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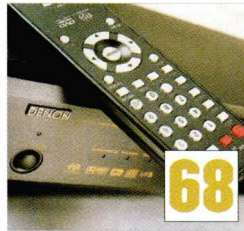


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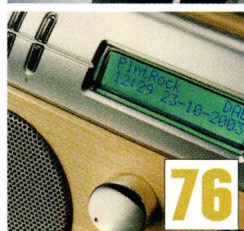
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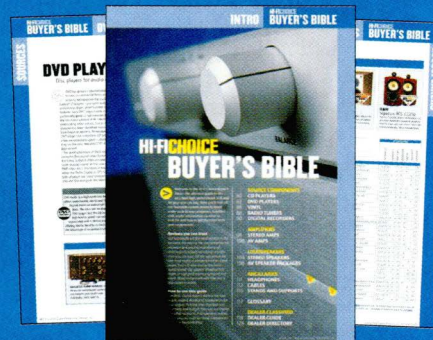
EST. 1975

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 28 years, our unique tests have brought you the most thorough and reliable hi-fi journal around. And our mix of rigorous group tests and in-depth solo reviews continues to ensure that **HFC** is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the *smarter* hi-fi read...

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



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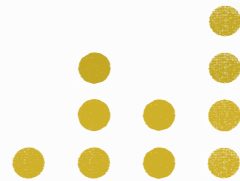
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audiofile



➤ THE YEAR IN BRIEF

You now hold in your hands

a very special edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*. It's our annual Awards issue, a veritable cocktail of all the best kit we've seen, heard and tested to the limit throughout the past year.

Our Awards are a little different from the norm. First, our performance-led approach means only the finest make the grade. We've listened to the kit, measured it, lived with it a while and sought the opinions of 'blind' listening panels before venturing our verdicts... verdicts formed by the most creditable set of reviewers around.

Then there's the fact that we don't limit ourselves to contrived product categories with a single Oscar-style winner trailed by a set of also-rans. Our winners come in four broad groups: Source Components, Amplifiers, Speakers and Cables & Accessories, ensuring all bases are covered yet only the most worthy earn the accolade of Product Of The Year. There's kit that will serve in a top-notch, low-cost separates system, components that will take you another rung or two up the sonic ladder and gear that may form the basis of your hi-fi hopes, dreams and aspirations, all presented in steps from entry-level to high-end. We've got two-channel stereo and high-quality multichannel surround, kit for purist audio systems and gear for those who want high-fidelity video too. Quite simply, there's something here for everyone, with a single common thread – scintillating sound that engages the senses so the music that moves you, moves you more.

There's plenty else in this issue too, including fresh product reviews, our regular music round-up and the usual concoction of news and opinion from hi-fi's most reliable grapevine. But first, let us take you through some of the key hi-fi happenings of the year in an *Audiofile* special – events that have helped shape 2003 and will influence the year to come...

Tim Bower **editor**



TWEETER TWEAKING

➤ Way back in Y2K, Tannoy surprised everyone. First by introducing a costly 'SuperTweeter', and then more importantly by scoring a considerable commercial hit with it. Although the need to extend output an octave or more above the audio band remains controversial, other brands such as KEF, Neat Acoustics and Townshend Audio have also responded.

However, two leading hi-fi speaker brands, B&W and Focal-JMLab, have both rejected the 'add-on' super-tweeter approach. Both validly point out the difficulty of integrating such a device with a normal tweeter, and instead are focusing their attentions on extending the bandwidth of 'normal' tweeters.

B&W has successfully extended the bandwidth of its 'Nautilus' alloy dome by improving its motor drive and mechanical integrity. Meanwhile, Focal-JMLab has gone one step further with a new wide-band tweeter using a pure beryllium diaphragm (pictured), with a very high stiffness-to-weight ratio and good self-damping.



Other examples also exist, including the pure diamond diaphragm in the Accuton D2 20-6, from German driver specialist Thiel & Partner, which claims a bandwidth which goes up to 100kHz, and further developments may be confidently predicted.



HI-FI MEETS THE PC

➤ **PC/home audio convergence continued to evolve in 2003, with hard disk storage making further inroads from the desk to the living room. Yamaha and Cyrus (LinkServer, above) have recently joined pioneers like Imerge with hard disk-based multi-room products, and more are set to follow.**

Meanwhile, people are now paying to download music, the influence of Apple's iPod player and iTunes service moving things on apace. The Media Centre Edition of Microsoft's Windows continues to point the way – direct digital music distribution is here to stay...

THE RISE OF ROOM EQ

➤ Adding equalisation in order to even out the bass peaks and troughs caused by loudspeaker/room interaction has been on the agenda for more than a decade. But it's only now, with the increasing availability of high-power digital signal processing (DSP), that practical commercial examples are appearing.

Harman subsidiary Infinity was the first to get involved, the RABOS (Room-Adaptive Bass Optimisation System) technique allowing a 'one-shot' approach to removing the most intrusive room mode on its Prelude MTS (right) and Intermezzo 2.6 models. Further development is expected to involve an auto set-up routine.

B&O has introduced just this feature on its amazing new active-drive Beolab 5, which certainly improves the overall bass alignment of this intriguing loudspeaker. Meanwhile, Meridian, Tannoy and TAG McLaren have all announced systems designed to do a similar job. But while the idea looks very well founded, all these approaches rely on operating in the digital domain prior to power amplification, which may prove awkward from an audiophile perspective.



CD'S LAST STAND?

⊕ In an era of multi-format disc players, a dedicated CD player is still the best thing to play your CDs on. The format has the best software support/sound quality ratio going and the only serious competition in popularity-terms comes from MP3, so if sound quality is an issue it remains unbeatable. DVD-Audio and SACD may have the sonic advantage but the catalogue is still less than one per cent of that for CD. At least for now...

This year, new format competition has forced CD player designers to come up with new ideas. The Resolution Audio Opus 21 (pictured right and reviewed in *HFC* 244) is a two-boxer with a difference – transport and DAC in one case with the power supply, display and so on in another. One-boxers have been getting more impressive too – Meridian's stunning 507 defines precision and we can't wait to hear its new C08, while Classé's CDP-10 brings high-end refinement to a bigger audience at a very competitive £1,599. It's also been a good year for standalone DACs, which are enjoying a renaissance thanks to the upsampling trend. Notable examples from Chord Electronics, Musical Fidelity and Nagra are setting the pace.



HI-RES LINKAGE

⊕ 2003 was the year when the high-res multichannel formats finally got a digital connection standard. i.Link, or FireWire, is a single cable which replaces six analogue interconnects and features a clock link to minimise jitter. So far only Sony and Pioneer (DV-757Ai universal DVD player and VSA-AX5i receiver pictured) have released i.Linkable products but Marantz and Yamaha have announced that they will soon follow suit.

21st Century SCART that is likely to find favour as it caters for digital audio and video – you'll find it on next year's Pioneer DV-868AVi universal player and the latest Meridians. Then there's DVi, a pure video digital interface that is now appearing on plasma TVs and has a strong base in computing circles.



As with any new standard the future is still not clear. For a start there's an alternative called HDMI, a sort of

VINYL REVIVAL

⊕ Vinyl's mini-renaissance has continued through 2003. Some of this stems from the format's unquenchable popularity among the dance/DJ fraternity, but vinyl's following in hi-fi circles remains solid, with 'audiophile'-standard pressings available on the high street and many still revelling in the format's tactile quality in the face of a complex digital world.



Hi-fi manufacturers have been meeting this demand with a plethora of new decks. Some are priced almost as impulse

purchases, like Pro-Ject's E210 1 Xpression (pictured). Others, like Roksan's TMS2 and Musical Fidelity's M1 are much more costly. But the hottest price point seems to be around £1,000, with Avid, Clearaudio, Michelle, Origin Live, Nottingham Analogue and Roksan all vying for a slice of the action.

HARD TIMES FOR HI-FI

⊕ It has been a turbulent year for the hi-fi industry. The Iraq war undermined demand in the early months and trends toward multi-room at one end of the market and MP3 at the other have led to some serious downsizing. TAG McLaren is now concentrating purely on home cinema and both Denon and Marantz lost their independence to a Japanese holdings company. Yamaha reported a loss for the first time in 100 years and even Arcam had to cut 20 jobs. Meanwhile, Kenwood pulled out of audio all together.

In North America, Harman shut down its Madrigal facility where Mark Levinson, Proceed and Revel products were built and moved production to the Lexicon and JBL factories.

Having sold NHT and Rockford, Recoton filed for bankruptcy leaving the future of several brands in doubt, including Heco, Jensen and Acoustic Research (AR) among others.

THE STYLE COUNCIL

⊕ Style continues to be a key concern for manufacturers as they seek to differentiate their products in a competitive marketplace. Home cinema has had its part to play, with sub/sat packages clearly the number one growth area in the loudspeaker sector as consumers seek discrete solutions to the domestic conundrum of spreading multiple speakers around the room.

Firms like Chord Electronics (pictured), Hovland and Shanling continue to push the stylistic boundaries, while even traditional 'sound-first' brands like NAD, Naim and Orelle have smartened up their acts with distinctive new looks. Turntables are looking increasingly fabulous too, even at lower price levels.

Fashion tends to go in circles, even in the hi-fi world. Through much of the 1990s, hi-fi had to be black to be taken seriously. Then, as manufacturers and punters alike sought a degree of differentiation, silver came back in and black was branded 'boring'. But now, it seems, black is 'the new silver' once again, and judging by the increasing number of raven-hued products we're now seeing in the office, black is well and truly back.



MUSCLE AMPS ON THE MAKE

⊕ Muscle power amps capable of driving everything short of the Paris shuttle are in vogue again. You can blame a renewed interest in massive high-grade speakers that need complete control and consistent behaviour over a wide bandwidth for this. Sitting pretty at the top of the market is Krell with its Full Power Balanced series, which in the stereo range extends to £15,000 for the immense 700-watt FPB 700cx (reviewed in *HFC* 234).

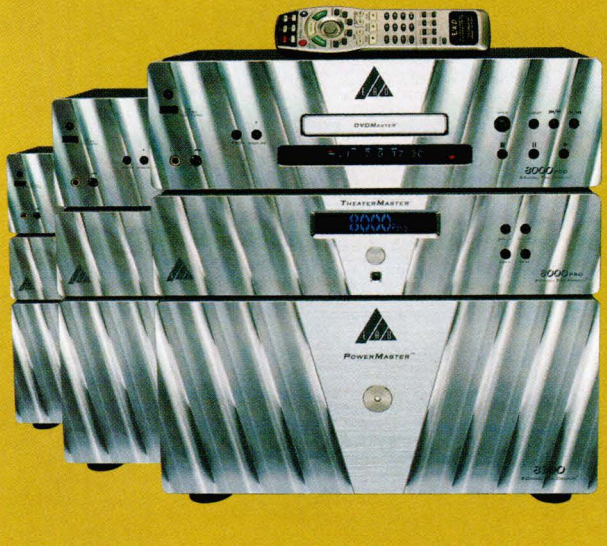
Mark Levinson should be a natural foil for Krell, but is currently suffering from a rather chaotic reorganisation of its business. On the other hand, we can soon expect some high-class newcomers from Canadian specialist Classé, following B&W's takeover of the brand. Other prominent names in the high-power game include Karan Acoustics with the 450-watt KA-S450, the first-ever Premier series solid state amp from Conrad-Johnson, the 350, and Musical Fidelity's three-box kW amp, which as its name suggests delivers a full kilowatt per channel. But the most extraordinary amp of all comes from Australian brand Halcro – the unfeasibly expensive dm68 monoblock (pictured right), priced at £26,600 per pair and reviewed in *HFC* 243.



AV AMPS COME OF AGE

⊕ Big home cinema amps, dripping with controls and digital sound bending circuits, used to be the laughing stock of the hi-fi industry. They were clearly over-endowed, yet under-engineered where it counted, and with all their flexibility they rarely lived up to the hype. Even simple parameters like power specs were usually missed by a mile.

But slowly, things are changing. Despite their reputation, many of these amps remain prodigiously powerful, and they are also raising their game in the area of sound quality. Soundfield processing has been improving in parallel, and with the introduction of high-res, multichannel music formats, they are now beginning to attract quality-conscious, audio-first buyers. Pioneer and Denon have led the way with integrated AV amps, while some truly superb processor/power amp pairings have blown us away this year (like the EAD kit pictured below and reviewed in *HFC* 242). With high-bandwidth capable digital interfaces like i.Link now on the uptake, 2004 should prove very interesting indeed...



GREAT UNIVERSALS

⊕ Mainstream manufacturers can barely give basic DVD-Video players away now that you can buy no-name equivalents in your local supermarket for £40. But the technology is on the move, and these very companies that have lost out on entry-level models can't lay their hands on enough of their immensely flexible 'universal' players, compatible with both DVD-Audio and SACD alongside CD and DVD-Video. In a maturing environment, there is increasing interest in models like the Denon DVD-2900 (right), and upmarket players like Marantz's DV-1252 an Linn's

Unidisk models. Naim is about to release a DVD player that can be upgraded to SACD or DVD-Audio (but not both), and Primare has launched its first universal player.

But the goalposts are being moved by models like Pioneer's DV-757Ai, which also includes an i.Link digital interface. Even without this, the performance of premium DVD-Audio/Video players like Arcam's DV27A when playing CDs has come a long way since DVD was first launched.



HIGH-RES AUDIO GROWING FAST

⊕ In some cases it is easier and more instructive to look at what didn't happen this year than what did. What didn't happen, save for a handful of decent releases mainly from Warner, was DVD-Audio. SACD meanwhile has been making hay with the Bob Dylan and Rolling Stones back catalogues, reissued as hybrid SACD. But not all is as it seems. On the whole they are not selling because of their high-res multichannel sound. They're being purchased primarily for their qualities as remastered CDs, and they are racked alongside other CDs without even being clearly labelled as SACDs. Meanwhile, the established music retailers like HMV and Virgin are looking increasingly like outposts for the Hollywood machine. But there are finally signs that the record industry is beginning to wake up to the power of DVD-Video and DVD-Audio, so expect some action over the next year, especially when Warner starts releasing its promised hybrid DVD/ CD discs early in 2004.



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BRUISER LOUDSPEAKERS

Big, money-no-object loudspeakers have always been attractive, and not just to loudspeaker manufacturers who are anxious to let the world know what they can do. This year, however, has been a classic by any standards, coincidentally following a year in which B&W made good with the Nautilus 800. First Focal-JMLab laid down a marker with its new £45,000 flagship speaker – the outstanding beryllium tweeter-equipped Grande Utopia Be. Then another major name in the French loudspeaker manufacturing pantheon, Triangle, chimed in with its impressively tall and slender £20,000 Magellan (pictured right). And last but certainly not least, Wilson-Benesch has launched the ACT

(Advanced Composite Technology) Silver at a comparatively reasonable (in this company, at any rate) £8,400. This model makes extensive use of carbon fibre, and its welded internal structure makes it one of the few designs that can boast of being assembled by a welder.

In the real world of course, very few people are going to have worry about where they're going to have to shift their furniture to accommodate speakers such as these in their homes. But a larger number will benefit indirectly from the technology and expertise that trickles down into more affordable speakers, including models like Focal-JMLab's Alto Utopia Be (reviewed last month), the next step down from the flagship Grande.



DAB MARCHES ON

Digital radio has continued its gradual penetration of the mainstream consciousness, with active DAB marketing campaigns and an increasing range of nicely designed, well-priced kit. A number of new names touting portable DAB radios have sprung up this year, while brands like Cambridge and DAB-pioneer Pure Digital have done brisk business with their tuners (Pure's DRX-702 is pictured above). Meanwhile, the news that Asda is now stocking DAB tuners in ten of its larger stores could start a trend that sees DAB radios

on UK supermarket shelves next to £40 DVD players. Broadcast coverage is improving too – the BBC switched on more new DAB transmitters last month and aims to achieve 85 per cent coverage in the UK by mid-2004, while digital radio via cable and satellite TV services and even the internet has increased the penetration of digital audio broadcasting in the home. New features like rewind and record are expected on DAB sets next year, but sadly broadcast bit-rates show little sign of improving on the current average of 130Kbps.



DIGITAL AMPLIFICATION CREEPS FORWARD

Digital amplification has been bubbling under for some years now, but has so far stubbornly failed to make the impact it promised on the hi-fi scene. Sony and others make low-cost integrated systems incorporating digital amps, with all the promised benefits – compact construction, efficiency and low heat dissipation. Opus, Yamaha and others are using simple digital amps, in some cases 'pseudo'-digital class T circuits, in their multi-room audio systems, and Class D amps have been put to use in the limited bandwidth world of subwoofers. But the killer punch – a leap in sound quality – has eluded the industry so far. Even the impressive PWM (Pulse Width Modulation) solutions pioneered by TACT and Sharp's own one-bit technology have yet to make real inroads (though a few high-end brands have made successful digital/analogue hybrids, like Chapter – see p64).

Perhaps 2004 will mark the turning point. The recent announcement by Sony (TA-DA9000ES pictured) of a proprietary S-Master development of PWM digital technology is being touted as the next great leap forward. It's simply too early to judge whether the technology will deliver, but the potential pay-off for a signal chain that remains digital all the way to the speakers is immense.

PASSION FOR SOUND

Hi-Fi Choice has evolved this year. We've maintained our strengths – the experience and passion of our writers, our unique comparative tests incorporating graphic lab reports and blind listening panels, and presented them in a fresher, more sophisticated package. We're giving you more ratings, more features, more of the crucial new kit you want to read about, and we're giving it to you first. Our philosophy is simple – a serious hi-fi magazine should be like a good system – rich in detail yet crisp, clear and easy to use.

It's our 250th issue next month, on sale 29 December. Remember – no magazine is more dedicated to your passion than *HFC*, the UK's sharpest and most reliable *real* hi-fi read.



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AUDIOPHILE VINYL

SANTANA

Abraxas

Hear The Music/CBS 180g vinyl

Music: Santana's second album from 1970 remains the high point of his career. It's essentially latin-influenced rock that works on a number of levels. Peter Green's *Black Magic Woman* has a new energy and life thanks to latin percussion that the original Fleetwood Mac would never have imagined, while Tito Puente's *Oye Como Va* has a rock treatment that doesn't smother its roots but enhances the rhythmic subtleties within. Carlos Santana managed to combine a range of styles without making a mess of them or getting carried away with his own distinctive playing as tended to happen with later works.

★★★★★

Sound: A dense and rich recording, this pressing benefits from the skills of Joerg Kessler who mastered the vinyl for Sony Music Germany, and it delivers the energy and dynamics of the music along with the fine detail. A great result. ★★★★★ JK

MARY BLACK

By The Time It Gets Dark

Vivante/Dara 180g vinyl

Music: In the early nineties Mission sponsored a Mary Black disc that brought this Irish singer's crystalline voice to the ear of the hi-fi community and wedged it firmly on the list of great demo artists. This is her second album from 1987 and contains a dozen folk-influenced songs by writers as diverse as Richard

Thompson, Ewan McColl and Henry (Moon River) Mancini.

Accompaniment is largely acoustic and lead by producer Declan Sinnott's sharp guitar picking with back-up from soprano sax, congas and cello among others. Black's voice is strong and clear, often very beautiful and she sings a sad song with tremendous feeling. ★★★

Sound: Vivante used the Metropolis half-speed cutting process and you can hear it in the clear, full highs and strength of sound. It could be sweeter but it's certainly not short on detail or power. ★★★★★ JK

These and other audiophile LPs are available from Vivante: ☎ 01293 822186 @ www.vivante.co.uk

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



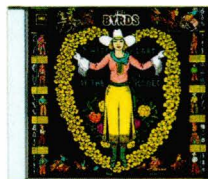
ISOBEL CAMPBELL

Amorino

Snowstorm

Music: Isobel Campbell played cello with shambling indie iconoclasts Belle & Sebastian before branching out with her own brand of fey, sweet, fine-toned pop. Eschewing guitars for the most part in favour of a sixties French pop-style palette of strings, flutes, muted horns, and accordion, it's never deep or difficult, but often beautiful. The sense of an artist stretching her wings is obvious, and perhaps there are one too many attempts to show her range – the ragtime swing of *The Cat's Pyjamas* sits uneasily with the imaginary Parisian spring mood of the rest of the album. ★★★★

Sound: As with much of her old band's material, the 'fi' is less than 'hi', but it does possess a cosy warmth that's much in keeping with the mood. ★★★★★ DO



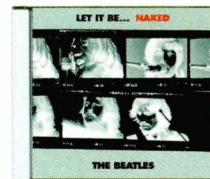
THE BYRDS

Sweetheart Of The Rodeo (Deluxe)

Columbia Legacy

Music: One of the most influential records in rock history was a product of Roger McGuinn's dreams of Americana and Gram Parsons' distillation of pure American country. Recorded in Nashville in Spring of 1968 and glistening with pedal-steel guitar, banjo, fiddle and honky-tonk piano, the most remarkable thing about the album was the songs. Dylan, Woody Guthrie and Merle Haggard populate a roster which speaks wisely of the lives of pilgrims and prisoners, sinners and seekers. This two-CD re-issue comes with 14 unreleased tracks, and a booklet full of rare photos and info. ★★★★★

Sound: Vic Anesini's Super-Bit Mapping process allows the acoustic instrumentation to shine through like never before. ★★★★★ MP



THE BEATLES

Let It Be - Naked

Parlophone

Music: *Let It Be* was never the farewell album the Beatles deserved. Now 33 years later, McCartney and Starr have refashioned it to give us the back-to-basics album the band intended before producer Phil Spector got hold of it. The orchestration, choirs and effects have been removed to leave the Beatles playing like a proper band again. *The Long And Winding Road* is transformed without the schmaltzy strings, Lennon's *Don't Let Me Down* has been added and the running order improved. Now *Let It Be* sounds like the coherent album it never did at the time. ★★★★★

Sound: Spector might be the world's most legendary record producer, but this stripped-back reinvention of the album suggests that he did the Beatles no favours. ★★★★★ NW



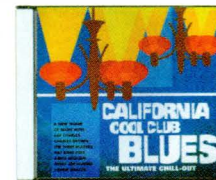
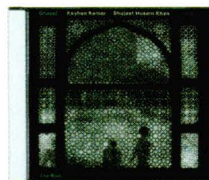
GHAZAL

The Rain

ECM

Music: Ghazal consists of grown-up child prodigies Shujaat Husain Khan (sitar, vocals) and Kayhan Kalhor (kamancheh, a sort of Persian fiddle) along with relative youngster Sandeep Das on tabla. The group's usual method is to build improvisations out of traditional ragas and modes from the classical Indian and Persian repertoire, taking them where they will, which can be quite a journey – there are just three tracks on this 53-minute album, each of them running the gamut from peaceful evocation to intense, passionate virtuosic pyrotechnics. The two main instruments complement each other surprisingly well, the jangling tones of the sitar counterpointed by the soaring, evocative sighs and elastic tone of the kamancheh. ★★★★★

Sound: This performance was recorded in a concert hall, but could have been a cathedral such is the clarity and presence of the instruments. ★★★★★ DO



VARIOUS

California Cool Club Cuts

Giant Steps Records

Music: This mid-price offering – compiled by jazz guru Roy Carr – is billed as "The Ultimate Chill Out" album which isn't a bad description, though the word "Fifties" should probably be in there since all these jazzy, laid-back choons were laid down between 1949 and 1960. T-Bone Walker's bluesy *Life's Too Short* is probably the best of a bright bunch but Nat King Cole, Johnny Otis and Slim Gaillard are all in there too. End the week in style. ★★★★★

Sound: Despite the hiss that's audible on a couple of tracks, this is a testimony to the sound engineers of yesteryear. How briskly direct those three-track vocals were, all you needed to hear and no more. ★★★★★ PS



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "This is modern classic jazz."

EST ESBJÖRN SVENSSON TRIO *Strange Place For Snow* ACT CD

Music: EST's 2002 album combines groove oriented keyboard work with tight but imaginative drums and double bass to tremendous effect. The piano is similar to Keith Jarrett at his more disciplined, and there's always a hint of Svensson's hero Thelonius Monk to keep the pace just so. Dan Berglund's bass is never lazy, driving each tune with power and grace. There is plenty of variety from tune to tune, some are atmospheric

while others indulge the pleasure of a good riff, the players working around the beat without letting it get away. This is modern classic jazz – not heavy, but always interesting. ★★★★★

Sound: Made up of largely acoustic instruments, this is a fine recording with a lot of fine detail to pick out and it easily sorts the great from the good in hardware terms. ★★★★★ JK



RYAN ADAMS

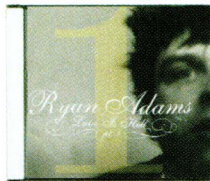
Love Is Hell Parts One & Two

Lost Highway

Music: *Rock 'N' Roll*, the bombastic 'official' new album from Ryan Adams which has received mixed reviews, wasn't the record he originally wanted to release. But his record company rejected his first offering, *Love Is Hell*, as 'too dark'.

After threats of legal action, they've now reluctantly agreed to issue its 18 songs spread across two EPs. The good news for fans of the lyrical style Adams developed on the acclaimed *Heartbreaker* is that *Love Is Hell* is a partial return to that album's memorable bitter-sweet aesthetic. The songs are cracking, Adams sounds suitably torn-and-frayed and *Lost Highway* must have been mad not to have recognised its quality. ★★★★★

Sound: Assisted by former Smiths producer John Porter, the guitars sparkle, while Adams' often spooky vocals echo atmospherically around the mix, especially on a magnificently improbable acoustic cover of Oasis's *Wonderwall*. ★★★★★ NW



ARNOLD BAX

Symphony No. 7, Tintagel

David Lloyd-Jones (conductor) Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Naxos 8.557145

Music: The tone poem *Tintagel*, Bax's most popular work, is a very English piece, but with echoes of Wagner, which conjures up the majesty of the sea. The seventh symphony, written 20 years later in 1939, was Bax's last, and although it lacks the accessible charm of earlier symphonies it is full of energy and invention. Both works are played with commitment and energy, and the sound has an honesty that makes up for an occasional lack of finesse. ★★★★★

Sound: The stereo perspective is a little kaleidoscopic, but the recording, at the Royal Scottish National Concert Hall in Glasgow, is powerfully atmospheric. ★★★★★ AG



HAYDN

String Quartet in F Major, James MacMillan Tuireadh, Schubert String Quartet in A Min

The Allegri Quartet, James Campbell (clarinet)

Naim CD067

Music: James MacMillan's *Tuireadh*, in which the quartet is augmented by a clarinet, is the odd man out here, and was written to commemorate the Piper Alpha oil rig disaster during which 167 lives were lost. The work is flanked by the more classically proportioned Haydn and Schubert quartets. The latter in particular is a splendid work, lyrical and thematically refined. ★★★★★

Sound: The sound is strongly focused, with a very distinctive and fairly empty sounding acoustic that gives the players nowhere to hide. But these players are too assured and virtuosic to need flattering. ★★★★★ AG

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

NORAH JONES

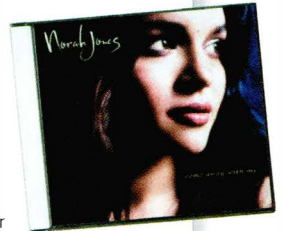
Come Away With Me

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Blue Note

Music: This classy album made quite an impression on the hi-fi fraternity last year and this SA rendition will join the ranks of dem discs at shows in the next year and probably beyond. Her voice is reminiscent of another Jones, Rickie Lee, herself something of an audiophile darling in the eighties. Norah is a little softer and more natural, she sings with real depth of feeling but doesn't have to overdo things for effect. The songs on here are largely romantic and beautifully played by a group of very slick dudes. Hank Williams' *Cold Cold Heart* joins original tunes including Jones' title track. Smooth music with heart and just enough edge, this sounds like a grower. ★★★★★

Sound: The SA mix matches the music – smooth, clean and open, in a very slick production that's sensitive to the feel of the band. The surround mix spreads the band around the room but keeps the voice largely up front, while the stereo has more integrity and precision of imaging. ★★★★★ JK



RACHMANINOV

Vespers Op 37

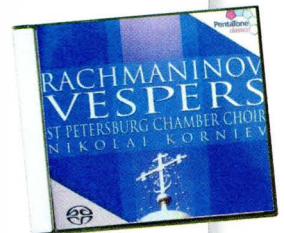
St Petersburg Chamber Choir, Nikolai Korniev (conductor)

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Pentatone Classics PTC 5186 027

Music: This devotional all-night vespers for the Russian Orthodox church was composed in 1915 for solo voices in keeping with the requirements of the liturgy, which does not permit embellishment from added instrumentation. The rich, polyphonic writing however is an absolute joy – colourful, varying in mood and with vocal echoes of bells and trumpet tones adding colour, it was apparently the composer's favourite of his own works, along with *The Bells* (Opus 35). The performances are top drawer, immaculately performed in every respect. ★★★★★

Sound: One of the highlights of the SACD era is the Pentatone Classics series, recorded at the old Polyhymnia home of Philips recordings. This is an excellent example of a recording which reproduces the rapt beauty of the sound in a solid space while retaining a properly focused image. ★★★★★ AG



REM

In Time 1988-2003: The Best Of REM

DVD-Audio (24/96 surround,

Dolby Digital 5.1 and 2.0, DTS 5.1)

Warner Video

Music: While purists may complain REM were never the same after signing for Warner, the body of work they've produced since then stands comparison with anyone's over the same period. The new tracks are first rate too, *Bad Day* (pretty much, *It's The End Of The World Part 2*) is REM near their best, and while perhaps not a killer reason to buy the disc, it's certainly worthy of its place beside some of the band's finest moments. The only reason we wouldn't buy this disc on DVD-A is because of the excellent bonus-disc of the CD version – why can't we have that as well! ★★★★★

Sound: One of the best surround sound mixes we've heard, a subtle and engaging testament to the fantastic work producer Elliot Scheiner is doing with the medium. ★★★★★ SM



ChoiceMail

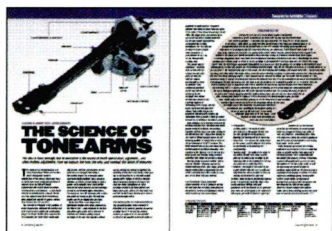
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Above: The Science Of Tonearms feature from HFC 244.

REGA ARM UPGRADE

I've set up a new Rega RB250 arm on my turntable, but I found that the RB250/Goldring G1012 combo sounded very dull and I suspected the nasty end stub and counterweight to be the culprit. I have access to the necessary tools to produce a copy of the Origin Live torqued counterweight/end stub and now my turntable sounds amazing. Bass is thunderous and agile, midrange nicely detailed, transients have a decent 'snap', and vocals seem just right. I can thoroughly recommend this upgrade for all Rega arms – it is truly amazing in terms of sound per pound, better still if you can make one!

Danza via email

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

What's happening with the superb Marantz CD6000 KI Signature? The UK dealers I've spoken to tell me it's no longer in production. So what's the replacement?

Arthur via email

HFC: We spoke to Marantz who confirmed it has stopped making the CD6000KI Sig player and has sold all of its new stock. We still believe this to be the best sub-£500 player on the market, so be quick if you're after a future classic – the dealers have the last few models. However, the official word is that there will be a new KI Signature player in the near future. What's still undecided is whether it will be a CD or SACD

player. We do know that the new CD7300 has been confirmed as one of the possibilities for tweaking, but designer Ken Ishiwata is still considering his options.

CD TO SUIT

I am looking for a new CD player with a max price limit of £400 and have been looking at three options: Arcam Diva CD73T (£399), Rotel RCD-02 (£379) and the Marantz CD7300 (£350). It would partner a Marantz PM7200 amp and B&W DM602 S3s.

Lee hardy via email

HFC: All of the players you mention are excellent models and you're unlikely to be disappointed with any of them. We love the CD73T's refinement for its price and the balanced contribution it made to our test system. We're reviewing the Marantz CD7300 next month and without giving too much away, it's a cracker. If it approaches the competencies of its respected older brother, the CD6000 OSE LE, then it'll help your budget system punch well above its weight.

"We'll review the Marantz CD7300 next month and without giving too much away, it's a cracker."



Above: Marantz PM7200

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SWING DANCE

Are there any all-in-one music systems with a competent turntable perched on top, that sound half reasonable on the market at the moment? I want to play Glen Miller to my eight-year old grand-daughter.

Neil Porter via email

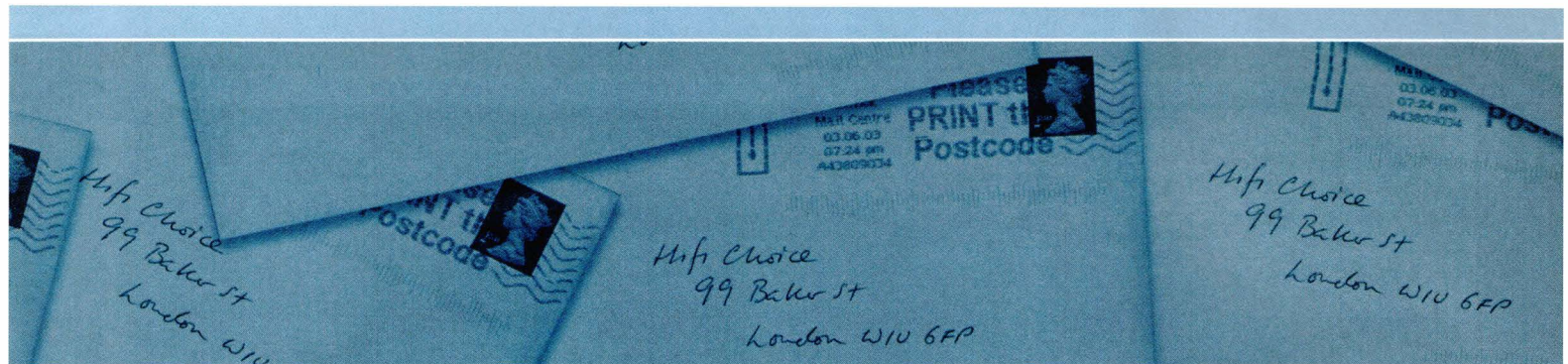
HFC: The market leaders in mini systems have moved away from supplying record decks with their products as demand at this end of the market dwindles in the face of CD, MiniDisc and the like. We'd recommend buying budget separates from the like of Richer Sounds – you can pick up CD, amp and speaker packages from around £150. You can always add further components to suit

your needs – Richer's turntables start at £50, but we'd go for the Pro-Ject Debut II for £120. An alternative would be Denon's DM31 micro (pictured), which should satisfy your sonic and aesthetic needs when partnered by a good turntable and a phono stage like NAD's £50 PP2.



WIN IXOS INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a free pair of Ixos XHA606 interconnects worth £60, featuring Gamma Geometry and silver plated OFC conductors for superior sound. So get writing! (250 words max please...)



Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk

You have mail



BLANKETY BLANK

I notice that *Hi-Fi Choice* once rated the TDK Audio Pro as the best blank CD-R disc. However a call to TDK confirmed that these discs are now discontinued. So which CD-Rs do you think are decent now?

Dacey via email

HFC: TDK confirmed it has stopped production of the Audio Pro discs with no real explanation why, though the fact that they were around five times the price of regular CD-Rs may have something to do with it. We'd still recommend the more affordable TDK CD-RXG or JVC's CD-R discs, but if you're buying in bulk, the cheapest store we've found is Pricebusters (tel: 0870 800 3444), where prices start at just 43 pence.

ITALIAN STALLION SEEKS HORNY PARTNER

I'm thinking of pairing a 15-watt Unison Research S2K amp (pictured) with the Unico valve CD. Being rather new to the whole valve world I'm having a few problems coming up with speakers to work with the low power output. Do you have any suggestions?

Magoo via email

HFC: To begin with you need a shortlist of speakers with a high sensitivity rating and amp-friendly impedance. Use our *Buyer's Bible* to help create a list of candidates in your price range. Some of our favourite speakers for valve amps include the Living Voice Auditorium (£1,600) and the Audio Note AZ One (£449). You should also take a look at some horn-loaded designs if your budget allows and the fine Italian exotica available from Unison distributor UKD (tel: 01753 652669).

BELOVED PIONEER A400

I have been using my A400 amp for the last five years after buying it second-hand, (during which time it has been switched on almost constantly). I have listened to some pretty expensive kit during that time, most of which has failed to outperform the Pioneer. It's not that the expensive stuff was bad – it just wasn't better.

I have found that it can make wonderful music with almost any peripheral and it *loves* top quality equipment. My dealer, who had advised me earlier to get a new amp, has recently changed his tune, smiled, and told me I should hang onto it for a while. Are there any other *Hi-Fi Choice* readers out there with interesting A400 stories to relate?

Frogmore via email

ONLINE FORUM

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at www.hifichoice.co.uk



How does an SACD player connect to an existing separates system? Which is the best input to use? **Niall5**

HFC: If you are using an SACD player as a purely two-channel source, then the CD input on your amp is an obvious choice. For multichannel playback through an AV amp, you would run five (or six with a subwoofer) interconnects from the player's analogue outputs to the amp (assuming there's no i.Link digital connection).

Having bought an AV receiver two years ago I wonder if there is any real difference in sound quality compared to the latest offerings? Some magazines would have us believing that they're improving every day. **Moo Moo**

HFC: AV amps evolve quickly, partly owing to the nature of digital processing technology. In fact, the multichannel amps of today bear little sonic resemblance to their equivalents of just two years ago. It's not just about more channels – the quality of processing has greatly improved and the general sonics are better, partly driven by the requirements of SACD and DVD-Audio. But don't expect hi-fi-standard multichannel performance to come cheap...

AUCTION ACTION

Personally, I think eBay is the best place to sell hi-fi but the worst place to buy it. You see



Above: Unison Research S2K

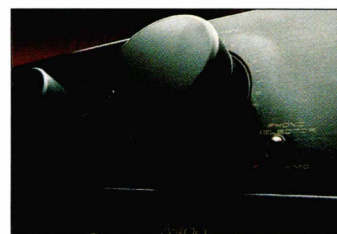
something that you like knowing full well you're going have to bid well over the odds to win it, but two minutes from the end of the auction things go mad. So you put on a pretty ridiculous bid say, 75-85 per cent of the new cost and there you have it – you might as well have just hauled your ass to the shops and bought a new one. You can never get a bargain these days. It just doesn't happen.

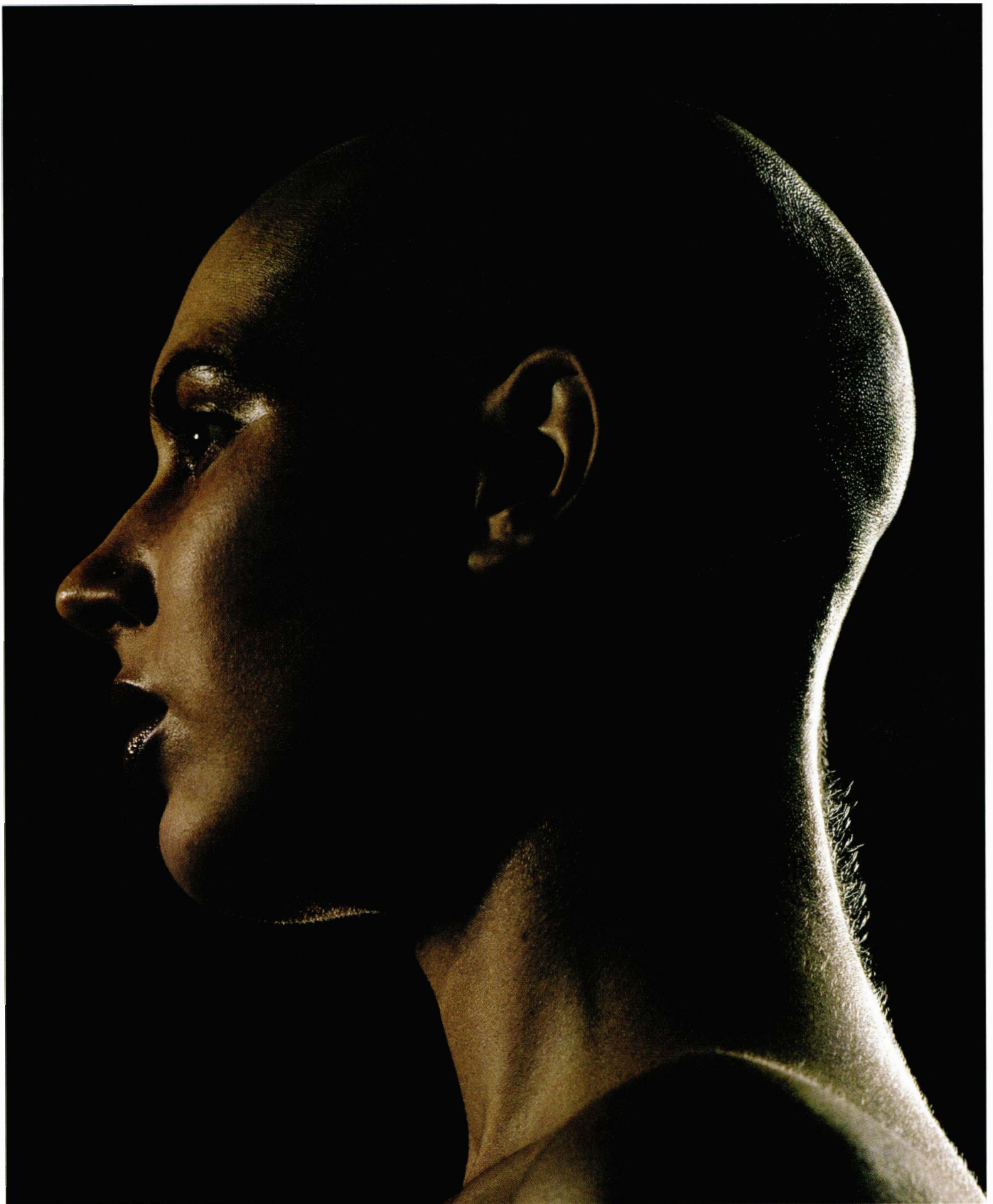
Dan via email

HFC: eBay has it all if you've got the will to bid and the wedge to match. Popular kit will always attract too much attention, but the more obscure hi-fi can often be snapped up for a song. Our *Reader Classified* section is full of bargains every month that aren't available to the eBay community, so don't overlook these previously cherished bits of gear.

“eBay is the best place to sell hi-fi but the worst place to buy it.”

Below: The Pioneer A400 has at least one thoroughly committed fan.





The Arcam DiVA range has always been about the performance. Pure emotion from pure sound. Experience the power of music at your DiVA dealer - it could make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck.

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DiVA

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THE HI-FI AWARDS

Welcome to the **Hi-Fi Choice Awards**, a celebration of the finest hi-fi components on the market today. We've whittled down our favourites from the past year – those which break the mould, offer exceptional value for money or have simply given us the most damn fun – and sorted them all into four broad categories: Source Components, Amplifiers, Loudspeakers and Cables & Accessories. Unlike other awards, every product featured has been through HFC's rigorous test programme, with an exhaustive listening and consultation process eventually resulting in our final shortlist. From CD and vinyl to the best new multichannel components, the common thread is pure and simple: the search for a level of excellence that matches our *Passion For Sound*.

Every component featured in the Awards receives a *Product Of The Year Badge*, a prestigious prize that demonstrates a particular product has undergone the HFC test programme and emerged as the best in its price band. We do not seek to declare a single winner and then present a bunch of also-rans – after all, how can you compare a £400 CD player to one that costs £4,000? Instead, we have nominated those that most impressed us at each price point, so there's something to suit every audiophile's taste, preference and pocket. Turn the page and all will be revealed...

ABRACADABRA



The magic of TEAC DAB radio

Following on from the award winning Reference 300 system, TEAC is proud to announce the World's first mini component Hi-Fi system tuner with Digital Audio Broadcasting. Fully matching the Reference 300 series, the T-H300DAB offers amazing audio quality, not just from the many new digital stations now available, but also the existing FM stations. This, coupled with the exciting information display and easy to use DAB channel selection, makes it the ultimate upgrade for your system. The Reference 300 DAB tuner has the same stunning good looks, style and build quality you have come to expect from TEAC. As if by magic, digital radio has now arrived in a mini format.

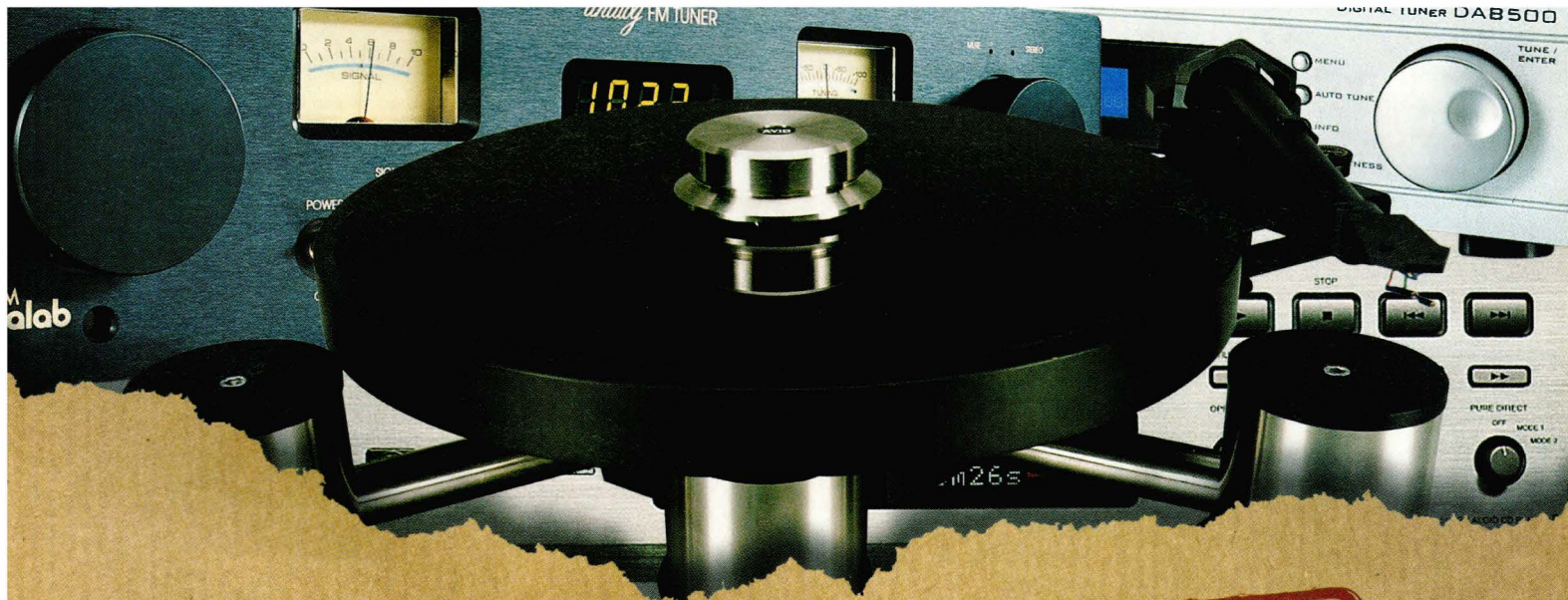


Reference 300 System



Digital Audio Broadcast from TEAC, the future of radio has arrived

TEAC



SOURCE COMPONENTS

From CD, vinyl and radio to DVD-Audio, SACD and hard disk – your choice of source components dictates not only what you can play, but also how good it sounds. Remember the old adage: ‘rubbish in, rubbish out...’

SELECTING YOUR SOURCE

There's a bewildering array of formats available to the clued-up consumer out there, not to mention a wide variety of ways to play them back, so the first thing to do is to work out exactly what you want to play. Chances are you'll know if you need a turntable to play vinyl records, ditto a radio tuner – though you may need to decide whether to go digital radio-wise (DAB) or stay analogue (FM/AM). On strict quality grounds we'd still be tempted to go analogue, particularly if you can afford a good tuner and roof-top aerial, but DAB has become an extremely cost-effective solution in many areas, with an increasing range of exclusive digital stations to add to your old favourites.

Then there's CD. Most of us have built up large collections by now, and despite its age the original digital music format is set to remain the dominant commercial music carrier for some years yet – after all, it's cheap to produce, easy to market and has achieved almost blanket penetration world-wide. For these reasons, good CD replay should remain a top priority for most sound-conscious music fans, and a dedicated CD player that's optimised for the purpose may continue to provide a worthwhile investment, whether you're sticking with two-channel stereo or building a multichannel (surround sound) set-up.

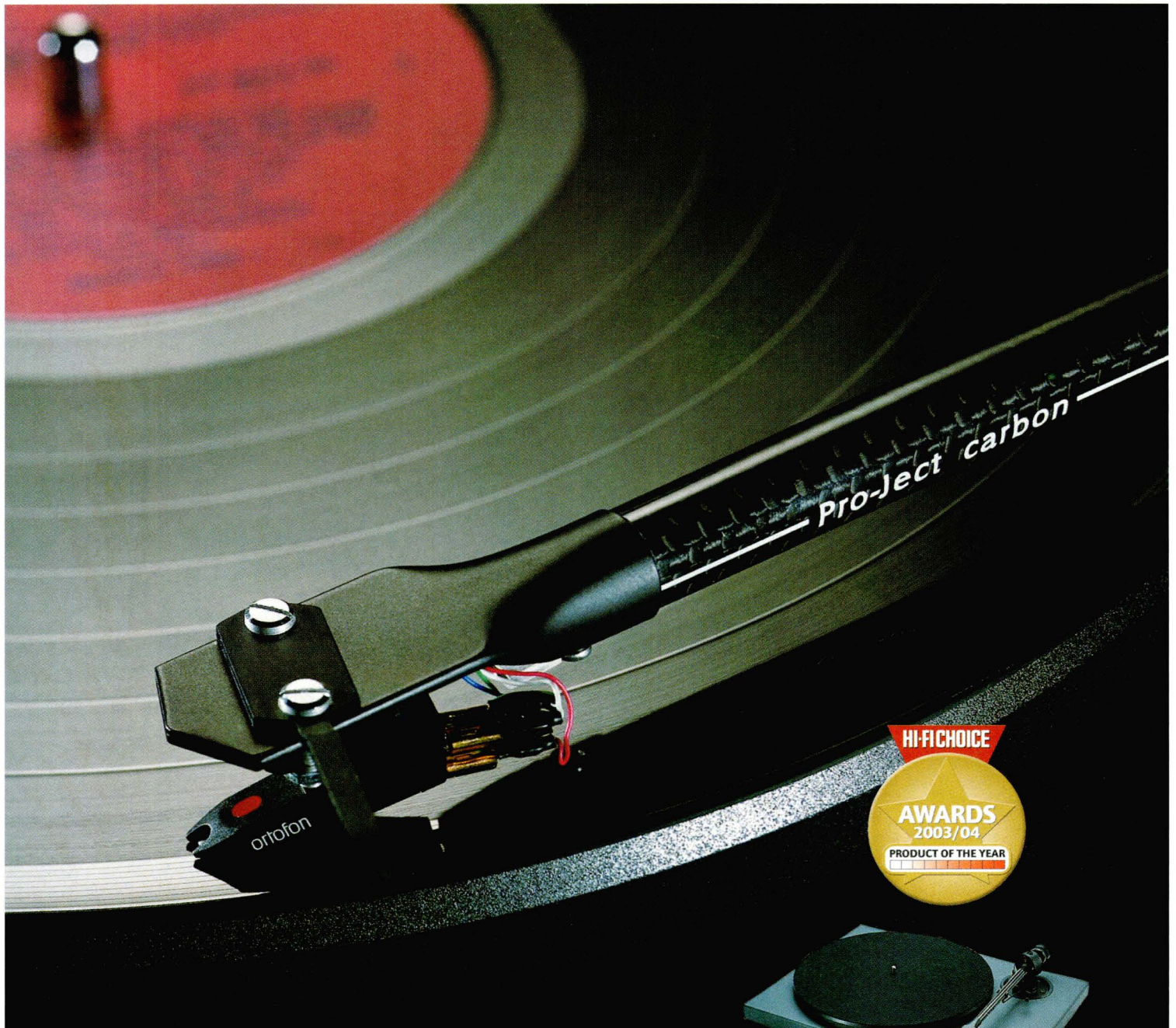
Of course, you can play CDs on any DVD player, but we wouldn't recommend you bother with most of the cheaper models. That said, some of the more specialist

machines have raised the bar in that regard, and most of these are also compatible with one (or both) of the newer high-resolution, multichannel-compatible music formats such as DVD-Audio and SACD. The quality and quantity of titles available on both these formats has improved significantly this year, and it makes sense for anyone building a multichannel set-up to incorporate them in his or her plans.

The neatest solution is to buy one of the new 'universal' DVD players, compatible with all current disc formats including DVD-A and SACD, like the excellent Pioneer and Denon players on p21 and p25. However, if you simply want to optimise playback of specific formats, or you're willing to incorporate several players in your system on quality grounds, there are some superb alternatives around – like Sony's audio-only SACD player on p22 or Arcam's DVD-Audio-compatible DVD player on p28.

Finally there's hard disk, now really coming of age as an entertainment storage format. Imerge (p27) has led the way in adopting this technology as the flexible heart of a multi-room audio system, with others licensing its technology and following suit, while Yamaha's implementation on p24 is a brilliantly versatile implementation for home recordists.

Incidentally, the concept of stand-alone CD recorders would appear to be all but dead judging by the dearth of new models and death of old favourites this year. Blame it on the PC... **HFC**



£210 ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.henleydesigns.co.uk

PRO-JECT 1 XPRESSION TURNTABLE, ARM AND CARTRIDGE

If you want a deck that will deliver the magic of vinyl but won't break the bank, the Pro-Ject 1 Xpression is a very tempting package. Included in its bargain price is a carbon fibre tonearm and an Ortofon OM10 cartridge, a needle which usually retails for £35. Built around an MDF plinth that supports a felt-covered alloy platter, the carbon fibre tonearm is its clear USP. Not so long ago this material was the sole domain of the high end and to find one on a budget player even now is remarkable.

The 1 Xpression delivers a remarkably together and weighty sound. The bass is full and fruity, and while the scale may not be as substantial as it is with more expensive decks, the sense of timing makes up for this, grabbing your ears and drawing you into the groove. High frequencies are smooth and sweet, and it has the knack of delivering most of the goods all of the time – some budget turntables can sound brash or aggressive but the Xpression is always calm and assured.

Given its price, this is a turntable with a remarkable grasp of the finer points of vinyl replay. It's sensitive to variations in pace and energy, and voices are full of expression and richness. It's capable of extracting the reverb and space in a recording too, unearthing more detail than a deck at this level has any right to. More money will buy a more substantial sound, but the Pro-Ject's delivery is far from thin and never threatens to grate on the nerves, however angular the music.

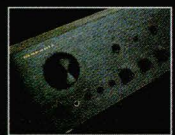
If you're looking for a low-cost turntable, ignore the 1 Xpression at your peril – it does space, light, energy and bass while keeping its finger firmly on the musical pulse. *Reviewed HFC 248*

TRY IT WITH THESE

STEREO AMP

Marantz PM7200 > £330

New two-channel amps under £500 are rare these days, but this one is pure genius – powerful and refined, with a very decent phono stage too.



STEREO SPEAKERS

Epos ELS3 > £200

One of the hi-fi bargains of the year – exceptionally communicative speakers for the money, able to make the most of the Pro-Ject's impressive sonic detail.



£150 ☎ 020 7940 2200 🌐 www.cambridgeaudio.com

CAMBRIDGE DAB500 DIGITAL RADIO TUNER



It would be exaggerating to say that DAB technology has come on in leaps and bounds – sonically it's principally limited at the transmit end and latest-generation tuners like this one are at best only slightly ahead of the very earliest models in performance terms. What's more noticeably improved is user convenience and the general 'look and feel' – little things like smarter displays, quicker auto-tuning, and of course price, which has descended even below this one, though the very cheapest show signs of cost-cutting.

Cambridge's real achievement here has been to combine all that's nice about DAB in terms of features with a smart and friendly appearance, sound that's as good as any, and an

attractive price. There's one interesting sonic feature in the use of selectable frequency-response tweaks, dubbed 'Natural Contour Technology'. A rear-mounted switch allows the user to choose between flat response and two mildly filtered versions intended to ameliorate the often over-bright sound that results from the combination of studio practices (close miking and compression) with DAB's MPEG 2 data reduction. Certainly worth a try.

That apart, twin Toslink and coaxial digital outputs allow easy interfacing

“Latest generation tuners are at best only slightly ahead of the earliest models in performance.”

to digital recorders or amplifiers, while a pair of inputs (looped to the outputs when the DAB500 is off) saves an amplifier input if you want to keep your FM tuner in the system. If you feel DAB may be your perfect answer to troublesome FM reception conditions, or you fancy sampling the new digital stations, this is probably the best entry point right now.

Reviewed HFC 248

£250 ☎ 01753 789500 🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

PIONEER DV-565A UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER



You have to hand it to Pioneer. The company was the first to produce a universal DVD-Audio and SACD-compatible DVD player, and now it does it cheaper than ever. When every other universal player costs the wrong side of £400, the DV-565A costs just £250 (or frequently even less – it's been spotted for under £180 in Richer Sounds stores).

The slim and silvery DV-565A-S, or its black DV-565A-K variant, manages to keep costs down by placing the decoding for both audio and video

together. But it still supports NTSC progressive scan pictures – PAL progressive scan should be included too by the time you read this – but earlier samples were NTSC progressive only (the moral of the story is 'ask first' if it's important). It sports all the connectivity you'd expect from such a full-featured player, including a pair of Scart sockets, and the player is also designed to be easy to use, with set-up menus to help control the bass management and some picture tweaking options.

“When every other universal player costs the wrong side of £400, the DV-565A costs just £250 – or even less.”

The sound is quite laid back, especially in multichannel (more so than the DVD picture quality, which is impressively brisk and colourful), but has a consistent presentation across both DVD-Audio and SACD. The overall balance is clean and rounded, and the player never once over-extends itself or sounds glassy and harsh. Even CD replay is well catered for, thanks to above-average DACs in the two main channels. All of which makes for a good all-rounder at a bargain price. *Reviewed HFC 240*



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #1

THE CINEMATIC ORCHESTR
THE MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA NINJA TUNE

TCO's latest is a genuine soundtrack with more depth, colour and groove than most regular albums. Keenly orchestrated reworkings of TCO classics sit alongside fresh material to produce a lush sonic landscape that simply oozes style. *Jason Kennedy, HFC reviewer*



HI-FI CHOICE



£800 ☎ 08705 111999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

SONY SCD-XA3000ES SACD PLAYER

While other manufacturers are producing universal DVD-Audio/SACD players, Sony's new SCD-XA3000ES is resolutely an SACD product. This is far removed from universal play, with no video component at all. To paraphrase TV's *The League Of Gentlemen*, this is an audio player, for audio people.

Naturally, with no on-screen user interface or menu system, setting up the SCD-XA3000ES could be complicated. Fortunately Sony doesn't attempt to baffle the user with a range of superfluous set-up parameters, but allows some control over bass management and has up to eight speaker size settings. The XA3000ES takes all the best influences from top-notch Sony SACD players of recent years and mixes them together while slashing the price. It takes its styling cues from the SCD-XA333ES and has the same expensive six-channel 'Super Audio' DAC configuration seen in the SCD-XA777ES. Most players tend to convert the 'pure' SACD bitstream into more conventional PCM data at some stage, thereby compromising the format's original DSD (Direct Stream Digital) ideal for the sake of convenience features or a single multi-format DAC solution. In the SCD-XA3000ES, Sony sticks to its guns – by using these Sony 'Super Audio' DACs, the data stays bitstream throughout the player.

This dedication to SACD performance is reflected in the sound quality, producing a SACD performance that cannot be bettered for the money, and beats the sound of any universal or SACD-compatible DVD player in this regard. The Sony simply creates vivid, liquid and very, very real multichannel music with effortless, almost ghost-like imaging. It's excellent in two-channel mode too, and should not be ignored for use in a stereo set-up to replace an ageing CD player.

If you are really serious about SACD, hang the expense and the extra boxes – choose this Sony for CD and SACD, and get a DVD-Audio/Video player for the other tasks. *Reviewed HFC 248*



TRY IT WITH THESE

MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER

Pioneer VSA-AX5i > £1,200

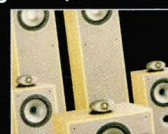
The Sony's equally at home with good stereo amps and top-end AV models, but for full-on multichannel SACD you won't find a better amp than this at the price.



FIVE-CHANNEL SPEAKER SYSTEM

Tannoy Sensys DC package > £1,400

Mixing DC2 floorstanders and the DCC centre speaker at the front with DC1s behind, this package is superb value in both two and multichannel modes.



£374 ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk

REGA RADIO 3 FM/AM RADIO TUNER



Electronically, the differences between outstanding and unremarkable FM tuners can often seem quite subtle – many of the same parts will be found inside all of them. Rega has clearly applied some serious thought to optimising the performance of the parts in the Radio 3, then, because it is a rather obvious cut above a goodly chunk of its competition. It's certainly simple enough in its outward aspirations, with the only feature beyond the absolutely basic set being

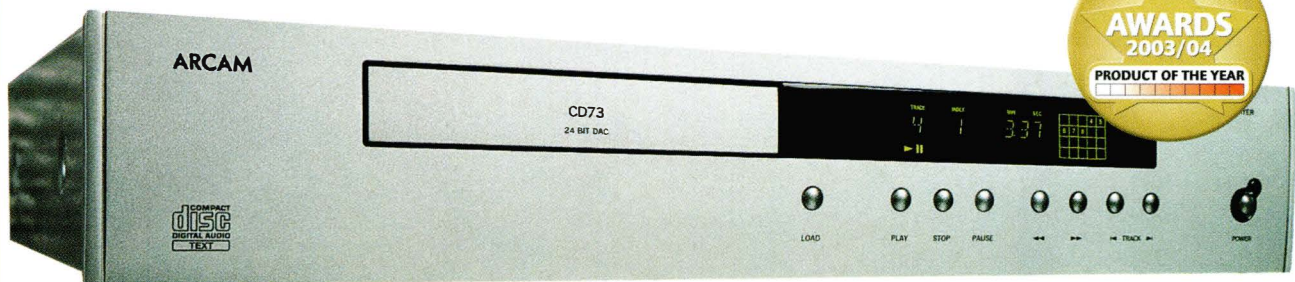
the ability to tune in 25kHz 'half steps'. Ergonomics can be a little odd but the manual explains it all and once tuned in it's something of a star. Most significantly, you'll hear more detail through the Radio 3 than cheaper models will reveal, and as long as there's enough signal coming in (like any FM set, it likes a good antenna!) you can enjoy uncluttered, crisp and pure sound across the band, from the solid and tuneful bass – yes, FM *can* do bass, given a chance – to the open

“What’s really remarkable is the sheer clarity of sound, with some of the finest stereo imaging available.”

treble. The balance is just a little on the bright side, which may seem initially disconcerting with speech in particular, but it's not bright enough to interfere with listening pleasure. But what's really remarkable is the sheer clarity of sound, with some of the finest stereo imaging available via FM backing up an admirably precise separation of instruments. There are some stunning bargains among really cheap tuners, but this one is still well worth its modest extra. *Reviewed HFC 242*

£450 ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM DiVA CD73T CD PLAYER

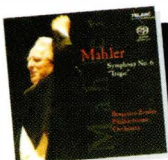


New dedicated CD players under £500 are a rare breed these days. While the big boys chase the DVD dollar, smaller brands are looking to more specialist upmarket territories to remain competitive. But Arcam clearly believes there is still life left in the sub-£500 CD player, finding time to introduce the CD73T as part of its range-wide updates. This has traditionally been a strong area for the brand, a succession of

popular players duking it out with some equally successful models from Marantz over a goodly number of years. Indeed, up until now Marantz's long-running CD6000 KI Signature has been our favourite dedicated CD player around the £500 ballpark, but its imminent demise has left the door open for Arcam's latest model to steal a gong at this year's *HFC Awards*. The CD73T's great strength is that it has none – or rather that it shows

“The CD73T’s great strength is that it has none – or rather that it shows competence in all important areas.”

competence in all important areas rather than emphasising one. Its sound is smooth, substantial and works well with a variety of music types and recording qualities, remaining musically expressive throughout. It may not have quite the articulation of the CD6000 KI Sig, but its smoother sound and all-round mix of attributes make it a worthy Award-winner on its own sub-£500 terms. *Reviewed HFC 247*



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #2

MAHLER: SYMPHONY NO 6 'TRAGIC'
BENJAMIN ZANDER (COND) TELARC (SACD)

If one release made the case for multichannel classical music this year, it was this utterly compelling, beautifully measured account of the Sixth by the Philharmonia Orchestra on SACD, arguably Mahler's finest purely orchestral work, packaged with an explanatory CD. Alvin Gold, HFC reviewer

£600 ☎ 01923 233166 🌐 www.yamaha-audio.co.uk

YAMAHA CDR-HD1300 CD & HARD DISK PLAYER/RECORDER

As hard disks creep into the collective audio consciousness, Yamaha has produced this slick and beautifully thought-out multifunction machine. You can use it as a jukebox, with a capacity of about 120 hours of music. You can play CDs from it directly, just as you can with other jukeboxes, and if those functions are all you want it is still a good choice because it is the easiest to use of all of the hard disk machines we've

seen and sound quality is definitely at the front of the pack.

But Yamaha has added some significant extra functions. For a start, the CD drive is a recorder too, and the hard drive part adds the ability to edit recordings smoothly and accurately. This makes assembling custom compilations a much easier task than with, for instance, a twin CD/CD-R deck. It's not just any old CD recorder but an audiophile special, with the

“The hard drive lets you edit CD recordings accurately, making it easier to assemble compilations.”

option of burning discs with slightly larger pits than normal, the idea being to enhance playback quality and disc longevity. And there's the invaluable option of recording to hard disk under control of an external timer, making the '1300 the answer to every radio addict's prayer – what to do about the too-frequent broadcasts of important programmes that coincide with work time, holidays, business trips, sleep...?

Even DAT only gives six hours maximum recording time – hardly competition with 120 hours – and you can edit out unwanted bits too, and then burn your broadcast seamlessly to CD. The same goes for old cassettes, all this facilitated by particularly fine analogue inputs. A joy to use, a great-sounding product and a genuine niche-filler, this one deserves to run and run.

Reviewed HFC 243



£850 ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk

ROKSAN RADIUS 5 TURNTABLE AND ARM

Roksan's new vinyl-spinning baby is a stunner in more senses than one. First, the Radius 5 is a visual KO. The dual-layer transparent acrylic plinth and matt-textured acrylic platter, with matching acrylic headshell and bearing housing on the supplied Nima tonearm, are part of the equation. But so is the superb standard of finish, and the detail design which helps prevent handling damage to the main bearing – essentially the same one used on the flagship TMS2. Equally impressive is the way that, despite being a suspended player with a unipivot arm, set-up is scarcely more onerous than a non-suspended deck with solid arm bearings. There are no suspension settings to make, and the unipivot arm bearing has a lock position that is easily engaged and disengaged.

Good looks are no cover for indifferent performance, however. Happily, the Radius 5 has an easy, natural and fluid voice, with rock-solid pitch stability and no hint of ducking under transient or sustained loads, despite the extra mechanical drag.

“The Radius has an easy, natural and fluid voice, with rock-solid pitch stability.”

Surface noise (clicks and pops), if not completely benign – this is an established weakness of vinyl replay after all – is muted. Low frequency noise is also handled well, and the player is decently immune from footfall noise and other unwanted low-frequency artefacts, as long as it is supported by a stable platform which is well anchored in the vertical plane. The Radius 5 is a grown-up, stable-sounding turntable, and at today's prices, a notable bargain.

Reviewed HFC 248



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #3

BJÖRK
LIVE BOX ONE LITTLE INDIAN

Each of these four CDs features a snapshot of the live show Björk took on the road for each of her previous studio albums. Each is successfully reinterpreted, reshaped and in many instances superior to its studio roots. Beautifully recorded too. *Dave Oliver, HFC music contributor*

£850 ☎ 01753 888447 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

DENON DVD-2900 UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER

Denon's DVD-2900 wasn't the first universal DVD player, but it is one of the best, especially when no-compromise performance is needed without spending a king's ransom. This big, golden machine covers all the bases – from good ol' CD to DVD-Video and the latest SACD and DVD-Audio multichannel music formats – and there's even the chance for periodic self-improvement via Denon's firmware upgrades on CD-ROM. It may lack the AL24 processing and 14-bit twin video DACs of the huge (non-universal) Denon DVD-A1 flagship DVD player, but this 8.1kg machine does include support for the latest DTS 24/96 recordings without compromise and features a high-end 12-bit/108MHz video DAC in its own right. It even has a 'pure direct' button with two addressable modes that can be assigned to disable the video output, digital output or panel display (or all three) – such flexibility is rare at any price, but marks out the DVD-2900 as a very special player indeed.

With such configurability, the on-screen menu is comprehensive and at times bewildering, but it's worth the effort – bass management and black level settings make a big difference for both audio and video performance. And it's here where the DVD-2900 lives up to its weight. It's a fantastic all-rounder, probably the best high-res universal playback solution currently available, short of spending thousands. DVD-Audio music sounds excellent, with a fast, powerful and room-filling delivery.

SACD is impressive too, almost as good as top-notch audio-only SACD players, and DVD-Video playback is simply superb. Even CD is well above average for a DVD player. An all-round audio/videophile bargain! *Reviewed HFC 246*



TRY IT WITH THESE

MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER

Harman Kardon AVR 5550 > £900

Hi-fi-quality multichannel amps don't come cheap, but this one's great value – a strong surround sound performance and unusually good in two-channel mode.



FIVE-CHANNEL SPEAKER SYSTEM

Castle Conway 3/ Bastion (x3) > £1,920

An unusual choice perhaps, but this package delivers superb musicality in both multichannel and plain stereo, and subtle yet powerful movie sounds too.



HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR





£1,100 ☎ 01480 457300 🌐 www.avidhifi.co.uk

AVID DIVA TURNTABLE

The toughest player on the increasingly tough turntable scene is a newcomer. Avid's entry-level Diva is a striking stainless steel heavyweight at a welterweight price. The engineering quality is unusually high – look at the hewn-from-solid-aluminium block that forms the mechanical hub of the turntable if you need proof. It ties the deck together, supporting the bearing, tonearm and three suspension pots, each containing an adjustable spring. It'll even take a second arm if you feel the need.

Once the vinyl is clamped to the platter the fun begins, and good entertainment it is too. The Diva has a strong, definite sound that is more confident than most at the price. It has good, solid bass allied to a distinct sense of assurance – eschewing soft romance for power and detail.

You can hear all the instruments and voices in the mix and the latter can have considerable presence. The tonal balance is on the stark side, with a warts-and-all approach that cuts straight to the chase, meaning it only sounds as good as your vinyl – there are no allowances made for knackered LPs here. Yet it can open up compressed-sounding pressings and reveal their inner power, which is a rare and entertaining skill.

The Diva has a coherency and drive that most CD players would kill for. You can hear right through the music, which enhances dynamic range and allows fine detail to shine through. It has a confident and solid sound and in the context of its competition, this makes it a hard act to beat.

Reviewed HFC 247



TRY IT WITH THESE

STEREO AMP
Roksan Caspian M Series > £1,000
This wonderfully engaging amp is a great partner for the entry-level Avid, in tandem with a good off-board phono stage like the Tom Evans on p56.



STEREO SPEAKERS
Castle Conway 3 > £930
Castle has always made great looking speakers, and its best models sound equally good – this beautifully balanced design is a perfect example.



£1,195 ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

MERIDIAN 507 CD PLAYER

The Meridian 507 is a CD player with exceptional refinement and poise, particularly given that it costs less than £1,200. It's the brand's entry-level model but it's still equipped with a CD-ROM transport mechanism driving a double buffering technique that's designed to minimise jitter. This is combined with a DVD-Audio-style 24-bit/192kHz digital-to-analogue converter. The analogue output is produced by a direct coupled (DC) output stage while the digital feed is precision re-clocked.

In operation, the 507 produces a precise sound. It's not hard or bright, which 'precise' can sometimes indicate, it's more of a measured and exacting reproduction of notes that suggests that there is very little distortion. It is particularly acute at a micro dynamic level, the variations in level and tone of different notes is very clear. Imaging



“Precision timing allows the instruments to produce energy that other players miss.”

is likewise precise with the placement of instruments and voices varying considerably according to the recording – Tori Amos stands out a mile from the speakers while Eminem seems relatively constrained. The atmosphere and tension produced by both performers is, however, fully intact.

Precision timing allows the instruments to enhance each performance and produce energy that

other players miss. It's not the most exuberant sound for the money but it is very convincing in terms of fidelity to the material, and in time its perfectly balanced charms see off all threat of competition. Its transparency succeeds in letting the passion and vitality of the music through alongside the detail – with the 507, Meridian is offering high-end CD replay at a price no-one can afford to ignore. *Reviewed HFC 238*

£1,599 ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.imerge.co.uk

IMERGE S2000-80 HARD DISK MUSIC SERVER

You may well ask, with Yamaha's hard disk recorder costing £600, and some such devices clocking in well below £400, why on earth should you pay so much for this one? Mainly because it's so much more sophisticated and versatile – and in fact it's hardly the same colour of a horse at all. The main clue to its abilities comes in the presence of three separate analogue outputs, each of which can play a different recording from the hard disk simultaneously. Simply add wire, some amplification and speakers and you've got a super-flexible multi-room installation.

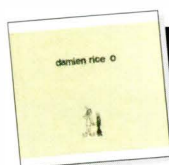
Now you *could* put a CD player in each room. Fine, but you'll be forever chasing round to find favourite discs and you'll miss out on the multitude of control possibilities that the S2000 offers (including the

automatic cataloguing of tracks by name, via an online database), not to mention the sheer convenience of having a substantial library of recordings instantly available in every room. You'll also miss out on some fine sound, because Imerge has put considerable effort into the audio parts of this device and it shows (though you'll want to avoid the heavier data reduction settings if you care about sound). Used on its

“Used on its own it's a tricky beast to master, but as part of a well-planned system, its full flexibility becomes obvious.”

own it's a tricky beast to master, but when installed as part of a well-planned system, as it certainly should be, its full flexibility becomes obvious. It's beautifully made too. With plentiful connection options and an upgradeable future, this is one of the most attractive servers on the market and worth a look even if you don't yet think you're in the market for multi-room!

Reviewed HFC 243



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #4

DAMIEN RICE
‘O’ EAST/WEST

Wrangling the singer-songwriter title back from whiny complaint-rockers, Dublin-born Damien Rice mixes Nick Drake and Terry Callier, sprinkles in liberal doses of Ryan Adams and comes up with something haunting and new. Great recording too. *Alan Sircom, HFC reviewer*

£1,900 ☎ 01223 203203 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM FMJ DV27A DVD-AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER

Arcam has been especially active this year, and the keynote introduction is its fully updated FMJ series DVD player, which now includes DVD-Audio and PAL progressive scan video compatibility. In the first case there has been a dearth of worthwhile software releases (though some interesting titles have crept out this year in the rock field). But the DV27A shows just what DVD-A is capable of, and it sounds clearly superior to most so-called universal players, so far at least. What's more, the

DV27A is also an accomplished CD player, not quite up with the best component CD players in the Arcam range, but not disgraced by them either. Perhaps the biggest surprise of all, however, is that it is an extremely capable DVD-Video player. This might be unexpected as Arcam's background is audio rather than video, but perhaps the use of broadcast-quality video chippery and unusual attention to clocks and power supplies makes it less so. Progressive PAL owes its existence in part to Arcam's advocacy, and a

“The DV27A shows just what DVD-Audio is capable of and is also an accomplished CD player.”

combination of the DV27A and a good projector/screen will be a revelation to many. Hi-fi video already!

The DV27A is also a player with a future – and a past. Owners of previous models can have their players upgraded, and future enhancements will also be available. The firmware is fully upgradeable, in part to deal with disc problems that arise from time to time, and also to programme the player's ROM to deal with CD anti-pirating strategies like Cactus Shield and Key2Audio. *Reviewed HFC 246*



£2,200 ☎ 0208 948 4153 🌐 www.magnum-dynalab.com

MAGNUM DYNALAB MD102 FM RADIO TUNER

For purists, the truly analogue FM stereo tuner has never been matched by more recent digital-synthesis techniques. The MD102 might be more costly and have fewer features – remote control is hard to implement, and carries a £300 premium over the £2,200 base price here – but its sound has a glorious delicacy and transparency which more 'modern' technology can't touch.

Canada's Magnum Dynalab

specialises in analogue tuner technology, even to the extent of including valves in its more upmarket models. Besides the quirky but effective remote control, its only other concession to modernity lies in a digital readout of the tuned frequency.

However, its five-stage analogue front end combines very good sensitivity and selectivity. The audio circuitry uses oxygen-free copper wiring, and there's a fine selection of

“The MD102's raison d'être lies in its very superior sound quality, especially at high frequencies.”

'traditional' features, including two large 'swinging needle' meters.

The MD102's *raison d'être* lies in the very superior sound quality it delivers, especially at high frequencies. It really comes into its own when dealing with live classical music, such as the annual summer Proms season, but it also provides a remarkably clear and open window onto the many new and very stimulating musical experiences that Radio 3 can provide, and was equally impressive with speech on Radio 4.

Digital DAB radio might offer more stations, but a high-class analogue FM tuner will always deliver the best sound quality from the major network stations under good reception conditions. The MD102 simply makes radio more communicative and informative, as well as incorporating convenient remote control operation.

Reviewed HFC 241



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #5

REM
IN TIME: THE BEST OF 1988-2003 WEA (DVD-AUDIO)

Grammy-winning recording engineer Elliot Scheiner deserves a medal for services to multichannel for his effective and engaging treatment of these already great guitar-driven tracks. The immersive high-res 5.1 soundfield on this DVD-Audio release makes CD seem dire. *Dan George, HFC reviews editor*

£1,599 ☎ 01903 750750 🌐 www.classeaudio.com

CLASSE CDP-10 CD PLAYER

The middle market for CD players has seen an aggressive year with a lot of good new players coming in, but this Classé is (forgive the pun) a class act and managed to beat all in its price range by a wide margin. This beautiful Canadian has a full-width chassis containing a Philips transport mechanism, a low jitter clock and PCM1738 Burr-Brown D/A converters running at 24-bits/192kHz. All top-notch stuff.

This is a superb player with a midrange to die for. It reveals everything no matter what you play, allowing you to easily follow each instrument in the midst of a busy passage of music. None of the competition manages this degree of coherence and engagement coupled with such strong focus on the different elements of the music. Voices offer up new layers of character – the more subtle they are the more the Classé seems to dig out of the recording. The CDP-10 is relaxed yet precise, the timing spot-on and the performance highly convincing. It's particularly adept at bringing to light notes and sounds that are lower down in the mix, which means that every 'familiar' disc becomes a voyage of sonic discovery.

Micro dynamics are well handled too – for instance, the variation in weight with which Tori Amos plays each key in the quiet opening of *Pretty Good Year* is clearly audible, much more so than through lesser players. The raucous outburst in the middle of the track remains strangely calm and coherent, but this is because the player isn't phased by the sudden onslaught of energy.

This is a superb CD player, with the sort of high-end sound that usually costs twice as much. You'll be hard pressed to get a more fluid and engaging result from CD. *Reviewed HFC 238*



TRY IT WITH THESE

STEREO AMP

AVI Laboratory Series > £1,399

It might not look it, but this neat little amp is rated at a mighty 200 watts per channel and offers grip and drive in abundance, and superb detail too.



STEREO SPEAKERS

Focal-JMlab Cobalt 816 Signature S > £999

This French maestro is a superb all-rounder, lively and dynamic with an essentially neutral sound. You won't find a finer speaker this side of £1,000.



HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR





£2,650 ☎ 01722 332266 🌐 www.naim-audio.com

NAIM AUDIO CDX2 CD PLAYER

CD players come in all shapes, sizes, types and prices these days, but those prepared to pay good money will find that the very best CD-dedicated machines can deliver spectacular results from the silver disc. Naim Audio's £2,650 CDX2 is a splendid player in its own right, and cleverly may be subsequently upgraded to a significantly better two-box machine with the £2,300 XPS external power supply.

It has 'trptych' styling with very sturdy all-alloy (non-magnetic) build, and features careful internal shielding, short signal paths and a number of separately regulated power supplies. The disc itself is held by a magnetic puck. A pair of phono sockets augment Naim's traditional five-pin DIN connections, the simple display provides purely basic info and a 'system' handset is supplied.

Connected to a suitably capable amp and speakers, the standalone CDX2 does a splendid job of replaying CDs. It combines beautiful manners with Naim's characteristically coherent musical drive and flow well in evidence, keeping the whole musical ensemble working properly together and moving in the right direction. Everything holds together beautifully, and unlike some previous Naim components it tends to sound equally superb when heard out of a complete Naim system context.

If the CDX2 alone is very good, adding the optional XPS external supply (for an additional £2,300) produces a substantial and obvious improvement, with extra sparkle and separation that must put this combination very close to the top of the class. Individual instruments are better separated and defined, and the space around is larger and more believable. The CDX2 is an excellent CD player – not least because it can be upgraded so effectively. *Reviewed HFC 238*

HI-FI CHOICE



TRY IT WITH THESE

STEREO PRE/ POWER AMP

Sugden Masterclass AA > £5,600

A CD player of the Naim's quality demands equally fine amplification, and this pre/power combo from Sugden delivers musical brilliance in abundance.



STEREO SPEAKERS

Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2 > £4,000

Like the Naim, this speaker's roots lie in sheer sonic enjoyment. It may not look particularly special for £4,000, but it gets to the heart of the music.



£7,500 01235 511166 www.roksan.co.uk

ROKSAN TMS2 TURNTABLE

It was Roksan that broke the hegemony that the Linn Sondek LP12 held over the vinyl market with its first product, the Xerxes. The TMS, originally introduced as the flagship 'signature' model, has developed over the years into this latest heavyweight, which stands comparison with virtually any turntable in the world.

What separates the TMS2 from the rest is that it presents genuine engineering solutions to the challenges posed by black vinyl replay. Unlike many of its competitors, Roksan has not opted for the obvious brute force approach, for example using the flywheel effect of a massive platter to dampen speed variations. Although based on the original TMS, which in turn was informed by the Xerxes, the TMS2 is radically different under the skin,

sharing only the fundamental design of the main bearing (the construction of which has been improved significantly) and the platter. The multiple-section decoupled chassis has been comprehensively redesigned, and now offers much better environmental isolation. Mention should be made too of the flecked finish of the polymer composite chassis, which is a real head-turner.

Because the TMS2 is as it is, it combines two sets of qualities that are very unusual in any turntable – the solidity, stability and authority of a heavyweight, with the speed and agility of a featherweight. Timing is on the ball, and the Artemiz arm, its



“The TMS2 combines the solidity and authority of a heavyweight with the speed and agility of a featherweight.”

preferred partner, which was used for our test, had the wherewithal to cope with almost any high-end moving coil, not least the test Roksan Shiraz. *Reviewed HFC 246*

£6,495 01844 219000 www.madrigal.com

MARK LEVINSON No390S CD PLAYER

We've heard a good selection of top-flight CD players in the last year but none of them have had the measure of this awesome Mark Levinson. Reviewed last year but still the machine to beat, the 390S is a stunning piece of kit that incorporates a digital preamplifier, accepting digital feeds from other sources (PCM up to 48kHz) and capable of driving a power amp via its analogue volume control. Unlike digital volume controls there is no sound quality compromise at lower levels.

From the moment you press play it's clear that this is a remarkable CD player. The sheer transparency and the resolution are dramatic. It reveals oodles of extra detail that

describes the instruments and voices in the recording with genuine and admirable vivacity.

There is a confidence and assurance about it that's hard to pinpoint. Each disc reveals more about the recording, so it's that character that you hear more of but at the same time there's a calmness to the overall sound that suggests

“Images are placed fore and aft of the speakers and have a tangibility that is uncanny.”

the bare minimum of distortion. Images are placed fore and aft of the speakers and have a tangibility that is uncanny – you feel that you can reach out and touch the musicians. Timing is natural, not emphasised or relaxed, 'just so' in fact. The 390S is a top-notch CD player, one of the very best you can buy, with build quality that even the most expensive struggle to emulate.

Reviewed HFC 231



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #6

VARIOUS ARTISTS
VERVE REMIXED2 VERVE MUSIC GROUP

Timeless jazz classics brought bang up-to-date by the industry's hottest producers and DJs. Never has the obvious connection between jazz and modern dance music been so sensitively fused as on this impressive series.

Howard Malone, HFC art editor

"We're talking about a future classic"

July 2002 / VS55 / Hi Fi News Ken Kessler

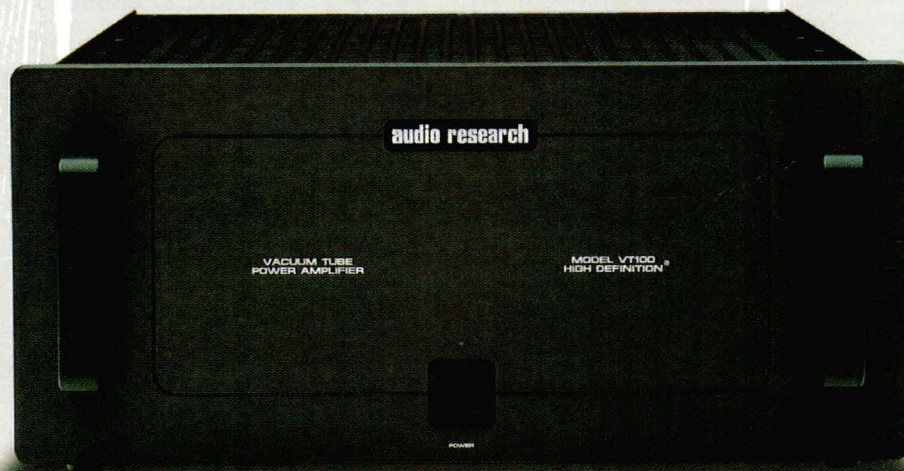
"More than any other CD player,
the CD3 is the machine that renews
my enthusiasm, wrapping me up
completely in the musical event"

November 2002 / CD3 / Suono Mario Berlinguer

ARC ANGELS

"Sets a new standard of quality"

December 2002 / SP16/VS55 / Suono Mario Berlinguer



HI-FI CHOICE
EDITORS CHOICE AWARD

AUDIO RESEARCH
LS25 MKII/VT100 MKIII
PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

"If you yearn for that intangible
'something' that many modern amps
miss, then you must hear the VS110"

March 2003 / VS110 / Hi Fi News Dave Berriman

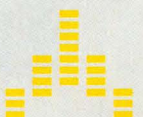


Audio Research apply the technology gained from their Reference 2 preamplifier and Reference 600 series amplifiers to every model in their range, right down to the entry-level designs. The SP16 preamplifier, VS55 and VS110 power amplifiers and the new VS155 integrated amplifier are not only packed with knowledge gained from the company's legendary flagship models, but herald a change in the way reasonably priced high end is perceived. Joining these classics are the state-of-the-art CD3 CD player and 150M multi-channel amplifier. For details of the full range and your nearest dealer, contact Absolute Sounds.

Audio Research: not a cautious choice, but a considered one.

audio research
HIGH DEFINITION®

absolute sounds ltd
58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW
T: +44 (0)20 89 71 39 09 F: +44 (0)20 88 79 79 62
www.absolutesounds.com info@absolutesounds.com





AMPLIFIERS

The beating heart of hi-fi, with current coursing through its veins. From minimalist two-channel stereo to complex multichannel processing, a weak amp means a sickly system, but a strong one brings power and control.

GOING MULTICHANNEL?

A fundamental question facing anyone building a hi-fi system these days is deciding whether it's best to stick with two-channel stereo or to take the plunge into multichannel. The latter is essentially surround sound, using at least five speakers including a centre and rears, an idea first popularised in the realms of out-and-out home cinema but one that can now stake a legitimate claim in real hi-fi circles.

One of the main reasons for this is that multichannel amps are much better than they used to be. The best models have been specifically designed to work well in two-channel mode (with CDs and so on) as well as doing a good job with full-on multichannel, while the standard of digital processing modes has improved almost beyond recognition. A strong influence on all this has been DVD-Audio and SACD. The two new music formats may be struggling to gain a mainstream foothold, but their ability to deliver CD-beating high-bandwidth multichannel music has created a need for suitably high quality multichannel amplification, of both integrated and preamp/processor-plus-power amp varieties.

It should be remembered that hi-fi-quality multichannel sound doesn't come cheap (which is why the amp entry-point in this year's *HFC Awards* is £900 for the Harman Kardon AVR 550 on p35). You're buying several more channels of amplification for a start, not to mention at least five speakers instead of two. If you've got a given budget to play with it's simple maths – you're not going

to get the same level of quality per channel/speaker (though the advantages of multichannel may arguably outweigh this loss of quality). You're also going to have to pay for all that processing whether you want it or not, together with the cost of licensing incurred by the manufacturer and passed on to the consumer. And the sheer development and construction costs involved in getting something so complex to sound half decent are pretty immense. Mind you, the technology can have its purist upsides – for example, piping all your digital data (CD, DVD-A, SACD or whatever it may be) through a single link for universal conversion by high-quality DACs inside a multichannel amp is an elegant solution, now made possible by high bandwidth-capable connections like i.Link and Denon's proprietary Denon Link (see p37 and p38 for evidence).

Then there's the question of whether you really want to put good quality full-range speakers all around the room, and whether surround sound really suits your listening habits at all. Remember – most of the music you're going to be playing for the foreseeable future will have been created in two-channel stereo and presented in a stereo format, and even multichannel music discs and Dolby Digital/DTS DVD-Videos can be played back quite happily through two-channel systems. For many hi-fi fans, two-channel remains the optimal system for their needs, but don't dismiss multichannel out of hand because of some misguided purist ideal – if you cherry-pick the kit, as we do at *HFC*, the results can be startling. **HFC**

ROTEL

ROTEL
STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER RA-1062

BALANCE

£595 ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.rotel.com

ROTEL RA-1062 STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Many Japanese audio brands have seemingly abandoned two-channel audio development in favour of home cinema. Rotel hasn't. Its recently introduced RA-1062 is one of the best new stereo integrated amps we've seen in a long time. Actually, technically it's not so new – it's the same basic circuit that was used in the successful RA-1060, but with extensive changes to around 60 passive components. Rated at 60 watts per channel (but delivering a healthy 95 watts into eight ohms and 145 watts into four ohms according to our measurements), the amplifier extends up to 100kHz, making it perfect for two-channel DVD-Audio or SACD replay alongside dedicated stereo sources like CD and vinyl. It even comes with an MM phono stage, a useful addition for 21st Century turntable enthusiasts.

This is an amplifier that is powerfully built, with large WBT-like speaker terminals around the back. That strength of build is reflected in the architectural quality of the sound, with music appearing solid and well constructed in front of the listener. Yet it's also detailed and thoroughly involving, with plenty of rhythmic, foot-tapping entertainment on hand when the music calls for it. Both bass and treble are notable, with plenty of bass depth and sweet high frequencies, while the overall performance ensures the listener is fully engaged, whatever the music. Usefully, Rotel has also included a 'contour' control, which permits bass and treble adjustment should a recording require it, but does so in a more elegant way than conventional tone controls.

This is a crisp, dynamic and expressive-sounding amplifier. Ally this to the excellent build quality and competitive price, and the RA-1062 will have the competition on edge. *Reviewed HFC 244*

HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



TRY IT WITH THESE

CD PLAYER

Arcam DiVA CD73T > £400

Arcam's latest entry-level player is a smooth and substantial-sounding all-rounder – an affordable model capable of punching well above its weight.



STEREO SPEAKERS

PMC DB1 > £555

If you're seeking a small, unobtrusive and affordable speaker that sounds much bigger than it looks, this PMC is ideal... and a good match for the Rotel too.



£330 ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

MARANTZ PM7200 STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

For obvious reasons, the mid-price integrated amplifier market is hotly contested with plenty of fine-value products around. Even so, the PM7200's specification looks quite impressive, with over 100 watts on offer, plenty of inputs (including phono) and the unexpected option of switching between Class AB and Class A operation. Now, 100-watt Class A amps are necessarily pretty vast, so output is curtailed in this mode, but however one looks at it, having a choice of two amps for the price of only one seems pretty cool.

There's an irony here though, in that operation in Class AB is so good that Class A really adds relatively little. It's a good 25-watt Class A amp but technically and sonically it's an astonishing 105-watt Class AB one. It produces sounds of great refinement and precision, with some of the

best-behaved bass you'll find for under a grand and very clean midrange and treble. It also manages the tricky business of keeping little details in place while bellowing forth the guts of some vast musical climax, so that, for instance, you can still hear the nuances of the solo guitar in some classic rock wall of sound, or the inner

"It manages to keep little details in place while bellowing forth a vast musical climax."

chorus parts of an operatic finale. In terms of controlling the trickiest speaker loads it inevitably bows to big high-end power amps, but no sane individual would even try it in such circumstances. All in all, it performs well above its apparent station and should be on every budget system wish-list. *Reviewed HFC 248*



£900 ☎ 020 8731 4670 🌐 www.harman-kardon.com

HARMAN KARDON AVR 5550 MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER

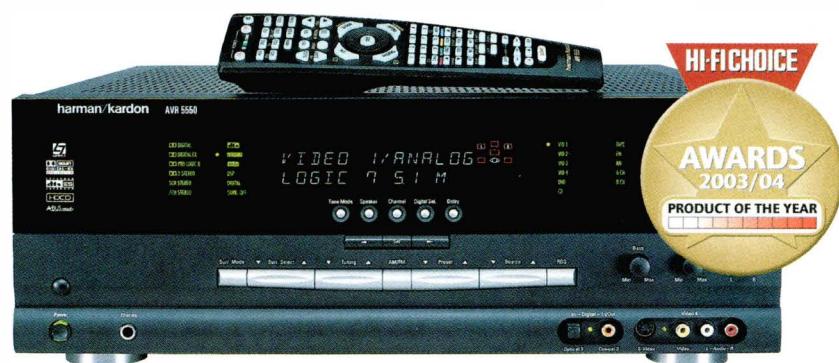
The AVR 5550 comes on as a straightforward, mid-price home cinema amp with all the usual trimmings and a rather overdressed front panel. But this is an amp – a receiver in fact, as it includes a preset RDS tuner – that repays a little extra attention. The features list has some surprises under the skin, including proprietary Logic 7 surround channel processing which has matured well over the years into something more than just another selling feature. More important, however, is the bass management, which is quite astonishing in its versatility. It not only provides a vast range of crossover frequencies, it also allows different crossover frequencies for different speaker groups. This feature can prove remarkably beneficial even when using identical satellites all round! Extensive customisation is also

possible for each of the surround sound modes, and for plain stereo listening, which can be uncontaminated by settings required for Dolby and DTS use. Last but not least, look under the lid and you'll find not one, but two massive transformers, one for the three front channels and the other for the remaining four.

This then is a receiver which can be

"It delivers palpably more detailed and lively results than expected at the price."

fine-tuned to the task in hand, and which is less compromised than most when used in stereo, and when driven from a multichannel analogue source. It's a unique combination of attributes that requires some dedication during set-up, but which can deliver palpably more detailed and lively results than expected at the price. A dark horse? You bet! *Reviewed HFC 240*



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #7

BLUR
THINK TANK PARLOPHONE

With its complex layers of sound and edgily compelling songs, Think Tank finds Damon Albarn moving far beyond the reassuring simplicities of Britpop to establish himself as the most adventurous British pop star of the last decade. *Nigel Williamson, HFC music contributor*

£1,000 ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk

ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

For some years, Roksan's middle-market Caspian range has been a steady if unspectacular seller, backed by a fair degree of critical acclaim. But the time had clearly come for a revamp, which is what the new M Series products are all about.

The changes are modest on paper but turn out to be highly significant in practice. Power output is up 20 per cent to 85 watts per channel into eight ohms, rising to 120 watts into four, and the comprehensive, non-intrusive protection circuitry has also been improved. Unchanged is the complement of six inputs including a tape circuit, two preamplifier outputs and a power amplifier input, plus a repackaged remote control – the rather unsuitable iMac look of yore has gone. The overall appearance of the amplifier has been improved with a new self-indicating indented volume control and silver finish button tops. Internally the changes are more extensive, bringing the Caspian M closer in line with the Caspian preamplifier and monoblock power amplifiers. Mains filtering is now specified, and a number of improved passive components are used in critical areas.

On audition, the new amplifier is a very superior animal. With similar basic voicing to the old model, the Caspian M integrated amp has a new-found sureness of touch that is a clear step or three beyond its predecessor's capabilities. It sounds cleaner and more detailed, delivering a new transparency, along with greater punch. Timing is propulsive and complex rhythmic material is handled with an almost disdainful aplomb. The original was always an entertaining amplifier, but the new Caspian clearly provides a more involving and downright enjoyable listening experience, with a greater sense of authority, ultimately bringing the listener closer to the source. Those not used to the Caspian sound are in for a surprise, but it will be an extremely pleasant one. *Reviewed HFC 248*



TRY IT WITH THESE

CD PLAYER

Meridian 507 > £1,100

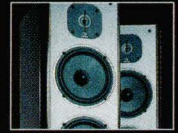
A superb CD player – refined and precise, yet not the least bit mechanical sounding. Forms a formidable partnership with the punchy Roksan.



STEREO SPEAKERS

Focal-JMlab Cobalt 816 Signature S > £999

With dull speakers the Roksan's enthusiasm would be wasted, but you'd be hard pushed to find a more enjoyable pair than this for less than a grand.



HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



£1,200 ☎ 01753 789500 🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

PIONEER VSA-AX5i MULTICHANNEL RECEIVER

Pioneer certainly stirred things up with the VSA-AX10 multichannel amp, which not only features an effective automated microphone-driven set-up, but which also premiered the use of the i.Link (aka FireWire or IEEE1394) digital interface to handle the full bandwidth multichannel output from a similarly equipped SACD and/or DVD-A player.

The problem of course is price. £3,000 is beyond the reach of many of us, and the VSA-AX5i was recently introduced to plug the gap. It retains a slightly simplified version of the same MCACC auto set-up regime, with plenty of grunt for most situations, and notably well-endowed surround sound processing with no significant missing algorithms.

But the i.Link feature is actually more useful in the AX5i. Not only are there two i.Link inputs rather than the one of

“It has plenty of grunt for most situations and notably well-endowed surround sound processing.”

the senior model, the VSA-AX5i's D/A stage understands DSD data, the native SACD data format, which the VSA-AX10 doesn't. This means one less conversion to analogue (unless bass management is required) and a more transparent sound from SACD. Other associated benefits include full auto-configuration to the disc type inserted, auto-recognition of the i.Link-equipped player, disc readout data and any

CD/DVD Text replicated on the receiver's display, and a clock link fed back to the player to reduce jitter. The result? A much more vivid and transparent performance from almost any kind of disc. Even CD replay is transformed as the i.Link interface and strong D/A conversion in the receiver turns an unexceptional player into a classy transport. A great all-rounder, and great value. *Reviewed HFC 248*



£1,399 ☎ 01453 752656 🌐 www.avihifi.com

AVI LABORATORY SERIES STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

A few months back, this amp hit us like a bolt from the blue. We knew that Stroud-based AVI was capable of producing some impressive hi-fi electronics, amps included, not to mention a laudable range of speakers, but this diminutive little monster is something else entirely.

For a start, it has a ridiculously long name – the Laboratory Series Integrated Amplifier Type S21 MI, to give it its full moniker. But the amp itself is rather more compact, its half-width case adorned with bead-blasted aluminium controls that neatly update the traditional AVI schematic. Its looks are deceptive, however, for under the lid beats 200 watts of sophisticated musical adrenaline.

It's incredibly rare to hear such a small amp sound so big or exert such iron-fisted control over almost any speaker you care to throw at it. It

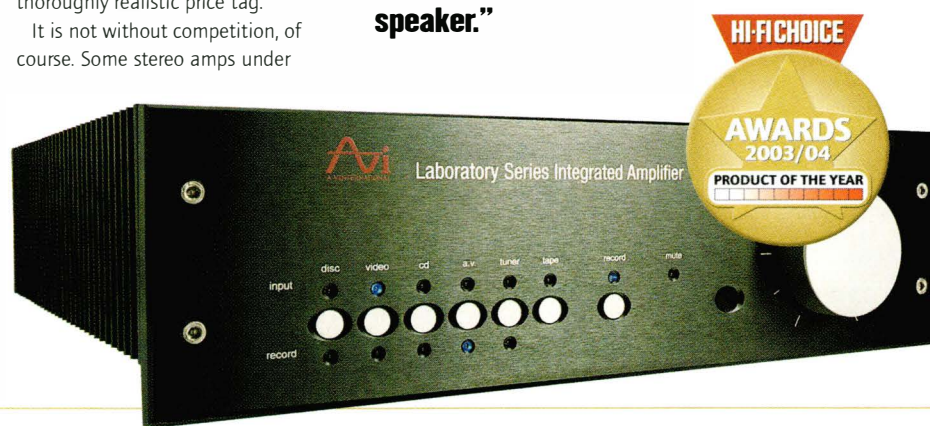
delivers grip and drive in abundance, with an engagingly wide dynamic range and deep yet controlled bass. It helps make recorded music sound palpably big and physical, yet does so with considerable refinement and attention to fine detail – a mix of attributes that make you look twice at this remote-controllable amp's thoroughly realistic price tag.

It is not without competition, of course. Some stereo amps under

“It's incredibly rare to hear such a small amp exert such iron-fisted control over almost any speaker.”

£1,500 may deliver a little more air and detail, others a more overtly punchy, rhythmic performance. But you'd have to spend considerably more to beat the sheer realism with which this AVI portrays music. For such a bijou nugget of an amp, it packs a huge wallop.

Reviewed HFC 241



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #8

ALISTAIR HINTON: STRING QUARTET
SARAH LEONARD, JAGDISH MISTRY ALTARUS

A string quartet that fills three CDs, with a large vocal part in the final movement – surely some mistake? But Hinton (currently in his fifties) has composed a haunting and compelling work of great beauty, here played with full conviction and stunningly recorded. *Richard Black, HFC reviewer*

£2,790 ☎ 01273 423877 🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

EXPOSURE XXIII/XXVIII STEREO PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

HI-FI CHOICE



We saw a good variety of superb pre/power amplifiers in 2003, with sonic styles ranging from the muscular to the romantic, but this Exposure pairing proved exceptional with a blend of qualities that really brings music to life. The £1,395 XXIII preamplifier has full remote control and a good range of line inputs (MM or MC phono is optional). Connection between the amps is via phono or XLR socketry, but unlike most XLR-equipped components these are not balanced amps. The XXVIII power amp (also £1,395) delivers 70 watts per channel courtesy of a dual mono construction with bipolar output transistors.

“Music comes across with incautious amounts of joy, the playing coming to life with sparkle and light.”



There's something of the valve sound about the Exposure combo's fluid and natural midrange that is extremely engaging, the combination with Living Voice speakers proving highly fruitful

on test. Tonally it's particularly gratifying, with instruments and voices reproduced very convincingly.

This is achieved largely by an excellent sense of dynamics – you can hear all the little variations in level within the music but don't miss out on the big swings either. Bass may not be as bone-crunching as with the bigger power amps and imaging isn't quite as precise as the best, but what's really

impressive at the price is the natural sense of perspective and spatial variation between recordings.

Music often comes across with incautious amounts of joy, the playing coming to life with genuine sparkle and light. This Exposure pre/power combo has a musical transparency and lightness of touch that gives it a distinct edge over the competition.

Reviewed HFC 241

£3,000 ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

DENON AVC-A1SR MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Denon's state-of-the-art home cinema amplifier is among the most fully equipped, finest engineered and most sophisticated of its type. It is also extremely forward-looking. Denon was one of the first manufacturers to develop a proprietary encrypted digital interface capable of accepting full (native) bandwidth multichannel audio data from high-resolution,

“Its musical performance will be a revelation to those normally against complex amps like this.”

multichannel players, allowing off-player conversion by the amplifier as close as possible to the amp output stage. Other highlights include THX Ultra2 (naturally), and a prodigiously powerful DSP engine for unwrapping Dolby and DTS processing, and for providing sophisticated bass management.

operating modes, thanks to unusually transparent D/A processing. There are few CD players that don't sound better by feeding a digital output instead of analogue, and allowing the amplifier to act as the D/A converter. But the Denon also has some extremely effective bypass options, including Pure Analogue Bypass. All of which makes the 7x170-watt AVC-A1SR a superb one-stop shop for systems intended for stereo and multichannel audio as well as stereo high fidelity.

Although principally intended for multichannel use, the AVC-A1SR's music-playing performance will come as a revelation to those whose audio sensibilities warn them against complex, massively endowed amplifiers like this. The Denon performs musically even in its standard

The amp's appeal is heightened even further when used with one of Denon's DVD-Audio players with a digital output. The icing on the cake is that Denon has included an upgrade path, with the ability to update firmware and even the key digital hardware if the occasion demands.

Reviewed HFC 232



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #9

THE WHITE STRIPES
ELEPHANT XL RECORDINGS

“No computers were used during the writing, recording, mixing or mastering”. This superb R&B album with plenty of variety was made on an analogue eight-track at Toe Rag Studios in London's Hackney, and is a brilliantly simple recording. Paul Messenger, HFC reviewer

£2,698 ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.krellonline.com

KRELL KAV-400XI STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Integrated amplifiers are comparatively new from Krell, and for Krell aficionados they seem almost like a concession. But one look inside the latest and greatest in the Krell integrated amplifier clan shows that it doesn't follow the usual rules – this is not just another integrated amplifier, even taking the asking price into account. Pop the lid and you'll see an amp that's been built with the precision of a Swiss watch, but also one which has absolutely no intention of merely marking time. The transformer is a massive 800VA toroid, feeding a circuit that employs Krell's proprietary CAST current mode topology, and which operates in true balanced mode from input through to output. Single-ended inputs (the KAV-400xi has both of course) are converted early in the circuit and processed as balanced.

Power output from the 24 bipolar output devices is 200 watts per channel, and remote control is provided. This is an elegant, slimline amplifier, fabricated from alloy pressings and extrusions, and styled similarly to the Showcase range. Looks are nothing short of stunning, and it's an amp that is clearly built to last.

Sound quality has the quintessentially Krell house sound, which is exactly what was intended. The KAV-400xi is blindingly quick and assured, with enormous power reserves into just about any loudspeaker load. More to the point, the amp has a typically Krell-like disdain for the load, performing consistently in every case, and irrespective of volume level. But at the end of the day, at everyday volume levels in moderately sized rooms, it is the Krell's small signal resolving power and window-like transparency that set it apart. This is a class act.

Reviewed HFC 246

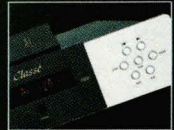


TRY IT WITH THESE

CD PLAYER

Classé CDP-10 > £1,599

It might weigh in well under the Krell's price tag, but this player trounces many more costly models with its fluidity and sheer musical communication.



STEREO SPEAKERS

Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor > £2,149

This beautiful Italian boat-tailed standmount is every bit an aesthetic match for Krell's gorgeous amp, and a worthy work of sonic art too.



HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



040

£5,500 ☎ 01223 203203 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

ARCAM AV8/P7 MULTICHANNEL PROCESSOR AND POWER AMPLIFIER

Arcam took a long time to commit to home cinema and multichannel audio, but has now done so with a vengeance, first with a range of DVD players and now with this amplifier combination, which will seed further developments in the not too distant future. With the AV8 THX Ultra2 processor and P7 7x150-watt power amp, which cost £3,000 and £2,500 respectively, Arcam has addressed the most mature high-end multichannel market in the world – the USA – where it competes on equal terms with talented opposition from the likes of EAD, Theta, Krell and others, at prices that come in below most of them.

Arcam's approach with the processor was to design a modular, upgradeable unit which won't be left behind by the fast-evolving multichannel market, and to use all its expertise to design a circuit that stands up to audiophile attention. This approach manifests itself in some surprising ways. The wide pitch between rear panel sockets means that almost any cable can be used, and a screened compartment can house a phono step-up which can feed a digital output for archiving purposes. The power amplifier is similar in conception and performance to Arcam's best FMJ amplification, and seven channels of will cover any foreseeable eventuality.

A great deal of thought has gone into the control options, which are key to the Arcam's credibility in a custom install environment. Similarly, the video switching is to broadcast standards, and is fully HDTV-compatible. The result of Arcam's efforts is a *tour de force*, a highly desirable and complete multichannel hi-fi and home cinema solution that will develop as the market itself develops in the years ahead. *Reviewed HFC 235*



TRY IT WITH THESE

UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER

Denon DVD-2900 > £850

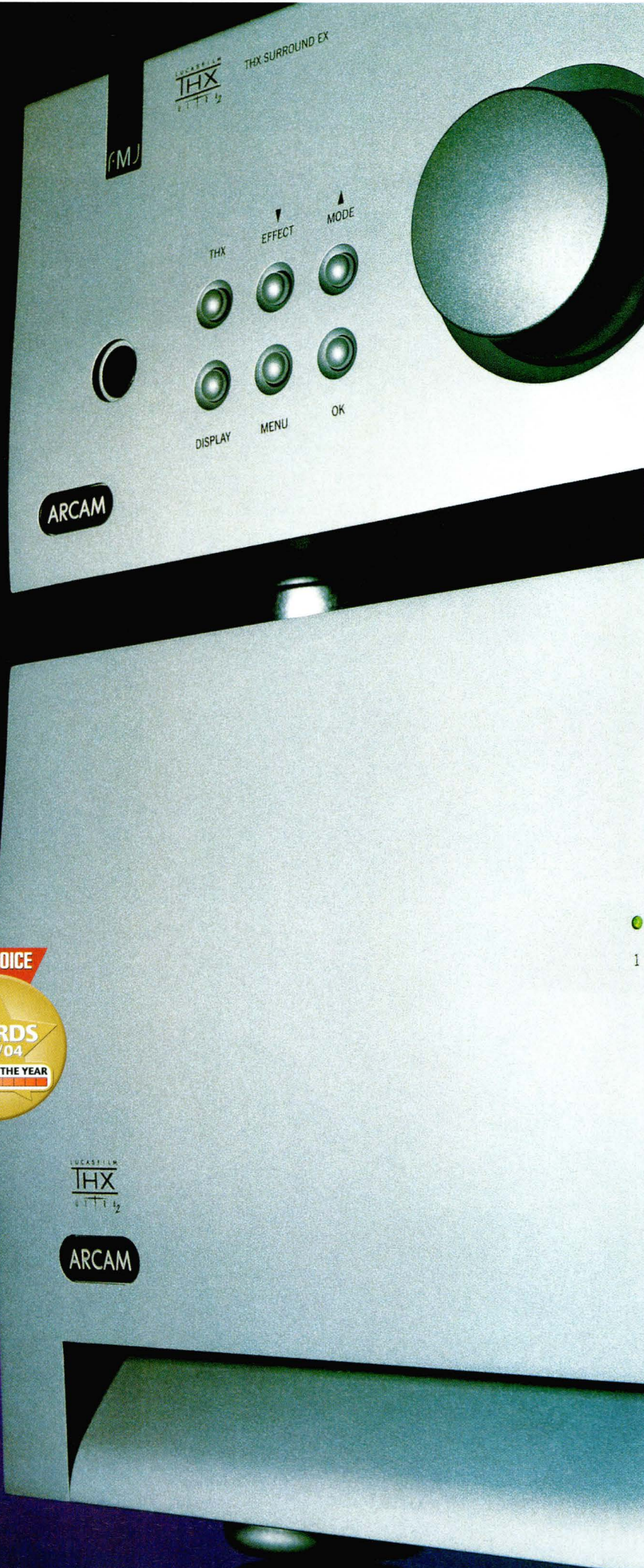
While Arcam's combo can cut it with the most exotic DVD players, its talents also show what Denon's relatively affordable universal player can do.



FIVE-CHANNEL SPEAKER SYSTEM

B&W 700 Series > £3,350

Combining 703s at the front with B&W's purpose-built HTM7/DS7 centre and surrounds, this set-up delivers with both music and film soundtracks.



£3,950 ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.gamutaudio.com

GAMUT D200 MkIII STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

Once in a while a product comes along that is so stunning that it changes your perception of hi-fi. The original GamuT D200 was such a product and this year it was upgraded to Mk3 to tremendous effect.

This power amp has been refined and updated with changes in components and layout, a process of evolution not revolution. It continues to use a single pair of MOSFET transistors to produce a stiff 200 watts per side and operates continuously in Class A at lower levels.

This is an open, dynamic and extremely coherent amplifier which delivers a transparent and fluent sound that is very strong on presence. You are right there in the crowd while Led Zeppelin play *Going To California*, with the bass in particular driving the monster sound along in no uncertain fashion.

“Its tendency if any is to make the music sound better rather than opt for maximum starkness.”

The Mk3 is a smoother, more effortless amplifier than its predecessors and its tendency if any is to make the music sound better rather than opt for maximum starkness – in particular you can play it louder than usual without discomfort because the high and mid frequencies are amplified, like the bass, with so little distortion. It can at times sound like a softness but the resolution of low-level

detail combined with silent backgrounds suggests that nothing is being masked. What we have here is an uncannily relaxed yet powerful and dynamically responsive amplifier.

The D200 Mk3 combines power, precision, dynamic subtlety and transparency in a way that is totally magical. You won't find a more capable powerhouse.

Reviewed HFC 247



£5,600 ☎ 01924 406016 🌐 www.jesugden.co.uk

SUGDEN MASTERCLASS AA STEREO PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

It takes a special blend of qualities to make the HFC Awards grade and this Yorkshire-born combo has them in spades. Priced at £2,300 and £3,300 respectively, this pre and power amp pairing operates largely in Class A, and delivers dynamic and tonal qualities to die for. Class A is why this is the biggest 50-watt power amp we've seen, and it needs an awesome amount of heatsinking to keep cool.

On the inside both amplifiers use gold-plated PCBs with silver-soldered connections and silver signal wires, balanced circuits, current feedback line stages, relay switching and low impedance power supplies.

This pairing is one of the most organic and dynamic transistor amplifiers you can buy – the similarities to good valve amps are uncanny. The strong biasing into class A is clearly a major factor here,

though another reason might be the fullness of the bass. This could be where the earthiness comes from, as it adds a richness that makes instruments sound more real.

It has a remarkable ability to reveal the energy in music, opening up even the densest discs to tremendous effect. Not all recordings are equal, of course, and this is more noticeable than usual. Timing is also a strong point and if you listen to the way notes decay with these amps you'll wonder why more transistor designers can't do the same thing.

The Masterclass AA pairing combines the strengths of trannies and tubes in a way that is rarely encountered and is highly entertaining.

Reviewed HFC 246

“This pairing is one of the most organic and dynamic transistor amps you can buy – similarities to good valve amps are uncanny.”



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #10

PINK FLOYD
THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON EMI (SACD)

The definitive high fidelity rock album remixed for multichannel SACD is an incredible aural experience. For the first time we can listen to Floyd's sonic vision of the future in a form that lets us hear what was originally intended.

Mark Prendergast, HFC music contributor

what do you want?

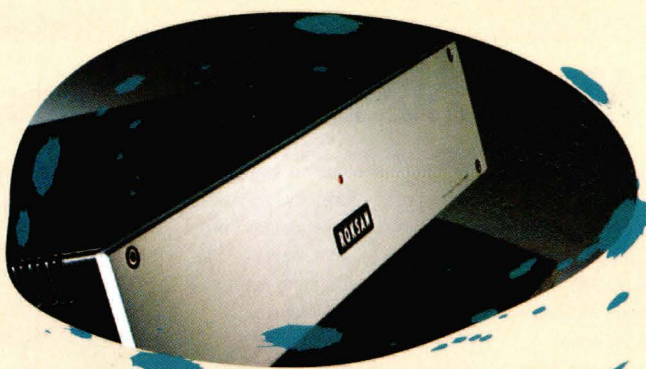
Buy
this



Buy
& this



Buy
& this



Kandy

- DVD
- Integrated amplifier
- Stereo amplifier



Henley Designs Ltd
Unit 11, Moorbrook, Southmead Industrial Park
Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7HP
Tel: 01235 511166 | Email: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk
www.henleydesigns.co.uk



SPEAKERS

Turning electrical signals into sound waves, your speakers are the crucial final link in the chain between your music and your ears. But the question is, do you need two, five or even more to satisfy your lust for sensational sound?

CHOOSING YOUR SPEAKERS

Hi-fi people choose speakers based on two grounds. First, sound quality and second, size and appearance (though not necessarily in that order). It's obviously important that the speakers you choose will suit your home environment and all speakers big or small will have their sonic pros and cons. But remember that a loudspeaker exerts more tonal influence over your system's sound than any other component, and so it's vital that you get ones that suit your musical and sonic preferences if you want to enjoy your system to the full.

At *HFC* we don't forget the importance of aesthetics, but we recommend products to you based on their sonic ability – for that reason you won't find many sub/sat packages recommended within these pages, unless they're truly exceptional. We also utilise our rigorous lab testing facilities to give practical advice on amp partnering and room placement – key areas in ensuring whether a speaker is right for you. In very basic terms, big speakers don't tend to work well in small rooms, while most modern amps are powerful enough to drive most modern speakers without too many problems. But particular care is needed if a speaker offers an unusually tough load, or your amp is of, say, the low-powered valve variety.

Most hi-fi quality speakers are of the common 'dynamic driver' type, albeit with greatly varying driver size,

construction and configuration, but a few create sound differently. The most significant alternative in audiophile terms is the electrostatic panel loudspeaker. The best of these give an 'out of the box' sound that no dynamic driver design can match, though with drawbacks in terms of bass depth, drive and room/amp compatibility issues. The MartinLogan electrostatic hybrid on p48 is unusually accommodating for the breed, and hence fully deserves its place in the *HFC Awards*.

The speakers we recommend across the next few pages are stereo pairs ranging from £200 to £10,000. If you're looking for a multichannel set-up, our recommendation is simple: choose a good stereo pair first to act as your main left and right speakers – this is hugely important from a musical point of view. Also, remember that speakers that are great with music will also work well with film soundtracks, but not necessarily the other way round. Once that's done, simply choose your centre and surround speakers from the same range – most manufacturers offer compatible options in this regard, and it's important that the centre unit in particular is a tonal match for the main left and right speakers. Most of the speakers we're recommending here will perform equally well in a multichannel configuration, and that way you can create a system that's every bit as good with your music as it is with your movies. **HFC**

£449 per pair ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

TANNOY SENSYS DC1 LOUDSPEAKER

Tannoy's standmount Sensys DC1 delivers a stunningly high-class sound by combining the very latest dual-concentric main driver technology with a top-mounted super-tweeter. These are mounted in and on a chunky, hunky, tough little box finished in a bland but quite acceptable vinyl woodprint, which keeps the price to an ultra-competitive £450 per pair.

The DC driver has a 175mm frame and fires a horn-loaded tweeter out through the centre of the bass/mid driver cone. The super-tweeter is built into a substantial cast housing, and comes in above a nominal 16kHz. And there's a unique five-terminal connection block, allowing the main driver chassis to be earthed to the amplifier. The 15mm MDF box has additional bracing, and the sort of shape and dimensions which should work very well acoustically.

Bass alignment works best with the ports open and the speakers quite close to a wall. Furthermore, wall proximity doesn't seem to create unwanted midrange colorations. Sonically this is a very impressive performer indeed – beautifully balanced and voiced, and reasonably smooth too for such an inexpensive model, though the high-ish volume control settings on test point towards its fairly modest sensitivity.

It's notably free from boxy effects, showing impressive stereo focus with natural perspectives that serves classical material very well indeed, and reproduces live acoustic recordings like Christy Moore's *Live At The Point* with great atmosphere and delicacy, and notably convincing applause.

The bottom end is lively and agile, reaching down pretty well into the deep bass, yet more importantly staying crisp and clean throughout the mid and upper bass. The upshot is that the Sensys DC1 provides an audiophile performance at an affordable price. *Reviewed HFC 245*



TRY IT WITH THESE

TURNTABLE AND ARM

Roksan Radius 5 > £850

If vinyl is a part of your replay plans, this Roksan is a peach. And the Tannoy DC1 is every bit good enough to reveal its considerable strengths.



STEREO AMP

Rotel RA-1062 > £595

Rotel's latest stereo amp is an absolute star for the money – combine it with a pair of these Tannoys and you'll have the basis of a giant-slaying system.



HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



£200 per pair ☎ 01442 260146 🌐 www.epos-acoustics.com

EPOS ELS3 LOUDSPEAKER

Good budget speakers aren't rare but truly remarkable ones are, which makes this little Epos all the more welcome and precious. Its diminutive nature makes it a convenient choice for surround or stereo duties, especially since the 25mm tweeter and 130mm woofer are fully shielded so that they don't upset your telly.

A two-way reflex design, it uses a 100mm polymer cone for mid and bass duties and hands the higher frequencies over to a 25mm metal dome. Sensitivity or ease of load is inevitably a bit tougher than average (87dB, four ohms) but a decent integrated or multichannel amp won't have a problem.

This is a stonking standmount that does far more than you'd expect at the price. It creates scale and depth of image with ease, so the music is wide

and deep with instruments sounding more real as a result. It's also unusually transparent and coherent – you can hear right into the mix and the way the music is delivered is fluent and clean.

It even has useful bass capabilities, which while unlikely to shake the furniture will be more than enough to annoy the neighbours, tracks like Goldrapp's *Brown Paper Bag* coming across in dynamic, deep and surprisingly tactile form.

Fast, accurate timing is a major key to how the ELS3 manages to make music so inviting, despite its diminutive form. Few speakers at this price level come close to sounding as clean and convincing as the Epos.

Reviewed HFC 241



"It creates scale and depth of image with ease, so the music is wide and deep with instruments sounding more real as a result."

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

PMC DB1 LOUDSPEAKER

It might be unbelievably tiny, but this DB1 (Dinky Box One!) is still a totally serious and extremely capable speaker. It's utterly seductive sonically, in the way it drags you into the music, yet it's an almost invisible presence in the listening room. If small is indeed beautiful – and for many that certainly applies where speakers are concerned – the DB1 should earn itself plenty of fans.

It's hard to believe that such a compact (29cm high) enclosure can incorporate a four-fold transmission line with a 1.5m effective length, but that feature helps explain why it costs a substantial £555 (in oak or cherry, ten per cent more for walnut or black). The other ingredients – two high-class drive units, a complex crossover and a wood veneered enclosure – are all of the highest quality too, while the internal partitions ensure a highly rigid box.

It's equally difficult to believe that something so small can sound so big, lively, and capable. A little more weight and authority might be appreciated, especially on heavier rock and dance material, but if the bass is quantitatively close to the margin, it was also qualitatively exceptional – clean, agile and invariably informative and communicative.

The broad midband is smooth and even, with a lovely warmth, coherence and overall neutrality. Siting is tricky, since the midband and imaging are better with the speakers clear of walls, while the bass benefits from wall reinforcement. One might assume the DB1 is primarily destined for surround channel duties, but don't underestimate its capabilities as a main stereo pair, particularly if you're after an expressive speaker for a small to medium-size room. *Reviewed HFC 240*



"It's difficult to believe that a speaker as small as the DB1 can sound so big, lively and capable."



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #11

BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY
MASTER AND EVERYONE DOMINO

Sometimes the best things come in simple packages, and Will Oldham's third 'Prince' outing is a prime example. This subtle and unprepossessing collection of almost-completely acoustic music contains some of the best American song-writing of the last decade, let alone this year. *Shaun Marin, HFC reviewer*

£930 per pair ☎ 01756 795333 🌐 www.castleacoustics.co.uk

CASTLE CONWAY 3 LOUDSPEAKER

Castle's Conway 3 is a totally beguiling and seductive package. It sits snugly quite low to the ground, is beautifully finished in a wide choice of real-wood veneers, and is realistically priced at £930. But above all it delivers a beautifully lively and well-balanced sound that will always make your music inviting and entertaining.

It's a relatively conventional two-way, with two bass/mid drive units mounted above and below the tweeter in a d'Appolito configuration, port-loaded through the base. Build is very solid, with a tasty rich red mahogany veneer, and a plinth usefully extends the stability footprint. The main drivers have cast alloy frames and 115mm woven carbon-fibre matrix cones, while the offset tweeter has a 28mm soft fabric dome.

The overall tonal balance is about as

good as it gets, just slightly laid back with a beautifully judged treble end, alongside fine focus and coherence. The only criticisms are a slight lack of deep bass weight and extreme top-end sparkle and 'air'. The solid enclosure probably contributes towards a notably wide dynamic range, and dynamics themselves come through with considerable verve and enthusiasm, ensuring fine expression of musical intent.

One might perhaps criticise the speaker for some lack of image height, but in all other respects the stereo soundstages are very well formed, with good depth and accurate perspectives whatever music you play. Above all, though, this speaker sucks you into the music in such a way that will ensure you and your system will enjoy plenty of use.

Reviewed HFC 237

"Dynamics come through with considerable verve and enthusiasm, ensuring fine expression of musical intent."



£999 per pair ☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-jmlab.fr

FOCAL-JMLAB COBALT 816 SIGNATURE S LOUDSPEAKER

Abrilliantly successful under-the-skin makeover has transformed Jmlab's original Cobalt 816 – itself a very capable design, commended in last year's *HFC Awards* – into one of 2003's star performers, with a splendidly lively and open character that fully addresses our (minor) criticisms of the original.

The 'Signature S' Cobalt 816 has much in common with its predecessor. It's a 'two-and-a-half-way' design, using two 165mm 'W-sandwich' cone drivers, and a Tioxid 5 inverted titanium dome tweeter. Contemporary styling combines 'red cherry' sides, metallic-look front and top and a perforated metal grille. Tough 8mm spikes give firm support – but without the stability of a separate plinth.

While the original version was a doughty performer, this upgrade undoubtedly represents a significant

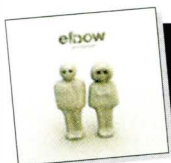
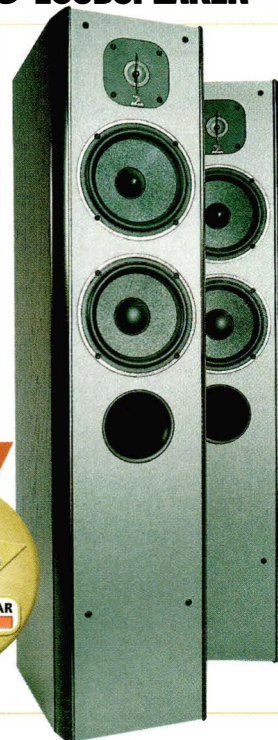
improvement, avoiding the rather 'shut in' and 'pinched' voice band of the earlier model. As a result, diction is much clearer and lyrics more intelligible, especially at low levels. Indeed, if anything, the Signature S has a slight tendency to over-project detail in the presence band.

It's a real class act sonically, delivering a rare combination of open neutrality alongside ample bass drive and weight and realistic dynamic expression. The *Live Alison Krauss + Union Station* album came across with all the verve, intimacy and dynamic tension that is the *raison d'être* of a top quality live recording.

While it might not go as loud as a three-way, this speaker's greater simplicity is reflected in its fine overall coherence, and that in turn accounts for its excellent communication skills.

Reviewed HFC 242

"It's a class act, sonically, delivering a rare combination of open neutrality alongside ample bass drive and weight."



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #12

ELBOW
CAST OF THOUSANDS v2

Warm your soul on Elbow's smouldering undertow with this, the band's second album of guitar-smoked ambience driven on a slothful, soulful breeze. Far-reaching and texturally fluid, it percolates through the year's creative malaise like fresh water through bone-dry sand. *Tim Bown, HFC editor*

£2,000 per pair ☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

B&W 703 LOUDSPEAKER

Advanced drive unit technology from the biggest speaker specialist around is the basic reason why B&W's new 703 sets an enviable standard for £2,000 three-ways, delivering a magnificently wide dynamic range that provides superb rendition of subtle low-level detail.

This floorstander has an extremely classy real-wood veneer covering all faces, and notably clean lines. The front and top are formed from a single piece, ensuring great structural stiffness, and the enclosure is subtly tapered front to rear, to avoid parallel surfaces.

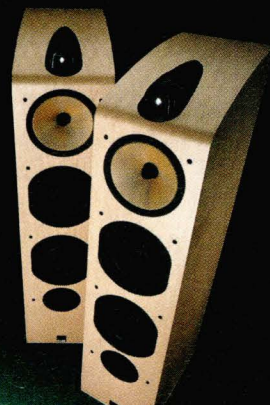
The high-class drivers include a version of B&W's radical 'surroundless' FST midrange driver, with 140mm woven Kevlar cone. There are two 'balanced drive' bass drivers, each with 120mm paper cones, plus a 25mm alloy dome tweeter, which is tube-loaded and mounted externally through the top surface of the cabinet.

The 703 can sound a little bright and edgy at first, but any harshness is pretty much mollified after a few days. Once properly in the groove, it displays some delightful musical characteristics, with an overall performance well ahead of the chasing pack.

The strong top end can occasionally prove a trial if playing bright and edgy recordings loud – but it also adds some welcome extra low-level clarity. And that FST midrange reproduces voices with great clarity and expression, and a notably wide dynamic window. Overall it's highly engaging mix, capturing both the essence of musical spirit and its finer detail, with imaging that's beautifully spacious and free from boxiness.

The bass is arguably even better – dry, clean, deep, even, and very, very agile. Check first that the brightness balance suits your personal taste and system. If it does, you'll find a wonderfully analytical and entertaining speaker, with an exceptionally wide dynamic range. *Reviewed HFC 248*

HI-FI CHOICE



TRY IT WITH THESE

CD PLAYER

Classé CDP-10 > £1,599

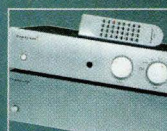
This machine is practically 'budget' for the high-end Canadian brand – for most of us it's hardly cheap, but its sound suggests a price that's much more weighty.



STEREO PRE/ POWER AMP

Exposure XXIII/ XXVIII > £2,790

'Musicality' is an enigmatic concept, but this amp combo has it well and truly nailed. Dynamic and free-flowing, it's a great match for the B&W.



£2,498 per pair

☎ 0208 971 3909 🌐 www.martinlogan.com

MARTINLOGAN CLARITY LOUDSPEAKER

The Clarity is a new kind of MartinLogan, one aimed at those who cannot afford, or for that matter perhaps even accommodate, a traditional electrostatic panel. Specifically, it deploys some innovative ideas to free the user from the tyranny of the listening hot spot. Other MartinLogans have addressed this problem with a curved diaphragm, which gives about 30 degrees lateral coverage, but stand up and the treble disappears precipitously as the panels act as line sources on this axis.

The principal novelty is a (switchable) vertically-oriented moving coil tweeter which is essentially inaudible when heard from in front as its prime axis is vertical, and whose effect becomes more obvious at angles that cause the panel's normally impressive treble output to disappear. Some may regard using a dome tweeter as a sell-out, but MartinLogan has used them before, for example in its centre speakers, and it merely underlines the pragmatic approach of the designer who has simply used the best tool for the job in hand. Other significant changes to the Clarity include a newly revised panel coating and new fabrication techniques, which are soon to be rolled out across the whole range. The results are said to be more consistent, and less affected by atmospheric conditions.

The Clarity is ostensibly intended as a home cinema speaker. Well perhaps, but in practice it is a very good speaker, full stop. It is not perhaps a first choice for full-blooded rock at elevated volumes, but it is a sweet, detailed speaker of considerable (but not excessive) warmth. It is well integrated despite the promiscuous mix of technologies, and it really struts its stuff with acoustic material in particular.

Reviewed HFC 245

TRY IT WITH THESE

FM RADIO TUNER

Magnum Dynalab MD102 > £2,200

Not everyone needs a tuner, but if you're serious about radio it doesn't get much better than this – in tandem with the Clarity the results are magical.



STEREO AMP

Krell KAV-400xi > £2,698

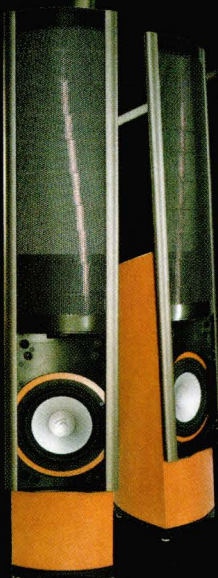
Krell's latest integrated is beautifully built and a superb performer, just what the doctor ordered to get ML's electrostatic hybrid singing sweetly.



HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



£2,149 per pair (stands £399) ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

SONUS FABER CREMONA AUDITOR LOUDSPEAKER

If the tall floorstanding Sonus Faber Cremona is too big or too expensive, the smaller standmounted Cremona Auditor has all the looks and is even more flexible, for a fraction of the price of its bigger brother. Sonus Faber has a commanding reputation as the Armani of speaker builders, and the drop-dead gorgeous Cremona Auditor, on its slightly swept-back stands and with its lute-string-style speaker grilles, only reinforces the perception of Italian style.

This two-way, rear-ported standmount speaker is claimed to have an 88dB sensitivity and a four-ohm nominal impedance, with an effective frequency response from 48Hz-40kHz. A well-endowed amp is required to drive a pair correctly and it needs to be carefully positioned away from walls, but if correctly set up it



“The Cremona’s sound is one that disappears, leaving a large, deep, holographic soundstage.”

returns a performance that is every bit as gorgeous as its looks.

It produces a crisp, clean and dynamic sound with stacks of treble detail and surprisingly deep bass for such a box of its size. The speakers themselves ‘disappear’ sonically, leaving a deep and wide holographic soundstage, with even a good degree of height information. But the Cremona Auditor is not one of those polite audiophile loudspeakers that lacks any form of heft when you move from pretty Mozart string quartets to flat-out guitar-driven rock. It’s punchy, yet refined enough to cope with any form of musical genre.

Speakers that look good and sound good are rare – those that combine these traits while remaining smaller than the average fridge are rarer still. That’s what makes the Cremona Auditor so special. *Reviewed HFC 246*



£2,995 per pair ☎ 01833 631021 🌐 www.neat.co.uk

NEAT ULTIMATUM MFS LOUDSPEAKER

One of the heftiest and most complex compacts around, this exceptionally elegant speaker is proof positive that very good things indeed can come in compact packages. It’s a splendid example of combining the best sonic qualities of the standmount with the weight and scale typical of large floorstanders, thanks to its isobaric loading and five-driver line-up.

Neat’s Ultimatum MFS is expensive, but very well equipped. Besides the five drivers – four visible, and an extra one hidden inside – classy real-wood veneers decorate the sides and back of an incredibly solid birch-ply enclosure. The 45mm-thick front and top panels use a ‘sandwich’ construction with a polyethylene membrane ‘filling’.

This is actually at heart a two-way loudspeaker, the front panel housing

Neat’s familiar 165mm main driver and a top-class Focal tweeter. The top surface meanwhile has a pair of EMIT-type super-tweeters, while a second bass driver inside provides the isobaric loading.

It seems slightly outrageous that a speaker this small should sound so inordinately large. Its superbly wide dynamic range and complete freedom from unwanted ‘box’ effects brings uncommon clarity to low frequencies.

With the MFS you get to hear the drive units, but not the enclosure – or for that matter the crossover network. There’s a communication directness here that is totally convincing, thoroughly seductive and also ruthlessly revealing.

Few speakers can distinguish better between the various sources, or show up differences between rival components, and therefore few more



“It seems outrageous that a speaker this small should sound so large.”

effectively lay bare the arguments, intentions and subtleties of even the most complex music.

Reviewed HFC 241



ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #13

HIT
PETER GABRIEL VIRGIN

Solsbury Hill, Shock The Monkey, Sledgehammer, Don't Give Up, Games Without Frontiers, Big Time... and that's just the first six of 31 re-mastered tracks. Intelligent, timeless pop, brilliant production. I like it. A lot.

David Vivian, HFC reviewer

£3,500 per pair

☎ 0845 660 2680 🌐 www.focal-jmlab.fr

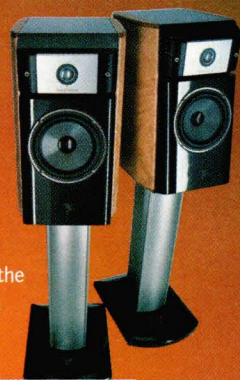
FOCAL-JMLAB MICRO UTOPIA BE LOUDSPEAKER

The high-end standmount market is turning into a technical *tour de force* and this year's obvious winner is the clear leader in the field. Beryllium (Be) is a dream material for high frequency domes, but it is so difficult to use that this is the least expensive speaker in the world with a pure beryllium tweeter. It is technically and sonically spectacular with a five-octave flat response, making it well suited to the 'wideband' formats – DVD-Audio and SACD.

The 'W' cone bass/mid driver is a sandwich of woven glass tissues on a foam core, the combination offering superior stiffness and damping, while drive is supplied by a Power Flower magnet which has a petal-shaped multi-ferrite 'motor'.

This speaker's strength lies in phenomenal transparency coupled with an absence of perceived distortion. There are recordings which make them sound grubby and others that make them sound crystal clear, but it soon becomes apparent that all the Micros are doing is revealing the quality of the signal. The majority of speakers sound positively crude by comparison.

Imaging is first class, and contrasts between recordings are often blinding. Tonal resolution is also extremely fine – pianos for instance sound much more real than usual despite the ultimate bass limitation. It's as if the extra transparency and extension at HF makes up for the curtailment down below. Track after track reveals subtleties of harmonic detail that simply aren't there with the alternatives. Quite simply, the Micro Utopia Be is one of the finest compact loudspeakers in the world. *Reviewed HFC 245*



TRY IT WITH THESE

CD PLAYER

Naim CDX2 > £2,850

A player that combines Naim's traditional rhythmic prowess with a healthy dose of finesse. Add an XPS power supply to make a genuine heavyweight.



STEREO POWER AMP

Gamut D200 Mk3 > £3,975

Speakers like the Utopias demand world-class power amps, and here's one of the best – add a suitable preamp (Gamut's C2R, for example) and it truly sings.



Beryllium

HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



£4,000 per pair ☎ 0115 973 3222 🌐 www.definitiveaudio.co.uk

LIVING VOICE AVATAR OBX-R2 LOUDSPEAKER

In what has been a very good year for loudspeakers, Living Voice's reworking of its Avatar OBX-R has kept this cracking box right up there in the premier league of top quality air shifters. It retains the distinctive outboard crossover, but this contains a redesigned network with both the cabinet and internal wiring having been upgraded.

The Avatar is an elegant and compact floorstanding design, its beautiful real-wood veneer contrasting with twin doped paper bass/mid units flanking a silk dome tweeter. The bass/mid units may not look particularly fancy but then they were not selected for their aesthetics – this is the best 165mm driver that Living Voice says it can get. Equally classy is the Revelator tweeter, a highly respected high-end design.

This is a phenomenally dynamic

loudspeaker – it can reproduce the energy, vitality and life in music in a way that is so tonally natural that you can't help but be swept away. Not only do trumpets, guitars, voices, you name it, have more life, but the way they are played is always clear. The sound is also more substantial and three-dimensional than many alternatives – you can always hear the space in recordings. The bass is not only deep, it is elastic and fluid to boot, with rich tone and real texture. Low-level detail is always well defined and denser passages untangle themselves so that you can hear precisely what's going on.

The Avatar OBX-R2 is a musical communicator of real talent, its transparency conveying the message in an effortless and engrossing fashion. A speaker for all seasons, no less. *Reviewed HFC 242*

“The sound is more three-dimensional than many alternatives – you can always hear the space in recordings.”



£10,000 per pair ☎ 0118 969 2288 🌐 www.bang-olufsen.com

BANG & OLUFSEN BEOLAB 5 LOUDSPEAKER

The 'intelligent loudspeaker', this striking looking model is simply the most radical, innovative and complex design ever, incorporating several thousand watts of amplification plus some very clever digital signal processing. The result is a speaker that automatically aligns itself to the particular room it's in.

A four-way floorstander, the striking conical shape allows an enormous 380mm bass driver to be mounted in the base, pointing downwards. The two horizontal silver discs mount the 78mm fabric-dome midrange and 18mm tweeter, both firing upwards onto elliptical acoustic 'lenses' that ensure a consistent performance irrespective of siting.

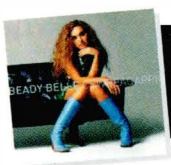
First impression, under truly 'blind' conditions, was of this speaker's exceptionally precise and detailed stereo perspectives, and even-handed

neutrality. The 'lens' system does indeed work 'as advertised', and seems to have no obvious downsides.

Coloration is exceptionally low throughout the audio band, but its cleverest trick is the way it seems to 'disappear', acoustically speaking. One simply isn't aware of the location of the speakers – only of the precisely detailed and well-focused soundstage, with all the instruments and voices of a recording portrayed with unusually natural positioning and proportions.

Loudness capabilities are prodigious and the bass alignment is about as good as it gets, imparting magnificent weight and power whenever the material requires, while neatly avoiding mid-bass thickening. Most significantly, this excellence should be consistently realised irrespective of the room in which the Beolab 5 is used – B&O has truly struck gold. *Reviewed HFC 244*

“Bass alignment is just about as good as it gets, imparting magnificent weight and power when required.”



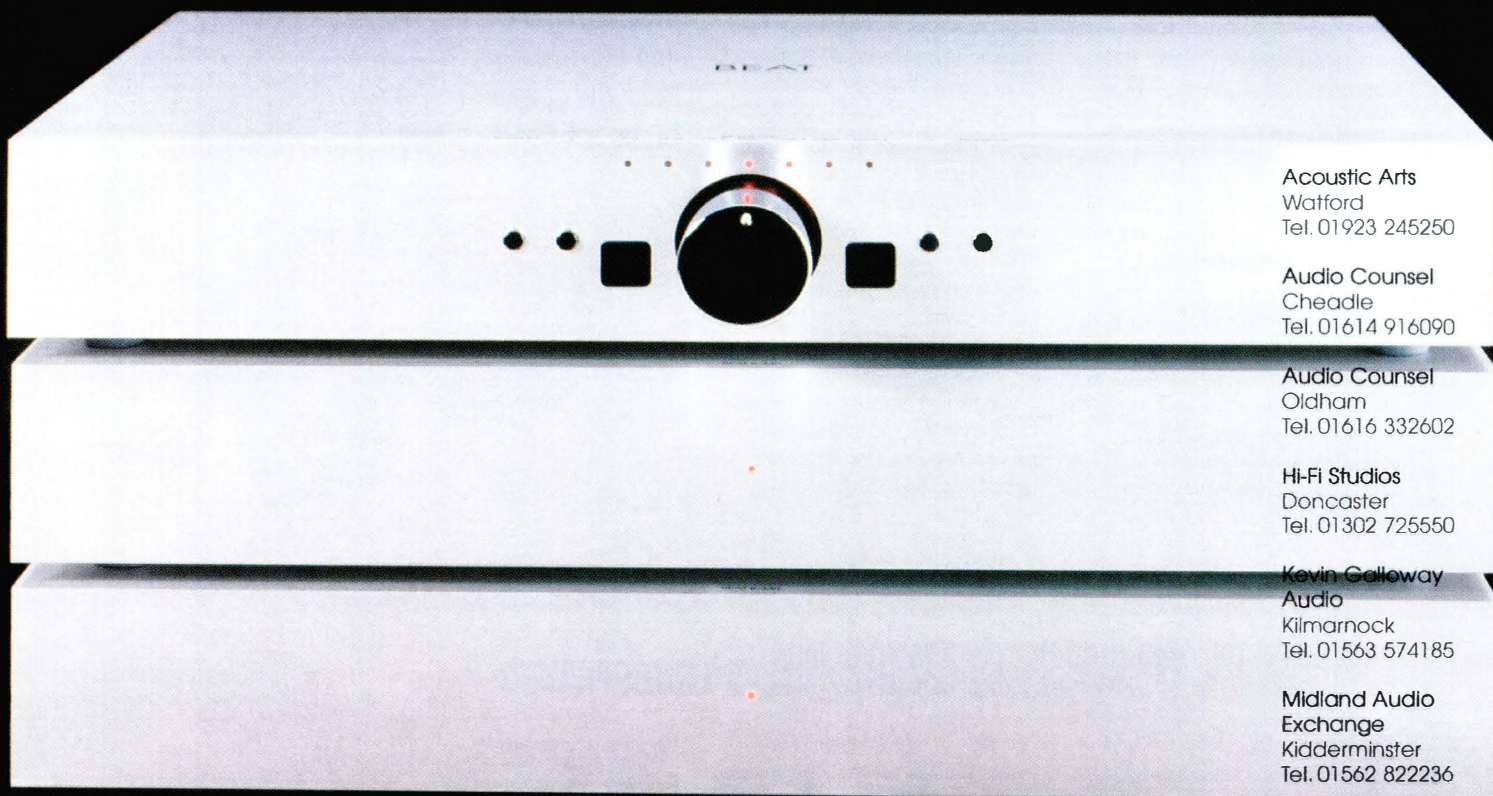
ALBUMS OF THE YEAR #14

BEADY BELLE
CEWBEGAPPIC JAZZLAND

Scandinavian blonde and mate of Norwegian new jazz meister Bugge Wesseltoft does her self-penned, self-produced thing. And it's great. Beate S Lech (her real name) is moodier than Nora Jones but still tuneful – a bluesy, touching, tough, vulnerable set. *Phil Strongman, HFC music contributor*

Densen

LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BORING HI-FI



Acoustic Arts
Watford
Tel. 01923 245250

Audio Counsel
Cheadle
Tel. 01614 916090

Audio Counsel
Oldham
Tel. 01616 332602

Hi-Fi Studios
Doncaster
Tel. 01302 725550

Kevin Galloway
Audio
Kilmarnock
Tel. 01563 574185

Midland Audio
Exchange
Kidderminster
Tel. 01562 822236

Mike Manning
Taunton
Tel. 01823 326688

Mike Manning
Yeovil
Tel. 01935 479361

New Audio Frontiers
Loughborough
Tel. 01509 264002

Phonography
Ringwood
Tel. 01425 461230

Progressive Audio
Gillingham
Tel. 01634 389004

Zen Audio
Hull
Tel. 01482 587397



Dear music lover

Our main focus is to achieve the best possible "airguitar factor"; only when your equipment sounds so good that it makes you want to stand up and play the airguitar or become an "air-conductor" - only then have we achieved what we wanted: to create musical experiences so great that you forget everything and focus 100% on the music.

"The Densen is like a Zeiss lens bringing everything into focus. It seems to transmit more musical clues which passes many other amplifiers by. One can analyse hi-fi specifics till the cows come home but it's something intangible, difficult to put into words, but to which the ear and brain subliminally react. So, do I like this Densen amp. No, I love it."

Hi-Fi Choice 2000

"The best advice I can give you is to audition the beat for your selves. It does so much right that really expensive amps get wrong, that it might event start you thinking!"

Hi-Fi Plus 1999

"I absolutely loved the Densen. I can confidently state that the Densen gave me more of everything that I treasured, not in the sense that it emphasized any aspect of the music but rather that it brought me closer (as far as I could tell) to it. I bought the review unit, and it is now part of my reference system."

Secrets of home theater 1999

"The Densen did an admirable job of simply making music. The Densen was extremely musical and nicely propulsive, so much so that it often interfered with my work, resulting in more than one or two 1:00-AM listening sessions as well as couple of missed deadlines. Densen offers tremendous value and musically it knocks it out of the park. I heartily recommend that anyone looking to assemble a real music system look at this box."

Soundstage 2002

Densen • Lundevej 10 • 6705 Esbjerg Ø • Denmark
Phone: (+45) 75 18 12 14 • www.densen.com



CABLES & ACCESSORIES

Accessories? Essentials more like. As any hi-fi aficionado knows, to optimise your system, choosing your source, amp and speakers is only the beginning...

ACCESSORIES MAKETH THE SYSTEM

Strictly speaking, there's only one hi-fi accessory that's absolutely essential – a set of speaker cables to run between your amp and speakers. (That said, wireless multi-room systems are now beginning to appear, but that's another story...) The only systems that tend to come with speaker cables are pre-packaged jobs of the mini/micro variety, so if you're buying separates you have to choose a set. That's actually no bad thing, as they can have a pretty profound effect on the overall sonic picture. The same goes for interconnect cables, which are commonly used to hook source components to amplifiers, though some lower-end components come with free ones in the box. Don't use these – even a modest set of specialist cables will have a marked effect on performance, and that goes for both digital and analogue connections.

Picking cables can be bewildering, but it's an important task because cables are the only conduits through which delicate signals travel between components. Choose poorly and your system will never perform at its best, no matter how carefully you've chosen the rest of your kit. Our reviews will tell you the strengths and weaknesses of individual models, and what sort of gear they're likely to work best with. All the cables in the *HFC Awards* come highly recommended of course, but the best way to find out what works well with your system is to listen,

preferably with a home trial. In terms of budget, spend as much as you can afford but consider at least 15 per cent of your total system budget as a starting point. And remember – fatter doesn't necessarily mean better!

Any decent hi-fi system also needs proper support. Standmount speakers will only perform at their best on a suitable pair of stands, while all types of equipment (particularly turntables) will benefit from a specialist rack. The purpose of a hi-fi support is to isolate, though some do this better than others. Some contribute their own effect to the sound, which may or may not appeal, but those we recommend highest are always those that contribute least, letting your system do the talking.

Beyond that, your choice of accessories will depend on what you want from your system. High-quality turntables will benefit from a well-chosen off-board phono stage, not to mention a good arm and cartridge, while headphone users will find a dedicated headphone amp will reap big sonic benefits. Mains cables and conditioners may prove highly effective too, particularly in a world where myriad appliances jostle for house space with your hi-fi and the electricity supply is increasingly polluted. And if you want to complement your hi-fi with a table radio or portable music device, or simply see what a good subwoofer can do to your system's sound, we'll tell you the best you can buy. Turn the page for an Award-winning selection... **HFC**

£65 (0.8m pair) ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.vandenhul.com

VAN DEN HUL THE WELL ▶
INTERCONNECT CABLE

This cable is one of the cheapest to use vdH's trademark 'Linear Structure Carbon', together with silver-plated copper. The resulting sound is remarkably clear and open, with particularly solid and deep stereo imaging, great confidence over a wide dynamic range and beautifully natural acoustic decay on percussion. A fine all-rounder. *Reviewed HFC 241*



HI-FI CHOICE
AWARDS
2003/04
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



HI-FI CHOICE
AWARDS
2003/04
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

£83 (1m pair) ☎ 0800 373467 🌐 www.kimber.com

◀ KIMBER TIMBRE
INTERCONNECT CABLE

One of Kimber's 'budget' cables, this shows little obvious concession to its price, with good phono plugs too. Its plaited construction gives it an excellently neutral balance and stereo imaging is equally good. Its pleasing, relaxed character complements many musical styles and does not preclude vigorous action when required. *Reviewed HFC 248*

£100 (1m pair) ☎ 020 8979 2155 🌐 www.townshendaudio.com

TOWNSHEND ISOLDA DCT100 ▶
INTERCONNECT CABLE

Cryogenically treated copper is quite an esoteric material to find at this price, and to accommodate it Townshend has economised on insulation material. The result is a highly engaging cable that majors on detail and subjective 'speed', with a good tonal balance too. An excellent choice if you're looking to pep things up a bit. *Reviewed HFC 241*



HI-FI CHOICE
AWARDS
2003/04
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR



HI-FI CHOICE
AWARDS
2003/04
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

£40 (1m single) ☎ 01622 664070 🌐 www.supracables.co.uk

◀ SUPRA TRICO
DIGITAL INTERCONNECT

A plain and sensible coaxial digital cable with good materials and workmanship, this one offered distinctly improved performance over freebies with a variety of DACs when tested. Its most obvious benefits are in the depth of stereo image, and also its well-extended tonal palette and weighty bass. *Reviewed HFC 241*

£10 (per metre) ☎ 01483 747474 🌐 www.qed.co.uk

QED X-TUBE XT300 ▶ SPEAKER CABLE

QED's cunning use of tubular conductors makes this cable bulkier than some of its competitors, but it's worth the trouble because the sound is blessed with unusually fine bass and stereo imaging for a cable at this price. An Award winner for the second year running, its natural tonality, balance and detail keep it ahead of the game at £10/m. Nice 'Airluk' plugs are extra. *Reviewed HFC 234*



£19.97 (per metre) ☎ 020 8991 9200 🌐 www.wireworldaudio.co.uk

◀ WIREWORLD SOLSTICE 5 SPEAKER CABLE

Available in both single and bi-wire form, the only difference in price being that of the terminations, this cable uses two 'Symmetricoax' wires joined together, each one offering considerably lower inductance than conventional cables. The musical results are excellent, with very fine bass, sparklingly clear treble and quite remarkable detail. *Reviewed HFC 248*



£45 (per metre) ☎ 01206 823136

ELECTROFLUIDICS MONOLITH 20/20 ▶ SPEAKER CABLE

A flat cable with unusual electrical characteristics that ensure maximum frequency response flatness. Subjectively, it offers some of the deepest and best-controlled bass we've heard, together with truly revelatory levels of detail. Treble is never over-emphasised but opens up effortlessly when required. A real reference product. *Reviewed HFC 241*



£4,400 (2m pair, £650 per extra 0.5m) ☎ 01352 730251 🌐 www.nordost.com

◀ NORDOST VALHALLA SPEAKER CABLE

The Nordost Valhalla proposition could not be simpler. On the one hand it is almost unfeasibly expensive. Never mind the reasons, because the other half of the bargain is that in most systems, Valhalla is simply the best cable you can buy, which delivers unprecedented resolution, depth and life. Full stop.

Reviewed HFC 239



£160 ☎ 01444 258258 🌐 www.beyerdynamic.co.uk

BEYERDYNAMIC DT990 HEADPHONE

This comfortable and practical headphone illustrates perfectly why many pro-audio users swear by 'cans' for high-resolution listening. New insights into familiar recordings become the order of the day thanks to the combination of extended bass and treble, neutral midrange and impeccable clarity across the range. A genuine high-end bargain.

Reviewed HFC 245

£249 ☎ 0208 900 2999 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANS^{v3} HEADPHONE AMP

The revitalised 'V3' X-series accessories from Musical Fidelity look better made and more businesslike than their predecessors. The new X-LPS^{v3} phono stage is impressive, but the real star of the show is the X-Cans^{v3}, a neat little headphone amp with a bold and open sound that beats most built-in headphone sockets hands down. *Reviewed HFC 248*



£50 ☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

NAD PP2 PHONO STAGE

Somehow, NAD has managed to squeeze into this tiny box a phono stage compatible with both MM and MC cartridges, and done it to a surprisingly high standard. There's better detail resolution than one might expect, with low noise, little or no hum (the external PSU helps) and nicely extended bass and treble. A great value budget option. *Reviewed HFC 245*



£400 ☎ 01443 833570 🌐 www.audiodesign.co.uk

TOM EVANS MICROGROOVE PHONO STAGE

This Perspex box may not be the latest but it is reliably still the greatest. Available in MM or MC variants it reveals what vinyl is all about, be it dynamics, imaging or low-level detail. The energy it produces gives the music a realism and presence that other stages struggle to imitate. *Reviewed HFC 234*





£998 ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk

REGA RB1000 ▶
TONEARM

Rega's flagship RB1000 tonearm not only features the RB-series continuous casting from bearing housing to headshell, it also has the very best bearings selected from the hundreds Rega makes each month. The result has wonderful musical delicacy, with subtle detailing that regularly sends shivers up the spine, alongside an exceptionally wide dynamic range. Expensive but worth every penny. *Reviewed HFC 244*



£110 ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.gradolabs.com
GRADO PRESTIGE GOLD
PHONO CARTRIDGE

This impressive moving magnet model is still an affordable favourite. The midrange is excellent, with great presence and vitality, it images well, placing instruments and voices with decent precision, and it follows complex lines with apparent ease. Bass is deep and timing is strong – you can't ask for more at the price. *Reviewed HFC 235*

£1,800 ☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk

LINN AKIVA ▶
PHONO CARTRIDGE

The low-output moving-coil Akiva features a substantial reduction in metalwork, alongside Linn's traditionally excellent mechanical integrity. Both measurement and listening show superb neutrality and magnificent bass, alongside notably low surface noise. With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape. *Reviewed HFC 242*



£1,960 ☎ 01622 721444 🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk
CHORD DAC64
DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTER

Positively oozing hi-tech, this DAC does an awful lot of things very right indeed. Most noticeable is the purity of the sound, combining effortless coverage of the frequency band with the true 'hear-through' quality that marks out the finest hi-fi. Vastly informative, and usefully insensitive to incoming data jitter. Smart, too! *Reviewed HFC 237*





HI-FI CHOICE



£130 ☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.tivoliaudio.com

▶ TIVOLI PAL FM/AM PORTABLE RADIO

No, you're not imagining it – a portable radio can be hi-fi and this is the model that proves it. Retaining the famous operational convenience and signal-pulling power of the original Tivoli, this smart and tough unit adds battery operation and if anything slightly better sound, highly intelligible on speech and relaxed on music. *Reviewed HFC 242*

£299 (20GB) ☎ 0800 0391010 🌐 www.apple.com/uk

▶ APPLE IPOD PORTABLE MUSIC SERVER

Whatever your thoughts about MP3, there can be no argument over the portable music player to use – Apple's stunning iPod is the only personal audio accessory to own. In its 20GB guise (they now go up to 40GB) it can hold up to 5,000 tracks, it works with Mac or PC, plus it's dead easy to use. A brilliant way to take your music on the move. *Reviewed HFC 243*



HI-FI CHOICE



From £3,484 (3 zones) ☎ 0845 090 2266 🌐 www.opus-technologies.co.uk

◀ OPUS SYSTEM MULTI-ROOM SOLUTION

Calling this an 'accessory' might be stretching it a bit, but Opus's clever kit deserves the recognition of anyone seeking an elegant route into multi-room audio. This customisable system includes a master control unit plus as many wall-mounted keypads, power amp modules and in-ceiling speakers as required – a simple and effective solution. *Reviewed HFC 241*



HI-FI CHOICE



£699 ☎ 0191 262 4646 🌐 www.customdesign.co.uk

▶ CUSTOM DESIGN CONCEPT 400 ACOUSTIC EQUIPMENT SUPPORT

It may look a little dowdy, but this very practical rack is made almost entirely of Custom Design's 'Acoustic Steel' and 'Acoustic Aluminium', giving it remarkably little sonic signature. It wobbles a little, it's true, but it helps produce an overall system sound that's detailed and neutral, with no overhang or artificially boosted bass 'speed'. *Reviewed HFC 247*



HI-FI CHOICE





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

◀ **TOWNSHEND SEISMIC SINK STAND 2**
EQUIPMENT SUPPORT

Available in various size options, this pneumatically suspended rack is more stable than the original version and offers much more isolation than 'conventional' racks. It's effective with any type of component, but its unique strength is with LP turntables where the suspension really helps clean things up and prevent feedback. *Reviewed HFC 240*

£100 (per pair) ☎ 01474 709299 🌐 www.partingtonspeakerstands.com

PARTINGTON DREADNOUGHT ▶
SPEAKER STAND

This metallic grey stand might look a little prosaic, but it supplies very impressive, fully welded engineering at a very sharp price. It sounds notably clean and sweet for the money, with a tight bass that's free from thickening or overhang. And it supplies genuine authority and drive with compellingly coherent voice band projection and expression. It's now something of an old favourite, but it's still hard to beat. *Reviewed HFC 220*



£495 ☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.isoteksystems.com

◀ **ISOTEK MINI SUB**
MAINS FILTER

The six outputs on the Mini Sub are progressively more filtered to suit various source and amplifier components in a full system. The approach is a sensible one and the results of using this well-made unit are surprisingly obvious, with a clear improvement in the resolution of fine details within the music. An excellent upgrade. *Reviewed HFC 248*



£2,000 ☎ 01903 221800 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

B&W ASW850 ▶
SUBWOOFER

This top-end subwoofer is a 45kg monster with a 38cm driver, tamed to the point where it blends successfully even with high-end speakers like the Nautilus 800. It's undoubtedly an expensive 'accessory', but while some excellent lower-cost alternatives are available from the likes of REL and indeed B&W, this sub is truly extraordinary. *Reviewed HFC 246*



READERS' AWARDS

Your votes have been counted and the results are in. Here are your nominations for the highlights of the year (and, judging by some of your votes, of yesteryear too...)



BEST CD PLAYER

- 1st** Marantz CD6000KI Sig
- 2nd** Naim CDX2
- 3rd** Cyrus CD8



BEST DVD OR SACD PLAYER

- 1st** Denon DVD-2900
- 2nd** Pioneer DV-757Ai
- 3rd** Pioneer DV-565A



BEST TURNTABLE

- 1st** Linn LP12 Basic
- 2nd** Pro-Ject Debut II
- 3rd** Rega P3



BEST RADIO TUNER

- 1st** Denon TU-260L II
- 2nd** Pure Evoke
- 3rd** Cambridge Audio DAB500



BEST DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDER

- 1st** Pioneer PDR-609
- 2nd** Yamaha CDR-HD1300
- 3rd** Apple iPod



BEST STEREO AMP

- 1st** Cyrus 8
- 2nd** AVI Laboratory Reference Series
- 3rd** Marantz PM7200



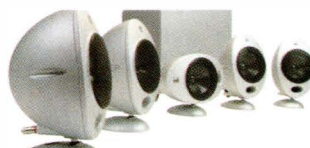
BEST MULTICHANNEL AMP/RECEIVER

- 1st** Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai
- 2nd** Arcam AV8/P7
- 3rd** Denon AVR-3803



BEST STEREO SPEAKERS

- 1st** PMC OB1
- 2nd** B&W Signature 805
- 3rd** Sonus Faber Cremona



BEST MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS

- 1st** KEF KHT2005.2
- 2nd** Meridian DSP system
- 3rd** Mordaunt-Short 500



BEST HI-FI ACCESSORY

- 1st** IsoTek Mini Sub
- 2nd** Musical Fidelity X-Cans
- 3rd** Kimber 8PR speaker cable



HI-FI INNOVATION OF THE YEAR

- 1st** Universal players
- 2nd** PAL Progressive scan
- 3rd** i.Link



HI-FI BRAND OF THE YEAR

- 1st** Cyrus
- 2nd** Arcam
- 3rd** Linn



HI-FI DEALER OF THE YEAR

- 1st** Audio T
- 2nd** Sevenoaks Sound & Vision
- 3rd** Richer Sounds



ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- 1st** The Darkness *Permission To Land*
- 2nd** David Bowie *Reality*
- 3rd** Red Hot Chili Peppers *By The Way*



BEST SACD OR DVD-A MUSIC DISC

- 1st** Pink Floyd *The Dark Side of the Moon*
- 2nd** Norah Jones *Come Away With Me*
- 3rd** Flaming Lips *Yoshimi...*



HI-FI CHOICE REVIEWER OF THE YEAR

- 1st** Paul Messenger
- 2nd** Alvin Gold
- 3rd** Jason Kennedy

the AUDIO CONSULTANTS

FINE TWO CHANNEL AUDIO SYSTEMS



SME turntables. Both Model 10 and Model 20/2 on permanent demonstration



A.R.T. Skibo loudspeakers with bass modules



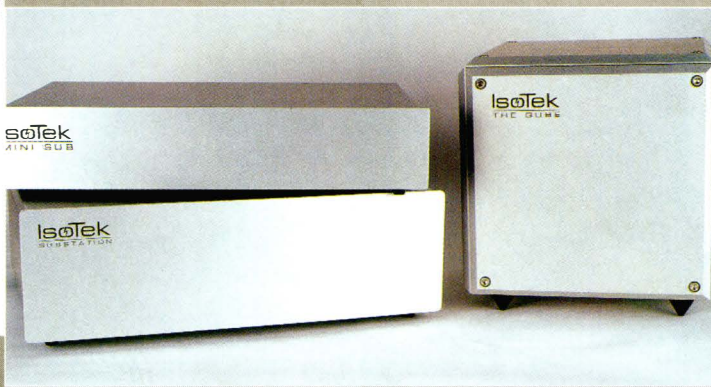
Unico CD. CD player with valve output stage



Wadia 861 CD player. Both Basic and SE versions on permanent demonstration



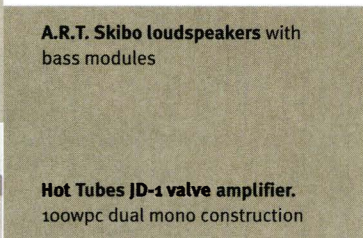
Unico pre-power amplification. Valve hybrid design, very good sound and great value



IsoTek mains conditioners. All modules in use in our demonstrations



Accustic Arts. High quality amplification from Germany



Hot Tubes JD-1 valve amplifier. 100wpc dual mono construction



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Hi-Fi Choice May '03
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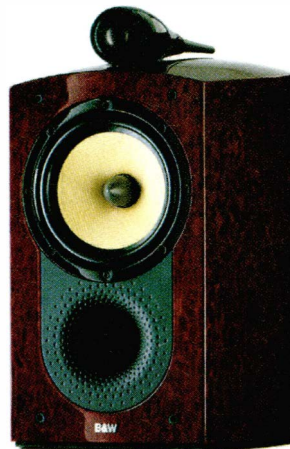
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FREE CATALOGUE

The Nautilus 805 Signature

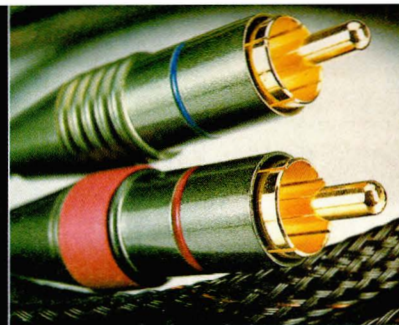


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REVIEWS



Welcome to the HFC hardware reviews section – the only place for definitive tests of the latest hi-fi components. Our unique combination of extensive listening, unsighted comparisons and scientific lab reports, conducted by the UK's most experienced set of reviewers, ensures you're holding the most comprehensive and reliable guide to high performance hi-fi in the world.

EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 64** Chapter Preface preamp and II+ power amp
- 68** Denon DVD-1400 universal DVD player
- 71** Cambridge Audio Azur 640C CD player
- 72** Vienna Acoustics Schonberg loudspeaker
- 75** PM Components Dragon Tails interconnect cable
- 76** Intempo Digital PG-01 DAB/FM table radio

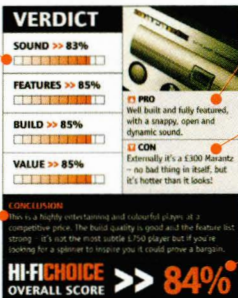


OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Percentage ratings for various different criteria, like sound quality and value for money

Our overall conclusion

You can find... civilised players for the money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this. **HFC**
Jason Kennedy



The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

The product's final score. All criteria are taken into account but the emphasis is on performance. Components scoring more than 85% may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

A component receiving the coveted Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Badge has been judged to deliver excellent performance at its price point, thereby offering outstanding value for money.



Editor's Choice

This Badge is awarded only to those components that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance, regardless of cost. These products may be considered among the very best of their kind.

Turn the page for the most rigorous tests of serious hi-fi in the business...

CHAPTER AND VERSE

Specialist British hi-fi firm Chapter has fused technologies to create a high-end tour de force

PRODUCT Chapter Preface/II+

TYPE Stereo pre/power amplifier

PRICE £4,300 (Preface)/£5,500 (II+)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): Preface 44x10x30cm, II+ 44x15x30cm • Gain adjust & bypass options • 300 watts/ch • XLR balanced and RCA single-ended in/outs

CONTACT ☎ 01392 686797

www.chapteraudio.com

Chapter may not be a familiar name yet but its directors have both served time with Chord Electronics and so know a thing or two about serious audio technology. Founded in 1999, the company started out with a power amp that looked exactly like the new II+ model under scrutiny here, yet featured more traditional analogue technology throughout. That amp was followed by the Preface preamp and now we have the very latest incarnation of the II, complete with a Class D 'digital' output stage.

The thinking behind this change in approach is revealed in our interview with the designer over the page, and the result is a manageable (that is, not physically backbreaking) 300-watt stereo power amp with the sort of heat sinking more associated with fully analogue designs. The weight aspect has been achieved by using a switch-mode power supply, and its cool running comes courtesy of the high-efficiency Class D factor. Yet this is not an entirely 'digital' amplifier – it's a hybrid of digital and analogue technology. All the initial gain stages are analogue, while the class D section forms the final output stage.

One big problem with switch-mode power supplies is that the high-frequency switching can have a negative effect on their performance. Chapter has got around this by sharply rolling off the amp's response above 35kHz at 24dB/octave, so that by the point at which the switching is active (100kHz) there is effectively no amplification going on.

The Preface preamp is no less an example of leading edge design. Parts selection is distinctly sophisticated with Burr Brown and Linear Technology op-amps, ultra-low ESR Panasonic Gold electrolytic capacitors and Linear Technology regulators keeping things clean and clear. The two mains transformers are custom made and the PCB is a full immersion gold type, incorporating surface-mount precision resistors.

Another notable variation from the norm is the inclusion of a custom-designed volume pot which uses a series of precision resistors and relays. You change level with a remote or the infinitely rotating knob which is acceleration-sensitive. Turn it slowly and volume steps are reduced to 0.1dB, but spin it with enthusiasm and you can have the sort of change rate associated with logarithmic devices. This takes a bit of getting used to but it's rare to have this degree of finesse in a remote-controllable pot. Unfortunately, the

outputs. Those of us with only single-ended (SE) outputs can pick from a various unrelated input names like 'Sat', 'DVD' and 'Video'. But once you've plugged your CD player into the 'Sat' input you can go back to the front of the unit and redefine or map the name of that input to 'CD SE' or even the name of your turntable, 'SME 20' for instance. Another useful feature is the ability to change the gain of inputs or even set one at 0dB, the latter being a bypass option whereby the Preface and II+ can sit between the main L/R channels and a processor in a multichannel AV system.

SOUND QUALITY

First impressions with the II+ are not necessarily the ones to go with. The loss of harmonic detail and the accentuation of compression compared to our reference Gamut D200 are dramatic, yet there is a spark to the Chapter's sound that encourages patience and in time it wins you over – in fact

“So stark is the reduction in harmonics that you have to ask the question – if this amp is right then are all other amps wrong?”

remote control isn't pressure-sensitive and at higher levels (above -50dB – this is one of those 'the lower the number, the higher the output' designs) it takes a while to make a big change in effective volume.

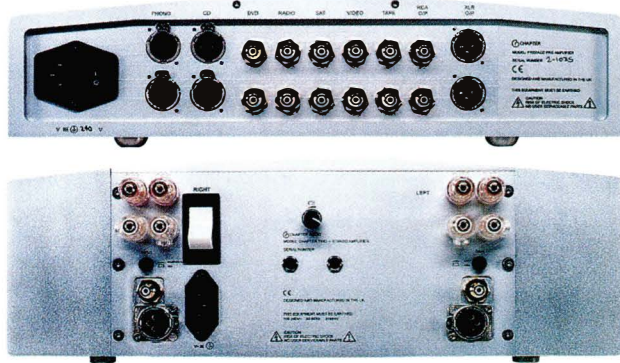
The fascia has only the amp's name inscribed upon it – all the relevant information for the end user is to be found on the small dot matrix display. This will let you adjust a number of parameters: the usual ones, such as volume, input selection and balance, and some unusual ones like balanced or single-ended output, phase inversion and 'sleep

mode' which shuts down the display and its micro controller at pre-set times (choose between five and 60 seconds).

The selection of in and outputs on the back panel includes more balanced XLRs than is usual, with both the most popular named inputs available in this way alone. This means that the inputs named 'CD' and 'phono' can only be accessed if your CD player or phono stage have balanced

it makes you hungry for more. So stark is the reduction in harmonics, however, that you have to ask the question – if this amp is right then are all other amps wrong? Are they subtly adding to the signal so that each note carries a tail of euphonic coloration, so realistic that it sounds like genuine harmonic detail or reverb? It seems unlikely, but when you remember that harmonic distortion is the technical bane of valve amps, the kings of tone colour, it might make sense that even small amounts of the stuff in many modern transistor amps has the same effect.

Whatever the Chapter amps are doing, or not doing, the end result is convincing. After a while it becomes clear that you can actually hear more of the fundamentals – little things like the low-level vocal samples on Fila Brazillia tracks make sense for a change. It comes down to two important hi-fi goals, timing and level resolution, and both seem unusually accurate here. Whatever you play – be it Chopin nocturnes or the high-speed excursions of Cornelius – the speed is spot on, and the timing gives the music a convincing ebb and flow. We played several albums that are not usually engaging and found them strangely





captivating. Anouar Brahem's *Barzakh*, for instance, often seems to lack variety, but through the Chapter combo we were drawn in and engaged by the playing and the emotion behind it. With a good ECM label recording like this you also get plenty of harmonic detail and reverb – these amps are not dry. On a less subtle tip, Marshall Mathers' pace is picked up perfectly, capturing the edge in his delivery that is so elusive. Even the small bells on *Kill You* ring out with individuality and colour.

The level resolution is most obvious when playing a variety of albums. Several can be compressed and lacking in level variation and

this sound a bit lacklustre, yet when a wide-band one comes along you know all about it – this often being the point when you wish the remote would change volume more swiftly!

AC/DC's *Back In Black* is disappointingly (though unsurprisingly) compressed and lacking in genuine energy while Richard Thompson's *Old Kit Bag* is full life and expands into the room. Any component that shows up big differences between recordings is a pretty transparent one so long as it's not merely emphasising a particular frequency, as can be the case with loudspeakers. And the Chapters are nothing if not neutral – you are

not drawn to any particular aspect of the tonal range, while the bass is clearly powerful and controlled but doesn't have the sort of signature associated with high power amps. The treble is clear and if anything slightly unusual but you soon get used to it – from then on it blends seamlessly into the bigger picture while helping to resolve fine detail.

Transparency is also unusually high albeit in a natural, relaxed way. Some electronics emphasise the treble slightly to achieve this but the Chapters merely let more of the music through, revealing details and sounds that are usually masked or lacking in distinction. ▶

Q & A

We talked to Chapter's Technical Director Duncan Shrimpton about what makes an analogue/digital hybrid amplifier tick.



HFC: With the Chapter II+ you have gone for a 'digital' Class D design rather than a fully analogue one. Why the big change in approach?

DS: The II+ is actually a fully analogue amplifier. The Class D topology uses an analogue hysteresis controller with a switching output stage, but it's still an analogue control loop and there is no clock. We chose Class D while reviewing designs for our forthcoming five-channel power amplifier. We needed a solution that was efficient in terms of both heat dissipation and space, hence the Class D. We discovered that if you could remove the switching component from the output of the Class D amplifier, the performance benefits of having no crossover distortion were phenomenal.

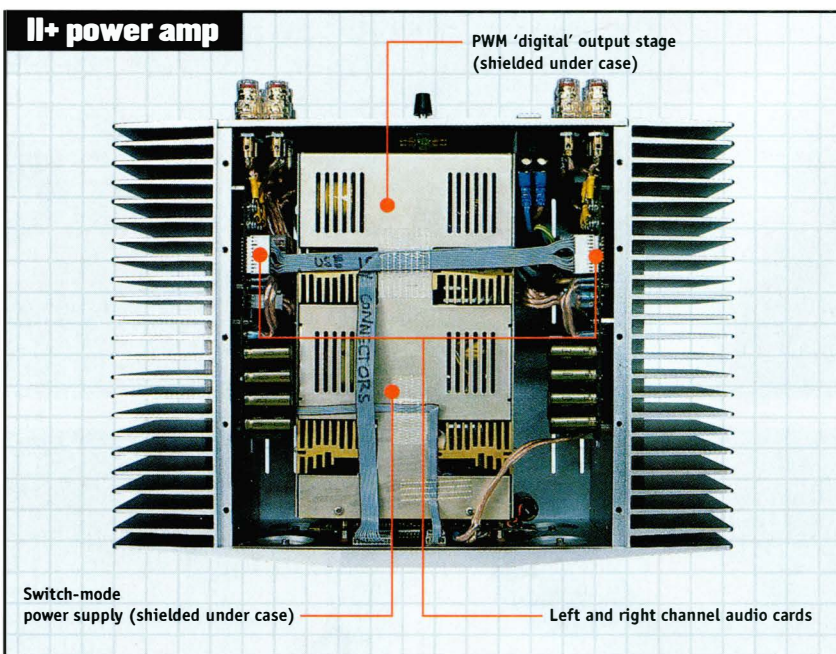
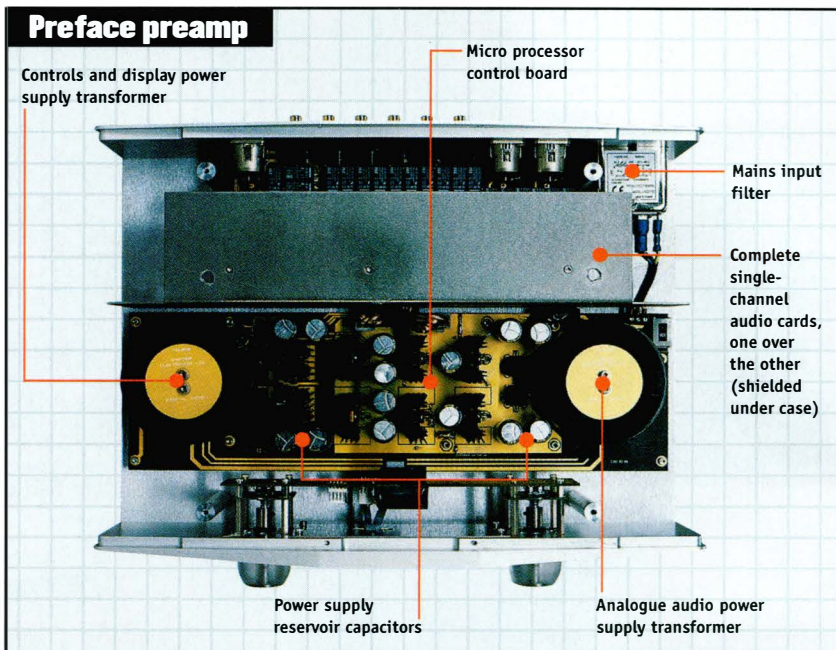
What type of digital amplifier are you using?

Our Class D design uses a fully balanced topology from input to output. RCA inputs are converted to balanced signals at the input. We use both voltage and current mode feedback to control the high-power PWM output stage with a second order output filter contained within the current feedback loop.

The Preface is a wide bandwidth preamp whereas the II+ has a curtailed response. Why?

With CD and SACD there is a lot of out-of-band noise, mostly aliased copies of the signal. In the case of SACD, this noise is very high (-20dB at 60kHz). This noise will fold down in frequency and become audible if the amplifier distortion is high above 20kHz. The preamplifier could filter out this noise, however, if each stage filters the signal then the cumulative effect introduces large amounts of phase distortion. So the Preface uses a very wide-band, low-distortion amplifier (-90dB at 5MHz) and carefully controls the gain in each section so that there is virtually no output by the time the distortion starts to rise.

It is not possible to design a power amp in this way. So we use a fourth order linear phase filter with a roll-off point of 35kHz to remove unwanted noise signals prior to amplification. The only thing that you get out of the Chapter II+ is the audio band you put in.



They also get the message across in no uncertain terms. Put on Aarvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa* for instance and you can't fail to hear the intensity of emotion and the power behind the composition. If music is about bringing us closer to the soul of the artist then these amps are a powerful conduit.

Alternatively, you can be a little more scientific and listen to the differences in recording – few amplifiers reveal the sort of breadth that the Chapters do. Which is a good sign, albeit one that might rearrange the pecking order in your favourite albums list. Some won't sound as good as others but the greats will really shine, and whatever you hear it's unlikely to have come from the Chapter amps – they cover their tracks far too well. **HFC**
Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 95%	
FEATURES >> 90%	
BUILD >> 90%	
VALUE >> 85%	

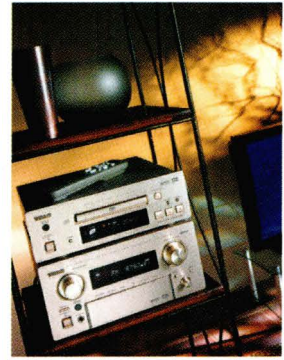
CONCLUSION
These beautifully understated components sit quite comfortably among some of the finest British amplifiers available. Their neutrality, timing and resolution challenge the very best at any price.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **90%**
OVERALL SCORE

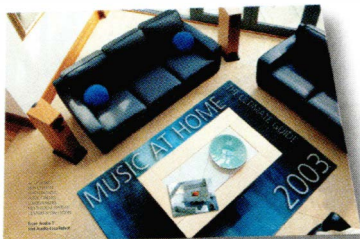
PRO
Superb transparency, timing, neutrality and dynamic resolution.

CON
Defiantly different from the high-end pre/power norm, takes some getting used to!

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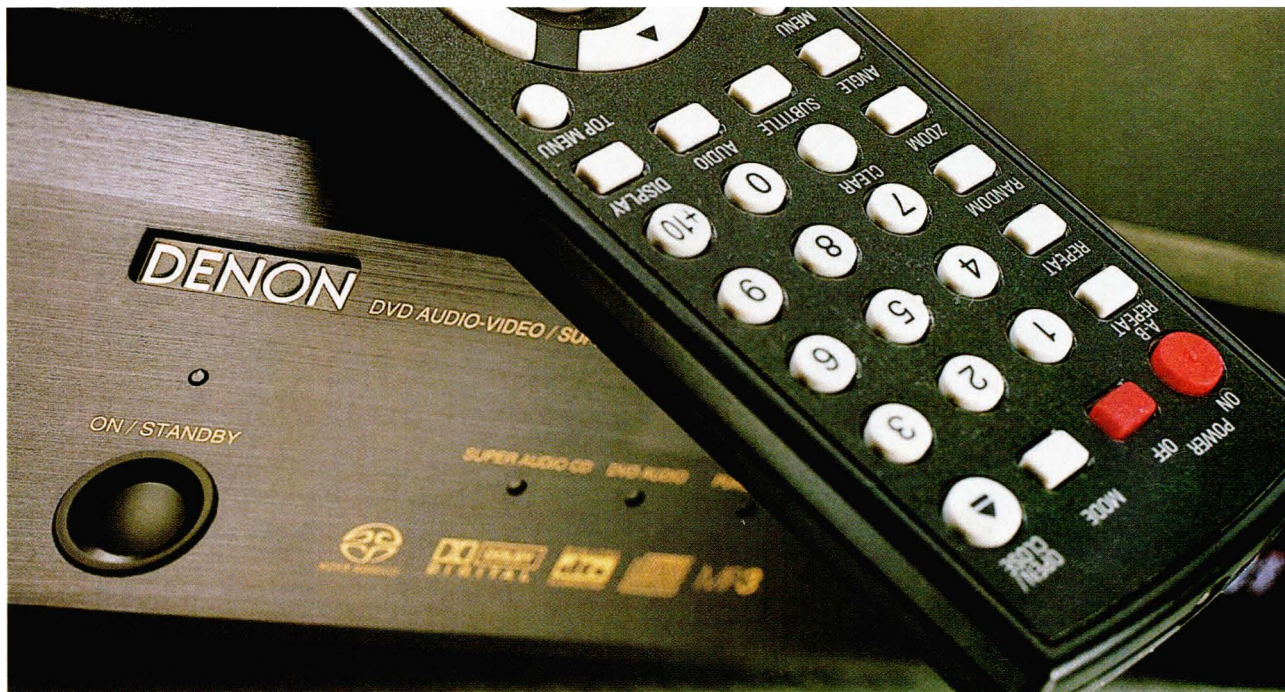
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UNIVERSAL FOR LESS

Denon's top-end universal players are among the best yet – but do you really have to pay for quality?

PRODUCT Denon DVD-1400

TYPE Universal DVD-Audio/Video/SACD/CD player

PRICE £400

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x7.5x22cm

Weight 2.2kg Universal player, supports DVD-Audio/Video, SACD, DVD-R/RW, CD, CD-R/RW, Video CD, JPEG Kodak Photo CD, plus MP3 and WMA audio files on CD-R/RW 'pure direct' audio mode

CONTACT 01753 888447 www.denon.co.uk

Universal players are still far from commonplace, but it's now possible to pick up a good machine that can do DVD-Audio and SACD (as well as DVD-Video and CD) for not much cash these days. Denon's new DVD-1400 is the company's entry-level player, yet at £400 it costs twice as much as the cheapest universal player currently available (Pioneer's DV-565A, commonly priced around £250 but available for as little as £180 in Richer Sounds). So why spend £400?

The DVD-1400 is a typically small, classy machine (now in silver or black – Denon's 'champagne gold' is a bit too 1990s these days), slightly taller than most cheaper players, but not too deep and quite straightforward in use. The front panel has less than a dozen buttons all of a decent size that effectively replicate most of the remote control functions well – there are also a trio of lights on the display to show when you are playing DVD-A or SACD (or have the 'pure direct' button

engaged). The blue display panel below the centre-mounted disc drawer contains scant information and is limited in use.

Its rear panel is equally functional and nondescript. With a single Scart and a trio of component video sockets (without progressive scan support), this looks like the back of almost any 5.1-equipped DVD player of the last two years or so and it's only under the covers where the obvious SACD/DVD-Audio part is entailed. There, a screened can covers the circuitry surrounding the 5.1 decoder, doubtless to prevent pirates thieving away the digital data stream of SACD or DVD-Audio before it reaches the analogue outputs.

But while it may not scream 'universal player', the DVD-1400 isn't entirely nondescript aesthetically and has a few touches that set it apart. One of the most important is the Pure Direct button, which effectively disables the display (both on-screen and on the front panel). This has a noticeable effect in raising the sound quality of DVD-Audio and especially SACD, but is not bad at improving CD sound a notch in the process, too.

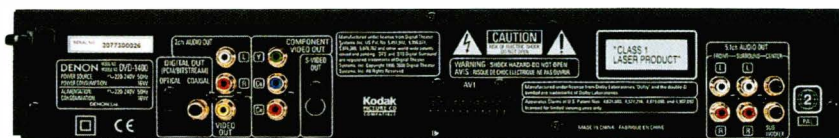
Another clever feature is the on-screen

set-up routine, which features a helpful picture of the remote control on the left-hand side. This tells you what button to press and when, making set-up virtually idiot-proof.

On the audio side the Denon lacks for nothing at the price. If money were no object, the lack of i.Link might be a stumbling block, but that digital connection is not yet an issue at £400. Video, however, is less well covered. By the end of the year, precious few players at the price will be supplied without progressive scan as an option. The DVD-1400 is one of the few exceptions. While this important extra is less applicable for those without the latest screens or projection systems, needed or not, it's nevertheless become something of a 'must have' video feature on DVD players these days.

SOUND AND VIDEO QUALITY

In a way, the DVD-1400 hides its light under a big bushel – Denon's own superb DVD-2900. Despite costing twice as much as the '1400, the '2900 is the model that's been getting the attention. But our advice is not to overlook this little stunner – it may not have the throw-it-down-a-liftshaft-just-to-watch-it-bounce build





“SACD is the weakest sonic link here, but even so it’s not so weak that it’s likely to require the Anne Robinson treatment.”

quality of its bigger brother but it delivers much of the performance where it counts, and that includes the music stakes.

CD audio is a perennial problem for multi-format DVD players. Conflicts with video aside, sometimes it’s as if the audio DACs inside are so geared up for replaying the more advanced digital data of SACD or DVD-Audio that they treat CD with disdain, losing the sort of cohesive, temporally correct sound a well sorted CD player can do brilliantly. The DVD-2900 was one of the few exceptions, and guess what? Its little brother is similarly well sorted in the CD stakes. Stick *Somethin’ Else* by Cannonball Adderley on the tray, turn off the display and you find yourself tapping your foot along with the be-bop beat.

Moving over to DVD-Audio, the performance is just as precise and up-beat as the CD sound. Even diving through the back catalogue with old classics like *Fragile* by Yes highlighted the focus of the Denon player, the vocals standing out effectively from the rather dense mix. More modern recordings like *Riding With The King* by BB King and Eric Clapton or the majestic *St Matthew Passion* by Nikolaus Harnoncourt really come to life, the Denon managing to combine weight without boom, frequency extension without brightness and very fine channel separation and articulation throughout. It isn’t going to make you ditch a more up-market player but its gutsy yet focused sound from DVD-A is highly enjoyable, like the DVD-2900 in miniature.

DVD-Video performance is about average for a middle-market player. The lack of progressive scan will hobble it for the videophile’s plasma

screen or projector, and the picture is more relaxed and a little more grainy than some. Fortunately, it’s colourful enough to make that graininess seem less noticeable. Although it attempts to replicate the picture performance of the bigger Denons, it’s clear this is a player where the lion’s share of the development budget has been spent on universal sound.

SACD is perhaps the weakest sonic link here, though not weak enough to receive the Anne Robinson treatment. The sound is dynamic and powerful but lacks the sheer clarity, integrity and precision of a dedicated SACD-only player or the meaty energy of the DVD-2900. The reissued *Blonde On Blonde* by Dylan is perhaps an odd choice for ‘surroundificaton’ but it worked well through the Denon, with plenty of earthy detail, though more audiophile recordings like the John Pizzarelli Trio playing *Live At Birdland* lacked the high-ambience, sharply defined audiophile credentials of a good dedicated SACD player.

Yes, it’s possible to get a dedicated SACD player for similar money that will do a better job at playing SACDs. You can find single-format CD players at the price that are better still at CD replay, and for the same money you can get a DVD player with extra video trimmings like progressive scan. But if you want to play all these discs, and audio quality is a key concern, you won’t find a better one-box solution anywhere near the price. Equally, if you’re willing to raise the stakes by buying several more specialised players it’ll cost you a good deal more to achieve a notable gain.

The only comparably-priced universal playback competition comes from the Pioneer

namechecked at the start of this review. And the two offer different strokes for different folks. The Pioneer’s performance is more geared toward the ‘V’ in ‘AV’ – it has a vibrant picture and an expressive sound that draws you into DVD-Videos. But Denon has the edge in sound quality, with a more balanced and musical performance from its analogue outputs, and that statement is a pretty good summation of the brands’ more costly universal players too.

We began by asking “why pay more?” but the Denon DVD-1400 is so good at its musical tasks that it invites the question “why pay less?” instead. You can buy cheaper, but if you want good sound – especially from CD – you should spend that bit extra and invest in this hidden gem from the Denon catalogue. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

VERDICT		<p>PRO A sub-£500 do-it-all player with a good all-round performance, especially in terms of CD and DVD-Audio.</p> <p>CON Universal players are dropping in price rapidly and from a purely material view, this may appear to offer less value than similarly-specced players at a fraction of the price.</p>
SOUND >> 82%	<p>SUB RATINGS CD 81% SACD 78% DVD-A 86%</p>	
FEATURES >> 75%		
BUILD >> 90%		
VALUE >> 95%		
<p>CONCLUSION Denon’s entry-level universal player isn’t the cheapest, but its sound makes it worth spending the extra, particularly in musical terms. More costly players like Denon’s own DVD-2900 deliver even more, but at £400 this is a great-value option.</p>		
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE		>> 87%

intensify stimulate yearn
crave sound arouse inspire
excite envy electrify move
desire lust sensation thrill
embrace fire ambition love

The new HD650's from Sennheiser are not simply headphones – they are a philosophy. And for fans of high-end audio equipment, they are the ultimate in listening pleasure. Every detail is suddenly crystal clear, and the sound is intensified with pure emotion. The HD650's are more than just sensational sound – they are headphones with a soul.



Technical Data

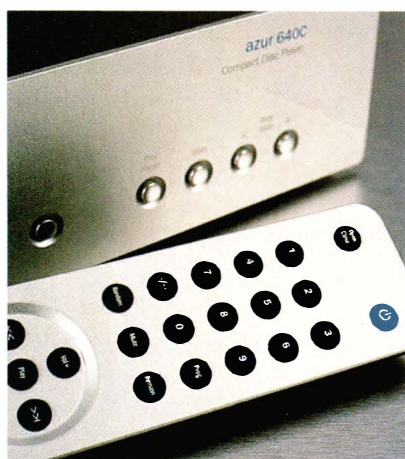
Nominal impedance 300 Ohm
Contact pressure approx 2.5 N
Weight w/o cable 260g
Jack plug 6.3/3.5mm stereo
Transducer principle open, dynamic
Ear coupling circumaural
Cable length 3 m
Frequency response 10 – 39,500 Hz
Sound pressure level (SPL) 103 dB (1 Vrms)
THD, total harmonic distortion 0.05%





CUTER CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge Audio's new range is very pretty but don't let that fool you, it means business



PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 640C

TYPE CD player

PRICE £250

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.cambridge-audio.co.uk

Since Cambridge Audio was taken under Audio Partnership's wing it has become a lean, aggressive brand that has a strong position in the budget market place. This is not hindered by the fact that in the UK it's sold exclusively by the most aggressive 'affordable' separates retail chain, Richer Sounds. But it doesn't rest on its laurels for long, hence the introduction of the shiny new silver Azur range. Azur contains two integrated amps, two CD players, a DAB/FM tuner and a progressive scan DVD-A player. With prices no greater than £250 for any one piece this range could slaughter the budget competition if it sounds half as good as it looks.

It's a brave company that launches a dedicated CD player in any market these days and a positively brash one that is prepared to take on a sector where DVD players are making mincemeat of the alternatives. But as anyone that cares to listen will hear it takes a

stunning DVD player to beat a good dedicated CDP at its own game.

The 640C is the top Azur CD player and differentiates itself from the £200 540C with a higher-specification DAC. This component alone helps improve all the important technical measurements according to the literature. The 640C contains a 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson DAC, a Sony transport mechanism and re-clocking circuitry to keep jitter under control, and houses them in a low resonance matt silver case. It is supplied with a slimline system remote which, thanks to its aluminium fascia, is very much more attractive than those found with many CD players. Unfortunately, both remote and player share stylish but rather subtle legends, and these are printed in words rather than being represented by symbols, which makes finding the right one a little slow to begin with, especially on the player itself where the white on silver is hard to read.

As far as connections go there are no surprises – analogue and digital (optical and coaxial) outputs sit beside an IEC mains socket.

SOUND QUALITY

This is an impressively relaxed and coherent player yet it's not bland or obviously restrained. In the revealing hands of a far from budget system it delivers a sterling performance that only begins to reveal its limitations when the going gets very tough. In the context of its partnering amplifier (reviewed next month) it is certainly the stronger of the two, extracting more music than the amp is capable of making the most of. It's not a bad amplifier, it's just that amp components are inherently more expensive than those found in CD players.

The 640C produces a smooth, coherent result with all manner of material from EST's jazz grooves to the deep voices of the Overtone Choir, a recording which reveals the subtlety of bass resolution on offer. It could be

more 'bone crunching' at the extreme end of the range but has more colour and variety than ostensibly heavier sounding players.

It readily makes the most of dynamic tension within the music, relaying Missy Elliott's rhythmically elastic grooves with a life and energy that budget players rarely reveal. There's a depth to the texture of instruments and voices, and scarcely any sense of strain – you have to really push the Azur components hard before limitations are audible, and you can push them further musically than you might with the few alternatives at this price. For the 640C, the serious competition comes from Marantz, NAD and Sony's SCD-XB790S, the latter offering SACD compatibility. The new Marantz models may deliver better timing and the Sony is perhaps more detailed, but whether either can match the relaxed resolve and all-round finesse of the Azur is debatable.

Smarter than previous Cambridge models and even better value, the 640C is a sophisticated budget player that sounds as good as it looks. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 84%	
FEATURES >> 75%	
BUILD >> 86%	
VALUE >> 92%	
CONCLUSION	<p>PRO Relaxed, coherent sound and real metal build at a very competitive price.</p> <p>CON Subtle legends and system specific remote make the learning curve a little steeper than average.</p>
<p>This elegant budget player can hold its own in very elevated company, although in truth, a budget system will barely do it justice. Yet another great reason, if one were needed, to buy a dedicated CD player.</p>	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE	>> 86%

FULL METAL JACKET

A metal enclosure brings freshness to the styling – and perhaps the sound – of this floorstander

PRODUCT Vienna Acoustics Schonberg

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeaker (2.5-way)

PRICE £1,500 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 27x105x9cm

• Weight: 13.54kg • Bead-blasted, clear-anodised alloy enclosure • 25mm fabric dome tweeter • 150mm clear plastic cone bass/mid and bass-only drivers • Sensitivity/impedance: 90dB/4ohms minimum

CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166

🌐 www.vienna-acoustics.com

Along with a handful of hi-tech models from brands like B&O and T+A, this Austrian beauty is one of the few floorstanders to use a metal alloy enclosure. The most obvious consequence is its rather gorgeous and radical styling – with a bead-blasted, clear-anodised surface treatment (good looking though not very hard wearing), the silvery Schonberg will look exceptionally sharp in any environment designed along contemporary lines. Shallow but quite wide, it's actually formed by fixing together with fillets of damped MDF, two long curved alloy sections, front and back – probably sections of architectural extrusion.

One of four models that share this styling, including three stereo pairs and a subwoofer, the Schonberg floorstander features similar drivers and casework to the Berg and Webern

standmounts. All models are magnetically shielded, and the smaller ones may be wall-mounted, though no specific centre-channel model is available.

If the styling is the most distinctive consequence of the metal jacket, it has significant potential performance advantages too. It provides immense stiffness, especially with the curved profiles used here, and those same curves spread and break up internal reflections and horizontal standing waves. Yet it's also relatively thin, and therefore maximises the internal volume for the bulk.

The enclosure is split in two by a horizontal internal partition. This helps avoid the column resonance that can affect floorstanders with a continuous single enclosure, and also provides the appropriate loading for the two identical drivers that operate through the bass region, with reflex ports set into the MDF sides.

The Schonberg is actually a 'two-and-a-half-way' design, which means the lower of the two cone drivers is a bass-only device, while the upper one handles both bass and midrange duties, prior to handing over to the tweeter. Unusually, the tweeter here is set to the side of the bass/mid driver, and set slightly back to provide time alignment. The two speakers are built as a mirror-image pair,

Schonberg is best sited less than 40cm from a wall, though our in-room measurements indicate that leaving a little more space behind the speaker is likely to be beneficial if mid-bass excess is to be avoided.

Under our conditions at least, while absolute extension is unexceptional (-6dB at 30Hz in-room), free space siting gave a very nice bass alignment – and indeed a good (if not particularly smooth) overall balance across the broad midband. Output falls off a touch above 1.5kHz, leaving the presence zone looking decidedly laid back. The treble proper then stages a rather peaky recovery. Sensitivity is around 90dB, close to the claimed 91dB, which is decent enough, though the load is a demanding four ohms.

SOUND QUALITY

I suspect that most of those checking out this speaker will have been attracted by its unique styling. Sound quality is unlikely to be the first priority in the decision making process, though it's important that it still achieves a good standard. And that's pretty much what you get here. It doesn't set any new standards or break any records, but it nevertheless reaches a very respectable sound quality which has more strengths than weaknesses,

“If perfectly happy doing ‘sweet ’n’ gentle’, it seems reluctant to do ‘rough ’n’ edgy’.”

to preserve visual and sonic symmetry. Most speakers place the midrange and tweeter in a vertical line, as this ensures more consistent integration through the crossover region across a wide lateral angle. Mounting the drivers laterally, as here, creates reinforcement and cancellation 'lobes' as one moves across in front of the speaker. Not a serious problem as such, but it does make it important to line up the 'toe-in' of the speaker as accurately as possible, so that both speakers are at roughly the same angle to the main listening zone.

A separate X-shaped framework, fitted with juicily fat but blunt spikes, acts as a plinth, usefully enhancing the stability and definitely improving the decorative appeal. The two main drivers here have 150mm frames and clear plastic cones 95mm in diameter, while the tweeter has a 25mm fabric dome. The speaker as a whole is magnetically shielded, and the input signal fed through a single side-mounted terminal pair.

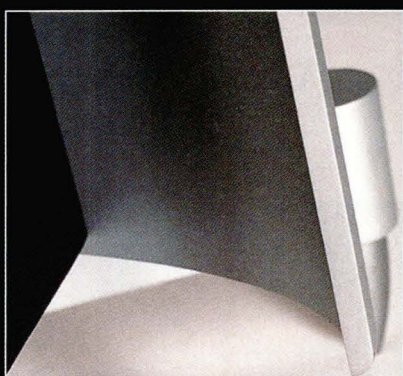
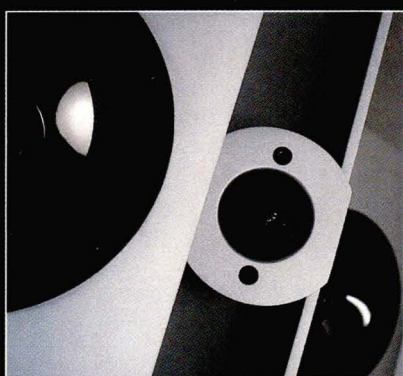
The instruction leaflet suggests that the

and which is generally unlikely to disappoint.

Ultimately, of course, a speaker should do what the rest of the system tells it to do, and this speaker proved quite capable of revealing the quality of the components from which it was being fed, and of distinguishing between the alternatives when these were substituted.

Driving the Schonbergs from our reference-level Naim NAC552/NAP500 combo, the restrained presence was rather too obvious, giving an overall sound that was arguably a little too much of a safe pair of hands for its own good. Voices – both singing and speaking – sound a little too 'shut in' and in consequence both consonants and dynamic expression lacked some bite. This meant that it was necessary to wind up the volume a little higher than the sensitivity might suggest in order to clarify diction – an important consideration for late-night listeners.

The strong treble provides good detail, usefully emphasising sibilants and cymbal work, which helps to compensate for the



weak presence, though some lack of smoothness and sweetness is also apparent.

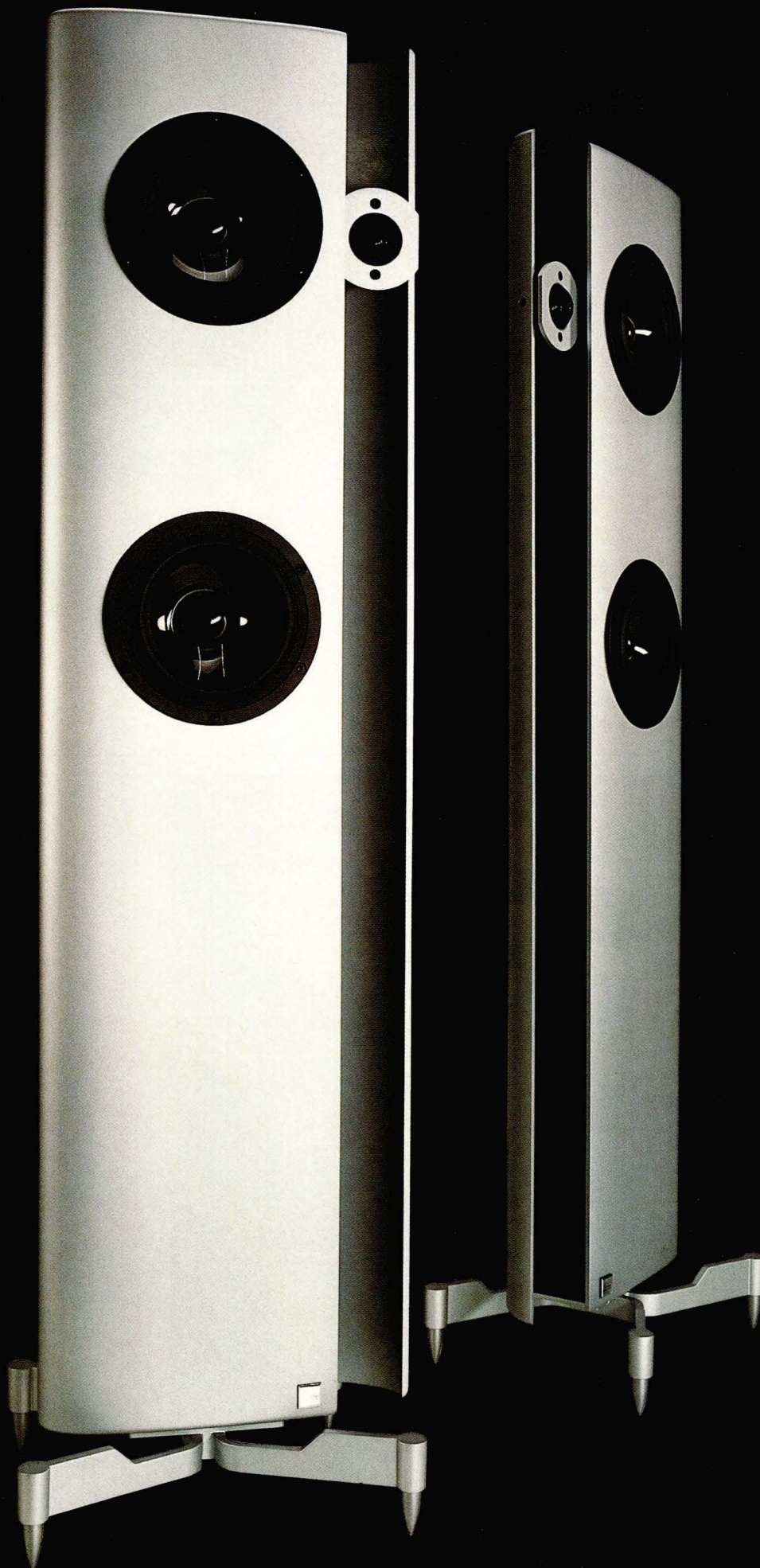
Enclosure coloration is notably low here, indicating that the combination of metalwork and cunning shaping has been very effective. Even winding the volume right up while playing something suitably heavy – The Beastie Boys' *Hello Nasty* came to hand – seemed to cause no obvious tactile vibration in any part of the enclosure.

However, the heavy samples, beats and scratches on that album very much require a system to generate hard-edged sounds with serious dynamic impact and tension, and here the Schonberg really didn't cut it. This speaker is essentially sweet and gentle – something of a pussycat, in fact, but one that has suffered the indignity of being de-clawed. The trouble is, music itself doesn't always take the easy listening route. While the Schonberg is perfectly happy doing 'sweet 'n' gentle', it seems much more reluctant to do 'rough 'n' edgy'. The net result is a rather bland side to its character, which tends to leave the music lacking in tension and excitement. This is particularly apparent at the bass end of things, where the sound seems to have decent enough weight and extension, but somehow remains weak in authority and attack.

However, the payoff from the low box colour is a notably wide dynamic range and excellent 'out-of-the-box' stereo soundstage imaging. Nitin Sawhney's *Beyond Skin* has a beautifully big and spacious sound, and if 'big' was mildly curtailed here, this speaker did 'spacious' exceptionally well, even to the extent of generating some images outside the spacing of the speaker enclosures themselves.

One of the most stylish speaker designs ever created, the Schonberg combines a very clean sound with a laid-back balance. Box coloration is notably low, and the excellent imaging has a spaciousness and depth rarely found with wooden boxes. But dynamics are rather limp, and this tends to sap some of the tension from more demanding musical forms. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 75% [Progress bar]	<p>PRO This very stylish floorstander combines a very clean sound with a laid-back balance. Box coloration is low, and imaging spacious and deep.</p> <p>CON Very cautious and restrained presence – can hamper diction at low levels. Bass end lacks some grip and authority, while dynamics are rather limp, sapping some musical tension.</p>
EASE OF DRIVE >> 69% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 92% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 80% [Progress bar]	
<p>CONCLUSION Ultra-stylish alloy floorstander has a very clean, laid-back sound, with low box coloration and deep, spacious imaging. But authority is weak and dynamics limp, sapping tension from more demanding musical styles.</p>	
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 78%</p>	

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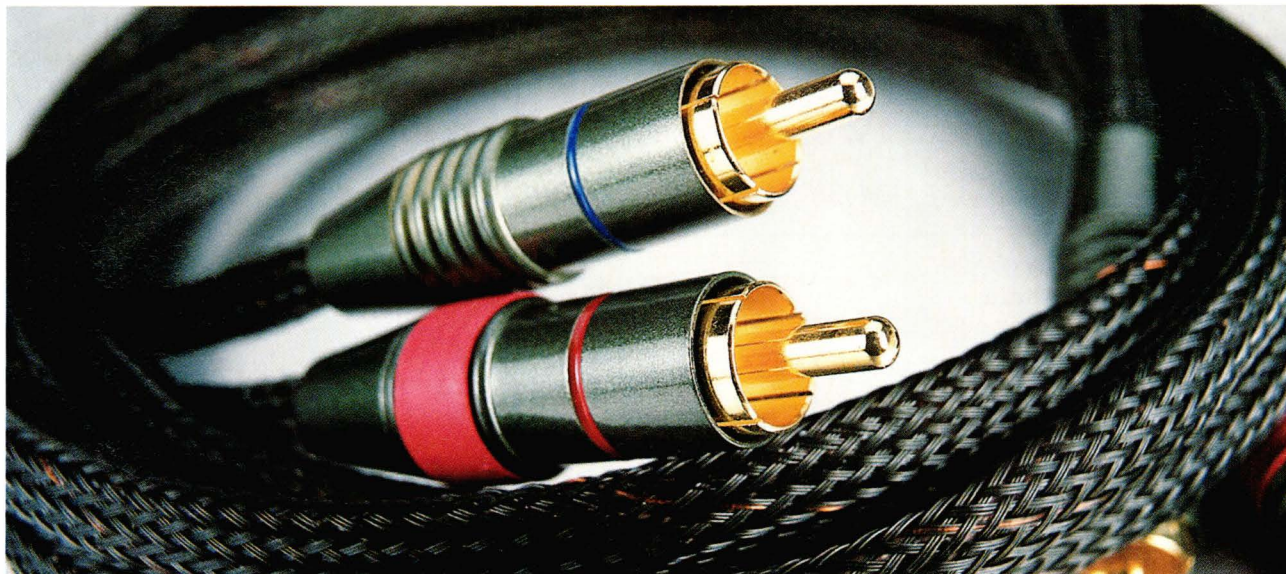
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As one of the largest valve vendors in Europe, PM naturally has an interest in furthering all things thermionic. It's a bit difficult to envisage a valve cable, so instead PM has commissioned from a "little known cable design company" some cables specifically designed to extract the utmost from valve-based systems.

According to PM, a different cable is required for valve amps because of their "higher speed" than solid-state designs. Now that's a pretty contentious claim, and a true pedant might point out that few valve amps can match the several-hundred-kHz bandwidth of the best solid-state amps... but let's not carp, there may be something in this.

Actually, valve amps vary widely in their construction, but many tend to stick to higher impedance levels than the current trend, with inputs of 100k or more and outputs of a few kilo-ohms. What's more, in the presence of interfering RF signals or possible causes of instability (including the load presented by cables) valve circuits can have subtly different behaviour from transistor types.

This is the most expensive Dragon Tails version, at a handsome premium over the Red (£50) and Black (£175) versions. All three share the most unusual feature – as well as having strands of different thickness within

each core (like Kimber, for example), Dragon Tails include strands which double back within the core, increasing their length. How this will work, given that cores are not individually insulated, is not at all obvious, and the usual quick tests for basic electrical parameters gave no hints either. Three quite thin cores and a braided screen make up the basic Silver construction, and yes, there are silver strands in there, together with silver-plated copper.

SOUND QUALITY

As always, the proof of the pudding is in the guzzling, and with Dragon Tails Silver we'll certainly be coming back for more. Trying them initially in a valve system, we found them to offer a highly detailed sound with plenty of life, a good balance, strong clear bass and nice definition. A few voices and instruments developed a slight coloration, a touch of over-emphasis in the tenor register, compared with the most neutral cables we've heard, but that's the kind of thing that has very little effect in the long term and indeed can subtly enliven some slightly subdued and 'flat'-sounding speakers.

In the stereo imaging department, side-to-side precision was about as good as it gets – very clearly delineated and independent in its clarity of signal levels and overall complexity. Image depth was also good, if perhaps not quite as transparently obvious as the best.

Having only one pair of DTs, it was interesting to move them round within the system, using a variety of long-term references elsewhere. At the input to a valve preamp (fed

from a solid-state CD player) they seemed happiest. At the output, feeding valve power amps, they were still very competent though slightly outdone in the clarity stakes by a couple of other models. They also gave excellent results between an all-valve source (an open-reel tape deck) and the preamp. But we couldn't resist trying them with solid-state gear and there too they made a fine presentation, perhaps not quite as revealing as some but very musical and communicative. In fact, their relatively high capacitance could lead to very mild dulling with some valve sources. All the same, the synergy claimed for them is largely borne out – but don't overlook them for solid-state applications! **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 89% ██████████	PRO Excellent levels of detail, very good bass extension and a good overall feeling of life, plus some very fine stereo imaging indeed.
PRACTICALITY >> 84% ██████████	CON Expensive, with some slight coloration in the upper bass. May give just-audible treble loss with some older valve components.
BUILD >> 80% ██████████	
VALUE >> 74% ██████████	
CONCLUSION This could indeed be just the ticket for anyone with a high-flying valve system looking for the perfect cable. The synergy is not by any means exclusive, but performance at inputs and outputs of sundry valve components is indeed very good.	
HI-FI CHOICE >>> 82% OVERALL SCORE	

TABLE MANNERS

Intempo's dual function DAB/FM radio looks smart enough, but how does it behave at the table?

PRODUCT Intempo Digital PG-01

TYPE DAB/FM table radio

PRICE £120

CONTACT ☎ 0161 924 0300

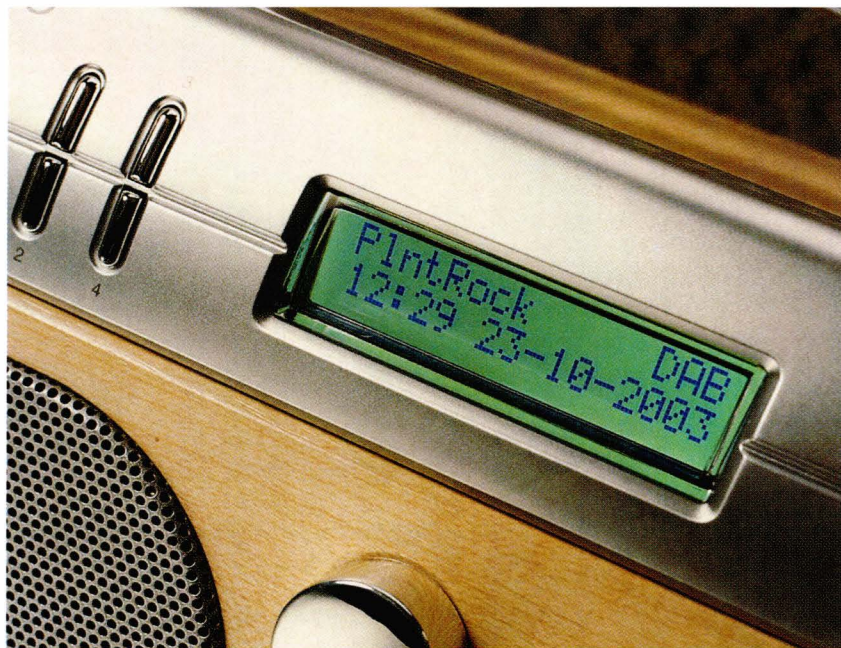
🌐 www.intempodigital.com

This smart little product would appear to be Intempo's launch vehicle, so don't be surprised if you haven't heard of the brand. Its physical appearance is not a million miles from the Evoque models of Pure Digital, but that's deceptive as it is in fact one of the few DAB tuners on the UK market that is not intimately related to those from Pure.

On switch-on, a message on the liquid crystal display announces that this is a Radioscape-based product. That means that instead of the ubiquitous chipset from Frontier Silicon it uses parts from Texas Instruments – which at least gives something to compare the FS-based models with! Sure enough, inside the case a small circuit board (comparable in size to those from FS and Roke Manor, about 2x4 inches) carries a variety of TI parts. The same board appears to carry out FM decoding as well as DAB, which means that some quite clever mixed-signal stuff must be going on in there. £120 may be a lot for a table radio but you get a fair bit of cutting-edge technology for it.

What you don't get is anything very sophisticated in the physical construction line, and the two speakers are actually very ornery three-inch jobs in a thin particle-board case. There's a cardboard reflex port on the base which doesn't seem to contribute much of anything, while a headphone socket at least allows the option of something approaching real high fidelity.

Ergonomically it's a simple enough unit to use, with four one-touch presets on each band and up/down buttons for DAB station tuning and FM manual tuning. It even displays RDS programme type and radiotext information on



FM. There's a built-in alarm clock too. Operation is only from the mains, using the supplied wall wart.

SOUND QUALITY

There's no doubt that the cabinet and speakers are the limiting factors with this tuner. Perhaps that's inevitable, so let's rephrase that and say that they are unduly limiting factors. The Tivoli FM radios have proved (for those too young to remember the golden days of Hacker etc) that good sounds can come from small radios, but Intempo has settled for something noticeably less.

You can't reasonably expect much bass from such a device, but a bit of body to the sound would be nice. There's really hardly any. Yes, you can turn it up to a fair loudness but it doesn't get any fuller, just coarser. Speech is intelligible, but only if you're actually listening. One of the toughest tests of a table radio is how easy it is to understand what's being said while there's a fair bit of background noise (washing dishes is a good example). With a Tivoli there's detail to spare and accordingly you'll understand much better than with the PG-01, where by contrast detail is in decidedly short supply.

Likewise with music: if your attention wanders even for a second you'll completely lose the thread, whereas the best radios (or any half-decent hi-fi) will keep hold of your subconscious for at least a few seconds.

With some decent headphones you'll have a much better chance of staying mentally tuned. There's a trace of background noise just audible, but on the whole the sound is pretty good and clear. It also becomes evident that DAB performance is much of a muchness with the Pure Evokes, while FM is actually quite impressive, surprisingly noise-free even when the aerial is badly misaligned.

There's certainly promise here, but if DAB is being sold on improved sound quality you'll really want a better acoustical performance to hear why. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT		
SOUND >> 59%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	PRO Good reception on both DAB and FM, with above average FM sound, at least via headphones. Easy to use and looks smart.
FEATURES >> 80%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	CON Badly let down by poor loudspeakers – tinny, coarse and lacking detail. No battery option. No dynamic range control on DAB.
BUILD >> 68%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
VALUE >> 70%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
CONCLUSION While the sound has great potential on both DAB and FM bands, the PG-01 needs much better speakers to let it show. Ironically, FM is good enough (with a separate antenna) to justify using it to feed a hi-fi.		
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>>		66%



Sugden Music Master System

Housed in the distinctive Bijou case design the Music Master has an identical footprint to the other Bijou components and is only slightly taller than the CDMaster. The heatsinks are custom made and anodised in the familiar titanium colour, giving the Music Master a very solid presentation. These attractive aesthetics give the appearance of a solid block of titanium.

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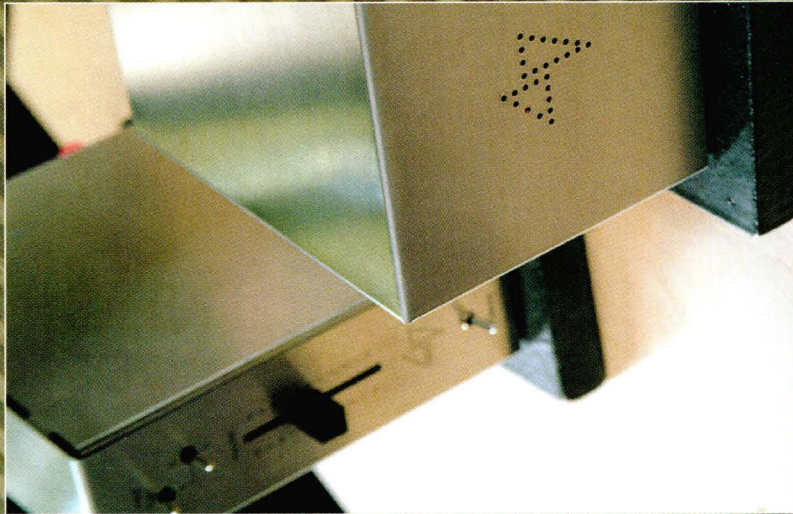
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Photography & Design: Tom Fovall 01952 727866



47 Laboratory

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47 Laboratory is now exclusively available at Midland Audio X-change the Shigaraki Line is the first of many solutions to musical wellbeing. Please call John Roberts to find out more about this truly wonderful product.



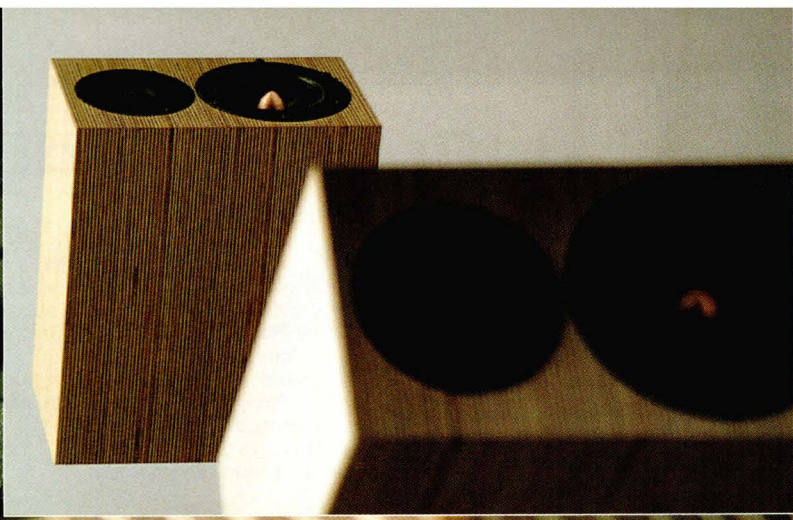
Orpheus

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Orpheus Two is a versatile multi-channel analogue domain preamplifier with digital control of volume setting. The unit can be configured as a pure stereo preamplifier or as a multi-channel preamplifier. Each input and output channel has an independent volume level set-up to optimise the interface between sources having different output levels.

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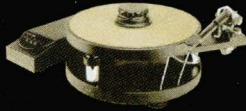
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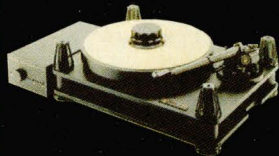
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EAR MC3 moving coil transformer 4/12/40 ohm - as new	£4000	£7500
EAR MC3 moving coil transformer 4/12/40 ohm - as new	£500	£750
Chord DAC 64 - four days old - whoops!	£1600	£2000
Lavardin IT 12 months old - perfect	£2400	£3400
Monitor Audio MA10 Gold - very good condition	£400	£800
Wadia 830 CD player - fully serviced, new laser - warranty	£1400	£3000
Tom Evans Groove - mc phono stage - 500 ohms, 0.2mV - as new	£1300	£1850
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn - Mahogany - new PM6As (alnico)	£1400	£3800
Jamo Concert 8 - 2½ years old - beautiful maple finish - spotless	£600	£1365
Ruark Crusader II - April 2000 very good condition	£900	£1800
Arcam CD 72 (it's a CD player)	£200	£400
Michell Gyrodec with RB300 and QC PSU	£750	
Roksan Xerxes Cognoscenti - black marble finish, lid, vgc, boxed	£800	£2000
Nottingham Analogue - Mentor with LV Mystic Mat - spotless	£1400	£2900
Tube Technology Unisys integrated amplifier EL84 Class A - 30watts	£1500	
Avid Acutus turntable - 10 hours use if that, perfect.	£4000	£5000
Avid Volvere Sequel turntable - sealed box new	£3000	£3500
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R

RETRO

MISSION CYRUS ONE & TWO AMPLIFIERS



Back in the early eighties, when Mission was a young, thrusting company specialising in speakers, a decision was made to launch the Cyrus range of amps, with the imaginatively named One and Two.

They first appeared in 1984/5, and went through a number of iterations. During the period they were on sale, they had a real impact, transforming the shape of the amplifier market for good.

Prior to Cyrus, the high ground in low-cost amplification was filled by the then ubiquitous NAD 3020, essentially an ordinary amplifier which just happened to sound rather nice, but there was a more direct precursor to the two Cyrus amps in a virtually forgotten design called the Mission 778. Among the first amps to take a rigorously minimalist design approach, the Cyruses had short signal paths, specialised components in critical areas, no tone controls or filters and no speaker switching. Both models were equipped with phono stages capable of handling moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges, but most famously of all, they were both built into compact, 'shoebox' format boxes, like modern Cyrus components (but a little less pretty).

The Cyrus Two had an additional trick up its sleeve too, in the form of a socket which allowed an extra power supply called the PSX, and later the PSX-R to be piggy-backed onto the internal supply. The intention was never to increase power output per se. The internal Cyrus power supply took charge of the preamplifier, leaving the external heavily regulated PSX, which was packaged in a box the same size and finish as the amp, to cope with the power amp. The PSX increased current delivery and improved the ability of the amplifier to cope with adverse loads. The beauty of the PSX was that it could be bought at any time as an upgrade, but it was not essential. It was, if you like, the icing on the cake.

In the UK, the two Cyrus models were affectionately known as 'audiophile shoeboxes' (or sometimes as 'singing bricks'), which captures their essence pretty well. They were commercially very successful, and their achievement here was matched in most of Mission's export markets. The exception was the US where Mission had a hard time gaining acceptance, not due to any perceived shortcomings, but simply because they were too small.

“In the UK, the two Cyrus models were known as ‘singing bricks’, which captures their essence pretty well.”

Then and now, two Cyrus components side by side used the same space as a single standard-width component. But Mission stuck to its guns, and the US market is now much more receptive to Cyrus – sadly too late for the heroes of our tale.

The Cyrus bricks had a reputation for being true budget esoterica. In retrospect, and viewed in the context of a digital age, sound quality would now probably rank as rather bright, thin and shiny, but the Cyrus was a product of the era of analogue source components, which often benefited from this kind of balance. In addition to the Cyrus Two's fairly refined MC step-up, this model also boasted extra power – 50 watts to the Cyrus One's 25 – and the light, clear and detailed sound of both amps proved an excellent antidote to the limitations of source components of the day. They were not particularly powerful, but their consistency within their operating ceilings meant they could be driven quite hard without the sound deteriorating.

The original Cyrus amps were housed in chassis made from Nyrol, a synthetic material that was a spin-off from the space programme, capable of holding very fine detail from the mould, and which avoided becoming brittle with age. Slit foil reservoir capacitors were added to the Cyrus Two in 1987, and faster output bipolars were specified at the same time, eventually to be replaced by even faster custom-designed output devices. The case design was switched in this period to magnesium alloy, which gave the amps a much more sophisticated appearance. For a short period, the main PC boards were built in Taiwan, but this experiment was abandoned following reliability problems. In 1989, the final version of the Cyrus designs was launched, identified by the toggle power switch. The plug was finally pulled on the final production run of Cyrus Twos in 1992. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

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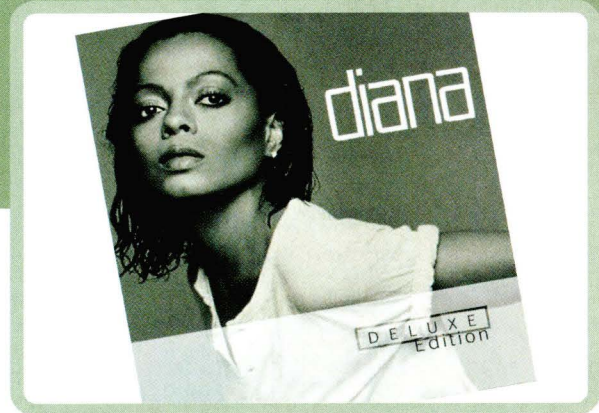
DIANA ROSS
DIANA



By 1980 Diana Ross's superstar trajectory had faltered. Disco and punk had replaced the soul-flavoured pop and power ballads which had made her a household name and she could no longer rely on the legion of fans who had supported her in her early post-Supremes success. Rumours of diva-like haughtiness and tantrums had also served to distance her from her fans, placing her in an ivory tower of her own making, while her ever more elaborate live shows emphasised her soul royalty status at the expense of accessibility. She wasn't hip, she wasn't street and in 1980 her über-diva persona meant she wasn't even sexy.

The queen of Motown badly needed a makeover, and it settled upon one of the most successful production duos of the late seventies to do it. Nile Rogers and Bernard Edwards were effectively Chic, who had created some of the most artful and enduring disco music under their own name, as well as lending their sound and writing skills to other chart-topping acts such as Sister Sledge and as a result greatly influencing the evolution of dance music. Rogers' trademark guitar scratching and Edwards' instantly recognisable aerobic basslines, married with the pair's ear for relentless melodic hooks and funky rhythms had made them one of the most successful production teams in history by that point, and individually they would later work with some of pop's biggest movers and shakers, including Madonna, David Bowie and Rod Stewart as well as unintentionally kick-starting hip-hop when their *Good Times* was used as the engine behind the first ever rap hit, Sugar Hill Gang's *Rapper's Delight*.

But despite their name on the cover, it wasn't Chic's mix of the hits *I'm Coming Out*, *Upside Down* and *My Old Piano*, or indeed any of the album, that hurtled Diana Ross back to the top of both popular and critical trees. Far from journeymen producers, the pair had been keen to experiment from the start and had used the project (and Ross's clout) to incorporate new ideas which were by no means risk-free from a sales point of view. They refused to show the songs to Diana or the band before the sessions to encourage spontaneity, and incorporated awkward rhythms and time signature changes on many tracks. Creating a



“Creating a gay anthem for Diana occurred to Nile Rogers when he met a trio of Diana Ross-themed drag queens.”

gay anthem for Diana in *I'm Coming Out* occurred to Nile Rogers when he encountered a trio of Diana Ross-themed drag queens in a New York club (though fortunately, neither La Ross or Motown twigged what the song referred to at the time).

But Motown, already nervous about what they saw as a radical change of direction for their biggest star, chose to entrust the final mix to established house engineer Russ Terrana. Bery Gordy and the Motown brass weren't the only ones who were concerned. Diana herself courted opinion from virtually everyone she could, and apparently ended up in tears following a meeting with NY radio personality and producer Frankie Crocker, who heard an early mix and congratulated her on ruining her career.

Rogers and Edwards objected publicly to Terrana's involvement, and threatened to remove their name from the credits, though Rogers now says that he's grateful they didn't go that far.

The recent *Deluxe Edition* of the album features both the original and Chic mixes, as well as rarities and remixes from Diana's dance period. Comparing the two, there isn't as much of a disparity as one might suppose. Diana's voice has been pushed forward (different, close-miked and more relaxed vocal takes were used, rather than Chic's more impromptu, 'gutsier' versions) and some of the band's musical interludes have been trimmed. The instruments have also been separated out more, sounding the better for it, but all the basic elements were kept.

The released mix gave Ross her biggest solo success to date, and the album spent a year in the pop chart, as well as delivering three hit singles. It gave the public what they wanted – Diana as diva, but with a more approachable, down to earth and downright funky feel. It's also some of the best dance music of any era. **HFC**

Dave Oliver

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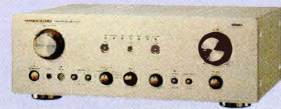


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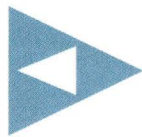
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MULTICHANNEL, LIKE IT OR NOT

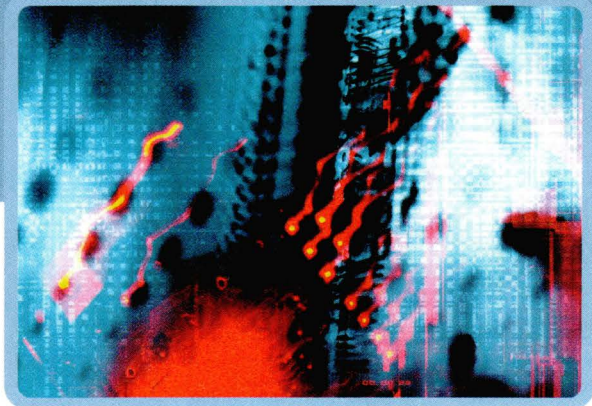


While no-one is suggesting that two-channel audio has had its chips, the practice of listening to stereo music in the home is steadily being eroded. "But the sales of multichannel DVD-A and SACD media are still pitifully low" I hear you cry. True, and this is despite the fact that manufacturers are falling over themselves to offer broader compatibility with these new formats with every new generation of hardware. First we had plain vanilla DVD players that would also spin a CD but not CD-R copies. Harmony with CD, CD-R and CD-RW slowly followed. Multichannel analogue outputs were provided (alongside a digital output for Dolby and DTS-encoded bitstreams) once the players were equipped with the appropriate decoders.

Midway through this cycle SACD, and then DVD-Audio, came into existence as competing high-resolution audio formats. The fact that DVD players were already equipped with all the analogue electronics to handle multichannel audio meant that compatibility with these uncompressed music formats was simply a matter of including a DVD-A or SACD decoder. Universal disc players are the ultimate expression of this integration, players with a single, typically dual-focus transport and decoder that will handle MPEG video, Dolby Digital and DTS data while also unpacking 'linear' multichannel audio from SACD and DVD-As.

For the average consumer, the universal player is a no-brainer. There's no need for hesitation over the future longevity of either high-band audio format because one player will suit whichever disc wins. Also, a universal player is the perfect companion for every multichannel AV amplifier or receiver, providing a digital output for Dolby and DTS sources and *analogue* outputs for DVD-A and SACD. This is always assuming that a FireWire or HDMI interface does not supersede the lot, of course.

Either way, with the larger manufacturers *only* producing multichannel disc players and amps, the range of conventional stereo kit (amps and CD players) is shrinking markedly. To an extent, the small-scale manufacturers of CD players are sticking to familiar ground simply because they lack either the financial or technical resources to design and build DVD or universal



"The consumer is being led, almost by default, down the multichannel road."

players. Similarly, it's still a lot easier to manufacture a two-channel analogue amp than a five or 7.1-channel AV receiver. So with two-channel audio left in the hands of a relatively few specialist companies, the hi-fi separates consumer is being led, almost by default, down the multichannel road.

And once you've got yourself an AV amp and five speakers, even if they are just little satellites, plus a sub, then there's always the temptation to use all six boxes when listening to music. While DVD-A and SACD can provide discrete multichannel audio without intervention, more and more consumers are turning to DSP trickery to deliver a similar 'surround sound' from existing two-channel (typically CD) software.

Both DTS and Dolby are well aware of this change in listening habit, a knowledge reflected in the distinct 'cinema' and 'music' derivatives of the DTS Neo:6 and Dolby Pro Logic II processing modes. Both of these options provide a matrix decoding of conventional two-channel material, deriving additional 'channels' according to the relative amplitude and phase of signals on the existing two-channel source material. But what of enthusiasts who have 6.1 or even fully-fledged 7.1-channel systems? Well, now Dolby even has an answer here in the form of an extended version of Pro Logic II called (no surprise) Pro Logic IIx.

This decode format is compatible with native two-channel and 5/6.1-channel-encoded software and provides 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1-derived output channels. As you might expect, every upcoming 7.1 channel AV amp will have Pro Logic IIx and many specialist producers, including Denon, Marantz, Meridian and TAG McLaren will offer hardware upgrades to existing kit. All of which underlines the manufacturers' commitment to multichannel, whether it's from encoded 5.1 channel DVDs, linear DVD-A and SACD or, indeed, from plain vanilla CD. **HFC**

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The new Audio Salon has opened !



Welcome to the new Audio Salon. Located in a Victorian Townhouse in the leafy Park area, one mile from the city centre we are less than ten miles from Glasgow's International Airport. Under one roof, for the first time in the UK, you can hear the variety of sonic presentations. This townhouse, a haven for Hi-Fi enthusiasts, has taken one year to organise, finance, and complete (in addition to another year hunting for the ideal building).

"Jack has 25 years experience in specialist Hi-Fi." It has been his passion and dream to one day build the best Audio establishment the world has ever seen. As each year passed a new stepping stone was placed down on the path to that goal. This year the last stone was placed down,...." At last, the UK has a world-class retailer capable of showing, selling and supporting the Formula One performance audio imported to these shores for those who are serious about their music and Hi-Fi.

The Townhouse is a major commitment and investment, and if you don't use us you will lose us! It is a reverse of the mediocrity mentality of the modern world -- the mentality of something for nothing. Low resolution sound, multi-functional, multi-room, equipment sold by morons to the people who expect satisfaction but get disappointment. The country is awash with B grade, grey-imports and dodgy dealers - but it is the hopeful who support and sustain them! Is that you? Do you really believe that you can mix and match components based on reviews and your own "expertise"? Audio Consultancy and industry experience are a specialist field like any other profession, and that is why retailers survive for those who really seek value and satisfaction. The majority will always be deceived by internet DIY, dodgy deals, and High Street shops who claim to sell brands performing but not costing high-end!

In 25 years, we have seen it all, but how can you be sure that the difference in an Audio Salon component or system will really give you satisfaction and better value?

We get phone calls all the time from people who really want to visit us but feel that they are too far away, people in London for example. So how can we help? Simple! The Salon has got together with a few travel agents and can organise a budget flight for yourself and/or your family to visit us. We can even organise accommodation. More and more people fly to Glasgow in the morning, spend the day with us and fly back in the evening. If this would be of interest to you then please call or email us for more details. **It's one trip that you will be very glad you made !!**

New Website. www.audiosalon.co.uk. We have worked hard to bring you a Website that stands out from the rest ! So what makes our Website different and why should you visit ? See below for a description on just some of the things that the Salon site offers:



Detailed information and pictures on nearly every product we sell

Images and information on all our second-hand / ex-dem items

Discussion forum - compare notes with other audiophiles: the truth is out there!

Customer section (under construction) - the privileged place on the website. Information and opportunities for existing customers only.

Enquiry Form - contact us anytime, anyday

This is just the beginning and Dale has lots of other exciting plans for the future. Watch this place or the site !

Friends, families and people from all over the world, call or visit the salon time and time again, shouldn't you give us a call and find out why ? You could be missing out on a lot more than you realise !

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Sugden and ProAc may share the same page, but that's not all they share. Read on.....

Over the years the Audio Salon has had the great pleasure in selling two particular brands who have stood the test of time, again and again.

ProAc Loudspeakers and Sugden Audio products are respected, admired and sold all over the world. Their popularity is as strong as ever and you don't have to look hard to see why or how, you only need to listen!

Many Audio Manufacturers release new products on a regular basis using the latest technology to share the limelight. A position that is very short lived, technology destined to join others that have come and gone. Surely using the newest and latest technology is the best approach to building products? After all, it means the customer always gets something that in theory sounds better than the rest. Right?

Like all things in this world, Audio included, there is more than one way to approach something and the obvious, easiest or latest technology at hand isn't always the best. The proof is in the listening!

Both Sugden and ProAc are great example of taking a different approach to Audio products rather than jumping on what is a very over crowded band wagon.

Sugden, based in West Yorkshire, England has been designing and building specialised audio products for over 35 years. Every component is built by hand in the UK at the Sugden plant. Each new product evolving from its predecessors, blending existing ideas with new ones to create a product that carries with it a strong musical heritage and pedigree. Every single product is meticulously and painstakingly designed to reproduce your music as you were meant to hear it - as faithfully to the original as is humanly possible.

Today **Sugden** produce three esteemed ranges of products; the **21 series, Bijou series and MasterClass series**. Each sharing the ability to breath life into your music and place it before you in a way that you will never get tired of.

The **A21 series** is the entry level range of products from **Sugden**. Entry level they may be but ordinary they are most certainly not. The range includes an Integrated Amplifier, CD Player, Tuner and Power Amplifier. Each component continues to win awards and world-wide acclaim from the press as being the best in their class by a long margin.

For people who want a wonderful sound but small boxes; the **Bijou** answers all your prayers. Audiophile products that are housed in beautiful slim-line elegant cases that will occupy a very tiny space in your listening room. CD Player, Tuner, Pre and two Power Amplifiers are available. Designed to be stacked, one on top of the other and placed on a special stand, you have a system that while very small, will be the talking point of any room.

The **MasterClass** series are **Sugden's** reference products. Built and designed using the finest discrete components, optimised circuit layouts and custom power supplies. These components deserve to be partnered with the finest loudspeakers available. Take a listen to a **MasterClass** system and it will be very hard to go back to anything else. You have been warned!

Fine electronics of course need to be paired with fine speakers and this is where the connection between Sugden and ProAc will become all too clear. Read on.....

Speaker Manufacturers come and go all the time, but not **ProAc**. A company famous throughout the world for their world-class products. Each and every one stands the test of time, for each and every one is more than a little special. Many have become true classics. A great example is the **Tablette** model, which was first released 24 years ago. Today the **Tablette** is as popular as ever and has undergone very few changes on the outside!

So what makes ProAc Loudspeakers special?

It could be that each loudspeaker is hand-crafted with each technician being individually responsible for the building and testing of each unit. Build quality alone is unsurpassed, each cabinet being meticulously constructed, damped and finished in real wood veneer.

Only the very finest components are used in **ProAc** loudspeakers, with each new model reflecting the very leading edge of audio technology. Indeed many models now incorporate dedicated drive units using **ProAc's** own basket, cone and magnet assemblies. Drive unit performance is fine-tuned through expensive and sophisticated crossover networks.

ProAc have just released a new **Response** range, which was shown at this years **Hi-Fi News Show**. Using equipment from **Sugden**, every model left a wonderful impression on those in the room. From the small **Tablette** model to the new **flagship D100** model.

You can see the new **Response** models on the right of the page.

For the last twelve years the legendary **Response Four** has been **ProAc's** flagship model. A model which has truly delighted its owners beyond reproach. With the development of an entirely new and next generation of sensitive drive units, the **Response Four** has now been eclipsed by a new flagship model, the **D100** starting from £14,995 (pair).

The **D100** is tall, slim, deep, elegant, with beautiful handcrafted cabinets, finished in real wood veneers, are exceptionally rigid. An entirely new porting system means that room placement of the cabinets is much less critical and the **100's** will perform superbly in rooms of most layouts and sizes.

The innovative drive unit layout has ensured greater dispersion and a seamless integrated sound. Two new professional quality 10" bass drivers are mounted on the baffle either side of two exciting new 3" midrange units and a one-inch soft dome tweeter. Married by a complex **HQC** crossover network and connected by **ProAc** oxygen-free copper wiring, this formidable combination of drive units produces one of the most coherent and expansive sounds in modern hi-fi.

The **D100's** produce stunning music, effortlessly. The enhanced sensitivity extracts the tiniest detail from any recording without brightness or exaggeration. Greater bandwidth creates a huge soundstage, drawing in the listener and creating a concert hall experience, where the loudspeakers seem to melt from the scene.

ProAc and **Sugden** when used together form a world class system, arguably unsurpassable, certainly offering value for money only possible on a home market. Optimise cables, mains and isolation, and it's better than sex.

All **Sugden's** products are on permanent dem, and the **Audio Salon** is proud to be the first UK dealer with the astounding **D100** speakers.



tablette 2000



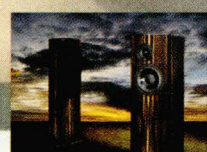
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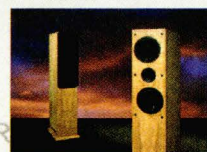
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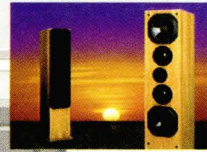
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Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

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Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major Home Cinema products:

DVD players: Arcam & **FMJ**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/**FMJ**, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe. Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** , Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting. Specialist set up services: **ISF Display Calibration**.

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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.

Products that score more than 80% overall are automatically featured in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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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.

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 44.1 kHz 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?

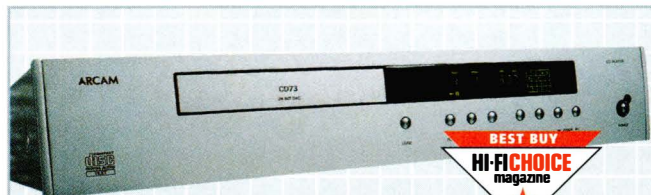
No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

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 surround sound using up to six channels, 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.

TOP BUYS



Arcam DiVA CD73T £400

This is traditionally a strong price point for Arcam, and the British brand's latest entry-level machine is another success – smooth, substantial and refined.



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.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	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												
BEST BUY	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems		●	●	●	●				247
BEST BUY	Arcam DIVA CD93T	950	Excellent high-resolution and transparent-sounding player in familiar DIVA clothing		●	●	●	●				247
	Cyrus CD8	1,000	Reveals the emotional and intellectual message in everything it plays and is guaranteed to keep you listening		●							247
	Exposure 2010	600	A smooth and substantial-sounding player, a little lacking in refinement but musical all the same		●	●	●	●				231
	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal								●	212
	Heart CD6000 OSE LE	750	Valved-up Marantz makes an entertaining and colourful player that will inspire you to listen longer		●	●	●	●		●	●	245
	Marantz CD-17 MkII M	800	Insight, detail and rhythmic precision make the modified CD-17 MkII M a top-draw player at the price		●	●	●	●				243
BEST BUY	NAD C541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		●	●	●					231
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		●		●					231
BEST BUY	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A revised and refined version of the SCD-XA333ES that provides an almost holographic sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		248
BEST BUY	Thule CD150B	775	A light but engaging and expansive-sounding player with a very quirky user interface		●		●	●	●			246
ABOVE £1,000												
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Very natural yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner		●		●			●		238
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Copland CDA 822	1,598	Well built and carefully thought out, if you go for the more sophisticated musical forms it is superb value		●		●			●		241
	Exposure 3010	1,195	What this player lacks in immediacy and punch is offset by its sparkling sense of occasion and musical tension		●	●	●	●				246
	Exposure XXII	1,395	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening		●	●						238
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Gamut CD1R	2,350	Natural, precise and impressively 3D sound that marries precision with emotional communication		●		●			●		240
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●			●	●	231
BEST BUY	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer		●	●	●					238
	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE24	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities		●	●					●	229
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●	●				237
	NAD S500i	1,200	A beautifully built machine that treads the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb		●	●	●			●		238
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply					●				238
BEST BUY	Orelle CD100evo	1,500	Very superior timing, a wide dynamic range, natural sweetness and fine transparency					●				248
BEST BUY	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●					●		226
	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source					●		●	●	244
BEST BUY	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,100	Not CD-RW compatible, but otherwise an excellent CD that punches above its weight		●							248
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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 multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **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.



Classé CDP-10 £1,599

An exceptional CD player from the Canadian high-end brand – its natural, detailed and engaging way with varied music types is little short of stunning.



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 very good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio 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 sound 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 music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

It's worthwhile for the very best picture quality, but make sure your DVD player and display device support PAL progressive.

DVD-AUDIO

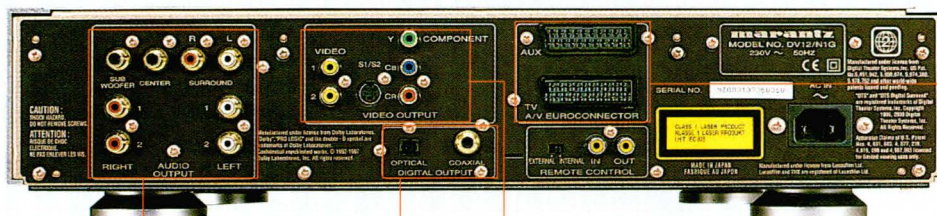
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/ SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



CONNECTIONS



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.

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BEST BUY	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
	Cambridge Audio DVD57	200	DVD-Audio replay, progressive scan pictures and a good performance at a silly-low price. Fantastic value for money.	●	●	●	●	●	243
	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match			●	●		237
BEST BUY	Denon DVD-2900	850	A beautifully built universal player that delivers a strong performance across all formats, all at a remarkable price	●	●	●	●	●	248
BEST BUY	Pioneer DV-565A	250	Do-it-all 'universal' player is a decent performer with all disc types, and superb value for money considering its range	●	●	●	●	●	248
BEST BUY	Pioneer DV-757Ai	800	State of the art universal player with iLink digital interface provides performance stretch currently unavailable to others	●	●	●	●	●	240
	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs	●	●	●	●	●	237
BEST BUY	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD in a distinctly superior package, with above average performance	●	●	●	●	●	234
ABOVE £1,000									
BEST BUY	Arcam FMJ DV27A	1,900	Very accomplished, clean sounding player with CD, DVD and DVD-Audio alike. Picture quality is excellent too	●	●	●	●	●	246
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs			●	●		238
BEST BUY	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	●	●	●	●	●	230
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●	●	●	●	●	218
BEST BUY	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs	●	●	●	●	●	230
	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	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



Pioneer DV-565A £250
A universal player with respectable performance across all formats, at a remarkable price.



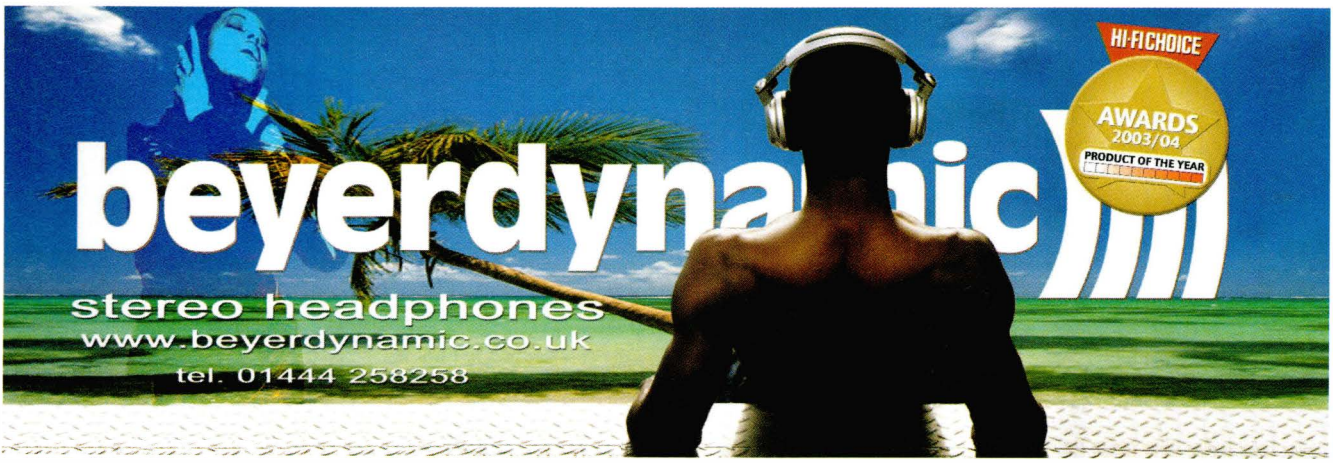
Denon DVD-2900 £850
A universal player that's good with CD and great with DVD-V, DVD-A and SACD alike.



Pioneer DV-757Ai £800
Now pressured by Denon's DVD-2900, but its wideband digi-out is still unique at the price.



Arcam FMJ DV27A £1,900
No SACD playback, but DVD-Audio and CD sound are first rate, as is picture performance.



beyerdynamic
stereo headphones
www.beyerdynamic.co.uk
tel. 01444 258258

HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2003/04 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

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



Pro-Ject 1 Xpression £210

The latest model from Czech turntable specialist Pro-Ject is remarkable value for money – an Ortofon OM10 cartridge and carbon fibre arm are included in the price.



Roksan Radius 5 £850

A beautiful mid-price turntable with an impressively well-sorted sound from low bass to high treble. Price includes matching Nima tonearm.



Avid Diva £1,100

Superbly well engineered for the money, Avid's entry-level deck spins a highly involving musical message – solid, powerful and detailed.



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.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			●	223
	Linn LP12 Basic	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	●		●	103
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45			●	248
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45			●	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Radius 5	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery, and good isolation	33/45	●		●	248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan TMS2	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●		246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●	195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akiva	1,800	With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape		●	●	242
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality		●		215
	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage		●		244

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	Musical Fidelity X-LPS ³	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved	●	●			248
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money	●	●			245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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

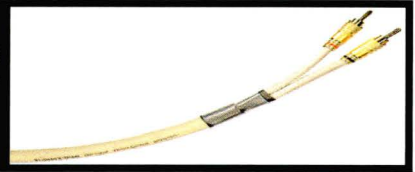
SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

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

AUDUSA

AUDUSA - OOM Silverlink Mono Crystal balanced speaker cable - conductor of 3mm diameter (approx 8 gauge), stranded silver on OFHC, plus three strands of Mono Crystal Copper for improved bass performance. Mylar infill and with designed in protection against RF and EMI. Cable OD 14.72 mm Priced at £12.95 per meter



AUDUSA EUPEN CSA 2.5 MAINS CABLE - HI FI CHOICE SEPT 2001 BEST BUY

GNLM 05/04 and GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) Cable with FERRITE TECHNOLOGY - A polymer material mixed with a considerable quantity of homogeneously fine high quality ferrite powder is extruded around the copper conductors. As a ferromagnetic material, it will go through hysteresis loops whenever it is under influence of an alternating magnetic field. Consecutively magnetizing and demagnetizing the material will cause considerable losses of high frequency energy. This energy is absorbed in the ferrite grains and converted into heat. This effect is more or less proportional to the field frequency; high frequencies will be strongly attenuated, because their energy will be absorbed by the ferrite powder. The GNLM cables which in addition to the above described ferrite technology is further protected with a foil shield and a drain wire and **specifically** manufactured for High End audio use. **Said by some to be the most neutral sounding mains cable on the market**



AUDUSA - Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Maringo IEC 320

Fitted with IEC (Martin Kayser) and MK Tough Cable can be supplied fitted to our all steel 4, 6 and 8 way distribution blocks. We can rewire the distribution blocks with Eupen cable as an extra cost option. Refer to our web site for details.



AUDUSA EUPEN GNLM 05/04

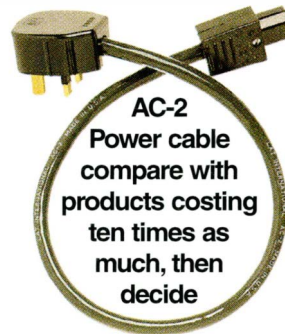
GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) £48 for 1.0m, £58 for 1.5m, £68 for 2.0m, Off the reel £30 for 1st meter, £20 per m thereafter. GNLM 05/04 £58 for 1m, £68 for 1.5m, £78 for 2.0m Also off the reel. Both GNLM cables available for export

AUDUSA - Eupen and LAT AC-2 mains cable available with 16 amp IEC (for certain models of amps by Krell, MF, Levinson etc), Maringo 320 IEC, Figure of eight, Bulgin, USA Hubble, European Schuko, Australian, Swiss, Danish, and Neutrik plugs.

SILVER SILVER SILVER - Upgrade the cable with silver plated contacts on IEC and MK plug for an extra £6. IEC's and MK plugs with silver plated contacts available seperately at £6, £8 and £9 Why Silver plated contacts? Simple, silver is THE BEST conductor of electricity.

LAT AC-2 HI-FI CHOICE - SEPT 2001 - RECOMMENDED MAINS CABLE

We have developed a cabling (weaving) pattern along with an unusual shielding/filtering system that gets rid of the garbage that contaminates your components. The difference you hear with our cord is astounding. Our power cord takes advantage of silver in its design through use of our proprietary Silverfuse conductors. The conductors are 10 gauge and with PTFE; the best insulation available. Fitted as standard with IEC / MK Toughplug. . 60cm £62, 90cm £75, 1.2m £88, 1.5m £101, 1.8m £112 etc Other lengths available and off the reel. **4,6 and 8 way all steel mains distribution blocks fitted with UK, Schuko or USA sockets.** CE tested & approved mains distribution units manufactured of heavy gauge steel, finished in black and fitted with high quality 13amp sockets. It has no filters, circuit breakers, surge protection, transformers, resistors, capacitors, LED's, on/off switches, chokes, regulators, just fitted with 1m of AC-2 mains cable. From £166 for 4 way, £198 for 6 way, £229 for 8 way.



SILVERFUSE is a near alloy of silver and copper. IT IS NOT SILVER PLATED OR SILVER CLAD. Plating (or clad, which is the same thing as plating) causes a dioding effect when signal is passed through resulting in brightness and distortion. The Silverfuse process starts with seven nines OFHC copper wire with a diameter that is slightly larger than the required size. It is then pulled through a trough of molten silver. The wire with a silver deposit, is then forced through a compacting die where it is subject to tremendous pressure. The silver and the high purity copper are fused together into a near alloy. The compacting fusion also reduces the wire diameter to the desired size. No dioding subsequently occurs with this process. The result provides for the benefits of silver; which are excellent definition and clarity, with the high purity copper benefits of warmth and mellowness.

LAT INTERNATIONAL - Analogue, Digital and Video interconnects and Speaker cable- better than most others at double the price Refer to www.audusa.com for further details or ask for reviews



SUNFIRE CORPORATION - Snohomish USA

New for 2002 Sunfire True Sub Woofer MKIV - 11 inch cube. Signature True Sub-Woofer 13 inch cube and Junior Sub Woofer 9 inch cube -all with two drivers, to as low as 16hz, 116 SPL and 360 cu ins of air movement, 1200 or 2700 watt patented amp technology. Classic Tube Pre-amp, Solid state power amps 2 channel (300 x 2 or 600 x 2) and 5 channel (220 x 5 or 430 x 5 - yes total of 2150 watts into 8 ohms or 4300 watts into 4 ohms) patented amp technology (no heat sinks) and Theatre Grand II processor pre-amp.



WWW.AUDUSA.COM

Tel: 020 8241 9826, 020 8264 0249 Fax 020 8241 0999 Email: sales@audusa.com

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 AM/FM tuners, with great sound and features.



Cambridge DAB500 £150

A low-cost DAB radio that gets very close to much more expensive digital models.



Rega Radio 3 £374

An excellent sound-first FM/MW tuner – low on features but big on sound.



Magnum Dynalab MD102 £2,200

If you're serious about radio this superb FM tuner is about as good as it gets.

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG STRENGTH METER	ROT TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			● ●		193
	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64			● ● ●		193
	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
	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		● ● ● ●			241
	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●		211
	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		● ●	● ●		193
	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	● ●	● ●	● ●		230
	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	● ●	● ●	● ●		230
	Rega Radio 3	374	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20			●		242
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	● ●	● ●	● ●		242
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16			● ● ● ●		221
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10			● ● ● ●		248
	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99			● ● ● ●		234
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99	● ●		● ● ● ●		242
	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 disk 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.



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 £600

Combining hard disk with CD-R makes CD recording a whole lot more flexible.



Imerge S2000 £1,599

Impressively flexible hard disk music server for multi-room applications.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS		
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS						
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		218
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		243
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		205
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		243
	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
MD RECORDERS						
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		233
HDD RECORDERS						
	Imerge S2000	1,599	Intended as the centrepiece of a multi-room installation, this three-output server combines flexibility with good sound	2	80	243
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	Superb combination of high-speed CD-RW drive and hard disk, adding editing flexibility to CD recording	2	80	243

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 Hi-Fi separates, DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma screens, LCD 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 stores 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 store 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.

CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Are you looking to neatly and seamlessly integrate a Home Cinema or Hi-Fi System into your home? Our Custom Installation experts are fully trained in all areas



and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for lighting control systems, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has the solution.

NEW STORES



NOW OPEN WEYBRIDGE & STAINES

The WEYBRIDGE store at 43 Church Street, The Quadrant, is now open. To contact the store call 01932 828525.

The STAINES store, located at 4 Thames Street, is now open. For more information call 01784 460777 or visit our website.

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

PRODUCT SHOWCASE



TRI-VISTA SERIES

Introduced to celebrate the company's twentieth anniversary, Musical Fidelity's Tri-Vista CD and 300 Integrated Amplifier are still available in limited quantities.

Both models feature Tri-Vista mini-tubes, which are similar, and a worthy successor, to the Nu-Vista tubes previously used in Musical Fidelity's highly acclaimed Nu-Vista products. The Tri-Vista 300 'super' integrated amplifier delivers an enormous 340W per channel and uses Musical Fidelity's latest circuitry, which has completely separate power supply circuitry for the output stage giving far-reaching sonic benefits. Hi-Fi

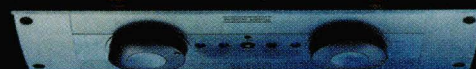
World magazine (Jan 2003) concurred, describing the Tri-Vista 300 as "quite exceptional".

The Tri-Vista CD/SACD Player again features the extremely robust miniature 5703, military-spec, triode valves and in addition to its SACD capabilities, can be used as a DAC for another digital source. When it's used in conjunction with the Tri-Vista 300 amplifier, you are sure of an immensely satisfying musical experience.

**TRI-VISTA 300
AMPLIFIER £3994.95**

**TRI-VISTA CD/SACD
PLAYER £3994.95**

MUSICAL FIDELITY



TRI-VISTA SERIES AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION STORES

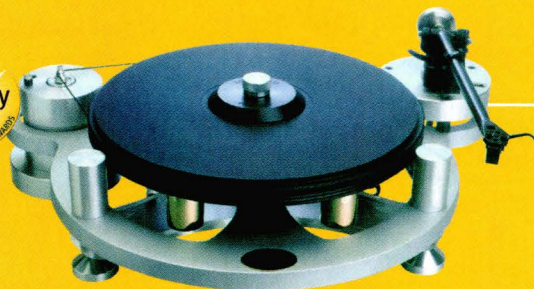
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- BROMLEY
- CAMBRIDGE
- CARDIFF
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- CRAWLEY
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- GUILDFORD
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- OXFORD
- PETERBOROUGH
- PLYMOUTH
- POOLE
- PRESTON
- READING
- SEVENOAKS
- SHEFFIELD
- SOLIHULL
- SOUTHAMPTON
- SOUTHGATE
- STAINES **NEW**
- SWANSEA
- SWINDON
- SWISS COTTAGE
- TUNBRIDGE WELLS
- WATFORD
- WEYBRIDGE **NEW**
- WITHAM (ESSEX)
- WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE
NUMBER DETAILS



HI-FI SEPARATES

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS



MICHELL GYRO SE
TURNTABLE / RB300 TONEARM
£1049.95



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

ROTEL
RCD-02 CD PLAYER
£379.95

RA-01 AMPLIFIER (PICTURED)
£249.95

RA-02 AMPLIFIER
£349.95

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £60
WHEN ANY ROTEL CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
AMPLIFIERS
£251-£500

PRO-JECT 1 XPRESSION TURNTABLE (BLACK) **£209.95**



"Compared with a £200 CD player this deck sounds remarkable: dig out your vinyl and give the Xpression a spin."

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

ARCAM CD73T CD PLAYER **£399.95**



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £60
WHEN ANY ARCAM DIVA CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

B&W BOWERS & WILKINS DM602 S3 SPEAKERS **£299.95**

The B&W 600 Series has become synonymous with superb value and home cinema. Now, Series 3 continues that tradition, while raising the standards of sound quality at this level by drawing on their vast experience in the high-end sector.

"But the B&W 602 S3 are our winners... 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."

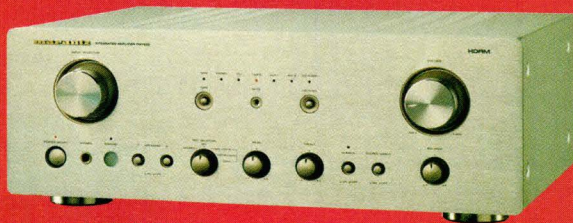
FREE SPEAKER CABLE*
WORTH £50
WITH ANY B&W SPEAKERS OVER £280



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
SPEAKERS
£201-£350

experience more

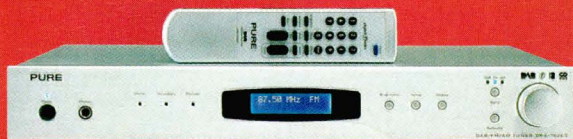
experience more
experience more



MARANTZ

PM7200 AMPLIFIER

£329.95 (BLACK)



PURE DIGITAL

DRX-702ES ANALOGUE/DAB

TUNER £329.95



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2

A3.2 CD PLAYER £999.95

A3.2 AMPLIFIER £979.95



FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £100
WHEN ANY MF CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

£

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.

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.

Please Note:
Some products may not be available at all stores.
Please call before travelling. *Not in conjunction with any other offer.
Advertisement valid until at least 16/12/03, E&OE.

QUAD

99 CD-P CD PLAYER/PRE

£999.95

99 POWER AMPLIFIER

£549.95

11L SPEAKERS

£379.95



MISSION

782 SE SPEAKERS

£899.95

780 SE SPEAKERS

£349.95

◀ 782 SE

"Well, with the exception of the alderwood-veneer finish, these floorstanders look identical to the standard model, although there's a new tweeter and crossover design. One of the advantages of the three-way configuration is that each driver deals with only a narrow section of the frequency range, and the designers optimise each unit to perform its respective task. Mission's engineers have excelled in this area: these elegant floorstanders sound beautifully balanced and few rivals under £1000 can match their wonderful levels of clarity. The 'special edition' tag is overused but these talented floorstanders are bona fide sonic stars."



780 SE

"The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable: anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider these standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off."



FREE SPEAKER CABLE* WORTH £50

WITH ANY MISSION SPEAKERS OVER £280

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION

ROKSAN KANDY ▶

KD-1 MKIII CD PLAYER

£594.95

KA-1 MKIII AMPLIFIER

£594.95



KA-1 MKIII AMPLIFIER "Roksan has done an impressive job with the Kandy MKIII, creating a powerful and musical amplifier that's a step up from previous models."



KD-1 MKIII CD PLAYER "Last year we said the Kandy CD player was very impressive but could be better - and now it is. The MkIII model is an exceptional-sounding all-rounder."

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £60
WHEN ROKSAN KANDY CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

WHARFEDALE PACIFIC

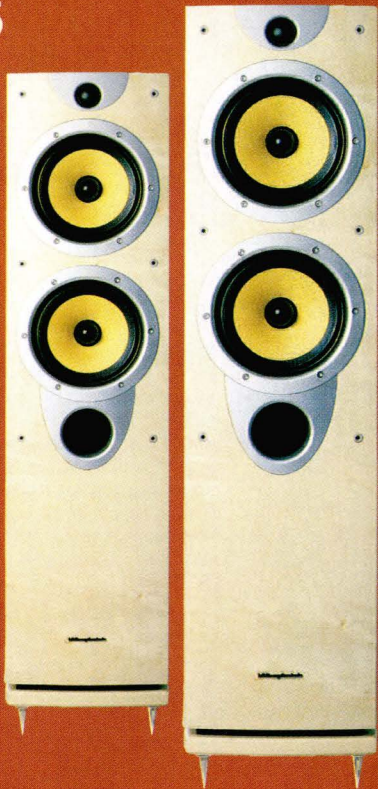
EVOLUTION 30 SPEAKERS

£649.95

"Evolution? This is more like a revolution: Wharfedale's new range is more than an upgrade of its Pacific series.

Listen to the Evolution 30s and the sonic changes leap out at you. Sitting on their chunky spikes and situated in free space, the speakers sound wonderful: low frequencies delve deep and delivery is punchy and fast...

You'll have gathered by now we love the Evolution 30s. They're beautifully made and great all-rounders."



Please Note:
Some products may not be available at all stores.
Please call before travelling. *Not in conjunction with any other offer.
Advertisement valid until at least 16/12/03. E&OE.

CYRUS ELECTRONICS

6 CD PLAYER

£599.95



8 CD PLAYER

£999.95



8 AMPLIFIER

£799.95 (BELOW)

PRE X PRE

£999.95

MONO X POWER

£1199.95 (EACH)

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for nearly 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. Cyrus products are hand finished, half size die-cast enclosures and include a hidden digital command system that allows simple operation of any size system.

The new product range includes the 6 and 8 amplifiers and the stunning new high performance, CD players, the CD6 & CD8. Other models include the Pre X and Mono X Pre/Power combination and a new disc player, DVD8, featuring specially tuned video and audio circuitry.

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."



experience more

experience more
experience more



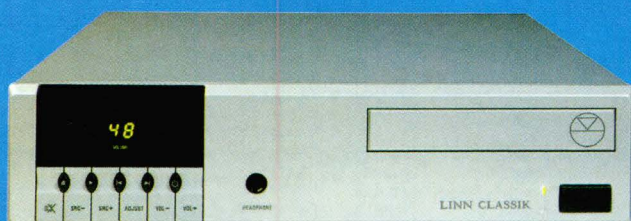
LINN CLASSIK ▾

MUSIC SYSTEM (EX SPEAKERS)

£799.95



"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



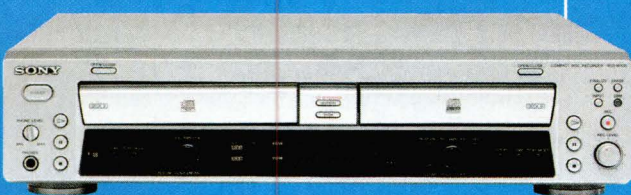
acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."



YAMAHA CDR-HD1300

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- SEVENOAKS** 109-113 LONDON ROAD
• 01732 459555
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• 0114 255 5861 *OPEN SUNDAY*
- SOLIHULL** 149-151 STRATFORD ROAD
• 0121 733 3727
- SOUTHAMPTON** 33 LONDON ROAD
• 023 8033 7770 *OPEN SUNDAY*
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- SWINDON** 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD
• 01793 610992
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- WITHAM (ESSEX)** 1 THE GROVE CENTRE
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- WOLVERHAMPTON** 29-30 CLEVELAND STREET
• 01902 312225 *OPEN SUNDAY*



WHO ARE SEVENOAKS?

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Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from Hi-Fi separates and systems to DVD players, 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 STORES

We are pleased to announce both the new stores in Staines and Weybridge are now open. For more information visit our website.

CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision's Custom Installation Service enables the integration of a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home as neatly and seamlessly as possible. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.



Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for a multi-room system, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control or lighting system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products available to cater for all your requirements.

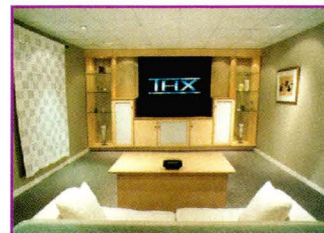
SEVENOAKS WEBSITE

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its stores.

There are regularly updated special offer and stock clearance lists with hundreds of products available and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store. To find out more, click on www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



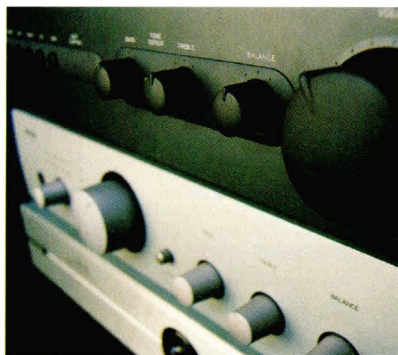
Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so 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 transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; 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.

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-AMPLING?

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.

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.

TOP BUYS



Marantz PM7200 £330

A true budget belter from Marantz – power and finesse in equal measure, plus the ability to switch between Class A and Class AB operation. Giant killing amps are back!



Rotel RA-1062 £595

Rotel's latest is an affordable taste of the high end, packed with power and detail. It'll drive virtually any speaker and embarrass a good many more costly amps.



AVI Type S21 MI £1,399

This AVI's full name is Lab Series Integrated Amplifier Type S21 MI – a lengthy moniker for such a neat little amp with a hugely accomplished sound.



Exposure XXIII/XXVIII £2,790

A beautifully natural and dynamic sounding pre/power amp combo – a transistor design with a touch of the valve amp sound.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Affordable integrated, with sophisticated control system, and crisp, detailed sound	5	●	●	●	85	245
	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Powerful, sophisticated and flexible – no longer quite the king of the sub-£1,000 crop but still a strong contender	7		●	●	105	244
	Cyrus 8	800	Impressive at low to medium volumes, and a clear improvement on its predecessor, but deteriorates at high power levels	7		●	●	70	239
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal. Sounds musical, if a touch 'safe'	6		●		50	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and enthralling sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PM7200	330	High power, plenty of features, and remarkably clear and informative sound with lots of impact	6	●	●	●	105	248
	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4				70	239
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,000	Improved mainstream model from Roksan is a fine, expressive amplifier – right at the top of its class	6		●		85	248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-1062	595	The pick of this season's crop. Fabulous sound with the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	opt	●	●	95	244
<input type="checkbox"/>	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									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AVI Laboratory Series	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution but effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell KAV400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
	Marantz PM-14 MkII Kl	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA 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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5			221	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		140	212	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●	30	216	
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	●	●	4	●	250	231	
	NAD Silver Series S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7		200	200	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		50	213	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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										
	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●	18	216	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<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	
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	300	241	

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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
EC	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4	●	100	237
	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6	●	120	216
	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	70	241
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price	●	●			200	247
EC	Halcro dm10/dm68	75,900	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	225	243
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●			125	230
EC	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
	Naim NAC202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8	●	70	241
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6	●		233
	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery	●	●	7	●	120	241
EC	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
EC	Sugden Masterclass AA	5,600	Yorkshire's finest class A kit. Dynamic and tonally rich, this gives even valve amps a run for their money	●	●	7	●	35	246
EC	Unison Research Unico Pre/DM	2,590	Hybrid designs with a rich powerful performance that makes a fine balance between valve and solid state sound	●	●	3	●	150	242

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



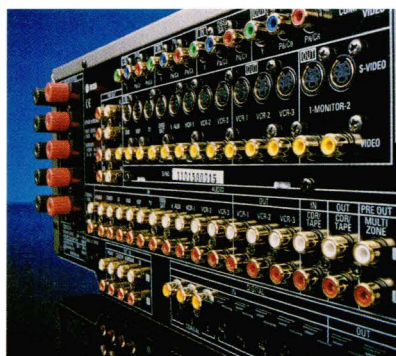
The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD

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



Harman Kardon AVR 5550 £900

Here's a rarity - a sub-£1,000 AV amp that does a good job with both stereo and surround sources, and well equipped too.



Pioneer VSA-AX5i £1,200

Trickle-down version of the VSA-AX10i is a superb performer at the price, good with both music and film soundtracks, with the added bonus of i.Link digital connection.



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 top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

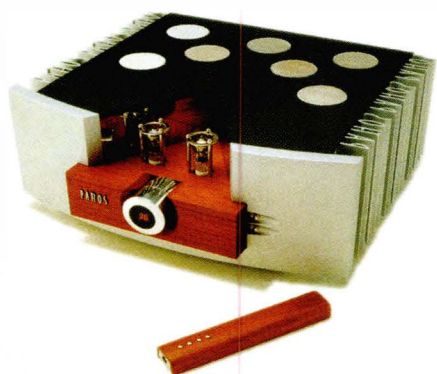
BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
INTEGRATED AV AMPS								
	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
RE	Denon AVR-3803	899	Feature packed 7.1 channel AV receiver which needs a lot of studying but does everything well	●	11	●	110	239
	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
RE	Harman Kardon AVR 5550	900	The upgrade to the AVR 5500 comes with features that are actually of some use to the audiophile and a meaty sound to boot	●	9	●	85	240
RE	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9	●	●	235
RE	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	●	100	248
ES	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
	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
	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
EC	EAD TheaterMaster 8000 Pro	5,200	Arguably the most 'musical' sounding AV processor to date - tested with the PowerMaster 8300 multichannel power amp		9	●		242
RE	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
	Myyrad MDP500/MA240/360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel AV amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music		9	opt	120	215
	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
EC	Parasound Halo C1/A51	8,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value - processor includes onboard screen		11	●	250	243
RE	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
	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 AV 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.

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Italian design is renowned throughout the world for its sophistication and beauty. The Logos integrated amplifier from Pathos Acoustics is no exception. With its stunning looks and 110 watts per channel of smooth, detailed and controlled power, it is truly a musical work of art - and superb value for money. Don't just take our word for it, contact us for your nearest UKD dealer and find out for yourself. You won't believe your eyes, or ears!



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- SPEAKER STANDS INCLUDED
- SACD MULTI CHANNEL PLAYBACK
- DOLBY DIGITAL 5.1 CHANNEL AMPLIFIER
- DTS DECODER
- FM/MW RDS TUNER WITH 30 PRESETS
- CD-R/CD-RW PLAYBACK

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SONY

STR-DB2000

DETAILS:

- D. DIGITAL EX & DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2 DECODERS BUILT-IN • DTS, DTS-ES DISCRETE 6.1, MATRIX 6.1, NEO:6 DTS 96/24 DECODERS
- 100W X 6 POWER OUTPUT
- TRUE 6.1 CHANNEL AMPLIFIER
- 6.1 CHANNEL INPUT
- SACD MULTI-CHANNEL INPUT
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SONY

SONY DVP-NS930

DETAILS:

- SLIM LINE OS RANGE DVD / CD / SUPER AUDIO CD MULTI-CHANNEL COMBINATION PLAYER
- OS COMPONENTS SOUND / QUALITY / PERFORMANCE
- CD-R/RW / (SVCD & MP3) PLAYBACK • 12-BIT / 108MHz NOISE SHAPED VIDEO D/A CONVERTER • NTSC PROGRESSIVE SCAN • ALUMINUM FRONT PANEL



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ARCAM

AVR-200

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- 5 X 70 WPC (ALL CHANNELS DRIVEN INTO 8 OHMS) • 2 X 90 WPC (BOTH CHANNELS DRIVEN, STEREO MODE) • D. DIGITAL AND DTS DECODING • DOLBY PRO LOGIC II DECODING • 5 X DIGITAL INPUTS (3 X CO-AXIAL AND 2 X OPTICAL) • 1 X DIG. OUTPUT (CO-AXIAL) • VIDEO SWITCHING FROM BOTH COMPOSITE AND S-VIDEO



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DV-89

DETAILS:

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- PAL & NTSC COMPATIBLE PLAYBACK SOUND & VISION



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- HOME CINEMA RECEIVER • HIGH POWER 6-CHANNEL DISCRETE AMPLIFIER CONFIGURATION (140W X 6 DDC; 90W X 6 RMS)
- DIGITAL TOP-ART • HIGH CURRENT AMPLIFICATION FOR HIGH SOUND QUALITY • COMPATIBILITY WITH LATEST MOVIE SOUND FORMATS INC. D. DIGITAL EX, DOLBY PRO LOGIC II, DTS-ES DISCRETE 6.1, AND DTS NEO:6



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RX-V540RDS

DETAILS:

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- DIGITAL TOP-ART • HIGH CURRENT AMP. • COMPATIBILITY WITH D. DIGITAL EX, DOLBY PRO LOGIC II, DTS-ES DISCRETE 6.1, AND DTS NEO:6
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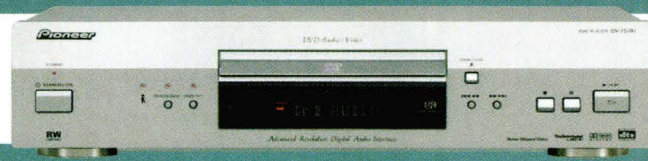
Pioneer

SOUND SYSTEMS

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- DOLBY DIGITAL & DTS DECODERS • PROGRESSIVE SCAN OUTPUT
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- 108MHZ / 12-BIT VIDEO DAC

PIONEER DV-7571

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- DOLBY DIGITAL-EX / THX SURROUND EX • DTS / DTS-ES DISCRETE 6.1 / DTS-ES MATRIX 6.1 / DTS NEO: 6 / DTS 96/24 • DOLBY PRO-LOGIC / DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2 • 6X1100W RMS POWER OUTPUT • 2 X DIGITAL COAXIAL INPUT • 2 X DIGITAL OPTICAL INPUT
- 1 X DIGITAL OPTICAL OUTPUT

PIONEER VSX-DB12

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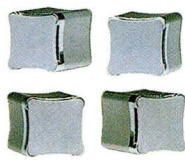


- THX ULTRA 2 CERTIFIED MULTI-CHANNEL AMPLIFIER • DOLBY DIGITAL-EX / THX SURROUND EX
- DTS-DTS-ES DISCRETE 6.1 DTS-ES, MATRIX 6.1 • DOLBY PRO-LOGIC & DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2
- 2 X I.LINK • 8 X DIGITAL INPUT • 3 X DIGITAL COAXIAL INPUT • 5 X OPTICAL DIGITAL INPUT
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PIONEER VSX-AX101

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DETAILS:

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HSP* £449.00

SONY DAV-S550

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DETAILS:

- PIONEER NS-DV1000 • DVD-VIDEO & DVD AUDIO
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- 10 BIT VIDEO D/A CONVERTER
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PIONEER NS-DV1000

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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.

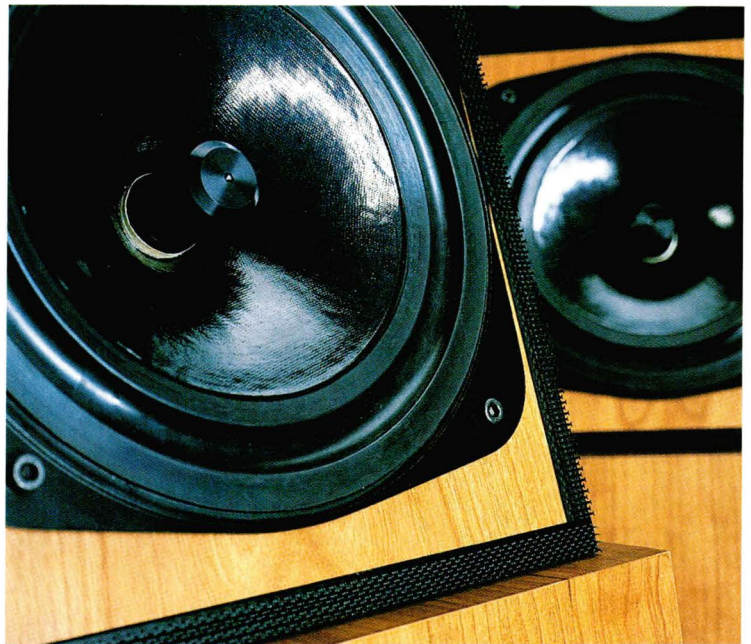
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. 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



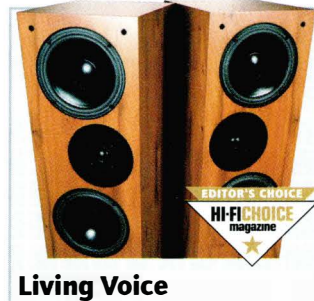
Tannoy
Sensys DC1 £449
A new dual-concentric main driver plus super-tweeter in a solid standmount box results in a neutral yet expressive speaker at a very tempting price.



Focal-JMLab
Cobalt 816 Sig S £999
One of the best all-round performers below £1,000, combining a lively and dynamic character with an unusually smooth and neutral balance.



B&W
703 £2,000
A hi-tech, three-way floorstander sporting a 'surroundless' midrange driver. Delivers a thoroughly engaging sound with great bass and an expressive midrange.



Living Voice
Avatar OBX-R2 £4,000
Newly revised for 2003, the top model in Living Voice's Auditorium range is capable of delivering both the music's spirit and also its finest detail.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	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
	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
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	B&W DM309	330	Much of the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●		235
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	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
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricy but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●		231
	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
	Energy Connoisseur C-5	600	Has a marvellously even and neutral overall balance, if a little too laid-back with restrained dynamic expression	20,95,37	●	A+	23	●		240
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816 S	999	Great all-rounder – lively and dynamic, smooth and neutral, marred only by a slight treble 'sting'	22,98,31	●	A-	25	●		242
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	Mission 782SE	900	Definitely one of the prettiest speakers around. Very even balance but could sound more exciting	17,80,30	●	A	35	●		242
	Monitor Audio Bronze B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight controlled bass and pronounced midband	18,5,35,25		A	42		●	238
	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
	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
	Monitor Audio Silver S10	1,000	Timing might be less than the best, but the full balance and fine dynamic range deliver plenty of detail.	20,100,27	●	A+	20	●		242
	MonoPulse 32	695	Very creative style and construction with an unusually vivid and communicative if less than smooth sound	21,98,23	●	A	30	●		245
	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20		A	30		●	211
	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		A	50	●		225
<input type="checkbox"/>	PMC DB1	555	Lacks a little weight and authority, but beautifully balanced, free from boxiness, and loads of fun for a tiny	16,29,24		A	50	●		240
<input type="checkbox"/>	PMC TB2	700	A worthy successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type for neutrality and transparency	20,41,31		A	30	●		211
	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40		●	233

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).

MISSION

Pioneer

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ANTHONY GALLO
ACOUSTICS

BOSE

DENON



N.A.D



YAMAHA

ARCAM



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SONY



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Our favourite EB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21	A-	30		●	223
	Spendor SR5	1,000	This wall-mount very cleverly avoids the usual colorations, delivering a very dynamic if rather dry sound	31,31,18	A+	50		●	240
EB	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25	●	A+	45	●	234
EB	Tannoy Sensys DC1	449	Modest sensitivity but beautifully balanced with fine authority at a very realistic price	21,41,29	A	40		●	245
	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricy but very cute wallmount miniature, oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17, 35, 26	A+			●	227
EB	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	A great-value speaker combining a super-tweeter and Dual Concentric drive unit at a real-world price	21,97,29	●	A	35	●	242
	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	●	A	20	●	231
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31	A	45	●		221
	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent, but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33	A-	65		●	219
EC	ATC Active 20	2,538	30k + 300W equals resolution and bass that most amp/speaker combinations dream about – a bargain	56,28,36	act	45	●		240
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48	A	38	●		218
	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28	A+	20	●		204
	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25	A	38	●		219
EC	B&O Beolab 5	10,000	Radical, environmentally independent active speaker has exceptional bass, neutrality, and imaging	49,97,49	●	n/a	<20	●	244
	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31	A	28		●	199
EC	B&W 703	2,000	Elegant floorstander with excellent bass drive and mid dynamic range, but slightly strong and obvious top end	23,101,36	●	A-	20	●	247
EB	B&W 704	1,400	Sleek and stylish two-and-a-half-way with deep, lively bass, sweet treble, and rather laid-back presence	22,96,32	●	A-	20	●	248
EC	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Gorgeous standmount sounds delicately transparent and laid back with very superior resolution and imaging	24,42,34	A	30		●	247
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art. Needs real power, but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	A-	34	●	183
EC	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	A-	34	●	186
EC	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●	231
	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	A-	40	●	204
	Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75	●	A+	80	●	244
EB	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	A	50	●	219
	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricy compared to some though	21,99,32	●	A+	38	●	229
	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear, but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	A	41	●	225
	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MKII	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29	A-	45	●		219
EB	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●	229
	Eclipse TD LuLét 307/316	1,250	Extraordinary satellite plus sub solution sounds a cut above other sub/sats. Can be expanded to multichannel	12,16,16.2	act	40	●		247
EC	Ferguson Hill FH001	6,853	Looks and sounds wonderful, with realistic dynamic expression, but needs careful amp matching and sub(s)	90,166,80	●	A+	180	●	242
EC	Focal-JMlab Micro Utopia	3,500	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38	A	50	●		245
EC	Focal-JMlab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37, 121, 53	●	A-	20	●	248
	Graves Audio Koronglay	1,999	Fast and very time-coherent, but rather bass-light and aggressive higher up – valve amps preferred	25,109,36	●	A+	45	●	247
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31	A	30		●	233
EB	Infinity Intermezzo 2.6	1,600	Bi-amp speaker sounds laid back and 'disappears' acoustically; highly enjoyable, looks and sounds great	25,38,29	A+	27	●	●	233
	Jamo D870	2,200	Handsome floorstander is a good basic communicator, though ultimately just a little 'cold' and 'shiny'	27,105,38	●	A-	20	●	247
	KEF Reference Model 205	4,000	Great looking speaker with a smooth, neutral and slightly 'cool' sound that could be tauter and more exciting	29,116,43	●	A-	20	●	245
	Leema Xen	1,000	A true micro-mini-monitor with remarkable powers of analysis and great musical insight, if a touch forward	14,22,23	A-	50		●	245



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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, though the top end is restrained and bass was uneven in our room	21.5,86,28	●	A-	30	●		247
E.C.	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	●	A+	40	●		218
E.C.	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	●	A+	35	●		244
E.C.	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●		245
E.C.	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15.38,22		act	45		●	214
	Mirage OM7	2,000	Warm, full and laid back Omni has weak stereo focus but brings the musicians into your room	30,115,16-39	●	A-	25	●		247
	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●		229
E.C.	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
E.C.	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
E.C.	Neat Ultimatum MFS	2,995	Wonderful five-driver standmount sounds bigger than it looks. Very spacious and informative, if a little bright	22,38,37		A+	25	●		241
E.C.	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20	●		226
	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
	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
E.C.	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
E.C.	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
E.C.	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
E.C.	Sonus Faber Cremona A	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32		A	48	●		246
	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
E.C.	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	A+	37	●		223
E.C.	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	30.5,85.5,30	●	A-	25	●		240
E.C.	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38	●		215
E.C.	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
E.C.	Totem Forest	2,390	Low sensitivity but wonderfully open neutrality, at heart a beautifully communicative and musical loudspeaker	19.5,90,27	●	A	25	●		247
	Triangle Zays 222	1,295	Wonderful freedom from time-smear gives invigorating and realistic dynamics, but colorations are also obvious	26,116,32	●	A	22	●		242
	Triangle Naia	1,900	Exciting, vivid and communicative, but also a bit untidy and uneven, the Naia is a whole lot of fun	23,119,32	●	A-	25	●		247
	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30		●	229
E.C.	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
E.C.	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 floorstanding 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 £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 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.



Mission
m5 package £1,450
A five-speakers-plus-sub package giving a strong performance with both music and film soundtracks. Excellent value.



Mirage
Omni 2 £2,650
Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

Our favourite BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	B&W 300	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●	241
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
	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
	Dynaudio Audience 42	1,142	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	5	53	●	241
	Focal-JMLab Cobalt	1,797	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	A	5	22	●	224
	Focal-JMLab Electra	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
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●	232
BT	Mission m5	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as does big bass for movie fans	A	6	28	●	241
	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
	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	20	●	210
	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
	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

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 BT BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

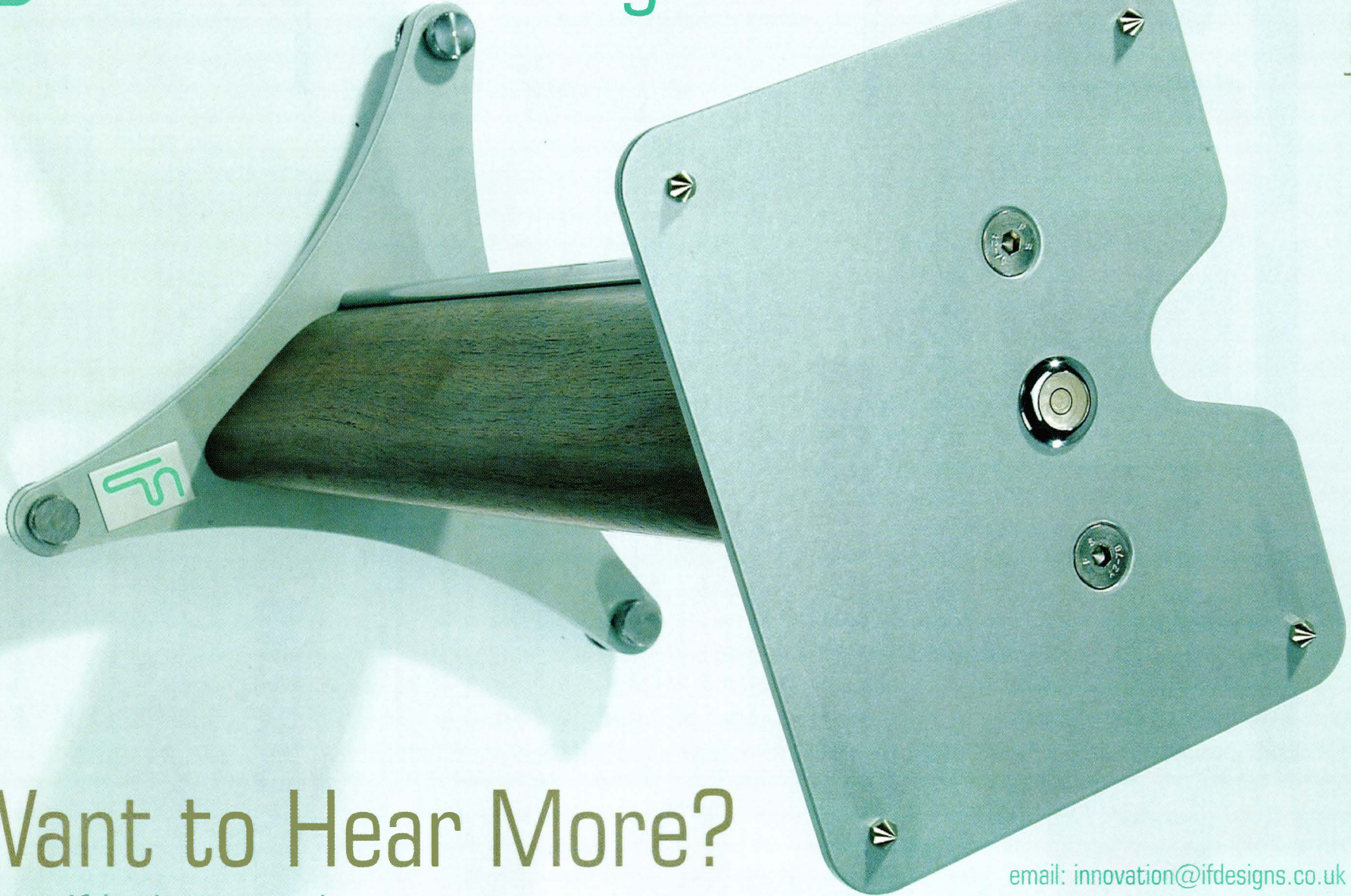
Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (HZ)	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
EC	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	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
	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
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59, 56, 39	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
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	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.

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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

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
	AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		●		●		190	●	205
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270		230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AKG K1000	550	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270		244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250		194
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise		●			●	200	●	230
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●		250	●	219
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stax System li	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205

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

 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables				SPECIFICATIONS				
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS					
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●		248
	DNM TBB75	75	Bass not always completely consistent, but sound has great clarity and insight		●	●		241
 	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
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●		241
 	Kimber Timbre	72	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●		248
 	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●		224
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●		211
 	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●		241
 	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 The Well	65	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●		241
 	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●		234
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
 	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●	E	241
 	van den Hul Optocoupler II	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 S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●		241
	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●		227
 	Electrofluidics 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●		241
 	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 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		227
 	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●		241
 	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 X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●		234
	QED X-Tube XT400	20	A practical cable with a liking for lively music, but slightly less assured with subtle classical grooves	●		●		248
	Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		203
 	Townshend Isolda DCT	150	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●		241
 	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●		248

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.

PRE-CHRISTMAS CLEARANCE!

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EALING 020 8566 4422
FARRINGDON 020 7329 7374
KINGSTON 020 8549 9999
LONDON 020 7403 1201
LONDON BRIDGE 020 7722 3359
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WESTEND
- BELFAST** 028 9032 1332
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- BOURNEMOUTH** 01202 720 380
- BRIGHTON** 01273 673 333
- BRISTOL** 0117 973 4397
- CAMBRIDGE** 01223 304 848
- CARDIFF** 0292 039 9988
- CHELtenham** 01242 572572
- CHESTER** 01244 400 102
- COLCHESTER** 01206 56 31 31
- COVENTRY** 024 7655 5959
- EDINBURGH** 0131 2263544
- EXETER** 01392 272 772
- GLASGOW** 0141 2265551
- GUILDFORD** 01483 489 222
- HULL** 01482 329 289
- LEEDS** RELOCATED 0113 245 5717
- LEICESTER** 0116 255 4656
- LIVERPOOL** 0151 708 7484
- MAIDSTONE** 01622 67 70 67
- MANCHESTER** 0161 773 0333
- MANCHESTER SOUTH** 0161 480 1700
- MIDDLESBROUGH** 01642 211 115
- MILTON KEYNES** 01908 608 908
- NEWCASTLE** 0191 230 1392
- NORWICH** 01603 620 860
- NOTTINGHAM** 0115 924 1551
- OXFORD** 01865 243 444
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MISSION M711i (black) **£80 OFF TSP**

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Picture Approximate

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WERE £89.95 Upgraded multi-region version available only £79.95

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£179.95 BRAND NEW BOXED

"A sound that's extremely big, rich and effortless, but at the same time manages to maintain high levels of detail and information... We like it!" - WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION magazine. **TSP £299.95**

STUNNING CD PLAYERS!



SONY SCDXE680 **£50 OFF TSP**

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!

£199.95 BRAND NEW BOXED

This astonishing CD player is also capable of playing SACDs, and exhibits breathtaking authority and scale in both modes of operation - and with a massive price reduction, too! **TSP £249.95**

SIZZLING DVD/CINEMA SYSTEMS!



SONY DAVS550 **£150 OFF TSP**

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!

£249.95 BRAND NEW BOXED

"Not only looks good, it performs brilliantly as well... This is a stunning product" - WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION magazine. **TSP £399.95** **WERE £349.95** **£399.95**

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EX-DISPLAY

This cracking plasma builds on the success of the reviewer's favourite, the MZ-42PZ10, about which *What Home Cinema* magazine wrote "We love it". The MZ-42PZ17 has significantly improved levels of brightness and contrast so that picture quality is better than ever. **OSP £3999.95**

SIZZLING DVD RECORDER DEALS!



Panasonic DMR-E50 **LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!**

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BRAND NEW BOXED

"The strength and depth of the colours makes movies jump out at you, while the precisely rendered detail provides startling clarity!" - *What Video* magazine. **TSP £449.95**

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Tuesday 23 rd December 10am - 7pm	Sunday 28 th 12pm - 4pm	Friday 2 nd January (Glasgow & Edinburgh)	10am - 7pm
Christmas Eve 10am - 2pm	Monday 29 th December 10am - 7pm	Saturday 3 rd January	10am - 4pm
Christmas Day	Tuesday 30 th December 10am - 7pm	Sunday 4 th January	10am - 7pm
Boxing Day 12pm - 4pm	New Year's Eve 10am - 4pm	Sunday 4 th January	12pm - 4pm

All stores are open on Sundays 12-4pm from Sunday 23rd November 2003 until Sunday 4th January 2004 and Wednesdays from 3rd December until Wednesday 31st December. From Monday 5th January all stores revert to normal opening times.



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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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66.46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50.50	●	4	Glass	217
●	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoscheif	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
●	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
●	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab appearance, but good sound and efficient use of space	74	48.40		4	Metal	247
	Isoblu 'The Stand'	460	Attractive modular design that's as easy on the ear as on the eye	47	48.40		4	MDF	247
●	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45.34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54.49		4	Torlyte	240
●	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50.40		5	Glass	217
●	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
●	Townshend Seismic Stand II	1,140	multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58, 45		5	MDF	240

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
●	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18	●		3	202
	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
●	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
	Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
●	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17,15	●	●	5	220
	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	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 (different configurations are often available). 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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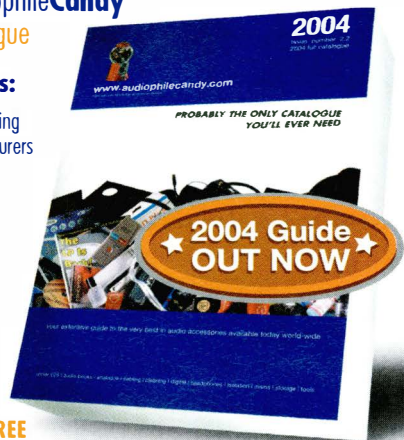
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For this special Awards issue we've rounded up some of the best mains-related products available, which can help improve your system's power supply. Giving your system a stable, clean mains supply will help all your components to function at their best.

Whatever your budget there is an easy way to improve your system's supply. You could install the HFC Award-winning IsoTek Mini Sub at £495, or try improving signal transfer with Caig's DeoxIT at just under £14. Protecting disused outputs with Cardas Caps and installing a good quality mains cable will also increase your system's performance.

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Key Features

- Improves the performance of your entire audio or AV system in one go
- Protects against dangerous power surges and spikes
- Convenient rack-width case



IsoTek Mini Sub

Mains filters could be said to have come of age with the new IsoTek Mini Sub complete mains solution. This convenient rack-width unit utilises technology seen in its bigger brother,

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The Mini Sub is a plug-and-play solution that will not only improve your audio but also an entire AV system. Unlike some other mains products, the IsoTek Mini Sub stops component-to-component cross-contamination, ensuring that all your equipment has the clean supply essential for high quality viewing or listening. Mini Sub also protects against dangerous power surges and mains spikes, and is ideal for all audio or home entertainment systems.

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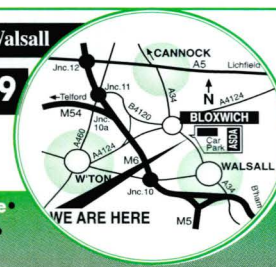
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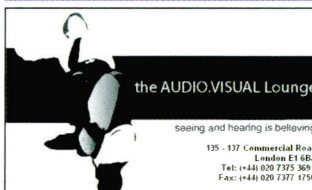
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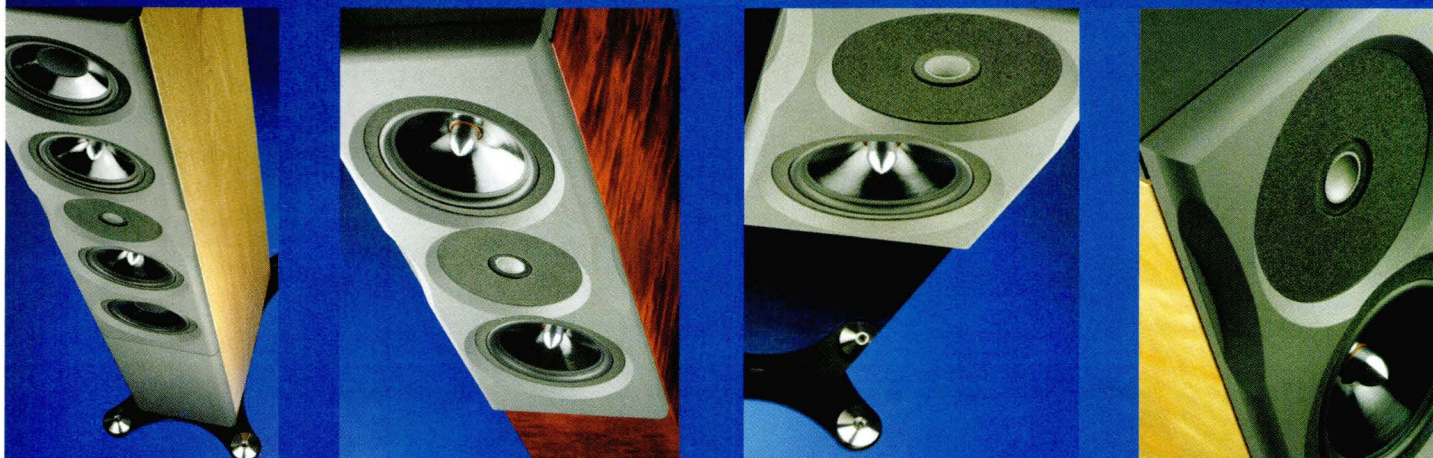
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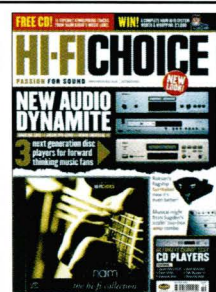
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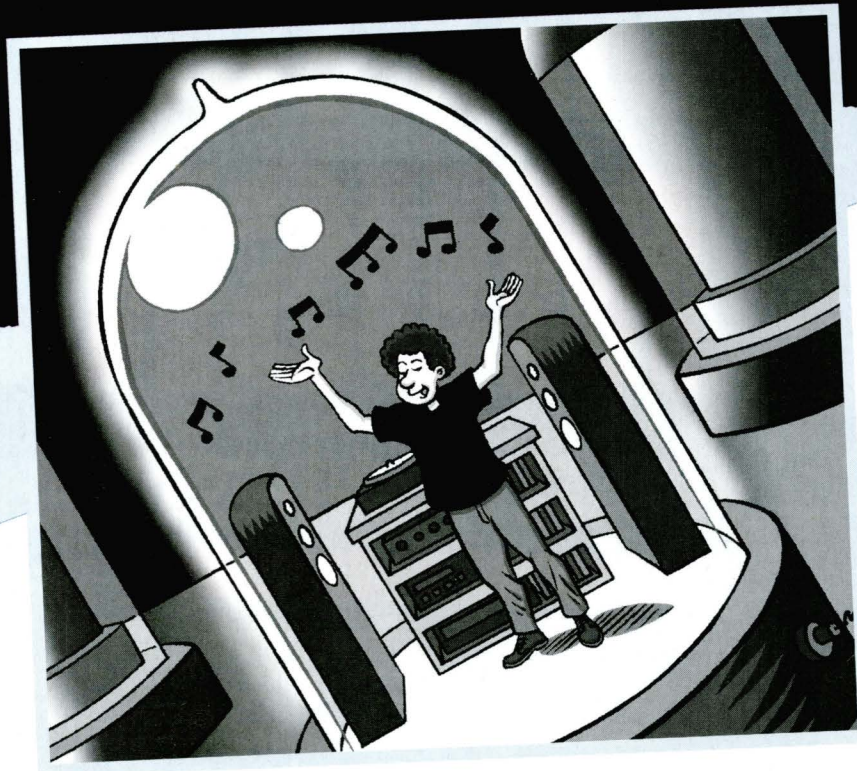
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HI-FI EXTREME



“Valve amps can’t compete with the grunt offered by transistors, right? Wrong.”

de Paravacini, it doesn't have to be like that.

Tim explains: “The problem is most people use traditional valve amplifier circuitry, and perpetuate the same mistakes. It's not the valve that has the ‘sound’, it's the collection of components that go with the valve – the transformers, the capacitors, the whole thing. When I designed the EAR 509 over 20 years ago (or the 3045 for Lux) I wanted a valve amplifier that sounded very close to a transistor amplifier. And that's what I made. It's also possible to make transistor amplifiers sound like ‘typical’ valve amplifiers.

“I made this Yoshino 30-amp, 30-watt single-ended transistor amp with just two transistors – one big output transistor and one little driver transistor. That was it, the rest was transformers. It was expensive to make but the circuitry was utterly simple. Blindfolded, no-one would know the difference between that and an equivalent valve amplifier.

“Designers brought up on transistors don't know the electronic fundamentals of valves. When they try to do it as an analogy, they get the analogies wrong because they have to realise that, if you include MOSFETs, there are three different operating principles. You have to find their equivalence – and most people don't understand that. Consequently, that's why the sounds are different rather than the valve having a ‘sound’ per se.”

Tim's point is supported by the increasing number of valve amps that sound as fast, clean and grippy as the best high-end transistors. What about power, then? Valve amps can't compete with the grunt offered by transistors, right? Wrong. De Paravacini has made 200-watt and 500-watt power amps. “More power?” says Tim, “Use more valves in parallel. It's the same as a car engine – the same as having more cylinders, basically.”

Enjoy the valve advantage while you can. Like Concorde, they won't be around forever. **HFC**

Valvelicious

David Vivian reckons valve amps are misunderstood

So here's the thing. Valve amps are back in the chair and sitting comfortably. They never actually left the room, of course. Wandered around in some dimly lit corners for a while where only the most dedicated tube-ophiles could find them. Curled up in front of the fire for, well, ages and were branded slipper-'n'-coco hi-fi by the transistor brigade. But give up their claim to the sonic high ground? Not a chance. The valve might be 100 years old but many believe completely in its superiority over the solid state alternatives. It is the very embodiment of hi-fi extreme.

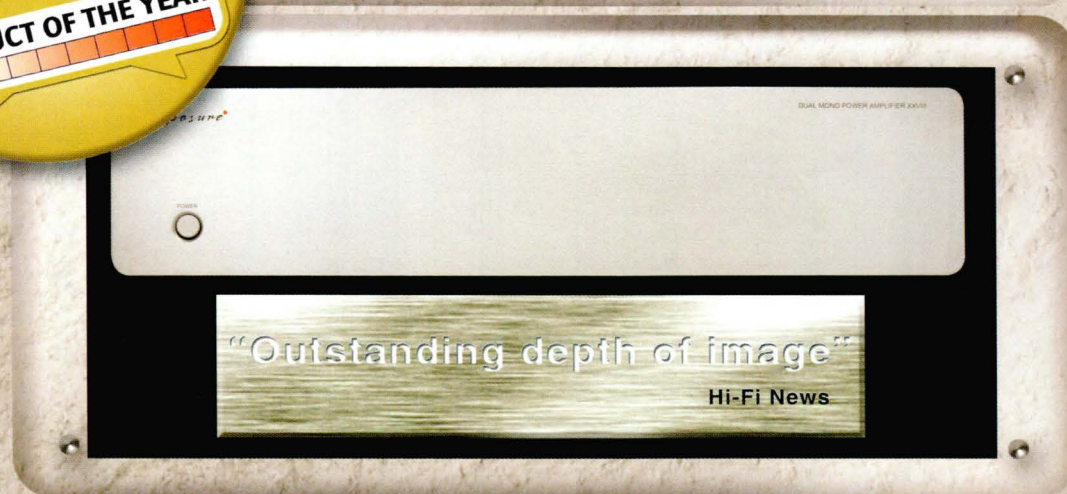
And, when you consider its natural advantages, perhaps it isn't hard to see why. First, valves achieve good high-frequency power effortlessly. Not for nothing are most radio and television transmitters valved. There simply aren't any high-powered transistors that work at FM's 100MHz and television's 500-800MHz band. In fact, if you're talking about outputs of tens of kilowatts, transistors are rather pathetic,

throwing in the towel well before 1mHz, whereas just about any power valve can operate out to 50mHz without breaking sweat. MOSFETs do better than ordinary transistors but are still no match for the old glass tube.

So valves get off to the best possible start, and that's crucial. You don't have to apply a lot of corrective effort (high-feedback, high-precision topologies) to make them work well. A valve amp, because of its greater simplicity, has fewer imperfections in the hearing range that matters most. The distortions in high-spec transistor amps tend to have a lot of high-order harmonics that bother us but lower levels of classic distortion (second and third harmonic) to which we're actually quite tolerant. With a valve amp, it's the other way round.

And yet it's valve sound that's often typified as being ‘characterful’: warm and friendly; soft at the bottom, soft at the top; very listenable but lacking guts and drive. But, according to legendary amp designer and valve acolyte Tim

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