

MASSIVE ATTACK» NEW ALBUM'S SECRETS REVEALED

HIFICHoice

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ROUND-UP
HEADPHONES
CANS AND AMPS
FOR PRIVATE
PARTIES

The latest models
from top British brands

SPEAKERS YOU MUST HEAR

FROM £500-£4,000



FIRST TESTS

CD STARS

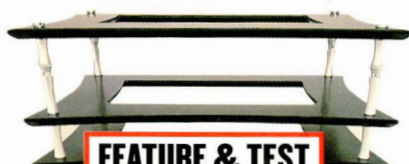
New players rated from Rega, Creek and Gamut



EXCLUSIVE

PLAY HARD

Linn's new music server: the future of audio?



FEATURE & TEST

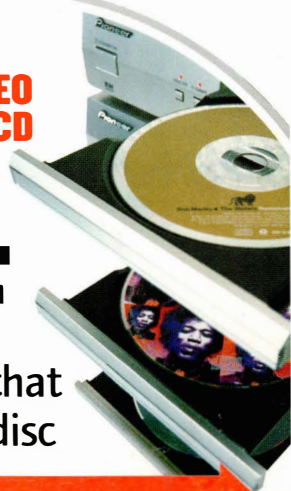
THE SCIENCE OF SUPPORTS

The latest racks and why they make a difference

CD • DVD-VIDEO
DVD-AUDIO • SACD

FUTURE PROOF

Universal players that work with **EVERY** disc



FIRST EVER UK GROUP TEST!

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PLUS BUYER'S BIBLE

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIGH PERFORMANCE HI-FI AND AV

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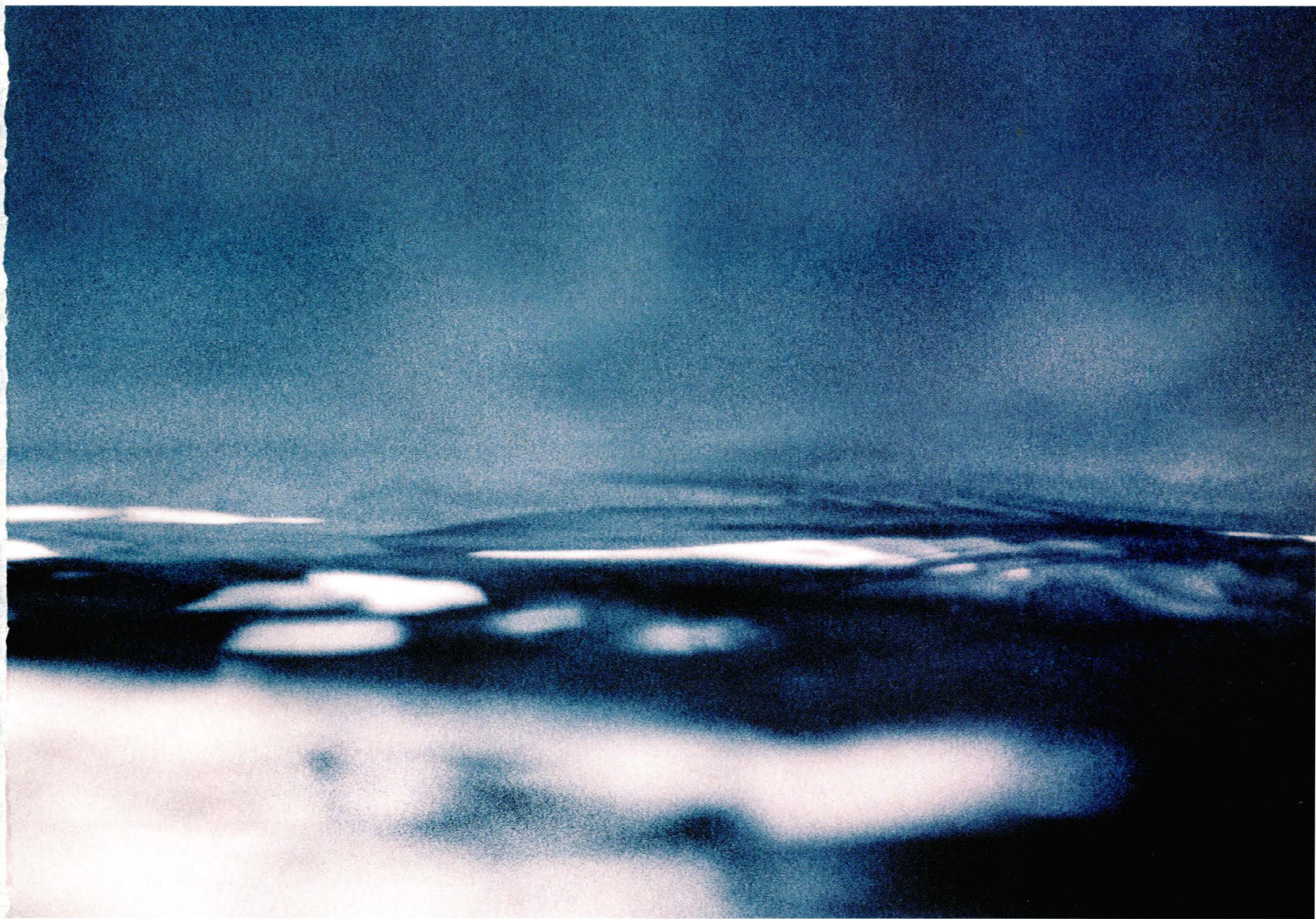
B&W Bowers & Wilkins



With every beautiful note

I'm where I want to be

Listen and you'll see



www.listenandyoullsee.com

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HI-FI CHOICE

APRIL 2003 ISSUE 240

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



PAUL MILLER

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



ALVIN GOLD

Alvin cut his hi-fi teeth in the retail trade, and has now been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides). Few can match his encyclopedic knowledge of all things audio.



RICHARD BLACK

Richard is one talented guy: a professional musician, experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi enthusiast to boot. He's particularly nerdy about cables. It's probably Freudian.

Remember the first time you heard good music through proper hi-fi? I do. It was one of those life-altering moments, when you discover something new and delicious, a light blinks on in your brain and you know there's no turning back. Like your first kiss – but less sloppy.

Many more illuminating hi-fi moments have ensued since, but I have to confess that in latter years they've been scarcer. After all, once you've heard *Smells Like Teen Spirit* through £100,000 worth of kit there's not a lot left to surprise you...

But then came the future. DVD-Audio and SACD emerged blinking in the sunlight, brave new hopes for a high-res multichannel world. It's taken a while, but the quality of software is picking up and there's finally some music on both formats I want to hear. The Stones, Dylan, Neil Young, REM – hardly ground-breaking, but great albums remastered and repackaged with laudable care and attention.

Two-channel hi-fi still rocks, but listening to the best high-res multichannel music is another of those revelatory experiences. Even revamped classics have the power to amaze – Young's *The Needle And The Damage Done* sounds more vivid, more natural, more fluid in multichannel 24/96 DVD-A than it ever did on CD. A moving moment in musical history made all the more poignant by the march of technology... ironic? Perhaps, but joyous all the same.

A universal DVD player like those in this month's group test will let you taste this for yourself, without the worry of compatibility with any given format. They play all music and movie discs without prejudice, some to a very high standard. The future is here. Welcome...



Tim Bownen **editor**

Star products in this issue



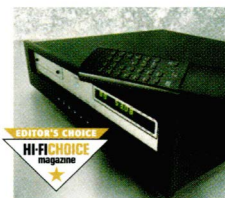
38 **PIONEER DV-757AI**
Universal DVD player



47 **PMC DB1**
Entertaining small speaker



56 **ATC ACTIVE 20**
Heavy duty active speaker



62 **GAMUT CD1R**
Very refined CD player

CONTENTS

HI-FI CHOICE

PRODUCT REVIEWS

14 INCOMING NEW GEAR

- 14 Creek CD50 CD player
- 15 Titan T2/s loudspeaker
- 16 Spondor SR5 loudspeaker
- 18 Harman Kardon AVR 5550 AV receiver
- 19 Rega Planet CD player
- 20 Cyrus 6 stereo amplifier

22 ROUND-UP HEADPHONES

- 22 Headphones and headphone amps

24 SYSTEM ADDICT SYSTEM TEST

- 24 Naim CD5 CD player
- 24 Briston B60 amplifier
- 24 PMC FB1 speakers

30 IN-DEPTH SOLO TEST

- 30 Linn Kivor Index music server

34 GROUP TEST

UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS £400-£1,400

- 36 Marantz DV8300
- 37 Onkyo Integra DV-SP800
- 38 Pioneer DV-656A
- 39 Pioneer DV-757Ai

42 GROUP TEST

LOUDSPEAKERS £500-£800

- 44 AVI Pro-Nine-Plus
- 45 Energy Connoisseur C-5
- 46 Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10
- 47 PMC DB1

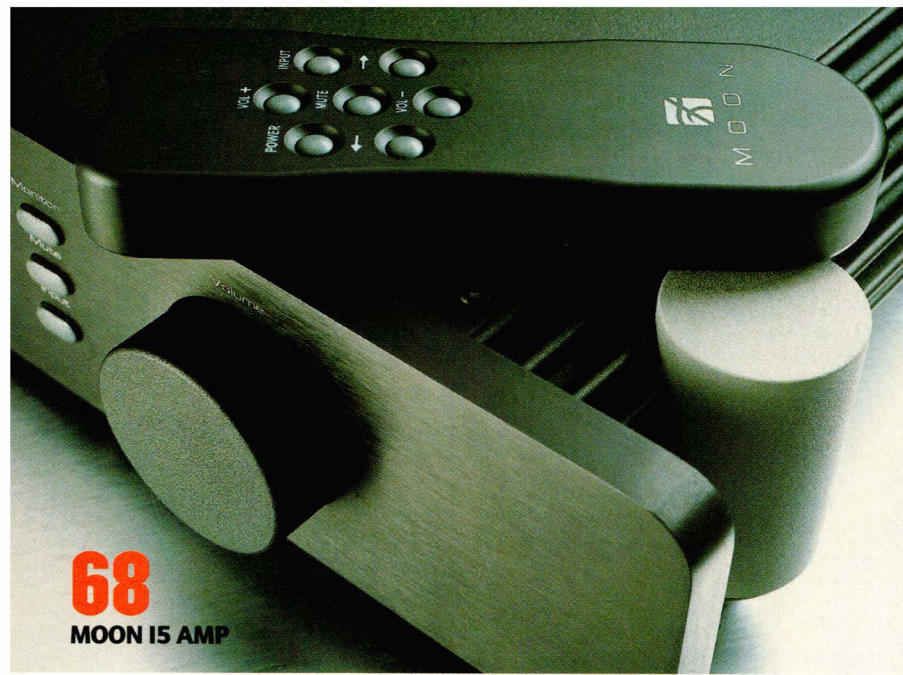
52 TEST FEATURE

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS £350-£1,200

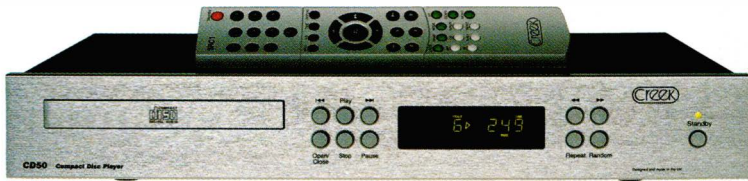
- 52 Quadraspire Q4 Ref Rack
- 52 Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack System
- 53 Soundstyle ST95
- 53 Townshend Seismic Sink Stand

56 STATEMENTS HIGH-END TESTS

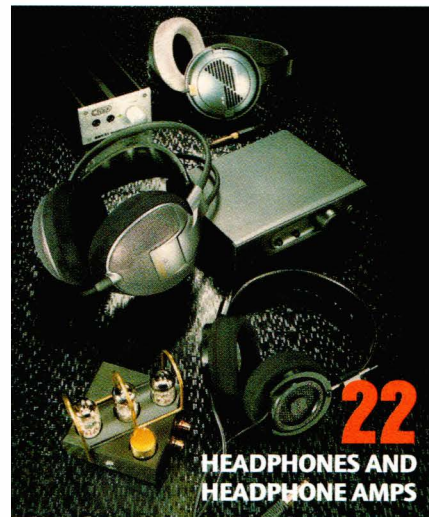
- 56 ATC Active 20 loudspeaker
- 60 ECS EA-2 stereo amplifier
- 62 Gamut CD1R CD player
- 66 Tannoy Dimension TD8 loudspeaker
- 68 Moon I5 stereo amplifier



68
MOON I5 AMP



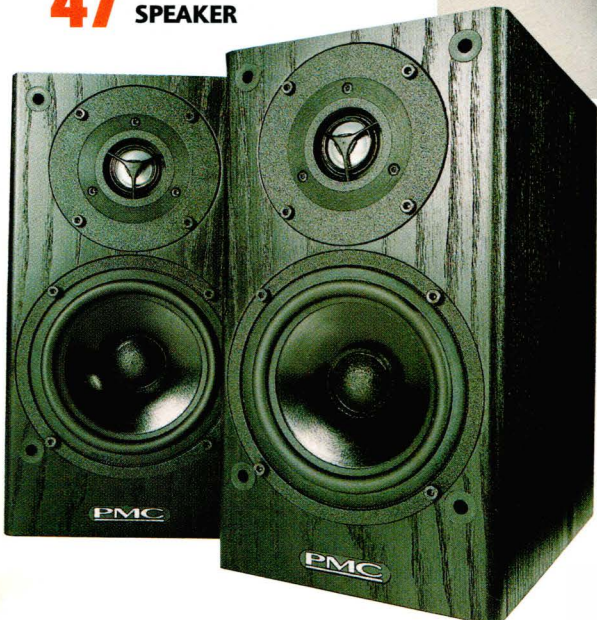
14
CREEK CD50 CD PLAYER



22
HEADPHONES AND
HEADPHONE AMPS



56
ATC ACTIVE 20
SPEAKER



47 PMC DB1
SPEAKER



10
MICHELL TECHNODEC
TURNTABLE

COVER HIGHLIGHTS

62

**GAMUT CD1
CD PLAYER**

NEWS & FEATURES

8 AUDIO FILE NEWS AND VIEWS
Insight from hi-fi's cutting edge.

27 CHOICE CUTS SOFTWARE
New and recent releases, rated for sound and content.

28 INTERVIEW MASSIVE ATTACK
Neil Davidge on the recording of *100th Window*.

50 THE SCIENCE OF SUPPORTS
Why equipment supports make a difference.

54 INDUSTRY PROFILE ATC
Speaker science with the Acoustic Transducer Company.

69 RETRO HI-FI REVISITED
The ground-breaking Sennheiser HD414 headphones.

71 MUSO CLASSIC ALBUMS
Neil Young's *Harvest*, from LP to DVD-Audio.

73 DIGITALIA DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
SACD versus DVD-A.

130 OUTRO HI-FI EXTREME
David Vivian on out of this world turntables.

READER SERVICES

Our regular information service, including where to buy, how to get a back issue and second-hand kit for sale.

- 76 How to Subscribe
- 77 Reader Classified
- 117 Glossary
- 118 Dealer Guide
- 126 Dealer Directory
- 129 Back Issues/Next Month

STAR RATINGS

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

AWARD BADGES



Best Buy

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



Recommended

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



Editor's Choice

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

For 28 years, our unique tests have brought you the most accurate guide to buying hi-fi. Our mix of thorough *Group Tests* and in-depth solo reviews ensures *HFC* is the magazine to trust.

30 IN-DEPTH: LINN KIVOR INDEX
HARD DISC MUSIC SERVER EXPOSED



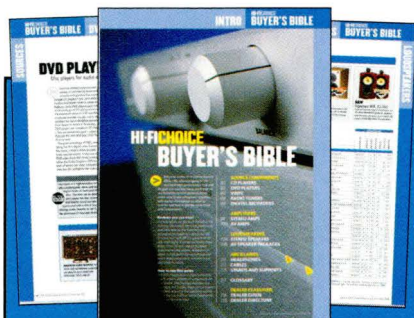
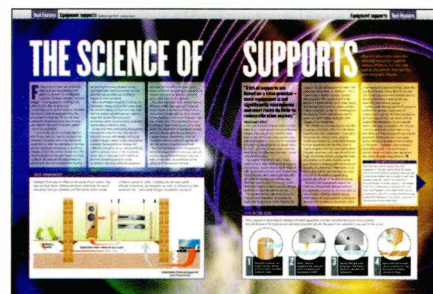
34 GROUP TEST: UNIVERSAL PLAYERS
FOUR FOR ALL DISC TYPES



42 GROUP TEST: STEREO SPEAKERS
HOT BOXES FROM £500 TO £800



52 TEST FEATURE: SUPPORTS
WHAT THEY DO AND HOW THEY DO IT



79 BUYER'S BIBLE

The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV – our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...

SOURCE COMPONENTS

- 80 CD players
- 82 DVD players
- 84 Vinyl
- 89 Radio tuners
- 90 Digital recorders

AMPLIFIERS

- 98 Stereo amps
- 100 AV amps

LOUDSPEAKERS

- 104 Stereo speakers
- 108 AV speaker packages

ANCILLARIES

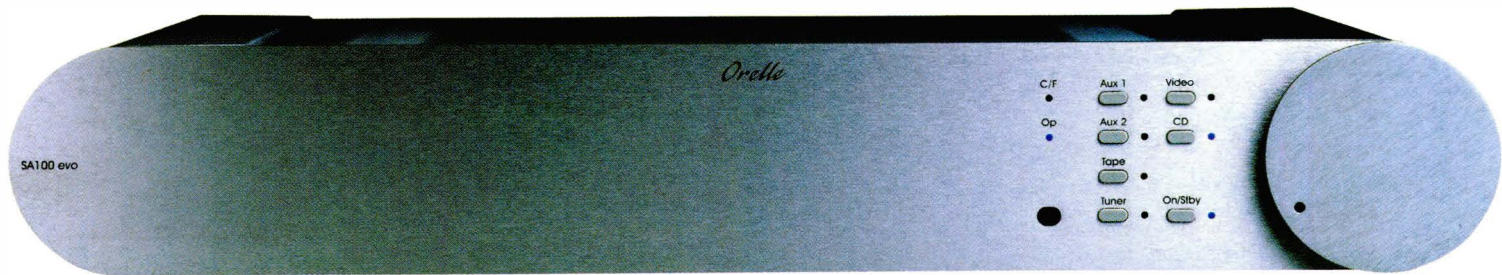
- 111 Headphones
- 112 Cables
- 115 Stands and supports



66

**TANNOY DIMENSION
TD8 SPEAKER**

audiofile



ORELLE'S BELLES

ORELLE RETURNS WITH NEW ELECTRONICS RANGE

Former *HFC* favourite Orelle has spent 18 busy months in the workshop and now steps back to the plate with a brand new range. The new products include a CD player called the CD100 evo, priced around £1,200-£1,500, a similarly priced DVD player, plus a pre/power

amp combo, the CA100 and SP100 priced at £1,000 each. First off the production line however, is the new SA100 evo integrated amplifier (pictured), a heavily stylised, 80-watt model evolved from the highly regarded SA100. The new model is remote controllable and

sports six inputs, a preamp output and dual binding posts for speaker bi-wiring. It weighs in at £1,200 and its arrival in the shops is imminent. Expect a full review next month.

Orelle Ltd 020 8991 9200
www.orelle.co.uk

COME TO YOUR SENSYS

NEW TANNOY SUPER-TWEETERED SPEAKERS

If you've drooled over the Tannoy Dimension series but lacked the necessary paperwork to make it happen, the brand's new Sensys range could be for you. Three models from a seven-strong line up combine Tannoy's Wideband super-tweeter, capable of extending beyond 50kHz, with the latest version of its 175mm (7") dual concentric driver.

The remaining four Sensys models, which include a centre and rear channel, also feature the super-tweeter, albeit with a more conventional paper cone main drive unit. Other features include RF grounding, bi-wirable speaker terminals and variable port damping, and all models use a braced cabinet that has an acoustically-damped, fabric-covered baffle. All this technology is available from £200 for the with the range topping Sensys DC2 priced at just £650. Expect a review soon.

Tannoy 01236 420199 www.tannoy.com



FEEL OB1'S FORCE

PMC'S SLEEK NEW FLOORSTANDER

PMC's new OB1 floorstander caught the eyes and ears of journalists and public alike at the Bristol Sound and Vision Show last month. It's a hand-built, three-way transmission line design that claims to offer the performance of PMC's larger models in a more svelte package. OB1 is as tough as a Jedi knight, using a veneered Medite panel construction for the cabinet that boasts an acoustically treated internal bracing system to eradicate flex. PMC has chosen a silk soft dome tweeter capable of extending to 25kHz to complement the bespoke paper-coned mid and bass drivers, all of which can be driven by bolt-on Bryston amplification should you require active versions. OB1 is available now priced at £2,450, or £4,500 for an active pair.

PMC 0870 4441044
www.pmc-speakers.com





SEXY LEXY

NEW WONDER BOX PLAYS ALL

Lexicon is the latest brand to unveil a play-it-all, DVD-A/SACD compatible 'universal' DVD player. The RT-10 is touted as a 'reference quality' source component capable of playing almost any 12cm disc, joining those players taking part in this month's universal DVD player group test, though at a higher price and with the promise of extra special performance. On the audio side are multiple 24-bit/192kHz DACs for all six

analogue output channels, along with a full range of output connections including three S/PDIF digital outs, plus one optical and one coaxial.

The player's video features include a progressive scan component video output, 12-bit/108 MHz DACs and something called Pure Cinema, a feature said to uprate standard 24-frame per second film rates to 60 frames per second for better picture quality. Further tweaks can be made to tailor the RT-10 to any kind of display device, while a comprehensive on-screen menu system provides optimum system configuration. Priced at £2,900, the RT-10 goes on sale in April.

☎ CSE 01423 359054 🌐 www.lexicon.com

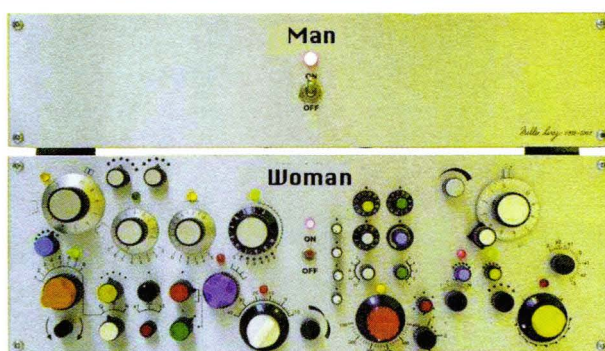
KRELL'S SACD STANDARD

TOP-FLIGHT SACD FROM US HIGH-END

Krell has finally launched a high-resolution audio disc player favouring the SACD format. Krell CEO Dan D'Agnostino admires the formats' music-first stance and compares SACD's objectives with that of Krell's, in "advancing the art of music playback".

Named the SACD Standard, the new player utilises a chassis-within-a-chassis design that is claimed to provide ultra stable disc drive operation and considerable damping. Separate regulated power supplies are used for both the analogue and digital circuitry and a low-noise, custom-wound toroidal power transformer supplies lots of current. Only those with deep pockets need consider this player - the price will be £4,244 come the April launch.

☎ Absolute Sounds
020 8971 3909
🌐 www.krell.com



HIS AND HERS

GENDER-SPECIFIC AMPLIFIERS

Esoteric hi-fi brand Mickey Disco says *vive la difference* with its new gender-specific amps. The Man power amp is a simple design boasting a 6mm brushed aluminium faceplate, straightforward on/off switch and 100 watts of power. In contrast, the 25-watt Woman integrated amp offers a complex range of set-up

features and takes much longer to warm up. Due to its vast range of controls much experimentation is needed to achieve a fluid output, and its Class A design means it runs hot and is very pricey. However, treat it right and you'll be making sweet music into the early hours.

☎ Mickey Disco 020 7745 3665
🌐 www.mapletoool.com



KILLA WATTS

MF UNLEASHES 75 ONE-KILOWATT MONSTERS

With more grip than a virgin hang-glider, Musical Fidelity's Tri-Vista kW power amp is a no-compromise powerhouse designed to show the full potential of the brand's design concept. Priced at £15,000, only 75 will be produced, each of which has been designed to have no practical voltage or current limits. MF believes it should be unclippable under any circumstances, delivering 1,000 watts into a standard eight-ohm load. Try a Tri-Vista kW at your dealer now - assuming the speakers can do it justice.

☎ Musical Fidelity 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

audiofile

PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites

REGA has added a monoblock amp to last month's product launch. The new Exon 3 is a symmetrical circuit power amplifier that uses dual toroidal transformers and four Sanken 200-watt output transistors that Rega claims can drive the most awkward speakers systems. The Exon 3 is available now, priced at £498.

☎ 01702 333071



KEF's best-laid plans hatched this month with the launch of the new and improved KHT2005.2 sub/sat system, commonly referred to as KEF's 'eggs'. The popular package has received modifications to the tweeter, which now extends to 27kHz, and will be available in a wider range of finishes. The subwoofer's output has been raised by 10dB at 30Hz due to the larger 250mm drive unit that is now housed in a sealed box. What's more, the price is unchanged at £800 for the full 5.1 set.

☎ 01622 672261

SONY's new CD Walkmen for 2003 offer a whopping 63 hours of playback, or 120 hours with a combination of the supplied rechargeable and dry batteries. Five new models also supply improved G-Protection anti-shock technology, CD-R/RW playback and LCD remote controls. The flagship D-EJ2000 is the world's smallest and lightest at 145 grams, and boasts Sony's 'bookmark' technology, which can store 10 CDs' worth of music in ATRAC format. Prices start at £90.

☎ 08705 111999

Hi-Fi diary

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+49 202 702022 or email
paxa@highendsociety.de

AUGUST
29-1 IFA Berlin 2003 Messe
Berlin, Berlin, Germany
020 7886 3103

SEPTEMBER
6-8 The Smart Show, NEC
Birmingham
www.thesmartshow.co.uk



FUTURE SOUNDS

On the spot reports from the Bristol Sound & Vision Show



SPENDOR S3/5SE SPECIAL EDITION

A 21st century variant on the late and lamented LS3/5a theme, the Spendor S3/5se features a 19mm Scan Speak tweeter and a new crossover to match. Price is £850 in cherry, and other finishes are available for more.



TACT DIGITAL AMPS

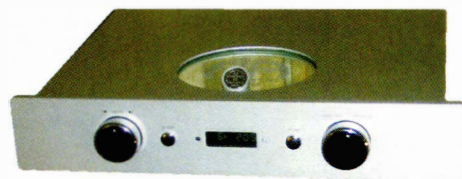
The off-again, on-again relationship that Tact has with the UK market was very much on at the Bristol show with an impressive demo using the Tact 2150 series digital amplifiers coupled to the RCS room correction preamp. For some, this was the best sound of the show.



NIRO AMP

Niro Nakamichi's new Niro brand includes this gorgeous high-end Integrated Engine

amp. It has a power amplifier section rated at 80 watts per channel, and operates in Class A mode up to 35 watts, hence the generous heatsinking.



ACOUSTIC ARTS CD PLAYER

One of the best sounding CD players at the show was the Player 1, an upsampling top-loader from Acoustic Arts. It's impressively specified internally, and has balanced outputs.



DYNAUDIO CONTOUR S3.4

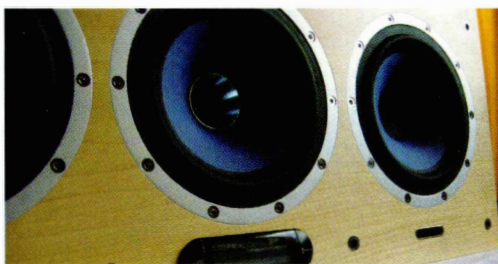
Dynaudio's new Contour S3.4 mounts its drivers on a substantial metal plate sub-baffle, itself mounted via a rubber damping gasket. The twin main drivers placed above a low-set tweeter are so disposed in order to minimise ceiling reflections.

MICHELL TECHNODEC

Michell showed a prototype of its new entry-level Technodec non-suspended turntable, which will be pitched against the popular Regas and Pro-Jects. It's priced at £575 without arm, or £699 with a Rega RB250, with various arm and power supply upgrades also available.

TANNOY ACTIVE

Tannoy is soon to introduce a sophisticated active speaker system, based on the upmarket Eyriss design and dubbed Eyriss iDP. It incorporates digital signal processing to match each speaker to its immediate environment and will be launched in the US initially, as a complete Eyriss multichannel package for c\$25,000.



FOCAL-JMLAB CENTRE

A true three-way speaker equipped with the fabulous Focal beryllium dome tweeter, the Centre Utopia is designed to be used in portrait or landscape orientation, so one possibility is to use five with a subwoofer in a high-end multichannel audio system.





EPOS M5

Ⓢ Epos doesn't often come up with new models, but Bristol brought two inexpensive newcomers. The pretty wood-veneered £400 M5 (pictured) looks like a 'scaled down' variation on the M12, while the multichannel-oriented ELS3 comes vinyl-wrapped at just £200/pair.

VIENNA ACOUSTIC SCHÖNBERG SPEAKER

Ⓢ One of the prettiest speakers at a show not short of contenders, the 2.5-way Schönberg (£1,500) is built into a narrow, rounded aluminium enclosure, though the positioning of the tweeter may be questionable.



WILSON BENESCH A.C.T.

Ⓢ Wilson Benesch has replaced its A.C.T. One and Two with a new version, called simply A.C.T. By replacing MDF with metal, it fits the volume of the Two into the smaller size of the One, the weight going up from 42kg to 74kg.

B&W ASW800 SUBWOOFER

Ⓢ The gap for a subwoofer in the B&W Nautilus line has finally been plugged with two models. The smaller one features a 30cm driver and a 10,000-watt Class D amp in a full Matrix enclosure. Cost is £1,500.



NAIM CDS3 CD PLAYER

Ⓢ Naim's new flagship CD player may look like a chip off the old CDS2 block, but has been developed significantly inside. The model features a new suspended mechanism, and includes HDCD. It costs £4,750, plus £2,300 for the recommended XPS power supply.



ARCAM A80 AMP

Ⓢ The DiVA A85 has established a fine reputation for sound quality, which the new A80 is supposed to continue at a slightly lower price, and with slightly less power. With 65 watts/channel and six inputs including phono, it'll be in the shops May.



TIVOLI CD

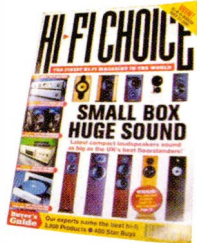
Ⓢ Tivoli is fast building on the success of the Model 1 analogue desk-top radio with a range of add-ons – a stereo module, a powered miniature subwoofer and this CD deck which is based on an in-car mechanism.

Ⓢ **CYRUS**
 Cyrus had some 16 new products at the show, including many new variations on its pretty 6, 8 and X ranges. Most surprising though was the appearance of an attractive chrome-plated turntable, sourced from Transrotor by the company's German distributor.



TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice,
April 1998



Five years ago a huge 12-way speaker test made heroes of the Neat Mystique MKII, NHT 1.5 and PMC's transmission line

TB15, three models that survived and surpassed the gruelling tests imposed upon them. We also looked at the hot MD decks of the day – full-width home recording units packed with editing facilities and very popular until CD-R decks plummeted in price a year or two later. Over £5,000-worth of Krell amps got rave reviews in our Statements section – the KAV-250 and KAV-250a set the standard for aspirational amplification for some time.

TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice,
April 1993

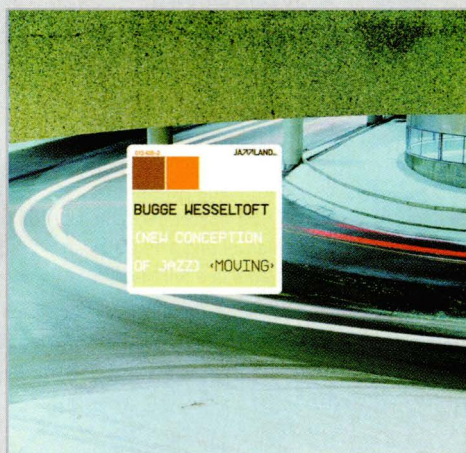


There were (just) enough Digital Compact Cassette decks to run a small group test – two from Philips and two from Marantz – funny

that. Still, it was far more exciting than analogue cassette, a format still very much in vogue as our ten-way group test demonstrated. We also got horny and unveiled the mighty Living Voice Air Partner with a full review of the no expense spared horn-loaded giant.

SYSTEM BUILDER

EACH MONTH, WE PICK A FAVOURITE DISC AND BUILD A SYSTEM TO SHOW IT AT ITS BEST



BUGGE WESSELTOFT

Moving Jazzland Records

Bugge Wesseltoft may have a challenging name but his music is quite the opposite. New jazz grooves backed up by propulsive yet subtle beats that underpin beautiful keyboard work from this maestro of contemporary Norwegian music. His third album is his best, combining the best elements of so-called new and soul-jazz with less of the slightly kooky explorations of earlier material.

The sound is dynamic and full, it'll fill up your listening room with ease and the way percussion sometimes tracks around the room is quite peculiar. It stretches low into the bass and shines in the midband, with piano harmonics sparkling into the treble. Tracks have a tendency to start out gently and build into a maelstrom of rhythmic energy, maintaining interest without falling back on dissonance, this is 21st Century jazz at its finest.



CD PLAYER

Classé CDP-10 £1,599

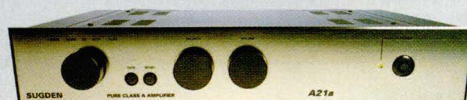
A highly natural and revealing player that will make the most of the acoustic instruments and dig deep into the fine detail in order to throw up a full-scale image.



SPEAKERS

Castle Conway 3 £930

Not only is the Conway 3 super efficient for sensible partnering with the 25 watts of Sugden power (see below), it is also a dynamic speaker with a beautifully balanced sound. The real wood finish also goes some way to making it a class act.



AMP

Sugden A21a £899

This remarkable integrated design has remarkable heritage and even more impressive sound – it can reproduce the dynamics and tone colour on offer from this disc in an entirely natural and engaging fashion.



WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

www.birdpages.co.uk

It's hard enough to find quality time for playing music, let alone finding the time to spend hours trawling through record shops for that elusive piece of vinyl. But thanks to the power of the interweb thingy, you can view a directory of second-hand vinyl shops in your area and that of the town you're perhaps planning to visit.

Follow the links and you can view what's in stock at a variety of stores across the UK without wasting any shoe leather. There are also links to record fair organisations which is useful if limited at the present time, plus links to stores selling vinyl-related accessories. Of course, CD is not neglected – we found some very cheap discs following links from this site so be prepared to bash the plastic (making sure the linked site is secure first, naturally).

CLASSIC DEMO DISCS

GREAT MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



THE BLUE NILE

Hats

"Whenever I buy a new hi-fi component, this is the CD I audition it with. Although recorded in 1989, it's just as fresh and dynamic sounding in 2003. Its lack of glare and compression make the soulful, moody vocals and percussion a treat. Just

listen to the strings float in and out of every track – each time it's played something new wafts from the speakers. Released by Linn records and produced by Glasgow tune masters the Blue Nile, that difficult second album is ergonomically faultless."

Matt Todd, Jersey

What's your favourite disc for hi-fi auditioning? Why not write in and tell us – 100 words on what and why – we'd love to hear about it. Email your choice to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk or write in to Classic Demo Discs, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #7

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES – HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER



Compare speaker outputs

Many amplifiers have two sets of speaker outputs. Often these are labelled A and B or 1 and 2, and sonically there should no difference between either option. However, it's worth making comparisons! Especially if one set of speaker terminals is placed above the other. In such cases, the lower set nearly always gives the best sound.

Why? Because these output sockets are physically closer to the main circuit board, and therefore offer a slightly shorter and cleaner signal path.

This is particularly true with integrated amplifiers that use inexpensive terminal blocks – although the increase in signal path length is small, the effect on sound quality is surprisingly noticeable. Ironically, because the upper set of terminals is marked 'A' or '1', this is usually the one that's used. Amplifiers with 'hard-wired' speaker outputs shouldn't show any difference, though it's always worth listening and comparing just to make sure this is the case!

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

Moloko Statues

Turin Brakes Ether Song

Massive Attack 100th Window

Nivea Nivea

White Stripes Elephant

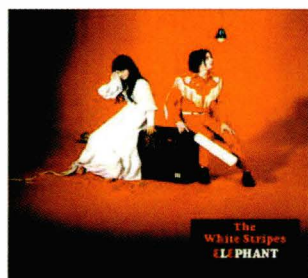
Gavin Bryars A Portrait

Ed Harcourt From Every Sphere

Various Artists Smallville OST

Wilco Yankee Hotel Foxtrot

50 Cent Get Rich Or Die Tryin'



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS



Goldfrapp
in glam

GOLDFRAPP

Black Cherry 28 April
The Goldfrapp duo of Alison Goldfrapp and Will Gregory sold half a million and won a Mercury Music Prize nomination with their debut, *Felt Mountain*. The follow-up features ten atmospheric new tracks, with Alison's glacial vocals, which first came to prominence with *Orbital*, floating enigmatically over Gregory's cinematic soundscapes.

DANIEL LANOIS

Shine May
Canada's Daniel Lanois has long been one of the world's most in-demand producers via his work with U2, Peter Gabriel, Bob Dylan and Emmylou Harris. Over the years he's also made occasional solo albums. The songs on this, his first solo release since 1993, deploy his usual tapestry of haunting effects and Bono lends his distinctive vocals to *Falling At Your Feet*.

STEELY DAN

Everything Must Go May
Steely Dan made one of the most spectacular returns in recent years with 2000's *Two Against Nature*, the first album from Donald Fagen and Walter Becker's group since 1980. It won an 'album of the year' Grammy and this is in similarly inventive jazz-rock vein. "I haven't listened to the radio for 30 years," Fagen admits. "I'm still listening to the same jazz records I was in high school."

IAN McCULLOCH

Slideling 5 May
After fronting Echo & The Bunnymen for over 20 years, Ian McCulloch has just finished recording his third solo

album and first for a decade. Co-produced by Cenzo Townsend (who worked on the Bunnymen's last, *Evergreen* in 1997), celebrity guests include Chris Martin and Jonny Buckland from Coldplay and actor John Simm (*24 Hour Party People*).



DIDO

Title: tbc Sept
Few albums will be more eagerly anticipated in 2003 than the follow-up to Dido's multi-platinum *No Angel*. "I was in my early twenties when I wrote those songs and now I'm thirty," she says. "I'm a completely different person and the new songs are definitely deeper."

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK / POP

Blur tbc (RMP) May, **Beyoncé** *Dangerously In Love* (Sony) May, **I Am Kloot** *I Am Kloot* (Echo) June, **Tony Bennett and kd lang** *Wonderful World* (Sony) June

JAZZ / CLASSICAL

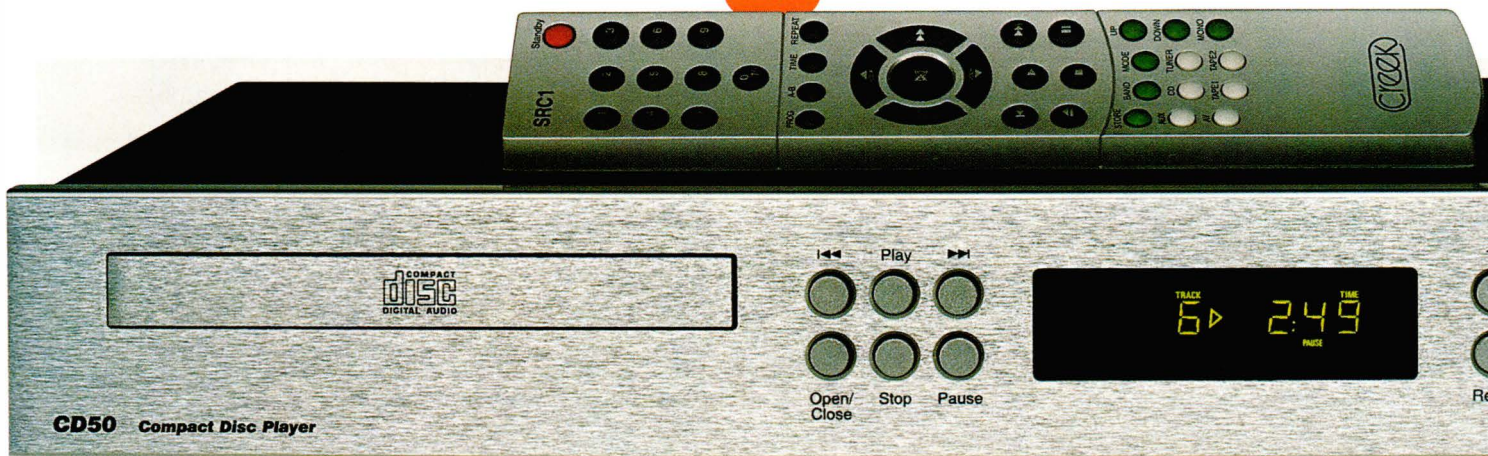
Yo-Yo Ma *French Chamber Music*, (Sony Classical) April
Miles Davis *Friday/Saturday Night At The Blackhawk* (Sony Jazz) May
Catrin Finch *Crossing The Stone* (Sony Classical) May, **John Sermon**, *Free And Equal* (ECM) Apr

DVD

Jools Holland - Later And Louder! Apr, **Die Another Day** May, **8 Mile** May, **Chris Morris's Jam** May, **Donnie Darko** May

Incoming

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



★★★★★

Creek CD50 CD player £699 **EXCLUSIVE**

Hemel Hempstead's finest audio electronics brand, Creek Audio, has a new range of components in the form of the 50 Series. This replaces the 43 series but maintains aesthetic consistency by sticking to slimline brushed aluminium fascias. This time however, the fascia is a full 10mm thicker, which gives the

products a solid look, albeit one that's never going to make you brace yourself when picking up the first example of the genre – the CD50 CD player. The CD50 will shortly be joined by A50i and A50iR amps, as well as the T50 tuner, to form a small but neatly formed range of components. This £699 player is full width but

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Philips CDM12 transport mechanism
- ▶ 24-bit DAC
- ▶ Coaxial electrical digital output
- ▶ System remote
- ▶ 10mm aluminium fascia

unusually slim and shallow – unlike some other brands there's no attempt to seduce with scale. The player is simply as big as it needs to be to contain the Philips CDM12 transport mechanism, CD7 chipset and Creek's own software which drives the micro-controller behind the operation of the player. The DAC is a 24-bit resolution device that, like all the major elements in the player, sits on a dedicated circuit board. As a result, individual sections like jitter reduction circuitry, the power

"It's not the most three-dimensional player and tonally it's a shade lightweight, but its timing is spot-on."





EXCLUSIVE



Titan T2/s speaker £500

Titan is a small British brand that has an equally small production line, creating speakers in the low to mid-price bracket that are nicely built by hand. The Essex factory makes various models, all of which retail for less than a high quality CD player – the T2 series tops the range and includes a full 5.1 channel package should you require it. Regular *HFC* readers will be aware of the brand's unusual Saturn subwoofer, reviewed and Recommended last month.

Like the sub, the T2/s standmount speaker is on the bulky side considering its relatively small main drive unit. Titan has chosen all-metal drivers for this design – a Focal titanium inverted-dome tweeter resolves treble information to beyond 22kHz, and the bass/mid driver is an equally stiff 100mm spun aluminium unit. Both drivers protrude from the baffle and can be disguised if required by a distinctive oval-shaped grille. The speaker exudes a lovingly made, hand-built feel, with a solid MDF enclosure and screw-assembled rear panel housing a reflex port and a single pair of cable binding posts.

The T2/s delivers a distinctly upfront sound, exhibiting a sense of explicit detail combined with a rather hard and aggressive overall balance. Bass is fast and clean, with a rhythmic quality that's

instantly engaging, but such qualities are compromised by strident upper frequency characteristics that may prove fatiguing. It's fussy about partnering equipment too, so if your preference is for a laid-back balance you're best off steering clear. Striking yes, but not entirely subtle.

Titan 01702 206870

www.titanloudspeakers.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Focal inverted-dome titanium tweeter
- ▶ 100mm spun aluminium bass/mid unit
- ▶ Impedance: 8 ohms
- ▶ Frequency Response: 30Hz to over 22kHz
- ▶ Weight: 13Kg
- ▶ Size (WxHxD): 24x41x30cm
- ▶ Finishes: Dark red cherry, rosewood, light oak, natural cherry, silver

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CREEK

Mike Creek started his eponymous company in 1981 with the launch of the CAS4040 amplifier, an integrated design that proved a critical and commercial success. The Creek range slowly expanded to include a tuner (CAS3040) and another integrated amp which enjoyed considerable success at home and abroad. In 1988 Mike sold the brand to Mordaunt-Short which employed him as a consultant for three years, and launched the first Creek CD player and loudspeaker. He then went on to form EMF which made an integrated amp and a DAC. In 1993 Mike formed a consortium to buy back the Creek brand and it continues under his direction to this day, making a broad range of electronics as well as owning the speaker brand Epos.

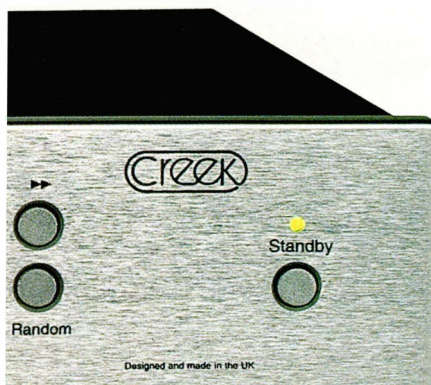
high-speed lyrics, or the way the members of a band gel together so coherently it seems real.

More importantly, timing is the crux of the groove – the beat that underpins all forms of music and gives it its sense of movement and speed. Be it the subtly intoned piano, drums and double bass of EST's jazz or the heavily inflected vocals on Missy Elliott's *Miss E...*, the Creek is right on the money. Even when the beat is less emphasised, such as in the layering of voices and the dynamic sweeps of the Gaudeamus choral ensemble, the way that the piece holds together is very encouraging.

If you are after the Naim sound but don't have a budget to stretch that far you'll find this an extremely worthy alternative that delivers much the same virtues in an extremely neat package.

☎ Creek Audio 01442 260146

🌐 www.creekaudio.co.uk

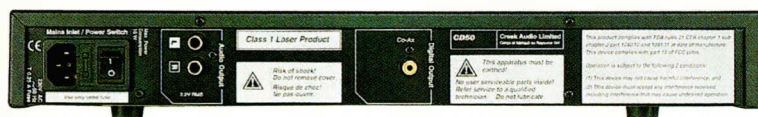


supply or the master clock generator can be upgraded with relative ease.

The CD50 comes with Creek's new system remote, a very smart and easily used stick design that clearly enhances the smart, high quality image that the brand is pursuing.

Tested in a suitably revealing system that included a Border Patrol preamp and ATC Active 20 speakers, the CD50 put in an engaging performance that greatly encouraged continued listening. But deadlines wait for no journalist and the bullet had to be bitten.

The key to this player's sound is timing. It's not the most three-dimensional sounding player around and tonally it's a shade lightweight, but its timing is spot-on and that is a major achievement. For many, timing is the most critical aspect of performance, and there are few who would deny that it's crucial to the believability of reproduced (and for that matter real) music. The CD50 delivers a snappy, rhythmically coherent sense of timing that is highly convincing. It manifests itself in the way you can understand



EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

Spendor SR5 speaker £1,000

Spendor is best known for creating high-accuracy monitoring loudspeakers with roots planted firmly in the BBC tradition, and indeed was one of the pioneers of the free-space standmount approach. Which makes this new SR5 all the more radical, because it's expressly designed to be fixed onto a structural wall, and wall proximity is integral to the acoustic design.

That in turn is why you get a decidedly unorthodox shape, stainless steel bracket and fixing screws, plus a number of other subtle but important details to suit this little speaker to its allotted task. And that's also why this attractive little miniature costs £1,000 per pair (or £500 each). It's very logical, as a major obstacle to multichannel acceptance lies in accommodating the extra speakers

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 25mm coated fabric dome tweeter
- ▶ 140mm bass/mid driver
- ▶ Sensitivity: 88dB/W
- ▶ Impedance: 6 ohms minimum
- ▶ Size (WxHxD): 31x31x18cm (inc bracket)
- ▶ Wood veneers: cherry, maple, rosenut or black ash
- ▶ Stainless steel wall bracket and fixings included
- ▶ Magnetically shielded
- ▶ Asymmetric enclosure
- ▶ Heavy gold-plated terminals allow bi-wiring

shape helps 'blend' the speaker front panel to the wall, permitting some swivelling to taste, and the speakers may be used either way up, depending on how high up the wall they are mounted. The box is very tough, usefully shaped to avoid lateral standing waves, and with the front and back braced via driver and a damping pad. Further controlled damping is used between bracket and box.

Sonically these strategies seem to have been successful in creating a substantially neutral loudspeaker that can be fixed close to a wall without suffering the usual characteristic 'honk'. (Listen to someone talking with their face close to a wall and you'll hear it!)

The SR5 simply doesn't sound like a wall-mount. It isn't entirely free from coloration – slight 'thickening' is audible in the lower midband region – but there's certainly no sign of the usual midband 'quack', and the stereo image shows fine spaciousness and even a measure of depth, though central focus did seem a little vague.

ROOM INTERACTION

The way that the loudspeakers interact with the room plays a crucial role in the overall performance of the system. One of the most important mechanisms involved is the reflection of sound from walls, as these act just like 'mirrors', acoustically speaking.

The wall behind a loudspeaker is by far the most significant one in the room. The bass output of a box speaker is omnidirectional, so it's reinforced through reflection when close to a wall. With a normal box speaker, however, the reflections cause unevenness and hence colorations well up into the midband. The difficult trick is to design a speaker that can give good bass alignment when wall-mounted, while avoiding the midband colorations.

extra subwoofery, and does present a rather different set of compromises to most conventional speakers. But it's nevertheless a very impressive achievement, combining fine accuracy and genuine hi-fi performance in a uniquely discreet wall-mounted package, particularly well suited to multichannel applications.

☎ Spendor 01323 843474
 🌐 www.spendoraudio.com



“The midband has all the traditional Spendor hallmarks of smoothness, evenness and low coloration, while the treble is clean, detailed and nicely restrained.”

required without undue clutter.

The basic facts are that the SR5 is a two-way sealed-box 'miniature', with a small, high quality 140mm bass/mid drive unit sporting a large shielded magnet, cast frame and 90mm polypropylene cone. The tweeter has a 25mm coated fabric dome, and the unit is fed via a high-quality crossover and twin bi-wire/amp terminals.

The combination of sealed-box loading and a large magnet is crucial to creating a well damped and controlled bass alignment to compensate for the close-to-wall reinforcement. The tapered

The midband has all the traditional Spendor hallmarks of smoothness, evenness and low coloration, while the treble is clean, detailed and nicely restrained, ensuring fine clarity alongside an impressively wide dynamic range.

The overall tonal balance is a little lightweight and forward, and the bass region is clearly lacking some warmth. But what it might lack in sheer weight and 'punch', it more than makes up for with impressive evenness and considerable agility. The bottom end might be a little dry, but its sheer speed ensures a fine combination of propulsion and information.

The SR5 might benefit from some



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EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

Harman Kardon AVR 5550 AV receiver £850

There are limitations in using a home cinema receiver as a hi-fi amplifier. But Harman Kardon's AVR 5550 receiver could be an exception: it's more of a sophisticated AV processor with amplifiers attached than an attempt to keep everything cheap and cheerful.

It has Dolby Digital EX, Dolby Pro-Logic II, DTS ES and DTS Neo:6, so it's handy for digital and analogue multichannel sound. But that's just the start. The seven 75-watt high current amplifiers (85 watts if you use stereo only) within the AVR 5550 have high quality power supplies, with a separate transformer for the front channels. It includes HDCD decoding and will convert MP3 recordings too. Then there's the extensive multiroom capacity, complete with a separate remote control for the second zone. This means you can listen to two different sources in different rooms – and this is normally unheard of at real world prices. Factor in a useful front digital audio input and output and a pair of custom surround sound formats (VMAx and Logic7), and you have an extremely flexible product.

Harman amps are always very potent and powerful sounding and this one is no exception. It pumps out a very decent sound, even in stereo, thanks in part to the separate power transformer for the front channels. Like most Harman amps, this sound is rich and dynamic rather than bright and steely. Perhaps this is not the vogue in stereo sound – some will prefer a more overtly detailed and forward presentation – but the sound is big and potent. This sounds exceptionally good with lo-fi recordings

- KEY FEATURES**
- ▶ 7.1 channel AV receiver
 - ▶ 85 watts per channel
 - ▶ Surround sound formats: Dolby Pro-Logic II, Dolby Digital/Digital EX, DTS Neo:6, DTS/DTS ES, DTS 96/24, VMAx, Logic7
 - ▶ EZ-Set remote control with auto set-up facility
 - ▶ Individual input speaker set-up facilities
 - ▶ RDS tuner with 40 preset stations
 - ▶ Extensive multiroom facilities

like the White Stripes, which take on an energy without the concomitant paint-stripping rawness.

This is allied to a big, slightly mellifluous soundstage which is attractive, although detail hounds might find it perhaps on the bloated side. So *Bach's Mass In B Minor* is expansive and deep, but the images within that soundstage are not so precisely detailed as a dedicated two-channel amp.

But a two-channel amplifier cannot do the full seven-channel experience of the Harman Kardon. And it is here that the receiver excels. The surround sound is controlled, forceful and expressive, making it perfect for multichannel movies and music alike. Logic 7 (which brings out seven-channel sound from a stereo soundtrack) sounds more musical than either Dolby Pro-Logic II Music or DTS Neo:6 with the right material, too. Once again, this sound is dark and powerful, but the level of detail is more than comparable with similarly priced integrated receivers. In fact, the overall performance with its nail-hard solidity makes the Harman ideal for DVD-Audio and SACD recordings, as it gives each channel the sort of drive and weight

you get from good stereo – this is rare for an integrated AV receiver.

The only real niggle is VMAx virtual surround sound – it is not worth bothering with. Otherwise this is a feature-packed, powerful sounding AV receiver, and one of the few around the price that ain't too sloppy on music as well.

Harman Consumer UK 020 8731 4670
www.harmankardon.co.uk

INDIVIDUAL INPUT SET-UP

One of the best features of the AVR 5550 is speaker set-up adjustment for each input. When you have DVD-Video decoded inside the Harman itself and perhaps CD and DVD-Audio decoded in the player, you need to have different speaker settings for each kind of input. Normally there is limited flexibility in this, but the Harman – like Lexicon processors – allows you to adjust each input accordingly. This also means you can hook up your DVD player for DVD-V via one of the digital inputs and for CD, SACD and/or DVD-A using the supplied analogue inputs, and ensure you get the best from each.



EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

Rega Planet CD player £548

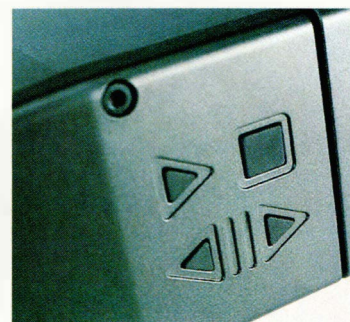
> You may be forgiven for performing a double take at the photograph and wondering what Planet Rega is on – in fact, it's on number three. Rega's entry-level CD player, little brother to the higher priced Jupiter, is now in its third incarnation, sporting a number of tweaks including a change to its distinctive top-loading mechanism. And the Planet is not alone – Rega has launched some eight new products for hi-fi aficionados who like their music... well, *musical*. You could go Rega mad and own a complete set-up from source right down to interconnects – in fact, if you're keen on pursuing Rega's fluid and rhythmic take on music making this is definitely the way to go.

Despite a recent £50 price hike to £548 (excluding remote), the Planet still offers good value for money in musical terms. What's more, its unique looks and Starship Enterprise-esque loading bay lid give it an appeal all of its own, particularly enticing to those seeking something a little *different*. But it's a top-loader for more than just cosmetic reasons – Rega believes conventional motorised trays are subject to reliability problems. Top-loading does make the player a little vulnerable however (watch out for those toast crumbs), and you'll have to place it at the top of the hi-fi rack.

It's hard not to like the look – for the cash the Planet is truly cosmic in a

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ New improved CD lid assembly
- ▶ Rega custom-built extruded aluminum case
- ▶ Rega 24-bit Sigma Delta IC40 DAC
- ▶ Sony CD mechanism and 'calendar' display
- ▶ Optical and co-axial digital outputs
- ▶ Finishes: black, satin metal
- ▶ Optional remote



galaxy of bland, drawer-loading silver boxes. But the Planet's sense of style extends beyond its lid. The display glows a brooding red and the front panel sports heavily stylised control buttons that are true to the alternative aesthetic, offering nothing more than play, stop and track skip/scan functions. A more comprehensive range of controls may be accessed from the remote – a additional £25.

The Planet's current revisions are in addition to the rather more major revamp of a couple of years ago, which included Rega's custom-built 24-bit IC40 DAC, improved power supplies with low impedance capacitors and higher quality capacitors in the signal path. It's all housed in Rega's custom-built aluminium case, which sounds encouragingly muted when given a sharp wrap with the knuckles

The current Planet certainly offers other-worldly performance in the lower

regions, yet fails to twinkle like the north star in others. Throw any band at it and it responds with a lush, full-bodied sound, but give it dance, say a touch of drum and bass, and the player truly excels. Masses of grip, grunt and low-down control give a sense of rhythm that's hard to beat, contributing to an impression of genuine 'musicality.' However, treble could be more explicit and the midband would benefit by coming forward more, giving greater emphasis to vocals and increasing the player's sense of presence. But the great pay-off is a genuinely fluid output which is something else in this price category. Like the player's looks, you're likely to either love or loath its sound according to your taste in music and hi-fi. If orchestral, dance or dub is your bag, it ranks as a very strong contender for your hard-earned cash.

☎ Rega 01702 333071

🌐 www.rega.co.uk

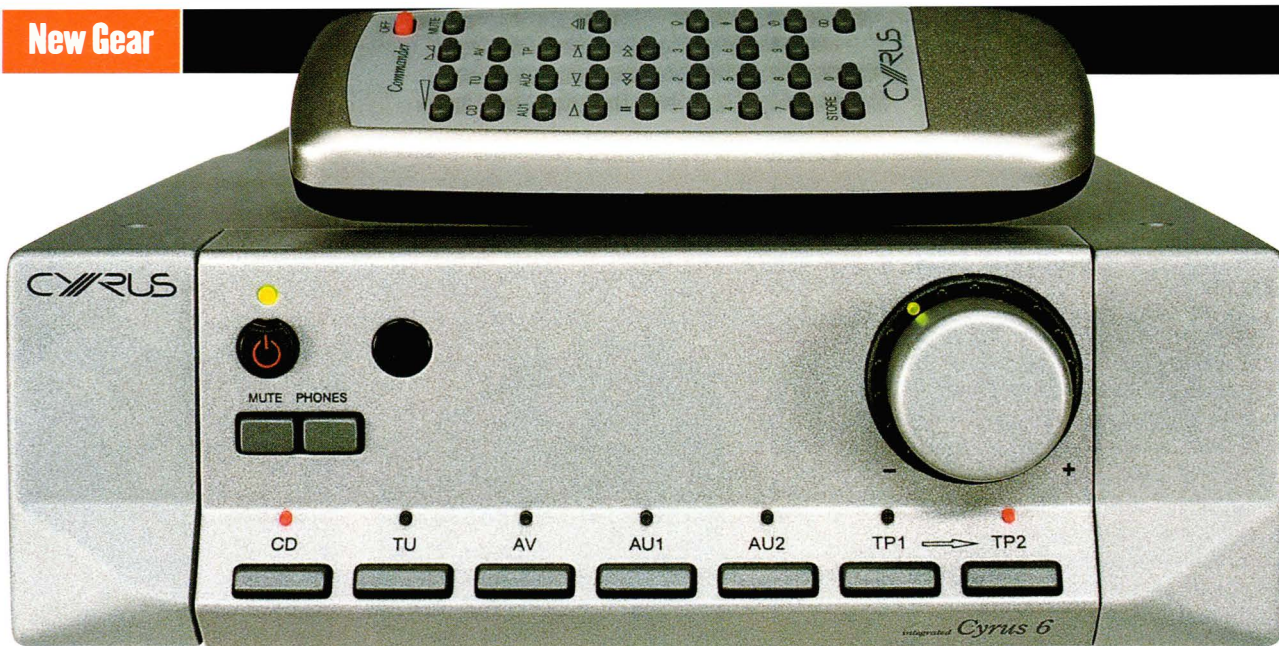
“Masses of grip, grunt and low-down control give a sense of rhythm that's hard to beat, contributing to an impression of genuine musicality.”



SUSPENSION

Most CD players use some form of sub-chassis suspension to isolate the transport section from the rest of the internals. However, Rega claims that this commonly used method is detrimental to sound quality as it increases the reliance on error correction and is likely to degrade over time.

Its solution is to employ the VCS (Viscous Coupled System), a method that employs sorbothane damping to act as suspension. A small 50mm circular 'foot' or disc minimises shock, eradicating the need for comprehensive sub-chassis systems and their associated costs. Rega claims that this technique improves sound quality and leaves additional budget for more fundamental sonic improvements.



★★★★★

Cyrus 6 stereo amp £600

Cyrus's entry-level integrated amp has moved up a notch. Just as the impressive Cyrus 7 recently morphed into the 8, so the more affordable 5 has notched up a digit to become the 6. Not that you'd immediately notice by looking at it – Cyrus amps look identical save for the subtle badging at the bottom-right of the front panel. Naturally, the Cyrus 6 is built using the brand's inverted die-cast chassis and as you can see from the picture our review sample was dressed in attractive silver – though Cyrus still makes graphite black kit.

There's little change around the back either – the only difference between this amp and the 8 is that the PSX-R external power supply socket is blocked off. As is usual with Cyrus, you can upgrade this model to a higher specification – in this case to that of

SOFT STANDBY SWITCHING

Cyrus makes a lot of the updated soft standby switching circuitry featured in its new amps. It developed the system in an attempt to avoid the contact degradation that can occur in speaker relays. As amps get older, the relay contacts degrade and contact non-linearity rises – which can result in inferior sound performance. The Cyrus system works by 'tri-stating' the amplifier, so it can't deliver any current to a loudspeaker while set on standby mode, which bypasses the need for a relay in the signal path. Other benefits include immediate disconnection of the amp if there's a problem with the speaker – such as a short circuit.

the 8 – and once that's been achieved you can upgrade further by adding the PSX-R. In standard guise the amp offers five line-level inputs, bi-wire-friendly speaker connections for each channel and preamp outputs. There's also the brand's MC-BUS connection for component communication.

The main internal difference between this and the more costly 8 is the power supply and power output. Cyrus was keen to produce an affordable amplifier that had many of the audio qualities of the 8, but at the price of entry-level amps, and did this mainly by scaling down the 8's massive power supply. However, much of the 6's internal specification mirrors that of the 8, including its new advanced thermal management.

While the 8 weighs in with 70 watts of power, the 6 offers a more meagre 40 watts per channel. Not that you'd notice any obvious lack of grunt once the amp is up and running, and it shows little sign of strain when playing at normal volumes. It's perhaps not quite as comfortable as the 8 when dealing with the dramatic dynamic swings of large scale orchestral pieces,

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 2x 40 Watts
- ▶ 5x line level inputs
- ▶ 2x tape loops
- ▶ Silver or black finish
- ▶ Inverted die-cast chassis
- ▶ Upgradable to Cyrus 8 specification

but it certainly gives the older E700 Cyrus 7 a run for its money in this area, while beating it in others.

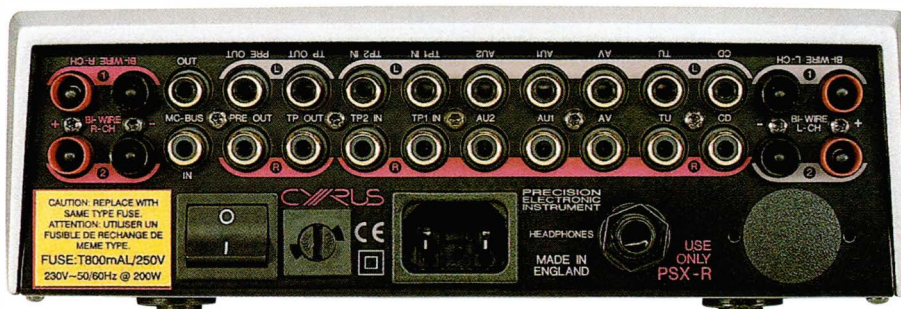
Resolution levels are higher and intricate details such as the differing strikes of cymbals in well-recorded acoustic music are communicated with greater clarity. But what really blows you away is the amp's ability to conjure solid and lifelike stereo images. Its performance in the midrange is first rate for what is after all a very affordable piece of kit – the vocals on Bonnie 'Prince' Billy's *Master And Everyone* really are breathtaking.

Elsewhere tonal extremes are dealt with in an engaging manner, with an insightful, but never harsh treble, and a well-controlled bass that extends far enough to satisfy rock and dance fans.

It's no mean feat that this amp offers a better all-round performance than the older, more costly Cyrus 7. It's not the ideal amp for head bangers, or those who like to really jack the volume, but if intricate detail at moderate volume levels is what you seek make sure you hear the Cyrus 6. It gives a great overall performance in its own right, with the added bonus of upgradeability when funds allow. Highly recommended.

☎ Cyrus 01480 435577

🌐 www.cyrus.co.uk



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Headphones & headphone amps

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Creek OBH-21 £150

▶ New from Creek is the slick little OBH-21. A replacement for the OBH-11, it comes in a slightly larger case with an anodised aluminium face plate. Power is supplied from a chunky little PSU that plugs into the unit's rear by the on/off switch and RCA phono in/outputs. Twin headphone outputs are supplied for cosy listening sessions with your partner – best make sure you both have the same type of cans however, otherwise the volume difference might be tricky to accommodate.

In the driving seat the Creek delivers a transparent, well-resolved result that reveals much of the detail and subtlety of the music. It's marginally more transparent than the Rega and not as tonally strong as the Earmax, but in value terms it's a fine performer. Bass is particularly good, being powerful and deep. The combination of great sound with great build makes it very hard to resist.

📞 Creek Audio Ltd 01442 260146 🌐 www.creekaudio.co.uk



Sony MDR-CD780 £65

▶ These Sonys are big, cosy ear melons that will keep you snug on the coldest winter night, their fleecy pads seemingly specially designed for the British winter. They have a rubber covered sprung headband for extra tactile thrills and their 3.5m detachable lead is made of oxygen-free copper (OFC). Detachable cables are unusual for anything but a Sennheiser and this one gives a very phasey effect when not properly installed – make sure you push it right in!

Their sound is a bit like their feel – warm with full-scale bass that can occasionally become over the top. Still, bass is a common shortcoming of affordable cans and the way it underpins whatever you listen to is rather enjoyable, coupled to a good level of musical detail. While not as sophisticated as the more costly competition they do most things well, including voices, and will provide hours of cosy listening.

📞 Sony 08705 111999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

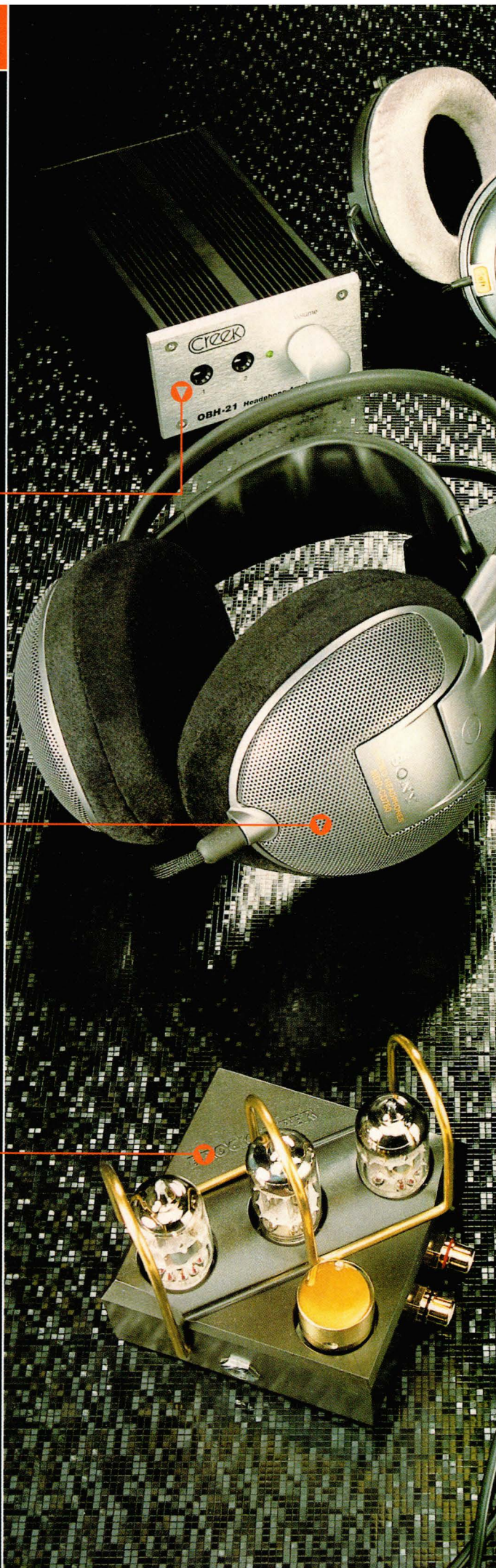


Earmax Pro £425

▶ Winner of the cutest hi-fi accessory award several years running is the gorgeous Earmax, the first and only vacuum tube headphone amplifier. Measuring a mere 8.4cm square, the Earmax has only one input so it's less flexible than some of the competition, but its sound quality shines through.

Its sound is not as distinctive as one might expect – the tonal balance is seemingly even and the bass more than adequately served, but then it is an OTL (output transformer less) valve amp, a genre that is perfectly suited to low power applications. It has the classic valve qualities of fine tonal colour combined with a sense of relaxation that will keep you listening. Bass weight is particularly strong and the midrange is both transparent and fluid. If you are serious about headphones this is one of the most appealing options available.

📞 Audiophile Club 020 8882 2822 🌐 www.earmax.com





Beyerdynamic DT931 £150

▶ These Beyers may not look very funky but they have been well thought out from both ergonomic and sonic points of view. The large ear pads encircle your ears, leaving them free and comfortable – those of a ‘wingnut’ persuasion will make contact with the velvety padding, but of the three headphone options here, these make for the highest comfort factor. The 3 metre lead connects to both capsules and is coiled to minimise the trip factor, while the plug offers both standard and mini jack terminations.

Apparently the cups benefit from computer aided design (CAD) to enhance their sonic potential, which probably explains their open, nimble and detailed character. They have a quick, clean and smooth sound that gets closer to the bare bones of the music than usual without sounding in the least brash. Bass is a bit more natural than the Sony pair and treble extends well, aiding the transparency of the midband. A fine and comfortable design, if a little aesthetically dull.

☎ Henley Designs 01235 511166 🌐 www.beyerdynamic.co.uk



Rega Ear £118

▶ Rega's Ear looks nothing like an aural receptor but has its own aesthetic charms nonetheless. It's a neat little box with the novelty of a mute switch and an easy access on/off switch, while the rear panel allows you to send the signal on to your tape deck or digital recorder ('tape out' being the most likely source of signal for a headphone amp). The Ear manual reveals four connection methods, including placement between a pre and power amp where the mute button cuts off signal to the speakers.

The Ear is tight and dynamic, with a clean sound that loves to pick up the beat. Not quite as transparent as the Creek, it is nonetheless not far behind and with the Sony cans the difference is pretty fine. It certainly communicates the way tracks build and swell, drawing you into the emotion of the moment. It has a well-balanced sound that worked well with the Grados but will suit most of the headphones around.

☎ Rega 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk



Grado SR125 £160

▶ Styles may come and go but Grado headphones remain resolutely the same, and whether you love the look or not it's become a classic by virtue of persistence alone. The foam pads rest on the ears, held there by a sprung steel headband that supports friction mounts to allow ear pad position adjustment. Comfort with Grados is a matter of taste, and their supra-aural fit is a try before you buy kind of affair. The 'Y' shaped connecting cable is two metres long and terminates in a standard quarter-inch jack only.

On the end of a good headphone amp, like the Creek, these Grados produce an ebullient and expansive sound that's rich with detail and sensitive to the emotional intent of the music. They're not quite as slick as the Beyerdynamics but make up for it with a natural, gritty sound that's strong on spatial definition. Timing is also a strong point and one which makes the Grados distinctly engaging.

☎ Veda Products 01279 501111 🌐 www.gradolabs.com

WHY USE A HEADPHONE AMP?

Headphone amps allow you to connect headphones when your components don't sport a headphone socket. Even if they do, an off-board amp invariably offers better quality, so if you're serious about your cans make sure you get one!



THE COMPONENTS



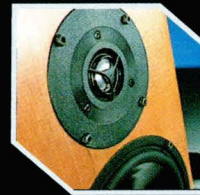
Naim CD5 CD player £1,150

Simple, swing arm player that can be upgraded at a later date by adding a Naim power supply like the Flat-Cap 2. Remarkably clean and up-beat sound that can breath rhythmic life into the most dull recordings. A well-built and fuss-free performer. Recommended in *HFC* 212.



Bryston B60 amplifier £1,500

The Canadian company's only integrated amplifier is a hand-built 60-watter. With just four line level inputs, a tape loop and a headphone socket, it isn't the last word in features and is perhaps not the most detailed amp around but it certainly makes good music.



PMC FB1 speakers £1,410

A *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy in issue 204, this tall, well built floorstander is one of the best examples of a transmission line speaker around. The company is best known for its professional studio monitors and it shows in the clean, controlled and deep sound.

NAIM CD5 CD PLAYER | BRYSTON B60 AMPLIFIER | PMC FB1 SPEAKERS | £4,060

SYSTEM ADDICT

Solid, dependable, but loads of fun system that specialises in fuss-free sound

This is a true back-to-basics system, with just a CD player, amplifier and a pair of floorstanding speakers – no fluff, no fuss, no nonsense. It's good, honest, solid hi-fi stuff that we can all relate to. Yet, for all that utility and purposeful design, you don't sacrifice anything in the process – this is a system that rocks, big time!

Its front end is the £1,150 Naim CD5 CD player, an upgradeable device with a swing-out CD drawer (but not the Flat-Cap 2 power supply upgrade – think of that as a future Christmas present). The amplifier is a £1,500 Bryston B60 integrated design, delivering 60 watts per channel and with only a headphone socket as a 'luxury'. Last comes the £1,400 PMC FB1 floorstanding two-way transmission-line loudspeaker, which claims 90dB sensitivity and a nominal impedance of eight ohms.

The PMC connection spells a very honest, studio-like sound, but with all the positive aspects that sound entails. So often, 'studio sound' means so much treble information that it can shatter glass at 200 paces or that it takes the music apart with all the gory detail and as much charm as an autopsy. This system steers clear of both 'studio' failings. Instead it throws up a detailed and three-dimensional soundstage, with plenty of dynamics and even more vocal articulation. But it does all this without straying into brightness. This becomes patently clear when listening to lo-fi sounds like the White Stripes – hardly audiophile recordings, the rawness of the album allied to the sort of volume levels a decent hi-fi can reproduce can spell an uncomfortable few minutes, but this kit bypasses that and through to the balls-out musical thrashy trashy fun.


Move over to something a bit more refined – *Bach's Mass in B Minor* for example – and the recording takes on a charming and detailed air. It doesn't quite have the holographic imaging and sheer detail needed to pick out background sounds like birds twittering in the quiet moments, but it manages to convey the musical intent wonderfully

and the choir ebbs, flows and soars as if you are in the cathedral. Even difficult time signatures – like the mono *Duet* by Count Basie – are well delineated, with the bass and rhythm section holding a steady beat while the muted horn plays a blues beat that can so easily sink into 'quirky' instead of 'cool'. This sticks on the cool side so well, you could be excused for thinking the disc was secretly importing hep from other jazz CDs.

No system does all things for all people, however. This kit has a degree of forwardness that might disenfranchise those who think of hi-fi as an adjunct to pipe and slippers for an evening of mellow chill-out sounds. It's more direct, more expressive and vibrant than that – not bright or brash, just direct. If you want a bigger, more mellifluous sound, it can be done, by replacing the Naim CD player with a similarly priced Arcam for example. Or you can get somewhere between the two by opting for a Rega

player. This is not saying one sound is intrinsically better than the other, it's a case of horses for courses. And where Cornflake Shop scores highly is it offers more than one horse – we just backed the Naim over the others in this context.

But whichever CD player you choose, this is a great, continually entertaining and rewarding system. It manages to dig up studio insight without ruining the music in the process and has a lot of weight behind it. An excellent system for those after fuss-free music.

For a shade over four grand, this system has little in the way of bonus features and impressive gizmos. Instead, it makes music and does an exceptionally fine job of it as well. The floorstanders need a bit of room and the CD player does make the sound a bit forward and direct, but this is a highly attractive sound very much in the mould that made British hi-fi famous in the 1980s and 1990s. Highly recommended. 



DEALER CONTACT

This system was recommended and supplied for review by: The Cornflake Shop, 37 Windmill Street, London, W1T 2JU
 ☎ 020 7631 0472
 🌐 www.cornflake.co.uk

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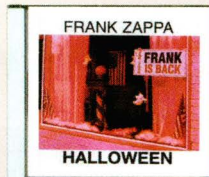
ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Jim Findlay, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver

NEW MUSIC FORMATS



FRANK ZAPPA

Halloween - Live in NYC 1978

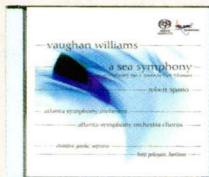
DVD-Audio

(24/96 surround, 24/48 stereo, DTS 96/24)

DTS Entertainment

Music: For a Zappa fan, the first high resolution, multichannel disc is a momentous occasion, and it's been worth the wait. This is a bunch of previously unreleased versions of favourite tracks compiled by Frank's son Dweezil and Joe Travers. While arguably better versions of some tracks have appeared on the *You Can't Do That...* series, the extra energy on the multichannel mix means that this is a whole new experience of a classic Zappa line-up (Colaiuta, O'Hearn, Mars, Walley, Wolf, Man). Tracks include *Dancin' Fool*, *Don't Eat the Yellow Snow*, the rare *Ancient Armaments* and the sublime segue of *Camarillo Brillo* and *Muffin Man*. **★★★★★**

Sound: While the balance is a mite bass-heavy, rear channels are used solely for the incredible atmosphere, so it sounds natural while it engulfs you in one of the best live recordings on multichannel today. **★★★★★ JK**



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: SYMPHONY NO 1 - A SEA SYMPHONY

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra & Chorus,
Robert Spano (conductor)

SACD (multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

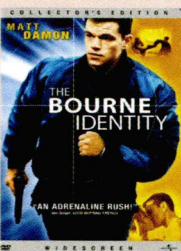
Telarc SACD-60588

Music: A setting of poems with a nautical theme by American poet Walt Whitman, *The Sea Symphony* has the unmistakable pulse and crashing rhythms of the sea throughout. The scale of the work is closest to Mahler's *Symphony Of A Thousand* which as the notes remind us was premiered in the same year, but the language is much more classical, episodic and emotionally charged. The opening choral phrase 'Behold the sea...' which leads the orchestra in is surely among the most stirring moments in recorded music. **★★★★★**

Sound: Here is the future of recorded sound. The massive score is framed by a massive sound, the extra channels adding rather than detracting from the sense of focus, scale and presence. The DSD recording is smooth and detailed, with no hint of edge or aggression. **★★★★★ AG**

DVD: THE CINEMA SELECTION

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



THE BOURNE IDENTITY

UNIVERSAL

Film: A plot centred on a mysterious amnesiac doesn't usually bode well for a film. What *The Bourne Identity* might lack in originality, however, it makes up for with the panache of its execution. Matt Damon is the eponymous (sort of) memory case who finds himself up against some shadowy baddies hell-bent on offing him after he's fished from the sea riddled with bullets and with no idea who he is. It's far grittier than your average gadgets 'n' girls spy caper and, despite taking

some liberties with the nature of amnesia, is exciting enough to keep you hooked throughout. **★★★★★**

Sound and vision: The picture is very crisp and realistic, but the big bonus about the disc is the DTS 5.1 soundtrack. It's not unnecessarily flashy, but renders a subtle, neatly three-dimensional soundfield and has plenty of wallop when required. The extras are bog-standard, but you won't find yourself feeling short-changed. **★★★★★ JF**

CD AND VINYL



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Impressed with Gilles Peterson

Universal

Music: Peterson is the UK's foremost 'soul-jazz' DJ, the man who put Terry Callier back on the map. This is his selection of nine British jazz tracks from the progressive days of the late sixties and early seventies. Tubby Hayes is the best known artist on here, the others never made the headlines outside the jazz world but their music deserves attention. There's some excellent and unusual material on here, not least *Black Marigolds* by The Don Rendell/Ian Carr Quintet. The tunes are generally upbeat and there's little that could be described as hard or dense, but it's a lot more interesting than easy listening. **★★★★★**

Sound: Coming from a variety of different sources the tracks vary a fair amount but the overall standard is good for the era and the sleeve notes are extensive. **★★★★★ JK**



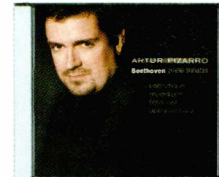
TURIN BRAKES

Ether Songs

Source

Music: There's a surfeit of sensitive singer songwriters around at the moment, but where Olly Knights and Gale Paridjanian impress over the likes of Tom McRae and David Gray is in their refusal to wear their hearts on their sleeves, instead quietly getting on with the business of producing intelligent, soulful songs chock a block with pop hooks. Their harmonies may get a wee bit strident on occasion, not least in the screechily nasal vocals of single *Pain Killer*, but it's hard to hold it against them for long. **★★★★★**

Sound: Acoustic guitars (of which there is much here) can easily sound muddy if they haven't been well recorded, but here all is clear and bright - perhaps even a bit too bright. **★★★★★ DO**



BEETHOVEN: PIANO SONATAS - PATHÉTIQUE, MOONLIGHT, TEMPEST, APPASSIONATA

Artur Pizarro (piano)

Linn CKD 209

Music: Recordings of Beethoven piano sonatas are three-a-penny, even given the parlous state of the classical market. But this first disc on the Linn label from Artur Pizarro is a gem, delivered in HDCD through compatible players. The readings are fresh, rhythmically assured and highly involving. The lop-sided finale of the *Tempest* is particularly thrilling, but it's unfair to select from this consistently excellent recital. **★★★★★**

Sound: The Blüthner piano used here is less percussive than a Steinway, and it lacks the sonority and weight of a Bösendorfer. Instead it has a warm, intimate quality that complements these highly original readings, and the engineering is more than worthy of the Linn lineage. **★★★★★ AG**



MOLOKO

Statues

Echo

Music: The fourth from Sheffield's maverick pop iconoclasts finds Roisin Murphy in fine voice (the overly affected tics of earlier albums have gone and she now sounds suitably confident and disco diva-esque). Post dancefloor smash *Sing It Back*, this is a more conventional, less quirky album than previously, but that could be just the sound of a band discovering what it wants to do. Myriad highlights include disco stomper *Cannot Contain This*, the slow soul burn of *Blow By Blow*, and the wide-screen John Barry-isms of *Over & Over*. **★★★★★**

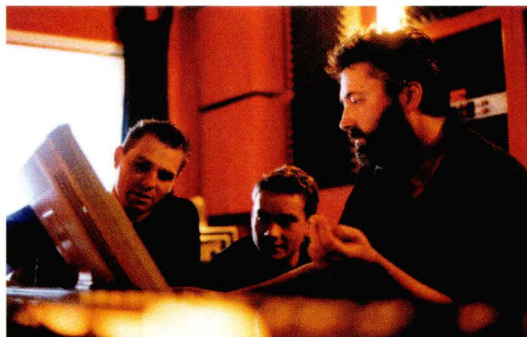
Sound: Abandoning their electro beginnings, Moloko have got into real instruments big time, including a 70-piece orchestra. All is rendered cleanly and coherently. **★★★★★ DO**

Through the dark window

Massive Attack producer, co-writer and unofficial third member Neil Davidge tells us about the making of their ominous, claustrophobic and quietly unsettling new album, *100th Window*



Neil Davidge (front) in the Massive Attack studio with engineer Lee Shephard (left) and programmer Alex Swift



The masters of the sonic and emotional atmospheric depth charge have returned after nearly five years, with probably their darkest album to date in *100th Window*. With no soulful anthems à la *Unfinished Symphony*, catchy chart favourites like *Karmacoma* and precious little in the way of traditional verse/chorus structure it's not exactly what you'd call accessible. Yet it is a grower, a subtle and densely layered blend of sound and vision that gets under your skin and eats at your soul.

It's the brainchild of Massive Attack main man Robert (3D) Del Naja and long-time producer and co-writer Neil Davidge. Of the original Massive Attack members, Andrew (Mushroom) Vowles left after 1998's *Mezzanine* and Grant (Daddy G) Marshall has taken some time off to concentrate on being a real daddy.

It's a change in style, if not tone from their previous albums. Gone are the dub and trip-hop elements of their early years, and the frazzled guitar rock-outs of *Mezzanine*, replaced by a quietly brooding pulse, carefully constructed layers of cunning effects and drifting, shadowy vocals from Del Naja, MA regular Horace Andy and Sinead O'Connor. It's a masterpiece of creeping paranoia and understated bad vibes. Though that's not necessarily the way they see it.

"Traditionally people have always said that MA albums are very dark, but there's something about this album that I find quite optimistic in a way," says Neil Davidge, a quietly-spoken bear of a man with full beard and studio tan who's worked with the band for the last seven years.

"Melodically, I think we have a dark kind of emphasis, but in terms of the overall approach to the creation of the tracks, we were fairly up about everything and we did try to put some of that energy, that upness, into the tracks. I guess we succeeded with some more than others, say in *Small Time Shot Away*, or *Antistar*. I don't expect everyone to see the tracks in exactly the same way that D or I do. We've both got an individual way of looking at things and at the end of the day that's what makes something stand out.

"A lot of music being made sounds the same, and that's because the people making it don't rely on the individuals being put into situations where they have to pull on their personality and use their gut to create the music. They just pull out another piece of equipment, find a preset that works and say, let's play something that someone else played on another record

"There's never a period where we say, 'right, that's the song written, now we're going to arrange it, and then we're going to record it and then we're going to mix it'. The whole process is mixed up."

five or ten years ago, or a track that's in the chart at the moment.

"We tend to follow our gut. If we wanna create a sound and we don't have that instrument, then we find some other way of doing it that's still capturing the vibe, the feel of what's actually in our heads.

"We've done a lot of experimenting with burning parts onto CDs, and then drawing across the CD with a felt tip pen, and getting the CD to jump and recording those effects. On certain tracks, there are little percussive parts in the background, they may sound like little clicks at times, but they're actually from stuck CDs, like on *Prayer For England*. We tend to like to use unusual sound sources. On certain tracks we've actually got guitars making the drum sound. We always like to push it a bit further and do the unusual thing. On one of the tracks, *Butterfly Caught*, D does a vocal that's actually the bass line of the track. We enjoy perverting technology."

DEEP DETAILS

It took over four years to create the album – they had planned a guitar-based record with Spiritualized offshoot band Lupine Howl, but when the tracks didn't work out, they scrapped them and started again from scratch.

With that in mind, it's no surprise that Massive Attack take a lot of time getting it right, and they'll spend months building subtleties into the tracks with layer upon layer of barely audible treatments and effects.

"We take a lot of time and care to make it blend.

There's never a period where we say, 'right, that's the song written, now we're going to arrange it, and then we're going to record it and then we're going to mix it'. The whole process is mixed up – on certain tracks we only actually finished the mixes at the cut, while we were mastering.

"When I'm working, I always tend to listen quite



Massive Attack's Robert (3D)
Del Naja: he's been happier

BLOW BLOW BLOW

TURF WAR

USERNAME TAKEN

BLOOD BRANDS

FUTURE PROOF

MUSIC SEARCH ENGINE PS

quietly (on our medium-sized Genlec monitors). If you listen to something loud, it's very difficult to say that a particular part is popping out at just the right point, and then it's receding at the right point and something else is coming out, because everything sounds like it's popping out. It actually becomes quite confusing, from an arranging/mixing point of view."

With so much attention, care and time being focused on the making of the album, you'd imagine there's also a lot of thought going into its reproduction. You'd be right.

"We've talked about doing a surround mix. It's something that we haven't done so far on anything but I'll definitely be pushing for that. I think it's a great opportunity, so maybe if *Hi-Fi Choice* readers go onto the *100th Window* website and say it would be great to get a surround version of this, we'll get the record company to pay for it, heh heh."


DIGITAL DIRECTION

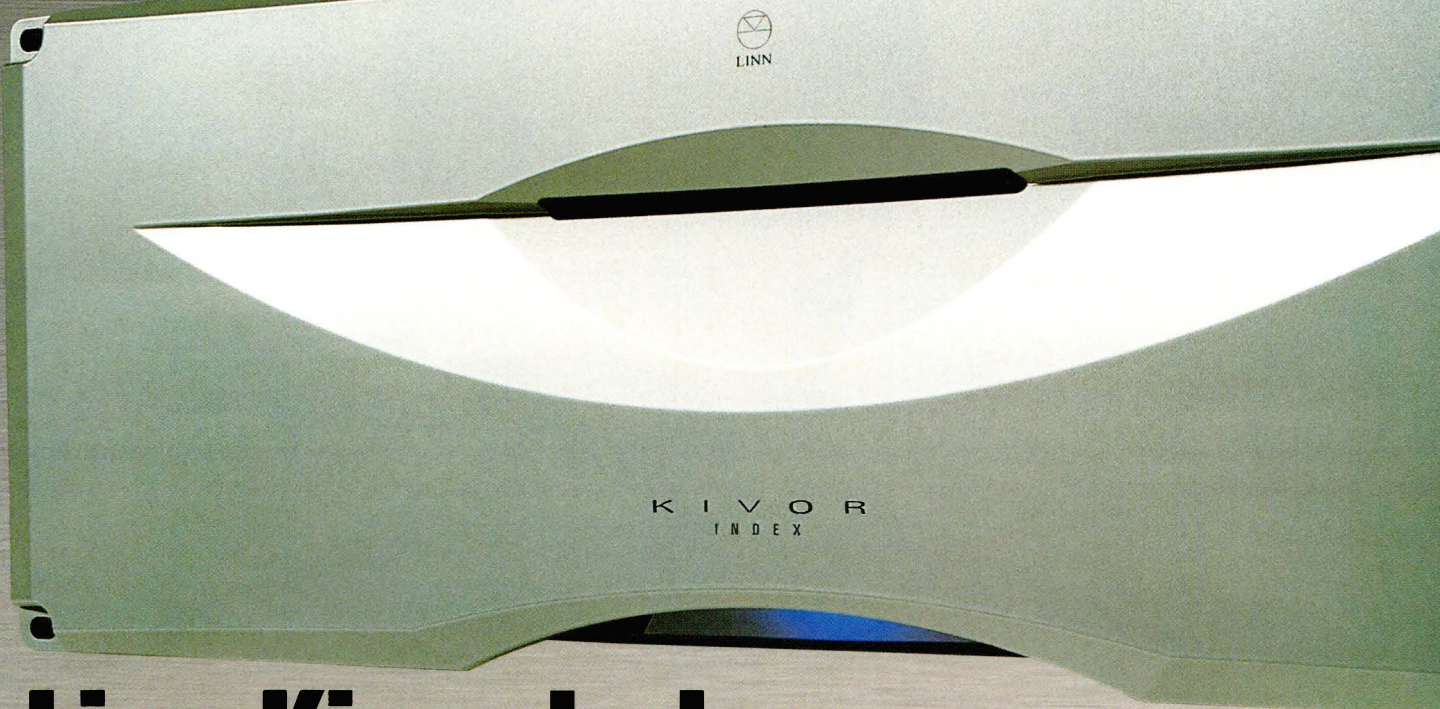
Mezzanine was a vinyl favourite among progressive audiophiles, a brilliantly dynamic and bassy record. But despite their early sound system days as The Wild Bunch, vinyl doesn't figure much for Massive Attack circa 2003.

"One of the things we decided, and I may be wrong here, was that we

weren't going to do a vinyl version of the album. There are certain restrictions with vinyl that you have to take into account when you're mixing. You can't have stereo low-end information because the needle will start jumping all over the place. You can't use out of phase sounds within vinyl, because again, it throws the needle off. And if you listen to things in mono and they're out of phase, they'll just disappear. So on this album, we said to ourselves that people have generally all got CD players, they're always going to be listening in stereo not mono, so let's use that. With the devices that are available to us today we can do things that are out of phase, which will widen the stereo of the audio, like panning kick drums and bass parts so you get a very wide sound. We've tried to use that a lot on the album.

"So I don't know if there's going to be a vinyl version. If we do I've said that we'll have to re-cut the whole album. The cut we have at this point just won't work on vinyl. You'd have to remaster it, but you'd lose quite a lot because you would have to mono certain sounds which would change the mix dynamically quite a lot."

No compromise, no quarter, no rubbish. *100th Window* is a deep, dark, intense album that rewards deep, dark, intense listening. Treat yourself. 



Linn Kivor Index music server **£4,560 EXCLUSIVE**

500 hours of music on tap is certainly convenient – but how does it sound?



The sophistication of any multi-room system is largely determined by just how many rooms (or zones) can be independently controlled or operated at any one time. Even the largest AV amplifiers typically offer control over just one or two additional zones. Then there's the choice of source material, for while a multi-CD storage system will cater for all musical genres, you are still limited to a single stereo output. This is where hard drive (HDD) storage systems with their instant access to uncompressed CD files become

very useful, particularly if they are able to drive multiple stereo outputs with different source material all at the same time.

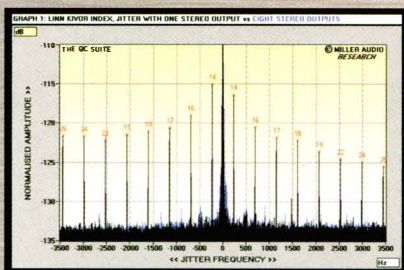
Linn's new Kivor Index 'music library' is one answer to all these issues, and while it's not exactly cheap at £4,560 for 250 hours of uncompressed audio (or £5,250 for 500 hours), it is certainly more affordable than the top-end Knekt Kivor music server system introduced a couple of years ago. The two options are distinguished by the number of 80Gb hard drives specified at the time of ordering. A pair of drives yields 250 hours

of CD quality storage (Index D2 version) while four 80Gb drives increases this to 500 hours (Index D4 version). Replay is achieved through Linn's integrated 'Musik Machine' PCI card which offers a total of eight independent stereo outputs.

KEY FEATURES

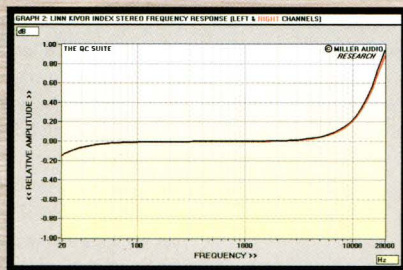
Typically, the Kivor Index will be used as part of Linn's Knekt multiroom system and will be addressed via a wall panel RCU (Room Control Unit) which duplicates the selected CD title, track name and playing

AUDIO TEST: JITTER PERFORMANCE



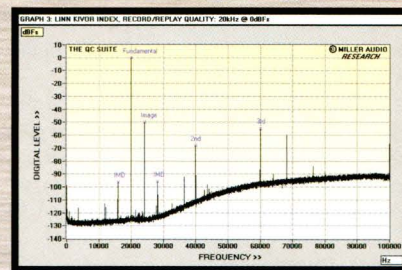
Even with all eight stereo outputs driven simultaneously, jitter amounts to just 325psec (blue spectrum). One uncompressed stereo output enjoys a best-case result of 275psec (black trace). These are fine results.

AUDIO TEST: FREQUENCY RESPONSE

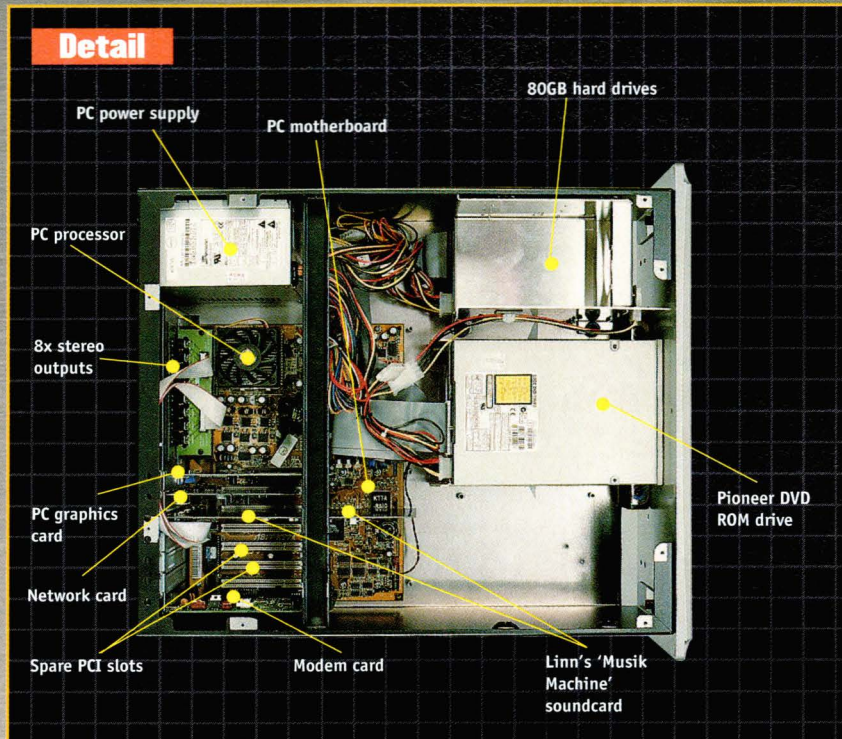
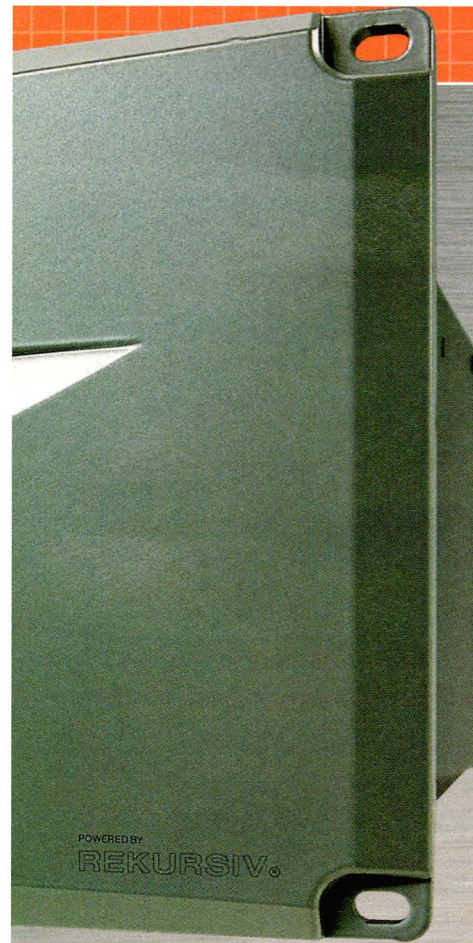


Linn's 'Musik Machine' PCI soundcard has evidently been designed to provide a +1dB boost to very high frequencies, possibly compensating for losses incurred when piping audio all around the house...

AUDIO TEST: RECORD/REPLAY QUALITY



Soundcard technology waits for no man, so Linn's DACs offer a mere 50dB image suppression and are at least partially responsible for the high 0.23 per cent distortion with this arduous 20kHz signal. IM distortion is also marked.



time information. Otherwise, and in order to populate the HDD 'library', the Kivor is addressed via Linn's proprietary Linntek software which can run on any PC linked to the Kivor's serial port. The Linntek software is also used to configure the Kivor's ISP network settings, set default record options, check disc space and organise playlists.

The Kivor Index is built into a custom PC chassis and includes a CD-ROM drive that's concealed behind Linn's own, sculptured alloy fascia. To make a recording, just post a CD (or CD-R/RW) into the slot. The Linntek software then provides the option to make a copy of the entire disc (at high speed) or a custom selection of tracks. If you really need more than 250 CDs stored at any one time, then three MP3 compression rates (192Kbps, 160Kbps and 128Kbps) will help

you squeeze vast numbers of discs onto the HDD. Most users will opt for the 'uncompressed' record mode as default.

Linn is licensed to access Gracenote's CDDB Music Recognition website on a CD-by-CD basis or by 'bulk' where one dial-up will search and provide genre, artist name, track and album titles for all of the unnamed CDs on the HDD. The Kivor includes both modem and network PCI cards to facilitate the dial-up process. The default connection type, ethernet and/or modem settings are all included as part of the Linntek configuration utility.

The Linntek software (see screenshot) provides a list of recorded CDs rather like Windows Explorer, allowing you to expand CD titles to show individual track names which can be edited. Favourite tracks from different CDs can be organised into a playlist, with its own title, on the left of the Linntek window. Finally, the Kivor's eight outputs are selected from the 'Source'

control, directing which musical selection is routed to what output. You could ask your Linn dealer or installer to begin the process, but the technology is quickly mastered.

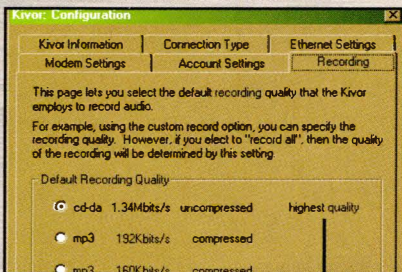
TECHNOLOGY

The Kivor uses an A-Bit PC motherboard, Duron 900MHz AMD processor and is equipped with 128Mb RAM, but there seems little attempt to use what is generally referred to as 'silent PC technology'. The power supply, for example, is particularly noisy and I could hear the whoosh from this PC in the room upstairs...

This aside, Linn has developed its own 'Rekursiv' file management software for the Kivor running – I believe – on an open source Linux kernel (rather than a Windows operating system). It's this software that organises the Gracenote data into a form accessible from the Linntek interface. The PC is also equipped with MPEG Layer-3 software from Fraunhofer IIS, which facilitates the file compression. This said, the delivery of uncompressed audio (10.72Mbps with eight stereo channels) is well within the compass of the slowest 80Gb IDE drives (typically >120Mbps). A large proportion of the 128Mb RAM is also probably used as a cache to improve this file management and streaming of audio data.

The Kivor still uses Imerge's XiVA Link protocol for connection to competing touch-screen solutions like the Crestron panel. Imerge helped pioneer hard-drive music server systems some years ago and many other HDD systems are still based on its technology. Of course, the Kivor's eight stereo channel soundcard has been

ONSCREEN: CONFIGURATION MENU

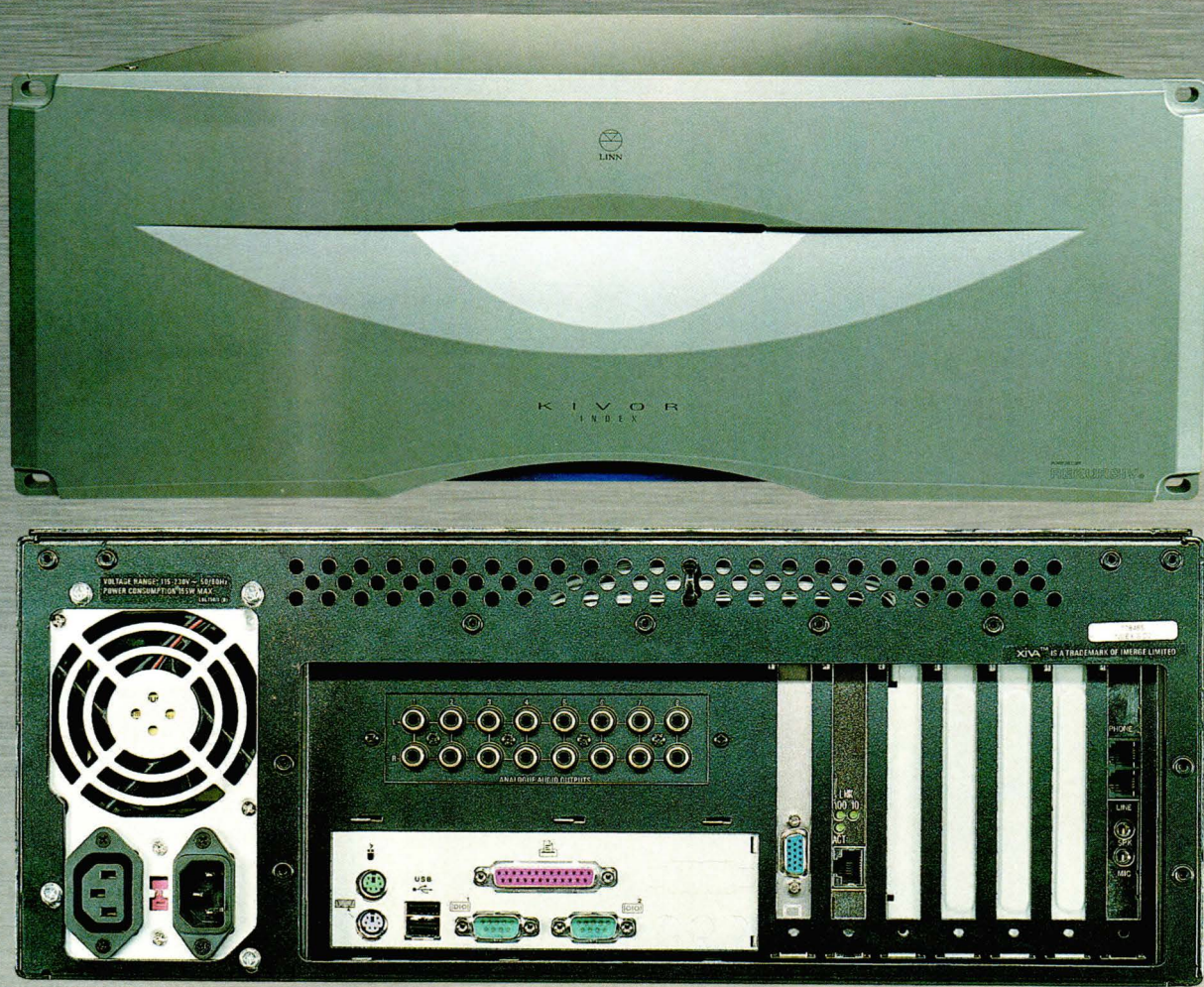


The 'Recording' tab of the Linntek configuration utility shows the 1.34Mbps (uncompressed), 128Kbps, 160 Kbps or 192 Kbps recording modes available to set as default. Modem and ethernet dial-up properties are also configured here.

ONSCREEN: LINNTEK CONTROL MENU



This is the main Linntek window. The right hand 'treeview' lists CDs and their track complement by name while the left hand view is used to detail any customised playlists, containing tracks from any number of different CDs.



developed by Linn for this application, and houses its own DS as well as several Crystal DACs. This is a considerable investment for Linn, especially as high quality multichannel soundcards are becoming available, at moderate cost, from third party vendors.

PERFORMANCE

Unlike standalone HDD recorders, like the Yamaha CDR-HD1300 (HFC 237), which may only offer one stereo audio output, the Kivor Index is almost certainly destined for use at the heart of an integral multi-room installation, rather than as the reference source for a two-channel system. Although the Kivor's software protocols are not compatible with Mordaunt-Short's new Opus multi-room system (review next month), it was still easy to hook into the latter's MCU500 controller and pipe the audio into my four separate house zones.

Frankly, even feeding high quality in-wall and in-ceiling speakers, the Kivor Index is still over-specified. Clicking from one track to another is achieved with a subtle fade, and the music is broadly indistinguishable from the original CD through a high-end player like Denon's DVD-A1. After all, there's a limit to the discrimination possible in the average kitchen or bathroom!

Auditioning the Kivor at the head of a high-quality audio system, however, is another

"While the Kivor Index is no match for the best two-channel disc players, as a multi-zone sound server offering swift track access and versatile disc management, it's pretty hard to beat."


matter. Used with Arcam amplifiers and B&W Nautilus 802 loudspeakers, the Kivor Index provided an inherently clean, slightly dry but very listenable sound. Steely Dan's *Jack Of Speed* bounced along with a refreshingly crisp string and percussive tone, although the bass was just slightly lumpy, especially at moderate levels. The placement of the voice is a bit indistinct on this track anyway – a double-tracked recording produces a richer vocal but one that's rarely so sharply focused. Even so, the Kivor Index places vocals further back into the soundstage than you might expect.


David Gray's *Babylon* was another disc that revealed the Kivor's subtle bass emphasis, a 'thud' that can become tiresome at high volume. The Sugababes' *Blue* suffered more at the hands of any perceived compression than simpler recordings like Tracy Chapman's *Fast Car*, where her vocals and percussion sounded significantly crisper. While Ms Chapman's style could hardly be called 'up-beat', this elegant pop song still sounded very positive. Still, more than one visitor commented on the loss of


openness and atmosphere with the likes of Madonna's *Nobody's Perfect*, a busier recording that's squeezed into a smaller but smoother-sounding acoustic.

So, although the Kivor Index gives of its best with relatively undemanding material, it still exceeded the expectations of all who heard it during the months it was installed in my AV facility. A glimpse of one possible future, perhaps, but one which might be expected to fall in price before it becomes more universally adopted.

VERDICT

While the Kivor Index is no match for the best two-channel disc players, as a multi-zone sound server offering swift track access and versatile disc management, it's pretty hard to beat. It is a dedicated piece of the multi-room jigsaw, and not the sort of product you're likely to entertain without the guidance of Linn's own authorised installer network. 

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REVIEWS – Alvin Gold

UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS

With so many disc formats competing for your attention, it makes sense to invest in one machine to play them all – DVD-Audio and SACD included



One of the big issues of the moment is – DVD-Audio or SACD? Or CD? Or even DVD-Video in its music-making guise? The definitive answer is easy – nobody knows. Not only is the battle royal between DVD-Audio and SACD yet to be settled, the reality is that it has yet to even be properly engaged. Worse, it is far from clear that either system will be around in the long term, still less grow to the point where they can replace compact disc.

All of which is a recipe for confusion. The competing claims of DVD-Audio and SACD in particular provide sufficient reason to ignore them both and stick with compact disc. Indeed this will be the option for many, especially where the range of recorded material takes precedence over other factors. Another increasingly popular option is to buy a DVD player – DVD-Video that is – on the grounds that it will also play compact discs. Indeed people have been doing just this in increasing numbers, and the idea of a multiformat disc player is now well established.

This test looks at a specific type of multiformat player, the so-called 'universal' player. Universal players are DVD players which can also play DVD-Audio and SACD discs, stereo and multichannel, as well as compact discs. Usually they can also cope with a secondary disc types, like CD or DVD recordable discs, and also VCDs and perhaps MP3 compilations too.

In this test we look at all the commonly available universal players (of which there are only four). But this is a moveable feast. Yamaha has a

player which will only be sold in tiny numbers through a small subset of Yamaha dealers. Denon is about to launch a player, and so is Linn Products, whose core technology will be available to other manufacturers, and others are known to be at or approaching the decision point. Entry-level prices are also dropping, and if there is one safe prediction that can be made in this uncertain business, it is that universal players are going to become very popular, at a rate governed above all by the availability of recorded software. ©

EQUIPMENT USED

MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIER

Pioneer VSA-AX10i AV amp

LOUDSPEAKERS

B&W Nautilus 800, HTM1, SCM1 speaker system. Mission's m5 speaker package was also used

CABLES

Nordost Valhalla speaker cables and interconnects (balanced, single-ended)

DISCS USED

DVD-AUDIO

Bach/Hanoncourt *St Matthew Passion*
Mendelssohn *Octet in E major Op 20*
Quartet in D major Op 44 No 1
Chie Ayado *Life*

SACD

Iván Fisher/Budapest Festival
Orchestra *Budapest Live*
Elenor McEvoy/Yola *Market Square*
Chie Ayado *Life*

CD

Beethoven/Artur Pizarro *Piano Sonatas*
Mary Coughlan *Love For Sale*
Cantus *Against The Dying Of The Light*

DVD-VIDEO

Movie: *Moulin Rouge*
Movie: *Saving Private Ryan*
Music: Diana Krall *Live In Paris*



DVD-AUDIO AND SACD

The debate surrounding these two next-generation music formats still rages among audiophiles, but for the average music buyer the relevance of this is negligible. Neither format has yet made a major mark on the music scene, and sales of compatible machines have been slow. CD is set to remain the dominant pre-recorded music carrier for years to come, and it's debatable as to whether either format will have the legs to succeed it. (Actually, the most likely eventual successor is direct digital distribution – music piped directly to our homes.)

But that's not really the point. The fact is, both DVD-A and SACD have the potential to raise the bar for music replay way beyond CD, given improved software support (and a following wind). Both have the ability to deliver improved sound, in multichannel surround to boot, and promise much as 'added value' alternatives for those with compatible players. Between the two, most audiophiles still sway towards SACD – it has a higher proportion of dedicated recordings that really push the concept of high-res multichannel music. But DVD-A has been making up ground of late and is gathering momentum in the UK...

The simple way to banish such uncertainties is to purchase a 'future proof' universal DVD player like those featured overleaf – these will play every major pre-recorded disc likely to see the light of day until blue-laser disc types eventually replace DVD in a few years' time. *HFC* has been undertaking in-depth reviews of these players ever since the UK's first – Pioneer's DV-747A – emerged over a year ago. For more details on DVD-A and SACD see our comprehensive feature in *HFC* 234, and keep your eyes peeled for the latest news and reviews in forthcoming issues. In the meantime, to view the range of discs currently available check out www.vivante.co.uk, www.play.com, www.dvd-audioworld.com and www.superaudio-cd.com.

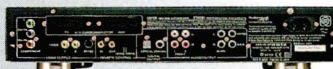
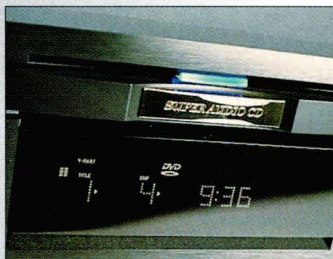


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MARANTZ DV8300 CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO/SACD PLAYER

This award-winning player is beginning to show its age, but still does much to impress

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Great looking, though conventionally minimalist front panel is not dissimilar to the Pioneers, but the Marantz has a more luxurious look and feel.

CONNECTIONS: The RS-232 port, which dealers use to defeat the Region Code lock, can also be used to apply Flash upgrades that Marantz intends to supply to defeat some of the copy protection algorithms increasingly infesting commercial compact discs. Cool, or what? Otherwise, the range of sockets covers all the essentials.

Launched last year, this Marantz was the second 'universal' player to hit the UK, following Pioneer's DV-747A. It shares various components with that now-defunct Pioneer, including the transport mechanism and DVD-Audio decode circuit, but its unusually substantial weight (6.2kg) is a clue to its superbly solid build, high capacity power transformers and independent power supplies for different circuit blocks.

The player also impresses for the quality of the passive components used (including a 12-bit/108MHz video DAC), the discrete HDAM output stage – a familiar Marantz feature – and the use of internal copper screening. The same holds even for small details like the copper case fixing screws, and the general standard of engineering.

The feature set includes playback of DVD-R/RW and MP3-CDs, the latter with data rates of 48Kbps or better – Marantz sensibly recommends 128Kbps on sound quality grounds. The component output is progressive (NTSC only from the box). Other features include internal Dolby Digital/DTS decoders, a Q&A-style set-up navigator feature, and THX Select certification. The latter is essentially a quality yardstick, but a more rigorous one than is popularly supposed. Region coding is controlled by the Eprom, which can be flash updated by Marantz dealers, a useful hedge against future developments. Video bypass can be engaged for audio-only CDs and SACDs, and contributes by subtly cleaning and sharpening the sound, especially when combined with the 'display off' feature.

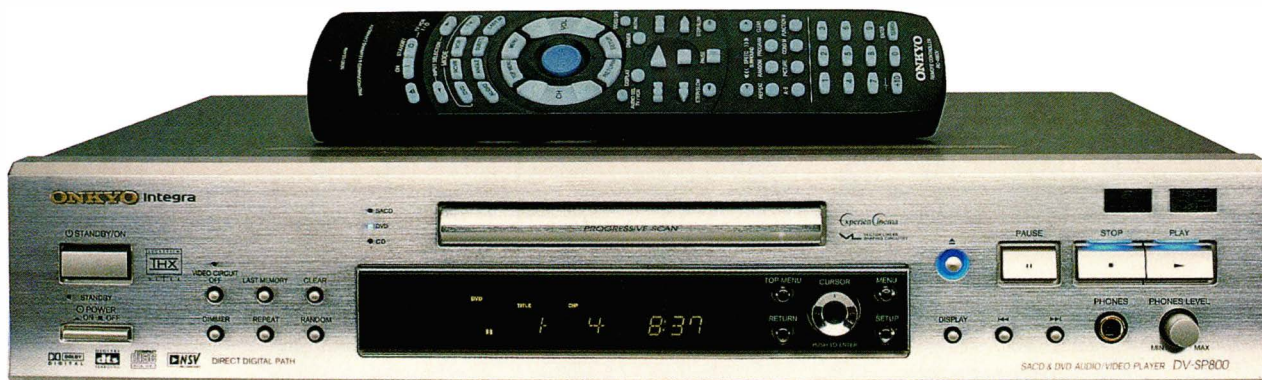
The Marantz is at its best with DVD-Audio and SACD material. Especially SACD, given the currently more readily

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
PICTURE	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
Although not a completely convincing replacement for a really good dedicated CD player, as a video player (via RGB or better) and playing SACD and DVD-Audio material, this is an excellent performer which shows what the high-resolution audio formats are all about.	
CHECKLIST	
FIREWIRE/iLINK	✗
THX CERTIFIED	SELECT
PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO	✓
SYSTEM WIRE LINK SOCKET	✓

available catalogue of worthwhile recorded material in this format. In both cases the Marantz has a fullness and warmth, which is achieved apparently without significant loss of definition. The test Chie Ayado recording sounded expressive in both DVD-A and SACD formats, and the DVD-A *Bach St Matthew Passion* recording reinforced the sense of detail with envelopment, but with the performers properly anchored at the front of the soundstage. After this, CD replay seemed a little anticlimactic. There was still plenty of detail, but replay performance was a little shallow and the low frequencies lacked body, though not depth. It just seemed the player lacked the same sense of occasion, and instrumental textures were sometimes cluttered and slightly coarse-grained.

The Dolby and DTS decoders perform well, but are clearly not in the same league as the internal decoders in the reference Pioneer amplifier, which has the knack of being able to paint complex, fast-changing soundscapes with agility and precision, like a juggler keeping many balls in the air at once. This is a key area where players with internal processors (and many older and inferior amplifiers) underachieve.

The video section looks flat via S-Video, with undersaturated colour, and the composite output is soft and prone to noise. But RGB Scart and component outputs look wonderful on screen (note these two outputs can't be used at the same time). Definition is crisp, and the pictures have rich, saturated colours and a wide video dynamic range that holds up well towards the full black and full white ends of the spectrum. Very impressive, even when projected onto a large screen. 🗨



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ONKYO INTEGRA DV-SP800 CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO/SACD PLAYER

A distinctive sounding player with a gentle disposition and fine SACD credentials

Onkyo is a recent addition to the ranks of 'universal' player manufacturers. Its solution bears some resemblance to the Marantz DV8300 and Pioneer DV-747A, the latter replaced by the iLink-equipped DV-757Ai, reviewed on page 38.

The THX Ultra-certified DV-SP800 has the usual 'universal' format compatibilities, including DVD-Video and Audio, SACD, CD, CD-R/RW, and also DVD-R/RW in VR (Video Recording) mode. VCDs are also supported, along with MP3-CDs with data rates from 48Kbps. The player can also decode Dolby Digital and DTS recordings in the absence of a suitably equipped amplifier or processor. The video subsystem is served by a 12-bit/108kHz video DAC and provides the option of a progressive feed on its component output from NTSC source material. Proprietary Vector Linear Shaping Circuitry (VLSC) works with the dual DAC stage in a manner analogous to a differential output.

The stripped-down front panel simplicity of the other players in this group is replaced here by a fuller and somewhat untidy layout, but all the important functions, including menu navigation, can be conducted without recourse to the remote control. It has an unusually wide range of picture conditioning options, a video-off feature and a direct digital output path, accessed via the front panel or the remote control. This is the only player in the test to accept headphones.

Where the other three players in this month's test tend to clump together in their general audio presentation, the Onkyo goes its own way, with a distinctive feel that is warm in the bass, yet cool in the upper midband and treble, and which verges on reticence

VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★☆
PICTURE
★★★★☆
FEATURES
★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★☆

An intriguing performer with a distinctive and attractive sound that excels with SACD and performs more than adequately with all other disc types. It's also a good DVD-Video player on screen, with a wide range of picture tweaking options.

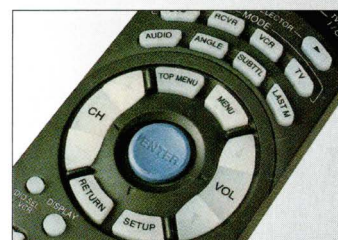
CHECKLIST	
FIREWIRE/I LINK	X
THX CERTIFIED	ULTRA
PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO	✓
SYSTEM WIRE LINK SOCKET	✓

with multichannel material. Detail is not presented in a very obvious way – there is no false sharpness to emphasise the leading edges of notes, but the player does have strong reserves of resolution which emerge in an organic and believable fashion.

The Onkyo is clearly a superior sonic beast with SACD, though less so with DVD-Audio. The orchestral sound of the *Bach St Matthew Passion* on DVD-A sounded slightly grubby and constrained compared to the Pioneer DV-757Ai for example, and this finding was mirrored with other material. But with SACD there was little indication of this. The excellent *Budapest Live* demonstration disc sounded fresh and communicative, with strong presence and still with that characteristic warmth in the bass, but with a more open, less coloured quality through the midband and treble. Compact disc retained a similar balance, though there was a hint that the player was a little sharper with CD than with SACD or DVD-A, which is neither praise nor criticism as it was not accompanied by any brashness or other forms of misbehaviour. If anything the Onkyo is often a little too laid back for truly engaging listening, encouraging slightly higher replay volume levels as a result.

As a DVD-Video player the Onkyo is a good performer. Deep black levels, strong picture definition and a relative absence of MPEG motion artefacts lead to clean pictures on a big screen. It's no better than the Marantz or the Pioneer DV-757Ai – indeed the Marantz sometimes looks richer and more three dimensional on screen, while the Pioneer's subtle colour performance just gives it an edge in this company. But the Onkyo is in the same video ballpark, with a sonic flavour all of its own. 🗣️

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: A very complete control set makes the player look a little untidy, but places less reliance on the remote handset. But what a handset – a large and button-bound backlit full-system design, it boasts an internal code library and a learning feature.

CONNECTIONS: Comprehensive socketry includes a twin Scart arrangement that will pass RGB (eg from a Sky digibox) with the player in standby. Extra surround outputs (SURR 2) are for films recorded using MPEG 2 sound – if you can find any.

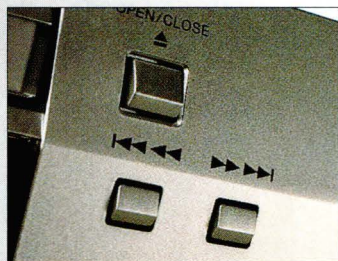


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PIONEER DV-656A CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO/SACD PLAYER

It plays everything, and to a good standard – a copper-bottomed bargain

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Coincidentally or otherwise, the front panel controls are virtually identical to Pioneer's DV-757Ai, and in-depth operation requires the remote control, which is best described as attractive and bijou.

CONNECTIONS: The only surprise with rear of this player is how fully equipped it is. Two Scarts, two composite video, two S-Video, and a component output is an impressive roster for a £400 player.

The DV-656A hits the shelves at a shade under £400, a keen price for a technology in its formative stage. This player was originally billed as the replacement for the DV-747A, the first 'universal' player to go on sale in Europe, and understandably so. It does virtually everything that the earlier player did and then some, but the more recent DV-757i (opposite) proved to be the real successor, with the DV-656A acting as Pioneer's entry-level machine.

The Pioneer cheapie doesn't want for much though. Replay compatibility includes DVD-Audio, SACD, DVD-R/RW, CD-R, CD-R/RW, Video CD and MP3 on CD-R. It also sports Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, with bass management for DVD-Audio, though as usual not for SACD. In common with its more costly brother, the DV-646A includes Pioneer's new-style graphical interface, which features attractive, colourful screen displays, and a simple Q&A set-up wizard to cover initial installation and speaker management.

The player has a component output, but it delivers interlace (non-progressive) video, and only works with NTSC material as supplied. It is well endowed with picture tweaking options, the list including a newly added zoom and scroll feature, and the mechanism navigates its way around the disc faster than previous multi-standard players (including the DV-747A and others sharing its first generation mechanism, like those from Marantz and Onkyo).

The DV-656A is a capable all-rounder, with the odd unexpected trick up its sleeve, such as the ability to play unfinished CD-R and CD-RW discs. Less surprisingly, it is fully compatible with DVD-R/RW discs, the DVD recording format that Pioneer supports. It also offers exceptional value as a £400

VERDICT

SOUND



PICTURE



FEATURES



VALUE



Sound and picture may not meet the standards set by other universal players in this test, but at its price level this Pioneer delivers play-all flexibility that's currently unique. A neat introduction to the high-res multichannel audio formats and a fine video player to boot.

CHECKLIST

FIREWIRE/ILINK	✗
THX CERTIFIED	✗
PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO	✗
SYSTEM WIRE LINK SOCKET	✓

player that does everything at least competently, and its slick user interface makes it more approachable than many DVD players.

But this machine was never intended for the audiophile. Multichannel high resolution discs at least perform comparatively well, confirming a pattern in which multichannel sound appears able to survive unpromising situations. The Poulenc SACD sounded expansive, stable and wide-ranging dynamically, and the pattern was followed by DVD-Audio recordings, including the Bach and the Mendelssohn. But good as it sounds, the player is clearly inferior to the heavyweights in this test, including Pioneer's DV-757Ai, lacking the stability, resolution and layered three-dimensional quality of the best.

Playing CDs, the DV-656A can sound rather mechanical and unexpansive. The powerful, rolling left-hand part in the finale of Beethoven's *Tempest* sonata (Artur Pizarro) was jumbled and lacking in articulation, though it was suitably tempestuous. The same piece played by a good CD player, or the Pioneer DV-757Ai for that matter, is palpably more articulate and measured, though performance improves if all the relevant bypasses are used. On a different musical plane, the Tracy Chapman album lacked some warmth and authority, though it still sounds pretty good for DVD player at the price.

As a video player, the Pioneer competes well with its direct price rivals. It's hardly a high-end player, and its colour reproduction is sometimes less than subtle. But it is sharp and clean, with surprisingly good, noise-free shadow detail. More expensive options do it better, but at the price this Pioneer is a unique all-rounder. **C**



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PIONEER DV-757Ai CD/DVD-VIDEO/DVD-AUDIO/SACD PLAYER

The current state of the art in universal DVD players

The true successor to the trendsetting DVD-747A, this model looks and behaves similarly, but there is one glaring, neon-lit difference. The DV-757Ai is the first with the iLink (aka FireWire or IEEE1394) digital audio interface, conforming to the newly ratified A&M (Audio & Music Data) protocol. Currently, the only other similarly equipped component is Pioneer's flagship VSA-AX10Ai AV amplifier – use the two together and you can transfer wide-bandwidth DVD-A and SACD data from player to amp in the digital domain, employing the amp's superior powers of processing and speaker management to give significant performance benefits.

The interface does more than just stream high-speed multichannel data, which has previously been possible with proprietary and mutually incompatible digital connections from Denon and Meridian. It also carries control information, allowing auto source-switching and configuration of the amplifier according to the type of disc used. It even feeds back a clock signal from the amplifier's master clock which slaves the player, reducing jitter. The same idea, but using separate clock sync leads, has been used by Linn, TAG McLaren and others.

Other enhancements over the original DV-747A include faster disc navigation and the same impressively simple user interface and 'set-up wizard' routines found on the less costly DV-656A.

In any assessment of this player, it is important to distinguish between two cases – use with the Pioneer VSA-AX10i using the iLink, and use with any amp using traditional digital and analogue inputs. The fact that iLink is limited to just one Pioneer amplifier, and an expensive one at that, is an

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★★
PICTURE ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★

The outstanding feature, from both the sound quality and useability angles, is the digital interface, which clearly marks a coming of age for high-res audio. The full benefits will only be available with amplifiers equipped with iLink inputs, but even without such an amp, this Pioneer delivers a fine performance and great value for money.

CHECKLIST
FIREWIRE/ILINK <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
THX CERTIFIED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SYSTEM WIRE LINK SOCKET <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

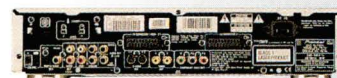
unfortunate fact, but a temporary one. Now that the A&M protocol has been mandated, other compatible amps are bound to appear, probably sooner rather than later.

The test combination makes a strong case in favour of this development. Under nearly all conditions, iLink works better than the alternatives, and that includes streaming CD and Dolby Digital/DTS data through a standard coaxial link. The presumption must be that iLink provides a lower jitter datastream for the reason already given. Ironically or otherwise, the main beneficiary is CD, where iLink transforms what in the DV-747A was a routine and unexciting player into a heavyweight, with greater detail, more precise and three-dimensional imagery and simply more expressive music making. DVD-Audio benefits in much the same way, though the comparative lack of material means that the evidence is more sporadic. Still, the DV-757Ai's replay performance of the Harnoncourt *Bach St Matthew Passion* was exemplary – light and agile yet rhythmic and well grounded.

The benefits of iLink are more equivocal with SACD, probably because DSD formatted data is converted to PCM in the amp. (Sony has just announced an iLink-equipped amp that will rectify this situation.) With the Pioneer combo, iLink's clear SACD benefit is better speaker management.

Nevertheless, this is a fine sounding player across the board, with or without iLink. Its video quality is excellent too, the 12-bit DAC and shaped video filter providing finely detailed pictures with rich, vibrant colour and freedom from noise. A superb all-rounder then, with a sonic performance made all the better via iLink to the VSA-AX10i. 🎧

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Simple, straightforward controls make for a neat, clear layout. There is considerable reliance on the remote, so it's just as well it's a pleasure to use.

CONNECTIONS: There are two of the small four-pin iLink connectors, allowing iLink equipped components to be daisy chained together. There are no important omissions, and several of the sockets are doubled up. Separate two-channel and 5.1 channel outputs allow multiple connections to the system amplifier – eg stereo from CD, multichannel to the multichannel analogue input.

CONCLUSIONS

It's early days for universal players, but one product already stands clear of the crowd

With the degree of commonality that underpins these players beneath the skin, it is not too surprising that their performance tends to clump together, and for this reason, price may play an overriding role in buying decisions. The Pioneer DV-656A is not much worse than the others, yet it costs a great deal less, and so earns a firm Recommendation. The Marantz and

the Onkyo are quite close in performance, and both are well-built upmarket examples of the breed, albeit ones that feature first generation 'universal' technology. The Onkyo's sonic style is a little softer than the Marantz, and that might swing you either way.

But it is the Pioneer DV-757Ai that takes most of the gongs. With a basic performance standard approaching and in some respects

exceeding that of the Marantz and Onkyo, it costs a full £600 less than the Marantz, and £400 less than the Onkyo. But this isn't the end of the story. The DV-757Ai takes the universal DVD concept a step further, and is the first DVD-A/SACD player with the option of off-player multichannel D/A conversion and bass management. This, along with the integral clock link and other

features, offers easier set-up and better performance, especially with PCM sources. It also offers the best CD performance of the four – good enough to allow you to retire a good CD player in its favour.

At the moment the digital link can only be used with a single rather costly amp, Pioneer's VSA-AX10i, but now that the technical standards have been agreed, this restriction won't apply for long. **C**

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PRIMARE SP31.7/A30.5 £3,700
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PIONEER VSA-AX10i £3,000
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LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS
B&W 600 S3 £900
Capable quality compact (not micro) system at an attractive price.

JMLAB COBALT £1,797
Purist design using excellent Focal drive units in solid enclosures. Can sound bright, but is articulate and dynamic.

MIRAGE OMNI 2 £2,650
'Dark' tonality, but a first class system with unusually spacious yet well focused imagery.

STAR PERFORMER



PIONEER DV-757Ai

One technological generation ahead of its rivals, the iLink digital link provides a range of enhancements to sound quality and useability when used with a compatible amplifier. Even without iLink, however, this model is a strong performer. The set-up screens are well designed, the feature range extensive and

video performance strong.

As an audio player, it is a close run thing with the other full-price models. You may prefer the Marantz's more balanced presentation or the Onkyo's softer style, but the differences are not massive – the price gap certainly is.



UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

	Make	Marantz	Onkyo Integra	Pioneer	Pioneer
	Model	DV8300	DV-SP800	DV-656A	DV-757Ai
	Price	£1,400	£1,200	£400	£800
	Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
	Picture	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
	Features	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
	Value	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
	Conclusions	A strong performer with both sound and vision, but it now looks a little pricey alongside recent competition.	Distinctive but attractive tonality combined with strong feature set make this a good, if pricey choice.	Astonishing value for money, although not great hi-fi, this player comes close to the heavyweight competition in its main operating modes.	State of the art universal player – iLink digital interface provides a performance stretch currently unavailable to others.

HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Keep away from amplifiers – heat and stray electro-magnetic fields will do your player no good.
- ⊕ A stable platform is an absolute prerequisite.
- ⊕ A solid weight placed on top (it could be an ordinary housebrick) can provide an excellent, cheap sonic upgrade.
- ⊕ Use the video bypass (where available) with audio material, along with any other straight line or bypass features where possible.
- ⊕ Avoid the internal Dolby Digital and DTS decoders which tend to perform crudely by comparison with well-designed separate processor/ amplifiers.
- ⊕ The A/D converters in many better AV amps can be used to upgrade CD playback by using digital output from the player.



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REVIEWS – Paul Messenger

STEREO SPEAKERS

Mid-price loudspeakers come in all shapes and sizes

Does size matter? Our group test this month brings together four models which fall firmly into a mid-price zone, between £550 and £800, yet which vary dramatically in size. In fact the difference between the largest and smallest here is a huge 6:1, yet the price difference between the tiny PMC DB1 and Energy's substantial Connoisseur C-5 is just £45.

As you might expect, the litt'l'un is clothed in a real wood veneer, while the floorstander has a vinyl woodprint surface, but the other implications are not necessarily that easy to figure. It's obvious that the tiny speaker will have some limitations, such as bass weight, all-round power handling and loudness capability.

The up side with tiny speakers, however, lies in the simple fact that a small enclosure will only generate modest amounts of cabinet coloration. Even though small speakers tend to have small bass/mid drive units, the actual ratio between the area of the main driver diaphragm and the surface area of the enclosure, tends to be larger than with bigger speakers. Indeed, this

is one of the areas where the standmount tends to have a significant innate advantage over the floorstander.

The strength of the floorstander is simply that it does, fundamentally, provide the biggest bang for your buck, especially because there's no need to find extra money for stands. Many also prefer the floorstander's style too, partly because it avoids cluttering up the lounge with stand ironmongery, and partly because the speaker as a whole looks more elegant and all-of-a-piece.

At the same time, the standmount is always going to be physically smaller, with a shape and dimensions that are acoustically preferable from the point of view of minimising boxiness.

Whether you make your choice on aesthetic or sonic grounds, or perhaps a bit of both, it's never going to be a clear-cut decision. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses, though perhaps the ultimate arbiter should be how you like your music, the standmount having the edge with lighter, more delicate material, while the floorstander will do a better job with loud and/or heavy stuff. **C**

EQUIPMENT USED

SOURCE COMPONENTS

Naim CDS2 CD player
Rega Jupiter CD player
Linn LP12 turntable
Rega RB1000 tonearm
Linn Arkiv B, Dynavector XV-1 cartridges
Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner

AMPLIFIERS

Naim NAC552 preamp
Naim NAP500 power amp

CABLES

Naim NACA5, Nordost SPM, Acoustic Zen speaker cables

MUSIC USED

Lambchop *Is a Woman*
Lowell George *Thanks I'll Eat It Here*
Alison Krauss and Union Station
New Favorite
Christy Moore *Live At The Point*
Nitin Sawhney *Beyond Skin*
Cambridge Singers/Rutter
There Is Sweet Music
LSO Live *Shostakovich Symphony No 11*
Rolling Stones *Let It Bleed*
BBC Radios 3 & 4 were also used extensively

ON TEST



AVI PRO-NINE-PLUS
£799

ENERGY CONNOISSEUR C-5
£600

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD REFERENCE 10
£800

PMC DB1
£555



£799 ☎ 01453 752656 🌐 www.avihifi.co.uk

AVI PRO-NINE-PLUS

Plenty of vim and vigour from AVI's new and beautifully built standmount

Known primarily for its range of high quality amplifiers and other electronic components, this is the fourth AVI speaker to come in for formal Choice scrutiny, and at £799/pair it's also the most costly.

The Pro-Nine-Plus is a chunky standmount combining a 6.5-inch main driver with a port-loaded, 12-litre enclosure. There are obvious and close similarities to AVI's Biggatron Red Spot, which we reviewed and Recommended back in *HFC* 211.

What is much less obvious is just why the Pro-Nine-Plus costs half as much again as the BRS. Apparently it has

much to do with the very costly Scandinavian main driver, which has a 'long-gap, short-coil' type motor for improved linearity when operating at high levels, but however you look at it, £800 seems a lot of money for a compact two-way standmount.

It's actually a development from the Pro-Nine, and is intended to complement AVI's imminent new 200-watt integrated amplifier. The new model promises improved bass extension and a more refined midrange, and uses very classy drive units linked together by AVI's complex 14-element, phase correct crossover.

You get good quality real wood veneer here, in either black ash or cherry, the drive units are neatly rebated into the front panel, the tweeters (and ports) are offset from the centre line, and the speakers are constructed as mirror-image pairs.

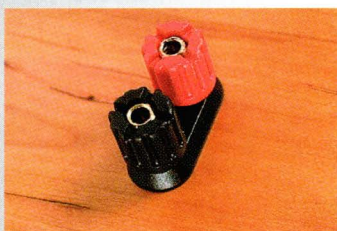
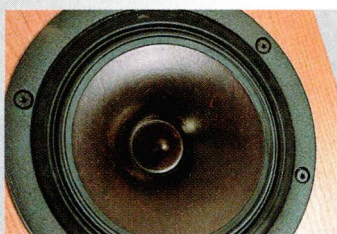
The main driver has a 165mm cast frame with a 120mm diameter 'curvilinear' doped paper cone, while the tweeter has a 28mm fabric dome. Unusually, there's just a single terminal pair, securely fixed through the back panel. The accompanying literature stresses that the Pro-Nine-Plus should be BluTack, rather than spike-coupled, to its stand.

The Pro-Nine-Plus balances out pretty well, and shows decent enough basic sound quality, with no obvious boxiness and an impressively wide dynamic range, but there's no avoiding the subjective effects of the measured response traces.

The bottom line is that this is not the most neutral speaker around. It lacks a certain degree of warmth and does have a tendency to over-project voices, giving them a slightly 'shouty' quality, the more so because the treble proper is rather restrained. The sound is quite



KEY FEATURES



DRIVE UNITS: Costly main driver's 'long-gap, short-coil' motor improves linearity at high levels. It has a 165mm cast frame with a 120mm diameter 'curvilinear' doped paper cone. Tweeter uses large 28mm doped-fabric dome. Drive units are rebated into the front panel, the tweeters (and ports) offset from the centre line, constructed as mirror-image pairs.

CONNECTIONS: Single terminal pair, securely fixed directly through the back panel, avoiding the usual rather flexible and resonant plastic terminal block.

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Classy but costly standmount likes close-to-wall siting, has fine dynamic vigour and headroom, and handles power with aplomb. However, the upper mid is rather over-projected, and the treble lacks sparkle.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✗
CLOSE TO WALL	✓
WIDTH	23cm
HEIGHT	35cm
DEPTH	25cm
BI-WIRABLE	✗

smooth, with no obvious isolated resonances or related colorations, but it's the loudspeaker's overall trend that imposes a particular character on the music that it's reproducing, and this character seems to be further exaggerated as a consequence of close-to-wall siting.

AVI's claims for good high-level linearity seem to be well justified. Certainly the Pro-Nine-Pluses seemed very happy when being worked hard, and maintained good tonal balance consistency at all different replay levels.

There's much to like about this loudspeaker, which is well aligned for close-to-wall siting, and delivers a vigorous performance with plenty of headroom and a wide dynamic range. Ultimately, however, its forwardness and some lack of 'sparkle' mitigates against formal Recommendation. **C**

MEASUREMENTS

AVI quotes a sensitivity of 88.7dB, a somewhat over-precise figure perhaps in view of an accompanying response graph which showed +/-2dB variations, though nevertheless closely enough aligned with our own findings. The amplifier load is 'easy', staying comfortably above six ohms throughout, though limited bass extension is another relevant factor.

The in-room measurements clearly indicate that close-to-wall siting will almost certainly be necessary here. The overall response trend is reasonably smooth, but does show a degree of 'character', with some lack of output in the lower midband (250-500Hz), some upper mid excess (800Hz-2kHz), and some treble roll-off above 8kHz.

£600 ☎ 01787 249656 🌐 www.energy-speakers.com

ENERGY CONNOISSEUR C-5

Good looking Canadian contender delivers a laid-back sound with excellent bass

A major Canadian loudspeaker brand that's been around for more than 20 years, the Energy factory is handily located quite close to the forests that supply the raw material for the MDF enclosures. Its mainstream Connoisseur series actually goes back some ten years, though the models have recently been updated with magnetic shielding, plus very contemporary styling with silver moulded baffles and pale grey driver surrounds.

This £600/pair Connoisseur C5 is the classic modern floorstander, slimline and with two main drivers operating as

a 'two-and-a-half-way', the lower of the two used to augment the bass output, while the upper one is a full bass/midrange driver operating up to the tweeter. Energy calls this a 'tapered three-way' configuration.

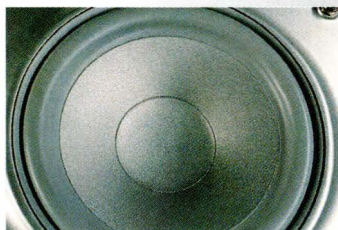
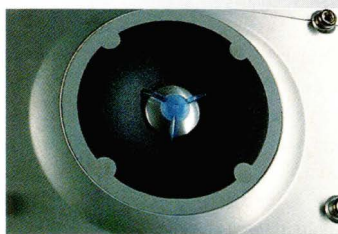
Although the surface finish is vinyl woodprint, and the box edges and corners are sharp, this is still a very good-looking speaker. The drive units and port are all mounted via moulded silver sub-baffles, which keep everything neat and tidy, so the speaker looks good with or without the grille.

One problem with floorstanders is that they can easily be accidentally knocked over. Energy has come up with a neat solution using little plastic mouldings that screw into the base of the speaker, so that the front floor spikes are set well outside the line of the cabinet, ensuring excellent overall stability. However, they're fiddly to fit, the woodscrews are poor quality, and the spike sockets themselves are weakly secured.

The bass and bass/mid drivers both have 165mm frames and 120mm diameter polymer cones, the upper one crossing over at around 2kHz to the 25mm aluminium dome tweeter. Surprisingly perhaps, there's just a single terminal pair for connection, though these are good quality.

Sonically the C-5 follows its own agenda, with a balance that's quite different from the market norm. That comment is by no means intended as a criticism, though it does raise the point

KEY FEATURES



DRIVE UNITS: 25mm aluminium dome tweeter has rear chamber, to lower resonance and improve power handling. The 165mm bass/mid and bass-only drivers use aluminium-infused 120mm homopolymer cones (concave dust caps). NBR/SBR (Nitrilic Butyl/Synthetic Butyl Rubber) surrounds provide high excursion, low noise, and attractive cosmetic blending with cone and baffle.

CONNECTIONS: Single pair of 'Super Sized' gold-plated binding posts offer good flexibility and sound quality.

MEASUREMENTS

Irritatingly and, indeed, irresponsibly, the specification quotes a sensitivity (of 93dB) for '2 speakers in a typical room'. Why not use the same standard as everyone else? The obvious reason must be to mislead the unwary. In fact, the 'proper' figure is around 87-88dB/W. This is satisfactory enough in the context of an easy amplifier load, which never drops below five ohms, and very impressive in-room bass extension.

The overall far-field in-room balance is particularly impressive, holding within +/-5dB right across the band (20Hz-20kHz), and within +/-3dB 90Hz-14kHz. However, it's also unusually laid back and restrained above 700Hz.



VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



This good-looking two-and-a-half-way has a marvellously even and neutral overall balance, albeit perhaps a mite too laid back for some tastes. Dynamic expression is a little too restrained.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✗
CLOSE TO WALL	✓
WIDTH	20cm
HEIGHT	95cm
DEPTH	37cm
BI-WIRABLE	✗

that if this speaker is right, most others must be wrong – or vice versa!

That said, few can match its studied neutrality and overall evenness, although possibly it could be just a little too laid back for some tastes. Bass is extended, deep, even and, rather more than most, this speaker has a tendency to 'disappear' sonically, leaving just the sound.

The down side is that the C-5 does sound just a little limp dynamically speaking. It's impossible to say for sure whether that's part of the speaker's innate qualities, or purely a function of its laid-back balance, but the evidence does seem to point towards the former. Despite which, this is still a rather impressive and good-looking all-round package, and at a realistic enough price for formal Recommendation. Ⓞ

£800 ☎ 01268 740580 🌐 www.monitoraudio.co.uk

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD REFERENCE 10

A beautiful little speaker that majors in detail but lacks a little warmth

A long-established UK brand with a strong penchant for metal cone drive units, Monitor Audio has emerged with renewed strength from major organisational changes in the late 1990s. A few months back we reviewed a large new Silver S8 floorstander, with very positive results indeed – now it's time to look at a smaller model from the rather more costly Gold Reference series.

The smallest of three stereo pairs, and the only standmount in the series, this Gold Reference 10 is a simple but very

classy two-way, and carries a pretty hefty £600 price tag. The justification comes through a combination of high-class finish – available in cherry, black oak, natural oak, or Rosemah real wood veneers – and advanced C-CAM and RST metal-diaphragm drive unit technology.

The 165mm main driver is particularly interesting, in the way the 120mm diameter light aluminium/magnesium alloy cone has indented dimpled patterning across its surface, to increase its overall stiffness, and hence extend its bandwidth. A pointed 'bullet' polepiece extension is hewn from solid aluminium. The 25mm 'Gold' dome tweeter also has a C-CAM alloy diaphragm, a damped rear chamber, and a claimed 35kHz bandwidth.

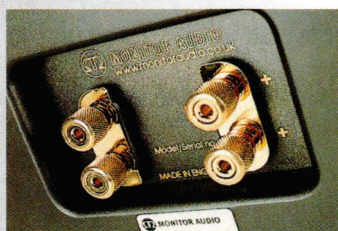
Both drivers are built on cast alloy chassis, and these are rebated into the front panel to give a smooth and smart effect. The rear-ported enclosure is as solid as it is beautiful, being built from thick 22mm MDF. Twin terminal pairs permit bi-wiring (or bi-amping), and internal wiring is solid silver.

Auditioning commenced with the speakers on Kudos S100 stands sited well clear of walls, and initial impressions were not very promising, it must be said. There was an overall 'thinness' to the balance, and the upper mid and top seemed slightly fierce and aggressive, although the stereo imaging seemed notably precise and exceptionally well focused.

Moving the speakers back towards the wall did, on balance, improve things significantly, chiefly because the top end was no longer so obviously exposed. The superb stereo precision was again fully in evidence, but wall reinforcement did have a tendency to create a little too much bass 'thump'



KEY FEATURES

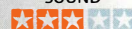


DRIVE UNITS: 165mm main driver has 120mm diameter aluminium/magnesium alloy RST cone with dimpled patterning to increase its overall stiffness and extend its bandwidth. Pointed 'bullet' polepiece extension is hewn from solid aluminium. 25mm 'Gold' dome tweeter has a C-CAM alloy diaphragm, damped rear chamber, and a claimed 35kHz bandwidth.

CONNECTIONS: Twin gold-plated terminal pairs permit bi-wiring (or bi-amping) once the links are removed, and these feed solid silver internal wiring.

VERDICT

SOUND



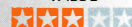
EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



A lovely standmount with a particularly interesting metal main driver cone, the GR10 is beautifully detailed with fine imaging and focus, but also a leanness and lack of warmth.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✗
CLOSE TO WALL	✓
WIDTH	20cm
HEIGHT	36cm
DEPTH	27cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓

around the mid-bass port resonance.

Blocking the ports with bungs is one way of tackling this, but it doesn't address this speaker's main weakness, which is an obvious leanness through the upper bass and lower midband. For all its strengths, this particular balance anomaly still leaves the Gold Reference 10 sounding rather thin, cold, forward, and lacking in warmth and richness.

A beautifully made and impressively creative design, the GR10 is capable of delivering lovely detail and fine imaging, making voices beautifully intelligible even at vanishingly low levels. However, this partly because of its forwardness, which in turn is a basic departure from neutrality through the lower midband. 🗙

MEASUREMENTS

Our in-room far-field averaged measurements broadly confirm Monitor Audio's claim for an 88dB/W sensitivity rating, which is pretty generous in view of a very benign amplifier load which never falls below seven ohms. However, there's very little bass extension below 40Hz, partly because the port is tuned to a high-ish 55Hz.

The overall balance is, however, rather problematic. With or without close-to-wall placement, output is strong around 50Hz and again through the upper midband, 500Hz-2kHz, but definitely weak through the broad midband decade, 50-500Hz. Although free space gives a slightly smoother trace, wall reinforcement delivers the best overall balance.

£555 ☎ 08704 441044 🌐 www.pmc-speakers.com

PMC DB1

Transmission-line bass loading gives this dinky standmount hidden depths

PMC stands for the Professional Monitor Company, which was founded by two ex-BBC engineers in 1990, and is unusual in enjoying similar respect from both the ProAudio and the hi-fi sectors. All its models feature transmission-line bass loading, and despite the normal perception that this approach inevitably involves considerable bulk, that includes this little sub-miniature. Christened DB1 (for Dinky Box One), it's hard to believe that the four-fold line in this tiny little enclosure has an effective length of an

amazing 1.5m!

At £550 it's quite pricey, but the only savings from its small size are probably in transportation costs – there are still two high-class drive units, a complex crossover and a real wood veneered enclosure.

Furthermore, the crossover components have been individually matched here, and the enclosure, with three internal partitions plus a complex recipe of damping materials, is a lot more difficult to build than most – and a lot more rigid too.

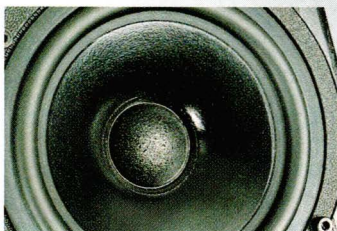
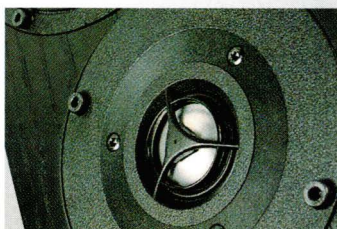
The standard finishes are black ash, oak and cherry, though a cheaper textured black Pro version is also available, and a more costly rosewood version too. There's also a magnetically shielded DB1C, and PMC suggests partnering a pair of DB1s with an XP1-B active subwoofer, for compact full-range stereo monitoring.

The main driver here has a 140mm cast frame and a 90mm doped paper cone, while the tweeter has a 25mm aluminium alloy dome with phase correction. Twin terminals facilitate bi-wiring or bi-amping, and the rear panel also accommodates the large line-exit slot and the attachment plate for a substantial wall bracket.

Sonically this little mini-monitor was a constant source of surprise, because it



KEY FEATURES



DRIVE UNITS: Small main driver has a 140mm cast magnesium alloy frame and this supports a 90mm doped paper cone, with magnetic shielding an optional extra. Tweeter uses a 25mm aluminium alloy dome, ferro-fluid damped and cooled and fitted with a phase corrector across its diaphragm. Both drivers are rebated into the front to minimise discontinuities.

CONNECTIONS: Twin terminals facilitate bi-wiring or bi-amping, provided 'jumper' links are first removed, and the rear panel also accommodates the large transmission line exit slot and an attachment plate for a substantial wall bracket.

MEASUREMENTS

Although the in-room far-field balance looked quite promising with the speakers on stands in free space, albeit with some lack of presence output (1-2kHz). It was also quite obviously lacking through the bass region below 120Hz. Close-to-wall siting provided useful fill-in down to 50Hz, but also led to significantly more unevenness overall.

PMC's claim for a sensitivity of 87dB/W might be a little optimistic. On our far-field measurement, a figure of 84-85dB/W would seem closer to the mark. While this is a low figure, it is in the context of a very easy amplifier load, which stays comfortably above six ohms throughout.

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Lacks a little weight and authority, but this pretty little miniature is beautifully balanced with an impressive freedom from boxiness and fine dynamic vigour. Loads of fun for a littl'un.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
CLOSE TO WALL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
WIDTH	16cm
HEIGHT	29cm
DEPTH	24cm
BI-WIRABLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

was quite difficult to believe that something so small could sound so big, lively, and all round capable. A little more weight and authority might have been appreciated, especially on heavier rock and dance material, but if the bass was quantitatively close to the margin, it was also qualitatively exceptional – clean, agile and invariably informative and communicative.

The heart of its success is unquestionably its very superior balance and evenness through the broad midband, which has a lovely warmth, coherence and overall neutrality while avoiding the upper bass leanness and over-projected upper mid that's so common among small loudspeakers.

Siting is a shade problematic, it must be said, as both the midband and stereo imaging are superior with the speakers clear of walls, but the bass benefits from close-to-wall reinforcement. Careful experimentation is advised.

One might assume that a speaker such as this is primarily intended to perform surround sound duties, alongside something larger and meatier. While that's an obvious application, one shouldn't underestimate this remarkable little speaker's capability as a main stereo pair, with or without additional subwoofery. **C**

CONCLUSIONS

Does size matter? Yes, but smaller can sometimes be better

For such a small group, these four models cover a large range of options. The largest – the Energy Connoisseur C-5 – is roughly six times bigger than the tiny little PMC DB1. That has inevitable repercussions upon their respective performance envelopes, but there's nevertheless a touch of irony in the observation that these two stood out ahead of the other two intermediate size models.

Both showed excellent overall neutrality, fine dynamic range and superior imaging. While it's true the miniature PMC is better suited to

the smaller room, both will happily grace a very fine hi-fi system.

It came as a surprise that the two 'classic' configuration models, from AVI and Monitor Audio couldn't quite hold their own in the group context. Both have 165mm frame main drivers operating in port-loaded enclosures of around 14 litres, and both tune their ports to around 50Hz, although there are substantial differences in both box shapes and in the drive unit technologies.

The bottom line is that both suffered from similar problems – a tonal balance which combines

plenty of output around the port-tuned frequency, and also towards the top end of the bass/mid driver's range, but showed a lack of relative output through the upper bass and lower midband.

The consequence is by no means unpleasant – indeed, the way the upper mid detail is projected is rather attractive. But if vocal intelligibility is enhanced, the down side is a loss of harmonic richness on bass guitars, a lack of warmth with cellos, and of sonority on grand pianos. But though these two standmounts show a similar

weakness here, it would be unwise to assume this is typical.

A couple of other surprises came out of this group. First, only two of the four featured twin terminals for bi-wiring, drawing attention to this still controversial issue, but perhaps indicating that the designers now feel free to make their own decisions rather than being manipulated by 'market forces'. It's also interesting to note that all these models – even the two-and-a-half-way Energy – had relatively high, easy-to-drive impedances, that rarely fell below six ohms. Ⓞ

TRY THEM WITH THESE

CD PLAYERS

EXPOSURE 2010 £800

Might be more distinguished, but this well-built machine's a solid performer and a welcome return to form.

MARANTZ CD6000 KI SIG £500

This impressive middle-of-the-market player is well built and also a very accomplished all-round sonic performer.

ROTEL RCD-1070 £495

A strong middle market performer that's well equipped and technically very sound, though could be more exciting.

AMPLIFIERS

ARCAM DIVA A85 £800

Original new circuitry and advanced topology delivers a more hard-hitting and engaging sound than earlier Arcams.

NAIM NAIT 5 £825

Punchy performer delivers much more than its 30-watt rating might suggest, and also permits future upgrading.

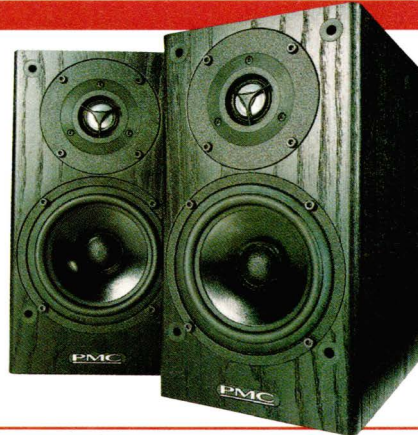
SUGDEN A21A £899

This 'classic revival' class A integrated solid state amp might have limited power but it also possesses exquisite resolution and presence.

STAR PERFORMER

PMC DB1

The smallest transmission line in the world, PMC's tiny little DB1 'miniature' might lack a little weight and authority, but it's beautifully balanced with an impressive freedom from boxiness and an altogether surprising degree of dynamic vigour. It's bags of fun for a small speaker – the only question is where best to place it in relation to room boundaries.



STEREO SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

	AVI	Energy	Monitor Audio	PMC
Make	AVI	Energy	Monitor Audio	PMC
Model	Pro-Nine-Plus	Connoisseur C-5	Gold Reference 10	DB1
Price	£799	£600	£800	£555
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Ease of drive	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Conclusions	Classy if costly close-to-wall standmount has fine dynamic vigour but upper mid is rather over-projected.	Good-looking two-and-a-half-way is marvellously even and neutral, if a bit laid back and dynamically restrained.	Lovely standmount is beautifully detailed with fine image focus, but also lean and lacking in warmth.	Lacks some weight and authority, but this fun miniature is beautifully balanced and free from boxiness.

HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Floorstanders need good floor coupling arrangements. A generous fore-and-aft footprint is sonically important, but decent lateral stability is handy too.
- ⊕ Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten.
- ⊕ Standmounts need the best stands to achieve best results.
- ⊕ Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Do take time and trouble experimenting, as even small changes of position can have a big effect.
- ⊕ Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.
- ⊕ Use decent speaker cable for optimum system performance.

call 0114 2852656 or e mail info@wilson-benesch.com for more information



"Perhaps some day, all CD players will be built as well and sound as fantastic as this. An ARTful choice!" Alan Sircom ^{HI-FI CHOICE}

"The very best of Wilson Benesch speaker magic in a pint pot: the Arcs are a truly stunning achievement"

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND & VISION

The advertisement features a large green textured speaker cabinet on the left with a circular logo that reads "arc" and "SERIAL NO. 10121010A CE". In the center, a smaller black speaker sits on a tall silver stand. To the right, a larger silver speaker with a visible driver is also on a silver stand. In the foreground, a silver CD player and amplifier stack are shown. The background is a solid purple color.

MICHELL GYRO SE

A SYMBOL OF PRECISION



Michell Engineering Ltd, 2 Theobald St, Borehamwood, Herts, WD6 4SE
Tel: 0208 953 0771 Web: www.michell-engineering.co.uk

THE SCIENCE OF

For years now it's been part of the hi-fi canon that your equipment will not perform to its best if it's inadequately supported. The basic rationale is intuitive enough – if the equipment is shaking at the whim of every little vibration in its surroundings it can't perform properly. Therefore we need to isolate the equipment from the environment in some way. To this end, there exist dozens of solutions in the form of racks and platforms that claim to provide 'optimal' support for equipment.

Is there actually any solid scientific basis for this? In one particular case the arguments are irrefutable. Turntables rely on tiny mechanical movements to 'read' the information in the vinyl and are notoriously microphonic (ie sensitive to vibration, in that they act like microphones). The very best turntables have good suspension built in, but for the most part the improvements in performance that can be obtained by isolating

the deck from incoming vibration are very significant. Some valve preamplifiers are also quite microphonic (although at different frequencies from turntables).

But a lot of modern equipment is frankly not microphonic. Whack a CD or DVD player while the system is playing and you won't hear much from the speakers, at least until you make the player skip. Modern FM tuners aren't microphonic either, nor are transistor amplifiers, cassette decks or MiniDisc decks.

On the other hand, the majority of equipment has casework made of metal, often not very thick and not at all well damped, which rings audibly if tapped. Indeed, simply making a loud noise near the equipment (a handclap, for instance) is enough to set up ringing which can last for a second or more. In fact, it's almost certain that in most cases there's next to no electrical microphony going on, simply 'sympathetic resonance' where the equipment

resonates mechanically as the music (and outside influences like passing cars) excite it. An extreme case would be leaning an acoustic guitar against one of your speakers.

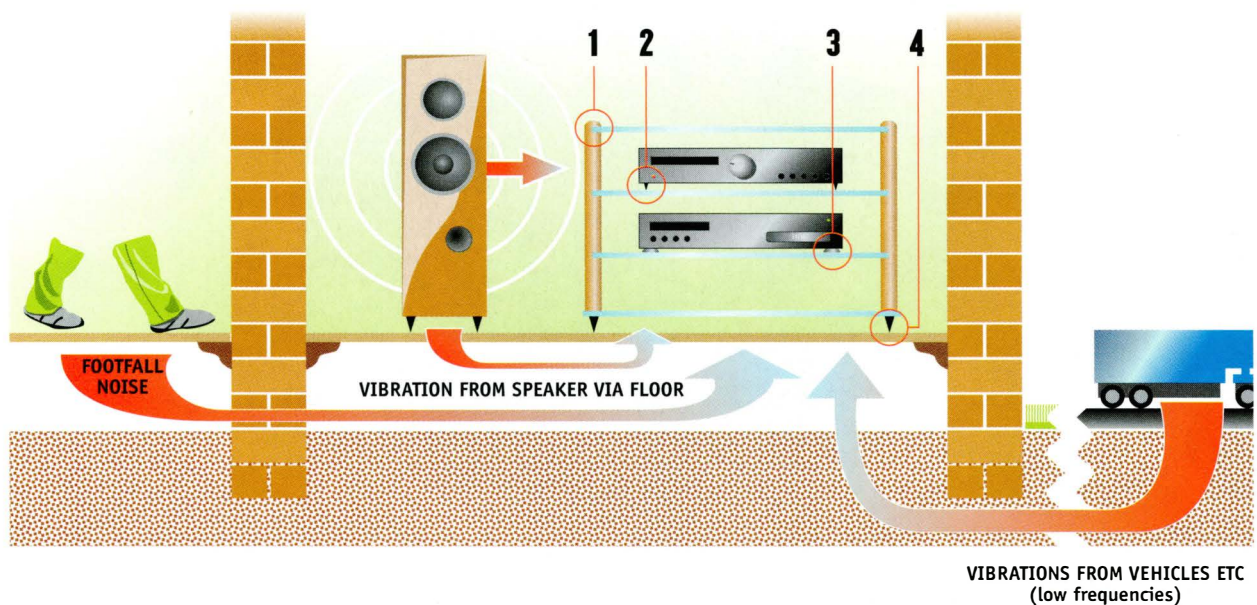
Now given that supports do certainly make a difference, what's the mechanism? There are various factors. First, the support itself will to some extent resonate with the music and add its own signature to the sound. Especially in the case of steel racks, this is probably the major contribution. Second, the support will to some extent alter the amount of floor-borne vibration getting to the equipment and possibly the airborne vibration (sound!) too. Third, the interaction between equipment and rack will alter the resonant characteristics of both.

That third part has an ironic consequence in that putting equipment on a resonant rack will actually improve the performance of the rack – that is, it will reduce its contribution to the coloration of the sound in the room.

BAD VIBRATIONS

Vibrations from have an effect on the sound of your system. They take two basic forms: airborne vibrations, particularly the sound emanating from your speakers, and floor-borne, which include

vibrations created by traffic. Turntables are the most overtly affected components, but vibrations can have an influence on other equipment too – particularly through 'sympathetic resonance'.



SUPPORTS

Most hi-fi aficionados know that dedicated equipment supports make a difference, but why? We explore the premise, then test four contrasting rack designs

“A lot of supports are based on a false premise – most equipment is not significantly microphonic and most racks do little to reduce vibration anyway.”

NECESSARY EVIL?

In this light, it almost looks as if racks are little better than a ‘necessary evil’. But the differences between them, and the fact that they often seem to make hi-fi sound better, warrant more detailed investigation. For a start, it’s important to realise that approaches to rack design vary a lot. Some use metal, some use glass, some use wood, some use spikes, some use mass – or any combination of those.

The material from which a rack is made obviously has a major influence on its resonant characteristics. Regular-shaped objects made of steel, for example, are much more resonant than irregular wooden items. Steel is generally stiff and transmits low-frequency vibration very efficiently from one end of a structure to the other, while wood and plastics are less stiff and more likely to dissipate vibration as heat.

The interface between the various parts of a rack is of great importance. An acoustically ‘dead’ shelf (imagine one made of granite, for

instance) can still resonate as a bulk item – the whole darn thing moves up and down – if it is supported by a slightly compliant (springy) vertical support. This may be at such a low frequency it hardly matters, but in many racks is at a few tens of Hz, which is a serious problem if there’s a turntable on the top, muddying bass like anything. There’s some evidence that CD players can suffer slightly worse jitter when vibrated in this manner too.

The interface can also have more or less effect in damping resonances within the shelf. Spikes have the least effect, incidentally – if you want to illustrate this, borrow a violin, guitar or ukulele and try plucking a string while pressing it to the fingerboard with the other hand. It rings for longest when held down tightly with a fingernail rather than softly with the ball of the finger. At the other extreme, squidgy feet made of Sorbothane and similar materials can be quite effective in damping shelf and equipment. Naturally, the positioning of feet/spikes of any kind is quite critical, with placement near (but not quite at) the centre of a panel being typically very effective in damping resonance.

Basically, a lot of equipment supports are based on a false premise. Most equipment is not significantly microphonic and most racks do little to reduce incoming vibration anyway. What they do, to a varying extent, is add some resonance and coloration to the system, which

is not necessarily unpleasant to hear. What they also do, in fairness, is keep the hi-fi neat and tidy in a way general-purpose furniture doesn’t, and at a cost mostly in keeping with any reasonably smart-looking furniture.

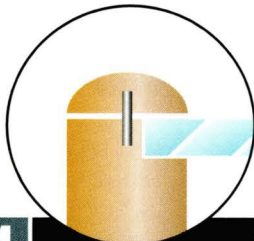
In other words, the majority of hi-fi racks are a perfectly fair purchase judged solely as furniture, and if you like the effect they have on the sound then so much the better. Some do actually offer real isolation, for example the Seismic Sink range as included in this test, and most have some kind of small effect on the floor-borne and airborne vibrations reaching the equipment. All the same, the usual caveat applies, because they really do have an effect on the sound – if possible, listen (at home is best) before buying – and certainly don’t discount tweaks like replacement equipment feet, which can make a big difference. ☺

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS TEST

Each rack was used to support the main equipment in the test system (Rotel CD player, EAR amps, Pink Triangle turntable), ensuring that at least three shelves were occupied in each case. Speakers were ATC SCM20, on stands but decoupled with compliant supports – the review room has a conventional suspended floor. Live music also happens in the review room, and it’s interesting to note that a couple of visiting musos spotted the difference in the room’s sound due to the presence of one of the racks!

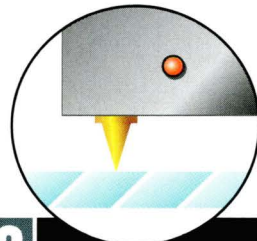
IT’S IN THE JOIN

How a support is made and its interface with both equipment and floor will effect the sound of your system, not just because of its isolating and damping properties but also because of the coloration it may add to the sound



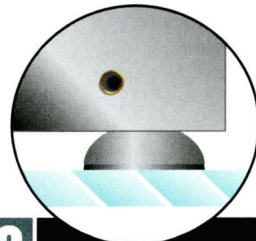
1

Materials in shelves and pillars, and the method of joining them, all affect resonance levels.



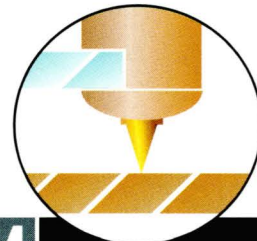
2

Spikes between equipment and shelf give minimum damping of resonances in both.



3

Squidgy feet give some damping of resonances – trouble is, we often like resonances!



4

Spiked feet pierce carpet and aid stability but they do transmit vibration through the floor.

£730 ☎ 01225 333360 🌐 www.quadraspire.com

QUADRASPIRE Q4 REF RACK

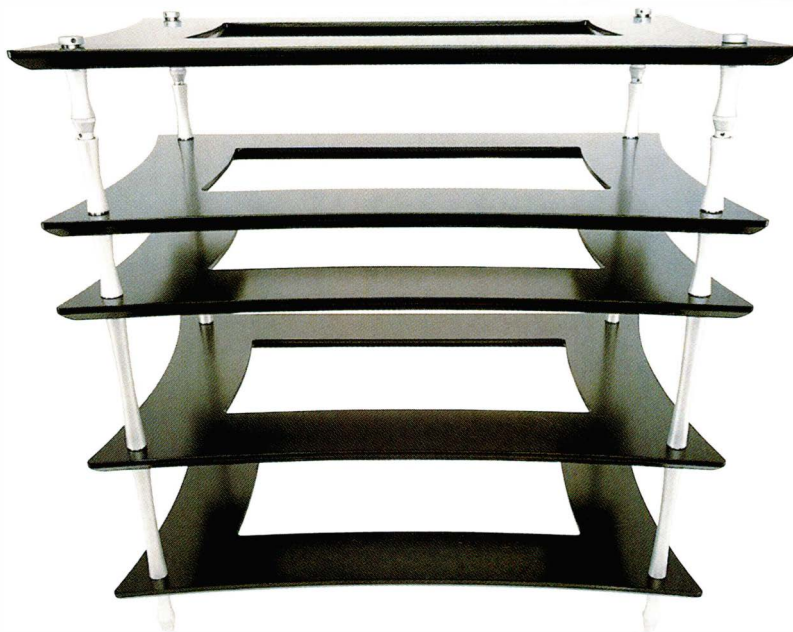
The style of this rack owes much to traditional Quadraspire products, but it has a few significant tweaks. Most obvious is the large hole in the middle of each shelf (just like fashion clothing, you pay more for less material!) which makes a big difference to the resonant characteristics. The shelves are MDF, painted with nice quality black paint, and the columns are of a 'special grade' of aluminium (black finish is £60 less than the silver).

The metal type and the waisted shape are intended to minimise resonance too, and these columns are additionally decoupled from the shelves. The system is modular and you screw it together, but at the interface between column and shelf a small aluminium 'decoupler' is inserted which prevents the sections above and below from clamping on to the shelf. Finally, the top shelf is decoupled further using spiked feet.

Unfortunately, all this decoupling is

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★☆
FEATURES ★★★★☆
BUILD ★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★☆

A smart piece of furniture which is rather expensive for what's on offer, and offers very little actual isolation.



only effective in a very limited kind of way and vibration is transmitted quite cheerfully throughout the stand. Intrinsically it's only moderately resonant but further decoupling would definitely be a good idea for a turntable – indeed, the wobble it shows at about 5Hz makes it arguably poorly suited to any turntable duty. For the rest it does a decent enough job of keeping the hi-fi off the floor and

doesn't contribute too much of its own character, just slightly warming up the sound and taking a little edge off the precision of sounds like piano and guitar – midrange sounds with a sharp attack. It's rather nice with voices and mellow instruments like cellos, but less successful with bright trumpets and synths. A smart and reasonably efficient product which does however seem very expensive for its attainments. Ⓞ

£988 ☎ 0800 373467 🌐 www.russandrews.com

RUSS ANDREWS TORLYTE RACK SYSTEM

Torlyte is a material exclusive to Russ Andrews, a remarkably light but rigid composite made from wood and fresh air. It's labour-intensive to produce so it's expensive, but low resonance is claimed to make it well suited to neutral equipment support.

As a rack, this is modular and indeed the upper shelves simply rest on the lower. Upright members are also made of Torlyte and rest, via Russ Andrews' Oak Cone Feet, on the socket heads of the screws fixing the shelf below to its respective uprights. This makes the whole assembly slightly delicate and rough handling could make it fall over. Care is also required with equipment that has a centre of gravity near a back corner (hence far from the supports).

It's clear from tapping around the structure that resonance is indeed low and using Oak Cone Feet between equipment and shelf helps damp it even further. And in general, the test system sounded lively but neutral with

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★☆
FEATURES ★★★★☆
BUILD ★★★★☆
VALUE ★★★★☆

Torlyte certainly has little sonic character of its own, but this design is not terribly practical and has almost no isolation from the floor.



this rack in place. There's none of the glare that can crop up with many metal-frame stands, but there is also a small addition of warmth. It's not unpleasant but is repeatedly audible with transient-rich instruments like piano, just slightly changing the timbre. A slightly microphonic valve preamp was noticeably tamed by the Torlyte,

which is useful. On the other hand, turntable duty is not recommended as there's next to no isolation from the floor and the structure encourages up-and-down resonances in the bass/low midrange, which can feed through. An attractive, if somewhat impractical, stand which will appeal principally to the serious hi-fi devotee. Ⓞ

£350 ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.soundstyle.net

SOUNDSTYLE ST95

Part of the Status range from Soundstyle, which includes AV racks and full-width hi-fi racks, the '95 is intended for midi-sized hi-fi. It's as wide as many full-width racks, but those enormously wide legs do look smart if your room isn't stuck for space.

The hollow steel frame is welded throughout, with threads underneath for adjustable spikes, and glass shelves sit on soft plastic pads. This somewhat damps the alarming levels of resonance in the bare frame, but even when fully loaded up it's not exactly the quietest – tap it with a fingernail and listen to a symphony. But it's certainly very strong, stable and practical. The frame can be silver or graphite, while shelves are opal, platinum or onyx shades (they're all well illustrated on the website).

Using this rack in the test involved some compromise in getting the full-width equipment to fit sideways, restricting access but giving reasonably comparable results. It's by far the friendliest here, keeping equipment

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆

Particularly nice looks, if you've got space for it, but makes a strong contribution to the sound which can become wearing.



where you expect it to be however hard you press buttons. On the sound side, however, it does little to dispel any preconceptions about steel, glass and 'glassy' sound. With any material it added its own character, not strongly at least but consistently, colouring voices, acoustic instruments and synths with midrange brightness which initially seems to add vim and vigour but

reduces sonic precision and, ultimately, listening pleasure. Once again it's not well suited to turntables, doing little or nothing to isolate the deck from the floor (actually exacerbating footfall in the test room), and the valve preamp showed some signs of slightly worsened microphony too. It's decent value and a sharp looker, but you can do better sonically even at this price. Ⓞ

£1,140 ☎ 020 8979 2155 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

TOWNSHEND SEISMIC SINK STAND

Building on the successful Seismic Sink (an air-bladder suspension platform), Townshend now offers a range of racks which support several components on a single airborne structure. Two bladders, one at the top and one at the bottom, share the load – this is a major change from earlier Seismic Stands which used only one bladder and were notoriously awkward to use, swinging just a little too freely for comfort. With two bladders the whole assembly feels much more secure and in addition is not accidentally 'grounded' if a component with an off-centre mains transformer, for example, is placed on one shelf. This one had five shelves but more or less can be supplied in various sizes, and indeed Townshend will make stands to order for particularly odd-size loads.

The basic idea of air suspension is sensible, if theoretically slightly short of the isolation that conventional springs can provide. However, the two bladders

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆

Isolation is not infinite but considerably better than most. However, this rack still contributes some of its own character.



here give stiff suspension and that, in combination with the close spacing between lower (grounded) and upper (suspended) members in the two load cells, places a limit on the amount of isolation provided. Also, the thick MDF shelves and hollow tubular vertical members are quite resonant, and it's arguable that the performance of this stand as a suspension component falls

short of the original Sink. Still, it does offer some isolation. It gave fair results under the turntable and with other sources added relatively little coloration – perhaps on a par with the Torlyte but of a different quality, a little 'quacky' on voices and just a touch boxy in the upper midrange. More practical than earlier Seismic incarnations, this seems to lag them on performance. Ⓞ

The world according to... **ATC**

ATC's profile among the general public may be low, but its stature in the industry is stellar, with an arm-long list of the audio blue chip on its client list. Not bad considering founder Billy Woodman only started it so he could hear jazz better...

For some people 'perfection' is a depressingly abstract concept. But my guess is Billy Woodman visualises it clearly. It's what he sees between the crosshairs of his company's aspirational gun sight. Maybe it's a target he can never hit, but as an exercise in concentration, precision and staying focused, it seems to do the trick.

It has allowed the Acoustic Transducer Company (ATC) to formulate one of the least modest mission statements in the history of audio, and get away with it. It reads thus: to build loudspeakers, drive units, complementary electronics (both passive and active) and custom installations that deliver nothing less than the very best sound reproduction that money can buy.

Although still a small specialist company operating out of a few unassuming low-rise buildings in the heart of the Cotswolds, ATC has a reputation big enough to

see from space. Clients include Sony, Pioneer, Chandos, Nimbus, Telarc, Pink Floyd, Peter Gabriel, the Sydney Opera House, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the BBC and over 1,000 recording studios world-wide. Which poses the question – who, then, is master of the studio monitoring universe, ATC or Luton-based PMC, profiled in *HFC 237*? Neither company really knows and, out of mutual respect, they're happy to leave it at that.

Little tit-bit here, though. That distinctive three-inch soft dome midrange unit that seems to be as much a signature of PMC's big monitors as ATC's? Billy invented it back in 1976. It was ATC's first 'clean sheet' product, the main

even dispersion, so that the reverberant sound field matches the on-axis sound, resulting in a flat response everywhere in the room. Which, in a nutshell, is ATC's take on sound reproduction. Seems simple. It isn't. But the benefits of getting it right have been massive for ATC, allowing it to exhibit the kind of sonic consistency and timbral matching across its range – nine stereo speaker pairs, four subs and three dedicated centre channels – that gels to stunning effect in multiple mix-and-match arrays in studios, home entertainment systems and custom installations alike.

It's easier to grasp the magnitude of ATC's achievement as operations director Bob Polley

“Although still a small specialist company operating out of the Cotswolds, ATC has a reputation big enough to see from space.”

reason he founded the company two years earlier. For reasons that will become apparent it's the defining product – the one that moved the game on and made ATC different. That PMC and others have copied it Billy accepts as a form of flattery. "But they haven't got it quite right," he says with a wry smile. "They're missing the point."

THE POINT

For ATC, the point of the soft dome midrange driver isn't merely to marry high sound pressure levels with low distortion across the 300Hz-3kHz band, though Billy claims no rival really gets close in this respect. It also has to produce exceptionally broad and

walks me round the part of the factory where the drive units – everything from the nuggety little five-incher of the tiny but weighty SCM7 to back-wrenchingly massive 15-inch PA drivers – are assembled. Polley, a mechanical engineer by profession, worked for Martin Audio for 13 years and was instrumental in introducing ATC to the PA business.

If ATC has a secret weapon, it's probably the way its drive units are engineered. Or rather, over-engineered. Bob explains: "Our coils are wound edgewise from specially milled copper wire, providing a higher density of conductor. Along with new adhesive technology and small coil-gap clearances, it allows



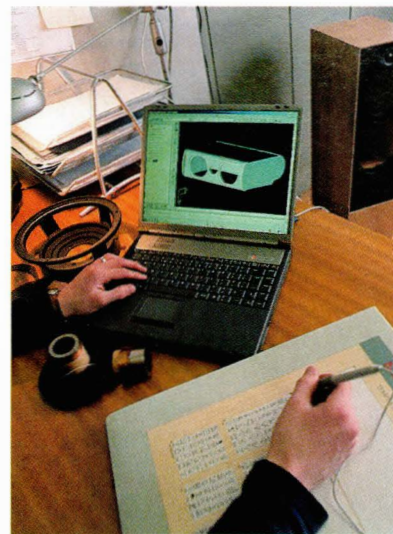
extremely high power handling and excellent reliability." The massive, high-power magnet systems have to be seen and lifted to be believed. Impressive hardly covers it.

In ATC's big active studio monitors, the drivers have high-flux Super Linear magnet assemblies that are said to eliminate distortion caused by eddy currents in the magnet pole piece and front plate. In most speakers this effect is masked by mechanical distortion. But in the uncompromising ATC bass drivers, its removal leads to greater linearity and low distortion. Each drive unit is powered by its own amplifier, optimised for its relevant bandwidth (with substantially

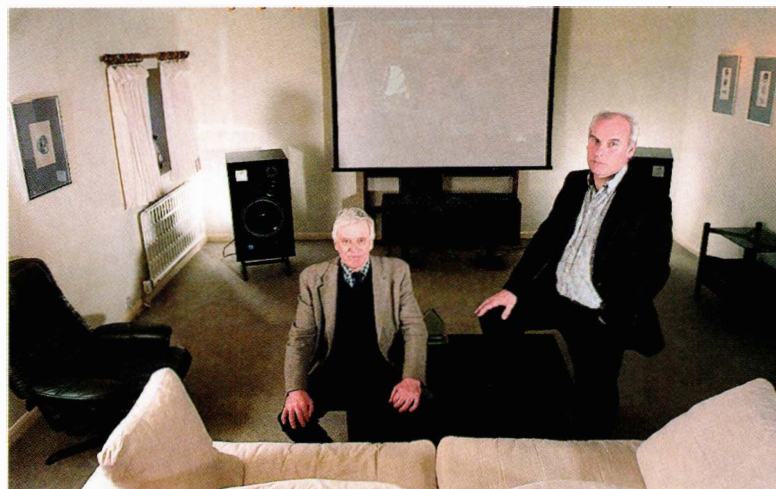
Current Key Products

SCM10A-2 ACTIVE MONITOR HFC 221
A classy blend of curved aluminium and gloss-lacquered MDF composite, the charcoal hued £1,269 ten-litre ATC is one potent and purposeful looking speaker system. It uses close-coupled high performance drivers: a 25mm soft dome tweeter and hand-built 125mm, high-gauss bass/mid driver, weighing in at a rugged 3.5 kg and with a cone excursion of over 20mm. And each sealed box has its own 250-watt power amp. Accurate, unexaggerated sound with agile and authoritative bass.

SIA2-150 INTEGRATED AMP HFC 228
This deeply understated £2,375 150-wattner combines bomb-proof build quality with huge real-world power and an effortlessly natural sound, which is why it received a gong in our 2002-2003 Awards. Maybe not the most exciting amp ever made but that isn't ATC's style – you'd be hard pushed to find an easier amp to live with.



Below: Acoustic Transducer Company founder Billy Woodman (left) and operations director Bob Polley show off the ATC listening room in the heart of the Cotswolds.



Class A midrange and high frequency amplification), delivering balanced maximum sound pressure levels along with huge headroom.

FUNCTION OVER FORM

ATC's speakers, for the most part, look fiercely functional – indeed, the company proudly wears its 'pro sector' sensibilities on its sleeve, despite these days selling around half its output to the domestic market. Truth is, ATC doesn't really see eye-to-eye with the tweaky-freaky, 'golden-eared' members of the audiophile community and



never has. Although quietly spoken, Australian born and raised Billy Woodman, like many of his countrymen, has a robust disregard for bullshit and – as far as sound reproduction systems go – that means pretty much anything that doesn't survive the rigor of his vertiginous engineering expectations.

Billy trained in pure engineering before moving on to acoustics and worked for Goodmans before setting up ATC in 1974. "I started ATC so I could listen to jazz properly," quips Woodman, an accomplished pianist himself and

lifelong jazz, as we do just that in ATC's plush, 5.1 channel listening room. He felt driven to do something about it. "The best hi-fi loudspeakers had reasonable sound quality but limited dynamic range, while studio monitors had plenty of dynamic range but relatively poor sound quality.

"That was one thing, to marry real hi-fi with the near-dynamic range of big, horn-loaded monitors. But even more important than that is the ability to precisely recreate spatial information in five or more channels." That's the bit that doesn't sound all that particularly

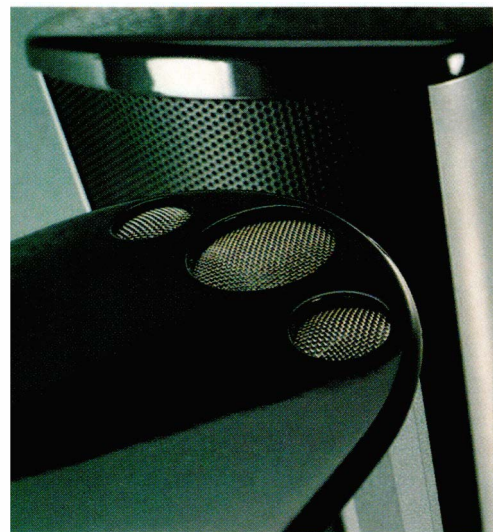
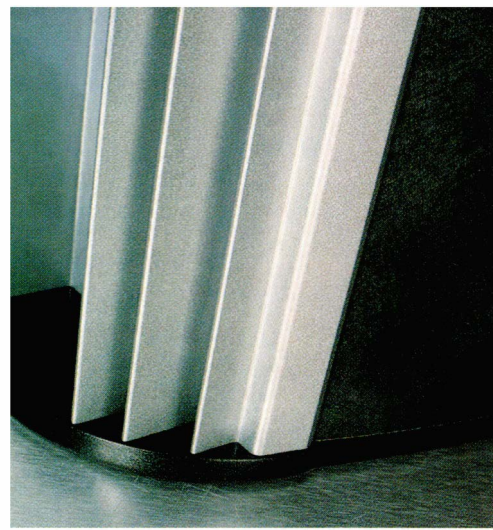
earth shattering. It is, though.

Believe me.  ATC 01285 760 561
 www.atc.gb.net

Turn over for a review of ATC's new Active 20 loudspeaker.

Past Glories

S50 (1978)
 ATC's first complete speaker system, the 50-litre S50 was a big bass-reflex design using a one-inch soft dome tweeter, three-inch soft dome midrange and a nine-inch woofer (the infinite baffle S85, with a pair of nine-inch bass units, launched at the same time). The crossover allowed for true active tri-amping and studios lapped it up.



Heavyweight and over-specced, the Active 20 does nothing by halves - check out the heatsinking that takes up the entire back of each speaker.



Active life

EXCLUSIVE ATC has transformed its SCM20 into the Active 20, a makeover worthy of Changing Rooms, but has it transformed the sound?

Something strange and powerful has invaded the styling department at ATC's Stroud-based HQ. Smartly veneered traditional cabinets are slowly being usurped by rugged, anthracite grey creations with metal grilles and silver fins. This industrial look first took form in the heavyweight SCM70A, a floorstanding brute of a design that takes no prisoners. Then it went to the bottom of the range and delivered the Active 10. Now we have the Active 20 – there may not be much of a future for veneers in that part of Gloucestershire.

One reason for this 'look' is the expanse of aluminium that's required to dissipate the heat produced by the power amps that form the active element in this speaker. A 250-watt monoblock powers the bass/mid driver while a 50-watt amp controls the high frequency unit. As these amps operate in Class A for up to two thirds output the speakers produce enough heat to keep the listening room cosy, even while idle, hence the ventilating ports atop each cabinet.

The drive units consist of a high-performance 25mm soft-dome tweeter which has a double magnet construction, and is said to produce a linear frequency response to well beyond 25kHz. Bass and midrange are catered for with a hand-built 150mm bass/mid drive unit. Unusually this features a 75mm midrange soft dome, mechanically coupled to a 150mm bass cone that's coated with a viscous damping material in order to minimise coloration. The midrange element looks much like a dust cap, but rather than providing a stiffening effect at the point where the coil drives the cone, as is often the case, this is a soft dome that reproduces higher frequencies than the cone as a whole can manage.

A large 177mm, high-flux magnet is used to control a short, edge-wound copper voice coil, operating in a close-tolerance long magnetic gap for high power handling. Meanwhile, a fourth order electronic crossover filters the signal prior to amplification, allowing maximum driver control.

VERDICT

ATC Active 20 loudspeaker
£2,538 (per pair)

▲ Superb control and resolution at the price, bass that most amp/speaker combinations can only dream about and timing that's right on the money.

▼ Distinctive styling may not be to all tastes, balanced connection will not suit all preamps.

CONCLUSION

A very solid and reliable loudspeaker system that will provide hours of highly engaging musical entertainment, suited to air guitarists and air baton twirlers alike.

KEY FEATURES

● Bass/mid driver: 150mm cone/dome

● Tweeter: 25mm soft dome

● Electronic fourth order crossover

● Bass/mid amplification: 250W

● Treble amplification: 50W

● Size (WxHxD): 27x44.8x31cm

● Weight: 30kg

● Bandwidth: (-6dB) 60Hz – 20kHz

All this power might seem a bit like overkill but in the pro world, where ATC does a lot of its business, you need a healthy amount of over specification to ensure a product's longevity. It's a bit like a V8 engine – not many cars require the sort of power available from them but the fact that they are cruising 99 per cent of the time means they should go on forever.

ATC's professional heritage is not only clear in the Active 20's appearance, you can hear it too. These speakers have much of the studio monitor in their sound. It's apparent in many ways but total unflappability is the key. Whatever sort of music you play and whatever volume level you play it at there's a sense of ease to the reproduction. And while high-level playback is very much on the menu this is not the sort of speaker that only sounds good when it's loud. ATC seems to have gone to some lengths to ensure that the Active 20s work equally well at 'normal' domestic levels.

PERFORMANCE

The heavyweight cabinets pay off with a sound that seems to be devoid of boxiness – it probably still sounds like a box compared to an electrostatic loudspeaker, but that's more down to the nature of the shape rather than its resonant character. Resonance is in fact extremely well controlled, which

BOX BUILDING

ATC takes cabinet construction seriously. Underneath all the 20's curves is a trapezoid box made of 18mm MDF, the only visible surface of which being the front baffle to which the drivers are attached, and even that's covered by a steel mesh grille. The sides that show are solid curved MDF with a composite coating while the top and the bottom are also solid but finished in a high-gloss paint finish. The latter is applied, we're informed, by the same company that finishes Jaguar racing cars. The two front pillars are aluminium extrusions which match the heat sinking that takes up the entire back of each speaker. At 30kg it's not a speaker to toy with!

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



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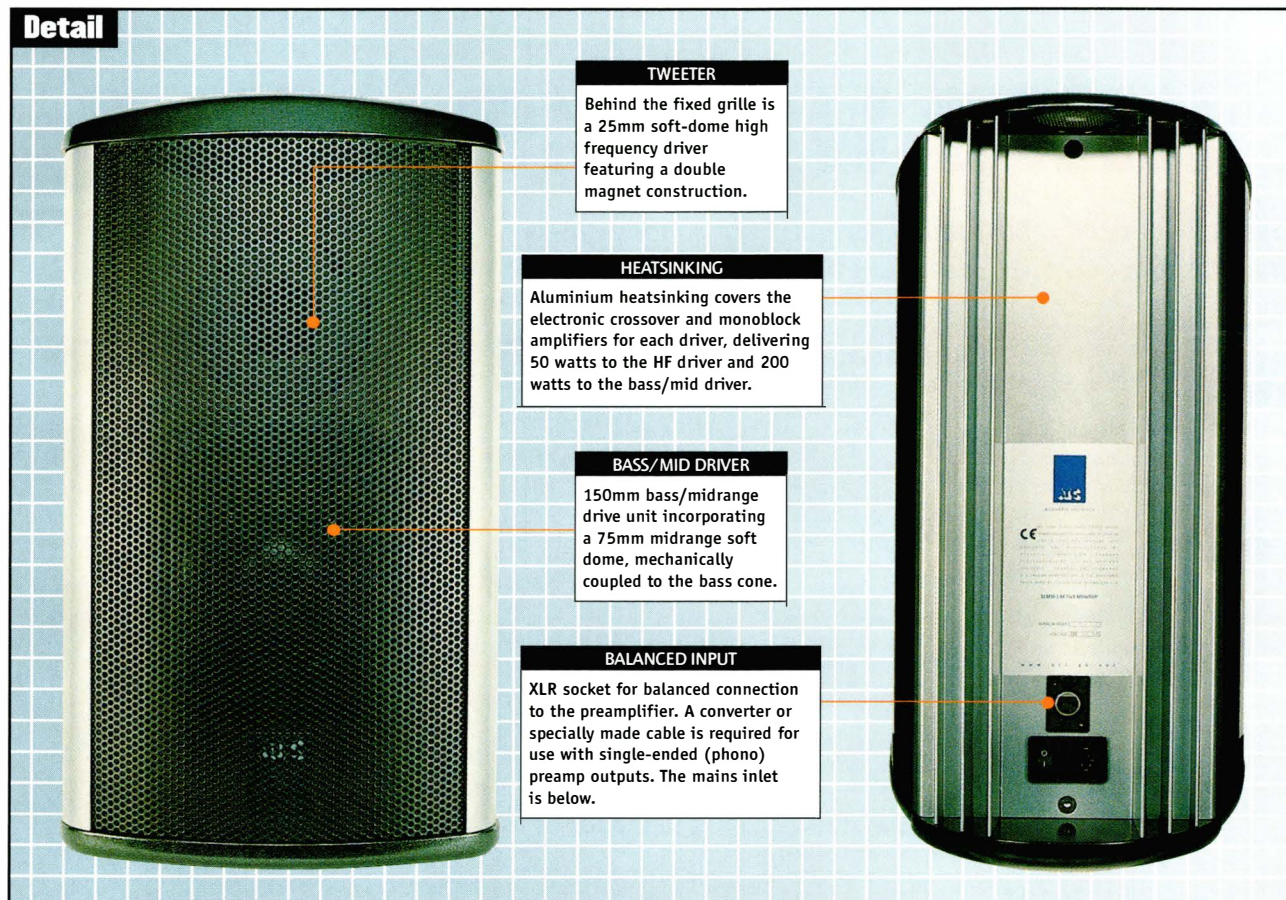
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“There’s no bass like active bass – control and power are awesome despite the speaker’s relatively diminutive dimensions.”

allows full size imagery when the right signal comes along.

The signal is of course key – some speakers produce a big sound because their panels are joining in, but these produce a big sound if it’s on the recording rather than if the recording contains a frequency that excites the box. The word is control. Not a hard-edged, aggressive control either, just a natural let-the-signal-reveal-itself sort of control.

The Active 20 is in fact remarkably smooth and relaxed when the material sounds that way. This is down to smooth but extended high frequencies and an open and revealing midrange that, while not the most transparent ever, lets an awful lot of detail through. You can hear right into the mix, whether it be Steely Dan’s *Royal Scam* or Rage Against The Machine’s *Know Your Enemy*. There’s also plenty of low-level resolution available, which comes in handy to sort out the lyrics of fast-talking rappers and the string tone of antique violins.

The most surprising aspect of the Active 20’s performance is the bass. The degree to which bass character changes with recordings is uncanny – you get a sense with plenty of discs that the speaker is very dry, then you put something else on and the sofa starts to resonate. The specs suggest they roll off at a fairly high 60Hz but that must be an anechoic measurement because in-room it feels more like 40Hz (easily). They go remarkably low for such relatively compact boxes.

This is the active factor in all its glory. There’s no bass like active bass – control and power are awesome despite the speaker’s diminutive dimensions. It’s a quality that craves indulgence, encouraging you to seek out the music in your collection that really digs down. In my experience that tends to be the newer material, things like Missy Elliott, Eminem and live recordings like Mari Boine’s *Eallin*. Old school tunes do bass too but rarely with the same energy.

There are of course exceptions, such as Jeff Beck’s live album with Jan Hammer and the *Koyaanisqatsi* soundtrack.

And inevitably some recordings sound sweeter than others. Frank Zappa’s *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life*, for instance, sounds harder than one might like. But there’s no suggestion that the speaker encourages an aggressive balance, just that it plays it like it is.

There are same-price alternatives with greater transparency but they aren’t active, so power amplification has to be factored in. At a guess you’d have to set aside at least £1,500 for that side of the equation, which doesn’t leave enough for a more transparent speaker – a more coloured one for sure, but what do you want to hear, the music or the speaker?

☎ ATC 01285 760561

🌐 www.atc.gb.net

ALSO CONSIDER

B&W SIGNATURE 80S £2,250
Superb transparency, if not the bass control and power on offer with actives.

MERIDIAN M33 £1,560
An active design in a compact enclosure that offers impressive dynamic vigour.

LINN KATAN AKTIV/LK140 £2,325
Very compact active design with free-standing amplifiers – sweet, clean and detailed.

Pump up the bass

This powerful and robust-sounding amp from London-based manufacturer ECS gives great bass but lacks a little detail

No, you haven't missed something – ECS is indeed a new company on the hi-fi scene. Not some perilously constituted start-up, though, since it has been making high quality printed circuit boards for manufacturers of all kinds of electronic equipment for several years. Clearly the temptation was just too much for the audiophile proprietors...

The basic recipe is simple. For a conventional one-volt input you get 180 watts of audio (into the usual eight ohms – more into lower impedances) per channel. There's no volume control, nothing indeed except a power switch on the front panel. But at the rear, there is the useful option of switching between unbalanced and balanced inputs, the latter connected via good quality transformers for good noise rejection.

Appropriately, connectors are of very high quality, especially the genuine WBT output terminals, two pairs of which per channel should be enough for any kind of multi-wired set-up one could imagine. General construction is also very good, the amp being built on a thick and sturdy metal baseplate with nicely finished heatsinks and a close-fitting lid. Inside, things are dominated by the enormous mains transformer, rated at 1.5KVA and clearly unafraid of awkward loads. It's assisted by some similarly

TECHNOLOGY

Like most amps, the EA-2 operates in 'push-pull' mode, one transistor pushing current one way and another pulling it the other way, with low 'standing current' (Class AB). This is efficient and makes for particularly low standby power. The trouble is that achieving a smooth handover from one transistor to the other is terribly hard to achieve – not impossible, as noted designer Doug Self has demonstrated in some detail in print, but hard.

The EA-2 doesn't quite crack that nut and the result is 'crossover distortion'. Because it is most noticeable at lowish levels it has a particularly evil effect on fine detail. Here, as very often, its level depends quite strongly on the temperature of the output transistors – clear objective evidence for 'warming up'.

VERDICT

**ECS EA-2
power amplifier
£3,995**

▲ Plenty of power on offer, making for strong, melodious but also very rhythmic bass, all from a very neat package.

▼ Detail and stereo imaging are somewhat behind the leaders of the pack at this price level.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
An amp with much to recommend it, and some will love its powerful style of music making, but it doesn't offer the last word in finesse.

KEY FEATURES

● Output power 180W/channel (8ohm)

● Balanced/unbalanced inputs

● Massive power supply – high peak current

● Two pairs of output sockets

● No cooling fan



chunky reservoir capacitors, from which the output current flows via two pairs of channel of fast bipolar transistors.

Audio circuitry has been kept simple, with a single fast op-amp per channel operating with discrete devices. There are no thumps on switch-on or off, the only slightly annoying feature being the inrush current protector which doesn't reset for some minutes after switch-off – so if you switch off by accident and switch on again a few moments later you'll almost certainly blow the plug fuse. Speaking of which, ECS supplies as standard a very nice handmade mains cable, which was used for this test.

PERFORMANCE

An amplifier with this much power on offer clearly expects to get its teeth into some power-hungry speakers, of which ATC's SCM20s are a fine example. There's no question it can drive some steam out of them too. Starting things off with some Michael Jackson (say what you like, his recordings are invariably beautifully done on the technical side), it

produced some seriously backside-kicking bass and a generally very danceable sound. But with a familiar opera recording things started to look less rosy. There was a distinct lack of detail, and stereo image depth was conspicuous by its absence. The basic tonality of the recording was absolutely fine, with particularly deep and melodious bass, but a good deal of the subtlety which certainly exists on the disc was lacking.

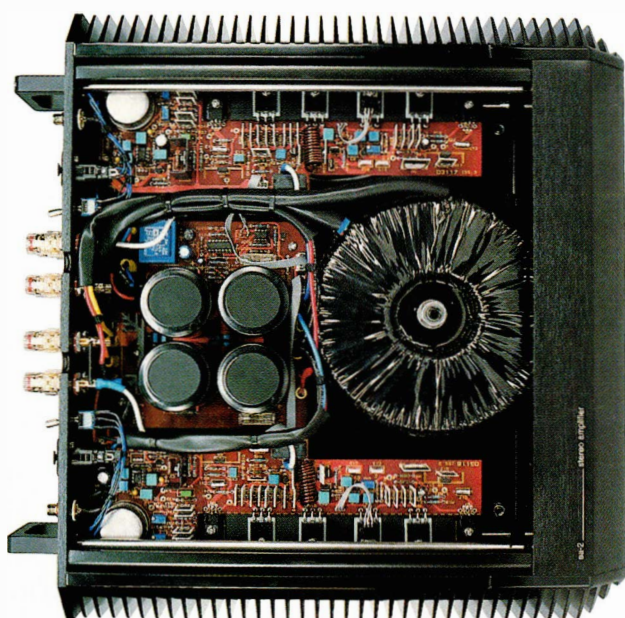
Those two recordings seemed in the end to represent extremes of the EA-2's performance. With various jazz recordings and small ensembles like the Penguin Cafe Orchestra the lack of detail was less distressing, though still noticeable, while the bass drive and weight were appreciated. Sometimes the treble seems a little dry and lacking sparkle, though on the whole it is well extended.

Granted that not all recordings possess much of it, but detail is very much one of the things that marks out good hi-fi – if you want to hear right into a recording to make out tricky words or follow a particular instrumental line, for instance,



“The amp produced some seriously backside-kicking bass and a generally very danceable sound.”

The EA-2's internals are dominated by a massive toroidal transformer (right-centre) and four large reservoir capacitors.



an amplifier like this can be quite obstructive. In this case, taken in isolation, the sound does not seem obviously mangled or veiled, but comparison with other kit (some of it, in truth, really very modest) soon shows just what this ECS is missing. As for image depth, there is at best only a little to be had, and this is perhaps the most immediately obvious failing.

To find out what's amiss, we parked the EA-2 on the lab bench and ran a few tests. Frequency response from the unbalanced inputs is a little rolled off (1dB at 20kHz – just audible), but surely more to the point there is considerably more distortion than a well-behaved amp in 2003 should show. Even at low levels and frequencies, crossover-type spikes show up, their level quite high, and at higher frequencies and output powers the distortion residual contains a large number of harmonics. There's not enough distortion for obvious harshness but the levels correlate well with the lack of detail noted.

ECS has made a brave launch with an

amp of this kind, at this price. All the same, and allowing its clear achievements in the lower octaves, it seems it could do with some further refinement. It's an attractive slimline package and the spec seems right for the money and market, but if it's to prosper in a world where high-power amplifiers are less than rare it needs to offer a broader reach of achievements. **Ⓢ**

📞 ECS 020 8932 7995

🌐 www.ecsamplifiers.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

KRELL KAV-3001L INTEGRATED £3,700

Krell is one of the traditional 'names to watch' for high power amps, and this integrated model is perhaps the firm's best value yet.

CHORD SPM1200C £4,200

A massive 330 watts, delivered with ease and also considerable subtlety.

BORDER PATROL 300B SE £4,000

The antithesis of the ECS, with 20W output. Try it though – single-ended valves have unique charm.

BRYSTON 4B-SST £2,300

Cheap(er) but a definite contender if it's power with control and detail that you're after.



“The CD1R is not a dramatic or instantly impressive sounding CD player. It is a stealthy, refined machine that bit by bit inveigles its way into your musical subconscious and pulls you in.”

The CD1R's front panel buttons and digital display may look old school, but its performance is state of the art.



Running the Gamut

EXCLUSIVE Danish amplifier specialist Gamut has been refining its well-received CD1 CD player, in the process creating one of the best disc spinners you can buy

The promotional guff on low-key Danish brand Gamut's CD1R doesn't go into a great deal of technical depth. In fact, the only angle it plays on is to suggest that the Crystal CS 4390 is a pretty fine digital-to-analogue converter (DAC). This key component, Gamut wishes to point out, achieves extraordinarily low jitter and has what is described as "a wonderful, fluid and non mechanical midrange and treble". Happily, the player as a whole tends to bear this out.

Isolation from vibration is something that many brands appreciate can be beneficial to all manner of components, but most designers leave it to equipment supports and accessories to sort out. Gamut (formerly Sirius, having sold the name to an American technology company) has gone to some lengths to minimise the influence of resonance by mounting both the disc drive and all major circuit boards on rubber insulation.

The Crystal CS4390 is a 128x oversampling DAC with a balanced output that goes through a BB2134 integrated circuit analogue filter in a

balanced path to the XLR connector-equipped balanced output. A more straightforward, albeit slightly more filtered, signal path is used for the RCA connector-equipped, single-ended output. Gamut recommends the balanced output for anyone that can use it, and as the ATC SCA2 preamp used for part of the review has the facility we were able to try both. The difference between the two is not subtle and to our ears the higher energy of the single-ended connection was preferable, but as the cables were different this was not the most scientific of comparisons.

The fully floating digital output is also balanced and can be linked to external components via the BNC socket on the rear panel. This connector is used because it offers an optimal 75-ohm impedance which ensures the integrity of the signal arriving at the DAC, processor or recorder. The only drawback is that only high-end DACs have BNC inputs and digital recorders with the connector are almost unheard of in domestic audio.

The player has two compact mains transformers, one supplies the disc drive,

VERDICT

**Gamut CD1R
CD player**
£2,350

➤ Natural, precise and impressively 3D sound that marries precision with emotional communication in a way rarely found with digital electronics.

➤ Poorly designed remote and front panel buttons, and the BNC coaxial digital output can be a pain. The player's supply and distribution are limited.

CONCLUSION

At the price the Gamut represents one of, if not the best option in the CD player stakes. Don't expect to be blown away but don't be surprised if time starts to move faster when you're listening!

KEY FEATURES

- Crystal 24-bit, 128x oversampling DAC
- Balanced analogue outputs
- Single-ended analogue outputs
- Alternative colour options for front panel and inset
- Remote control
- Size (WxHxD): 40.8x11.2x43.1cm

WHO'S GAMUT?

Gamut is a the hi-fi wing of pro audio brand Ampspeaker. This company makes full-on active loudspeaker installations that make even silly money hi-fi speakers look like toys. Its first installation was for the PUK recording studios in Denmark, the place where George Michael's *Faith* and Elton John's *Sleeping With The Past* were made. The four-way speaker system has 10kW (10,000 watts) and what can only be described as the mother of all bass drivers. Size is not specified but they are at least a metre in diameter!

The original AmpSpeaker system was developed by Ole Lund Christensen of SLT and Poul Ladegaard of Brüel & Kjær. Gamut is run by the former and this background informs the amplifiers and source components in its small but muscular range.

the other is for the DAC board. It has also, although hardly uniquely, identified time domain resolution as the key to accurate audio reproduction. It is suggested that frequency domain and square wave analysis will never give rise to great digital electronics, but goes no further than to suggest that the ear is the finest piece of testing equipment in its explanation of how Gamut designed its own digital electronics. Still, the proof is in the hearing and in this respect the CD1R makes its point.

The 'R' suffix indicates a change of power supply for both disc drive and digital control board. Owners of CD1s can have this fitted by their dealer though a price has not yet been set.

PERFORMANCE

The CD1R is not a dramatic or instantly impressive sounding CD player. It is a stealthy, refined machine that bit by bit inveigles its way into your musical subconscious and pulls you in. That sounds rather sinister, but it's not meant to. It is in fact an addictive and engrossing player that makes you want to keep listening till way after bedtime.

In high fidelity terms its strengths are many. Timing is excellent – there's no undue emphasis on leading edges, no



OUTPUTS

CH 2

CH 3

CH 5

PRO

COPLAND

Copland Audio Products:

Scandinavian Cool.

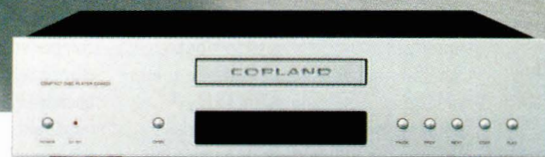
PREV

NEXT

ST

CVA 306

POWER



CDA822 - High resolution CD player



CTA305 - High Performance valve preamplifier



CTA520 - Power amplifier (stereo or mono)



CVA306 - Multi Channel Valve preamplifier



CVA535 - 5 channel Audio Video amplifier

Copland's design team believes that its greatest challenge is to use a scientific approach to create a product which conveys art. Although music has its basis in mathematics, its *raison d'etre* is to communicate emotion.. Soul. Spirit.

To achieve this end, Copland has chosen to blend the best of proven technologies - the valve - with the most sophisticated of modern methodologies. Because of this, you will find a compact disc player in a range which also reverses the vinyl LP. You will find stereo playback, which has served pure music for a half-century, alongside multi-channel amplification, designed to recreate the cinematic event in the home.

All of this reaches you, the music lover and cineaste, through components which reflect the most striking of Scandinavian virtues: minimalism, simplicity, clarity.



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overeager bite, but beats are infectious as are the more subtle rhythms of jazz and classical material. EST's *The Message* is reproduced with an easy but taut gait, the player letting you know precisely when the double bass is plucked but doing so in a natural, relaxed way that leaves time to produce the harmonic richness of the instrument.

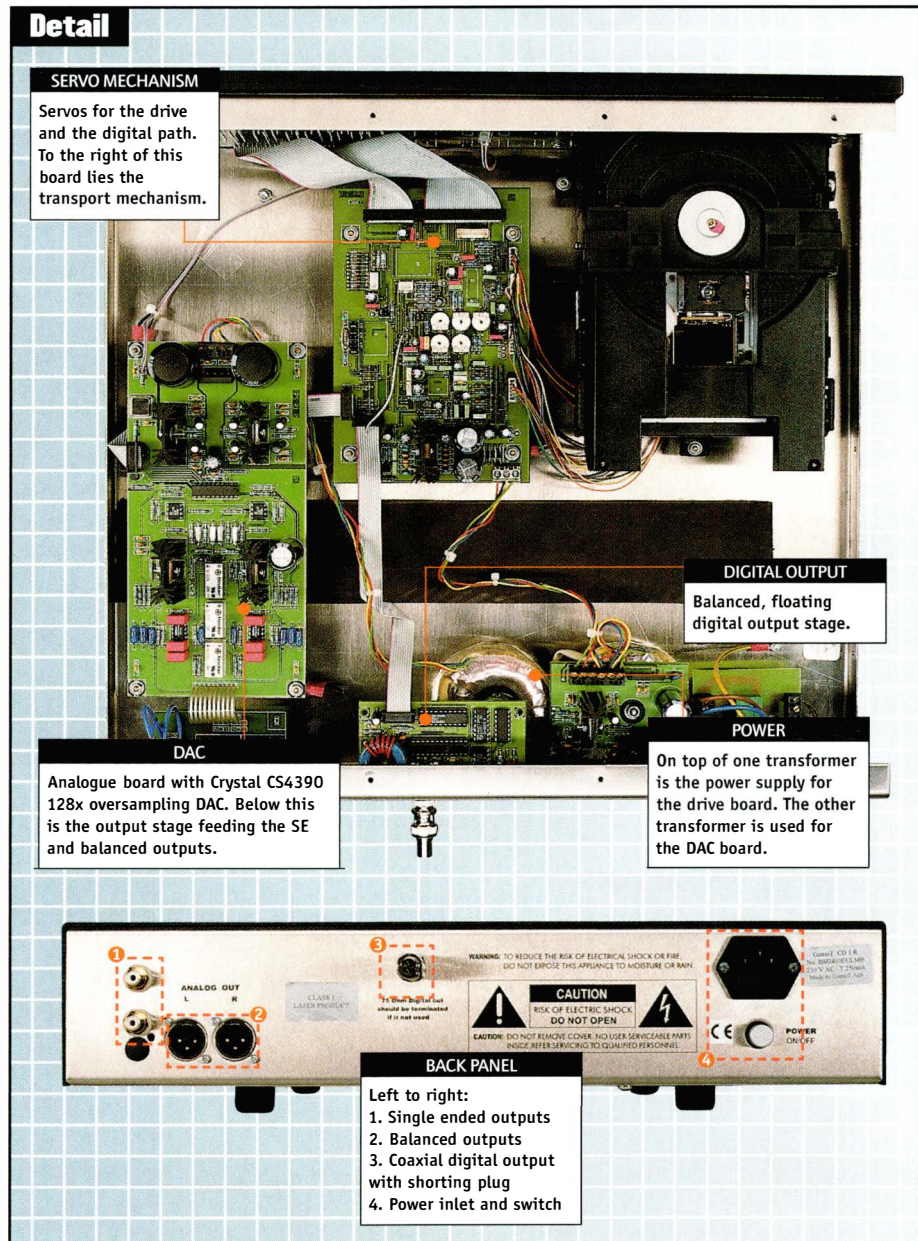
Imaging is also particularly strong. This is aided in no small way by the tremendous sense of focus to the CD1R's sound – instruments and voices are reproduced in a tactile, three-dimensional fashion that quite literally places them in the room if the amp and speakers are up to the job. Low frequencies are handled with no little aplomb as well – at first they seem a touch dry, though there's no shortage of depth. Put on something truly heavyweight such as Eryka Badu's *Baduizm* however, and you realise that any more bass energy would be overpowering. The word is tight, but that doesn't mean that texture and shape are undermined. Far from it – we succeeded in playing lots of stuff that many machines render disturbingly OTT, Terry Callier's *Lazarus* being a good example.

Tori Amos served to reinforce the sense of precision without edginess that the Gamut can produce with the right recording. Her voice on *Pretty Good Year (Under The Pink)* is blown up by reverb and other FX but is intrinsically precise, as is the great piano playing that accompanies it. And it's the quality of music that really shines through, the spark of emotional contact which music serves to ignite that is truly alive.


It deals with more challenging material such as the Gaudeamus choral SACD (playing the CD layer, of course) with equal ease, reproducing the breadth of voices in the context of a deep, naturally reverberant soundfield. An SACD player has an advantage with this disc of course, and there are a few that will equal the Gamut, but if they play ordinary CDs this well we'd be surprised.

Bringing the ATC Active 20 speakers, reviewed elsewhere this month, into the fray only served to increase respect for the Gamut. They reveal the variety in recording styles that this extremely transparent player reproduces with ease. The more obscure lyrics on Eminem's *Marshall Mathers LP (on CD)* are at last brought to the fore, like "I hope the weed'll outweigh these drinks" for instance, but most fans will probably never have heard it.

The Gamut CD1R doesn't have the muscularity of a big Wadia or the precision of a top Meridian, but it creates



“Put on something truly heavyweight such as Eryka Badu’s *Baduizm* however, and you realise that any more bass energy would be overpowering.”

a degree of presence and realism that’s impossible to ignore. In fact, the opposite is true – you’ll be glued to your system for as long as you’ve got discs to play and the energy to play them. If you want a highly resolved, balanced and yet musically engaging player, this is hard to beat. 

Audio Reference 01252 702705
www.gamutaudio.com

ALSO CONSIDER

NAIM CDX2 £2,650

All Naim’s traditional attention-grabbing attributes plus a healthy dose of poise.

WADIA 301 £3,650

Impressive resolution plus good quality volume control for direct injection to a power amp.

CLASSÉ CDP-10 £1,599

A very fluid and natural player that gets close to the mark at a more friendly asking price.

The third dimension

EXCLUSIVE We loved the hefty TD10. We adored the massive TD12. Now the more compact TD8 floorstander comes under scrutiny – but does it sound as cute as it looks?

Although this isn't, in reality, a small loudspeaker, it somehow manages to look like one, and is exceedingly cute when sat beside its bigger TD10 and TD12 Dimension series brethren.

Hi-Fi Choice reviewed both of the larger Dimensions some time ago – see *HFC* 215 and 225 – yet this smaller model, which arrived later on the scene, has until now been overlooked (bar an appearance in a system test in *HFC* 232). Which is a pity, as it's the most lounge-friendly of the three, and retains nearly all the features of the larger models. Indeed, the only real difference lies in the size of the main driver and the enclosure that loads it.

As the name suggests, here you get a 200mm (eight-inch) main driver and a £4,000/pair price tag (against £5,000 and £6,500 for the larger models). The TD8 is essentially a two-way design, but elaborated by an additional super-tweeter operating close to (and beyond) the limits of human hearing.

The enclosure has stylish Art Deco overtones, combining an unusual mixture of real wood, polished stainless steel and black velvet. The box is made up from thick birch ply covered in a top quality cherry real wood veneer. The tilted top and base, and strong front-to-rear tapering will help avoid the standing waves created between parallel faces.

At the heart of this speaker is one of Tannoy's famous dual-concentric main drivers, combining a conventional bass/mid cone with a horn-loaded tweeter that fires through the centre of the main cone, on a single substantial cast chassis. The bass/mid cone is paper, while its surround is a real 1950s throwback, using impregnated cloth to avoid the energy storage effects of rubber. The 'tulip waveguide' horn tweeter has a nominal 90-degree radiating angle.

The terminal block is equally unusual, with five chunky WBT socket/binder terminals arranged in a circle. Four provide bi-wire/-amp connection, while the fifth earths the main driver frame

VERDICT

Tannoy Dimension TD8 loudspeaker
£4,000 (per pair)

▲ Splendid all-rounder with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration. Unusually stylish yet also compact and well suited to British rooms.

▼ Could be smoother and more transparent perhaps, and the bass might be more even too, but complaints are very minor.

CONCLUSION

This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration.

KEY FEATURES

► Size (WxHxD): 30.5x85.5x30cm

► Recommended amp power: 40-160W RMS

► Weight: 25kg

► Two-way design with additional 25mm super-tweeter

► Bass/mid driver: 200mm paper pulp cone with a twin roll impregnated fabric surround

► Tweeter: 25mm horn-loaded

► Tilted top and base helps avoid standing waves

► 200mm dual-concentric main driver with conventional bass/mid cone and horn-loaded tweeter.

► Time aligned super-tweeter only comes in at 12kHz

back to the amplifier ground. Tannoy sources its own Reference five-conductor cable specifically for the Dimension speakers sonically. The crossover is at a relatively low 1.1kHz here, and uses specific components made to non-standard values. It's also rather simpler than that used in the TD10 and 12.

The super-tweeter, which only comes in at 12kHz, looks like a regular 25mm dome tweeter, but is mounted in a solid aluminium billet, set back on the sloping top surface of the enclosure to time align with the recessed horn tweeter.

PERFORMANCE

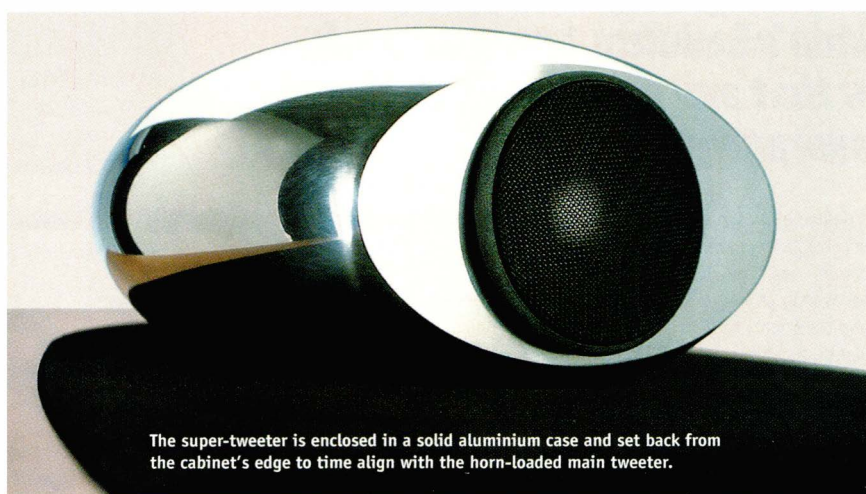
While it's true that the TD8 lacks a little of the warmth and fullness of the TD12, and ultimately some headroom reserve too (though it's still ample), it's arguably a better balanced speaker overall, thanks to its more pronounced midrange. Here at least, it's certainly closer to the market norm than its rather more laid back big brother, with the bonus of a worthwhile advantage in voice intelligibility.

This isn't the smoothest sounding speaker around, but it is a remarkably impressive all-round performer. Best sited well clear of walls, the solidity of the box translates into a similar solidity in the sound, with a bass delivery that has splendid drive, speed, solidity and lack of overhang. Another consequence is a fine

TD8 VERSUS TD12

It's interesting to compare the TD8's technical performance with its big TD12 brother. Naturally enough, this smaller model sacrifices a little in terms of sensitivity and/or bass extension – though both remain very healthy nonetheless. Tannoy quotes 2dB less sensitivity (90dB rather than 92dB), alongside half an octave of bass (45Hz rather than 30Hz).

This seems fair enough, and is pretty much confirmed by room measurements, though in practice the bass differences aren't all that great, and rather less significant than the differences seen in the upper midband. Whereas the '12's far field output starts to drop slightly above 500Hz, the '8's midband output is maintained up to 1.5kHz, albeit with some unevenness.




The super-tweeter is enclosed in a solid aluminium case and set back from the cabinet's edge to time align with the horn-loaded main tweeter.



freedom from box coloration, and here the super-tweeter plays its part in adding a measure of top end 'air' that the very directional nature of the dual-concentric driver's horn alone won't provide.

Dynamic range is wide, and low-level detail is captured superbly well. There's something very 'right' about a 200mm main driver, especially when used in the typical modestly sized British lounge. The 200mm unit is small enough to maintain decent dispersion right up to the tweeter crossover point, yet also large enough to deliver realistic dynamic expression and enthusiasm.

Horn tweeters don't have the best of reputations, and their relatively narrow dispersion angle doesn't suit every taste or room, but there's no sign of harshness, while the high efficiency probably accounts for the complete freedom from strain even at high levels. The imaging is pinpoint-sharp too.

Perhaps the truest guide to the performance of a particular review loudspeaker is how quickly I want to finish off a review, re-pack the speaker, and go back to my regular references. With the TD8 I felt in absolutely no hurry. I could live with this speaker, no question. It looks good, and does the business with fine authority and dexterity. It's not a cheap loudspeaker, but it is an exceptionally good one, and arguably better suited to UK rooms than its larger brethren. 

📞 Tannoy 01236 420199

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ALSO CONSIDER

TANNOY DIMENSION TD10 £5,000

Ten-inch version of the TD8, features similar ingredients on a larger scale, and delivers a rhythmic and very detailed sound.

WILSON BENESCH DISCOVERY £5,500

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LIVING VOICE AVATAR OBX-R £4,000

External crossover adds refinement to a dynamic and high-resolution design, with a relaxed balance.

Moon fleet

EXCLUSIVE Moon's swift little integrated amp proves good things often come in small packages

Three months back we looked at and listened to the Moon Nova CD player, and here we have its partner, the 15 integrated amplifier. Both units inhabit the same distinctive casework and share a similar price point, but the similarities don't stop there.

This Canadian amplifier is a chunky little beast. While it's more compact than the homegrown competition it's no less sturdy, weighing in at a respectable 12 kilos and delivering a specified 70 watts into eight ohms or 110 watts into four. Technical claims to fame include a "very short signal path, 15 inches (38cm) from input to output" and a Crystal microprocessor where you might expect to find a volume control (see box). An equally intriguing, if less unusual factor which should help is a minimal use of feedback – the 15 has a single stage, of the local variety, at the output.

The preamp section has been built around parts and capacitors that are devoid of carbon, Moon's designers feeling that the material introduces distortions into the signal. The power supply is also extremely robust, hence the weight of the unit, and it is specifically designed for both low resonance and high current stability.

The quality of build and socketry is very high, and the continuously rotating volume control is weighted and speed-sensitive, which might sound scary but is really very intuitive to use. The level display is also very nice – you instantly know what kind of volume to expect

TECHNOLOGY

The Moon 15 uses a microprocessor-based version of the brand's RBC technology (that's Richard Benoit Gain, named after its developer) for volume control. This is a system of applying more or less impedance (using a network of relays) in a shunt-to-ground mode against the input signal. In this way it varies gain without degrading the quality of the signal as much as with a conventional resistor-based potentiometer, overcoming subtle changes of sound quality relative to volume. Being in chip form it also has the advantage of compact size, which is an issue inside casework of this scale – the Moon is not a very big amp.

VERDICT

**Moon 15
stereo amplifier
£2,500**

Compact, remote control, high-quality build, lovely terminals and high quality volume control.

Takes forever to run-in and three days to warm up – so don't turn it off. Speaker cable fussy.

CONCLUSION
Once it's cooking and you've got the right cables this is a remarkably swift and agile amplifier that combines resolution and power in highly musical fashion.

KEY FEATURES

- Alloy remote control
- Digital volume readout
- Spike feet
- 5 high quality RCA phono inputs
- WBT speaker terminals
- Preamp and tape outputs
- 70 watts/channel

when pressing play, which should avoid those nasty ear-splitting moments that can follow the dabbling of a small person. The remote handset is an appealingly indulgent device from the aluminium cast school, but it's not so heavy that it threatens your toes when dropped. It has a mere seven buttons which are sensibly laid out and easier than many to differentiate when you're in a hurry. However, going from input 'A1' to 'CD' does mean scrolling through three other inputs – a minor pain.

PERFORMANCE

Early impressions were mixed. It proved to be strong in terms of timing and power but its tonal palette lacked the breadth one expects of components at this price. It seemed a bit hard and grainy as well, which never goes down well in these parts. Reporting this to importer Virtual Reality led to a set of

Images are well projected for a transistor design, Lambchop's sultry *My Blue Way* standing up on its own two feet and inhabiting the room with little difficulty. Alternatively you can feel the cavernous scale of the church used for the superb Gaudeamus choral recording on SACD – here the 15 has little trouble in reproducing the layered voices and scale of the performance. You can also hear what is either background noise or tape hiss from the CD layer of this disc, something which usually requires full SACD playback in order to come through.

With the Chord Co cables it also gets into tone colour with enthusiasm, Dave Holland's double bass counterpointing John Surman's saxophone in tactile and vibrant fashion on Anouar Brahem's *Thimar*. Sticking on some vinyl in the form of Cornelius's entertaining *Point LP* revealed the Moon's ability to resolve tension and power rather well, not to

“Speed and transparency in the midrange are of a high order, allowing you to hear right into the music.”

Chord Co cables turning up, namely the new double-barrelled Signature interconnects and Odyssey speaker cables. Using these in place of the previous Living Voice/Townshend Audio cables seemed to liven things up quite nicely – clearly this amp is fussy about the company it keeps.

The 15 has surprising grunt for a 70-watt amp – our Living Voice Avatar speakers don't take a huge amount of driving but getting them to go low in a controlled fashion ain't that easy. The Moon seemed to have no trouble, pitching up a convincing rainstorm for the backdrop of Eminem's *Stan* and underpinning orchestral pieces in very sure-footed manner. Speed and transparency in the midrange are also of a very high order – you can hear right into the music and untangle the most convoluted lyrics or rhythmic lines, and there's always a strong sense of timing to draw you in.

mention a generous helping of good old-fashioned enjoyment.

The Moon 15 takes plenty of running in and warming up and it seems to prefer the more upbeat variety of speaker cable, but give it such circumstances and it will produce a lively and engaging sound that will bring a broad smile to the face of any music lover. **D**

Virtual Reality 01277 227355

www.simaudio.com

ALSO CONSIDER

ATC SIA2-150 £2,375

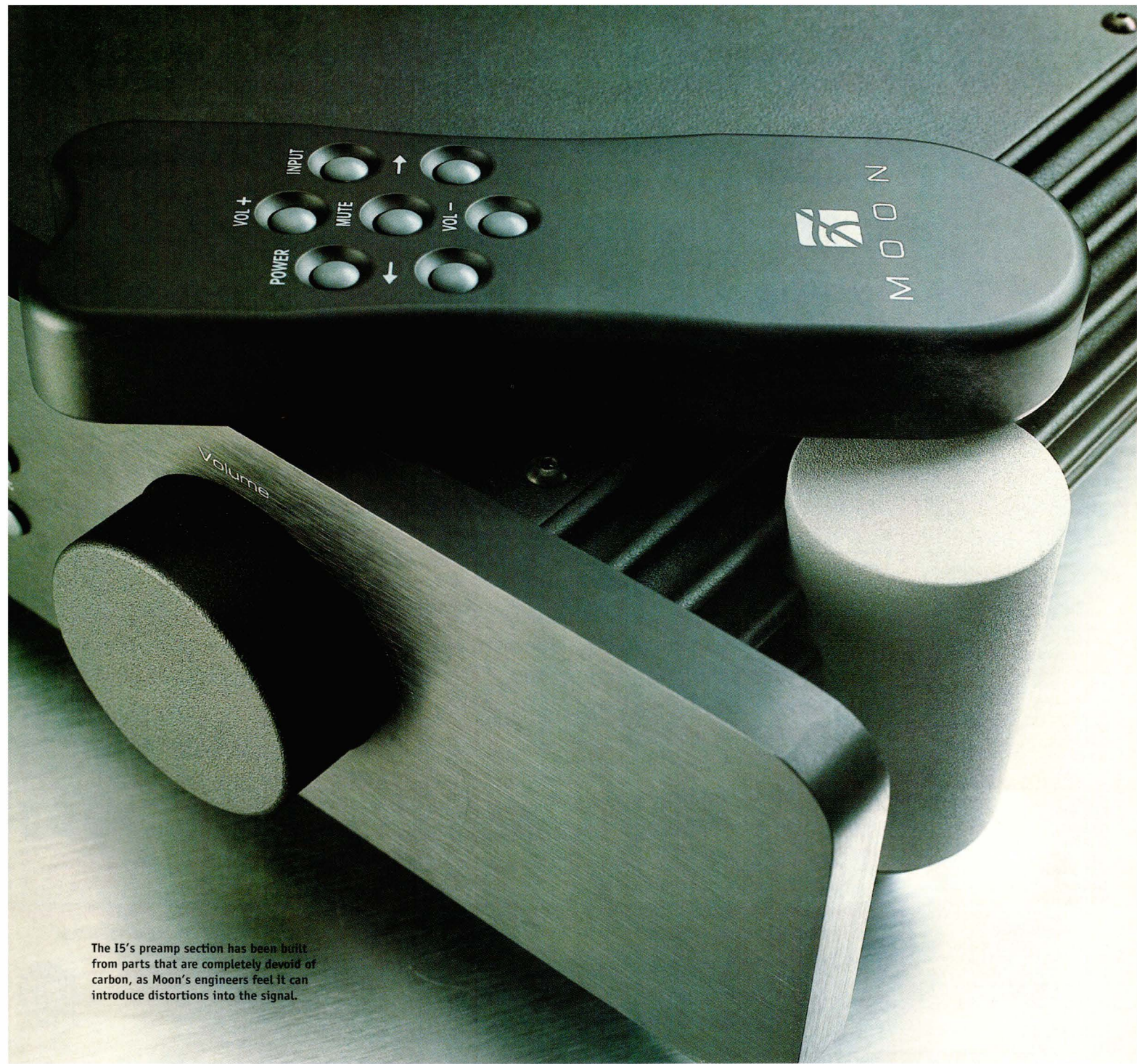
With its battleship build and awesome firepower, this is the transistor amp to beat under £3,000.

CANARY AUDIO CA-608 £2,250

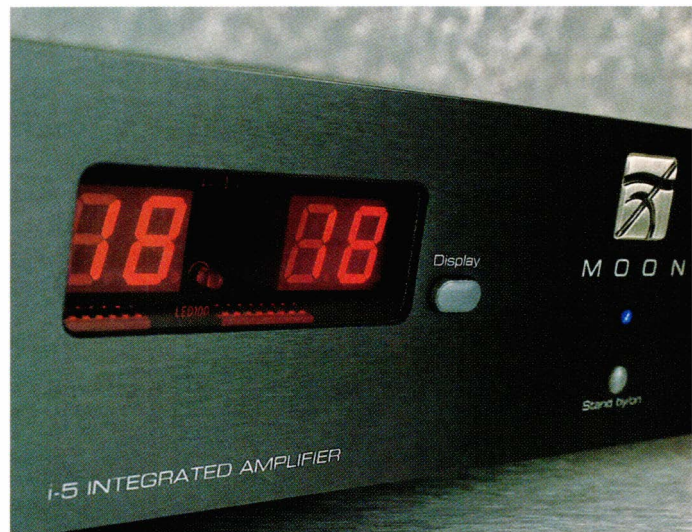
Huge valve integrated with remarkable dynamic and tonal capabilities. Extraordinary value for money.

PRIMARE A30.1 £1,500

Less bucks but not much less bang, this is a well built 100-watter with elegance and sophistication.



The I5's preamp section has been built from parts that are completely devoid of carbon, as Moon's engineers feel it can introduce distortions into the signal.



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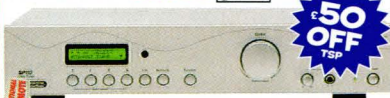
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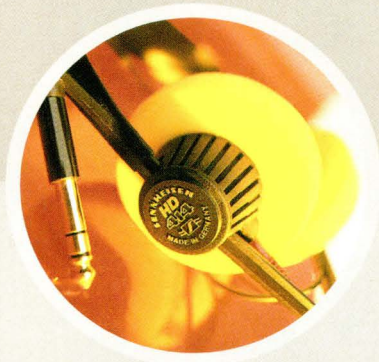
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RETRO

SENNHEISER HD414 HEADPHONES



Headphones may not be the most glamorous of hi-fi components, but they have their moments, and 1968 was one of them. It marked the beginning of the end of the status quo and the start of an epic battle between two design schools, triggered by the Sennheiser HD414, the world's first open-back moving coil headphone.

Before the HD414, the market was dominated by headphones that were designed as miniature loudspeakers, with an enclosure intended to stop sound escaping, and an impermeable seal formed by the earpad, in some cases oil-filled to conform to the topology of the head. The sealed air mass surrounding the ear was pressure loaded to generate a wide and even frequency response. The problem, well known to those around at the time, was that these were inherently heavy and tiring to wear, and the seal around the ear meant that the sides of the head became hot and sweaty. They also sounded coloured, the massive structure around the ear being easily energised by the driver.

By all accounts the HD414 arose as a result of serendipity. Sennheiser was best known then as a manufacturer of microphones, and the original HD414 prototype was apparently constructed to provide a quick and easy acoustic test of microphone capsules, consisting of two such capsules bound together with a headband – essentially just a strip of plastic. There was just a simple protective structure around the capsule, which doubled as an anchor for the headband, but there was no attempt to provide an air seal between the capsule and the ear or the back of the capsule and the outside world. The ear cushion was replaced by a pad of distinctive bright yellow reticulated foam, the HD414's trademark.

The HD414 came as a revelation. It didn't do bass like other headphones, but Sennheiser bought something quite new to the party – an exquisite sense of detail, a finely detailed mid and treble, and a sense of vitality that was completely novel. Much of the reason for this was that instead of using a miniaturised loudspeaker to generate the sound, the HD414's use of what in

“The original HD414 was constructed to provide an acoustic test of microphone capsules, and consisted of two bound together with a strip of plastic.”

essence were microphone capsules provided a more refined and delicate kind of sound. The lack of a physical structure around the capsule also played a part. True, it meant the music could be heard by others much more readily than with other headphone types, and true, the user was less isolated from the environment. But all headphones spill sound to some extent, and the ability to hear outside – a baby crying next door, a fire alarm or a phone – wasn't necessarily a disadvantage. If it was, external sounds could be drowned out by turning the volume a little higher.

Not only was the HD414 cheap – £11.75 at launch – it was also extremely practical. Every component from the cables to the capsules could be detached and replaced. Ear cushions were washable and replaceable. The headband could be bent all the way back without danger of breaking. And there were some cool accessories. Earpads were available in a range of vibrant colours, and there were soft accessory covers for the headband and even for the foam ear cushions. The original model shipped with DIN adapter plugs allowing several headphones to be stacked up to a single socket, and the 600-ohm impedance was an easy load.

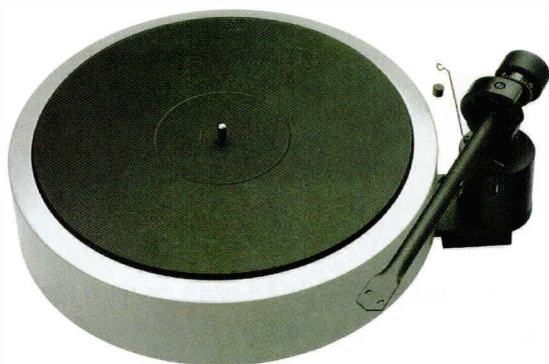
In short, the HD414 was an irresistible package. It quickly became a phenomenon, selling in enormous numbers to an appreciative public, and it became a favourite in studios too. But it was far from perfect. Auditioned in the light of more recent designs, it sounds coarse and shrill, apparently the result of an unsuppressed lower-treble resonance. But it was good enough to all but see off Koss (the market leader in pre-HD414 days) and other big names practically single-handed. Quite a result for such an inexpensive and apparently modest design. ●

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MUSO

NEIL YOUNG
HARVEST



Neil Young's most enduringly popular album (and the disc that contained his only ever US number one, *Heart Of Gold*) was never really intended as such. It followed his breakthrough solo album *After The Gold Rush*, but this much more musically diverse album seemed to fall together almost by chance.

Young was in Nashville for an appearance on *The Johnny Cash Show* and while there, he bumped into producer Elliot Mazer at a party. After mentioning he was ready to record a few tunes, a session was arranged at Mazer's Quadrafonic Sound Studios with a loose collection of session musicians who would be dubbed the Stray Gators. Since it was a last-minute booking, none of the musicians were Mazer's first choices, though the fact that none of them were part of the super slick Nashville elite would have recommended them to Young.

As it was, their session musician chops were considered superfluous for Young's songs, leading to a certain tension as these extremely capable musicians were forced to hold back by the reticent genius in their midst. As drummer Kenny Buttrey, quoted in Jimmy McDonough's *Shakey* biography says, "Neil hires some of the best musicians in the world and has 'em play as stupid as they possibly can."

The hastily assembled group would record four tracks in Nashville: the laid-back country vibe of *Heart Of Gold*, *Old Man*, *Harvest* and *Out On The Weekend*. Another three, *Are You Ready For The Country?* and the electric guitar rock outs *Alabama* and *Words (Between The Lines Of Age)* were laid down at Neil's Broken Arrow ranch in California – in his barn, with a remote-recording truck backed up against it. The plan was to use some of the natural space afforded by virtually open-air recording, to get a really open and natural sound.

And there was plenty of that. When Young's old Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young compadre Graham Nash dropped by while the album was being mixed, Young said he wanted him to "listen to

"He'd wired up his house and his barn as gigantic speakers, which broadcast the album across the lake at deafening volume."

something". He took him out in a rowboat on his lake, much to Nash's consternation, until he realised that Young had wired up his house and his barn as gigantic speakers, which broadcast the album across the lake at deafening volume.

The final two tracks, *A Man Needs A Maid* and *There's A World* were recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra. Young and long-time collaborator, keyboardist/arranger Jack Nitzsche, travelled to Barking Town Hall to create some of Young's most overblown, bombastic music, in stark contrast to the more intimate feel of the rest of the album. It shouldn't fit, but like much of Young's unique, iconoclastic approach, it does.

The album's most intimate track *The Needle And The Damage Done*, was culled from a performance at Royce Hall, UCLA during one of Young's occasional solo tours.

Despite its varied musical styles, the album does hang together, bound by Young's plaintive vocals and a generally laid-back and open mood, the sound of a man enjoying his life but not quite sure what to make of it.

2002 saw the release of the DVD-Audio version of the album, which among stereo and surround mixes includes a 30-year-old interview with Young, lying in a field, listening to a take of *Words* blasting out from his barn in the middle distance. He was clearly thinking big when he recorded it. Happily, the surround mix doesn't tinker with the orientation of the sound – just opens it up and makes everything deep and clear and resonant – perhaps closer to what Young was after when he was out on that lake. ©

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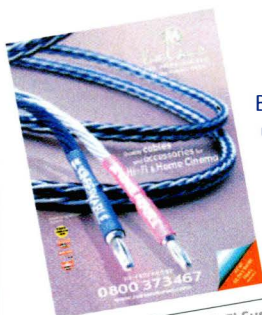
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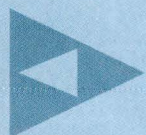
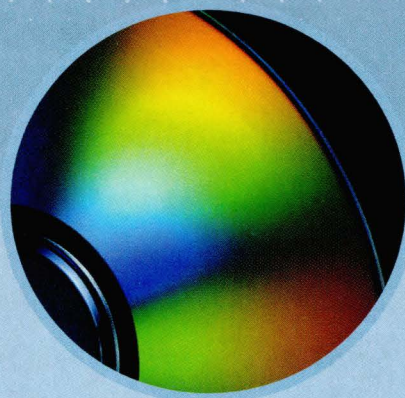
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DIGITALIA

SACD VERSUS DVD-AUDIO



Whatever happened to the debate about SACD versus DVD-Audio sound quality? When Sony launched its Super Audio CD format nearly four years ago, many critics were bowled over by the improvements in acoustic space, transparency and subtle detailing that the medium seemed to offer. These positive features of SACD were reinforced by the faltering launch of DVD-Audio and, if not by the choice of those early software releases, then certainly by their eclectic mastering.

More than three years ago, in a special surround sound music edition (*HFC 198*), we suggested that many of these early recordings were something of a novelty, more a bonanza of special effects than an attempt to incite a genuinely realistic, live soundfield. Vocalists, for example, do not skip from front to rear in 'real life' and will only do so in a multichannel audio system at the whim of the recording engineer. Many of the first DVD-A releases made gratuitous use of the rear channels, for the simple reason that they could.

It would take time for engineers to make the best of the multichannel format, to remaster old recordings and revise the microphone techniques for new ones, all in an effort to deliver a genuinely coherent 'surround sound'. Cheap special effects were out. In was a sound that fills the room, putting the listener into the middle of the musical action but avoiding the sense that each of the 5.1 speakers was fighting for attention. And with somewhere between 400 and 500 DVD-A titles now available, engineers have the wherewithal to deliver a multichannel experience that knocks stereo into a cocked hat.


But is improved mastering the only reason why DVD-A seems to have caught up with SACD in perceived quality? After all, it is the fundamental differences between the PCM coding used by CD and DVD-A versus the DSD scheme of SACD that distinguishes the two formats. At its launch, the superior sound of SACD was the subject of some debate. DSD or Direct Stream Digital uses a continuous stream of one-bit data to describe the

audio signal and requires no digital filtering or complex post-processing. Indeed, a simple analogue filter will reveal the audio signal from DSD. Pioneer and Wadia had been arguing for years that the aggressive use of FIR digital filters was limiting the sound of CD and, by inference, any other PCM-based format including DVD-A.

Unlike the earliest, standalone two-channel players, today's SACD players are hybrid carriers of DVD-Video, CD and SACD or truly universal machines that handle DVD-A *and* SACD (like those featured in this month's group test). Which means the one player is dealing with both PCM data (CD, DVD-V and DVD-A) and DSD data (SACD). Typically, though one universal transport is employed, the data is stripped from the disc but decoded along two independent paths before meeting again at the DAC.

This is where things become a little murky. The last year or so has seen the introduction of very sophisticated DACs that accept PCM data up to 24-bit/192kHz but also interface with the high-speed 1-bit/2.82MHz DSD data derived from SACD. In the clamour to meet market expectations for cheaper, fully-specified players, these third party, single-chip solutions are invaluable.

Nevertheless, it's not entirely clear that all these solutions maintain DSD's one-bit integrity. Some, it seems, pass the DSD data through a digital filter and into the same noise-shaping sigma-delta modulator as the DVD-A data. But these are multi-bit devices, albeit operating at between four to six bits, so what was once DSD is now PCM. And then there's the question of how bass management and digital level control is achieved. These features are very difficult to implement with raw DSD data and were not available on the first giant-killing SACD players like the Sony SCD-1 and Marantz SA-1.

In which case, perhaps the 'sound' of SACD has been diverted towards DVD-A, and not the other way around. Perhaps too, the debate over whether SACD can survive is moot if the essence of the format itself is lost to commercial expedience. 

Paul Miller

READER CLASSIFIED

Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified*, the UK's premiere free service for second hand hi-fi. This page is a must-read if you're thinking about buying used kit, and if you want to sell something it's definitely the place to be. It's FREE to place an advertisement – simply submit your ad of up to twenty words, remembering to

include your name, phone number AND home town. If you can, please help us by emailing ads to: dan.george@futurenet.co.uk. Alternatively, mail to: *Reader Classified, Hi-Fi Choice, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP*. Please note that this service is only open to private advertisers.

FOR SALE

ARCAM ALPHA 7 CD player, Alpha 8 amplifier and Alpha 9 power amp, Acoustic Energy AE109 floorstanders. All mint condition with packaging. Call Mick 07931 579549 (Kent)

NAKAMICHI DR3 cassette deck, boxed, hardly used, includes head demagnetiser. £200 ono. 0191 416 9864 (Tyne & Wear).

CYRUS 7 amplifier, black, seven months old, mint condition, £450. 01394 274350 (Felixstowe)

ROTEL RP 190 70-watt amplifier, mint, with manual and box £245. Mr Smith 01903 247779 (Sussex).

ROKSAN XERXES turntable, DSU power supply, RB300, excellent sound and condition, £495. Rega Planar II mint, £95. 01777 700066 (Notts).

PRIMARE D30.2 CD player, £1,020, Primare A30.1 amplifier £1,020. Both three months old and barely run-in. 01529 410171 (lincs).

AUDIOVECTOR M3 SIGNATURE black, AVEX active crossover, latest version, awesome, all mint £1,480. Also Audiovector M1 Signature black. Under half price. Klaus 07776 177485 (Kent).

AUDIO ANALOGUE PUCCINI SE integrated amp [no-remote] £300, Rega Planet CD player [last of Pre-2000 player] £300 Chord Electronics CPM 3200e pre-amp £3,500 all mint. 07900 410230

DENON DCD1700 CD player, mint, remote, boxed, flagship player when new (£600). Upgrade forces sale £140 ono. 01454 294804 (South Gloucestershire)

B&W DM610 speakers, excellent condition. Black finish, complete with stands. Accept £110 ono. Andrew 0161 7972270 (Bury, Lancs).

CYRUS 31 amplifier, £225. Cyrus FM7 Tuner, £150. Cyrus DAD3Q CD

player £350. Excellent condition. Complete system £675 (£1,700 new) 07764 664479 or 0121 580 8541 (Birmingham).

LINN KARIK III, four years old and in perfect condition. Original cables, manual and box included. A pleasure to both use and own and offers excellent sound quality, £850. (01793) 828639 (Swindon)

B&W MATRIX 802 S3 speakers, walnut, £1,200 ono. B&O DVD1, blue, £400 ono. Angus 01727 826120 (St Albans)

MERIDIAN 566 DAC 20 Bit D to A converter, three coax and one opt inputs. Perfect working order, as new, instruction booklet, boxed. £400 (£1,150 in 1996). Peter 01752 765018 daytime, 01752 843827 evenings (Plymouth).

NAIM SYSTEM, CD 3.5, NAC 72, NAP 180, HI-CAP, EPOS ES11 walnut inc dedicated stands £2,300. David 01263 722517 or email davidaccord@aol.com (Norwich).

ARCAM 10/10P (£1,400). Pristine condition, remotes unused, boxed, instructions, under warranty. Can demo £700 ono. Rob 01639 639904 (West Glamorgan).

MONITOR AUDIO STUDIO 20SE speakers, natural oak, upgraded crossovers, immaculate cond. Fully boxed, manuals, £799 negotiable. Tony 07790 632361 (Cardiff).

QUAD ELS 63'S, seven years old, black ash, excellent condition £925 ono. 01926 491394 (Warwick).

MARANTZ CD94 CD player, £195 ono. Nakamichi BX300E, £195 ono, Yamaha KX-580SE, as new £90. Quad 34 preamp and 306 power amp, £135 ono each. 01494 725409 (Amersham).

MUSICAL FIDELITY Typhoon

preamp and two power amps. Perfect working order, excellent condition, £350. Andrew 01636 674019 (Nottinghamshire).

PAIR OF AUDIOQUEST crystal and speaker cables bi-wired four metres in length (£240), £95ono. van den Hul d103 mk2 cable, £45 ono. Kevin Healy 01656 720815 (Bridgend).

LINN KOLECTOR preamp, £250. Linn LK140 power amp, £375. Castle Harlech speakers, cherry wood, £400. Nakamichi DR-2 3-head cassette deck, satin black, £200. VG cond. Mr

Mughal 07855 371705 (Leeds)

CASTLE HARLECH S2 speakers, £600. Micromega Drive 2/DAC, £750. Monitor Audio 14 Gold, £250. Audiolab 8000A, £200. Howard 07778 591188 (Hungerford).

NAIM NAIT 3 amplifier, Chord Solid interconnect, 2x9m NAIM NACA5 speaker cable. Other NAIM interconnects, £395. Mike 01964 623982 (Hull)

MARANTZ DR-17 CD recorder, brand new, boxed for sale, £1,000 non-neg. email andy@hfchoi.free-online.co.uk for details.

MARANTZ DV8300 universal disc player, brand new boxed, £1,100 ono. email hfchoi@hfchoi.free-online.co.uk.

NAKAMICHI BX-300E 3-head

WANTED

B&W MATRIX 802 SERIES 3. Late Series 2 also considered. Must be in excellent condition. Cash waiting. Contact Alan, 020-8422 1195

cassette deck. Very little use, mint condition in original box. £250. Andrew 01245 226842 (Essex).

VIDEOLÓGIC DRX-601E DAB tuner, absolutely brand new, in original packaging (still sealed and stapled), genuine unwanted competition prize, £250+p&p. (01202) 462837 or atom2001@ntlworld.com

MARANTZ CD63K1S CD player, £140. Yamaha TX480L tuner, £50. Audioquest 0.5M Ruby 3 interconnect £30. 2 x 1.8m pairs VDH CS122, £40. Colin 01255 818001 (Essex).

ROKSAN KANDY (20-bit) CD player, silver fascia, boxed with instructions, must be sold £275 ono. 01483 823 193 eves (Surrey).

EXPOSURE XV11 preamp and XV111 mono-regulated amps. Perfect condition, £800. Frank 0151 334 1964 (Wirral/Merseyside).

EAR YOSHINO V20 valve amp, 18 months old, vgc, £1,700 ono. (£2,700) Richard 01387 267323 (Dumfries).

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

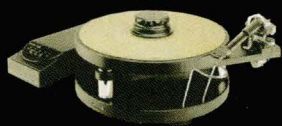
Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

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Model 20/2



Model 30/2



Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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Record players: **SME** models 10, 20 and 30; **Kuzma** Stabi, Stabi Reference;

Nottingham Analogue Interspace, Space Deck, Hyperspace and Dais;

Mitchell Orbe; **VPI** AriesScout; **Avid** Volvere, Sequel and Acutus.

Arms: **Rega** 300/600/900; **SME** Series IV and V; **Kuzma** Stogi; **Triplanar**.

Cartridges: **VanDenHul** Grasshopper and Colibri; **Kuzma** KC Ref; **EMT**;

Reson Recca and Elite; **Cartridge Man** Musicmaker; **Benz-Micro** including

Ruby Open Air; **Kondo** Io J.

Amplifiers: **Border Patrol**; **Canary**; **Sugden**; **Art Audio**; **Monarchy**;

Western Electric; **Icon**; **Tom Evans Audio Designs**; **SJS**.

CD Players: **Wadia**; **Sugden**; **Primare**; **Resolution**.

Louspeakers: **Living Voice**; **Vitavox**; **Lowther**.

Cables and Tables by **Living Voice**.

Sale of Part Exchange and Ex-dem Items

	Sale	New
SME Model 20 / 2 - 5 years old	£1500	£3658
Dynaudio Confidence 3 - Rosewood - perfect, boxed - giveaway	£2300	£4800
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn - Mahogany	£1500	£3800
Mirage 890i - fine condition - giveaway	£200	
Art Audio Symphony - 300B SE 10 watts integrated - full chrome	£2250	£4000
Art Audio Vinyl 1 - moving magnet phono stage - chrome - fabulous	£1100	£1550
Art Audio VP1 - line pre-amp - chrome	£1000	£2000
Art Audio Concerto - 6550 line integrated	£1200	£2650
Art Audio VP1 special - line pre-amp - full of Hovlands	£1150	£2250
Canary Audio CA 301 - 300B - 22 big watts - very good	£3400	£5400
Canary Audio CA 303 - 300B monos - 22 lovely watts - better	£5400	£7400
Canary Audio CA 309 - 300B parallel p.p. - 45 mad watts - superb	£9500	£13500
Canary Audio CA 601 - line pre-amp - very, very good	£1900	£2750
Canary Audio CA 300 - single ended monos - valve rect. - 8 watts	£2000	£3500
Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace - turntable - 2/3 years old	£1000	£1700
Nottingham Analogue Space - tonearm	£250	£450
Nottingham Analogue Mentor - tonearm	£390	£800
Jamo Concert 8 - loudspeakers - 2½ years old - spotless	£800	£1365
Townsend Seismic - speaker stands - for bookshelf speakers	£450	£695
Tube Technology MAC - mm and mc phono - nearly new	£700	£1400
Audio Innovations L2 - line pre-amp	£350	£750
Audio Innovations Series 1000 - silver circuit - 50 watts class A	£1100	£2500
Audio Research SPLS2(B) - line pre-amp	£1250	
Alchemist Forsetti ADP 15A - integrated amp	£700	£1400
Alchemist Forsetti ADP 20A - stereo power amp	£700	£1400
AudioNote Soro - phono integrated - serviced - new valves	£700	£1900
Sonus Faber Guarneri	£3000	
Unison Research Feather One - line pre-amp	£450	£800
Clear Audio Master Reference - turntable with Master TQI arm.		
2 years old - Incredible. Go on, be crazy! A snip at only...	£8000	£13000
Audio Research LS2 B - line pre	£1250	
Pro Ac Tablette - Cherry - cute - perfect	£300	
Meridian 502 - pre-amp - 4 years - techy - spotless	£700	£1385
Meridian 557 - power - 4 years - techy powerhouse lump - spotless	£800	£1525
Voyd Standard - turntable - Black - perfect - collectable joy	£1500	
Sugden Masterclass - CD player - very nearly new	£2000	£2500

LIVING VOICE



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EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Auditorium Avatar

Hi-Fi Plus *Editor's Choice*
Hi-Fi Plus *Product of the Year*
Hi-Fi Choice *Editor's Choice*

"The Avatar is a near perfect balance of size, bandwidth, efficiency and tonal refinement. Its slim lines and small footprint deliver a genuine 94db sensitivity, and excel when it comes to delivering the scale, vibrance and colour of the music. Its unobtrusive quality allows it to cut straight to the heart of a performance, unlocking the music trapped in the recording, whilst its refinement makes it equally at home with both basic and surprisingly expensive amplification."

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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and AV gear you can buy. Here you'll find all our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, together with useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most thorough techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

SOURCE COMPONENTS

- 80 CD PLAYERS
- 82 DVD PLAYERS
- 84 VINYL
- 89 RADIO TUNERS
- 90 DIGITAL RECORDERS

AMPLIFIERS

- 98 STEREO AMPS
- 100 AV AMPS

LOUDSPEAKERS

- 104 STEREO SPEAKERS
- 108 AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

ANCILLARIES

- 111 HEADPHONES
- 112 CABLES
- 115 STANDS AND SUPPORTS

117 GLOSSARY

DEALER CLASSIFIED

- 118 DEALER GUIDE
- 126 DEALER DIRECTORY

CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one (vinyl), CD is still the king of formats if you require breadth of choice. And despite the fact that other sources will play CDs, if you want to hear your discs at their best there's little substitute for a dedicated CD player.

It's also the most enduring format on the market. Despite high-resolution contenders like SACD and DVD-Audio, nothing has been able to undermine this universally popular format.

CD players work by reading a stream of 1s and 0s off a disc that spins at a constantly changing speed (to counteract the increasing length of 'groove'). This bitstream is then digitally filtered before undergoing digital-to-analogue conversion in the DAC (D-to-A convertor). Thereafter, the signal is filtered



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

The processes of reading the disc and converting the data are sometimes split between a CD transport and separate DAC in so-called two-box players. A popular approach with very high-end kit, this separates the electronically noisy elements from the sensitive analogue stages, but can introduce timing errors known as jitter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

SUPER AUDIO CD



SACD or Super Audio CD is a relatively new audio-only format introduced by Sony and Philips. It offers higher resolution than CD in the form of considerably greater bandwidth and improved dynamic range. It also has the potential for uncompressed six-channel surround, and most new discs take advantage of this. SACD discs are usually hybrids and will play on normal CD players, but you won't be able to appreciate their highest quality or their multichannel capability without an SACD-compatible player. Some SACD players also play DVD and even DVD-Audio – these are listed in our DVD section.

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

A DAC or digital-to-analogue convertor is a fundamental part of any CD player and converts the digits read from the disc into an analogue music waveform which is amplified to line level.

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

Discs are read by a transport or disc drive, which creates radio frequency 'noise'. Separating the DAC means the conversion can be done with less interference.

CAN I USE AN OUTBOARD DAC WITH MY INTEGRATED CD PLAYER?

Yes, if it has a digital output – and most do.

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

No. All analogue cables are suitable for connecting a CD player to an amp. Digital specific cables with 75ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

Yes. The vast majority of SACD discs are hybrids, with a CD layer that all CD players can read.

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

TOP BUYS



NAD C451i £330

Dynamic, tonally varied and confident sound combines with class-leading detail resolution. Excellent value and highly entertaining.



Marantz CD6000 KI Signature £500

An affordable high-end machine, this very impressive player has it all: brawn, finesse and class. Not to mention the full range of features.

Our favourite CD PLAYERS

Audio only CD and SACD players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER	
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET		VARIABLE OUTPUT
UP TO £1,000												
[R]	Arcam CD92	900	High-resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing		●	●		●				212
[R]	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness		●	●						217
[R]	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks		●							212
[R]	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless is a return to form for this famous marque		●	●	●	●				231
[R]	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal								●	212
[R]	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain		●	●		●		●	●	217
[R]	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built		●	●	●	●		●	●	231
[R]	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step		●	●		●	●	●		206
[R]	NAD C541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		●	●	●					231
[R]	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		●		●					231
[R]	Rotel RCD-1070	495	Technically sound and well equipped, this player lacks a little excitement but shows excellent precision		●							226
ABOVE £1,000												
[R]	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,200	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility		●	●	●	●				226
[R]	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!		●		●					231
[R]	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Very natural yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner		●		●			●		238
[R]	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well-built player – balanced outputs too		●	●	●		●			226
[R]	Exposure XXII	1,175	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening		●	●	●					238
[R]	Krell KPS 25sc	24,998	One of the finest CD players available, this is also a state of the art preamplifier with Cast interface technology		●	●	●		●		●	236
[R]	Marantz CD17 MkII KI Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)		●	●						226
[R]	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●		●		●	231
[R]	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer		●	●	●					238
[R]	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE ²⁴	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities		●	●					●	229
[R]	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●	●				237
[R]	NAD S500i	1,200	A beautifully built machine that treads the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb		●	●	●		●			238
[R]	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition – a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses									212
[R]	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●					238
[R]	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●					●		226
[R]	Sony SCD-XA333ES	1,200	High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround		●	●	●		●			224
[R]	Sony SCD-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch		●	●	●		●	●		223
[R]	TEAC D-70/P-70	13,000	This two-box solution is one of the best CD replay systems available, with a fantastic range of facilities		●	●	●		●	●		239
[R]	Wadia 301	3,650	Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect		●	●			●		●	228

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. **CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs.



Meridian 507 £1,195

The entry-level player from British digital audio specialist Meridian is an absolute peach – a transparent and detailed sound, and superb build quality to boot.



Naim CDX2 £2,650

A superb player that mixes rhythm and timing with precision and poise. Add the £2,300 XPS power supply (pictured) to make one of the best CD players in the world.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are remarkably good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD, apart from being the first digital video format for the home, is that it offers discrete multi-channel sound. In the case of plain DVD video discs, this music is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit onto the disc alongside the video data. You



can use a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround benefits that the format specialises in.

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear the benefits of surround sound. DVD players can be used with stereo amps to great effect, but you won't be able to decode the Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks on movies.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

Not unless you have a progressive scan/NTSC compatible monitor or TV – as yet there is no PAL version.

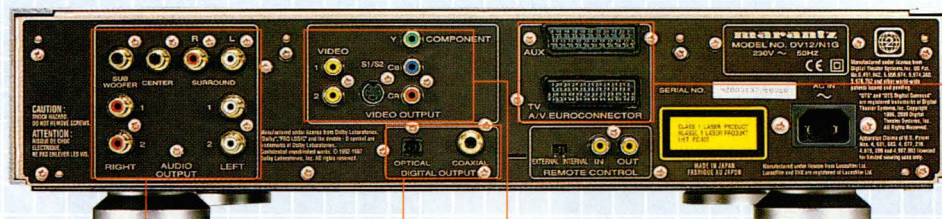
DVD-AUDIO

DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player. While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for

information – lyrics, images and so on. To save you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, and this would seem to be the best route if you want to enjoy high-resolution digital audio. If you're after a high-end model, look for one with a 'high bandwidth' digital audio output as well as 5.1 analogue outputs.



CONNECTIONS



SCART CONNECTIONS: These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS: For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

G GROUP TEST BEST BUY
 R GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
 E EDITOR'S CHOICE
 N NEW GEAR REVIEW

Audio/Video disc players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
E	Arcam DiVA DV88 Plus	1,000	The first DVD player (just) enabled to deliver progressive scan with UK-spec PAL discs. Superb picture and good sound			●	●		238
R	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match						237
G	Denon DVD-2800 MkII	750	Excellent Silicon Graphics processing, a wide range of features and sharp pricing make this a winner			●	●		237
G	Denon DVD-3800	1,000	High and progressive DVD-Video player with good CD and DVD-Audio capabilities, priced below its station			●	●	●	234
E	Pioneer DV-656A	400	'Universal' SACD/DVD-Audio/Video player does everything moderately well or better, and is an excellent buy	●	●	●	●	●	234
G	Pioneer DV-757Ai	800	Superb second generation 'universal' player equipped with next gen FireWire digital output – cutting edge disc replay	●	●	●	●	●	236
R	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs	●		●	●		237
G	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance	●	●			●	234
ABOVE £1,000									
N	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs			●	●		238
E	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	●		●	●		230
E	Marantz DV8300	1,400	Early universal DVD player takes first-gen Pioneer technology and breathes on it with Marantz know-how	●	●	●	●		233
E	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra-progressive DVD-A player is a classy all-rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●		●	●		229
E	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player			●			218
E	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs	●		●		●	230
R	Roksan Caspian DVD	1,195	A good all-rounder – a solid and propulsive sounding DVD player which is also a surprisingly capable picture-making machine			●	●		237
E	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	An engineering <i>tour de force</i> . It's pricey and plays neither DVD-A nor SACD, but performance – especially video – is top notch			●	●		212
E	Townshend DV-747A	2,899	Major upgrade to Pioneer machine turns it into a giant slayer of a disc player, available as an upgrade to existing owners	●	●	●	●		232

SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes.
ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver.
HEADPHONE SOCKET Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

TOP BUYS



Sony DVP-NS905V £400
SACD-compatible DVD-Video player offers excellent audio and video performance.



Denon DVD-3800 £1,000
This DVD-Audio compatible player is excellent with music and equally sharp with video.



Pioneer DV-757Ai £800
Pioneer's latest 'universal' disc player - strong with CD, SACD, DVD-V and DVD-A alike.



Marantz DV-12S1 £2,500
A superb DVD-Audio/Video player - great with DVDs and unusually fine with CDs too.



The most complete & thoroughly integrated solution to quality vinyl replay.

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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce.

Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS



Rega P3 £298

Latest version of a hi-fi classic is a very capable deck for a very modest price, with very little serious competition from other makes. A great turntable for the money and a very safe buy.



Audio Note TT1/ARM1 £594

Simple, unpretentious and relatively inexpensive, Audio Note's TT1 delivers a real taste of high-end performance at a realistically affordable price.



Michell Orbe SE £1,825

A fine example of the turntable art, the stripped down SE version of Michell's flagship now features a DC motor. Does justice to the best arms and cartridges.



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

A beautifully made turntable that delivers a high-end vinyl experience without costing the earth. Neutral, even-handed, detailed and frankly spellbinding.

Our favourite **TURNTABLES**

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
EDITOR'S CHOICE
NEW GEAR REVIEW

Record players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
HT	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●		203
ES	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●			229
ES	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●			194
R	Bluenote Bellavista/Borghese	1,594	Charming in appearance and sound if not particularly practical. Start your love affair with vinyl here	33/45			●	opt	239
R	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			●	●	223
R	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	●		●		103
HT	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●		239
ES	Michell Orbe SE	1,825	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor.	33/45	●				235
NGR	Pro-Ject RPM 6	500	Basic, very neutral turntable and arm combination that can take a very expensive cartridge. A high-end bargain!	33/45			●		236
R	Pro-Ject RPM 9	1,000	Capable deck with some unusual features. Highly engaging sound with an essentially neutral character	33/45			●	opt	239
HT	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	33/45			●		214
R	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●		214
R	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45			●	opt	239
ES	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●		228
ES	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●		195
ES	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●		186
ES	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in clean, clear reproduction	33/45	●	●	●		205

Our favourite **PHONO CARTRIDGES**

MM and MC cartridges

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
			MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
Audio Technica AT110E	29	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	214
Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	●			223
Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms		●		235
Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone		●		235
Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	192
Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
Van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●		235

Our favourite **PHONO STAGES**

Phono stages

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
			MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUJ GAIN	AUJ IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	●				223
Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price	●	●	●	●	234
Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	●	●		●	201
Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	●	●			201
Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension alongside good tonal colour this is the one to beat, excellent value for the money		●			234
Tom Evans Microgroove Plus	700	Stunning detail, gives new insights into familiar discs		●			223
Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP		●			201
Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

TURNTABLE SPECS KEY **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you. **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown. **CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY** **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

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TX-32PH40
TX-32PL10
TX-28PL10
TX-32PL4
TX-28PL4
TX-32PL1
TX-32DK2
TX-28DK2
TX-24DX1

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32DW9625
28DW6577
32DW6577
28DW6557
32DW6557
32PW9586
32PW9576/05E
32PW9595
32PW9596
32PW9594
32PW9607
32PW9527
32PW9617
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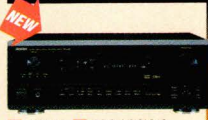
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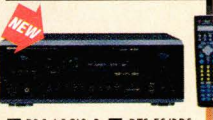
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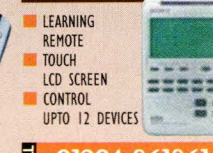
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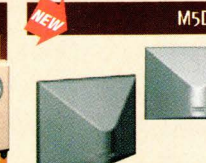
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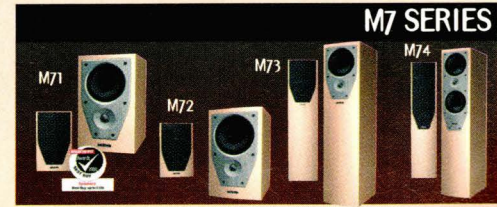
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MDS-JE470
MDS-JE770
MDS-JB940
MDS-JA333ES
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MXD-D40
MXD-D5C
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MDS-550

AV RECEIVERS/AMPS

STR-DE875
STR-DE870
STR-DB1070
STR-VA555ES
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STR-DE475
TAP 9000ES
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CD PLAYERS

CDP-M305
CDP-XE270
CDP-XE370
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CDP-XE270
CDP-XE370
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SS-MF400H
SS-MB200H
SA-VE705
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SACD

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SCD-XE 670
SCD-XE 770
SCD-XA333ES
SCD-XA777ES
SCD-555ES

DVD PLAYERS

JVC

XV-N5
XV-S302
XV-300
XV-SA72
XV-FA92
XV-E112

TOSHIBA

SD120E
SD220E
SD510E
SD520E
SD420E
SD900E
SD9500E

Panasonic

DVD-RA61EBS
DVD-XV10EBS
DVD-RV32EBS
DVD-LA95EBS
DVD-LV60EBS
DVD-PV40EBS

JVC

XV-N5



DVD-R CD
SVCD CD-R/RW MP3

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SONY

DVP-NS300
DVP-NS400
DVP-NS305
DVP-NS405
DVP-NS700
DVP-NS900
DVP-FX1
DVP-CX860
DVP-9000ES

ACRAM

DIVA88

PHILIPS

DVD1010
Q50
Q40
DVD870P
DVD910SA
DVD962SA
DVD763SA
DVD723
DVD623

Pioneer

DV444
DV545
DV646A
DV747
PDV-20
PDV-LC20

HITACHI

DVP315
DVP325

YAMAHA AUTHORIZED DEALER

DSP-AZ1



DPL2 Dts-Es
Dd-Ex 6x130w+2x45w

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AV AMPS/RECEIVER

RX-V730RDS
RX-V630RDS
RX-530RDS
RX-430RDS
RX-V420RDS

REMOTE CONTROLS

RAV-2000

SUBWOOFERS

YST-SW005

CINEMA PACKAGES

HTiB 45
HTiB 60
HTiB 65
DVX-S100
VS-10
DVX-S80

CD RECIEVER

TSX-20
TSX-15
TSX-15
TSX-10

RXV730RDS



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DV-H550
A-H500
T-H500
R-H500
PD-H500
AG-H500
MD-H500
RW-H500
L-5500
AGH-350
DV-H350
A-H300
AG-H300
T-H300
R-H300
PD-H300
PD-303
MD-H300
RW-H300
L-S300J
L-S303J

DVD SYSTEMS

DVD-HD RECORDERS

JVC

HIM-VDR10
HR-XV10

Panasonic

DMR-E30
NV-VHD1BS

Pioneer

DVR-7000

PHILIPS

DVDR1000
DVDR980
DVDR985
HDR1000

JVC

HIM-VDR10



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DVD-AUDIO DVD-RAM

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DVD SYSTEMS

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HTK160

JVC

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TH-A5R
TH-A9R
TH-A10R

Panasonic

SC-DT300
SC-DT100
SC-HT70

Pioneer

NS-DV77
NS-DV88

SONY

DAV-S400
DAV-S500
DAV-S550
DAV-S800
DAV-S880

SONY DAV-S800

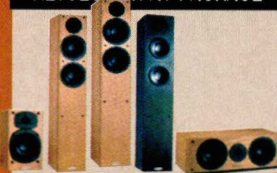
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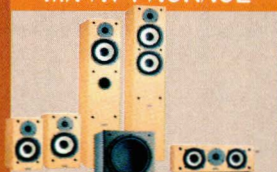
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01204 861861

MX-AV PACKAGE



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TANNOY SPEAKERS

R1 R2 R3
MX1 MX2 MX3
MX4 RC MXC
MXR MXSUB

D SERIES

SATURN 56
SATURN 510
SATURN 58
SATURN SUB15
D500 D700 D750
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EYRIS 3 EYRIS C
EYRIS RR-SUB15

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DIVA A85
DIVA AR100
DIVA CD 72
DIVA CD 92
DIVA P-75
DIVA P-85
DIVA PT-51

RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) is said to be available to 80 per cent of the population and the long-term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive programming information. FM's RDS system means that station name and occasionally track titles are displayed, but the range of information is fairly limited.

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

What is clear, however, is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB that aren't available on FM. So if it's variety of programming you're after, they have a lot to offer.

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget tuners, with great sound and plenty of features.



NAD S400 £600

A nicely judged performer that maximises the potential of FM broadcasting.



Pure DRX-701ES £250

This 'budget' DAB model can meet much more expensive alternatives head-on.



Arcam DT-81 £650

Highly professional implementation of DAB technology makes this one of the best options on the digital tuner market.

Our favourite TUNERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY | GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED | EDITOR'S CHOICE | N W GEAR REVIEW

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB
FM TUNERS									
[R]	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			● ●	193
[R]	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64			● ● ●	193
[R]	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			● ●	211
[R]	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40	●		● ●	193
[R]	Harman Kardon TU940	180	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●		● ● ●	221
[R]	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		● ● ●	211
[R]	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		● ●	● ● ●	193
[R]	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	● ●	● ●	● ● ●	230
[R]	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	● ●	● ●	● ● ●	230
[R]	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good, honest, budget tuner – loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	● ●	● ●	● ● ●	221
DAB TUNERS									
[R]	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		● ● ●	● ● ●	221
[R]	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99		● ● ●	● ● ●	234
[R]	Pure DRX-601ESM	330	Cheap, small and capable, but with major tonal variations from neutral which confuse the issue	DAB	90		● ● ●	● ● ●	230
[R]	Pure DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB separate available at the time of review – concedes little if anything to more expensive models	DAB	9		● ● ●	● ● ●	211
[R]	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB, and a joy to own and use	DAB,FM,M,L	99	● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	230

SPECS KEY WAVEBANDS Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. PRESETS How many stations can be stored in memory. RDS Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). REMOTE CONTROL For the couch potato. SIGNAL STRENGTH METER Useful for setting up an aerial. ROTARY TUNING KNOB An ergonomic alternative to buttons.

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders

MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300

Multidisc recorder that's slick and accomplished, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



Marantz DR6000 £400

Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



Sony MDS-JE480 £130

Entry-level MD recorder that does exactly what it says on the tin, at a bargain price.



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 £600

Impressive implementation of hard drive technology for home audio applications.

Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HD recorders

				SPECIFICATIONS				
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
BEST BUY	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●		218
RECOMMENDED	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●		233
RECOMMENDED	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1		● ●		205
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		● ●		233
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●		205
RECOMMENDED	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well-equipped, well-priced CD-R/RW deck	1		● ●		218
RECOMMENDED	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single-deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good, if characterful, player	1		● ●		218
RECOMMENDED	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		● ●		218
NEW GEAR REVIEW	Sony RCD-W3	250	Superb Sony build and ease of use complement great recording ability and amiable CD playback	2		●		238
MD RECORDERS								
RECOMMENDED	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●		205
RECOMMENDED	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●		233
HDD RECORDERS								
	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	CD-R/RW and hard drive in one – a flexible beast, one of the best of its ilk thus far though just short of formal recommendation	2	80	● ●		237

SPECS KEY **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stocks a wide range of DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma monitors, televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers.

From starter systems to custom designed multi-room and home cinema installations, our friendly staff are available in all outlets to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle. If you're interested in home entertainment and want to avoid the confusion, contact your local Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet and experience more. 0% interest free option* is available on most products. *Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

MUSICAL FIDELITY Tri-Vista Series

Celebrating Musical Fidelity's twentieth anniversary, the new limited edition Tri-Vista series offers both audio excellence and value for money. The first products released are the Tri-Vista 300 Integrated Amplifier and the Tri-Vista CD/SACD Player, with Pre and Power Amplifiers following later this year. Both products are already receiving excellent reviews - Hi-Fi World (January 2003) said "If you want extreme power with superb grace the new Tri-Vista 300 is quite exceptional" - while the CD is, according to Hi-Fi Choice (January 2003), "Simply the best CD Player MF has ever made and one of the finest available anywhere."



ARCAM F·M·J SOUND & VISION

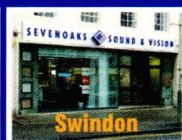
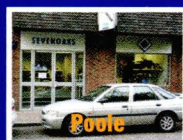
Arcam has been at the forefront of designing home cinema since 1996 and has established an international reputation for audio excellence. This highly specified combination is enhancing this reputation even further, having already been described as "Arcam's best ever product to date."

The ultra-flexible AV8 Pre-amp Processor offers Dolby Digital, THX-EX, Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS decoding and is among the first processors to have THX Ultra II certification for music and movie post processing. According to Arcam, the partnering P7 Power Amplifier is a 'true audiophile powerhouse' delivering over a kilowatt of power from seven channels each THX-Ultra rated at 150 watts.

This combination has recently been awarded 'Editor's Choice' by Hi-Fi Choice magazine - being described as "A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand - an AV processor par excellence." - while Hi-Fi World (March 2003) concludes, "Right now, this is the best reason to go multichannel I can think of. Exquisite."

New Outlets Now Open

We are delighted to announce that we have opened new stores in the following locations: **Poole** 01202 671677 • **Solihull** 0121 733 3727 • **Swindon** 01793 610992 and **Wolverhampton** 01902 312225. In addition, the **Leeds** store has relocated to larger premises and offers an improved product range and demonstration facilities.



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Manchester • Newcastle • Norwich • Nottingham • Oxford • Peterborough
Plymouth • Poole • Preston • Reading • Sevenoaks • Sheffield • Solihull
Southampton • Southgate • Swansea • Swindon • Swiss Cottage
Tunbridge Wells • Watford • Witham (Essex) • Wolverhampton

Please refer to Page 7 for full address and telephone number details.



Free
Goldring Ex-Static
Cleaner Worth £12
 With **All** Pro-ject Turntables Over £125

PRO-JECT

Debut II Turntable (Black) £114.95

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

is a fine turntable, and it clearly reveals the benefits of listening to vinyl, with a rich and detailed soundstage, and a good dynamic response.

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2000

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



Michell Gyro SE/RB300
 £1049.95

Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DIVA T61 Tuner	£199.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£99.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£109.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable	£1049.95
Project Debut Phono SB Turntable	£159.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	£129.95
Project RPM4 Turntable.....	£324.95
Pure Evoke 1 DAB Radio.....	£99.95
Sony ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner	£499.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB Tuner	£229.95

STARTER SYSTEM

marantz®
 CD4000 (Black) CD Player
 PM4200 (Black) Amplifier



m70 (Black) Speakers

List Price **£380**

£299.95 • SAVE £80

TOP BRAND NAMES AT A BARGAIN PRICE!



RCD-02 CD Player **£379.95** RA-02 Amplifier **£349.95**

RA-02 Amplifier "The amp has a fast, detailed and yet satisfyingly full presentation. That allows it to make a fine job of the beats of Groove Armada's

Goodbye Century set without losing sight of the fine details of the mix, and also husking out Marianne Faithfull's deliciously smutty vocals on *Kissing Time* with real relish. Add in decent levels of

equipment - and the convenience of remote control, and we reckon Rotel has a winner on its hands."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2002



WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2002
UP TO A HOME CINEMA AWARDS
AMPLIFIERS
 £251-£500

CD Players

Arcam DIVA CD62T.....	£369.95
Arcam DIVA CD72T.....	£449.95
Arcam FMJ CD23T.....	£1199.95
Cyrus CD7.....	£799.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki.....	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£89.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature.....	£369.95
Meridian 507.....	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity A308 ^{CP}	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD.....	£3994.95
Quad 99 CD-P.....	£999.95
Roksan Caspian.....	£994.95
Rotel RCD1070	£494.95
Sony CDPXE570	£99.95

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 9th April 2003, E&OE. *From our selection in-store - Not in conjunction with any other offer.

(((AE))) Aegis Evo One Acoustic Energy Speakers **£179.95**

"The original Aegis Ones were great speakers, to the extent that they were category winners in our 1998 awards. Since then a host of new models have raised the standards in the sub-£200 category, and the Aegis Ones soon went from stunner to also ran. AE's response to that is an EVO version.



WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2002
UP TO A HOME CINEMA AWARDS
SPEAKERS
 Up to £200

The Aegis Ones genes are clearly evident. The original's refinement and bass weight are preserved and backed up with better openness and more free-flowing dynamic ability. The old speakers would have delivered a cool and calm version of Pink's *Missundaztood* set - they'd be enjoyable, but would lack a little drive and excitement.

The new speakers, however, address those limitations... Add authority and good stereo imaging to the list of plus points and it comes as no surprise to find these speakers at home with classical, too. Indeed, running

through our test room's extensive CD library we couldn't find a genre that these AE's weren't happy playing."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ July 2002

Free
 Speaker Cable*
 worth £30 with **All**
 Speakers over £170

Also Available
KEF Q1 • £249.95





Amplifier Selection

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£369.95
Arcam DIVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£469.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1149.95
Cyrus 6 Amplifier	£599.95
Cyrus 8 Amplifier	£799.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£179.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£139.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 Amplifier	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier	£3994.95
Quad 99 Power Amplifier	£549.95
Roksan Caspian Amplifier	£894.95
Rotel RA-01 Amplifier	£249.95



ARCAM SOUND & VISION

Claim £200 Off the Speakers* of your choice

When purchased together with any Arcam CD & Arcam Amplifier combination. Min Spk Value £400

DiVA CD82T CD Player £599.95
DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier £799.95

DiVA CD82T "Arcam's latest sounds like a more mature version of its little brother. On an initial listen the increased solidity and refinement are obvious, but over time the subtler dynamic shading and more assured handling of transients come to the fore... The Arcam CD82T is one of the best CD players available at this price point." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★** September 2002

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

ARCAM GRAND SYSTEM
 DIVA CD72T CD Player
 A75 Plus Amplifier & T61 RDS Tuner
 List Price £1189
£999.95 • SAVE £190
 Claim Free m711 Speakers Worth £129
Not in conjunction with any other offer



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
 2002
 HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
SPEAKERS
 £201-£350

B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM602S3 Speakers £299.95

Free
 Speaker Cable*
 worth £50 with ALL
 Speakers over £280

"But the B&W 602 S3 are our winners. They're big and not particularly beautiful, yet if it were our money they're what we would buy. No rival can match the wide ranging dynamics or low frequency performance of these not so compact standmounters. Add all-round sonic excellence and the choice is easy. Give them sufficient space to breathe, then sit back and enjoy the music." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★** Supertest Winner August 2002

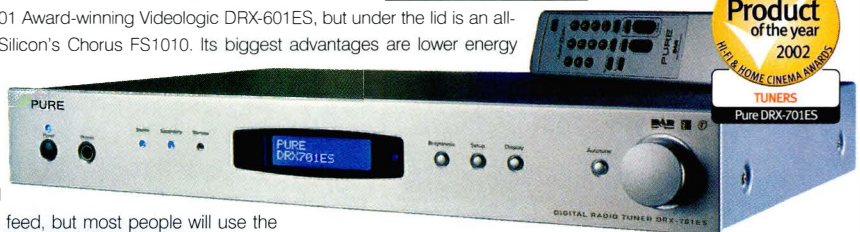


Also Available (Pictured Right)
 B&W CDM NT Series • Prices start from £749.95

PURE DIGITAL DRX-701ES Digital Tuner £229.95 **Save £20**

This new tuner from the recently renamed Pure is based on the 2001 Award-winning Videologic DRX-601ES, but under the lid is an all-new third-generation digital radio engine, in the form of Frontier Silicon's Chorus FS1010. Its biggest advantages are lower energy consumption and above all cost - it's the major reason why the DRX-701ES is £100 less than last year's model.

The tuner uses 24-bit/192kHz conversion with 4x upsampling and data interpolation, and is powered by a low-noise toroidal transformer - such attention to sonic detail pays off. Digital outputs are provided



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
Product of the year
 2002
 HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
TUNERS
 Pure DRX-701ES

on electrical and optical feed, but most people will use the analogue out, and these sound very good indeed. As usual the tuner is subject to the signal quality off-air, but when it's fed from a high-quality outdoor aerial and a good signal it's capable of a crisp, powerful and detailed presentation. Even more populist music stations like Radio 6 benefit from the mix of a neutral balance and fine weight, while speech is also neutral and easy to follow... If you want a quality home tuner for digital radio, you need look no further." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★** October 2002

Also Available
Denon TU260L/II • £99.95

pricing policy

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.



Claim £150 Off the Speakers* of your choice
 When purchased together with any Cyrus CD & Cyrus Amplifier combination. Min Spk Value £300



CD7Q CD Player £1149.95
8 Integrated Amplifier £799.95

Cyrus 7Q CD "How it compares directly (with the competition) is a matter for a group test, but I can tell you now that it'll be a close one, because the CD7Q is a fantastic CD Player, offering all you'd expect from a disc spinner at this price, and more... The CD7Q's a major upgrade from the class-leading CD7. Its weighty, detailed sound puts it at the pinnacle of CD players at this price."



Also Available
Cyrus 7 CD £799.95



Cyrus 8 Amplifier

"The 8 is a large step forward from older generations of Cyrus amplifiers, and takes the company back into the leading pack in the sub-£1000 integrated amp sector... The Cyrus 8 is a must-audition product."



ROKSAN

Kandy KA1 MKIII Amplifier £544.95

"When we last reviewed Roksan's Kandy integrated amp in February it fought off serious competition to come top in a *Supertest*. This is its replacement, the MkIII. Internal changes include an updated power supply for the preamp section and identical mono modules for the left and right power amp sections. Roksan also claims 50 percent lower distortion on line-level inputs and a whopping 150 percent less on the phono input. The rated power output is an impressive 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and this amp has a confident, muscular way with music that bears this out. But don't be fooled into thinking this amp is raw but unrefined. With Van Morrison's *Down the Road* the Kandy has the guts to render the performance exciting and dynamic, but also the guile to deliver subtle details.



The upgraded Kandy MkIII is an excellent amp; the MkII version was impressive, but MkIII is a stunner. It betters all the amps here in the timing department, and has a wonderfully robust character that works well with all types of music. It manages to retain the good points of the MkII while adding extra resolution and subtlety. All the amps here have a place in the market. It's just that at £550 the Kandy really does set the pace."



Also Available
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier • £3994.95



Free Speaker Cable* worth £50 with ALL Speakers over £280

11L Speakers £379.95

"Quad is best known for its superlative electrostatic designs, which start at £3500. So any £379 pair of speakers that carries the company's name has to be going some to avoid tarnishing the family reputation. The first surprise is that the 11Ls come in real-wood veneers covered with piano-gloss lacquer. This type of finish is almost unheard of at the £1000 mark, let alone at this price. Has anything been sacrificed for such a luxury finish? Here's the second surprise: apparently not.

The final surprise? Well, saving the best for the last, the sound quality of the 11Ls is phenomenally good. These are small speakers at just 33cm tall, but the scale and authority of their performance is terrific. The laws of physics dictate bass extension limitations, but thanks to a clever dual rear firing port arrangement the 11Ls plumb the depths with the determination of a rottweiler, even when placed in free space.



Also Available
Monitor Audio Silver S1 • £299.95

If you're in the market for a pair of top quality standmounters these Quads are a must listen. Quite simply, they're good enough to scare the competition big time."



Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM601 S3.....	£249.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Q1.....	£249.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
KEF XQ1.....	£999.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780SE.....	£349.95
Mission m74i.....	£299.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2.....	£199.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Quad 22L.....	£895.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale Pacific EVO 30.....	£649.95

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 9th April 2003, E&OE.
 *From our selection in-store - Not in conjunction with any other offer.

QUAD

"Quad is best known for its superlative electrostatic designs, which start at £3500. So any £379 pair of speakers that carries the company's name has to be going some to avoid tarnishing the family reputation. The first surprise is that the 11Ls come in real-wood veneers covered with piano-gloss lacquer. This type of finish is almost unheard of at the £1000 mark, let alone at this price. Has anything been sacrificed for such a luxury finish? Here's the second surprise: apparently not.

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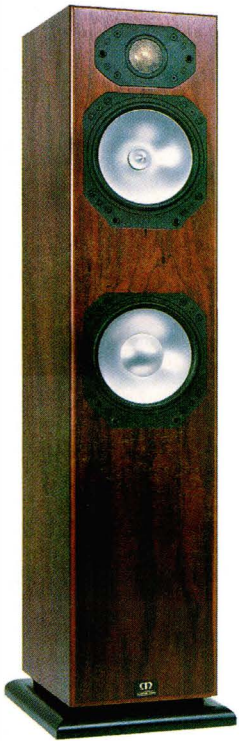
MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

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

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

Claim £250 Off the Speakers* of your choice

When purchased together with any MF CD & MF Amplifier combination. Min Spk Value £500



MONITOR AUDIO Silver S6 Speakers £599.95

Free Speaker Cable* worth £70 with ALL Speakers over £500

British loudspeaker manufacturer Monitor Audio has introduced a replacement series for its acclaimed and award winning Silver Series speakers. "The aim has been to offer real advances in performance and value", says technical director Dean Hartley. "New models include the S1 and S2 standmounters, the S6, S8 and S10 floorstanders.



Also Available Gold Reference GR10 & GR20

"With a close-miked track such as James Taylor's *Line 'Em Up* from SACD they really deliver the character of the singer's voice and they're just as expressive with the cultured rhythms of Groove Armada's latest outing, having just the right mix of rhythmic control and fluidity... But amazingly the best is yet to come: these are simply beautiful speakers for classical music, once a few days' thrashing has tamed their initial rawness. With the latest release of Holst's *The Planets* on DVD-Audio, they thunder out *Mars* with true conviction.

These are rather magical speakers, with a poise and grace that belies their ability to turn on the power when required. Pair them with a good CD player and suitably accomplished amp, and you won't go far wrong." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002**

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW Recorder £199.95



Also Available Marantz DR6000 CD Recorder • £279.95

"While it looks simple, the Pioneer has an impressive array of features, including the handy double-speed disc finalization and CD-Text compatibility. Internally, the PDR609 is a big step up from the Award-winning PDR-509 it replaced: the DAC is now a 24-bit/96kHz number, aided and abetted by Pioneer's Legato Link conversion technology, and it has 24-bit A-to-D conversion, which is ideal for copying your vinyl onto CD. If this is your plan, you'll appreciate that the Pioneer makes it easy to create first-rate copies from any source, helped by the manual recording-level controls. It was hard to tell our copy of Jim White's *No Such Place* from the original.

While the Pioneer's replay quality can't match the Marantz, it costs £120 less, which would buy you a lot of blank discs. If you've already got a dedicated CD player, we'd go with this recorder." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2001**

Recorder Selection

- Harman Kardon** CD-R30 CD-RW..... **£499.95**
- Marantz** DR6000 CD-RW..... **£279.95**
- Sony** RCDW3 CD-RW..... **£219.95**
- Yamaha** KX393 Cassette Deck..... **£119.95**
- Yamaha** KX580SE Cassette Deck..... **£199.95**
- Yamaha** CDR-HD1300 CD-RW..... **£499.95**



pricing policy

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

Free Interconnect Cable* Worth £150
When TAG AV30R & TAG 100x5R Purchased Together

TAG McLaren



AV30R AV Processor £1799.95
100x5R Power Amplifier £2994.95

TAG McLaren's AV30R AV Processor is aimed at the home cinema enthusiast who is concerned with keeping up-to-date with the latest surround formats. When partnered with TAG's 100x5R Power Amplifier it makes an exceptional combination.

According to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine in their October 2002 issue: "In use, the AV30R, connected to TAG's 100x5R power amp, is superb. True, it can't quite match the clarity and power of the latest-specification TAG flagship, the AV32Rbp-192, but by any AV standard this is a very high-end piece of kit, with excellent impact and fine detail across a range of movie soundtracks from Once Upon A Time In America to the explosive actionfests. Channel steering is immaculate, and the sense of a soundfield wrapped around you - even in 5.1-channel mode - entrancing, with spine-tingling rear-channel effects. The fine Pro Logic II implementation serves music as well as it does non-discrete AV soundtracks, and with an SACD machine hooked up via the 5.1 channel inputs, the lack of coloration and sheer bass oomph is extraordinary." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002**



ACOUSTICS
REL

Strata III Subwoofer (Wood) £799.95
Q150E Subwoofer £499.95

REL is an audiophile company who take great pride in designing and building their highly acclaimed subwoofers. Because of their total commitment to performance, REL sometimes adopt unusual solutions to otherwise straight-forward problems.

"The aggression of Rage Against The Machine's Take The Power Back is near-tangible, the midrange a spitting, spiteful companion for the tight, deep, air-agitating bassline. As for the more deft creations of Chick Corea, the REL's articulate nature serves subtly to underpin basslines, rather than swamp them. The adaptability makes the Strata III a highly recommended subwoofer - it's a very versatile, musical piece of kit, and it doesn't cost the earth." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ July 1999**

Claim Free
Tivoli Model One Radio worth £99
When You Purchase any REL Subwoofer over £700*



REL Q150E

Claim £200 Off The Speakers* of your choice when purchased at the same time as the Linn Classik Music System - Minimum Value £300



LINN

Linn Classik

Music System £999.95



WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision Awards 2001 BEST BUY
Systems Best Buy £1000 plus

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



Classik Movie System
£1699.95 • SAVE £300

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

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***From our selection in-store - Not in conjunction with any other offer.**



experience **more**



outlets nationwide

- Aberdeen** 491 Union Street **01224 587070**
- Bedford** 29-31 St Peters Street **01234 272779**
- Birmingham** Arch 12, Livery Street **0121 233 2977**
- Brighton** 57 Western Road, Hove **01273 733338**
- Bristol** 92b White Ladies Road, Clifton **0117 974 3727**
- Cambridge** 17 Burleigh Street **01223 304770**
- Cardiff** 104-106 Albany Road **029 2047 2899**
- Cheltenham** 14 Pitville Street **01242 241171**
- Crawley** 32 The Boulevard **01293 510777**
- Edinburgh** 5 The Grassmarket **0131 229 7267**
- Exeter** 28 Cowick Street **01392 218895**
- Glasgow** 88 Great Western Road **0141 332 9655** Open Sunday
- Guildford** 73b North Street **01483 536666**
- Hull** 1 Savile Row, Savile Street **01482 587171**
- Ipswich** 12-14 Dogs Head Street **01473 286977**
- MOVED Leeds** 62 North Street **0113 245 2775** Open Sunday
- Leicester** 10 Loseby Lane **0116 253 6567**
- Lincoln** 20-22 Corporation Street **01522 527397**
- Liverpool** 16 Lord Street **0151 707 8417**
- Maidstone** 96 Week Street **01622 686366** Open Sunday
- Manchester** 69 High Street, City Centre **0161 831 7969**
- Newcastle** 19 Newgate Street **0191 221 2320**
- Norwich** 29-29a St Giles Street **01603 767605**
- Nottingham** 597-599 Mansfield Road **0115 911 2121**
- Oxford** 41 St Clements Street **01865 241773**
- Peterborough** 36-38 Park Road **01733 897697** Open Sunday
- Plymouth** 107 Cornwall Street **01752 226011**
- NEW Poole** Latimer House, 44-46 High Street **01202 671677**
- Preston** 40-41 Lune Street **01772 825777** Open Sunday
- Reading** 3-4 Kings Walk Shopping Centre **0118 959 7768**
- Sevenoaks** 109-113 London Road **01732 459555**
- Sheffield** 635 Queens Road, Heeley **0114 255 5861** Open Sunday
- NEW Solihull** 149-151 Stratford Road **0121 733 3727**
- Southampton** 33 London Road **023 8033 7770**
- Swansea** 24 Mansel Street **01792 465777** Open Sunday
- NEW Swindon** 8-9 Commercial Road **01793 610992**
- Tunbridge Wells** 28-30 St Johns Road **01892 531543**
- Witham (Essex)** 1 The Grove Centre **01376 501733**
- NEW Wolverhampton** Burdett House, 29-30 Cleveland St. **01902 312225**

within the M25

- Bromley** 39a East Street **020 8290 1988**
- Chelsea** 403 Kings Road **020 7352 9466**
- Croydon** 369-373 London Road **020 8665 1203** Open Sunday
- Epsom** 12 Upper High Street **01372 720720** Open Sunday
- Holborn** 144-148 Grays Inn Road **020 7837 7540**
- Kingston** 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
- Southgate** 79-81 Chase Side **020 8886 2777**
- Swiss Cottage** 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd **020 7722 9777** Open Sunday
- Watford** 478 St Albans Road **01923 213533** Open Sunday

Please call to verify hours of business.

Contact our outlets via **E-Mail** outlet@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

who are sevenoaks?

Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision are one of the largest and most successful hi-fi and home cinema retailers in the country.

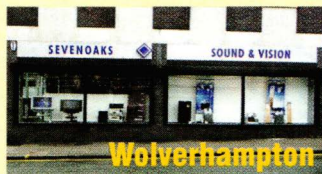
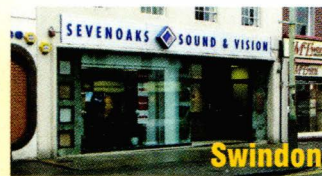
Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from DVD Players to Widescreen Plasma Televisions and Projection Systems, all at highly competitive prices.

Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

new outlets now open

We are delighted to announce that we have opened new stores in the following locations.

Poole 01202 671677 • **Solihull** 0121 733 3727 • **Swindon** 01793 610992 and **Wolverhampton** 01902 312225. Also our **Leeds** store has re-located to larger premises.



staff wanted

We are currently recruiting staff at several locations. If you are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, have good customer service skills and would like a career within the audio/visual industry, call Janys Ness on 01732 466214 for more information.

sevenoaks online

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its 48 outlets nationwide. The website is designed to provide you with answers to the questions you may have when buying new equipment.

There are regularly updated stock clearance lists with hundreds of products on offer and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest outlet.

For impartial advice and information, just click on sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

stock clearance

With 48 outlets nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As individual models and product ranges are changed or superseded, the preceding models are made available at a reduced price, for clearance. Visit our Website for an up-to-date list of the clearance stock, listed by outlet, within the Sevenoaks Sound and Vision group.

0% finance option†

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock. †Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

pricing policy

Whilst we do not claim always to be the cheapest, we try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. Take into account the expert advice, unrivalled product selection, demonstration facilities and excellent pre, during and after sales service and the lower price might not look such good value.

In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention. We will always endeavour to offer you the best deal.

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that trannies can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use trannies; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo

amps tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

TOP BUYS



Rotel
RA-02 £349

A terrific budget integrated from Rotel's latest line-up. Offers pace, guts and finesse, wrapped up in a prettier package than one might traditionally expect from the marque.



Primare
120 £750

This revised version of Primare's A20 MkII sounds significantly more engaging, with genuine punch and rhythm coursing through its circuits. A real musical maestro.



Arcam
A85/P85 £1,330

Bi-amp combo featuring Arcam's £800 integrated and matching power amp. The resulting sound is both robust and finely detailed across myriad music types.



Classé
CP-35/CA-101 £2,797

This very classy pre/power combo from the Canadian high-enders is blessed with a particularly natural, open and no-nonsense sound.

Our favourite GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
GB	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
GB	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
GB	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Powerful, engaging amplifier with extensive non-intrusive features, and strong upgrade potential	7		●	●	85	239
R	Cyrus 8	800	Superb at low to medium volumes, and a clear improvement on its predecessor, but deteriorates at high power levels	7		●	●	70	239
GB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			●	30	208
R	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal, but a bit on the bland side	6		●		50	214
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5		●	●	60	224
N	Myryad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	●	●	●	50	232
R	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
GB	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail and a strong power yield	7		●	●	60	208
GB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
R	Naim Nait 5	825	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	6		●		30	214
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
GB	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian MkII	895	An excellent all-rounder, with an articulate, assured delivery and excellent drive capability with a wide range of loudspeakers	6				70	239
GB	Rotel RA-01	250	Take a Best Buy amplifier and rip out the remote control to save £100. No wonder we love it!	4	●		●	40	237
GB	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
GB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
GB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
GB	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
R	Canary Audio CA-608	2,250	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4				24	202
GB	Karan KA-i180	3,900	Lean, sharp and articulate, this impressively constructed heavyweight is almost up there with the audiophile pre/power elite	4		●		180	236
R	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
GB	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	3,999	If you audition one, you will want to be one of the handful of Tri-Vista owners	5	●	●	●	350	239
GB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214
R	T+A PA 1520 R	2,400	Powerful, punchy amp that has many positive qualities, but sometimes seems to try too hard	8	opt			260	230

Our favourite GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
GB	Arcam A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	●	●	7		85	225	
GB	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	100	227	
GB	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5			221	
GB	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		140	212	
GB	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●	30	216	
R	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	●	●	7		60	212	
N	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	●	●	6	opt	opt	100	216
GB	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	●	●	4	●	●	250	231
R	NAD Silver Series S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7		●	200	200
GB	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		●	50	213
GB	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	●	●	6			10	216
ABOVE £2,000										
R	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●		18	216
GB	Audio Research LS25/VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	●	●	6	●	●	100	216

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5	●	150	221
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●			20	231
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bryston BP-20/4B-ST	3,375	Quick, articulate and powerful, this is an excellent all-round amp which controls difficult loudspeakers superbly	●	●	8		250	230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4	●	100	237
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6	●	120	216
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●			700	234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4	●		238
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Klimax Tiwin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●			125	230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mark Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Pre has precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	●	●	6	●	125	195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6	●		233
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,700	Powerful, smooth, though slightly uneven with some speakers, but excellent control and separation in others	●	●	6	●	100	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7	●	100	236
<input type="checkbox"/>	TAG McLaren DPA32R/250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extensibility and it's tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	●	●	6	●	250	230

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as

their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking

with stereo. There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Pioneer VSX-D2011 £900
A feature-packed receiver, and a great sounding one to boot. Only Denon's new AVR-3803 currently competes at the price.



Marantz SR9200 £2,000
Few AV receivers manage to sound as musical as this one. A top all-rounder and an excellent multichannel solution.



Denon AVC-A1SR £3,000
Denon's AV behemoth is arguably the best integrated multichannel amp to date - superbly cinematic and one of the very few with genuine 'hi-fi' music credentials.



Arcam AV8/P7 £5,498
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand - an AV processor and seven-channel power amp *par excellence*.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY | GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED | EDITOR'S CHOICE | NEW GEAR REVIEW

Multichannel amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
INTEGRATED AV AMPS								
R	Arcam AVR200	800	Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel	●	6	70	229	
V	Denon AVR-3803	899	Feature packed 7.1 channel AV receiver which needs a lot of studying but does everything well	●	11	110	239	
R	Denon AVC-A11SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11		235	
EC	Denon AVC-A1SR	3,000	An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Includes a ground-breaking 'wide bandwidth' digital audio link		8	170	232	
SB	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9		235	
SB	NAD T761	650	First-rate home cinema amp that sounds more powerful than its specs imply, and competes with specialist stereo amps	●	9	80	223	
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,850	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle	●	9	160	210	
V	Pioneer VSX-D2011	900	Outstanding sonic performance for the price and a remarkable features list to boot	●	10	140	235	
EC	Pioneer VSA-AX10i	2,700	Seven channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and eq, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD		8	150	229	
R	Sony VA-777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder		9	100	210	
AV PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
EC	Arcam AV8/P7	5,498	State-of-the-art processor (£2,999) and seven-channel power amp (£2,499). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	180	235	
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights		6	opt	120	219
EC	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
V	Cyrus AV8	1,100	A refined and listenable processor that will integrate into an existing hi-fi system with ease		9		235	
R	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
SB	Marantz PS-17/2 x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	60	238	
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6		230	
R	Myriad MDP500/MA240/360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music		9	opt	120	215
R	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5		50	238
SB	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5		120	238
R	Roksan DSP/5ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels		4		80	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible A/V processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form		6		215	

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.



Olson's new Sound Fantastic range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

Each unit is fitted with a 10A mains R.F.I. filter with earthing choke and transient suppressor, designed to filter mains-borne transients, switching surges, R.F. interference, intermittent spikes and other disturbances.

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Home Entertainment - **POWER VERDICT UP**

Home Entertainment, May 2001

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MAX

Midland Audio X-change

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Krell FPB400cx/700cx

The Full Power Balanced X Series Stereo Amplifiers offer the greatest performance possible from a stereo amplifier. All X Series amplifiers share the same circuit topology, from the 300 Watt Full Power Balanced 300cx and the mid-level FPB 400cx at 400 Watts, to the awesome 700 Watt FPB 700cx—the most powerful stereo amplifier ever offered by Krell. While the amplifiers have much in common, there are also some important reasons for investing in the additional power. Each amplifier houses a massive power supply, doubling in size with each step. When the power increases from 300 Watts to 400 Watts and 700 Watts, the power supplies increase from 2000 Watts to 4000 Watts to 8000 Watts, respectively. More power delivers more authority on the low end, greater ease through the critical midrange frequencies, and effortless highs. In short, with every significant increase in power, there is a palpable increase in the believability of the sonic presentation.

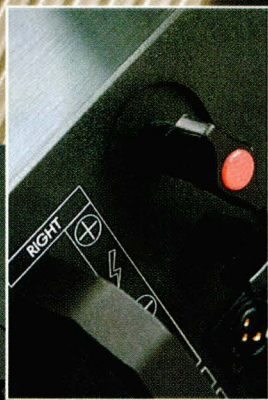
We are pleased to announce that Midland Audio X-Change is the exclusive Krell dealer for the Midlands, and will be hosting a Krell music evening within the next few months. To hear how good these amplifiers really are—call John Roberts for an appointment

Krell KPS 28c

The KPS 28c Compact Disc Player reveals the full sonic potential of the compact disc format. The KPS 28c is noted for its ability to resolve the finest musical details—many listeners boast of hearing their compact disc collections “for the first time” upon introducing the player into their systems. CAST, Krell’s proprietary current-audio connection is featured along with Current Mode, Class A, and discrete balanced circuitry. The power supply, featuring several stages of regulation, is modelled after the Krell Current Tunnel preamplifier. The beautiful black anodized chassis is finished to complement the Full Power Balanced X Series Amplifiers, right down to the elegant convex centrepiece. A custom-machined remote control, hand finished and laser engraved, is included

Krell KCT Preamplifier

The Krell Current Tunnel (KCT) CAST stereo preamplifier holds the distinction of being the finest sounding, most technologically advanced, and most system friendly stereo preamplifier ever designed by Krell. It derives its name from the way the signal is routed from its input to its output. The signal is brought into the KCT in the current domain from a CAST source such as the Krell KPS 28c Compact Disc Player. The signal stays in the current domain as it travels through the KCT, protected from extraneous noise and unwanted signal interference as if it were in a tunnel. Using CAST technology and power supply regulation that is a direct result of the development of the Master Reference Amplifier, the KCT is able to deliver a usable bandwidth that extends to 1.5 MHz. The result is seamless, transparent musical reproduction of even the most dynamically demanding sources. Ease of operation is also accounted for in equal measure with features that include dual-zone operation, with independent volume controls, Theatre Throughput for integration into home theatre systems, and RS-232 controls for whole house automation. The KCT is a stereo preamplifier that delivers the ultimate stereo performance today and the opportunity for continued growth into the future.



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Verity Audio Tamino II

Building on the worldwide success of its prestigious products, Verity Audio is pleased to introduce a new high-quality loudspeaker – The Tamino. It sets new standards of sonic excellence at a sensible price of £3999.

The Tamino is a unique reduced-size floor-standing loudspeaker that incorporates the same attention to detail, exquisite lacquer and level of execution, which granted the Verity Audio loudspeakers an enviable notoriety.

The Tamino definitely answers a growing need for a system that offers a fine musical experience to more music lovers while being a luxury piece of furniture. Book now to hear this amazing loudspeaker.



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Bel Canto eVo2/4

The Bel Canto eVo2 represents the true potential of modern digital amplification — providing a transparent and musical path to the original performance for stereo and multi-channel systems. The eVos present a naturally sweet and extended sound quality that transcends older amplifier technologies in both efficiency and sonic quality. With the advent of new and emerging digital technologies, this is an amplifier design whose time has truly come. Guided by the musicality of Bel Canto design, the eVos mark a remarkable step forward in digital stereo amplification.

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Audio Research	Mark Levinson
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Conrad Johnson	Siltech
dCS	Sonus Faber
Densen	Spectral
DNM/Reson	Nordost
Electrocompaniet	Sugden
Finite Elemente	Transparent Audio
Graaf	Verity Audio
Gryphon	Wadia

STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

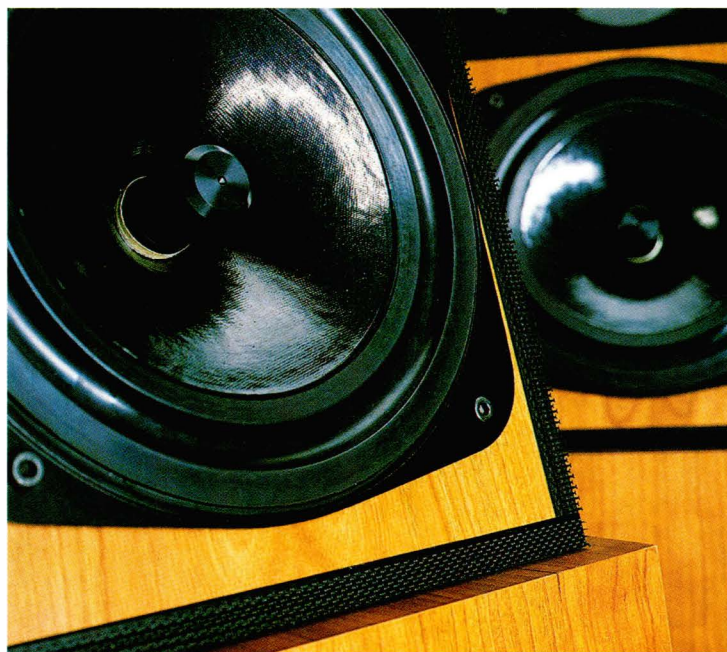
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Dynaudio
Audience 42 £400

It might be expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but it's an aristocrat among the breed, and we'd be surprised if there's a better small speaker around for the price.



Castle
Conway 3 £930

A great success with its lovely real wood finish and beautifully balanced sound, along with fine dynamics and transients. A kingly sub-£1,000 floorstander.



PMC
FB1 £1,410

A well-built floorstander that delivers the goods sonically, with the sort of subtlety and delicacy that's likely to have strong audiophile appeal.



B&W
Signature 805 £2,250

You won't get this degree of resolution out of a wider bandwidth speaker at anywhere near the price, and most of your music will sound considerably better through them.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
RE	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		A	30	●		226
R	AR S20	150	Might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28		A	28	●		215
RE	ATC SCM12	999	Transparent, engaging and quick – a revealing, high-fidelity performer that's not afraid to bare all	22,39,25		A	62	●		237
R	Audio Note AZ One	449	Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29	●	A	30		●	215
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	599	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19.5,37,30		A	30		●	211
RE	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23		A	23		●	226
RE	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29		A	25	●		234
RE	B&W DM309	330	All the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●		235
RE	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●		231
R	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		A	30	●		208
R	Blueroom Minipod	249	Wonderfully blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		A	50		●	225
R	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●		227
RE	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●		237
R	Dali Royal Tower	750	Cutely compact floorstander has a delightful liveliness and lightness of touch to match its luxury real wood finish	17,85,22	●	A	25		●	237
RE	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24		A	40	●		215
R	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricey but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●		231
R	Elac JET 205	650	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29		A	40	●		231
RE	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act	20,38,26		A	40	●		215
RE	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	24,36,27		A+	25	●		201
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned and sounds a bit coloured, but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		A+	27	●		199
RE	Infinity Alpha 30	300	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression	22,86,29	●	A	30		●	215
R	Jamo E 850	400	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	18,87,34	●	A-	30	●		224
RE	JBL Xt140	430	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	A	40	●		210
RE	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28	●	A-	22		●	227
R	JMLab Cobalt 816	899	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	A	22	●		224
R	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30		A	30		●	234
R	Mission m71	129	Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28		A	40		●	226
RE	Mission m73	199	Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,88,31	●	A	25	●		215
RE	Mission m51	300	Distinctive and dynamic – not the last word in subtlety but enjoyable with both music and video sources	21,32,34		A+	58		●	228
RE	Monitor Audio B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight controlled bass and pronounced midband	18.5,35,25		A	42		●	238
RE	Monitor Audio Silver S1	300	Super-quick sonics thanks to the C-CAM metalised drivers. Resolution and speed – a great value box	18,30,24		A	45		●	236
R	Monitor Audio Silver S8	800	A thoroughly impressive all-rounder, notable for its wide dynamic range, excellent imaging and fine neutrality	19,90,27	●	A	20	●		237
RE	Mordaunt Short MS914	300	An even and open loudspeaker that is both detailed and precise. A budget gem	21,90,27	●	A	50	●		234

SPECS KEY SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).



SUPER TEST: THE PERFECT HOME CINEMA SET-UP SORTED

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Our favourite GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW **STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet, but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	22,104,27	●	A+	45	●		196
RE	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		act	45		●	214
R	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●		229
EC	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	A-	20	●		200
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20	●		226
R	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26		A-	40	●		199
RE	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	A	20	●		204
R	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude, 'in yer face' balance and great dynamics	20,40,32		A	25	●		214
EC	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47		A-	25	●		237
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	A-	20	●		221
R	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	Attractive shape with a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	●	A+	40		●	229
R	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	A	38	●		219
RE	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	A	20	●		211
RE	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large standmount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		A+	50	●		219
R	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	A+	40		●	229
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	A+	37	●		223
EC	TAG McLaren F1	17,995	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	A-	25	●		202
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38	●		215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	A-	23	●		225
RE	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super-slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver marvellous musical results with superb imaging	15,130,17	●	A	30	●		225
RE	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30		●	229
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	A+	50		●	191
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid back, but also very charming and musical	17,97,30	●	A-	25	●		199
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way	21,100,21	●	A	45	●		225
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	●	A-	20	●		234
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	A-	45	●		212

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floor-standing or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position – this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £750
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 200 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



KEF
Q AV7 £1,300
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



JMLab
Cobalt package £1,797
There's no avoiding this package's fine underlying sound quality – both stereo and multichannel are reproduced with aplomb.



Mirage
Omni 2 £2,650
Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

Multichannel speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
BT	Acoustic Energy Aegis	650	High-value package with deep bass and smooth neutrality	A+	5	22	●	198
BT	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front)	A-	5	22	●	224
R	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28	●	224
BT	JBL Xti-series	980	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all-round tension	A	5	40	●	210
R	JMLab Cobalt	1,797	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	A	5	22	●	224
R	JMLab Electra system	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●	232
BT	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●	232
R	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●	232
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25	●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	20	●	210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	A	5	25	●	210
R	Spendor S-Series	1,650	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness	A	5	30	●	224
BT	Tannoy mXAV4	500	Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value	A	5	20	●	210
R	Wharfedale Pacific	700	Plenty of speaker package for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward, but unquestionably entertaining	A-	5	25	●	224

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

Bass speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
BT	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
R	REL Strata III	700	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence, this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42, 52, 33	100	20	210
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
BT	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59, 56, 39	200	16	217
BT	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5.40	300	30	225
R	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72x48x72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.
BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

Agencies include:
 ARCAM
 LINN
 NAIM
 MERIDIAN
 REGA
 B&W NAUTILUS
 PROCEED
 M+K
 NEAT
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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals

enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

Stereo headphones

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain
AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price
AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material
Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal
Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste
Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise.
Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone
Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low coloration and great comfort
Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too
Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics
Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way
Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates

SPECIFICATIONS					3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK		
		●		●	190	219
	●		●		190	205
		●		●	270	230
		●		●	250	194
	●		●		200	194
	●		●		200	230
		●	●		330	219
		●	●		270	205
		●	●		250	219
	●			●	160	205
●		●	●		295	205
	●		●		250	219

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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CABLES

Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA phono plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection. Speaker cable is sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing the best cables is not quite as

straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances

electrical varieties sound better than optical, but if you are after a smoother sound the light carriers have the advantage, as they do if long lengths are needed (10m+). Optical outputs tend to have Toslink connectors (around 99 per cent), but some electrical digital outputs are of the superior BNC type, which uses a bayonet-type socket. Check which type your digital component has before buying a digital interconnect.

Our favourite CABLES

Interconnects and speaker cables

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER	
			STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
Acoustic Research Master	50	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection	●		●			224
Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	●		●			211
Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●		●			211
Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●			211
Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●			224
Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●			211
Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension	●		●			211
Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price	●		●			211
QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●			211
Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round, with just a hint of bass congestion. Very good value	●		●			224
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		E	207
QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value					O	207
van den Hul Optocoupler MkII	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	20	Bi-wire cable with great kick in the bass, though the treble can sound dry and recessed	●		●			227
Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●			227
Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round		●	●			203
Ixos Gamma 6003	3	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent	●		●			203
Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
Kimber BVS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●			227
Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
QED XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●			215
Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●			203
Tara Labs Prism Nexa	10	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●		●			215
Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor		●	●			203
van den Hul The Snowline	5	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●			215

SPECS KEY STRANDED Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. SOLID CORE Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. COPPER Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. SILVER Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. DIGITAL CABLE TYPE E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS • ELEGANT SOUNDS

1. GamuT CD 1 player

This product has received universally stunning reviews in the US. A big, bold sound. £2400



1



4



5

2. Avalon Eidolon

We are now able to demonstrate this reference loudspeaker, along with the Diamond. Superlative transparency and resolution. Exceptionally musical with what appears to be an endless soundstage.



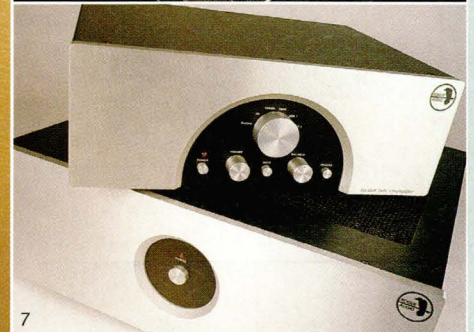
2

3. Shanling CD – T100 player

The amazing, highly flexible CD player with valve output and upsampling. Superb sound and certainly makes a statement with its appearance. £1650



3



7



8

4. GamuT D 200 dual mono power amplifier

An extremely lucid and controlled sound. £3250

5. Nottingham Analogue Horizon turntable

The new budget product from this respected manufacturer. Amazing value at £484; with Rega Arm £530. Tonearm shown is Nottingham Analogue Interspace at £434. Cartridge shown is Clearaudio Aurum Beta at £195

6. Unico integrated amplifier

80wpc integrated valve-mosfet amplifier. As you would expect, a remarkable sound from this valve amplifier manufacturer. £750 With phono stage £800. The new, matching Unico valve CD player produces a very big stage with rich tonality. Outstanding performance for its price. £1095

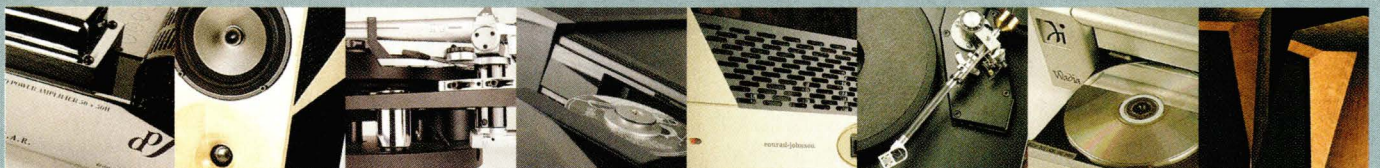
7. Rogue Audio valve amplification

Tremendous sound and build quality at this price point. The Model 66 pre-amplifier with phono stage costs £1295. The Model 88 stereo power amplifier 60wpc from matched 6550 valves. £1495

8. VPI Scout turntable with JMW Memorial 9" tonearm

Superb sound and value at £1350. Cartridge shown is Benz-Micro Glider at £650

Amphion • Avalon Acoustics • BCD Racks • Benz-Micro • Cardas • Clearaudio • Clearlight Audio RDC • conrad-johnson
Diapason • EAR/Yoshino • Gamut • Gryphon Audio Designs • Heart • IsoTek • Kuzma • Lavardin • Living Voice • Lyra
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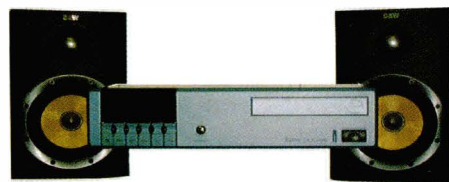
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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price
Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept
Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade
Avid Isosshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value
Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make
Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility
Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple, but modestly effective and very attractive
Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail
Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!
Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance
Townshend Seismic Sink Stand	900	Serious resolution and stunning isolation from air decoupled self-levelling design. If you have the cash, buy one

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
80.5	47		4	MDF	193
81	50.50	●	4	Glass	217
82	43		4	MDF	193
87.5	48		5	MDF	193
75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217
66	46	●	4	Glass	206
90	49	●	4	Glass	193
96	45.34		5	Glass	232
52	49		4	MDF	206
51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
92	50,40		5	Glass	217
88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
61	53,39.5		4	MDF	217

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS
Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain
Cyrus CLS50 Stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment
Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail
hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material
Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth
Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent
Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price
Partington Dreadnought Ultimate	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it
Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive
Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers

SPECIFICATIONS					
HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
60,50	14,5,18	●		3	202
64	17,19			1	220
61,56,51	16,5,18	●		2	202
63	17,20	●		1	220
61	15, 20	●		1	220
62	18,15	●	●	4	232
61	17,15	●	●	5	220
63	21,24	●		1	202
60	16	●		4	220
4	38,48			0	202

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY: HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on. **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY: HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.

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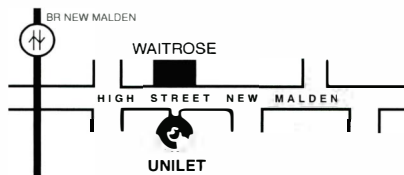
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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

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

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

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

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

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL DD (AC3) A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

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

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

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP or Digital Signal Processor. Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 41 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-A High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

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

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

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

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

JITTER An insidious distortion specific to digital audio caused by the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio, being imprecise.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

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

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

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the

ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

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

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

SACD (super audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

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

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

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. THX Ultra is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

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

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

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

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent. A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

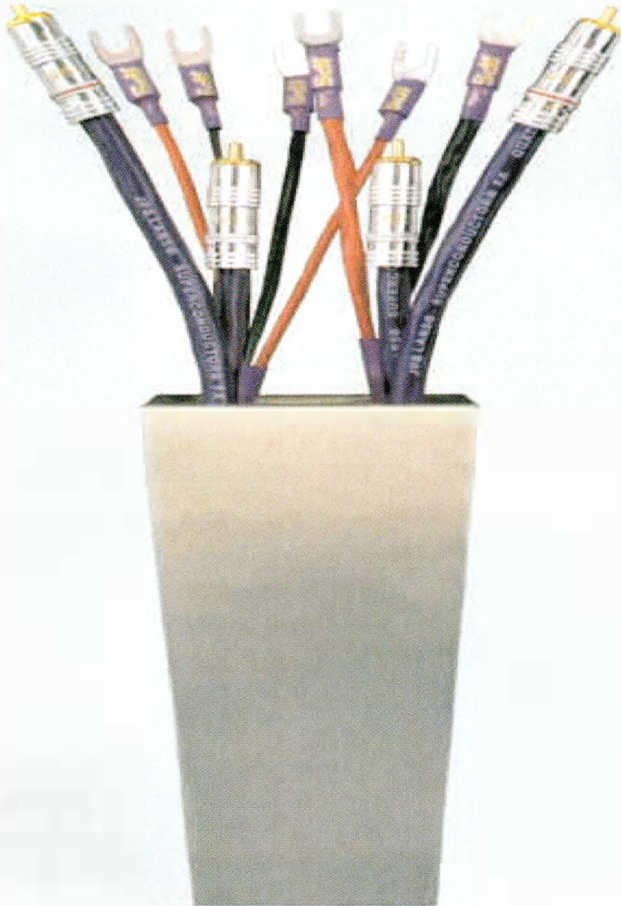
VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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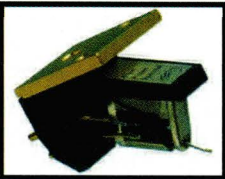
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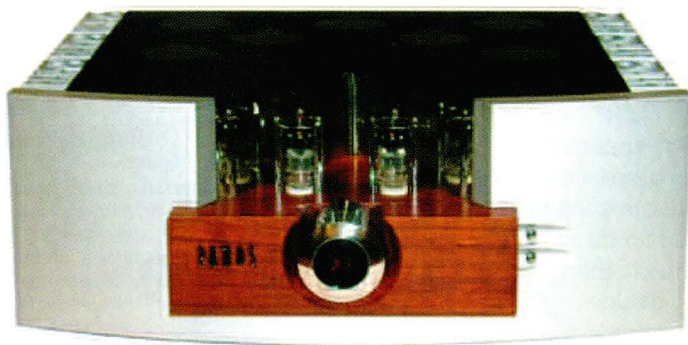
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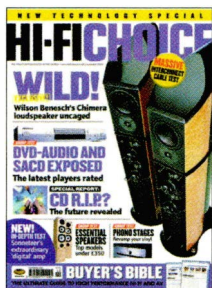
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- Special new technology issue
- Group Test: DVD-A/SACD players
- Group Test: Speakers
- Group Test: Phono stages



DECEMBER 2002/ISSUE 235

- Group Test: CD separates systems
- Group Test: AV amps
- Group Test: Phono cartridges
- Arcam AV8/P7 AV processor/amp



AWARDS 2002/ISSUE 236

- The best gear of the year
- Copland CVA306/CVA535 AV amp
- Karan KA-1180 stereo amplifier
- Pioneer DV-757Ai 'universal' player



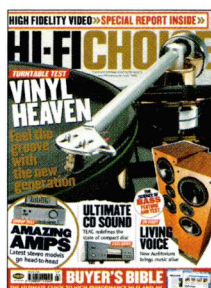
JANUARY 2003/ISSUE 237

- Group Test: Speakers
- Group Test: DVD players
- Test Feature: DACs
- Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD player



FEBRUARY 2003/ISSUE 238

- Group Test: CD players
- Group Test: AV amps and processors
- Test Feature: Mains cables & filters
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- Group Test: Stereo amps
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NEXT MONTH



Copland's CDA 822 CD player – on test next month

STATEMENTS

We promised it, you got it – AVI's new Lab Series amplifier gets a full probing, along with the latest CD player from Copland. Dynalab's extraordinarily expensive FM tuner turns us radio ga-ga, and Neat has handed over its diminutive standmount Ultimatum speaker for us to fire up.

INCOMING

Our new product wish list is pages long after the Bristol show – queuing up for reviews are new electronics from Orelle, PURE's latest DAB/FM tuner and dinky pair of EPOS speakers.

GROUP TEST – PRE/POWER AMPS

One of our favourite tests of the year: tasty two-box amps. And what a selection – brand new models from Naim, Bryston, Primare and Exposure. Do NOT miss this one.

GROUP TEST – MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGES

Virtually every hi-fi speaker brand makes surround sound products these days, but who can you trust for genuine excellence with music as well as movies? Let's see what B&W, KEF, Dynaudio and Mission can do with sound from all around...

TEST FEATURE – HI-FI CABLES

We untangle the twisted world of cables and explore the theories and technologies involved in piping music around your system, then test 12 of the latest wires in our in-depth test special!

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PLEASE PHOTOCOPY

Star Deck

David Vivian attempts to boldly go where no turntable has gone before

The moment I realised I didn't need a turntable anymore? When the accumulating mass of my CD collection began to develop its own gravitational field and suck paper clips off my desk. Or maybe it was when affordable CD players started to sound 'just good enough'. You remember that – not as good as a budget vinyl spinner but sufficiently musical to enjoy without feeling you had to get up half-way through and slip on an LP.

Okay, I know. You're still thinking about the first sentence. How can anyone claim to be a hi-fi enthusiast having turned their back on vinyl? The question's been bugging me ever more in recent months. When I think back to my Rega, Linn, Pink Triangle and Michell days, it's with the dull ache of nostalgia. Still got the 500 or so LPs, of course. I'd never sell those. Dumb, really, as all they do is gather dust; but I suppose I thought I'd come back to records one day, despite the fact that CD players have long since left behind being 'just good enough'.

But it isn't just the sound quality thing or a burning desire to get reacquainted with some music I probably should let go that's got me drooling. It's the idea of the turntable itself. The object. That incomparably cool synthesis of art and engineering, defiantly re-cast in the modern era as the antithesis of the nipple-clean, conformist, convenience medium mainstream hi-fi has become.

Now you *can* buy an honest and capable record deck made out of MDF, metal and plastic for little more than £100. But it's not what I want. Recently, turntables have transcended mere functionality to reanimate a dying genre. What's required here is the business in a 'Welcome home, Daddy,' kind of way. A turntable so extreme, so excessive, so otherworldly, that if miniature aliens ever crash-landed on Earth, they'd try to fly it home. All right, it'll cost as much as a car. But, at a push, it's got to substitute for sex.



“What’s required is a turntable so extreme, so other-worldly, that if miniature aliens ever crash-landed on Earth and encountered one they’d try to fly it home.”

Suggestions please. Linn LP12 Basik for a grand? Do me a Rod Laver. SME Model 20 at £5.5K, then? You're having a Gerald (political cartoonist, wear it round your neck). Toy town kit. I was thinking more along the lines of the Platine Magnum made by eccentric French turntable legend JC Verdier. Verdier is an imaginative engineer. He compares the bearing on one of his turntable designs, in which a pump continuously maintains the oil pressure, to breakfast. “The result has been obtained thanks to the ‘slice of bread principle,’” he says. “At breakfast, when you butter your toast, if the butter is at the right temperature, your knife lays the butter on the toast, gliding voluptuously without ever touching the bread. In a similar way, at the top of the axle, two blades making a 120-degree angle spread the oil, maintaining a

thick lubricating bath on which the whole weight of the turntable can rest. Which results in a totally rumble-free turntable.” That's what I'm talking about. A turntable made by someone who understands the importance of a good breakfast.

No surprise the Magnum's got that little bit more size, authority and weight, like a 60k 20-inch platter spinning on a 1.2-inch 'steel axle' sitting in a 4k bearing. The PM's granite base dials up another 100 kilos and is supported by three adjustable feet with air shock absorbers. The three motors and their power supplies are housed in a separate 40k unit. With its own mounting table, the whole assembly tips the scales at 300 kilos, or about half a Smart car. Price? Verdier suggests “somewhere between £20,000 and £30,000” for potential customers to discuss with him. Be in touch, JC. ☺

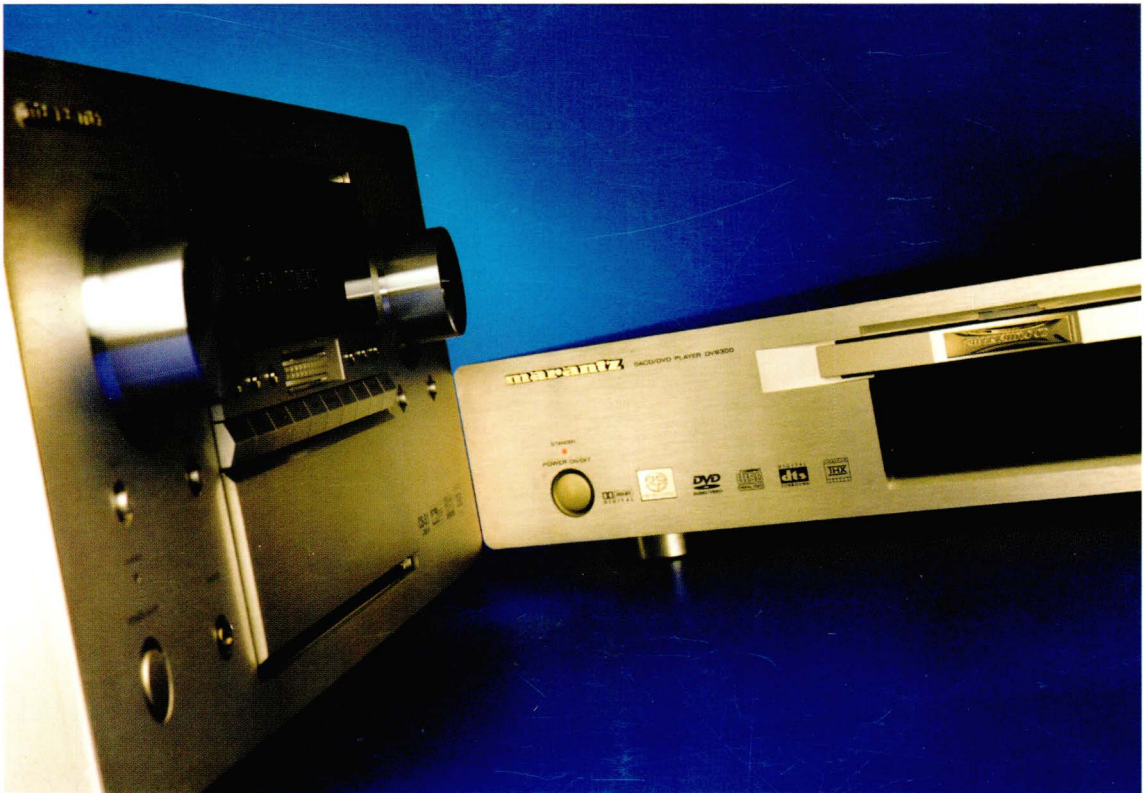


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