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HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND

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Beautiful Curves are speakers to die for

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FIDELITY ALL STARS

High-end sound at real-world prices

VALVE SPECIAL!
In-depth report p16
PLUS →

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >> VALVE AMPS

- FEATURING...**
- > Audio Note Oto Line SE
 - > Audio Research VSi55
 - > BAT VK-300x
 - > EAR 864/534
 - > GRAFF Venticinqe
 - > Graves Audio Merlin
 - > Icon Audio Stereo 40i
 - > Quad QC-24/II-40





LINN

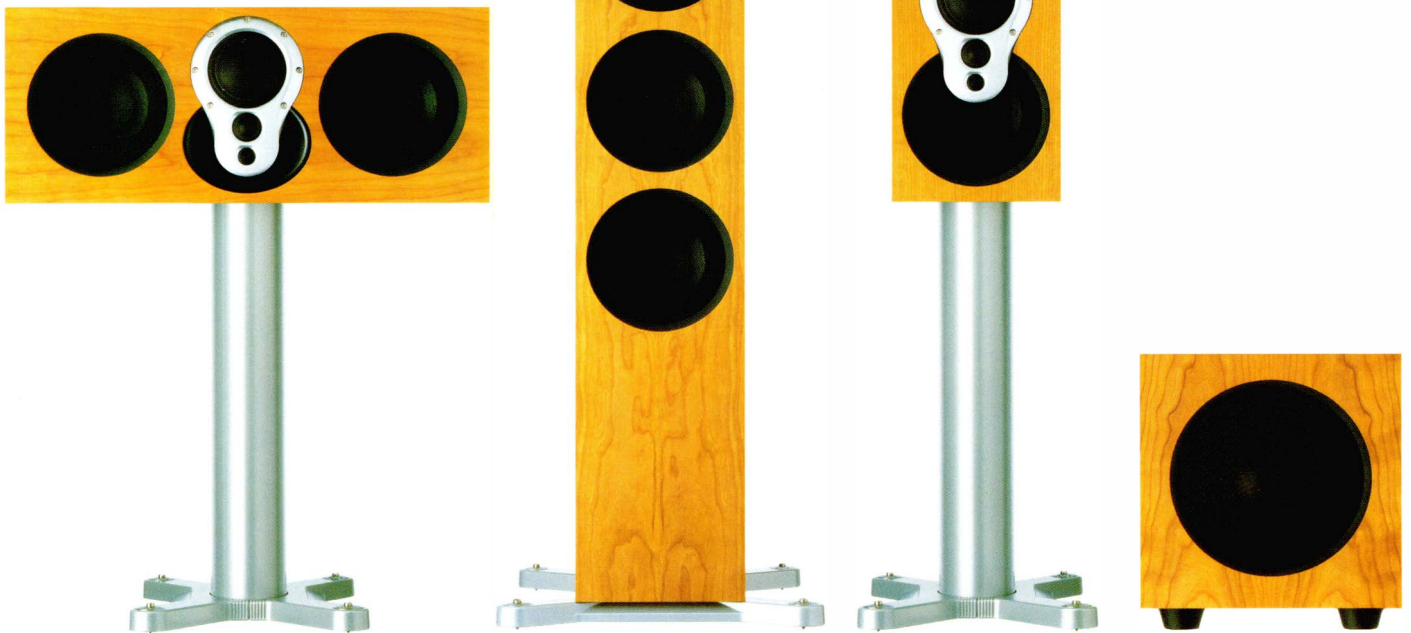
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accurate *adj.* faithfully representing the truth; precise.



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or email helpline@linn.co.uk

www.linn.co.uk

HI-FI CHOICE

JUNE 2004 ISSUE 254

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



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



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 variety is the spice of life, then here at *Hi-Fi Choice* we like to think that the magazine you're holding is chilli double hot with a hint of cayenne – serious seasoning with attitude for discerning aficionados. We believe in taking our music seriously, but we also know there's more than one way to pepper a soufflé, if you catch my drift.

Here at *Hi-Fi Choice* we positively glorify the virtue of variety, choice, and the celebration of different technologies to reach a common hi-fi goal. This month's issue is a case in point. While last month we devoted much of the issue to new-tech, hi-res digital audio, from SACD to all-digital amps, this time around we're stepping into our hi-fi Tardis and setting the controls for Planet Valve, a sonic land some would call primitive but others find exotic, virtuous and beautiful. Our coverage begins with a brief history of valve amps (p16), then stretches to our *Ultimate Group Test* (p58) – a collection of some of the finest valve amps available today, each one rigorously tested as only *Hi-Fi Choice* knows how. Perhaps it's time for you to warm your soul on their seductive sonic glow...

Personally, I embrace such sonic variety. I love the potential of what SACD and DVD-A can do, and I'm filled with burning admiration for the glorious sound a good CD player can wring from those original silver discs that stretch across my music racks. And yet, every time I slip an LP from its sleeve and let the needle fall I'm reminded just how rock solid and musically coherent this 'ancient' technology remains. It's all for the love of music, and it's all in *Hi-Fi Choice* – the hi-fi mag with added spice.



Tim Bower **editor**

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marantz

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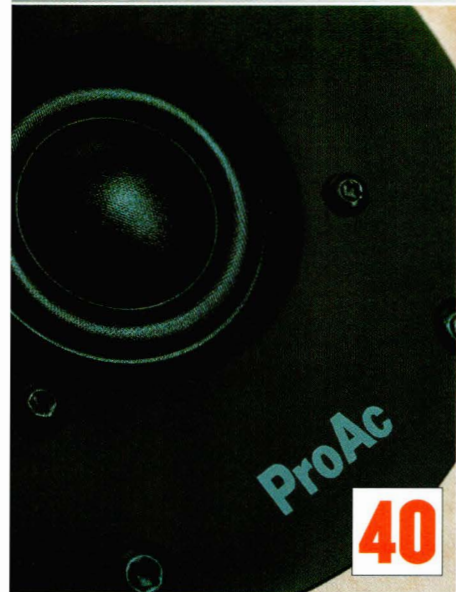
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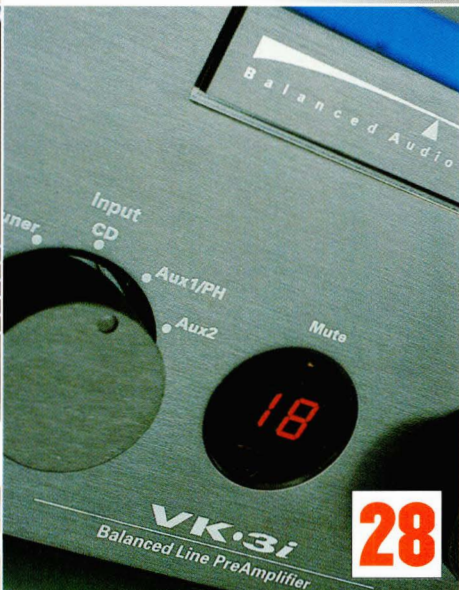
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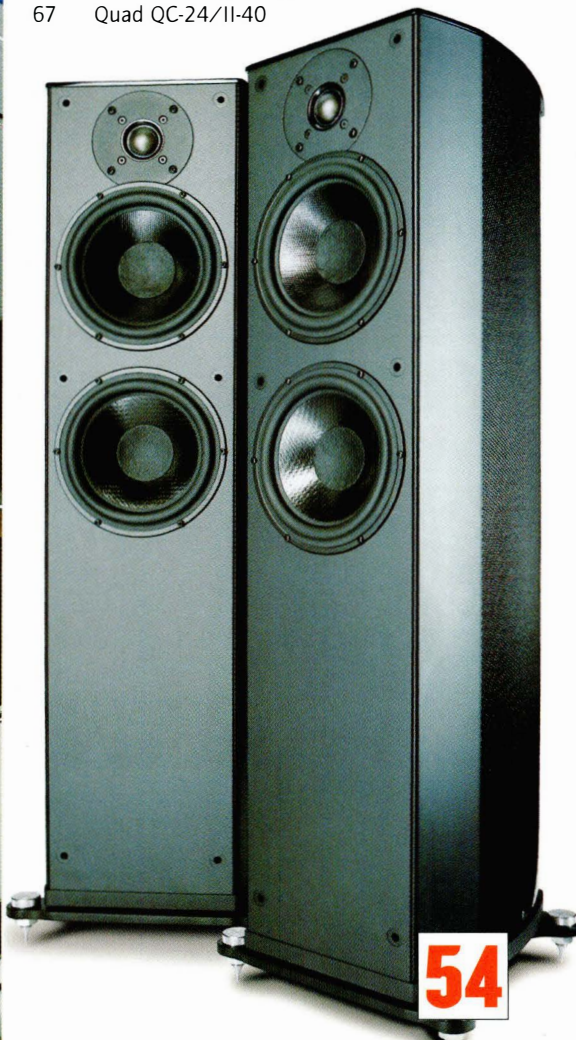
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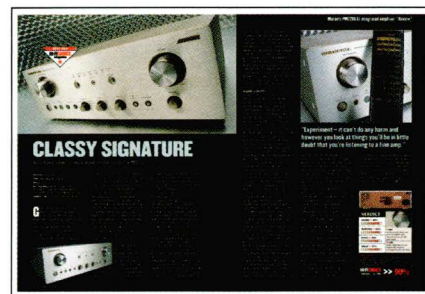
EST. 1975
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 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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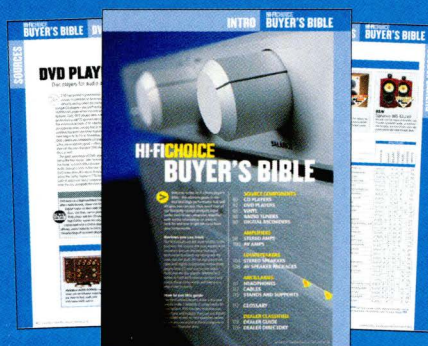


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The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV - our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...



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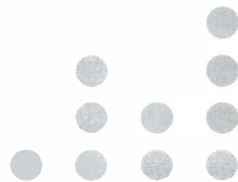
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audiofile



CLASSÉ OF ITS OWN

HUGE RANGE OF HIGH-END HI-FI ANNOUNCED

▶ A stunning range of high-end hi-fi and A/V products has been unveiled by Classé Audio, the Canadian specialist now owned by B&W. The Delta Series has been designed from the ground up and will replace Classé's current products with the exception of the flagship Omega range. Delta products will be released in two phases: two-channel stereo (spring) followed by the multichannel products

later this year. The three disc players are the £2,950 CDP-100 CD player, a universal DVD player, the CDP-300 (£7,950) plus a universal disc transport at £6,450 the CDT-300.

Complementing these are seven amplifiers – a £3,950 stereo integrated, the CAP-2100, a two-channel preamp, the CP-500 (£2,950, above) with two matching stereo power amps, a huge 400-watt monoblock plus a three and

five-channel power amp. Two 7.1 channel processors complete the Delta series with further products to be introduced in 2005. The seamless curve of the aluminium front panel is achieved through a heating process and all models except the five power amps feature an intuitive TFT touch-screen display to operate individual functions.

☎ 01903 221500 🌐 www.classeaudio.com

ANNIVERSARY AMPS

FIVE NEW RECEIVERS FROM TECHNOPHILES
HARMAN KARDON

▶ Harman Kardon continues its 50th Anniversary celebrations with the launch of five receivers brimming with the latest in A/V technology. Prices start at £350 for the 5.1 AVR 130, rising to £1,000 for the 7.1 AVR 630 (below) – where most of the new features can be found. Two of the top models, the AVR 630 and 430, offer selectable crossover frequencies for 7.1 speaker systems, upgradeable firmware, Dolby Virtual Speaker and Dolby Headphone processing, plus assignable HDTV-compatible component inputs. Further features include Harman Kardon's proprietary Logic 7 and VMAx surround processing and a host of Dolby/ DTS surround modes. ☎ 020 8731 4670 🌐 www.harmankardon.com

MYTHOS OR LEGEND?

DEFINITIVE SPEAKERS
STRAIGHT FROM THE US

▶ US manufacturer Definitive Technology is back in the UK with a new speaker range called Mythos – headed by the £1,800 aluminium Mythos One (right). The slender floorstander measures over one-metre in height and is designed to perfectly complement plasma screens. It's based around an extruded aluminium cabinet with a pair of Def Tech 130mm midrange drivers flanking an aluminium dome tweeter in D'Appolito configuration. There are also four 130mm bass drivers helping the Mythos One extend to a claimed 20Hz. Also in the range is the Mythos Two – a slender model for front or rear duties, the Three centre channel and the Supercube subwoofer.

☎ 01279 655955

🌐 www.definitivetech.com



A LOUD CLASH OF THE TITANS

FLAGSHIP RANGE OF LOUDSPEAKERS ARE DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT

Essex-based Titan loudspeakers has launched three floorstanders all with their own distinct driver configurations and sonic attributes. First up at £799 a pair is the compact FS/1 that uses three Kevlar mid/bass drivers with a textile tweeter in a real-wood-wrapped box. The FS/2 (£1,500, right) is quite different – it sports a Visatron ribbon tweeter with a 100mm Bandor

aluminium midrange driver, plus a 250mm glass fibre bass-driver assisted by two 125mm ABR units. Leading the FS range is the £2,000 FS/2s, a studio monitor fitted with an 800-watt digital on-board Class D amp. Line-level signals are fed to the speaker via a 6.3mm jack plug in the back panel.

01702 206870
www.titanloudspeakers.co.uk



audiofile
PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites



MONITOR AUDIO has hit the wall. Its new range of in-wall and in-ceiling speakers mirrors the Bronze, Silver and Gold performance levels of its more conventional boxes and comes complete with C-CAM (Ceramic Coated Aluminium Magnesium alloy) drivers and dome tweeter in the Gold and Silver models. The CP (Controlled Performance) series each has its own rigid enclosure and is suitable for plasterboard walls ranging from 9-32mm thick. Prices start at £100.
01268 740580

TEAC is the latest manufacturer to offer a DAB/ FM kitchen radio touting hi-fidelity sound and a price tag to match. The £179 SR-L30DAB has a retro design and a range of features with both auto and manual tuning, 40 station presets, a backlit LCD display and two 75mm full-range drivers. Further benefits include a digital output, headphone jack and varnished maple cabinet.
01923 819630

RUSS ANDREWS has a new range of Kimber mains cables on sale this month. The PK PowerKords and the Palladian PowerKords differ from Kimber's usual woven design by offering a stranded three-core design. Pricing starts at £120 for a 1.2m PK14, rising to £820 for the PK10 Palladian model.
01539 825500

CHESKY RECORDS of New York has released a multichannel SACD test disc entitled *Dr. Chesky's Magnificent, Fabulous, Absurd and Insane Musical 5.1 Surround Show*. The disc demonstrates the abilities of 5.1 surround sound and includes a mix of original rock and world music plus a few strange compositions including *Circle Of Voices* and *Monster Percussion*. The 38-track disc costs \$16 (£8.67) and is available from the Chesky website.
www.chesky.com

SONY 2004

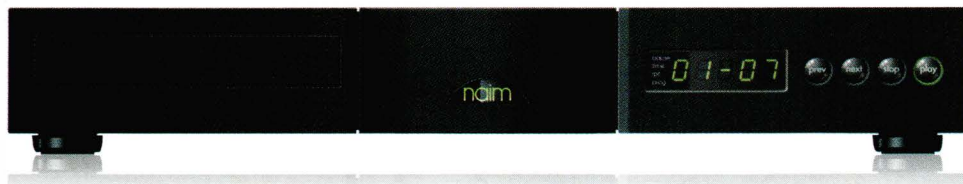
A HOST OF NEW FEATURES FOR SONY MICRO SYSTEMS

Sony's 2004 product range has been unveiled with key technologies implemented into budget systems. Sony has equipped some of its new micro systems with a host of features including Net MD, SACD playback and S-Master (Stream Master) digital amplification. The CMT-CPX11 and CPX22 will feature S-Master technology and offer 75 and 100 watts of power respectively, with a further two models incorporating 5.1 DVD/CD/SACD playback with Dolby Digital and DTS decoding.

From Sony's new six-strong range of DVD players comes the DVP-NS955 SACD player – a progressive scan machine available in October.

Portable products include a new range of ATRAC/MP3-compatible Walkmans employing Sony's ATRAC3 Plus format that extends bit-rate compression from 48 and 64kbps to 256kbps. Sony has also been developing a wireless audio system for 5.1 channel sound. Its new DAV-SR4W integrated home theatre system uses proprietary D-DIAT (Digital Infrared Audio Transmission) technology to transmit sound from the system to the rear speakers, eliminating the need for long cable runs. Sony's 2004 range will be released throughout the coming year.

08705 111999 www.sony.com



NAIM ON VIDEO

DVD PLAYER PROMISES TO EXPLOIT HI-RES AUDIO MODULES

Naim's first video source component has been unveiled, promising reference standard video performance and upgradeable software to exploit high-resolution audio modules. The progressive scan DVD5 will be priced at about £2,300. CD performance from the player is said to surpass that of the brand's CD5i thanks to its proprietary re-clocking circuitry developed from the flagship CDS3. Forthcoming 24-bit/ 192kHz modules will bring the player to a new high-resolution

performance level should buyers want to upgrade in the near future.

Inside the 5 series' anti-resonance casework lie five PCBs and a linear power supply with 12 separately regulated supplies. Naim's video circuits support a wide range of transmission systems including composite, component, S-Video (interlaced), DVI digital and RGB. It is expected to be available in stores from May.

01722 332266 www.naim-audio.com

⊕ **Soundbites**

AIWA has confirmed details of its 2004 range. Exciting products include a headphone-style 128MB flash memory player, a micro-sized hi-fi with USB streaming and two Pavit hard disk portables. Its portable range is aimed at a new generation of PC-based audio consumers
 ☎ 0870 168 9000

DAEWOO is the first volume car manufacturer to offer a DAB radio option in its Lacetti three-model family hatchback range. Lacetti comes with a Blaupunkt DAB 53 head unit offering DAB, FM and MW reception.
 ☎ 0800 666222

ELAC has a new two-and-a-half-way speaker based on an aluminium enclosure for use with plasma and LCD screens. The CM24 uses a silk-dome tweeter and four 80mm drive units. They cost £200 each.
 ☎ 0800 652 5002

CD GIVEAWAY!

We're giving away another brand new office favourite double album *Soul Man* – a collection of the best classic male soul vocals. It includes styles from acid funk to Philly soul and features legendary artists the O'Jays and



Barry White. We have ten copies to give away. To enter, send your name, address, and telephone number to – I need a Soul Man, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date is 14 May 2004.

Hi-Fi diary

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

OCTOBER
 23-24 Home Entertainment Show
 Manchester
 01524 36991
Premier show in the north west



INPOL INSIDE

NEW PATHOS VALVE/HYBRID WITH INPOL TECHNOLOGY INSIDE

⊕ It may look very similar to the Logos amplifier from our last issue (*HFC 253*), but the Pathos Inpol² is an all-new pure Class A design featuring the Italian specialist's proprietary Inpol hybrid circuit technology. Inpol is now in its second generation and is based around a hybrid construction – a valve preamp stage optimised for feeding the MOSFET

solid-state output. The Inpol² uses the same digital volume control as the Logos and boasts 50 watts of power per channel. Two Inpol circuits driven in opposite phase are used at the output stage for 'virtual cancellation of distortion without feedback' it is claimed.

☎ 01753 652669 Ⓜ www.ukd.co.uk

LUMLEY JUBBLY

NEW LAMPROS SPEAKERS FROM UK

⊕ Small-scale hi-fi specialist Lumley has launched four three-way floorstanders in the UK. The Lumley Lampros Series 2 range replaces the Series 1 and enjoys a host of cabinet revisions and a new driver complement. All four speakers use a full-range rear-firing driver and all models except the most affordable Lampros 100/S2 use two domed-midrange cones flanking a Visaton ribbon tweeter in D'Appolito configuration. The cabinets have a sloping baffle design housing the Morel drivers. Prices start at £1,995 for the 100/S2.

☎ 01892 539245
 Ⓜ www.metropolismusic.co.uk



BAND AID

L-BAND-COMPATIBLE DAB PORTABLE

⊕ It may be pocket-sized, but the Lagio R105 DAB tuner is big news. Not only does the diminutive portable sport both DAB and FM reception, it also boasts L-Band (European DAB). The next-generation frequency spectrum will allow consumers to receive L-band transmissions when they start appearing here in the near future, as well as DAB broadcasts when travelling in Europe. The R105 has an LCD screen that supports radio data and a battery life of ten hours from two AA batteries. The unit is being sold exclusively through Maplin Electronics and is priced at £130.

☎ 0870 429 6000
 Ⓜ www.maplin.co.uk



Kandy

**It's not all
black and white.**



Roksan, for those with a little more grey matter.



HIGH-END WIRELESS

O'hEocha Design has finalised its wireless system that's designed to replace the link between amplifier and speaker in both single and multiroom applications. Based on a proprietary 2.4Ghz transceiver set using digital data encoding it works with both O'hEocha's D1 loudspeakers (left) and Powerplinth amplifiers and with any system that incorporates monoblock power amps or active loudspeakers.

The signal is transmitted at 32-bit/192kHz using one of four antenna systems, each optimised for different house shapes. The range of operation varies with the thickness of walls but O'hEocha claims it should be able to reach for 100 feet in most building types. The data encoding uses a number of operating modes: fixed service (FS) channels, adaptive frequency selection (AFS) and frequency hopping spread spectrum (FHSS). In order to optimise quality, it also uses automatic gain control (AGC) to maintain signal strength. The first product is due in September.

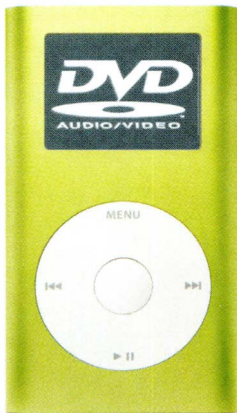
SONY MUSIC DOWNLOADS

Sony is poised to enter the music download business with its Connect service in June. With a catalogue of over 300,000 songs, the service will initially be available in the UK, France and Germany. Rather than adopt the popular MP3 format Sony will be offering tracks in its ATRAC 3 compression format developed for MD. ATRAC 3 currently offers compression rates of between 48 and 256kbps but is only supported by Sony MD Walkman, Network Walkman and ATRAC CD Walkman products. Popular compressed audio players such as the Apple iPod will not be compatible.

Connect prices will start at 79p per track, the same as Apple's popular iTunes download service currently only available in the US. Tracks are copy protected by Sony's OpenMG system and will have to be downloaded to a PC equipped with the company's SonicStage Jukebox software.



COMPRESSED DVD-A OPTION



The DVD Forum is planning to change the specification for DVD-Audio discs to allow for a DVD-ROM portion which will be able to contain a compressed version of the material. This is designed to make the format more appealing to the iPod generation who are currently unable to rip DVD-A discs due to the anti-piracy technologies built into the format.

While it has been reported that the format for this section will be AAC rather than the more popular MP3 this has been denied by the DVD Forum.

AAC is generally accepted as a superior sounding and technically more efficient compression algorithm to MP3 and its integral copy protection system would appeal to the music industry and encourage uptake.



MORE DAB COVERAGE

The BBC has added five more digital radio transmitters in Scotland and the west country. The extra transmissions mean that a further 611,000 people will be able to pick up DAB radio.

ENHANCED NEO:6

DTS has announced an upgraded version of its Neo:6 surround matrix codec which converts two-channel stereo sources to 5.1 or 6.1 surround. The latest version claims to improve the sound quality of its predecessor by maintaining the 96kHz sampling rate of stereo recordings when converting them to multichannel. DTS says it "preserves the integrity of the stereo mix while augmenting it with a centre channel to anchor the image, and deriving enough surround content to yield a spacious, three-dimensional listening experience."

So far three manufacturers have announced product with enhanced Neo:6 - Denon's AVC A1SRA (below), Pioneer's VSX-59Txi and Yamaha's DSP-Z9.



BLUETOOTH AUDIO

Bluetake, a specialist in the Bluetooth wireless connection technology used most commonly with mobile phones, has created HiPhono, an audio station that replaces the speaker cables in a multichannel audio system. The system offers a range of 20-30 metres and will work with a two-channel input.

GOODMANS IN RECEIVERSHIP

Goodmans Loudspeakers Ltd (GLL) has appointed administrators. Losses sustained over the past two years are not expected to be reversed which means that 150 jobs at the Havant, Hampshire factory are at risk.

where Sight

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TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice

June 1999

Sony launched the world's first SACD player in Japan – the £2,500 SCD-1. It was a two-channel player, despite multichannel sound being a key selling point of the emerging format. B&W upgraded its 600 Series launching five new front speakers under



the Series Two range, all retaining the distinctive yellow Kevlar drivers. In the lab we took twelve CD players to hell and back, and found that the £300 Sony CDP-X920 had God-like qualities. Cyrus was up there with its dAD 1.5 and so was NAD with its 524 workhorse. And who can forget Traxdata – recommended for its bargain CD-R recorder?

TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice

June 1994

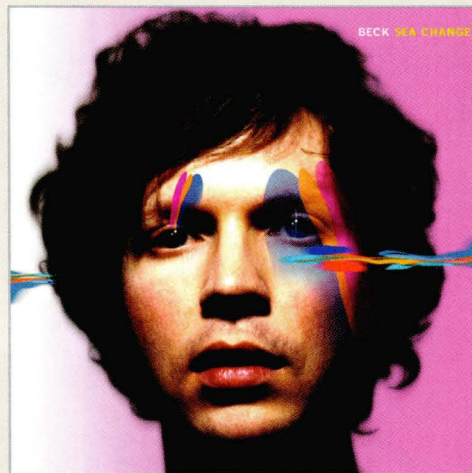
Demonstrating our commitment to fidelity of vision as well as sound (a pledge that remains today) we tested eight VCRs priced at £500 – ten years later they're almost giving them away. One-make systems were on test in the days where



you could buy everything – CD, amp, tuner and tape deck from the Japanese big guns, and it was Denon who had the most firepower. You may remember Audio Research's first CD transport, or Dual making a comeback in the UK with its CS-505-4 – a turntable designed specifically for UK audiophiles for just £200.

SYSTEM BUILDER

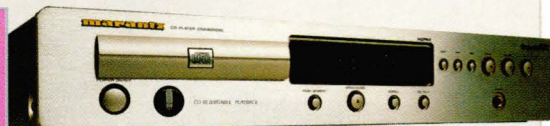
EACH MONTH, WE PICK A FAVOURITE DISC AND BUILD A SYSTEM TO SHOW IT AT ITS BEST



BECK

Sea Change Geffen

Sea Change marked a musical departure from Beck's big but quirky hits in the nineties. It's pastoral, melancholic folk rock that revels in the sumptuous sound provided by the more relaxed boxes and electronics money can buy. His seventh studio release compounds Beck Hansen's influences – Dylan, Drake, Hank Williams and Johnny Cash in a folksy, tranquilised way – were it a book it would be strictly bedtime reading. Not that it isn't a richly rewarding and effortlessly inviting disc, despite the somewhat miserable track titles – *Lonesome Tears*, *Already Dead*, and *Lost Cause*. Slip it on at the day's end and it'll ease you into a night of laid-back listening. Try hard and you may discover its more romantic musical charms and leave the melancholy lyrics to one side. So to hear it at its best we've assembled a fine posse of hi-fi specially selected to seduce your senses.



CD PLAYER

HEART CD6000 OSE LE £750

Heart took an already very fine Marantz CD player and dropped in a valve output stage. The result turned out to be inspired.



AMPLIFIER

ROTHWELL INDUS/ RUBICON £1,488

One of our favourite valve pre/power combos from the last group test, this small-scale manufacturer delivers big-league results.

SPEAKERS

CASTLE HOWARD S3

£1,350

A doddle for the Rothwell to drive – a solid all-round performance with fine and spacious imaging. The Howard S3 isn't afraid to deliver Beck's slouchy rhythms with vigorous fidelity.



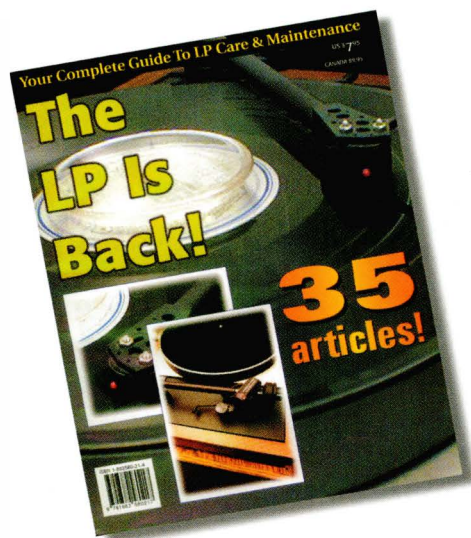
BOOK OF THE MONTH

THE LP IS BACK

Your complete guide to LP care and maintenance

www.hififorsale.com £10

This invaluable tome is an informed collection of feature articles covering all things turntable. Content includes theory and care, practice, electronics and hardware all penned by a colourful variety of US authors with a good selection of technical diagrams and illustrations. We were particularly intrigued by the DIY sections revealing how to make your own seismic platform and even your own tonearm! If you're something of a turntable fettleer you'll love this book from across the pond, but even to the casual vinyl spinner it still makes for a fascinating read.



READERS' DEMO DISCS

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



KATE BUSH

Sensual World EMI

This was a late eighties album that Kate produced herself and to her own agenda. Her vocal is one of many that I find very useful for evaluating the midband of loudspeakers. There is a huge array of instruments used throughout the album,

synchronised by a dominant drum pattern providing exercise for every variable parameter of performance. The lengthy violin and piano sections make light work of establishing system neutrality and dynamics. If your collection is big on vocal music, *Sensual World* should be a consideration as a test disc or even just a great album to have.

Hugh Jordan via email

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 #20

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



Which output should I use?

Many transformer-coupled valve amplifiers offer speaker output terminals of differing impedance. The idea is to match the amplifier to your loudspeakers. So, if you've got eight-ohm speakers, you'd use the eight-ohm output terminals. Theoretically, the 'correct' impedance match is the one that gives the greatest

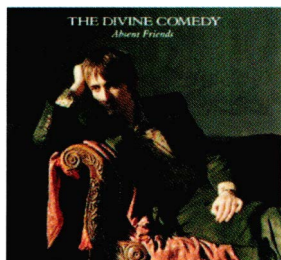
volume level. So, if the amp in question offered output impedances of four ohms, eight ohms, and 15 ohms, and 15 ohms gave the loudest sound, that would be the most suitable match.

However, nearly always the lowest impedance tap (usually four ohms) gives the best sound, tending to be tighter, cleaner, and better controlled. Why? Because you're driving your speakers from the lowest source impedance. Unfortunately, the penalty is a slight loss of power – not always something you can accept with tube amps.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

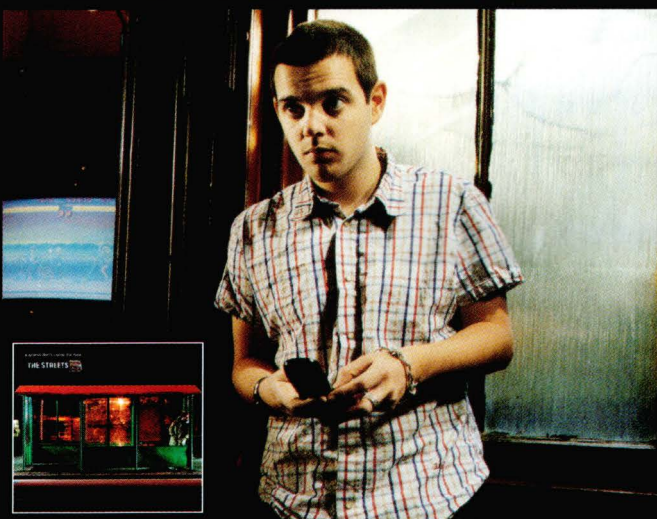
MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

The Divine Comedy *Absent Friends*
 The Specials *Singles*
 Sheryl Crow *Tuesday Night Music Club*
 N*E*R*D *Fly Or Die*
 Ryuichi Sakamoto *moto.tronic*
 Paco de Lucia *Cositas Buenas*
 Eek-A-Mouse *Mouseketeer*
 London Posse *Gangster Chronicle*
 Wilco *A Ghost Is Born*
 Jason Downs *Spin It*
 Zero 7 *When It Falls*



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

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



THE STREETS

Title: *Grand Don't Come For Free*

Release date: 10 June

Mike Skinner – aka The Streets – sold over a million copies of his debut album, which almost won him the Mercury Music Prize in 2002. The follow-up is full of similarly clever and off-kilter rhymes of urban blight rapped against an underground garage soundtrack including the deliciously witty first single, *Fit But You Know It*.

SCOTT WALKER

Title: *tbc*

Release date: autumn

The reclusive Mr Walker has signed to leading indie label 4AD and started recording his first studio album since 1995's *Tilt*. Over the last decade his reputation has undergone a major critical revival with his directorship of the prestigious Meltdown Festival on London's South Bank and the acclaimed *Five Easy Pieces* box set.

THE CHARLATANS

Title: *Up At The Lake*

Release date: May

After singer Tim Burgess's solo debut last year, the Charlatans storm back with their eighth album. 'Raw and stripped down', according to the band, eight tracks have been recorded with producer Ken Nelson, including *Feel The Pressure*, a collaboration with the Chemical Brothers.

MORRISSEY

Title: *You Are The Quarry*

Release date: May 17

The former Smiths genius, once Mancunian miserabilist and now millionaire resident in the Hollywood



hills returns with his first album of new material since 1997's *Maladjusted*. Produced by Jerry Finn (whose credits include Blink 182) typically quirky Moza titles include *I Have Forgiven Jesus* and *Come Back To Camden*. He's also curating this year's Meltdown festival in June.

KEANE

Title: *tbc*

Release date: late May/ early June

The hottest-tipped new UK band of the year recently signed to Island after a fierce bidding war. The three-piece from Sussex owe something to the sonic adventures of Radiohead but also favour more radio-friendly pop tunes. If they play their cards right with their debut, Keane could become the biggest thing since Coldplay.

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK/ POP

Beta Band *Heroes To Zeros* (May), **Agnetha Faltskog** *My Colouring Book* (May), **Mull Historical Society** *Loss* (June), **Graham Coxon** *Happiness In Magazines* (June)

CLASSICAL/ JAZZ

Gilles Peterson *Impressed 2* (Jun), **John Schofield** *En Route* (Jun), **Gwyneth Herbert** *First Songs* (Jun), **James Brown** *Soul On Top* (Jun)

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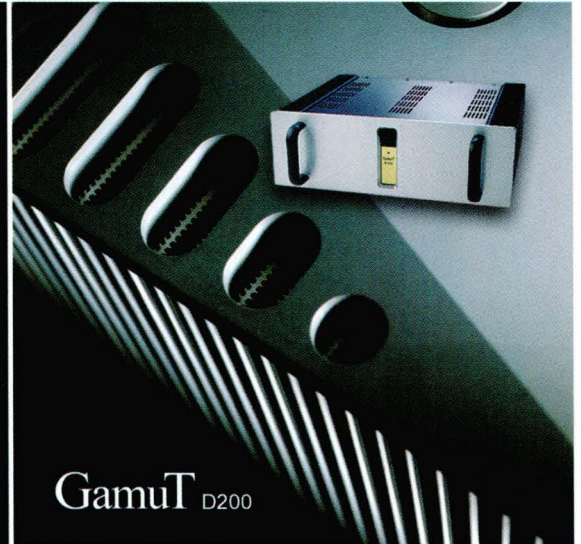
006 CD Player



032 Integrated



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aloia, audiovalve, accoustic arts, burmester, clearaudio
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dealer desirables:

advantage s1 cd	3150	1899	hovland radia	7995	5276
cabasse ibiza	1250	899	cabasse boltic 1	3450	1999
cabasse egea	2400	1899	perigee fk1	3999	2700
gamut cd1r	2680	1599	kharma cerm. 3.1	3999	2999
hovland sapphire	6995	4499	boulder 1012	12950	7199
hovland hp100	5750	3795			

Cabasse

Iroise II
Kara





Kimber PBJ headphone extension cable £68 (2m)

Available in various lengths, this cable features high-quality plugs and sockets from Neutrik attached to a piece of Kimber's PBJ interconnect. Costing more than some decent cans it's not aimed at the budget market, and it has to be said that most headphones, even upmarket ones, don't feature particularly high-quality leads – so why go to the trouble of a fancy extension?

Even with conventionally wired headphones the advantages of PBJ in general clarity were obvious against a cheap alternative. And with a pair of Beyers, modified to leave only a few inches of original flex, they benefited even more. A 3.5mm plug and/or socket are options, so all bases are covered, including those few headphones with removable leads. A significant and rare upgrade for lovers of intimate music replay.

Russ Andrews 0800 373467 www.russandrews.com



Milty LC2 CD/DVD lens cleaner £13

We looked at a cheap alternative to this a few issues ago, but this is the real thing with six little brushes and decent quality cleaning fluid to ensure your laser lens is kept free from harmful residue. Wet one brush, insert the disc and follow the spoken instructions. This is where it all goes horribly wrong, because the music that accompanies the instructions is tragically awful – the first manufacturer to produce a cleaning disc with decent music (in any genre at all) will get our vote quite unequivocally. Until that happens, though, this will suffice and while one won't normally notice too much difference before and after use one can at least smugly enjoy the warm feeling that accompanies preventive maintenance conscientiously done. That there really is some cleaning going on has been confirmed by the use of one of these discs over some months to 'repair' a handful of 'broken' ghetto blasters and portables in the neighbourhood! Buy it and use it wisely.

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

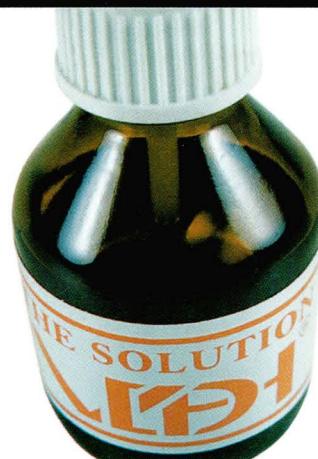


Russ Andrews ReVive record cleaning fluid £9.95 (1 litre)

Some time ago, we recommended the Knosfi 'Disco Antistat' record cleaner in glowing terms. Unable to improve on the design (a bath designed to clean LPs leaving the label dry), Russ Andrews offers an alternative fluid, alone or as a kit with one or two Disco Antistats – two, as you must use purified water as a rinse bath.

Traditional disc cleaners are based on organic solvents which lift grease and wash away solids but aren't that effective on mould release agents and ingrained grime. ReVive has some gentle solvent action (so gentle that it seems safe on old LPs and even 78s – not acetates though) but claims results on real-life groove deposits. A selection of second-hand LPs previously cleaned with normal alcohol-based cleanser did seem quieter after ReViving. Worth it for the dedicated.

Russ Andrews 0800 373467 www.russandrews.com



van den Hul 'The Solution' contact cleaner £25

The case for contact cleaners is not entirely accepted, some past treatments which actually worsened things left a bad odour over the field. However, after experience with Caig products we've become converts to the idea. van den Hul's product is a general-purpose oily-looking liquid supplied in a small bottle with an applicator brush (ozone friendly!) which claims both cleansing and protecting properties – sensibly the accompanying literature suggests cleaning very dirty contacts with alcohol first. Results varied from no change (on fresh contacts or those previously treated with similar products) to a small but noticeable improvement in clarity and focus, while long-term protection, as far as we could judge, also seems good, certainly undiminished after two months. Economical and easy to apply too.

Henley Designs 01235 511166 www.vanden Hul.com

Valve amplifiers

Heart of glass: A brief history of 'the tube' as told by Richard Black

Valve electronics is almost a century old this year. In 1904 the first valve diode (rectifier) made its debut, followed three years later by the first electronic amplifying device, the triode. Within five years the valve audio amplifier was born. In the 90 years since, an awful lot of electrons have flowed through those glass bottles.

The first domestic audio amplifiers were used in radio sets. Disc replay was generally acoustic, relying on direct mechanical conversion from needle to air via a horn, until the mid-1920s, but radio reception required amplification in all but the very crudest 'crystal' receivers. These amps were basic but they performed their function well. They used the only valve type available, the triode, and used it carefully since valves were expensive components. Transformer coupling at every stage was commonplace, matching impedance so that each valve worked at maximum efficiency. Transformers were not always required at the output as some loudspeakers had very high impedance (over 2,000 ohms, against the eight ohms common today) and could be connected directly to the valve's anode, via a capacitor.

Valve technology developed fast. Early devices had limited gain and current handling and they were not particularly linear. However, the pace of discoveries was rapid and soon enough triodes became far friendlier, more practical devices. At the same time, circuits became more sophisticated. Early designs were simple: put a small signal into the grid and get a bigger one out at the anode – give or take a small amount of distortion. But the invention of feedback by Harold Black in 1927 sowed the seeds of more complicated circuits with greater fidelity. Another invention which had an important effect on audio design was the push-pull configuration, where two power valves operating out of phase with each other

alternately conduct (pull) and turn off (push), enhancing overall power efficiency, easing the design of output transformers and allowing higher-power amplifiers to be built with ease. Amazingly, push-pull was first demonstrated in 1916 but it took the best part of two decades for it to become standard practice.

POPULARITY GROWS

Serious interest in domestic audio amplification dates from around 1930, as electrical models and improved radio transmission superseded acoustic horn gramophones and reception equipment made decent fidelity a reality. The first high-quality loudspeakers date from the late 1920s, including the Lowther drive units. Audio equipment was expensive by today's standards and quality equipment was the preserve of the rich and the enthusiast, but common practice of home construction kept it affordable. The best-sellers of the day were kits of parts for amps and speakers, and pamphlets detailing various designs. – providing many evenings of entertainment and scorched fingers for music-lovers, before television dictated our living room (in)activity.

Throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s improvements in audio design were more evolutionary than revolutionary, though the pace was rapid. During this period (with an interruption for the war, which limited the relevance of home audio) most of the famous names in audio made their first marks. Luminaries of the time included Leak, Quad, Dynaco and McIntosh. Leak was making amplifiers in the mid-1930s and can be said to have started the craze for low distortion figures with the 'Point One' amplifiers shortly after the war – using technology developed for wartime applications. In truth the distortion only just managed to better 0.1 per cent in the midband at moderate power with a good set

of valves, but the race was on. In any case, Leak's amplifiers performed reliably and are still sought-after today.

Quad, like Leak, started off with public-address amplifiers, but came to prominence with the Quad II in 1952. This 12-watt mono power amplifier, built on a neat and compact chassis, remained in production for nearly 20 years, by which time well over 100,000 units had been built. Around the same time, Dynaco and McIntosh (both in the USA) were producing amps of higher power, Dynaco mostly in kit form, which, like Leak and Quad, have stood the test of time.

What of the circuit designs used by these amps? They were all push-pull. The Leaks used an arrangement that, with detail changes, has served many manufacturers to this day (illustrated opposite). The output valves are coupled through a transformer to the load, using

Right: Despite the onslaught of the transistor, valve amps like this Unison Research model remain popular with audiophiles



TIMELINE

1904 >>

First electronic device, the thermionic diode

1911 >>

First audio amplifier

1927 >>

Invention of feedback

1932 >>

Invention of stereo

1933 >>

Introduction of the 300B, the most famous audio valve

1934 >>

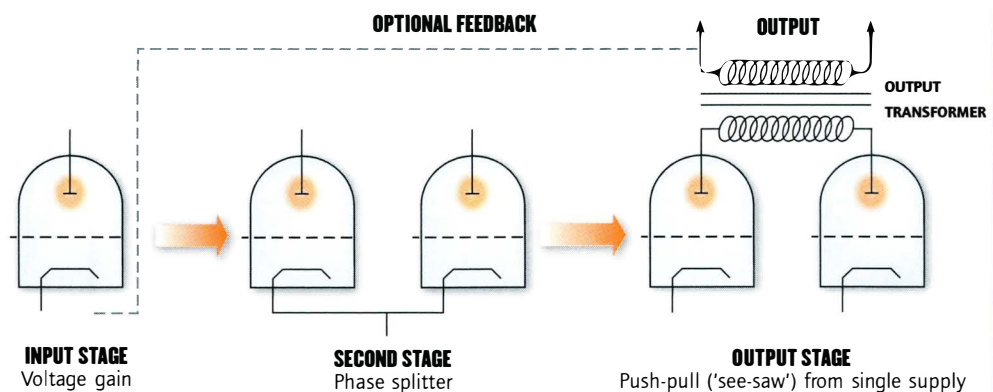
HJ Leak & Co begins trading

1936 >>

Acoustical Manufacturing Company (later Quad) begins trading

HOW A VALVE AMP WORKS

Probably at least half the valve amps currently in use follow this general outline, with an input stage providing voltage gain, followed by a phase splitter that provides the plus and minus phase signals for the push-pull output. Single-ended designs have no phase splitter and only one output valve. Typical transistor amps lack the output transformer but provide push-pull operation using two power supplies, plus and minus.



“Best-sellers of the day were kits of parts – providing many evenings of entertainment and scorched fingers for music-lovers.”

in most cases the 'Ultralinear' configuration – tetrode or pentode valves with the screen grid connected about halfway between the anode and the centre-tap of the transformer primary. This in itself is a form of feedback, but overall feedback was used from the transformer output to the first valve.

Quad used a unique circuit which was elegant and highly efficient, producing low distortion and excellent stability. So carefully honed was the design that even the 'parasitic' (side effect) characteristics of a couple of components were used to advantage to stabilise the amplifier at high frequencies. Another popular circuit in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the Williamson, published in *Wireless World* and adopted by many kit builders. This had one more gain stage than most and promised lower distortion, but in practice was hard to stabilise: the big problem of negative feedback in any application is that at very high and low frequencies it wants to become positive and produce self-sustaining oscillations – incompatible with fidelity.

Perhaps the most striking circuit of the 1950s was the McIntosh 'Unity Coupled' circuit, which used complex output transformers with separate windings for anodes and cathodes of the output valves. The resulting amplifiers were of such high performance and so reliable that

they became a staple of electronics labs as well as of hi-fi set-ups.

But then the transistor came along and the large, hot, inefficient valve was obsolete.

Except that it refused to die. Some firms made valve amps for years after the transistor had become established (Quad, Radford and McIntosh to name but three) but eventually switched to solid state. Hardly had they done so, when a new breed of electronics designers discovered anew the qualities of the valve. Credit goes to Jean Hiraga, who in the 1970s was one of the first to state his belief that valves actually sounded better than trannies.

Valves were still in production at the time, supplying spare parts markets and in the production of elderly TV models, and it wasn't too hard to restart production of audio amps. Among surviving veterans of the 1970s and 1980s are Audio Research, EAR, Jadis, Conrad Johnson, Audionote and VTL. Now they are in the company of many other manufacturers, with a myriad of design approaches. The well-known breed of single-ended triode (SET) amps are notable, which go back to the designs of the 1920s and 1930s with directly-heated tungsten-filament valves – no feedback, multiple transformers, low power, high measured distortion and, claim advocates, unparalleled sound.

NEW DESIGNS?

Apart from fairly traditional circuits with new valves (yes, there are some) and modern high-performance passive components, there have been a few useful novelties over the years. Tim de Paravicini's 'Enhanced Triode Mode' is one of them: he has also come up with some interesting configurations that continue in the McIntosh vein. William Z Johnson at Audio Research is one of the leaders in valve circuits with sophisticated solid-state 'housekeeping' to maintain operating conditions of the valves at their optimum, while various manufacturers have investigated 'hybrid' combinations of valves and transistors. A few brave firms, notably Futterman and (more recently) Graaf have come up with output transformerless (OTL) amplifiers.

Valve amplifiers will be with us for a little while yet. Sources of valves are starting to become a problem, but there are still a lot of the bottles floating around in systems, and what one man has made, another will copy. The textbooks may say the valve is dead, but the sound, appearance and sheer joy of ownership of a good valve amplifier will keep the flame alive for a long time to come. **HFC**

Turn to p58 for our group test review of the latest valve amplifiers

1945 >>

First Leak 'Point One' amplifier

1947 >>

Invention of the transistor

1949 >>

McIntosh begins trading

1952 >>

Quad II power amp

1960 >>

Transistor amplifiers start appearing

1970 >>

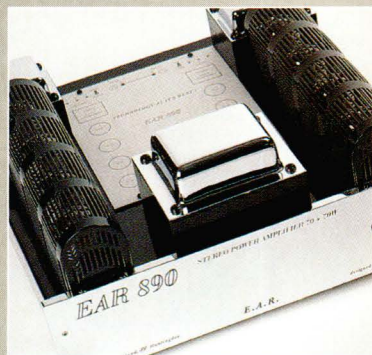
Audio Research begins trading

1990 >> today

Dozens of valve amp manufacturers still trading worldwide

the AUDIO CONSULTANTS

FINE TWO CHANNEL AUDIO SYSTEMS



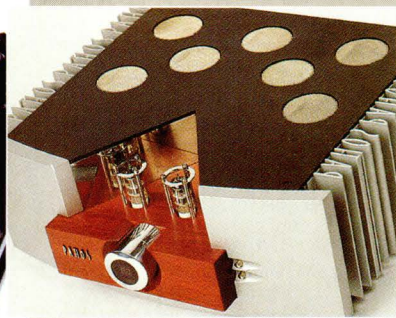
EAR/Yoshino 890 stereo amplifier
Ideal match with the 834L pre-amplifier.



Ferguson Hill FH001 horn loudspeakers
Very stylish with a dynamic, immediate sound.



SME Model 20/2 turntable
One of our best sellers, this combination produces a totally different listening experience in terms of tonal accuracy and transparency.



Pathos Logos integrated hybrid amplifier
A popular amplifier with great looks.



Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player
The improved sound with the new drive is astonishing.



Finite Elemente Pagode furniture
For extracting the very best from your equipment.



Shanling CD T100 valve CD player
Superb sound and appearance.



Amphion Xenon loudspeakers
Fast and articulate with neutral tonal balance. Slim floorstander which does not mind walls.



Nottingham Analogue Space Deck
With the new, thicker platter and upgrade kit it produces an even more neutral and stable image



Exposure New Classics
XXII CD player, XXIII pre-amplifier, XXIV power amplifier, XXVI phono stage. Superbly controlled, dynamic sound and tonally correct.

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QUADRASPIRE ▶ ROGUE AUDIO ▶ SME ▶ SHANLING ▶ SHUN MOOK ▶ SUGDEN ▶ TRANSFIGURATION ▶ UNISON RESEARCH ▶ WADIA

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COMPETITION

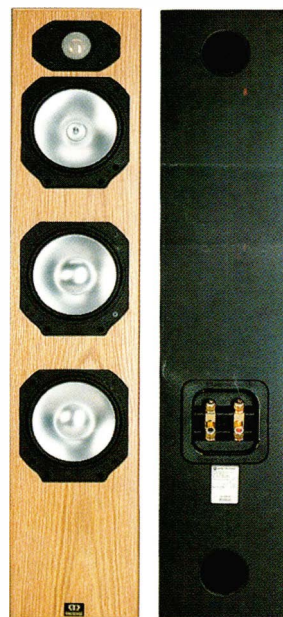
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Monitor Audio has a 30-year hi-fi heritage producing some of the most visually distinctive and sonically pleasing speakers around. Famed for its use of shiny alloy drivers, the bling-bling Monitor Audio ranges are a familiar sight in dealer showrooms around the country.

We've teamed up with the loudspeaker specialist to give you the opportunity to win a superb pair of Silver S8s – Recommended in *HFC 237* and worth £800. For your chance to take them home, simply answer the question below.

This impressive floorstander charmed our ears with its amiable balance, excellent focus and wide dynamic range. The real-wood-wrapped cabinet houses three 115mm drivers in a two-and-a-half-way configuration with twin rear-firing bass ports. Midrange is smooth and coherent with impressive imaging and deep, clean bass. Good luck!



HOW TO ENTER:

Answer the question by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and daytime phone number below.

QUESTION

What type of driver does Monitor Audio prefer?

- a) Alloy driver
- b) Minnie driver
- c) Long distance lorry driver

YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Title _____ Initials _____ Surname _____
 Address _____

 Date of Birth _____ Daytime tel number _____

What type of hi-fi product you intend to buy next? _____

Which brands would you most like to read about? _____

Would you like to see more expensive or less expensive kit reviewed? _____

What would you like to see more of in *Hi-Fi Choice*? _____

Please tell us if there's anything you don't like. _____

COMPETITION RULES

The closing date for this competition is 14 May 2004. Winners of the Monitor Audio 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 Monitor Audio competition is not open to employees of Monitor Audio, 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:

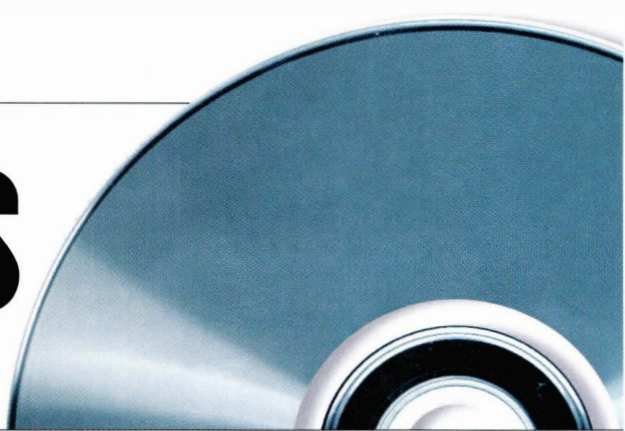
Monitor Audio Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

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

JAMES BROWN

In The Jungle Groove

Polydor/Simply Vinyl 2x180g vinyl

Music: Originally released in 1971 but reissued in 1986 this is a compilation of the Godfather of Soul at his

funkiest. Nine tracks over four sides seems a mite thin but it's quality all the way. Most tracks find Brown backed by his classic band the JB's, with Bootsy Collins on bass and the original funky drummer Clyde Stubblefield. Cuts

include much of the fodder of the breakbeat generation, with *Talkin' Loud And Sayin' Nothing*, *Give It Up Or Turnit A Loose* and *Funky Drummer* among the highlights. You won't find sixties favourites like *Sex Machine*, this is a deeper groove, an album that paved the way for the unstoppable funk engine of Funkadelic. ★★★★★

Sound: Given the compilative nature of this album it's not surprising to hear variations in sound quality, never outstanding but usually lively – this ain't demo stuff it's raw funk. Just get down with your bad self (so to speak). ★★ ★★ JK

PORTISHEAD

Portishead

Go! Beat/Simply Vinyl 2x180g vinyl

Music: The success of Portishead's debut, *Dummy*, left the band with a heavy task when it came to the

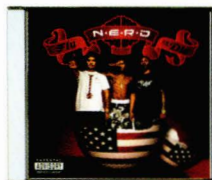
follow-up three years later. This reflects the atmospheric style of *Dummy* but is a darker, less obvious work that requires familiarisation before its qualities become apparent. It is a haunting collection of deliberately dirty sounding

tunes, with heavy use of knackered vinyl samples, Beth Gibbons' torch song style and Barrow and Utley's film noir-inspired compositions. The single *Only You* remains the standout but there are plenty of strong songs on here including *Cowboys* and *All Mine*. One for the trip hop connoisseur and Darkness fan alike. ★★ ★★

Sound: The heavy sampling and deliberately grubby style don't make for audiophile excellence, but it gets its message across very effectively. ★★ ★★ JK

These and other audiophile LPs are available from Simply Vinyl: ☎ 0208 545 8580
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COMPACT DISC & VINYL



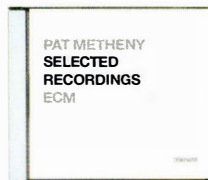
N*E*R*D

Fly Or Die

Virgin

Music: The cooler alter ego of Midas-touched production duo the Neptunes may not sell in the sort of numbers as their clients (Britney, Justin, Usher et al) but then this is what they're *really* into – like Mike Yarwood's '...and this is me' bit at the end of his show. 'Me' for the Neptunes is an addictive mix of hip-hop beats, pop hooks, rock breaks and, yes, nerdy music references, a melting pot of influences, styles and a whirlwind of imagination. From the caboose-obsessed funk groove of *She Wants To Move* to the intelligent pop balladry of *Wonderful Place*, and many, many points in-between, whatever you're into, there's probably room for a little N*E*R*D. ★★★★★

Sound: It's slick of course, but also spiky when you need it – perfect pop really. ★★ ★★ DO

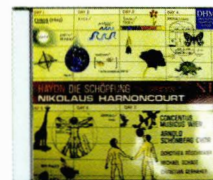


PAT METHENY

Selected Recordings

ECM

Music: Here Metheny picks his most important music from his 1975 debut *Bright Size Life* to the sounds that made him world famous with Lyle Mays and The Pat Metheny Group. On top of succulent Barney Kessel/Wes Montgomery guitar passages we get arrangements that are so good the jaw still drops. The switch to creamy Gibson phrasing on *It's For You* (1980) is still bewitching and the entire 1982 live version of *Are You Going With Me* is a masterclass in dynamics and the sheer power of the guitar synthesiser in the right hands. The beautiful closer, an acoustic take on Horace Silver's *Lonely Woman* is sublime. ★★★★★
Sound: Newly remastered, the ever-impeccable standards of ECM will, as ever, take your breath away. ★★★★★ MP



HAYDN

The Creation (oratorio)

Nikolaus Harnoncourt (conductor), Concentus Musicus Wien, Arnold Schönberg Chor, Dorothea Röschmann, Michael Schade (soloists)

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 82876 58340 2

Music: *The Creation* is an ambitious large-scale work constructed from a number of short episodes, and its aim was nothing less than to tell the story of the biblical creation after John Milton, a work that his idol Handel had in Haydn's view conspicuously failed to write. The work is engaging and the solo and choral singing, as well as the orchestral accompaniment (with modern instruments, but light and open in texture) are superb. ★★★★★
Sound: This orchestra has always been steeped in the music of Haydn and the sound is explicit, clean, but utterly fluid and musical, making this two-CD set a major release. ★★ ★★ AG



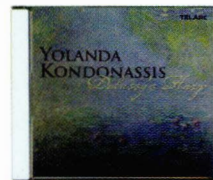
GEORGE MICHAEL

Patience

Epic

Music: Patience? That's one way of putting it, since we've waited eight years since George Michael's last album. Musically, he's given us a safe and predictable collection of epic ballads and slick, up-tempo pop tunes. Yet lyrically, *Patience* is considerably more interesting as Michael has taken as his subject matter the soap opera that his life has become. The autobiography is only thinly disguised in songs about his trial-by-tabloid (*Through*), casual sex (*Cars And Trains*) and his current partner (*American Angel*). *Round Here* is even about the early days of Wham!. Camp and daft – but fun if you don't take it too seriously. ★★ ★★

Sound: The word 'glossy' simply doesn't do it justice, the production is polished fit to dazzle – which works better on the pop ballads than on the somewhat stilted funk outings. ★★ ★★ NW



DEBUSSY

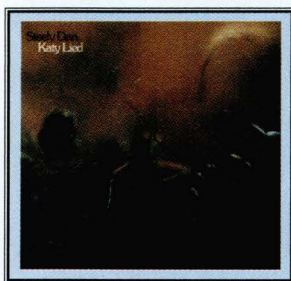
Debussy's Harp

Yolanda Kondonassis

Telarc CD-80622

Music: At first sight this seems like a bit of an oddity, and it is. But it is an oddity that works well in practice, and as the disc notes point out, Debussy wrote extensively for the harp, albeit mostly in its more usual accompanying role rather than centre stage, as it is here. The works are mostly well known (*Claire De Lune*, *Réviere*, *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, which receives a powerful performance here), but there is also a smattering of lesser-known pieces, most of which work well. ★★ ★★

Sound: The recording is unexceptional, the harp recorded fairly close, but with a fair amount of ambient space around the instrument. Yolanda Kondonassis's musicianship however is of the highest order. ★★ ★★ AG

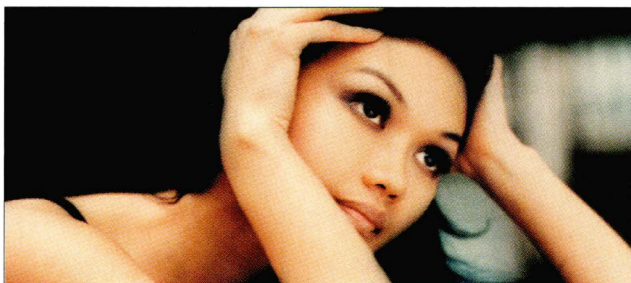


THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "A degree of sophistication rarely heard..."

STEELY DAN *Katy Lied* MCA Records 120g vinyl

Music: Recorded at the peak of the incredibly talented duo's powers, 1975's *Katy Lied* is arguably the best 'Dan album ever. Donald Fagen and Walter Becker perfected a variant of jazz rock that has oft been imitated but never equalled. Made with the cream of LA's session musicians including Jeff Porcaro, Larry Carlton and Mike McDonald this LP contains ten superb tracks from which it's difficult to pick standouts. Still, it would be churlish not to point out

Doctor Wu, *Your Gold Teeth II* and *Chain Lightning* as the headliners. *Katy Lied* mixes complex rhythms and harmonies with melodic hooks that displays a degree of sophistication rarely heard in mainstream music. ★★★★★
Sound: The liner notes include a section devoted to audiophiles that is as wry and tongue in cheek as the Dan's lyrics, nonetheless this is a well recorded album with a clean, detailed, analogue sound. ★★★★★ JK



BIC RUNGA Beautiful Collision

Epic

Music: The biggest thing to come out of New Zealand since the Interislander Ferry is a 26-year-old singer songwriter of Chinese/Maori origin (hence the striking bone structure). Her first album, *Drive*, was at number one in the NZ charts for a year and now she's bringing her distinctive pop craft and slightly angsty lyrics over here. Some have compared her to a southern hemisphere Dido but there's a lot more going on here, in terms of arrangement and in the commitment of the delivery. Standouts include the catchy single *Get Some Sleep* and the heartbreaking *Something Good*. She plays piano and guitar, wrote all the songs and produced the record too, while former 'biggest thing to come out of New Zealand', Crowded House's Neil Finn, guests on backing vocals. It won't be long before she makes it big here too. ★★★★★
Sound: Beautifully judged, intimate and delicate, but never precious, it's like Norah Jones might sound if she had a personality. ★★★★★ DO



DVD-AUDIO & SACD

THE POLICE

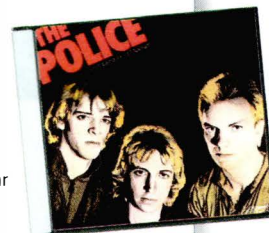
Outlandos D'Amour

SACD (stereo SACD plus stereo CD layer)

A&M

Music: The Police's 1978 debut was ostensibly a punk album but only because they knew they could get more airplay with spiky hair and a bit of shouting. Now it sounds like prog rock in bite-size chunks. With the guitar solos and imaginative drumming, it's not hard to see why the new wave genre had to be invented – this sure ain't anarchy. Everyone knows the hits: *Roxanne*, *So Lonely* and *Can't Stand Losing You* and for the most part they are the best tracks, however *Hole In My Life* and *Next To You* reveal why the band was so successful. The combined talents of Summers and Copeland drive the taught songs along even when they are pretending to play reggae beats. A much better album than you remember. ★★★★★

Sound: This SACD remaster has vigour and grip not to mention lovely full bass lines. Thankfully it hasn't been surrounded-up and retains much of its original energy. ★★★★★ JK



RICHARD STRAUSS

Four Last Songs, Ein Heldenleben

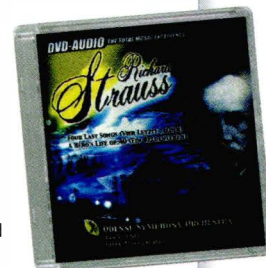
Jan Wagner (conductor), Gitta-Maria Sjöberg (soprano), Odense Symphony Orchestra

DVD-Audio (5.0 and 2.0 channels, Dolby Digital 5.0 channels)

Silverline Records 288119-9

Music: No notes were supplied with this disc but what can be said is that this is a live recording made at the Odense Koncerthus – just to prove it the opening track is of the orchestra tuning up – and that it was recorded in March 1999. The music needs little introduction: *Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life)* is a complex large-scale tone poem, and the *Four Last Songs* are exquisitely beautiful, from the very pinnacle of Strauss's oeuvre. Both receive deeply felt and thoroughly idiomatic performances. ★★★★★

Sound: The stereo recording is good, but for sheer involvement, it cannot touch the 5.0 channel mix, which in DVD-Audio form especially is nothing less than a joy. The mix is largely front-centred, though you may want to turn the back channels down a notch. ★★★★★ AG



LAST DAYS OF APRIL

If You Lose It

Bad Taste/Nettwerk

Music: They're young(ish), new(ish) and Swed(ish) and that's about all we know apart from the fact that they've just delivered this album – which just so happens to be a wonderful slice of classy indie pop, complete with West Coast phrasing, English lyrics and a collection of tunes to (Wanna)die for. Fans of Prefab Sprout, Jonathan Richman, Neil Young and maybe even the Hives will find much to like here but really, anyone who loves a bit of guitar melody will have no trouble warming to this. Intelligent, poignant and delicately tough, it's a modern classic, no less. ★★★★★

Sound: Clean ringing guitars, thuddy drums and dry vocals seamlessly recorded by Mathias Olden. Very electric but very human. ★★★★★ PS



VARIOUS ARTISTS

46664

Warner (CD and DVD)

Music: Last November, Nelson Mandela lent his former prison number to an AIDS benefit concert in Cape Town. His sainted name drew some of the world's biggest stars but the resulting triple CD is inevitably a curate's egg. The best includes Beyoncé, Bono and Ms Dynamite. The worst includes the bombastic Queen and a ramshackle Bob Geldof. Baaba Maal and Youssou N'Dour both turn in superb performances and South African acts Yvonne Chaka Chaka and Bongo Maffin are a revelation with their thrilling combination of hip-hop and township rhythms. ★★★★★

Sound: The wonders of digital technology mean these days you can create warmth and intimacy even in an echoing stadium. ★★★★★ NW

ROBERT CRAY

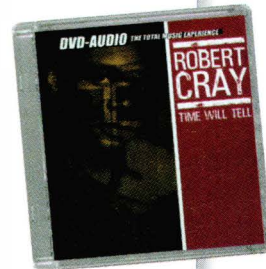
Time Will Tell

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

Silverline Records/Sanctuary

Music: Despite Cray's 1986 Grammy award for his services to blues (for *Strong Persuader*), songwriting is arguably not his strong point. But blues guitar is, and this bunch of emotions put to music finds the Albert Collins protégé on a self-produced album that folds soul, pop and blues together with seasoned craftsmanship. Cray's backing ensemble plays tight but loose, contributing to a fluid and natural sounding groove. With some surprise twists and effects laid down, this debut high-resolution 5.1 disc (Cray's 13th album no less) is one of his more rounded and accomplished works to date. ★★★★★

Sound: This no-frills surround mix is conventional and without spatial trickery. Rear channels do no more than play ball, although this isn't necessarily bad – clever effects do not make an album, but the strength of the underlying music most definitely does. ★★★★★ DG





'Lab tests

Stereolab's Tim Gane explains why his band's latest album, recorded in dual mono, is actually three for the price of one. Interview: Dave Oliver

Since 1991 Stereolab, the 'lo-fi', high concept brainchild of Tim Gane and Laetitia Sadier, have ploughed their own furrow of off-kilter Europop, French melodic fancies mixed with Teutonic motorik rhythms and a distinctly English sense of wilful quirkiness. They've shown an unusually strong loyalty to the analogue synthesiser, and over the course of nine albums and countless EPs and singles have created their own oeuvre of synth-pop, which while it has yet to reveal any major hits, has generated a loyal following worldwide.

Main 'labber' Tim Gane lives in south

London (he commutes to the group's own studio at Sadier's house in northern France) and spends an unconscionable amount of time and money on records and hi-fi equipment. He's fascinated by the *sound* of records, and how the sonic character of a recording can convey the atmosphere of a song every bit as much as rhythm and melody. This leads him to experiment in some unusual ways.

"I'm not interested necessarily in a natural sound, or an organic one, I'm interested in a sound that allows the music to come through, regardless of whether or not it's analogue. I go for

the character that personifies what we're trying to do, and I think analogue helps that more than digital. Digital facilitates an ease of use, which people can be seduced by, though I don't necessarily think it sounds better.

"Since 1997 we've recorded pretty much exclusively on computer, and put it onto two-inch, 24-track tape. For us, using mainly old instruments and older synthesisers, and with drums, bass

Below: Left to right: Simon Johns, Laetitia Sadier, Dominic Jeffry and Tim Gane



and vocals I find it warms things up and gives it character. When you listen to drums, before, it sounds alright, you don't notice anything untoward. But when you put the songs onto two-inch and play them back they have a character, they're warmed up, they're just 'fat', feel heavier and have larger presence. It's difficult to describe, but they're bigger, rounder and fuller. I think what's happening is that the analogue to digital conversion isn't optimum, so you don't hear everything when you hear it from digital, but when you put it onto two-inch tape everything's revealed, because the analogue playback of a Studer two-inch tape machine is as great as you're gonna get. It adds character, and with organs and Rhodes, or piano or old synths, it adds a poetry to the sound.

"It's subtle, but I think people notice, without realising it. You notice when something feels at ease and when you engage with the music more directly. I always think vinyl portrays that as well."

ONE FOR ALL

Stereolab's new album *Margerie Eclipse*, their first since the death of founding member Mary Hansen in a cycling accident, is in some ways quintessentially Stereolab. The floating pop vocal harmonies (now all performed by Sadier), the metronomic rhythms, the odd quirky synth confections, but this time there's something more.

"For this LP we recorded one arrangement for one speaker and a different one for the other. So if you listen on one speaker, you won't hear anything that happens in the other.

That's everything, nothing crosses over. Everything has two drums, two basses, two guitars, two vocals, so you can listen to one in isolation, as one arrangement of the song.

"The idea was that we'd have one arrangement on one speaker, another on the second speaker, and then the combination of the two would give you a third version of the album. It's 2.1. We call it dual mono, because we have two mono outputs simultaneously.

"Originally, I wrote the songs with the

"We recorded one arrangement for one speaker and a different one for the other... it's dual mono."

idea of recording them live. They were upfront and simple, 'cos we'd just built a studio, so we didn't want to be arsing around with finicky, nit-picky arrangements. But eight months later when we recorded them, after everything that had happened, I got tired of that idea, so we decided to record one side live, and the other would be electronic, or acoustic or other things. But that didn't pan out, so we did one arrangement for one side, and a different one for the other.

"Most people don't even know, we didn't make a point of it, although some have said it's wild-sounding on headphones. It sounds good in cars as well, because car speakers aren't split between woofers and tweeters so you get a more focused sound. I like stuff like that, but I don't know if I'll do anything quite like it again though."

NEW SOUNDS

Despite Stereolab's reputation in some quarters as a 'lo-fi' band, it's clear that any perceived limitations to their sound are quite deliberate. It may not appear polished, but they clearly put a lot of thought and consideration into their sound and if that appears idiosyncratic, so be it. From 'dual mono', it doesn't seem like too much of a jump to 5.1, but Gane's not sure.

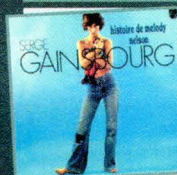
"5.1 is a possibility, it will happen eventually, but I'm not sure how yet. We

could do a remix of one of our past albums, but I don't know if there's any point in recreating something artificially. For me it's better that you think about it and do it as one thing. I've heard some 5.1 stuff, such as Fleetwood Mac, but it's just a novelty that wears off after a few minutes. You have an acoustic guitar here, something else there, and I don't think music is necessarily about that.

"Some of the most amazing music sounds great just coming out of a one-speaker jukebox, because it has energy. The more you diffuse it, the less energy you have. Stereo has less energy than mono. Mono sometimes can sound great, pumping, because it's a single sound source. Music through a single speaker will sound more energetic than if it's split into three, four or five speakers with different frequencies. And with our record, of course, you can have it totally mono if you want.

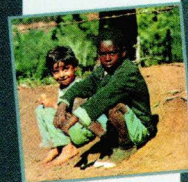
"I like SACD though, I've had a player for a long time. I don't think it matters so much for rock music, although I like those Rolling Stones ones. "I only have a stereo player, but where you hear it is with jazz or orchestral, soundtrack music, it's just tangible, closer, more upfront, less diffuse. I have three copies of (Bob Dylan's) *Blonde On Blonde* – SACD, ordinary CD and double vinyl. The best is still the double vinyl, but the SACD is better than the ordinary CD. I don't think you can work miracles with something that's not there, it will just illuminate what's already there. I don't know about DVD-Audio, I haven't heard that. But I don't have time to follow the latest trend, I'm too busy making music to follow the ins and outs of the latest hi-fi technology." HFC

Tim's top test albums



SERGE GAINSBOURG Histoire De Melody Nelson (1970)

Very rich and opulent sound. It's the record I use when testing out speakers, turntables and amps etc. Jane Birkin's vocals are very high, but shouldn't be tetchy or stretched. Serge's vocals are very deep, but you should hear the lips smack and saliva sticking to puffed cigarette. The bass sound is sublime, slightly woody, but beautiful in the upper register. Great on LP and reissue CD.



MILTON NASCIMENTO & LO BORGES Clube Da Esquina (1972)

A brilliant record anyhow, but no doubt helped by the super production of 1970s EMI Brasil, which effortlessly conveys progressive and complex arrangements with full-on instrumentation in a natural and relaxed way. Brazilian production from the late 1960s and early-mid 1970s was highly advanced and creative (check Marcos Valle & Egberto Gismonti in this period) but this LP is surely a pinnacle of clarity and eloquence.



BERNARD HERRMANN Taxi Driver OST (1976)

The reissue CD is the one to get with all the Herrmann cues and out-takes. So many of his soundtracks have received the hi-fi treatment (check the Phase IV/London stuff on MOFI) but this dynamic recording is the normal release and is so beautifully controlled.

'Lab systems

Tim Gane uses two distinct and highly individual hi-fi systems at home: his standard 'downstairs' system for everyday use and his thoroughly distinctive, highly tweaked 'upstairs' system for dedicated listening

UPSTAIRS

- > Sony SCD1 SACD/CD player
- > Simon Yorke S7 turntable
- > Crown Jewel SE MC Cartridge
- > Vibration turntable platform with pump
- > Tice Power Block III power conditioner
- > Cary 805c valve amplifier (two single-ended monoblocks)
- > Jadis JP80 preamp
- > Stax SRM-3 amp + Lambda Nova Electrostatic headphones
- > EAR MC3 Step Up Transformer
- > Ergo AMT headphones system
- > Shahinian Hawk loudspeakers (six drivers, plus bass unit)
- > Tara Labs The One speaker cables and interconnects

DOWNSTAIRS

- > Cambridge Audio CD4 CD player
- > Marantz DR6000 CD recorder
- > Well Tempered Classic Turntable
- > Dynavector DV 17D2 MK II 'Karat Diamond' Cartridge
- > EAR 834P phono stage
- > Croft Vitale Series VC pre/power amp combo
- > Shahinian Arc speakers (three-way, with passive sub, pictured)
- > Nirvana speaker cables
- > Coincident Speaker Technology interconnects



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"I bought some cheap cables and definitely found more detail."

A CASE FOR CABLE

I didn't believe I had the ears to notice fine variations in sound quality from different cables. But I decided to educate myself by experimenting with speaker cables on my Denon DM30 micro system. I bought some cheap stuff and definitely found more detail – even on such an inexpensive 'lifestyle' system. I found I had more treble and cleaner bass whilst the whole sound was more airy and transparent.

Fouad via email

HFC: It just goes to show that upgrading with any system is always a worthwhile exercise.

RETURN OF A LEGEND

I loved the review of the Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII (*HFC* 251) – I bought a pair and I'm driving them with a Marantz PM17 amplifier, which sadly doesn't do them justice. The PM17 falls short in just about every aspect of driving the AE1 MkIII. I need amplification that is clean and powerful. In your review you drove them with Naim's NAC552/NAP500 pre/power combo which, sadly, is a bit pricey for me. What other Naim amps will drive them? I have £2,500 for a power amp or £3,500 for an integrated and will also consider other brands.

Marino Marinkovic Sweden, via email

HFC: We contacted the guys at Acoustic Energy and asked which amplifiers they most enjoyed using during the development of the AE1 MkIII. They had great success with the £1,400 AVI Type S21 M1 (which they used to demo at Bristol recently)

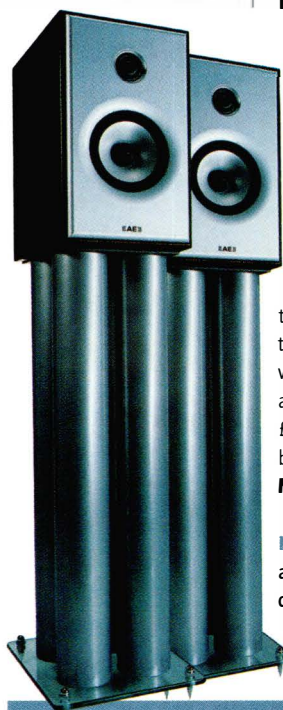
and they also extensively used Naim amps throughout the speakers' development. Their suggestion is that you should try the NAC112/NAP200 – a very affordable Naim solution at just £660/£1,345. From our reviews we'd also recommended auditioning the Arcam FMJ C30 preamp with the P1 monos. This would fall easily within your budget and would offer an incredible 180 watts continuous power. You could also try Krell's 200-watt KAV-400xi if you fancy a bit of kudos.

HEAD IN THE SAND

I live in the US and may have to buy some hi-fi, blind. I have the opportunity to order a 5.1 set of KEF Codas at a bargain price – under \$1,000. Trouble is, I've never heard them, or anything from KEF for that matter, and I fear taking such a chance. Would you know how the KEF Codas compare to the B&W DM303 package? I have heard the DM303s and I was impressed.

James Saucedo USA, via email

HFC: First let's reiterate the old adage – never buy before you try. Our rigorous reviews should be a guide in helping you create an audition shortlist; the rest is very much down to you – taking into account your tastes, your system and your interpretation of what sounds good and bad. We appreciate that not everyone can visit a dealer easily, but investing time and effort in auditioning just a few products will pay dividends in the long term. To answer your question though, we'd go for the excellent DM303 any day. The Coda by comparison is outperformed in most respects by the class-leading B&W.



LETTER OF THE MONTH

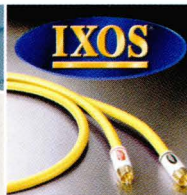
A QUESTION OF CLASS

I read with interest Richard Black's review of the Marantz PM7200 amplifier (*HFC* 248), and in particular his comments about the surprisingly small difference in sound quality between Class AB and Class A operation. I have one of these amps, and concur with this. What I am also surprised to find is an indiscernible difference in sound levels between the two

modes of operation, which are rated at 105 watts and 25 watts respectively. Therefore I am beginning to wonder whether my amp is faulty. Can you throw any light on this?

Peter Moore via e-mail

Richard Black: This illustrates a common misconception about power – more power doesn't mean that music will play louder under normal conditions. You'll only notice a difference if you switch to Class A mode and turn up the wick until it sounds 'bent'. Switch to Class AB and it will be just as loud but cleaner, and less distorted. Keep turning up the volume and it will eventually distort in Class AB too. More power means more control and potentially higher level.



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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



VINYL VERSUS CD

I have Rotel's RCD-971 CD, RA-02 amp with Epos M12s and an ancient Marantz turntable. The system sounds great with LPs – it has absolute speed stability, which the newer audiophile belt drives cannot match. With certain CDs the system is fab, but a bit harsh with others. I correct it with tone controls on the RA-02 but it cannot match the LP. Would buying the matching Rotel RCD-02 CD player help? I listen to 1970s-80s music.

K. Fonseka via e-mail



HFC: While the Rotel RCD-02 is a very good machine (*HFC 231*) there are better players. How about the Marantz CD7300 (£350) or Arcam's CD73T (£400)? Your points about LPs sounding better are rational, particularly when comparing vinyl to a recent CD master. Go with it and enjoy your vinyl, but you could consider a universal player to exploit the bandwidth of DVD-A and SACD discs. This should bring you closer than ever before to vinyl's undisputed charm.

SOUND SERVICE

Some time ago I noticed a hiss and hum from my Naim 42.5 preamp and 110 power amplifier. I called Naim who suggested I upgrade it. I was quoted a price and went for it. The 42.5 preamp however, was a bit old. Naim later suggested I replace components in the 110 rather than upgrade – at half price. After mentioning my quest for a new preamp, they called back to recommend a used 102. So I bought it, got my power amp back and hooked it up to my Naim CD2 – and the sound quality is stunning. Where else could you speak to the workshop and managers, get good advice and honesty?

Kevin Webb via email

RICHER RANT, PART TWO

My experiences of Richer Sounds are the opposite of Richard Franklin's (*HFC 252*). Staff were helpful and they try to source out of stock items elsewhere. They are a low-frills operation – what do you expect at the price? For budget-conscious hi-fi enthusiasts, they offer a chance to own products which are otherwise beyond their pockets. I have no connections of any kind with Richer Sounds.

James Curran via email



ONLINE FORUM

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



A woman apparently once said, "I need to put on my glasses to listen to music." This is by no means an attack on the female of the species, but can anyone better that? **Bill**

When one's vision is impaired it can cause some anxiety and a feeling of vulnerability. Putting on one's glasses and then being able to see properly removes this tension therefore allowing a more relaxed mood to listen. **Daglesj**

I've seen Marantz's stunning PM7200 for £220. To all you bargain hunters like me building budget systems try: www.audiovisiononline.co.uk **Taymat**

How about £250 from Richer Sounds with a five-year warranty? (Black only though). **Frenchie**

THRIFTY AT FIFTY

I recently turned 50 and my wife is letting me spend some money on a hi-fi upgrade. I bought some PMC FB1s on the strength of your review, but I need a CD and amp. I have lots of CDs and as a Dylan fan I'm considering an SACD player but one dealer reckons SACD is for the manufacturers' benefit, as the original licence for CD has now expired and they no longer receive huge royalties. My budget is £1,500 for both, and my music tastes are huge – from opera to Led Zeppelin. Do Saga do hi-fi deals? **Ken Vettes** via email

HFC: Congratulations – we're glad some funds have been liberated for the cause. If you're an old rocker the recent DVD-A/SACD releases from Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and Led Zep are hard to ignore when considering a new source. We'd advise getting a universal DVD player – one that will see you through the format war and more. Try Pioneer's excellent £600 DV-668AV-S (*HFC 252*), Denon's bomb-proof £850 DVD-2900 (*HFC 248*), or see page 44 for our review of the superb Marantz DV-6400 – a firm Best Buy at just £500. This would leave £1,000 for Exposure's 120-watt 3010 (a great partner for the FB1), or for a chunk less, Rotel's 95-watt RA-1062 – the market leader.

"This should bring you closer than ever before to vinyl's undisputed charm."

G R A N D E

N O V A

A L T O

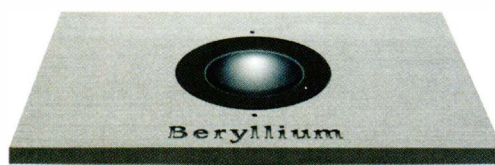
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LUMLEY LAMPROS 200 SERIES 2 LOUDSPEAKERS | £12,940

American Blighty

The Anglo-American 'special relationship' is alive... and has never sounded better

If you believe one-man rom-com factory Richard Curtis, the only feel-good value left in the 'special relationship' between Britain and America, is the prime minister telling the president where to shove it. Wrong actually. High-end hi-fi has a long tradition of the two countries getting on famously in the feel-good department, and this month's Anglo-American Beautiful System meshes together so comfortably, you really can't see the join.

Hold onto the idea of comfort for a moment. Large, expansive, effortless, comfort. It's an American thing: the reason their cars have such huge, but lightly-stressed engines; the reason those cars' interiors have immense amounts of legroom and a certain lavish plumpness to the seating; the reason pared-to-the-bone minimalism is a concept that simply doesn't play well west of Galway.

Thinking about the shape this month's to-die-for audio should take, I wanted to encapsulate the more-is-more, luxury-to-burn aspects of the American way. And, hailing from Michigan, home of high-end digital stalwart Wadia, the 302 CD player that heads up this five-piece ensemble is a fine way to introduce the concept.

MONEY WELL SPENT

Never known to do anything by halves, Wadia's idea of an entry-level CD player is the kind of machine that embarrasses rivals' cost-no-object flagships. But at £3,995, it's pricier than many of those. Still, you can see where a sizeable wedge of the money's been spent. This is a fine figure of a CD spinner by any standards, making extensive use of

charcoal-coloured, satin-finished chunks of hewn aluminium in its solid, but manageably-weighted build and totting a display of true extravagance that spans half the fascia. The use of blue and red graphics is a little startling, but the breezy spacing between the various numeric elements makes it easy to read. Handsome and unusual, it's the sort of black magic box you warm to the moment you ease it from its packing.

INSIDE STORY

Despite using a modest Philips VAE 1250 transport (the sexier Pioneer stable platter mech that featured in the 302's predecessor is no longer available), the inside story still has a lot to hold the attention: Wadia's proprietary Digimaster 3.1 upsampling algorithm, Swiftcurrent IC and DirectConnect technologies and 24-bit Burr-Brown 1704 DACs. The Swiftcurrent IC is a current-to-voltage converter that avoids negative feedback, while DirectConnect is a digital volume control, the primary benefit of which is the possibility of direct connection to a power amplifier, sidestepping the need for a preamp.

Naturally, digital volume controls work differently to analogue ones. As you turn down the volume, resolution decreases by one bit per 6dB with a corresponding reduction in sound quality. In practice it isn't a problem, though. The 302 has selectable output levels (via micro switches on the back panel) to match a range of power amps, the aim being to set the listening level correctly for the digital volume control's maximum resolution range: between 67 and 99 on the display. The combined balanced and single-ended outputs

“Wadia's idea of an entry-level CD players is the kind of machine that embarrasses rivals' cost-no-object flagships.”



Wadia 302 CD player
£3,995

Top-flight disc spinner with bass to die for, stunning resolution and a sense of solidity that adds hugely to believability.



BAT VK-3i preamp
£2,295

Entry-level model from tube champs BAT doesn't stint on features, but majors on very serious sound for the money.



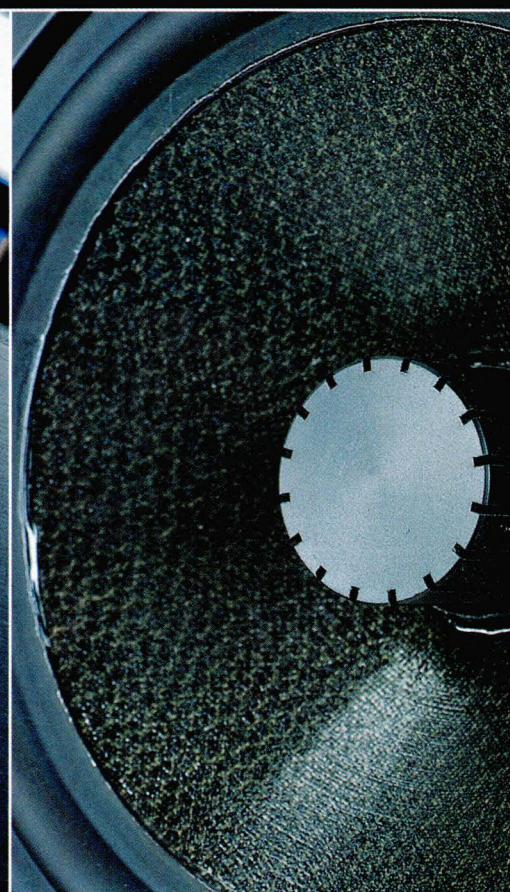
BAT VK-220 power amp
£3,150

Capable of delivering a whopping 250 watts into four ohms, this chunky, powerhouse mixes tube warmth with real grunt.



Lumley Lampros 200 Series 2 speakers
£3,500

Complex and, in many ways, idiosyncratic design, that requires plenty of care and attention to detail to set up. The results are worth it though.



of the 301 are carried over to the 302. All in all, a piece of work.

NO BARRIERS

For the amplification we shift states to Wilmington, Delaware and tube specialist Balanced Audio Technology (BAT). BAT was founded in 1995 by a Russian engineer called Victor Khomenko with the laudable goal of building amplifiers that place 'virtually no barriers between the music and the listener'. As such, each component, has to adhere to certain founding principles. These are balanced circuit design, zero feedback, simple signal paths, high-energy power supplies, compatibility with unbalanced inputs or outputs, and (for added psychological well being) gracefully balanced industrial design. A prerequisite here Victor, old boy.

From an extensive range of frankly mouthwatering kit, and given that optimum results will be achieved by running the Wadia directly into the power amp, I've gone for a modest preamp, the VK-3i. Modest by BAT standards, that is. A six tube, zero-feedback design, the VK-3i has a fully balanced line stage, five inputs and two outputs, full current regulation, oil-filled signal capacitors and the same circuit topology as that used in BAT's

most expensive designs. It costs a reasonable £2,295 and looks terrific, which probably explains why it's BAT's best-selling preamp.

The VK-220 power amp (£3,150) is a more recent design and a little more ambitious, but a highly recommended partner for the 3i. Said to use the same circuit topology as BAT's reference VK-6200 multichannel power amp, it gives the lie to the notion that valve power amps are limp-wristed wimps, delivering 125 watts per channel into eight ohms and 250 watts per channel into four ohms. Build quality is extraordinary inside and out, from the immaculate layout of the circuit board, to the oversized 700 VA toroidal transformer to the muscular, chunky, industrial design. Oh yes, and it weighs a reassuringly hefty 75 pounds.

EXTRAORDINARY BEAST

Which just leaves the British connection. Well, that's easy. BAT's UK distributor, Metropolis Music, is also the force behind Kent-based Lumley Loudspeakers, a company whose products might easily, to the untrained eye, be mistaken for sophisticated American behemoths. Pretty much ideal for this system, then.

The new Lumley Lampros 200 Series 2 three-way floorstander (£3,500) is

one up from the bottom of the five-strong revised Lampros, but an extraordinary beast nonetheless. Extraordinary in several ways. First, as well as a large rear-firing port, it has a rear-facing full-range driver with its own volume control to 'enhance musical ambience'. Second, it has two 2.5-inch domed Morel midrange drivers above and below its Visaton ribbon tweeter in a D'Appolito configuration. Third, it uses a very high-tech seven-inch Eaton hexacone carbon composite bass driver. Fourth, the cabinet doesn't have a flat surface on it (to absorb and damp internal reflections). And fifth, the crossovers (silver-plated OFC cabling, custom-wound air core inductors, Hovland MusiCap capacitors in critical areas) are, to a degree, listener-configurable.

Located on the rear panel are two special hardwired plug-in jumpers wired to the upper crossover input. The idea is to offer flexible control of the output levels from the ribbon tweeter and the midrange domed drivers, allowing the listener to fine-tune the balance of the speakers to their own taste, system and room characteristics.

Two points. Unless you're in a grumpy mood, doing this is fun (born tweakers will love it). And if you're going to splash out a few thousand on cables,





“The new Lumley Lampros 200 Series 2 three-way floorstander is one up from the bottom of the five-strong revised Lampros, but an extraordinary beast nonetheless.”

taking the time to get things sounding just so is effort well spent. For auditioning purposes, the system was supplied with many EK's worth of Nordost Valkyrja speaker and balanced interconnect cable and a mix of Vishnu and Shiva mains power cables. With this level of cable transparency, I fine-tuned until the pips squeaked.

For my own personal taste (and room), the Lumleys sounded best pulled a foot away from the rear walls with a few degrees of toe-in, the crossover plugs set to their factory 12 o'clock positions, the rear-firing drivers turned up about half way and with medium-sized foam bungs (bigger and smaller are supplied) inserted in the rear ports.

A CLASS ACT

And how good is 'best'? It's awesome. This system has prodigious bass weight, speed and drive. Bass guitar has satisfying presence, power and extension. The effect is pleasingly luxurious and reassuring. Low synth notes are amazingly taut and articulate,

too, and when the music demands – *Shoot The Dog* from George Michael's *Patience*, for instance – deliciously propulsive. But never unruly. The overall context is extremely classy and clean, with an absence of grain and hardness in the mid and upper frequencies.

FULL SOUNDING

This system will never sound bright or lean. If you dream of a smooth, laid-back, full-fat American sound you can find it in the wider performance envelope of this system, and it's a polished and accessible version.

Colourful doesn't always sound convincing, but it does here. Midrange and treble are natural and full, too. Yes, there is a tendency for this system to err on the benign side of neutral; sometimes it sounds so 'nice' you wonder if it's strictly telling the truth.

And no, for all its resolving power and dynamic freedom, it isn't the most overtly open or 'airy' sounding high-end combo you'll hear. But it's so capable of generating a life-size, cohesive and

believable sound – that doesn't want for ambient detail or atmosphere – it's hard to feel bothered. It 'cruises' beautifully, too; if a system can sound supple and loose-limbed, this does.

Let's just say it's effortlessly musical and enjoyable. Oh, and it goes very loud without the hint of strain – it's no hide-behind-the-sofa performer. This system can hit hard but, rather against expectations, it doesn't sound in any way overpowering. You're aware of the big stick, but it never clobbers you over the head. Then again, achieving that 'real' sound isn't about macho displays of raw power, more perceived energy levels and dynamics. This is stealthy muscle. It doesn't sound pushy or shouty, usually a symptom of small amps trying too hard, but rather creates a sense of instrument pressure in the room – never more evident than with Lambchop's *No You C'mon* – that's much more believable.

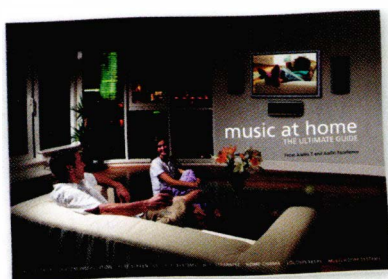
It makes glorious music, that's the bottom line. **HFC**

David Vivian



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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

...nor an... we liked... point here is... to the job of... recommend you...
 ...pare this with Marantz's £800 player, the 17 MKII M, which has excellent build and a very good impression in HFC 243. At same price there's also the Cyrus 7, a ring all-rounder in a compact case.
 ...er trying the Heart with the standard... s we switched over to the Siemens... grade, a comparison somewhat muddled by... e fact that it was a cold for hot swap – the... player had been on for several days with the... after a livelier... tubes shone... through. The Siemens-equipped player has an... n snappier sound with better timing that... es with dense material with remarkable... fidence and ease. It even seems to be

Our overall conclusion

...the things we like most about the product

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

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 83%	<p>PRO Well built and fully featured, with a snappy, open and dynamic sound.</p> <p>CON Externally it's a £300 Marantz – no bad thing in itself, but it's better than it looks!</p>
FEATURES >> 85%	
BUILD >> 85%	
VALUE >> 85%	
<p>TECHNICALS This is a really well-specified and useful player at a competitive price. The build quality is good and the feature list strong – it's not the most subtle £1,000 player but if you're looking for a winner to inspire you, it could prove a bargain.</p> <p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 84%</p>	

The things we think could be better

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

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

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



Editor's Choice

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

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



A DOSE OF ANDREWS

Hi-fi accessories maestro Russ Andrews tries his hand at amplifiers and speakers

PRODUCT Russ Andrews Signature system: SJA1, SJA2 and Quave LS1

TYPE Stereo preamp, power amp and loudspeakers

PRICE £2,750 (pre) £3,500 (power) £2,550 (speakers)

KEY FEATURES (Preamp) Size (WxHxD): 36x10x36cm

⊗ Six line inputs, two tape loops, three line outputs

⊗ Headphone output ⊗ Remote control

⊗ (Power amp) Size (WxHxD): 36x10x32cm

⊗ Power output: 50 watts/8ohms ⊗ (Speakers) Size

(WxHxD): 41x93x28cm ⊗ Sensitivity: 97dB

CONTACT ☎ 01539 825500 # www.russandrews.com

Russ Andrews has made his name as the king of the tweekers. His widgets and gizmos are found in systems across the land and the results he achieves speak for themselves. Although he demonstrated a complete system some years back, there had not been any electronics in the meantime. So it was a surprise to see this RA amp/speaker system (reviewed here for the first time) take a bow at last year's London show.

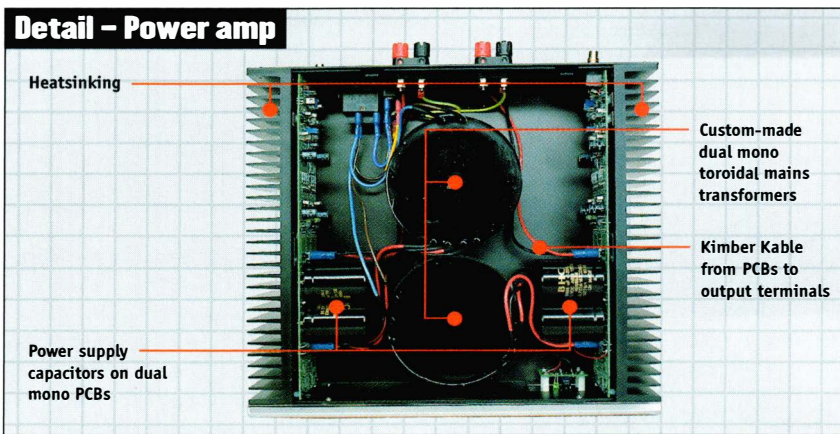
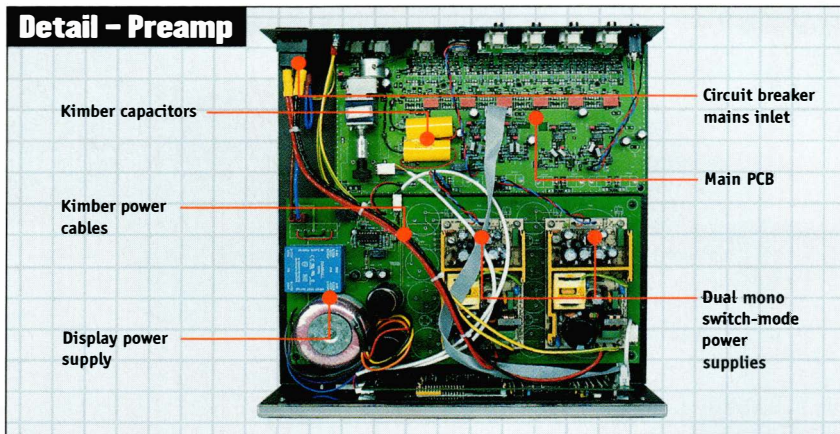
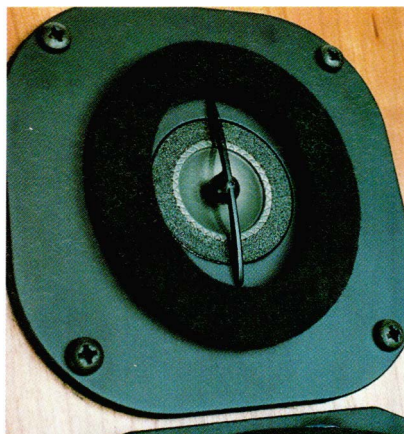
As you can see it's no ordinary system either. The preamp and power amp are variations on the Samuel Johnson components that we

reviewed way back in *HFC* 201. The SJ amps had beautiful casework but quite a bright, edgy sound that wasn't to all tastes and little had been heard from the brand over the last four years. But Andrews had seen their potential and convinced designer Norman Johnson to make up some examples incorporating his component choices. The result is a 50-watt pre/power partnership with sonic and aesthetic qualifications to die for.

You can see without opening the lids that these amps have had the RA touch. The feet are large oak cones and all but one pair of input sockets on the preamp come fitted with Shorties – noise-reducing phono plugs, claimed to stop the inputs acting as aerials for RFI (radio frequency interference). Both pre and power amp are supplied with RA Classic PowerKord mains leads and a half-metre pair of Crystal-Cu interconnects, so you've enough to hook pre to power and one source to the pre.

Inside the SJA1 preamp you'll find a switch mode power supply, Kimber cabling and Kimber capacitors in a circuit that keeps signal





paths to a minimum. One unusual feature, aside from the rear-mounted headphone socket, is that half the inputs have a different input sensitivity (360mV compared to 500mV), designed to make them better suited to lower output sources like older tuners or tape decks. There is also an alternative version of input one, marked HDCD, designed for high-output HDCD players (we've not come across any yet).

The SJA2 power amp sits in another distinctive wood inset into chrome-faced box, and contains a more traditional power supply along with the Kimber components found in the preamp. It produces a mere 50 watts per channel but claims to double this into half the load (four ohms), which makes it an unusual beast. This low power is all you need for a pair of highly efficient Quave LS1 speakers – these offer a tremendous 97dB sensitivity alongside an impedance that never drops below eight ohms if the supplied figures are to be believed.

The reason for this high ease of drive is the quarter wave loading that the main driver 'sees', which tricks it into functioning as if the air mass it's working with is identical back and front. The base of the speaker is open, a bit like a horn mouth, the inside of the speaker being a simple tapering pipe. The LS1 is supplied with two sets of feet, both oak cones, but one set has spikes attached for carpeted floors. This set also comes preset so that it leans the speaker back to project sound upwards.

The main drive unit is a substantial ten-inch paper coned bruiser with pro origins and a

“We’d defy anyone not to be totally engrossed by a system this musical.”

doped fabric surround, from the high-sensitivity, short-throw school. The tweeter is a Focal inverted metal dome with a ring of felt glued on to reduce diffraction off the cabinet edge. The six-sided cabinet functions as both an inherently stiff enclosure and makes corner siting aesthetically pleasing – which is a good thing because that's where they're meant to sit. Each pair is supplied with a 2.5m terminated pair of Kimber 8TC speaker cable that's also used as internal wiring to connect the drive units and their minimalist Kimber Kap crossover, a device that, given the size of the bass/mid unit, operates at a high 6.5kHz.

Alongside the single-wire terminals that sit rather high on the speaker is an earth terminal that is attached to the chassis of the main driver. Hefty earth cables are supplied to connect to a mains earth, but you'll need a chunky mains plug per speaker or an RA distribution block to do this.

SOUND QUALITY

As they are the lightest elements in this system we plugged the SJ pre/power amps into our reference speakers and source to see how they sound on their own. The result makes for

compelling if slightly hard-edged listening, a jaunty, expansive and nimble sound that still veers a little too close to the bright side. But the snappy timing is addictive, as is the impressive level of detail on offer.

Bringing in a pair of Quave LS1 speakers proved less straightforward because of the unusual way they vent from the base. Placed in free space they produce a well-timed, highly detailed sound that is surprisingly short on bass. Put them close to the wall or the corner as the handbook suggests and the bass reinforcement is a little overwhelming. While they give a good result wherever you put them there is a tantalising aspect to the ▶



Q & A

We spoke to master tweaker turned component manufacturer Russ Andrews about his new system



HFC: Why launch these amplifiers now?

RA: Because our customers keep asking for them. I've had electronics in the past but they weren't a success because even though the sound was great I couldn't get them to look good enough. When I came across the SJ amps I thought they looked fantastic but wasn't impressed with the sound. So I said to them if I were to change the electronics, would you make them?

What have you done on the inside of the amps?

Basically I cut out the over-engineering in the SJ amps by removing unnecessary elements and simplifying the circuit. I improved some crucial capacitors, like coupling caps which I upgraded to Kimber caps. I massively changed the power supply, which in the preamp went from quite a number of linear power supplies to just a couple of switch-mode PSUs.

With the power amp again it was a matter of cutting out the belt and braces over-engineering – the basic design was fine. We improved the mains supply, put Schottky diodes in the power supply, and used better caps but we didn't use a switch mode in there because in my view you can't get enough transient current from them.

What's the difference between a quarter-wave, a horn and a transmission-line speaker design?

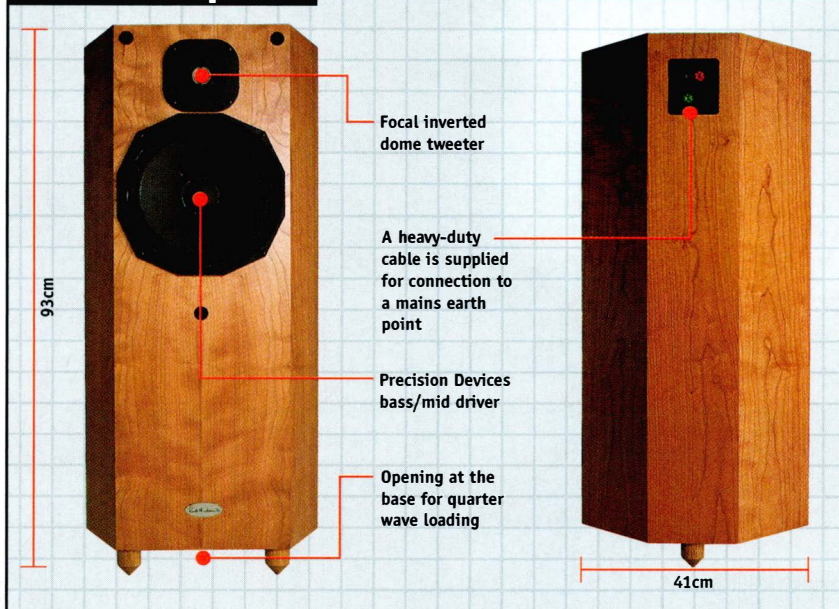
The divisions are somewhat blurred, but I think the essential difference is that you are not loading the rear energy of the driver as tends to be the case with a horn design. You've got a horn of sorts, in fact it's a tapered pipe, but you're not stuffing it with anything to absorb that energy which a transmission line does. With the quarter wave the aim is to have the same air load on the back and front of the driver, or as close as is possible.

What does the drive unit earthing do?

I suspect it's either grounding earth eddy currents induced by the coil and/or discharging static – those are two explanations I've heard. But it seems to work and in a surround system it's astonishing – the extra channels seem to amplify the effect.



Detail – Loudspeaker



□ bass that makes you feel that if the perfect position could be found you may get deep bass as well as other qualities on offer. In the end it becomes clear that the nature of bass from this speaker is so different to regular designs that you're not likely to get the same result. Instead you adapt to enjoying the tunefulness of the speaker's bottom end and realise that giving up effects for musical insight is a worthwhile compromise.

The system is dominated by the speakers which have a very distinctive character, a slight hollowness to the bass and a seemingly softened midrange. One's initial reaction is that they must be colored, and while you adapt to their way of sounding quite easily there's a sense that theirs is not the most neutral of approaches. Fortunately the system's pros easily outweigh its cons and we'd defy anyone not to be engrossed by a system this musical. It produces an expansive, open and easy sound that responds to the atmosphere on recordings. Keith Jarrett's *Eyes Of The Heart* LP has rarely sounded this palpable – the man, his piano and the rest of the band are there in front of you, playing loud enough without distortion to make this a living, breathing performance.

Replacing the wooden feet with spiked versions and finding a way to connect the speakers to an earth point had positive effects on bass performance. The spikes tightened things up but the earthing initially made the sound harsher, until both speakers were earthed to the same circuit to get extra definition and solidity to the bass and an overall gelling of the sound that takes the system into another league. It's as if the colorations disappear and you can hear right into every note – the depth, colour and shape of sounds is clear yet the timing and dynamics of the music are not lost. In fact they are reinforced by this extra resolve.

This is a far from conventional amp/speaker system that often produces quite spectacular results because of its impressive dynamic headroom, excellent timing and remarkable degree of insight into the elements that make up the music. It takes some time to get to grips with its abilities but at every stage you can tell that things are improving and that the potential is worth the effort – now it will be difficult for me to go back to a conventional system, speakers especially! The LS1 does have more character than most speakers and as such exaggerates certain aspects of recordings; some sound significantly better than usual, the uncompressed, live recordings in particular, while others – Rage Against The Machine springs to mind from the test period – are less successful. Separately, these are interesting products with some serious strengths, but together they come into their own. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT – Quave LSI loudspeaker

SOUND >> 86%	EASE OF DRIVE >> 98%
BUILD >> 84%	VALUE >> 87%

CONCLUSION
Does timing and resolution superbly. A little unusual tonally, especially bass, but the result is extremely engaging and revealing.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE
>> 87%

VERDICT – SJA1/SJA2 amplifier

SOUND >> 85%	BUILD >> 95%
FEATURES >> 90%	VALUE >> 87%

CONCLUSION
Timing and detail to die for but may be too hard-edged for many speakers. Superb design plus a good range of inputs/outputs.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE
>> 87%

pure quality



ECS EA-1

mono power amplifier



These power amps are very impressive devices. They seem to be extremely neutral, responding to every nuance of the music in a clear, coherent and swift fashion that lets the sound breathe - in truth, they are highly capable in all respects.

Jason Kennedy, Hi-Fi Choice

Call for pricing/demonstration



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MUSICAL VISION

It can't play DVD-A or SACD, but Arcam's new 'low cost' DVD player is a master of sound and vision

PRODUCT: Arcam DiVA DV78

TYPE: DVD-Video player

PRICE: £700

KEY FEATURES: Size (WxHxD): 44x9x35cm

Ⓢ Weight: 5.2kg Ⓢ PAL/NTSC progressive scan video

Ⓢ 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson DAC for stereo output

Ⓢ Front panel navigation button

CONTACT ☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

Arcam had a problem on its hands. The company designs its own DVD players, instead of buying off-the-shelf models and badge-engineering them. Their challenge was to make a product which produced the Arcam quality, but at a lower price. The solution is the £700 Arcam DiVA DV78.

It's an oversimplification, but the DV78 is essentially an Arcam DV88 Plus, stripped of a few features like the chance of a DVD-Audio replay upgrade. Arcam took the successful DV88 Plus circuit and reworked it extensively for the DV78 to make production as efficient as possible and as such features a single four-layer board and a simplified power supply.

Stripping back the DV88 Plus does make for

a simple specification. It supports CD and DVD-Video, as well as Video CD, S-VCD and all of the recordable/rewriteable DVD and CD formats (barring DVD-RAM). It can even cope with JPEG, WMA and MP3 files. It has no built-in decoder and only one Scart socket. It has limited multi-room control via a mini-jack, but is hardly RS232-controlled.

This is another progressive scan player, which can support both PAL 625p and NTSC 525p pictures. Progressive is now officially 'Nothing Special', since these days it features on the majority of DVD players above £150. However, Arcam was the first to implement PAL progressive scan into a player (previously you could only watch films in the superior, joggle-free frame-by-frame progressive picture on American NTSC discs). It is also widely considered to be the best implementation of progressive scan, this side of hyper-expensive DVD players. It uses all the right elements, with a Zoran Vaddis V processor, which allows per-pixel motion-adaptive progressive scanning, as well as RGB and component video that seamlessly convert NTSC to PAL and can still produce a 625p picture.

Zoran chips are also a feature of the audio, with 32-bit Zoran DSP running alongside the 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson WM8470 DAC used

specifically for the stereo analogue output stage. This includes HDCD processing (remember that?). It also squirts PCM signals up to 24-bit/96kHz (but not DVD-A) as well as Dolby Digital and DTS datastreams along the coaxial or optical digital connections.

Although it lacks the bomb-proof build of the FMJ range, the DiVA player is still solidly built, with an all-metal cabinet that stands taller and is heftier than most ultra-slim players today. Its sheet steel and aluminium construction makes for a player that is rock solid, only really wimping out in the face of much more costly high-end designs.

Arcam has made slight headway with the new CR415 remote control. It's a little less grey and ghostly than the previous handset – instead it's dark grey and almost as ghostly. The grey-on-charcoal lettering is a bit easier to read than the charcoal-on-grey of the previous design, but is still arranged less than intuitively and finding the right key entails peering at the handset for half a minute to find which of the near-identical buttons to push. Backlighting wouldn't go amiss, either.

If the remote is somehow sucked into a temporal vortex (like the back of the sofa), there is an extra button on the front panel of the player marked 'navigation' that allows the front panel buttons to take on extra features and behave like a remote control nailed to the front panel. Aside from that extra button, the





player looks identical to every DiVA player since the first, whether in black or silver livery.

SOUND AND VIDEO QUALITY

For hi-fi enthusiasts, the least important part of a DVD player is its picture performance. But that's a shame, because the DV78 is a beauty for playing a picture. Wave goodbye to those artefacts, those digital dark-cat-in-a-coal-bunker blockinesses and jaggly lines; the picture on the DV78 will make your TV set, plasma or projector come alive. Especially the latter – on a big screen, it has the layering, impressive detail, rock solid picture stability and colour needed to make *Pirates Of The Caribbean* feel like you are watching it at the multiplex. It's also painless to de-regionalise the DV78: press open, type 1111, followed by 01 for region one, 02 for region two or 13 for auto-region select and the player is ready to cope with discs from all around the globe.

But a good picture alone doesn't make a good DVD player. Fortunately, this is a player with extremely fine sound too. Leaving the picture on while playing music does have a slight advantage, in that the on-screen display gives you a page on your TV telling you which track is being played, elapsed time and other useful information. It can even supply file names for your own MP3s burned on to CD-R.

Musically the DV78 is highly competent and CD audio replay is simply sumptuous. The performance through the analogue outputs makes it one of the few DVD players that can pass muster as a CD spinner. It isn't the most quicksilver of players and has a slight puffy sluggishness to the sound common to most DVD players in CD mode. Nevertheless, it has a real-world sense of size and scale. It's also detailed in stereo, especially in the midband.

The DV78 has that range and subtlety that escapes most DVD players on CD. This is important when playing something like *Cannonball* by Damien Rice on his *O* album. The delicate range of his voice is swamped by the rest of the music, but the DV78 is far more adept at playing a musical performance than



“It’s surprisingly close to the performance of some of the better CD-only devices, making it a real star by any standard.”

most DVD players, on or near the money.

It's also reasonably good at playing music with some beat, often the *bête noir* of DVD replay. Stick on *Step Into My Office*, *Baby* from Belle & Sebastian's *Dear Catastrophe Waitress* and the player keeps a good poppy rhythm, without compromising the Trevor Horn mix. This is still some way from the performance of top-notch CD players, but is surprisingly close to the performance of some of the better CD-only devices at £500 and below. That makes it a real star by any standard.

There are two things missing from the line-up though – HDMI/DVI digital picture links and DVD-Audio/SACD replay. Still, the Arcam is proof that there's more to life than a full spec sheet. The replay through analogue picture – especially in progressive scan mode – closes the gap between analogue and digital. You have to use a superior digital picture system (via Denon's DVD-A11 for example) to offer any real challenge to the quality.

The lack of DVD-Audio and SACD replay may appear to be the more bitter pill to swallow, but the current paucity of must-own DVD-A and SACD material makes many wonder about the absolute value of these formats, aside from specmanship. Certainly as a CD player and a DVD-Video player, the Arcam DV78 is first rate – unless you are actively seeking multichannel DVD-A or SACD discs, it's what most people would need for the best compromise. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY	
DVD-AUDIO ✗	DVD-R ✓
DVD-VIDEO ✓	DVD-RAM ✗
SACD ✗	MP3 AUDIO ✓
CD ✓	WMA AUDIO ✓
HDCD ✓	AAC AUDIO ✗
CD-R/RW ✓	VIDEO CD ✓
DVD-R/RW ✓	JPEG PICS ✓

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

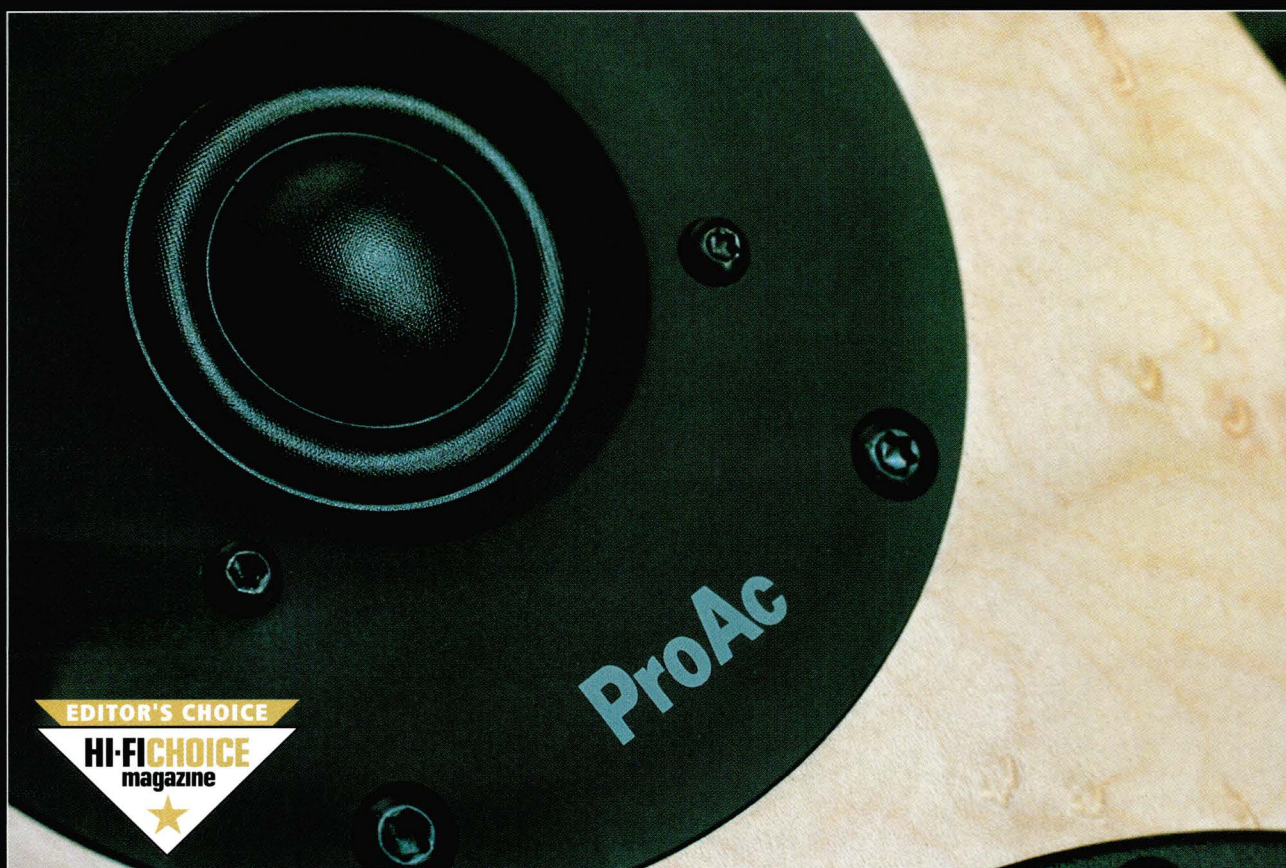
VISION >> 92%

BUILD >> 79%

VALUE >> 86%

CONCLUSION
 Ask yourself if you really need SACD or DVD-Audio, because this sort of CD sound and DVD picture quality is hard to find on a universal player, especially for this kind of money. Otherwise, there's nothing wrong at the price.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%



THE FLAT RESPONSE

ProAc's newbie will work with almost any amplifier. Is it the ultimate high-end speaker?

PRODUCT ProAc Response D25

TYPE 2-way floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE From £2,995 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 22x107x25cm

⊗ Weight: 26kg ⊗ Sensitivity/impedance: 88dB/8ohms (nom)

⊗ 165mm polypropylene bass/mid cone

⊗ 25mm soft dome tweeter ⊗ Ported through plinth

CONTACT ☎ 01280 700147

Ⓜ www.proac-loudspeakers.com

The ProAc Response range is one of the most popular British high-end loudspeaker lines in the world, and the ProAc Response 2.5 was the one of the most successful £2,000-plus speakers, ever. Changing it would be a daunting and perhaps foolish task – geese and golden eggs, or babies and bath water, all spring to mind. But the Response 2.5 was almost eight years old and change was inevitable.

Enter the £2,995 Response D25. The intervening years have brought about profound changes in materials, science and technology. Those Scan-speak carbon-fibre impregnated paper cone bass drivers are

gone, replaced instead by an identically sized 165mm custom unit made in association with UK pro-speaker designer Volt (the driver brand behind the likes of PMC), with a special polypropylene cone on a die-cast chassis. ProAc's designer Stewart Tyler suggests these up the sensitivity by a couple of dB, but sourcing your own drive unit is an extremely expensive way to crack this nut and shows just how seriously ProAc takes speaker design. This is allied to a heavily modified Scan-Speak 25mm soft dome tweeter with a special inner damping and a curious surround arrangement, which looks more like that of a bass driver. The crossover is redesigned too, featuring ProAc's proprietary High Quality Crossover design with custom components and wired throughout with ProAc's own multi-strand oxygen-free cable.

Externally at least, the cabinet appears unchanged, and with its offset tweeters and grilles, the speaker is functionally identical to its predecessor, the Response 2.5. They are also just as damped and rigid and, at 26kg a piece, just as damnably heavy too. But there

are some significant differences.

The down-firing port that moves air out through the plinth of the speaker makes the speaker less fussy about positioning (the port on the Response 2.5 was a rear-firing affair and this meant that at least a good metre was needed between the back of the speaker and the rear wall). This feature also masks some of the more obvious 'chuffing' endemic to ports. By loading air under the speaker, it acts almost in the same way as a horn, which



then raises efficiency and room coupling as well as evening out the resonance.

All of which helps to make this a speaker that is suggested to be supremely easy to drive. ProAc claims an efficiency of 88dB, a nominal impedance of eight ohms, a frequency response from 20Hz to 30kHz and a range of compatible amplifiers between ten watts and 200 watts. But there are watts and watts, and ProAc is quite selective about the type of low-powered amplification it wishes to see partnered with the Response D25. Decent Class A transistor or valve amplifier systems are the recommended choices. Sure, it can be partnered with cheaper integrated amplifiers, but the quality of the speaker is far too good for amplifiers that cost anything short of £3,000.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and the Response 2.5 was one of the most copied speakers ever produced (type 'ProAc Response 2.5' into a Google search and the first listings are for DIY versions of the speaker; ProAc itself hardly gets a look-in). The down-firing port and the relative scarcity of the drive units might make this a tougher act to copy, but you can bet the DIY-ers will be out with their jigsaws and soldering irons soon. This is just too good a speaker to pass up. Unfortunately, few DIY-ers will ever get the finish as good as ProAc can; the company makes the D25 in seven finishes as standard (yew costing £3,295, while the distinctive birds-eye maple finish of the review samples cost £3,575), and an even wider, funkier range can be had to special order.

SOUND QUALITY

Somehow, the Response D25 addresses the criticisms levelled at the Response 2.5 without introducing any negative elements along the way. Given that the criticisms of the 2.5 always came with the "this is nit-picking" caveat, the bloom and slight tendency toward a saccharine sound have gone, but that hasn't turned the speaker into a harsh detail retriever. It is more comfortable in less-than-perfect surroundings, but it hasn't lost any of the speaker's critical faculties in the process. And although the D25 can go louder than the 2.5, there's no hint of harshness or harshness to the performance.

ProAc's D25 produces a sound that is both audiophile-friendly and naturally musical (the two do not automatically go hand-in-hand). This is the key to the the speaker's success – it can sound magical with those hi-fi demonstration discs, yet not overly analytical when it's time to listen to something produced under less sterile conditions.

It has this wonderful facility to fill a room with sound. Even something sparse and simple like Nick Drake's *Pink Moon* or Damien Rice's *O* – just a singer and his guitar – takes on a fully embodied, room-filling sound that seemingly makes the artist physically appear

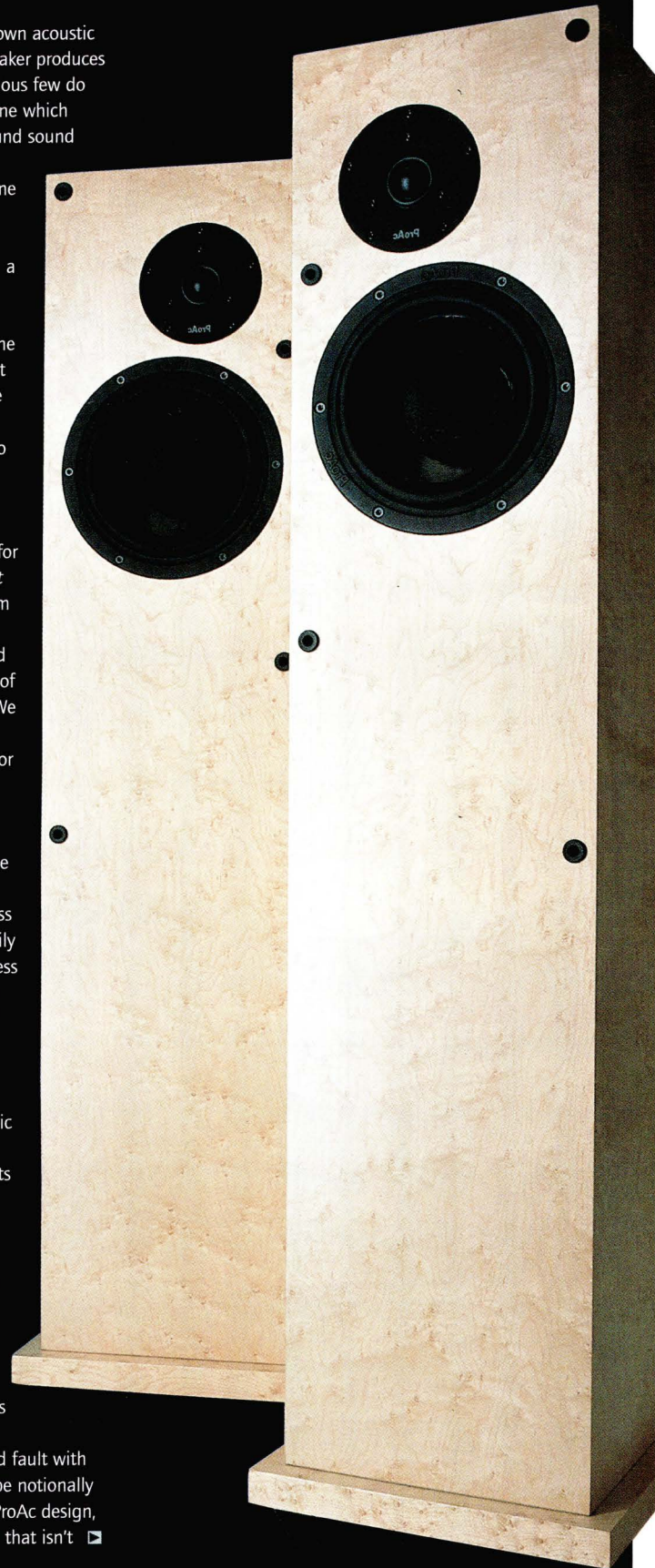
between the speakers, in their own acoustic space. Yes, practically every speaker produces a soundstage of sorts, but precious few do such a good job at delivering one which seems so close to reality. Surround sound attempts to fill a room, but you would really have to deploy some deadly serious surround sound components to make a room disappear more effectively than a pair of these ProAc's can.

It's a supremely detailed speaker, too. Classic jazz from the early 1960s can be a tough test for loudspeakers. Why? Because the analogue stereo tape recordings were early enough to be reasonably free from processing, while the artistes were so consummately professional they had no need for chop-ins. The out-takes of *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* from the second disc of *The Great Summit* by Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington made any form of veiling immediately apparent. We heard studio chat, papers shuffling... all of which makes for a fascinating insight into this classic recording, and it was all presented beautifully.

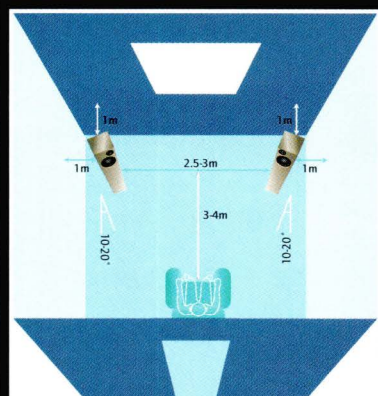
There is a slight warmth to the ProAc tone, adding richness to piano tones and a bloom to bass guitars. But this is not necessarily a criticism. It is this same richness that makes people still listen to valve amplifiers, not the sort of lushness that strongly colours music. Any negative feelings toward the richness is quickly ameliorated by the easy dynamic range of the speaker, which bounces along far better than its predecessor. American high-enders like to talk of microdynamics, the way that smaller dynamic sounds can be resolved within a bigger, more dynamic sound – the ProAc is certainly adept at digging out these subtle elements within a recording, which makes for a sure sign of quality.

It behoves the reviewer to find fault with any product and no thing can be notionally perfect. But, in fairness to the ProAc design, it's a real struggle to find much that isn't ▀

“They produce a fully embodied, room-filling sound that seemingly makes the artist physically appear between the speakers.”



SET-UP



POSITIONING

By placing the port under the speaker, instead of firing directly to the front or back, ProAc has made the D25 a more flexible speaker than many high-end designs. It can be placed slightly closer to walls than its predecessor, but it's difficult to ignore the fact that this metre-tall speaker needs room to breathe.

The optimum position for a pair of D25s is approximately 2.5-3m apart, ideally with at least 1m between each speaker and the side and rear walls. The tweeters are offset and mirror-imaged – they're best positioned with the tweeters on the inside, although in extremis, you can use them with the tweeters 'out' if you need to extend the imagery in a small room.

Ultimately, if you are listening in a small room, choose another speaker, especially as placing the speakers more than 2m apart necessitates sitting at least 3m from the speakers.

Toe-in is important in defining the imagery of the ProAc, and there's some latitude in positioning. However, the best toe-in seems to be about 20 degrees, so that from the listening seat, you'll see mostly front baffle and just a little bit of the inside face of the speaker. Expect a long run-in time.

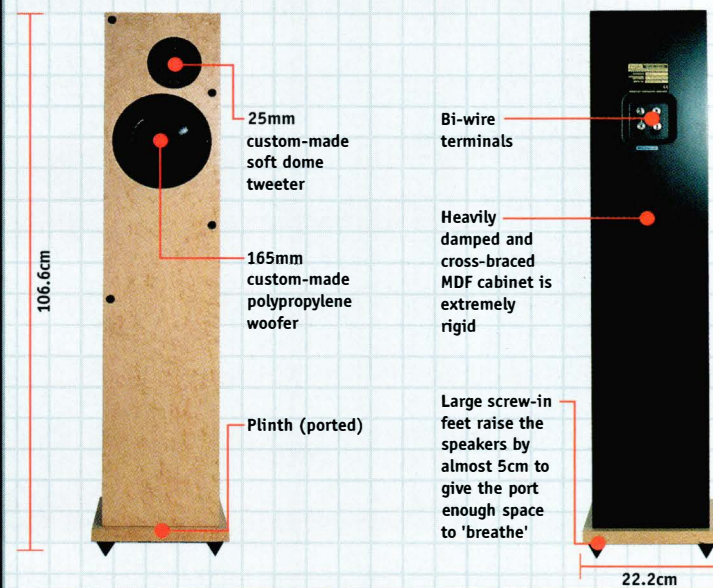
SYSTEM MATCHING

ProAc's D25 is easy to drive, but the speaker is all quality, not quantity. A ten-watt, well-designed valve amplifier or a 25-watt Class A transistor amp of the best quality will sound considerably better than a so-so 100-watt.

The character and resolution of the D25 preclude cheaper amplifiers, but also make it a perfect choice for high-end integrated amps like the Lavardin Model IT, a 2x45-watt design that captivates anyone who hears it. Alternatively, why not try an amp from Audio Research, as used by the speaker's designer. The SP16 preamplifier partnered with the 50-watt VS55 – or indeed the VS155 50W integrated amplifier reviewed on p61 – are a fine match for the D25.

The choice of cable is important, but not overtly so. The speaker seems happiest with a good multi-strand copper cable, rather than solid-core or silver cable designs. However, it's not a cable-crucial speaker, so choose what best suits the amplifier.

Detail



“The Response D25 is (by a long way) the tightest and most rhythmic-sounding speaker that ProAc has ever produced.”

❑ just pointless criticism. I could say, the Response D25 isn't as 'good' as a Wilson WATT/Puppy 7 system or an Avalon Eidolon, but that's akin to saying that a Porsche Boxster isn't as 'good' as an Aston Martin DB9. And even here, it depends how you define 'good' – if you factor in the price and compatibility, the Porsche and the ProAc come out as the real winners.

Perhaps the only solid criticism of ProAc's of old is that they weren't the automatic choice for those who prefer the tighter, more rhythmically controlled sound of, say, Linn or Naim systems. Then again, it could equally be argued that those who prefer the rich, enveloping sound of ProAc are just as unlikely

to choose the more etched and stark sound of Linn or Naim. Even this is subject to some rapprochement as this is (by a long way) the tightest and most rhythmic speaker ProAc has ever produced, while Linn and (in particular) Naim both recently produced electronics that are much fuller sounding than their stereotypical 'sound' might lead one to expect.

If the harshest criticism that can be levelled at the Response D25 at its price point is little more than an observation about compatibility, then it seems inevitable that ProAc has another winner on its hands. Which means, if you go to audition them, you will more than likely leave with a pair for yourself. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%



PRO

Real high-end sweetness and detail, without an eight-grand (or more) price tag. Less position-fussy than most high-end speaker designs.

BUILD >> 92%



CON

Compatibility doesn't mean it will necessarily work well with el-cheapo amplifiers, and rhythmically speaking, it's still not as precise as some others in the high end.

VALUE >> 89%



CONCLUSION

ProAc has another winner on its hands with this tall, easy-driving speaker that's capable of producing a truly magical sound. Once heard, forever smitten, unless of course you are a real rhythm nut.

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



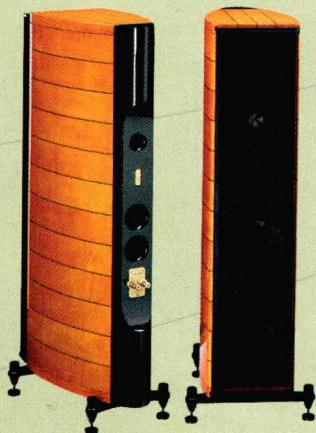
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CONCERT HOME SERIES
L - R: SOLO, CONCERTINO, GRAVIS

AMATI HOMAGE



Franco Serblin is too much the artist to settle into a routine, too passionate a designer to sit still. After 20 years, he remains driven to discover better methods for reproducing sound. And just as his views change the way we look at loudspeakers, so has his medium – Sonus Faber – evolved alongside his need to further the loudspeaker art.

His loudspeakers have developed into three distinct ranges – all the better to address the needs of an increasingly sophisticated marketplace. After all, with maturity comes clarity of vision and intent. At the time of Sonus Faber's birth, there was no home theatre to address, and digital audio was in its infancy.

In 2004, the world of home entertainment encompasses discrete 5.1 channel surround sound, purist 2-channel analogue audio, emerging digital technologies such as SACD and DVD-A and more.

Sonus Faber welcomes the future, yet it shows respect for the past, the most vivid example being the Homage series. This luxurious range consists of the stand-mounted two-way Guarneri the three-way floor standing Amati, and the brand new Stradivari all embodying artisan skills

Sonus faber.



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of centuries past: the beauty and warmth of hand-fashioned cabinetry, wrapped around components which deliver sound worthy of the names of the greatest stringed instruments of all time. For more affordable installations, the Cremona range comprising of the Cremona floor standing speaker, the Cremona auditor and the Cremona center and subwoofer forge a direct link with the speakers, which established the Sonus Faber, name. And last but not least to serve a multitude of channels, the dazzling, award winning ultra-modern Concerto Home series contains everything from satellite speakers and slim floor-standing models, to a centre channel, to the new Gravis subwoofer.

Whatever Sonus Faber speaker you acquire, whether you are reacting to the looks and touch or the sound it produces, there is only one response "Che bello!

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IT'S PLAYBACK TIME

Marantz's first sub-£1,000 universal player takes on Pioneer and Denon in the do-it-all stakes

PRODUCT Marantz DV6400

TYPE Universal DVD player

PRICE £500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x8x21cm

Weight: 2.2kg • Integral Dolby Digital/DTS decoders
• Audio outputs: 2-channel & 5.1 analogue, standard optical & coaxial digital • Video outputs: Composite (phono, Scart), S-Video, RGB (Scart), component

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Marantz is getting serious about the affordable end of the market for so-called universal disc spinners. But, the DV6400 is worryingly light in weight, and the shallow enclosure a bit disconcerting – can this be a serious player? The range of outputs shows nothing remiss unless you expect to find encrypted hi-res digital audio or digital video outputs (i.Link, HDMI *et al*), which are not available from Marantz or any other source at this price. On the plus side, the alloy front panel is rather impressive, and the player's controls feel good. Its disc handling is smooth and quiet, though not especially quick.

Inside and out, the player bears considerable resemblance to the entry-level universal from Marantz's sister company Denon – the £400 DVD-1400. Unsurprisingly, the Pioneer mechanism used previously by Marantz is not in evidence, claimed not to fit the slimline housing. The SACD decoder is Sony's CDX2753R, and there's a trio of stereo audio DACs from Texas Instruments: the DSD1702E, which accepts one-bit DSD and up to 24-bit PCM data, with an 8x digital interpolation filter for PCM and fourth-order noise shaping for DSD. Unlike more costly Marantz players, the DV6400 doesn't extend to the use of discrete HDAM output modules, contenting itself with a simpler solution in the form of three dual-channel M4580 integrated op-amps.

Like any self-respecting universal player, the DV6400 makes a decent stab at playing virtually any kind of disc. A full list is reproduced in the *Format Compatibility* box, but includes all the usual picture disc and MP3 options as well as the headline disc types – DVD-Video, DVD-Audio, CD (of course) and SACD. To make it even more self-sufficient, the player includes its own Dolby Digital and DTS decoders as well as a 'virtual surround' feature which works after a fashion from two loudspeakers, but don't expect too much. Basic bass management is available in the time-honoured fashion. This means you're not reliant on the decoders in a full home cinema amplifier, and you could, for example, use an



FORMAT COMPATIBILITY

DVD-AUDIO	✓	DVD+R	✓
DVD-VIDEO	✓	DVD-RAM	✗
SACD	✓	MP3 AUDIO	✓
CD	✓	WMA AUDIO	✓
HD CD	✗	AAC AUDIO	✗
CD-R/RW	✓	VIDEO CD	✓
DVD-R/RW	✓	JPEG PICS	✓

Arcam DIVA A90 stereo integrated amp with 7.1-channel input board plus a DIVA P90/3 power amp – a five-channel amp combo reviewed in *HFC* 250 which has no decoders, but which offers better basic sound quality than comparably priced full-on alternatives.

Outputs available include, on the audio side, separate two and six (5.1) channel outputs which can be connected to stereo and multichannel bypass inputs on the partnering amplifier or receiver, though the stereo tracks of SACD discs are not available from the stereo output (and there is no audio output from SACD through the Scart lead for that matter). There are also coaxial digital and optical digital outputs, and on the video side, composite and S-Video, as well as the previously mentioned Scart which also carries composite and RGB. Component video is also available. Picture aspect ratios supported include 4:3, pan and scan, and 16:9.

These basic facilities are supplemented by a vast array of secondary features, which include (in no particular order): still, fast and slow motion play, random/shuffle play, track programming, chapter, title, A-B and group repeat (depending on disc type), 2x and 4x zoom and pan, plus a bit rate indicator. There's much more in a similar vein, though it takes

some dedication to work out and remember how it's all accessed. Like most DVD players, you can stop play of a DVD-Video disc midstream, in the knowledge that a resume function will simply pick up where you left off.

SOUND AND VIDEO QUALITY

It is difficult to know why this is the case, but SACD sound quality was consistently on the dull and bland side throughout our test period. The top end failed to open out properly, while the low frequencies too often sounded heavy and bloated. The result was a rather overcooked, heavyweight sound lacking in tension and clarity, which was tonally and dynamically bland. The new (and excellently recorded) Eleanor McEvoy *Early Hours*, sounded uncomfortable and a touch bloated – vocals were uncharacteristically restrained and dull, a pale imitation of the way this excellent recording normally reproduces. The lush and expansive opening of Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* lacked articulation and space,



marantz

SUPER AUDIO CD / DVD PLAYER DV6400

STANDBY
●
POWER ON/STANDBY



SUPER AUDIO
CD

AUDIO
EX.

DOLBY
DIGITAL

DIGITAL
dts
SURROUND

DVD
AUDIO/VIDEO

“A recording of the *Richard Strauss Four Last Songs* on DVD-Audio had a raptness and concentration that was genuinely moving.”

making it hard to hear between crowded notes.

It's tempting on the basis of this kind of finding to suggest that there's something not quite right about the sound of SACD as a format, and some people do. In fact Marantz makes some strong SACD players, and so long as it is understood that we're talking about one particular model, and not making a statement about the format, we have here a player that appears to be stronger with PCM data (CD, DVD-A etc) than it is with SACD's DSD.

Indeed, the Marantz sounded better balanced when playing DVD-As, and also CDs. The bass no longer overwhelmed the balance, and the treble took on a much stronger feel of life and variety. It no longer sounded compressed, and the whole demeanour of the player was more lively, more active and within limits, more analytical. It was easier to hear what was going on. Of the few worthwhile DVD-Audio recordings we have access to – worthwhile in the sense that they deliver something more than would be expected of an equivalent CD – a recently acquired recording of the *Richard Strauss Four Last Songs* on Silverline (Odense Symphony Orchestra) had a raptness and concentration that was moving, and which

wasn't matched by the Dolby Digital 5.1 recording on the same disc (included to ensure replay compatibility with DVD-Video-only players). The sound has richness and a full balance, but nothing excessive, and no obvious lack of fine detail or presence.

CD performance was little worse than DVD-Audio, or at least it was capable of being so given the vastly wider choice of raw material to listen to. This was especially true if the 'Audio EX' mode was used, which turns off the video circuitry, and helps the player generate a purer, more open and cleaner sound. It has to be said that none of the high-tech recordings we played for this test had anything on the old Solti *Wagner Ring*, the very first *Ring* for the LP era, which consistently sounded more tactile, expressive, alive and impassioned on CD than any DVD-A or SACD. But from experience this recording is capable of more than the Marantz can give.

In its video-playing role, the DV6400 is on strong ground as a good mainstream player. It lacks high-tech niceties like PAL progressive scan, but all the essentials are present and correct, and it produces clean, well saturated images on screen, with low noise and modest

levels of MPEG artefacts, though the Dream Machine DLP projector in the replay chain did its own processing to reduce motion-related nasties. The only slight letdown was a slow layer change on dual layer discs.

The DV6400 shows how modern universal players of good design play CDs much better than earlier DVD players. It sounds warm, inviting and transparent, but there's some way to go before this or any other £500 universal player can play CDs like a heavyweight. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 77% ■■■■■■■■■■ SUB RATINGS CD 80% SACD 67% DVD-A 84%	PRO Does it all at a reasonable price, in some style. The basic sonic balance of DVD-Audio is warm without being overly lush, with good CD and DVD-Video performance to match.
VISION >> 81% ■■■■■■■■■■	CON SACD replay performance was not of the standard of DVD-Audio, or in some respects even CD. No SACD output from stereo line out.
FEATURES >> 85% ■■■■■■■■■■	
VALUE >> 88% ■■■■■■■■■■	
CONCLUSION A very competent starter universal player, the DV6400 is a thoroughly presentable model with a clean, open sound with most disc types. However, it is slightly disappointing with SACD discs, which tend to lack detail, air and presence.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 83%	

HEGEL'S BELLE

Hegel's integrated amp may seem straightforward but there are some unusual ideas under its skin

PRODUCT Hegel H1

TYPE Stereo integrated amplifier

PRICE £1,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x8x44cm © Weight: 15kg © Power output: 120W/8ohms © Inputs: 5x RCA unbalanced, 1x XLR balanced © Outputs: heavy duty speaker terminals, 2x RCA pre-outs, record-out

CONTACT ☎ 01785 711232 # www.hegel.com

Although it hails from another part of Scandinavia, Hegel has a lot of similarities with Denmark's Densen. Both companies are run by people whose enthusiasm is clear even if you've never met them and both concentrate on small ranges of electronics with distinctive physical and sonic characteristics. Hegel is Norwegian, one of the few electronics brands from that part of the world to have made it to the UK. It's run by Bent Holter whose previous life was spent in and around recording studios. One might reasonably assume therefore that he likes to play his music pretty loud and in well-damped rooms, but rather than transform the rooms he listens to music in, Bent has designed electronics that emulate the powerful but smooth sound of a good studio – we're not talking Yamaha NS10s here!

We have had two goes with the Hegel

CDP2A CD player in both solus and group tests (*HFC 250* and *HFC 252*) and it acquitted itself admirably on both occasions. Now it's the turn of the entry-level amplifier in the range, the high stepping H1 integrated – high stepping because it sits on aluminium legs that are both taller than average and sit further inboard. They're also completely unshod bare metal, so care needs to be taken when slotting the amp into a rack as the lack of rubber or felt means they will scrape painted or varnished surfaces. The reasoning behind all of this is of course sound quality (the same reasoning behind the rest of the product) and therefore entirely acceptable. And it's not as if the thing has spikes sticking out the bottom, which is not unheard of!

The key to the Hegel sound is a technology which Bent calls the SoundEngine that will "continuously watch the audio signal, and if the audio signal contains errors or distortion, the SoundEngine system will dynamically correct errors and distortion, making the audio signal pure and undistorted". Which sounds like what most amp designers call feedback but which Bent explains is more subtle than normal feedback or feed-forward systems. Rather there is a sensing network around each gain stage which measures

differences between input and output. The error is then fed to a threshold detector which, "dependent upon a range of different signal parameters decides if the error of the local gain stage needs to be feed-forward error corrected". The system would therefore seem to be algorithmically based and more complex than regular feedback. The advantage claimed for the SoundEngine is a 20dB improvement in intermodulation distortion without the need for complex circuit topologies – which is quite an ambitious claim. Our measurements of the CDP2A did confirm that its distortion levels are uncommonly low, so perhaps there's something in the system after all.

As far as the user's interface with this amp is concerned everything is pretty straightforward. Hegel's attractive aluminium remote control can be used to vary volume including mute, and drive a CD player that responds to a Philips RC5 signal. You have to manually turn the source select knob on the fascia to switch between one balanced and five single-ended inputs. There are three single-ended outputs, two for power amps and one for a tape deck. The speaker terminals are chunky WBT-style devices for plugs, spades or bare wire. Build quality is very high with lovely slabs of brushed aluminium making up the top and sides with a chunky casting producing that distinctive curved fascia.





“Via the Hegel, all of the funky glory of Outkast’s *The Love Below* was crystal clear, right down to the finest minutiae.”

SOUND QUALITY

The Hegel sound is relaxed and smooth yet also transparent to detail and not short on energy when it's required. In some respects it was a little too smooth at the higher frequencies to be well partnered by our Living Voice Avatar OBX-R speakers whose balance is not a million miles from the H1. Nonetheless many hours of happy listening were enjoyed with an array of sources including an SME Model 20A/vdH Grasshopper turntable and cartridge with a Groove phono stage next to a Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player.

Via the Hegel, all of the funky glory of Outkast's *The Love Below* was crystal clear, right down to the minutiae that differentiates tracks like *She Is In My Lap* from stuff that Funkadelic did 25 years ago. But hey, if you're going to bring something back then this is the sound to use, and it's only on certain tracks that the connection is clear – *Cupid Valentino* could be a Prince tune. The H1 has a slightly warm bass which works extremely well with electric instruments, adding a bit of body to guitar strings and fleshing out bass lines so that speakers which don't normally excel in that department sound meaty.

It seems unusually good at hearing the connections between songs too. Despite using the *Shostakovich Jazz Suites* many a time to assess kit, it had never occurred how similar they are to the tunes used by Italy's answer to

Tom Waits, Paolo Conte, some 60 years later. The H1 lets you hear the complete music as much as the details making up the whole, though you get plenty of the quiet stuff too. There's a real sense of low distortion behind the relaxed presentation – it's never aggressive even when the wick is given some stick.

We tried as much with Him's *Many In High Places...* and found the differentiation between the varied percussive instruments remarkably clear cut, the sound being at once easy and resolute. You get a more grippy, taught sound with other amps but in exchange the H1 does a very convincing job tonally with things like kettle drums, acoustic guitars and voices. Norah Jones was as clear and crisp as you could want her, the piano revealing genuine sparkle if not quite the full image scale that this disc can deliver.

In timing terms, this amp neither emphasises nor smooths over timing cues – it's on the ball and capable of fine temporal resolution, not as forthright as a Densen, say, but more lively than an Arcam. Energy is served well despite the relaxed balance and Massive Attack's *Angel* delivered all of its menace and undertones – the rendition used on TV sounds emasculated by comparison.


What's striking is the degree to which the H1 responds to variations in the recording played through it. Put on John Fahey's *After The Ball* and you'd think it was a bright

amplifier but swap for Norah Jones and you'd be forgiven for thinking that it is a rich, harmonically colourful one. This is a good sign, and one that reflects the impressive transparency of the design. It's not without character; the bass is richer than one might expect of strict neutrality, though whether this suits your system depends on the room and speakers – if the word dry could be used to describe either, this will provide balance.

The Hegel H1 is an amplifier that grows on you. Its resolving skills become more apparent with every disc you spin and its ability to transmit both the essence of the music as well as its constituent parts is a real winner. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT		 <p>PRO Organic, high-resolution sound, transparency to the source, chunky well designed aluminium remote.</p> <p>CON Apparently relaxed presentation won't suit all. No source selection on remote.</p>
SOUND >> 87%		
FEATURES >> 80%		
BUILD >> 89%		
VALUE >> 85%		
<p>CONCLUSION The H1 represents another fine product from the small but very well formed Hegel stable. It's a rich and responsive amplifier that revels in great music with a warmth that encourages non-stop listening.</p>		
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 85%</p>		

CHANGING GUARD

The Epos M12 has dropped its plastic façade for a traditional face, but has it retained its character?

PRODUCT Epos M12.2

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £449 per pair

KEY FEAT RES Size (WxHxD): 20x38x25cm
⊗ Weight: 8kg ⊗ Sensitivity/impedance: 87dB/8ohms
⊗ 150mm polypropylene bass/mid cone ⊗ 25mm aluminium dome tweeter ⊗ Three wood veneer options

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🌐 www.epos-acoustics.com

This pair of speakers may look fairly normal but for Epos they mark a considerable change in style and construction. The brand which made its mark with a larger model, the ES14 in the early eighties, has not gone in for traditional veneered boxes in the past. The model which this replaced, the four-year-old M12, had an injection-moulded plastic baffle with integral main driver chassis – a radical approach that started with the ES11 back in the early nineties, a model on which the rear baffle was also plastic, the two being held together by steel bolts.

One of the founding principles that Epos creator Robin Marshall espoused was to use the least amount of crossover components possible, up to the point of using none at all if that could be achieved. When Mike Creek purchased Epos in 1999 he continued this ethos and has applied it to the M12.2, which has no components limiting the range of the bass/mid driver, relying instead on its mechanical characteristics and the tuning of the port to define its frequency response. The tweeter has a single polyprop capacitor to act as a high-pass filter, a resistor to match level with the woofer and a small inductor to correct phase error. The new M-series features 25mm thick MDF cabinets



throughout, with five-way binding posts in place of the old 4mm banana sockets and DNM internal wiring. It also takes the radical step of offering grilles for each model, albeit steel box ones which do little to undermine the brand's hardcore image.

While the design of all Epos products is done in the UK by a team headed by Phil Knight, manufacture is carried out in China by a company working under licence. Epos owns all the tooling and sources components specifically for its speakers so that the end result retains the qualities it requires, while production costs are kept competitive. This has enabled the M12.2 to weigh in at £50 less than the M12, even though the previous plastic baffle/driver chassis was originally designed to reduce costs.

The M12.2 is one of a veritable explosion of new Epii which includes centres and subs for the surround sound experience. The M-series includes four other models, all of which bear a resemblance to the M12.2. The M5 is a diminutive variant with a 130mm main driver, the M8 is a centre speaker with a pair of the same drivers while the M15.2 (reviewed last issue) and M22 are floorstanders based

around the same drive units as the M12.2, with the latter being a three-way.

The bass/mid driver that takes over from its plastic predecessor is a new design built on a die-cast chassis, supporting a 150mm polypropylene cone complete with phase plug. The tweeter is a 25mm aluminium dome with a perforated protective grille.

The cabinet is finished in real-wood veneer on all sides and reflex ported at the back, with a pair of foam bungs supplied for near-wall or bookshelf placement. Epos recommends a gap of between 20-50cm between speaker and wall – we got a decent balance of bass extension to midrange transparency at 33cm with a slight toe-in. Epos still makes its classic four-leg stands, first developed for the ES11 and now suitable

for the M12.2, and anyone into retro styling and a fleet-footed sound should certainly give them a spin. They weren't supplied with our review samples, however, so we used a pair of rather more contemporary IF stands which put the speaker 22 inches from the floor and seemed to work well enough.

SOUND QUALITY

Driving a pair of M12.2s with the rather OTT reserves of a Gamut D200 200-watt power amplifier and equally capable ancillaries proved a most entertaining experience. The Epos doesn't need a particularly powerful amp to give its best and, as you'll read, a more modest Rotel RA-01 was brought in to establish as much, but it's always fun to see how much performance can be wrung from what is still quite an affordable loudspeaker.

The Police album *Outlandos D'Amour* recently turned up on SACD and thus seemed an appropriate place to start, not that this speaker's lineage goes quite as far back as 1978, but what the heck! Playing it on an old Sony SCD-XA333ES SACD player produced a taught, clear result with Sting's raucous punked-up singing failing to disguise the prog rock standard of playing. Copeland and Summers are as tight as you like on this album and Sting is no slouch either. You can see why they had to invent the term 'new wave' – despite the hype, this is not punk. The speakers help to make this album sound a lot better than it used to on plain CD, with good speed and dynamic impact, the drums kicking hard and the rhythmic tenacity of the pseudo reggae beat proving irresistible. Out of interest we put the same disc into a Resolution Audio CD player to see how the sound would change, and it was a shock to hear a far more substantial and three-dimensional sound come through. After all, shouldn't the SACD layer beat any normal CD player? Obviously not – hardware quality has proven still to be the final arbiter.

A more up-to-date recording revealed a tendency to highlight the upper midrange – jazz outfit EST's latest (*Seven Days Of Falling*) is distinctly distorted at the start and with the Epos the noise floor on the disc was more obvious than usual. The next track proved more rewarding, the piano's high notes sounding open and clear and the double bass full and tuneful. The drummer's brushwork could have been a little clearer though, the speaker making it sound slightly synthetic. This slight tonal aberration appeared with a horn on another track and made it difficult to identify the precise instrument. The clarinet on the other hand sounded superbly natural and expansive, so it's a small glitch that doesn't often show up.

With the Rotel integrated there is no problem producing level but a degree of discomfort is audible in the upper mid, the



“*Outlandos D'Amour* sounded better than it used to on CD, the rhythmic tenacity of the pseudo reggae beat proving irresistible.”

amp's limitations not being very effectively disguised – but then again you wouldn't want that from a loudspeaker. Nonetheless, if the level wasn't pushed this proved a happy partnership and one which you could live with until funding for more or better power was available. Given that Epos speakers are these days made by the same people who bring you Creek amps, that would be a wise place to start if genuine synergy is desired.


Back with the bigger amp and the Resolution Audio CD player, this speaker finally reveals its capabilities to the full, including impressive depth resolution with reverberated sound and decent openness and air. Some speakers in this hotly contested sector offer a more relaxed treble but surrender ground in terms of low-level detail. Others, usually floorstanders, go down further but can't compete with the tunefulness of bass offered here. You do of course have to factor in some stands, which are likely to add another £100 or more, and there are some impressive floorstanders for £550.

The M12.2 doesn't have the character of its forebears which is theoretically a good

thing, but by the same token it doesn't have their charm either and while this is clearly a fine loudspeaker, whether it will prove to have the edge over its wide competition is going to be open to debate.

Still, it does have funky grilles. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 80% [Progress bar]	 <p>PRO Substantial and well made box with plenty of bass extension and decent resolution.</p> <p>CON Quite simply, and good though it is, it just doesn't have the same unique charm of its predecessors.</p>
EASE OF DRIVE >> 76% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 86% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 82% [Progress bar]	
<p>CONCLUSION This is both an engaging and revealing speaker which shows its appreciation for decent ancillaries. It does deliver decent welly, if not quite the 'X-factor' that the very best speakers are able to produce for this price.</p>	
<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 81%</p>	



BEST BUY
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CLASSY SIGNATURE

Ken Ishiwata waves his magic wand over the already fine PM7200

PRODUCT Marantz PM7200 KI

TYPE Stereo integrated amplifier

PRICE £500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 44x16x38cm

● Weight: 12.3kg ● Class A/AB switchable (95W/ch Class AB) ● Inputs: 6 line, phono ● Remote control

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Given the way we (and plenty of you, evidently) reacted to the basic, non-signature, PM7200, why on earth would Marantz want to upgrade it? Let's see: we accused it of having "bags of power... remarkable refinement... bass goes down for miles...". Okay, you get the idea. But we also pointed out that, bargain though it may be, it's not part of the real high-end pantheon.

So has Ken Ishiwata's signature on the front changed that? What, in fact, has he changed apart from the badge? Most obvious is the chassis, now entirely copper-plated inside and out. It's pretty and it's also functional, improving the conductivity of the metalwork and hence making it more effective at keeping interference out. Internally there are some component changes and a new toroidal mains transformer, entirely wrapped in copper foil to reduce electrostatic interference. Keeping with the theme, power transistors are also now covered with a copper-plated shield, and some internal wiring has been changed from stranded to solid core.

The biggest practical difference all these changes seem to make is to reduce the output power. Continuous output is just a little under 100 watts and peak output is around 110 watts, the former less than 1dB below the standard amp but the latter more like 2dB down. Put in those terms, it's not a big problem, and frankly you're still looking at a pretty powerful lump: it's also a little more assured

into lower impedances so there is a *quid pro quo*. What may prove to be an issue is that hum is slightly increased compared with the standard model, at least on the review sample. This is almost certainly due to magnetic interference from the new transformer – copper foil doesn't do much about that, unfortunately. It's a buzzy, high-frequency sort of hum on the left channel and with sensitive speakers it may just become audible at typical listening distances: however, the way toroidal transformers are made is inherently slightly inconsistent and levels of hum may vary between units.

In case you missed the original PM7200 review, here's a quick recap. This is an integrated amp with a fairly typical set of features – bypassable tone and balance controls, twin speaker outputs, plenty of inputs including phono and a remote control. But it also has unusually high power around the 100-watts mark plus the distinguishing feature of a choice of operating modes – high power Class AB or medium power (around 30 watts) Class A. In both original and KI units, Class A holds up to ten watts or a little under, so strictly speaking it's really highly enhanced Class AB. You can switch between the modes



on the fly, which makes for fascinating comparisons, though in practice, at power levels within the Class A envelope, both we and at least one HFC correspondent found that differences are often so small as to make one wonder whether anything has changed.

Apart from the KI changes, construction is good inside and out but the casework is prone to resonance and a little damping wouldn't go amiss. This is easy for the user to experiment with of course, but if you're going to use Class A mode don't block up the ventilation slots! There's quite a lot of heat to get rid of and watching your hi-fi catch fire can seriously spoil a listening session...

SOUND QUALITY

It's been a while since the basic 7200 left HFC but luckily one such unit (not the one we reviewed) was also on hand for part of the listening tests, which reduced reliance on memory. At least one recollection proved correct: it's a very capable amp. Probably the toughest test of any true audiophile amp – high-power ones, anyway – is the extent to which it can fully take charge of any given speaker and show it who's the boss. That's also the area where budget amps have come on most obviously over the past decade or so, and while the 7200 isn't going to displace many Krells from their owners' affections it shows a lot more aptitude in that area than previous sub-£500 amps. Give it some high-energy programme in any musical genre and it will keep a tighter rein, with correspondingly tauter definition especially across the bottom couple of octaves, than one might expect from it.

It's probably in that department where the KI shows the most marked improvement over the basic 7200. And it's an interesting comparison too, not quite as simple as just being tauter or more extended. In fact it sometimes sounds *less* extended but that's not the actual case. What is actually happening, as becomes much clearer on extended listening and comparison with high-end references, is that the limits of the non-KI are being reached with some very tough basslines and its grip is relaxing just sufficiently to allow just a little bass bloat.

The KI, on the other hand, is less easily rattled and holds on just that little bit longer, keeping the sound together and under better control, with less immediate impact but noticeably more detail and definition. There's also no feeling that the sound is being restricted in any way, and perhaps the best way to describe the overall effect is that the KI sounds somehow smoother in the way it handles the bass. For an intuitive analogy of sorts, think of two stones of equal size, a rough piece of sandstone and a polished piece of granite. Despite its sophisticated finish, the granite clearly is the tougher and harder – and frankly more interesting – of the



“Experiment – it can't do any harm and however you look at things you'll be in little doubt that you're listening to a fine amp.”

two. The KI feels a little like that.

Pseudo-poetic bass apart, what of higher frequencies? The difference seems less marked here. The midrange of both amps is very detailed, highly neutral and very well defined spatially, leading to excellent stereo imaging. Just occasionally, listeners felt that the basic amp had the edge in image specificity over the KI, but if there was a difference it was so small as to be barely repeatable. The KI did seem to offer slightly more depth though, in most cases. As for the treble, again the KI had a slight advantage in cleanliness, though in a couple of tracks the basic appeared to be slightly ahead on extension and 'air'.

And as we found the first time round, switching from Class A to Class AB mode can often be a complete non-event. Obviously if you drive the amp flat out in Class AB and switch to Class A the resulting distortion will be blindingly obvious and very horrible, but short of extreme cases like that there's very little to hear. Maybe, just maybe, Class A is a little sweeter and more clearly defined tonally with well-recorded acoustic material, but then Class AB seems more detailed in quiet passages. Experiment by all means – it can't do any harm and however you look at things you'll be in little doubt that you're listening to a very fine amp.

So to the crunch: does the 50 per cent price hike justify itself? It's hard to say. If the 7200 didn't exist we'd recommend the 7200 KI at

£500 like a shot anyway. Probably the fairest way to deal with this is to say that the law of diminishing returns very slightly favours the basic model, but the KI is a damn fine £500 amp in its own right. If you can afford the difference, audition it, but if you can't, then don't bother gnashing your teeth over it. It is, after all, just a matter of taste. **HFC**

Richard Black



VERDICT

SOUND >> 89%



FEATURES >> 92%



BUILD >> 86%



VALUE >> 91%



PRO
A very assured, neutral and powerful amplifier with improved control over the basic model.

CON
Barely audible hum on one channel. Not always as viscerally exciting as the basic.

CONCLUSION

An excellent amp in its price range by any reckoning, with terrific sound allied to plenty of features and good ergonomics. Its value compared to the original, basic model will largely depend purely on your personal taste.

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



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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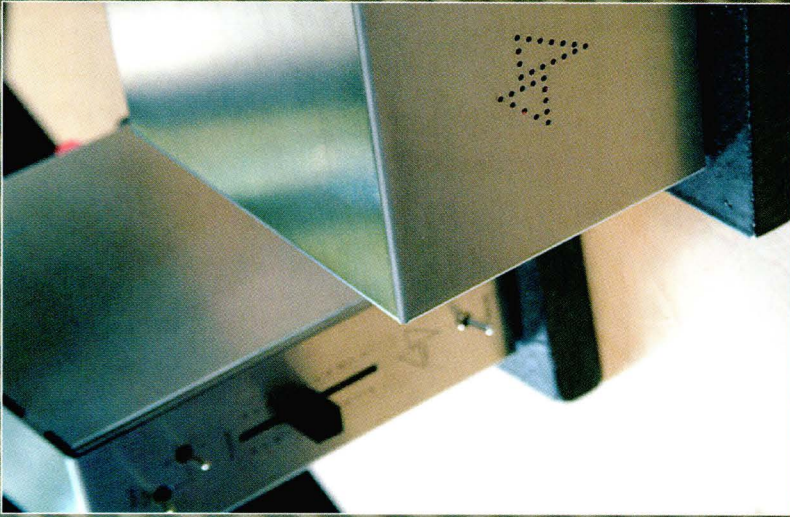
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Photography & Design: Tom Foxall 01952 727866



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.



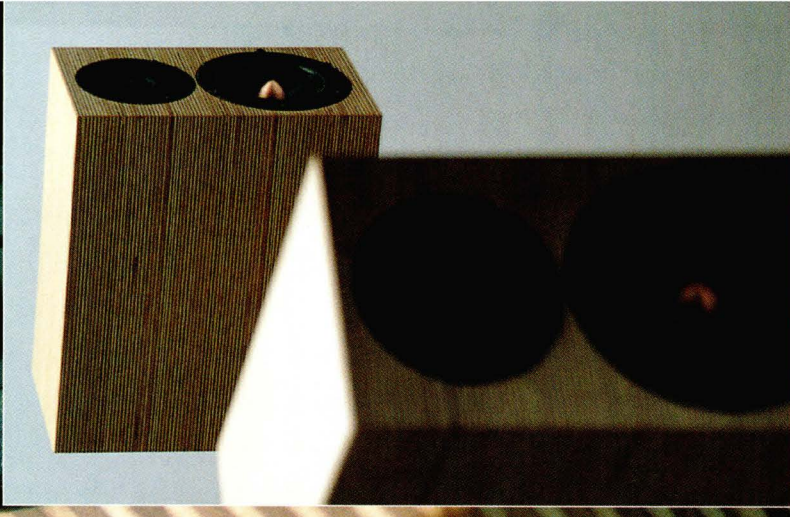
Orpheus

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 interfaces 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.

TALL, SLIM & BLONDE

Mordaunt-Short's Avant range may be the height of fashion, but does it have inner beauty?

PRODUCT Mordaunt-Short Avant 906

TYPE 3-way floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE £350 per pair

CONTACT ☎ 020 7551 5339

🌐 www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

Mordaunt-Short is pretty keen on the continuous profile cone (CPC) technology that it uses to make the sexy little silver drive units in its latest speaker range. It's not hard to see why – they look a whole lot prettier than your average cone, so much so that the Avant range is one of the few that looks better with its grilles removed.

The 906 sits second from top in the Avant range, just below the slightly taller 908 (which features side-mounted bass drivers). The rest of the range consists of a smaller floorstander, a standmount and the usual trio of multichannel speakers: subwoofer, centre channel and dedicated surround units.

Distinguishing Avant features include an unusually slim baffle and deep cabinet, a decent vinyl woodprint finish and aluminium-look outriggers for the spikes. The latter add a useful 50mm or so to the footprint width of what might otherwise be unstable structures.

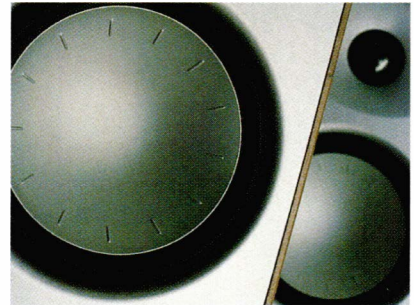
Despite the identical size of the 906's main drive units this is a three-way, rather than two-and-a-half-way speaker, with one 100mm cone charged with producing bass and the other the midrange. Treble is covered by a 25mm metal dome, here protected from prying fingers by a mesh and set into a shallow horn to increase efficiency. The specs quote a healthy 90dB sensitivity but are less specific about impedance and while we found it a reasonable load, bass control was only fully achieved with a reasonably beefy amp.

On the rear baffle, a set of chunky bi-wire cable terminals is thoughtfully placed close to the ground while two reflex ports tune the cabinet, presumably somewhere in the region of its 45Hz claimed low frequency roll-off.

SOUND QUALITY

This is a hard speaker to fault at the price, though we do our best to reveal whatever chinks there are in any component's armour and there is of course no such thing as a perfect loudspeaker. But as budget floorstanders go, this is a good 'un.

Placed about 20cm from the wall it produces a balanced, coherent sound that seems to work with most types of music at all but the highest volume levels. High frequencies are well extended and precise without being edgy and the midrange is clear and detailed. Any sub-£500 floorstander has trouble producing deep, clean bass however, and while the 906 is no slouch it ain't going to kick heavyweight butt in this department. It goes down surprisingly low at times though – Missy Elliott (or rather her producer Timbaland) sticks some heavy stuff in wherever it fits and this rumbled away very nicely. Bass is only really a limitation when compared with more expensive speakers and



perhaps a few standmounts which, while they won't go down any deeper, can remain a little tighter due to their construction.

This is a very coherent speaker with a good sense of timing and crisp imaging skills – Norah Jones's dulcet tones were portrayed with good scale and solidity, for example.

Tonally they remained convincing 95 per cent of the time, the exception being a clarinet on the *Shostakovich Jazz Suites*, but otherwise all was even and sweet, including violins which can sound less than real on budget speakers.

Putting a real-world Pioneer A300R Precision amplifier in front of them reduced bass power and definition, but did nothing to undermine the essentially engaging nature of the speaker. Contemporary budget integrateds tend to be more powerful than that particular classic and as long as you've got a decent 50 watts (or more) on hand you'll get plenty of grunt.

This is low-cost floorstander that sounds as smart as it looks. It times well, has decent dynamics and tells you what's going on while hooking you into the groove. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 82%	
EASE OF DRIVE >> 82%	
BUILD >> 84%	
VALUE >> 92%	
CONCLUSION	Clearly a capable and engaging speaker for the money, this neat design will complement most musical tastes and low to mid-price hi-fi/AV systems with ease. Don't let its good looks distract you – this is one classy blonde worth listening to!
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE	>> 86%

PRO
It cuts a lovely figure, with decent dynamics and timing plus impressive communication skills.

CON
Suffers slightly from limited loudness and bass grunt, and minor tonal inconsistencies.

CURVED AIR

The Curve packages the most important ingredients from the ACT in a much less costly enclosure

PRODUCT Wilson Benesch Curve

TYPE 2.5-way floorstanding loudspeaker

PRICE From £4,900 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 23x91x37cm
⊕ Weight: 48kg ⊕ Advanced combination metal/CFC enclosure ⊕ 2x170mm open chassis Isotactic polymer cone main drivers ⊕ 28mm fabric dome tweeter
⊕ Reflex ports at rear and base

CONTACT ☎ 0114 285 2656

🌐 www.wilson-benesch.com

Just two months ago, we reviewed Wilson Benesch's new ACT, an advanced floorstanding speaker that is compact and stylish, if costly. At the time, we were unaware that WB was planning to introduce a second floorstander with similar ingredients and performance, but at a much lower price.

So now we have the Curve, big brother to the Arc and priced from £4,900 for the pair – still a lot of money, but saving £3,500 compared with the ACT (the Curve's quoted base price covers versions with either silver or black-finished metal side-cheeks each side of the front baffle; real wood veneered trim here costs an extra £353).

Whereas the ACT is a bit flash in its cosmetic presentation, with a chunky, sculpted, high-gloss tilted top, alloy baffle and complex multi-layer base/plinth, the Curve is a more demure confection that's positively understated compared with its bigger brother. It has a flat Perspex top, no metal spine, a simplified plinth and black-painted MDF baffle trim. It's also 18cm shorter, which makes it more discreet in the

listening room. It might not be as eye-catching as its larger brother, but greater discretion definitely has its own appeal. The Curve's internal volume is just seven per cent smaller than the ACT.

But the important bits are substantially common to both models. The Curve shares the same drive units and a similar crossover network, the triple-curved CFC (carbon fibre composite) sides-and-back section, the metal internal bracing, the machined bi-wire terminals and the massive 10mm spikes. Yet by stripping away much of the peripheral enclosure bits, WB has reduced the weight from a backbreaking 74kg to 48kg.

The two 170mm main drivers fitted here are both examples of WB's own proprietary 'Tactic' units, named after the three-layer,

“The Curve might not be as eye-catching as its larger brother, but greater discretion definitely has its own appeal.”

self-bonding woven Isotactic polymer material used for their cones. Other interesting features include a frame machined from solid aluminium, and shaped to give an open profile, free from obstruction, behind the diaphragm, which is further assisted by the tiny rare earth magnet motor structure.

These two drivers operate in a 'two-and-a-half-way' configuration, the lower one covering the bass frequencies, up to a nominal 500Hz. The upper one covers the full two decades of the complete bass and midrange spectrum to around 2.5kHz, where the Scandinavian-sourced 28mm soft fabric dome tweeter takes over.

Most two-and-a-half-ways use two identical main drivers, but WB has added subtle variations. Look carefully and you'll notice that the bass-only unit has a coarser cone weave because it uses a thicker, stiffer cone alongside a lighter aluminium voice coil. The bass/mid driver, however, uses a thinner, lighter cone, alongside a heavier (copper) voice coil.

The enclosure is as important as the drive units, which is where much of this speaker's originality and advanced technology is found. The rear section, comprising most of the curved sides and the narrow concave

back, is formed in a single piece of tough carbon fibre composite, reinforced by internal metal bracing to ensure high stiffness. The shape is usefully irregular in width and depth, so that the reflections and internal standing waves are spread and de-focused.

Set into the rear spine is a reflex port and two pairs of high-class terminals, while a second port exits through the base. The whole thing is mounted on a hefty steel plate that improves mass and footprint stability and secures the fat spikes.

SOUND QUALITY

The speakers were mostly used in a Naim-based system (CDS-3 CD player, NAC 552 preamp, NAP 500 power amp), plus Burmester 001 CD player, Magnum Dynalab

MD102 tuner, and a Linn/Rega hybrid vinyl record player. Connecting cables and equipment supports were from Vertex AQ, Naim and Mana.

As soon as they were powered up, the close similarity between the Curve and its bigger brother was obvious, particularly so in a freedom from boxiness and cabinet coloration that's almost uncanny in a floorstander. You hear the drive units doing their thing here, but any contribution from the enclosure is vanishingly small, and in this respect at least the Curve seemed more like an open-back panel-type speaker than one with a regular enclosure boxing in the back of the drivers.

Rather than merely reporting on the Curve, it's better to compare it with the ACT. Physically speaking, the differences between the two models look small. Essentially they amount to a seven per cent reduction in enclosure volume, and a positioning of the drivers and the port about 10cm closer to the floor, but this has a big impact on the performance nonetheless.

The impedance traces – a good indicator of differences – are almost identical above 150Hz, though there are small variations below that frequency. The exact details of the reflex tunings are obscured here by the addition of conjugate load crossover elements, but there is the suggestion that the Curve's port is tuned to a slightly higher



frequency – about 45Hz rather than 35Hz.

This seems to be confirmed by the in-room measurements, which show a different bass alignment between the two models. The ACT proved a virtually ideal match in our room, with an unusually even as well as extended bass end. The Curve, however, peaks up to about 50Hz, and rolls off more quickly below that point. Although the Curve didn't suit our room as well as the ACT, in another room the situation could be reversed.

However, the Curve is also leaner than the ACT through the broad midband, 150-600Hz, so that a 700Hz-1kHz peak – visible on both – stands out as rather more isolated and obvious. The result is clearly audible as a rather less neutral balance overall, the Curve sounding thinner with less harmonic richness, especially with wideband orchestral material. Speech shows a similar character, with clarity and articulation, and lots of explicit detail, but also some leanness and lack of 'chest' on male voices in particular.

The Curve might not therefore have the same easy neutrality as the ACT, but it's also true to say that it doesn't seem to matter all that much, and it doesn't spoil the enjoyment of an excellent loudspeaker. It's also impressive proof that the virtual elimination of enclosure coloration is more important than the accurate tailoring of the overall frequency balance. One remains conscious of the particular sonic 'fingerprint' imposed by the balance anomalies – the treble is a bit stronger than average – but it doesn't intrude.

The weeks spent with the Curve were enjoyable and very informative. It might not have the tautest grip or most dramatic drive, but its strength lies in freedom from enclosure coloration. The precise and well-focused stereo soundstage fills the space between and around the speakers, yet the speakers themselves seem to disappear from the scene, allowing the music to fill the room without obstruction and with a tangible sense of realism. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 91% 	
EASE OF DRIVE >> 85% 	PRO A compact and shapely high-end contender with excellent imaging and an uncanny freedom from boxiness.
BUILD >> 93% 	CON Could have more dynamic drive and authority. Overall tonal balance is good, but a bit weak in the lower mid.
VALUE >> 86% 	
CONCLUSION Superb enclosure engineering is responsible for this speaker's remarkable freedom from boxiness. It has very superior imaging and a decent balance, but sounds a little lean through the lower midband, and a bit strong and peaky higher up.	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 89% OVERALL SCORE	

PURE AND SIMPLE

Looking for a portable DAB solution? Pure's latest, fully-featured table radio could be the answer

PRODUCT Pure Digital Evoke 2
TYPE DAB/FM table radio
PRICE £150
CONTACT ☎ 01923 277488 🌐 www.pure-digital.com

Pure Digital no longer has the DAB market sewn up in the way it did a couple of years ago, but surely its long track record should stand it in good stead? Certainly the Evoke 2 is a smart-looking unit with a good feature count. A stereo table radio, it offers both DAB and FM reception, mains or battery operation, headphone and line output sockets and even an optical digital output. Build quality is good and operation is generally simple and slick, though tuning on the FM band is a bit slow.

SOUND QUALITY

Sound is good in many ways. It's unlikely that many users will bother with any mode other than listening via the internal speakers, so it's good to report that they put out a healthy level with a good stab at real bass, low distortion and fair balance. Actually the

balance doesn't seem quite consistent from station to station, but never mind, the tone control does what it should and generally serves well. If you do try headphones, you'll find maximum output limited and there's a little extra hiss via that or the line output.

The real trouble however, is that the high-frequency twittering and burbling that plagues DAB (even when signal quality registers 100/100) is paradoxically more obvious than ever over the small speakers of a radio like this. FM reception is not bad but it can be a bit hissy and congested. So only a qualified recommendation, mainly for those who really want DAB reception away from the main hi-fi. For that, it's the best of the bunch. **HFC**



Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 78%
 [Progress bar]

FEATURES >> 88%
 [Progress bar]

BUILD >> 85%
 [Progress bar]

VALUE >> 82%
 [Progress bar]

CONCLUSION
 If you want a DAB table radio, this is probably the best one around right now. If you just want a table radio, buy a Tivoli.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
 >> **83%**

ARE YOU RECEPTIVE?

Tivoli blazed a trail, but does Boston merely follow or make its own proud way?

PRODUCT Boston Acoustics Receptor
TYPE AM/FM table radio
PRICE £130
CONTACT ☎ 01423 359054 🌐 www.bostonacoustics.com

The success of the Tivoli Model One was bound to spawn, if not exactly imitators, then at least followers. Here's one – a neat package from Boston which is differentiated from the Tivoli models by its digital tuning and bedside functions such as an alarm and snooze/sleep modes.

It's a nice solid package which is easy and intuitive to use, helped by the inclusion of presets, and for the most part, it seems well made too, although a couple of feet fell off the review sample with very little provocation. A three-inch speaker with a very substantial magnet graces the front, aided by a rear-firing reflex port. Operation is from the mains only.

SOUND QUALITY

There's plenty of volume on tap and a pretty healthy dose of bass too, especially for such a

diminutive box, though on prolonged exposure the bass seems a little over-developed in a chesty kind of way. How this will affect you depends on your aural tastes: with speech it's not particularly worrying, with classical music it's not often particularly noticeable, but with pop it does tend to get a bit much unless you really like your stuff bassy. We found a sock in the reflex port calmed things down a bit though.

All the same, treble is cleanly extended and the midrange possesses plenty of detail, which all goes to make for very good intelligibility and long-term listenability.

The ability to use internal or external AM and FM antennae adds flexibility and all things considered this is a very decent-sounding alternative to the Tivoli models if you like its look and feel. **HFC**



Richard Black

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%
 [Progress bar]

FEATURES >> 88%
 [Progress bar]

BUILD >> 82%
 [Progress bar]

VALUE >> 84%
 [Progress bar]

CONCLUSION
 A smart and well presented alternative to Tivoli which has its own character and good, if not outstanding, performance in all areas.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
 >> **85%**

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GROUP TEST: PAUL MESSENGER LAB REPORTS: CHRIS BRYANT

VALVE AMPLIFIERS

The sentimental favourite that just refuses to die. What can today's valve amps offer in place of their solid state competitors' modern advantages?

ON TEST



AUDIO NOTE OTO LINE SE
£1,599



AUDIO RESEARCH VS155
£2,895



BAT VK-300X
£5,350



EAR 864/534
£4,156



GRAAF VENTICINQUE
£2,350



GRAVES AUDIO MERLIN
£1,250



ICON AUDIO STEREO 40i
£900



QUAD QC-24/II-40
£4,007

Collecting together this group of eight valve amplifiers proved surprisingly difficult, though eventually we managed to do it just in time to carry out the review programme. We've chosen six integrateds, including one hybrid, plus a couple of pre/power combinations in order to achieve a wide range of valve-based options. As well as types, they also cover a broad range of prices, starting below £1,000 (the Icon Audio Stereo 40i) and exceeding £5,000 (the BAT VK-300x). This gives both a very useful overview of the total valve amp market and a solid and panoramic perspective on the alternatives that are available across this wide price span, with most of the important brands included.

Valve amps might be well outside hi-fi's consumer mainstream, but the very fact that they're still available – in impressive numbers and variety – almost 50 years after the transistor was supposed to have rendered them redundant, is proof they must still have something important going for them. And since that something obviously has nothing to do with low cost, measured performance, style, or user convenience, the only rational explanation is that the valve amp's sound quality must have its own particular appeal and superiority.

Those devotees who choose valve amplification invariably do so because they find the uniquely delicate sound quality so irresistible that all the less desirable characteristics of the breed pale into insignificance. There's absolutely no avoiding the fact that valve amps are bulky, chuck out plenty of waste heat, supply only limited power and rarely include the convenience features like remote control that users of solid state amps take for granted.

Because their main appeal is to a small, but very enthusiastic minority,

the companies involved in making and marketing valve amps also tend to be small-scale, enthusiast-led affairs, often lacking both the resources and the will to implement complex microprocessor control systems. It's not surprising therefore that only two of our eight systems chosen incorporate full remote operation.

Although the features vary only slightly between the different models used in our test, there are considerable differences in the valves used, in the configurations in which they operate, and probably in the quality of the vital output transformers. All of which will result in sound quality differences that are more obvious than you would find in a similarly sized collection of solid state amplifiers. **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Tannoy Yorkminster loudspeakers
- ⊕ Burmester 001 and Naim CDS 3 CD players
- ⊕ Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
- ⊕ Vertex AQ, Rega and Chord Company cables
- ⊕ Linn LP12 turntable with Rega RB1000 tonearm and Linn Akiva cartridge

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Lambchop *Is A Woman*
- ⊕ Mari Boine *'eallin*
- ⊕ LSO *Live Dvorak New World*
- ⊕ Red Hot Chili Peppers *Greatest Hits*
- ⊕ Idet Biret *Stravinsky Firebird*
- ⊕ Alison Krauss + Union Station *Live*
- ⊕ BBC Radios 3 and 4 were also used extensively

EARS USED

Many thanks to the following people for their time, patience, experience and invaluable judgement in our unsighted listening tests: Andy Whittle (Exposure Electronics) Terry Bateman (Rega Research) Reuben Klein (ECS)

STRUCTURED LAB AND LISTENING TESTS

Using the latest Audio Precision System II lab kit, together with the necessary ancillary equipment, allows complete graphic analysis of distortion, frequency response, output impedance and power up to and beyond 100kHz. Impulse and burst signals were used to examine dynamic power and current output under a variety of load conditions. Spectrum analysis was also performed to examine the form of the amp's distortion at various levels and frequencies. Also, the normal, noise (both 'A' weighted and unfiltered), stereo separation, channel balance, input impedance and sensitivity, and where appropriate, DC measurement were undertaken. All this allows a complete picture of the amplifier's measured performance to be fully constructed.

The listening tests were carried out over a two-week period, and consisted of extended 'hands-on' work alongside a carefully controlled unsighted panel session.

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 in this group 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] Dynamic power output: Depending on the nature of the amp's power supply, this can be somewhat higher than its *continuous* output and provides an indication of its delivery under realistic, music-like conditions.

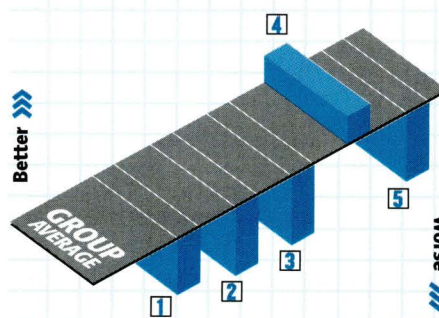
2] Speaker load tolerance: This indicates the amplifier's capacity to maintain a given level of performance into tough, low-impedance speaker loads.

3] Audible distortion: A measure of how distortion changes with frequency (bass through midrange to treble) and power output. The type of distortion harmonics are also factored into this equation.

4] Noise: This is a direct representation of the amplifier's A-wtd S/N ratio, measured with reference to 1W/8 ohm.

5] Overall compatibility: An important category that not only includes both load tolerance and distortion, but also wideband frequency response and output impedance.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE





£1,599 ☎ 01273 220511 🌐 www.audiernote.co.uk

AUDIO NOTE OTO LINE SE

Plenty of single-ended refinement is hidden inside a bland case

With its original roots in the Audio Innovations operation, this Brighton-based outfit has now been trading under the Audio Note brand for more than a decade, and is probably the largest and most ambitious of all the British valve amp brands. It has a broad and enormous range of products, including CD players, DACs, turntables and loudspeakers as well as amplifiers, and these cover an extraordinarily wide span of price points, with logical upgrade steps. All subscribe to a broadly common philosophy of maximum simplicity alongside high-quality components.

This £1,599 Oto Line SE, for example, features ultra-simple single-ended circuitry, using just a pair of small EL84 valves for each channel, and so has much less available power than a push-pull design – just six watts per channel is the claim. Accordingly, the use of high-sensitivity speakers – such as those that Audio Note itself makes – is strongly encouraged.

This is the least costly of Audio Note's integrated amps (there are four variations on the Oto theme) and the SE suffix refers to its single-ended operation; a PP (push-pull) variation offers double the rated power for £400 less. Each can be specified with a phono stage (for higher output, MM-type cartridges) for an extra £300.

This is not a good-looking amplifier. It is bulky, heavy and very black, the steel casework only enlivened by a (black) Perspex front panel, decorated by a row of five shiny bronze knobs. There's no remote control, and 'hands-on' operation will take a little getting used to because all the knobs are the same, and the gold-on-black legends are not very easy to read. Channel balance may be adjusted, but there's no mono switch. Four basic line inputs are available, plus an in/out recorder loop, while speakers are fed from four or eight-ohm taps via high-class silver-plated terminals.



SOUND QUALITY

The Oto SE has a slightly dark balance with a quite restrained top end, and this did rather unsettle our listening panel. The bass too can sound a little vague at times, with some lack of weight and authority, which led one of our panellists to comment that he preferred this amplifier with acoustic, rather than rock tracks.

But despite those criticisms this remains an superbly entertaining and involving amplifier, simply because its midband is exceptionally clean and coherent, with impressively defined leading edges. There's a limpid transparency and delicacy here that sounds unusually natural and 'right' – so much so that it becomes difficult to listen to the amp as such, simply because the music itself provides such a strong distraction.

Images are very well formed, delineating a precise soundstage with decent depth perspectives, even though the sound is a little constrained towards the frequency extremes. The strength of this amplifier clearly lies towards the simpler and more acoustic end of the musical spectrum, solo voices with simple accompaniment really emphasising its naturalness and coherence, while also avoiding putting the limited power reserves under too much pressure.

The limited handful of watts available here is an obvious disadvantage to those of us who like to play our music loud 'n' heavy, but it shouldn't be forgotten that the first watt is by far the most important one, and it's here that the Oto SE really shows its strength, with a combination of delicacy, coherence and dynamic integrity that more expensive and powerful amplifiers struggle to match. **HFC**



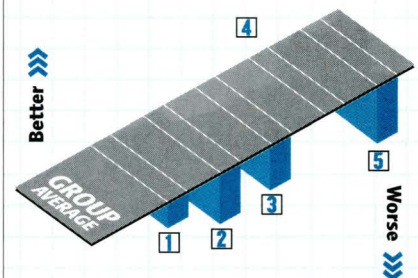
LAB REPORT

The frequency response is band limited particularly at the bass end and 0.5dB down by 35Hz and almost 2dB down at 20Hz, but the treble is only 0.25dB down at 20kHz.

Distortion is high, even when driving an 8 ohm load at 1W it struggles to have less than 1% distortion through the midband into the treble. At 10W distortion it was 3% at 1kHz, increasing to 7% at high and low frequencies with bass distortion measured at 80Hz in order to gain any meaningful significance (3% at 1W). The distortion spectrum was dominated by a benign second harmonic, which does tend to sweeten the sound. Into 4 ohms output holds up in the midband, but not at the frequency extremes.

On a more positive note, signal to noise ratio was acceptable and input parameters were as expected. With a relatively high output impedance, the Oto SE needs sensitive loudspeakers with easy loads to get the best out of it.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> -20%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> -40%
- 3] Distortion >> -35%
- 4] Noise >> 0%
- 5] Compatibility >> -45%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	10W	4.2W
Distortion (1W/1kHz/8 ohm)	2%	0.8%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	Not supplied	244mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%

FEATURES >> 65%

BUILD >> 75%

VALUE >> 89%

Low power output limits both loudness capability and choice of speakers, but emphasises that the first watt is by far the most important with a good mix of delicacy, coherence and dynamic integrity that others will struggle to match.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **87%**



£2,895 ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.audioresearch.com

AUDIO RESEARCH VS155

Combines valve performance with microprocessor convenience

US valve amp protagonist Audio Research was founded in 1970 – just around the time that the rest of the industry had completed the changeover to solid-state technology. For most of that decade it ploughed an extremely lonely furrow in promoting thermionic (analogue) technology to a transistorised world, while building a powerful reputation for sound quality. Thirty years of its faith and persistence look to be fully justified, and the organisation has built up more experience in valve technology than any other operating today.

A relatively recent addition to the comprehensive Audio Research range, this VS155 is not the prettiest or slickest looking amplifier to come our way. However, at £2,895 it's rather more affordable than most of the company's offerings, and looks to have a very practical and sensible all-round feature list and specification to boot.

It's an integrated amplifier, equipped with five inputs on pairs of singled-ended (unbalanced) phono sockets, and rated at 50 watts per channel. Surprisingly perhaps, there are no stereo line-level outputs, fixed or variable, so there's no feed for tape recorders or additional power amplifiers; unusually, a single mono output for subwoofer connection is provided. The usual speaker binding posts have four or eight-ohm taps, but access to 4mm banana plugs appeared to be irrevocably blocked.

A simple, well laid out handset controls all functions remotely, including power, mute, stereo/mono, input selection and volume up/down. Sensibly the amplifier powers up with the mute on, releasing this with the volume initially set to zero. The control section here is passive, using microprocessor-controlled relays, while the driver stages have three 6N1P tubes, and the output stages use two pairs of 6550EH valves. Presets are available for adjusting valve bias settings with the aid of a voltmeter. Normally supplied with



its valves exposed as here, an optional perforated cage-type cover is available.

SOUND QUALITY

The VS155 is an excellent all-rounder in sonic terms, attracting only minor criticisms. One panellist, however, said it was too controlled and lacked excitement, while others liked its open transparency, praising the plentiful detail and all-round musicality.

The sound does lack a little in terms of overall scale, and the bottom end might be a bit fuller and more robust, so the attention tends to focus on the upper registers, which are well defined, delivering plenty of detail with fine coherence. The overall tonality does tilt towards the bright and shiny, so there's a good case for partnering the VS155 with loudspeakers that are naturally warm and rich.

There was praise for its fine vocal articulation, and the way the musical interpretation came through on a solo piano track. But above all perhaps this is an amp that's very even-handed and easy to listen to. Nothing seems to faze it, yet it remains fundamentally transparent to the musical qualities of the source it's reproducing.

A minor practical point, encountered in the hands-on work, is that when used with high-sensitivity speakers like the Tannoys, and listening at very low levels, the available volume steps are coarse at the very bottom of the operating range.

A superb all-rounder and an obvious Best Buy, the VS155 shows that it's possible to enjoy the delights of valve amplification without having to make sacrifices in terms of convenience and practicality. **HFC**

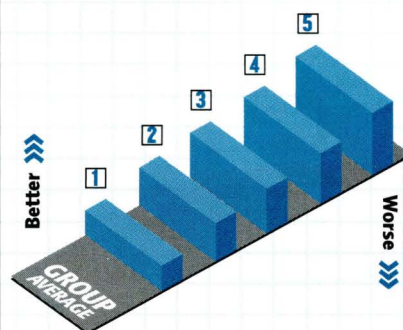


LAB REPORT

This long-established US brand is expected to produce a sensible product with a good specification and performance and that's basically the case here.

It just met its rated spec at 1kHz, but fell a little short at the frequency extremes. Using the 4 ohm tap, power output held up well into a 4 ohm load. The relatively low output impedance, which is relatively consistent across the audio band at 0.4 ohms, means that loudspeakers with impedance which varies with frequencies should not suffer as much coloration as with some of the other amps tested here. The frequency response was extended in the bass to well below 10Hz with a slight 0.15dB down at 20kHz. Channel separation held up well with 70dB at 1kHz and 58dB at 20kHz. Signal to noise ratio measured a respectable -85dB (ref 1W 'A' weighted) and the volume control had exceptional channel balance throughout its range.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> 20%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> 30%
- 3] Distortion >> 35%
- 4] Noise >> 40%
- 5] Compatibility >> 50%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	50W	50W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.05%	0.045%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	0.5V	400mv

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 89%

FEATURES >>> 84%

BUILD >>> 81%

VALUE >>> 89%

A superb all-rounder, if a little lacking in looks, the VS155 demonstrates that it's possible to enjoy the delights of valve amplification without having to make substantial sacrifices in terms of convenience and practicality.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >>> **89%**



£5,350 ☎ 01892 539245 🌐 www.balanced.com

BAT VK-300X

US firm mixes valves and transistors for the best of both worlds

BAT stands for Balanced Audio Technology, a US high-end brand that got under way in 1995. It's therefore one of the newer companies in this group test, which perhaps explains why this VK-300x is also one of the more original in conception and execution. Considering its youthfulness, BAT makes a large and complex range of models, and these are often available with various options. It also uses a mixture of valve and solid-state devices, separately, or together, as in this hybrid.

The VK-300x can be purchased for as little as £3,995, or as much as £5,350, depending on which of the nine options is chosen. The base version is entirely solid state, line-level, and hands-on. Thanks to modular construction there are two alternative hybrid versions with valve-based front-ends – the top £4,445 SE version is reviewed here using the 6H30 'SuperTube' circuitry. Then there's the extra £450 that is charged for the phono stage and/or the remote handset. Yes, an outrageous £450 extra for an unexciting remote handset!

Going hybrid allows the delicacy of valves in the early, high-impedance stages, to be combined with the transistor's ability to deliver lots of low-impedance power to drive loudspeakers – 150 watts into eight ohms here. The VK-300x also differs from the others assembled here in benefiting (the term is used advisedly) from the services of an industrial designer.

Also unusual in the assembled company, this amplifier has an elaborate, feature-rich control system, with a variety of programmable functions, including allowing the adjustment and storage of balance, relative volume, phase, mono/stereo, and maximum volume parameters independently for each input. Inputs include two sets of balanced XLRs plus three single-ended phono pairs; output phonos feed a recorder and XLRs an extra power amp. Display names may be



assigned to each input, volume may be faded or muted, and the rather obtrusive blue display turned off.

SOUND QUALITY

This big BAT was well received in the various listening tests, and while it doesn't perhaps achieve the best characteristics of thermionic and solid-state technologies, it's certainly a doughty and effective performer that was liked by our panellists.

The overall character, however, is clearly rather different from the all-valve types. Whereas the latter tend to focus the attention on the midband, which is invariably their area of greatest strength, this hybrid has a midband which is a little laid back – even slightly recessed – and one therefore tends to take rather more notice of what's going in the bass and especially in the treble instead.

The firm and robust bottom end is a standout feature, leading one to remark that this was an amp that favoured rock music over more acoustic varieties. Yet the top end is impressive too, delivering bags of detail and inspiring several panellists to comment favourably on its good stereo spaciousness and depth, as well as its fine and 'airy' reproduction of acoustic space.

Ultimately, there is a touch of artifice here, and the midband did seem a trifle congested, with slightly smeared voices. Although this BAT amp might not be quite as natural as some simpler designs through the vital midband, it remains a highly enjoyable and thoroughly informative experience nonetheless, and offers obvious advantages in terms of power output and speaker drive ability, as well as a very flexible, feature-rich preamp section. **HFC**



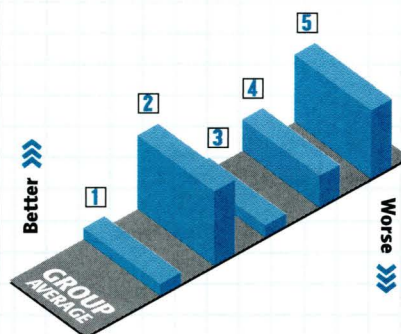
LAB REPORT

This integrated amp is the only hybrid of the group. It has a bipolar transistor output stage and so its measurements should be different.

The preamplifier section works well enough, giving a low noise floor of -80dB and excellent volume balance tracking, and with an input impedance of 100 kohms it should prove easy on sources.

Power output into 8 ohms was a little more than that specified, but fell slightly short of delivering the promised 300W into 4 ohms and refused to be power tested into a 2 ohm load. Harmonic distortion at 0.4% was slightly higher than expected at 1W, but fell at higher powers to 0.1%, which is reasonable enough. The frequency response is basically flat from 20Hz to 20kHz. Channel separation was maintained from 20Hz to 20kHz at 61dB. With a low output impedance of <0.1 ohm and with good drive capability and decent peak current capability this amp will drive most loudspeakers without a problem.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> 10%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> 60%
- 3] Distortion >> 10%
- 4] Noise >> 25%
- 5] Compatibility >> 65%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	150W	155W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.1%	0.4%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	Not supplied	230mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%



FEATURES >> 90%



BUILD >> 88%



VALUE >> 80%



Not as natural as some through the vital midband, but enjoyable and informative nonetheless, with obvious advantages in power output and speaker drive ability, as well as a flexible, feature-rich preamp section.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **83%**



£4,156 (£1,682 + £2,474) ☎ 01223 208877 🌐 www.ear-yoshino.com

EAR 864/534

Good combo from one of the most respected valve amp names

EAR – Esoteric Audio Research – has probably been producing valve amps for longer than any other UK brand. The firm was

founded by Tim de Paravicini in the late 1970s, by which time he had been designing electronics for more than a decade.

Although valve amplifiers represent the core of the current EAR/Yoshino operation, Tim is known for applying his skills to other audio devices, especially in recording studios, where his electronics are regularly found in analogue tape recorders, cutting lathes and so forth.

Although the majority of amps in this test are of the integrated variety, our EAR is a two-box affair which includes the 534, a 50-watt stereo power amplifier. With hindsight it would have been possible to use this as a two-source integrated amp, because it has a separate volume control for each channel, plus both balanced XLR and single-ended phono inputs, with a switch to select between them.

Having requested a partnering preamp, an 864 arrived, which unlike the others in the test group comes fitted with a costly phono stage. The equivalent line-only preamp is the 834L, which is available in black at £655, or £1,095 in a Deluxe finish seen here, with its heavy chromed front panel and gold knobs. Features are modest – neither remote control nor mono is available, but there's a generous selection of both balanced and single-ended inputs and outputs, and the power amp has a balance adjustment.

If the preamp is a deliciously bijou confection, the power amp looks a little more oddball. Again there's a chunky chrome-plated fascia, this time with just an illuminated on/off push button, but the rest is a hefty open-chassis affair with a large and exactly square footprint, with black slotted covers running down both edges, covering and ventilating the four EL34 output valves used for each channel.



SOUND QUALITY

'Solid' was the first adjective that sprang to mind when this combo was powered up. It delivers music with confidence borne of comfortably generous headroom and ample power delivery. It's not a romantic sounding amp and it doesn't gild the lily, nor interpose rose-tinting between source and listeners. But it does come across as an honest performer with a neutrality that defies easy criticism.

Our panellists reacted well to the EAR combo, but that was perhaps more to do with respect than affection, and some did wish for less matter-of-factness, and more warmth, sweetness and delicacy, especially towards the top end of the band. Adjectives like sterile and clinical appeared on the notes of some listeners, and the top end might have been a little more open and transparent.

The bass end is well timed, and voices are well presented, though one panellist said the violin desks were too smooth, and the midband was congested, without delivering the expected space and air between adjacent piano chords. However, this amp has little signature of its own, and supplies a solidly high standard of measured and subjective performance that inspires confidence. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 87%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

FEATURES >> 70%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BUILD >> 87%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VALUE >> 81%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Lacks the romanticism that some valve aficionados are looking for, but this quick, lively amp combo supplies a solidly high standard of measured and subjective performance that inspires great confidence.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **84%**



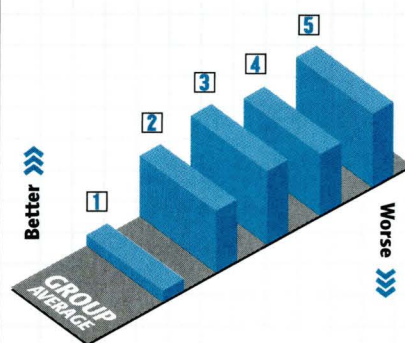
LAB REPORT

This pre/power combination is very sensibly specified and meets the expected high standard defined by EAR.

The preamplifier is very competent with low input noise, accurate equalisation in the phono stage for mm and mc settings, low distortion and a healthy output capability. The frequency response shows a slight rise below 50Hz, but only 0.2dB up by 20Hz and 0.1dB down at 20kHz.

The 534 power amplifier will give over 50W into both 8 ohm and 4 ohm loads using the relevant tap on the output transformer. Input noise was 95dB down from 1W and the input impedance of 47 kohms should not cause problems with any preamp. Harmonic distortion was an extremely low 0.01% in the midband and the intermodulation distortion results were an exceptional 0.003% at one watt. With a low output impedance of about 0.17 ohms across the audio band this amp will drive a variety of loudspeakers well.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> 10%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> 50%
- 3] Distortion >> 60%
- 4] Noise >> 50%
- 5] Compatibility >> 60%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	50W	50W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohm)	1%	0.008%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	1V	190mV



£2,350 ☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.graaf.it

GRAAF VENTICINQUE

GRAAF is known for big OTL devices, but this is less extreme

An Italian brand operating out of Modena – a city better known for producing very fast, sharply pointed, red racing cars – GRAAF (Gruppo Ricerche Audio Alta Fedeltà) was founded in December 1985 by Giovanni Mariani, with the prime objective of producing high-quality valve amps.

The company quickly built a reputation with its dramatic-output transformerless designs – an extreme variation on the valve amp theme that parallels a large number of output valves to lower the source impedance and avoid the need to use an output transformer to drive low-impedance loudspeakers. Such designs tend to be very large and expensive, so GRAAF has taken a more conventional route for this much more modestly priced Venticinque.

Styling does not seem to have been high on the designer's agenda, as this is basically a rather large and boring looking black box. Its one interesting stylistic feature is a smoked transparent strip set into the fascia that allows a discreet glimpse of the glowing valves. But at least the volume control is larger than the rest, so it falls easily to hand.

An integrated stereo amplifier, it has five line inputs plus a tape in/out and a pre-out, all on single-ended phono pairs, and as the name suggests it's rated at 25 watts per channel (see lab measurements opposite). There's neither remote control nor a mono switch here, though one of the knobs provides some balance adjustment between the two stereo channels.

The valve complement consists of two 6922 double triodes plus four 5881 (6L6) output valves, and the circuitry is equipped with automatic bias and offset adjustment for the longest possible valve life. A particularly neat touch is the forced ventilation system, which uses two very quiet fans set into the back panel to suck air through the casework. This allows the case to be kept quite



compact, while still keeping the valves close to a constant temperature.

SOUND QUALITY

The Venticinque certainly possesses the classic sound of a valve amplifier, with the seductive midband transparency that is invariably the hallmark of the breed, but this particular model didn't get our listening panel particularly excited. It didn't disgrace itself by any means, but there was a general impression that it lacked some clarity and authority compared with other models that had preceded it in the panel test.

The most persistent complaint was that it simply lacked a little excitement, and this led one panellist to suggest that it was significantly happier with classical than with rock material. While the bottom end delivered decent enough weight, it could sound a little bit sluggish and ponderous with plucked strings, leading to a slightly disjointed impression overall.

However, the overall tonal balance is good, and the midband is attractively clear and transparent. The top end is notably detailed, sweet and delicate, especially in the reproduction of orchestral strings, which come across with convincing air and texture. Brass too comes across with a realistic intimacy, and the complete impression of a full orchestra at work was reproduced with some conviction.

A neat enough package that does pretty much what's expected, this Italian offering sounds pleasantly sweet and open especially with classical material. But it didn't really get our listeners particularly excited, while the lab test results don't exactly add to the confidence either. **HFC**



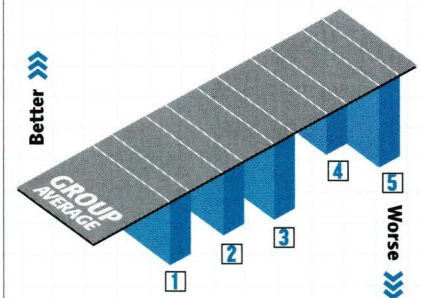
LAB REPORT

The Venticinque has a very limited frequency response, being 3dB down at 35Hz and 0.5dB down at 20kHz. When driving an 8 ohm load, distortion was high across the audio band and drops to a minimum of 3% in the midband at 1W. Allowing distortion to rise to 10%, only 5.2W was available into 8 ohms at 1kHz with less than 2W available at 80Hz and 3.7W at 20kHz.

The input impedance of 32 kohm is reasonable enough as is the sensitivity. The volume balance tracking showed a variation of up to 2.7dB across the range, but at least there is a balance control to compensate. Channel separation fell from a respectable 60dB at 80Hz to a rather poor 19dB at 20kHz. The 'A' weighted signal to noise ratio of 76dB ref 1W is unexceptional.

To get this amplifier to perform to its maximum potential great care will be required in choosing a speaker to work with it and compromises will have to be made.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output » -50%
- 2] Speaker tolerance » -50%
- 3] Distortion » -60%
- 4] Noise » -30%
- 5] Compatibility » -65%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	25W	5W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	Not supplied	3%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	140mV	120mV

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 74%

FEATURES >>> 67%

BUILD >>> 79%

VALUE >>> 75%

OVERALL SCORE >>> 74%

This neat Italian package does pretty much what's expected, offering a pleasantly sweet and open sound especially with classical material. But it's a little short on excitement and never quite manages to shine like the best valve amps can.

HI-FI CHOICE **74%**
OVERALL SCORE >>>



£1,250 01442 270141 www.gravesaudio.co.uk (not yet active)

GRAVES AUDIO MERLIN

A stylish and sharply priced design from a new brand on the scene

Graves Audio's mission is to persuade us of the virtues of combining low-power single-ended valve amplification with high-efficiency horn-loaded loudspeakers. We tested the compact Koronglay speakers in HFC 247, with positive results, and are looking here at its intended low-power, single-ended amplifier partner called Merlin (in tribute to the aero engine, not the wizard!).

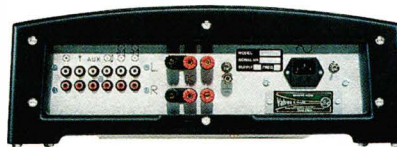
Given the appalling lack of any design flair shown by several of those assembled for this group test, the £1,250 Merlin shows a very attractive, if idiosyncratic, face to the world. Both front and back panels are surrounded by shaped wooden frames that also incorporate the feet. They also locate the curved and perforated stainless steel wrap that covers the innards, and confers fine structural integrity.

Back-lit hieroglyphics decorate the front panel to delineate the basic function set – four knobs providing on/off, volume, input and tape selection. There's neither mono nor balance options, though remote control volume is available for an extra £150 – a motorised potentiometer may be activated by programming any two convenient buttons on whatever existing handset the user has.

The wooden trim and curved shape give a decidedly retro impression, and while the unit's height is much less than most in this group, it does get rather hot, so needs plenty of ventilation. The back panel carries six pairs of phono sockets – five inputs and one tape output, all single-ended, plus terminals to supply eight or four-ohm loudspeakers. The Merlin comes in three versions: a £1,050 'budget' version with just one input, a £1,200 'open grid' version, and this 'stopped grid' example, which adds a third EL84 output valve to extend life to an estimated 8,000 hours.

SOUND QUALITY

Some very polarised panellist opinions greeted the Merlin, perhaps reflecting a



sound quality that's similarly polarised, or at least somewhat inconsistent, requiring the listeners to try and contrast the strengths and weaknesses, and come up with some sort of overall judgement.

The bottom end could certainly be tighter, tauter and better defined, and that weakness tends to become more obvious as the amplifier is worked harder. The upper bass seemed a little weak too, so that male vocals sound a little lacking in 'body', and instruments in this register seemed set a little too deep into the mix.

But the Merlin's midband and treble can sound quite delicious, with a combination of delicacy and transparency that seems the exclusive preserve of the single-ended design approach. The best feature is surely its righteous sense of timing and superior coherence, which can bring a toe-curling realism to a well-recorded disc. As one enthusiastic panellist put it: "A well defined soundstage; performance drives along well; articulate and fluid... with bags of detail and information. Worth staying in for!"

While the listening tests show that this amplifier has enormous sonic and musical potential considering its relatively modest price, the lab test results must add the rider that achieving its maximum potential is not necessarily going to be easy or straightforward.

High sensitivity speakers are a must in view of the limited power available, and while the horn-loaded, Lowther-driven Koronglay is an obvious given, other designs may prove less predictable. For those prepared to take the trouble to get things right, the rewards can be very sweet indeed. **HFC**



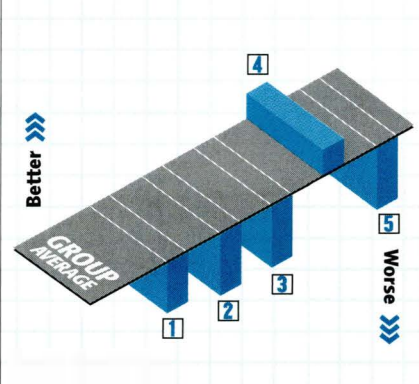
LAB REPORT

The case can get a little warm – with a room temperature of 20°C the spot temperature on the case measured 75°C.

Because this is a low power amp consisting of a short path circuit, primarily to drive Graves' own horn speakers, it needs to be quiet. It's not bad in this respect, recording -85dB against a 1W output.

Input sensitivity was low at 280mV, but with a 90 kohm input resistance it's a fairly benign load. Distortion was higher than claimed giving 2.13% at 1W into 8 ohms, and although the measured frequency response at 1W extended to 20Hz no useful power was available. At 80Hz, 2.6W was available for 1% distortion and 2.4W at 20kHz. Using the 4 ohm tap into a 4 ohm load it managed 2.2W with a flat response. However, using this tap into an 8 ohm load produced a treble lift from 5kHz giving a peak of 2.6dB at 30kHz. Channel separation was 66dB at 1kHz, falling to 40dB at 20kHz. Careful speaker choice is a must for this amp to perform well.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> -40%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> -50%
- 3] Distortion >> -50%
- 4] Noise >> 20%
- 5] Compatibility >> -50%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	6W	2.4W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	<0.04	3%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	500mV	280mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 84%

FEATURES >> 72%

BUILD >> 80%

VALUE >> 89%

Lack of power requires high-sensitivity partnering speakers, but if a good match is found, the hot-running Merlin proves capable of delivering delightful delicacy, coherence and transparency at a surprisingly affordable price.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **85%**



£900 ☎ 07787 158791 🌐 www.iconaudio.co.uk

ICON AUDIO STEREO 40i

Stunning styling and an impressive spec at a very sharp price

A new name on the hi-fi scene, Icon Audio is offering some impressive packages for valve enthusiasts, combining attractive styling with impressive technical specs at prices that are very competitive. Lined up alongside the others in this group test, one might expect this Stereo 40i to cost in the region of £2,000. The very pleasant surprise is that the actual price here is just £900, so it's therefore much less of a surprise to hear that Chinese manufacture lies behind this compact and good looking bargain.

The shape and proportions are a little unusual. It has a small 32x25cm footprint – smaller than most support furniture shelves – yet it also stands quite tall at 18cm (and requires a bit more for ventilation). The basic chassis is super-shiny chrome plating, which certainly looks very smart, even though it does make the labelling difficult to read. The three transformers are separately encased along the back half, while the four large EL34 output valves, plus the small ECC81 and ECC83 types protrude through the front part of the chassis. A very clever cover arrangement combines a perforated Perspex top with a series of spaced chrome-plated slats to provide protection, ventilation and a very stylish appearance.

The feature count is modest. There's no remote control, balance or mono provision, for example, just a neat little volume control, and three basic line inputs plus a tape loop in/out set, all on single-ended phono pairs. Speakers are connected to the usual multi-way terminals, with eight or four-ohm tap options. The one unusual touch is a front panel switch that selects between ultralinear and triode operating modes for the output valves, the two modes delivering power outputs of 40 watts and 17 watts respectively.

SOUND QUALITY

While there's no denying that the Stereo 40i does offer the delightful character of valve



amplification at a very attractive price, it's also true that it does lack the precision and focus found in the more expensive examples gathered together for this test. Prior to the formal unsighted tests, the ultralinear and triode modes were compared. We found that the latter sounded clearly superior, especially in terms of perceived treble extension and detail. Triode operation was therefore used thereafter.

Stereo imaging seemed to be its most obvious area of weakness. One listener described the sound as a bit "phasey"; another found difficulty in pinning down the sonic architecture of the soundstage; a third commented on "imprecise central focus".

Those criticisms aside, it delivered a good sense of drive and purpose, with decent separation between voices and easy-to-distinguish articulation of lyrics. Despite its slight vagueness, the sound has a lovely spacious and airy quality with plenty of depth. The music flows well with a good sense of purpose, and attractive interplay between different instruments, though the bass end did seem to lack a little discrimination on some material.

Even though the sound quality falls a little short of the standards set by significantly more costly examples in this group test, the Stereo 40i remains an extremely viable prospect. While it's clear that you get the sound quality you pay for here to some extent, the price is undeniably very attractive, and the amplifier itself is a thoroughly practical as well as a very good looking device, confirmed by its solid measured lab performance. **HFC**

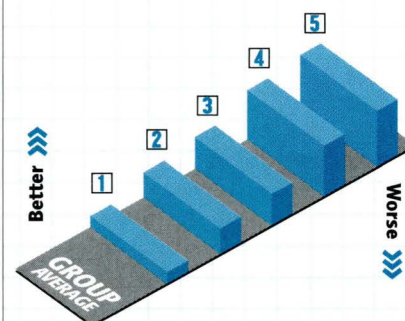


LAB REPORT

This amp has two operating modes, but in the majority of cases the only thing that changes noticeably from a measurement perspective is the output power.

This is a short path amplifier with a minimum of stages and manages a fairly useable input sensitivity. Output power exceeded spec at 1kHz into 8 ohms, but just missed out into 4 ohms. On triode operation the specified 20W was achieved into both 4 and 8 ohm loads. The frequency response exhibited extended bass response below 10Hz and fell by only 0.3 dB at 20kHz. Distortion is less than 0.1% at 1kHz rising to 0.3% at 20kHz. Channel separation and signal to noise ratio were good. Unusual in this batch of amps, spectrum analysis revealed third harmonic distortion higher than second in UL mode, suggesting that if you don't need the power the triode operation is preferred. This amplifier is capable of driving a range of loudspeakers including 4 ohm.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >> 10%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >> 20%
- 3] Distortion >> 25%
- 4] Noise >> 40%
- 5] Compatibility >> 45%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	37W	43W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	0.1%	0.1%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	500mV	300mV

VERDICT

SOUND >> 76%

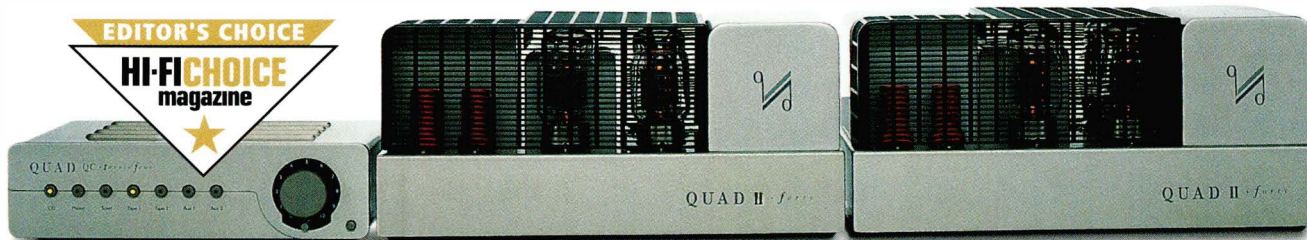
FEATURES >> 65%

BUILD >> 78%

VALUE >> 89%

A very attractive amp that sells at an exceptionally sharp price, its sound lacks some of the precision found for higher cost, but is still very enjoyable, while this thoroughly practical design also delivered a solid measured lab performance.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **83%**



£4,007 (£777 + £3,230) ☎ 0845 458 0011 🌐 www.quad-hifi.co.uk

QUAD QC-24/II-40

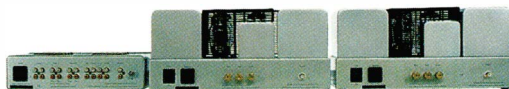
Quad revives some early memories with this pre/power combo

Although its electrostatic loudspeakers have gone on to achieve even greater fame, Quad – which originally stood for Quality Unit Amplifier Domestic – started out as an amplifier manufacturer, which formed the foundations of the company. The most famous and revered of these was probably the combination of the Quad 22 preamplifier with a pair of Quad II mono power amps, which became a reference standard stereo valve amp combo through most of the 1960s, prior to the arrival of the solid state 33/303.

After a thirty-year interregnum, Quad has reintroduced a valve amplifier, and the £3,230 QC-24/II-40 represents a revival of that classic 22/II three-box pre/power combo. These will evoke memories in those that recall the originals. Apart from the placement of input/output socketry along the sides rather than on one end, and the provision of a cage to cover the hot valves, the new II-40 mono power amp looks similar to its inspiration, although it's scaled up in size and weight. It also follows Peter Walker's original circuitry, though engineer Andy Grove has updated and uprated the components – KT88s replace the original KT66 output valves, for example.

The QC-24 is also similar in style to the 22, including the radiused edge and louvred top of the casework, the flanged volume control above a curved balance slider, and the fascia's curved line motif. In line with present day thinking, however, the elaborate tone controls and filters of the original are omitted here, replaced by a row of LED-illuminated line-input selector buttons. Out of line with modern thinking, no attempt has been made to implement any form of remote control.

Though logical in a historic context, the styling is unconventional, in the camouflage colour scheme and shape of the components. Choosing the right support furniture will need careful consideration, and routing the pre-to-power interconnects can be tricky.



SOUND QUALITY

Highly rated in the unsighted and the hands-on listening tests, with just one dissenter, this Quad combo has a distinctive character. It delivers a big, full sound, with an impressive bass foundation that has plenty of weight and brings due gravitas and power to rock and classical material.

The soundstage is generous, with fine depth perspectives and good overall control. This isn't the fastest nor the most detailed amplifier around, which put off one panellist, who said it was sluggish on some tracks. But the majority were happy to be seduced by a sweetness, smoothness and softness.

One of our panellists acknowledged "some muddle", but said: "it throws good weight into the room, with a big, full-on sound". Another said it is "not the most detailed, but gets on with it in a businesslike way".

The bottom line is an amp combo that's free from vice. It has a big, muscular sound that communicates the musical messages well, while remaining easy on the ears. The lab measurements confirm solid engineering, with good power delivery and modest distortion. The only down sides are the high price, and the unusual shapes and sizes of the three components. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 90%



Notably free from vice, with a big, muscular, lush sound that is easy on the ears. Lab measurements confirm solid engineering with good power delivery, the main down side being the relatively high price tag.

FEATURES >>> 68%



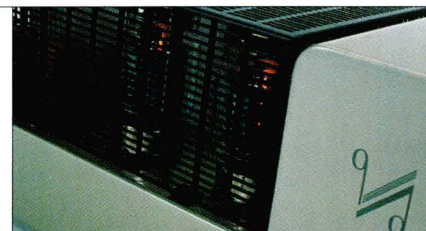
BUILD >>> 88%



VALUE >>> 83%



HI-FI CHOICE 86%
OVERALL SCORE >>>

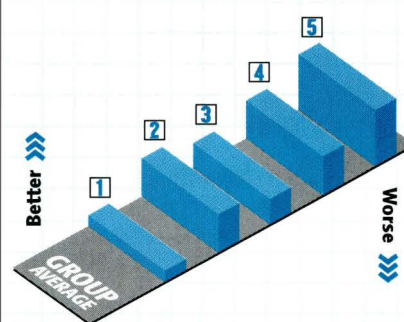


LAB REPORT

The preamplifier worked well, delivering a consistently good range of performance figures with extended bandwidth, respectable sensitivity (81mV), good overload margins, good drive capability and reasonably low (0.1%) distortion. The 'A' weighted signal to noise ratio of -83dB ref 0.5V output is also adequate.

Midband output power exceeded spec at 1kHz into 8 and 4 ohms. At rated power the distortion at both 20Hz and 20kHz rises to 4%. The frequency response extends below 10Hz in the bass, falling by 0.2dB at 20kHz. At 1W output distortion is less than 0.04% at 1kHz, increasing to 0.2% at 20Hz and 0.3% at 20kHz with second harmonic distortion the dominating artefact. Signal to noise ratio was good at -90dB ref 1W 'A' weighted. With an output impedance of 0.3 ohms, the damping factor is reasonably low and with peak currents of more than three amps available this combo should be capable of driving the majority of loudspeakers both old and modern.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic output >>> 10%
- 2] Speaker tolerance >>> 30%
- 3] Distortion >>> 20%
- 4] Noise >>> 30%
- 5] Compatibility >>> 45%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Continuous power output (8 ohm)	40W	48W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohm)	Not supplied	0.1%
Input sensitivity (CD/aux)	150mV	150mV

CONCLUSIONS

Several decades into the age of the transistor, valve amps still have much to offer the music-lover

This is a truly fascinating group test, full of seriously interesting sounding amplifiers, each of which has its own distinctive character. Perhaps the biggest shock of all was discovering just how difficult it was to return to regular solid state amplification after some weeks playing under thermionic rules.

There are plenty of good reasons for taking one look at this collection of oddballs and deciding to opt for something rather more conventional. But try

to ignore the often indifferent and frequently oddball styling – set aside the relatively primitive facilities, modest power ratings and indifferent distortion, stop worrying about the waste heat, and the fact that the valves might eventually need replacing many years hence. Just take the trouble to listen to a valve amp in comparison with a solid state alternative – and prepare to find yourself seduced.

One thing about valve amps is that they all offer different

combinations of compromises, often laced with a liberal dose of irony. The ultra-simple single-ended designs from Audio Note and Graves Audio might have much poorer measured performance parameters than push-pull designs, yet their very simplicity is presumably responsible for the breathtaking midband realism they can deliver. It also probably accounts for the fact that things become rather less happy towards the top and bottom of the audio band.

By the same token the push-pull designs tend to represent a good overall compromise between the need to drive the majority of real-world loudspeakers to decent operating levels, while still supplying plenty of that special valve *je ne sais quoi*. These PP designs are arguably more sensible all-rounders, but there's an equally tempting case for going single-ended, while hanging onto an existing solid state amp for those occasions when you really want to crank it up. **HFC**

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TRIANGLE ANTAL 202 £925

Good sensitivity and fine midband dynamic expression come together in a very cost-effective package.

HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Valve amps put out lots of waste heat, so do ensure that there's plenty of ventilation space around them.
- ⊕ Valve amps usually have output transformers, which match the high impedance of the output valves to the lower speaker impedance. The option of four or eight-ohm matching

terminals can only be approximate, as impedances vary with frequency, so experiment to see which works best in your system.

- ⊕ Don't leave a valve amp powered up without speakers connected because the output transformers don't like being unloaded.

VALVE AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE	Audio Note	Audio Research	BAT	EAR	Graaf	Graves Audio	Icon Audio	Quad
MODEL	Oto SE	VSi55	VK-300x	864/ 534	Venticinque	Merlin	Stereo 40i	QC-24/ II-40
PRICE	£1,599	£2,895	£5,350	£4,156	£2,350	£1,250	£900	£4,007
SOUND	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
FEATURES	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
BUILD	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
VALUE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
CONCLUSION	Lacks power, but demonstrates remarkable sonic delicacy, coherence and dynamic integrity.	Great all-rounder provides the delights of valve amplification without sacrificing convenience.	Enjoyable and informative sound, with advantages in power and preamp flexibility.	Supplies a solidly high standard of measured and subjective performance that inspires great confidence.	Delivers a sweet and open sound especially with classical material, if a little short on excitement.	Requires high sensitivity speakers, but delivers good coherence and transparency for the price.	Competitively priced and good looking; could have more precision, but a good all-round performer.	A big, muscular sound that's smooth and easy on the ears, plus solid engineering with good power delivery.
KEY FEATURES								
LINE	4	5	4	5	4	5	3	5
TAPE	1	No	1	1	2	1	1	2
PHONO	Option (MM)	No	Option (MM/MC)	MM	No	No	No	No
PRE OUT	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
REMOTE	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Vol (optional)	No	No
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR								
POWER	4.2W P	50W A	155W E	50W A	5W P	2.4W P	43W A	48W A
DYN. POWER	5W A	56W A	180W G	56W A	6W A	3W A	45W A	50W A
CURRENT	1.5A P	3.7A G	7A G	5.5A G	1A P	1.2A P	2.25A A	2.25A A
DISTORTION	0.8% A	0.05% G	0.4% A	0.008% E	3% P	3% P	0.1% G	0.1% G
NOISE	-80dB A	-85dB A	-80dB A	-95dB E	-76dB P	-85dB A	-90dB G	-83dB A

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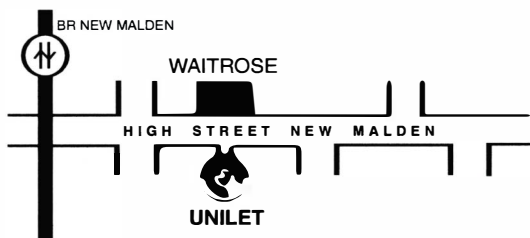
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RETRO

DUAL CS-505 TURNTABLE



Dual was a famous cuckoo clock manufacturer based in the Black Forest that somehow got into the turntable industry. Its heyday was in the eighties, and the product for which it was most

famous was the CS-505, which went through various iterations, the first of which appeared in 1981, but with antecedents that went back much further. It bit the dust at the end of the decade, but again this wasn't quite the end. Anyone who has had a look at some of the recently reintroduced Thorens turntables range will have noticed their resemblance to earlier generations of Dual turntables, which is no coincidence.

The CS-505 was a development of a short-lived model called the CS-506, which cost around £120, and which appeared – and vanished – at the beginning of the eighties. The CS-505 was essentially a lightweight, stripped-down version of the CS-506, which if memory serves, used to sell for around £70-£75. It was a clever design in many ways, but above all it was a cost-effective one which didn't waste resources on costly die-castings or other conceits and paraphernalia of high-class design if it could get away with a simpler solution. The fact that it still managed to deliver the goods is a tribute to the fundamental integrity of the design, and the Dual became first choice among budget turntables year after year, ahead of rivals from Pioneer and Trio (later Kenwood) among others.

Readers who own one of the Dual turntables – and there must be quite a few even now – will hopefully forgive me if my recollection proves faulty on some of the details. The basics are however, that it was an integrated turntable with a fixed, ultra-low-mass arm in a gimbal bearing with an offset plastic headshell with, in the earliest versions, a rather untidy cartridge carrier that clipped into the fixed part of the headshell. Most CS-505s were equipped as standard with an OEM version of the Ortofon OM10 cartridge, which was a clever choice as users could upgrade simply by changing the stylus.

The arm was interlinked with the motor drive switch, so that moving the arm towards the platter started the motor. The cueing device worked accurately to drop the stylus gently and

“Let's not get too rosy-eyed. It was a good cheap turntable and got us onto the quality audio ladder, but a starting point, not the final destination.”

quietly into the lead-in groove. At the end of a side, the arm was lifted automatically, and the motor drive cut.

The player itself was a belt-drive model driven by a 16-pole synchronous motor with a lightweight platter and a rubber mat covering belt access holes. The motor spindle was an ingenious design which opened out, providing a pitch control which allowed the platter speed to be referenced against strobe marking on the rim of the platter. The main bearing, fixed to a lightweight platform, was independent from the main chassis.

Let's not get too rosy-eyed about the CS-505. It was a good cheap turntable and got many of us onto the quality audio ladder, but for most it was a starting point, not the final destination. Pitch stability was good, and wow and flutter levels unobjectionable, but the bass was lean and not very powerful, and the midrange coloured compared to the Rega Planer 2, which was the next step up the ladder for keen audiophiles.

Basically, the CS505 was what it was, and the finish was determinedly plastic. Attempts to upgrade with a moving coil cartridge fell foul of the low mass armtube which didn't suit low-compliance cartridges, and the arm bearings probably weren't up to it either. Dual did attempt a higher quality version called the CS-5000 designed to be sold at a higher price. As I recall it had a direct drive motor, 78rpm and a felt mat, and was better built all-round, with a real wood plinth surround too. Not that these refinements did it a lot of good. When it came up against the Regas which were by then firmly ensconced as the turntables of choice between the CS-505 and the Linn Sondek class, the CS-5000 barely got a look in, and it didn't survive long. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

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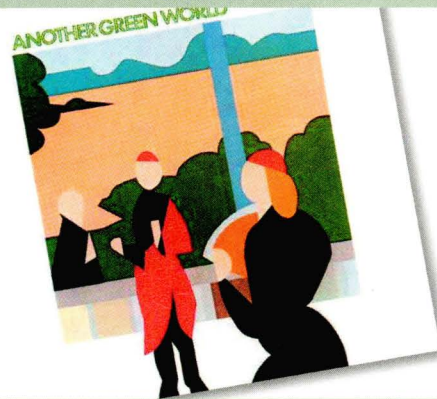


The mid-1970s was a period of physical debilitation for Brian Eno, which he countered by achieving his artistic zenith. In 1974 he suffered a collapsed lung and the period of convalescence allowed him to absorb new ideas on organisational dynamics and the biological quality of art. Once recovered, Eno was hit by a London taxi. His inability to get out of bed and turn up a record resulted in *Discreet Music* – his first full ambient composition. He would also produce *Evening Star* with Robert Fripp, but the icing on the cake was his third official solo album, *Another Green World*, the record that would unhook pop music from the merely novel and push it towards the unknown.

Released in 1975, *Another Green World*, was hailed as “a progressive rock masterpiece” by Rolling Stone, who devoted its lead review to “this important and brilliant record”. Many noted its “classical orientation” – which harked back to Satie and Debussy – and its “unfinished and fleeting quality”. Even the modernist NME praised Eno’s “quiet industry”.

On the surface *Another Green World* looks like an oddly conventional Eno album. He assembles the usual cast: Robert Fripp, John Cale, Phil Collins and various others on keyboards and bass. Eno himself handles much of the percussion – mostly derived from a tape loop and rhythm generator (an early drum machine). The album’s palette of percussion, ranging from ethnic wood-block to wiry metallic, defines the record as a precursor of Eno/David Byrne’s *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* and, in some form, all subsequent ambient techno music.

On *Another Green World*, Eno’s forays into defining “music as a sense of place, a geographical location” came into its first bloom. *Over Fire Island*, *St Elmo’s Fire*, *The Big Ship*, *Little Fishes* and the title track all conjure up specific locations. *In Dark Trees* with its wooden percussion, car-horn refrains and sad guitar was inspired by Eno’s vision of ‘an inky blue forest with horses off in the distance’. Side one ends with the melancholy refrain of *Another Green World* with rising piano and harmony of Farfisa organ, double-tracked with treated guitars. BBC2 would use it (and still does) as the theme for its arts programme, *Arena*.



“The vast palette of percussion sounds define, in some form, all subsequent ambient techno music.”

St Elmo’s Fire is often cited as Eno’s most perfect pop song. Characterised by a speedy tempo with some brilliant picking from Robert Fripp on his Wimshurst guitar, its most memorable line is the elemental “splitting ions in the ether”. *I’ll Come Running*, with an almost Latin rhythm, uses electric guitars played with mallets to produce what Eno describes as “castanet guitars”. Of the vocal tracks it’s *Golden Hours* which has the most delicious structure. Beginning with hesitant, choppy-sounding organs, with Eno vocalising doubt as to his ability to keep concentrating after a lengthy studio session, this emotional song is framed by a wonderful Fripp guitar solo and John Cale’s subdued viola playing.

The charm of *Another Green World* is its instrumental sound – with voices somewhere between vocal and pure music. But the instrumental pieces anchor the record as an early ambient masterpiece. *Becalmed*, with its piano fed through the revolving Leslie horn of a Hammond organ, is so slow, so mournful, that one cannot help to throw a metaphorical stone into the speakers to fathom just how deep this music goes. The feeling of worlds in slow drift is topped off by the spatial *Zawinul/Lava*.

In all, this album is a masterpiece of creativity and restraint. A 24-track recording at Island Studios, much of it was done using Eno’s strange ‘composting’ and ‘subtraction’ methods. It is possibly pop’s most successful homage to Cage’s theories of indeterminacy and proof positive of Eno’s importance as pop’s primary avant-garde figure.

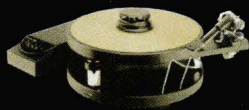
Another Green World forms part of an extensive reissue programme of 22 Eno albums over the next two years, revived in the purest possible way using the EQ’d production masters from the original vinyl cut for CD and possible SACD release. It’s the least this masterpiece deserves. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

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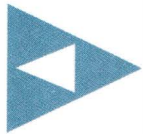
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Agencies include: Krell, Sonus faber, Martin Logan, Copland, Pathos, Unison Research, Transparent, Chord cable, finite-elemente, Futureglass, BCD

DIGITALIA

THE RIDDLE OF THE UPSAMPLERS



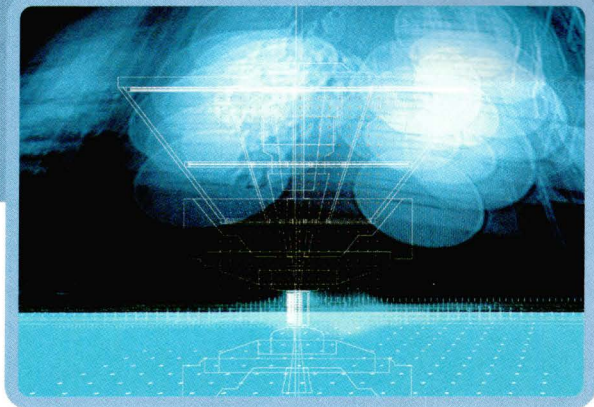
Upsampling is not new. It dates from the very first CD players on the market. Philips' first model, the CD100, used upsampling (calling it oversampling, but a rose by any other name).

Ever since, all digital replay machines based on Philips internals – and most of the players from other brands, at least since 1985 or so – have used oversampling.

Upsampling does the same thing as Philips' oversampling, although the ratios used may be different and typically the wordlength is maintained or increased, usually to 24 bits. This doesn't create any new information, and done correctly should yield the same results at the analogue output as straight conversion to analogue of the original bitstream. However, people listening to the first upsamplers heard differences and liked them. Now it's practically *de rigueur* to upsample in any hi-fi CD player or DAC. But does it actually serve a purpose?

Once a signal is in the digital domain it is represented by a string of numbers. The more numbers there are, in principle, the more accurately the signal can be reconstructed. What really matters though is the *smallest number of digits* at any stage of the digital chain. On a CD there are $44,100 \times 16 = 705,600$ digits per channel, per second. If at some later stage this number is decreased (perhaps when you copy to MD, for example) information is irrevocably lost. On the other hand if it is increased, no information is gained – the best you can hope for is not to lose any in the conversion.

Now it's possible to do conversions extremely accurately. Converting from say 44kHz 16-bit to 96kHz 24-bit can be done with a loss of something like 0.00002% of the information – assuming you do your sums correctly. But how easy is it to be sure that the sums are right? This is where it gets tricky. You know that the samples going in represent a signal with a bandwidth of DC (Direct Current = 0Hz) to 22kHz (half the sampling frequency). You then have to calculate where the new samples will go – which is conceptually the same as converting to analogue (filling in the curves between the old samples) and back to digital (sampling at new points). You therefore have to



“Even in the digital domain, real filters that meet these criteria are not so easy to produce.”

deal with exactly the same problem as in D-A and A-D conversion – namely, filtering.

And that's where the problem lies. The filters must have sharp cut-off to prevent aliasing (the production of distortion tones that are effectively intermodulation products between the input frequency and the sampling frequency) but still allow the audio to get through unaltered. Even in the digital domain, real filters that meet these criteria are not so easy to produce. They can have problems including slight aliasing and pre-echo – this is not the same as pre-ringing (which is almost certainly harmless), but is a real image of the signal, attenuated but occurring before it. It's rare but can still exist.

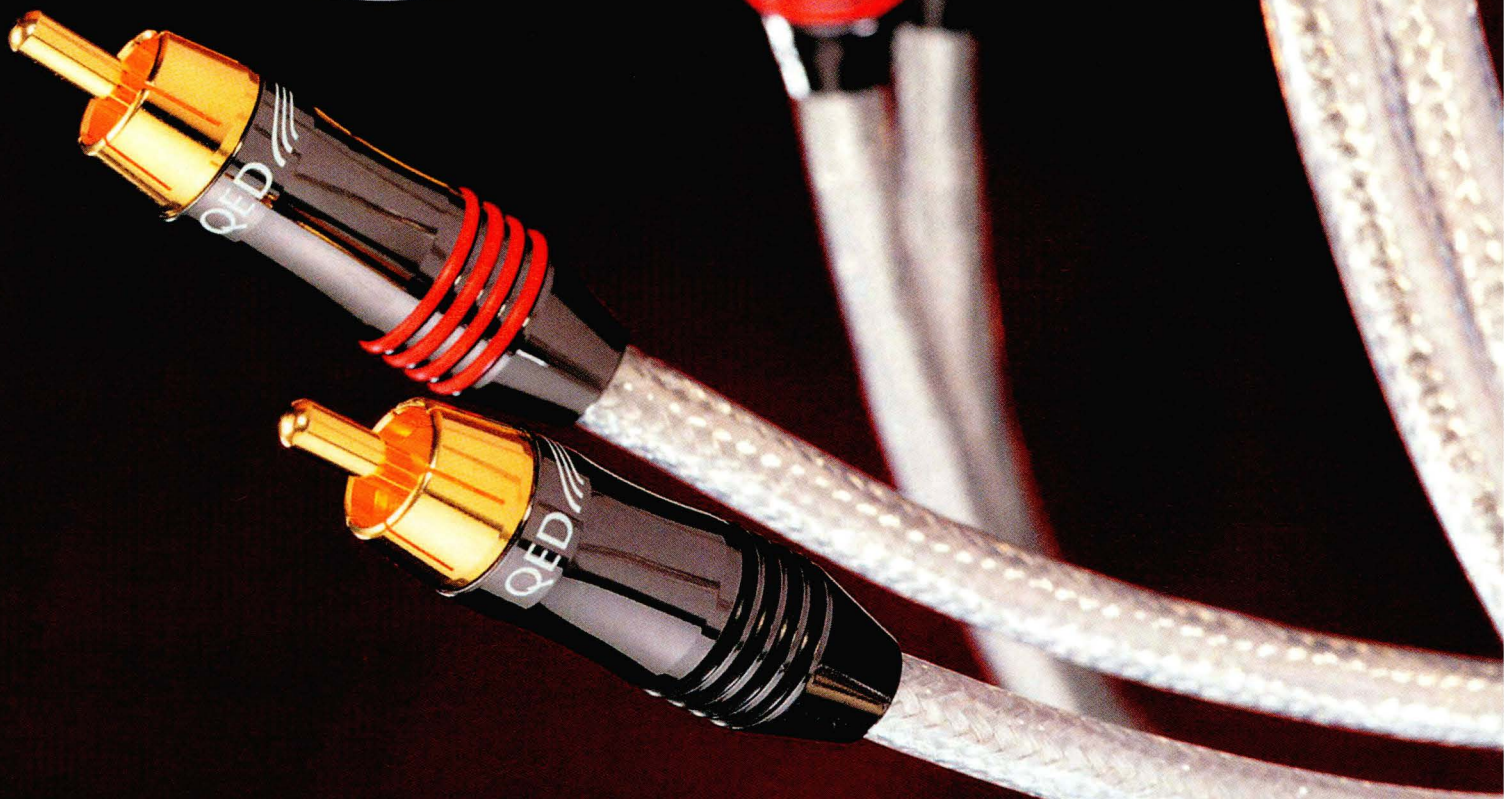
As we discussed in the last *Digitalia*, even slight aliasing can produce audible side effects due to 'alias-intermodulation distortion' (AID). Generally, two digital filters of very slightly different performance can be expected to sound different. In fact, when you compare upsampled CD replay with 'regular', or even when you compare two upsamplers, you are comparing filters. You may be comparing jitter too, which complicates things, but using a single high-sampling-rate DAC you can largely eliminate that variable.

Upsamplers often have a nearer-ideal filter characteristic than regular ADCs, due not least to the relative difficulty of awkward upsampling ratios (441:960, for instance, instead of 1:4). Once designers tackle that one it's not much of a mathematical or hardware overhead to include slightly better filters. But in general the responses are *different*, and there's a psychological tendency to equate 'different' with 'better' when a pet theory says it should be better. In reality, there's nothing in upsampling that a well-designed 'regular' CD player can't achieve. **HFC**

Richard Black

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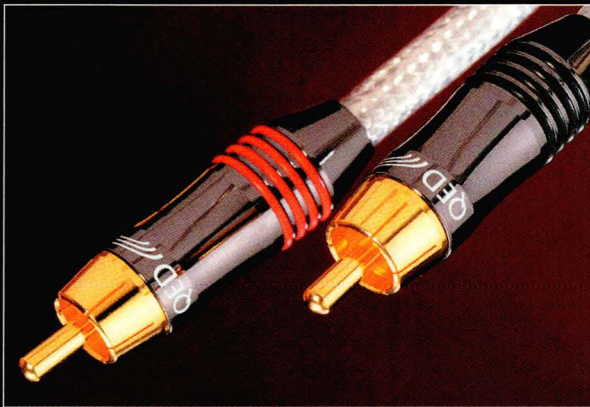


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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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.

Reviews you can trust

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

How to use this guide

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

Products that score more than 80 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.



Arcam DiVA CD93T £950

Few CD players under a grand can match the accomplishment of Arcam's latest beauty. Its sound is neutral but always musical – delicate or vigorous, whatever the disc requires.

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 OUT	OPT DIG OUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000											
BB	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems	●	●	●	●	●			247
BB	Arcam DIVA CD93T	950	The CD33 may technically be Arcam's ultimate CD player, but it's the little brother that really won our hearts	●	●	●	●	●			252
BB	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
BB	Cyrus CD8	1,000	A truly cracking player, particularly when partnered with the optional PSX-R off-board power supply (£350)	●	●	●					252
	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
BB	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages	●	●	●	●	●	●		250
	Naim CD5i	825	Taut and rhythmic, Naim's starter CD player will win many fans. A particularly fine partner for the Nait 5i amp				●				252
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, this Rotel generally holds up well		●		●				231
BB	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A revised and refined version of the SCD-XA333ES that provides an almost holographic sound	●	●	●	●	●	●		248
ABOVE £1,000											
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
EC	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
	Hegel CDP2A	1,500	A technically proficient and masterly-sounding player built by people who clearly know what they are doing		●		●		●		252
EC	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
EC	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
EC	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●		●	●	231
BB	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer		●	●	●				238
EC	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
EC	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●				238
BB	Orelle CD100evo	1,500	Very superior timing, a wide dynamic range, natural sweetness and fine transparency				●				248
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●				●		226
BB	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed D and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source				●		●	●	244
	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,100	An enjoyably dynamic-sounding player featuring a positively unique choice of digital components		●		●				252
EC	Sony SCD-XA9000ES	2,400	State-of-the-art CD and SACD player with full SACD bass management and i.Link-encrypted digital output	●	●		●	●	●	●	253
EC	Wadia 302	3,995	A dynamic and gripping player, with bass to die for and resolution to change your listening habits		●	●	●		●	●	253

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.



Cyrus CD8/PSX-R £1,350

Taken on its own, Cyrus's CD8 is a highly articulate £1,000 CD player. Add a PSX-R power supply and it really takes off – detailed and dynamic, with musical poise and panache.



Naim CDX2 £2,650

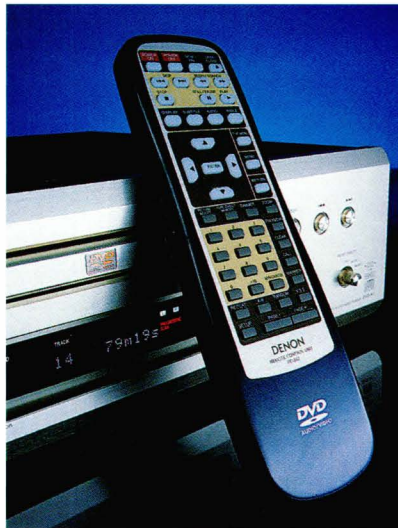
A superb player that mixes rhythm and timing with precision and poise. Add the £2,300 XPS power supply (pictured) to make one of the best CD players in the world.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video

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

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio onto the disc alongside the video data. You can



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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

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

DVD-AUDIO

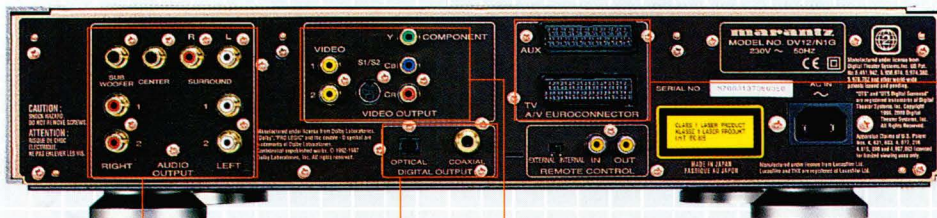
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for information – lyrics, images and so on. To save

you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD *and* DVD-A, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELECTRIC 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
	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match						237
SB	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
SB	Denon DVD-2900	850	A beautifully built universal player that delivers a strong performance across all formats, all at a remarkable price						248
SB	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
SB	Pioneer DV-668AV	600	HDMI-equipped universal player without i.Link audio output, but still absurdly well equipped and highly capable for the price						252
SB	Pioneer DV-868AVi	1,000	State of the art universal player with next-gen digital outputs – HDMI for video and i.Link for high-resolution audio						252
	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	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs						230
EC	Primare DVD30	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles – no wideband digital outputs but masterful with music and a good picture too						253
	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.



Pioneer DV-868AVi £1,000

Pioneer's HDMI/i.Link-equipped universal flagship packs an amazing hi-tech punch.



Denon DVD-A11 £1,700

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

Sound Fantastic

Olson's new *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

Each unit is fitted with a 10A mains R.F.I. filter with earthline choke and transient suppressor, designed to filter mains-borne transients, switching surges, R.F. interference, intermittent spikes and other disturbances.

- ✓ Robust steel construction
- ✓ 13A Sockets
- ✓ 10A Panel Mount Fuse
- ✓ RFI 10A Mains Filter & Surge Suppressor
- ✓ External Earth Stud
- ✓ 2m x 1.5mm Screened Cable
- ✓ UK Plug - 10A Fuse Fitted
- ✓ Colour Black
- ✓ Specials to order

TYPE NO.	NO. OF SOCKETS	OVERALL LENGTH	PRICE
HF 4	4	446mm	£83.72
HF 6	6	557mm	£92.47
HF 8	8	670mm	£98.70

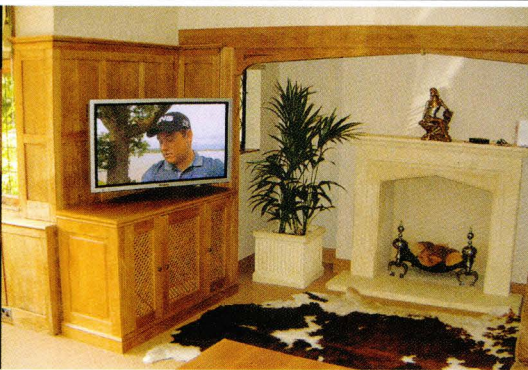
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Home Entertainment, May 2001



Five Stars for Value

**Does the best price always mean the best deal?
Ask our top twenty UK specialist hi-fi dealers.**

"I thought I had this buying hi-fi business sorted out. I bought all the hi-fi magazines and read them thoroughly, because I reckoned their experts knew exactly what they were talking about - at least a lot more than I did! It was reassuring to see the same product names cropping up regularly and I figured the writers' experience and guidance would steer me straight to the system of my dreams. The trouble is I've ended up more confused than when I started".

One reviewer said a product I fancied was absolutely brilliant but another said it was nothing special at all. How can that be? Surely one CD player is pretty much the same as another? And how can a loudspeaker that's one magazine's top recommendation not get so much as a mention in any of the others? I don't mind admitting it, I'm completely lost."

Plan B - I'm going for a deal

"So, I've decided to adopt plan B. I'm sure there can't be any really dramatic differences between all this gear and it's all bound to work together properly, so I'm going to check the price lists and the adverts and shop around for the best deal. I know getting the right hi-fi is important hey, I'm as mad about music as anyone but if I can get close to the mark and save a few quid, I'm sure I'll end up with a good system and be happy. I know there are specialist shops out there that do demonstrations and reckon they've got all the solutions but, to be honest, I'm a bit scared of going to one. I'd really welcome some advice and guidance but I don't know all the technical jargon and I'd feel daft sitting there trying to 'hear the differences' if I couldn't. Anyway, a friend told me that these shops only sell the really expensive gear and that they're not interested if you don't have loads of money to spend."

And so another hi-fi buyer starts his journey down the road to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a permanent overdraft.

There is only one way to buy a hi-fi system that will prove satisfying, reliable and deliver true value for money, and that's

through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Let's face it, you wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details and a photograph. Even if you're spending far less, say buying a jacket or a pair of shoes, you want to try them on to make sure they fit you.

Buying a hi-fi system is no different. It doesn't matter what the specifications say or what the 'experts' think: if it doesn't measure up to what you want from a system, then it's not the right choice. Knowing that you've bought a room full of five-star favourites or best-buys is no consolation when you can't bear to listen to them for more than five minutes. Even that ten per cent discount on the price won't make them sound any better.

Buying or being sold to?

Mind you, most of us are easily suckered when it comes to buying hi-fi. Given the choice of venturing into the unknown territory of a specialist dealer's shop and exerting some influence over what we buy, or taking what looks like the easy route having adverts and magazine reviews push us along a path sweetened with discounts and special offers - we opt for the latter. We don't buy a system, we allow ourselves to be sold one. We side-line our own ideas about quality and personal satisfaction and buy someone else's opinion of what's good for us and good value for our money.

Take control!

Now there's a group of long-established, independent specialist dealers who are



“ You wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details. ”

totally committed to putting the customer back in the driving seat. They're encouraging the buyer to take control with a little help and guidance provided where required. They know how difficult it can be to establish the true quality and worth of hi-fi and home cinema systems. They know that without experiencing the performance of the systems they offer, you can't possibly assess the value of them. That's why their idea of 'selling' is to play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost

certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. With the dealer's help and advice you will be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problems you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand into your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure that you're entirely happy with the way it works.

Why bother?

There is, of course, one question that hasn't been answered: why should you and these dealers go to all this trouble? Well, from your point of view maybe it's because a good deal is about a great deal more than just price. unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

for years - years during which most of those five star products will probably stop shining quite so brightly. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are 20 of the best hi-fi shops in the country. They all have lots of stars. You'll find them on the shop floor: they're the people waiting to guide customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road
020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
020 7924 2043

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI

40 High St. 01233 624441

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead

AUDIO DESIGNS

26 High St. 01342 314569

Horsham AUDIO DESIGNS

7-9 Park Place
01403 252255

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY

9 High Street Hampton Wick
020 8943 3530

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High St. 01268 779762

Ringwood, Hampshire

PHONOGRAPHY

Star Lane 01425 461230

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Southampton PHASE 3 HI-FI

37 Bedford Place

023 8022 8434

Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI

213-217 Tarring Road

01903 708810

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE

3 Church Lane

01295 272158

Birmingham SOUND ACADEMY

152a High Street, Bloxwich

01922 493499

Coventry Frank Harvey

163 Spon Street

024 7652 5200

Leicester CYMBIOSIS

6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754

Northampton LISTEN INN

32 Gold St. 01604 637871

Shrewsbury CREATIVE AUDIO

9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle THE AUDIO WORKS

14 Stockport Road

0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL

12/14 Shaw Road

0161 633 2602

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS

184 Fitzwilliam St

0114 275 6048

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI

34 Northumberland Street

0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO

260 St. Vincent Street

0141 248 4079

N. IRELAND

Belfast LYRIC HI-FI

429-431 Lisburn Road

028 90 381296

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.

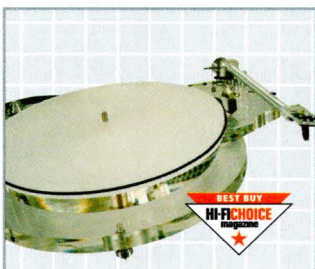
There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS



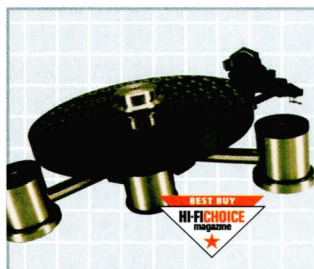
Pro-Ject
1 Xpression £210

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	SPEEDS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
					SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	
	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●		203
	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●				247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●			229
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●			194
	Clearaudio Emotion	655	An engaging turntable offering plenty of audiophile credibility for the money (price includes arm and cartridge)	33/45			●	●	251
	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			●	●	223
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Goldring GR1	140	The best value 'Rega' yet and a new benchmark for budget turntables. Vinyl nirvana on a shoestring	33/45			●	●	252
	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●		239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michell Orbe SE	1,825	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor	33/45	●				235
	Nottingham Analogue Horizon	529	A fluid midrange and nimble but rich bass are two of the many attributes of this bargain deck (price inc RB250 arm)	33/45			●		253
	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45			●	●	248
	Pro-Ject RPM 6	500	Basic, very neutral turntable and arm combination that can take a very expensive cartridge. A high-end bargain	33/45			●		236
	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	33/45			●		214
	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●		214
	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45			●		239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●		228
	Roksan Radius 5	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation	33/45	●		●		248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan TMS2	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●			246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●		195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●		186

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms		●		235
	Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone		●		235
	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akiva	1,800	With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape		●	●	242
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
	Van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●		235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage		●		244
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wilson Benesch Naked Analog	1,450	With its smooth clean highs, transparent midband and nimble bass, this is a lot of performance for the money		●		253

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU IN	AU IMPEDANCE	
	Musical Fidelity X-LPSV3	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved	●	●			248
	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money	●	●			245
	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP		●			201
	Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

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

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

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

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

definitive audio

Definitive Audio creates a quality of musical experience that is irresistible. We achieve this using some of the world's most ingenious contraptions and by employing a value system that places musical considerations above all others.

Our inventory includes the tantalising KSL Kondo amplifiers from Japan. There is the M7 Line, M7 Phono, M77 Ongaku, Neuro Integrated and of course the extraordinary Gakuoh. We also have a range of single minded amplifier designs from, amongst others, Border Patrol, Art Audio and Sugden.

Our Aladdin's cave of analogue treasures includes 12 choices of moving coil cartridge, along with the Kuzma Airline, Triplanar 6 and SME Series IV and V tonearms. Keeping these company is an enviable selection of turntables that includes the Kuzma Stabi Reference and the unequivocal SME Model 30.

And, of course, you will find the complete range of Living Voice loudspeakers including the internationally celebrated Avatar OBX-R2.

More importantly we have an attitude and an intent that breathes new life, interest and fascination into your relationship with music.

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

	Sale	New
Voyd turntable - black - reference bearing and platter - no packaging	£900	£2000
Voyd turntable standard - ash	£700	£1500
Naim SBL - walnut - very good condition	£700	£2000
Nottingham Analogue Space Deck - with Mystic Mat and psu	£900	£1500
Wadia 850 CD - very chunky chap - means business	£3200	£5400
Avid Volvere Sequel - new - boxed - unused	£2500	£3500
Ariston RD11s with Signet low mass arm - old classic - original box - v. tidy	£300	
Roksan Xerxes Cognesenti - needs service - SME cutout - take it away	£400	
Wilson Benesch ACT1 tonearm - carbon fibre unipivot	£450	£900
Proac Studio 200 - yew finish - MTM 2 way - very nice	£1250	£2150
Ruark Crusader - dark cherry - very tidy	£900	£2000
Hovland Sapphire - stereo power amp - vgc - give away	£3500	£7000
SJS Arcadia Model 2 - valve rectified, choke input - boffin style line pre-amp - copper casework - interesting, lush and lovely	£1000	£2000
ATC 50 passives - oak - very good condition - beefy boys	£1800	
T.E.A.D. The Groove - phono stage MM	£1300	£1850
Canary Audio 309 - parallel push-pull - 300B monos - 45 endless watts of beefy joy - ex dem - perfect condition - champagne - boxed	£6000	£10000
Canary Audio 303 push-pull - 300B monos - 22 watts of loveliness - used only once at US hi-fi show - a joy and a steal	£4500	£7500
Linn Kelidh - very good condition - giveaway	£400	
Canary Audio 301 push-pull stereo - 22 watts - great amp - champagne finish - boxed	£3500	£5400
Canary Audio 601 pre-amp - with saucy intestines - beautiful sound - new -	£2200	£2850
Revolver 45 speakers - cherry - new	£900	£1200
Revolver 45 speakers - standard finish	£700	£900
Quad 989 ESL - brand-new - black - boxed - big	£4000	£4400
Revolver R33 - standard finish - new	£300	£400



probably the best loudspeaker in the world.

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www.dynaudio.com

For additional information, dealer locations or product literature about the Evidence series or any other audiophile Dynaudio loudspeaker model, please call Dynaudio UK, 020 73781810

LIVING VOICE



Auditorium Avatar

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

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

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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
	Creek T50	499	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,ML	128	●	●	●	●	251
	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40	●			●	193
	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●		211
	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●	●	●		230
	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	●		●		230
	Rega Radio 3	374	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20		●			242
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●	●	●		242
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		●	●	●	221
	Cambridge Audio DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10		●	●	●	248
	Pure 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 DIGITAL RECORDERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	
CD-R/RW RECORDERS							
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	218
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		● ● ● ●	233
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ● ● ●	205
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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.



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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.

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WHY RISK VIRTUAL SHOPPING WHEN
THERE'S A **REAL STORE** NEARBY?

NEWS



The Denon AVR-3805 replaces the highly rated AVR-3803 and the jump in model number is deliberate to signify a major model change and upgrade.

Every single element has been examined and upgraded. The 3805 is designed to leapfrog current and anticipated competition in both performance, sound quality and real-life usable features.

The '3805 is supplied with a radical new

DENON'S AVR3805 7.1 AV RECEIVER

handset - the RC970.

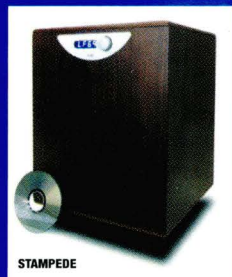
This advanced remote control is fully backlit and features full learning capability and is pre-programmed for most major brands.



**FREE GRADO
SR60 HEADPHONES
WORTH £90**

WITH THE AVR3805
DURING APRIL*

NOW THE BEST BASS BEGINS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS



REL, the UK's leading sub-bass specialist, has announced two completely new, remotely controlled, sub-woofer systems as part of its 'ST' series.

The STAMPEDE is the new entry-level model, a true audiophile system that will fit into the smallest room. For the STRATA 5, REL has refined driver/amplifier/cabinet relationships so that it offers superior performance to its predecessor (Strata III), despite being physically smaller.

**LOOK FOR THE FREE
QED CABLE OFFER**

WITH MOST
REL SUBWOOFERS*

ACOUSTICS
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BRIGHTON
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BROMLEY
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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
SWANSEA
SWINDON
SWISS COTTAGE
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
WATFORD
WEYBRIDGE
WITHAM (ESSEX)
WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE
NUMBER DETAILS



HI-FI SEPARATES

Michell Gyro SE Turntable / RB300 Tonearm £1049.95



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
BEST BUY
2003
BEST BUY
2003

"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 GOLDRING CARTRIDGE OF YOUR CHOICE*



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."

Pro-ject 1 Debut II Turntable (Black) £119.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2002
BEST BUY
2002
BEST BUY
2002



THE PROJECT RANGE
STARTS AT ONLY £119.95

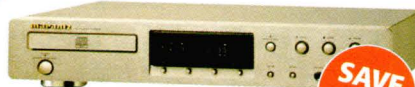
Arcam DiVA CD73T CD Player £399.95



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
BEST BUY
2003

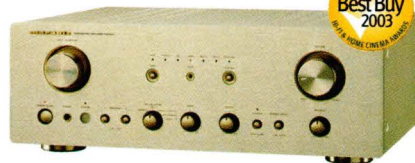
FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90 WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN*

NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



Marantz CD5400 CD Player £119.95

SAVE
£30



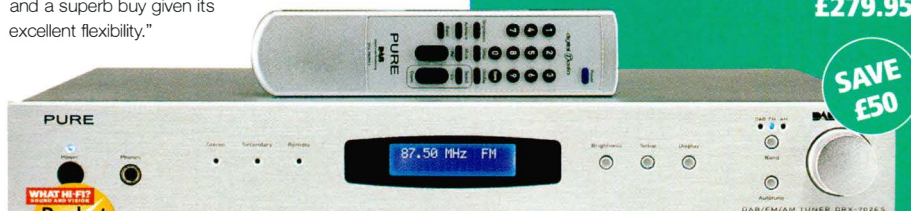
Marantz PM7200 Amplifier £249.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
BEST BUY
2003

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."

"So do you buy a digital tuner? Or an analogue one? Now you don't have to pick: just buy Pure Digital's DRX-702ES! Whether on FM or DAB, this tuner sounds superb... The overall balance is powerful, clean and crisp, making this a fine tuner by any standards, and a superb buy given its excellent flexibility."



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2003
BEST BUY
2003

SAVE
£50

DIGITAL RECORDERS



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW/HD Recorder £449.95

SAVE
£80

"No more wasted CD-Rs: in a stroke of genius, Yamaha had the idea of combining a CD recorder with a hard drive, enabling you to edit your music before burning it to disc. The result was the excellent CDR-HD1000, and the CDR-HD1300E is its younger, cheaper and vastly superior sibling. It's the best home-recording solution currently available."

Pioneer PDR-609 CD-RW Recorder £169.95

WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2002
BEST BUY
2002



DAB RADIO

Pure Digital DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB Tuner £279.95

experience more

experience more
experience more



Cyrus
Pre X Pre Amplifier £999.95
Mono X Power Amplifier (Each) £1199.95

"This Cyrus pairing isn't cheap but listen to a well-run-in sample and its array of talents is hard to beat. Load your favourite CD into a capable player, turn up the Pre X and the sonic magic will be worth every penny."



WHAT HI-FI? **Aug 03**
★★★★★



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

NEW

KEF Q4
Speakers £399.95

The Q4 is one of the latest additions to KEF's acclaimed Q Series. At the heart of this floorstander lies the Uni-Q driver array - a 130mm die-cast chassis housing a long throw cone and coincident mounted 19mm aluminium dome HF unit. This driver arrangement makes the speaker much easier to place in the room and alleviates the 'sweet spot' found on 'ordinary' speakers. This has been combined with a dedicated 130mm LF unit for extended bass output which belies the size of its diminutive cabinet.

FREE QED **SPEAKER CABLE** **WORTH**
WITH ALL HI-FI SPEAKER PAIRS OVER £299*
£60 WITH SPEAKERS OVER **£299**
£80 WITH SPEAKERS OVER **£499**

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."



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £80*

WHAT HI-FI? **June 03**
★★★★★

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."



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

WHAT HI-FI? **Feb 03**
★★★★★

Roksan Kandy
KD1/III CD Player £594.95
KA1/III Amplifier £594.95

"Timing and rhythm are excellent. DJ Shadow is delivered with clarity and a tight bass, while at the other extreme the treble is sweet and detailed, getting the most from Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. The result is a breathtaking Best Buy amplifier that betters its competition with ease." KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER - AWARDS 2003

"The Kandy KD1/III CD player offers a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."



WHAT HI-FI? **Best Buy 2003**

WHAT HI-FI? **Dec 03**
★★★★★

FREE **GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90** WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN* NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

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.

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.
*ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 07/05/04, E&OE.

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



WIRELESS NETWORKING

MUSIC ALL AROUND THE HOME



You've heard of hi-fi – now welcome to the world of wi-fi! Wi-fi devices allow you to network a range of devices together – from your music system to your PC – without the wires. For example, a multiroom server like Yamaha's MusicCAST can wirelessly send music to up to five 'client' playback systems dotted around your home. That music could be stored on the MusicCAST server device or other sources – existing hi-fi kit, maybe, or an internet radio station or MP3 files from your PC; plug-in adapters make it easy to wi-fi-enable products.



YAMAHA'S MusicCAST
MCX-1000 DIGITAL SERVER
& MCX-A10 CLIENT



YAMAHA MusicCAST

MCX A10 £599.95
(MusicCAST Client)
MCX 1000 £1799.95
(MusicCAST Server)

CYRUSLINK

Linkserver 160 £2999.95
(Four Zone HD Server 160Gb Drive)
Linkserver 250 £3499.95
(Four Zone HD Server 250Gb Drive)
Linkport £649.95
Linkwand £199.95



Cyruslink

AVAILABLE AT SELECTED
SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION OUTLETS



COMPACT HI-FI SYSTEMS



Linn Klassik Music System (Ex Speakers) £799.95

SAVE
£50

"The Klassik 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 Klassik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."



Denon DM31 UD-M31 CD Receiver £199.95

SAVE
£30

"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



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

Rotel RCD-02 CD Player RA-02 Amplifier

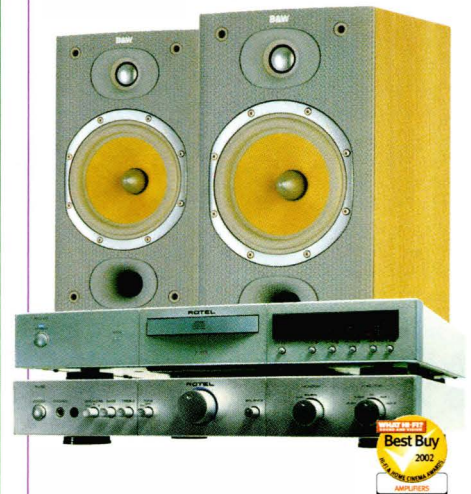
B&W DM601 S3 Speakers

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**.



FREE
TURNTABLE
WORTH £119*



SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£949.95 | **£149**

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING. *ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 07/05/04, E&OE.

experience more

experience more

experience more



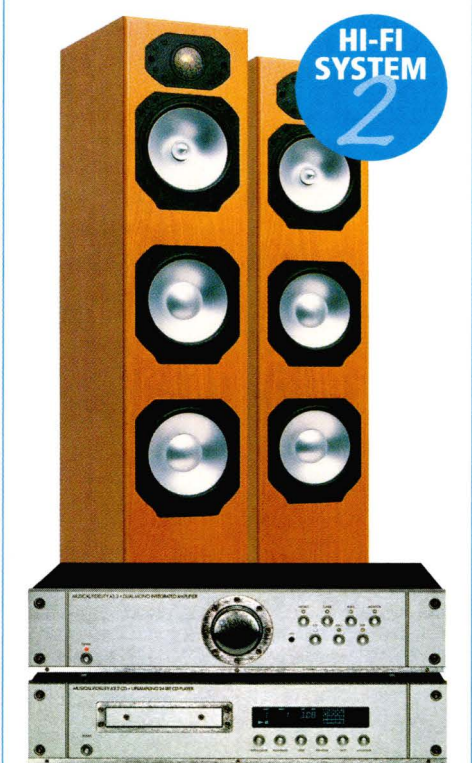
SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS



Musical Fidelity
A3 CD Player
A3 Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Silver S8 Speakers

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

SYSTEM PRICE **£2399.95** SAVE **£379**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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



Cyrus
CD8 CD Player
8 Amplifier
Monitor Audio
GR10 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, compact, Gold Reference GR10 speakers (★★★★★ - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision August 2001) from British speaker specialists Monitor Audio complete the package.

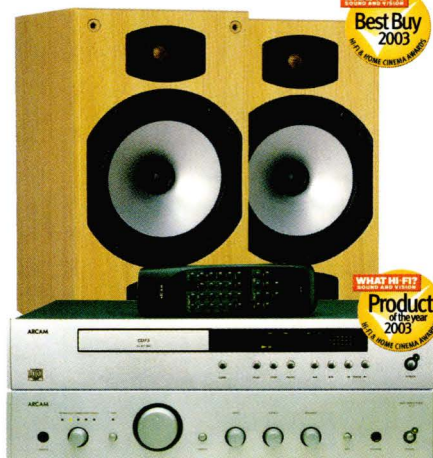
SYSTEM PRICE **£2599.95** FREE SOUNDSTYLE RACK WORTH **£300**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLE & STANDS WHEN YOU PURCHASE THIS SYSTEM

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

Arcam
CD73T CD Player
A65 Plus Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Bronze B2 Speakers

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."



SYSTEM PRICE **£799.95** SAVE **£169**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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

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	£139.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 ES0 GOLDRING CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TechnoDec	£599.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut II (Black)	£119.95
Project Debut II (Colours)	£134.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95

TUNERS

Arcam DWA T61	£199.95
Cyrus FM X	£499.95
Denon TU260L MKII	£99.95
Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/AM/FM	£299.95
Marantz ST4000	£99.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£199.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£279.95

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DWA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DWA CD82T	£599.95
Arcam DWA CD93T	£949.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1299.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8	£999.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£1099.95
Linn Ikemi	£2199.95
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Marantz CD17111 M	£799.95
Meridian 507	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity X-Ray 19	£899.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity A308*	£ CALL
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD	£3994.95
Quad 99 CD-P	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£594.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£169.95
Yamaha CDR-H1300 CD-RW	£449.95

AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£ CALL
Arcam DIVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A85	£ CALL
Arcam DIVA A90	£849.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1149.95
Cyrus 6	£599.95
Cyrus 8	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X Pre	£999.95
Cyrus Mono X Power	(Each) £1199.95

Denon PMA355	£179.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£574.95
Linn LK85 Power	£544.95
Marantz PM4400	£149.95
Marantz PM7200	£249.95
Musical Fidelity X-150	£799.95
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	£3994.95
Quad 99 Power	£549.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£594.95
Roksan Caspian M	£999.95
Rotel RA-01	£249.95
Rotel RA-02	£349.95
Rotel RA-1062	£594.95

SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£129.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£249.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII (From)	£1699.95
B&W DM601 S3	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3	£299.95
B&W 704	£1399.95
B&W 705	£899.95
KEF Q1	£249.95
KEF Q4	£399.95
KEF XQ1	£999.95
Linn Katan	£649.95
Mission m31	£119.95
Mission 780SE	£349.95
Mission 782SE	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver S1	£299.95
Monitor Audio Silver S6	£599.95
Monitor Audio Silver S8	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£1499.95
Quad 11L	£379.95
Quad 12L	£499.95
Quad 22L	£894.95
Ruark Epilogue II	£344.95
Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30	£649.95

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£499.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£299.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Linn Klassik Music Ex Speakers	£799.95
Onkyo CS210 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Teac Legacy 600 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Teac Reference 300 Ex Speakers	£449.95
Teac Reference 500 Ex Speakers	£569.95

DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV-M71 Inc Speakers	£499.95
Denon DVD-770SD/AVR-770SD Ex Speakers	£599.95
Jamo DVR50/A305PDD Inc Speakers	£549.95
Jamo DVR50/A355PDD Inc Speakers	£699.95
KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers	£1199.95
Linn Klassik Movie Di Ex Speakers	£2199.95
Teac Legacy 700/LS-L800 Inc Speakers	£849.95

DVD PLAYERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DIVA DV78	£699.95	£699.95
Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	£999.95	£999.95
Arcam DIVA DV89	£1299.95	£1299.95
Cyrus DVD8	£1199.95	£1199.95
Denon DVD-1400 Universal	£299.95	£329.95
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A11	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A1	£1799.95	£1849.95
Harman Kardon DVD25	£279.95	£279.95
Harman Kardon DVD22	£299.95	£299.95
Harman Kardon DVD31	£399.95	£399.95
Pioneer DV360	£69.95	£89.95
Pioneer DV464	£89.95	£109.95
Pioneer DV565A Universal	£169.95	£ CALL
Pioneer DV668AV Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV868AV Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Samsung DVD-HD935	£149.95	£149.95
Tag McLaren DVD32FLR	£ CALL	£ CALL
Teac DV50	£399.95	£399.95
Toshiba SD330E	£69.95	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S540	£119.95	£119.95

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-HS2 DVD-R	£ CALL	£ CALL
Philips DVDR70 DVD+RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Philips DVDR80 DVD+RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR3100S DVD-R/RW	£399.95	£429.95
Pioneer DVR5100HS DVD-R/RW	£499.95	£549.95
Toshiba RD-XS30 DVD Recorder	£479.95	£ TBA

A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR200 AV Receiver	£599.95
Arcam AV8/P7 AV Pre/Processor/Power	£5499.95
Cyrus AV8 AV Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A11SR AV Amplifier	£1199.95
Denon AVC-A1SR AV Amplifier	£2199.95
Denon AVR1604 AV Receiver	£229.95
Denon AVR1804 AV Receiver	£299.95
Denon AVR2803 AV Receiver	£449.95
Denon AVR3803 AV Receiver	£599.95
Denon AVR3805 AV Receiver	£999.95
Harman Kardon AVR2550 AV Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR5550 AV Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR8500 AV Receiver	£1299.95
Harman Kardon AVR330 AV Receiver	£599.95
Harman Kardon AVR630 AV Receiver	£999.95
Marantz SR4400 AV Receiver	£289.95
Marantz SR5400 AV Receiver	£349.95
Onkyo TX-SR501E AV Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-SR601E AV Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-NR801E AV Receiver	£ CALL
Onkyo TX-NR900E AV Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-C301 AV Receiver	£199.95
Pioneer VSX-C501 AV Receiver	£329.95
Pioneer VSX-D812 AV Receiver	£319.95
Pioneer VSX-AX31 AV Receiver	£649.95
Pioneer VSX-AX51 AV Receiver	£949.95
Pioneer VSA-AX101 AV Amplifier	£2199.95
Rotel RSX1065 AV Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 AV Pre/Power	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1098 AV Processor	£2294.95
TAG McLaren AV30R AV Processor	£ CALL
TAG McLaren AV192R AV Processor (From)	£ CALL
Yamaha DSP-AX640SE AV Amplifier	£299.95
Yamaha DSP-Z9 AV Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V440RDS AV Receiver	£199.95
Yamaha RX-V640RDS AV Receiver	£349.95
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS AV Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V2400RDS AV Receiver	£ CALL

A/V SPEAKER PACKAGES

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Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£699.95
B&W VM1/AS1	£849.95
B&W DM300 AV	£899.95
Castle Compact CC3	£999.95
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KEF KHT5005 £200 FREE QED CABLE*	£1199.95
KEF Q7 AV £300 FREE QED CABLE*	£2199.95
M&K K5 £250 FREE QED CABLE*	£1699.95
M&K K3	£1894.95
M&K Xenon 25	£2249.95
M&K 850/CS35/V850	£3899.95
Mission M30 AV Pack	£449.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2 AV	£799.95

Monitor Audio Bronze B4 AV	£949.95
Monitor Audio Radius	£999.95
Ruark Vita 120	£1699.95

SUBWOOFERS

B&W ASW675	£649.95
MJ Acoustics Pro 50 (Black) £60 QED CABLE*	£299.95
MJ Acoustics Pro 100 (Black) £60 QED CABLE*	£599.95
MJ Acoustics Ref 100 (Blk) £60 QED CABLE*	£349.95
MJ Acoustics Ref 1 (Black) £60 QED CABLE*	£699.95
REL Q150E MKII (Brittix Black) £100 QED CABLE*	£499.95
REL Q201E (Brittix Black) £100 QED CABLE*	£724.95
REL Q400E (Brittix Black) £100 QED CABLE*	£999.95
REL Quake (Brittix Black)	£349.95
REL Strata III	£549.95
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Fujitsu P42HH430 42"	£3599.95
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Fujitsu P50XHA10 50" (ED)	£5499.95
Fujitsu P50XHA30 50"	£5999.95
Hitachi 42PD3000P 32" (ED)	£1999.95
Hitachi 42PD3000E 42" (ED)	£2799.95
Hitachi 42PD5000E 42"	£ CALL
Hitachi 42PMA400E 42" (ED)	£2299.95
Panasonic TH37PA20B 37"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH42PA20B 42"	£2999.95
Panasonic TH42PW6B 42"	£2799.95
Philips 37PF9965 37" (ED)	£2599.95
Philips 42PF9965 42" (ED)	£3299.95
Pioneer PDP434HDE 43"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP503HDE 50" (ED)	£4399.95
Pioneer PDP504HDE 50"	£5499.95
Toshiba 42WP36P 42"	£ CALL

LCD TV

Panasonic TX15LT2 15"	£749.95
Panasonic TX22LT3 22"	£1399.95
Philips 17PF9945 17"	£ CALL
Philips 30PF9975 30"	£1999.95
Sharp AQUOS LC-13S1E 13"	£ CALL
Sharp AQUOS LC-15B4E 15"	£ CALL
Sharp AQUOS LC-15S1E 15"	£ CALL
Sharp AQUOS LC-20B4E 20"	£899.95
Sharp AQUOS LC-20S1E 20"	£ CALL
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"	£ CALL
Toshiba 26WL36P 26"	£ CALL
Toshiba 32WL36P 32"	£ CALL

PROJECTORS

NEC HT1000 DLP	£2999.95
Sanyo PLV-21 LCD	£999.95
Sanyo PLV-22 LCD	£1449.95
Screenplay SP4800 DLP	£1199.95
Screenplay SP5700 DLP	£ CALL
Sharp XV-Z91E DLP	£1699.95
Sharp XV-Z200 DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 Domino 20 DLP	£3499.95
Sim 2 HT300 Plus DLP (ED)	£5999.95
Sim 2 HT300 Xtra DLP	£7999.95
ThemeScene H30 Cinema DLP	£1199.95
ThemeScene H50 Cinema DLP (ED)	£1499.95
ThemeScene H56 Cinema DLP	£2299.95
Yamaha LPX-500 LCD	£ CALL
Yamaha DPX-1000 DLP (ED)	£5999.95

CALL

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£ PRICING POLICY

SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION OPERATES A PRICING POLICY SEE OPPOSITE PAGE FOR DETAILS

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all stores. Please call before travelling. *Added Value Offers- From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. (ED) - Limited stock, some could be ex-display. Advertisement valid until at least 07/05/04, E&OE.

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• 0121 233 2977

BRISTOL 92B WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON
• 0117 974 3727

CAMBRIDGE 17 BURLLEIGH STREET
• 01223 304770

CARDIFF 104-106 ALBANY ROAD
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CHELSEA 403 KINGS ROAD
• 020 7352 9466

CHELTENHAM 14 PITTVILLE STREET
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• 01293 510777

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• 01392 218895

GLASGOW 88 GREAT WESTERN ROAD
• 0141 332 9655

GUILDFORD 73B NORTH STREET
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KINGSTON 43 FIFE ROAD
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• 0113 245 2775 *OPEN SUNDAY*

LEICESTER 10 LOSEBY LANE
• 0116 253 6567

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LIVERPOOL 16 LORD STREET
• 0151 707 8417

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• 01622 686366

MANCHESTER 69 HIGH ST, CITY CENTRE
• 0161 831 7969

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• 0191 221 2320



NORWICH 29-29A ST GILES STREET
• 01603 767605

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• 01752 226011

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SHEFFIELD 635 QUEENS ROAD, HEELEY
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SOLI HULL 149-151 STRATFORD ROAD
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SOUTHGATE 79-81 CHASE SIDE
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SOUTHAMPTON 33 LONDON ROAD
• 023 8033 7770

STAINES 4 THAMES STREET
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SWANSEA 24 MANSEL STREET
• 01792 465777 *OPEN SUNDAY*

SWINDON 8-9 COMMERCIAL ROAD
• 01793 610992

SWISS COTTAGE 21 NORTHWAYS PDE, FINCHLEY RD
• 020 7722 9777 *OPEN SUNDAY*

TUNBRIDGE WELLS 28-30 ST JOHNS ROAD
• 01892 531543

WATFORD 478 ST ALBANS ROAD
• 01923 213533 *OPEN SUNDAY*

WEYBRIDGE 43 CHURCH STREET, THE QUADRANT
• 01932 828525

WITHAM (ESSEX) 1 THE GROVE CENTRE
• 01376 501733

WOLVERHAMPTON 29-30 CLEVELAND STREET
• 01902 312225 *OPEN SUNDAY*

WHO ARE SEVENOAKS?

Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is one of the largest and most successful hi-fi and home cinema retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from Hi-Fi separates and systems to DVD players, widescreen plasma televisions and projection systems, all at highly competitive prices.

Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

CUSTOM INSTALLATION

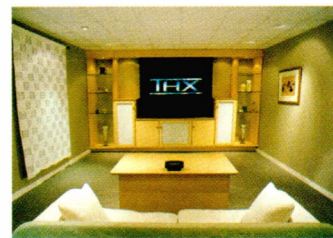
Sevenoaks Sound & Vision's Custom Installation Service enables the integration of a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home as neatly and seamlessly as possible. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.

Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for a multi-room system, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control or lighting system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products available to cater for all your requirements.



DEMONSTRATION FACILITIES

Our comfortable demonstration rooms are among the finest in the country, many complying with full THX specifications.



SEVENOAKS WEBSITE

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

There are regularly updated special offer and stock clearance lists with hundreds of products available and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store. To find out more, click on www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

STOCK CLEARANCE

With 49 stores nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As models and product ranges are changed or superseded, the preceding models are made available at a reduced price, for clearance. Visit our Website for an up-to-date list of the clearance stock.

PRICING POLICY

Whilst we do not claim always to be the cheapest, we try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. Take into account the expert advice, unrivalled product selection, demonstration facilities and excellent pre, during and after sales service and the lower price might not look such good value.

In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention. We will always endeavour to offer you the best deal.

FREE

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision GUIDE TO HI-FI AND HOME CINEMA

Pick-up your FREE 68 page guide at your nearest Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store or order a copy via our Website. The brochure will be posted to you (UK mainland addresses only) free of charge while stocks last.



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E-MAIL: [insert store name]@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

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

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

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

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

TOP BUYS



Marantz PM7200 £330

A true budget belter from Marantz – power and finesse in equal measure, plus the ability to switch between Class A and Class AB operation. Giant killing amps are back!



Rotel RA-1062 £595

Rotel's latest is an affordable taste of the high end, packed with power and detail. It'll drive virtually any speaker and embarrass a good many more costly amps.



AVI 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	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BEST BUY	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and enthralling sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
BEST BUY	Marantz PM7200	330	High power, plenty of features, and remarkably clear and informative sound with lots of impact	6	●	●	●	105	248
BEST BUY	NAD C352	350	Dynamic and musical sounding update on what was already a star product	7		●	●	80	253
BEST BUY	Naim Nait 5i	699	A trade-off of more power and better connectivity against less inputs works surprisingly well in a grunty, musical manner	4		●		50	252
	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
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
BEST BUY	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
BEST BUY	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
BEST BUY	Thule IA60B SE	895	An amp that's so faithful to the spirit and detail of the source material and costs less than £1,000 is hard to fault	5		●		75	253
ABOVE £1,000									
BEST BUY	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
BEST BUY	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
EDITOR'S CHOICE	AVI Laboratory Series	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution – effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Burmester 032	9,100	Bulky, powerful amp sounds delightfully delicate with a lovely natural warmth and superb imaging	5		●		170	252
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	●	●	4	●	●	250	231
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		●	50	213
BEST BUY	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		●	150	221
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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
EDITOR'S CHOICE	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

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output. CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel

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

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection		●				180	253
E	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	●	70	241
EC	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
EC	Halcro dm10/dm68	75,900	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5		●	225	243
EC	Hovland HP-100/RADIA	12,745	Uncommonly musical valve/transistor hybrid transcends stereotypes, one of the genuine high achievers	●	●	9	Opt		125	250
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●				700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4		●		238
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●				125	230
	Naim NAC202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		●	70	241
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●				140	208
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6		●		233
	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery	●	●	7		●	120	241
EC	Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7	●	●	100	236
EC	Sugden Masterclass AA	5,600	Yorkshire's finest class A kit. Dynamic and tonally rich, this gives even valve amps a run for their money	●	●	7		●	35	246
EC	Unison Research Unico Pre/DM	2,590	Hybrid designs with a rich powerful performance that makes a fine balance between valve and solid state sound	●	●	3	●	●	150	242

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies

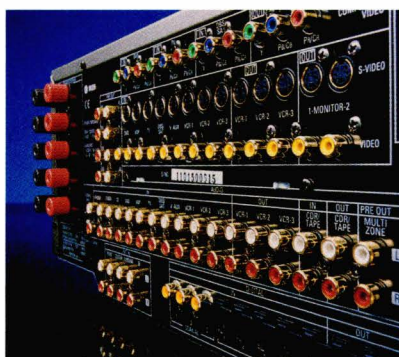


The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as

their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo.

There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



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 – an 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	
	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	
	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	
	Marantz SR9300	2,000	Not a high flyer, just a thoroughly enjoyable, warm and attractive sounding receiver with music and film soundtracks alike	●	8	105	252	
	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	100	248	
	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	
	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	
	Sony TA-DA9000ES	2,600	Arguably the first convincing fully digital amplifier, an excellent match for players with i.Link encrypted outputs	●	10	200	253	
	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								
	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	
	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	
	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	
	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	
	Marantz PS-17/2x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	60	238	
	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	
	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	
	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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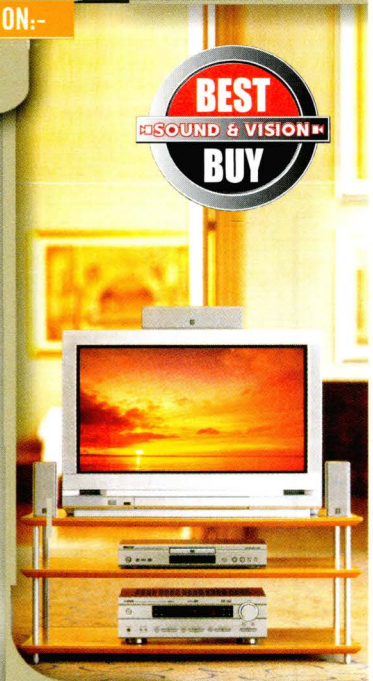
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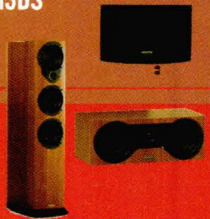


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- No Interest*



Panasonic

PT-AE200E

- 858 X 484 RESOLUTION
- 700 ANSI LUMENS BRIGHTNESS
- 700:1 CONTRAST RATIO
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- 2.9KG IN WEIGHT

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PT-AE300E Panasonic

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Panasonic

TX-28PS1 INC CAB

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- 50HZ DIGITAL SCAN • NICAM STEREO SOUND
- AUDIO TREBLE/BALANCE • AMBIENCE
- MUSICOPEECH • DIGITAL COMB FILTER
- AUTOMATIC DIGITAL PICTURE NOISE REDUCTION • QLINK • CHANNEL VOLUME
- CHILD LOCK • GRAPHIC OSD
- QRF TRIPES • FAST TEXT
- REMOTE CONTROL



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- SUBWOOFER • DVD/AUDIO/CD/MP3/MP3/WMA COMPATIBLE
- MP3 PLAYBACK • DIGITAL TUNER WITH RDS AND PRESETS



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PANASONIC PRODUCT LISTINGS

MAKE	MODEL	MAKE	MODEL	MAKE	MODEL
PANA	TX-47PT10	PANA	TX-32DT4	PANA	DMR-HS2EBS
PANA	TX-42PT12	PANA	NV-VP30EBS	PANA	NV-SV120EBS
PANA	TX-32PS1	PANA	DVD-S75EBS	PANA	DMC-LC40B
PANA	TX-28PS5	PANA	DVD-S35EBS	PANA	NV-HV60EBS
PANA	TX-28DK2	PANA	DVD-LV65EBS	PANA	NV-HS880
PANA	TX-28DK2			PANA	DMC-LC5B
PANA	TX-24PS1				



PANASONIC DVDS75EBS **CALL US NOW**



PANASONIC DVD-S35 **LOG ON NOW**



PANASONIC DVDF65 **CHECK US OUT**



PANASONIC DMR-E100HE **CALL US NOW**



PANASONIC DVD-S35EBS **LOG ON NOW**



PANASONIC NV-HS780 **CHECK US OUT**

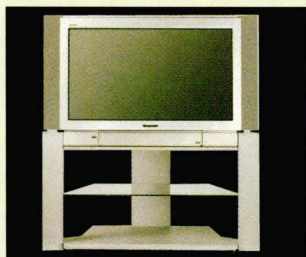
Panasonic

TH-42PW6

- 42" (106CM) PLASMA DISPLAY • RESOLUTION: 852 X 480 PIXELS • PROGRESSIVE SCAN • PIXEL PITCH: 1.08MM
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- INPUT BOARD • SILVER FINISH
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Panasonic

TX-28PS5 INC CAB

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- BUILT-IN DOLBY DIGITAL SOUND • DIGITAL COMB FILTER
- AUTOMATIC DIGITAL PICTURE NOISE REDUCTION • DOLBY DIGITAL / DOLBY PRO LOGIC / SIMULATED DOLBY NICAM DIGITAL STEREO
- LEFT & RIGHT LOWX2 • LEFT & RIGHT TWEETERS
- 10W X 2 • SUBWOOFER 12W • QLINK

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TH37PA20B

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Panasonic

TX-36PD30 INC CAB
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- SMARTLINK FASTEXT • 2 X SCART • 1 X FRONT AV INPUT • CABINET SUPPLIED SILVER COLOUR



SONY DAV-SC8

- HOME CINEMA SYSTEM • MULTI REGION
- COMPLETE DVD HOME THEATRE SYSTEM WITH FLOOR-STANDING SPEAKERS AND ACTIVE SUBWOOFER
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SONY KV-36FS76

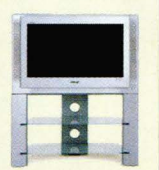
- 36CM (14") VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN • IMPROVED DMC MF
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- VIRTUAL DOLBY AND BBE DIGITAL
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- DYNAMIC PICTURE AND PICTURE
- DYNAMIC PICTURE AND TEXT
- DIGITAL COMB FILTER
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- CABINET INCLUDED



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SONY KV32 FX68

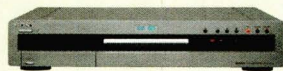
- 32CM VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN (23" TUBE)
- 100HZ (ABAB)
- DIGITAL NOISE REDUCTION (DNR)
- 3D SOUND
- VIRTUAL DOLBY + BBE
- 2 X SCART (RGB ON SCART LAND 2)
- UNIVERSAL REMOTE
- CABINET INCLUDED



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SONY RDR-GX3

- DVD RECORDER • DUAL HW RECORDING (RW, +RW, R) • ALL DVD FORMAT PLAYBACK
- VIDEO PLUS • TELETEXT TITLE DOWNLOAD

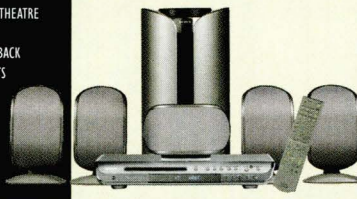


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SONY

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- DVD/SUPER AUDIO CD/CD/CD-R/RW PLAYBACK
- DOLBY PROLOGIC 2 • DOLBY DIGITAL/DTS
- S-MASTER FULL DIGITAL AMPLIFIER
- TOTAL 550W: 90W X 5 + 100W (RMS 10%)
- FM/AM RDS TUNER
- ON SCREEN MENU

DAV-SC5



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SONY

KV-32FQ70 WITH STAND

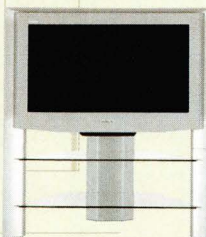
- 76CM VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN (32" TUBE) • 100HZ DIGITAL PLUS (ABAB)
- VERTICAL PICTURE STABILISER (VPS)
- DIGITAL NOISE REDUCTION (DNR)
- AUTO NOISE REDUCTION • ARC DESIGN (ONE TONE)
- 3D SOUND • VIRTUAL DOLBY + BBE
- 3 X SCART (RGB ON SCART 1 AND 2)
- PICTURE AND PICTURE (I TUNER)
- EPG LEVEL 2 • UNIVERSAL REMOTE

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SONY

- 32" WIDESCREEN WEGA TV • 76CM VISIBLE FD TRINITRON • INTEGRATED DIGITAL FREEVIEW READY TV ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL TUNERS • ELECTRONIC PROGRAMME GUIDE • SMARTLINK
- IMPROVED DIGITAL TEXT FASTEXT
- VIRTUAL DOLBY SURROUND • AUTO TUNING/AUTO START-UP/ONE BUTTON TUNING • AUTO LABELLING/AUTO SORTING • SMART/ZOOM/4:3/WIDE MODE • 2 X SCART • 1 X FRONT AV • 1 X FRONT S-VIDEO • SLEEP TIMER • AUTO STANDBY

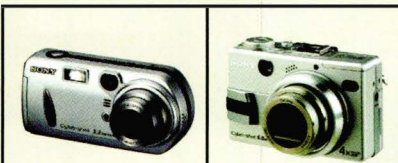
KD-32DX50 WITH STAND



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SONY PRODUCT LISTINGS

MAKE	MODEL	MAKE	MODEL	MAKE	MODEL
SONY	VPL-W12HT	SONY	KD-32NX200	SONY	DVP-NS330
SONY	KV-32LS36	SONY	KD-36MX300	SONY	DVP-NS330
SONY	KV-28LS36	SONY	KE-32TS2E	SONY	DSC-V1
SONY	KP-44PX2	SONY	SLV-D950GS	SONY	DSC-U50
SONY	KLV-17HR	SONY	RDR-GX3	SONY	DSC-U30
SONY	KF-60SX300	SONY	HTP3100		
SONY	KE-50MR1	SONY	DVP-NS99ESN		



DSC-P72

DSC-V1

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SLV-D950

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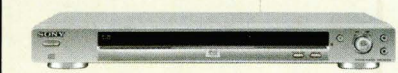


DSC-P52

VPL-HS1 I

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DVP-NS330S

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SONY

KE-42MRI
42" Wega
Plasma TV

- 42" (107CM) WEGA PLASMA MONITOR • PC INPUT
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- BUILT-IN SPEAKERS
- SUPPLIED SEPARATE TUNER BOX WITH MEMORY STICK • 4 X SCART
- CENTRE SPEAKER INPUT
- SUBWOOFER INPUT
- MEMORY STICK PLAYBACK
- PAL/NTSC FILM MODE DETECTION (2:2/3:2 PULL DOWN) • DIGITAL COMB FILTER • DYNAMIC PICTURE
- AUTO RGB AND Y/C DETECTION
- SHOWN WITH OPTIONAL GLASS STAND

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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.

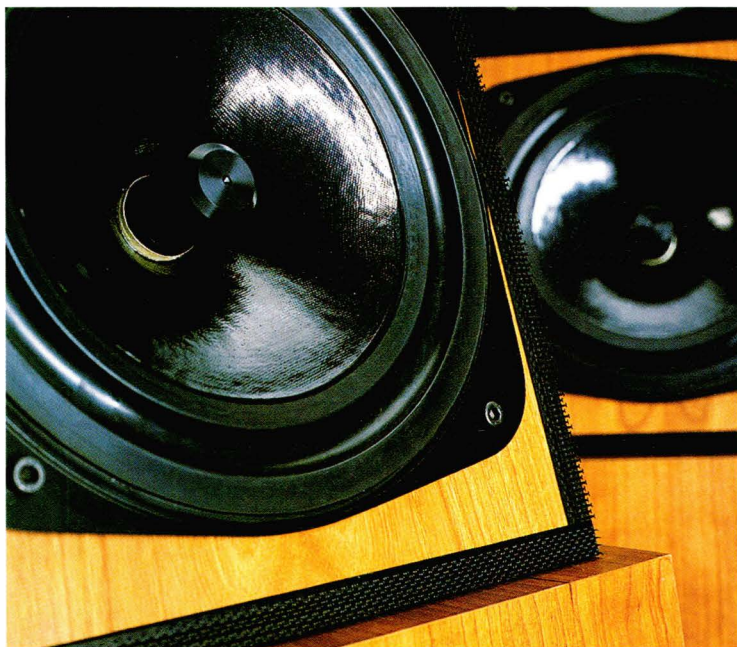
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. 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	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
UP TO £1,000									
BC	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
BC	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26		A-	55	●	253
	Avance Dana 670 AV	760	Very pretty slim floorstander is impressively neutral and well balanced, if less than dynamic	15,95,27	●	A	30	●	253
	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
BC	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
BC	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
BC	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
BC	B&W 705	900	Deft, delicate and delightful, if a little bass light, with clever enclosure and driver engineering	22,42,29		A	35	●	253
	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
BC	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
BC	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
BC	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
BC	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●	241
BC	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
BC	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 Chorus 726 S	780	Big generous sound with good dynamic freedom, hampered by some voice-band congestion	22,100,32	●	A+	55	●	N 253
BC	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
BC	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

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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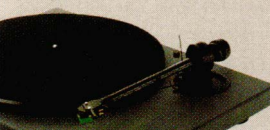
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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

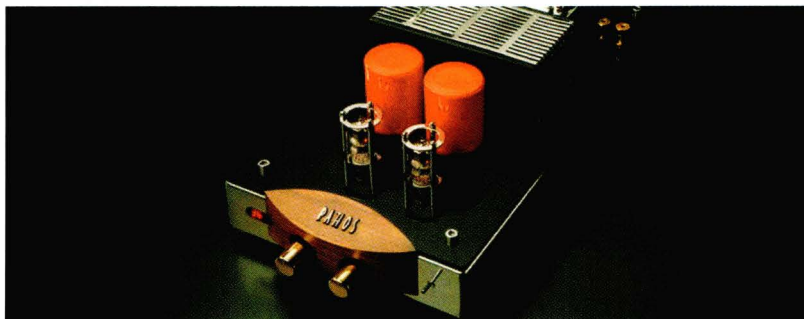
STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE-TO-WALL	ISSUE NUMBER	
	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	
MB	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	
MB	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	
MB	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
	SonusFaber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40		●	233	
	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	
MB	Tannoy Sensys DC1	449	Modest sensitivity but beautifully balanced with fine authority at a very realistic price	21,41,29		A	40		●	245	
	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricy but very cute 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
MB	Triangle Antal 202	925	Ugly duckling with the voice of a lark, thanks to its magical midband with plenty of dynamic brio	22,108,30		●	A+	30		●	253
ABOVE £1,000											
EC	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII	1,690	Luxury miniature has a laid-back but bouncy sound, a marvellous dynamic range and very superior imaging	19,31,25		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	19,99,29		●	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	
MB	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	
MB	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
MB	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 pricy 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	
MB	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 Luiét 307/316	1,250	Extraordinary satellite plus sub solution sounds a cut above other sub/sats. Can be expanded to multichannel	12,16,16		act	40		●	247	
EC	Ferguson Hill FH001	6,853	Looks and sounds wonderful, with realistic dynamic expression, but needs careful amp matching and sub(s)	90,166,80		●	A+	180		●	242
EC	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia	3,500	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38		A	50		●	245	
EC	Focal-JMLab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53		●	A-	20		●	248
	Graves Audio Koronglay	1,999	Fast and very time-coherent, but rather bass-light and aggressive higher up – valve amps preferred	25,109,36		●	A+	45		●	247
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30		●	233	
MB	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	

PATHOS

'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					
				SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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
	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, though the top end is restrained and bass was uneven in our room	22,86,28	● 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 OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	● A+	35	●		244
BB	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	● A-	46	●		245
	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	18,53,26	● A-	40	●		199
BB	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
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	31,86,30	● 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
BB	Totem Forest	2,390	Low sensitivity but wonderfully open neutrality, at heart a beautifully communicative and musical loudspeaker	20,90,27	● 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 Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	● A-	45	●		212
EC	Wilson Benesch ACT	8,400	Superb enclosure gives uncanny freedom from 'boxiness'. Well balanced, but top end might be sweeter	23,108,37	● A	20	●		252
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

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



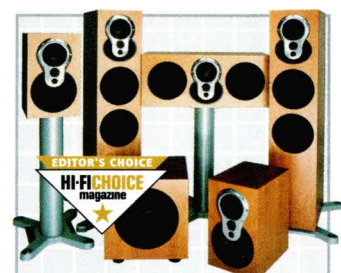
B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



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.



Linn
Akurate package £13,750
Linn has worked wonders with its new multichannel speaker system – it's not cheap, but its performance is breathtaking.

Our favourite HB BEST BUY EB EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				EASE-OF-DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●	241
HB	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 package	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 system	4,875	Slim, attractive, electrostatic panels have clever connections, limited loudness but a breathtaking transparency	A-	6	20	●	251
	Focal-JMLab Electra package	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●	232
HB	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●	232
EB	Linn Akurate (242/212/225/221)	13,750	An extremely capable system that offers new insights into the potential for multichannel audio	A-	6	18	●	253
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●	232
HB	Mission m5 package	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 package	1,650	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness	A-	5	30	●	224

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite HB BEST BUY EB EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy Aesprite 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
EB	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
HB	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
EB	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
HB	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
	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●			211
	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●			224
	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●			211
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
	Kimber Timbre	72	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
	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
	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
	van den Hul The Well	65	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●			241
	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS									
	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound	●		●		E	207
	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E	241
	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE									
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●			241
	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●			227
	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●			227
	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●			241
	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
	QED X-Tube XT400	20	A practical cable with a liking for lively music, but slightly less assured with subtle classical grooves	●		●			248
	Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●			203
	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material
	AKG K1000	550	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal
	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack
	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste
	Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort
	Sennheiser HD650	299	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too
	Stax System li	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way

SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER
ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	
				WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
				190	219
				270	230
				270	244
				250	194
				250	245
				200	194
				200	230
				330	219
				270	205
				260	252
				250	219
				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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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
	Avik 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 Fraim	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
	Ine 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRANSISTOR/MOSFET The two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.
TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse.
GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent. A clarity-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

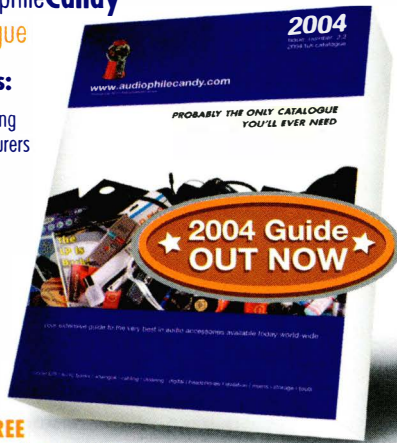
WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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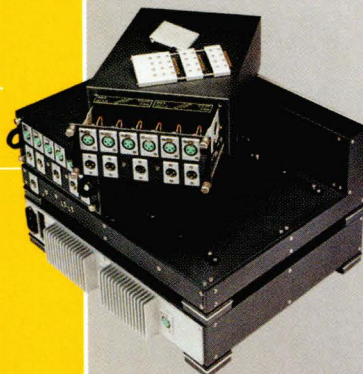


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Choice Bits is the easy way to buy the best audio accessories available today. Simply pick up the phone, order online or drop us a note via mail or email (see order form below). It couldn't be simpler!

This issue we are showcasing Sennheiser's portable PXC 250 headphones, which feature NoiseGuard technology to remove background noise. These headphones transform mobile listening, allowing greater detail to come through with a solid bass reproduction free of the normal environmental low-frequency input from buses, trains and aircraft.

For our full selection of high-quality audio accessories please visit our dedicated website at www.choicebits.co.uk

SHOWCASE

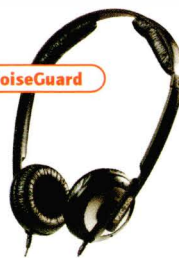
Sennheiser PXC 250

High-quality audio headphones

Key Features

- High quality production
- Incredibly portable and compact
- Weighs only 60g
- Features NoiseGuard to eliminate all background noise

Features NoiseGuard



Ideal Headphones On The Move

Almost all of us use a portable audio device, either for travelling or while we're out and about, but the sound quality of the headphones supplied with many of these devices is far from

audiophile quality. Couple this with a noisy environment and listening on the move can be extremely difficult.

Sennheiser's solution is the PXC 250, a closed-back portable headphone weighing only 60 grams with noise reduction technology called NoiseGuard. The basic idea behind NoiseGuard is the application of a small, pen-sized active module, which the headphones are connected to. This listens to the noise in the environment and produces an anti-noise signal.

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Allsop Motorised Scratch Repair System	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Carbon Fibre Record Brush	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
DeoxIT Contact Cleaner (200ml)	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Exstatic Deluxe Record Brush	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Exstatic Record Sleeves	£11.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knosti Disco Antistat Manual Record Cleaner	£44.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knosti Record Cleaning Fluid (1 Litre)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last All-Purpose Record Cleaner	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Power Cleaner	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Last Stylus Cleaner	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Nagaoka Antistatic Record Inner Sleeves (50 Qty)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Eben Cold Ray Isolation Feet (Steel) (Qty 4)	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IXOS Sorbothane Feet (4 Qty)	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost Pulsar Points (Aluminium) (4 Qty)	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spectral Foculpods Support Systems (4 Qty)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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The LP Is Back	£9.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

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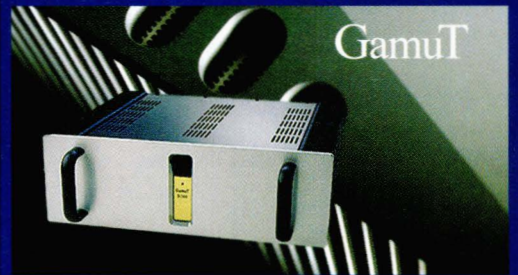


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CYRUS CL550 standmount speakers in cherry veneer. Mint, boxed, virtually unused (£500) £200. 07753 625783 (Kent).

CYRUS SYSTEM 7Q CD player, 7 amp, 2xPSX, SmartPower, Qunex 2 cables and Tri Arbour stand (oak). Mint and boxed (£3,500) £1,700. Nick 01253 713033 (Lancs).

DENON AVC-A1D £600. Denon DVD 3300 £400. Ecosse Reference MS-2.3 speaker cable £100 MS-2.2 1x£50. James 0141 646 2545 (Glasgow).

HEYBROOK HB1 speakers with QED79 strand £130. NAD 3130 amp £45. NAD 4220 tuner £30. Denon tape deck £20. All boxed and mint, stands available. Rob 01743 240917 (Shrewsbury).

KEF REFERENCE 203 floorstanders and Chord Odyssey 2 cable. One month old, as new (£3,000) £1,800. Nick 01253 713033 (Lancs).

KESWICK AUDIO ARIA II bookshelf speakers, *HFC Best Buy*, real wood veneer (£330) £95. Atacama SE 20 stands £35. 01543 258617 (Staffs).

LEAK 20/ 75 floorstanding speakers with 15-in bass unit. Open to offers. Chris 01792 898660 (Swansea).

LINN KANNS and floor stands. Wharfedale diamonds, not new but unused, still boxed. Stephen 01904 489901 (York).

LINN LK 280 sparks, mint cond, boxed, great sound £275. Luxman L30 integrated amp excellent £50. 00353 1 2954076 (Dublin).

MANTICORE MANTRA turntable with Rega tonearm and Audio Technica cartridge. Excellent cond £150 ono Mr E James 01382 203775 (Dundee).

MERIDIAN DSP5000 speakers with Meridian 500 transport. All components immaculate with original boxes and manuals £2,650 ovno. 01383 413695 or email garyjbold@btinternet.com (Scotland).

MICHELL GYRO SE with Rega RB600 and Dynavector DV20X. Black frame, boxed, mint cond. Ten hours use (£1,500) £1,100. Richard 01233 501524 (Kent).

OPUS multiroom audio system top of the range. Unwanted competition prize. (£4,200) £2,100 ono 07791 749921 (Birmingham).

PRO-JECT DEBUT II turntable. Good cond, boxed, still guaranteed. £80. 07947 251533 (Warwickshire).

QED silver anniversary bi-wire cable never been used. Ten metres £50. Dave 01229 584509 (Cumbria).

RESOLUTION AUDIO OPUS 21 CD player less than six months old, boxed, as new (£2,850). £2,000 David 01242 517669 (Cheltenham).

RUARK EQUINOX speakers black ash finish. A rare chance to buy these fabulous reproducers. Mint cond, with boxes £850 ono. 023 8073 8935 (Hants).

SONY 5.1 speaker package, good cond, boxed, as new £100. Buyer collects. 07947 251533 (Warwickshire).

STAX SRD-7SBMKII headphone amp runs off speaker outputs £50. Amcron DC150 amp £50. Target heavy 28-inch stands £30. 020 7724 9945 (London).

TANNOY 615 speakers (£750), Albarry PP1 amp (£500). Offers 01706 854176 (Manchester).

WANTED

MORDAUNT-SHORT MS50, MS50C, HT50 speakers, any condition considered. Also MSCi centre. 020 7724 9945 (London).

VDH CS122 speaker cable 4x5 metres (£270) £100. Cable Talk III Broadcast interconnects (£100) £50. Russ Andrews interconnects (£100) £50. Yello mains cable 2x1 metre (£60) £30. Stuart 01384 394441 (West Midlands).

VERITY AUDIO Parsifal Encore speakers, piano black, 24 months old, flight cases, excellent cond, (£13,000) £6,000. Henry 07970 020204 (Devon).

WHARFEDALE PACIFIC PI-30 floorstanders, LE birds eye finish, nine months old, as new boxes, instructions £180. 01978 762903 or email ngparker@talk21.com (Wrexham).

YAMAHA DSP-A22 eight-channel digital amplifier only eight months old, mint cond (£1,250) £450. Stuart 01724 853357 (Lincs).

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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AudioNote UK Oto SE + phono	£1400	£650
Linn Klout Poweramp	£2500	£695
Reference 3a I, integrati.	£6000	£2000
Marantz ML SC22 / MA23 Mono's	£2500	£1100
JR 149s Piano Black (mint & rare)	NK	£295
Apogee Mini grands	NK	£1900
Jamo Concert 11s	£2500	£1100
Hafler 220 Poweramp	NK	£195

PRODUCT

Audio Research LS7 Preamp	£1800	£695
Audio Research Classic 30	N/A	£995
BAT VK5 SE CD Player (as new)	£5950	£3500
Bose 321 DVD AV System	£1000	£400
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Burmeister Rondo CD Player	£2000	£900
Cello Serafin Active Piano Blk.	£12k	£3250
Gamut CD1R (new)	£2950	£1900
Hovland HP100 MC (xdem)	£5750	£3800
Clearaudio Insider MC (20 hrs)	£5700	£1000
Krell FPB700CX (10mths old)	£15000	£8995
Krell FPB 250MC Mono's	£14000	£6250
Krell KAV 300i	£2750	£1100
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Medowlark Kestral Hotrods	£1500	£650
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Theil 2.3 (mint boxed)	£3200	£1600
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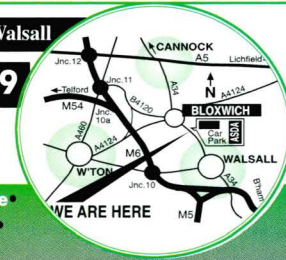
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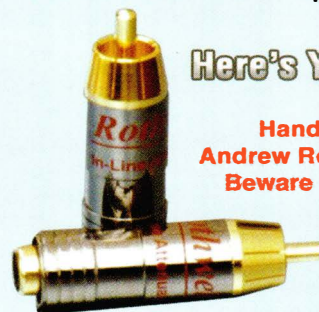
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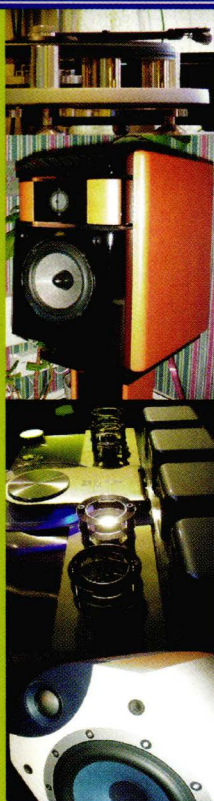


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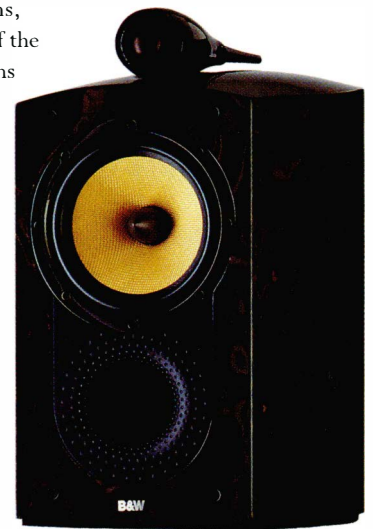


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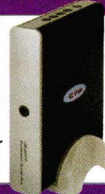
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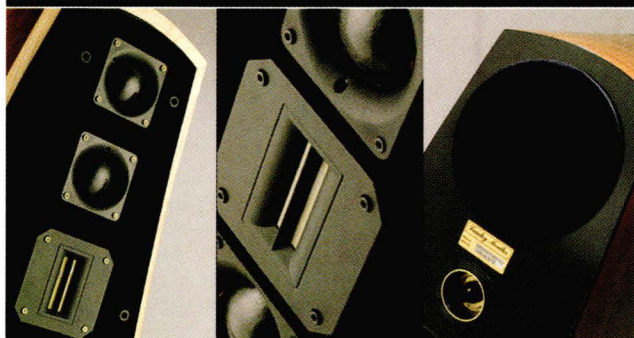
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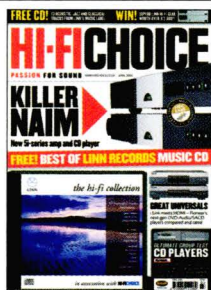
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HI-FI EXTREME



“No good uncorking any old bottle of plonk if you’re serious about your hi-fi.”

of valves and neither do we need a sonic sledgehammer and ceiling-high speakers. We don’t need pace, rhythm and timing emphasised to the exclusion of virtually everything else. What we do need, though, is enough transparency to hear through a recording so clearly that every last scrap of harmonic and timbral resolution, every nuance of technique, every ambient acoustic clue is laid bare”.

Okay, Gluck’s got a little way to go, but you get the idea: essentially we’re writing about the same thing. Here’s the general picture. It’s no good uncorking any old bottle of plonk if you’re serious about your hi-fi experience. According to the principles laid down by the GLoAaGD’s founding fathers, Monty Nosegay and Isaac Azimuth, each grape variety is indexed to specific groups of hi-fi hardware. So secretive is the GLoAaGD, even I don’t have access to the component/label matches. The best I can give you is this brief guide.

Reds: Beaujolais – Light, fruity, easy to drink. Aromas of pear and banana. Drink with NAD, Rotel and Rega; Pinot Noir – Colour can range from chery red to purple-red. Typical flavours include earth, leather, vanilla (from the oak). Great with pasta, Sonus Faber and Audio Note; Merlot – Mellow but complex, a bit chewy. Perfect for beef, Sugden, Primare and KEF.

Whites: Chenin Blanc – Dry to semi-dry. Match with chicken, TAG McLaren, Pioneer and Harman Kardon; Riesling – Indigenous to Germany, flavours include fruity and floral, as well as honey and musky. Complements oriental dishes, seafood and Sony; Chardonnay – Typical flavours are apple, tangerine, lemon, lime, melon, and oak. Goes best with Marantz, Roksan and Musical Fidelity.

If you meet anyone who admits to being a member of the GLoAaGD, do let me know – I’m missing some detail on the rosé. Until then, good drinking one and all. **HFC**

Grape and gain

David Vivian drinks (and drinks) to the perfect listening experience

Ever wondered why hi-fi and wine buffs attract a derisory press? The scornful point to common traits: elitism, insularity, obsession, snobbery and a love of arcane terms, strained similies and cardboard cartons.

A little unfair, I think. We’re just ordinary people with serious hobbies and highly evolved vocabularies. They’ve unwittingly picked up on one thing, though. Pour yourself a glass of Barolo and grab a chair. The wine and hi-fi industries are, in fact, deeply in cahoots. Every item of hi-fi made over the past 50 years has been created to have a sonic equivalence with a bottle of wine. It goes back generations to the formation of the Grand Lodge of Audiophilia and Grape Dependency in Aspen, Colorado, who vow to create a fusion of consumption and perception, the most rewarding in human history, a taste/hearing loop that would take the experience of getting sloshed listening to your stereo to another level, each enhancing the effect of the other in

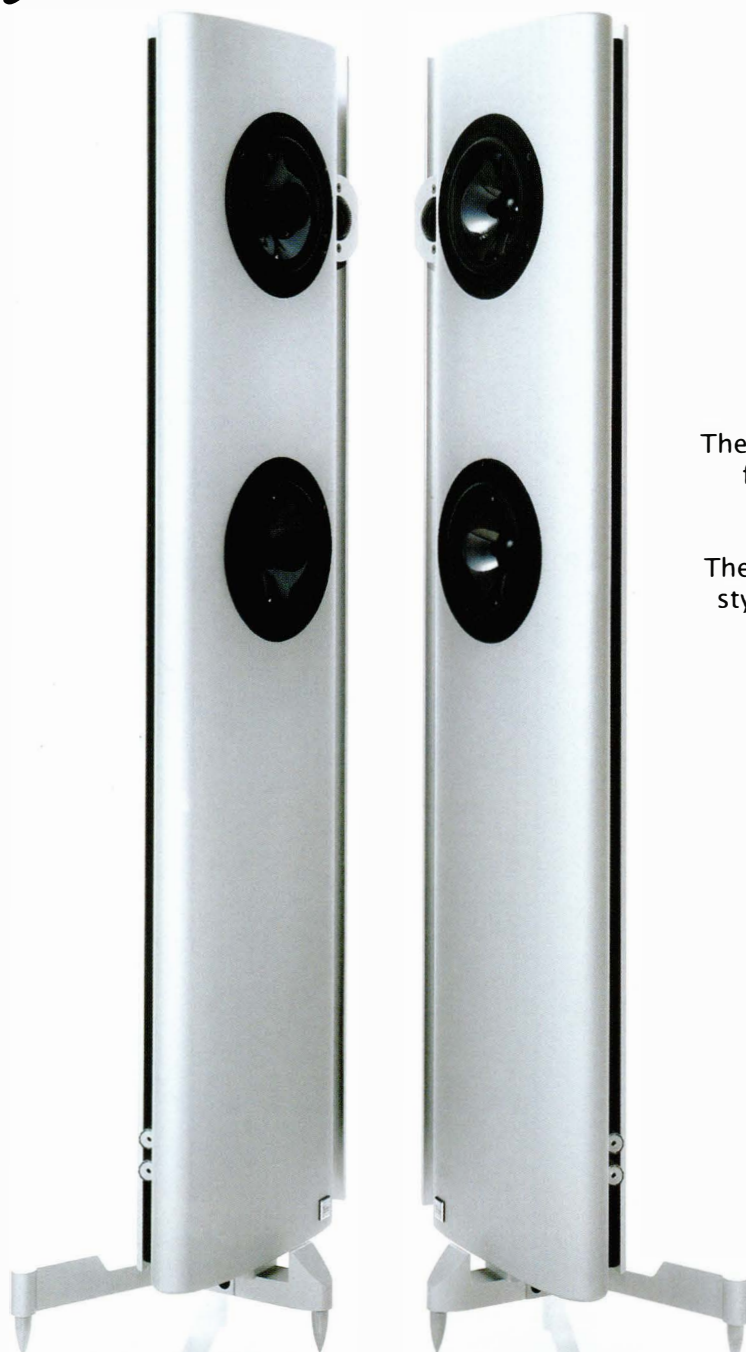
an inescapable whirlpool of pleasure.

C’mon, it must have occurred to you. Just think about the general grape types for starters. Cabernet Sauvignon: Arcam. Shiraz: Naim. Merlot: Quad. Chardonnay: Marantz. Pinot Grigio: Cyrus. See? Then there’s the language of description. Compare what wine buff Malcolm Gluck, in his outstanding book *Superplonk 2004*, wrote about Majestic’s Casa Lapostolle Chardonnay 2001 (£6.49) with my take on the sound quality of a recent Beautiful System in the equally outstanding *Hi-Fi Choice*.

Gluck: “Calm, beautifully controlled, dry melon fruit, with nuttiness and a charmingly dry, elegant finish. It insists on being itself in spite of the comparison which can be made between it and Californian specimens and Southern France. It has neither the exuberance of many an Aussie Chardonnay nor the fleshiness of say, a Cape specimen, and therefore food for it has to be subtle.”

Me: “We don’t need the caramel warmth

Beauty

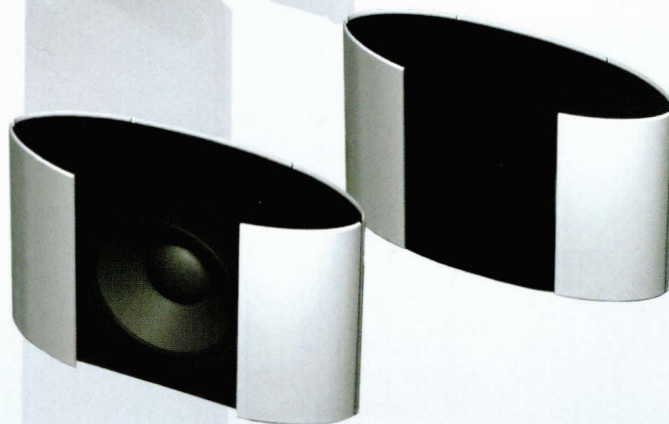


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