
£251 to £500

Aiwa DX-C100M	500
AMC CD6	349
Arcam Alpha 5 Plus	480
Audio Innovations Alto	399
Aura CD100	450
Denon DCM-260	300
Denon DCD-1015	350
Grundig CDC14	300
Harman/Kardon HD7325	299
Harman/Kardon FL8450	300
Harman/Kardon HD730	300
Harman/Kardon HD7425	349
Harman/Kardon HD7525	400
JVC XL-2674BK	300
Marantz CD-67	270
Marantz CD-63SE	350
Marantz CD67SE	350
Marantz CD-63HII	500
Micromega Minium	350
Musical Fidelity E60	300
NAD 513	290
NAD 515	350
NAD 514	370
NAD 517	400
Onkyo DX-7210	260
Onkyo C721	290
Onkyo DX-7510	400



Mordaunt-Short MS10i Officially declared "a kickin' little box" in Hi-Fi Choice, issue 156.

Onkyo CM716	450
Pioneer PD-S705	300
Pioneer PD-F805	330
Pioneer PD-F905	400
Pioneer PD-S904	400
Rotel RCD-965BX	300
Rotel RCD-970BX	375
Sony CDP-XE900E	300
Sony CDP-CX-200	380
TEAC CD-5	350
£501 to £1000	
Arcam Alpha 8	520
Arcam Alpha 6	600
Arcam Delta 250	800
Creek CD42	600
Harman/Kardon HD7625	550
Harman/Kardon HD7725	800
Heybrook Signature II	989
Linn Mimik	875
Luxman D-373	550
Marantz CD-17	800
Meridian 563	795
Meridian 200	895
Monrio Privilege	995
Myriad MC100	700
Naim Audio CD3	977
Orelle CD-100E A	649
Orelle CD100E S A	849
Orelle CD 100E V	999
Quad 77B	700
Quad 77M	900
TEAC VRDS-10SE	850
Technics SL-P2000	1,000
Thule CD100	849
Over £1000	
Audio Research CDI	3,290
Copland CDA-288	1,799
Copland CDA-277	1,800
Jadis JS-1	8,068
Krell CD-DSP MkII	5,000
Krell CD-DSPH 5000	5,000
Krell KPS-20i	9,990
Luxman D500XS	4,500
Marantz CD-17KI	1,300
Marantz CD-23	4,000
Mcintosh MCD7008	2,195
Mcintosh MCD7009	2,635
Meracur Auriga	1,295
Meracur Flagrare	2,495
Meracur Amago	3,995
Meracur Imagio	4,495
Meridian 506	1,100
Meridian 506	1,100
Meridian 606	1,350
Meridian 508	1,685
Micro-Seiki CD-M2DC	3,695
Micro-Seiki CDM-2000X	4,689
Mission Disc/Dacmaster	1,900
Musical Fidelity FCD	1,500
Naim Audio CD2	1,977
Naim Audio CDS	3,751
Roksan ATT-DP3P	1,595



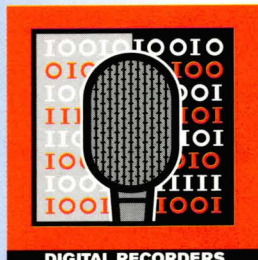
Transports

Audio Alchemy DDS III	700
Audio Research CDTI	3,290
Audio Synthesis Transcend	1,395
Audiolab 8000CDM	1,400
Audiomeca Damnation	950
Audiomeca Damnation SE	1,100
Audiomeca Kreatura	1,299
Audiomeca Kreatura SE	1,450
Audiomeca Talisman	1,850
Audiomeca Maphisto	2,100
Cambridge Audio New CD-4	200
Cambridge Audio Discmagic One	300
Cambridge Audio CD6	300
Counterpoint DA-11E	1,495
Jadis JD2	4,990
Jadis JCOT	8,000
Jadis JDI	9,950
Krell KSP-20i/i	1,100
Krell MD-20	4,999
Krell MD-10	7,990
Krell KPS-20T	8,490
Krell DT-10	9,090
Linn Karik	1,850
Meridian 500	1,245
Meridian 602	1,750
Micromega Drive 1	700
Monrio Bitmatch	875
Orelle CD100E T1	549
Orelle CD100E T2	749
Pink Triangle Cardinal	875
PS Audio Lambda TR	2,250
PS Audio lambda AT&T	2,778
Roksan ATT-DP3	1,295
TEAC VRDS-T1	550
TEAC VRDS-7	599
TEAC P-700	900
TEAC P-30	2,500
Theta Data Basic II	2,298
Theta Data Basic II AT&T	2,877
Theta Data BasicII S MDE	3,490
Theta Data III NTSC	5,345
Theta Data III NTSC/PAL	5,879
Thorens TCD-2000	900
Wadia 8	3,195
Wadia 20	4,370
XTC CDT-1LE	1,250

DACs

Arcam Black Box 50	480
Arcam Black Box 500	750

Counterpoint DA-10E	1,895
Linn Numerik	1,500
Pink Triangle Ordinal	837
Pink Triangle DaCapo	1,400
PS Audio UltraLink 2 HDCC	2,590
PS Audio Ref Link	4,550
TEAC D-T1	500
Trichord Pulsar Ser One	1,395



DIGITAL RECORDERS

Meridian CDR	4,500
Philips DCC730	250
Philips DCC170	250
Pioneer D-05	900

Pioneer PDR-05	1,300
Pioneer D-C88	2,000
Sharp MD-R1H	400
Sharp MD-MS100H	400
Sony MDS-SE7	300
Sony MDSJE-500	300
Sony MDS-S1	550
Sony MDS-503	550
Sony DTCZE-700	699
Sony MDA-JA3ES	700
Sony MXD-D1	800
TEAC R-9	1,200



HEADPHONES

Up to £40

Aiwa HP-X201	13
Aiwa HP-A360	13
Aiwa HP-X301	20
Aiwa HP-VX303	25
Aiwa HP-X705	40
AKG Rox	30
Audio Technica ATH-P1	10
Audio Technica ATH-P3	15
Audio Technica ATH-P5	20
Beyer DT111 Alpha	15
Beyer DT111 Beta	20
Beyer DT111 Gamma	25
Beyer DT211	34
Denon AH-C33	26
JVC HA-22	6
JVC HA-CD88	18
JVC HA-D525	20
JVC HA-F65	20
JVC HA-D626	25
Kenwood KH-535	15
Kenwood KH-757	20
Kenwood KH-959	25
Kenwood KH-1000	25
Kenwood KH-2020	40
Maxell EB-125	4
Maxell HP-200	6
Maxell EB-225	7
Maxell HBS-150	8
Maxell HP-300	8
Maxell EBS-325	9
Maxell EB-425	10
Maxell HP-700	10
Maxell HP-800	11
Maxell HBS-250	13
Maxell HBS-350	13
Maxell HP-1000	20
Maxell HP-2000	25
Maxell HP-3000	30
Pioneer SE-A10	8
Pioneer SE-A20	13

Pioneer SE-A40	20
Pioneer SE-A20V	23
Pioneer SE-M250	25
Pioneer SE-M350	30
Ross RE-233	5
Ross RIH-150	6
Ross RE-235	6
Ross RE-234	6
Ross RE-229	6
Ross RE-2030	6
Ross RMH-300	7
Ross RE-280	7
Ross RE-246	7
Ross RE-223	7
Ross RMH-500CD	9
Ross RIH-360CD	9
Ross RE-2060CD	9
Ross RMH-310TV	10
Ross RIH-550	10
Ross RIH-460CD	12
Ross RDH-200CD	13
Ross RDH-100CD	15
Ross RDH-300CD	17
Ross RDH-400CD	22
Sennheiser MX3	9
Sennheiser HD26	10
Sennheiser HD36	15
Sennheiser MX4	15
Sennheiser HD56	18
Sennheiser MX5	25
Sennheiser Vegas	30
Sennheiser Manhattan	30
Sennheiser HD60TV	40
Sony OPEN MDR-005EL	4
Sony MDR-E807	6
Sony MDR-007-MK2	8
Sony MDRW-08L	10
Sony MDR-009	10
Sony MDR-E817V	12
Sony MDR-A009	12
Sony MDR-V50	13
Sony MDR-E827 KIT	15
Sony MDR-15	15
Sony MDR-W24V	15
Sony MDR-E837	18
Sony MDR-E846MP	20
Sony MDR-009TV	20
Sony MDR-A34L	20
Sony MDR-E848	20
Sony MDR-CD170	20
Sony MDR-P1TV	25
Sony MDR-HF120	30
Sony MDR-CD270	30
Sony MDR-CD370	40
Technics RP-HT3000	40
Vivanco SR60	3
Vivanco SR12	3
Vivanco SR52	5
Vivanco SR54	7
Vivanco SR16	7
Vivanco SR14	8
Vivanco SR120	15
Vivanco SR250	19
Vivanco SR150	20
Vivanco SR200	25
Vivanco SR300	30
Over £41	
AKG K301	80



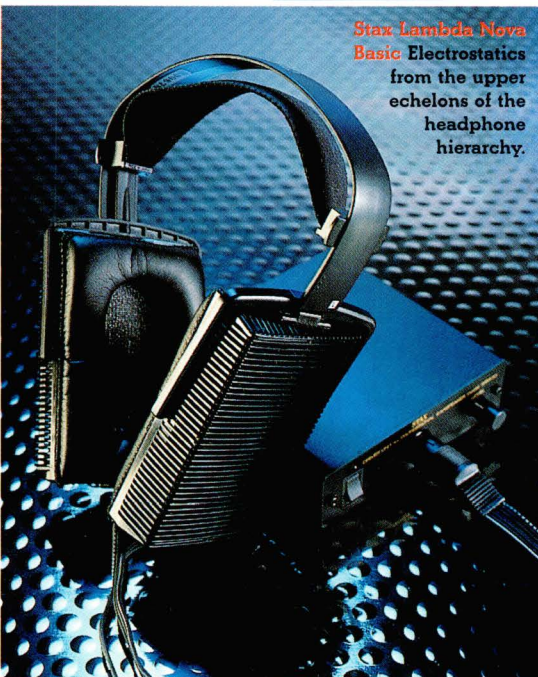
Roksan Attessa ATT-DP3 Proves that great hi-fi doesn't have to come in a plain black box.



THE ESSENTIAL ACCESSORY – SENNHEISER'S HD565
 "Sound quality is exceptionally good... easily the best all-round model tested" – Alvin Gold, Hi-Fi Choice, September 1996.
 Call 01494 551551 for more information or your nearest stockist.

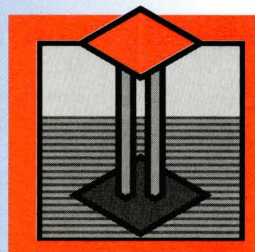
AKG K222IR	100
AKG K222R	100
AKG K401	120
AKG K333R	150
AKG K501	150
AKG K333R	150
AKG K444R	180
AKG K290S	250
AKG K1000	700
Audio Technica ATH910PRO	90
Beyer DT311	57
Beyer DT411	69
Beyer DT331	82
Beyer IRH790	93
Beyer DT431	98
Beyer IRH 890	117
Beyer DT511	117
Beyer IRS790	130
Beyer DT531	135
Beyer DT770 Pro	152
Beyer DT100	152
Beyer DT801	172
Beyer DT990 Pro	187
Beyer DT811	200
Beyer IRS890	222
Beyer DT901	222
Beyer DT911	235
Denon AH-D210	45
Denon AH-D350	65
Denon AH-D550	80

Denon AH-D650	95
Denon AH-D750	130
Denon AH-D950	150
Ergo 1	120
Ergo Model 2	140
Grado SR80	110
Grado SR225	79
Jecklin Float Model 1	200
Jecklin Float Model 2	99
Jecklin Float ELS	399
JVC HA-D727	43
JVC HA-D910	65
JVC HA-D1000	250
JVC HA-F25	699
Kenwood KH-5000	70
Sennheiser HD445	45
Sennheiser HD455 II	55
Sennheiser HD465	65
Sennheiser IS360/UK	70
Sennheiser HD475	80
Sennheiser HD 480II-13	85
Sennheiser HD25SP	90
Sennheiser HD25 SP	90
Sennheiser HD535	105
Sennheiser IS450	120
Sennheiser HD545 Ref	125
Sennheiser HD250II	150
Sennheiser HD565 Ovat'n	150
Sennheiser HD265 Linear	150
Sennheiser HD25-13	160



Stax Lambda Nova Basic Electrostatics from the upper echelons of the headphone hierarchy.

Sennheiser HD25	160
Sennheiser HD25	160
Sennheiser HDC 451-1	166
Sennheiser HD 580 P'cision	200
Sennheiser HD600	250
Sennheiser LUCAS	280
Sennheiser IS850	859
Sennheiser HE60/HEV70	998
Sennheiser Orpheus	9,652
Sony MDR-IF120K	50
Sony MDR-CD470	50
Sony MDR-IF50K	70
Sony MDR-CD570	70
Sony MDR-LF320RK-MK2	80
Sony MDR-CD770	100
Sony MDR-CD770	100
Sony MDR-D77	130
Sony MDR-NC20	150
Sony MDR-NC10	150
Sony MDR-IF610K	160
Sony MDR-CD1700	200
Stax SR34	169
Stax SR Gamma	239
Stax SR84	259
Stax SR Lambda	349
Stax Gamma Pro	399
Stax Lambda Pro	449
Stax Lambda Nova Basic	449
Stax Lambda Sig	549
Stax Omega	1,695
Technics RP-HT400	50
Technics RP-HT600	60
Technics RP-HT700	70
Vivanco IR5700	50
Vivanco IR5000	50
Vivanco SR850	50
Vivanco SR650	50
Vivanco SR750	60
Vivanco IR6000	70
Vivanco SR909	70
Vivanco IR6500	90
Vivanco SR10001FL	110
Vivanco IR7100	120
Vivanco IR7600	140
Vivanco SR2001FL	140



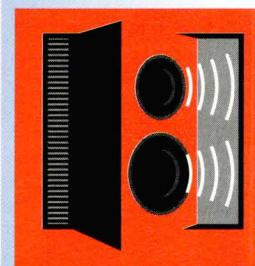
EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS Speaker Stands

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Deadrack 902	60
Deadrack 901	60
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Revolver RS1	70
Royd Royd	99
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Sound Organisation 2027	55
Sound Organisation 2026	55
Sound Organisation 2040	70
Sound Organisation 2055	72
Sound Organisation 2010	82
Sound Organisation 2018	84
Sound Organisation 2024	86
Soundstyle X016	100
Soundstyle X012	100
Soundstyle X024	105
Soundstyle X020	105

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Deadrack 703	130
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Deadrack 705	230
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Ixos 701	40
Ixos 711	60
Ixos 802	70
Ixos 803	90
Ixos 802P	100
Ixos 703	100
Ixos 803P	110
Ixos 804	110
Ixos 713	130
Ixos 804P	140
Ixos 704	140
Ixos 705	170
Ixos 714	190

Ixos 715	230
Jamo TLS-1	40
Jamo ST-80	130
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JPW 5 Tier	100
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QLN A4	165
QLN A5	205
QLN A6	245
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Sound Organisation Z230	70
Sound Organisation Z031	75
Sound Organisation Z030	95
Sound Organisation Z060	115
Sound Organisation Z550	125
Sound Organisation Z038	130
Soundstyle X300	180
Soundstyle X053	200
Soundstyle X050	200
Soundstyle X305	210
Soundstyle X100	220
Soundstyle X058	230
Soundstyle X310	250
Soundstyle X120	250
Soundstyle X105	250
Soundstyle Select 6105	280
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Stands Unique Midi Sound Tower	249
Stands Unique Sound Tower	249
Stands Unique Sound Tower 10	269
Stands Unique Sound Tower	269
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Celestion Little 1	90
Celestion Impact 10	129
Celestion CSC	129
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Mission 7311	130
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Sony SS-126E	130
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TDL NFM 1	120
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Technics SB-CS75	100
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Wharfedale Valdus 100	79
Wharfedale Valdus Centre	100
Wharfedale Diamond 7.1	100
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Allison Model 4A	170
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Celestion Centre 2	189
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Gale Model 4	200
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GLL Imagio IC100	170
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Infinity Reference 11i	200
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Interaudio XL4000	200
Jamo Studio-140	140
Jamo SAT-300.II	150
Jamo D-135	160
Jamo Studio-180	180
Jamo 38	180
Jamo Converta	180
Jamo D-165	200
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JBL TLX121	170
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JPW P1	170
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Bose 151 Environmental	270
Bose 161 Freestyle	275
Bose 201 Ser III	290
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Boston 381	250
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Boston VRS	300
Boston VR12	300
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Celestion CSW	299
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QLN Projekt B3	240
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QLN 122	270
QLN A6	270
QLN Projekt B3i	285
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Richard Allan Dimension Five	299
Richard Allan Minette Gold	299
Richard Allan RA6M	299
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Royd Minstrel	269
Royd Merlin	298
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Visonik 7003	203
Visonik SUB5	259

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Wharfedale Valdus 500	299
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ZYP A1T	219
ZYP A2S	275
ZYP A2ST	295
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Allison Model 2A	420
Allison AL120	420
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B&W CDM2	400
B&W AS6	500
B&W DM603	500
B&W Signature 7	500
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Bose 401	500
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Celestion Style 3	399
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Infinity SSW-10 Sub	500
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Jamo 98	360
Jamo Classic 6	360
Jamo BX-100A	370
Jamo D-365B	400
Jamo THX Sub One	400
Jamo THX LCR One	400
Jamo Graphic	400
Jamo Classic 8	430
Jamo BX-150A	460
Jamo Atmosphere	480
Jamo 128	500
Jamo 477A	500
Jamo Concert Centre	500
Jamo Silhouette	500
JBL TLX151	350
JBL TLX70	400
JBL TLX161	400
JBL TLX171	500
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KEF RDM ONE	500
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Mission 751 Freedom	348
Mission 734	499
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Mus Tec Harrier	400
NAD 804	400
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Polk RT8	400
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Polk RT10	500
Prof Monitor Co TB1S	366

Prof Monitor Co TB1SM	403
Prof Monitor Co TB1	410
Prof Monitor Co TB1M	447
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QLN Projekt B4	320
QLN Projekt B3ii	329
QLN Projekt C3	330
QLN Projekt B MULTI	330
QLN Projekt D3	360
QLN Projekt C3i	370
QLN Qubic 222	400
QLN Projekt C3ii	400
QLN Projekt B5	400
QLN Projekt C3iii	400
QLN Projekt D3i	440
QLN Projekt C4	440
QLN Projekt C3iv	440
QLN Projekt D3ii	470
QLN Projekt D4	480
QLN Projekt CMULTI	500
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TDL RTL 3	400
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Allison Model 3A	525
Allison CD8	550
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B&W CDM1	670
B&W P4	600
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Celestion Impact 40	629
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Dali 107	600
Dali 350	600
Dali 450	700
Dali 109	800
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DefinitiveTechnology BP6B	750
Epos ES14	675
Faraday FS10	795
GLL Imagio IC130	530
Harbeth BBC LS3/5A	699
Harbeth HL-P3ES	799
Heybrook Quartet	575
Infinity SM125	550
Infinity SM155	650
Jamo BX-200A	550
Jamo THX Surr One	550
Jamo Classic 10	700
Jamo 507A	800
JBL TLX181	600
Jordan Watts JH200	510
Jordan Watts JHFLG	560
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KEF Q70	729
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Keswick Audio Volante	629
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KEF 30B Packaged with the 60S surrounds and 80C centre, won two major awards last year.



Wilson benesch Turntable Deploys high-tech carbon fibre in the name of harmonious sound.

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Lumley Reference Premenade SP4	650
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Monitor Audio Studio 2	600
Monitor Audio MA700 PMC	600
Monitor Audio 702PMC	700
Monitor Audio 703PMC	800
Manticore Minaret	580
Meridian A500	750
Miller & Kreisel S-85	700
Mission 752	578
Mission 735	650
Mission 753 Freedom	798
Mordaunt-Short MS50i	550
Naim Audio INTRO	596
Naim Audio NA PX03	705
Naim Audio S-NAXO 3-6	719
Naim Audio S-NAXO 2-4	719
Neat Petite	595
Neat Mystique	650
Neat Petite II	745
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Origin Live Resolution	732
Origin Live Victory	750
Pentachord B	519
Pentachord Pentode	729
Polk RT12	600
Polk LS50	800
Proac Response CC One	599
Proac Tablette 50	599
Proac Studio 100	699
QLN 313	600
QLN 929	700
QLN Classic One	800
Quad Q7710L	600
Richard Allan Dimension Five 3	579
Richard Allan Magnum LS1	589
Richard Allan Dimension Five 4	699

Rogers C6/20	533
Rogers AB1	549
Rogers LS3/5A	699
Rogers Studio 5	699
Rogers C6/25	763
Royd The Sorcerer	595
Royd Abbot	665
Ruark Talisman II	749
Shahinian Super Elf	790
Silverado Raider	695
Sonus-Faber Concertino	595
Spendor 2030	599
Spendor 2030	599
Spendor LS3/5A	630
Spendor SP3/1	795
Tannoy 637 ProfilePlus	549
Tannoy 638 ProfilePlus	599
Tannoy D100	689
TDL T-Line 2	550
TDL RTL 4	650
TDL T-Line 3	750
Totem Rokk	695
Triangle Zephyr	749
UKD-Opera Opera II	595
UKD-Opera Operetta II	770
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ATC SCM10	1,000
ATC SCM20	1,500
Audio Physic Step	1,299
Audiovector 2X	850
Audiovector 3X	1,500
B & O Beolab 4500	1,300
B&W P5	875
B&W Matrix 805 V	995
B&W DM604	1,000

B&W P6	1,095
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Bandor Mora	1,260
Blue Room House Pod	895
Bose A'mass AM7	900
Boston VR40	1,000
Castle Harlech	849
Castle Howard S2	1,199
Celestion SL600si	820
Celestion 300	1,099
Celestion 700SE	1,435
Cerwin Vega 1515	1,300
Clements Reference 1	995
Dali 850	1,100
DefinitiveTechnology BP8B	1,000
DefinitiveTechnology BP10B	1,500
Epos ES22	1,185
Gamma Acoustics Epoch Five	1,499
Harbeth HL-K6	1,049
Harbeth HL-Compact 7	1,499
Harbeth BBC LS5/12A	1,499
Heybrook Sextet	1,159
Impulse Kora	1,250
Infinity Kappa 6.1i	995
Infinity Kappa 7.1i	1,195
Jamo 707i	900
Jamo Concert 8	1,300
JBL L20	850
JBL L40	1,100
JBL L60	1,200
JBL L80	1,300
JBL L90	1,300
Jordan Watts JH400	820
Jordan Watts JH400M	970
JPW Ruby 3	1,000
JPW Ruby 4	1,300
KEF Model One	1,099
KEF Model Two	1,499
Keswick Audio Torino	899
Keswick Audio Figaro Evolution	899

Keswick Audio Milano	1,099
Keswick Audio Alto	1,299
Keswick Audio Amber	1,399
Linn Sekrit Aktiv	895
Linn Tukan Aktiv	1,050
Linn Keilidh Aktiv	1,250
Living Voice Auditorium	1,300
Lumley Reference LM3	895
Lumley Reference L/M3.5	1,050
Monitor Audio Studio 12	1,000
Monitor Audio 705PMC	1,400
Magneplan SMG-C SE	990
Magneplan MG-0.6 SE	1,370
Magneplanar SMG-C SE	990
Magneplanar MG-0.6 SE	1,370
Manticore Matisse	1,390
Meridian Argent 1	995
Mission Freedom 5	1,298
Mordaunt-Short Perf 820	1,495
Naim Audio Credo	987
Origin Live Sovereign	975
Pink Triangle Vertical	990
Polk LS70	1,200
Proac Tablette 50 SIG	899
Proac Response 1 SC	1,199
Proac Studio 150	1,399
Prof Monitor Co LB1	935
Prof Monitor Co AB1	1,496
QLN Signature	1,000
QLN Prestige	1,500
QLN Sig Splitfield	1,500
Rega XEL	1,040
Rogers Studio 7	899
Rogers C6/28	1,303
Roksan Ojan 3 Rosewood	995
Roksan Ojan 3X Black	1,195
Roksan Ojan 3X Rosewood	1,395
Royd The Albion	1,270
Ruark Broadsword II	899
Ruark Paladin	1,099
SD Acoustics SD5	1,395
Shahinian Compass	1,295
Sonus-Faber Minuetto	898
Sonus-Faber M Amator	1,498
Spendor 2040	899
Spendor 2040	899
Spendor SP2/3E	1,050
Spendor SP1/2E	1,390
TDL Studio 1M	899
Technics SB-M1000	1,500
Thiel SCS	1,379
Thiel 2	1,499
Thiel CS-5	1,499
Totem Model One	1,195
Triangle Antal	1,099
UKD-Opera Callas II	895
UKD-Opera Callas II	950
UKD-Opera Opera III	999
UKD-Opera Callas Gold	1,050
UKD-Opera Divina II	1,500
Vandersteen 2Ce	1,395
Visonik LB1	935
£1501 to £3000	
Acoustic Energy AE1 Sig	1,695
Acoustic Energy AE2 Sig	2,695
Allison L.C. 10	2,500
Amb Mod 3.2	1,780
ATC SCM20 Tower	1,999
Audio Physic Spark 2	1,749
Audio Physic Tempo	1,999
Audiovector 5	2,500
B & O Beolab 6000	1,550
B & O Beolab 8000	2,100
B & O Beolab Penta 3	2,650
B&W Matrix 804	1,595
B&W Matrix 803s2	1,995
B&W Matrix 802s3	2,795
Bandor Bandora/Mora	2,800
Bose 901 V1	1,650
Boston Lynfield 300L	2,000
Bravura Virtuoso	2,995
Celestion Kingston	2,500
Chord LS5/12A	1,593
Chord CEL 301	2,130
Chord CEL 201	2,840
Clements Reference 7	1,995
Credo SPB 003	1,820
Credo SPB 009	2,453
Dali Grand Coupe	2,500
Dawn Audio Symphony	1,995
DefinitiveTechnology BP2002	2,400
ECA Servo A.2	2,450
Epos ES25	1,655
Gamma Acoustics Epoch Ref Five	2,999
Harbeth HL-S8	1,999
Helius Syrius II	2,395
Helius Syrius I	2,850
Horning Aristophane	2,600
Impulse Lali	1,850
Jamo Concert 11	2,000
Jamo THX System	2,500
JBL Ti 1000	1,600
JBL L100	1,800
JBL Ti 2000	2,000

JBL Ti 3000	2,700
Jordan Watts JH1+1 Aspect	1,730
Jordan Watts JH1+1 Aspect K	2,310
Jordan Watts Aspect JH1+1	2,745
KEF 104/2 REC	1,799
KEF Model Three	1,999
KEF Model Four	2,999
Linn Kaber Passive	2,000
Linn Kaber Aktiv	2,640
Lowther Fidelio	1,999
Lowther Academy	2,399
Lowther Bel Canto	2,699
Lumley Reference LM2	2,500
Lumley Reference L/M 2	2,795
Monitor Audio Studio 20SE	2,200
Magneplan MG-10 SE	1,650
Magneplan MG-1.5 SE	1,780
Magneplan MG-2.7 SE	2,650
Magneplanar MG-10 SE	1,650
Magneplanar MG-1.5 SE	1,780
Magneplanar MG-2.7 SE	2,650
Martin-Logan Aerius	2,288
Martin-Logan Stylos	2,993
Mordaunt-Short Perf 860	1,895
Mordaunt-Short Perf 880	2,795
Naim Audio SBL Active	1,743
Naim Audio SBL Passive	1,875
Neolith NEO 1	2,999
Origin Live Conqueror	1,600
Pentachord P'column	1,649
Polk LS90	1,700
Posselt Albatros	2,200
Proac Response 2S	2,000
Proac Studio 250	2,249
Proac Response 2.5	2,700
QLN Reference	2,000
QLN Ref HDII	2,500
Rehdeko RK115	1,550
Rehdeko RK125	2,750
Richard Allan Magnum System 1	1,589
Rogers LS5/9	1,531
Rogers Studio 9	1,549
Ruark Crusader II	1,599
Ruark Equinox	1,849
Ruark Accolade	2,699
SD Acoustics SD1E	2,995
Shahinian Arc	1,675
Shahinian Obelisk	2,490
Silverado Silverado 1	1,995
Sonus-Faber Electa	1,790
Sonus-Faber Amator	2,992
Spendor SP7/1	1,990
Spendor SP100	2,099
Tannoy D500	1,999
Tannoy D700	2,199
Tannoy Sterling TW	2,200
TDL Studio Monitor M	2,449
TDL Studio 2	2,450
Thiel CS2.2	2,749
Totem Mann-2	2,795
Triangle Zays	1,650
Triangle Altinis	2,250
Triangle Extan	2,950
UKD-Opera Caruso II	2,350
Over £3000	
Acoustic Energy AE5	7,995
Allison L.C. 20	5,500
Amb Mod 5.0	9,550
ATC SCM50	3,499
ATC SCM100	4,149
ATC SCM50A	4,999
ATC SCM100A	5,699
Audio Physic Virgo 2	3,199
Audio Physic Terra	3,499
Audio Physic Avanti 2	6,399
Audio Physic Caldera	9,999
Audiovector 6	4,600
B&W Matrix 801s3	3,795
B&W Silver Signature	5,000
Boston Lynfield 500L	4,449
Bravura Accelerando	6,600
Chord LF5.12	3,620
Credo SPB 012	3,147
Credo SDP	5,353
Credo SDL 001	5,677
Dali Grand	4,000
DefinitiveTechnology BP2000	3,600
Fase Evoluzione Fase/Aria	3,100
Horning Agathon	3,555
Impulse Ta'us	3,100
Infinity ARS Epsilon	9,995
Jamo Oriel	7,000
JBL S2600	3,500
JBL Ti 5000	3,700
Jordan Watts JH2K	3,230
Jordan Watts Classic JH2KM	4,250
Jordan Watts Classic JH5K	4,875
Jordan Watts Classic JH5KM	5,860
Jordan Watts Classic JH10K	9,340
KEF 107/2 REC	3,999
Keswick Audio Zero 2	6,000
Linn Keltik Aktiv	6,000
Living Voice RW24 Basebin	9,500
Lowther Delphic	3,999



You must listen to...Mission's 731i.



"A combatant truly worthy of the budget speaker challenge"
 Alan Sircom, Hi-Fi Choice,
 July/August 1996
 Call 01480 451777 for more information or your nearest stockist.

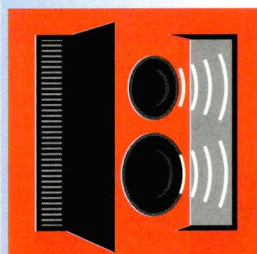
Marantz CD-17 KI Signature CD player, Aura CA-200/PA-100 pre/power amps and Tannoy D-100 speakers. One of the more harmonious combinations that have turned up in our systems tests.



Lumley Reference L/M 2 Signature	4,500
Lumley Reference LM1	8,500
Monitor Audio Studio 50	4,000
Monitor Audio Studio 60	6,000
Magnepan MG-3.5 SE	3,800
Martin-Logan Sequel SL3	3,349
Martin-Logan Sequel II	3,399
Martin-Logan CLS IIz	4,555
Martin-Logan Quest Z	5,350
Martin-Logan Monolith IIIIP	8,730
Meridian DSP6000	9,400
Miller & Kreisel BP2000	3,600
Naim Audio DBL Active	7,414
Neolith NEO 2	3,499
Neolith NEO 3	4,999
Proac Response 3.5	4,250
Prof Monitor Co MB1	4,370
Prof Monitor Co MB1P	4,681
Prof Monitor Co BB5	6,270
Prof Monitor Co BB5P	6,754
QLN Artec 1600	4,500
Quad ESL63	3,450
Rehdeko RK145	4,250
Rehdeko RK175	7,750
Shahinian Hawk	4,950
Shahinian Diapason	8,350
Sonus-Faber Extrema	5,991
Spendor SP9/1	3,450
Tannoy Edinburgh TW	3,050
Tannoy GRFM TW	4,000
Tannoy Westminster TW	6,600
Tannoy Canterbury 15	7,720
TDL Ref Standard-M	4,999
Thiel CS3.6	3,899
Triangle Nemo Altair	3,850
Wilson WAP Puppy II	5,600
Wilson Puppy 5	7,290
Wilson WATT 5	8,800
Wilson WITT	8,888

B&W CC3	150
B&W CC6	200
B&W Matrix	500
Boston CR1	100
Boston Centre 6	130
Boston Centre 7	200
Celestion Centre 2	189
DefinitiveTechnology C1jr	275
DefinitiveTechnology C1B	395
DefinitiveTechnology CLR1000B	595
DefinitiveTechnology CLR2002	695
DefinitiveTechnology CLR2000	845
Harman/Kardon SC305	150
Jamo Centre 50.II	80
Jamo Centre 40	100
Jamo Centre 18	150
Jamo Centre 160	180
Jamo Centre 200	200
JBL TLX103	100
JBL MR	100
JBL MR Centre	100
JBL SC305	150
KEF 80C	129
KEF Model 90	259
KEF Model 100	359
KEF 200C	699
Kenwood CS-6	150
Keswick Audio Centrali	359
Monitor Audio CC300	300
Monitor Audio CC900	400
Monitor Audio CC70	600
Martin-Logan Logos	1,949
Meridian M60C	1,125
Meridian M60C	1,125
Meridian DSP5000C	1,750
Meridian DSP5500C	3,095
Meridian DSP6000C	4,900
Miller & Kreisel S-85	400
Miller & Kreisel S-150C (THX)	800
Mission 73C	150
Mission 75C	248
NAD 808CC	170
Polk RM2500C	249
Polk CS250	250
Polk CS350	450
R A BG	95
Richard Allan Centre	59
Richard Allan Centre plus	99
Richard Allan Pod	149
Richard Allan Dimension Ctr Pod	199
Richard Allan Magnum Ctr Pod	299
Royd AV77	250
Sony SS CN15	40
Sony SS CN35	70

Sony SS CN65ES	130
Tannoy Profile 21	100
Tannoy Profile 622	179
Tannoy D750	999
Triangle Sat 1	375
Yamaha NS-C60	60
Yamaha NS-C105	80
Yamaha NS-C150	110
ZYP A1TAV	109



Dedicated Surround Speaker

B&W SCM8	550
Boston CRX	200
Boston 575X	349
DefinitiveTechnology BP1	395
DefinitiveTechnology BP2	595
DefinitiveTechnology BPX	1,095
Jamo Surround 40	60
Jamo Surround 50	70
Jamo Surround 100	90
Jamo Surround 200	180
Jamo Surround 300	280
Kenwood RS-05	80
Kenwood CM-5ES	80
Kenwood CM7ES	100
Kenwood Omni 7	170
Martin-Logan Stylos	2,872
Miller & Kreisel SS-150 (THX)	750
Miller & Kreisel S-150	2,400
Mus Tec Merlin	200
Mus Tec HOBBY	250
Mus Tec Osprey	250
Polk M3 II	220
Polk M5	300
Polk LS f/x Surround	449
Richard Allan Satellites	99
Richard Allan Dimension Cubes	139
Sony SS SR65ES	170
Triangle SAT II	250

Subwoofer

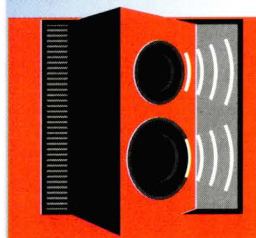
Aiwa TS-W9	170
B&W AS6	500
B&W PCS8	750
B&W 800ASW	1,500
Boston 595X	305
Crede SDC 001	3,054
Jamo SW25	140
Jamo SW170.II	240
Jamo SW200.II	300
Jamo SW400E	330
Jamo SW300.II	370
Jamo SW505E	400
Jamo SW600E	530
JBL PS60	399
JPW Satellites	80
JPW Subwoofer	130
JVC SX-SC1VBK	60
KEF Model 20B	349
KEF 30B	499
KEF 40B	759
KEF AV1	2,499
Kenwood SW500	250
Linn AV5150	2,850
Monitor Audio ASW 7	700
Meridian Sub 1	1,500
Meridian M2500	1,595
Miller & Kreisel VX-7B	450
Miller & Kreisel VX-7MKII	450
Miller & Kreisel V-75 MKII	650
Miller & Kreisel V-125	800
Miller & Kreisel V-125 (THX)	800
Miller & Kreisel MX-70	900
Miller & Kreisel MX-100	1,500
Miller & Kreisel MX-150	1,500
Miller & Kreisel MX-200	1,800
Miller & Kreisel MX-300	2,500
Miller & Kreisel MX-5000	2,900
Mission 73PS	180
Mission 73AS	450
Mission 75AS	550
Polk PSW100	500
Polk PSW300	750
R A Reference	199
REL Q50	375
REL Q-100	475
REL Strata II	575
REL Storm	700
REL Storm II	1,000
REL Stentor II	1,800
REL Studio II	4,000
Richard Allan Gold	149
Richard Allan Gold Subwoofer	199

Richard Allan Dimension Active	699
Richard Allan Magnum Active	999
Sony SA W101	230
Sony SA W301	330
Tannoy 625AIIIE	595
Triangle SATIII	650
Wharfedale Modus	180
Yamaha YST-SW40	140
Yamaha YST-SW80	180
Yamaha YST-SW150	280
Yamaha YST-SW200	400



TONEARMS

Air Tangent IC	3,333
Air Tangent Tangent 10B	7,777
Air Tangent Ref. Sig.	11,000
Audiomeca SL5	1,999
Decca LI Arm	49
Decca LIR Arm	99
Dynavector 507	2,200
Graham 1.5T	2,550
Helius Orion 4 Copper	549
Helius Orion 4 Silver	725
Helius Cyclane 2	1,495
Linn Akito	500
Linn Ekos	1,500
Manticore Musician	425
Manticore Magician 1	750
Manticore Magician 2	850
Moth Arm	109
Moth MKIII Stainless	146
Moth MKIII	174
Moth Moth 900	598
Naim Audio ARO	992
Nottingham Analogue Space	350
Nottingham Analogue Mentor	750
Nottingham Analogue Alien	1,200
Rega RB250	109
Rega RB300	174
Rega RB900	598
Roksan Tabriz	320
Roksan Tabriz Zi	420



Dedicated Centre Speaker

B&W Solid HCM1S	125
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Pro-Ject 6. A lot of record player for the money.

Moth Kanoot MkIII Arm	329	Michell Bronze Gyrodek	905
NAD 533	220	Michell Gyrodek/arm	971
Pioneer PL-J2500-C	80	Michell Orbe	1,950
Pioneer PL-990	130	Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck	600
Pro-Ject 0.5 (OM10)	160	Nottingham Analogue Illusion	600
Pro-Ject 1(510)	200	Nottingham Analogue HyperSpacedeck	1,200
Pro-Ject Project 2 MC10	300	Nottingham Analogue Graphic	1,200
Pro-Ject Project 6(MC15)	450	Nottingham Analogue Mentor	2,200
Rega Planar 78	214	Nottingham Analogue Mentor Ref	4,800
Rega Planar 2	214	Pink Triangle Export	948
Re a Planar 3	274	Pink Triangle Anniversary	1,797
Rega Planar 3 Colour	289	Pink Triangle Anni/DC PSU	2,173
Roksan Radius 3	470	Pro-Ject 6/Sumiko	850
Sony PS-LX56	70	Rega Planar 9	1,598
Sony PS-LX150H	90	Roksan Xerxes 10	1,295
Sony PS-J10	90	Roksan TMS	2,750
Sony PS-LX-300H	150	SME Model 20	3,240
Systemdek I/920	136	SME Model 20/2A	3,941
Systemdek IIX/900	230	SME Model 30	8,652
Systemdek I/920/Moth	235	SME Model 30/2A	9,836
Systemdek IIXE/900Ap	388	Technics SL-1200LTD	1,000
Systemdek 960	500	Thorens TD-146 V1 TP50	550
Technics SL-BD20	160	Thorens TD-2001 TP90	700
Technics SL-BD22	180	Thorens TD-520 SME	1,050
Technics SL-1210MkII	500	Townshend MkIII Rock	1,499
Technics SL-1200MkII	500	Well Tempered Record Player	1,850
Thorens TD-180 AT91	190	Well Tempered Classic	2,980
Thorens TD-180/S500	200	Well Tempered Super	3,900
Thorens TD-280 IV/UK	210	Well Tempered Reference	5,300
Thorens TD-180 Stanton 500	219	Wilson Benesch	1,550
Thorens TD-166 VI/UK/BC	300		
Thorens TD-166 VI/UK/AT	370		
Thorens TD-166 VI/UK/RB	400		
Thorens TD-318 III TP50	500		

Over £500

Audiomeca Romance	1,675
Audiomeca J1	2,500
Audiomeca J1/SL5	4,250
Basis 2001	2,750
Basis Ovation II	4,800
Basis Debut Gold Std III	7,200
Basis Debut Gold Vacuum	9,250
DNM Rota 1	3,500
DNM Rota 2	4,800
Dual Silverstone	900
Dual Goldenstone	1,200
Impulse Moskito	695
Linn LP12 Basik	1,100
Linn LP12 Valhalla	1,200
Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750
Lumley Reference Strotosphere ST1	6,250
Manticore Mantra	950
Manticore Magister	3,990
Marantz TT-1000	6,000
Michell Mycro/arm	581
Michell Gyrodek	825

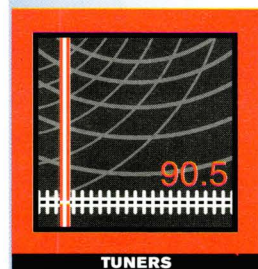
Remember that all entries printed in **RED** refer to hi-fi products that we have reviewed. Turn to page 106 for a full summary of test results!



Roksan Artemiz	895
SME 3009 Ser II Imp	250
SME Series II 3009-R	273
SME Series II 3010-R	416
SME Series II 3012-R	426
SME Series II 3012-R	458
SME Series 300-309	558
SME Series 300-310	571
SME Series 300-9 Gold	642
SME Series 300-312	649
SME Series IV	796
SME 300-309 Gld Pltd	1,024
SME Series IV Gld Pltd	1,261
SME Series V Gld Print	1,361
SME Series V	1,391
SME Series V Gold Pltd	1,649
Townshend Excalibur	1,499
Wilson Benesch ACT1	975
Zeta AS	469

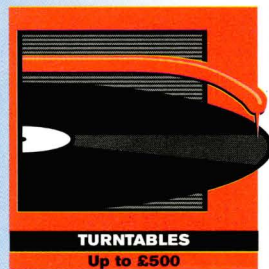
Meridian 604	1,350
Michi RHT-10	895
Micromega Minium FM	300
Micromega Tuner	700
Mission Cyrus FM7	400
Musical Fidelity E50	300
Musical Fidelity E500	499
NAD T 4210RDS	180
NAD 412	190
NAD 414RDS	250
Naim Audio NAT03	566
Naim Audio NAT02	1,028
Naim Audio NAT01	1,645
Onix TU39	800
Onkyo T4210RDS	180
Onkyo T-409	230
Onkyo T-411RDS	260
Onkyo R-811RDS	420
Pioneer F-204RDS	140
Pioneer F-304RDS	190
Pioneer F-504RDS	250
Quad 77FM	700
Rega Radio	229
Rotel RT-990BX	500
Sony ST-SE200	100
Sony STS-E300	120
Sony ST-S261	140
Sony STS-E700	180
Sony STS-A3ES	250
TEAC T-R400	120
TEAC TB-X10	400
Technics ST-GT350L	150
Technics ST-GT550L	200
Technics ST-GT650L	250
Thorens TRT-2000	450
Yamaha TX-480L	120
Yamaha TX-590RDS	180

Dual CS750-1	400
Dual Golden II	500
Genezza Lab-710	60
Genezza Lab-810	70
Grundig TT1	180
Kenwood KD-492F	100
Michell Q.C Gyro Power	389
Michell Syncro	405
Michell Mycro	435
Moth Turntable	199
Moth Alamo	199
Moth Kanoot Mkl Arm	279



TUNERS

Arcam Alpha 7	230
Arcam Alpha 8	280
Arcam Delta 280	399
Audiolab 8000T	800
Aura TU80	350
AVI S2000MT	599
Day Sequerra FM Ref	5,937
Day Sequerra S B'dcast Mon	14,640
Denon TU-260L	120
Denon TU-215RD	150
Denon TU-425RD	200
Grundig T12	170
Harman/Kardon TU930	180
Harman/Kardon TU950	200
Harman/Kardon TU9400	299
Kenwood KT-2080	130
Kenwood KT-3080	180
Linn Kudos Sneaky	500
Linn Kudos	775
Linn Kremlin	2,600
Luxman T-353	200
Marantz ST-57	150
Marantz ST-65	200
Mcintosh MR7084	1,550
Meridian 504	695



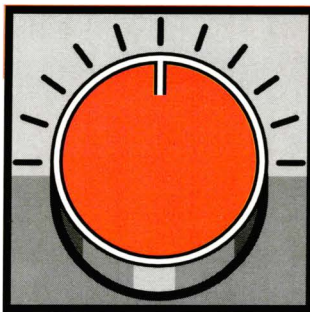
TURNTABLES

Up to £500

Akai AP A850	179
Ariston Pro-1200	160
Dual CS3700/3701	85
Dual CS435	130
Dual CS 435-1	150
Dual CS503-2	170
Dual 505-4 UK	250

Rega Planar 3 A classic budget turntable (also available in black).





Amplifiers

The amplifier sits at the heart of the system, processing the outputs from the various music sources as necessary and then driving the loudspeakers. These two (quite separate) functions are integrated into a single box at the low-to-middle price points; but become separated into preamps and power amplifiers. Even separate power supplies become increasingly common as one moves upmarket. Bear in mind that output power and sound quality are not necessarily

related. Some of the finest amplifiers available have outputs as low as 12 Watts, but team them with high efficiency loudspeakers and you can achieve loudness aplenty.

Power output is equally no indication of sound quality.



KEY

LINE INPUTS: Amount of input sockets for non vinyl sources such as CD players, tuners and cassette decks.

MM PHONO INPUT: If an amp has a vinyl phono input for moving magnet (normal output) cartridges.

MC PHONO INPUT: If an amp has a vinyl phono input for moving coil (low output) cartridges.

REMOTE CONTROL: If amp is couch potato ready.

HEADPHONE SOCKET: If an amp is can friendly.

POWER OUTPUT (W): Lab tested power output in Watts per channel.

RECEIVER: If an amp has a built in radio tuner.

FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback

information page.

BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

Product	Price(£)	Comments	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUT	MC PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT(W)	FACTSBACK NUMBER	RECEIVER	ISSUE NUMBER
Alchemist Maxim APD30A	299	Vivid and colourful sounding amp that's just too bold and brassy	5	●				30	1737	154	
AMC 3050	220	Low-price NAD-alike amplifier that is polite and modest but rather wooden. Phono better than line	4	●				45	1738	154	
Arcam Alpha 8	350	Enjoyably soft-centred amp won't frighten the animals. Upgradeable via preamp output, and R/C (not supplied)..	5	●				50			162
Arcam Alpha 9	500	Clear, colourful and well disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder which can compete with conviction. Tested with 9P	5	●	●	●	●	75			165
Audio Innovations Alto	300	Probably because of a lack of deep bass, this stylish amp sounds open, natural and relaxed	6					35	1540	138	
Audio Innovations S700	1,199	Turns the roughest of digital sounds into understated and graceful music	5					25			116
Audio Note Ongaku	56,000	A single ended, zero negative feedback triode, line-level amplifier and a half. Probably the best amplifier in the world	3					26			C91
Audio Note Oto SE	1,500	Transparent, dynamic, clear and subtle, but limited power	4					24			126
Audiolab 8000A	500	The 8000A remains a highly disciplined and mature sounding amp	5	●	●		●	60			1581 140
Audiolab 8000S	650	Informative in every sense, only a slight lack of bite detracts. Perhaps Audiolab's best yet!	6				●	60			1740 154
Aura VA100 II	330	Big, smooth yet slightly disjointed sound was equally familiar	5	●				70			1541 138
Copland CSA-14	1,099	Great sound and looks, but watch out for high capacitance cables	4	●				60			1416 148
Creek 4240	279	Bearing no relation to earlier Creek designs, this radical rethink is more successful via MM than CD	4	●				40			1127 134
Creek 4240SE	350	At best, bland and plodding, at worst grainy, shouty and honky. Best on simple rock	5					35			1741 154
Denon PMA-350SE	200	Reinvented in the minimalist tradition, the new SE model is a control freak, but can sound wonderful	5					50			162
Denon PMA-450SE	280	Based on the original '450 and offers a fast, furious and entertaining sound	5	●				60			1258 142
Denon PMA-725R	350	Warm, bold, up-front presentation but musically unexciting	5	●	●	●	●	97			1802 157
Densen Beat B-100	600	Low feedback amp with passive internal preamp gives a bold, pacy and thoroughly involving sound. Phono option listed.	5					60			162
DeVa 125	249	Subjectively loud this throws an unlikely quantity of music at the audience, bouncy sense of rhythm	6					20	1464	149	
DPA Renaissance	595	DPA's first integrated amp is typically innovative, but a little too 'crisp 'n dry' for our tastes	5	●			●	40			1582 140
EMF Audio Sequel	349	Relaxed and restrained design from Mike Creek	5	●				50			109
Exposure XX Super	700	Rather transistorised, unexciting sound. Good coherence and rhythm. Best played loud	6					55			1743 154
Gamma Acoustics Gemini	699	Genuine single-ended triode design, but low power, mundane sound and poor build	3					12			1416 148
Grundig Fine Arts V-11	160	Rhythmically dull. Never gets out of first gear	5	●			●	55			1803 157
Harman/Kardon HK610	200	Lively and friendly sound, but could prove too exciting for the faint hearted	6	●				30	1465	149	
Harman/Kardon HK620	250	Capable and musical amplifier which is among the nicest available at the price. Optional add-in MM/MC board available.	6				●	40			162
Harman Kardon HK1200	300	Big sound with little bite. Becomes confused with complex music	7					45			1804 157
Harman/Kardon HK1400	400	Relaxed, confident sound is only troubled by the most dense of recordings.	5	●	●			40			1011 129
Harman/Kardon HK640	450	Breezy, nimble sounding amp lacks grip and fortitude - it can sound artificial and insubstantial	6					55			1542 138
John Shearpe Phase 2	649	Either a natural-sounding superstar or nasal and hard to listen to — make up your own mind!	5					50			1744 154
JVC AX-V4	200	Respectable performance for a Pro-Logic AV amplifier. Lacks resolution and sparkle, though	5	●			●	63			1805 157
JVC AX-R5	200	Versatile, and lots of even-handed, articulate detail; but let down by superficiality	5	●			●	45			1466 149
Kenwood KA-3020SE	200	Not a brilliant phono stage, but this is a lively, exuberant sounding amp via CD	5	●			●	50			1130 134
Kenwood KA-3060R	230	Classy engineering, but sound is over-dry, often frustratingly restrained and rather unsophisticated	5	●			●	45			1260 142
Kenwood KA-5050R	350	A listenable but neither particularly communicative nor captivating amplifier	5	●			●	95			1012 129
Kenwood KA-7090R	400	Power with responsibility here, but the Kenwood can sound lean and lacks transparency	6	●	●			85			162
LFD Integrated Zero	499	Lively and brisk, but at the same time cold and unsympathetic	6					50			1584 140
Linn Majik-1 (Phono)	725	The cornerstone of Linn's modular hi-fi system is innovative, but sounds vague and confused	5	●	●			33			1013 129
Magnum IA170	270	Gives a realistic sense of instruments playing within a very believable acoustic, preserves colour & dynamics well	6					96	1260	142	
Magnum Quartet	329	An integrated model that incorporates four monoblocks optimised for bi-wiring, but sound is sandy in the treble	5	●				36			121
Magnum IA-200	465	Sweet, valve - flavoured solid state amplifier flatters where it doesn't cast light. Note: power output listed is peak	7					100			162
Magnum Class A	599	Lashings of rich and compelling music, but the Class A trades lushness for accuracy.	4	●	●			60			116
Minium Amp	350	Excellent musical performance but doesn't like high levels or low impedance speakers	6	●			●	40			1806 157
Mission Cyrus IIIi	600	Beautifully presented, but mid-dominated balance and other anomalies were not liked on test. Upgradeable using PSX unit PSU.	6	●			●	50			162
Musical Fidelity E10	300	Smooth and high-endish sound that is marred by a lack of dynamics and a touch of grain	5	●				40			1746 154
Musical Fidelity A2	499	Lucid, transparent midband and a full upper bass are provided by this highly proficient A1 replacement	5	●				25			162
Myriad MI 120	530	Despite an ultra-modern appearance, the old-fashioned cold, dry transistor sound	5				●	60			1747 154
NAD 310	100	Fleet and sure of foot, it seems likely to set all appendages tapping with its blend of enthusiasm and artfulness	5					20	1468	149	
NAD 314	260	Lively if coloured presentation that is musically engaging and easy on the ear	6	●				53			1807 157
Naim Nait 3	550	Distinctive and highly musical sounding integrated. Perhaps too distinctive for some tastes	5					30			1748 154
Onix OA31	480	Eager to please, dynamic and fresh sounding, but it's grip is wafer thin	5	●	●			60			1587 140
Orelle SA-100	449	A musically rewarding amplifier that grows on you. Trace of coarseness in treble	5					50			1749 154
Pioneer A-300R	200	Its bright and breezy sound is a natural tonic to those of use worn down by the ongoing stress of life	5	●			●	50			1469 149

FACTSBACK NUMBER
ISSUE NUMBER
RECEIVER
POWER OUTPUT(W)
POWER SOCKET
HEADPHONE CONTROL
REMOTE CONTROL
MC PHONO INPUT
MM PHONO INPUT
LINE INPUTS

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

Product	Price(£)	Comments	5	4	3	2	1	0	45	1129	134
▶ Pioneer A-303R	200	Fresh and uncomplicated sound bests much of the audiophile competition	5	●					45	1129	134
Pioneer A-300X	230	This revamped version of the A300 sounds more confident via CD than MM, yet our panel was unmoved	5	●					40		116
▶ Pioneer A-400X	300	On second audition, this amp was tonally unchanged but less compelling	6	●	●				50	1545	138
Pioneer A-503R	300	Best via MM disc, the dull and claustrophobic sound is otherwise deeply uninspiring	5	●		●	●		70	1544	138
▶ Pioneer A-300R Precision	400	Sophisticated breathed-on variant of the A-300R is not an obvious winner, but it will slowly win you over with its subtle charms	5	●	●	●	●		35		162
Pro-ject Model 7	300	A minimalist amplifier brimming with good intent, but too quirky for its own good. Either MM or MC	5	●					40	1264	142
Quad 77	650	Stylish remote driven amp, bright and lively. Tested in Sessions	4	●	●				50		139
Rega Elex	398	Minimalist amplifier derived from Elicit is a little uninspiring, though at least it is not badly behaved.	4	●					50		162
▶ Rotel RA920AX	120	Commendable performance at the price. Tuneful, robust bass	4	●				●	32	1808	157
Rotel RA930AX mkII	150	Good phono stage with a realistic sense of space and dynamics but CD is less impressive	3	●				●	30	1470	149
▶ Rotel RA970BX	250	Lively, fresh and perky with plenty of power, but not so clever with complex recordings	6					●	60	1546	138
Sherwood AX-7030R	400	Versatile, and with truck-loads of power on tap, this model is disappointingly coarse and uninvolved on audition.	5	●	●	●	●		95		162
Sonic Frontiers SFC-1	1,795	Smooth, sophisticated Canadian valve amp with a decent direct input and more features than average	6						50		126
▶ Sony TA-F246E	200	Relaxed quality that seduces with its guile and subtlety, MM input is a tad laconic but CD is very tidy and composed	3	●				●	40	1471	149
Sony TA-F448E	250	Confused and coloured sounding, it needs a large dose of delicacy adding to its presentation	5	●				●		1809	157
▶ Talk Electronics Storm 1	500	Good soundstaging and strong detail are provided by this unassuming and not especially powerful model	6						50		162
TEAC A-BX7R	700	Characterful balance mars an otherwise meticulously designed amplifier. Includes a balanced input, optional MM/MC stage.	5				●		50		162
Technics SU-A700 Mk 3	250	Fully equipped, high tech amplifier ultimately fails the 'is it Stork...?' test, and can sound messy and inarticulate	5	●				●	45		162
Woodside ISA230 Disc	1,249	Smooth and inoffensive valve amplifier, though it lacks the sparkle and euphony required for a truly entertaining sound	3	●					30		116
Yamaha AX-490	250	Widgets aplenty, but unemotional sound evoked an uncertain response from panel	5	●	●	●	●		85	1473	149
Preamplifiers											
▶ Alchemist Kraken/Pre	380	Quirky Class A design with an equally warm and colourful sound	4								124
AMC CVT2030A	400	Budget valve preamp, modest build and a tad noisy, with fair sound	6	●				●			165
▶ Audio Innovations L1	369	Reviewed with S800 Anniversary — Explicitly detailed, conveys the message of the music as a whole	4								1300 145
Audiolab 8000C	520	Distinctive, stark neutrality that will not appeal to all. Good value engineering.	5	●	●			●			97
Audiolab 8000Q	1,000	Tested with 8000M monoblocks	6					●			1301 145
▶ Aura CA200	700	Flexible, well designed - can sound slightly aggressive, but it's fast, clean and dynamic, and makes compelling listening	10	●	●	●	●				165
▶ Conrad-Johnson PV-10A	1,250	Beautiful imaging, superb detail, plenty of gain on the phono input; classy build too. Tested in Sessions	4		●						1560 139
▶ Conrad-Johnson Premier 7	11,000	The 7 is designed without compromise, and is clearly one of the finest (valve) preamplifiers money can buy	5								C91
▶ Copland CTA-301MkII	1,349	Sweet sounding - but never gets bogged down in audio treacle	4	●							1630 151
▶ Creek P42	279	Tested with bridged A42 power amps, an articulate and open combo with tight tuneful bass (optional phono stage & remote)	6					●			155
▶ Cyrus Pre	650	Tested with Cyrus Power. High tech design Punchy, light footed character with a sense of substance and natural warmth	5	●				●			155
▶ DPA DSP200S	495	Dramatic but detailed and transparent sound belies modest power rating (tested with DPA-200S)	6								124
▶ EAR 802MC	2,599	Tested with 509 Mk II - see comments in power amp section	4	●	●						63
▶ ECA Vista	760	Wind up the volume and blow a breath of fresh music into your system (tested with Lectern)	5								1302 145
Exposure XVII	849	Superbly rhythmical; maybe a tad overpowering in the midband. Tested in Sessions with XVII Super	5	●	●						142
▶ Jadis JP-30MC	5,978	French tubes, JP-30MC has beautiful build, nostalgic styling and delightful midrange. (tested with JA30)	5	●							60
Krell KRC-2s	4,190	This is an exquisitely refined and transparent design (tested with KSA-50S in Statements)	6					●			141
LFD Mistral Linestage	499	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6								165
Meridian 501	695	Tight, positive sound, but dispassionate; intense at high levels. Tested with 555	5	●				●			1303 145
Meridian 562V	995	Transparent and capable preamp, also features 6 digital inputs	9	●				●			140
▶ Michell Argo	730	Open, well focussed imagery with natural, refined textures	6								165
▶ Moth 30 Passive	149	Modular system gives cracking results. Passive preamp and power amp warrant Best Buy (tested with 30/Stereo 60)	4								109
Moth 30 Active Line Stage	349	Excellent sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp	4								165
▶ Musical Fidelity F2	500	Subtle, sweet sounding preamp with strong presence	5	●	●						165
▶ NAD 114	270	Beer budget preamp, sounds focussed, detailed and consistent	6	●	●			●			165
Naim NAC92R	599	Upgradeable preamp uses proprietary socketry etc. See NAP90 power amp for comments	5					●			165
▶ Quad 77 Pre	850	Sophisticated design with 2-way remote control console; open colourful sound and very flexible	4	●	●	●					165
▶ Rega Hal	998	Dedicated to Exon power amps — passive line stages.	6	●	●	●					165
▶ Rose RV-23	450	You can pay more to get a more transparent sound, but it's hard to criticise at the price	3	●							77
Rotel RC970BX MkII	175	Confident, consistent sound. reviewed (in Sessions) with RB970BXMKII power amps	5					●			144
Rotel RC980BX	375	Tames enthusiastically recorded material with a laid back and occasionally smeared sound (tested with RB980BX)	5	●	●			●			155
▶ Sumo Athena IIB	767	Tested with Polaris III. Big, natural and tidy sounding with very natural reproduction of acoustic and electric instruments	6								1305 145
Talk Hurricane 2L	649	Design of integrity which get to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6								165
Thorens TTP2000F	650	Glamorous shoebox format minimalist pre with fine detail and some granularity	3	●	●	●					165
Woodside SC26 Phono	2,233	Synergistic with STA35, with a cool, controlled sound, good focus and transparency (tested with STA35)	5	●	●						100
Power amplifiers											
Acurus A150	1400	Price includes RL11 preamp with which it was tested. Powerfull remote control US combo with a slightly forward inclination	1						150		151
▶ Alchemist Kraken/Pwr	399	Hardly accurate, but entertaining nevertheless	1						60		124
AMC CVT2100A	600	Astonishing value valve/MOSFET hybrid with K788 output, but lacks the magic of the best valves	1						80		165
▶ Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all rounder which can compete with conviction	1								165
▶ Art Audio Quintet	1,393	Switchable triode, ultralinear output stage. In triode mode, these are 15 of the sweetest Watts around. Surprisingly gutsy	1						15		109
▶ Aura PA100	700	Can sound slightly aggressive, but it's fast, clean and dynamic, and makes compelling listening	1						100		165
▶ Audio Innovations S800 Anni	1475	Reviewed with L1 — Explicitly detailed, conveys the message of the music as a whole remarkably well	1						25	1300	145
Audiolab 8000M	750	Strong, controlled sound; confident bass, but colourless. Tested with 8000Q	1						125	1301	145
Audio Research VT60	2,395	Ranks as 'must try' American cultural item (tested in Statements). Tube design	1						35	1179	136
Copland CTA-505	2,099	Grown up amplifier with a refined, yet never over-civilised air	1						67	1630	151
▶ Creek A42	279	Tested with bridged P42 pre in bridged mode. Articulate and open combo with tight tuneful bass	1						100		155
▶ Cyrus Power	450	Tested with Cyrus Pre. Punchy, light footed character with a sense of substance and natural warmth (bridgeable)	1						50		155
▶ DPA 200S	750	Dramatic but crisp, open sound belies power rating (tested with DSP-200S)	1						60		124
▶ EAR 509 Mk II	3,499	Combining sonic strengths of transistors and valves, this amp warrants attention (tested with 802)	1						100		63
▶ ECA Lectern	880	Tested with Vista. Wind up the volume and blow a breath of fresh music into your system	1						50	1302	145

CABLES (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	FAXBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER	
LFD Spirolink II	70	Price for 0.7m length. Strong and confident sound enhancing bass depth and subtlety, concentrates of nthe meat of the music	●				●	●	1694	131	
LFD Trilink	150	Price for 0.7m length. Warm and luxurious sound but a little too fruity in balance, treble is a little subdued, bass detached	●				●	●	1695	131	
Linn Phono to Phono	47	Encourages a delicate performance underpinned by a strong and authoritative bass			●	●		●	1695	131	
Monster Interlink 200	20	Colourful in an appealing rather than contrived sense, bass is slightly over-blown, large and ingratiating sound stage	●				●	●	1696	131	
Monster Interlink 300	30	Richer, smoother more civilised sound than 200 with improved articulation and reduced sibilance	●				●	●	1696	131	
Monster Interlink 400	40	Compromised by a grainy top end, treble and vocal range sound particularly sharp and untidy	●				●	●	1697	131	
Monster Interlink 500	50	Sounds rather good, providing a livelier and more interesting account of music than most sub £100 cables	●				●	●		108	
Monster Interlink 800	80	Not as bright or aggressive as the 400 but treble is strangely lumpy, muted and manipulated - odd cable	●				●	●	1697	131	
Monster Interlink Reference 2	100	Easy on the ear but rather contrived, slightly clanky treble fails to integrate with the smoother but splodgy midband					●	●	1697	131	
Moth Ley Line Black	100	Offers a full and big sound, neutral yet very solid and confident in delivery. Expansive imaging retains music's energy	●				●	●		108	
Moth Ley Line Grey	200	Detailed enough but there's a sense of distance between the music and the listener, vox are course rather than liquid	●				●	●		108	
Nordost Black Knight	55	Flat black cable that is distinctive, but slightly coloured — but not in a wholly negative manner	●				●	●		160	
Panasonic RP-CA910	50	Uncongested and even handed balance if slightly flat imagewise, retains impact but has a vaguely untransparent quali y			●	●		●		108	
Silvertone Ex-Static	35	Pleasantly unfratiguing and competitively priced cable that lacks detail and insight			●	●		●		160	
SonicLink Silver Pink	35	Dynamically sensitive and muddle-free. Unsure about the flesh-coloured finish though...	●		●			●		160	
SonicLink Black	49	Encourages an upbeat and snappy sound that's driven by leading edges, full and rumbustious bass maintains an even tempo					●	●	1699	131	
Tara Labs Prism 11	45	Very compatible cable that wins through with a naturally balanced and realistically dynamic sound. 6N purity copper	●				●	●	1699	131	
Tara Labs Prism 22	56	Delivers a fresh and detailed sound with clear and bright treble giving it a free, quick and dynamic character			●		●	●	1700	131	
Tara Labs Quantum CD	75	Lacking in obvious vices, neutral and transparent, there's also a good solid bass. Vox are not always as intimate as possible	●				●	●		108	
Tara Labs Prism 33	90	A pedestrian cable that sounds lively but muddled. Quite dynamic, quite rich, quite smooth but also quite indistinct					●	●	1700	131	
Transparent Audio Music Link	119	No aggressive nasties to tax the ears, neither does it sparkle with inspirational detail. Only suited to low output impedances			●	●		●	1701	131	
van den Hul The Storm	25	Price for 0.8m length. Rich and warm but bass is rolled off, however there's plenty of drive and high frequencies are clean			●		●	●	1701	131	
van den Hul Source HB	50	(Priced for 0.8m) Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness. Airy and well controlled			●	●		●		160	
van den Hul The First	210	Using 12,000 carbon fibres, a gentle and subtle sounding cable that conveys oodles of information but lacks dynamic punch			●	●		●		1702	131
van den Hul The Second	225	Wonderfully open and relaxing but also intimately detailed, slightly softens percussive dynamics	●				●	●		1702	131
XLO Type 150	50	A restrained but useful cable for taming lively CD players, dynamics lack freedom, treble lacks clarity			●	●		●	1703	131	
XLO Type 0.1	180	Unusual but highly expressive and detailed with a hint of graininess on powerful vocals					●	●	1703	131	
Digital Interconnects											
Audio Note AN-V	110	Ostensibly an analogue cable but gives a meaty and natural performance when used for digital duty	●				●	●	E 1704	131	
Audioquest Video X	40	A decent level of detail, imparts a gentle lift from vocal to high treble that can sound a little splashy			●		●	●	E 1705	131	
Audioquest Video Z	60	The very best available, with an expressive sound, but generously priced	●	●	●	●	●	●	E	108	
Audioquest Optiink Z	120	Good level of midband detail but frequency extremes lack depth and extension							O	108	
Audioquest Digital Pro	100	A silver cable with all the drive of Video Z but lacking its clear cut transparency			●	●			E	108	
Bandridge AL4900G	40	Lacks deep rounded bass and treble is coloured with a spittiness, a little rough and ready					●	●	E 1705	131	
Chord Codac	32	A connection with a stranded inner core and a sound that lacks integration			●	●		●	E	108	
Chord Prodac	50	Price for 0.6m length. Lively detailed treble, drives music along confidently with no hint of fizz			●		●	●	E 1706	131	
DPA Opti-link	20	Very similar to Bandridge AL560; sound is lacklustre							O	108	
DPA Digi-link	28	Can seem slightly impassive but there's no avoiding its exceptionally detailed sound			●	●		●	E	108	
Ixos 105	25	Extended but soft edged treble that's mercifully free of fatiguing colourations, plenty of weight, smooth vox			●		●	●	E 1707	131	
Kimber Kable Opti-link	70	Hardly cheap for what appears to be a bog-standard PMNA fibre, yet it sounds a little brighter and livelier than most							O	108	
LFD Digiink Copper	30	Slightly grainy highly compatible cable with coherent and forward dynamic quality			●		●	●	E 1708	131	
Monster Interlink LS100	45	Well constructed stepped-index fibre with polished ends and connectors. Lean, fuzzy, engaging performance							O	108	
Monster Datalink 100	45	Price for 0.5m. A colourful coaxial interconnect with an equally colourful and up-beat sound. Very compatible			●	●		●	E	108	
Monst Leyline Datalink	140	A thin, coaxial version of Leyline Black with a rather hard and unforgiving character. Too expensive			●	●		●	E	108	
QED DigiFlex	20	A top performance, low-loss 75ohm coax with a very open, almost liquid quality			●	●	●	●	E	108	
Siltech HF-6	150	Sounds detailed, very clean and very extended, but bass is less well resolved - a treat for high end systems			●		●	●	E 1709	131	
SonicLink Green	60	Spacious, positive and engaging if a tad over crisp at times, very compelling however			●		●	●	E 1709	131	
van den Hul MC Videolink 75	48	An AV-cum-digital cable that nearly beats QED's DigiFlex, but emphasises sibilants			●				E	108	
van den Hul The First	120	Exceptionally natural albeit slightly dark or cautious compared to some, plenty of subtle information and beautiful integration			●	●			E 1710	131	
Loudspeaker Cables											
Audio Note AN-D	4.50	Supplied in linear, non-polarised lengths that should be twisted into stereo pairs. Sounds rather grippy and forward					●	●		109	
Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical					●	●		1711	133
Audio Note AN-L	29.50	Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel which was happy to accept its foibles	●				●	●		1712	133



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... in YOUR system
... for YOUR ears
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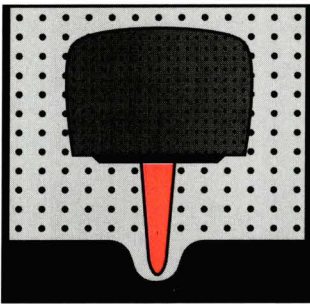
CONNECTIONS

13 John Princes Street, London W1M 9HB (A division of Connection 90' Travel Ltd.)



CABLES (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	CABLE TYPE					ISSUE NUMBER
			SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	
Audio Note AN-SP	125	A calm and civilised presentation, very quiet in the way it reveals subtle low level detail. Great poise and clarity	●			●	●	109
Audioquest F-14	1.95	Ideal for laying under carpets, F-14 encourages a slightly warm and vibrant sound				●	●	109
Audioquest Type 4	4.95	Four 18-gauge OFHC copper conductors wound in a Litz-type fashion increases capacitance but restrains the cable's 'bite'	●		●		●	109
Audioquest Cobalt 2	45	A rather polite and anemic sound that bubbles gently with detail and is largely uncoloured and cautiously spacious	●		●		●	133
Bandridge SF LC1070	42p	Basic figure 8 bellwire, lightweight balance and a softness that dilutes even the strongest bass	●		●		●	1713 133
Bandridge SF LC1259	1	Fresh and open, bubbly and naturally colourful soundstage that's neither forced or unduly edgy. Treble is slightly messy	●		●		●	1713 133
Bandridge Highflex LC2604	3.50	Substantial 6mm ² conductor produces weighty but ploddy music that lacks transparency	●		●		●	1714 133
Bandridge LC7409	3.85	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings			●		●	1800 157
Cable Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained			●		●	1800 157
DNM LSCB500	5.95	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire					●	1716 133
DPA Black Si teen	90	Unflappable resolution of fine musical details, there's no dampening of dynamics simply oodles of taut information	●				●	1717 133
Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value					●	1800 157
Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy sounding bi-wire cable. Slightly manipulative sounding			●		●	1800 157
Heybrook Heywire	4	This well-meaning facsimile of earlier ribbon cables ends up sounding lumpy and uneven					●	109
Ixos 603	2	Big and expansive sounding cable, full and engaging while retaining a high degree of neutrality					●	1718 133
Ixos 604	5	Midrange is detailed and surprisingly smooth but treble is hard and synthetic and the bass no better			●		●	1719 133
Kimber 4TC Double-wire	40	A variation on a Kimber classic which produces a rich and weighty sound, but isn't quite as transparent as single runs			●		●	133
Mission Quartet	7.90	Mixed, inoffensive sound, adds guttural resonance to vocals and could be generally more coherent. Bi-wire					●	1722 133
Monster Cable XP	1.50	XP offers plenty of slightly soft bass and a slightly rounded treble, a relaxed cable whose indiscretions are not bothersome		●	●		●	1723 133
Naim NACA 5	5.11	Described as a 'dinosaur of a cable', this stiff wire rod doesn't belong outside Naim systems. But it works a treat in them					●	109
Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey sounding and strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance, a bit bass shy too					●	133
Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric with robust full blooded bass, and dynamic too if slightly bright at times					●	133
Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound — but too messy and bloated for its own good					●	1800 157
Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design, shame about the sound quality	●		●		●	1800 157
QED Qudos	2.50	Despite high tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, the music failed to gel					●	1800 157
QED Profile 8	5	Sophisticated flat cable that lacks decent bass and get up and go					●	1800 157
SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced					●	1800 157
Tara Labs Rectangular SCM	725	Price for terminated 2m pair. Dynamics are exquisite, luxurious smooth sound, brimming with unforced detail					●	1725 133
Transparent Audio Musichord	11.42	Sweet, open and refined treble, a bit of breathy exuberance and can sound slightly lackadaisical					●	1728 133
Transparent Audio Wave	22.84	Very close to the sound of 'no cable', one of the very best. Slightly softens treble detail	●				●	1728 133
Tech + Link OFC79	1	Bargain basement cable that sounds cosy, but suffers from a wobbly bass					●	1800 157
van den Hul The Clearwater	6	Despite its evocative title, the Clearwater turns out to be a disappointingly murky sounding cable					●	109
van den Hul CS122	19	Smooth and articulate with superb focus and control, its sheer coherence makes it a winner (tested in Sessions)					●	153
van den Hul The Magnum	31	Touted as vdH's most prestigious twinlead cable, Magnum sounds soft and old fashioned					●	109
van den Hul The Wind	35	'The Wind' kicks up a storm with its lush midrange and bone-crunching bass!					●	109
van den Hul Revolution	64	Silver plated OFC combined with carbon fibre prompts a sombre character with an easy and relaxed treble					●	1726 133
XLO Pro Type 625	4	Lively but natural and relaxed sounding but a hint of congestion at frequency extremes					●	1726 133



Cartridges

Cartridges fall into two groups: high output MM (moving magnet) models, capable of working directly into most phono inputs; and generally more expensive low and very low output MC (moving coil) models. MC cartridges usually have better mechanical integrity, tighter tolerances and give better performance. Many amplifiers are no longer equipped with the necessary phono input for a cartridge, and a separate phono stage is necessary. Phono input equipped valve designs need a

transformer to cope with MC cartridges.

Cartridge/amplifier interfacing can be very subtle, but even basic high output MM designs benefit in overall balance from optimised amplifier capacitance loading.

Best buy

Recommended

KEY

MM: Moving magnet cartridge with a normal output suitable for all vinyl disc amplifier inputs.
MC: Moving coil cartridge with a low output only suitable for high

sensitivity vinyl disc amplifier inputs.
REPLACEABLE STYLUS: Most MM cartridges have a stylus that can be removed and replaced

OUTPUT (mV): Cartridge output in millivolts.
MASS (g): Cartridge mass can affect arm choice.
FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax

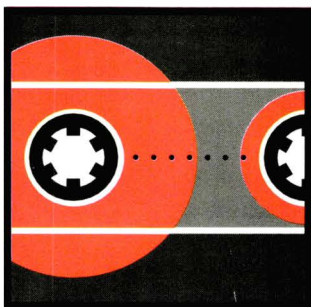
copy of the review.
BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.

CARTRIDGES

Product	Price(£)	Comment	REPLACEABLE STYLUS		OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
			MM	MC			
Arcam C77	30	A sensible moving magnet package with good bounce at a competitive price.	●	●	4.0	6	48
Arcam C77MG	40	Punchy, with plenty of energy to liven things up. The solid body is well worth the extra £10.	●	●	4.0	6	67
Arcam E77MG	60	Our sample had a disappointing stylus, but gave a coherent, rich and laid back sound.	●	●	4.0	6	48
Arcam P77MG	73	Preferred to its cheaper partner thanks to a better tip. Channel balance poor	●	●	4.0		48
Audio Note Io IIV	1,395	One of the best, giving an extraordinarily relaxing midrange clarity. Needs a transformer.		●	0.1		100
Audio Technica AT-95E	19	Clear and dynamic, though richly balanced.		●	2.8		48
Audio Technica ART-1	944	This is a delicate and very fluid-sounding MC that tracks well.		●	0.4	9	72
Audioquest 404L	599	Slight harshness detracted from the performance of this otherwise clear-sounding and detailed cartridge.		●	0.5	6	84
Audioquest 7000NSX	1,495	Stunning stereo imaging and detail spoiled by poor tracking and high sensitivity to arms.		●	0.4	6	91
Denon DL110	70	A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well		●	1.0	6	48
Denon DL160	90	Although listeners just preferred the 110, its brother here survived lab tests and is still 'thoroughly competent'.		●	0.1	6	43
Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life' is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail.		●	0.1	6	103
Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether and a top notch bargain too.		●			103
Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	449	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent.		●	0.15	5.3	158

CARTRIDGES (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comment	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (MV)	FAXBACK MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm.	●	0.25	12	84
Dynavector XX-1	998	Good, but not immensely competitive at the price, and not helped by comparison with the low output version.	●	2.0	12	84
Goldring Elan	19	A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body	●	5.0	7	67
Goldring 1012GX	65	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency colouration apparent.	●	6.5	7	85
Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved	●	6.5	7	85
Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative.	●	0.5	8	84
Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively though.	●	6.5	6	91
Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound has a certain dirtiness.	●	0.5	8	103
Grado Prestige Gold	150	Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●	4	6	158
Linn K5	65	Not as crisply focussed as the other Linn magnetics, but the K5 is smoother.	●	4.5	6	67
Linn K9	150	Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus.	●	4.5	5	Col
London Decca Maroon	259	Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconic/silent as ever.	●	5.0	6	67
London Decca S Gold	339	Immediate and detailed, but coloured, nonlinear with a questionable effect on records.	●	5.0	6	84
Lyra Lydian	699	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed	●	0.3	7	158
Lyra Clavis Da Capo	1,069	A stable tracker, and one of the finest cartridges we've heard	●	0.1	7	143
Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues - weight, clarity and neutrality	●	3.0	5	85
Ortofon 520/P	65	Sensitive to load capacitance, the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound.	●	3.0	5	6
Ortofon MC10 Super	100	'What a delightfully sweet-sounding cartridge this is...' we said.	●	0.3	7	48
Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unobtrusive - take it as it comes.	●	3.3	4	103
Ortofon MC15 Super II	130	A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and clos up.	●	0.35	7	103
Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable	●	0.5	11	139
Ortofon MC25FL	249	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP	●	0.5	11	139
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings	●	0.5	10.7	158
Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real eye-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere, one of the very best.	●	0.12	10	84
Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo	●	0.12	10	91
Rega Bias	39	Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow build, the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound.	●	5	4	67
Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is both more detailed, accurate and convincing.	●	5.0	5	67
Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but more civilised and smoother.	●	6.5	5	91
van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●	5.5	6	103
van den Hul DDT-II	699	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy	●	0.35	7.6	158
van den Hul MC-10	799	A neutral, balanced performer gives, fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass	●	0.4	6	60
van den Hul MC-One	999	This extended all the positive qualities of the '10, but added greater authority and scale - worth all the extra money.	●	0.4	6	60
van den Hul MC-Two	1,349	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal.	●	0.4	6	72
van den Hul G' hopper III/IIA	2,999	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available, it has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse.	●	0.4	6	122
Wilson benesch Matrix	689	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive.	●	0.58	6	158



Cassette Decks

The compact cassette is still the world's most versatile and ubiquitous music storage medium. Buffs may wrinkle their noses, but they all use it.

There should be no problems in connecting a cassette deck to any normal amplifier, but some care needs to be taken in choosing the best tapes for a specific machine. (Trial and error is one effective technique, but many decks have manual bias adjustment and some match up to the tape automatically.) Twin decks offer the option to dub tapes and play two cassettes

sequentially. Autoreverse is a useful feature, but usually implies some mechanical compromise. The sort of facilities that are useful include tape monitor switching and Dolby S.

Best buy

Recommended

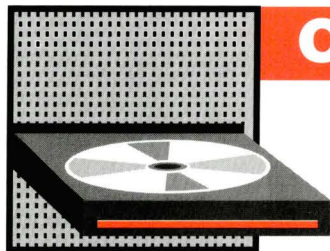
KEY					
DOLBY C:	A rather extreme noise reduction system not usually associated with high sound quality.	3-HEAD:	If you want to monitor a recording whilst you are making it a third head is essential.	AUTOREVERSE:	Automatically plays both sides of the cassette.
DOLBY S:	A desirable derivative of the Dolby SR professional noise reduction system.	TWIN DECK:	Contains two decks for dubbing and continuous play, in most instances only one deck will record.	AUTO CALIBRATION:	The deck will automatically set up bias and EQ for any tape.
DOLBY HX PRO:	System designed by B&O to extend headroom			ADJUSTABLE BIAS:	Bias can be manually set to suit the tape being used.
				FACTSBACK NUMBER:	The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback information page.
				BACK ISSUE:	The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.

CASSETTE DECKS

Product	Price(£)	Comments	DOLBY HX PRO	DOLBY S	DOLBY C	3-HEAD	TWIN HEAD	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Aiwa AD-F450	120	Basic but well designed budget deck, astonishing value; only the poor metering gives the game away.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1513	136
Aiwa AD-WX727	170	High class twin for those who want bells, whistles - and music.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1377	146
Denon DRM-550	160	There are some technical limitations, but this remains a fine sounding deck, and excellent value.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	158
Denon DRS-640	200	Drawer loading deck, with simple facilities and smooth, well adjusted sound.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1591	140
Denon DRM-650S	230	An all-round improvement on predecessors, offers a wide ranging, disciplined sound, Dolby S is not the best feature.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	164	164
Denon DRM-740	270	Breathed-on DRM-710, with good external treatment offers good, if somewhat detached sonics.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1514	136
Denon DRS-810	310	Drawer loading deck, carefully designed yet lacking in subtlety on audition.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	127	127
Grundig CCF3	200	Simple, sensible and well built twin, but lack of pitch stability compromises performance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1379	146
Harman/Kardon TD420	280	Minor inconsistencies detract from a well conceived, minimum features design	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1592	140
Harman/Kardon TD450	350	Draw loader with poor tape navigation features; good midband but shallow bass	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	164	164
JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	158
JVC TD-V562BK	220	Ultra-sophisticated transport at a silly price; sound quality is stable but slightly opaque.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	123	123
JVC TD-V662BK	270	Assured, clean and agile sounding recorder, if not quite the most refined in its class.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1380	146

CASSETTE DECKS (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	DOLBY C	DOLBY B	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN HEAD	AUTO REVERSE	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Kenwood KX-7060S	329	Although slightly dull sounding with prerecorded tapes, this is a well equipped and fine sounding deck.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1381	146
Luxman K-322	200	Gives best value results with lower bias tapes, helped by a successful Dolby C installation.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1382	146
Luxman K-373	400	Decent performance, but a little costly. Includes microphone inputs.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	
Marantz SD-63	300	Poor pitch stability is a major snag in an otherwise nondescript design.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	
NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	
NAD 614	270	Not cheap, but as integrity build-wise and sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	164	
NAD 616	300	Double deck whose music sounded shut in and prosaic, as though its energy content had been ironed flat	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1648	152
Onkyo K-611	430	Cute drawer loading mini-size component with 3-heads and dual capstan transport.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1384	146
Pioneer CT-S500S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic quality.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	164	
Pioneer CT-S830S	500	High class mechanism, if lacking in battleship externals, and superb sound.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1385	146
Sony TC-KE550S	230	Warm, enjoyable music making, but assisted tape setup routine gives inaccurate results.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	164	
Sony TC-KE600S	300	Mild setting-up problems notwithstanding, this UK-tweaked design has a smooth, open and un-cassette-like sound.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	
Technics RS-AZ6	230	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7; exquisite clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin film head.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	164	
Technics RS-AZ7	300	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in the state-of-the-art.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	
Yamaha KX-490	199	Electrifyingly transparent and capable deck, whos only flaw is a trace of audible wow and flutter.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	158	



CD Players brought to you in association with MISSION

All CD players offer a basic selection of facilities, and some can keep you entertained for hours as you programme in disc names and track orders. All but the excessively inexpensive feature remote control. Most CD players can be upgraded by adding an outboard DAC (see below). To do this the player needs a digital output of either electrical or optical persuasion; sonically the former is preferable. A CD player can be split into two basic components; the disc drive or

transport, and a device which turns the digital bitstream coming off the disc into an analogue audio signal. This is called a digital to analogue convertor, or DAC. Although most players are contained in a single box, expensive players are usually two-box affairs.

Best buy

Recommended

KEY

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT: For electrical connection to an outboard DAC.
AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUTPUT: Balanced digital output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT: For optical connection to an outboard DAC.

AT&T OPT DIG OUTPUT: High speed optical output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
BAL ANALOGUE OUTPUT: Balanced analogue output for amplifiers equipped with balanced inputs.
HEADPHONE SOCKET: For can users.
VARIABLE OUTPUT: Remotely adjustable volume controlled

output.
MULTI-DISC: Equipped with a carousel or multi-tray system for continuous play of multiple discs.
DAC TYPE: Digital to analogue convertor: BS - Philips Bitstream, MB - multibit, Hyb - hybrid of multibit and bit-stream technologies, 1bit - single bit types such as MASH,

bitstream, PWM etc
FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback information page.
BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared

CD PLAYERS

Product	Price(£)	Comments	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT	AT&T OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER	
Acurus ACD11	899	First rate if costly player from the US, which combines a delightful transparency with an uncontrived naturalness.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	166	
Arcam Alpha 7	320	Very detailed for a budget player with a slick and free sense of dynamics, needs careful ancillary matching	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	163	
Arcam Alpha 8	520	Refined, intricately detailed but a little cautious this should be broadly compatible with a variety of amps	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Audio Innovations Alto	399	Refreshing piece of audio sculpture belies inconsistent audio behaviour	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1635	151
Audiolab 8000CD	1,000	Developed according to the Green cross code of digital audio with an elegant but safe musical presentation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Audio Research CD1	3,290	Suspends disbelief with a frighteningly real yet obviously coloured sound. A rare proposition among CD players	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Cambridge Audio CD4	150	Basic appearance and sluggish track access/track search belies its up and at 'em sound quality.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	1268	147
Cambridge Audio CD4SE	200	Among the best players we have encountered at the price, considerably more refined and convincing than CD4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Cambridge Audio CD6	300	A sharp, lively and articulate player, a real thoroughbred in fact, perhaps too sharp and lively for some systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	159	
Copland CDA-288	2,199	A gentle giant of a player that errs in favour of pastel shades rather than bold daubs of colour, one for refined tastes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	163	
Denon DCD-625	200	DCD-615 replacement is generously equipped but lacks sophisticated sound of its forebear	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1269	147
Denon DCD-825	240	Despite extensive revisions, this latest player still sounds like a typical 18-bit Denon, which is no bad thing!	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1531	137
Denon DCD-1015	350	Excellent, middle range player - fast, fluid and lean	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1599	141
Denon DCD-3000	1,000	Sings with the temperament of a huge orchestra under the baton of a timid conductor, but very agreeably at that	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	163	
Eclipse CD101a	80	If you want to know the sound of high order distortion, this is probably as good a place to start as any	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	144	
Harman/Kardon HD710	250	Player of integrity, but can sound a tad hard and rough when extended, and is somewhat amplifier fussy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	159	
Harman/Kardon HD730	300	Competitive at price, with a coloured but dynamic and outgoing sound supported by a raft of user features	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	166	
JVC XL-V284BK	140	Featuring a new set of bitstream innards, this flexible player has a refined, if occasionally unpredictable sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	1270	147
JVC XL-Z574	250	Strong resolving power and good midband and dynamics, but slightly raw and thin	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	159	
JVC XL-Z674BK	300	Even handed, but glosses over the most intimate moments	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	1637	151
Kenwood DP-3080	170	Bold, dynamic and outgoing sound, though somewhat aggressive. Poor build quality and finish	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	159	
Kenwood DP-7090	400	A lively and compelling performer with an even handed and coherent disposition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	163	
Krell KPS 20i	9,900	Forthright, edge of the seat sound with outstanding bass performance (tested in Statements)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1734	155
Linn Mimik	875	Useful multiroom features matched to strong bass, but poor imagery and transparency	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	1762	155
Marantz CD-67	270	Dynamic, authoritative, and wide tonal response, but also shut-in and mid-forward balance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1 bit	159	
Marantz CD-67SE	350	Refined, enjoyable player, though ultimately a little soft-centred	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	166	
Marantz CD-17	800	Fabulous packaging and an excellent all round performer: smooth, detailed and consistent	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1763	155
Meridian 508 (20-bit)	1,685	Combines a delicate mid and treble with rich, opulent bass and has impressive low level resolution	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Micromega Minium	350	Dynamically weak and some roughness offsets the pleasing tonal balance, articulate mid and strong bass	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1 bit	159	
Mission dAD3	598	This front loader has a relaxed style of delivery that convinces with guile and subtlety rather than orchestral ordnance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Mission dAD7	900	Pleasant but not particularly exciting, but this remains a classy, sharply etched performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	145	
Monrio Privilege	995	Costly and well engineered, but ultimately rather heavy handed and dull, if refined player.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	166	
Musical Fidelity E60	299	This entry level player lacks proper stereo localisation and clarity	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	-	166	
Musical Fidelity FCD	1,500	A forward disposition makes this perfect for Fenders but less appropriate to Guarneris	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
Myryad MC100	700	A little extra get up and go wouldn't go amiss but its sheer maturity and composure ensure listenability	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	163	
NAD 512	250	Simple, well focused presentation, and articulate with it, though hard nosed quality is not everyone's cup of tea	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1 bit	159	

CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPTICAL DIGITAL OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUTPUT	AT&T OPT DIG OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DAC	DAC TYPE	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER	
▶ NAD 514	370	Boisterous sound, but undeniably attractive	●								BS 1639	151	
▶ Naim Audio CD3	978	The idiosyncratically packaged CD3 is solid and highly articulate. Always has its feet on the ground though									MB 1765	155	
▶ Naim Audio CD2	1,998	Provides bags of detail with a solid stereo focus but not all the romanticism we know to be possible									MB	163	
▶ Onkyo DX-7210	260	Well-bred CD player features an unusual digital filter is smooth and cultured without appearing grey or boring	●		●			●			BS 1273	147	
Onkyo DX-7510	400	Strongly flavoured, assertive sound	●		●			●			BS 1640	151	
Orelle CD-100	500	Excellent information retrieval and convincing with a wide range of music. HF could be more natural though	●								MB 1628	151	
▶ Orelle CD-100SE	549	Articulate and solid performer, with a simple, purposeful, interface and attractive pricing	●								MB 1766	155	
▶ Orelle CD-100E	649	Excellent imagery, timing and transparency, and readily upgraded or reconfigured.									MB	166	
▶ Philips CD-721	130	Surprisingly well sorted, articulate if slightly lossy and attractively presented sound. Captive signal lead									1 bit	159	
Philips CD-740	170	One of several Philips players using hybrid DAC technologies. Still sounds insufferably boring, however	●		●			●			MB 1567	139	
Pioneer PD-204	150	Generally easy on the ear, but can bite back, especially with complex high frequency music content. Well endowed									1 bit	159	
Pioneer PD-S705	300	A dichotomy, this machine was loved by some for its articulacy and disliked by others for sounding too impressive!	●		●						BS	163	
Pioneer PD-S904	400	Too much legato - literally - in sound, but a very smooth performer	●		●						1bit	1641	151
▶ Pioneer PD-S505 Precision	460	Assured, fluid sounding player, with great spatial coherence.	●								1 bit	166	
▶ Quad 77	900	A true thoroughbred combining a penetrating insight into detail with poise rarely found at the price									Hyb	163	
▶ Roksan DP3P	1,595	Dramatic and compelling, classical listeners should be ready to 'air conduct' when auditioning this player	●								BS	163	
Rotel RCD-940BX	250	A sea change in transport and DAC technology lies behind this untidy-sounding and irritating player	●		●			●			MB 1535	137	
▶ Rotel RCD-970BX	350	A combination of solid build, useful facilities and an attention grabbing sound make this a winner	●								BS	163	
Rotel RCD-975	849	Bright and superficially detailed, this deck can sound coarse and inarticulate	●								BS 1767	155	
▶ Sherwood CD-4030R	180	Easy on the ear, smooth sounding player, with limits set by the slightly soft, compressed quality - and messy fascia			●				●		BS	159	
Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●		●						BS	163	
▶ Sony CDP-XE300	140	Cost/performance ratio is pretty impressive and sound is clear, articulate and informative						●			BS	163	
▶ Sony CDP-XE900E	300	Refined and analytical disc scavenging tool, but there are some distinctive colourations making auditioning vital						●			BS	159	
▶ Teac 3450SE	200	For once a budget player where the gadgets take second place to respectable, budget amplifier friendly sonics.	●		●			●			1 bit	166	
Teac CD-5	350	Bright, breezy and up-beat - but short in the trouser department	●		●			●			BS 1643	151	
Teac VRDS-7	650	Although bold and outgoing, this player can sound both intrusive yet lacking fine detail	●		●						BS 1769	155	
Teac VRDS-25	1,300	A solid player in all respects combining powerful sound with state of the art technology	●		●						MB	163	
Technics SL-PG480A	140	Full driving sound, but somewhat uneven in balance with a unsubtle, slightly harsh top end									1 bit	159	
Technics SL-PS770A	250	A mellow sounding player that never quite rouses from its slumber to really tackle the music at hand	●		●			●			BS 1278	147	
Trichord Genesis	599	Modified Pioneer PD-S504 that's a bit like a Williams Renault Clio — astonishing at the price (tested in Sessions)	●		●			●			BS 1753	155	
Trichord Revelation	799	Well ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●								1 bit	166	
Yamaha CDX-490	170	Big, blowsy sound, is undermined by lack of precision and focus						●	●		1 bit	159	
▶ Yamaha CD-X890	350	Clearly a quality product in every sense, the Yamaha provides a spacious, refined and tuneful account of the music.	●		●			●	●			166	
TRANSPORTS													
▶ Arcam Delta 250	800	Arcam's best effort yet is a new design based on Philips CDM9 transport. Specification includes Sync Lock facility	●		●			●			-	1491	130
Audiolab 8000CDM	1,400	Super-slick transport and basically very honest sound, but lacking the last degree of fine detail	●	●	●						-	162	
Audiomeca Kreatura SE	1,450	Superb combo for those who like the sound of valves (tested with Elixir DAC in Sessions)	●		●						MB	141	
▶ Audiomeca Mephisto	2,100	Tested with Trichord Pulsar, the duo provides a highly composed and tactile sound	●		●						-	1320	144
Linn Karik	1,750	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●		●						-	1323	144
Meridian 500	1,245	Used with the 563 DAC, the combination is thin, brash and uncomfortable	●		●						-	1103	133
Mission Discmaster	1,500	Powerful performance - large and beefy without sounding fierce or aggressive (price includes Dacmaster)	●								1104	133	
Pink Triangle Cardinal	875	Sound quality is warm but over-polished compared to PT Ordinal (tested with DaCapo and DC PSU)	●								-	1324	144
▶ PS Audio Lambda	2,250	With Ultralink Two, sound positively sparkles with colour and resonant detail	●	●	●						-	1106	133
Roksan Atessa ATT-DP3	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of good excitement with the right material	●		●						1 bit	162	
Teac VRDS-T1	550	Superb quality engineering is mated to tidy and composed sound (tested with D-T1)	●		●						-	1325	144
▶ Teac P-700	900	Tested with D-700, low resolution sound is warm, bubbly and entertaining	●		●						-	120	
Teac P-2S	4,000	The latest version of Teac's luxury P-2 transport sounds as over-engineered as it looks	●		●						-	1493	130
Theta Data Basic II	2,298	Uses a Philips CDM-9 Pro mechanism a works a treat with more lively DACs	●								-	1494	130
Thorens TCD2000	900	Lively and up-front presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble.						●			-	162	
▶ Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer.	●		●						-	162	
Wadia 8	3,195	Budget version of Teac's VRDS mechanism in a fancy case; just too expensive for the performance on offer	●	●	●	●					-	1495	130
DACS													
Audio Note DAC1	600	Oddball DAC with manual de-emphasis switch. Needs a high preamp input impedance or bass will suffer									MB	127	
Audiolab 8000DAC	900	Basically very honest sound, but lacking the last degree of fine detail.									BS	162	
Audiomeca Elixir	745	DAC was tested with Kreatura SE - see above									BS	141	
Cambridge Audio DACMagic 2	200	Superb value DAC that makes the jump from good to outstanding if balanced outputs are used (tested in Sessions)						●			Hyb	1521	136
DPA PDM256	2,995	Highly advanced, with adjustable dither. but the different settings only lead to compromise									BS	133	
Linn Numerik	1,400	A new 20 bit DAC and revised Karik transport have cleaned up; but sounds a tad dry and humourless.									MB 1323	144	
▶ Meridian 563	795	Warmer but no less detailed than the earlier 200-series, the 563 flies with a top rate transport									DS 1103	127	
Mission Dacmaster	1,500	Powerful performance - large and beefy without sounding fierce or aggressive (price includes Discmaster)									MB 1104	133	
▶ Pink Triangle Ordinal	925	The cheapest dual-differential DAC7 converter available offers top-flight sound quality									BS 1524	136	
Pink Triangle DaCapo	1,765	With Cardinal and DC PSU, the DaCapo is best with its 22bit option. It is warm but over-polished									BS 1324	144	
▶ PS Audio UltraLink 2 HDCD	2,590	With Lambda transport, the sound positively sparkles with colour and resonant detail									MB 1106	133	
PS Audio Ref Link	4,550	Consolidates reputation of PS Audio for high performance digital electronics						●			MB 1069	132	
▶ QED Digit Plus	139	Bearing in mind its expensive but very forgiving performance, the Digit is almost embarrassingly cheap									BS	113	
Roksan Atessa ATT-DA2/DS5	1,145	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of good excitement with the right material.									1 bit	162	
Teac D-T1	500	Teamed with VRDS-T1 for test, this superb quality unit is tidy and composed.									BS 1325	144	
▶ Teac D-700	600	With P-700, the D-700 may lack the resolution, but is bubbly and entertaining									MB	120	
Thorens TDA2000	700	Lively and up-front presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble.									BS	162	
▶ Trichord Pulsar Series One	1,395	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer. Switchable phase, dither etc									Hyb	162	

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Digital Recorders



Digital recorders come in a variety of different guises, but have yet to make much of an impact on the domestic market. At present there are four types to choose from: DAT (digital audio tape), MD (Mini Disc), and DCC (digital compact cassette) and CD-R (CD Recordable). DCC is backwards compatible inasmuch as the machines can play regular audio cassette. MD's claim to fame is its optical disc format, which offers instant track access and can't be worn out like a tape. DAT has been on the market for quite some time now, but has never

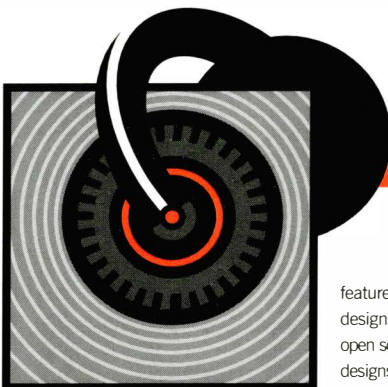
really 'made it' as a consumer medium due to the dearth of pre-recorded material. However it has begun to carve itself a niche in the top end of the market, replacing reel-to-reel as the audiophile's tape based medium. Home CD-R is coming into its own with Pioneer's PD-R05 machine attempting to set a trend.

B Best buy **R** Recommended

KEY	FORMAT: Type of recorder, see above for descriptions.	DAC TYPE: Digital to analogue converter. BS - Philips Bitstream, MB - multibit, Hyb - hybrid of multibit and bitstream technologies, 1bit - single bit types such as MASH, bitstream, PWM etc.	ADC TYPE: Analogue to digital converter types as per DACs.	PORTABLE: Can be run off batteries but not necessarily personal stereo size.	ELECTRICAL IN/OUTPUTS: Digital socketry for electrical cable.	FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback information page.	BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.
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DIGITAL RECORDERS

Product	Price (£)	Comments	FORMAT	DAC TYPE	ADC TYPE	PORTABLE	ELECTRICAL IN/OUTPUTS	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Philips DCC170	250	Good sound quality for a portable that records as well, beating competition from MD in its group	DCC	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	1237	141
Philips DCC951	280	Offering 18-bit record and replay this does an impressive job in many ways but PASC is still a limitation	DCC	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	139	
Pioneer D-05	800	Second generation 96kHz DAT recorder can offer startling realism with the right software - ie first generation	DAT	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	1652	152
Pioneer D-07	1,150	96kHz double sampling mode gives this deck a sense of naturalness missing from most DAT recorders	DAT	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	1089	133
Pioneer PDR-05	1,300	CD recorder that uses domestic blanks only (limited to 62 minutes), write once but excellent sound quality	CD-R	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	1652	152
Pioneer D-C88	2,000	State of the art portable 96kHz DAT recorder, the size of a lap-top computer this Nagra country on the cheap	DAT	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	1431	150
Sharp MD-M11	450	Slick MD personal with recording capabilities and rapid track access but less stunning sound quality	MD	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	139	
Sony MDA-JA3ES	800	Full width MD recorder that makes a decent job of recordings but is less impressive with pre-recorded material	MD	BS	BS	●	● ● ●	1216	152



Headphones

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There are a variety of different approaches to headphone design. Among the more expensive models, electrostatic drivers are used in open-backed phones. Most models feature dynamic (moving coil) drivers in circular, open or closed-back designs. The advantage of open backs seems to be a correspondingly open sound, but one can also hear external noise, of course. Closed-back designs are useful in situations where it is necessary to block out noise.

There are three styles of headphone: circumaural models enclose the ear; supra-aural designs feature a flat pad which presses on the outer ear; and intra-aurals (in-ear) rest inside the ear itself, à la personal stereos. For best results a separate headphone amplifier is recommended.

B Best Buy **R** Recommended

KEY	TYPE: Operating principle: D - dynamic, E - electrostatic.	SUPRA-AURAL: Style where a flat pad presses on the outer ear.	CIRCUMAURAL: Style which encloses the ear.	OPEN BACK: Offers an open sound but lets in noise.	CLOSED BACK: Keeps out external noise.	WEIGHT (G): Mass in grams	IMPEDANCE (Ω): Load offered to the headphone amplifier. All else being equal, the lower the impedance the louder the sound for a given amplifier output.	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR: Can be used with mini-jack-equipped components such as personal stereos.	FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback information page.	BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.
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HEADPHONES

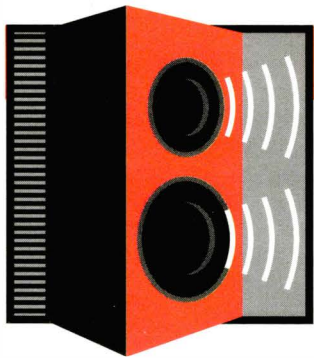
Product	Price (£)	Comments	CIRCUMAURAL	SUPRA-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	WEIGHT (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
A AKG K240 Monitor	82	Something of a classic, these AKGs are very user-friendly in all respects; sonically on the warm side of normal.	D	●	●	●	●	240	600	●	63
A AKG K1000	646	One of the best dynamics on the market, hooks directly into speaker outputs.	D	●	●	●	●	270	120	●	99
A Audio Technica ATH910PRO	80	The closed back 910s are an improvement on the 909s, with a nice rhythmic quality rarely found with headphones.	D	●	●	●	●	280	40	●	55
Beyer DT100	152	Rugged, modular professional design, but bass is woolly and treble lacks detail.	D	●	●	●	●	350	600	●	157
Beyer DT311	49	Uncharacteristically tight, unrefined sound quality from this otherwise well engineered 'phone.	D	●	●	●	●	124	40	●	1098
A Beyer DT331	82	Tonally bright and deficient in bass, but exceptionally comfortable, articulate, detailed and refined.	D	●	●	●	●	210	40	●	1801
Beyer DT411	69	A reasonable but not very thrilling headphone that doesn't really offer enough at the price.	D	●	●	●	●	120	250	●	111
Beyer DT531	129	A good buy for serious, heavy-duty music making	D	●	●	●	●	245	250	●	144
Beyer DT911	219	Probably too revealing for many headphone amps, these are very subtle and fine, if expensive cans.	D	●	●	●	●	275	250	●	111
Denon AH-D550	80	A competent 'phone with integrity, but little panache or charisma. Hard headband causes brain strain.	D	●	●	●	●	200	35	●	1801
Grado SR-80	110	Clear, open and dynamic with pedantically open mid-band. Crude physical design, rough frequency extremes.	D	●	●	●	●	60	8	●	1801
A Grado SR225	200	Solid, dark tonal coloured and ultimately lacking in clarity, but it true to the spirit of the music if not the letter	D	●	●	●	●	200	32	●	163
A Jecklin Float Model 1	75	Whilst very unusual in appearance, the Floats give remarkable sound quality and openness at a reasonable price.	D	●	●	●	●	400	200	●	55
A Jecklin Float Model 2	99	Helmet shaped, but open sounding and comfortable in long term, despite lack of adjustment.	D	●	●	●	●	400	200	●	63
JVC HA-D910	65	Broadly acceptable if unexciting design with low level losses and some colourations.	D	●	●	●	●	220	32	●	121
Kenwood KH-1000	20	First step up from a true mini: a near miniature which is cheap, comfortable and inoffensive	D	●	●	●	●	30	32	●	121
Maxell HP-3000	30	Solid, smooth sounding supra-aural headphone, but congested and undynamic. Includes in-lead controls.	D	●	●	●	●	120	32	●	1099
A Pioneer SE-400D	37	Acceptable, if unexciting all-rounder, this supra-aural phone has good long-term comfort levels.	D	●	●	●	●	185	35	●	1099
Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness and detachment of the Float from which it is derived, but has a coarse mid/top	D	●	●	●	●	380	100	●	163
Ross RDH-300CD	17	In-lead controls are the highlights of this shoddy, sometimes aggressive sounding design.	D	●	●	●	●	155	8	●	133
A Sennheiser HD455	55	Inoffensive, if nondescript sound, modular, but can become dislodged from head.	D	●	●	●	●	185	60	●	1801
A Sennheiser HD565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable.	D	●	●	●	●	255	150	●	1801

HEADPHONES (CONTINUED)

ISSUE NUMBER
FACTSBACK NUMBER
3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR
WEIGHT(g)
IMPEDANCE(Ω)
CLOSED BACK
OPEN BACK
CIRCUM/AURAL TYPE

Product	Price(£)	Comments	TYPE	WEIGHT(g)	IMPEDANCE(Ω)	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Sennheiser HE-60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with an aching pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy	E	260	n/a		163
Sony MDR-CD770	100	Neutrality and comfort make the Sony easy to live with. Technically correct sounding too, yet musically unrewarding.	D	-	-	1801	157
Sony MDR-CD1700	199	Astonishingly detailed, uncoloured and free of the usual artefacts from a sealed back headphone. Tremendous value	D	325	32		163
Stax Lambda Nova Basic	449	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence – and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards	E	347	n/a		163
Stax Lambda Pro	449	Tested with SRD-7B PSU, this is an industry reference, and is frighteningly revealing.	E	325	-		55
Stax Lambda Sig	549	With SRM-T1. Electrostatic - the Signature must be the most transparent headphone available.	E	325	-		72
Technics RP-HT700	70	Well-finished but physically crass and grubby sounding.	D	255	-	1801	157
Vivanco SR606	40	Although slightly overblown at times, this model is easy on the ears and essentially enjoyable	D	225	32	1101	133
Vivanco SR650	50	Unusually comfortable 'phone with excellent detail resolution but aggressive, thanks to tweeter resonance.	D	175	-	1801	157
Vivanco SR750	60	Cossetting physical design, attractive sound an pricing, though suffers overhang and lacks ultimate dynamics.	D	188	-	1801	157
Vivanco IR7100	120	Infra-red phones that work well but suffer from the limitations of the medium ie compression and hiss(Sessions)	D	265	-		149

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Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

As the last item in the hi-fi chain, the loudspeaker is merely the slave of what has gone before; it is only as good as the signal it is fed. Nevertheless, the distortions introduced by loudspeakers (and rooms) tend to be the most obvious. The average loudspeaker consists of an enclosure plus a couple of drive units behind a removable grille. Inside the box lurks a simple electrical circuit known as a crossover, which divides the incoming (full range) signal into the right bits for the drivers to handle. The designer's primary task is to balance the 'sensitivity' of the loudspeaker (how loud it goes

for a given electrical input) against the bass extension (how low it goes), for the given box size. Subwoofers augment the bass and come in passive and amplified active form, they are less sensitive to placement than regular speakers.

B Best Buy **R Recommended**

KEY	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	FREE SPACE	FACTSBACK NUMBER
SIZE WxHxD (cm): Width by height by depth in centimetres.	Measured in Ohms impedance it is a measure of how hard a loudspeaker is to drive; the lower the number the more powerful the amplifier needs to be	Speakers should be placed away from walls.	The reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback page.
FLOORSTANDER: As opposed to requiring a dedicated stand.	BASS FROM (Hz): The lowest frequency that a speaker can reproduce, based on in-room measurements.	CLOSE TO WALL: It is recommended that these speakers be placed close (between 3 and 12cm) to the rear wall.	BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.
SENSITIVITY (dB/W): Efficiency: how much volume you get for a given input; the higher the louder.			

HI-FI LOUDSPEAKERS

ISSUE NUMBER
FACTSBACK NUMBER
CLOSE TO WALL
FREE SPACE
BASS FROM (Hz)
IMPEDANCE(Ω)
SENSITIVITY(dB/W)
FLOORSTANDER
SIZE WxHxD(CM)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	TYPE	WEIGHT(g)	IMPEDANCE(Ω)	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER	
Acoustic Energy AE109	330	Lots of mass-loaded twin-driver speaker for the money, especially for loud, driving bass		18,90,25	88	4	25	164
Allison AL100	100	Loud and lively budget wall-mount is big and beefy, but lacks sparkle and refinement		24,33,19	90	4	30	94
Allison AL105	170	Pretty enough in appearance; sonically the AL105 doesn't really make the grade at the price		24,37,21	90	4	45	78
Allison AL110	220	Compact bookshelf model is a little dry and mid-forward, but bass is extended and solid		24,40,23	90	4	28	102
Allison AL120	420	Pretty well balanced if slightly mid-forward, but sound quality is disappointing at the price		28,61,29	90	4	30	98
ATC SCM20	1,499	Massively built, invariably informative but the rather forward presentation can be uncomfortable		24,44,31	83	8	28	86
Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound		18,94,21	87	6	40	164
Audio Innovations Alto	329	Styling makes competition look old-fashioned, but sound is thin and cold		20,38,26	88	6	45	1653 152
Audio Note AN-J/B	799	Light damping and local unevenness adds some colouration, but doesn't spoil the very speaker		38,58,25	93	8	25	110
Audio Note AN-E/B	1,299	Coherent dynamic and transparent, with extended bass and high sensitivity - but ugly!		36,84,28	94	8	20	106
Audio Physic Tempo	1,999	Tall and unusually styled floorstander has stunning stereo but suspect bass tuning		22,107,47	88	8	28	1344 143
Audiovector 3X	1,500	Superior time coherence, a wide dynamic range and exception bass/mid balance		19,32,98	89	8	20	1345 143
B&W DM302	130	highly competent and neutral all rounder, clever Prism enclosure		19,32,22	88	4	45	1778 156
B&W DM601	200	Great main driver for the price, entertaining dynamics		20,5,35,5,23	88	6	30	1779 156
B&W DM602	300	Prefers tall stands and space, but offers impressive midband dynamics and musical tension		24,49,31	90	8	30	1654 15
B&W 305	350	Ridged paper cone gives lively sound, clever box, but a little uneven		22,87,31	89	4	40	164
B&W P4	600	Strikes a nice balance between all-out studio monitor sound and bass-filled crowd pleaser (tested in Sessions)		20,81,25,6	88	8	50	156
B&W CDM1	600	Gorgeous stand-mount delivers unusually good bass for its size		22,38,28	88	6	30	160
B&W Matrix 805 V	995	Stylish, remarkable imaging, good balance and low colouration		33,33,21	87	8	30	98
B&W Matrix 801S3	3,795	Lacks transparency and the drama of the best dynamics, but acoustically a tour de force		44,100,56	87	8	20	81
Bose 305	430	Fine dynamic liveliness and a good room match counter strange imaging and treble		23,45,28	-	8	40	78
Bose 401	500	Cheaply built but distinctively styled, the 401 suffers from heavy midband		30,30,76	-	4	28	110
Boston Acoustics HD5	139	Pretty miniature lacks boxiness, but is short of drama and dynamic drive		16,25,18	89	8	30	110
Castle Isis	230	Expressive with a full upper bass, tonally colourful with a big, dynamic sound (tested in Sessions)		17,35,19,5	87	8	60	1729 154
Castle Durham 900	300	Lovely veneer and lots of engineering create a very upfront, coherent and exciting sound		22,40,23	90	8	60	1162 135
Castle York	370	Real wood compact has an engaging transparency: fine balance and timing, but could use some authority		26,43,22	89	8	50	110
Castle Severn	500	Light and bright, but sound is open and communicative. Looks good too		23,77,20	88	8	47	1655 152
Castle Avon	700	Lovely box and lovely voices from carbon-fibre composite cone		22,91,28	85	8	22	164
Castle Chester	700	A brilliant throwback, using a horn type approach to provide startling dynamics and coherence		23,91,25	90	8	44	98
Castle Harlech	800	Handsome big-sounding floorstander, great value and dynamic midrange		20,96,33	88	8	28	160
Castle Howard S2	1,100	Absolutely fills the gap between Chester and Winchester; has a rich, laid back balance		26,104,41	90	8	40	1078 132
Castle Winchester	1,650	Large for its bass extension but engagingly agile, open and airy		42,108,23	90	8	35	90
Celestion 1	99	It sounds a bit scrappy and untidy, but its heart is in the right place		16,27,21	86	8	50	114

HI-FI LOUDSPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	SIZE WxHxD(CM)	SENSITIVITY(DBS/W)	IMPEDANCE(Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FLOORSTANDER	FACTS CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER	
Celestion 3 MKII	139	Smooth and polished by budget speaker standards, if a bit laid back for some tastes	21,31,18	88	8	45	●	1036	130	
Celestion Impact 23	300	Big, cheap and loud. Sounds coloured and old fashioned, lacks subtlety	28,82,29	89	8	30	●	1656	152	
Celestion 15	389	Big box and but short on subtlety and control though long on both enthusiasm	21,100,25	●	89	8	28	●	114	
Celestion Impact 25	400	Both capable and enjoyable these rock boxes are real contenders in the bang-for-the-buck stakes	27,82,29	●	90	8	43	●	1758	155
Celestion SL6Si	429	This stereotype luxury compact can sound a bit dull and congested; favours CD	20,38,27	●	84	8	30	●	94	
Celestion A1	700	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35	●	88	6	25	●	164	
Celestion 300	1,099	Splendid bass extension and fine panel-like openness, but dynamics and timing are suspect	21,97,33	●	84	8	20	●	118	
Cerwin-Vega VS10	350	Not all that refined but ballsy as heck, these rock boxes have no shortage of gung ho	33,70,29	●	95	6	37	●	1758	155
Dali 104B	370	Lively, rich sounding and communicative. Shame about bland styling and dull balance	22,86,27	●	93	4	28	●	1657	152
Dawn Audio Chorus FS	698	Compact floorstander with superb coherence but rather forward midband. Would suit smaller rooms best	26,88,21	●	89	8	30	●	114	
Electrofluidics Sonolith 2.2xi	5,999	Substantial polymer concrete cabinet with aluminium cones produces world class imaging and very serious bass	38,95,42.5	●	86	4	n/a	●	139	
Epos ES12	500	High quality luxury stand-mount has great midband and stereo imaging	20,38,25	●	85	8	45	●	160	
Epos ES14	675	Substantial stand mount delivers delightful midrange focus and delicacy with good bass control	23,49,29	●	87	8	25	●	98	
Epos ES22	1,185	Elegant floorstander with 'safe' balance that can be enlivened with the right cable and energetic material (Sessions)	21,88,25	●	87	6	58	●	1629	151
Epos ES25	1,655	Handsome floorstander with a rather uneven and bass heavy balance	24,90,35	●	88	6	22	●	1346	143
Faraday Siren	445	High mass concrete cabinet is let down by imbalance of ageing driver combination	25,27,46	●	90	4	48	●	94	
Gale Model 4	200	Low cost floorstander; sounds a bit edgy, with detached bass	19,79,22	●	87	8	28	●	1780	156
GLL Imagio IC130	550	Lots of speaker for the money, but sound is decidedly dull and shut in	22,112,29	●	88	4	20	●	160	
Harbeth BBC LS3/5A	699	Still a classic miniature, though not to every taste, and none the better for the recent update	19,30,18	●	82	10	80	●	66	
Heybrook Prima	139	Fine pace and timing, but balance is forward and bass is tight	20,29,18	●	87	6	50	●	110	
Heybrook Heylios	339	Great all round performance in a pretty package at a sharp price	24,36,27	●	87	6	25	●	164	
Heybrook Solo	199	Untidy bass and treble, but handles complex rhythmic material well	23,36,23	●	89	6	28	●	90	
Heybrook Trio	373	HBS1 drivers in real wood enclosure give a sweeter and more forgiving sound	24,47,25	●	89	8	45	●	118	
Heybrook Heylo	389	Good vocal reproduction, but sounds thin and bass seems an afterthought	23,73,19	●	88	8	30	●	1658	152
Heybrook Heystak	499	Elegant, highly detailed and level-headed sound, but could use injection of life	22,98,28	●	89	8	38	●	141	
Heybrook Quartet	575	Solidly large bookshelf model with good sensitivity and a lively, forward sound	24,41,22	●	90	8	48	●	122	
Heybrook Sextet	1,129	Coherent and highly analytical, partly due to distinct upper-mid forwardness	27,90,20	●	88	8	25	●	102	
Infinity Reference 1i	150	Although not to our tastes, this is a competent speaker, and decent material value	20,34,20	●	89	6	50	●	1403	148
Infinity Kappa 6.1i	995	Good extension, but bass is fat and slow, and dynamics are unconvincing.	31,95,25	●	89	6	25	●	1080	132
Jamo BX100A	370	A cracking output for their size these rock boxes can be a tad bright but have decent bass	31,5,54,28	●	91	8	40	●	1758	155
Jamo Classic 8	430	A lot of speaker for the money; good when playing quietly, but boom 'n tizz character sounded crude	22,90,29	●	90	4	28	●	1659	152
Jamo 477	500	Very prettily styled, but build and sound quality are disappointing at the price	19,77,28	●	88	4	40	●	1549	138
Jamo 707A	900	Superb styling and cosmetics and decent balance apart from detached bass	26,38,104	●	90	4	25	●	1085	132
JBL Control One	115	Sub-miniature with forward midrange and real bass; price justified by build	24,156,14	●	87	4	100	●	90	
JBL TLX70	400	Startling bass weight from party animal that is let down by rather bland high frequencies	27,88,28	●	88.5	8	50	●	1758	155
JBL L20J	850	Pricy, heavy and a bit laid back, but this is a fine rock 'n' roller which is dynamic and communicative	26,42,28	●	86	8	30	●	1550	138
JBL L90	1,300	A classic monitor which communicates with gusto and enthusiasm, though it can sound a tad crude	24,94,35	●	91	6	23	●	143	
JBL Ti 1000	1,600	Performance compromised by over enthusiastic midbass output from port	20,30,13	●	89	4	45	●	118	
Jordan Watts JH400	820	Piano finish hexagon has controversial sound, with uneven balance but delightful mid	28,38,21	●	86	8	50	●	106	
JPW Mini Monitor	60	Ultra-cheap miniature works well in a limited way	18,27,17.5	●	86	8	50	●	1781	156
JPW Gold Monitor	80	More informative than Mini Monitor - but fiercer too	18,27,17.5	●	86	8	50	●	1782	156
JPW Sonata	120	Fine sound if limited bass and dynamic range. wood veneered at a silly price	23,32,22	●	87	8	70	●	71	
JPW P1 Vinyl	150	Competent loudspeaker for the price, with a safe sound that won't disappoint	26,44,25	●	89	8	65	●	102	
JPW P1	170	Longstanding design is remarkable material value (real wood etc) and sounds pretty too	26,44,25	●	89	8	65	●	1611	141
JPW AP2	200	Real wood finish, and performance is cleaner but similar to P1 Vinyl overall	26,44,25	●	89	8	65	●	106	
JPW AP3	230	Good stereo and well balanced overall; character is well suited to vinyl replay	26,52,29	●	88	8	55	●	46	
JPW Ruby 1	500	Very pretty but pricy luxury metal-cone miniature has good, if slightly edgy balance	19,32,21	●	87	6	55	●	1572	139
KEF Coda 7	130	Lovely open voice reproduction, but bass could be tauter; build tougher	18,30,23	●	88	6	50	●	1783	156
KEF Coda 8	190	Outstandingly well balanced, bass is deep but a little vague	20,32,5.29	●	86	6	28	●	1784	156
KEF Coda 9	300	Uneven budget 3-way floorstander with poor bass definition	20,86,28	●	89	6	30	●	1785	156
KEF RDM One	500	Cute and tiny, nice midband but lack of bass warmth and weight	23,30,24	●	88	6	70	●	164	
Keswick Audio Aria II	329	Confident and dynamic sound, if a little crude and shut in	21,42,24	●	89	8	20	●	1405	148
Linn Keilidh Passive	700	Stunning timing and coherence, and awesome bass drive	20,83,28	●	87	4	22	●	1552	138
Linn Kaber Passive	1,800	Dry, bright balance emphasises dynamics and transients, but can sound unconvincing	20,90,28	●	87	4	25	●	118	
Living Voice Airscout	14,750	You want dynamics, get a horn, get a very, very good horn. This, is a very, very good horn. Tested with RW24 horn sub	62.5,115,57	●	104	8	60	●	163	
Living Voice Air Partner S	27,000	Outstanding transparency and dynamics from remarkably solid and fast mega horn	64,160,90	●	108	8	40	●	138	
Lumley Reference LM4	375	Metal diaphragm and wood veneer; balance uneven upper and has suspect timing	18,36,22	●	86	6	44	●	126	
Lumley Reference LM3	895	Despite indifferent bass alignment, LM3 is fast, coherent, solid and informative	27,87,28	●	90	8	30	●	106	
Meridian DSP6000	8,500	Sophisticated digital design, with a wide ranging, refined and detailed sound. Has onboard amplification	28,133,43	●	-	-	35	●	1226	140
Meridian DSP5000	2,995	State of the active loudspeaker art, a high grade design with unique capabilities. Has onboard amplification	21,90,30	●	-	-	35	●	1226	140
Mission 732	200	Attractive presentation but a rather dull and thick sounding speaker, and a tad pricey too	20,41,30	●	89	8	45	●	1613	141
Mission 733	300	Duller than before, though still an honest all-round package	20,5,87,30	●	87	8	45	●	1786	156
Mission 751	300	Gorgeous looking, very petite; boogies with a sting at the top	17,5,32,26	●	87	8	45	●	1788	156
Mission 734	430	Fine all rounder, and good value, but dynamically a bit lazy, and tweeter quality limited	21,84,33	●	90	8	43	●	1660	152
Mission 752	500	Brilliant style, engineering and sound	20,88,26	●	90	8	50	●	1553	138
Mission 753 Freedom	798	Great styling. New, more restrained tweeter reveals fine midband dynamics	21,90,31	●	89	4	40	●	164	
Monitor Audio MA201	300	Lively and coherent with good power handling, but also a bit shut in and coloured	22,41,40	●	90	8	40	●	1164	135
Monitor Audio MA202	450	Uneven, informative and easy-listening floorstander delivers decent scale	22,89,27	●	90	8	50	●	1575	139
Monitor Audio MA700 PMC	500	Good looking luxury compact with all-metal diaphragms, lovely midrange, but occasionally edgy	22,35,26	●	89	8	45	●	1661	152
Monitor Audio MA703 PMC	800	Lovely but pricy floorstander has up-front, coherent 'shiny' sound	20,89,27	●	88	8	50	●	160	
Monitor Audio Studio 6	900	Metal diaphragm compact has transparent midband but lacks vigour and drive	22,35,25	●	88	8	45	●	118	
Monitor Audio Studio 12	1,000	A real looker, but sound and content are a bit on the small side for the price	17,92,20	●	90	8	28	●	1349	143

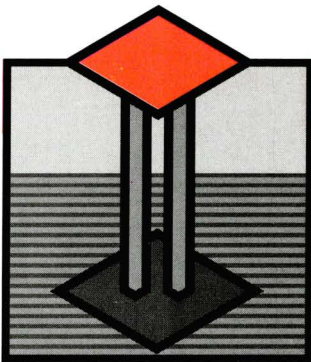
HI-FI LOUDSPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

SIZE WxHxD(CM) SENSITIVITY (dB/W) FLOORSTANDER IMPEDANCE (Ω) BASS FROM (Hz) TREBLE FROM (Hz) FACTSBACK CLOSE TO WALL FREE SPACE ISSUE NUMBER

Product	Price(£)	Comments	W	H	D	S	F	I	B	T	F	I	I
Mordaunt-Short MS10i	140	Up front, bouncy and a whole lot of fun	18.5	30.5	20	86	8	50	●	1789	156		
Mordaunt-Short MS30i	275	Slightly shut in and coloured quality is compensated by fine bass and impressive communication	25.43	28		90	8	28	●	1662	152		
Mordaunt-Short Perf 860	1,695	Although a very neutral loudspeaker it can, with the right ancillaries, pack a serious punch (Statements)	26.86	35		90	6	35	●	1367	146		
Morel 704/2	1,000	There's real potential here, but it's not fully realised	23.80	21		88	8	20	●	1350	143		
Musical Technology Kestrel SE	300	Brighter and drier-sounding than standard Kestrel (and not the better for it)	20.84	19		84	5	50	●	164			
Musical Technology Harrier	400	Very pretty package, good measured performance and even sound. Sensitivity is low, and dynamics limp	25.80	23		86	8	25	●	1663	152		
Naim Intro	596	Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth	24.89	27		89	6	30	●	164			
Naim SBL Passive	1,878	Lively and punchy - smoother but more upfront than before	27.89	27		88	6	25	●	1352	143		
Neat Mystique	575	Elegant compact floorstander has good allround sound and value	20.85	18		84	8	25	●	160			
Neat Petite II	745	Compact design now utilising ribbon tweeter with a fine sense of timing and surprising musicality (tested in Sessions)	20.30	18		86	8	33	●	160			
Origin Live OL-2A	470	Fine dynamics and a good looking, well engineered package, though presence bland and treble restrained	19.80	19		86	8	45	●	1664	152		
Origin Live OL-1	499	Luxury miniature has very good overall balance, sacrificing sensitivity for bass	20.30	19		86	8	25	●	106			
Philips Legend FB720II	200	Liveliness, coherence and fine information retrieval justifies the odd looking baffle	21.37	31		90	6	50	●	122			
Pink Triangle Ventral	896	If you are after Quad Electrostatic type transparency but can't afford the price . . . (Sessions)	15.80	32		86	11		●	142			
Pioneer S-4UK	250	Latest version now balances pretty well, with a coherent lightweight bass	21.37	28		88	6	50	●	1157	139		
Polk LS50	800	No enthusiast tweaks here, but powerful and beautiful balance	27.83	29		89	8	25	●	1155	138		
Polk LS70	1,200	High sensitivity, but balance has too much midbass boom; mid-top is laid back	31.94	37		90	8	22	●	1084	132		
Proac Response 2.5	2,700	For aspirant high-enders looking for seriously good conventional boxes, this speaker should be first port of call	22.107	25		86	8	30	●	1457	149		
PMC TB1	500	Superb transparency, subtle laid back sound, well worth seeking out	20.40	31		87	8	45	●	160			
PMC LB1	998	Delightful smoothness and transparency, though bass and treble are both limited	18.53	25		89	4	33	●	110			
PMC AB1	1,598	Lovely panel-like transparency, slightly shut-in balance, needs a big room	26.79	43		89	6	22	●	114			
Polk RT16	800	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and not very pretty	22.105	39		91	4	22	●	160			
QLN Qubic 222	400	Ugly but good value floorstander with loads of bass and a smooth balance	21.87	29		88	6	25	●	160			
Quad ESL-63	2,860	Classic electrostatic lacks punch, but has strengths some can't live without	66.93	27		86	8	34	●	60			
Rega Kyte	198	Has splendid timing and coherence, sounds very explicit and informative	19.31	19		87	8	50	●	114			
Rega EL8	298	Kyle drivers in compact floorstander gives more bass but less coherence	17.72	20		86	8	55	●	122			
Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty and smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30.80	20		87	8	40	●	1578	139		
Rega XEL	1,040	Looks and sounds great: balance bright but even, with delightful coherence and timing	20.82	30		89	6	40	●	1083	132		
Revolver Boretta	100	Great bass for the price, a bit crude further up	19.35	22		87	8	45	●	1790	156		
Revolver Colt	139	A good all-rounder, if a little bland, and excellent value for money	30.19	22		88	6	48	●	1407	148		
Revolver 260	350	A no nonsense presenter of rock with plenty of dynamics, not too refined (tested in Sessions)	21.5	91.6	30	89	6	40	●	1731	154		
Rogers LS1	149	High grade miniature	20.20	30		87	6		●	1408	143		
Rogers AB1	499	Designed as partner for LS3/5a or similar miniatures	19.57	16		82	8		●	1354	143		
Rogers Studio 3	499	Pricy LS3/5A derived miniature, excitingly coherent if lightweight, can't go loud	19.30	16		85	8	30	●	118			
Rogers LS3/5A	699	Clever AB1 stand/subwoofer helps the classic 3/5A monitor give its best shot	19.31	17		82	12	45	●	1354	143		
Rogers Studio 5	699	Luxury finish bookshelf size model has genuine monitoring capabilities	25.25	48		89	8	40	●	1556	138		
Rogers Studio 7	899	Latest variation on classic BBC-monitor theme has beautifully voiced, laid back sound	30.63	30		90	8	30	●	122			
Roksan ROKone	600	Large stand-mount is musically very communicative if a little coloured	21.45	33		89	6	30	●	160			
Roksan Ojan 3 Black	795	Squat, stylish and black, great bass extension and somewhat uneven balance	28.76	46		88	8	20	●	1082	132		
Royd Minstrel	249	Not much wellie or loudness but fine coherence and timing, a bit bright	18.69	12		86	8	30	●	1167	135		
Royd Merlin	298	Invigorating and exciting design with plenty of upfront detail, but balance lacks warmth and a tad overpriced	20.31	18		86	8	33	●	1409	148		
Royd Doublet	450	Great value compact floorstander; lively and very informative, if a little uneven	18.93	19		90	4	28	●	160			
Royd The Sorcerer	595	Extremely musical and communicative speaker that fun to listen to. Aesthetics could use improving though	20.31	18		86	8	35	●	139			
Royd Abbot	665	Dynamic and fine transient qualities are hampered by a rather coloured mid-forward balance	20.81	30		90	8	43	●	118			
Ruark Templar	499	Striking baffle gives decent bass/mid but dull treble; could tame over-bright system	19.70	27		87	8	25	●	122			
Ruark Talisman II	749	Less ideologically committed than some, strength lies in fine all-round coherence	23.84	32		88	8	30	●	118			
Ruark Equinox	1,849	The primary strength of this speaker is its ability to remove itself from the picture	25.88	34		88	6	45	●	1227	140		
SD Acoustics SD3R	399	New SD3 has the agility and charm of a quality miniature, good bass and low sensitivity.	20.38	30		87	8	25	●	106			
SD Acoustics SD5	1,235	Bass suspect but forward midband is delightfully smooth. Has ribbon tweeter	20.110	30		88	8	30	●	1081	132		
Shahinian Arc	1,675	Occasionally wonderful small floorstanding omni; bright but coherent and revealing	35.69	25		88	6	24	●	110			
Spendor 2020	399	Utilising an oval drive unit in a stylish cabinet this is a neutral design with AV inclinations (tested in Sessions)	18.34	26		87	8		●	1756	155		
Spendor 2030	600	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid back sound	18.89	27		87	8	30	●	160			
Spendor S20	760	Maintains Spendor's tradition for peerless mid-to-treble coherence and perspectives.	22.38	26		84	8	25	●	102			
Silverado Raider	695	Beautifully built audiophile compact, neutral if bright, tough work for amps	20.40	25		83	3	30	●	164			
Sequence 400	330	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25.100	7		86	8	45	●	164			
System Audio 905	250	Fine coherence and remarkable dynamic freedom some something so small, though there's little real weight	15.27	21		89	8	60	●	1410	148		
Tannoy 631	149	Balanced, open, unboxy and quite lively, but lacks muscle	19.34	15		87	6	60	●	1616	141		
Tannoy 631SE	170	Very refined midband; maybe too laid back for some	13-19.34	16		86	7	45	●	1791	156		
Tannoy 633/II	300	Impressive bass and balance from very compact floorstander. Upper midband could be cleaner	29.75	28		89	85	20	●	1665	152		
Tannoy 635	450	Beefy low-line floorstander packs real bass punch and an up-front balance	17-29.85	27		90	6	22	●	160			
Tannoy 637	550	Good value package but a rather heavy, thick, big-bass sound	17-29.84	27		90	3	20	●	164			
Tannoy 638	599	Big value vinyl big box has good balance and lots of loudness, but needs a good amp.	33.96	32		91	6	25	●	1558	138		
Tannoy D500	1,470	Plenty of muscle and stereo, but short of poise and delicacy. Hard work for amps	31.93	34		91	6	20	●	1355	143		
Tannoy Westminster TW	6,000	These awesome horn loaded speakers are remarkably controlled and impressive	large			99	8	38	●	C93			
TDL Near Field Monitor	120	Despite low price, this is an unimpressive performer, poor low frequency resolution and analysis being main flaws	18.30	17		87	8	50	●	1043	130		
TDL RTL2	300	Spacious, weighty and enveloping sound if you can accept the laid back balance	20.73	22		87	8	25	●	1412	148		
TDL RTL3	400	Bargain price floorstander has rich, heavy and bright sound with a good scale	20.90	37		90	8	25	●	126			
TDL Studio 0.5	499	Tiny floorstanding transmission line lacks coherence or the balance of Studio 1	20.62	30		85	8	40	●	94			
TDL Studio 1	699	Genuinely extended bass from a compact enclosure, very detailed but a shade clinical	23.77	33		86	8	25	●	78			
TDL T-Line 3	750	Plenty of bass and treble, but broad midband is rather repressed	20.97	38		86	8	20	●	164			
TDL Studio 1m	899	Transmission line helps bring the best from metal cone driver	23.77	34		86	8	20	●	118			
Technics SB-M20	200	Well balanced with natural perspectives and fine midband coherence, but bass is a bit boxy and uneven	20.32	23		70	8	50	●	1413	148		

HI-FI LOUDSPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	SIZE WxHxD(CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY(OB/W)	IMPEDANCE(Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Technics SB-M500	450	This model offers a clean, open sound, offset by midbass heavy balance and low sensitivity	25,78,37	●	100	8	25	●	1666 152
Totem Model One	995	Utterly delightful but exasperatingly expensive luxury miniature sets the benchmark for its size	17,31,23	●	87	4	28	●	122
Vandersteen 2Ce	1,395	Elegant staggered baffle contributes to a refreshing freedom from boxiness	41,101,27	●	88	7	23	●	86
Wharfedale Valdsu 400	199	Goes very loud with a minimum of amplification, but the sound is very thick and uneven, with a heavy upper bass	25,80,26	●	91	8	30	●	1414 148
Wharfedale Valdsu 500	299	Offering a large version of events these rock boxes can move plenty of air, albeit not as subtly as alternatives	25,108,26,5	●	91	4	40	●	1758 155
Wharfedale MFM-3	350	Smooth broad midband gives fine voice rendition; bass could be better	22,89,28	●	87	8	40	●	164
Wilson benesch ACT1	6,400	Stylish, technically advanced and sonically as clean as a whistle this is a truly high end loudspeaker (Statements)	23,108, 37	●	89	6	40	●	162
ZYP AI	199	Cute metal cased micro-miniature is quite coloured but great fun	14,22,12	●	88	8	30	●	110
SUBWOOFERS									
B&W AS6	500	Good material value with a fair amount of low bass from 100W active design	45,51,45,5	●			30		1736 154
Boston Acoustics SW10	450	A little thumpy but transparent with good timing and goes loud (active)	28,5,50,42	●			33		128
Celestion CS135	139	Compact hideaway passive sub lacks deep bass: for high sensitivity speakers	52,19,34	●	86	8	45	●	128
Infinity RS10	500	A very cute cube of an active sub but midbass is boomy with no real extension	34,34,34	●			38		128
Jamo SW600	530	Has some neat styling touches and remote control but deep bass is limited (active)	38,41,53	●			30		1736 154
KEF Model 30B	500	Commendably discreet with good sense of timing but limited extension (active)	38,5,37,43	●			45		1736 154
KEF AV1	2500	Works well, looks great, shakes the windows but costs a lot and is bulky	56,43,50	●			45		128
Living Voice RW24	9,500	The only horn subwoofer on the UK market brings new meaning to low frequency energy, speed and resolution	146,84,59	●	104	8	40	●	163
M&K VX-7B	450	Baby of a big range this active design delivers deep, plenteous bass albeit lacking in transparency	35,25,37	●			40		1736 154



Stands & Supports

Hi-fi furniture is more important than you might imagine. The effect it can have on the sound of your system is far from subtle. Hi-fi furniture can be split up into two categories — equipment supports and loudspeaker stands. It is not entirely clear what makes a great equipment support, but some are definitely more equal than others. There's a variety of approaches and materials used, including particle board, glass and all manner of steel tube and section.

Speaker stands come in a variety of sizes and styles to suit different models. Use dealer or manufacturer recommendations to narrow down the choice, but as a rule you want the tweeter at ear height.



KEY

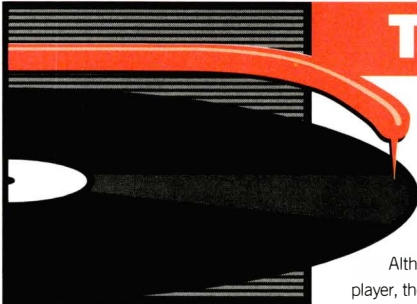
HEIGHT (CM): Height of stand or equipment shelf.	WELDED: The better stands and supports are welded rather than bolted together.	rack or support.	copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback information page.
TOP PLATE SIZE (CM): Dimensions of top plate on speaker stand or equipment support.	NUMBER OF SHELVES: The amount of tiers on an equipment	SHELF TYPE: Material that shelves are made of on an equipment rack. Wood generally means MDF	BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.
FILLABLE: Some speaker stands can be filled with sand and/or		FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax	

STANDS & SUPPORTS

Product	Price(£)	Comments	TOP PLATE SIZE(CM) HEIGHT(CM)	FILLABLE	NUMBER OF SHELVES	WELDED	FACTSBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER	
Equipment Supports									
Audiophile Furniture Base	480	Easy to set up, well ordered sound	40		4	Wood	1633	151	
Custom Design Classic Four	270	Glass shelved stand with octagonal wooden uprights with upward facing spikes isolating the top shelf, adjustable shelf height	81	46,37	4	Glass	166		
Fi-Rax R4	250	Lively, exuberant sound, slightly weak bass			5	Glass	1633	151	
Frameworks H500/H175	404	Two shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel that made a spectacular impression on audition	70	52,34	●	3	Glass	166	
Mana Acoustics Ref. Table	350	King of its type, angle iron, chipboard and glass combined to make a significant difference to sound quality			●	1	Glass	147	
Mana Acoustics 5 Tier Amp Stand	600	Infinitely upgradable. Persuasive and thrilling glass and angle iron design that adds speed and bandwidth to components upon it			●	5	Glass	1633 151	
Optimum Int 2000 OPT490	350	25kg stand with shelves sandwiched between variable height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass	50	60,40	4	Glass	166		
Quadraspire Q4	200	Easy to live with, and tonally neutral			4	MDF	1633	151	
Sound Organisation Z038	130	Too lively and lacking order - but cheap	50	84,40	●	5	Wood	1633 151	
Organisation Z560	150	A mix of welded and bolted members gives good structural integrity and while performance is not up with the best it's great value	90	46,36	●	5	Wood	166	
Soundstyle Select 6105	280	Respectable sonics, structurally solid and smart			5	Glass	1633	151	
Soundstyle Finewoods W105	320	Veneered shelves clamped between tubular uprights that delivers it with classical material	82	48,27	4	Wood	166		
Stands Unique Sound Tower	249	Adds colouration, and lacks weight. Optional Isolation Platform	81	72,42	5	Glass	1633	151	
Target B5	175	Free of colourations, fine grip and good value			●	5	Wood	1633 151	
Speaker Stands									
Alphason NC I	45	Filled single column design without threaded spike holes that's appropriate for non-critical applications	40-60	16,16	●			1373 146	
Alphason NCII	80	Tall, slim and elegant, though sound and value are unexceptional	40-60	17,17	●			159	
Alphason Titan	120	Excels in the midband and allows voices to come across in a detailed and expressive fashion	40-60	16,16	●	●		1373 146	
Apollo AZ6	80	Fine engineering value, but sound unexceptional and top-plate small	66	15,13	●	●		159	
Atacama BD21	55	Good looking and good value but doesn't match the SE24's sound quality	56	15,17	●			159	
Atacama SE24	70	Stand out from the budget crowd because of the consistency and overall quality of the performance	61	19,5,17	●	●		1373 146	
AVF Tower 400	35	Ridiculously cheap and much better than no stand at all	54	17,20	●			159	
Ikos Deadrock 903	50	Smooth and tonally even but short on definition. Deep bass is soft which doesn't help timing	60					1373 146	
Gale Reference 600	60	Smooth sounding with impressive bass well suited to less civilised speakers			●	●		1373 146	
Kudos S50	100	Better sound than the budget stands, particularly at the bottom end	60	15,21	●			159	
Kudos S100	270	The best all round stand around. . . Probably. . .	63	15,21	●			159	
Mana Soundframes	125	For use under floorstanders and equipment racks these make music effortless and natural, can be stacked for greater effect	5		●	●		1373 146	
Partington New Merlin	60	Although light in weight, the stands performance seemed remarkably muscular but musical rendering lacked a little precision			●	●		1373 146	
Partington Discovery	80	The depth and substance of the presentation truly added to the convincing nature of the system's portrayal			●	●		1373 146	
Partington Trophy	100	Four column design with damped top and base plates, sound is tight and cogent with smoothly integrated detail			●	●		1373 146	

STANDS & SUPPORTS (CONTINUED)

Product	Price(£)	Comments	TOP PLATE SIZE(CM) HEIGHT(CM)	FILLABLE	NUMBER OF SHELVES WELDED	FAXBACK NUMBER SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
Revolver RS1	70	A good blend of performance and appearance for the price	53	18,18	●		159
RMS/Stand Unique Vivus	550	Pricey carbon fibres give ultra-clean sound with exceptional voices	50	N/A			159
Soundstyle 124	100	Big, shiny and solid, with fine midband projection	65	17,16	●		159
Sound Style Z024	100	Three pillar triangular based design with high gloss finish. Enthusiastic sound suited to better systems	61		● ●		1373 146
Stand Unique HP	220	Real wood disguises high performance tuned technology	59	22,23			159
Sound Organisation Z124	80	Atacama style big pillar. A pleasantly balanced performer, tonally even with good timing and dynamics, but leaks sand!	61		●		1373 146
Sound Organisation Z129	110	Heavy four pillar design, extracts detail well and very little colouration together with an excellent sense of timing	74		●		1373 146
Target R1	280	Truly high mass four pillar design with superb weight and speed, giving music delicious attack and outstanding imagery	53	15,21	● ●		1373 146
Target TR60	68	Lively, dynamic midrange and detailed treble from a less than audiophile oriented twin column design	60	15,15	●		1373 14



Tonearms

Turntables at the cheaper end of the market tend to be supplied with a matching tonearm, and often include a 'starter' cartridge. Still better quality is found at higher prices among the separate motor units and tonearms. Careful partnering and set-up is essential for these components.

Although the turntable is the most important part of a record player, the tonearm is the second most important, and the quality of

its construction and design have a significant bearing on sound quality. There are three basic types of arms listed in the key and each has its strengths, but pivoted designs are the most popular, for reasons both practical and economical.

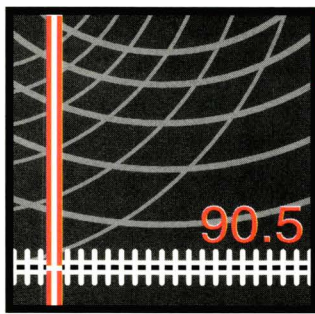
B Best buy

R Recommended

KEY			
EFFECTIVE MASS: This relates to cartridge compliance. Generally high mass arms are suitable for low compliance cartridges and vice versa.	PARALLEL TRACKING: An arm which allows the cartridge to track the disc in a linear fashion.	PIVOTED: Arms which allow the cartridge to describe an arc as they traverse the record.	UNI-PIVOT: Pivoted arms with a bearing that allows movement in two planes.
ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT: Important for accurate cartridge set-up.	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm): Length of arm from bearing to cartridge mounting.	FACTSBACK NUMBER: The reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback.	BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.

TONEARMS

Product	Price(£)	Comments	PARALLEL TRACKING	EFFECTIVE MASS	EFFECTIVE LENGTH(CM) UNI-PIVOT	ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT	FAXBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Alphason HR100S	490	S-shaped arm sounds smooth, but nevertheless reproduces transients with fine attack.	Medium	●	229	●		86
Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,000	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness.	High	●		●		79
Linn Ekos	1,297	Superb, state of the art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths.	Medium	●	229	●		6
Moth Arm	95	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural.	Low	●	237			60
Rega RB300	139	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high end turntables.	Low	●	237			60
Roksan Tabriz Basic	275	Targetted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases - a touch bright though.	Low	●	240	●		91
SME Series 300-309	657	Beautifully made and finished: fully adjustable and a highly neutral performer.	Low	●	238	●		79
SME Series IV	936	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low colouration.	Low	●	233	●		60
SME Series V	1,391	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price.	Low	●	233	●		60



Tuners

The radio medium operates at a lower profile than TV, but in areas outside pop music the BBC service is the envy of the world. Live concerts rival all other sources from a hi-fi perspective.

Though tuners might seem something of a hi-fi afterthought, the task they discharge is far from simple, since it requires the skills of RF (reception) and audio (signal processing) engineering. The importance of the former will depend on reception conditions, but a high-quality aerial system is well worth having. Tuners come in two basic types. Analogue models

tune gradually and can have analogue or digital displays; they are often preferred for sound quality. Digital tuners offer convenient automatic tune facilities and pre-set memories.

B Best buy

R Recommended

KEY			
WAVEBANDS: Only the FM (VHF) bands give stereo hi-fi sound, though AM (MW & LW) are useful for receiving certain transmissions in the UK.	PRESETS: Number of station frequencies that can be stored.	RDS: (radio data system) was originally designed for in-car applications. Basically RDS tuners can identify and display the name of the radio station being received, but they offer a variety of other features as well.	REMOTE CONTROL: Couch-potato friendly.
SIGNAL STRENGTH METER: Indicates strength of signal from aerial, useful for aligning your 'twig' during installation	ROTARY TUNING KNOB: The ergonomically attractive approach to dial-surfing.	FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page	to find the Factsback information page
			BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared.

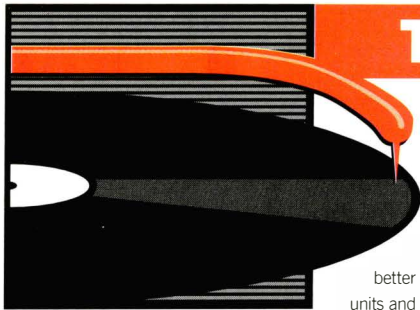
Tuners

Product	Price(£)	Comments	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	SIGNAL STRENGTH METER REMOTE CONTROL	ROTARY TUNING KNOB	FAXBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
AMC T7	130	Performance adequate but price is sharp, especially with remote control. Some hum	FM, M	30	●			166
Arcam Alpha 7	230	Indifferent RF performance but a touch of audiophile sound quality with clean strong signals	FM, M, L	24				166
Arcam Delta 280	399	Fine sound quality marred by mild synthesiser whine; RF performance only average. remote £60 extra	FM	20		●		120
Audiolab 8000T	750	Unusually combination of fine sound quality and RF performance (inc AM), and superb ergonomics	FM, M, L	39		●	●	1254 142
Denon TU-260L	120	Careful minimalist design promises a surprisingly open and vivacious sound.	FM, M, L	20				93
Denon TU-425RD	200	A fine allrounder with advanced RDS, good RF performance and decent sound. Remote extra.	FM, M, L	40	●			166
Harman/Kardon TU950	200	Bulky but effective, delivering fine RF performance and good sound for the price	FM, M, L	30	●		●	166
Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price. The reviewer's saving up but you should check it out for yourself.	FM	80	●	●		1254 142

ISSUE NUMBER
FAXBACK NUMBER
ROTARY TUNING KNOB
SIGNAL STRENGTH METER
REMOTE CONTROL
PRESETS
WAVEBANDS

Tuners (Continued)

Product	Price (£)	Comments	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	SIGNAL STRENGTH METER	REMOTE CONTROL	ROTARY TUNING KNOB	FAXBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Magnum Dynalab FT101	825	Although fairly expensive given its minimum set of facilities, its excellent sound provided ample compensation.	FM						72
Micromega Tuner	700	Has digital output but even without the Micromega DAC, this provides exceptional sound quality. Looks good too.	FM	39	●	●	●	1810	157
Mission Cyrus FM7	400	Open, generous soundstaging gives the music plenty of foundation, if a touch shut in at the top	FM	29	●	●	●	1254	142
Musical Fidelity E50	300	Sounds involving if coloured and with a subjectively larger than life presentation	FM	20				1810	157
Naim NAT01	1,645	There may be better sounding tuners in the world, but we have yet to hear one.	FM					1254	142
Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance, slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●	●	●		166
Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M	20					166
Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to its best	FM,M,L	30	●	●	●	1810	157
Technics ST-GT350L	150	Decent RF performance is offset by sound quality more typical of a mini/midi system	FM,M,L	30	●	●	●	1254	142
Thorens TRT2000	450	Not exactly neutral sounding, it nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	1810	157



Turntables

Specialist turntables are what high fidelity sound is all about. CD players may offer silent backgrounds and flat frequency responses, but they can't match the dynamics and superlative timing that serious turntable users take for granted. Turntables at the cheaper end of the market tend to be supplied with a matching tonearm, and often include a 'starter' cartridge. Still better quality is found at higher prices among the separate motor units and tonearms. Careful partnering and set-up is essential for these

components, but many so-called 'sympathetic' combinations exist. Because turntables are mechanical devices that are designed to retrieve modulations as small as a micron, engineering quality is of paramount importance. It is also the reason why turntables cost as much as they do, and require high quality support systems.

Best buy

Recommended

KEY

<p>MANUAL: You do it all: put the needle on the record and take it off.</p> <p>AUTO: The record player does it all.</p> <p>SEMI-AUTO: You share the work: you put it on, it takes it off.</p> <p>SPEEDS: In RPM to correspond with your platters.</p> <p>SUSPENDED SUBCHASSIS: Sprung suspension to minimise structural interference.</p>	<p>EXTERNAL PSU: Outboard power supply; generally it indicates high quality.</p> <p>SUPPLIED WITH ARM: Many turntables require a separate arm to be fitted; if not, this tells you so.</p>	<p>SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE: Most turntables do not come supplied with a needle.</p> <p>FACTSBACK NUMBER: The Factsback reference for ordering a fax copy of the review. Use the contents page to find the Factsback information page.</p>	<p>BACK ISSUE: The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which the original review appeared</p>
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TURNTABLES

Product	Price (£)	Comments	MANUAL	SEMI-AUTO	EXTERNAL ELECTRONIC PSU	SUSPENDED SUBCHASSIS	SPEEDS	SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE	FAXBACK NUMBER	ISSUE NUMBER
Alphason Sonata	835	Good sound in all areas - bass, clarity and neutrality all in top class (tested with HR100S MCS).	●				33	● ● ●		79
Clearaudio Reference	2,500	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail with a fizzy character but is quite bold	●				33/45			1328 144
DNM Rota 2	4,800	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on own table	●				33/45	● ● ●		1328 144
Dual CS503-2	170	Coarse and woolly sound - not inoffensive, but bettered by the CS-505-3.					33/45	● ● ● ●		91
Dual 505-4 UK	200	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph.					33/45	● ● ● ●		103
Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,200	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		91
Linn LP12 Basik	1,050	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc still top rank	●				33	● ● ●		103
Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains.	●				33/45	● ● ●		91
Michell Gyrodek	765	Sweet and natural sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm	●				33/45	● ● ●		55
Moth Kanoot	329	Rather coarse sounding deck that requires decent isolation and comes with a Rega RB300 arm	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		164
Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm1,125		No frills, just a first rate, outstandingly natural sounding deck that will last forever.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		159
Pink Triangle Anniversary	1,980	Possibly the most detailed, clear and neutral sounding deck around. Likeness to master tape is uncanny.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		91
Pro-ject 2	299	Remarkably effective at the price with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		164
Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	699	Don't think of this as a mid price deck with a good arm, but as a scaled down Oracle/Delphi - it's that good	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		138
Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		48
Rega Planar 3	274	The '3 sounds musical in a balanced and coherent manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		164
Rega Planar 9	1,598	Featuring the RB900 arm and a ceramic plinth this deck puts Rega into contention with the best decks available	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		151
Reson RS1	675	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		159
Rivellin Eclipse	1,100	Tested with SME 309. Tends to simply things and add a slightly ragged edge to the proceedings	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		1328 144
Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		159
SME Model 20A	4,631	Supplied with Series V arm. Engineered to last a lifetime, giving excellent stereo and detail retrieval.	●				33/45/78	● ● ● ●		118
Systemdek 1/920/Moth	235	The motor is derivative of the Rega Planar 2 with a Moth arm. Uptempo, even bright at times but never lacks enthusiasm.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		115
Systemdek 2X2	499	Neutral, flexible and dynamic deck that begs to be used with a good arm and cartridge.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		159
Thorens TD166 VI/UK/RB	300	Refined and solid sound with well focussed imagery; suitable for use with good MM and budget MC cartridges.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		103
Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		159
Thorens TD3001/UK	770	Excellent middle ranking esoterica, with strong all-round abilities rather than excellence in particular areas.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		103
Voyd 0.5	3,940	Cross between standard and Reference Voyds. Superb finish, colourful and dynamic.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		1328 144
Voyd Reference	6,962	Voyd's flagship, equipped with three substantial motors. is a strong contender for world's best.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		91
Well Tempered Record Player	1,800	Intriguing and challenging. Musically it is not ideal, but has a limpid quality and a lack of artificiality that sets standards.	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		1180 136
Wilson-benesch TT/Act 2 arm	3,249	Carbon fibre is extensively used in this neutral and well resolved turntable with its fabulous unipivot tonearm (Statements)	●				33/45	● ● ● ●		156

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LONDON

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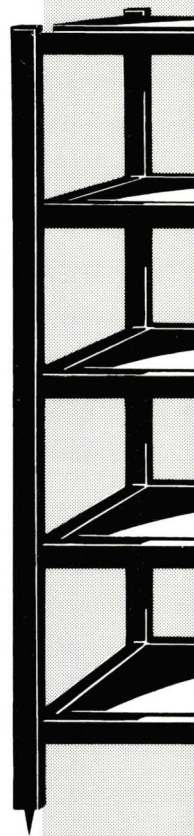
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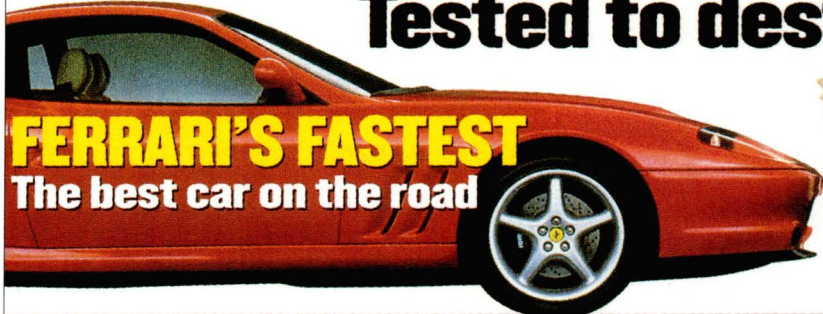


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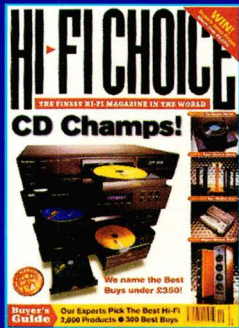
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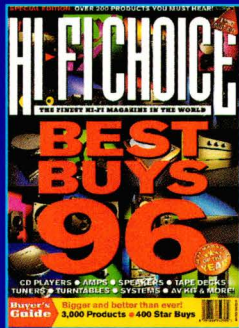
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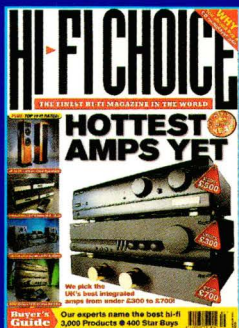
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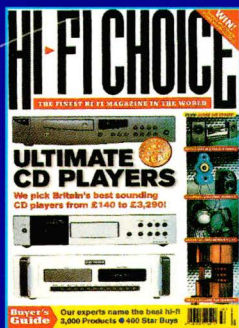
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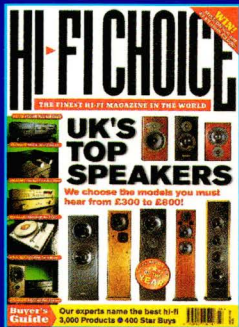
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NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

JUNE'S HI-FI CHOICE WILL BE JUST THE TICKET FOR THOSE HOT SUMMER NIGHTS!

FINEST LOUDSPEAKERS REVIEWED AND RATED

Looking for a speaker with serious pretensions? If so, don't miss our massive review of enclosures priced from £800 to £2,000. We've got 15 hot boxes of the moment, representing both mainstream and more radical hi-fi philosophies. The likes of Mission's 754 Freedom 5, Tannoy's D300 and Dynaudio's Contour 1.8 will lock horns with the KEF Reference Model 3, B&W Matrix 804, JBL L40, Ruark Crusader II and Rehdeko RK115. Find out about these and many more in next month's mega test!



Mission's 754 F5 enters battle next month!

AMPING AT THE BIT

The foundation of any good hi-fi system is an amplifier with four feet on the floor. Best of all, many of today's 'budget' amplifiers won't break the bank but will keep your system motoring even when you start to upgrade. We pit five £200-£300 amps against one another to see which delivers the goods: AMC's 3050a, Arcam's Alpha 7, Cambridge Audio's A1mkIII, Denon's new PMA-425R, and Marantz's PM66SE. Full lab test included.



MAKE ROOM FOR YOUR HI-FI

It's a notorious old chestnut, but its truth remains undiminished: a hi-fi system is profoundly influenced by the room in which it's sited. With this in mind we've invited David Lewis, a well-known architect and audiophile, to reveal the secrets of making your room sound as good as your system! Learn all about Helmholtz resonators, Golden Sections and "bookshelves on the ceiling", and understand why your room sounds like it does.

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Proceed is the 'affordable' marque of Madrigal Audio Laboratories. At £3,395 the new Proceed CDP offers an intriguing entrance into the high-end, with distinctive industrial design and the incorporation of digital technologies developed for sister brand Mark Levinson. Read all about it in our exclusive review next month!

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THE JUNE 1997 EDITION OF HI-FI CHOICE WILL BE ON SALE FRIDAY MAY 2, 1997 - DON'T MISS IT!

Ultra Vivian Scene

After a month's listening, **David Vivian** has the measure of Musical Fidelity's X-DAC... and finds new toys at February's Bristol hi-fi show!

Last month I was excited but unsure about the £300 Musical Fidelity X-DAC. Excited because, when used in conjunction with the identical-looking £99 X10-D line stage buffer, it made my stock Pioneer PD-S904 CD player sound like a totally (and I mean totally) different machine. There seemed to be more of everything: pace, drive, detail, air, life, tonal colour, stereo, rhythm, sex — you name it. And that was with ordinary CDs. When its High Definition Compatible Digital (HDCD) decoding chip did its thing with the appropriate software, the results were simply thrilling.

Unsure because, on first listen, it even seemed to wipe the Linoleum with the Trichord Genesis I'd been listening to and enjoying hugely. And I knew that the Genesis (an acknowledged £600 reference argued by some to outperform everything up to £1,000) was drawing further strength from a synergistic partnership with my Pioneer A300R Precision amp and a pair of revealing but smooth B&W CDM2 speakers. For the Pioneer/MF combo to sound so much better, I reasoned, it would either have to be performing way beyond its price (a combined £799) or going all out to impress with scant regard for long-term listening satisfaction — a classic hi-fi pose.

One month on, and the MF "booster modules" (their ribbed canister styling is more likely to win the endorsement of NASA than BADA) are still happily tethered to the Pioneer — but now with lengths of girthing green Audioquest interconnect almost as expensive as their hosts. I wouldn't have gone to the trouble if I didn't think it was worth it. Believe me, the set-up sounds lovely. And very expensive.

Formal criticisms are hard to level. Tonally it's warm enough to be natural and inviting but not to the point of smothering euphony; the exquisitely resolved treble, for instance, positively shimmers with fine detail and vitality. Stereo is big and spacious, in the style of some five-figure West Coast hulks, but with solid, believable imagery. The speedy bass is deep and weighty but possessed of a wonderfully dry and taut bottom octave. Dynamics are punchy but not forced, the mid-range clear but not pedantically analytical, integration and linearity everything you would expect of a thoroughly modern and well-engineered product.

The Seismic Sink Stand: the most advanced equipment support ever?



As pure hi-fi it does the business and exposes what might be perceived as the weaknesses (or quirks) of the Genesis: slightly soft bass, relatively narrow soundstage, a degree of reticence to get down and boogie when the music demands, and a thoroughgoing sweetness that doesn't always ring completely true.

But I've kept the Trichord hooked up to the A-300R, too, because it has the one quality the MF-turbocharged Pioneer lacks: magic. This isn't as glib and whimsical as it sounds. The Trichord has often been described as having an analogue-type delivery (meant as a compliment, of course). And it has: more real, more human, more musical. What its soundstage lacks in width (arguably nothing, others might be exaggerated) it makes up for in depth — an altogether rarer talent and one that the almost holographic imaging of the A-300R Precision allows full reign. Treble has that effortlessly extended yet completely grainless quality you usually get only with top-flight turntables. And its mid-band is so transparent and musically lucid, it can make the X-rated Pioneer occasionally sound slightly thick, grainy and stilted, even when it's firing spectacularly on all twelve HDCD cylinders. (Actually, the Genesis sounds

great with HDCD-encoded CDs, too, without the benefit of a special Pacific Microsonics chip).

The amazing floating Pioneer

At least now I know the sort of sound that constitutes a genuine improvement over what I'm used to. It has the full-on verve, dynamism, drive and substantial architecture conferred on my '904 by the MF X-factor, and the profoundly human touch and musical fluidity of the Genesis. I've already found it, or maybe something better. And so have you if you visited the Pioneer room at the Sound & Vision show in Bristol last month. People were seen near this demo scratching their heads and looking puzzled. They clearly couldn't connect the stunning sounds with what appeared to be a collection of regular-looking black boxes arranged on a curiously complex and worryingly wobbly equipment stand.

They probably hadn't noticed that together for the first time were the A-300R Precision amp and its new stablemate, the PD-S505 Precision CD player — the second fruit of the collaboration between Pioneer GB and Tom Evans Audio Design. Or Max Townshend lurking in the wings enthusiastically to passers-by and fans about his wobbly equipment table.

For Sound & Vision marked the world debut of the Seismic Sink Stand, modestly billed as the most advanced equipment support ever. Son (or maybe Father?) of the Seismic Sink platform, the £699 Stand is a structure of shelves floating on dual air suspension with extremely low resonant frequencies (1Hz lateral, 2Hz vertical) that isolates anything placed on it from the harmful vibrations of our everyday environment — especially the low frequency urban grunge that exists, almost inaudibly, all around us. At Sound & Vision it had to compete with the combined output of a hundred subwoofers shaking the Marriott hotel.

Max reckons the SSS will do for hi-fi what the wheel did for personal mobility. It doesn't just allow existing hi-fi to sound better but future hi-fi to be designed and developed more effectively, without the corrupting element of vibration. In theory, the Seismic Sink Stand should have given Pioneer a unique advantage. We all heard it. More, much more, on the SSS next month. ▲

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