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HI-FI CHOICE

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ULTIMATE GROUP TEST CD PLAYERS

FEATURING...

- > Arcam DiVA CD93T
- > Hegel CDP2A
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- > Monrio Asty PL/HP
- > Cyrus CD8/PSX-R
- > Roksan Caspian M
- > Densen B-400 Plus
- > Thule CD150B



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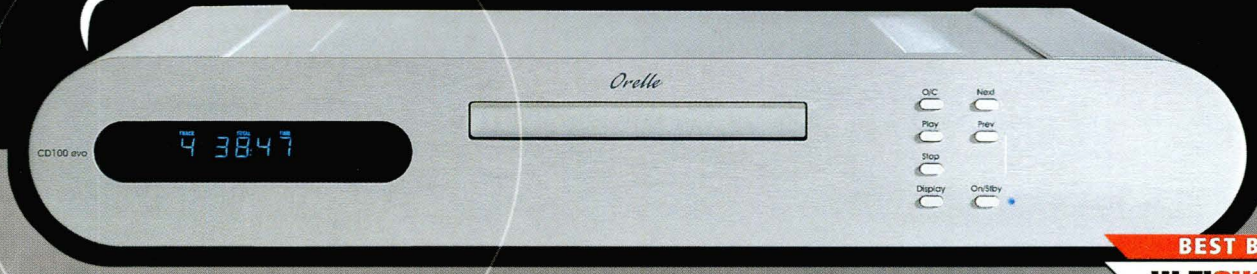
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▶ "Timing is exquisitely tight, whatever the material being played, the resolution bandwidth and dynamic range is unusually wide, and the overall sonic character has a fine natural sweetness and transparency." *Hi-Fi Choice, December 2003*



CD100evo - CD Player



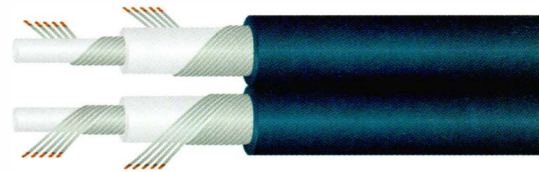
▶ "Information retrieval and stereo sound staging are two of the most important aspects of any true hi-fi system, and these are what Orelle does best." *Hi-Fi Choice, May 2003*

SA100evo - Amplifier

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HI-FI CHOICE

APRIL 2004 ISSUE 252

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



JASON KENNEDY

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



PAUL MILLER

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



ALVIN GOLD

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



DAVID VIVIAN

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

If music is a jet plane, hi-fi is its engine. From data to drive unit, soundwave to cerebrum, it propels its cargo direct to the pleasure centres of your brain. Without good hi-fi, the energy and emotion of recorded music is diminished, the authenticity of its sound shrunk and shrivelled. It becomes a poor facsimile of its original self, drained of its ability to soar and reach its intended emotional destination. But good hi-fi gets you there, first class, every time.

Such passions drive us in our quest to unearth the world's finest hi-fi, so we may share our experiences with you as we listen, measure and compare. Not for us the quick-hit review which says so little, or the rambling diatribe with no discernible conclusion – we live this life for the love of music, our continued intention to publish a journal with depth and substance, yet one that's also smart, useful and easy to navigate.

To this end, we continue to evolve. You may have noticed this issue's larger size and glossier front cover. And you can't have failed to find your free Linn Records CD, exclusive to *Hi-Fi Choice*. It's packed with beautifully recorded music that makes a great tool for hi-fi auditions, as well as a rewarding listening experience.

Then there's all the kit that nestles within this issue's pages. Naim's latest starlets, a superb amp from Burmester and speakers from Wilson Benesch, plus a thorough comparison of Pioneer's latest universal players, complete with new digital interfaces that will transform high-fidelity sound and vision. Plus the most rigorous group test of CD players you'll find anywhere in the world, and plenty more besides. So have fun – see you next issue..



Tim Bower **editor**

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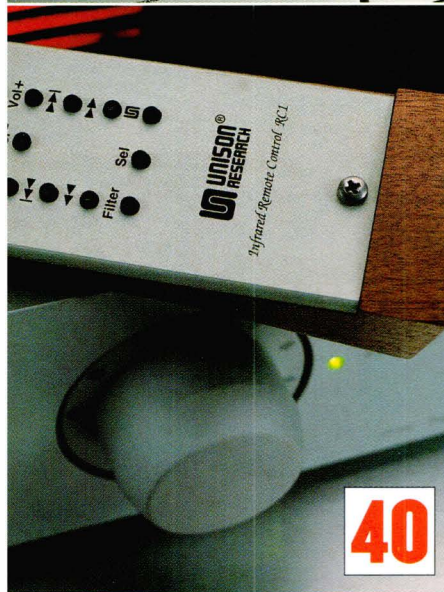
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EST. 1975
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 29 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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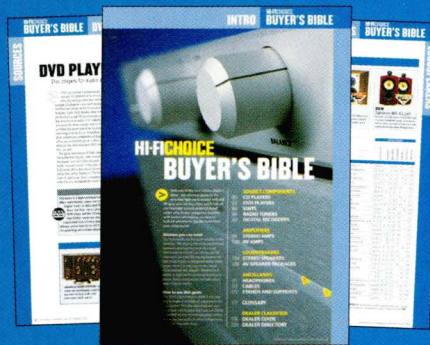
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The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV – our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...



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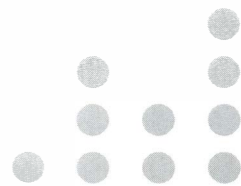
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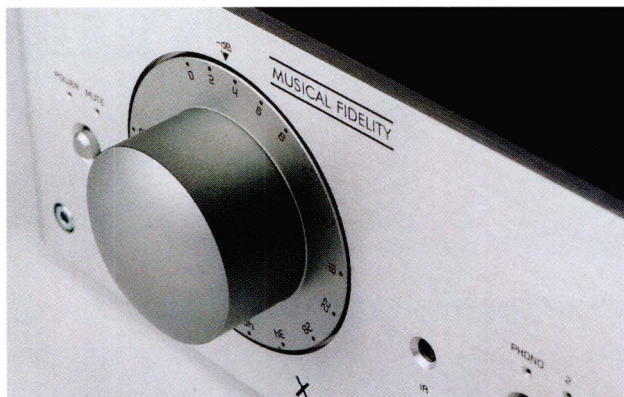
DO-IT-ALL UNIDISK

NEW UNIVERSAL PLAYER WITH INTEGRATED PROCESSING FROM LINN

Linn's latest universal disc player is almost ready to roll, this time complete with integrated multichannel processing and control – enabling direct connection to a multichannel amplifier. The Unidisk SC features Linn's Silver Disk Engine technology that automatically recognises the disc format before optimising the player and outputting the signal in its native format. The internal processing offers decoding

for the latest audio formats, including SACD and DVD-Audio, plus matrix surround processing for secondary stereo sources. For video, the Unidisk SC boasts progressive scan and video switching and supports a variety of interface control options. It's expected in the shops late March/April, when pricing will also be confirmed. Expect an HFC review soon...

☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk



SEXY M.F.

COMPACT AMPS FROM MUSICAL FIDELITY

Musical Fidelity has unveiled a pair of compact integrated amps to join its revamped X-series. Just 18cm wide, the amps are said to derive from the upmarket Tri-Vista series and use a custom-made extrusion with aluminium faceplate and fitments. The X-80 (£600) is rated at 40 watts per channel, with the X-150 (£800) putting out 80 watts.

Features include a dual-gang analogue volume control, high-output transistors for each channel on the output stage and three line inputs plus a phono stage. The X-series amplifiers will go on sale in the UK in March, with a CD player and tuner set to follow.

☎ 020 8900 2866 🌐 www.musicalfidelity.com

MONSTER AMP

BIG, SCARY, 250 WATT MONSTERS

Monster, the popular cable maker has broken away from its core business and unveiled not one, but two extremely interesting new power amplifiers. Details are so far limited on the two-channel model (MPA 2250), but we do know that the flagship three-channel amplifier (MPA 3250, pictured below) boasts 250 watts per channel with independent power supplies for each channel. Further features include MOSFET output transistors, lab-grade digital power meters to monitor output power and a Monster PowerLine mains lead. UK pricing is unconfirmed, but US retail is around \$3,000.

☎ 01923 431634 🌐 www.monstercable.com



CINEMA PREVIEW

DENON AVR-3803 RECEIVER SET FOR REPLACEMENT

A new feature-packed multichannel receiver from Denon is due to replace the popular AVR-3803 (Best Buy in *HFC* 239) in April. The new AVR-3805 will sell for just under £1,000 and offer technologies such as Auto Room EQ, FireWire and Denon Link inputs, and new higher-grade DSPs. Comprehensive audio decoding algorithms include the new 96kHz DTS Neo:6 and the unit is said to feature upgraded styling and build quality. Stay tuned to *Hi-Fi Choice* for more details.

☎ 01234 741 200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

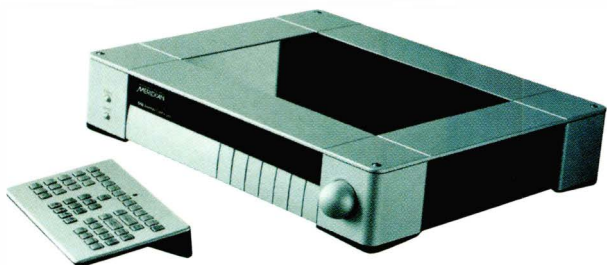


audiofile
PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites



KEF has released a one-box home theatre system comprising a DVD player and 2.1 speakers capable of providing pseudo surround. The KEF Instant Theatre system (KIT) uses two front speakers employing KEF's Uni-Q drivers with an NXT panel mounted behind to create a 'virtual rear effect'. The main drivers create a phantom centre image while the NXT panels are fed the rear channel information, relying on reflected sound to create a rearward image. Bass is provided by the 250mm driver in KEF's subwoofer that also accommodates the five amplification channels. The natty little DVD player also manages to house an AM/FM radio and decoding for the major audio formats. It costs £1,200. ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.co.uk



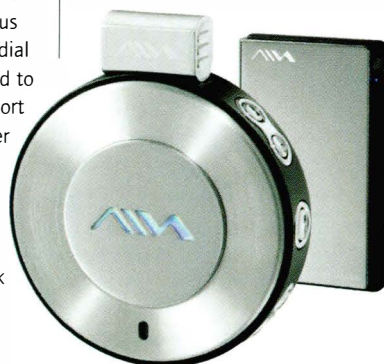
GO 2 MERIDIAN MEET THE PHAT CONTROLLER

The latest component to join Meridian's new G-Series range is a balanced dual mono control unit called the G02. It acts as both preamp and control unit for integration with the Meridian's G-Series power amps, and is said to offer ultra

low noise from an "extremely high quality power supply". The G02 unit provides seven two-channel analogue inputs and is set to go on sale at the reasonable sounding price of £1,750. ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

AIWA OF LIFE AIWA EMBRACES PC AUDIO

Aiwa is launching a range of USB Audio products in the UK. Designed for use with a PC, the portable range includes a wearable MP3 player, credit card-sized hard disk player and storage media. All products connect via a USB port for data transferral and Aiwa plans a series of high-quality USB speakers to match. A key product in the range is the Pavit hard disk audio player, which offers 2Gb of storage from a card-sized device just 10.6cm tall. Available in the UK in March, the products will also be able to store non-music data files like text and pictures, increasing their flexibility. ☎ 0870 168 9000 🌐 www.aiwa.com

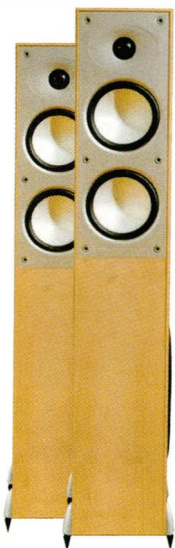


DENSEN has taken the principles of the DeMagic CD player demagnetising disc to the multichannel world. The new DVDMagic disc works using the same DeMagic technology, but this time in 5.1 surround, cleaning the entire signal path of magnetism. It's available from *Choice Bits* (p116) for £19.95. 🌐 www.densen.com

QED is launching a new interconnect cable to celebrate its 30th anniversary. The Qunex 3 has been designed for specialist line-level applications including DVD-A/SACD and uses silver-plated OFC conductors in a dual balanced design. The wires are screened with Mylar foil and a woven braid, all wrapped in transparent PVC. Priced at £40 for a one-metre pair, the Qunex 3 cable comes complete with gold-plated Qunex phono plugs. You can get a set free by subscribing to *Hi-Fi Choice* this month – see page 78 for this not-to-be-missed offer! ☎ 01483 747474 🌐 www.qed.co.uk

MORDAUNT-SHORT is integrating the new driver technology in its Avant speakers (see main story) into its Premier and Premier Plus sub/sats. The little satellites now come with 90mm CPC drivers and re-voiced crossovers. Pricing starts at £400. ☎ 020 7940 2200 🌐 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

AVANT NEW SPEAKERS NEW CONES FOR MORDAUNT-SHORTS



Details of Mordaunt-Short's new Avant 900 speaker range have finally been confirmed. There will be two standmounts, the MS902 (£150) and MS904 (£250), plus two floorstanders, the MS904 (£350) and MS908 (£500). A centre speaker and bipolar rears complement the four main speakers in the series. At the heart of the six-strong range lies M-S's latest incarnation of its proprietary continuous profile cone (CPC) drivers. The new drivers have radial ribbing on the cone edge plus a new surround, said to reduce break-up and improve timing. Mordaunt-Short continues to use a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter across the range with a revoiced crossover controlling both drive units.

The Avant models will debut in the UK at the Bristol Sound and Vision show.

☎ 020 7940 2200 🌐 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

⊕ **Soundbites**

MINISTRY OF SOUND is back with an innovative new audio product range, Space, that includes the world's first DAB micro system. The cube-shaped system features a DAB/FM tuner, CD player and backlit LCD display with CD and station information. Also in the range, a portable desk top radio boasts the same DAB features as the micro system, and a personal CD/MP3 player completes the line-up.
 www.ministryofsound.com/audio

ARTCOUSTIC of Denmark has a new multi-purpose speaker called the **Diablo C-1**, said to be equally at home in professional and domestic environments. The floorstanding towers are the exact height of a 42in plasma screen and can be installed both vertically and horizontally.
 www.artcoustic.com



PMC has a new centre channel speaker designed specifically to work with its OB1 floorstander and TLE1 active subwoofer. The three-way CB6 (above) uses the same midrange drive unit as the OB1 (a 75mm soft dome), plus a 170mm fabric bass driver. The cabinet is made from Medite, veneered inside and out, and as with all PMC models incorporates a transmission line system that is said to offer a full octave more bass than an identical driver in a ported box. It's priced at £1,450.
 0870 444 1044

Hi-Fi diary

FEBRUARY

20-22 **Sound and Vision**
 The Bristol Show
 Marriott Hotel, Bristol
 01242 239 839
 www.bristolshow.co.uk
 A major UK hi-fi show

MAY

20-23 **High End 2004**
 Munich, Germany
 The dog's danglies at the former Frankfurt show

JUNE

1-4 **Cedia Expo 2004**
 ICC, Birmingham
 01462 627377
 Custom install showcase

SEPTEMBER

24-26 **The Hi-Fi Show and AV Expo**
 Heathrow, London
 020 8774 0847
 London's established hi-fi show

MINIDISC SOLDIERS ON

SUFFERING FORMAT GETS A BOOST WITH 1GB CAPACITY

⊕ Sony is attempting to revive its flagging MiniDisc format by increasing storage capacity to 1GB and offering image and text file recording capability. Using Sony's new Hi-MD hardware, the extra capacity can be achieved by formatting a regular MiniDisc into the Hi-MD format. In addition, a 1GB Hi-MD disc has been developed, offering a maximum recording time of 45 hours at 48kbps, using the latest version of the ATRAC codec. Sony claims its new 'ATRAC3plus' processing for Hi-MD offers high quality sound, even under high compression. Hi-MD will also enable linear PCM recording that should result in CD-quality playback.

The discs will be formatted in FAT (File Allocation Table), similar to a PC hard drive – allowing storage of audio, text and images. Hi-MD will retain backwards compatibility with existing hardware and a new range of portable Hi-MD Walkmans will be available in the spring.

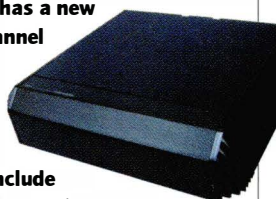
08705 111999 www.sony.co.uk



BUILDING BLOCKS

ECS LAUNCHES NEW MONOBLOCK

⊕ London-based amp specialist ECS has a new monoblock to join its EA2 two-channel amp. The new 22kg EA1 (£3,000) shares the same colossal power transformer – a bespoke 1500VA component helping to deliver around 180 watts of power. Internal features include custom PCBs, pure silver wiring and WBT terminals.
 020 8743 8880



GOING BACKWARDS

NEW TURNTABLE TO DECIPHER BACKMASKING

⊕ Specialist turntable newcomer Natas Sound is celebrating the current rock music and vinyl resurgence by releasing a new turntable with a trick up its sleeve. The new Pentagon turntable has a reversible motor that enables rock fans to play their favourite albums backwards to enjoy those colourful satanic messages.

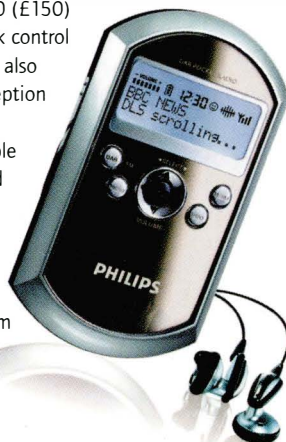
Until the Pentagon, back-spinning vinyl has been the preserve of club DJs using Technics 1210 decks. The Pentagon uses a carbon arm fitted with the Natas triple-six cartridge. Artists with backmasked tracks include Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin and The Beatles.

020 7317 2497
 www.hellosweetnatas.com

PHILIPS DAB TO GO

FIRST BIG-BRAND PORTABLE DAB TUNER

⊕ Philips is the first big-name brand to launch a portable DAB radio. The DA1000 (£150) weighs just 100g and features a joystick control and backlit LCD display. The device can also tune into ten FM stations based on reception quality and offers 20 DAB/FM station presets. Ten hours of playback is available from two rechargeable AA batteries and the unit will also work from the mains. Other features include signal strength indicator, carry pouch and six EQ settings for music on the move.
 0870 900 9070 www.philips.com



Densen

LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BORING HI-FI



Lifetime warranty??

My name is Morten Nielsen. I have been responsible for sales and marketing here at Densen for a couple of years now. Being in contact with customers worldwide, I am constantly asked why we don't have a cheap plastic remote, obviously I popped this question to our Head Honcho Thomas Sillesen, who furiously replied "a plastic remote ??? You must be out of your f..... head Morten!!! We don't make plastic remotes, we only make what we can take pride in! For me a plastic remote is a total turnoff, no matter what other people might say... The next thing people would suggest would be that we should give up on our life long warranty just because we could earn more money! Let me make this clear once and for all; we are not here to become the richest or the biggest audio manufacturer in the world, but we do intend to be the best." After that statement I thought it might be the perfect chance to finally get him to approve that I used the **lifetime warranty** as a statement in our ads, so I popped the magic question, but he just replied: "That's nothing to market. If you believe in your product, it is just one of those things you do out of pride of your workmanship, not something to write ads about, but if it can stop your persistent nagging of me, go ahead and make my day... Even though I don't understand why it is so important news, after all it has been like that since day one in 1992 here at Densen! And when that is said, please leave me alone, so I can develop some new products...!"

Having finally gotten Thomas' permission, I can now make it official what has been an official secret for years. We stand by our products, and give a **lifetime warranty** to the first purchaser of each of our products. You can read more about our warranty and Densen on our website www.densen.com

Densen • Lundevej 10 • 6705 Esbjerg Ø • Denmark
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Tel. 01482 587397

COMPUTER-FREE MUSIC DOWNLOADS ON THE WAY

Soon you will be able to download from online music services without having to go near a computer. AnyMusic has been formed by Sharp, Sony, Pioneer and Kenwood with the aim of giving domestic hi-fi the ability to access online music from the LabelGate store. New systems from these brands will feature a large-scale display to enable the selection of tracks and hard disk drives to store it. At present most LabelGate titles are selected to appeal to the Japanese Market but AnyMusic CEO Fujio Noguchi has ambitions to give the system worldwide appeal: "Our dream is to make the service a world-wide



standard". Details of suitable hardware have not yet been made public but it is understood that they will feature 13in displays and conventional CD drives.

FORTRESS EUROPE

In a possible blow to consumer choice, internet music retailer CD Wow has made an out-of-court agreement with the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) not to sell CDs purchased outside of the EEC to British and Irish customers. The effect will be to raise the price of top 75 titles by £2. Previously, CD Wow sourced its supplies from record companies outside Europe but will now have to change to European suppliers.

Director Phillip Robinson said, "We got our CDs from wherever we

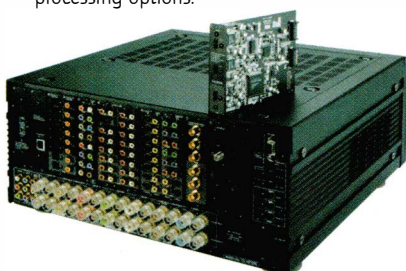


could, but they were always record company product and legitimate. There was never any question of piracy". He also stated that the company had decided to settle because it is a small business that could ill afford to take the case to the Court of Appeal or the European Court. The BPI is also investigating online retailer Amazon.com to see whether it is importing CDs from North America. A spokesman said, "If we find a net retailer is importing music from outside Europe, then they are infringing copyright law".

DIGITALLY CONNECTED

January's CES show in Las Vegas revealed that a number of big players are following Pioneer's lead in offering digital connections for the latest audio and video formats. Onkyo's first FireWire-equipped AV controller, the TX-NR1000, accepts direct digital connection from its DV-SP1000 SACD/DVD-A player. It also sports HDMI in and outputs for digital connection of video and audio signals from players and to video displays/power amps. There's even an Ethernet option. Meanwhile, Panasonic's DVD-S97 DVD-Audio/Video

player can deliver six channels of 24-bit/96kHz data to its matching SA-XR70 receiver, while Meridian's VE12 card for its flagship 800 series DVD player offers HDMI transmission and Faroudja DCDi de-interlacing among a range of video processing options.



INTEGRATED BASS

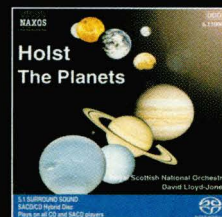
Wilson Benesch has completed feasibility studies on a new infra-sonic drive system, with the aim of developing a sub-bass speaker that is both better performing and more competitively priced than others. WB hopes to eliminate the basket element that is integral to all current bass units by building the subwoofer's chassis so that it forms a structure for the driver to work within. WB has modified the motor and magnet system to give a claimed 7dB increase in output and plans to build its cabinets without a slice of MDF in sight.

FIVE-CHANNEL NAXOS

Classical music specialist Naxos is joining the high resolution fray with plans to release two SACD titles a month.

Each disc will contain a full five-channel surround track alongside a stereo version. The label also plans to bring DVD-A titles to the UK.

Released so far are *Holst The Planets* and *Mystic Trumpeter* with Clare Rutter, and *Rachmaninov Piano Concertos No. 2 and 3* with Konstantin Scherbakov.



NEW HYBRID DISC FORMAT

DualDisc, the new hybrid disc format to rival SACD went on sale to test



markets in Seattle and Boston this month. DualDisc is a dual-sided format with a 16-bit/44.1kHz CD layer on one side, and DVD content on the other, with the option of including high-resolution DVD-Audio. The discs will play on both DVD players and regular CD players, including PC drives and game consoles.

The format has been backed by the big five record labels, including SACD-backer Sony Music. Thirteen test discs priced at \$18.99 (around £10) include artists such as REM, David Bowie and AC/DC.

BELOW
FRESCO CENTER / REAR CHANNEL
MOSAIC LOUDSPEAKERS
GROTTO SUB WOOFER

LEFT
PRODIGY LOUDSPEAKER

BOTTOM
CLARITY LOUDSPEAKER



MARTIN LOGAN

EYE TO EAR CO-ORDINATION

ABSOLUTE SOUNDS' commitment to Martin Logan has been rewarded with a line of hybrid electrostatic speakers so comprehensive that it now encompasses every permutation of home theatre and audiophile performance, and a price band from entry-level to cutting edge. Because of their sheer beauty - both aural and visual - the Statement Evolution 2, Prodigy, Odyssey, Ascent i, Aeon i and Clarity have established hybrid electrostatic technology as the obvious choice for those who want state-of-the-art sound without suffering a profusion of ugly boxes.



All of the speakers are immediately recognisable as Martin Logan products because of the peerless, oft-imitated, room-friendly appearance, with the captivating see-through panels and furniture grade finish. Best of all, the sound is as clear as the panels themselves. This year, in recognition of its astonishing performance and sensible price, the Clarity - the 'baby' of the line - won the coveted EISA award, proving that the Martin Logan look and the sound are acknowledged across Europe.

For the new season, Martin Logan has applied its years of experience to even smaller, room-friendlier systems suitable for a wider range of applications, by launching a second hybrid technology called ATF. Martin Logan had already demonstrated its skills with home theatre applications with the Theater i and Cinema i centre-channel models, the Script i main and surround speakers, the awesome Descent self-powered subwoofer and its baby sister, the Depth.

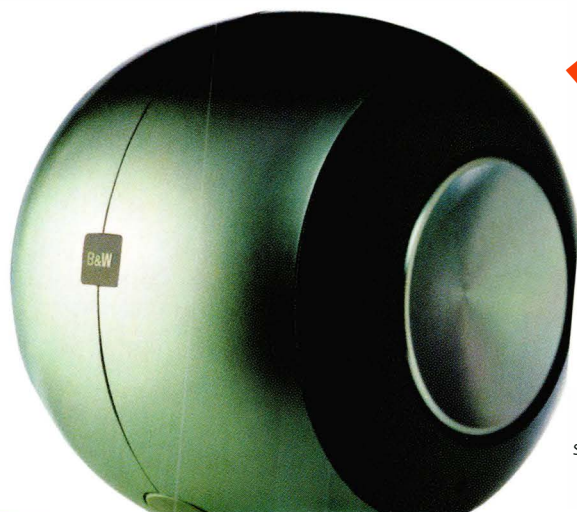
Thanks to ATF, an even wider audience can savor the Martin Logan experience. The ultra-compact Fresco hybrids can be used horizontally or vertically, wall- or shelf-mounted above or to the sides of plasma or other flat-screen display, while the Mosaic and Montage floor-standing models have the look of a 'baby Clarity'. Even the subwoofer's size has been addressed: the new ATF designs work wonderfully with the Grotto, literally a miniature Depth!



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

audiofile

CES SHOW 2004



◀ B&W PV1

What is it? Powered subwoofer
When is it available? April 2004
Price? £950

Why are we excited? It looks like a toy, but pick it up and you'll soon realise your mistake. PV stands for Pressure Vessel, and this is a sealed sub with two 200mm drivers operating in opposition and driven by a 500-watt Class D amplifier, the shape being inherently stiff and stable in this application.



MYRYAD MX RANGE ▲

What is it? Flagship stereo and AV range
When is it available? End February 2004
Price? £800-£3,000 per component
Why are we excited? This new range, shown in prototype form, includes source components, integrated and power amps, and a digital preamp/processor. The components feature improved industrial design, enhanced circuit design and modular upgradeable power amps.

LAS VEGAS HOT 10!

CES SHOW REPORT 8-11 JANUARY 2004

Las Vegas played host once again to the world's largest consumer electronics show. Here are the hi-fi highlights...



DENON DVD-1Z, AVP-1X, POA-1X ▲

What are they? Flagship universal transport, processor/control unit and multichannel digital power amplifier
When will they be available? Early 2005
Price? Around £25,000 for the lot
Why are we excited? All-digital system which makes the most of recently developed technologies like HDMI and Denon Link 'high-band' connections.

MISSION ELEGANTE ▶

What is it? Loudspeaker range
When is it available? Feb-Apr 2004
Price? 5.1 channel systems from £2,490
Why are we excited? The first truly new speaker from Mission since the Pilaastro flagship draws on Pilaastro technology, with superb wide dispersion sandwich enclosures finished in anthracite piano gloss. The range is explicitly voiced for both hi-fi and home cinema.



SME M2 ▶

What is it? Turntable tonearm

When is it available? End February 2004

Price? From £583

Why are we excited? SME is one of the world's most respected manufacturers of tonearms, and this new, 'affordable' entry-level arm comes in eight, ten and 12-inch versions covering virtually all turntable requirements. All have a stainless steel arm tube and a detachable magnesium headshell with azimuth adjust.



KRELL RESOLUTION ▶

What is it? Loudspeaker range

When is it available? April 2004 (except subwoofer, expected Autumn)

Cost? £2,945-£8,998 per pair

Why are we excited? The entry-level Resolution range brings Krell's LAT-series tech a little closer to 'mainstream' prices.

AUDIO NOTE ONGAKU ◀

What is it? Integrated valve amplifier

When is it available? May 2004

Price? £29,500

Why are we excited? The original Ongaku single-ended Class A was one of the finest valve amps ever made. Its new namesake has a lot to live up to.



TEAC UX-1 ▼

What is it? Universal disc player

When is it available? Spring 2004

Price? Around £10,000

Why are we excited? This DVD-Audio/Video/SACD/CD player has the potential, on paper at least, to be a total knockout. It uses a superb new VRDS mechanism and has the ability to accept an externally generated clock (also available from Teac). Can't wait.



SONUS FABER STRADIVARI ▲

What is it? Loudspeaker

When is it available? End February 2004

Price? £22,000 per pair

Why are we excited? Five years in gestation, this promises to be the Italian speaker specialist's best-ever design.



LINN ARTIKULAT ▼

What is it? Active loudspeaker range

When is it available? April 2004

Price? TBA

Why are we excited? A delightful surprise: the Artikulat speakers on dem at CES, with internal Chakra power amplification, produced some of the best sounds ever heard from a Linn system. They're exquisitely packaged, too – we can't wait to get our hands on a pair.

ALSO WORTH WAITING FOR... PHILIPS IPRONTO TSI Billed by its maker as "the ultimate intelligent system controller/internet access point"

FOCAL-JMLAB SUB UTOPIA Massive subwoofer rounds off Utopia Be range MARANTZ SA-14 Two-channel SACD player with everything going for it... except for the final

3.1 channels! MERIDIAN C SERIES Looking more delicious by the day, now featuring a new system controller THETA SIX SHOOTER Multichannel analogue preamp for

DVD-Audio/SACD, links to Theta digital processors/controllers CLASSÉ RANGE Complete new range of high-end electronics, a cross between Mark Levinson & B&O... sort

of! GAMUT CD1 New version of a well-loved CD player, now featuring improved build – one of the nicest sounds at the show DENON NS-S100 SERVER AND NS-C200

CLIENT Multimedia server/client hardware that will be customised for Europe, complete with audio storage and PVR-style video recording ROTEL RSX 1056 AND 1057

New multichannel receivers that build impressively on their musically capable predecessors TIVOLI DAB RADIO Digital unit joins Tivoli's much-loved desk top radio range

TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice
April 1999

We gave the Bishop a bash – Wilson Benesch's ecclesiastically-named £20K flagship speaker didn't disappoint as it flaunted its curvy, carbon-flanked cabinet and eight paired drivers in 'clamshell isobarik' configuration.

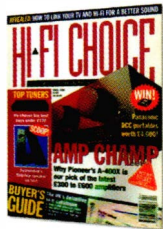


Equally entertaining were the silver NADs we were playing with – the SilverLine S300 amp and S500 CD, the latter getting an Ed's Choice badge. Our big amp test exposed Primare's A30.1 (£1,500) as the Daddy, with silver medals for Copland, Musical Fidelity and Naim's Nait 3R. News included incoming SACD players from Marantz and Sony.

TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice
April 1994

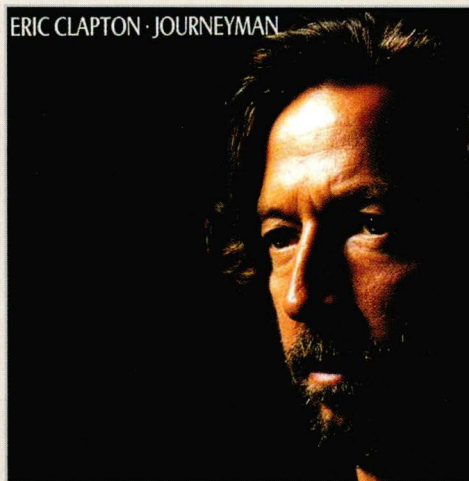
We rounded up some of the best amplifiers of 1994 for a definitive spring shoot-out. Perhaps you bought an Audiolab 8000A, Arcam Alpha 6 or the test winner – Pioneer's A-400X? Our high-end gear comprised Pink Triangle's



DaCapo D/A converter and Michell's amp trio – Alecto, Argo and Iso HR, all of which impressed. Big news came in from Mission who had just released a batch of electronics under the Cyrus badge, to include the DAD-7 CD player and Cyrus 3 amplifier. It even had the new Mission 780SE and 752 speakers to match.

SYSTEM BUILDER

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



ERIC CLAPTON

Journeyman Warner

Slowhand's eighties efforts were of variable quality, but 1989's *Journeyman* hit home for many people including a whole bunch of audiophiles. The poppy collection spawned several hits for the great god of British blues guitar as critics considered the album one of the top three of Clapton's career. Despite the commercial feel, the blues influence is strong from sentiment to solo, with the much-admired acoustic number *Before You Accuse Me* wrapping up a fine collection of work. Clapton was under pressure from the record company to quickly follow up the commercial success of his last effort, and so he drafted in creative support from George Harrison and Phil Collins. It's Robert Cray's influence however, that shines throughout. *Journeyman* manages the deft trick of pleasing both Clapton's loyal fans and his more selective roots admirers.



CD PLAYER

MARANTZ CD7300 £350

It's great to see Marantz's commitment to making great CD players still reaping rewards. Clean treble, open midband and plenty of detail is on offer – a great starting point for this sub-£1,200 system.

LOUDSPEAKERS

PMC DB1 £555

Hard to argue with this little box of tricks – superior balance, obvious neutrality and bags of charm make the DB1 a sound choice for many a modest set-up.



AMPLIFIER

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640A £250

Its 65 watts of power have proven plenty in past auditions and the weighty yet detailed sound will guarantee longevity in any system. It'll drive an average load with the minimum of fuss.

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

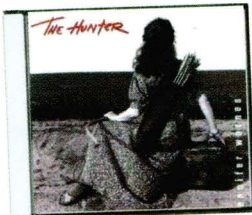
www.dvd4music.com

Still struggling to find all those elusive high-resolution music discs? So were we until we found [dvd4music.com](http://www.dvd4music.com). The online retailer boasts a considerable number of SACD and DVD-Audio discs, plus it claims to stock every DVD music disc currently on sale. The site can be sorted by genre with impressively large classical and rock sections available, with dedicated areas for DVD-A and SACD that make for a browser's paradise. You can also buy and sell used music DVDs and a comprehensive enquiry facility makes it easy to hunt down rare discs. It might not always be the cheapest, but we've found it essential for those rare and hard-to-find hi-res discs.



READERS' DEMO DISCS

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



JENNIFER WARNES

The Hunter Arista

"I always use this disc when evaluating new gear. It is an extremely well-recorded album with a closeness and presence many modern recordings lack. The music in combination with Jennifer Warnes' special voice can make almost any system

sound exciting and vibrant, but it really shines in systems with power and control. And in such a system you can really feel the drums in your chest – it's almost overwhelming. This is especially evident on the lead track *The Hunter*. Whenever I listen to this album (which is often) it always sounds fresh and crisp."

Pontus Ericsson Sweden

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

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #18

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



Over-egging

Let's say you buy a set of the latest spiked feet, or perhaps a snazzy equipment support platform. You try it, and it significantly improves the sound of your hi-fi system. So much so, you do a few feverish calculations to work out how much it would cost to put the same feet or platforms under each item in your system.

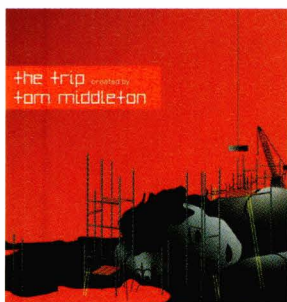
But – is that the right thing to do? It's logical to assume that because it worked once you'll get six times the improvement

by buying six more. Unfortunately it doesn't always work that way. Often, what you end up with is an exaggerated over-the-top result. Why? Because the effect each change makes is cumulative in precisely the same area. You end up over-egging the pudding.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

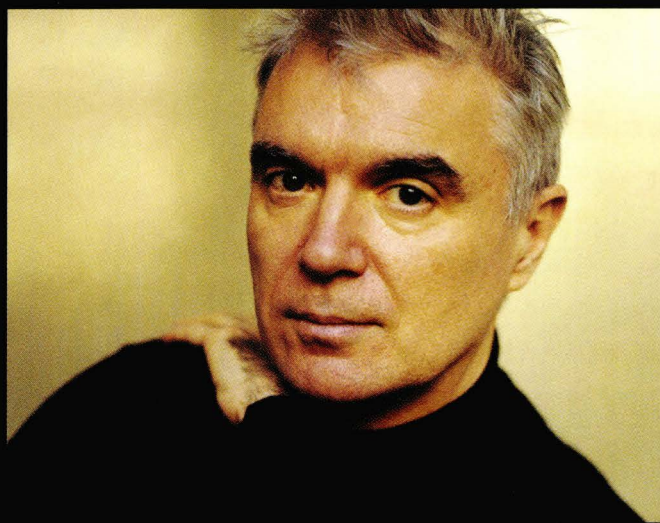
MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

Tom Middleton *The Trip*
 David Kitt *Square 1*
 Style Council *Singular Adventures Of*
 Jamiroquai *Late Night Tales*
 Ofra Haza *Yemenite Songs*
 Polly Paulusma *Scissors In My Pocket*
 Willard Grant *Conspiracy Regard*
 The End
 Amy Winehouse *Frank*
 Ry Cooder *Paris, Texas*
 Mary J Blige *Love And Life*
 Various Artists *The Sound Gallery*



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

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



DAVID BYRNE

Title: *Grown Backwards*

Release date: 29 March

After film scores, art shows and a book, *Envisioning Emotional Epistemological Information*, 'the renaissance man of pop' returns with a new solo album. Expect quirkily inventive songs full of wit and irony from the former Talking Head. But he's also done a couple of arias by Bizet and Verdi. "They're really just great pop songs and that's how I sing them," Byrne says.

TEARS FOR FEARS

Title: *Everybody Loves A Happy Ending*

Release date: April

A cynical cash-in? Perhaps. But fans have been waiting a long time for Roland Orzabal and Kurt Smith to reform 1980s synth-pop heroes Tears For Fears. They've certainly picked their moment, following Michael Andrews and Gary Jules's chart-topping revival of TFF's 1982 hit *Mad World*.

GREEN DAY

Title: *tbc*

Release date: Summer

GD front man Billie Joe Armstrong says "I wouldn't say I'm a perfectionist. But I want things to be exceptional," in explanation of the band's four-year release deficit. He sounds angry too, and several songs have been influenced by Michael Moore's savage critiques of contemporary America.

ALANIS MORISSETTE

Title: *So-Called Chaos*

Release date: April 17

In between starring in an off-Broadway production of *The Exonerated* and a



role in the forthcoming Cole Porter biopic with Kevin Kline, Morissette is completing her fourth album in a Santa Monica studio owned by Jackson Browne. Produced by John Shanks (Sheryl Crow, Pink), word is that it's her best since 1995's *Jagged Little Pill*.

ASH

Title: *tbc*

Release date: Late Spring

Northern Ireland's Ash, whose hits include *Kung Fu* and *Girl From Mars*, have almost completed their fifth album, which front man Tim Wheeler promises will be heavier than anything they've done before. With American producer Nick Raskulinecz (Foo Fighters) on board and Wheeler claiming the still-untitled record is heavily influenced by Nirvana and Guns 'n' Roses, expect riffs galore.

ALSO COMING SOON

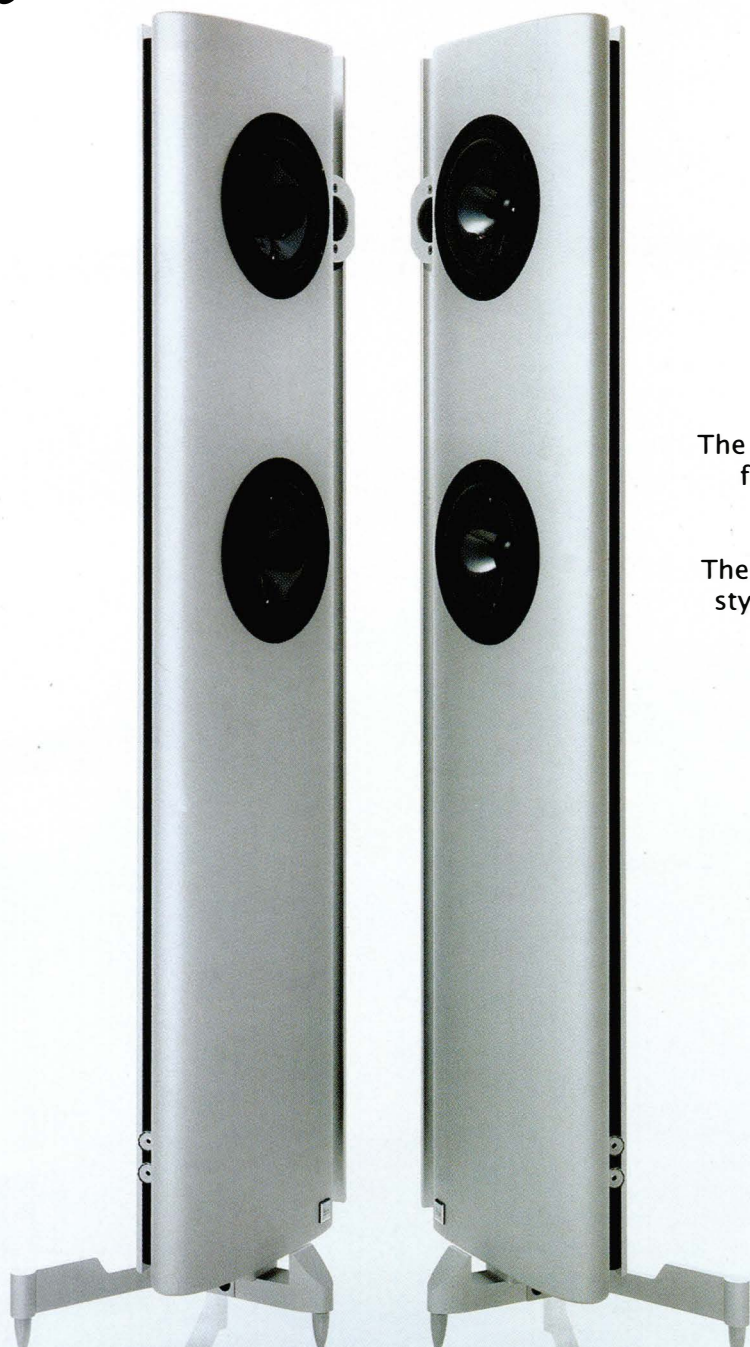
ROCK/POP

The Streets *tbc* (May), **The Corrs** *tbc* (May), **Mary-Chapin Carpenter** *Between Here And Gone* (May), **PJ Harvey** *tbc* (Jun), **Gorillaz** *tbc* (Nov)

CLASSICAL/JAZZ

Pierre Boulez Ravel and Debussy (Apr), **Gnawa Diffusion** Souk System (May), **Omara Portuondo** *Flor De Amor* (May), **Ali Farka Toure** *tbc* (Nov)

Beauty

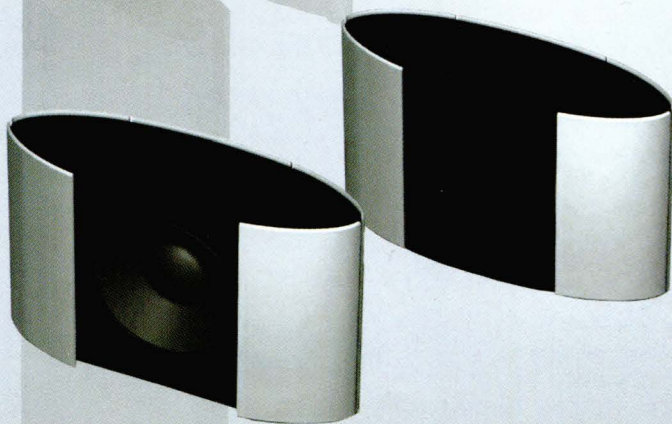


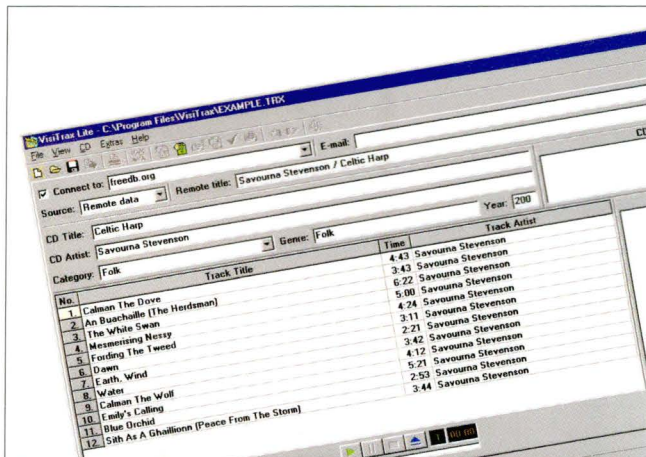
The new home cinema series
from Vienna Acoustics

The ultimate combination of
style and power, in a word

awesome

and the Beast





Synapsa VisiTrax \$30 (£17)

There are plenty of database programs around aimed at the music lover who wants to catalogue a collection efficiently, and many of them are very good. This one, available as a gratifyingly small 1.3MB download and usefully compatible with any Windows version from 95 up, seems particularly handy. As well as the obvious features (enter disc title, track titles, catalogue numbers and artist names manually, and search using any part of any of those as a parameter) it allows you to load a CD into the PC and connect to a free online database to retrieve track listings, saving a helluva lot of typing. This works by analysing the track timings and other non-audio data on the disc and comparing them with those for discs on the database. Obviously the online database is not complete but it's still quite impressive and public-spirited users of software like this can help update it. Altogether rather brilliant, and a real human use for the internet.

www.synapsa.com



Milty Permaclean £12

A classic approach to LP cleaning, this kit comprises a spray can of alcohol-based liquid and a double-sided cleaning pad made of synthetic velvet. Unusually, it claims to be suitable also for CDs and DVDs, although its dimensions and the photographs in the instructions make it clear that LPs were the original target. Use is simple and quite quick, and as claimed the result is a nicely clean disc which is resistant to picking up static charge. The velvet pad can then be used, dry, for subsequent routine cleaning before each play, if needed. A double-faced pad is supplied which allows one face to be dedicated to 'really filthy' records and the other to 'slightly grubby', a useful feature. However, as with all solvent-based cleaners it has little effect on discs attacked by mould (use Vinyl-Zyme) and is not suitable for pre-1955 discs. Heavy users will prefer a Knosti Disco AntiStat (see Choice Bits, p116), but for occasional use this works as well as any.

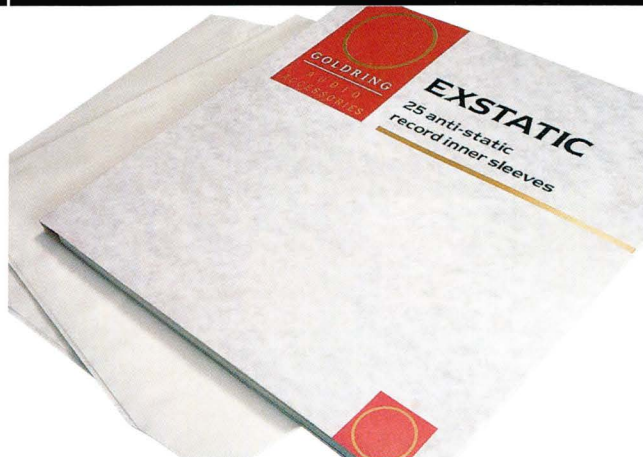
Veda 01284 701101 www.veda-uk.co.uk



QED Qunex Y-SW Adapter £32

This phono-socket-to-two-phono-plugs adapter is marketed at the owners of subwoofers that require both left and right inputs to be connected. If your amp has only a single sub output, you'll clearly need this or something like it. But possible uses also extend to dedicated mono preamps (vintage valve models with variable disc equalisation, beloved of pre-1955 LP collectors), other mono sources and even, rather cheekily, splitting digital outputs to two inputs: that shouldn't work but in practice usually will, helped by the fact that this adapter is short and made of excellent quality cable. The plugs are good too, and even if you can solder and make your own adapters you won't easily make something this smart! When running a mono cartridge into a stereo preamp, an adapter like this will give lower noise than connecting only one input and switching to mono. Incidentally, you can't use this kind of adapter to mono left and right outputs – very strange results will typically ensue.

QED 01483 747474 www.qed.co.uk



Goldring Exstatic record sleeves £11.95 (25 sleeves)

It always pains any true vinyl-lover to put a carefully cleaned record back in a dirty sleeve, so fresh sleeves are a definite boon. These are double-layered, with an anti-static plastic inner glued to a paper outer – a practical, robust sleeve that's kind to discs. The plastic is not only anti-static, it's of the kind that doesn't stick to discs or stain their surface, so a few packs of these will benefit your disc collection no end. Yes, they're a little pricier than plastic-only sleeves, but they won't crinkle and refuse to slide neatly inside the outer sleeve. And the anti-static properties really do make discs easier to wipe clean of dust. Just make sure that the opening is not in line with the outer sleeve's opening, which would allow dust to creep inside and spoil the whole effect.

Choice Bits 0870 240 7228 www.choicebits.co.uk



LINN *the hi-fi collection*

All you need to know about your free Linn CD*

BACK IN 1972, before hi-fi was old enough to walk, Linn Products burst on to the music reproduction scene to challenge the hegemony that was obstructing the sonic truth. The company's first product, the Sondek LP12, showed what a difference a well-engineered turntable could make to recorded sound, and since then a passion for music and innovation has kept the brand at the forefront of sonic endeavour. This extends to its music label, Linn

Records – a label for whom attention to detail during recording and production is almost as important as the music itself.

The free CD given away free with this issue samples 13 choice cuts from its current CD and SACD-based repertoire, cherry-picked by Linn and brought to you exclusively by *Hi-Fi Choice*. Below you'll find more information on each of the featured artists – just load up your CD player and enjoy.



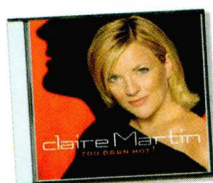
1 CLAIRE MARTIN
When I Fall In Love
Claire Martin has been with Linn Records for ten years and nine albums. She was awarded the BBC Jazz Award for Vocalist of the Year in 2003. *Too Dam Hot!* is exactly what it says on the tin. Taken from the CD: *Too Dam Hot!* Linn AKD 198



2 TINA MAY
Come Fly With Me
Tina May's funky rendering of *Come Fly With Me* was used as the theme tune to LWT's *Airline* television programme. *I'll Take Romance* was an Observer Jazz Disc of the Year, 2003. Taken from the CD: *I'll Take Romance* Linn AKD 202



3 BARB JUNGR
Waterloo Sunset
Barb Jung is a jazz and cabaret star who's refreshingly eclectic approach to performance has gained her an army of fans. Her 'torch song' rendering of Ray Davies' classic is delicious. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Waterloo Sunset* Linn AKD 222



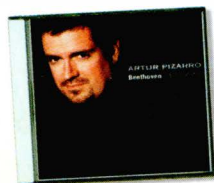
4 CLAIRE MARTIN
Black Coffee
Also taken from Claire Martin's latest album is *Black Coffee*. Claire has a new album coming out later this year and is touring extensively in the UK. Taken from the CD: *Too Dam Hot!* Linn AKD 198



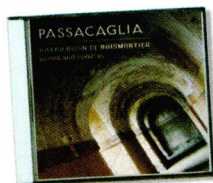
5 SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA/ SWENSEN
Sibelius - 'Miranda' from The Tempest Suite No. 2
Principal conductor Joseph Swensen has proved to have a strong relationship with the SCO, and shows a perfect feel for subtlety in tempo and dynamics. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Sibelius: Theatre Music* Linn CKD 220



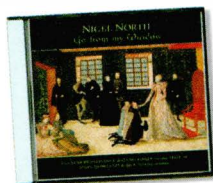
6 SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE
Ravel - Vif Et Agité from String Quartet in F Major
Ensemble director Clio Gould had long wanted an arrangement of this piece. Barsha's lush work loses nothing of the power of the quartet. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Ravel/Shostakovich arr Barsha* Linn CKD 215



7 ARTUR PIZARRO
Beethoven - Adagio from Sonata No. 8 'Pathétique' in C Minor
Artur's performance is a welcome change from much of today's classical output. He has also just completed a full cycle of Beethoven's sonatas. Taken from the CD: *Beethoven: Piano Sonatas* Linn CKD 209



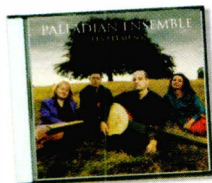
8 PASSACAGLIA
Boismortier - Allemanda from Trio Sonata in G Major
Passacaglia's performances of early French Baroque are some of the most exciting rewards of a renewed interest in early music. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Boismortier: Suites and Sonatas* Linn CKD 204



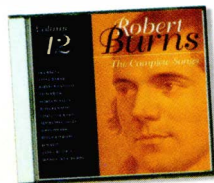
9 NIGEL NORTH
Greensleeves
Nigel North has been playing lute for nearly 30 years. His quiet and gentle personality goes hand in hand with his choice of instrument, one of the most gentle, yet technically demanding of 'old' instruments. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Go From My Window* Linn CKD 176



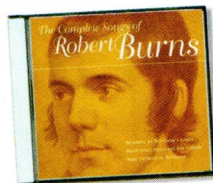
10 SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS/ MACKERRAS
Mozart - Sanctus in D Minor from Requiem in D Minor
Sir Charles Mackerras, the SCO's conductor laureate presents his first, highly acclaimed recording of Mozart's *Requiem*. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Mozart: Requiem in D Minor* Linn CKD 211



11 PALLADIAN ENSEMBLE
Rebel - Caprice from Les Elemens
Considered as shockingly forward-thinking music in its day, *Les Elemens* was premiered in 1737. The award-winning Palladian Ensemble is the UK's premiere baroque ensemble. Taken from the CD/SACD: *Les Elemens* Linn CKD 221



12 TICH FRIER
Ah Chloris
This beautiful ballad is taken from the final volume of Linn Records' *Complete Songs Of Burns*. Tich Frier has been respected on the Scottish folk scene for some thirty years. Taken from the CD: *Complete Songs of Robert Burns Vol. 12* Linn CKD 201



13 RONNIE BROWNE
Auld Lang Syne
The most famous song in the world, here with its original tune. A must for any celebration! Ronnie Browne was formerly with The Corries, one of Scotland's most famous musical exports. Taken from the CD box set: *Complete Songs of Robert Burns* Linn CKD 213

SPECIAL CD OFFER

As a *Hi-Fi Choice* reader, you can obtain copies of the individual discs featured on your sampler for only £12*. Simply phone Linn Records on 0141 303 5027/5435 quoting the *Hi-Fi Choice* offer or post your order to: Freepost, SCO 6853, Glasgow, G76 0BR.

Alternatively, register online at www.linnrecords.com, quoting *Hi-Fi Choice* in the "How did you hear about Linn Records?" field, and place your order online.

All orders placed online will also be subject to a £5 discount when orders of £20 or more are placed.

*This excludes the Complete Songs of Robert Burns box set, which is a 12-volume CD set at £98.

*Free CD available in the UK only

HI-FI CHOICE

COMPETITION

Win one of two Linn systems worth up to £1,700 each!!

From the first days of the LP12 to the brand's current position as leader in the field of multiroom audio, Linn Products has always had a reputation for innovation and attention to detail. To celebrate this month's free CD, we're giving away not one, but two fabulous prizes that demonstrate exactly that.

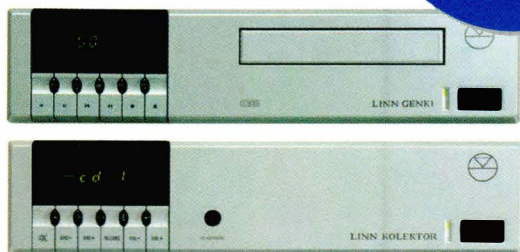
Prize One is a Genki CD player and Kolektor integrated amp, worth a combined £1,675. Ideal for anyone wanting to refresh their existing hi-fi separates system, this combination delivers a lively and detailed sound that's sure to prove a breath of musical fresh air.

Those looking for a more compact stereo system solution, however, might prefer Prize Two, combining the hugely successful Classik Music System one-box CD player, amp and tuner with the equally stylish Unik speakers and stands.

Which of the two prizes you choose is up to you – simply answer the simple question on the entry form below and tick the box to show which prize you would prefer. Good luck!

PRIZE 1
Linn Genki CD
player and Kolektor
amp worth
£1,675!

PRIZE 2
Linn Classik Music
System and Unik
speakers worth
£1,440!



HOW TO ENTER:

Answer the question by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number below. And don't forget to tick the box to say which prize you'd prefer.

QUESTION

In which country is Linn based?

- a) England
- b) Scotland
- c) Wales

CHOOSE YOUR PRIZE

Genki CD player and Kolektor amp

Classik Music System and Unik speakers

Please tick this box if you do NOT wish to receive any correspondence from Linn Products or its associated companies.

YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Title _____ Initials _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Email _____ Daytime tel number _____

COMPETITION RULES

The closing date for this competition is 18 March 2004. Winners of the Linn competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the closing date. Winners will be notified by post. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The Linn competition is not open to employees of Linn Electronics Ltd, Future Publishing Ltd, nor their suppliers, agents or associates. We regret this competition is only open to UK residents. No cash alternatives will be offered. By entering the competition you will be bound by the rules. We reserve the right to substitute alternative prizes with equivalent value to those shown, in the unlikely event of stock being temporarily unavailable. All entries must be on this official coupon, but photocopies are acceptable. Only one entry per household.

Send your entry to:

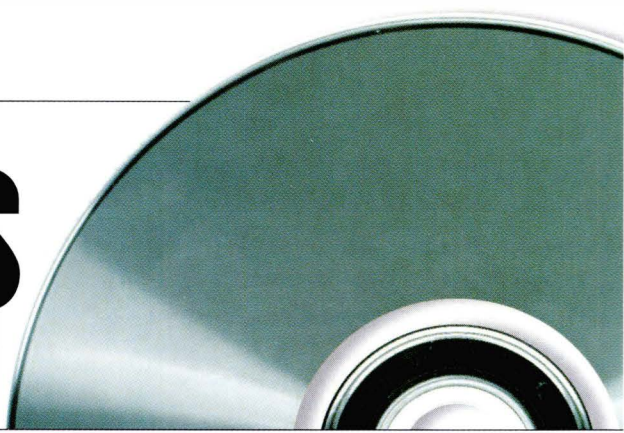
**Linn Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing,
99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6PP.**

ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Dan George, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman, Nigel Williamson



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

SYLFORDD WALKER AND WELTON IRIE

Lamb's Bread International

Blood and Fire/Simply Vinyl 2x180g vinyl

Music: Released in 2000, this is a compilation of roots reggae tracks from the late seventies. Sylford Walker's work has never received the recognition it deserves, although the eight Walker tracks on this double album represent the majority of his output. The remaining six tracks are by contemporary MC Welton Irie, whose style fits in well and sounds particularly good on the title track. Other key tracks are Walker's *Cleanliness Is Godliness* with its powerful horn section, solid rhythm and great lyrics, and *Give Thanks And Praise To Jah*. You can hear producer Glen Brown's influence and those familiar with his material will recognise many of the rhythms used here. An accessible album, but one that should please roots devotees to boot. ★★★
Sound: Given its vintage, this is an impressive sounding album, with life and energy if not the bass power of modern recordings. ★★★★★ JK

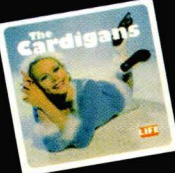


THE CARDIGANS

Life

Stockholm/Simply Vinyl 180g vinyl

Music: Even those who are good at avoiding pop will know the Cardigans. The sound is often fluffy but there is a sophistication and integrity behind the tunes that sets the band apart. *Life* from 1995 brought them international acclaim and is lighter than their subsequent albums, yet it is also arguably their finest with superbly catchy tunes like *Sick And Tired* to uplift the spirits and a bizarrely cute rendition of *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* that must have given Ozzie a chuckle, if he recognised it. Before they became superstars and went rock, the Cardigans were almost jazz pop, the intricacy of the backing belying the poppy sound – tracks like *Travelling With Charley* could almost be by Steely Dan. ★★★
Sound: Bright and sparkly, this is a clean sounding LP with plenty of subtlety. The acoustic bass is lovely and Nina Persson's voice always open and sweet. ★★★★★ JK



These and other audiophile LPs are available from Simply Vinyl: ☎ 0208 545 8580 @ www.simplyvinyl.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



SOFT MACHINE

Man In A Deaf Corner

Castle

Music: This is a mostly live Soft Machine anthology from the bluesy jazz-rockers' 1963-70 heyday, with a bonus CD of incredibly raw mid-sixties out-takes thrown in. *Dada Was Here* is suitably surreal, *Thank You Pierre Lunaire* trembles on the brink of stoned greatness and *Pig* is hog heaven for percussionists with a bent for accented beats. Some of the others don't really cut the mustard but even at their most excessive and experimental, SM were never going to be mediocre and so this proves; a magnificently unstable curate's egg that captures a long-lost world. ★★★
Sound: This compilation varies from sixties cuts that sound like they were recorded without tape in a toilet to dynamic early seventies pieces that are technically excellent. ★★★ PS

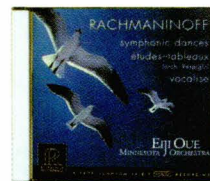


TANGERINE DREAM

Tangents 1973-1983

Virgin/EMI

Music: Harnessers of the modular Moog synthesiser, inventors of sequencing and all things space rock, Tangerine Dream were the ultimate seventies synth band. From Salvador Dalí to Richard Branson, from cathedral concerts to Michael Mann in Hollywood. For my money the best music the Dream ever produced was for two eighties films by Mann, *Thief* and *The Keep*, described as "hallucinogenic adrenalin" in America. You get great dollops of sound here, controversially remastered and re-recorded by head 'Tang' Edgar Froese over five exhaustive CDs. ★★★★★
Sound: Using 'mixing maps' computer technology and other techniques, Froese's high-octane electronic music will strain your system to breaking point. ★★★★★ MP



RACHMANINOFF

Symphonic Dances, Études, Vocalise

Eiji Oue (cond), Minnesota Orchestra

Reference Recordings RR-96CD (HDCD)

Music: All three works on this disc started out for piano. An obvious partner for the *Belkis*, *Queen of Sheba* (reviewed last month), the *Symphonic Dances* is among his most well-loved works. For many very obvious reasons it has long been an audiophile favourite with its rich palate of colour and dynamic expression, not forgetting the musical quality of the score. The music is matched here to committed and virtuosic playing. *Vocalise* is elegiac and beautiful, and the *Etudes* are stunning in their virtuosity. ★★★★★
Sound: This is quite simply among the finest sounding orchestral recordings available on CD – a *tour de force* of space, image scale, fire-breathing bass and a sumptuous orchestral sound. ★★★★★ AG

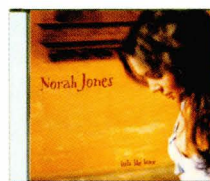


NORAH JONES

Feels Like Home

Blue Note/Parlophone

Music: Unchallenging and conservative *Feels Like Home* may be. But there's no denying the sheer class of the follow-up to Norah Jones's multi-platinum *Come Away With Me*. From the Carole King-style opener *Sunrise* to the closing remake of Duke Ellington's *Melancholia*, here is a record to restore one's faith after the dispiriting run of manufactured karaoke-style pop idols. Sounding at times uncannily like Bonnie Raitt, Jones is equally at home with the blues (*In The Morning*), sultry southern R'n'B (*What Am I To You?*) and even bluegrass (*Creepin' In*). The band is immaculate, Jones's voice is growing richer along with her bank balance and the songs are perfectly chosen. Exquisite. ★★★★★
Sound: Veteran producer Arif Mardin brings all his decades of pre-digital experience to bear to create a warm and organic sound that is both simple and yet sophisticated at the same time. ★★★★★ NW



ARTHUR BLISS

Piano Concerto, Piano Sonata,

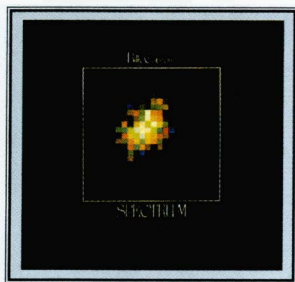
Concertos For Two Pianos

Peter Donohoe, Martin Roscoe (piano),

David Lloyd-Jones (cond), RSN Orch

NAXOS 8557146

Music: Strange to think Arthur Bliss (1981-1975) was once considered radical and modernist. His piano concerto is an ebullient, big-boned work, not unlike Tchaikovsky, and extremely virtuosic. In some ways his sonata offers greater rewards, though it is not a million miles removed from the preceding work. The highlight however is the concerto for two pianos, which is a little more astringent, with shades of Prokofiev. ★★★★★
Sound: A clean, agile sound thanks to a fairly close microphone set-up helps lay bare the detail without straying over the edge and being excessively analytical. ★★★★★ AG



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "One of the finest jazz rock albums ever."

BILLY COBHAM Spectrum Atlantic 120g vinyl

Music: Billy Cobham was the most explosive drummer of the seventies, and you only have to hear him here or with the Mahavishnu Orchestra to be struck by his incredible speed, power and virtuosity. *Spectrum* is one of the finest jazz rock albums ever, with Cobham at his peak, pushing keyboard player Jan Hammer and guitarist Tommy Bolin to new heights of intensity. It's not full-on all the way through, there are several jazzy tracks but *Quadrant*, *Stratus* and

Snoopy's Search/Red Baron are as dynamic and energetic as anything on record. Ted Nugent may have come up with the title *Intensity In Ten Cities* but these guys deliver it with gusto. It's a crime that *Spectrum* has not been re-issued on vinyl but luckily the CD comes pretty close. ★★★★★ **Sound:** For sheer energy, Ken Scott's "all-round objective ear" and engineer could not have done better – there's real power in these grooves. ★★★★★ JK



THE VINES

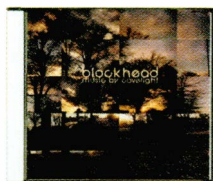
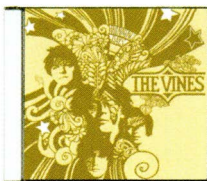
Winning Days

Capitol

Music: Of all the post-Strokes nu-rock bands, Australia's The Vines are arguably the most interesting, due in large part to the manic antics of unhinged lead singer Craig Nicholls.

Their melodic second album will come as a revelation to those who had them down as standard three-chord noise terrorists. The squalling riffs and Nicholls' trademark screaming are prominent on the opener *Ride* and the closing *Fuck The World*. Yet they bookend an album that in-between displays astonishing diversity and nuance, from the dreamy sixties psychedelia of *Amnesia* through the Byrds-like jangle of *Rainfall* to Beatles-influenced ballads such as *Autumn Shade*. ★★★★★ **Sound:** They may be filed under 'garage rock' but the production certainly isn't. Iggy and the Stooges never sounded as polished and expensively groomed as this.

★★★★★ NW



BLOCKHEAD

Music By Cavelight

Ninja Tune

Music: Blockhead (Tony Simon to his mum) is a rapper-turned-DJ from New York in the DJ Shadow mould of moody, atmospheric, very clever cut 'n' paste, electro mould. He admits his voice isn't up to much, but his ears are sharp as his diamond stylus and he's created a superb blend of melancholy yet uplifting epic soundscapes, borrowing from everywhere to create a genuinely distinctive instrumental hip-hop sound.

★★★★★

Sound: Considering it's an album comprised of samples, Blockhead does an exquisite job of joining the dots to produce a lush, seamless soundscape perfect for chillout or immersion. ★★★★★ DO



STEREOLAB

Margerine Eclipse

Duophonic

Music: The Lab's first album since the tragic death of Mary Hansen feels like a schizophrenic affair. It has all the usual elements: kitschy lounge grooves, burbling synths, sublime harmonies (now all by Laetitia Sadier), air of detached ennui... and yet there's something missing. And it's not just Mary's ba-ba-ba backing vocals. Their sound hasn't moved on in the way it generally does with each release. It feels like just another Stereolab album, though that's still much better than most. ★★★★★

Sound: Recorded at the band's studio in France, there's a warmth to the production that belies the sometimes glacial arrangements.

★★★★★ DO

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

AWAKEN

Awaken

DVD-Audio (24/96 stereo, 24/48 surround, Dolby Digital 5.1)

Electromatrix/Immergent

Music: *Awaken* sounds more like a project than a 'band' in the normal sense, produced by Poet Name Life, and each track features an artist with a similarly bizarre 'tag'. And tag is the word – there are videos of graffiti artists alongside artist interviews, illustrations and video clips. The music is as diverse as the people producing it – RPL's *Futuristic Island* takes a Baaba Maal chorus and adds fruity bass beats, Mount Cyanide's impressive *Antarctica* rolls in on a heavy ambient vibe and builds into a techno dub monster, while Xilent Xage's *Observation Link 213* could be a 21st Century version of the Floyd's *Great Gig In The Sky*. It's dark and moody with heavy smatterings of techno and hip-hop, the overall effect closer to Massive Attack than Prodigy. ★★★★★ **Sound:** A full, lush sound from every angle, this is one of the most effective uses of surround around, and it suits the music to a tee. Bass is the tonal strongpoint but the production also delivers acres of space. ★★★★★ JK



PROKOFIEV

Ivan The Terrible

Leonard Slatkin (conductor), St Louis Symphony

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Mobile Fidelity UD SACD 4003

Music: This is the first time this classic 1979 recording has been released as a single disc, rather than as part of a larger collection. It works as an excellent counterpoint to the *Alexander Nevsky* recording reviewed recently – both are film scores for Sergei Eisenstein films. The work is presented here as an oratorio, with (uncredited) chorus and a full complement of bells, and without the usual narrator. *Ivan* is undeniably theatrical, with patriotic overtones, though not as dramatic as *Alexander Nevsky*, yet it works brilliantly as a piece of pure music. ★★★★★ **Sound:** Remastered from the original multichannel tapes with no centre channel, a proprietary process claims to result in high resolution and bandwidth to beyond 60kHz. In fact the sound has a slightly flattened and forward quality, but the sense of presence is palpable, if the sound overall is somewhat lacking in sophistication. ★★★★★ AG



ELTON JOHN

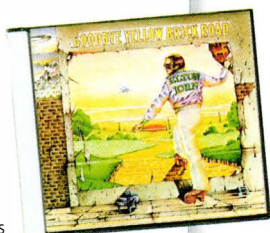
Goodbye Yellow Brick Road

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Universal

Music: Now thirty years old, *Yellow Brick Road* is back in its original gatefold guise, but now with the added sonic bells and whistles of SACD. Bernie Taupin and Elton John were riding high on one of the many creative peaks of their conjoined careers with this double album which spawned some of Elton's greatest successes. Critics pigeonholed it as glam rock, but the journey from ballad to reggae for example, clearly exposes a more balanced portfolio. Some of Taupin's most memorable lyrics are cemented into musical history by Elton's legendary music writing, signalling *Yellow Brick Road* as the *Sergeant Pepper* of his expansive career. ★★★★★

Sound: Sympathetic to the stereo original, this multichannel mix brilliantly integrates band, backing vocals and Elton's prominent piano into the bigger sonic picture. SACD's extra resolution allows you to decipher Taupin's lyrics and enjoy the colourful musical diversity to the full. ★★★★★ DG



Choice Mail

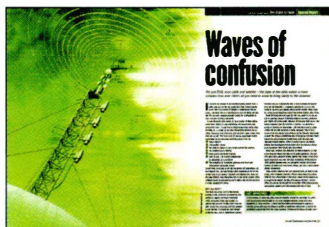
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99 Baker St
London W1U 6PP



Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP



Above: Our comprehensive radio feature from HFC 242, which included a look at digital radio via cable, satellite and Freeview digital TV services

“How can dealers get it so wrong sometimes?”

SMELL THE AIR

I'm a professional double bassist and consider myself to have a fairly good ear after many hours in playback sessions. I took a long trip (45 miles) to a local dealer to audition a new £600 CD player, only to be disappointed with the service. The young sales assistant filled the room with bull and tried to tell me what it was I could hear. He couldn't offer to loan the unit to me (even after full payment) to see how it fared at home. So I took my £600 to another dealer, who was more focused on my needs. How can dealers get it so wrong sometimes?

Richard Keane via email

BIG WOOFER

Way back in the early 1970s, a friend of my parents owned a top-of-the-range set-up. It sounded unbelievable, and it is this sound I've been trying to find for the last 25 years. It comprised Thorens Transcript turntable, Leek amplifier, and massive three-way floor-standing speakers with 15-inch woofers.

Ever since those days I've been trying to find that articulate rumble of bass and have been through very many set-ups. Dealers all trot out the same rhetoric that three five-inch woofers produce the same bass as one 15-inch – it's just not true. The three woofers produce the same amount of bass but it doesn't have the same quality or depth that one big cone moving plenty of air does.

I have B&W CDM7SEs with a REL Storm subwoofer, driven with Arcam 10 and 10P amps in a largish living room



Left: B&W's ASW850 subwoofer

the sound lacks dynamic and doesn't pull out the gritty drive of the deep bass that reggae or funk music needs.

I'm now looking at the B&W ASW850 sub as it has a 15-inch driver, or indeed changing amps. Am I mad saying that the quality of bass just isn't reproduced anymore by modern speakers with rows of tiny woofers as opposed to the massive drivers of 25 years ago?

Michael de Koningh via email

HFC: There's a lot to be said for a 15-inch driver and we've had some wonderful experiences with B&W's Matrix and Nautilus 801 models in the past, but fashion does dictate design and the face of the mighty 15-inch driver sadly no longer fits.

But, before you consider spending more money, make sure everything is set up correctly – experiment with subwoofer position and speaker placement in relation to the walls, listening position and so on. Once exhausted with experimentation with no sonic improvement, then look at new kit. B&W's ASW850 should indeed deliver very deep, very high quality

bass, but arguably you could achieve better results from your existing system by using an amplifier with more grip. Try Audio Analogue's Maestro (£2,600), Musical Fidelity's Tri-Vista (£4,000) or ATC's SIA2-150 (£2,375). Not cheap suggestions we know, but models like these also crop up in our Reader Classified pages all the time. Let us know how you get on.

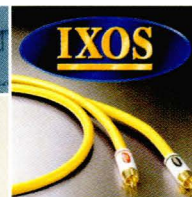
LETTER OF THE MONTH

RADIO 3 NO MORE?

My main source of hi-fi is Radio 3 on FM, and I find that the sound quality is very good indeed – particularly on live music. Unfortunately the BBC is planning to stop broadcasting FM at some point. It is possible to get Radio 3 on DAB, but the sound quality is worse than FM and is unlikely to improve as the BBC have locked themselves into an antiquated standard for digital transmission. It is also possible to receive Radio 3 on digital terrestrial TV, on satellite and via the internet – I am wondering about investigating these as an alternative to FM. Which of them has the best sound quality and what equipment do I need to connect them to my hi-fi?

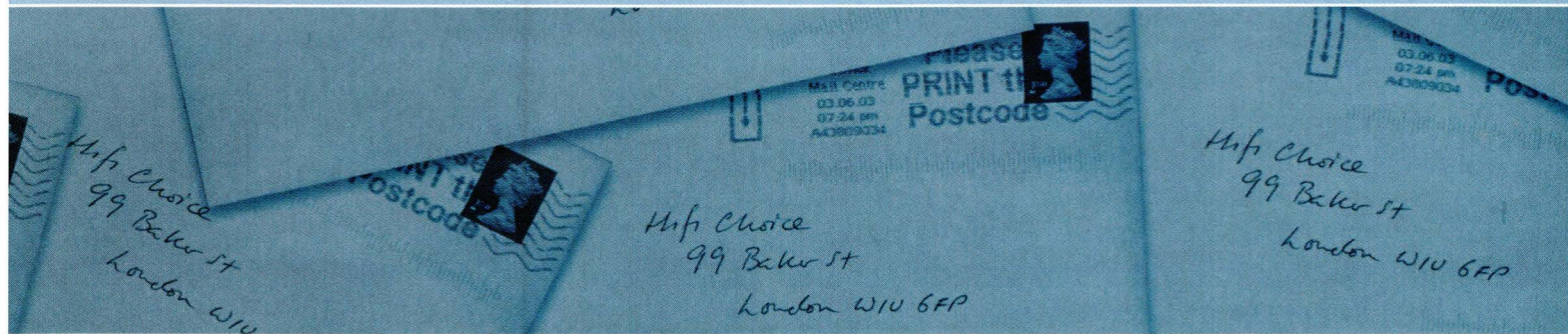
Andrew Lyall via email

HFC: Radio 3 is broadcast on DAB at 192kbps, which compared to other stations is rather good. The obvious way to access digital radio for optimum sound is with a dedicated DAB tuner. However, digital TV services are carrying digital radio, sometimes at higher bit rates than DAB (Radio 3 is still 192kbps though). Sky's digital satellite service is available all over the UK, or for less outlay you could try Freeview if your area is active. Nokia's Mediamaster Freeview box has given good results, but you'll need a Scart lead to connect to your hi-fi. Other products in Nokia's range have standard audio outputs, but only a dedicated DAB tuner will give you the full station line-up. That said, with the switch-off still years away, why not stick with FM if your tuner and aerial are up to it?



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



Above: Yamaha's CDR-HD1300 CD & hard disk player/recorder

HARD TO BEAT

Is the Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD player/recorder with built-in hard disk any good? I hope the hard drive won't spoil the sound with background noise.

Frenchie via email

HFC: We hold the CDR-HD1300 in high regard and gave it a gong in our recent Awards issue (*HFC* 249). It's not a noisy machine at all (unlike a PC's hard disk) and don't forget you can play from the CD drawer as well as the hard disk. It can be used as a single-room music server, but its real talent is the editing flexibility its hard drive adds to CD-R(W) recording.

RICHER RANT

Why is it that whenever I call Richer Sounds to check the availability of a product I'm told, "Nah, you don't want that mate, you want a...". Are they trying to shift old stock, or product they make a greater margin on? I'm glad I know hi-fi – were I a beginner, who knows what cast-offs I might be persuaded to buy.

Richard Franklin via email

BPI MORE DAMAGE THAN GOOD

Good on you for giving internet music retailer CD Wow a plug (*HFC* 251), but unfortunately the timing was a bit out. The BPI (British Phonographic Industry) has just told CD Wow that all CDs not sourced from Europe will be subject to a £3 surcharge, increasing CD-Wow's prices by £2 per disc. I am surprised that the BPI can get away with this. The EU should regard this as an anti-competitive price fixing move that restricts the choice of the consumer. CDs are over-priced whatever official enquiries may say, and any source of cheap CDs is a blessing.

Rod Theobald via email

HFC: CD Wow was (and still is) a great resource for buying cheap CDs and we expect it to remain competitively priced whatever restrictions are placed upon its business. At a time when the recorded music industry is in crisis with music sales on a continuing downward spiral, you'd think the BPI would have more sense. Let's hope it can live with this special contribution to the industry's demise.

ONLINE FORUM

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



Does anybody actually know when the new mini iPod is due in the shops and how much it's expected to cost? **Sumdumgi**

HFC: Apples' new iPod Mini is due in the UK in April with an expected retail price of around £200. In the US it's \$249, while the larger 40GB version is \$399 or in the UK £399. Another example of UK pricing disparity.

Will there be a difference in quality from an original CD and a copy burnt on a PC? If so would I be able to detect this on my system? **Tomo 13**

HFC: Yes, but the difference is small. Whether you can hear it depends on your listening skills and the quality of your system, but, if you use compression, the difference will be obvious with sound dangerously bordering on lo-fi.

BLIND BUYER

I was wondering how many people actually buy hi-fi blind as opposed to sitting down and listening to it? I imagine that the majority of normal consumers would do just that. I personally find it very difficult to find time to listen to loads of different types of hi-fi, and inevitably find myself drifting towards the Best Buys. Last time I bought some speakers, my dealer had lent me a showroom pair beforehand, and I liked them so I bought them. However, had I had the time and energy to try a different pair each week, I'm sure I could have ended up with something quite different.

Ted via email

ROXY BOX

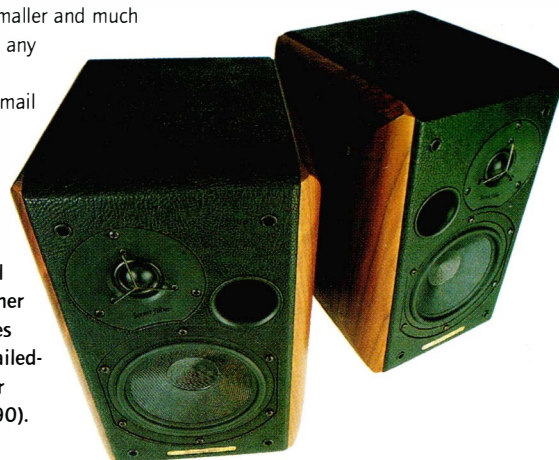
I have a Marantz CD17 MkII Kl-S CD player, AVI S2000 amp, Linn Sara speakers and a REL Q150e subwoofer. I am after some speakers which are smaller and much more elegant, but without giving up any sound quality. Any ideas?

Graham Burnett via email

HFC: Plenty. Sounds like a great system – have you considered the luxurious Sonus Faber Concerto Home at £999? They have a great midband and have all the elegance you could ask for. Other smart yet sonically masterful moves would be B&W's spacious and detailed-sounding Nautilus 805 (£1,400) or Acoustic Energy's AE1 MkIII (£1,690).

"How many people really buy hi-fi blind as opposed to sitting down and actually listening?"

Below: Sonus Faber Concerto Home





CHORD BLU CD TRANSPORT | CHORD DAC 64 | CHORD PRIMA PREAMP
CHORD MEZZO 50 POWER AMP | KEF XQ3 LOUDSPEAKERS | £12,440

Life is beautiful

Chord calls it a lifestyle system. We just sighed...

Welcome to the converted cupboard Knightsbridge studio flat of hi-fi electronics. The Chord Choral system you see before you might just be the most expensive sonic real estate in the world. East to west, each identically-sized component in this four-floor combo measures a titchy 13 inches. Front to back you're looking at a not-at-all deceptive 5.5 inches, and top to bottom... well, a rather less than spacious 2.5 inches. More than enough room to swing a gnat, you'll agree. I'd like to draw your attention to the domed penthouse roof, the selection of stunning circular skylights on floors two and three, the extremely high quality fittings and, last but not least, the sexy blue/purple mood lighting. As Loyd Grossman probably wouldn't say, who lives with a system like this?

Clues. Someone with more of a life than Loyd Grossman and a genuine appreciation for form, function and, indeed, style. Someone who likes the feel of cold, hard aluminium in the morning: it's wall-to-wall, ceiling-to-floor. Someone who, like Chord founder and chief designer John Franks, wondered what real, no-compromise, high-end hi-fi would be like reimagined with leffield, bijou lifestyle system sensibilities. Someone who wants simultaneously to be cutting edge and avant-garde. Someone with forearm-swallowingly deep pockets.

All right, put yourself in Franks' position. Chord had been pushing the right buttons with serious, well-heeled audiophiles for years, exploring the limits of what could be achieved with his own, highly developed switch-mode 'high frequency' power supply technology, unique industrial design and aerospace-spec, all-alloy build.

Then, a few years ago, his Kent-based company launched a digital product some believed to be the most important since the introduction of Compact Disc itself: the ground-breaking DAC 64. Whereas the amps Chord had built its reputation on were respected and admired by the ultra-discerning, a much broader range of music lovers fell head over heels in love with the DAC 64. There were a few possible reasons. One, the technology under the lid was definitely in the "serious shit" Doc Brown from *Back To The Future* category. Two, it made any CD player/transport connected to it sound quite ridiculously good. Three, at £1,900 it was reasonably affordable by Chord standards. And four, it looked unlike any other hi-fi component ever made and about a million times better.

I'll skip the blow-by-blow description – it's probably the most photographed DAC ever, and you can see why. Naturally, the unprecedented success of the DAC64 – and the "what if...?" wish lists of numerous customers – got Franks thinking. The real beauty of Chord's signature switch-mode power supplies is their extreme efficiency. Therefore, they're small and light. Small and light enough to build a preamp (Prima), power amp (Mezzo) and phono stage (Symphonic) into the same basic lozenge-shaped, solid alloy casing. Optional at £995 – but, in reality, a no-brainer addition – the gorgeous all-aluminium Choral stand (chunky base, two bowed pillars with precision-cut slots angled to support the kit with the maximum degree of oo-er) would find the must-have factor into the red. Thus Chord's Choral "audiophile lifestyle" system was minted, at least in Part One form. Predictably, Choral combos have been flying out of Chord's factory ☑

"The Blu CD transport is claimed to be 'the most intricate and exacting piece of mechanical and electrical design Chord has ever undertaken'."



Chord Blu CD transport
£4,195

The perfect partner to the DAC 64, Blu boasts WTA filtering, dual data output and selectable output sampling frequencies.



Chord DAC 64
£1,995

Now that the full potential of all that processing power has been harnessed by the Blu, results are staggering.



Chord Prima preamp/Mezzo 50 power amp
£2,850/£1,900

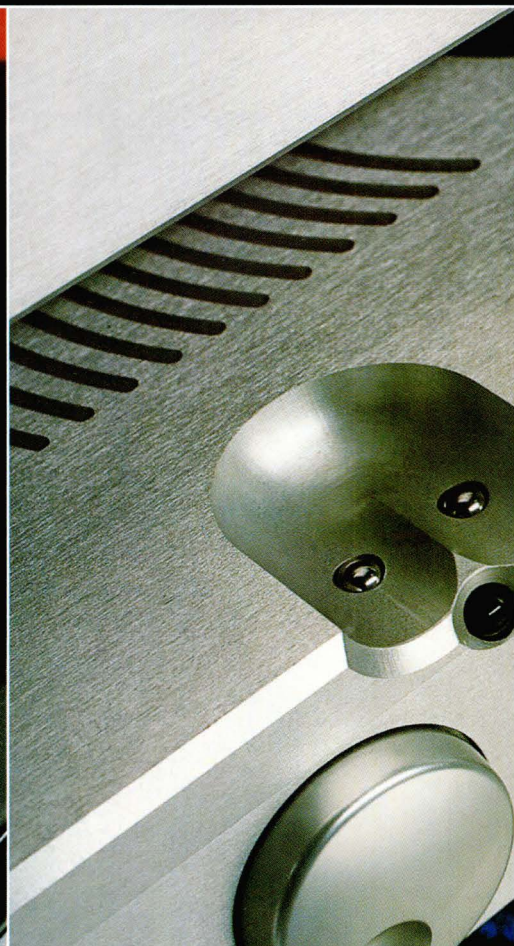
Prima's minimalist design belies its sophistication, including individual gain adjustability for its five inputs. The Mezzo 50 can drive any speaker you care to connect it to.



KEF XQ3 loudspeaker
£1,500 per pair

Attractive, complex standmount totes a four-way driver line-up and elaborate all-curved-surface cabinet. Smoothness and refinement at frequency extremes help the Choral's lean tendencies.





as fast as they can be made (which, all things considered, isn't very).

Just one nagging and rather obvious omission: a matching CD transport. This has been the most eagerly anticipated brick in the Choral wall, and little wonder. Despite its jitter-reducing, re-clocking buffer, the DAC 64, like other DACs, is transport-sensitive. It's safe to assume that few, until now, have fully exploited its extraordinary potential. In fact, the prospect of Chord designing one to do just that was always plain mouthwatering.

CD BLU

Now it has, the Choral system is complete. It's called Blu and, according to Franks, is "undoubtedly the most intricate and exacting piece of mechanical and electrical design Chord has ever undertaken". Its looks alone strongly hint at that being the case. The top plate of the solid aluminium billet casing totes no fewer than 25 buttons, the blue vacuum fluorescent display, ventilation holes and, most remarkable of all, a domed, over-centre sprung CD tray lid, save for the ring of blue LEDs around the perimeter that illuminate when the lid is open, wouldn't look out of place on a miniature AGA stove.

Technically, the £4,195 Blu is a *tour de force* to rival the DAC 64 and has been designed to exploit the specialist WTA filtering algorithms used in the Chord DAC, by having its own WTA filter. With selectable upsampling from 44.1 to 176kHz and a dedicated word clock input, Blu has the flexibility to work successfully in a wide range of systems. But its dual data output (via twin BNC sockets) hands a significant advantage to the latest version of the DAC 64 which is so equipped. In addition to that, there are two AES/EBU digital outputs, BNC and Toslink optical outputs for standard data transfer and a BNC input for word clocking synchronisation.

Since its introduction, the Mezzo power amp has evolved into the more muscular but less flamboyant Mezzo 50. A plain, solid lid has replaced the twin glass top plate porthole and quoted continuous power has risen from 30 watts per channel to 50 watts into eight ohms – hardly foundation-threatening grunt, you might assume, but as with all Chord power amps, the plain figures are deceptive. Since the drive circuitry power supply operates at over 1.2Mhz, the amp can store considerably more energy with greater

efficiency than others of comparable size, allowing it to drive even the most demanding speaker loads. (Early customer feedback suggests never mind B&W 801s, Wilson WATT Puppies are mere child's play!)

At the nerve centre of this tiered tech-fest, the Prima preamp has been designed to be used in conjunction with Chord's fully programmable, touch-screen remote handset. Another tactile chunk of aluminium with a large, back-lit blue screen, as well as mechanical cursor direction buttons, it can handle up to ten devices with 42 commands per device. This leaves the Prima virtually bereft of control clutter – just two front-mounted knobs for volume and source selection, and two tiny buttons set into finger-shaped scallops in the middle of the top plate. The left of these toggles through the inputs (four standard RCA, one balanced XLR), while the right selects tape.

Okay, here is one of the finest CD front ends yet devised. And Chord says the Mezzo power amp will drive any speaker with unconditional stability. So by all means shoot for the sky if the muse takes you. But we've decided to cap the system budget at the £14K mark (including the Choral stand)





“It’s fiercely analytical – shockingly so when you hear stuff you swear wasn’t there before – but what keeps you listening into the early hours is the emotional force with which the music connects.”

which means splashing out no more than £2,000 for speakers. Adhering to the ethos of the electronics, the need for good looks and shiny technology aren't negotiable. As for size, floorstanders were tempting sonically, standmounts would have fitted the system context better aesthetically. So we settled for the beefiest (good looking, high-tech) standmount we could find at the price, in the elegantly bowed and modestly imposing shape of KEF's XQ3. And came in £500 under budget.

HIGH ENERGY

It's a complex but beautifully engineered beast with a four-way driver line-up – incorporating a co-axial Uni-Q unit and a hyper-tweeter – and fancy resonance-zapping cabinet construction with curved surfaces top and bottom as well as side to side. Each immaculately finished enclosure weighs a hunky 14.5kg – substance in every sense.

Including the sound, surely. Here's a

caveat straight away. Partnered with small, bass-light boxes, the Choral electronics can seem a tad lean and lacking in body. Fabulously fast, taut, open and articulate but, nope, just not interested in bumping up a thinly padded bottom end.

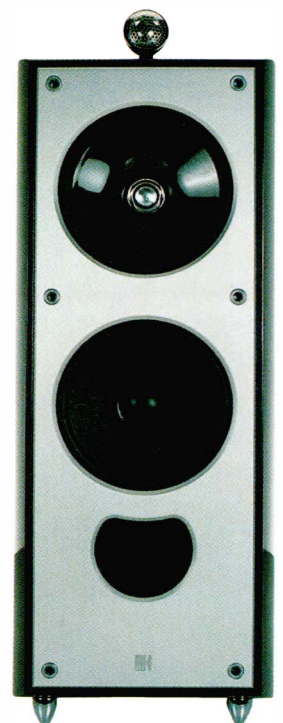
With the hefty KEFs *in situ*, though, the frequency extremes are nailed: bass is deep and grippy, treble extension and refinement clearly exceptional. Cymbal strikes are imbued with a natural smoothness and sheen most hi-fi simply glosses over. Integration is terrific too considering the complexity of the driver complement. The gorgeous mid-range meshes so seamlessly with top and bottom that vocals have an almost tangible presence, scalp-tinglingly so in the case of Joni Mitchell on her astounding *Travelogue* album.

Add the Blu/DAC 64's superbly natural sense of timing and ability to look deeper into a recording than you'd believe possible and the system has an

“alive”, super-transparent quality that is utterly compelling. Yes, it is fiercely analytical – almost shockingly so when you start to hear stuff you swear wasn't on the recording before – but what keeps you listening long into the early hours is the emotional force with which the music connects. A large part of the credit goes to the quite stunning performance the Blu transport draws from the DAC 64, perhaps the best CD front-end currently available with its staggering resolving power, wonderfully lucid and expressive mid band and deep, agile and tuneful bass. It delivers musical coherence of the highest calibre and tells it like it is, without smear, blur or exaggeration.

Few one-make systems, in our experience, have sounded as good as the Chord. In most reviews, that would be the punchline. But not when you're looking at the most beautiful hi-fi system in the world. **HFC**

David Vivian



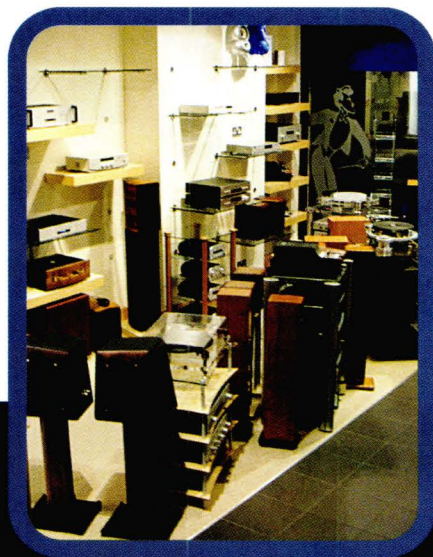
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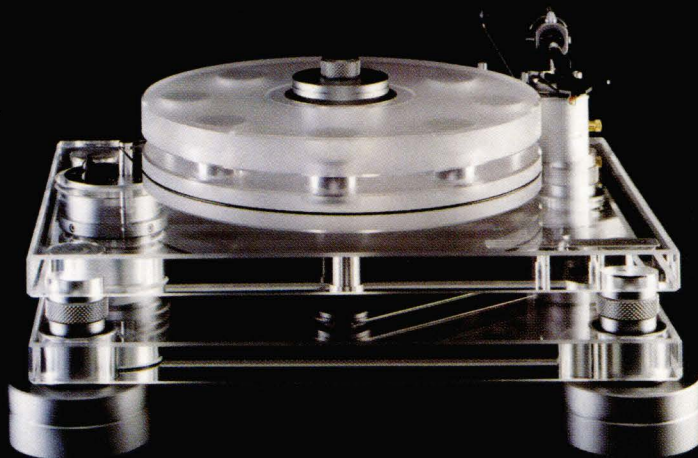
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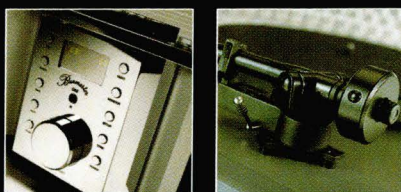
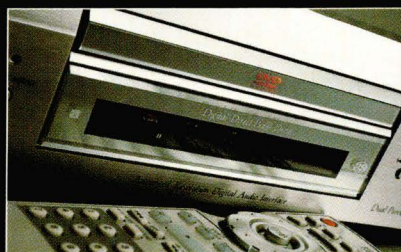
REVIEWS



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.

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OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

You can find more 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

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%

PRO Well built and fully featured, with a snappy, open and dynamic sound.

CON Externally it's a £300 Marantz – no bad thing in itself, but it's hotter than it looks!

LONG LISTEN This is a highly entertaining and colourful player at a reasonable price. The build quality is good and the feature list strong. It's not the most subtle of CD players but if you're looking for a spinner to entertain you, it could prove a bargain.

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 overall conclusion

After a livelier tubes shone through. The Siemens-equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable fidence and ease. It even seems to be

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...

THE NAIM GAME

Naim's new entry-level amp and CD player trade features for a sharp price and fine sound

PRODUCT Naim CD5i and Naim Nait 5i

TYPE CD player and stereo integrated amplifier

PRICE £825 (CD) and £699 (amp)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x7x30cm (both)
• Swing-arm CD player with digital audio built into arm for short signal path • First Naim integrated amp designed to work with non-Naim cables • Nait 5i's power upgraded to 50 watts per channel • Both units feature zinc and aluminium anti-vibration case

CONTACT ☎ 01722 332266

🌐 www.naim-audio.com

The old Nait 5 and CD5 were well received by press and public alike, but weren't drastically different from previous models. Often partnered with Naim's Intro or Intro 2 loudspeakers, they really only had their new-look zinc/aluminium casework to distinguish them.

But that's all changed. The new CD5i and Nait 5i may look notionally similar to the existing products, and the change in name (no pun) from 5 to 5i might suggest a minor upgrade, but these are almost clean-sheet products, entailing drastic changes to the circuitry inside the player and amplifier. Later in the year, a new entry-level speaker system will arrive to partner the electronics (see box – *Ariva Arrives*).

One of the big changes is the removal of upgradeability for both products. Traditionally, Naim Audio owners start small and build and build until they reach the full

Below: Naim has developed an optional push-on alloy front plate for those who want to spruce up their components' appearance – this is pictured right, while the standard finish can be seen below

'grande complication' of an active DBL system. Even starter systems have some upgrade path built into the product, usually a bolstered-up external power supply, or occasionally turning the integrated amplifier into a preamp. That simply isn't an option on either of these products. The CD5i only has phono and DIN analogue outputs (there isn't even a digital audio output), while the Nait 5i only has phono and DIN inputs, along with the tape monitor phono outputs. The reason for the lack of upgrade potential is three-fold, according to Naim; it keeps the cost of the basic units manageable, it improves the sound of both and – most importantly – very few people actually upgrade the entry-level devices.

At least, very few upgrade the amplifier. The Nait 5i replaces the older Nait 5 entirely, but (for now, at least) the CD5i undercuts the price of the older CD5, though the player stays on the order books. Perhaps people do add power supplies to CD players after all. In simplifying the Nait 5i, Naim also cut back the number of possible inputs. Instead of the six sources (with optional phono) on the Nait 5, the new amp sports just four – CD, tuner, tape and AV. If you want phono, you can buy a Naim Stageline.

The other major change is the added flexibility of cable connections. The amp's CD player and tuner inputs are doubled up with both Naim's beloved DIN connectors and industry-standard phono sockets (Naim CD players and tuners come with grey DIN

cables in the box), but the 'AV' connector and tape circuit are both supplied with phono sockets only. This is a significant enhancement to both products in that it makes them more immediately accessible to people with non-Naim systems. You can now upgrade CD player or amplifier without changing anything else in your system. Of course, the Naim plan is to gradually convert such a listener to a wholly Naim system, but the simple addition of phono sockets does prevent disenfranchising those not directly anticipating such a conversion process.

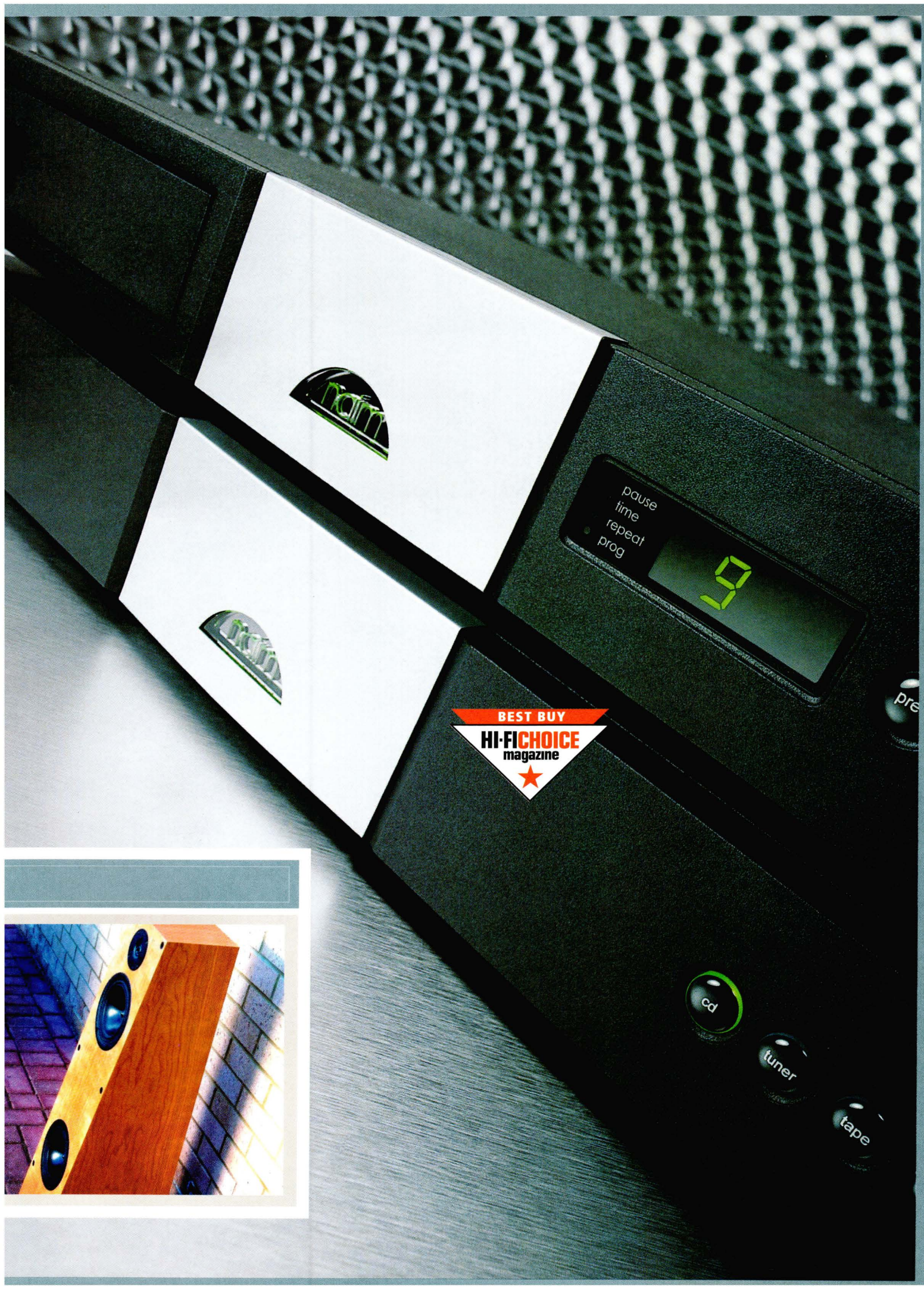
Aside from philosophical considerations, the cable flexibility suggests a change in the design of the Nait amplifier. In the process, the amplifier has also been boosted to deliver 50-watts per channel; a step up from the 30-watt delivery of the previous model. Naim amplifiers have to date insisted on Naim speaker cables, in part because the cable is factored into the amp's circuit. Using another cable design may lack the same inductive damping properties of Naim's own older NAC A4 or current A5 with potentially dire consequences. The Nait 5i is considerably more flexible in speaker cable choice than previous models; the company claims the cable flexibility is to allow greater system tuning for systems without enough Naim gear in them. It also allows the user to use slightly cheaper QED cable (or similar) as a temporary stopgap before shelling out £8 per metre on NAC A5. ▶



ARIVA ARRIVES

A new entry-level Naim loudspeaker to match the CD5i and Nait 5i is due to be launched shortly. Called the Ariva, the new floorstanding two-way speaker is still in the last stages of design, but prototypes were seen at hi-fi shows in late September last year. At first glance, the new speaker bears a similarity to the old Naim IBL loudspeaker, with its slightly slanting front baffle and the main speaker enclosure resting on a solid metal plinth.

The similarity is only slight, however. The IBL from the 1980s had a small enclosure, which was one of the reasons it was criticised for lacking bass, whereas the Ariva is bigger and goes much deeper. It sounds potentially wonderful, in early guise at least, with a delicate yet driving sound – but it's not ready yet. Expect it to cost around £1,000, with a *Hi-Fi Choice* review coming your way soon...



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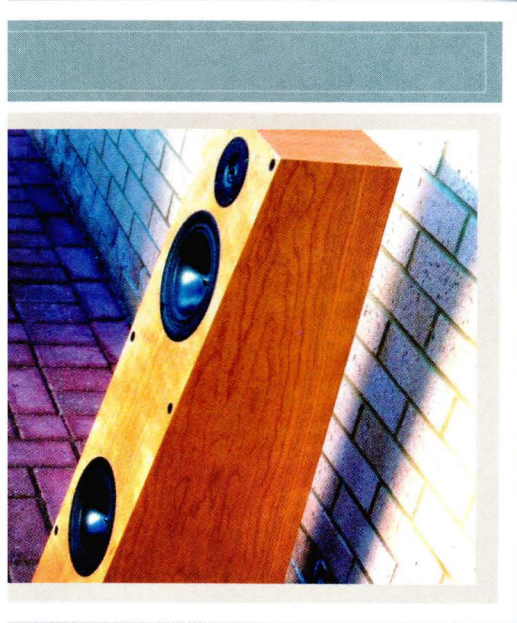
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Q & A

Roy George, chief of R&D at Naim Audio, took time to answer our questions about the company's latest products



HFC: Why the new system?

RG: We knew that with our new circuitry we would be able to offer the true entry-level music lover a great product that could really be a market leader.

The timing was also right, in that certain ideas and technologies were available together, for us to produce a very high-quality sound from a new integrated amplifier and CD player. Those who choose Naim expect the very best sound performance even at the entry-level price point and we achieved this by redirecting resources, reducing facilities and spending on parts that have the most beneficial effect on sound quality.

Are the products derivatives of previous Naim models?

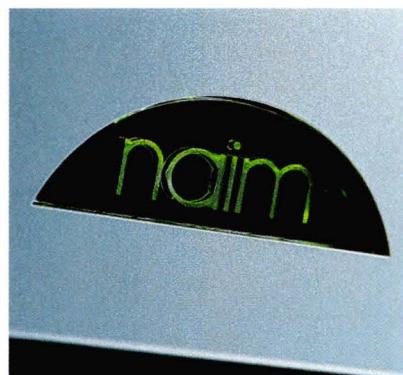
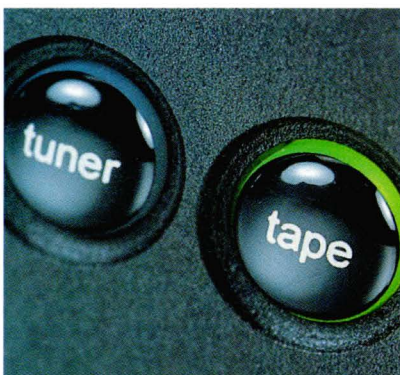
One is and one isn't. The CD5i is a slightly modified version of the CD5, which in turn has much in common with the CDX2 and CDS3. It has the same architecture; 13 very low noise regulated supplies, Naim's control and audio filtering and Naim's proprietary software. The Nait 5i is completely new. The gain structure of the Nait 5i is very different to the Nait 5 because the preamp has no voltage gain circuit – it's passive. This necessitated the design of a power amplifier section with unusually high gain, much higher than previous Naim amplifiers, and so it needed a different circuit topology.

What are the big changes from the previous products?

The main change to the build of the products is the adoption of a large proportion of surface-mount components. This produces a cost-effective build, partly because manufacturing costs are reduced and partly because the PCB area is smaller, for instance most of the CD5i circuitry is inside the swing-tray disc loader, whereas it occupies a separate PCB in the CD5. Much R&D effort was needed to investigate and find surface-mount components that sounded as good as possible. Very critical components such as analogue filter capacitors are still through-hole types.

What's next for Naim?

Naim has been moving pretty swiftly the past few years and we have a very exciting programme ahead of us based on the key Naim value of performance. As the market sectors have become more diverse the music lover has a clear picture of what to expect from Naim, so whether it's stereo music and the 5i range or AV and our DVD player, you will see that the special qualities Naim can bring to the party clearly differentiate us within the market. What's next? Watch this space...



❑ The CD5i is similarly fundamentally changed. It now supports CD-R and CD-RW discs alongside standard Red Book CD. MP-3 or any other Internet Audio format support, so beloved of cheap DVD players as a useful add-on, isn't part of the line-up, however. Nor is upsampling. Naim is typically pragmatic about the decision not to include an upsampling converter – the company chose the DAC on musical performance, not on-paper specifications, and Naim claims that upsampling DACs at this price-point simply don't cut the musical mustard.

However, the choice of DAC is unimportant, compared to the layout. The digital conversion circuit is built into the swing-arm CD transport mechanism itself, instead of being connected to the transport by cable. As this is the most resonance-controlled part of the player (the transport design is borrowed from Naim's upmarket CDX2), it helps to keep the circuit well-damped and close to the mechanism, too. The DAC is also

less important simply because Naim writes its own control and transport software, which in itself influences the performance.

In most cases, the lack of upsampling and digital output in the CD player and lack of inputs in the amplifier would be massive stumbling blocks. But Naim is more like Rolls-Royce in this manner, and any Naim product is simply 'sufficient'.

SOUND QUALITY

Usually it's hard to split Naim components thanks to the company's insistence on using DIN plugs in place of phono sockets. Not any more. These two are designed to be more flexible and used in systems that only speak a smattering of Naim. This is a brilliant move on Naim's part, as it allows more people to switch to a Naim CD or amplifier without substantial system changes. Of course, this only works if the products stand up on their own. A player that only works in context will fail to shine

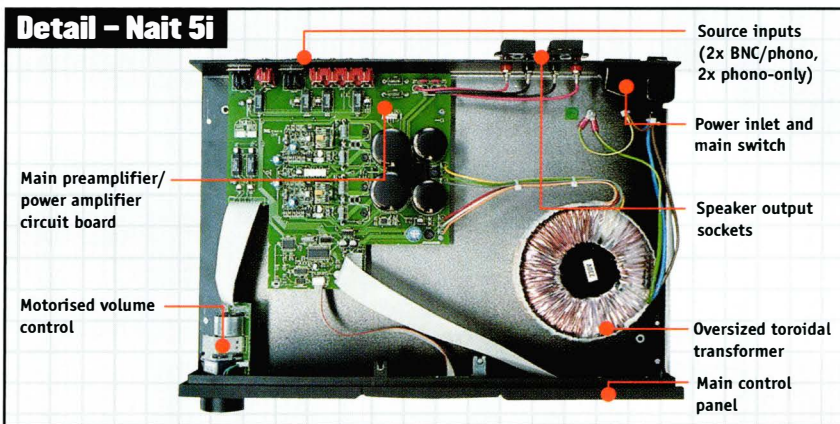
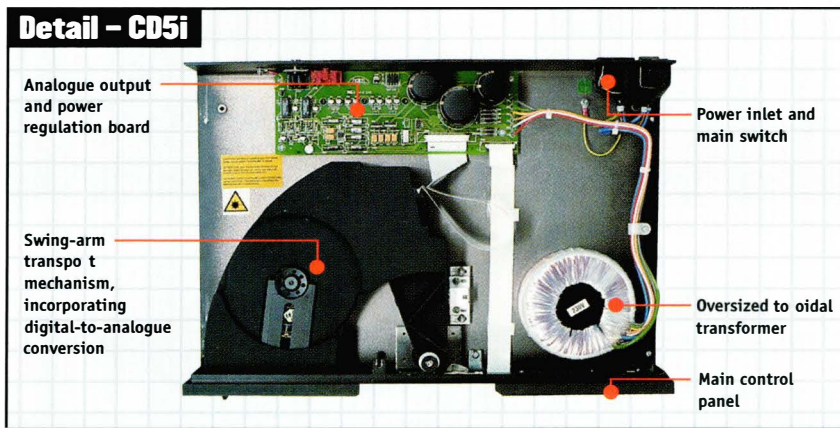
when inserted in a non-proprietary system and Naim will find it hard to convert people to the Naim cause in this stealthy manner.

Fortunately for Naim, both products do work exceptionally well in their own rights. There is a distinct family sound to the Naim components – clean, direct, upbeat and very musical. The CD5i is the detail freak of the two, while the Nait 5i is the grunt-delivery powerhouse. Both are surprisingly good at producing a tight, narrow but surprisingly deep soundstage, given Naim's legendary dismissal of the concept. And both seem to stamp an air of authority on any sub-£3,000 system they are included in.

Of the two, the Nait 5i should be considered the first step in the 'Naimification' process. The amplifier has an amazing ability to bring out the best in cheaper CD players (unless they are really shrill sounding) and can grip hold of speakers like an amplifier with three times the power. It also bestows that uniquely musical Naim quality on any system it touches. In comparison, the CD5i is a little more fussy and demands a superior class of amp to really come to life – the Nait 5i being exactly the sort of superior class of amp it needs. Of course, if you are not in the upgrade market and starting anew with no preconceptions, this is an ideal duo and one with a performance that most newcomers to hi-fi would find jaw-droppingly good.

It's a well-used audio oversimplification to suggest that Naim's entry-level kit is designed for rock music only, but it has some semblance of truth. The Naim kit seems to appeal to the rock end of the spectrum simply because it acts on the sort of emotional level rock music most naturally addresses. Those who consider music to be some form of cerebral, intellectual affair may prefer something a bit less exciting and a lot less fun. But it really doesn't matter what genre of music you listen to through the Naim system, it will make it enjoyable and enticing. Even something considered polite and genteel – Mozart's *Violin Concertos* for example – comes across as fresh, new and fun. Some of this excitement is due to a bit of judicious bandwidth limitation, and the Naim duo taken together lack the sort of bat-eared frequency extension so beloved of SACD and DVD-Audio fans. This is a welcome trade-off though, as less 'sound' seems to spell more 'music'.

And it really does make a lot of musical sense. Belle & Sebastian's latest *Dear Catastrophe Waitress* CD is their best recording yet (thanks to Trevor Horn at the faders) and tracks like *Step Into My Office*, *Baby* take on an absolutely precise rhythm with the vocals standing out from the rest of the recording perfectly. So what if you don't get the very last scintilla of detail or the sort of soundstage width that appears to project



“Naim kit appeals to the rock end of the spectrum because it acts on the sort of emotional level rock music addresses.”

the bass player into next door's living room? Delivering that much *schadenfreude* on disc is going to take some compromise – at least the Naim components compromise in the right (read: musical) way.

Finally, the cable flexibility works – up to a point. Whether it's a function of the product design or a sign of the poor quality of other cables is a moot point, but if you are using both CD5i and Nait 5i, the best interconnect is the little grey DIN cable and the best speaker cable is a single run of NAC A5. Changing up for capacitive speaker cables (such as Kimber 8TC) is a definite no-no, turning a lively, bouncy performance into something flat and dead. Still, the flexibility allows you to gradually change into the right Naim robes at your own pace.

It's not hard to see why Naim is still at the top of the hi-fi tree with products as fine as these. If you have a non-Naim system that costs around £1,500 or so, the CD5i will gently persuade you to make the complete switch to Naim Audio components. Slot in the Nait 5i in place of the CD5i and the gentle persuasion is gone and the Nait makes you an offer your system can't refuse.

It's still a controversial choice – the limited inputs, the lack of digital output, the enforced bandwidth changes will never sit comfortably with some. But the Naim components sound so good that it makes it hard not to be won over. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

VERDICT – Naim CD5i

SOUND >> 84%	BUILD >> 90%
FEATURES >> 50%	VALUE >> 86%

CONCLUSION
One of the most distinctive and finest sounding CD players under £1,000. A rhythmic and solid-sounding music-maker.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
>> 85%

VERDICT – Naim Nait 5i

SOUND >> 88%	BUILD >> 90%
FEATURES >> 58%	VALUE >> 90%

CONCLUSION
The little Nait ain't so little now, but keeps the powerful, fun sound of before, along with wattage and detail upgrades.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
>> 89%

TRUE CLASS ACT

This modern classic has been redesigned with an all-new metal/composite enclosure

PRODUCT Wilson Benesch ACT

TYPE 2.5-way floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE From £8,400 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 23x108x37cm

◊ Weight: 74kg ◊ Advanced combination metal/CFC enclosure ◊ Crossover frequencies: bass 500Hz; midrange to tweeter 5kHz ◊ Isotactic cone main drivers

CONTACT ☎ 0114 285 2656

🌐 www.wilson-benesch.com

Sheffield-based Wilson Benesch is a specialist hi-fi company that's built a considerable international reputation after only a decade or so of operation, based largely on the creative application of carbon fibre composites. Known as CFCs, these have been used successfully in turntables, tonearms and cartridges, as well as the company's impressive range of loudspeakers, several of which have been reviewed in *HFC* over the last few years.

The original WB speaker, which did much to put the company on the map, was the ACT One. With its initials referring to the Advanced Composite Technologies used for the enclosure, this compact and very pretty floorstander had an attractively tapered

enclosure and carried a £6,500 price tag on release. Ranges with smaller and larger models have both been developed, but the ACT One and its derivations (Actor, ACT Two) remain at the heart of things, as packages which supply an enticing combination of laudable high-end performance and good domestic acceptability.

This latest, brand new version of the ACT, now with a price tag that starts at £8,400, has the same internal volume as the somewhat larger ACT Two. But by replacing relatively thick MDF with much thinner metalwork, it manages to achieve this within the same external dimensions as the original ACT One.

Indeed, all the structural components used here are either carbon fibre composites or metal. The latter, in a combination of steel and aluminium up to 18mm thick, is used for both the front baffle and the internal braces. This ensures that the total structure is exceptionally stiff, while increasing the total weight from the original ACT One's 42kg up to a rather dramatic 74kg. CFC, with a woven pattern, is used to form a complete 'U' section around the rear part of the enclosure.

Size-wise, the ACT is about right – big enough to impress and do the business, small enough not to impose, and with enough clever detailing to look interesting. Shape, size and styling cues are all very similar to its ACT One predecessor, with the curved sides and a narrow back giving a usefully irregular plan view, helping to 'spread' and 'de-focus' internal standing waves and reflections. The distinctively sloping and exceptionally thick top might frustrate horticulturalists, but will also block sound transmission.

The driver configuration is a simple 'two-and-a-half-way', using two of WB's own proprietary 'Tactic' drive units. The lower one of these just covers bass frequencies, up to around 500Hz; the upper one handles the complete bass and midrange spectrum, right up to a nominal 5kHz, where the Scandinavian-sourced soft fabric dome tweeter takes over.

The Tactic driver is unique in several respects. Its frame is machined from solid aluminium, and shaped to give a very open profile, free from obstruction, behind the diaphragm – all the more so because the tiny motor structure uses powerful but very compact rare earth alloy magnets (NeFeB). The cone material is a three-layer, self-bonding woven Isotactic polymer, which gives the driver its name. The latest Tactic drivers used here show some specific variations, with clearly visible cone weave differences between the two. The bass-only unit has a lightweight edge-wound aluminium voice coil, allowing a thicker, stiffer cone to be used without increasing the moving mass. The bass/mid driver, however, has the lighter cone, alongside a heavier (copper) voice coil.

The 'standard' finish combines matt black metalwork with a glossy (if gloomy) woven pattern CFC section. High-quality real wood veneers can be laid on the metal for an extra £705 – an extravagant price perhaps, but you're paying for a difficult and expensive process (allegedly carried out by a company which also veneers dashboards for Rolls Royce cars). Bespoke options are also available.

The porting arrangement has been revamped. The uppermost (bass/mid) driver is vented through the spine near the top of the cabinet, while the bass-only driver's port passes through the chunky steel 'n' MDF base. The latter is equipped with four of the wickedest looking spikes, combining unusually sharp points with hefty 10mm shafts.



The crossover network is deliberately simple, using first-order filtering, with selected polypropylene caps and air-cored inductors. Internal wiring is multi-strand PTFE-insulated silver-plated copper.

SOUND QUALITY

The speakers were initially connected onto the end of a predominantly Naim-based reference system (CDS-3 CD player, NAC 552 preamp, NAP 500 power amp), plus Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner and a Linn/Rega hybrid record player. Connecting cables and equipment supports were a mixture of kit from Vertex AQ, Naim and Mana. Further listening was done using a Burmester 001 CD player, 032 integrated amplifier and 948 power conditioner.

The room measurements indicate that free-space siting is likely to make most sense with this speaker (see Positioning, p38), in order to make the most of its remarkable stereo imaging capabilities and minimise midband colorations, and this was therefore adopted for most of the listening sessions.

However, the bass here is both well damped and fairly lean, as well as exceptionally clean, and therefore proves reasonably tolerant of some wall reinforcement. Some time was spent with the speakers performing very satisfactorily just one foot out from the wall, and although this does inhibit the transparency a little, the slight extra weight and warmth provides generally positive compensation.

The first and most abiding impression here was of the ACT's superbly 'quiet' enclosure, which was probably less audible, with a lower 'sonic signature' than any floorstander we've yet come across. Its sheer inaudibility brings new meaning to the phrase "freedom from boxiness", and was readily confirmed by feeling the virtual absence of box vibrations when playing loud 'n' heavy music.

One hears the drive units here, in a sense, but they seem to operate as if suspended in the air, with imaging so precise that one remains unaware of their exact location, and merely conscious of the music filling the space around and between the speakers. Central focus was particularly impressive, creating an image that was not only stable and precisely positioned, but also somehow correctly proportioned in size and scale.

This is a brilliantly easy speaker for simple relaxation because it's so self-effacing. ▶

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



"Bass is exceptionally clean, and provides unusually fine insight into the most complex bass interplay and texture."

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HYBRID HEAVEN

Unison Research turns over new leaf with its baby valve/transistor hybrid amp



PRODUCT Unison Research Unico P

TYPE Valve/transistor hybrid stereo integrated amp

PRICE £750

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x10x34cm

Weight 14kg Power output: 50 watts/channel
Internally switched MM/MC phono input Four line level inputs Remote volume control

CONTACT 01753 652669

www.unisonresearch.com

The Unico P is a stereo integrated amplifier. It's worth making that clear up front because new introductions in this category are nothing like as common as they once were – and stereo is a necessary qualifier for equally obvious reasons. But this is what the Unico P is: a nice, straightforward amplifier of the old-fashioned kind, designed to appeal to the audiophile, and gimmick-free.

Unison Research is a small specialist brand of quality electronics from Treviso in Italy which was founded around 15 years ago. The products are housed in simple but (for the price) amazingly well presented housings, but this is no surprise – build and finish are practically the calling card of the

Italian hi-fi industry. The Unico P is the baby of the range, a £750 amplifier rated at 50 watts, but which the maker claims invariably delivers around 70 watts.

The Unico P is a hybrid valve/transistor design which uses ECC82 valves in twin triode configuration for the first stage of amplification, followed by subsequent stages executed in silicon in which the driver is bipolar and the output stage uses MOSFETs. According to the explanatory information supplied with the amp, the idea is to maintain "the sonic performance of the valve amplification while improving power output level by means of a properly designed solid state stage".

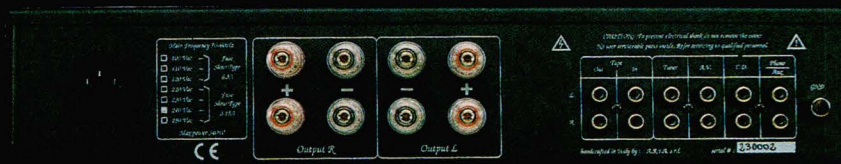
This circuit operates in what the maker describes as Dynamic Class A, which in this context means that bias levels change according to the signal amplitude. According

to the maker's notes once again, this results in a much better performance in terms of gain linearity to give a very smooth output with only low-order harmonic distortion residues. This kind of circuit, often referred to as sliding bias, has some of the technical properties of Class A in that crossover distortion artefacts are avoided as the two transistors in a pair are not completely switched off at the switching point. But sliding bias is often associated with other non-linearities, possibly due to modulating demands on the power supply. It's a moot point whether they are better than the ills that are being avoided, but as always the proof is in the eating, and as you'll see, the Unico tastes pretty good.

On fixtures and fittings, the Unico is solidly built with a particularly impressive ultra-thick front panel extrusion, and is neatly presented with just two controls. The volume control is an old-fashioned type based on a motorised ALPS pot and mechanical wiper, rather than the digitally stepped type that is almost standard form these days. The selector switch is also a nice, simple mechanically switched type. Four line inputs include a tape circuit but no monitor facility, and there is a phono input, which can be switched between moving magnet and moving coil using internal jumpers.

The nearest that the amplifier gets to high tech is a remote control that is made from wood with an inset panel screwed in place with two ugly round headed screws. This is home to the small, rather stiff control buttons, which will operate a matching CD player as well as exercising control over the amplifier volume.

The amp also has internal monitoring which keeps the output stage disconnected from the load at power up, flashing a pair of front-panel LEDs which double as position indicators for the two controls until the amplifier is ready for use. The same circuit also checks for proper operation in use. There is no preamplifier output however, which means that Unison doesn't envisage that the Unico P will be used in a bi-amplified situation.



SOUND QUALITY

The last time we looked at a Unison Research amplifier, it didn't exactly come out smelling of roses. That was a hybrid design too, which sounded lumpy in the bass, and screechy in the treble. This is repeated here not to rub it in, but just the opposite, to show how far Unison Research has come in the interim. Everything that was wrong about that earlier amplifier has turned around for this one, and the real beauty is that this is a more affordable design that doesn't promise all that much on paper.

But while that earlier model didn't live up to the expectations that preceded it, in contrast, this one exceeds them in almost every way, and the turnaround was apparent from the very first. Even without the benefit of an extended burn-in period, the Unico P is a thoroughly engaging and enjoyable amplifier. Some rapid A-B comparisons against more powerful, expensive, solid state competition left the Unison Research unequivocally in the lead in terms of sheer all-round ability to communicate the essence of fine music and music making. It is not quite the most detailed or transparent amplifier in its class, but it has other important things going for it. This is a hybrid design that does just what the maker claims, delivering a strong measure of the grace and purity of glowing bottles with solid-state power and authority.

Specifically, Unison Research is right to point to the Unico P's deceptive power delivery. It does indeed go louder than you'd expect of a 50-watter, and it does so

gracefully, rather than hitting the end stops in a fit of pique when the output runs out of steam. This amplifier has a bold, direct quality, along with an exuberance that drives music along at a strong clip, but it never sounds matter of fact. Music that can become disjointed through lesser amplifiers hangs together well, in part because timing cues are handled well, which is perhaps the area that contrasts most strongly with what came before.


One of the recordings tried for the purposes of this test was a Reference Recordings disc of Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* and other pieces, which is a great performance of sometimes too-familiar repertoire, but which is of interest because it is on Reference Recordings, a label that appears to be constitutionally incapable of making ugly sounding discs. This is one of their best, but even so, it was lifted by the Unico P. The orchestra reproduced with realistic scale, weight and size, and predictably, based on what had already become apparent in early trials, the Unico P did nothing to diminish these qualities. What was surprising however was the agility of the sound. This is an amplifier with most of the qualities of a heavyweight, but when it comes to timing and articulation, this is definitely a small, nimble sort of amplifier and a very together sounding one at that. The Unico P has real snap and rhythm.

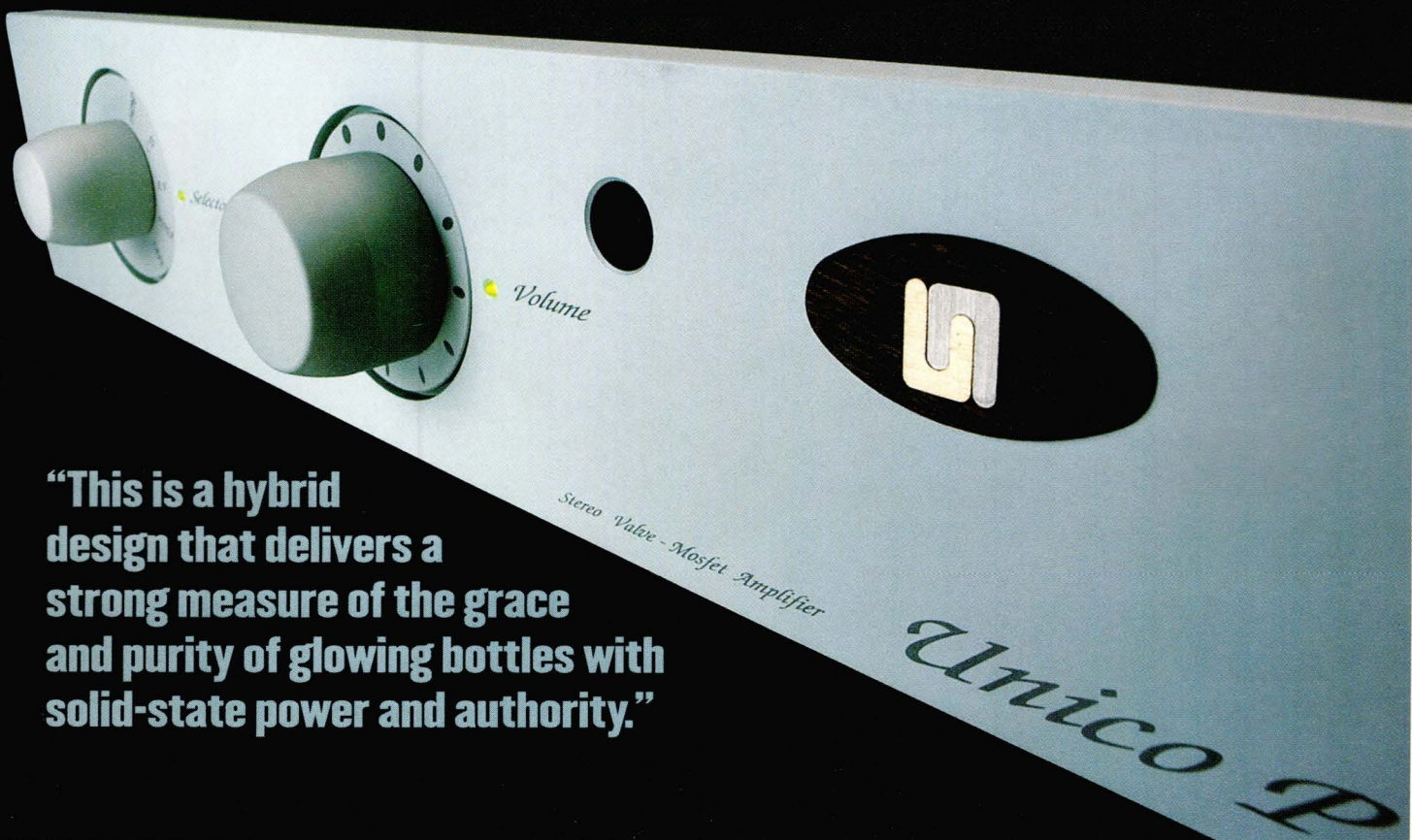
The pattern was repeated elsewhere. Piano was powerful and percussive, female voice sounded pure and refined. Rock did just that, with a surprising sense of conviction for a

design that makes no pretence of being a muscle amp. Given that this is a part-valve amplifier, noise could perhaps have been a limiting factor, but it wasn't. Even on full gain, there is essentially no hiss or hum audible whatsoever.

The bottom line is that this may not be the kind of amplifier that excites the intellect – it lacks the ready analysis and resolving ability of some – but it certainly knows how to stir the emotions. If you end up feeling that you've been, let's say, manipulated, it all seems in such a good cause and in such good musical taste that you're unlikely to feel aggrieved. This is simply an amplifier that provides a thoroughly ear-pleasing ride. Enjoy it. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT		
SOUND >> 87% [Progress bar]	PRO Superb packaging belies price, but so does its well-sorted power delivery and nicely-judged sound quality.	
FEATURES >> 72% [Progress bar]	CON No preamp output, and despite the wooden superstructure and its ability to stand on its heel, the remote control feels clumsy and won't even switch inputs.	
BUILD >> 86% [Progress bar]		
VALUE >> 89% [Progress bar]		
CONCLUSION Price for price, this must be the best Unison Research amplifier yet, one that receives our seal of approval as an amplifier that belies its modest specification, and which makes music with a quality that enthuses as much as it informs.		
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 87%		



“This is a hybrid design that delivers a strong measure of the grace and purity of glowing bottles with solid-state power and authority.”

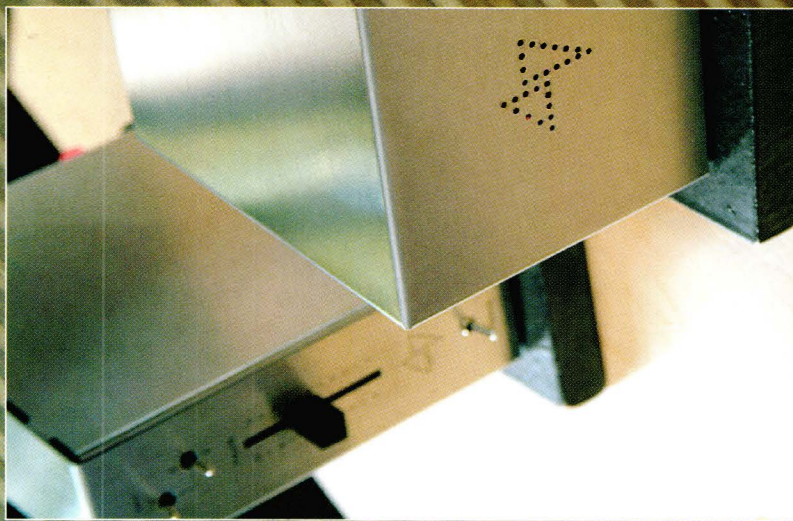


Sugden Music Master System

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 CD Master. 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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Photography & Design: Tom Foxall 01952 727866



47 Laboratory

For some it's Zen - for others, radical. Call it what you will, but at the end of the track, it's all about trusting your ears. About letting the simplicity of design, the energy and flow of the music carry you away.
Small in size, big on sound, and more music than mere audio jewels, 47 Lab distills technology down to its simplest, purest form. And when you listen you'll know that this path - *your path* - is the one to follow. Why? because designer Junji Kimura preserves the life of the music. There are no compromises. No unnecessary flash - no B.S. - just dynamic, unadulterated music. Radical? Maybe.

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.

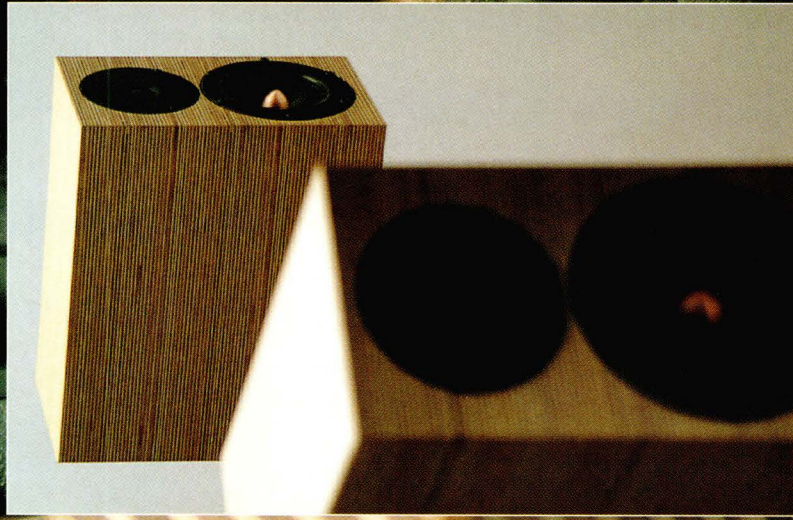


Orpheus

Orpheus Zero is an innovative CD drive or player. It reads CD, CD-R and CD-RW formats with 100% precision. Consequently, the standard reading correction mechanism is always switched off during track reading. When used as a player, the incoming data stream is converted into analogue with a 24bit/192kHz component

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.

Orpheus Three is an analogue domain power amplifier, 150W mono and 40W stereo units are available. They both have XLR and RCA inputs, as well as two speaker outputs (allowing bi wiring of the mono power amplifiers).
Orpheus Three excels with coherence and optimal transient response throughout the whole frequency spectrum, and adapts to every speaker configuration and load.



Penaudio Charisma

The Charisma is a small stand mounted loudspeaker for those who want to maximise space and sound quality. The custom-made woofer and hand made birch finish make these the most transparent 2 way we have heard. Also now available is the Rebel 2, priced at £995, another great 2 way for the money, truly a giant in a small package, it creates a sound stage and depth you would not imagine. Please take the time to listen to these superb mini monitors.

IT'S IN THE CANS

£300 buys quite a lot of speaker these days – it also buys an outrageous amount of headphone!

PRODUCT Sennheiser HD650

TYPE Open-back headphone set

PRICE £299

CONTACT ☎ 01494 551551 # www.sennheiser.co.uk

Few manufacturers have more experience of headphones than Sennheiser, the classic yellow ear-piece models having been a staple of practically every professional sound-bod's life at one time or another and various models having achieved telephone-number sales in the hi-fi world too. The arrival of a new 'reference' model is not to be treated lightly, then, especially when the literature (from a firm not given to hyperbole) likens the performance to that of the legendary Orpheus electrostatic system, once sold for £10,000.

Naturally, there's a lengthy list of technical benefits, including hand-selected pairs of drivers, ultra-low-mass coils and diaphragms for extended frequency response, OFC leads, newly optimised magnet design for lower distortion, and so on. All of this builds on the established success of the HD600 model, itself no mean performer. And of course the claimed performance figures leave practically all speakers standing – frequency response from 10Hz to over 39kHz, distortion of 0.05 per cent and maximum levels limited more by comfort than any mechanical considerations.

SOUND QUALITY

Except for headphone diehards, few people realise just how far 'cans' have come on over recent years. A good pair of 1980s headphones could deliver quite a lot of musical information in a reasonably balanced manner, while electrostatics of the period were exceptionally informative though not always to everyone's taste, tonally. The better 1990s models added significant performance

in both resolution and tonal areas.

The HD650s, however, are revelatory. Dropping into a review system which of late has seen Beyerdynamic's very tasty DT990s as well as various high-resolution speakers, they immediately moved the whole resolution game up a level or five. Usefully, they arrived during the mastering of a new CD, and within their first few seconds of use had helped identify a minor editing fault: they also confirmed that the recording was on the mark for tonal balance and adequate though not outstanding for outside noise. The sound of these transducers is simply so convincing that you know, instinctively and at once, that you can trust it implicitly.

And does that translate to the virtues that make a regular playback system sing? Most certainly. Apart from anything else, the combination of their extraordinary resolution and neutral balance means that listening fatigue is all but banished – with all too many cans it's a serious drawback due to a harsh brightness that is presumably intended to win quick converts in a two-minute dem. None of that here, and indeed one might think on occasion that the treble's a bit soft, not least because background hiss is particularly unintrusive. But when extension is required it is obviously there, bags of it, clear and quite devoid of ear-slicing tendencies.

At the other extreme, the bass is extended in a way that's unique in our experience of open-back cans, so deep and tuneful that it can really make one feel that tightening of the chest that's normally associated only with drop-dead-huge loudspeakers at high levels.

There are things these headphones can't do. They can't match speakers for stereo imaging (especially depth) when the recording has been optimised for speakers, as most have. No headphone will ever do that unaided, but with extended listening one soon learns the required mental adjustments and it seems natural enough. And the HD650 absolutely cannot make excuses for poor or flawed recordings. If it's there, you'll hear it and it's



up to you whether to concentrate on the musical plus or the technical minus when there's a conflict. When both are pluses, though, you'll hear more of your music collection than you knew you had. This is high fidelity in its truest form. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >> 95%



COMFORT >> 88%



BUILD >> 92%



VALUE >> 91%



PRO
Fantastically detailed sound in the best possible way, never forcing detail on the listener and impeccably balanced.

CON
Fairly tight headband could become a little uncomfortable for some listeners. A coiled lead might be friendlier.

CONCLUSION

One of the most impressive hi-fi experiences we've had in a while, with a worryingly substantial advance in what we had regarded as 'high resolution' sound quality. Does far more than merely make headphones acceptable for late nights.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> 93%



DVD PIONEERS

The new generation of Pioneer universal players has moved DVD playback to a new, higher plane

PRODUCT Pioneer DV-668AV-S and DV-868AVi-S
TYPE Universal DVD-Audio/Video/SACD/CD players
PRICE £600 (DV-668AV-S), £1,000 (DV-868AVi-S)
KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 42x10x28cm (DV-668AV), 42x11x28cm (DV-868AVi) • HDMI digital video output with HDCP encryption • 'PureCinema' progressive scan • i.Link 'wide band' digital output, compatible with SACD/DVD-Audio (DV-868AVi-S only)
CONTACT ☎ 01753 789500 🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

For the last few years, Pioneer has consistently led the field with the development (through strategic partnerships) of new video and audio disc-related standards and technologies. This strategy bore fruit in 2001 with the industry's first truly 'universal' DVD player, compatible with both the DVD-Audio and SACD high-res multichannel music formats. The company then followed up with the FireWire/IEEE1394-based 'i.Link' digital audio interface, helping to establish a standard also adopted by Yamaha, Sony and Denon. And last year, Pioneer startled observers with working samples of a player with the new HDMI interface with HDCP encryption even before it had been ratified as a standard. That third-generation player is now available commercially as the DV-868AVi-S ('S' for 'silver', the player's colour), at an attractive price for leading-edge

technology. It's reviewed here alongside its slightly simpler, but more affordable and still very impressive stablemate, the DV-668AV-S.

The headline feature of both players, which sets them apart from all others thus far, is the HDMI interface (see box, p45) that streams digital video off the disc and feeds it to an HDMI-equipped video display in digital form. Although there are differences in the way the two players process video which favour the more costly player, they both output progressive video in PAL or NTSC form. Both can handle a wide range of disc types including DVD-Audio, DVD-Video, stereo and multichannel SACD, DVD-R/RW, CD, CD-R/RW, VCD, Super VCD and MP3-CD.

In addition to HDMI, the more basically equipped DV-668AV sports a 12-bit/216MHz video DAC, Analog Devices NSV (Noise Shaped Video) to enhance colour linearity and reduce noise, and Pioneer's own VQE8 video enhancer, which offers a range of progressive scan adjustments. The DV-868AVi has all these features, plus an enhanced 14-bit video DAC, Legato Link Pro curve smoothing and Hi-Bit upsampling audio enhancements. The most important addition, carried across from the earlier DV-757i, is the i.Link digital interface, which outputs audio from CD, DVD-V, DVD-A and SACD discs in their native PCM or DSD (SACD) formats. A range of new technologies

and components are common to both models, including six-layer PCBs with separate ground and power planes. Very whizzy.

Both players include on-board Dolby Digital and DTS decoders and SRS pseudo surround for two-speaker operation, with some modestly powerful speaker management options. But as usual these functions are best handled by the AV amplifier in a high-performance system. Both players are solid and well-built, and operated smoothly and reliably in day-to-day use during our test work.

SOUND QUALITY

Apart from some minor pratfalls, there were no real problems with system set-up. The graphical on-screen menus are helpfully designed and a pleasure to use. The digital interfaces worked well with a range of partnering equipment too. i.Link digital audio output was used with Pioneer's VSX-AX5i multichannel receiver and its senior cousin, the VSA-AX10i. It was also possible to give the Pioneer DV-868AVi a spin with Sony's new i.Link-equipped TA-DA9000ES, a fully digital multichannel amp. It was a thrill to see the Pioneer's model name show in the Sony display as the music began, but the combination only worked with CD and SACD, as DVD-Audio compliance for Sony's i.Link interface is a software upgrade away.



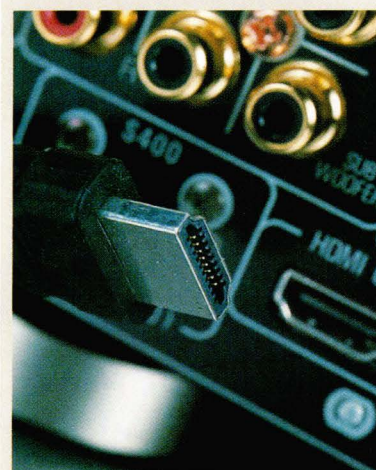
Through their analogue outputs, the two Pioneers gave a clean, clear account of a variety of discs in all formats, with a slightly weightier showing for the DV-868AV. It is no match for the more costly and less flexible (but still i.Link-ready) Sony SCD-XA9000ES SACD player, and as an analogue player it comes second to Denon's similarly-universal DVD-A11, whose sound is more grounded and scaled. But it is no walkover in either case, and both Pioneers have a characteristically smooth, neutral presentation and excellent spatial imagery. Although there are now more DVD-Audio discs around, there remains a famine of good contemporary material in most genres, but what was available (Prokofiev on Naxos for example) reproduced with exquisite detail and gusto.

Switching to the i.Link output is both a limiting and a liberating experience. Limiting because the performance of current i.Link-equipped amps is some way from the true high end, and these are effectively high-end players in everything but price. And liberating because it improves on what is possible using the same amps via their analogue inputs. Dynamically, i.Link sound hits a touch harder. The base noise level is lower (barely noticeable because noise was never a big issue with any format, even SACD which has a disadvantage in this area) and detail is a little better expressed.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

There are not many HDMI-equipped video display devices yet, but Pioneer supplied one of their new HDMI-friendly PDP-504

HDMI



Often referred to as 'digital Scart', HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) is a newly industry-ratified AV interface capable of transferring raw digital video data off disc to a video display, avoiding any analogue processing on the way. Apart from control and other housekeeping functions, the only change to the signal is HDCP encryption, which is a lossless process reversed at the receiving end and which has no effect on picture quality. Although HDMI offers wider bandwidth and other potential performance advantages over the much older DVI standard, and always includes encryption (which is not always the case with DVI), backwards compatibility has been retained. Video screens and projectors with DVI-HDCP inputs can use the HDMI output of these Pioneer players via a simple passive converter. HDMI is also capable of handling Dolby Digital and DTS audio data. HDMI Version 2, which should start to ship within a year, will extend audio capability to full uncompressed DVD-A and SACD.

“The difference that HDMI makes is like night and day, the only initial reaction is ‘Wow!’.”



LINKING UP

Naturally, Pioneer produces components to which these players' advanced digital interfaces may be connected. Both machines will output digital video directly to Pioneer's PDP-504 plasma TV (left) via HDMI, while the VSX-AX5i receiver (below) will take all forms of audio, DVD-Audio and SACD included, from the DV-868AVi's i.Link output.

Q & A

John Bamford, Product Manager of Pioneer UK, gives us his thoughts on the future of high-fidelity sound and vision



HFC: How do you see the importance of i.Link to the future of multichannel audio?

JB: We have long known it would be great to extract all kinds of digital audio from a multi-format DVD player, so that we wouldn't have to listen to the sound of the player's own D/A converters. In September 2002, IEEE1304/i.Link was rubber stamped for DVD-A and SACD, and a year later, with the acceptance of HDCP encryption for DVI and HDMI, it is possible to output audio and video in raw digital form. It's especially exciting with the new generation of plasmas and projectors. The DVD player now only has to act as a transport.

Now the signal is fully digital, doesn't it mean that all players with digital outputs are effectively the same?

No. The main differentiating factor now becomes the development of the scaling chips that upsamples the video data to match the display.

Where will be the next big shift come from?

Full high-definition TV. We've been tucked up with digital television like we have been with digital radio, but it's narrow band and not high quality, and I think it's a tragedy we are so far behind Japan and the USA. My own view is that high-def will only get under way when the bandwidth becomes available, but this won't be until after the big analogue switchoff. Ironically the BBC is one of the biggest producers of high-def video.

What future, if any, is there for DVI?

DVI was designed for computers, and it has no long-term future in home video. HDMI will replace the Scart as the high-definition multimedia interface of choice.

What are your feelings about the relative merits of SACD and DVD-Audio?

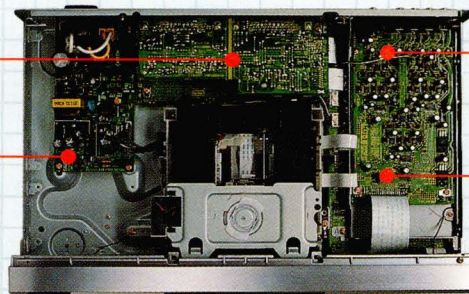
If I was to be pinned to a wall, I would prefer DVD-Audio, partly because it tends to offer a better package, but also because it offers a more naked, rawer sound which I think is truer to the master tape. SACD to me sounds slightly euphonic, but the reality is that it's hard to establish the provenance of most DSD recordings. Most of them have almost certainly been PCM at some stage.



Detail – DV-668AV-S

Analogue video output board, with twin Scarts

Switch mode power supply



Main audio board, includes 3x Burr-Brown PCM1738 DACs

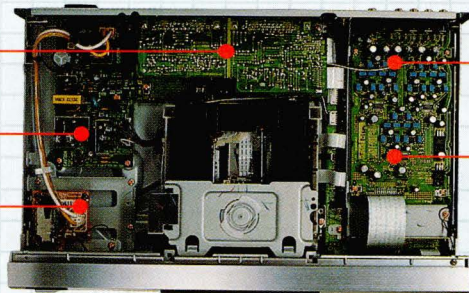
Board beneath this one includes MPEG video decoder, SACD/DVD-Audio decoders and Silicon Image SiL9090 HDMI transmitter

Detail – DV-868AVi-S

Analogue video output board, with twin Scarts

Switch mode power supply

Mechanical power switch with added filtering for a quieter supply feed



Main audio board, includes 3x Burr-Brown PCM1738 DACs

Board beneath this one includes i.Link circuitry, video upscaler for HDMI output and digital audio processing

plasma TVs for our test, which worked beautifully. But the players are capable of delivering a signal which offers more than any plasma, no matter how good, can show to full advantage. As good fortune would have it, the DVD player loan period coincided with the availability of SIM2's latest and greatest DLP projector, the superb HDMI-equipped HT300 Link – high-fidelity video at its best.

HDMI is much more than simply the latest technological toy. Although it has yet to stretch its wings as an audio interface, it is capable of very impressive video. As 'legacy' analogue video players, the two Pioneers give excellent performance, but switching to HDMI gives a clearer, cleaner and sharper picture with visibly less video noise, better colour transitions and well controlled motion artefacts. The difference that HDMI makes is like night and day, and the only initial reaction is an involuntary "Wow!". Perhaps the difference is so large because there is no analogue conversion at all. The signal stays in digital form from when it is read off disc until it hits the pixels on screen. Even the plasma was good enough to show a performance edge with HDMI enabled, and the surprisingly strong showing of Pioneer's internal video scaling and deinterlacing to boot. But the SIM2 showed what was really possible, which is nothing less than the best standard resolution PAL performance this reviewer has ever seen. Roll on high definition TV!

There was little to choose between the two players via HDMI, but there was a small but identifiable advantage from the DV-868AVi,

which just looked a little cleaner and more expressive in the way that colour reproduced with films like *AI* and *Moulin Rouge*, which have an extended and subtle colour palate.

This is a pair of players with superb all-round performance, but from a musical perspective the more costly DV-868AVi has greater stretch thanks to its i.Link digital interface, and also its marginally better sound through analogue outputs. This is particularly important because one lesson from this and other recent tests is that universal player performance now notably outstrips the ability of most multichannel amps to deliver at the highest level, even though they have been raising their game. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT – DV-668AV-S

SOUND >> 81%

VISION >> 93%

FEATURES >> 91%

VALUE >> 95%

CONCLUSION

High-value player with good audio and state of the art video, all at a price which belies the advanced technology within.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> **90%**

VERDICT – DV-868AVi-S

SOUND >> 86%

VISION >> 95%

FEATURES >> 95%

VALUE >> 92%

CONCLUSION

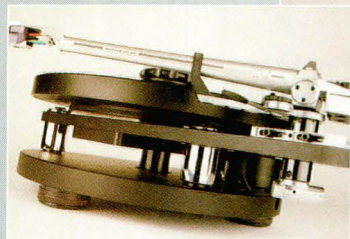
Serious player with great picture quality (analogue and digital) and sound quality to match or better most universal players.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> **92%**

the AUDIO CONSULTANTS

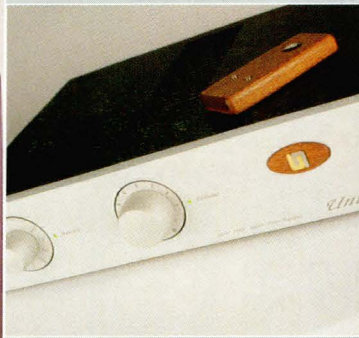
FINE TWO CHANNEL AUDIO SYSTEMS



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



Mono Pulse. A new British range of loudspeakers with very precise imaging and a large soundstage not normally found at this price range. Contemporary looks, wide range of colour options, priced from £500 to £1000.



Unico. Hybrid integrated amplifier, 80wpc. Line only version £900, with phono stage £950.



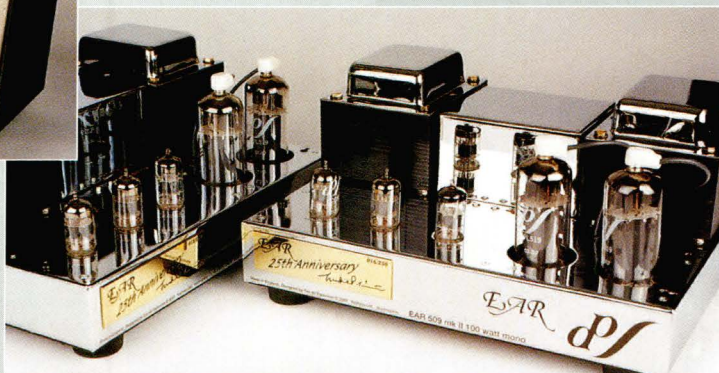
Wadia 861 CD player. Both Basic and SE versions on permanent demonstration



Sugden Masterclass. The Masterclass series of products has one of the most transparent and three-dimensional sounds we have heard in any amplifier. A must hear! AA Pre-amplifier £2300, Balanced Mono Amplifiers £6600 the pair. CD player (not shown) £2750.



Consonance Audio. A new valve amplifier range from China. Extremely good sound, well built and affordable pricing. Dual mono amplifiers 65wpc £1995.



EAR 509 mono amplifiers. The anniversary edition of this classic EAR amplifier. 100wpc of pure valve sound. EAR 509: £4895 the pair.



Pathos New Classic One
This valve hybrid amplifier has many of the qualities of the Logos but at an affordable price £1275.

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GAMUT ▶ ISO TEK ▶ KUZMA ▶ LAVARDIN ▶ LYRA ▶ MONO PULSE ▶ MOON ▶ NORDOST ▶ NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE ▶ OPERA ▶ PAGODE ▶ PATHOS ▶ QUADRASPIRE
RESOLUTION AUDIO ▶ ROGUE AUDIO ▶ SME ▶ SHANLING ▶ SHUN MOOK ▶ SUGDEN ▶ TRANSFIGURATION ▶ TRI-PLANAR ▶ UNISON RESEARCH ▶ VPI ▶ WADIA

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EYRIS REVISITED

Tannoy's largest Eyris undergoes a major makeover, with the latest dual concentric driver

PRODUCT Tannoy Eyris DC3

TYPE 3.5-way floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £1,299 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 20x10x26cm

◉ Weight: 22.5kg ◉ Reflex rear-ported enclosure

◉ Magnetic shielding ◉ Internal volume: 23 litres

◉ Three real wood veneer options ◉ Measured sensitivity: 89dB/W ◉ Measured impedance: 5ohm (min)

CONTACT ☎ 01236 420199 # www.tannoy.com

Tannoy's original Eyris models, introduced in 2002, received a mixed response in *HFC*, with the Recommended ratings going to the smaller Eyris 1 and 2 models rather than this particular model's Eyris 3 predecessor. While this stylish range might not have enjoyed dramatic commercial success in its original guise, it still makes considerable sense as a compact, tidy and attractive package well suited to further development.

These new DC models represent just the first stage in this process, replacing the original bass/mid driver with a newly developed 175mm version of Tannoy's famous proprietary dual-concentric driver – a two-way 'full range' drive unit in which a tweeter is mounted behind the main cone, firing out through a horn that replaces the usual pole-piece extension of conventional bass/mid drivers.

If the Eyris DC-series represents a logical step forward from the original models, plans are also well advanced for a much more complex range of Eyris models which have similar styling but built-in power amplification, active drive and 'room compensation' filtering, to avoid the bass unevenness that results from the excitation of standing wave room modes. This advanced feature was most effective when demonstrated using movie material at the major Autumn 2003 hi-fi show.

Offering something rather different from the styling norm, the Eyris shape gets away from the regular rectilinear box by mounting a super-tweeter in an elegantly arched top, made from a mixture of shiny cast metal and moulded plastic. The real wood veneered enclosure – finished in sycamore, American walnut or black ash – is solidly engineered with an 18mm carcass, a hefty 30mm front panel and substantial internal bracing.

Paralleling the configuration found in the much less costly vinyl-covered Sensys DC2, recently reviewed in *HFC* 250, the Eyris DC3 operates as a 'three-and-a-half-way'. The bass driver is rolled off by a second order filter at 250Hz; the dual concentric driver uses first order crossover slopes between bass/mid and

treble, centred on 1.8kHz; the super-tweeter is fed via a third-order network at 16kHz.

Both 120mm diameter cones are made from carefully selected multi-fibre paper pulp mixes, coloured blue. The lower unit, without the horn tweeter, is just used to augment the bass region, along with the rear port. Above this is the main dual-concentric driver, which covers the full gamut from bass through to the extreme treble. At very high frequencies, however, it's joined by the top-mounted super-tweeter, which extends output into the ultrasonic region, and also augments the dispersion of high frequencies at the top of the regular tweeter range. Both the bass and the dual-concentric drivers have cast alloy frames, rebated into the baffle, and held by no fewer than ten fixing screws.

The special super-tweeter uses a thin (25 micron) titanium dome to provide a 'WideBand' frequency response extending more than an octave above the normal limits of audibility (Tannoy quotes a 53kHz upper limit). A unique 'five-way' terminal block incorporates an extra connection which (provided one uses special three or five-way cables) can be used to earth the driver chassis back to the amplifier, and therefore avoid the adverse consequences of RF pick-up.

Four neat little castings are supplied which bolt on to the base in order to extend the stability footprint, either laterally or lengthwise (or a pair of each!) These provide secure accommodation for the modest 6mm spikes. Although port-blocking bungs are supplied, our in-room traces suggest they'll only be needed if close-to-wall siting is unavoidable. Fundamentally, the Eyris 3 looks well suited to free space siting, delivering fine ultimate bass extension, free from any mid-bass boom, with its ports left open.

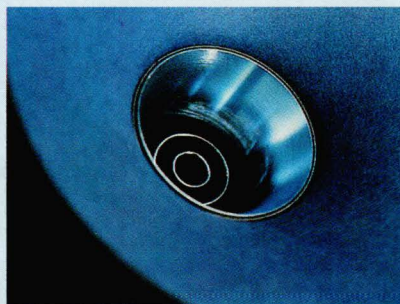
SOUND QUALITY

Given the considerable similarity in the configurations of the Eyris DC3 and the recently reviewed Sensys DC2, one might well expect a close similarity in their relative performance. The impedances are certainly very similar indeed, and there are some similarities in the far-field averaged in-room responses too. Trouble is, this more costly model lacks the smooth and well-balanced neutrality of its junior cousin.

Whereas the Sensys model showed a gently down-tilted balance with an apparently seamless transition from midrange to treble, the Eyris DC3 peaks up a little around 800Hz, but has then fallen by a substantial 5-6dB by 1.2kHz. Further trouble is, this quite abrupt discontinuity, situated right in the part of the band where the ear is most sensitive, is immediately and not very pleasantly audible.

The speakers were initially used in a predominantly Naim-based system – NAC 552 preamp and NAP 500 power amp, fed from CDS-3 CD player, Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner and hybrid Linn/Rega record player. Further listening was done using Burmester's 001 CD player, 032 integrated amplifier and 948 power conditioner. Connecting cables and equipment supports were various items from Vertex AQ, Naim and Mana.

That 1kHz-centred discontinuity is most obvious with voices, especially speech, which sounds decidedly 'shut in', pinched and nasal in consequence. Transparency is entirely off the agenda here, and much important fine detail is significantly suppressed. It's a real shame, because the broad bass and midrange are thoroughly capable, with impressive even-handedness alongside good deep bass extension, while the treble is definitely flatter, smoother and more even than most. The basic



"You can wind the volume up high and never find it too strident or unpleasantly edgy."

Tannoy Eyris DC3 loudspeaker [Review]

ingredients all seem well enough founded – it's just that they don't seem to glue together properly to make a coherent sonic whole.

There is a modest bonus on the positive side, inasmuch as that weak presence ensures that any aggressive tendencies in the specific material are ruthlessly suppressed: you can wind the volume up high – even on bluegrass material like Nickel Creek, with its sharply focused, almost percussive mandolin picking – and never find it too strident or unpleasantly edgy.

While the above balance anomaly remains a distinct handicap, it's not difficult to make the necessary mental adjustment and 'hear through' to the very capable performance elsewhere. The bass region is exceptionally smooth, clean and agile, and beautifully balanced too. In this respect the Eyris DC3 definitely has the edge over the Sensys DC2. It also has excellent ultimate extension, bringing a very impressive sense of scale and weight to the proceedings.

Mari Boine's *Eallin*, which is full of complex overlapping polyrhythms, was delivered with great clarity, punch and enthusiasm. The lower octaves show no colorations, overhang, thickening or boxiness, simply getting on with supplying a firm and stable foundation.

Some might prefer a warmer, richer sound, with a slightly more assertive sense of power and authority, but the DC3's success lies in the way it delivers the bass region with discretion and studied neutrality. Indeed, so successful is it in this, it seems ironic that Tannoy is busy developing room compensation electronics for a model which needs it less than most.

The top end is impressively smooth and extended too, and again seems largely free from any tendency to focus on any particular part of the spectrum. Sibilants are sweet and unexaggerated, helping to make up for the lack of energy lower down. And if the midband lacks some transparency, the super-tweeter brings welcome extra air to the spacious, well-focused stereo image. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT

SOUND >> 74%



EASE OF DRIVE >> 76%



BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 77%



PRO

A pretty and stylish contender with fine real-wood finish. It has a beautifully smooth and even bass delivery, and a similarly smooth top end.

CON

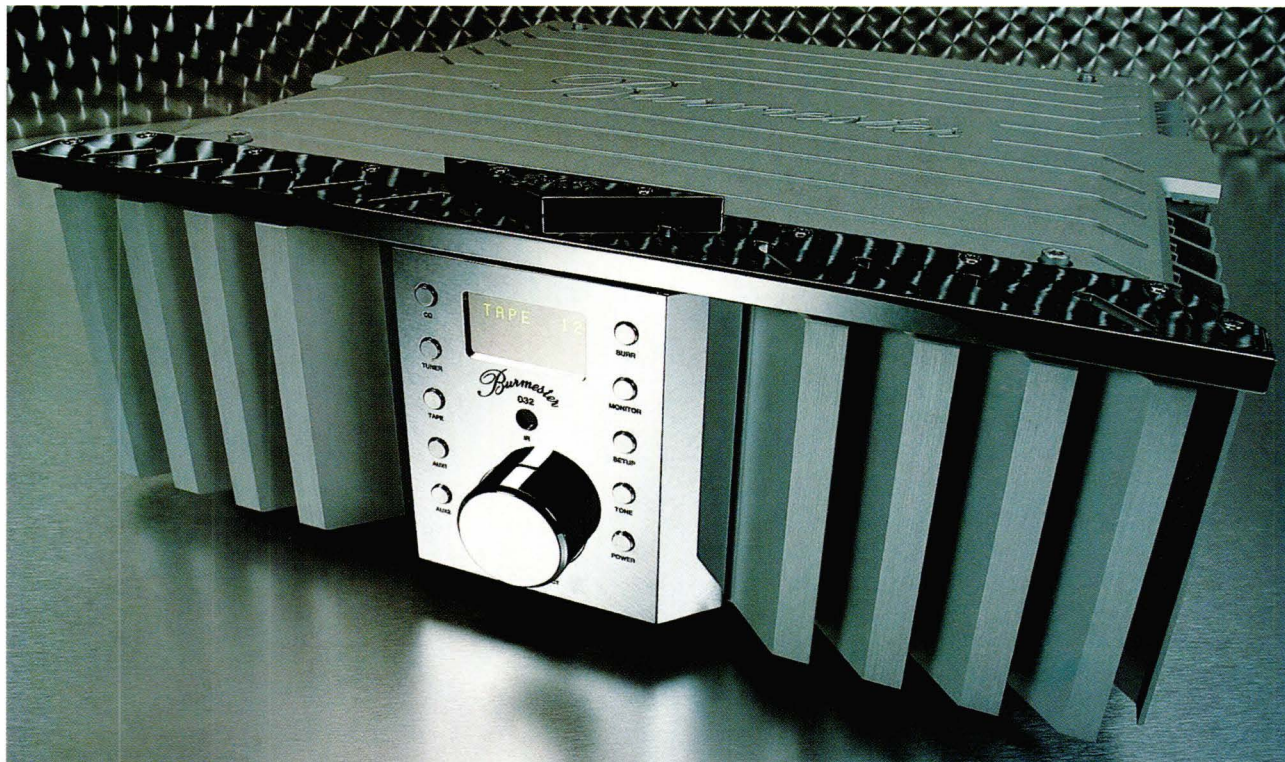
Midrange and treble don't glue together too well, resulting in a lack of presence energy that hampers midrange transparency and leaves voices rather 'shut in'.

CONCLUSION

An attractive looking package at a decent price, but sonically a mixed bag, unusually smooth through both the bass and treble regions, but not in the midband, where a rather 'shut in' presence loses transparency and suppresses detail.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

>> 77%



BURNIN' BURMESTER

At this price you'd be entitled to expect something extra special. You'd be right...

PRODUCT Burmester 032

TYPE Stereo integrated amplifier

PRICE From £9,100

KEY FEATURES Dimensions (WxHxD): 48x22x48cm
 ◊ Weight: 36 kg ◊ Balanced design throughout
 ◊ Low overall negative feedback ◊ Completely DC-coupled
 ◊ Oversized power supply ◊ Rated power output: 171W per channel ◊ Six line-level inputs

CONTACT ☎ 0239 250 1888 🌐 www.burmester.de

Berlin-based Burmester is a key player on the German 'high-end' hi-fi scene, with an illustrious twenty-year history that included a short spell of UK distribution, way back in the 1980s – during which the company's original and radical preamp was very warmly reviewed in *Hi-Fi Choice*.

Now Burmester is back, with a much larger range than before, though something very like that original 808 preamp is still featured. That's Burmester for you. The company makes no-compromise products that are built to last. There have been some changes to the 808 since 1980, and it's now in Mk5 form, but the overall modular architecture remains, and changes are invariably retrofittable.

Burmester now makes four distinct ranges of electronics, all decidedly costly, and distinguished by an approximate doubling as

one moves up the ladder, from the £2,500 Rondos via the Basic Line (£5,000) and Top Line (£10,000) to the £20,000 per component Reference Line. Does hi-fi have to be that expensive? Probably, if you share the same obsessive attention to detail as these guys. A lightning factory visit showed how much effort is put into match-pairing individual electronic components, to achieve the best possible match between the two stereo channels. Dieter Burmester explained that the better the channel match, the less the brain has to work to recreate the image, and the lower the consequent listening fatigue.

This review looks at model 032, finalised in February 2003 and the very latest Burmester component to go into production – so new, in fact, that we had to make do with a German language instruction manual. It's an integrated amplifier, and quite the largest, most costly and muscular looking example of the breed ever to come in for *HFC* scrutiny.

The vital statistics tell the story clearly enough. Total weight is a massive 36kg, power output a substantial 2x171 watts into four ohms, with 30 amps of peak current capability, and the unit is an oversized 48.2cm wide and deep. Even the all-metal remote handset is larger and heavier than

most. Price starts at a basic £9,100, though the fancy top plate supplied with our sample takes it up to £10,000. That's nearly twice the Basic Line norm, because it combines both the pre and power amps in one case.

Exquisitely finished, like all Burmester electronics, with the trademark chrome restricted to a modest central control panel and a top strip, the 032's styling owes more to Albert Speer than Walter Gropius – monumental and brutal are two adjectives that readily spring to mind.

Chrome plating is a rather extreme finish, though classy and essentially timeless, as Burmester pointed out. The effect is certainly very stylish, especially with the legends actually embossed into the fascia, though their small size and mirror-like reflections can make them quite difficult to read.

Although that top plate carries a large and deeply engraved Burmester logo, 'handle with care' might be more appropriate, as both sides and most of the front are covered in rather sharp-edged heatsinks. Gloves are a sensible precaution, given the weight and bulk. To all intents and purposes this is a power amp with knobs on, stylistically speaking – or to be pedantic, one lovely chrome-plated knob, plus a modest display



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
 magazine
 ★



“The midrange is exceptional by solid state standards, with a wide dynamic range and clarity that ensures expressive voices.”

and a roster of ten chrome pushbuttons.

It all looks disarmingly simple, though in fact microprocessor control provides rather more features than normally found among extreme audiophile products today. There's even a fairly simple tone control arrangement, providing +/-14dB treble and bass plus balance adjustment. Input sensitivities may also be independently adjusted by +/-9dB.

Crucially, the volume control, a 61-step electronic device backed by the digital display, was particularly nice to use, either hands-on or by remote control. The all-metal and decidedly hunky remote handset is a triumph of style over substance. It looks great and works fine, but it's also unnecessarily heavy and bulky, and the labels are difficult to read.

Key elements in the Burmester design philosophy include DC-coupling throughout, balanced operation as far as possible, and exceptionally high damping factors. The back panel is very well equipped with six inputs

and three outputs, including two pre-outs and one power-in. There's a sensible mix of unbalanced phono and balanced XLR sockets, and a pair of phono-to-XLR adapters is supplied. The only obvious omission here is phono cartridge provision. Unlike Burmester's separate preamps, the 032 is a line-level-only device, and the company doesn't actually make a separate phono stage (though there are plenty of other brands to choose from).

SOUND QUALITY

Burmester pioneered the purification of mains electricity way back in 1994. Logically enough, therefore, the company supplied its Model 948 Power Conditioner (£3,995) for use during this review. We were also loaned a 001 CD player, in order to make full use of the balanced connection approach that it favours, plus the company's appropriate Silver interconnects. These do indeed sound good but they're very stiff, costly (£399 per metre

stereo pair), and also proved rather fragile.

This amp also provided the first real opportunity to use the balanced XLR output socket option on the Magnum Dynalab MD102 FM tuner, which is a regular part of one of our reviewing systems. Unbalanced sources such as Naim's CDS-3 CD player and a hybrid Linn/Naim/Rega vinyl record player were also used. The Wilson Benesch ACT loudspeakers seemed a very appropriate match, since WB has been particularly successful on the German market, and these were connected using several types of speaker cable, from Naim, Nordost and Vertex AQ.

First impressions are always important, and the 032 created a very strong one. It delivers an immediate sense of 'rightness' that's very persuasive, combining a rigid neutrality, extended bandwidth and wide dynamic range, alongside a richness of tonality that is rare among solid state amplification.

Indeed, the WB ACTs proved a most ▶

Q & A

Udo Besser, Burmester's vice president (and top linguist!) answers questions about the company's key design features



HFC: You place great importance on DC coupling. Can you explain why?

UB: In order to avoid roll-off in the frequency response, and the phase errors created by coupling capacitors, Burmester has no capacitors at all in the signal path, and has pioneered this design approach since the late 1970s.

Your amps attempt to maximise damping factor (i.e. minimise output impedance). Does this make a significant difference in controlling speakers? Doesn't it mean lots of feedback?

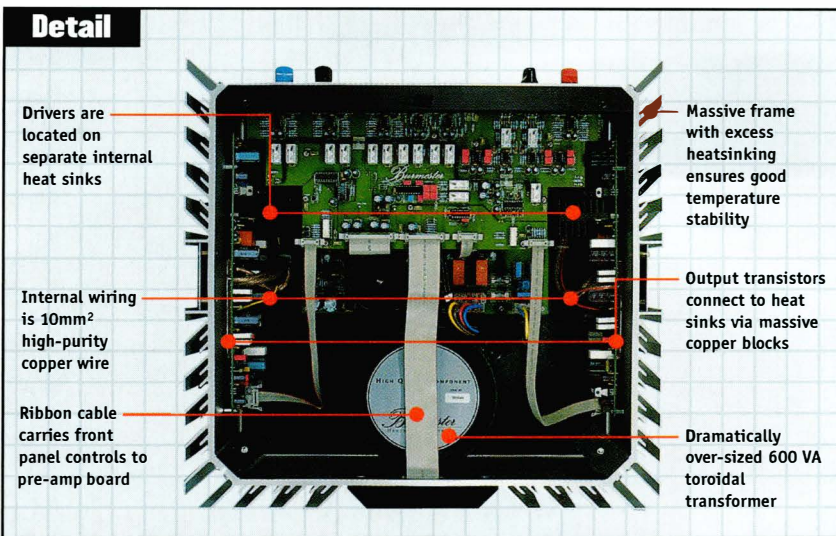
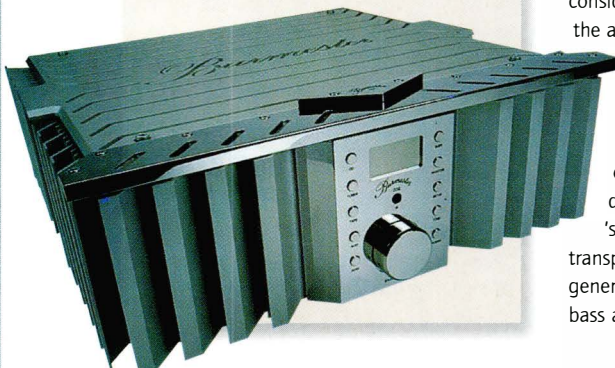
High feedback is not necessary, as a high damping factor can also be achieved by pairing an oversized power supply with high damping. To achieve the 'sweet' sound of our amps it also needs the balanced audio design, DC-coupling and pure Class A amplification in the preamp and driver stages. A high damping factor needs to be partnered with the ability to deliver high currents, to maintain control over the speakers' complex loads, so that the speakers do not add anything to the music.

You undertake very careful matching of power transistors. Why is this important, and which are the key parameters?

We put extreme efforts into computer-matching ALL the parts in all our equipment. First of all, this serves as a 'first function' test. Secondly, we achieve a perfect channel equality, which is important for the music to play effortlessly in the room. Thirdly, we can achieve an equally high standard throughout many years of production. "All Burmesters are created equal" is the phrase, so you may partner any Burmester power amp with any other power amp of any production year to make an identical mono-mono pair.

'Balanced' connections have never caught on in the UK. Why do you consider it so important?

It is not only the connector that has an advantage. The signal itself is processed in a push-pull mode, and at the same time takes advantage of common-mode-suppression, which naturally avoids adding unwanted errors to the music signal.



Drivers are located on separate internal heat sinks

Internal wiring is 10mm² high-purity copper wire

Ribbon cable carries front panel controls to pre-amp board

Massive frame with excess heatsinking ensures good temperature stability

Output transistors connect to heat sinks via massive copper blocks

Dramatically over-sized 600 VA toroidal transformer

felicitous combination, the innate warmth of the amplifier sitting very well alongside this rather dry loudspeaker, while the 032's slight tendency to emphasise presence detail again dovetailed beautifully with the ACT's mild restraint here.

The ACT has an innately very transparent and 'unboxy' sound, and these characteristics were further exploited by Burmester's 032. I was reminded of Dieter's comments about the relationship between stereo imaging, listening fatigue and precision channel matching, and was very aware not only that the imaging was quite superlative, but also that an extraordinary freedom from boxiness was making this a very easy amplifier simply to relax and enjoy.

This integrated Burmester stacks up as one of the finest amplification systems we've seen. You don't perhaps get quite the limp midband transparency found with the best valve amps, but the midrange is exceptional, especially by solid state standards, with a wide dynamic range and clarity that ensures notably expressive voices, with splendid communication of accents and emotions.

The full tonal qualities of acoustic material came through particularly well. The Alison Krauss and Union Station *Live* set was particularly enjoyable, with fine vocal rendition and very delicate plucking of banjo and mandolin strings. Much of the same was equally true with Mari Boine's *Eallin*, the powerful bass end coming through with considerable weight and purpose, although the amp did struggle a bit to keep up with the fastest percussion sections.

This Burmester definitely provides stiff competition for our regular Naim kit. While it lags just a little in terms of outright speed and leading edge definition, with a little less ultimate 'sparkle', it leads the way in midband transparency and stereo imaging, and in a general freedom from congestion through the bass and lower midband in particular.



While the price is certainly high, and both the styling and the ergonomics have their fair share of idiosyncrasies, this is a superb amplifier by any standards, whetting our appetite to try other examples in the range. Build and finish are quite exceptional, and it's doubtful that there are many solid state amps out there that can match its combination of good flexibility, excellent dynamics, superior neutrality, and fine musical expression. It has all the hallmarks of the very best hi-fi components, which are of course those which you simply forget because your attention is focused entirely on the music. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

VERDICT

SOUND >> 95% [Progress bar]	PRO Very powerful amp with flexible preamp section and massive construction. Great sound quality with fine neutrality, splendid dynamics and stunning imaging.
FEATURES >> 88% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 96% [Progress bar]	CON A pricey proposition, and the casework heatsinking is rather sharp-edged. Sound could have a more assertive top end, but that's nit-picking.
VALUE >> 83% [Progress bar]	

CONCLUSION
A bit of a brute physically, but this big, powerful, integrated amp has a delightfully delicate sound with lovely natural warmth, a wide dynamic range with very low coloration, and delicious 'out of the box' imaging.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%

MISSION

Pioneer

SHARP

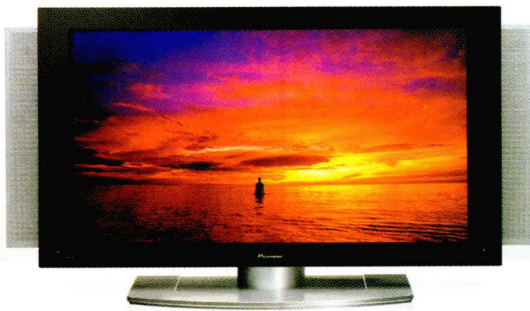
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marantz

Panasonic



HOME ON THE RANGE

It may not have the full connection spec of some new designs, but this Marantz gets the basics right

PRODUCT Marantz SR9300

TYPE 7.1-channel AV receiver

PRICE £2,000

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x19x48cm

➤ Weight: 19.5kg ➤ FM-RDS/MW/LW radio tuner with 50 presets ➤ THX Ultra2 compliant ➤ Power output 105 watts/channel (RMS 20Hz-20kHz 0.08% THD, 8 ohms, one or two channels driven)

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

Top of what Marantz satirically describes as its Range (i.e. mainstream) range, the SR9300 is the replacement for the former HFC Best Buy SR9200, but the two are closely related. One of the key features of the '9200 was its upgradeable firmware, which has been used to allow SR9200 owners to upgrade to the new model for a very reasonable £200. Additions to the feature list include THX Ultra2 (was THX Ultra), DTS 96:24, Circle Surround II (which replaces Circle Surround without the II), and most important of all, a new algorithm for the Crystal DSP which performs surround sound arithmetic to a claimed 32-bit precision, though the chip is still 24-bit.

This is a powerful and highly capable design,

but the money has gone into the traditional areas. Build quality is better than average, with extensive use of copper for screening, and specifications include modest levels of current feedback in the gain stages, 24/192 converters on all channels (dual differential when working in stereo), HDCD (yawn), source direct, video off and so on. Plumbing is available for multi-room operation at a relatively advanced level.

THX Ultra2 may not be a big deal for those looking for a music-first receiver for stereo and multichannel music, but it has a very definite role to play when used with THX Ultra2-compliant speakers in a home cinema content, for example the ability to set up the subwoofer so that it behaves properly in confined spaces and at high volume levels. THX Ultra2 also offers up to 7.1-channel output from Dolby and DTS-encoded sources, and of course the Marantz will cope with this number of speakers, to the tune of 105 watts per channel (one or two channels driven). You get a rich complement of surround sound options, starting with

the usual flavours of Dolby and DTS, including Pro Logic II (not PLIIx, please note, which may yet appear as a firmware upgrade) and DTS Neo:6, plus DTS 96:24 – the 'pop video format', missing from the '9300's predecessor, which is still resolutely failing to fulfil its destiny. Or perhaps that's just what it is doing...

There are some surprising features, and some notable omissions. In the first category are Scart in and outputs, which can radically simplify interconnections, and provides RGB as a superior alternative to composite or S-Video. On the topic of video, there is no up-conversion between the various video standards, so you may find you need at least one video output of each type connected to your display. Also notable by their absence are





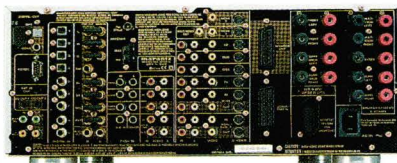
“It’s smooth, warm and physical sounding, with surprising refinement and poise for a fully-loaded multichannel receiver.”

FireWire/i.Link, HDMI, or any of the new digital audio or video interfaces which is just beginning to become a live issue now that HDMI-HDCP has been ratified. There are no component inputs either – S-Video and RHB/Scart are the best on offer. Nice assignable digital inputs jostle for room on the back panel alongside an otherwise unremarkable set of socketry, but the quality of the fixtures and fittings is above average.

One other notable feature is a neat 50-preset radio tuner, enlivened by a weighted, edge-mounted spinning flywheel ‘gyro’ tuning control, and by the inclusion of LW as well as the usual MW and FM. Ah, and lest we forget, the Marantz comes with one of their LCD touch-screen remotes that will do everything apart from make breakfast. It’s fine once you get the hang of it, but the learning curve is longer than strictly necessary.

SOUND QUALITY

Given what this amp is clearly about in the nuts and bolts stakes, you could probably write your own script for the rest of the story, and find yourself quite close to the truth. Much of the time with this model was spent playing DVD-Audios and SACDs, but also with



plain two-channel CDs. With these, with all unnecessary circuits switched off (problematic but possible with DVD-Audio, and not an issue with the other formats), the SR9300 was at its impressive best. If you want the very best from this amplifier, use the 7.1 channel inputs, even from two-channel sources. This input offers the shortest signal path, and is marginally more transparent than the other inputs – but marginal is the operative word here. In either case, the Marantz is smooth, warm and quite physical sounding. It provides a sound of surprising refinement and poise, highly unusual from a ‘home cinema’ receiver.

The only slight blot on the Marantz’s copybook it’s that its *savoir-faire* can be upset by difficult recordings which other amplifiers (not multichannel ones usually, but still...) take in their stride. We could name several clear examples of this, but that would be to miss the wood for the trees. The point is that

complex material that needs pinpoint precision lacks the polish and definition that is strictly needed, and that nasty, compressed studio pop can sound rather edgy and uncomfortable. So no change there...

As a surround sound amplifier, the Marantz is very impressive overall, but a few percentage points short of its excellent showing (in most cases) with pure music. Dolby worked as Dolby does, and if it sounds a tad flat and mechanical (it does), the DTS circuit adds some of its customary polish and refinement to the sound. In both cases, image steering is smooth and progressive and the amplifier is capable of sustaining fast-moving soundfields in action films (*The Thin Red Line* was one of the test discs that showed this most clearly). It was immediately clear, even after a considerable gap since hearing it, that the surround sound performance of this amp has improved significantly from the SR9200.

This is no real surprise. One of the most notable, but still largely unrecognised developing themes in multichannel amplifier design is that real strides that have been made in surround sound decoding thanks to the use of the most recent high-speed, wide-bandwidth DSP processing engines, and the Marantz takes full benefit of what current technology can achieve.

Where the Marantz is beginning to look a little like yesterday’s news is in the absence of the latest digital audio interfaces such as i.Link. It’s true that Marantz has yet to commit itself to this or any of the competing interfaces, but Denon, which is part of the same global group, has done so and the pressure is certainly on Marantz’s engineers who can be expected to respond, perhaps with the next major range change (or Range range change). Until that time, think of this model as an unusually capable option for those who want to go multichannel, perhaps from the starting point of existing DVD and CD players, but who don’t want to make unnecessary sound quality compromises. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 85% >> SUB RATINGS STEREO 87% MULTICHANNEL 83%	PRO Good, ‘traditional’ multichannel receiver with strong but not leading-edge feature set and an unusually smooth and musical sound.
FEATURES >> 81%	CON Can be caught out with difficult material, and there’s no support for the latest generation of digital audio or video interfaces.
BUILD >> 92%	
VALUE >> 80%	
CONCLUSION Not a ground-breaking receiver perhaps, but one of the ultimate pre-i.Link/DVI/HDMI generation designs, updated with the latest surround sound algorithms. It goes further than most to meeting the aspirations of purist music lovers.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%	

BACK IN BLACK

Goldring hasn't made a turntable since the seventies, but now it's back and it means business

PRODUCT Goldring GR1
TYPE Turntable, tonearm and cartridge
PRICE £140
CONTACT ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.goldring.co.uk

Hands up anyone who remembers the Goldring Lenco. Good, we're not alone then! That turntable was big in the seventies, selling shedloads in the face of stiff competition from Pioneer and Dual among others. The brand is planning to try to emulate that success with the ridiculously inexpensive yet serious-looking GR1.

Look beyond the rather basic trim and you will see what appears remarkably like a Rega P2. It's not a P2 but it's about as close as you'll find to that £198 (sans cartridge) deck, with the same bearing, motor and felt-matted MDF platter. Where it differs is in the base for the RB250-based arm, which is a fixed-height plastic version of the threaded steel base associated with Rega arms, and the way the plinth is finished with a distinctive trim. The lid, though it looks very similar, is actually made out of polystyrene. And of course, there is a Goldring Elektra cartridge on here, something you would normally expect to pay £30 for.

The GR1 is a UK-built and designed turntable with considerable (Rega) pedigree. Why, you might ask, isn't it a Rega then? Well, to get this sort of price you need big

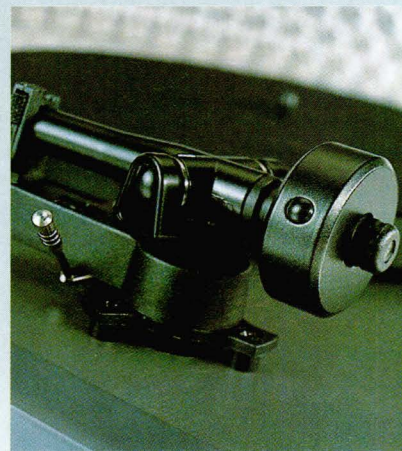
production runs and with Rega's selected 40 dealers you are never going to sell the kind of numbers required. Veda supplies an army of dealers by comparison and needs a weapon to fight the advances of a certain Czech Republic brand (Pro-Ject) that has been making a killing on the budget turntable market. The GR1 is well equipped for the challenge.

SOUND QUALITY

With decks that come with a pre-installed cartridge, it pays to check out alignment to avoid vinyl wear. In this instance the Elektra was correctly aligned and all we had to do was set the cartridge downforce by putting the right amount of turns on the counterweight. Easy stuff. Speed change is via the popular manual route, requiring platter removal but no special tools.

Sticking Richard Thompson's *Old Kit Bag* onto the felt mat and lowering the needle into the groove produced an assured sound that was instantly engaging and entertaining. The GR1 is unusually calm and relaxed for a budget deck, with decent timing and a solidity that belies its price point. While scale may be limited by absolute standards, everything is in good proportion and music is coherently reproduced.

High frequencies are clean and smooth too, partly because the Elektra doesn't extend too far up into the treble but mostly because of the deck's intrinsically relaxed nature. Fear not though, when the fireworks come along it rises to



the occasion – Cornelius's *Point*, for instance, has plenty of energy and stereo effects which the Goldring did a fine job of reproducing. Dynamics are a little restrained but not as much as you might expect and it is very capable of delivering tension in a piece. The latter is a good example of its ability to respond to differences in recordings and it seems very difficult to phase, however dense the material – even the virtually opaque Mahavishnu Orchestra sounded stunning.

Exactly how the GR1 will compare with its closest rival, the Pro-Ject Debut, remains to be seen, but the presence of a tonearm of near-RB250 quality bodes well. The fact that it costs an extra £30 is not to be underestimated at this end of the market either, but it's definitely worth sacrificing two or three albums for. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%
[Progress bar]

FEATURES >> 72%
[Progress bar]

BUILD >> 81%
[Progress bar]

VALUE >> 96%
[Progress bar]

CONCLUSION
It's heart-warming to see a British turntable in the genuinely 'budget' marketplace which still manages to have quite so much going for it. Anyone looking for a low-cost route to hi-fi vinyl replay would be a fool to overlook it.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%

PRO
Remarkable sonic assurance and build quality for the money – a great budget buy.

CON
Very hard to criticise any perceived faults at this price.

audio

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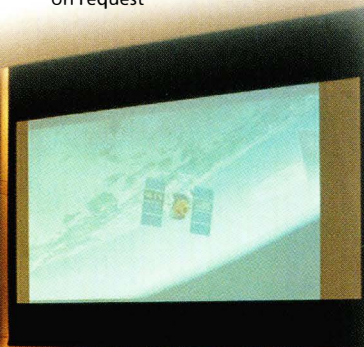
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GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MILLER

CD PLAYERS

It may be an increasingly specialist occupation, but a dedicated player is still the only way to wring the very best from your CD collection

ON TEST



ARCAM DIVA CD93
£950



CREEK CD50 MK2
£850



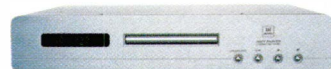
CYRUS CD8/PSX-R
£1,450



DENSEN BEAT B-400 PLUS
£1,495



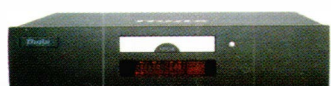
HEGEL CDP2A
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MONRIO ASTY PL/HP
£1,050



ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES
£1,100



THULE CD150B
£775

While new DVD, DVD-Audio, SACD and universal disc players continue to emerge thick and fast, the development of new 'plain vanilla' CD players has not come to a grinding halt. Of course, as far as the Japanese majors and their mega budgets are concerned, there seems to be as much value in designing a new CD player as chocolate fire tongs, which is why the likes of Sony, Pioneer, Technics and Denon are conspicuous by their absence from this test. Their 'CD players' are designed for DVD replay first, followed by multichannel DVD-A and/or SACD. The fact that it just so happens that these machines are also compatible with the legacy technology of CD is seen merely as a bonus, and nothing more.

The eight players in this test, however, are designed from the ground up to squeeze the very best from this original silver disc technology. And it's surprising just how good they really are, bearing in mind the massive advantage the 24-bit resolution and 96kHz-plus bandwidth offers to its newer, multichannel offspring. The bottom line is, despite its relatively ancient 16-bit/44.1kHz core, the CD format can still deliver a powerful and inherently musical performance. All of which is very good news for the countless enthusiasts who have amassed hundreds or even thousands of CDs over the last twenty years or so.

But distilling that last gasp from CD has its price – quite literally. Those manufacturers undertaking the task are typically very specialist brands and even the largest of them still lack the

economies of scale enjoyed by the true giants of the Far East. As a result therefore, the vast majority of CD players available to the enthusiast are typically £500 or more. In this respect, every player in this test is eclipsed by the flexibility and compatibility of far cheaper universal players from Pioneer and Denon, for example.

On the other hand, even the very best of the current crop of DVD-A or universal players are eclipsed by the sound of the best players in this test when it comes to CD replay. So if you really want to hear your CD collection at its best, and you have the ancillaries to match, then there is still no substitute for a dedicated player. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Arcam AV8 processor (preamp) and P7 power amplifier
- ⊕ B&W Nautilus 802 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Townshend Isolda DCT interconnect and QED X-Tube 400 speaker cable

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Norah Jones *Come Away With Me* (on CD)
- ⊕ Anastacia *Freak Of Nature* (on CD)
- ⊕ Vivaldi *Stabat Mater* (on SACD/CD Hybrid)
- ⊕ Ryan Adams *New York, New York* (on CD)

EARS USED

Thanks to the following panellists for their experience and diligence in facilitating our unsighted listening tests:

- ⊕ John Bamford (Pioneer)
- ⊕ Terry Murphy (Yamaha)
- ⊕ Andy Whittle (Exposure)



STRUCTURED LAB & LISTENING TESTS

Each of these CD players was subject to a penetrating series of lab and listening tests which provide a unique insight into their performance and compatibility. The latest QC Suite Functional Testing Station was used to probe every crevice of the player's performance including their response with standard and pre-emphasised CDs, low-level resolution, trends of distortion versus frequency and digital level, plus the bane of all digital systems – jitter. These, together with standard noise, crosstalk and digital filter measurements leave no stone unturned in our quest to get under the skin of these products.

Our comprehensive listening tests were no less rigorous, being conducted under blind, level-matched conditions with the assistance of some of the industry's most experienced hi-fi panellists. Levels were electrically, rather than acoustically, matched for greatest precision. This means any perceived difference in level between one CD player and another was not 'real' but provided an important clue to the product's sonic character and long-term suitability.

No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five parameters are:

1] Harmonic Distortion: Not derived not from a single '1 kHz figure' but from multiple measurements of distortion from 20Hz to 20kHz and 0dBfs to -100dBfs.

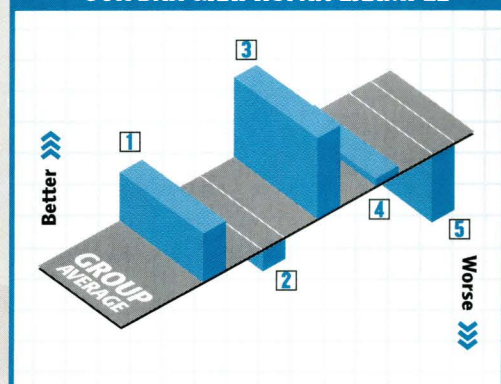
2] Jitter: Any uncertainty or modulation in the timing of data as it passes through the player causes a particular form of distortion to arise during D-to-A conversion. Above-average bar graphs mean low jitter.

3] Linearity: This is a measure of the player's low-level resolution. If a very quiet (say, -80dBfs) digital signal is decoded at -79.5dB, for example, then it'll sound 0.5dB louder than it should. And vice-versa.

4] Practical Dynamic range: A measure of the player's A-wtd S/N ratio, distortion and noise when reproducing a low-level (-60dBfs) signal and any noise modulation caused by non-monotonic behaviour in D/A conversion.

5] Digital Filtering: All CD players employ an oversampling filter and its effectiveness in suppressing 'images' of the desired signal without affecting the (audioband) response is represented here.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





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ARCAM DIVA CD93T

How does the FMJ CD33T fare without its Full Metal Jacket?

At a saving of some £350 over the CD33T, this top-end 'DiVA' version is still based around the same technology as its costlier relative. In fact, the DiVA CD93T uses exactly the same DAC board as the FMJ CD33T, employing a very sophisticated combination of upsampling (from Analog Devices) and a pair of WM8740 DACs per channel. The CD's sample rate is asynchronously increased from 44.1kHz to 192kHz, allowing a gentler filter to be employed, while the multiple DACs reduce both distortion and noise and improve the player's low-level resolution.

Arcam's CD72, CD73, CD82 and CD92 players can all be retro-fitted with this new '93' quad-DAC board for the princely sum of £550. What you'll lack is the beefier 'Acousteel tri-laminate' chassis, thicker lid and 8mm extruded fascia of the top FMJ version.

Otherwise, this CD93 is no less equipped with useful features. The transport reads both CDs and dual-layer SACDs, revealing any Text data via its bright, green-filtered display. A pair of stereo L/R analogue outputs are joined by optical and coaxial digital outputs while a further jack socket can accommodate multi-room remote commanders. Short of a headphone socket, it's as comprehensively equipped as you might wish for.

Subjectively too, the CD93 is just as well-rounded. The articulation and projection of Norah Jones's vocal performance was very impressive, the detail and phrasing sophisticated and realistic. The piano now had a structure, both musical and physical, that was typically missing with other players in this group, save the Hegel and Cyrus. The opening fretwork to the second track was similarly detailed, a rasping and highly charged sound achieved without compromising either its precision or stability.

There is also a studio-like quality to its sound, a very 'technical' performance but one still imbued with colourful, artistic



interpretation you could wish for. The haunting, sweeping strings from *Stabat Mater* filled the room, even though the solo voice just failed to reach the rafters. In this respect there's a slight dryness to its reproduction of this live recording which, in any event, cannot sound as spacious or involving as it does in multichannel mode through an SACD player.

Ryan Adams' CD was reproduced with the same adroit precision, which exposed the backing vocals, drum skins and bass guitar with equal aplomb. Nevertheless, we felt the player could have "driven the room more convincingly", for while it was clearly unfazed by these most intense of rock tracks, neither was there the raw edge, from either the harmonica or lead guitar, that we had come to expect.

Indeed, any disappointment was short-lived, for the CD93 clearly outpaced the CD33 that we had auditioned under identical circumstances some months before. The upshot is a player that loses nothing for its slimmed-down chassis and power supply, a player that's neutral but very musical, bold and vigorous when required. A player that captures the performance with a level of detail and composure that sets a high standard for any sub-£1,000 player to follow. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 84%	It may be that the very top-end CD33 can claim to be Arcam's ultimate technical realisation of the 'Quad-DAC' theme, but it was the merits of its little brother that won the hearts of our panel.
FEATURES >> 84%	
BUILD >> 85%	
VALUE >> 88%	
HI-FI CHOICE 86% OVERALL SCORE >>	

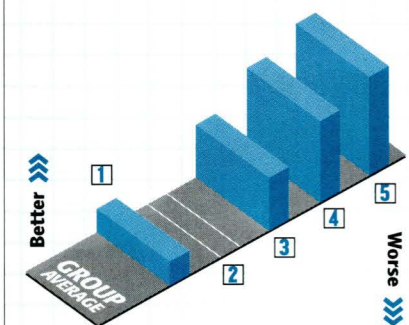


LAB REPORT

Arcam's use of four WM8740 DACs in a mixed parallel/differential arrangement actually exceeds its own specification. Noise, for example, is driven so low that the A-wtd S/N ratio amounts to a massive 116.5dB while even-order harmonics are cancelled to the point where overall distortion is just 0.0009% at 0dBfs and 0.0004% at -10dBfs. These figures are lower even than Arcam was able to measure using a 24-bit digital generator. High-frequency distortion increases to 0.002% at 20kHz/0dBfs (which is still very low indeed) just as the ultrasonic spectrum is free of additional 'shaped' noise.

As a result of this and its low output impedance, the CD93 should perform very consistently with different amplifiers. The player's low-level performance is equally impressive with errors in linearity of just +/-0.1dB at -90dBfs and distortion of just ~2.3% at the same level - which isn't bad considering there's just one bit of data left to describe the audio!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> 20%
- 2] Jitter >> 0%
- 3] Linearity >> 45%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 70%
- 5] Digital filter >> 85%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.2V	2.2V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.003%	0.0009%
Signal-to-noise ratio	113dB	116.5dB



£850 ☎ 01442 260146 🌐 www.creekaudio.com

CREEK CD50 MK2

Less a 'mk2' than a totally new design from Hemel Hempstead

Quite why the CD50 has shot up in price from £700 to £1,000 in a few short months only becomes clear by looking under the bonnet. The 10mm alloy fascia is retained along with the same onboard transport functions and SRC1 remote, the latter including input selection and volume adjustment for Creek's amps and tuning, plus band and mode selections for its tuner. Track access, program, random and repeat play modes are offered for the CD players.

So the CD50 mk2 looks, feels and operates like the CD50 from HFC 246. However, since then, supplies of Philips' CDM12 transport and CD7 decoder solution have dried up, forcing Creek to look elsewhere. As a result, the CD50 mk2 is equipped with a Far Eastern DVD-ROM transport with ATAPI interface. This has obliged Creek to completely re-engineer its player with a FIFO buffer that reformats and re-clocks the data for its S/PDIF digital output and audio circuit. The latter is still based around Crystal's 24-bit/192kHz CS4396 DAC driving a pair of standard, single-ended outputs.

The new player also includes two RS232 control ports for connection to Creek's next generation of product and/or existing multiroom controllers from other manufacturers. These features are enabled by plugging an appropriate module onto Creek's existing motherboard and upgrading its internal software – a significant advance on the old 'standalone' CD50 and one that should be very interesting to explore later.

Despite all Creek's re-engineering, the company has a sufficient handle on sound quality to ensure the CD50 mk2 is not vastly removed from the original CD50 in its musical qualities. It is, however, better in almost all respects. Indeed, if this player has a 'character' then this revolves around its great sense of space, an ability to carve an open and fruity atmosphere with the simplest of material. Norah Jones sounded a little chestier



than usual, a reflection of the fuller and weightier bass reproduced by the player, and a quality that was part and parcel of the CD50's slightly 'rose tinted' view of events.

The music might not ebb and flow as fluidly as it could, but while the performers could sound slightly stilted, this does not mar the overall confidence and stature of the performance as a whole. It is big-boned and not a little colourful but none the worse for it. Creek's sense of occasion and atmosphere perfectly suited the two-channel *Stabat Mater* mix which escaped the bounds of the speakers to great effect and the fruity bass brought a real bounce to Anastacia's *Overdue Goodbye* which proceeded to strut its stuff to the general delight of the panel.

There's a good sense of momentum about the sound of this player, a gathering weight that had the panel eager to hear more. But while it is not the most accurate, articulate or even neutral player, it has an engaging quality all its own that ensures the musical whole is far more impressive than the sum of its parts might suggest. Sadly, existing owners of the CD50 will not be able to upgrade their current player to this 'mk2' version as the latter is, to all intents and purposes, a new design. Perhaps Creek should call it the CD51 instead. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 77%	As a manufacturer, it must be irritating to find your key building blocks become obsolete. But Creek has won some advantage from its adversity and the 'mk2' CD50 represents a significant upgrade.
FEATURES >> 75%	
BUILD >> 77%	
VALUE >> 82%	
HI-FI CHOICE 78% OVERALL SCORE >>	

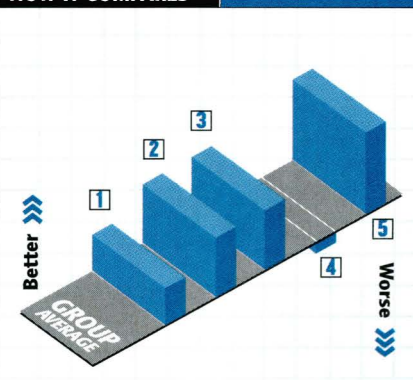


LAB REPORT

This new player is equipped with a beefier dual-transformer PSU, a superior crystal clock and improved layout, but the overall performance has simply shifted rather than fundamentally improved. For example, the 108dB S/N ratio (CD50) has dropped slightly to 106dB (CD50mk2) although midrange distortion has improved further from a very low 0.0006% to just 0.0004% here. On the other hand, THD at very high frequencies is actually a little higher (from 0.0005% to 0.0015% at 20kHz/0dBfs) and jitter increased to ~180psec thanks, ironically, to an injection of PSU artefacts which were missing from the old CD50.

IM distortion, by contrast, is down from 0.0006% to 0.0001% in the CD50 mk2. The frequency response, with its slight 'knee' at 17kHz has not changed appreciably but, importantly, its low-level resolution has witnessed an upgrade. Errors in low-level linearity are now just -0.3dB at -90dBfs/20kHz from ~-2dB in the old CD50.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> 31%
- 2] Jitter >> 52%
- 3] Linearity >> 49%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -8%
- 5] Digital filter >> 70%

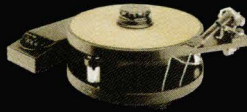
SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.08V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.0008%	0.0004%
Signal-to-noise ratio	>97dB	108dB

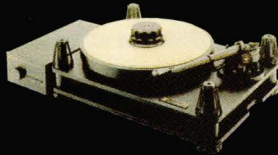
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CYRUS CD8/PSX-R

A great little player – made even better by the optional PSX-R

If you want a player that *looks* different from the mainstream, then the Cyrus 'brick' architecture is as good a place to start as any. Even if this locks you into a particular stylistic theme, Cyrus has a hi-fi or AV product for every occasion. The CD8 is its top player and comes at a hefty £400 premium over the similar-looking CD6. Both players feature a row of slightly fiddly buttons beneath the loading tray which, when opened, are less accessible still. Fortunately, Cyrus offers a very comprehensive and rather less fiddly system remote control which offers the advantage of direct track access, various display modes and the ability to switch the absolute phase of its two (parallel) analogue audio outputs. The coaxial and optical digital outputs are unaffected by this last widget.

Inside, the CD8 employs two of the PCM1738 DACs used in the CD6, configured here in differential mode to successfully reduce distortion and noise. The player features a more sophisticated re-clocking (prior to D/A conversion) with additional power supplies, including twin toroids each with dual windings, separating transport, digital and analogue circuits. Independent regulation for the different circuits also boosts performance although the biggest upgrade is an external one – using the £350 PSX-R outboard supply to feed the CD8's transport motors and any other 'high current' activities.

In overall demeanour, the CD8/PSX-R combination is not dissimilar to Arcam's CD93, with an extremely solid, well composed and sophisticated sound that was judged to be from "a top-drawer performer" at the outset of our listening. It was now possible to hear the subtle shift in microphone position as Norah Jones moved in and out of the acoustic picture, the presence of her backing musicians also fading from back to foreground accordingly. This is both a technically detailed sound and one that communicates the impact of the 'musical



message' with a quiet assuredness.

There's a confidence about the sound of plucked strings, the crack of percussion and weaving quality of vocals that makes the other players in this test seem positively reticent. The vocal quality of *Stabat Mater* was haunting and the pipes simply more 'breathy' than we had heard earlier in the day. Indeed, this was the only player to significantly expand upon the detail and atmosphere achieved by the Arcam, building a larger and more transparent acoustic that both more accurately reflected the venue and dynamic inflections in both the voice and organ.

And if the CD8 has an Achilles' heel then it's reflected in its handling of over-cooked rock material which, while still coherent as a 'musical whole' was left sounding a little muted. Then again, this is possibly preferable to a player that behaves less predictably with CDs pushed well into the red... Either way, the CD8/PSX-R belongs to a rare breed that really makes you want to stop, sit and listen to music of every denomination. The sound has scale, weight, extension and the ability to convey the best efforts of every musician on the CD. Both technically and subjectively, it is a very accomplished player and the undisputed star of this month's test. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 92%	This is a truly cracking player and yet another example of the general superiority of Cyrus's 8-series range over its 6-series. With the PSX-R in tow, CD doesn't get a great deal better.
FEATURES >>> 84%	
BUILD >>> 85%	
VALUE >>> 89%	

HI-FI CHOICE 90%
OVERALL SCORE >>>

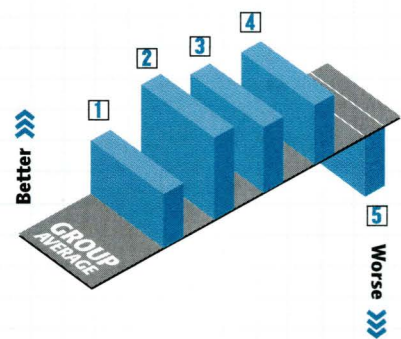


LAB REPORT

This month's star performer turns in an appropriately reassuring set of figures on the bench, beginning with a slightly high 2.2V output at a very low 0.0003% midband distortion. The pair of 24-bit PCM1738 DACs deliver a wide 110.5dB A-wtd S/N ratio while their balanced operation helps suppress distortion to just 0.0005% at -10dBfs and 0.005% at -30dBfs. Distortion is necessarily higher at higher frequencies, although 0.001% at 20kHz/0dBfs is nothing to get worked up about.

At lower levels, however, there is a 'jump' in distortion that takes it from 0.07% at 20kHz/-40dBfs to 3.8% at 20kHz/-60dBfs as a strong 3rd harmonic punches for the sky. There is also a marked and highly unusual peak in the player's ultrasonic noise output around 65kHz. Otherwise, jitter is so low as to be practically non-existent (~50psec) while the CD8 is extremely rare in showing a slightly rising HF response, up by +0.2dB at 10kHz and +0.4dB at 20kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Distortion >>> 42%
- 2) Jitter >>> 68%
- 3) Linearity >>> 53%
- 4) Dynamic range >>> 48%
- 5) Digital filter >>> -50%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.1V	2.2V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	0.005%	0.0003%
Signal-to-noise ratio	>110dB	110.5dB



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DENSEN BEAT B-400 PLUS

Does Densen's 'Air Guitar Factor' work with its latest CD player?

Densen is an intriguing outfit. One that is clearly driven by a passion for music and high-quality production engineering but, by withholding the sort of facts and figures routinely published by its competitors, also keen to encourage an air of mystery. The B-400 CD player, now updated to 'Plus' guise, is a perfect example of a specialist company ploughing its own furrow. Nevertheless, charging another £200 for a stylised remote control seems a little short-sighted to us. Perhaps Densen should have provided an off-the-shelf IR handset just to get its customers up-and-running.

The sharp-edged case is composed of separate alloy panels for the top, bottom, rear and side cheeks and strongly bolted together. Inside, Densen has implemented control logic for the CD mechanism on its own board – a very neat job that includes board-mounted, encapsulated transformers for the digital and analogue circuits. Additional logic and clocks are provided for Densen's loop-through system link and its proprietary 'Denlink' digital output for use with outboard DACs.

In this instance, Densen's DACs are concealed beneath a rectangular screening can that's soldered to the analogue output PCB. The analogue output itself is driven by a low-feedback stage comprising discrete, surface-mount devices on a very high-quality board.

In the listening room, this player produced a very mixed reaction from our panellists who, while recognising its rendition of detail and stability, were equally put off by the metallic edge added to vocals and percussion. Norah Jones's companions seemed to be playing without due regard to one another, it was suggested. Listening to this ensemble was rather like viewing an oil painting with a torch, highlighting one feature after another without really grasping the entire picture. The sense of acoustic height was also diminished, focusing more energy into a narrower



soundstage which, in turn, lent it a slightly harder or even steely balance that, while detailed, was simply not that believable.

"This reminds me of dinner at a motorway service station," quipped one listener, "shoved on a plate and thrown in front of you". *Stabat Mater*, which was recorded at lower digital levels, sounded less emotive, the voice slightly monotone and the strings, while recognisably so, remained slightly steely. Sadly, the pipes did not add any appreciable weight or substance to the music, which was described as "listening by numbers".

We were particularly interested in how the B-400 Plus would handle very dense recordings with plenty of action in the top 10dB of its dynamic range (see Lab Report). Ryan Adams' *New York, New York* fits this bill perfectly. Frankly, our listeners were astonished by the heavily compressed sound that greeted our ears, the strings lacking bite and definition, the sax sounding more like a trumpet while bass guitar and drums coalesced into an indistinguishable morass. Our listeners, unaware of the name or nature of this player, suggested it was "something of a poisoned chalice, a player that probably thinks it's better than it really is". A pity really, bearing in mind the innovative efforts of its designers. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 60%



FEATURES >> 57%



BUILD >> 82%



VALUE >> 57%



This is a costly player in a niche all of its own. In the wider market it faces very tough competition from technically superior players which, our panel felt, also sound that much more convincing than this.

HI-FI CHOICE 60%
OVERALL SCORE >>

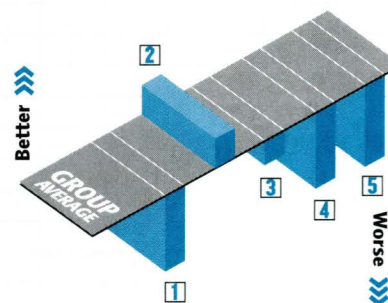


LAB REPORT

While Densen is a trifle reticent to provide any technical data, it clearly believes in running production improvements as the ~1,900psec of jitter suffered by the original B-400 in 2000 is reduced to just ~100psec in this 'Plus' version. Similarly, the A-wtd S/N ratio is now 'improved' to 99.4dB. The output level remains very high at 3.35V, some +4.5dB above the 2V standard and easily sufficient to bias any non-matched A/B listening tests. Distortion, too, is rather higher than usual over the top 10dB of its dynamic range at 0.08%-0.018% (0dBfs to -10dBfs), falling to 0.007% at -30dBfs.

This is caused by a cascade of 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th harmonic distortions that, likely as not, stem from the very low-feedback analogue stage and not the DACs. Intermodulation distortion – rarely an issue with modern players – is higher than normal at 0.035%. Both standard and pre-emphasised CDs have the same, gently rolled-off response which begins around 5kHz reaching just -0.4dB at 20kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -64%
- 2] Jitter >> 25%
- 3] Linearity >> -20%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -65%
- 5] Digital filter >> -68%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	Not Supplied	3.35V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	Not Supplied	0.08%
Signal-to-noise ratio	Not Supplied	99.4dB



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HEGEL CDP2A

An elegant Norwegian player with an equally well-sorted sound

It's no secret that supplies of once-omnipresent CD transport mechanisms are drying up, but Hegel has still managed to retain a Philips VAM1202 solution for its 'high-end' CDP2A. Hegel's IR remote is also based around Philips' RC-5 codes. The player, in turn, uses many of the building blocks found in its 'reference' CDP4A model, blocks that include the signal processor, the Crystal CS4396 DAC and custom analogue stage. This single 192kHz-compatible, dual-channel DAC feeds both balanced and conventional, single-ended analogue outputs using a mix of Burr-Brown and PMI op-amps – an unusual but not unheard-of combination.

Hegel has rather ingeniously condensed all the common CD functions on to two rocker buttons that flank the display and loading tray, giving the player a very elegant appearance. The curved and crackle-coated fascia is also both distinctive, rugged and very, well, 'Scandinavian' – appropriately, since it hails from Norway. The remote is similarly rugged but minimalist in appearance, adding forward and reverse search plus repeat functions to the standard play, pause and track access facilities on the front panel.

While Hegel's marketing is accompanied by a significant dose of philosophising about 'SoundEngine' technology and the like, the company doesn't shy away from providing specific, and accurate, technical details.

The seriousness of Hegel's intent is obvious upon hearing its very composed and communicative sound. The CDP2A may have followed Densen's unfortunate B-400, but it immediately demonstrated a greater poise and sophistication about its music that "floats effortlessly on a gossamer cloud". Norah Jones was at her sleazy best, not quite as 'tarty' as she was with the Roksan, but still betraying "sufficient flesh" to keep our panel eager for more!

The player's inherently neutral balance holds every instrument in the right place at



the right time, contributing to a transparent, coherent whole that captivates and draws you in. Vocals sound deliciously breathy while piano has a realistic percussive quality, the notes enjoying a genuinely believable sustain and decay. The *Stabat* CD was described as "exquisite" in reference to the haunting prowess of the soloist, the intonation of the voice firmly punctuated and drawing us readily into the performance. The strings, pipes and voice were beautifully integrated but still, perhaps, not so sharply defined as they were with the Cyrus CD8, which had provided us with the boldest rendition of this classical masterpiece.

The Hegel has a slightly more organic quality, revealed in the expansive and highly integrated rendition of Anastacia's *Freak Of Nature*. Track after track from this CD bubbled with detail from the harmonies, strings, bass and what sounds like a squeezebox to the rear of the soundstage. This player can fill the room with a big sound and yet maintain a firm grip on all its elements, never biting off more than it can chew. Tonally, the CDP2A was judged by our panel as "spot-on", helping it deliver a thoroughly wholesome, "nourishing" sound that will surely grow with the capacity of your system. **HFC**

VERDICT

<p>SOUND >> 89%</p> <p>FEATURES >> 78%</p> <p>BUILD >> 86%</p> <p>VALUE >> 82%</p>	<p>This is a technically proficient and masterly-sounding player built by people who clearly know what they are doing. The relatively high £1,500 price tag does dent its ultimate value, however.</p>
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HI-FI CHOICE **85%**
OVERALL SCORE >>

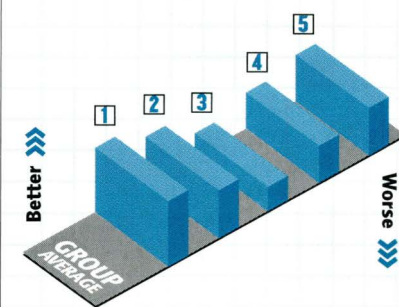


LAB REPORT

Hegel's proprietary analogue stage makes very good use of the CS4396 DAC's differential output, achieving a creditable 109dB A-wtd S/N ratio from a slightly high 2.36V peak output. Distortion, too, is remarkably well managed with a worst case result of 0.0006% right across the audio band. To achieve just 0.00055% at 20kHz/0dBfs is almost unheard of and demonstrates that today's D/A converters are actually capable of far better performance than is commonly realised.

At lower digital levels, figures of 0.00055% at -10dBfs and 0.005% at -30dBfs are equally impressive. Stopband rejection of 109dB is about as good as it gets while jitter is squeezed down to ~80psec. Similarly, crosstalk is minimal at <-120dB through the midrange and <-105dB at 20kHz. The only minute blip on Hegel's copybook is a 0.6dB 'ripple' in its response with rare, pre-emphasised CDs. Otherwise, its response is flat to within -0.04dB over the entire audioband.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> 55%
- 2] Jitter >> 40%
- 3] Linearity >> 20%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 28%
- 5] Digital filter >> 40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.3V	2.36V
Distortion (1 kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.002%	0.0005%
Signal-to-noise ratio	>105dB	109dB

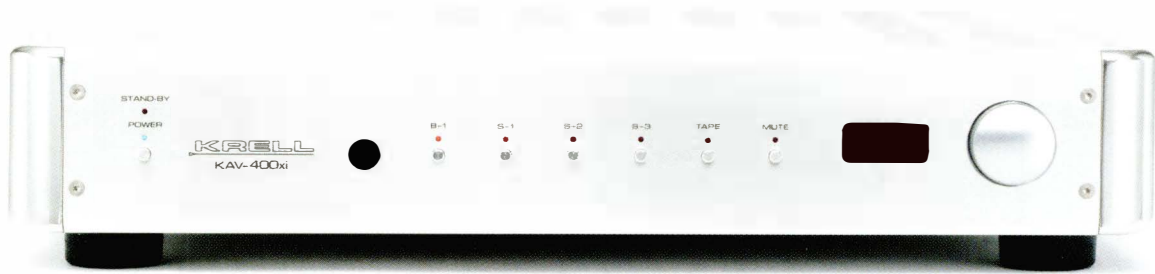
"This amplifier can blow your house over but loses nothing from the music"

Your Guide to Hi-Fi and Home Cinema, January 2004, Stan Curtis



"Combining clarity with control is virtually a three word encapsulation of the KAV400xi"

Hi Fi Choice, November 2003, Alvin Gold



KAV400xi

"The new player not just delights with the still quite rare SACDs, it also knows how to please with CDs"

Audio, Germany, September 2003

"If I had to choose one SACD player, (regardless of price), I'd go for the Krell."

Stereophile, December 2003, Michael Fremer

"A unit capable of delivering performance at the very top in the reproduction of CD and SACD"

Audio Review, Italy, November 2003, Franco Guida

"The 'Standard' is a player with...guts"

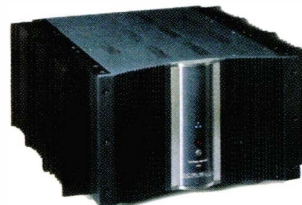
Diario de Noticias, Portugal, September 2003, JVH



SACD

KRELL'S ANGELS THE NEXT CHAPTER

From its arrival with a single power amplifier in 1980, Krell's exclusive product range has evolved into a total system concept. Because it is now recognised as the premier high-end audio and home theatre brand, Krell has been compelled to create the ultimate in audio-only and audio-video systems from front to back. Its range of amplification devices have been augmented over the years by CD transports, digital converters and audio/video processors. In 2004, the concept reaches fruition with the ascendancy of both definitive source components – the SACD Standard and the DVD Standard – and a range of loudspeakers suitable for pure music or multi-channel cinematic pleasure.

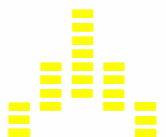


Krell FPB 700cx

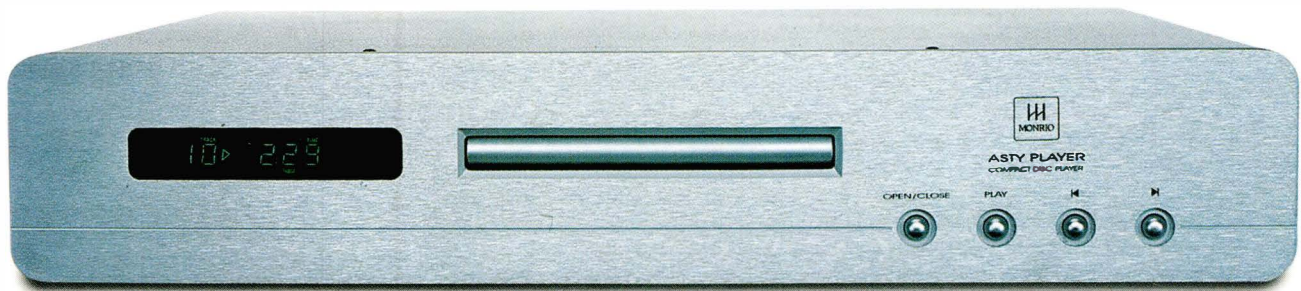
"There's a timeless quality to all-round excellence, and the FPB 700cx has just that"

Hi Fi News, June 2003, Martin Colloms

Krell has also expanded its catalogue vertically, with the KAV and Showcase ranges for entry-level and mid-level systems, and the rare and exotic Reference Series for systems without limit. Regardless of the model, however, a component must attain the highest standards of sonic performance, ergonomic excellence, superior build quality and long-term dependability before its front panel is graced with the Krell badge. Krell - a premier high-end company by excellence .



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MONRIO ASTY PL/HP

This Asty upgrade is improved in many ways, but is it enough?

Hailing from Italy, this Monrio CD player is the sole 'digital' product in a range otherwise consisting of integrated, mono, two, three and five-channel power amps. The £895 'PL' version of the Asty is the more affordable of two variations, with this £1,095 'PL/HP' version benefiting from what Monrio describes as "a precision oscillator module that replaces the CD player's internal oscillator circuit". Frankly, at £1,000+ this should be a given, not an upgrade.

Otherwise, the two iterations of the Asty utilise a pair of power transformers, an encapsulated device for the digital and control circuits with a relatively large toroid feeding the analogue stages. Monrio's choice of Crystal's CS4390 DAC is perfectly adequate, but a choice that's arguably longer in the tooth compared with the CS4396 used by both Creek and Hegel, for example. Similarly, Monrio has paid great attention to the quality of the metal film resistors and polypropylene capacitors used throughout its analogue stage but, once again, there's not a surface-mount component in sight.

Viewed from the outside of its substantial alloy fascia, none of this is evident of course, as the Asty presents a very clean and purposeful face to the world. The display is mounted to the side of the elegant CD loader so that commands from the black plastic IR remote are not blocked when the drawer is open. A useful array of features are provided, including direct track access, repeat, random (shuffle) and program play modes plus a ten-second intro scan. Around the back, standard analogue and coaxial digital connections complete this workmanlike product.

For our listeners, the Asty PL/HP proved quite a difficult player to pigeonhole, not because it is a neutral window on the music but because, as one panelist put it, "this player is neither fish nor foul". We thought it lacked the exquisite detailing of the Arcam and the body of the Creek, despite offering



an enjoyably laid-back balance all its own. The Norah Jones CD has a clean bass, and the Asty provided a firm 'whack' to the deepest strings while her voice sounds articulate, fulsome but not as emotive as it could. It's as if the player has a clear idea of its limits, beyond which it refuses to step.

Ryan Adam's vigorous *New York, New York* sounded rather subdued, for while his vocals were as clear as day, the snap of drums and bass were pushed well into the background. Once again, faced with a highly compressed and intense rock track, the Asty backs right off providing a recessed and muted 'overview' of what should be a very raucous musical event. The solo voice from *Stabat Mater* was impressively clear and articulate but, once again, the pipes and strings were pushed into the back of the church. Indeed, our panel suggested that this slightly dry performance could just as easily have been achieved by the less expansive acoustic of a studio recording.

While a player like the Creek succeeds in sounding greater than the sum of its parts, the Asty does not. It's a very composed and safe-sounding player but not one that readily sets an emotive charge in the room. The detail and passion is there, but it's hard work pulling it from the performance. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 68%

FEATURES >> 72%

BUILD >> 72%

VALUE >> 65%

While Monrio has addressed some of its previous shortcomings, the Asty remains both technically and subjectively flawed. Never hard or aggressive it is, nonetheless, insufficiently adventurous.

HI-FI CHOICE 67%
OVERALL SCORE >>

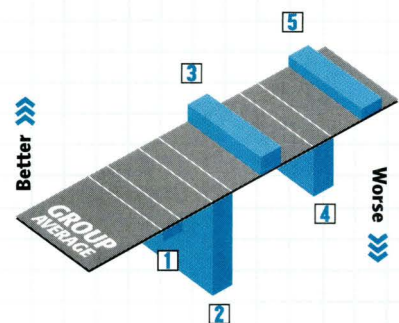


LAB REPORT

I last tested a Monrio Asty CD player in 1999 and this 'PL/HP' derivative, while sharing some hallmarks, has also addressed its most fundamental technical oversight. The earlier player suffered a stupendous ~5,760ppm clock error because the DAC was driven off the transport's clock. This 'HP' version is fitted with a separate and very high quality 16.9MHz crystal clock and enjoys a mere +8ppm error.

However, while clock error and jitter are often confused, they should not, because the original Asty's ~3,600psec jitter is only reduced to ~1,500psec here. Low, but not low enough bearing in mind that this predominantly PSU-induced jitter may have a direct bearing on the cleanliness and articulation of bass detail. Otherwise we have a 102dB A-wtd S/N ratio, 0.0006-0.005% distortion (1kHz-20kHz at 0dBfs) and a 2.3V peak output from a higher-than-average source impedance. Stopband rejection is a good 98dB and linearity true to +0.4/-0.0dB over a 90dB dynamic range.

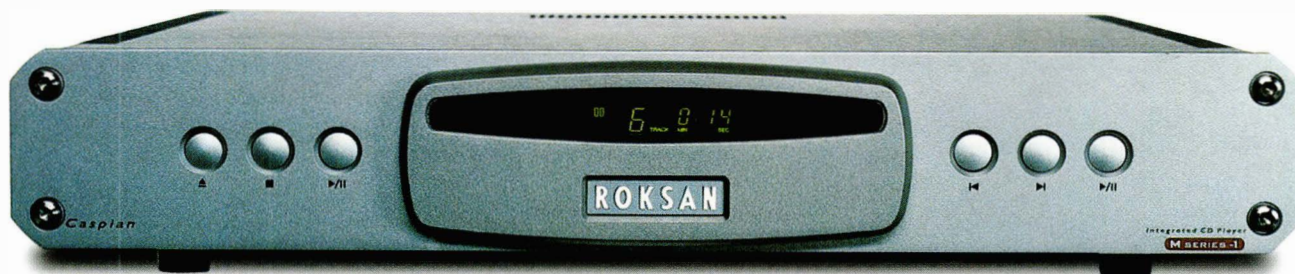
HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -12%
- 2] Jitter >> -82%
- 3] Linearity >> 15%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -39%
- 5] Digital filter >> 12%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.1V	2.3V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	0.0014%	0.0006%
Signal-to-noise ratio	115dB	102dB



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ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES

If you crave dynamics over detail, look no further

There's plenty of new metalwork in this latest M Series Caspian CD player, from the reworked silver fascia to the new chassis and slotted bonnet that provides improved ventilation. The audio circuit is now laid out on a double-sided, two-ounce copper board while the power supplies, and their associated regulation, have apparently been up-rated in an effort to improve the general performance of the player. The improved master clock and selected coupling capacitors also have a role to play here, but the key building blocks remain largely unchanged.

As such, the Caspian is a fairly complex design, lacking the high integration of more modern designs. The central CD signal processor and controller (a Yamaha YM7121) is from around 1994, and the TDA1305 DAC from Philips, is not, as far as we know, still in use in any other current player. Not that this is necessarily important, but it does 'date' the player somewhat. Otherwise, Roksan's 'Rokdac' analogue output board uses a single, dual-channel OPA2604 op-amp to drive its fixed stereo outputs while a BNC connection delivers an electrical digital output.

This M Series unit retains the classic Caspian aesthetics with its display section in a drop-down panel that makes way, Thunderbird-style, for the CD loader. Duplicate 'play' buttons flank this mechanism while the stylised remote offers direct track access, repeat and program play modes. This system handset also offers a measure of control over Roksan's matching tuner and amplifier, so don't expect the up/down volume buttons to have any effect over the CD player itself.

It was not long into our listening tests before one wag suggested "there's something a little sleazy about the sound of this player", a remark intended by way of backhanded compliment to the late-night potential of the Caspian. The breathy quality of Norah Jones's voice was widely appreciated even though the backing harmonies were less distinct. The



double bass possessed a deep resonance but would occasionally trip over a strong drum note, producing a 'boing' that rippled through the fabric of the acoustic.

Then again, the player does have a fairly rich balance and one lacking in the finest of detail resolution, a 'haze' not atypical of the type of jitter detected in the lab. The *Stabat Mater* did sound a little blurred for, despite a pleasing openness and natural acoustic, the combination of strings, voice and pipes were still a little congested. Vigorous recordings are also more likely to leap into the room, which is exactly how Anastacia greeted our panel, painting a big sound with a broad instrumental brush that filled the gap between us and the speakers. The bass was just on the verge of tripping out of control while the main and backing vocals all but exploded with energy – a welcome change from the mealy-mouthed reticence of other players.

It's always refreshing to stumble upon players like the Caspian because they show that there's always life beyond the mainstream. So, if you like your music larger than life and put dynamics ahead of detail, then Roksan's Caspian is the player for you – the one player not afraid to improvise. **HFC**

VERDICT

<p>SOUND >> 80% </p> <p>FEATURES >> 75% </p> <p>BUILD >> 82% </p> <p>VALUE >> 80% </p>	<p>Roksan continues to squeeze life out of its longstanding Caspian CD player with a quirky but not unappealing blend of novel styling and, by today's standards, positively unique digital components.</p>
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HI-FI CHOICE 80%
OVERALL SCORE >>

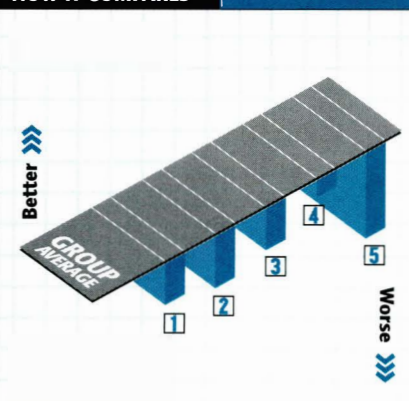


LAB REPORT

Our last set of test data for Roksan's Caspian CD player originates from 2000, where its performance was not a million miles away from this 'M Series' version. Most significantly, perhaps, its output level has been tickled up but the overall S/N ratio is unchanged at 106dB (A-wtd). Distortion remains dissimilar on left and right channels (an asymmetry mirrored by Roksan's Kandy KA-1 amplifier tested last month) but averages-out at ~0.001%, ~0.002% and ~0.008% at 0dBfs, -10dBfs and -30dBfs, respectively, through the midrange.

Roksan is still using Philips' old TDA1305 DAC, as evidenced by the 63dB stopband rejection and 0.008% distortion at 20kHz. The very specific data-induced and complex jitter patterns (510psec and 640psec, left and right channels) also look pretty similar to those suffered by the old Caspian. Real differences are few but include the very slightly more rolled-off treble (-0.7dB at 20kHz instead of -0.4dB) and increase in output from 2.0V to 2.3V.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -37%
- 2] Jitter >> -47%
- 3] Linearity >> -35%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -17%
- 5] Digital filter >> -76%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	2.3V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	0.002%	0.001%
Signal-to-noise ratio	105dB	106.1dB



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THULE CD150B

A fine player, but can it keep pace with the competition?

It's often instructive to revisit a model from a previous group test, if only to act as a point of reference or, indeed, confirm its competitiveness. Rotel's RA-1062 was re-introduced to our amps group last month and proceeded to show all and sundry a very clean pair of heels. On this occasion, however, it was Thule's CD150B that ended up staring several sets of heels square in the face.

Aesthetically there's little to touch Thule's spirit of minimalism with its single-button control over disc loading, play and track skip. The unbranded remote extends this list with backwards skipping, repeat and program play modes but the remaining volume, tone and input selection buttons are destined for Thule's amp range. Otherwise, the CD150B competes with the Arcam CD93 by offering full compatibility with CD Text embedded in either CD or dual layer CD/SACD discs while offering the luxury of both single-ended and fully balanced analogue outputs. The latter may have greater significance in the US market, but it's a feature normally reserved for far more costly players.

Inside, Thule has equipped the player with separate digital and analogue power supplies and a pair of PCM1716 DACs, arranged in differential mode to reduce noise and distortion. An asynchronous upsampling board remains available as an upgrade, as it is for the partnering DVD250B DVD player.

This remains a generally safe and cautious sounding player, even with elegant but explicit tracks like Norah Jones' *I Don't Know Why*, which adopt a very gentle demeanour. The double bass is slightly ill-defined, the voice softened but not inarticulate while the percussive strut of strings is similarly damped. The music is as light and engaging as it was some months ago but, against this competition, its impact is greatly reduced. For example, the bongos throughout Anastacia's *Freak Of Nature* lack the taut 'bounce' heard elsewhere, while the extremes of both bass



and treble lack extension, depth and bite. This sobering influence means the CD150B will never sound hard, aggressive or fatiguing. Neither is it especially soft or boomy. Rather, and compared to the explicit detailing of both the Cyrus CD8 and Arcam CD93, it has an endearing way of conveying hard-edged detail with all the comfort of an inflatable armchair.

In similar fashion, Ryan Adams' *New York, New York* sounded more like the offerings of the latest boy band masquerading as a serious rock outfit. The soundstage was described as "rather two-dimensional" while the player was likened to "a hedgehog rolling over in the face of demanding material but without any spikes by way of protection".

So, the CD150B fared rather less well than the sample supplied for *HFC 246* where, quite frankly, the CD150B's bacon was saved by the generally uninspiring sound of the group as a whole. In this instance, with the same player, same blind panel, ancillary equipment and listening levels, it was simply outclassed by several (admittedly more costly) players that would have caused similar damage had they been included in *HFC 246's* test. In the event, the CD150B is no better or worse than it was before, it's just that the available competition has turned the temperature way, way up. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 72%



FEATURES >> 70%



BUILD >> 85%

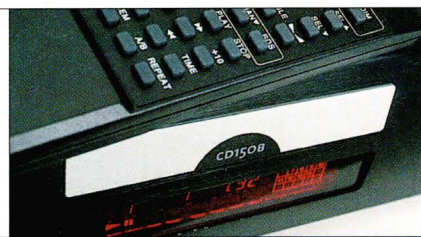


VALUE >> 80%



Last time out, the lean but detailed-sounding CD150B was more engaging than most of a rather lacklustre group. This time round the tables have turned, though its lightness of touch is still deserving of merit.

HI-FI CHOICE 76% OVERALL SCORE >>

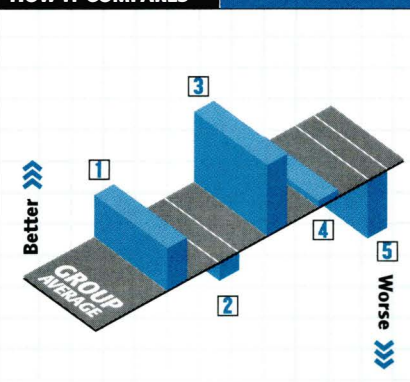


LAB REPORT

The original lab report for this CD150B was carried back in *HFC 246*, so this time round we compared the performance of its balanced outputs with those of the standard single-ended outputs (figures in brackets). The output level is necessarily higher at 4.3V (vs 2.17V) but distortion is pushed fractionally higher too at 0.00035% (vs 0.00025%) even though the overall A-wtd S/N ratio edges up to 110dB (vs 107dB).

At lower levels, where there's less stress on the analogue output op-amps, distortion unifies at ~0.0004% and ~0.005% at -10dBfs and -30dBfs through both balanced and single-ended outputs. Other parameters, including the 80dB rejection of digital images and modest output of ultrasonic noise, are fixtures of the PCM1716 DAC, which has proved a popular choice in many players over the last few years. Otherwise, Thule's own analogue filter does further modify the player's response with a gentle HF roll-off amounting to -0.75dB at 20kHz.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> 33%
- 2] Jitter >> -15%
- 3] Linearity >> 61%
- 4] Dynamic range >> 5%
- 5] Digital filter >> -48%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.2V	2.17V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.003%	0.0003%
Signal to noise ratio	98dB	107.0dB

CONCLUSIONS

A fascinatingly varied crop of players, capable of some of the best sounds yet heard from CD

There is no doubt that this group of eight players contains some of the best CD spinners currently available under £2,000. Bearing in mind that CD players face tough competition from DVD-A, SACD and – particularly – universal players, the former rely, almost solely, on their purist intent. Rarely will you find a dedicated CD player with a switch-mode power supply, for example, and certainly never with a small cinema's worth of video processing. So, a tightly-focused CD solution has every

chance of sounding significantly better with music's most prolific medium than an equivalently-priced or even much costlier DVD-A or universal player. Only the small crop of dedicated SACD players run the old-timers close because they, too, are free of potential interference from neighbouring video processors and MPEG clocks.

At these prices, any shortcoming seems greatly magnified, as Densen and Monrio evidenced. Roksan, too, might look to make significant, core changes to the

dynamic but dated Caspian in the near future, rather than continue to trade on past glory.

Creek has done just that, even if its hand was forced by the need to change its CD mechanism. But the headache was worthwhile, for the 'mk2' CD50 is an altogether more impressive player than the original, if pitched at a less competitive price. The three standout players, however, are the Arcam CD93, the Cyrus CD8/PSX-R and the Hegel CDP2A. The latter's sound is utterly composed and unruffled, while Arcam's CD93 brings a little

more physicality to the music. The Cyrus CD8/PSX-R brings these qualities together, combining a quiet, confident composure with an equal confidence in realising the dynamic swings of rock and orchestral pieces alike. There is a latent, brooding power about its music that holds individual notes in a vice-like grip but it's never so brutal as to crush the delicacy of the finest detail. Backgrounds are dark and foregrounds busy, with energetic yet perfectly intelligible, well-integrated detail. A superb result at the price. **HFC**

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HINTS AND TIPS

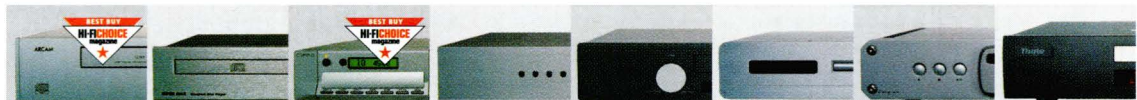
⊕ Give the CD player a good 30 minutes or so to warm up before making a critical judgement.

⊕ If you intend to use your CD player with a passive, rather than active, preamplifier, then check that its output impedance is 100 ohms

or less. Higher output impedances may cause audible changes in response.

⊕ You'd be amazed how sound quality can be influenced by cables. Choose with care but don't spend over the odds.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



Make	Arcam	Creek	Cyrus	Densen	Hegel	Monrio	Roksan	Thule
Model	DiVA CD93	CD50 mk2	CD8/PSX-R	Beat B-400 Plus	CDP2A	Asty PL/HP	Caspian M	CD-150B
PRICE	£950	£850	£1,350	£1,450	£1,500	£1,050	£1,100	£775
SOUND	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
FEATURES	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
BUILD	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
VALUE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
CONCLUSION	The top-end CD33 may technically be Arcam's ultimate CD player, but it's the little brother that really won our hearts.	Thoroughly re-engineered model represents a significant upgrade on the original CD50.	A truly cracking player and another example of the general superiority of Cyrus's 8-series.	This is a costly player in a niche all of its own, but faces tough competition from technically superior players.	A technically proficient and masterly-sounding player built by people who clearly know what they are doing.	Remains both technically and subjectively flawed. Never hard or aggressive but insufficiently adventurous.	Roksan continues to squeeze life out of the Caspian with a positively unique choice of digital components.	A lean, agile and detailed-sounding player, but it lacks the impact of the very best in this group.
KEY FEATURES								
ELEC. DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OPT. DIG O/P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
CD-RW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CD TEXT	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
BAL. AN O/P	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR								
DISTORTION	0.0008-0.002% E	0.0004-0.0015% E	0.0003-0.001% E	0.078-0.085% P	0.0005-0.0006% E	0.0006-0.0055% G	0.0013-0.007% A	0.00025-0.003% E
JITTER	160psec G	180psec A	50psec E	100psec G	80psec E	1500psec P	640psec P	180psec G
LINEARITY	+0.0/-0.3dB G	+0.0/-0.3dB G	+0.0/-0.3dB G	+0.0/-0.8dB A	+0.0/-0.4dB G	+0.4/-0.0dB G	+0.0/-0.9dB A	+0.0/-0.2dB E
S/N RATIO	116.5dB E	106.0dB G	110.5dB G	99.4dB P	109.0dB G	102.0dB A	106.0dB G	107.0dB G
STOPBAND REJECTION	>120dB E	113dB E	79dB A	69dB P	109dB E	98dB G	63dB P	80dB A

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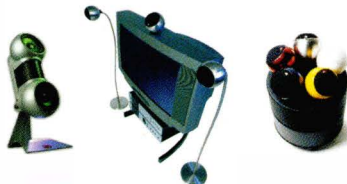


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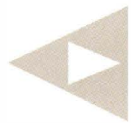


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MERIDIAN MCD AND MCD PRO CD PLAYERS



CD was launched in 1983 and went on to become the single biggest paradigm shift in music replay since the invention of the long playing record. At this early stage there were essentially two

contenders, from Sony and from Philips. Sony made 16-bit players, but at the time Philips had been unable to produce similar devices and were stuck with 14 bits. This apparent disadvantage however was cleverly turned around using oversampling, which had the effect of plugging the gap, and it quickly became apparent that the Philips technology players generally sounded better, a lead they would keep for some time.

It was at this point that other manufacturers began devising their own ways of driving CD performance forward, by using digital hardware sourced from Philips with their own supporting electronics. Marantz, which had a substantial Philips equity stake at the time, introduced the CD65, which was based on the seminal Philips CD101 and like the Philips had a 14-bit DAC and 4x oversampling. It was this model spawned the very first of the Marantz Special Edition products, with upgrades to key passive components in the output stage. The SE modifications were produced in the UK, and along with other improvements to output op-amps, made a big difference to sound quality which with this generation of hardware was none too hot.

The other prime mover was Meridian, whose own variant on the CD101, the MCD, was launched shortly afterwards. The MCD looked similar to the Philips progenitor, and changes under the skin included modified analogue and power supply circuitry, and different filters, which were available in two forms, giving the player different voicing for the UK and the US markets.

The MCD was then followed by the MCD Pro, which was originally aimed at the mastering and quality control market, and this helped establish Meridian as a serious contender in the digital arena, in the same way that the 105 amp had done for Meridian amplification a few years earlier when it went head to head with the Naim 250. The MCD Pro had the familiar CD101-style top-loading mechanism, but was built into a much deeper box which housed a dedicated DAC board with separate

“The MCD Pro established Meridian on a path that would lead it into high-end digital processing on the world stage.”

D/A converters for each channel (the MCD used a single converter). The D/A section had its own properly executed regulation, and the player also featured better power supplies and improved grounding. In addition there were some minor functional differences, including a switch to change the absolute phase, a feature executed losslessly in the digital domain – the first time this had been done – and an LED to monitor error correction. The MCD sold for £425 while the MCD Pro cost £675, a princely sum which told of its professional, studio monitoring intent.

An argument could be made that the MCD Pro was the first true high-end CD player, though this might be disputed by Cambridge Audio which launched the first two-box player, also made in the UK, at around the same time. The effect of the MCD Pro however was twofold. First, it established Meridian firmly on a path that would eventually lead the company into high-end digital processing on the world stage. Remember that MLP, which makes DVD-Audio practical, is a Meridian technology. And on a more prosaic level, Meridian has been making highly regarded and highly ambitious CD players, transports and converters since the MCD days.

Second, it established the idea that digital hardware, previously regarded as a more or less level playing field, could be improved by applying the same kind of measures that were also well understood from analogue amplifier design – grounding, power supply regulation and so on. The early literature produced by Meridian for the MCD Pro was also the first I can recall that explicitly mentions jitter, in claiming that the new master oscillator developed for the model was responsible for a 40dB reduction in jitter and modulation noise. Quite simply, the modern concept of high-end CD replay started here. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

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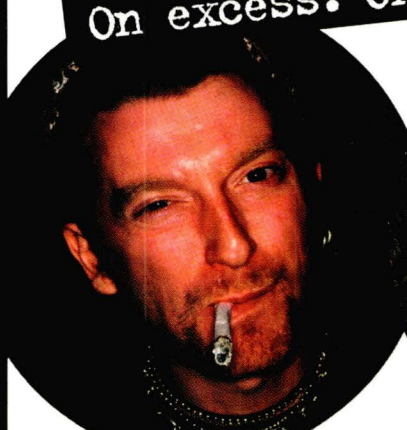
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THE WHO
WHO'S NEXT



After spending \$36,000 on *Tommy* and scoring a huge hit in the US with what many thought was the first 'rock opera' (in fact, The Pretty Things' 1968 *SF Sorrow* was the first real rock opera), Pete Townshend set about changing the future of rock and roll. With his managers Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp keen to see *Tommy* turned into a film, Townshend was on an altogether higher trip. Not content with gold-selling double concept albums, he wanted to redefine the whole notion of entertainment in the form of the mind-boggling *Lifeshouse* project.

This would be a filmed concert cum major theatrical event, a sci-fi song-cycle performed every night through a huge quadraphonic PA, a virtual reawakening of the youth movement, a work of spiritual harmony that would take the counter-culture out of the mire of the Woodstock mud (witnessed first hand by the band in 1969) and into the future underpinned by deafening commitment to the loudest rock 'n' roll on the planet.

What Townshend didn't really understand at the time was that *Tommy* was unwieldy enough as a double album and his managers were desperate to get Universal in America to back a film deal. They pursued that aim and left Townshend to noodle on his synthesisers and guitars in his Twickenham home studio.

Eventually, the band teamed up with Glyn Johns to record with the Rolling Stones' mobile studio. They performed a *Lifeshouse* concert at The Old Vic, London and during the summer of 1971 went into Olympic studios in Barnes to record the whole thing sober and alert. As time went on, Johns put his foot down as the concept became less and less feasible. He warned Townshend that a double or triple album without proper narrative structure would be lost on the public. A single album of the best of the material would have much more impact, and so it was that *Lifeshouse* was ditched and in August 1971 *Who's Next* was released to universal acclaim.

The most striking aspect of the nine-song album was its incredible track separation, a sheen produced by superior multi-track recording facilities at Olympic. The playing was uniformly tight and the concentration on superb performance



“Townshend was warned that a double or triple album without proper narrative structure would be lost on the public.”

was paramount. The timbre of the music went way beyond the normal four-piece rock ensemble for it was here that mainstream audiences finally got a taste of the potential of what new electronic instruments could achieve.

On *Baba O'Riley* and *Won't Get Fooled Again*, Townshend introduced the cyclical method of composition known as minimalism, utilising the sequencing potentials of VCS3 and ARP synthesisers. Though Edgar Winter and Stevie Wonder had already famously used ARP it was *Who's Next* which really put the synths on the map. These electronic efforts were made more profound when the LSD-added guitarist heard the minimalist music of Terry Riley, in which tape-delayed lines produced by organs were continuously fed back into the performance.

On *Bargain* you can hear the whooping filtration of the ARP in the middle of the song, but it's on the grand finale of *Won't Get Fooled Again* that Townshend's ARP minimalism really hits home. This space-age effect coupled with blistering 1970s rock was state-of-the-art and way ahead of everything around it. Coupled with lyrics that said the head revolution achieved nothing and Townshend's ultimate guitar riffing, this magnificent blitzkrieg of a song (all eight minutes and 46 seconds of it) is refrained by the spooky oscillating tones of the ARP, which still sound effectively contemporary. Compared to *Tommy*, *Who's Next* was futuristic rock 'n' roll for a new generation. It's reasonable to say that if *Lifeshouse* had been realised, The Who would never have become the stadium rock fillers that *Who's Next* consequently guaranteed.

Tommy has just been released on SACD, but this is the album that really deserves such treatment – its beautiful acoustic/electric and electronic timbres would sound incredible in multichannel DSD. But that's one for the powers... **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

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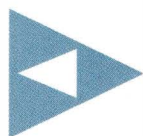
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DIGITALIA

THE FUTURE
OF MULTICHANNEL?



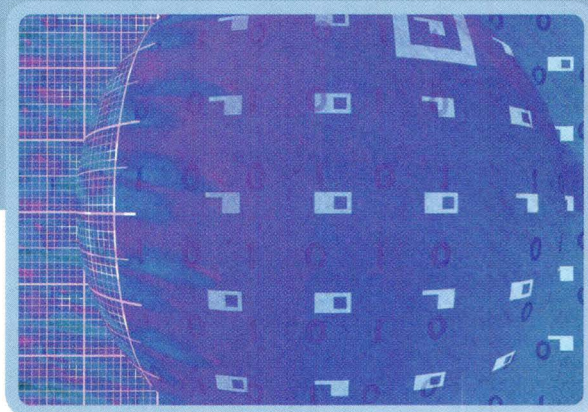
These days 'multichannel' can mean a multitude of things from compressed Dolby Digital and DTS movie soundtracks to uncompressed, wideband and very high resolution DVD-Audio/SACD media operating over a full six channels. But on a more basic level, 'multichannel' typically means 'more than stereo'. A simple three-channel system with a derived centre feed to reinforce vocal images or a single rear channel to enhance the sense of space and depth represents a primitive form of multichannel audio. Quadraphonic and Ambisonic systems were crude by modern standards, but as ideas they were ahead of their time and hampered only by the technology of the day.

The concept of multichannel audio now enjoys far greater acceptance, thanks to the uptake of DVD software and home cinema hardware. Now, there's a good reason for having more than two speakers, but few enthusiasts still have more than 5.1 boxes on show. Domestic pressure remains a key factor in the acceptance of additional channels, because more channels means more speakers. Which begs the question: just how many channels is enough to create a truly 'surrounding' experience?

Frankly, I do not see much AV hardware extending beyond the 6.1 and 7.1 channel Dolby EX and DTS ES formats that we have at present. For the mass market producers, the move from 5.1 channel to 7.1 channel amp design was an especially painful one. They will not relish the prospect of further 'enhancements'.

But if more channels do come, then they will likely furnish some form of 'height' information to augment the largely horizontal dispersion of front, centre, side and rear channels. In fact, one of the first such systems was also the most extravagant, a 10.2-channel format demonstrated by Tomlinson Holman (the TH in THX) in early 1999. This was a practical realisation of 'immersive audio', using three front speakers, two wide (or side) speakers, three surround speakers, two subs (the 0.2 in 10.2) and – importantly – two 'height' information speakers.

Perhaps the term 'practical' is somewhat wide of the domestic mark, but this immense system still succeeded in creating a broader, higher and more three-dimensional acoustic than any



“One specialist label has announced a 2+2+2 recording technique that encodes additional height information.”

5.1 channel AV system. Great idea for commercial theatres, but unlikely to be approved by even the most conciliatory of spouses.

Back in the real, albeit high-end world, AV processors from the likes of TAG McLaren are already carrying additional height channels, fed by signals derived from a matrix of the centre and surround back channels with various Dolby EX and DTS-ES movie DVDs. It's a simple and elegant idea, pulling out data that bridges the gap between the front and rear of the room and placing it overhead. Some multichannel DVD-A and SACD discs already utilise the 0.1 channel to carry full bandwidth height information instead of band-limited LF effects. Indeed, the more recent Sony SACD players even allow you to switch between height and subwoofer outputs when such discs are in play.

MDC, a specialist music label, has recently announced a 2+2+2 recording technique that makes full use of DVD-A's existing six full bandwidth channels to encode additional height information. Exactly how this is achieved is far from clear, at least to me, but the method seems to use existing centre and sub channel spaces to deliver left and right height channels.

Another technique being considered by a number of small, specialist recording companies involves the use of the existing, sixth full-bandwidth channel to carry both LF effects *and* height information. The LF portion is mixed in below 125Hz using a fourth-order low-pass filter while the height information is carried above 180Hz via a second-order high-pass filter. Since any 'height audio' is principally reverberant in nature, the fact that it is band-limited from 180Hz-45kHz (with 96kHz DVD-A) should not prove disastrous. All you need is an active sub with its own low-pass filter and what remains, should you care to pass it on, is an 'additional' height channel obtained for free. **HFC**

Paul Miller

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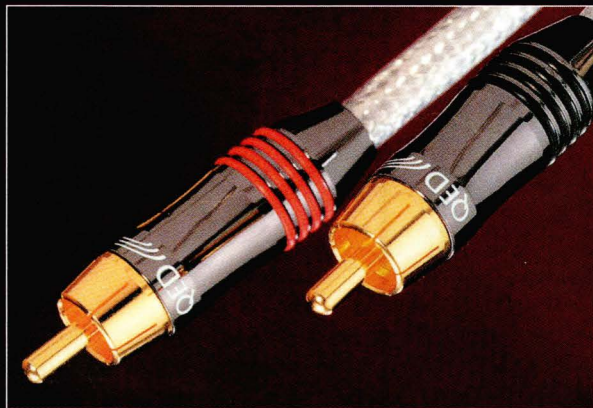


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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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.

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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 per cent 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.

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.

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.

TOP BUYS



Marantz CD7300 £350

The latest in a long line of highly successful sub-£500 CD players from Marantz is an absolute beauty. Engaging and sonically refined, there's little to touch it at the price.



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	
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
BEST BUY	Cambridge Audio Azur 640C	250	This elegant little player can hold its own in very elevated company – a budget system will barely do it justice	●	●	●	●				249
	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
BEST BUY	Hegel CDP2A	1,500	Norwegian player that does what every hi-fi component should – gets out of the way and lets the music shine	●	●	●	●		●		250
BEST BUY	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages	●	●	●	●		●		250
	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
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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Ayre CX-7 CD player	2,950	Superbly built and natural sounding player that will win you over with its range of capabilities and transparency	●	●	●	●		●		251
EDITOR'S CHOICE	BAT VK-D5SE CD Player	5,495	Superb valve CD player that is smooth and refined but with real guts that doesn't conform to valve stereotypes	●	●	●	●		●		251
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 SACD Standard	4,244	A landmark SCD player and an excellent CD player at what by Krell standards is a relatively affordable price	●	●	●	●		●		251
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
BEST BUY	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

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.

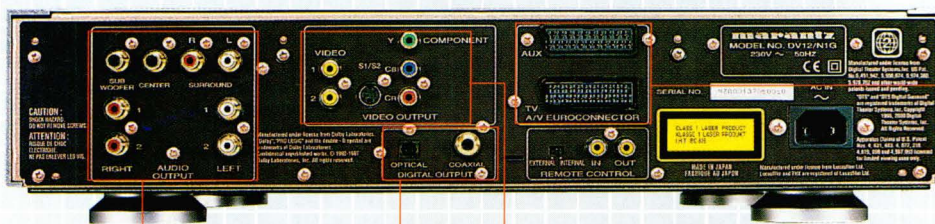
DVD-AUDIO



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



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
EC	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
EC	Denon DVD-1400	400	Denon's entry point to universal disc playback and a remarkably good one too. Excellent CD replay for a universal player						249
EC	Denon DVD-2900	850	A beautifully built universal player that delivers a strong performance across all formats, all at a remarkable price						248
EC	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
EC	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
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA DV89	1,300	No SACD playback, but CD sounds strong, DVD-Audio is highly engaging and video performance is excellent too						248
EC	Arcam FMJ DV27A	1,900	Very accomplished, clean sounding player with CD, DVD and DVD-Audio alike. Picture quality is equally top-notch						246
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs						238
EC	Denon DVD-A11	1,700	Refinement and clarity are hallmarks of this player, which is also as close to being future-proof as they come						250
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse						230
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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

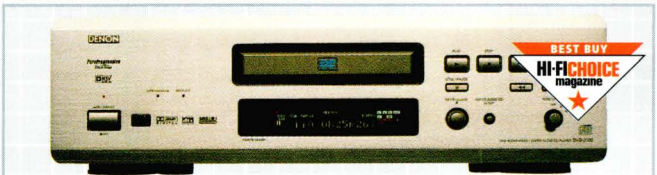
SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL 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.



Denon DVD-A11 £1,700

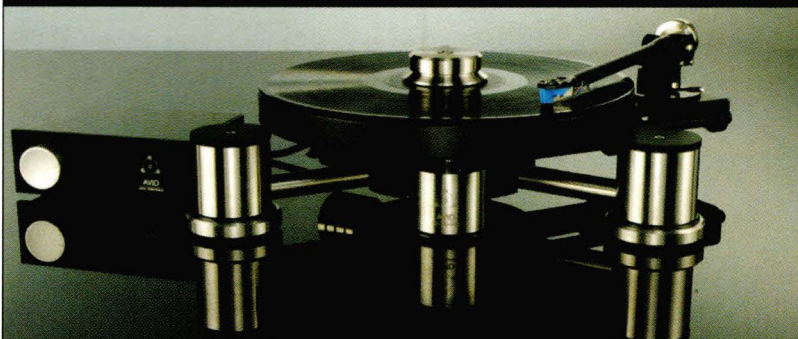
A superb universal player, made even better with i.Link/Denon Link/DVI digital outputs.



Arcam FMJ DV27A £1,900

No SACD playback, but DVD-Audio and CD sound are first rate, as is picture performance.

AVID DIVA - AFFORDABLE HI-END



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HFC "Product of the Year"
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Contact us for your nearest dealer

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	194
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Emotion	655	An engaging turntable offering plenty of audiophile credibility for the money, needs a decent support for best results	33/45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	251
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	223
<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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Radius 5	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery, and good isolation	33/45	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	186

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	223
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Golding Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	215
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	244

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AUJ GAIN	AUJ IMPEDANCE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	223
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	234
<input type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity X-LPS ³	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	201
<input type="checkbox"/>	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	234

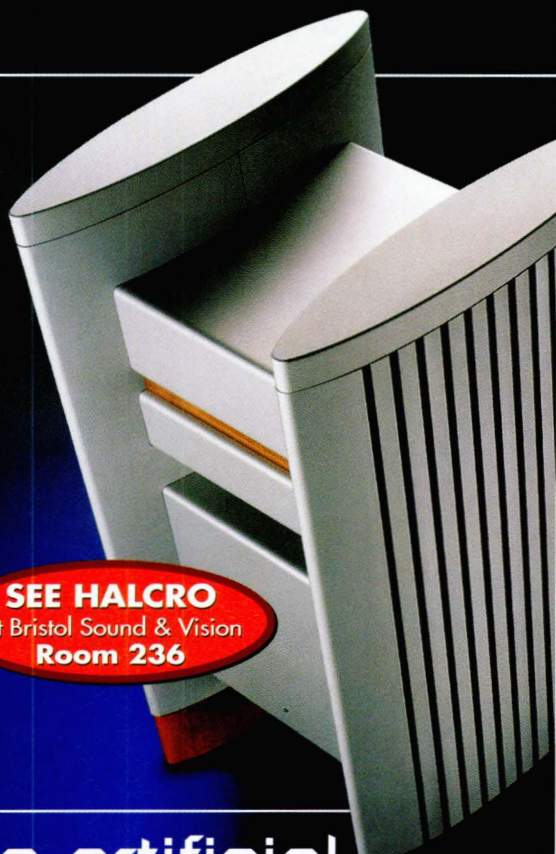
TURNTABLE SPECS KEY **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you.

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

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

REPLACEABLE STYLUS Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

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Hi Fi Review magazine in Hong Kong

The Outstanding Power Amplifier 2001 Award

Super AV magazine in Hong Kong

Best Buy Component 2001 Award

Stereo Sound (Japan)

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"what was coming from the stage had a clarity, focus and transient naturalness that said 'you are there': it didn't blend in with the reverb, but separated out, as you'd experience it in concert. - **Michael Fremer, Stereophile**

Audio Reference

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GRAHAM ENGINEERING, INC.



The reference Model 2.2 tonearm, incorporating advanced engineering principles, premium components, and superior, long lasting performance.

"I can't say with absolute authority what is 'the best sounding tonearm in the world', but the Graham 2.2 is among the handful of contenders. Factor in its build quality, ease of setup, versatility, and convenience, and it's hard to beat."
Micheal Fremer Stereophile

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 Audio T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			● ● ● ●		193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creek T50	499	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,ML	128	● ● ● ●		● ● ● ●		251
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	● ● ● ●		● ● ● ●		211
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	● ● ● ●		● ● ● ●		250
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●		230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	● ● ● ●		● ● ● ●		230
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●		248
	Pure Digital 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)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	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
■	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
■	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
■	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		●	●	205
■	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
■	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.

Product NEWS



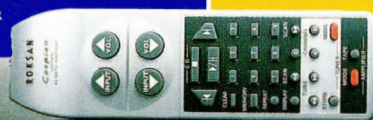
ARCAM'S entry-level DiVA DV78 DVD Player

Arcam's latest DVD player in the DiVA range is the DV78. The result of over four years' development, it uses the design team's insight and understanding to engineer their most affordable player ever.

The cost saving is substantial, but Arcam are proud to say that they have video performance which is truly world class. They have also used their expertise to ensure that the audio quality reflects the audiophile heritage, which is at the heart of every Arcam product.

The quality of components is identical to those used in the more expensive models, the DiVA DV88 Plus DVD player and DiVA DV89 DVD-Audio player. What has changed is the simplified construction and assembly techniques, which have substantially reduced both build and test times. The player comes equipped with a new remote control as well as a new navigation button.

Call your local Sevenoaks store for a demonstration and confirm that the DV78 provides reference class performance on both music and movies.



ROKSAN upgrades its entire CASPIAN range

Roksan's CASPIAN range of Hi-Fi and Home Cinema components was originally introduced in 1998 and, having remained almost unchanged since, it was clearly time for an update.

The design aims for the new 'M' series were to improve reliability, enhance the aesthetics and, most importantly,

improve sound quality. And it seems these updates have been successful with What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine concluding "Roksan's calculations were spot-on... The Caspian M Series-1 is well worth the extra money." **JANUARY 2004**

CASPIAN M RANGE AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS STORES

- BEDFORD
- BIRMINGHAM
- BRIGHTON
- BRISTOL
- BROMLEY
- CAMBRIDGE
- CARDIFF
- CHELSEA
- CHELTHENHAM
- CRAWLEY
- CROYDON
- EDINBURGH
- EPSOM
- EXETER
- GLASGOW
- GUILDFORD
- HOLBORN
- HULL
- IPSWICH
- KINGSTON
- LEICESTER
- LEEDS
- LINCOLN
- LIVERPOOL
- MAIDSTONE
- MANCHESTER
- NEWCASTLE
- NORWICH
- NOTTINGHAM
- 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

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



HI-FI SEPARATES

**MICHELL GYRO SE
TURNTABLE / RB300 TONEARM
£1049.95**



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

"The Gyrodec SE sounds great, combining the best sonic characteristics of rivals... Quite simply, the Michell Gyrodec SE is terrific. Nothing compares at this price point - it's well deserving another Best Buy."

CLAIM £50
TOWARDS THE CARTRIDGE OF YOUR CHOICE*



**SYSTEM PRICE
£949.95**

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
AWARD WINNER
£251.600

**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

FREE GOLDRING EXSTATIC CLEANER*

ARCAM CD73T CD PLAYER £ CALL



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

FANTASTIC OFFERS ON ARCAM DIVA AMPS & CDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 1

SAVE £149



**FREE
PRO-JECT DEBUT II TURNTABLE***

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
Up to £150

**ROTEL
RCD-02 CD PLAYER
RA-02 AMPLIFIER
B&W
DM601 S3 SPEAKERS**

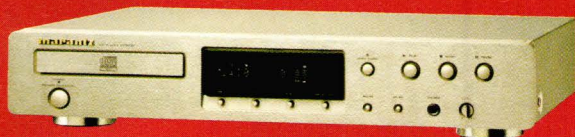
Rotel electronics and B&W speakers are natural partners for each other, giving excellent sound quality and stunning looks. So what better than this combination of class-leading detail with an even and robust sound.

But at Sevenoaks we always aim to offer you more and this means What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision's Award-winning Project Debut II turntable is thrown in **FREE**.

HI-FI SYSTEM 1 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

experience more

experience more
experience more



MARANTZ
CD5400 CD PLAYER
£119.95

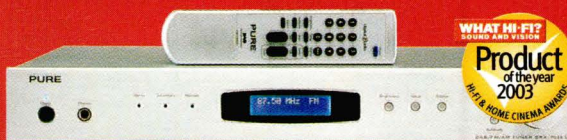
SAVE £30



MARANTZ
PM7200 AMPLIFIER
£249.95

SAVE £80

"This is one of the most powerful amps in its class, at 95w per channel, and it sounds it with anything from dance to a big orchestral work, offering a delicious combination of poise and impact. Stick with fast, dynamic speakers such as B&W DM601 S3s or KEF's equally capable Q1s and the results will amaze."



PURE DIGITAL
DRX-702ES ANALOGUE/DAB TUNER
£299.95

SAVE £30

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. *Cable Offer - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. Advertisement valid until at least 10/03/04, E&OE.

HI-FI SYSTEM 2

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 CD PLAYER & AMPLIFIER

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER S8 SPEAKERS

One of our most popular systems at an amazing sale price. Full-scale dynamics with a lightness of touch makes this combination stand out.

SYSTEM PRICE
£2399.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 2
NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

SAVE £379

MISSION 780 SE SPEAKERS

£349.95

"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."

WHAT HI-FI? Feb 03
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

INCLUDES **FREE** SPEAKER CABLE WORTH £60*

MISSION 782 SE SPEAKERS

£899.95

"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."

WHAT HI-FI? June 03
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

INCLUDES **FREE** SPEAKER CABLE WORTH £120*

SAVE £169

HI-FI SYSTEM 3

ROKSAN

KANDY KD1/III CD PLAYER

KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER

QUAD

11L SPEAKERS



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

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

If you're after detail and excitement in your music then this system's for you. Here we've combined the Quad 11L speakers - Product of the Year 2002/2003 - with Roksan's double Award-winning Kandy KA1/III amplifier and its ideal partner, the Kandy KD1/III CD player.

Awarded five stars in a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test, the Kandy KD1/III CD player was described as "offering a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

But don't just take our word for it; come in for a listen.

HI-FI SYSTEM 3 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

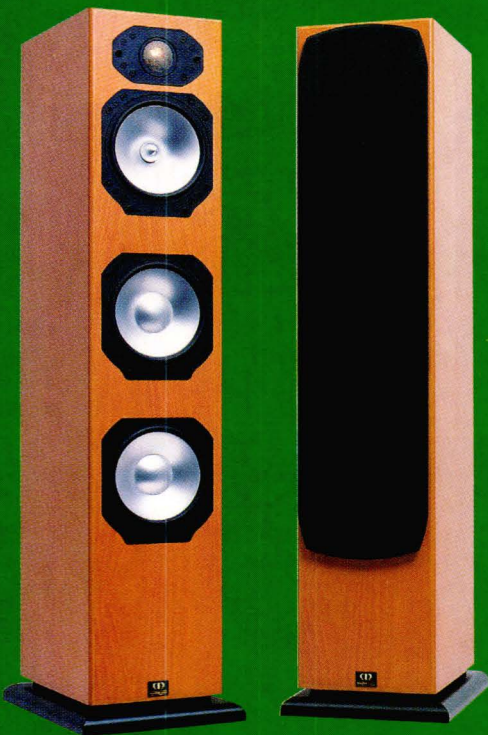
SYSTEM PRICE
£1399.95

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

MONITOR AUDIO

SILVER S8 SPEAKERS

£699.95 SAVE £100



HI-FI SYSTEM 4

SAVE £399

CYRUS CD8 CD PLAYER & 8 AMPLIFIER
MONITOR AUDIO SILVER S6 SPEAKERS

Another very popular combination that's more than the sum of its already talented parts - and that's before you've examined the upgrade options. The CD8 is a magnificent player (Best Buy - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards 2003) and like most Cyrus products its performance can be maximised with the addition of a Cyrus PSX-R power supply.

The beautifully crafted Silver S6 speakers from British speaker specialists Monitor Audio complete the package.

HI-FI SYSTEM 4 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



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

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

SYSTEM PRICE
£1999.95

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all stores.
Please call before travelling.*Cable Offer - From range available in-store.
Not in conjunction with any other offer.
Advertisement valid until at least 10/03/04. E&OE.

experience more

experience more

experience more



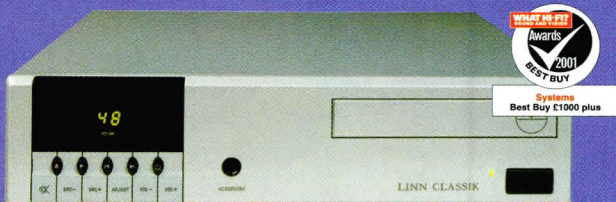
LINN CLASSIK ▼

MUSIC SYSTEM (EX SPEAKERS)

£749.95

SAVE £100

"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."

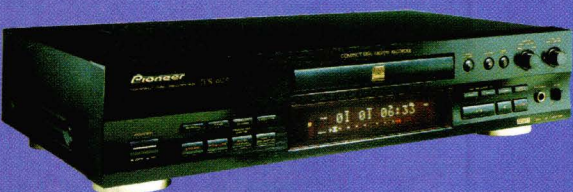


YAMAHA CDR-HD1300

CD-RW/HD RECORDER

£469.95

SAVE £60



PIONEER PDR-609

CD-RW RECORDER

£159.95

DENON DM31 ▶

UD-M31 CD RECEIVER

£179.95

SAVE £50

"The D-M30 was exemplary, as its three What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards clearly show. The D-M31 is even better, making it phenomenal value for money."

OPTIONAL RECORDERS: DMD-M31 MINIDISC RECORDER • DRR-M31 CASSETTE DECK
NB - PRICE EXCLUDES SPEAKERS

HI-FI SYSTEM 5

SAVE £169

ARCAM

CD73T CD PLAYER & A65 PLUS AMPLIFIER

MONITOR AUDIO

BRONZE B2 SPEAKERS



SYSTEM PRICE
£799.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

Arcam and Monitor Audio both have an enviable reputation for producing great sounding kit without breaking the bank. This system shows why with a well balanced sound that's both musically involving and enjoyable.

At the front of this package is Arcam's upgradeable CD73T CD player - a What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision 'Product of the Year 2003'. We've coupled this with Arcam's complementary A65 Plus integrated amplifier and Monitor Audio's beautifully balanced 'Best Buy' Bronze B2 speakers. According to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision (Awards 2003), these compact speakers "Sound superb... Speakers don't get much better than the B2s."

HI-FI SYSTEM 5 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



What Hi-Fi?
SOUND AND VISION
Product of the year 2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
RECORDERS
Pioneer PDR-609

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



PRODUCT RANGE

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores. However, some products may not be available at all stores.

Please call to check availability before travelling.

TURNTABLES

Goldring GR1	£ CALL
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 £50 TOWARDS CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TecnoDec	£ CALL
Project Debut Phono SB	£ CALL
Project Debut II (Black)	£ CALL
Project Debut II (Colours)	£ CALL
Project 1 Xpresson FREE EXSTATIC CLEANER*	£209.95
Project RPM4	£ CALL

TUNERS

Arcam DiVA T61	£ CALL
Cyrus FM X	£ CALL
Denon TU260L MKII	£99.95
Marantz ST4000	£ CALL
Pure Evoke 1 DAB	£89.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£199.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£299.95

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DiVA CD73T	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA CD82T	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA CD93T	£ CALL
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£ CALL
Cyrus CD6	£ CALL
Cyrus CD8	£ CALL
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£ CALL
Linn Ikemi	£ CALL
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Marantz CD17/II M	£ CALL
Meridian 507	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308*	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD	£ CALL
Quad 99 CD-P	£ CALL
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKII	£ CALL
Roksan Caspian M	£ CALL
Rotel RCD02	£ CALL
Rotel RCD1072	£ CALL

RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£159.95
Sony RCDW3 CD-RW	£169.95
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW	£469.95

AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA A80	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA A85	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA A90	£ CALL
Arcam FMJ A32	£ CALL
Cyrus 6	£ CALL
Cyrus 8	£ CALL
Cyrus Pre X Pre	£ CALL

Cyrus Mono X Power	(Each) £ CALL
Denon PMA355	£179.95
Linn Kolector Pre	£ CALL
Linn LK85 Power	£ CALL
Marantz PM4400	£149.95
Marantz PM7200	£249.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	£ CALL
Quad 99 Power	£ CALL
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKII	£ CALL
Roksan Caspian M	£ CALL
Rotel RA-01	£ CALL
Rotel RA-02	£ CALL
Rotel RA-1062	£ CALL

SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£129.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£249.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII (From)	£ CALL
B&W DM303	£ CALL
B&W DM601 S3	£ CALL
B&W DM602 S3	£ CALL
B&W 704	£ CALL
B&W 705	£ CALL
KEF Q1	£179.95
KEF Q4	£ CALL
KEF Q01	£ CALL
Linn Katan	£ CALL
Linn Ninka	£ CALL
Mission m31	£ CALL
Mission 780SE £60 FREE CABLE*	£349.95
Mission 782SE £120 FREE CABLE*	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£ CALL
Monitor Audio Silver S1	£ CALL
Monitor Audio Silver S6	£ CALL
Monitor Audio Silver S8	£699.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£ CALL
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£ CALL
Quad 11L	£ CALL
Quad 12L	£ CALL
Quad 22L	£ CALL
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Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30	£ CALL

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£499.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£299.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£179.95
Linn Classik Music Ex Speakers	£749.95
Onkyo CS210 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Teac Legacy 600 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Teac Reference 300 Ex Speakers	£449.95
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DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV-M71 Ex Speakers	£ CALL
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Jamo DVS90/A305PDD	£ CALL
Jamo DVS90/A355PDD	£ CALL
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Linn Classik Movie Di Ex Speakers	£ CALL
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Teac Legacy 700VLS-L800 Speakers	£849.95

DVD PLAYERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DiVA DV78	£ CALL	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA DV88 Plus	£ CALL	£ CALL
Arcam DiVA DV89	£ CALL	£ CALL
Cyrus DV08	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-1400 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A1	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A11	£ CALL	£ CALL
Harman Kardon DVD21	£ CALL	£ CALL
Harman Kardon DVD25	£ CALL	£ CALL
Marantz DV4300	£189.95	£189.95
Pioneer DV360	£79.95	£99.95
Pioneer DV464	£99.95	£119.95
Pioneer DV565A Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV668A Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV868A Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Tag McLaren DVD32FLR	£ CALL	£ CALL
Teac DV50	£ CALL	£ CALL

Toshiba SD330E	£79.95	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S540	£ CALL	£ CALL

DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Panasonic DMR-E50 DVD-R	£269.95	£299.95
Panasonic DMR-E60 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E100 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-HS2 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Philips DVDR70 DVD+RW	£239.95	£239.95
Philips DVDR80 DVD+RW	£349.95	£349.95
Pioneer DVR3100S DVD-R/RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR5100HS DVD-R/RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Sony RDR-GX3 Recorder	£ CALL	£ CALL
Sony RDR-GX7 Recorder	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba RD-XS30 DVD Recorder	£549.95	£ TBA

AV AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR200 A/V Receiver	£599.95
Arcam AV8/P7 A/V Pre/Processor/Power	£ CALL
Cyrus AV8 A/V Processor	£ CALL
Denon AVC-A1SR A/V Amplifier	£2249.95
Denon AVC-A11SR A/V Amplifier	£1299.95
Denon AVR1604 A/V Receiver	£239.95
Denon AVR1804 A/V Receiver	£319.95
Denon AVR2803 A/V Receiver	£489.95
Denon AVR3803 A/V Receiver	£679.95
Harman Kardon AVR2550 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR5550 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR8500 A/V Receiver	£1499.95
Marantz SR4400 A/V Receiver	£289.95
Marantz SR5400 A/V Receiver	£349.95
Onkyo TX-SR501E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-SR601E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-NR900E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-C301 A/V Receiver	£199.95
Pioneer VSX-C501 A/V Receiver	£329.95
Pioneer VSX-D812 A/V Receiver	£319.95
Pioneer VSX-AX31 A/V Receiver	£649.95
Pioneer VSX-AX51 A/V Receiver	£949.95
Pioneer VSA-AX10i A/V Amplifier	£2199.95
Rotel RSK1065 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 A/V Pre/Power	£ CALL
Rotel RSP1098 A/V Processor	£ CALL
TAG McLaren AV30R A/V Processor	£ CALL
TAG McLaren AV192R A/V Processor (From)	£ CALL
Yamaha DSP-AV640SE A/V Amplifier	£299.95
Yamaha DSP-Z9 A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V440RDS A/V Receiver	£219.95
Yamaha RX-V640RDS A/V Receiver	£349.95
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

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Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£369.95
Castle Compact CC3	£999.95
B&W VM1/AS1	£ CALL
B&W FPM Series	£ CALL
Energy Take 5.1	£ CALL
Energy Encore	£ CALL
Jamo D7 THX Ultra 2 (from)	£ CALL
KEF KHT1005	£ CALL
KEF KHT2005.2	£ CALL
KEF KHT5005	£ CALL
KEF Q7 AV £300 FREE CABLE*	£2199.95
M&K K5 £250 FREE CABLE*	£1699.95
M&K K3	£ CALL
M&K Xenon 25	£ CALL
M&K 850/CS35/V850	£ CALL
Mission m70	£369.95

Monitor Audio Bronze B4	£ CALL
Monitor Audio Radius	£ CALL
Ruark Vita 120	£ CALL

SUBWOOFERS

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B&W ASW750	£ CALL
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MJ Acoustics Pro 100 (Black)	£ CALL
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REL Q201E (Brittix Black)	£ CALL
REL Q400E (Brittix Black)	£ CALL
REL Quake (Brittix Black)	£ CALL
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REL Storm III	£699.95

PLASMA

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Fujitsu P42HH40 42"	£3699.95
Fujitsu P50XH410 50"	£5699.95
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Panasonic TH37PA20B 37"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH42PA20B 42"	£3299.95
Panasonic TH42PW6B 42"	£2999.95
Philips 37PF9965 37"	£ CALL
Philips 42PF9965 42"	£3699.95
Pioneer PDP434HDE 43"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP503HDE 50"	£4989.95
Pioneer PDP504HDE 50"	£ CALL
Toshiba 42WP36P 42"	£ CALL

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Panasonic TX15LT2 15"	£779.95
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Sharp Aquos LC-22SV2E 22"	£1099.95
Sharp Aquos LC-30AD1 30"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-30HV4E 30"	£2399.95
Sharp Aquos LC-37AD1 37"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-37HV4E 37"	£3699.95
Toshiba 26WL36P 26"	£ CALL
Toshiba 32WL36P 32"	£ CALL

PROJECTORS

NEC HT1000 DLP	£3499.95
Sanyo PLV-Z1 LCD	£999.95
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Screenplay SP4800 DLP	£ CALL
Screenplay SP5700 DLP	£ CALL
Sharp XV-Z91E DLP	£1799.95
Sharp XV-Z200 DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 Domino 20 DLP	£3599.95
Sim 2 HT300 Xtra DLP	£7499.95
ThemeScene H30 Cinema DLP	£ CALL
ThemeScene H56 Cinema DLP	£ CALL
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Yamaha DPX-1000 DLP	£ CALL

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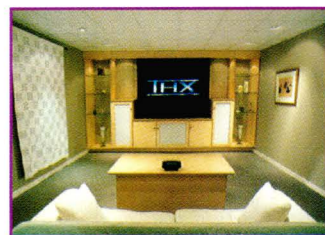
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The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its stores.

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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-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

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 Lab Series £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	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Arcam's most successful mid-range amp to date – sophisticated control system and crisp, detailed sound	6	●	●	●	90	251
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Enhanced replacement for A85, convertible to 7.1 sound with the addition of an add-on module and extra P90 power amps	6	opt	●	●	90	250
	Cambridge Audio Azur 640A	250	Cambridge has a powerful weapon in the battle for budget amp supremacy, it's a lot of musical entertainment for the money	5	opt	●		65	250
	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
	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and enthralling sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
	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
	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,000	Improved mid-range model from Roksan is a fine, expressive amplifier – right at the top of its class	6		●		85	248
	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
	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	●	●		95	251
	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									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
	AVI Laboratory Series	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution – effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
	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
	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
	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
	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	PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
	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
	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5		●		221
	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
	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
	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		●	50	213
	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										
	Arcam FMJ C30/P1	2,300	A lot of features, high build and flexibility, with a revealing and detailed sound	●	●	6	●	●	180	251
	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●		18	216
	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
	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		●	150	221
	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
	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249
	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4		●	100	237

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					
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
	Conrad-Johnson PV10BL/MV60SE	4,290	Gorgeous valve combo – preamp may seem a bit dated by today's standards, but both still rate as hi-fi classics	●	●	5		55	250
<input type="checkbox"/>	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6		120	216
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	70	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●			200	247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Halro dm10/dm68	75,900	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5		225	243
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	Opt	125	250
	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●			700	234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4			238
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●			125	230
	Naim NAC202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		70	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6			233
	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery	●	●	7		120	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7		100	236
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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



Sony
STR-DB790 £300
It used to be the rule that you had to spend close to a grand to get an AV amp that shines with music. Not any more.



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 – a top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED 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	
	Denon AVR-2803	650	Merely 'average' sound but it's impossible to argue against the flexibility and value of its engineering	●	9	130	251	
	Denon AVC-A11SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11	125	235	
ECO	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	
BEST BUY	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	
BEST BUY	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	100	248	
ECO	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		11	150	229	
BEST BUY	Sony STR-DB790	300	No six channel amplifier has any right to be able to sound this good at such a ridiculously affordable price	●	7	112	251	
	Yamaha RX-V1400	800	Equipped for every occasion, this is a capable receiver with stereo music and better yet with DVD-A/SACD and movie sources	●	9	175	251	

MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS

BEST BUY	Arcam A90/7.1 mod, P90/3	1,920	Add Arcam's multichannel module and a P90/3 power amp to the A90 stereo integrated and you've got got superb purist 5.1	8	●	90	250	
ECO	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	
ECO	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights	6	opt	120	219	
ECO	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	
ECO	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	
BEST BUY	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	
ECO	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	6	●		230	
	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	
ECO	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	
	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	
ECO	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel systems 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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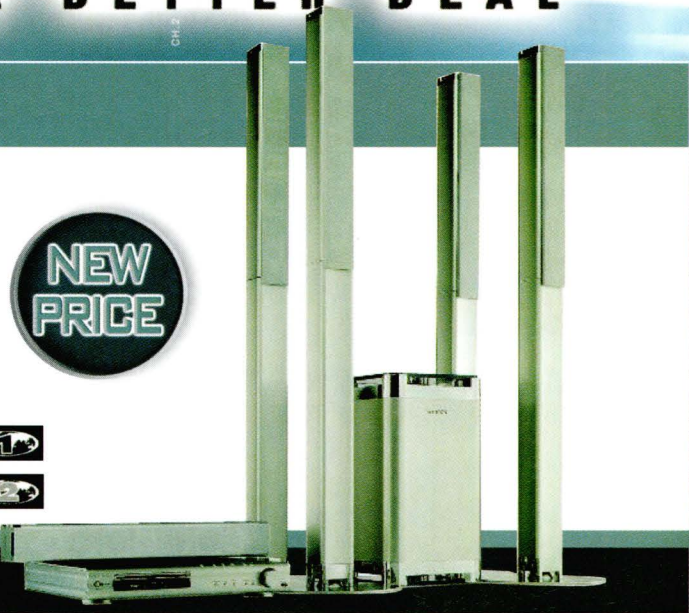
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- 6 CHANNEL INPUT
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SONY

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- NTSC PROGRESSIVE SCAN
- ALUMINUM FRONT PANEL



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- DOLBY PRO LOGIC II DECODER
- 5 X DIGITAL INPUT
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- VIDEO SWITCHING FROM A/D COMP. AND VIDEO



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YAMAHA

RX-V740RDS

DETAILS:

- 100W X 6 (100W X 6)
- DOLBY DIGITAL II DECODER
- DTS DECODER
- 6 CHANNEL INPUT
- 1 X D. CLIP T. (CD A/D)
- VIDEO SWITCHING FROM A/D COMP. AND VIDEO



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YAMAHA

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- HIGH CURRENT RECEIVER
- 6 CHANNEL OUTPUT
- DOLBY DIGITAL II DECODER
- DTS DECODER
- 6 CHANNEL INPUT
- 1 X D. CLIP T. (CD A/D)
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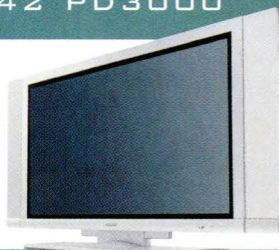
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STEREO SPEAKERS

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.

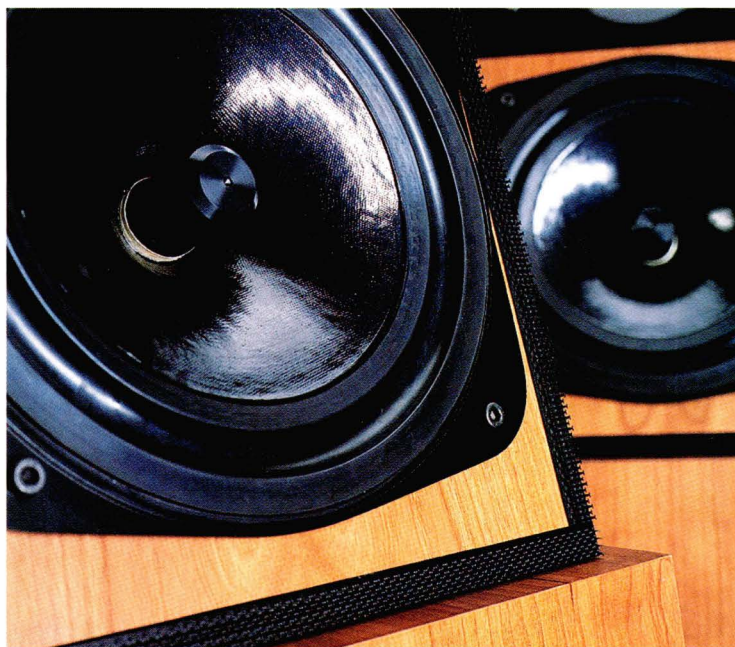
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. 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 around £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
Revised in 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										
🏆	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
	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
	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
🏆	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 52	557	Brilliant neutrality, though a little understated dynamically (wood veneered version, as tested – £647)	20,33,26		A-	30	●		250
	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
	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
🏆	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
🏆	Focal-JMLab Chorus 707 S	350	The size and shape might be unfashionable, but this is an outstanding all-round performer at a very sharp price	23,5,49,30		A	25	●		251
🏆	Focal-JMLab Chorus 716 S	550	Not the smoothest around, but combines coherent voicing with fine dynamic expression and real authority	22,95,30	●	A	20	●		250
🏆	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
	Infinity Kappa 200	600	Notably artful styling. Some coloration, but good punch and drive with real dynamic propulsion and expression	22,37,36		A	25	●		250
	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
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	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

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).

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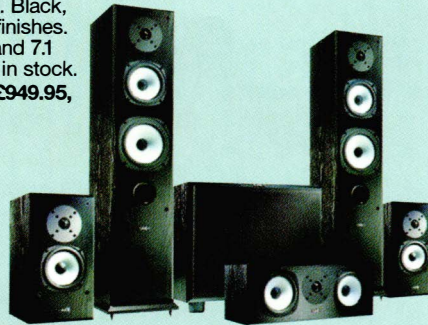
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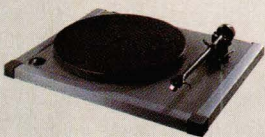
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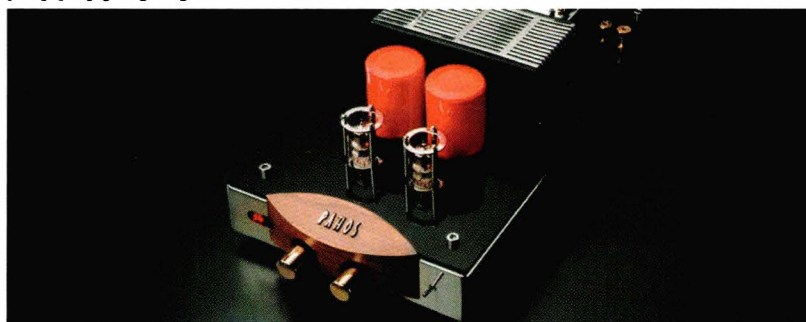
STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
BB	Rega Ela	749	Might have more grunt, but few can match its impressive agility, delicacy, and superior musical communication	23,89,30	● A	28	●	250	
	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall sitting	24,36,34	A	40	●	233	
	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	
BB	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	
EC	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	Pricey but very cute standmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26	A+		●	227	
	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	Has impressive scale and weight with fine stereo imaging, but is also rather laid back, lacking easy agility	21,97,29	● A	20	●	250	
	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	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkII	1,690	Luxury miniature has a laid-back but bouncy sound, a marvellous dynamic range and very superior imaging	18,5,31,25	A-	30	●	251	
	Acoustic Energy AE3 MkII	4,490	A beautifully neutral speaker with very wide dynamic range and superior imaging, plus lovely Art Deco styling	18,5,99,29	● A	20	●	251	
	ATC Active 10	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31	act	45	●	221	
BB	ATC SCM35	1,999	If you want to hear the uncoloured truth about your record collection in all its glory, this is a speaker to treasure	23,88,30	● A-	48	●	250	
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 SCM50 ASL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48	act	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	● act	<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	
BB	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	
BB	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	
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	
	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	
	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricey compared to some though	21,99,32	● A+	38	●	229	
	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	
BB	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 Korongray	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	
BB	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	
	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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'The Classic One is one of the finest amps I have ever heard, of any era, from anywhere. . .' Sam Tellig, Stereophile



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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOOR/STANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	
	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
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	● A+	40	●		218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OEBX-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
	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	● A-	46	●		245
	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
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	● A-	20	●		232
EC	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	● A-	20	●		200
EC	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
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	● A-	20	●		226
	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
	PMC OB1	2,450	Genuinely deep bass and lovely overall neutrality, though mid could have more tension and bass more punch	20,103,33	● A	20	●		243
EC	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47	A-	25	●		237
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	● A-	20	●		221
EC	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
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	● A+	37	●		223
EC	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
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	● A-	38	●		215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	● A-	23	●		225
	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
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	● A-	20	●		234
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	● A-	45	●		212

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be 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 BEST BUY 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	ISSUE NUMBER
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 (602/601/LCR 600)	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures	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
	Final Sound Electrostatic	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●		251
	Focal-JMlab Electra	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 BEST BUY 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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.

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

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber Timbre	72	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
	PM Dragon Tails	600	Targeted at valve equipment, but its virtues, including superb imaging, apply to solid-state duties too	●			●		249
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●			211
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.

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	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
🏆	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
🏆	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270		230
🏆	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
🏆	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
🏆	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
🏆	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
🏆	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
🏆	Stax System II	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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AVI Biggatron Speakers - Cherry (2Yr /Gtee)(599.00)	£399.00	Naim PSX S/H Power Supply (1Yr G/tee)(2100.00)	£1295.00
B&W CDMCse S/H Centre Sp-Blk (6Mth G/tee)(400.00)	£179.00	Naim NAP 250 S/H P/Amp (1Yr G/tee)(1890.00)	£1295.00
B&W HTM2 Nautilus Centre Spkr - Blk (2Yr G/tee)(850.00)	£499.00	Naim SL2 Speakers - Maple (2Yr G/tee)(4995.00)	£3595.00
Linn Klimax* Twin Power Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)(6000.00)	£3995.00	Naim NBL Speakers - Beech (2Yr G/tee)(7700.00)	£5495.00
Linn Trikan Centre Spkr - maple (2Yr /Gtee)(549.00)	£349.00	Revox E642 42" Plasma/Tuner (1Yr/Gtee)(7499.00)	£2395.00
Linn Espesk Speakers - maple (2Yr G/tee)(2800.00)	£1795.00	Spendor S3 Speakers - Maple (2Yr G/tee)(599.00)	£449.00
Mission M5c* Centre Spkr - Beech (1Yr/Gtee)(199.00)	£99.00	SpendorS8 Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee)(1699.00)	£1185.00
Naim NAPV 175 3 Ch P/Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)(1225.00)	£895.00	Yamaha DSP800 S/H Processor (6Mth/Gtee)(399.00)	£149.00
Naim NAC 252* Preamp (2Yr /Gtee)(3995.00)	£2995.00	Yamaha DVD 530* DVD Player (1Yr G/tee)(149.00)	£89.00
Naim NAC 112 S/H Preamp (6Mth /Gtee)(660.00)	£369.00	Yamaha RXV 630 RDS A.V. Amp (1Yr G/tee)(459.00)	£299.00

STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities -- a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim Frain	1,825	Pricy 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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50.40		5	Glass	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 SPEAKER STANDS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.

Sound Fantastic

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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

5.1-CHANNEL AUDIO Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

BALANCE Most loudspeakers have a characteristic frequency balance resulting from emphasising parts of the audio range and/or de-emphasising others.

BASS The lowest three octaves of the audio band – hence 'low bass' refers to the bottom octave (20-40Hz); 'mid-bass' the middle octave (40-80Hz); and 'upper bass' the 80-160Hz octave.

BI-AMP (sometimes tri-amp) Loudspeakers equipped with separate access terminals to each drive unit can be driven by separate (matching) power amplifiers for each driver.

BI-WIRE (sometimes tri-wire) Loudspeakers with separate access terminals to each driver can be driven by separate cable runs between the amp and each driver.

CD-R Recordable CD that cannot be erased, though discs that have not been completely filled can have tracks added until the disc is finalised.

CD-RW Re-writable or re-recordable CD, incompatible with older CD players.

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

CLASS AB Most practical amps operate in Class A for the first fraction of a watt and Class B thereafter.

CLIPPING An amplifier's output waveform is 'clipped' if the volume is advanced too far and no more 'volts' are available to sustain ever-increasing power levels. Distortion increases dramatically at this point.

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

CROSSOVER A simple electrical network which divides the full bandwidth signal received from the power amplifier, apportioning appropriate parts of the spectrum to the various drive units.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

DOLBY DIGITAL A compressed digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear channels are used.

DOLBY PRO-LOGIC, DPL Forerunner to DD that 'steers' information to the front L/R, centre and mono surround channels via an analogue matrix.

DRIVE UNIT/DRIVER A transducer which converts electrical energy into acoustic energy, eg bass driver, tweeter.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP or Digital Signal Processor. Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

DVD-AUDIO High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range. Discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

ELECTRICAL DIGITAL Any digital connection that uses an electrical cable rather than optical. Includes the balanced (AES/EBU) interface.

FILTERS Filters are intrinsic to digital audio, both analogue and digital. These are often very sophisticated in design, and in total they probably have rather more to do with the 'personality' of CD player sound than most other factors.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE The range of frequencies, from low to high, which a loudspeaker will reproduce.

IMPEDANCE With speakers, the complex electrical load that a loudspeaker presents to the amplifier which is driving it.

JITTER An intrinsic distortion specific to digital audio caused by the clock, used to regulate the conversion of data into analogue audio, being imprecise.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

LINE LEVEL Practically every modern source component (except phono cartridges) gives an output in the region of 1-2V, referred to as 'line level'. It follows that all inputs labelled 'CD', 'tuner', 'aux' or 'tape' are designed for this input level and are thus interchangeable.

LOSSLESS COMPRESSION A method of reducing the number of data bits (density) without corrupting the original description of the musical signal.

LOSSY COMPRESSION Reduction in data density by recourse to a psycho-acoustical model that predicts what is, and what is not, 'audible' within a sequence of music.

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the

ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

PRESENCE BAND Critical section of the audio band at the point where midrange and treble meet.

QUANTISATION NOISE A form of distortion or noise resulting from errors in the description of the musical signal by the digital code.

SACD (Super Audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

SAMPLE RATE The rate at which the musical waveform is sliced up into discrete chunks. For CD this is 44.1kHz or once every 0.023msec. DVD will also support 48kHz and 96kHz.

SENSITIVITY The relative loudness that a speaker generates for a specific voltage input. Expressed in decibels per watt (dB/W).

THX Standards system for home cinema set-ups which includes amplifier power and speaker dispersion characteristics. THX Ultra is more stringent than THX Select.

TOSLINK The proprietary name given by Toshiba to the optical fibre signal transmission system it invented for consumer applications.

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEEDS A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent. A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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Choice Bits is the easy way to buy the best audio accessories available today. Simply pick up the phone, order online, drop us an email or fill out the order form opposite and pop it in the post. It couldn't be simpler!

Featured in this issue we have a variety of some of our finest accessories. Whether you prefer analogue or digital, stereo or multichannel, these will give your system that added lift in all-round sonic performance.

We have an exclusive product launch from IsoTek in the form of the Mini Sub AV, together with Densen's DVDMagic, which builds upon the huge success of the DeMagic disc for CD players. Chesky Records, meanwhile, famous for pushing back the boundaries of recording technology, presents its superb DVD-Audio Professional Test Disc.

SHOWCASE

DVD Magic

High-quality system-demagnetising DVD

Key Features

- High quality production
- Improves your whole AV system at a stroke
- Can be used to burn in new equipment
- Builds upon multi-award-winning technology



Densen DVDMagic

Following in the footsteps of the highly regarded and much praised Densen DeMagic, the Densen DVDMagic does for your AV system what the former did for your hi-fi. The DVDMagic is a breeze to use – simply

place it in your DVD player, set the volume to normal listening levels and press 'play'. Three minutes later your system will be transformed! DVDMagic cleans the entire signal path for magnetism by sending a complex algorithm signal through your system which removes magnetically induced distortion. DVDMagic can also be used to break in new equipment by repeating the demagnetising track continuously. This disc builds upon the award-winning Densen DeMagic CD, which over 100,000 audiophiles world-wide have benefited from.

Introductory Price £19.95

Chesky DVD-Audio Professional Test Disc



This brilliant DVD-Audio test disc from Chesky Records includes what were the world's first true 24-bit/96kHz recordings, taken from the Chesky catalogue, plus various DVD test routines.

Only £24.95

IsoTek Mini Sub AV Dedicated Home Theatre Mains Filter



The Mini Sub has been a huge success for IsoTek with the standard unit winning awards in three major magazines, including 'Product Of The Year' and a special 'Readers' Award' in *Hi-Fi Choice*. Due to popular demand, IsoTek has now launched a dedicated AV version for home theatre owners.

This dedicated 'AV' unit builds upon the already legendary performance of the original Mini Sub with special dedicated circuits to destroy specific frequencies that audio visual and digital-based components put on the mains supply.

Introductory Offer £549.95

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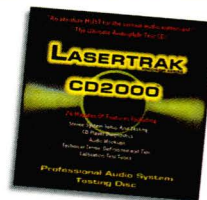
AudioPrism CD Stoptlight



AudioPrism's CD Stoptlight is a green paint CD edge treatment that improves CD performance by reducing laser light leakage from the outside edge of CDs. Easy to apply, a single pen can be used to treat over 100 CDs. According to *Stereophile's* John Atkinson: "The cost per disc of this tweak is almost zero, meaning that it offers a big bang for the buck and can be confidently recommended."

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Lasertrak CD2000 System Calibration Disc



An indispensable disc which contains 74 minutes of programs that couple precise test signals, unique audio tests and useful component diagnostics in a concise way. Audiophiles wanting to achieve 'sonic certainty' with their audio systems should look no further.

Only £19.95

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Densen DVDMagic	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IsoTek Mini Sub AV Home Theatre Mains Filter	£549.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lasertrak CD2000 System Calibration Disc	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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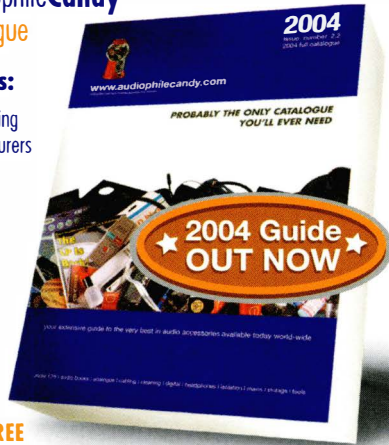
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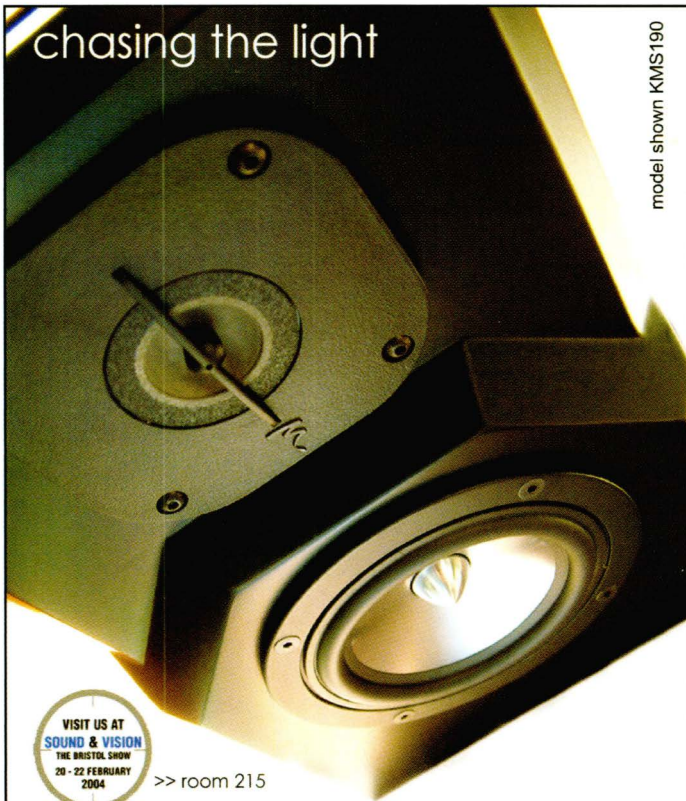
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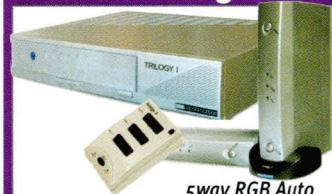
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B&W DM602 speakers, mint, £120. Technics SV450 amp, SLP200 CD player, STG450L tuner £100, £200 with speakers. 01226 758009 (Barnsley).

BSS M-250 studio speakers, black, floorstanders, mint condition £550. 01273 733061 or 07759 864679 (Brighton).

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO A1 Version 2 amp. Black, mint cond, £40. Chris 01462 896121 (Baldock, Herts).

CASTLE HARLECH floorstanders, mahogany finish. Excellent cond £400ono. 01743 460520 (Shropshire).

DENON AVC-A1D immaculate cond (boxed) £650. Mr Seaton 01303 279638 eve (Kent).

DYNAVECTOR L200 preamp, later remote version with P50 phono stage. HX75 power amp. Three years old, all mint. Can demo (£4,000) £1,850 ono. Mark 0131 538 0013 eves (Edinburgh).

LEXICON DC1 version 4 THX ultra DTS, 5.1, Surround ex (7.1) new remote. Instructions, boxed excellent condition £900. 01474 322784 (Kent).

LINN 280 spark, boxed, mint £295. Meridian 601 digital preamp, boxed, mint £595. Luxman L30 integrated amp, classic sound, £45. 003531 2954076 (Dublin).

LINN KABERS (passive) Ku stone bases and full set of Linn active xover cards £500. John 07736 638686 or email wm4287@tiscali.co.uk (Kent).

LINN SONDEK LP12 Lingo-silver Ittok LV11 K9 and K-18-2 £900 ono. Black Linn Isobariks, panel stands/external covers £770 ono. Arcam DV88 £600 ono. Charlie 0117 9635597 or email charliestumpy@blueyonder.co.uk (Bristol).

MARANTZ 63SE CD player, mint and boxed £85. Blues and Rock CDs, four for £18 all perfect. 01278 783622 (Somerset).

MARANTZ CD63 MkII KI Sig, mint, boxed, £180. 07818 415464 (Yorkshire).

MARANTZ CD67SE CD player, PM66SE amp, Tangent floorstanders. All mint, boxed with Cable Talk Bi-Wire £225. 01279 718072 (Herts/Essex).

MICHELL ALECTO monoblock amps £950. Audio Synthesis passion £350. Heybrook Sextets £300 01903 815208 (W Sussex).

MICORMEGA STAGE TWO CD player £150, Marantz amp PM6010 KI signature £150, both boxed and in mint cond. Bill 01344 642069 (Bracknell).

MISSION 753 Floorstanding loudspeakers (Rosewood) £375 01962 774644 (Winchester).

NAD C370 amp, good cond £220. Pro-Ject Debut II deck, three weeks old (£120) £85. 01708 452136 (Essex).

NAIM NACA5 speaker cable, two terminated lengths 6.5m £65. Two van den Hul D102 III 0.80m interconnects £45. Paul 01283 551369 eves (Burton upon Trent).

NORDOST boxed phono interconnects: 2x 0.6m Solar wind (£85) £60. 1x0.6m Blue Heaven

(£135) £85. Speaker cable 1x3m and 1x1.5m solar wind bi-wire/bi-amp on 4mm bananas (£165) £120. 01704 578324 evenings and Saturdays. (Southport, Lancs).

NORDOST SOLARWIND interconnects, new, unwanted gift. £50 no offers. 01268 415017 (Essex).

PIONEER PD91 CD, Tannoy 615 floorstanders, Rotel RC980BX preamp, two RB980BX power amps £900. Bill 0141 620 0892 (Glasgow).

PMC DB1 Cherry, as new (£555) £425, DB1M centre new, boxed (£385) £275. 01295 275983 (Banbury).

QUAD 77 preamp and remote, CD player, FM tuner £950. Ruark Crusader MkII speakers, £650 ono. All superb cond with boxes. 023 8073 8935 (Southants).

REGA PLANAR 2 (P2), Origin Live structural arm modification and Ortofon 510 Mk2 cartridge. 20 hours use (£335) £180. Peter 01392 669754 (Exeter).

SHANLING CDT100 valve/solid output stage CD player. Four months old, boxed

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CIRCUIT DIAGRAM for Beam Echo Avantic bm611 tuner. Gary 01484 328296 (West Yorkshire).

LOWTHER acoustics twin cabinets, 1960s. Also PM7A drive units any cond. Jeff 020 8220 0380 (Barking, Essex).

ARCAM ALPHA 8 CD Player. Must be good cond. Steve 020 8658 4139 (Beckenham, Kent).

MONITOR AUDIO (Silver 12i) Rosewood. Mr Seaton 01303 279638 eves (Kent).

(£1,650) £1,250. Warren 01278 794547 or 07793 437544 (Highbridge, Somerset)

TECHNICS Class AA system, turntable SLDD33, cassette deck RS-TR355, tuner ST-G 450L, amp SU-V450, CD player SLP555, Mordant Short speakers £300. 01268 754381 (Essex).

TRICHORD TRANSPORT and DAC, power supply, mods (£3,000) £490. Lumley ST70 power amp (£2,500) £490. Ben Duncan 1kW mains transformer £230. Kimber Superpurifier £200. 01772 314 151 or 07751 475062 (Preston).

BUYING TIPS

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

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

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

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Hovland products shown from left:
RADIA Solidstate Poweramp and HP200 Preamplifier.

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Audio Research LS7 Preamp	£1800	£795	Jeff Rowland Coherence pre.	£14000	£5995
Audio Research Classic 30	N/A	£995	Jeff Rowland Cadence phono	£3500	£1900
Alon V mk3	£5500	£2250	Krell LAT 2 + stands (1yr old)	£12000	£7500
Audio Physic Virgo	£3500	£1500	Krell FPB700CX (10mths old)	£15000	£8995
BAT VK5 SE CD Player (as new)	£5950	£3500	Krell FPB 250MC Mono's	£14000	£6250
Basis Debut-Graham 2.2 deluxe	£12000	£4995	Kuzma Ref.+ Triplannar IV	£7000	£3800
Burmester Rondo CD Player	£2000	£900	Mark Levinson 360s Dac	£6995	£3250
Cello Serafin Active Piano Blk.	£7000	£3900	Muse Model Two Dac	£2000	£750
Dynaudio Contour 3 Cherry	£3500	£1500	Oracle Si 3000 Integrated	£11995	£4995
Gamut CD1S (new)	£2950	£1900	Quad 988 and 989's (xdem)	£3800+	Call
Hovland HP100 MC (xdem)	£5750	£3800	Theil 2.3 (mint boxed)	£3200	£1600
Hovland Sapphire Poweramp	£7000	£3900	Gryphon S100 Poweramp	£6000	£1800
Clearaudio Insider MC (2o hrs)	£7500	£1000	Sugden Bijou System (1mth old)	£2850	£2200

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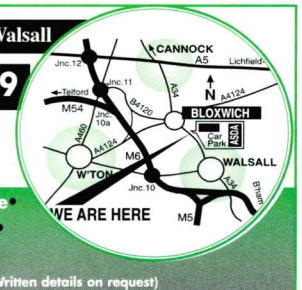
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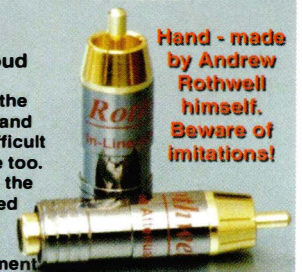
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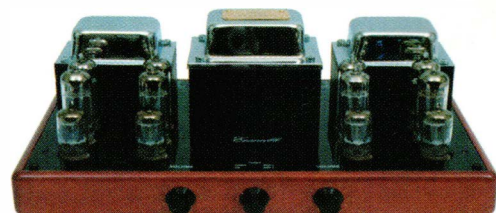
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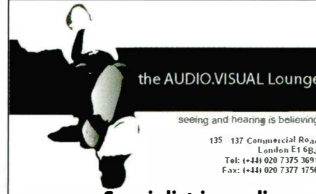
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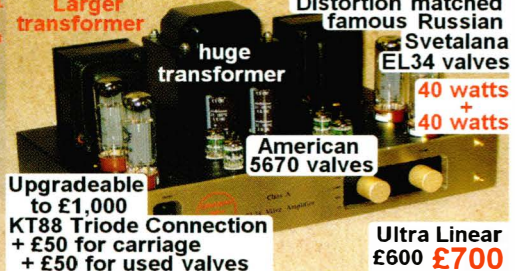
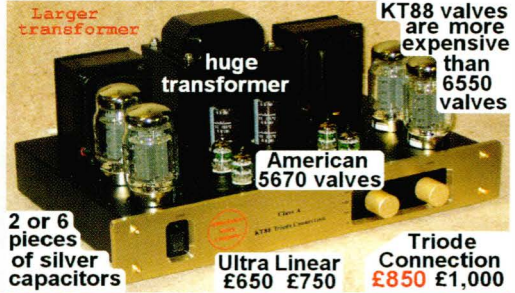
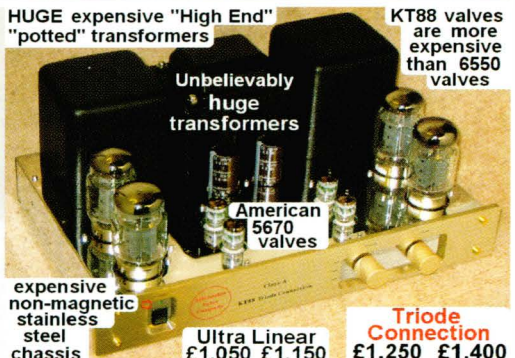
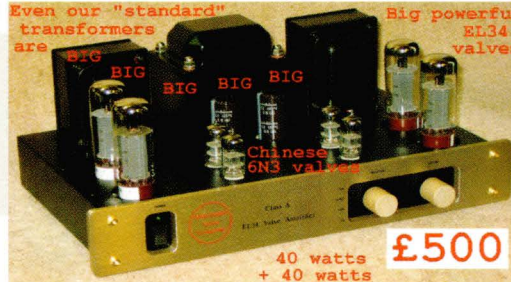
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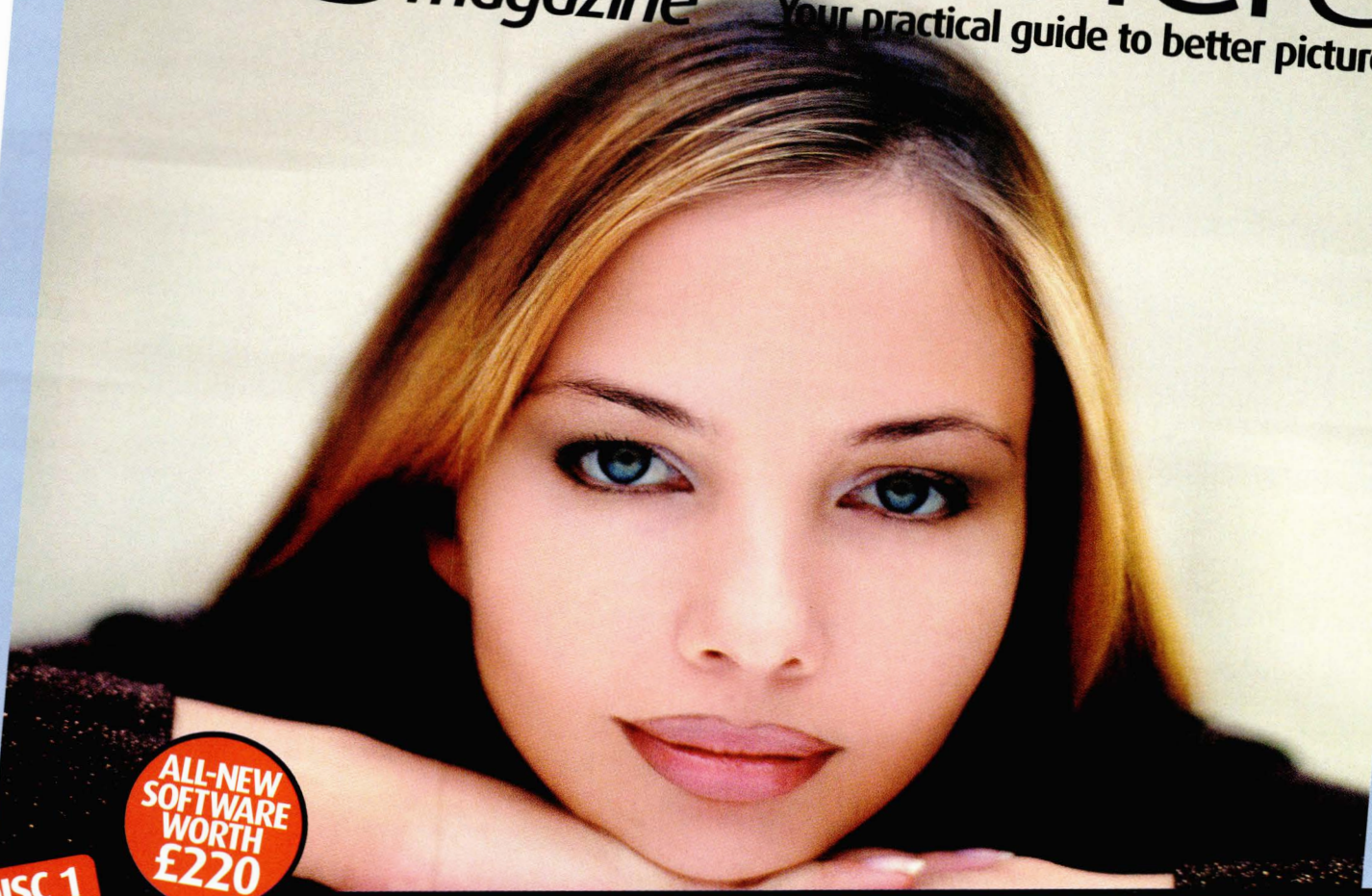


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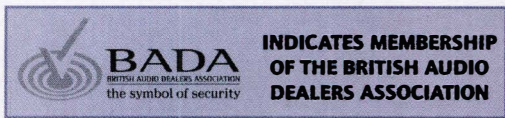


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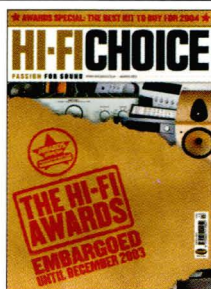
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HI-FI EXTREME



“The alien can’t believe its ears but the hi-fi enthusiast is oblivious to the racket.”

lighting, tinkling ivories wafting eerily out of dinky speakers on the wall. A fluffy cloudbase of soothing, mellifluous murmurings,” it muses, lighting up a cigar and sticking it in its ear before continuing to observe the hi-fi enthusiast. Not such a bad idea.

Ambling Tambourine having served its purpose, *The Ultimate Test Disc* moves on to the 315Hz test tone which plays for exactly one minute, 15 seconds and is met with an expression of knowing satisfaction from the hardcore enthusiast (still standing up). After a pause comes a sharp bleep approximately 0.75sec in duration. This causes a wry half-smile and nervous twitch from the listener and the alien to blush a deep green and giggle. The hi-fi just uttered a sexual expletive. Next is the 57-second *Demagnetising Sweep* quickly followed by the three-second longer Demagnetising Fade.

The alien can hardly believe its three remaining good ears. It sounds like the noise that happens when the warp core containment field on his starship goes wrong. The hi-fi enthusiast is oblivious to the racket, though, and walks between the speakers, checking that each is absolutely perpendicular to the ground.

Only then does he go to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. The alien is fairly keen to know what happens next, waiting with baited purple vapour. Just what, it’s asking itself, can the climax to this elaborate, lifestyle illiterate ritual be? After a few minutes the hi-fi enthusiast returns with another CD. In fact, it’s a double. It’s called *The Greatest Audiophile Hi-Fi Set-Up Test Disc In The World Ever!* and, before it’s inserted into the CD player’s tray, all the bricks, cut-up rubber balls and panes of glass are removed from the hi-fi. For the time being. The alien decides to stick around. He thinks he might be able to help this man. Besides, he likes the music... **HFC**

David Vivian

The acid test

David Vivian ponders the peculiar appeal of the hi-fi test disc

What would a visiting alien make of the hardcore hi-fi enthusiast? He would see (assuming it was a ‘he’ and had eyes) a person who owns a CD collection that cost roughly twice the national debt but who plays just one track from one CD over and over again. What could it possibly be? *Beethoven 9? Mahler 5? Still Crazy After All These Years?*

No. *Ambling Tambourine* from *How To Set Up Your Hi-Fi – The Ultimate Test Disc*. The lyrics go like this: “Ahem, I’m now standing three feet back and two feet to the left of the microphone and my friend, who’s standing next to me, is going to shake a tambourine. Bash... I’m now standing eight feet back from the microphone...”

First, *Ambling Tambourine* is played with the CD player placed on a quartet of spliced squash balls. Then with the balls removed. Then with a sheet of glass inserted between the balls and the support table. Then the glass sheet is placed on top of a half-inflated bicycle

inner tube, a house brick rested on top of the CD platter and a CD-shaped carbon-fibre mat placed on top of the test CD, all the mains plugs buffed to a bronzed shine with Brasso, the speaker grilles removed and the track replayed once more. “Do these people never sit down?,” the alien wonders. “So they always stand midway between the speakers, hands on hips, wearing a perplexed expression that suggests they can hear a tap dripping but don’t know where?” Yes.

This is very perplexing to the alien. Its long-range scans of popular media have pin-pointed something called ‘lifestyle literacy’. As far as it can tell, this has nothing to do with mutilated sports equipment, house bricks, half-inflated bicycle inner tubes or, indeed, ambling tambourines. The data simply reads... Sony micro system. “Hmmm, tech-sheen fascias, soft-touch controls, big, rubber-buttoned remote,” mutters the increasingly well-informed but confused alien. “Sonic wallpaper, mood

Kandy

It's not all
black and white.



Roksan, for those with a little more grey matter.



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