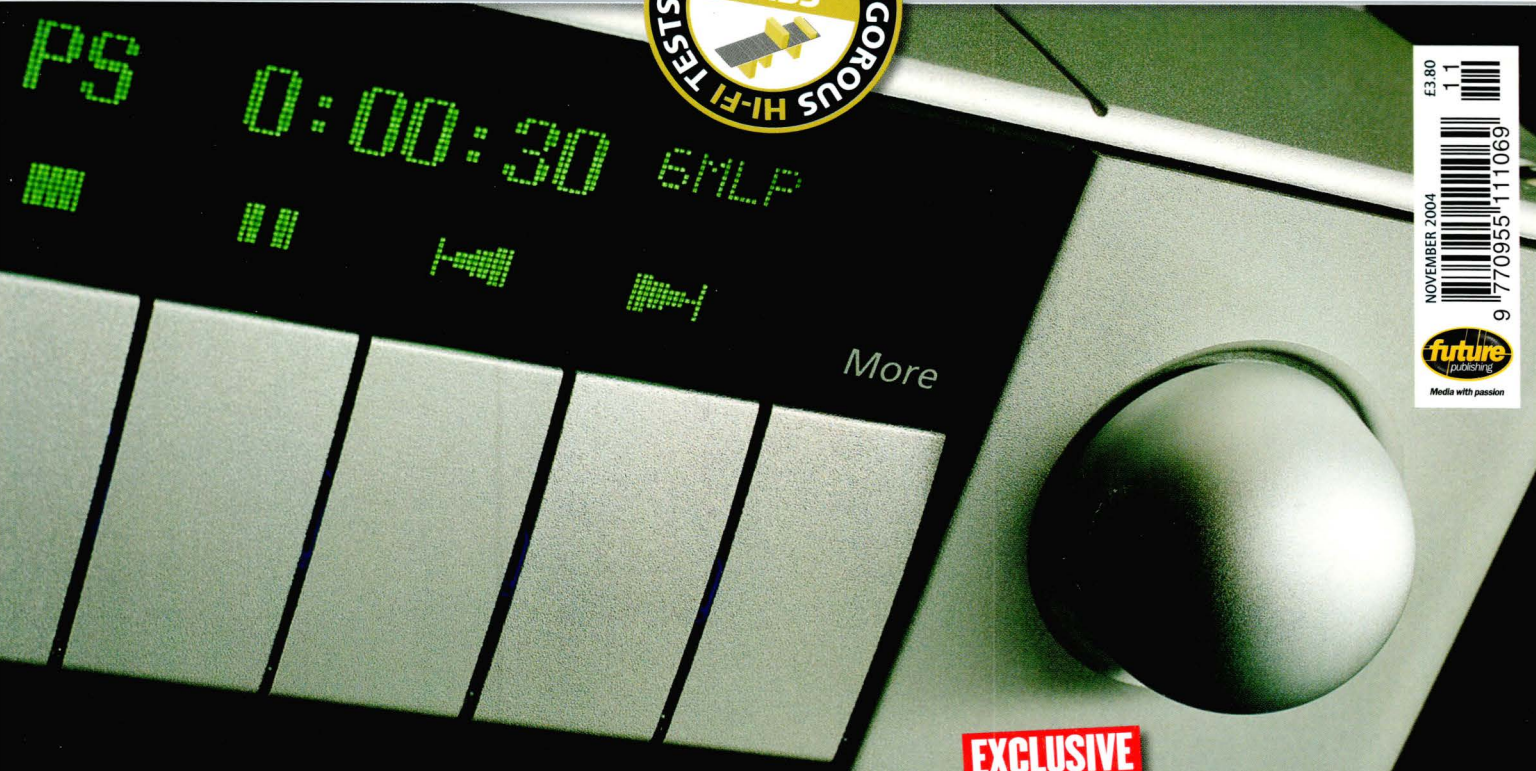


# HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND

WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK | NOVEMBER 2004



## AMPLIFIER MAGIC

Latest Myriad stereo integrated is a peach

## SMALL WONDERS

Splendid new 'bookshelf' speakers from AVI and Castle Acoustics

## PLUS!

- >> Arcam Upsampling CD192 CD player rated
- >> Denon New DVD-3910 universal disc player tested
- >> Townshend Win a universal player worth £2,500 – see p24



EXCLUSIVE

# DVD

## COMES OF AGE

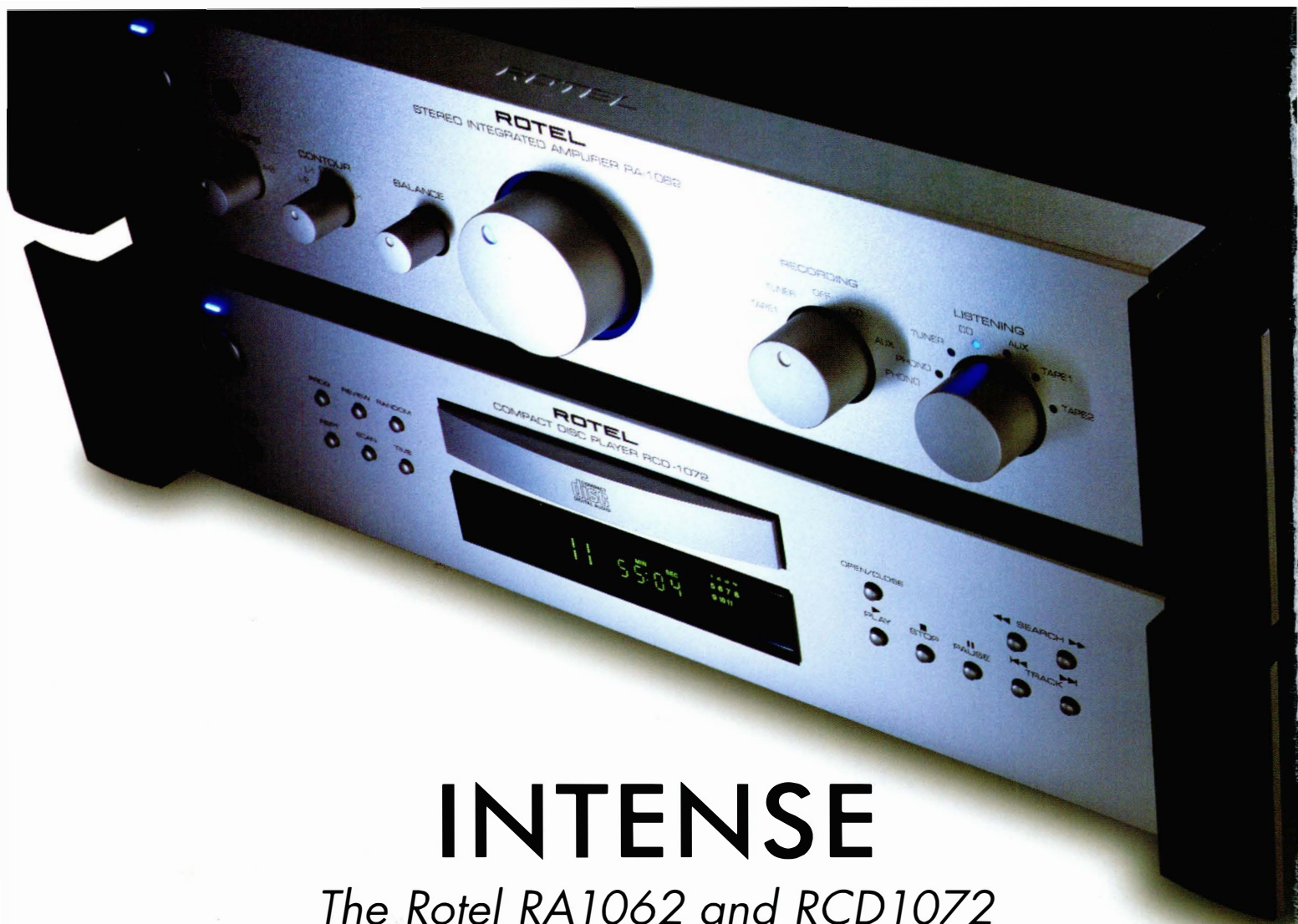
Meridian helped invent DVD-Audio. Now its new player reinvents hi-res DVD

**FREE!**  
2nd hand hi-fi mini-mag!



## ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>> LOUDSPEAKERS

- FEATURING**
- > Audiovector Mi 3 Sig
  - > B&W 703
  - > Dali Helicon 300
  - > Dynaudio Contour S 1.4
  - > PMC FB1+
  - > Totem Hawk



# INTENSE

## *The Rotel RA1062 and RCD1072*

Individually, Rotel's latest CD player and amplifier will make a striking difference to the way you hear music. When they hook up with each other, though, it's a match made in hifi heaven. The chemistry is instant, thanks to a shared pedigree of meticulous component selection, painstaking refinement and balanced design by Rotel's award-winning team of engineers. It's an intense relationship, and a powerful listening experience. Get them connected.

To find out more about this perfect partnership, call B&W Loudspeakers UK on 01903 221500.



# HI-FI CHOICE

NOVEMBER 2004 ISSUE 260

Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7317 2600 Fax: +44 (0)20 7317 2686

## EDITORIAL

Tim Bownen **editor**  
tim.bownen@futurenet.co.uk  
Dan George **reviews editor**  
dan.george@futurenet.co.uk  
Howard Malone **art editor**  
howard.malone@futurenet.co.uk

## CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Black, John Brandon, Dominic Dawes, Art Dudley, Colette Fahy, Andy Giles, Alvin Gold, Stuart Harrison, Jason Kennedy, Paul Messenger, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Stuart M Robinson, Alan Sircom, Richard Stevenson, Phil Strongman, Dominic Todd, David Vivian, Nigel Williamson

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Chris Foster

## ADVERTISING

Michelle Blackwell **senior advertising manager**  
020 7317 2602 michelle.blackwell@futurenet.co.uk  
Mark Bezodis **advertising manager**  
020 7317 2656 mark.bezodis@futurenet.co.uk  
Brad Francis **senior sales executive**  
020 7317 2415 brad.francis@futurenet.co.uk  
Doug Hope **sales executive**  
020 7317 2429 doug.hope@futurenet.co.uk  
Stuart Harris **classified sales executive**  
01225 442244 stuart.harris@futurenet.co.uk

## HFC ONLINE

www.hifichoice.co.uk  
Lucy Price-Lewis **online editor**  
lucy.price-lewis@futurenet.co.uk  
Mark Phillips **online ad manager**  
mark.phillips@futurenet.co.uk

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Tel: +44 (0)870 444 8650  
Email: customerservice@futurenet.co.uk  
Prices (13 issues): UK £31.65 (or £7.91 quarterly Direct Debit), Europe £45.39, North America £52.77, rest of the world £65.44

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## MARKETING & LICENSING

Philippa Montgomery **marketing manager**  
philippa.montgomery@futurenet.co.uk  
Simon Wear **licensing director**  
simon.wear@futurenet.co.uk

## PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Paul Burden **circulation manager**  
Rose Griffiths **production manager**  
Craig Broadbridge **senior production controller**  
Helen Ramjuttan **ad coordinator**

## PUBLISHING & MANAGEMENT

Simon Maxwell **publisher**  
simon.maxwell@futurenet.co.uk  
Aubrey Ganguly **group senior editor**  
Andy Semple **publishing director**  
Jayne Caple **advertising director**  
Robert Price **managing director**

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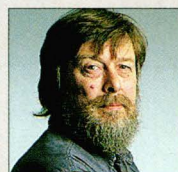
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## WELCOME TO HI-FI CHOICE

To ensure you get the best information, opinion and advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most knowledgeable and experienced hi-fi writers in the business...



**"Music digs deep into our emotional core like no other art form. It touches the soul and makes grown men weep. Hi-fi is simply a means to a musical end – it provides the conduit for its energy and detail, delivers scale and space, ensures you get closer to the tone and impact of the original performance. It makes music seem more real and hence achieve its emotional goal. Quite simply, the music that moves you, moves you more."** Tim Bownen, Editor



### PAUL MESSENGER

A former *HFC* editor, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for nearly 30 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer.



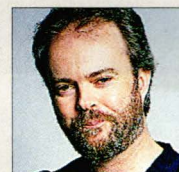
### DAN GEORGE

Dan is a huge hi-fi nut whose dream came true when he became *HFC's* reviews editor. Armed with a bristling contacts book and a pair of razor-sharp ears, he ensures that only the most interesting products make it into *HFC*.



### ALVIN GOLD

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



### DAVID VIVIAN

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



### RICHARD BLACK

Richard is a professional musician, an experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi analyst to boot. He has a particular knack for writing about complicated subjects in a comprehensible way – and he only writes for *HFC*.



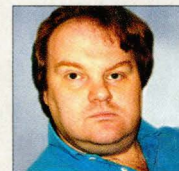
### ART DUDLEY

One of the most respected commentators on the American hi-fi scene, Art has written for numerous titles including *Hi-Fi Heretic*, *Sounds Like*, and *Listener*. Among other things, he is currently 'editor-at-large' of US journal *Stereophile*.



### JASON KENNEDY

Jason previously edited *HFC*, 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.



### ALAN SIRCOM

After a stint selling hi-fi, Alan began his journalistic career at *HFC* some 12 years ago. Now a successful freelancer, you too can benefit from his extensive hi-fi knowledge, from prurist two-channel stereo to the latest multichannel gear.

## ESTABLISHED 1975

**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 cherry-picked kit, rigorous group tests and in-depth equipment reviews continues to ensure that **HFC** is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the smarter hi-fi read...



## HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE >>

### ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

Six of the best new speakers, priced from £1,600 to £2,400, rigorously tested as only *Hi-Fi Choice* knows how

### INNOVATIVE DISC PLAYERS

From Meridian's gorgeous G91 DVD-Audio player to Denon's latest universal machine

### AWESOME AMPS

Fab new models for stereo and multichannel from Linn, Myryad, Pioneer and Sony

### BRILLIANT BABIES

Superb new compact speakers from British stalwarts AVI and Castle Acoustics

### AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...

The next issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* is on sale 25 October. Ensure you never miss a thing – turn to p80 for our latest great subscription offer



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## FREE MINI-MAG!

Inside your free 2nd-hand hi-fi mini-mag...

- 2 Guide to 2nd-hand kit – this issue, B&W, plus DIY tips
- 3 Trading Pages
- 7 Reader Classified

# SUPER NATURAL BEING








## HELICON C200 & S600

Nature never ceases to amaze us! Whenever on the lookout for truly innovative solutions, nature constantly proves itself to be miles ahead of the technological ratrace – thus continuing to serve as an unlimited source of inspiration to us all: artists & engineers alike...

## 3D AUDIO

Proprietary ribbon and dome tweeter technology meet in perfect synergy in our Helicon range of loudspeakers to create a transparent, holographic soundstage. Strong, lightweight composite materials and low-loss suspension excel by allowing our drivers to react with lightning speed to even the most subtle variations in the source material. This is not unlike the immensely rigid, yet feathery light insect wing. The dragonfly masterly balances an amazing cocktail of awe-inspiring speed and three-dimensional mobility, making it capable of outperforming any airborne challenge on the fly...

## FEATURES

-  Wide Dispersion
-  3D Audio
-  Low Resonance Cabinet
-  Time Coherent
-  Hand Crafted
-  Amplifier Optimised





## PRO-JECT DEBUT III TURNTABLE

▶ Czech out the latest record deck from Eastern European vinyl veteran Pro-Ject – the long-awaited Debut III. None who heard it will forget the original Debut – a superb budget turntable that enticed over 120,000 music lovers to get into the groove. Its phenomenal success has prompted a number of rival manufacturers to produce super-budget decks, but few match the Pro-Ject package. The new MkIII version has been cleverly improved without adding a bean to its pin-money price tag.

It features a new (and very different) high-mass tonearm for greater compatibility with a range of upmarket cartridges, plus the same motor as the rest of the Pro-Ject range for better speed stability. Further mods include a new sapphire bearing and a 500VA power supply. Czech Republic manufacture keeps the price low while British/Austrian design ensures the performance is rockin'. You might just be looking at the hi-fi bargain of the year.

*To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next edition of Hi-Fi Choice*

**PRODUCT** Pro-Ject Debut III

**TYPE** Turntable (including arm and cartridge)

**PRICE** £130

**KEY FEATURES** High-mass tonearm ▶ Improved power supply ▶ Upgraded motor ▶ Package includes OMS cartridge

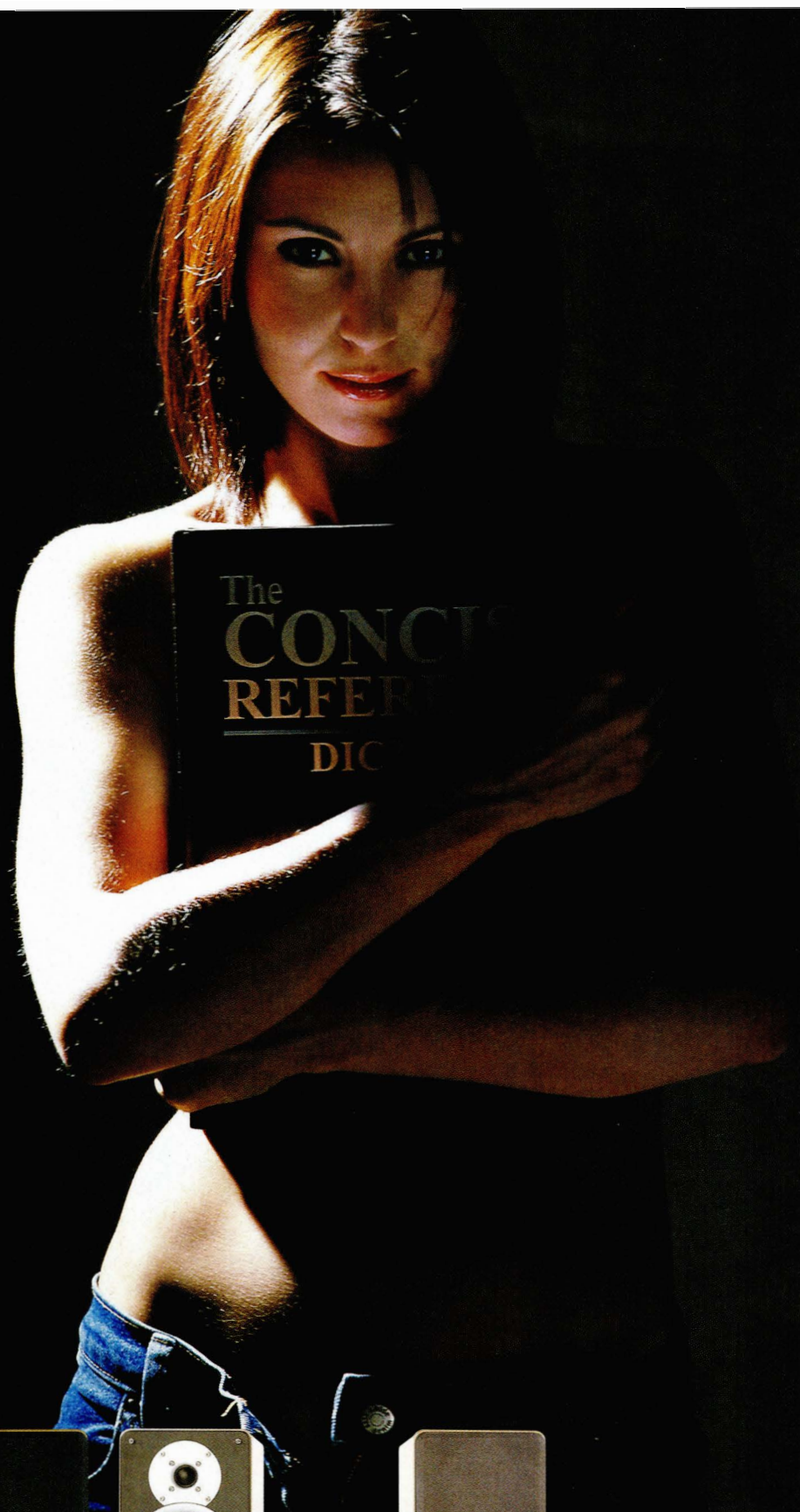
**CONTACT** ▶ 01235 511166  
▶ [www.project-audio.com](http://www.project-audio.com)

# Character Reference

Introducing the new Reference Series 250 System and Reference 300 Mk. II. Following the stunning success of the original award winning Reference Series, TEAC is proud to announce these brand new products. Both feature DAB tuner, beautiful silver finish and offer high quality hi-fi performance in a micro/mini sized package. Ease of use comes naturally with a full function remote control.

**The new Reference Series -  
the new reference point for  
all mini systems.**

For an audition at your nearest retailer  
contact TEAC on 01923 819630  
or at [info@teac.co.uk](mailto:info@teac.co.uk)



Reference 300 Series Mk. II

Reference CR-H250 System

The New  
**Reference 300**  
Mark II

Reference 300 System  
The Award Winner



**TEAC**  
[www.teac.co.uk](http://www.teac.co.uk)





## EXPOSURE 2010 S CD PLAYER

It's been well over two years since Exposure's entry-level 2010 CD player seduced our ears and its replacement, the 2010 S, looks likely to charm with equal measure. And *Hi-Fi Choice* has got the scoop on this key player – this is the first photo of the 2010 in the UK. At its heart lies a new CD transport, developed and produced by Exposure using a Sony mechanism. Its in-house manufacture demonstrates Exposure's commitment to two-channel, which is great news for audiophiles.

Many of the internal electronics have been tweaked for better performance and on the outside you may notice the improved cosmetics, fit and finish. Attention has also been paid to the casework – the player boasts a new non-magnetic aluminium chassis, which is 20 per cent thicker than the last model. The player is just one exciting product from Exposure's new 2010 S range; turn the page for further details...

*To find out more, see our exclusive in-depth review in the next edition of Hi-Fi Choice*

**PRODUCT** Exposure 2010 S

**TYPE** CD player

**PRICE** £600

**KEY FEATURES** New transport mechanism • Tweaked circuitry • New system remote • Improved chassis • Exposure micro controller and display

**CONTACT** ☎ 01273 423877

🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

## NEW PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



### MERIDIAN 808 SIGNATURE REFERENCE

Twenty years after Meridian launched its first CD player to the UK comes its new flagship model. Lining up as part of the 800 Reference Series, the new 808 Signature Reference CD player is a limited edition machine designed to offer the very best standard of CD playback that Meridian can offer. Features include a multi-speed DVD-ROM drive, a DVD-Audio-quality DAC and precision upsampling. Jitter is kept to a minimum with Meridian's triple buffering technique, which is clocked by a new high-stability system. There are two versions – one standard player (the 808) and one with a built-in preamp with six analogue and five digital inputs (the 808i).

**Price** 808: £7,195, 808i: £8,250 **Due Now**  
 ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com



### TALK ELECTRONICS THUNDER 2.2

The new Thunder 2.2 CD player for Talk Electronics sports the latest technology on the inside, and a new look on the outside. Within the all-new 3mm thick casework lies a 24-bit/192kHz DAC with 384 times oversampling, a new master clock, and custom-made transformers. The player is also flexible – it can be upgraded to Thunder 3.1 B specification at the factory, or it can be converted to CD transport duties by fitting an additional digital output board. Talk also offers an external power supply called Whirlwind, which it claims offers enhanced performance.

**Price** £1,200 **Due Now**  
 ☎ 01276 709966 🌐 www.talkelectronics.com



### O'HEOCHA DESIGN DSW-600i/DSW-1000i

Radical speaker manufacturer O'heocha Design has produced two "loud and proud" subwoofers. So proud is the company of the design that it suggests the stainless steel/aluminium subs are designed to be exhibited as functional art. Both models feature the isobaric (constant pressure) loading principle using twin aluminium drivers. The larger DSW-1000i model packs a 300-watt bipolar amp, with 200 watts available from the more room-friendly DSW-600i.

**Price** DSW-600i: £2,800, DSW-1000i: £2,950 **Due Now**  
 ☎ 00353 91 506 970 🌐 www.oheocha.com



### RIO CARBON AIWA HZ-WS2000

Hard disk audio portables to rival Apple's dominance are coming thick and fast. Rio's Carbon (above) offers a 5GB capacity and will hold 80 hours of compressed MP3 audio, or 160 hours in the WMA format. It also boasts a very decent 20-hour battery life and cigarette packet dimensions. Meanwhile, Aiwa's HZ-WS2000 delivers a 1.5GB storage capacity (around 25 CDs) from a tiny unit just 10.6mm thick.

**Price** Rio: £199, Aiwa: £199 **Due Now**  
 ☎ Rio 08700 991794, Aiwa 0870 168 9000  
 🌐 www.rioaudio.com, www.aiwa.com

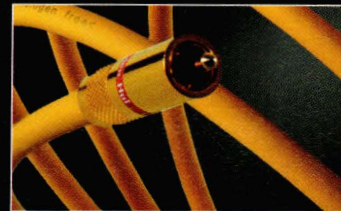


## KEF Q COMPACT AV SYSTEM

⊕ Kent-based KEF Audio has introduced a new 5.1 speaker package based around its long-standing 'tweeter in a cone' Uni-Q driver array. The Q Compact AV System comprises four of the two-way 'Qcompact' stand/wallmount speakers, with a matching Q6c centre unit and 250-watt active subwoofer. KEF has continued to use an elliptical cabinet design to minimise resonance, and each package is available in four matching finish options.

**Price** £850 **Due** Now ☎ 01622 672261 🌐 www.kef.co.uk

## Soundbites



**VAN DEN HUL** has a new £40 interconnect called The Name. It's being marketed as a universal cable – for audio, video and digital signals. The core and screen are made of silver-plated OFC and the cable uses the same terminations as the more upmarket vdH cables. High-value six-packs are also available, (3x0.8m pairs for £100) for multichannel applications.

☎ 01235 511 166

**SEARCH4CDS** is a new service that claims to obtain any hard-to-find recording released on CD or vinyl and transfer it to CD-R. The service includes tracing TV, film and advert tracks, deleted albums and singles plus a vinyl to CD-R transfer service. Prices vary, but the average cost of obtaining and reproducing a vinyl album is £25.

☎ 01462 892181



**CUSTOM DESIGN** is launching more equipment supports and speaker stands incorporating the firm's proprietary 'acoustic steel' damping material. The Icon Signature 400 equipment rack is available in two forms – one with the acoustic steel damping platforms, called iRAP, and one without. The technology is also available in the Signature 402 and 404 speaker stands. Rack prices start at £320 for a four-shelf support.

☎ 0191 262 4646

**ECOSSE** has given its flagship interconnect, the Master Reference, the deep cryogenic treatment. The new triple-screened cable uses a twisted pair topology and silver-plated, non-compressing copper plugs. Prices start at £305 for a one-metre pair.

☎ 0141 353 0509

**PURE** has a new portable DAB/FM table radio called The Elan. It features an amazing claimed battery life of 30 hours for DAB and 80 hours for FM, together with the full gamut of DAB radio functionality including scrolling text and autotune, all for an expected price of £80.

☎ 01923 277488



## EXPOSURE 2010 SERIES

⊕ Exposure is to replace its entry-level 2010 series with a new 2010 S range. Products include a CD player, an integrated amp (above) and a power amp, and feature a number of improvements. These include a new mechanism for the CD player, a higher rated transformer and high performance output devices for the amps and a new 'full system' remote. Other modifications across the range include a thicker aluminium chassis and improved fit and finish.

**Price** CD player: £600, integrated amp: £600, power amp: £500 **Due** Mid-October

☎ 01273 423877 🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

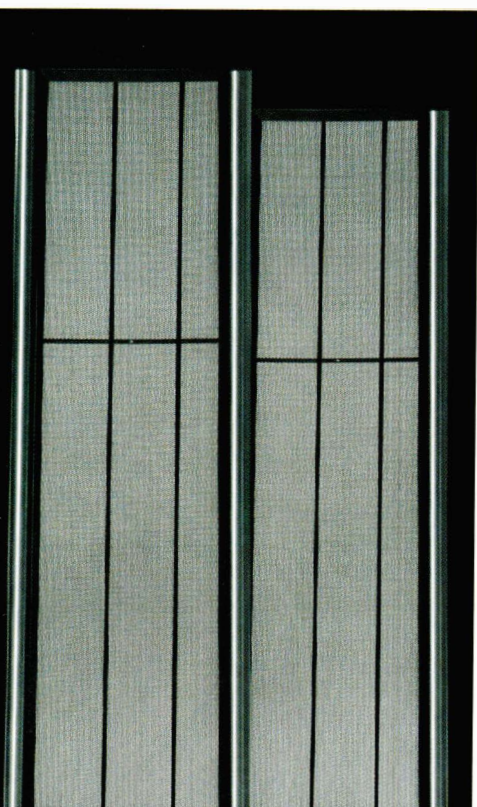


## AUDIOPAX MODEL 5

⊕ New from innovative valve amp producer Audiopax is the Model 5 preamp, sporting the company's proprietary Timbre Lock gain controls for each channel. It boasts four inputs and both high and low gain output switching for partnering power amps. The amp is an inverting type; meaning partnering with an inverting power amp is required to retain correct polarity of the signal. Audiopax also has a range of power amps to suit the Model 5.

**Price** £4,450 **Due** Now

☎ 0141 332 5205 🌐 www.audiopax.co.uk



## FINAL 400i

⊕ The countdown for Final's new 'affordable' electrostatic speaker is over. The Dutch specialist's new 400i stereo speaker system can be driven with modest power levels for an electrostatic (60 watts) and benefits from room-friendly dimensions. At 1.2m tall and only 28cm wide, the transparent panels are joined by a 100-watt subwoofer with "exemplary integration", Final claims.

**Price** £1,995 per pair **Due** Now

☎ 01753 652669 🌐 www.final.nl

### The Insider

#### THIS MONTH, HFC TALKS TO...

**ROGER BATCHELOR**  
Job Title: Marketing and training officer  
Company: Denon UK



**What's your most exciting product in development at the moment?**  
A new monster AV amplifier.

**What's the future of hi-fi?**  
More 'choice' than ever before.

**What's the most innovative hi-fi product you've encountered recently?**  
It would have to be our new DVD-3910 universal DVD player, naturally!  
(See HFC's in-depth review on p50 of this issue.)

**DVD-Audio or SACD – and why?**  
DVD-Audio. For me, the format is closer to the studio master in terms of sound and there is far more information on the disc. Of course, SACD currently has the edge because of the hybrid disc option and the greater variety of discs available.  
For the foreseeable future though, we will continue to have the choice of both DVD-A and SACD formats and manufacturers like ourselves will continue to produce universal players.

**Is the universal disc player the future of CD playback?**  
For major manufacturers, yes probably, but not exclusively. There'll always be room for specialist companies to produce dedicated CD players.

**Name a really great album that you've heard recently.**  
*Shining Brother, Shining Sister* by Jackie Leven.

### Hi-Fi Diary

#### OCTOBER

10 **National Vintage Communication Fair**  
National Exhibition Centre,  
Birmingham, 07947 460161  
*Popular hi-fi antiques and collectables fair*

23-24 **Home Entertainment Show**  
Manchester, 01524 36991  
*Premier AV show in the north west*

#### NOVEMBER

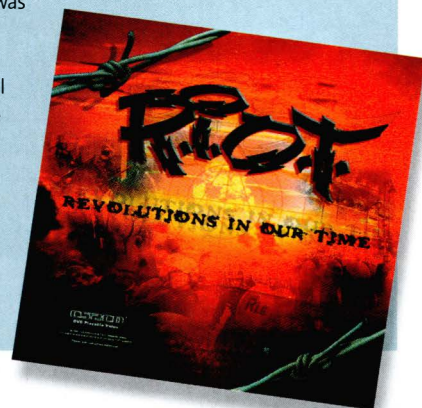
5-7 **What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision Show**  
Novotel London West Hotel,  
020 8267 8378  
*Second year for this new home cinema and hi-fi show*

## Video SACD

Given the less than spectacular success of the high-resolution formats outside sound-conscious circles, it's unsurprising that record labels are looking for ways to enhance their appeal. DVD-Audio has found an option for adding broader compatibility with DualDisc and now there's a way of adding video content to SACD and CD called CS2CD. The company behind the technology, also called CS2CD, has come up with a way of adding the sort of extras found on DVD-Audio discs such as still pictures, text and video to an otherwise audio-only format. Company founder William Grecia says: "I may have found the missing link to SACD's full commercial potential. I wanted to create a disc that was consumer-friendly, and offered additional features."

His idea is that each disc has a number of different tracks or features that can be accessed by appropriate players, i.e. they will be playable on everything from a CD deck to a PC and yet to the end user it's a single-sided five-inch disc. As yet Grecia has not found a partnering record company to finalise development but has found support for the base CS2CD technology on standard CDs in the hip-hop field with Riot, Jay Z and Kool Keith.

Meanwhile, sales of standard SACDs are improving with 2,300 titles available – Sting's *Sacred Heart* has sold out and the Rolling Stones remastered series sales have topped two million.

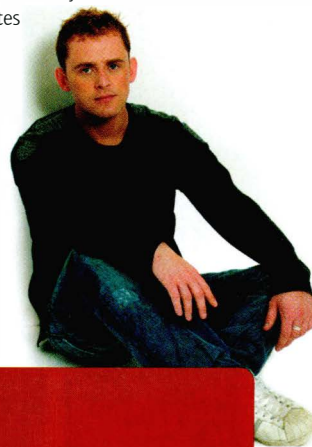


## Downloads count

The UK's first official download chart launched in September with Westlife taking the number one spot with a live version of *Flying Without Wings*. Sponsored like the regular singles chart by Coca-Cola, the chart counts tracks that have been legally downloaded from the major download sites including iTunes, Napster and MyCokeMusic.

The chart is announced weekly on Scott Mills' (right) drive-time show on Radio 1, Wednesdays from 6pm. The first chart was expected to reflect the 'underground' character of the market prior to September with bands like the Pixies and Biffy Clyro featuring strongly. However, there were good showings from Maroon 5 and Shapeshifters, suggesting that this chart isn't too dissimilar to the singles chart.

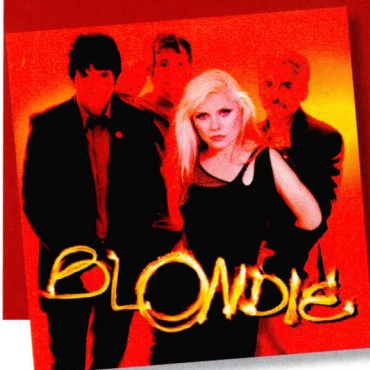
At a time when the BPI is reporting the first rise in singles sales in five years, the reported two million units sold via downloads this year will come as a boost to an industry that thought the internet would be its downfall. The BPI also reports that album sales are up 3.7 per cent and music DVDs doubled their UK market share.

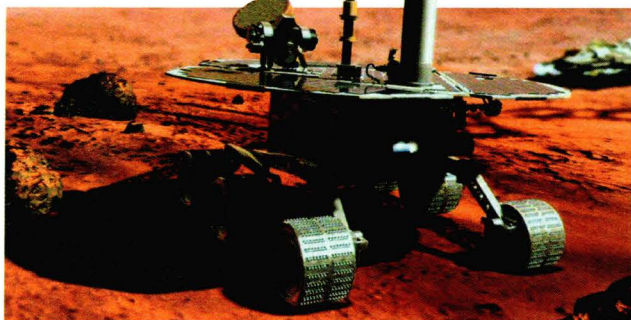


## DualDisc launched

DualDisc, a format that combines DVD-Audio or Video on one side of a disc with a CD layer on the other, will be officially launched in the US in October. Having been tested marketed in Boston and Seattle earlier in the year and with official approval from the DVD forum, DualDisc is an enticing catch-all hybrid solution for music labels and consumers alike, combining the universal compatibility of CD with added-value DVD content on a single disc. The main protagonists of the format are EMI, Sony/BMG, Universal and Warner, with 5.1 Entertainment/Silverline committed to releasing 50 titles including albums from Blondie, Robert Cray, Queensryche and the London Symphony Orchestra.

One possible fly in the celebratory champers comes in the shape of DVD Plus, an existing CD/DVD hybrid currently being licensed by Dieter Dierks in Germany. Dierks is challenging WEA from whom he originally bought the rights to the format, claiming to have made a deal with WEA in 2000 to market DVD Plus discs. At present Dierks' US patent is still pending but should it come through things could become rather more complicated...





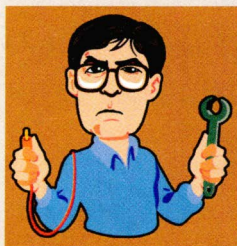
## Space age audio

Wilson Benesch is expanding its manufacturing facilities with the latest generation of 3D photo-realistic CAD-CAM software (computer-aided design/manufacture). The company will be using the same software that was chosen to develop and animate the working prototype for the Mars Rover space exploration vehicle. This investment will allow WB to produce rapid prototypes for new products and be able to get input from distributors around the world.

E-files that show exact three-dimensional animated images can be used to establish the suitability of new designs in different markets, with distributors having the option to change sizes where they feel it's appropriate. This new system will be able to drive the company's CNC machining tools to produce new generations of carbon fibre hi-fi components for the WB range.

## JIMMY'S TWEAKS #26

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



### Extending HF response

It's well-known that the ear's high frequency response deteriorates with advancing age. So, it's unlikely that many listeners aged (say) 40 or over would be able to hear much above 16kHz. Indeed, if your daily working environment is noisy, it's possible your hearing limit may not extend beyond 12kHz or 13kHz.

Does this mean the finer points of the finest hi-fi systems will be lost? Not a bit! For reasons hard to explain, a hi-fi system with extended bandwidth produces audible benefits even for those with restricted HF hearing. So adding super-tweeters (like the Townshend Maximums, which extends high treble beyond 100kHz) gives crisper detail and a more holographic presentation that can be heard by all.

## TOP 10 CHEAP HI-FI TWEAKS

- 1 Clean mains plugs and cable connections with Brasso
- 2 Get speakers out of corners
- 3 Use a proper equipment support or try Ikea's Lack tables
- 4 Break up bare walls in your listening room (e.g. bookshelves)
- 5 Make isolating 'feet' by cutting squash balls in half
- 6 Use the best room in the house acoustically
- 7 Switch your kit on at least one hour before playback
- 8 Separate mains from signal cables at the back of your rack
- 9 Borrow cables from friends or dealers first before buying
- 10 Use a mains suppressor for noisy domestic appliances (fridges etc.)



## New Music

### IN THE STUDIO

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



#### EMINEM

**Title:** *E=MC2*

**Release date:** late 2004

Several tracks from Eminem's fourth album including *Bully*, *Come On* and *We As Americans* were stolen from his studio and posted on the internet earlier this year. Rumours suggest he's now got so much material the new record could be a double. "It's very different," says fellow rapper 50 Cent. "It's still Em, but the concepts and things he talks about are somewhere else. He's gone in another direction."



#### THE PIXIES

**Title:** *tbc*

**Release date:** 2005

The comeback of the year has surely been the Pixies, whose abrasive but melodic alt-rock albums of the late eighties remain musical landmarks. After a series of triumphant reunion appearances frontman Frank Black has confirmed the band are recording a new album, their first since 1991. Tom Waits is mentioned as a potential producer.

#### BECK

**Title:** *tbc*

**Release date:** 2005

Beck has been working on the follow-up to 2002's *Sea Change* for most of the year, with producers The Dust Brothers and Tony Hoffer and Jack White of the White Stripes making a guest appearance. New songs include *Guero*, *E-Pro* and *Chain Reaction*.

#### TONY BENNETT

**Title:** *The Art Of Romance*

**Release date:** 8 Nov

Some of us are still wondering how in the twilight of his career, Tony Bennett has suddenly become cool. But he undoubtedly is with recent appearances at Glastonbury and an MTV Unplugged session. At 78, he

insists he has no thoughts of retirement and he recorded *The Art Of Romance* with a live orchestra on a set that includes *Close Enough For Love* and *Don't Like Goodbyes*.

#### QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

**Title:** *tbc*

**Release date:** 2005

We wondered whether QOTSA could survive the loss of Nick Oliveri and Mark Lanegan, while a solo album from frontman Josh Homme also suggested curtains. But Homme now reveals the follow-up to 2002's *Songs For The Deaf* is well underway and features guest appearances from Distillers' singer Brody Dalle, Garbage singer Shirley Manson and ZZ Top legend Billy Gibbons.

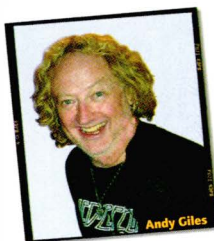
#### ALSO COMING SOON

##### JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

**Keith Jarrett Trio** *The Out-Of-Towners* (Nov), **Ali Farka Toure** *tbc* (2005), **Rosa Passos** *Amorosa* (Nov), **Madeleine Peroux** *Careless Love* (Nov)

##### DVD-AUDIO/ SACD

**Cotrubas, Domingo, Kleiber, Milnes** Verdi: *La Traviata* (SACD, Nov) **Herbie Hancock** *Gershwin's World* (SACD, Nov) **Elton John** *Captain Fantastic* (SACD, Oct) **Blondie** *The Curse of...* (DVD-A DualDisc, tba)



## It's the music, stupid...

*Hi-fi's great, but the power is in the music*

I was wallowing in the bath the other day – just doing what people do in the bath. Well, normal people anyway. In my bathroom I have a mono radio. It's good quality – but just a standard portable radio, nothing outstanding. I was listening to, as it happened, a recording of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* – the final setting of his wonderful *Ring Cycle*. Don't expect me to go through the whole opera (let alone the complete *Ring Cycle*) – it'd take all day – but it was the very last scene, the bit where Günter is killed by Hagen, who falls back in fear when the dead Siegfried raises his hand. Brünnhilde, entering, orders a funeral pyre for Siegfried. She condemns the gods for their guilt in his death, takes the Ring, and promises it to the Rhinemaidens. Placing it on her finger, she throws a torch onto the pyre and joyfully rushes into the flames. As the river overflows its banks and the Gibichung

**“To say I was moved is an understatement. It touched my soul. It was one of those rare moments of sublime serenity.”**

Hall is consumed, the Rhinemaidens, dragging Hagen to his death, regain their gold, at last purified of its curse. Flames engulf Valhalla, leaving a human world redeemed by love. Got all that? Well, those who know it will tell you that it provides some of the most extraordinarily emotive music ever written. As I lay there I was utterly overwhelmed by what I was hearing. To say I was moved would be an understatement. It touched my soul. It was one of those rare moments of sublime serenity that one treasures.

When I was out of the bath and dressed I wandered down to my music room and dug out the recording I had just listened to (for those of an inquisitive nature, it was the 1951 Bayreuth Festival recording under Knappertsbusch – a mono pressing). I thought I would play the chunk I'd listened to again – on my drop-dead-expensive audio system. As I listened to it I was reminded of the hard cold truth that inspires my reason for writing this. Taking into consideration the fact

that I might have been emotionally drained from the first hearing of the piece, the replay on a truly high-end system made no difference whatsoever to the poignancy I felt in the bath. The power is with the music. It wouldn't have mattered a stuff what I was listening to that music on – steam radio or the world's most costly system.

So why am I stating the bleeding obvious? Well, because to some, I'm not. Some people are convinced by the years of incessant bullshine from audio manufacturers (and some sheep-like press) that it really does sound different. I'm not daft enough to think that it's *all* cobblers. After all I do have a good system and I have made a reasonable living from the audio business over the years. No, I say, just be realistic. Electronic sound equipment is just the conduit. It's the music that does it. Anyway, I'm off to have a bath.

*Andy Giles is one of British hi-fi's biggest personalities. A former journalist, he has strong industry ties and a long-standing PR business*



Art Dudley

## Lamm chops

*Saucy amps are fab if you're minted*

**H**ere's something I've never done before: Having finished a new product review, I took the thing out of my system, cleaned it off, packed it for shipping... and then right before I called the air freight company for a pick-up, I unpacked it again so I could hear it for just a little while longer.

It is – or perhaps I should say *they* are – a monoblock amp from Lamm Industries of Brooklyn, New York, which is about five hours from where I live. The ML2.1 is a single-ended amp that uses a Russian 6C33C indirectly heated triode as its only output device per channel. The amp can pass 19 unclipped watts across an average load, and it's capable of that much only because its 6C33C is regulated from here to next Sunday and back again (each Lamm amp has six tubes, fully three of which are used as voltage regulators.)

But the Lamm sells for \$30,000 a pair, which is considerably more than I earn in half a year. My disdain for very expensive audio products is no secret. I've never encountered a \$10,000-plus turntable I could take seriously, musically or aesthetically, and because the cereal boxes of 2010 will likely contain giveaway players better than anything from dCS or Wadia today, pricey digital sources are even sillier. But the Lamm ML2.1 amplifiers – or, more to the point, the extraordinary sense they make of every record I feed them – made me reconsider.

Imagine a product that seems to scrape away every bit of dirt from the musical wave, leaving the attack and decay components of notes sounding particularly clear and purposeful. The resulting presentation isn't threadbare but rather rich with believable tone and texture: Reeds, strings, and skins have never sounded so convincingly real in my home.

As a recovering flat-earther I'm also qualified to suggest that the Lamm does a better than average job of keeping timing and tunes correct. Of course I've found that to be true of most single-ended amplifiers, assuming decent enough output trannies and sensible loudspeaker matching. That a single ML2.1 weighs over 70 pounds speaks to the former; that it drives a Quad ESL-989 in my ▶

# R

## RETRO

HI-FI REVISITED

SME 3009  
PICKUP ARM



The SME 3009 arm has not always been in favour with the audiophile community, but it has always been the benchmark. First and foremost, it was always exquisitely built, with the precision, accuracy and consistency of a Swiss watch, and the finish was simply unmatched, making it a true object of desire.

The key to this excellence dates back to SME's early history. The company was founded in 1946 as the Scale Model Equipment Company Ltd – a producer of scale models for the aeronautical and general engineering industry. The first SME arm appeared in 1959, and was based on a thin wall steel tube, with an internal rawlplug to damp arm resonances (a similar damping arrangement is used in SME's current designs). The bearings are miniature ballraces for the vertical axis, and knife edges for the horizontal axis. The headshell was detachable using a screw collar arrangement that became known generically as the SME fitting, and was made from perforated metal with a lip around the edge for stiffness.

Bias was applied with a simple weight and thread which was channelled across a calibrated outrigger arm, and the lift/lower device was a beautifully articulated hydraulic mechanism. Because SME was not a turntable manufacturer in those days, the arms have always been highly adaptable, with a simple but secure adjustable height setting, and overhang adjustable with a sliding base arrangement, the arm being secured in a long slot in the bedplate that is screwed to the turntable. There was even a 12-inch version (the 3012) which offered reduced tracking angle error as the cartridge traversed from outer to inner grooves, but the cost was higher moving mass with no increase in structural integrity, and few turntables could accommodate its length.

The 3009 was designed to support relatively low-mass, medium to high-compliance cartridges, which during the SME's period of pre-eminence was generally accepted as the key parameter in any design. A low-mass arm with low friction bearings combined with a cartridge whose stylus assembly was free to



**“SME arms were used on just about every turntable that was available without one of its own.”**

move vertically and horizontally was the obvious way to look after the precious vinyl groove. This paradigm for arm design held sway until Linn Products upset the applecart with the Grace arm, and later their Ittok in the seventies, which was also well made (by Japanese engineers this time) but with higher mass, which was regarded as acceptable with the relatively low-compliance moving coil cartridge that they helped establish as the new kings of vinyl. The extra mass helped deliver greater structural integrity.

The favoured partners for the SME were high-end moving magnet cartridges such as the Shure V15 series and the ADC 25 and 26, ultra high compliance designs that may have been built specifically to suit this arm. And SME arms were used on just about every turntable that was available without one of its own, for example just about the entire Thorens range (for a long moment in history the two brands were almost as inextricably linked as SME and Shure). It was far from unknown for hobbyists to rip out fixed arms and replace them with SMEs. What finally consigned the 3009 to history was the clear superiority of the best moving coil cartridges, which performed better in higher mass arms. Later SME designs were better adapted to this kind of cartridge, and for many of today's vinyl fans its arms remain king. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*



## “Whether audiophiles like it or not, high-resolution formats like SACD and DVD-Audio need more Britney, not Brahms.”

moderately sized room with only occasional compression and absolutely no hard distortion speaks to the latter, and admirably so.

Audio jewelry this is not – while impressively large, the ML2.1 is a rather drab looking flat-black thing. Similarly, its interior doesn't have anything in the way of rare metals or designer parts. But it's stunningly solid and well-built, and I haven't had a moment's trouble in the three months it's been here. Three months going on four, actually.

At last count I owned four amplifiers myself – an EAR 890, a Naim NAP 110, a Fi 2A3, and an Audio Note Kit One – and the Lamm monoblocks don't render them obsolete or make them seem any 'worse' to me: I'm very lucky to have what I have. But it's also good to have something to stretch toward. Perhaps Haliburton needs an audio reviewer...?

*Art Dudley* has written for *Hi-Fi Heretic*, *Sounds Like* and *Listener*. He lives in the US and works as *Stereophile's* editor-at-large



### Britney, not Brahms

*Hi-res labels need to pop it up*

Recently, *High Fidelity Review* ran our annual poll to find the year's best high-resolution music discs. Readers vote online, and by collating the results from previous years, along with the number of times a particular review or news story is read, a clear trend towards certain types of music is revealed.

All around the world, labels are saturating the SACD and DVD-Audio catalogue with jazz,

experimental and classical recordings. Sony has funded countless such productions to kick-start the SACD market and the small labels sticking with PCM have discovered how easy it is to create 96 and even 192kHz titles. Dedicated bands of engineers slave over their consoles to bring us fantastic discs of Chopin, Mahler and Mozart that convey previously undiscovered nuances of the performance or venue.

And yet, the market for DVD-Audio and SACD cares hardly one jot – only 18 per cent of our voters cited a classical or jazz title as their favourite and an even smaller percentage focus their attention on news on either genre.

Contemporary pop, rock and headline reissues are where all the interest is – classic albums from Elton John and The Who together with the Flaming Lips' *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots* attracted more than 70 per cent of the award vote this year and it's pretty much the same story when it comes to news and reviews.

So what does all this tell us? Well, first and foremost, it seems that classical music listening (or at least buying) is undoubtedly on the decline; we knew that already as the section is often in a little annexe – somewhere out by the dustbins – at many high street stores. But secondly, and more importantly, it is clear that those trying to draw the consumer towards high-resolution have been

focusing their efforts in the wrong areas, or at least in areas that offer very little return.

Jennifer Lopez, Usher and Beyoncé sell albums, as do the old favourites like Pink Floyd, the Rolling Stones and Elvis. Every time an artist such as these appears on DVD-Audio or SACD, the disc sells like hot cakes, which is good for high-resolution as a whole as it perpetuates both formats and also helps keep the less popular genres alive. Yet, if the evaluation discs I receive provide an accurate sample, the balance between classical/jazz and pop/rock high-resolution productions is somewhere in the region of 10:1, the exact opposite of what it should be to enable DVD-Audio and SACD releases to proliferate and the formats to become more widely known.

As the sales of DVD-Audio and SACD titles have remained static during the last twelve months in many regions, headline acts are obviously needed, and now that the roadblock of uncertainty known as DualDisc has been removed, hopefully the major label consortium involved will concentrate on mainstream releases – as they did in the test markets – and not simply rerelease classical and jazz performances from the 1950s. Like it or not, high-resolution needs Britney, not Brahms.

*Stuart M Robinson* is editor and publisher of *HighFidelityReview.com*, a website dedicated to high-resolution digital sound





## Pay more, get more

Time to fight for 'the quality issue'

Quite often in the course of my day-to-day existence as a technology journalist, erstwhile musician and all-round enthusiast of things that make loud noises, I find myself offering the benefit of my experience to others in the form of system advice. "What new speakers shall I get?" "Should I go back to vinyl?" "You can't really tell the difference between MP3 and CD, can you?" These are just three of the litany of questions I've been asked recently – some reasonable, some curious, some downright odd.

This privileged position – yes, some people think being phoned at four in the morning because a drunken friend has accidentally poured beer into his amplifier and thinks I'm going to say anything other than "sod off and leave me alone" makes me privileged – gives me something of an insight into the changing nature of people's lifestyles and sound systems. And that's why I worry.

Entertainment technology is changing so fast that I increasingly get requests for advice from people who, impressed by marketing that constantly hails the newest, latest lifestyle products, have not even considered what we might call 'the quality issue'.

The emphasis on convenience and affordability is so strong now that an increasing number of the people I talk to don't understand, for example, that with so many budget speakers available, there might be any benefit to spending more.

Of course, everyone has to work within their budget, but in a disturbing number of cases people who could afford, say, £1,000 for a pair of speakers are spending much less on inferior products. Why? Because many people these days have no experience of what excellent hi-fi actually sounds like. In these days of MP3 and digital downloads, home-cinema-in-a-box systems and the like, the quality issue is being forgotten and some people simply never get the chance to experience genuine, high-quality, hi-fi sound.

But when they do, people always see the benefit. Every time I demonstrate to someone the huge difference in quality between a budget system and a better system – they always decide to go for the very best they can afford. The quality issue isn't suffering because consumers' ears don't work: it's suffering ▶

# M

## MUSO

CLASSIC ALBUMS

JEFF BUCKLEY  
GRACE



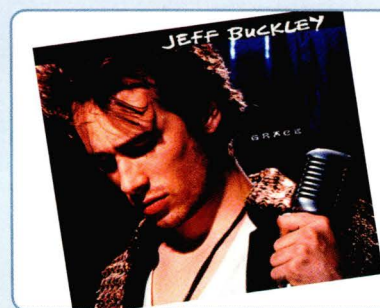
When Jeff Buckley went to his watery grave on 29 May 1997 aged 30, we lost potentially one of the greatest musical talents of the new century. The fact that his posthumous recorded output far outstrips what he produced when he was alive is testament to his enduring popularity and influence.

Like his father, folk/jazz singer Tim Buckley, Jeff was a restless talent with a voice like an angel and charm in abundance. He was constantly searching for new ways to express his gift but unlike his father, who also died young at 28 in 1975, he wasn't into drugs and was considerably more focused on producing a body of work that would last.

Unfortunately, that body of work really just comes down to one album, *Grace*, recently re-released in a three-disc 'Legacy Edition'. It includes a remastered version of the original album, plus a CD full of contemporary out-takes and live tunes and a DVD featuring music videos and a documentary.

Despite its polished and refined sound, the album was written and recorded pretty much on the fly at Bearsville Studios in Woodstock, NY. The band which would record it was only assembled a couple of weeks before and most of the songs were written in the interim period. As it happened, Jeff didn't write enough songs that he considered fit for his debut album release, hence the eclectic range of covers of old-time country act Joe Shelton's *Lilac Wine*, Benjamin Britten's *Corpus Christi Carol* and Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*.

The original songs, which began as sketches in those early jams, continued to evolve through the recording sessions, with Jeff constantly revisiting lyrics and melodies. In an attempt to catch his muse, producer Andy Wallace set up three soundstages – a full-on electric set, a quieter combination of acoustic and electric, and a little folk club-style stage, so that Jeff could try out new approaches to each of the songs as the mood took him. He certainly experimented, playing harmonium, organ, dulcimer and even tabla (Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan was one of his many musical heroes) as well as guitar and that extraordinary voice.



**"Three sound stages were set up so he could try new approaches to the songs as the mood took him."**

He also brought in strings to accentuate some of the songs, along with seasoned jazz arranger Karl Berger, whom he saw as a collaborator he could bounce ideas off.

Even after recording was finished, mixing took months as Jeff restlessly kept changing his vision of how his debut bow to the world would sound. In the end, he succeeded in creating a record that's meditative, thoughtful, extremely musical, and a world away from the prevailing grunge aesthetic of contemporary rock in the mid nineties. But the influence has been phenomenal, and is probably even more starkly illustrated on the bonus tracks, which include uncanny prior echoes of Radiohead (and all their subsequent offspring, from Coldplay to Elbow), the earthy pop of Ryan Adams, the screeching adolescent rock-out frenzy of the White Stripes and many more.

In his short lifetime Jeff Buckley was constantly trying to focus his influences and find new ways to express his muse. The posthumous live and demo-based albums have all failed to capture his essence because they were never finished, never distilled. Had he lived, it's very likely that Buckley would have produced more records as thrilling, as distinctive and as brilliant as *Grace*, but as it is, we can only listen to this gem of a record, and imagine. **HFC**

Dave Oliver



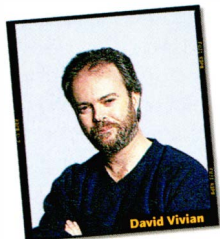
## “Car mags never miss a chance to get a Ferrari, Aston and Porsche together for a punch-up, why not hi-fi?”

because we're all constantly having sonically substandard formats and products rammed down our aural passages.

Just the other day, I demonstrated some speakers for an acquaintance. His budget was, by most standards, pretty unrestrained: he could afford to buy whatever he wanted, and imagined around £1,000 to be a good amount to spend on speakers. However, when I enhanced his system with a pair of ATC SCM50s (£5,500), it took him about 20 minutes before saying, “I'm buying a pair.” For me, those ATCs proved a point. Their sonic presentation was so complete, so well-rounded, that with comparable components feeding them, what he heard was a sound that was both subtle and exciting, dynamic and intricate, powerful and controlled. And that is what hi-fi is all about.

So let's not let the quality issue disappear, regardless of what the 'lifestyle technology' marketing people think. When most people hear truly great sound, they decide it's worth paying for. And that's because it is.

*Dominic Dawes is a freelance writer and musician with a deep love of music and a corresponding passion for hi-fi*



## High end and mighty

...because we're worth it

Had something of a droolathon when I read *The Collection* edition of *HFC* a few weeks ago. All right, it was a hot day and, at half distance, fantasy fatigue (and world class dribbling) began to take their toll. Two-thirds of the way through I fell off the sofa, delirious with the stress of thinking up schemes to painlessly acquire the serious sums of money needed to finance my dream system. But then, with just six pages to go, I was mercilessly overtaken by the realisation that the closest I'd get to most of these Olympian high-end hi-fi components was reviewing them, and experiencing the sweet sorrow of returning them all too soon. I felt like collapsing to my knees and crying. But I pressed on to the finish. Tongue hanging out, eyes rolling back in my head and on quivering lead-filled legs, true. I may have been mentally and emotionally crushed but I'm no quitter.

Just wish I had £20K or so going spare. The thing that struck me pounding through the pages of *The Collection* is that 20 big ones is

pretty much what you should spend to purchase the best pair of speakers in the world. But which ones are The Daddies? Coming from a car magazine background, I can assure you that the question over which is the best sub-looney tunes supercar in the world (same thing, just apply a x5 price factor) is never left hanging in the air for long. Getting the latest Ferrari, Lambo, Aston and Porsche together for a friendly punch-up is pretty much the most fascinating and important thing a car mag can do, and they do it whenever possible.

So, given that I want my £20K speaker to be damn near intolerably talented, what happens, for instance, when a Wilson Watt/Puppy System 7 (£22,490) stands toe to toe with JBL's K2 S9800 (£20,000)? Which has the real muscle and scale? Gotta know. And can the 2.18-metre tall, eight-driver Triangle Magellan (£19,995) put the frighteners on the impossibly gorgeous £22,000 Sonus Faber Stradivari Homage? Could be, of course, that B&W's battleship Nautilus 800 whips down their trousers at half the price. These questions may get the better of me but I'd really like to know. What about it, Mr Editor?

*David Vivian has been wallowing in gorgeous hi-fi and then describing its virtues/vices in Hi-Fi Choice since 1990*



## Wireless wonderland...

...and why we'll have to wait for it

Unless you have a cat that prefers big, fat cables to kitty chow, nothing beats a proper hi-fi cable for audio transmission. Whether you're connecting an amplifier to a DVD player with an optical digital cable or running speaker wires, cable connections are simple and provide the highest quality transmission. Yet, there is a new connection option on the horizon that may help you eliminate that rat's nest behind your plasma set. The question is however: will the sonic

and visual quality of a wireless connection ever match wired cabling?

It will, but it will take some work. The current wireless standard used for streaming audio signals is either infrared (RF) or 802.11 (sometimes referred to in its various forms as Wi-Fi). Infrared is notoriously flaky if you want to stretch an audio signal more than about ten feet. Some surround-sound systems such as the Sony DAV-LF1 use RF, but you have to make sure the rear speakers are placed with a clear line of site to the receiver. And RF doesn't work at all for video.

On the other hand, 802.11 uses a low power radio transmission in the 2.4GHz spectrum. Instead of running an optical digital cable out of a laptop, you can stream music from a corner den to your living room over a wireless network. Problem is, 802.11 is susceptible to interference from other neighbouring networks, portable phones, and even microwave ovens. And, while the 802.11g standard provides a high-quality feed, the more common 802.11b protocol is just too slow for streaming an audio file at, say, 160Kbps.

A cable connection may be more aesthetically challenged – in some cases, you may need to hire an electrician to route the wiring through house walls – but if a wireless signal drops or fades in and out, you've lost all the benefits of cable-free audio. That's why many have been doubtful – and justifiably so – about whether wireless will ever really work for those of us who care about sound. Plus, the install is more complex. There's usually a certain amount of software that needs configuring, which just means an extra step to take. With a cable, the connections are easy and the effect of good wire is obvious, so it's more of an audiophile no-brainer.

In a few years, you'll start hearing more about ultrawideband or UWB. This wider frequency wireless protocol is intended almost exclusively for high-quality audio and video streaming. UWB will be far less susceptible to interference, the range is higher – probably at least 100 feet – and the signal will move at 400Mbps or more.

In other words, UWB will match signal quality note for note with a cable connection. And there's another benefit. If UWB becomes ubiquitous, there won't be any software to tweak. You'll power on an amplifier and the signal will automatically configure itself for any devices found in the room, including speakers, televisions, DVD players and a portable audio system. And, at that point, we'll all probably make the switch.

Still, we're not at that point. Interconnects, speaker cables and even the power connectors you use will go the way of the dinosaurs, but not for a few years yet...

*John Brandon is a US-based technology journalist with the inside track on hi-tech digital convergence*

# TECHNO

TECHNOLOGY EXPLORED

IT'S THE LACK OF  
POWER THAT CORRUPTS

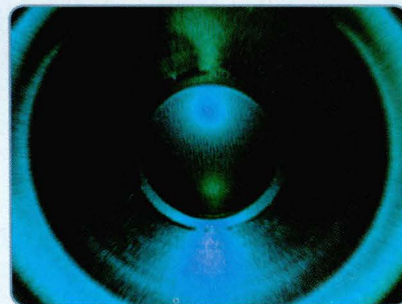


When we talk about 'full power' for an amplifier we invariably mean power that can be delivered over a period of time on a steady sinewave (unless you're specifying power for computer-connected active speakers, in which case the figure quoted typically appears to relate more closely to the power that might be released should the speaker be set on fire). But the fact is that even the least dynamic music recordings don't really look much like a steady sinewave. Rather, peak power is required for relatively small time intervals (we're talking a few tens of milliseconds at most) with much lower power for longer periods in-between.

Armchair hypotheses won't get us very far here, so we analysed some pieces of real music in a variety of styles. As it turned out, highly rhythmic pop turned out to be the easiest to generalise, and typically you tend to get around 50-70ms of near-full-level stuff followed by another 400ms of material lurking around the 70 per cent level. As it happens, 70 per cent amplitude equates to half power (power is proportional to the square of amplitude). So evidently if you crank it up to full whack, the amp is only going to be putting out half its rated power for most of the time. With slightly more freestyle rock the numbers look more like 20-50ms of full level followed by 400ms of 50 per cent or less – only one-quarter power.

At the other extreme, classical music of course features whole minutes at a time when the level drops down to many dB below peak, but when climaxes do come along they can last for a full second or more right up at peak power. Or at least, the individual waveform peaks reach full level. To be truly pedantic about power one has to analyse from microsecond to microsecond but the amplifier output limit applies to the peaks so we'll stick with those.

Where's all this leading? The point is that while the basic idea about power – you need it for the loud bits – is a statement of the blindingly obvious, the exact conditions under which you need it are perhaps a little



**“In typical amps, the value of the capacitors restricts the dynamic power to a few milliseconds only.”**

surprising. Specifically, the duration for which it is needed: less than a tenth of a second at a time for most pop, but over a second for classical and jazz. This sheds some light on the subject of 'dynamic power', which basically means the power that an amp can deliver briefly while its power supply capacitors hold up, but which the mains transformer cannot sustain. In typical modest amps, and a surprising number of more upmarket models, the value of the capacitors restricts the dynamic power to a few milliseconds only. It's of some use then, but probably not a lot, and is most beneficial with not-too-heavy rock which tends to have the briefest full-power transients. Really high-end amps usually have almost no dynamic headroom anyway since the mains transformer is not much stressed at full power.

But the real surprise is this, again based on observation. 'Loud' pop music is frequently the stuff that requires the least power from an amp. Averaged over several minutes it has the highest power, but its peaks are often significantly lower than those of classical music. In other words, if you want to find out if an amp has enough power for you, play the climax of a classical symphony or an operatic soprano's top C. That'll sort the sheep from the goats! **HFC**

*Richard Black*



## ESSENTIALS



### TIVOLI MODEL THREE BEDSIDE CLOCK RADIO £200 (EXTRA SPEAKER £100)

Now this is just beautiful – the audiophile's bedside clock radio. It's got all sorts of features – you can connect external sources and recording devices and an external antenna – but the main point is that it brings Tivoli radio sound quality to the bedroom. This dinky device embodies the familiar virtues of decisive tuning, clear reception and forthright sound that other Tivolis have already exhibited. In short, it completely blows the usual bedside radio sound under the bed where it belongs. The optional second speaker allows stereo operation (as well as another clock for the other side of the bed) and it looks gorgeous in real wood, with smart clock faces and easy-to-use controls – we're in love.

☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.tivoliaudio.com

### TCI TIGER ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT £28 (1M PAIR)

There's nothing remarkable about this cable except perhaps the price. For four such solid phono plugs alone (with split centre pin for good contact force) you'd expect to pay nearly this much, so value looks good already. Performance is good, though in all honesty not startlingly so – there's a little of the 'flatness' still in evidence that one generally aims to leave behind when upgrading cables. Tonality is for the most part good, with a slight reticence in the bass, and detail is respectable for the price. It won't bitterly disappoint but there are others around at this price that compete strongly – or move up to TCI's more expensive ranges, which we've enjoyed greatly.

☎ 07710 196949 🌐 www.true-colours.com



### KIMBER SELECT KS2020 DIGITAL INTERCONNECT £546 (0.75M)

Seen alongside complete audio systems costing less, it looks ridiculous: but the fact is that in every application we tried, from cheap to seriously high end, this coaxial digital cable gave an improvement. So what's going on? Is it the high quality materials, or the unconventional connection? There's more inside those wood-bodied phono plugs than just solder, as both hot and return conductors are connected through capacitors, which will certainly reduce the chance of stray circulating earth currents. Mad it may sound, but we'd recommend auditioning this cable as an integral part of any DAC purchase over a grand or so.

☎ 0800 373467 🌐 www.kimber.com

### ACOUSTIC SOLUTIONS PORTAL 2 DAB/ FM PORTABLE TUNER £60

This is where the price of portable DAB starts to become sensible. Given that this smartly presented unit also features FM it should be a pretty easy recommendation, but does it sound any good? Well, it's listenable. It lacks the star quality of the best FM portables (Tivoli PAL, various veteran models) but you can hear reasonably well what's going on, speech is communicative and music fairly clear. There's a headphone socket though, as well as a line output, and sound definitely benefits from standing the unit on a table or the floor, though nothing can help retrieve much real stereo from the two internal speakers.

☎ 01327 340601 🌐 www.acousticsolutions.co.uk



## SENNHEISER HD 515 HEADPHONES £70

➤ First impressions count for a lot with headphones. If they feel uncomfortable on your head from the outset they're unlikely to make for any kind of relaxed listening experience. This trendy new model is the opposite – very comfortable indeed. The deep circumaural earcups make direct contact with your ears unlikely and the headband is just the right tightness. But all of this is wasted! The sound is very disappointing. It's hard, boxy, coloured, undynamic, devoid of real depth and detail and generally completely unworthy of such an honoured marque. How could they get it so wrong? You expect sound like this from some no-brand 20-quid wonder. Please, Sennheiser, let this be a one-off aberration...

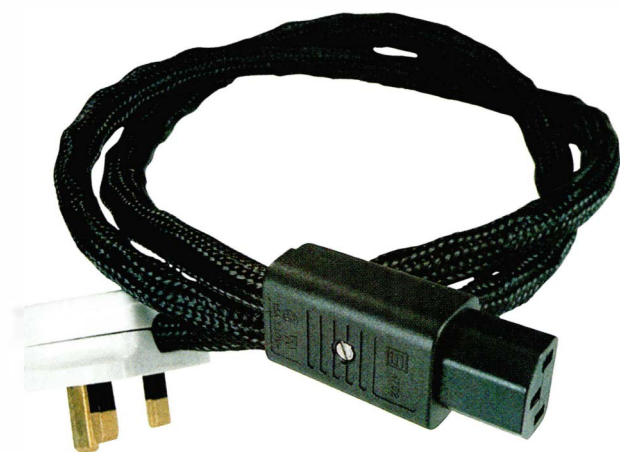
☎ 01494 551551 🌐 [www.sennheiser.co.uk](http://www.sennheiser.co.uk)



## TCI CONSTRICTOR MAINS CABLE £100 (1M)

➤ There's no shortage of fat mains cables around, and most of them lift the performance somewhat compared with regular flex. This model, which features several silver-plated conductors for each of live and neutral, is available with various terminations including the basic MK plug and commercial IEC outlet tried here, and seems particularly beneficial in the bass, adding an extra bite to danceable rhythms with both amplifiers and source components. Treble is just a shade clearer, the large conductor area makes it especially suited to high-power amps, and the price seems quite friendly.

☎ 07710 196949 🌐 [www.true-colours.com](http://www.true-colours.com)



## BLACK RHODIUM OPERA ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT £297 (1M PAIR)

➤ Eichmann's 'Bullet Plugs' seem to have created quite a stir, and Black Rhodium is not the only manufacturer to have created a cable specially suited to them. With solid silver centre conductor and silver-plated screen, this coaxial design is less outré than many other BR types, but its sound is really rather special, with a clarity and lack of grain that's quite delightful.

The sense of openness it produces can sometimes cause the sound to seem tonally light, but real bass is not at all lacking. Treble appears absolutely limitless at all times and acoustic decay is superb. All things considered this is an uncommonly capable interconnect.

☎ 01332 755 766 🌐 [www.blackrhodium.co.uk](http://www.blackrhodium.co.uk)

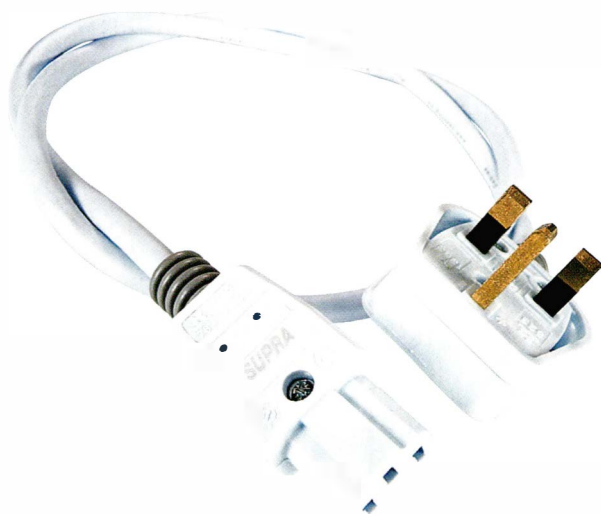


## SUPRA LORAD MAINS CABLE £12

➤ As Supra points out in its promotional literature, not many mains cables manage to achieve full safety certification: this one does though, which is perhaps a lesson to the others. At any rate, it makes our recommendation for it that bit more secure, based as it is on a very clear improvement in sonic clarity when LoRad replaces basic flex.

There's little or no tonal change though, unlike some other mains cables. Supra bases its claims largely on the screened construction, which is unusual although certainly not unique – though some implementation details are. Anyway, the price is way below most specialist mains cables and it's clearly a very good buy.

☎ 01622 664070 🌐 [www.supracables.co.uk](http://www.supracables.co.uk)



# L-Series Collector's Edition

A range of limited edition finishes have been released of the Quad 11L and 12L loudspeakers. Only 250 pairs of each are available worldwide. Each pair is numbered and supplied with an authentication certificate. These are only available whilst stocks last and will not be repeated.



## Authorised Stockists

•Aberdeen Holburn Hi-Fi, 01224 585713 •Basingstoke Audio T, 01256 324311 •Bath Radfords, 01225 446245 •Beckenham Musical Images, 0208 6633777 •Birmingham Music Matters, 0121 4292811 •Bournemouth Movement Audio, 01202 529988 •Brentwood Audio T, 01277 264729 •Bristol Radfords, 0117 9441010 •Cambridge Hughes Ltd, 01223 461518 •Canterbury Canterbury Hi-Fi, 01227 765315 •Cardiff Sevenoaks, 02920 472899 •Carlisle Practical Hi-Fi 01228 544792 •Cheadle Audio Counsel, 0161 4916090 •Cheltenham Hutchinsons, 01242 573012 •Cheshire Hi-Fi Stereo 0161 9735577 •Cornwall R.J.F., 01209 710777 •Coventry Frank Harvey, 02476 525200 •Crewe Sound of Music, 01270 214143 •Darlington Music Matters, 01325 481418 •Edinburgh Hi-Fi Corner, 0131 5567901 •Edinburgh Hi-Fi Corner, 0131 2201535 •Exeter Howards, 01392 258518 •Falkirk Hi-Fi Corner, 01324 629011 •Gateshead Lintone Audio, 0191 4772771 •Glasgow Glasgow Audio, 0141 3324707 •Glasgow Hi-Fi Corner, 0141 2265711 •Guildford P.J. Hi-Fi Ltd, 01483 504801 •Hampshire Hampshire Audio, 01962 854466 •Harrogate Hi-Fi Hut, 01423 810990 •Hastings Adams & Jarrett, 01424 437165 •Hereford English Audio, 01432 355081 •Hove Sevenoaks, 01273 733338 •Hull Zen Audio, 01482 587397 •Inverness Telly on the Blink, 01463 233175 •Lancaster Romers Hi-Fi 01254 887799 •Lancaster Practical Hi-Fi, 01524 39657 •Leeds Sevenoaks, 0113 2452775 •Leicester Sevenoaks, 0116 2536567 •Lewisham Billy Vee, 0208 3185755 •Lincoln Sevenoaks, 01522 527397 •Liverpool Sevenoaks, 0151 7078417 •London Bartletts, 0207 6072296 •London K.J. West One 0207 4868262 •London Spatial Audio, 0207 4365358 •Macclesfield Dooleys, 01625 423158 •Maidstone Home Media Ltd., 01622 676703 •Manchester Practical Hi-Fi, 0161 8398869 •Montrose Robert Richie, 01674 673675 •New Malden Unilet Sound & Vision 0208 9429567 •Newbury B&B Hi-Fi 01635 32474 •Newcastle Global Hi-Fi Centre, 0191 2303600 •Newcastle (metro) Lintone Audio, 0191 4600999 •Norwich Martins Hi-Fi, 01603 627010 •Nottingham John Kirk, 01159 252986 •Nottingham Sevenoaks, 01159 112121 •Oxford Audio T, 01865 765961 •Preston Sevenoaks, 01772 825777 •Reading B&B Hi-Fi, 01189 583730 •Rugby Sounds Expensive, 01788 540772 •Salisbury Hi-Fi, 01722 322169 •Scarborough Zen Audio, 01723 350850 •Sheffield Moorgate Acoustics, 0114 275 6048 •Shrewsbury SMC Sound and Vision, 01743 232317 •Solihull Music Matters, 0121 76520254 •Southampton Sevenoaks, 02380 337770 •Staines Sevenoaks 01784 460777 •Stourbridge Music Matters, 01384 444184 •Sutton Coldfield Music Matters, 0121 3542311 •Tunbridge Wells Sounds of Music, 01892 547003 •Warrington Doug Brady, 01925 828009 •Watford Hi-Fi City, 01923 226169 •Weybridge Sevenoaks, 01932 828525 •Weymouth Weymouth Hi-Fi, 01305 785729 •Wigan Adventures in Hi-Fi, 01942 234202 •Witham Sevenoaks, 01376 501733 •Wolverhampton Sevenoaks, 01902 312225 •Worcester Worcester Hi-Fi, 01905 612929 •Wrexham Acton Gate Audio, 01978 364500 •York Vickers Hi-Fi, 01904 629659

Model shown is 11L in Ebony finish

## Product of the Year 2002-2003

What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision (11L Loudspeakers)

## Product of the Year 2003-2004

What Hi-Fi Sound & Vision (11L Loudspeakers)

## Separates System of the Year 2003-2004

Hi-Fi News (99 Series and 11L Loudspeakers)

Quad Electroacoustics Ltd, IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, PE29 6XU  
Download brochures and reviews from [www.quad-hifi.co.uk](http://www.quad-hifi.co.uk),  
Tel :- 0845 4580011, Fax :- 01480 431767

# QUAD

# Piano man

Contemporary composer and impossibly hip film score writer Craig Armstrong has made a solo piano album.

Dave Oliver found out why

Craig Armstrong has been quietly cutting a deep furrow as one of the major names in soundtrack and orchestral music both in his native Scotland and on the world stage since the late eighties. The career of the Royal Academy of Music alumnus has been varied, taking in big-movie soundtracks for *Love Actually* and *Moulin Rouge*, classical commissions for the London Sinfonietta, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and others, not to mention his string arrangements for everyone from Massive Attack to Madonna.

He has also produced two solo albums in the past, both intriguing works mixing orchestral and electronic textures with guest appearances by famous friends including U2's Bono.

This year, however, he's produced an album of original works for piano... and nothing else. Most of the short pieces are melancholic in tone but never maudlin and although piano is the only instrument, he couldn't resist a few subtle electronic treatments using brand new real-time software. In-between recording in Tokyo and Berlin, the peripatetic Mr Armstrong called us from Portugal:

"I did a concert in Paris with a little bit of solo piano and a friend asked me if I'd thought of doing a solo piano album. I had done quite

were recorded using my own small Pleyel piano back in Glasgow.

These French pianos have a very bell-like quality to them, very pure. And for my sort of playing they suit what I do. German pianos tend to have a slightly harder edge to them and are a bit more bassy lower down, a bit more 'present', a bit more in your face. A lot of jazz pianists enjoy Pleyels, that slight distance in the sound seems to suit jazz.

"We tried our best to keep all the dynamics because in a lot of modern music, they tend to compress everything and make the soft sounds loud and the loud sounds loud, and we really wanted the recording to be as dynamic as possible. I wanted an album you could listen to on good hi-fi, but you could also use it in the background. I wanted it to sound like glass, or water... crystal clear.

"In the studio we'll check a mix on our studio monitors, then we'll try it on a medium-price hi-fi, then on, say, a Sony system worth a hundred quid. Then I'll try it on my posh system at home, just to check if there's anything missing, really. The smaller system for instance can be very forgiving and you could have too much bass or too much middle, or maybe some hiss, which the more expensive

**"I wanted an album you could listen to on good hi-fi, one that sounds crystal clear."**

a few movies recently, including *The Clearing*, and *Ray*, the Ray Charles story, both of them quite harrowing and difficult, so when I came to sit down at the piano, I really wanted to do something that was quite beautiful. I don't think it's unchallenging, but generally the mood is fairly relaxed.

"First we had to find a piano to record with, and (film director) Luc Besson said that Pleyel in Paris had just made their first grand piano since 1945 – a fantastic instrument that took them about five years to make. We were lucky enough to get a chance to work with that piano, in their own concert hall called Le Theatre Pleyel, and I was one of the first people to ever play it. In the end we did about half the album tracks in Paris and two in Berlin on an upright Steinway. The rest

systems will pick up really quickly. The truth is it's my younger brother who's a bit of a hi-fi fan and he came over to my house a couple of years ago and was actually shocked that I was listening to a Sony mini system. So shortly after that I went on a bit of a hi-fi journey and started off with a Tannoy-based system. Now I've got a Mark Levinson No390S CD player with ATC Active 50 speakers.

"There's nothing on the album that isn't piano. But I thought that rather than it just being tunes I'd done before, I wanted to stretch out a bit and make an album that couldn't have been done, even five years ago, with the electronic treatments that are on it. When you compose music, you just write what you'd like to hear. If it doesn't exist out there, then you just try to make it." **HFC**

## Solo Armstrong

### 1. *The Space Between Us* (1998)

Downtempo electronica for the post-rave generation. Immaculately produced, with guest vocals from the Cocteau Twins' Liz Fraser.



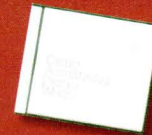
### 2. *As If To Nothing* (2002)

Lush, cinematic melancholia offers the perfect comedown soundtrack. The guest list this time includes Bono, David McAlmont and Evan Dando.



### 3. *Piano Works* (2004)

Just a man, three pianos and a lot of imagination. The mood is generally contemplative, the sound fluid, warm and inviting. Includes a stripped-down take on *Love Actually*'s haunting *Glasgow Love Theme*.





# WIN! TOWNSHEND'S FABULOUS TA-565 UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER WORTH £2,500

Last month we announced that Townshend Audio's stunning new TA 565 universal disc player was the best sounding universal machine yet (particularly with two-channel material). For stereo lovers everywhere, this skilfully modified player is a great introduction to high resolution audio, and also offers superb levels of depth and transparency from standard CD. Company boss Max Townshend has used all his know-how to carry out extensive work on the power supplies, suspension and crucial components, paving the way for our coveted Editor's Choice badge.

The Pioneer-based machine offers all the flexibility and ease of use of a mainstream player, with the kind of audiophile performance found in the most expensive audio esoterica. The lower part of the player houses the power supplies – one for analogue circuitry, one for digital, both of which concentrate on high-frequency noise rejection. Max has also incorporated his new sprung-coil suspension base into the package, giving the player a sonic edge and distinctive aesthetic. For your chance to win one, simply answer the question below correctly. A winner will be drawn at random.

## QUESTION:

**What does the lower part of the Townshend Audio TA 565 house?**

**A:** Power supplies

**B:** The overspill from Battersea Dogs Home

**C:** A working flour mill for bread-loving ants

## TO ENTER:

**By Phone:** Simply call **0905 053 3352** and follow the instructions (calls will cost 50p per minute and last no longer than 90 seconds).

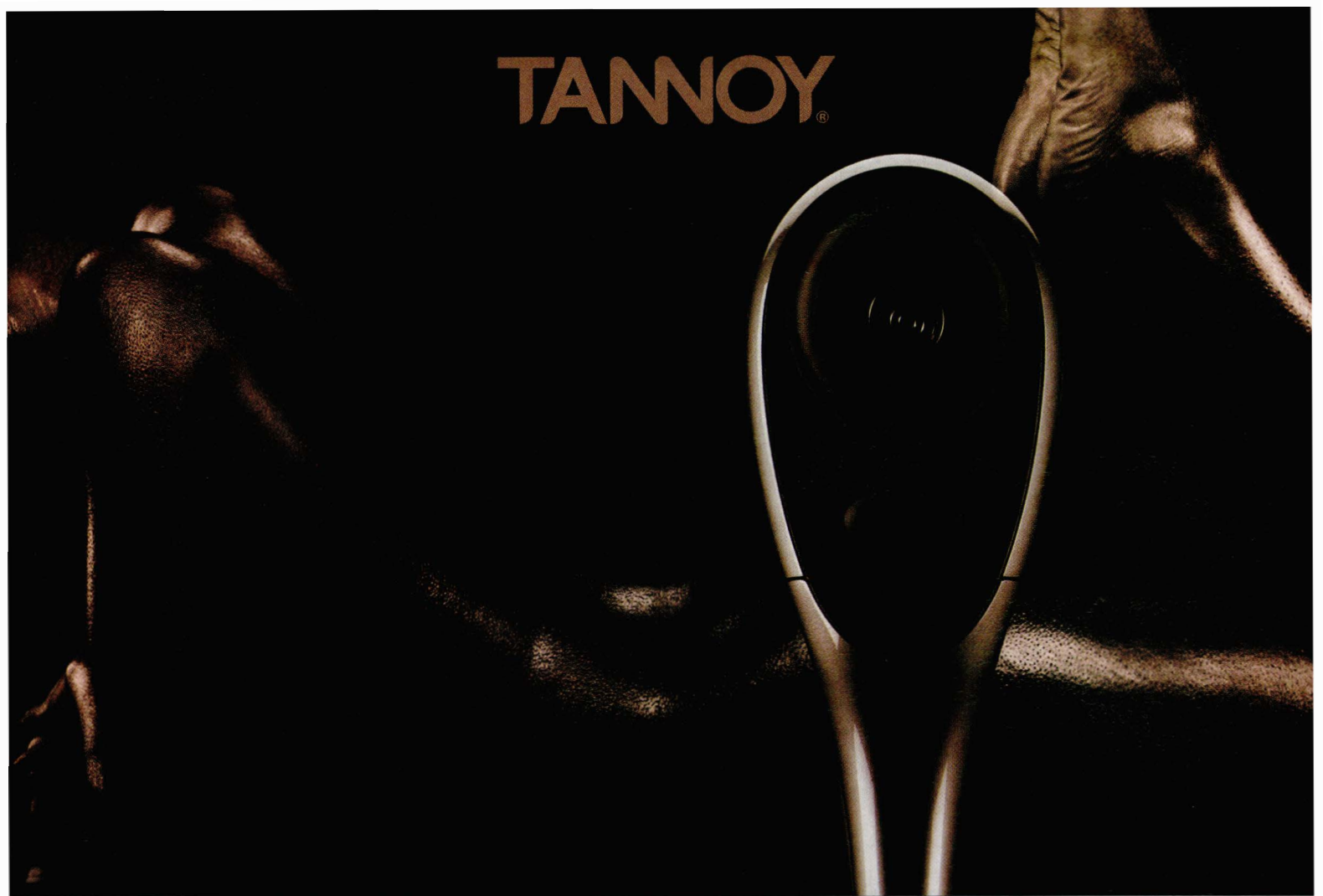
**By Text:** Send the text message **HFC COMP1** with the answer A, B or C to **85070**. For example, if you think the answer is B: The overspill from Battersea Dogs Home then text HFC COMP1 B to 85070.

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# TANNOY®



Arena is a radical new Home Theatre system from Tannoy. Blending form and function, this beautifully crafted audio system offers much more than gorgeous styling; exceptional acoustic performance combines with application flexibility to deliver a system that defines the category.

The satellite speakers feature a technology breakthrough from Tannoy. They bring together the company's renowned WideBand™ expertise into a brand new miniature (5") version of their world famous point source Dual Concentric™ drive unit. Arena's powerful 300 Watt active subwoofer delivers tremendously controlled low frequency acoustics and integrates impeccably to present an outstanding home theatre performance.

Versatile mounting platforms with carefully designed cable management enable complete integration with the surroundings in the way that you choose. Arena is lavishly finished in a choice of magnificent high gloss colours - bronze, silver, white or black.

For more information, please contact Tannoy by e-mail or telephone.

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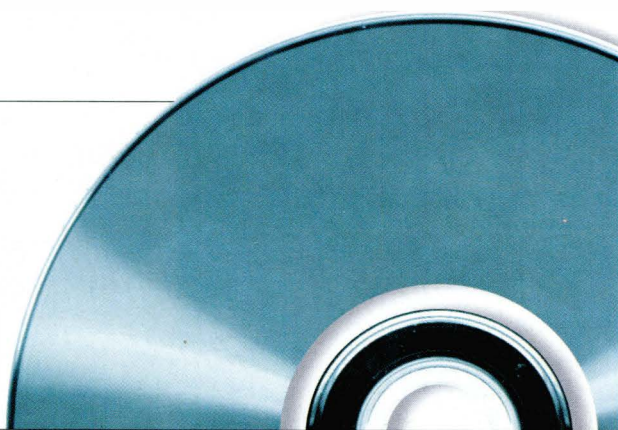


# ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

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



## AUDIOPHILE VINYL

### MACHITO AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Kenya

Roulette/Pure Pleasure 180g vinyl

Music: Originally released in 1958, *Kenya* is a riot of horns and percussion in the mambo style that was so

popular at the time. A startling brass section backs up trumpeter Doc Cheatham and saxophonist Cannonball Adderley on a dozen high-energy tracks – there is the odd lullaby and blues track but little you couldn't shimmy to. Recorded

in honour of the recently formed republic, *Kenya* brings together bandleader Machito with musical director Mario Bauza who along with two others composed and arranged the music, using percussion to convey the rhythm rather than drums to stamp it out. ★★★

Sound: The vintage means that stereo here is largely of the left/right variety, but what this LP is all about is energy – put this through a pair of horns and the dynamics will blow you skywards. The brass recording, meanwhile, is just plain rude. ★★★★★ JK

### THE ORB

Bicycles & Tricycles

The Hexus/Simply Vinyl 2x180g vinyl

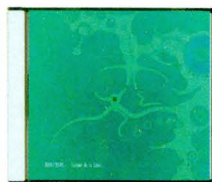
Music: It's unusual to see a first release on Simply Vinyl, but if you enjoyed Alex Patterson's output in the early nineties you should find this double album suits your tastes – its best tracks are strongly reminiscent of those heady days. There are others more akin to the Prodigy such as opener *Orb Is* which has a big beat appeal, albeit not one that seeks to expand the formula.

The most interesting and progressive material is found on the tracks *Gee Strings* and *Dilmun*, both of which have been released in original form by Kompakt, but it's a luxury to have them on vinyl for a change. ★★★

Sound: This music is made for vinyl and sounds that much more substantial and large-scale thanks to this quality print – you just can't beat heavyweight ambient dub on high mass vinyl. Let's hope Simply Vinyl can give us some of the Orb's earlier work to go with it. ★★★★★ JK

These LPs are available from Vivante: ☎ 01293 822186 @ www.vivante.co.uk and Simply Vinyl: ☎ 020 8545 8580 @ www.simplyvinyl.com

## COMPACT DISC & VINYL



### BIOSPHERE

Autour De La Lune

Touch

Music: Glow. Undertow. Chilliness.

These are the words most associated with Geir Jenssen's music. Over five albums as Biosphere, Jenssen has given us electronic sonic vistas of slow-moving icebergs, Norwegian fjords and the snow-swirl of the Himalayas. For his sixth outing he has taken a space story by Jules Verne and pushed his discreet textures, samples and analogue synthesizers beyond the northern lights. Made for Radio France this is genuine space music, a work of dramatic innovation where little you hear has a precedent. Brilliant. ★★★★★

Sound: Incredible high frequencies and subsonic textures will flow unhindered from your speakers. Set the controls for a hi-fi epiphany as Jenssen plays havoc with your sonic expectations. ★★★★★ MP



### BETHOVEN

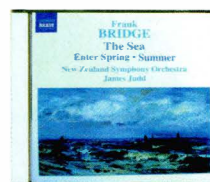
Symphony No. 5, Egmont Overture

Seiji Ozawa (cond), Boston Symphony Orchestra

Telarc CD-80060

Music: Beethoven's *Fifth* is core repertoire for any orchestra and conductor, and there are no excuses for inadequate performances or recordings, especially from an orchestra as fine as the Boston led by Seiji Ozawa. From the familiar dot-dot-dot-dash (coincidentally Morse code for V) opening motif which came to be associated with victory in WW2, the dramatic energy of the work has long symbolised the power of the symphonic form. The doom-laden Egmont overture is included as a filler of the highest calibre. ★★★★★

Sound: This Soundstream recording dates from 1981, and is a little scrawny at times, but Telarc's engineering clarifies the bold orchestral textures and the drama of the music. ★★★★★ AG



### FRANK BRIDGE

Enter Spring, Summer, Two Poems for Orchestra, The Sea (suite)

James Judd, NZ Symphony Orchestra

NAXOS 8.557167

Music: British-born Frank Bridge was a composer of chamber and orchestral music, a contemporary of Bax and Holst, and Benjamin Britten's music teacher, as well as an accomplished conductor and a violin and viola player. The works on this disc cover a period when he progressed from writing quintessentially breezy English music (*Summer, Two Poems...*) to a bolder, more adventurous style (*The Sea*), which hints at the musical worlds of Richard Strauss and Delius. ★★★★★

Sound: The New Zealand Orchestra, whose profile has been increased with its recording of the music for Lord Of The Rings is a solid band, captured here in a bold, detailed if slightly 'tight' sound. ★★★★★ AG



### ELVIS COSTELLO

The Delivery Man

Mercury

Music: Elvis Costello's last album, 2003's *North*, was a collection of jazz ballads. He's also just released his first full-length orchestral work, *Il Sogno*. But the one long-term fans have been waiting for is *The Delivery Man*. Recorded in Mississippi earlier this year, its 13 new songs are steeped in American roots music and it's frequently overlooked that Costello's 1981 Nashville album *Almost Blue* predated the current alt-country boom by more than a decade. There's a strong country influence again with lots of steel guitar and guest vocals from Lucinda Williams and Emmylou Harris. But there's also a potent southern rock-soul feel to tracks such as *Button My Lip and Bedlam*. ★★★★★

Sound: Inspired by the location, a raw funkiness roars out of the rock tracks, while even the country songs eschew Nashville gloss in favour of far earthier emotions. ★★★★★ NW



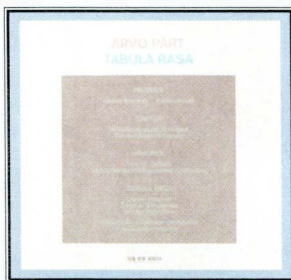
### REM

Around The Sun

Warner

Music: These days, REM are like expert cabinet makers. Everything they turn out is marked by high craftsmanship, fine attention to detail and a polished veneer. They simply don't know how to make bad records – and *Around The Sun* is another masterpiece. If it lacks some of the rock 'n' roll swagger of old, that's merely a reflection of the times. Songs such as *Final Straw* make no bones about their anger over Bush and the war. But the directness of those lyrics seems to have spread to Stipe's love songs, too, among which *Leaving New York* is destined to become one of the band's all-time classics. ★★★★★

Sound: Most of the songs are built on acoustic guitar which is then clothed with layers of rich texture and colour. ★★★★★ NW



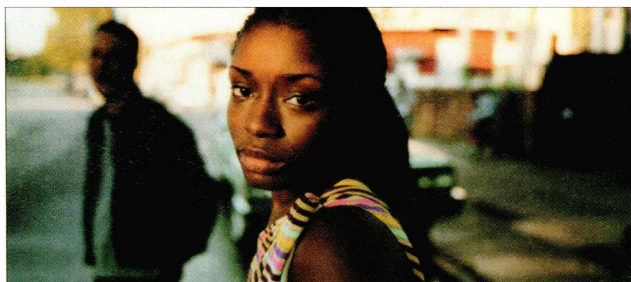
## THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "Possessed of a striking emotional power."

**ARVO PÄRT** *Tabula Rasa* ECM New Series 120g vinyl

**Music:** Russian-born Pärt is one of the foremost living composers, on a par with John Tavener for religious choral music and in another league with the pieces on this 1984 ECM recording. All four works are sparse and dry yet possessed of a striking emotional power. *Fratres* features Gidon Kremer on violin and Keith Jarrett on piano playing a duet of exceptional, shimmering beauty. *Cantus* is an orchestral piece that overwhelms with its sadness, its

ringing string tones evoking a bleakness one hopes to never know. But this is not a miserable recording – it's an emotionally powerful album of such insight that it warrants years of listening. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The title track is a 1977 recording by WDR radio and of high analogue quality. If you want to hear how well your system plays high string tone this is as clean a test as you'll find. ★★★★★ JK



### FRIED

Fried

London

**Music:** Former Beat and Fine Young Cannibals bassist David Steele spent five years looking for the right singer before settling on New Orleans-born Jonté Short as his collaborator in *Fried*. On this evidence she was worth the wait, with a marvellously emotive style that can switch from plaintive to sassy in a heartbeat. She doesn't make the all-too-common mistake of many R&B singers either, and pretty much sticks to singing the melodies, without feeling the need to enunciate every note in-between as well.

The music is a superb southern soul stew, with just a soupcon of thankfully bling-free R&B. It comes complete with a gorgeous summer anthem in *Sugar Water Days*, along with the bum-shakin' nu-soul of the first single, *When You Get Out Of Jail*. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Much of it sounds close to genuine seventies soul, but with a few up-to-the-minute electronic touches to break out of the Joss Stone-style 'do-it-like-they-did-it' archaeological approach. ★★★★★ DO



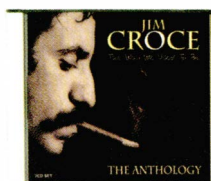
### CHUNGKING

*The Hungry Years*

GUT

**Music:** Brighton's Chungking plough a shiny electro pop furrow previously dug by the likes of St Etienne and Avalanches, but in singer Jessie Banks they have a voice of rare flexibility and grace. That said, there's plenty of variety, from the shimmering, regal pop of *Making Music* to the ersatz soul of *Voodoo*, the feelgood romance of *Come With Me* to the bizarre Teddy Pendergrass-style loverman schtick of *Full On*, in which her light, enticing alto voice is manipulated down to a baritone leer. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Generally, it's quite thin, bright and shimmery like a shaft of sunlight on a summer's day. It will benefit from a warm-sounding system, but even the thinness of the sound can't detract from the quality of the tunes. ★★★ DO



### JIM CROCE

*The Way We Used To Be*

Sanctuary Midline

**Music:** In those dark, dark days before the corporations got that nice young Dido to lead their anti-music campaign, there was such a thing as the singer-songwriter. One of the best was the late, great Jim Croce who never scored a hit in the UK despite pop-acoustic classics like *Operator*, *You Don't Mess Around with Jim* and *I'll Have To Say I Love You (In A Song)*. These are all here on this three-CD collection, along with poignant gems such as *Photographs & Memories* and the stompalong *Bad Bad Leroy Brown*. In fact, the 60 plus cuts present reveal a hitherto hidden breadth of talent. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Jim C's small bands were always crisply recorded – even the live cuts are like talking to an old friend. Casually pure. ★★★★★ PS

## DVD-AUDIO & SACD

### BECK

*Sea Change*

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Geffen

**Music:** Following the commercial doldrums of *Midnite Vultures* and the end of his relationship with girlfriend Leigh Limon, Beck's 2002 *Sea Change* is inevitably not the most upbeat of albums. It is in many ways a lament but one that has been put together with such artistry that it can't help but make you love both it and him. It soothes with a mellifluous sound that attempts to disguise the feeling behind the intricate composition, but listen a little closer and it's all there. David Cambell's string arrangements are reminiscent of George Martin and Nigel Godrich's production shimmers with crisp luxury. This is what they call a grower, and one that's well worth nurturing. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The SACD factor makes a relaxed-sounding album seem that little bit smoother and cleaner. You can hear right into the multilayered mix and fully appreciate the high-quality but subtle production and particularly the superb use of reverb. ★★★★★ JK



### EMMA BELL

*Songs by Richard Strauss, Bruno Walter, Joseph Marx*

Emma Bell (soprano), Andrew West (piano)

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Linn Records CKD238

**Music:** Emma Bell is one of the younger generation of sopranos, whose richness of tone, dramatic expressiveness and the sheer beauty of her voice will ensure her increasing success in the years ahead. This, her debut recording, is a mixed programme of songs from Richard Strauss and two of his contemporaries, Joseph Marx and Bruno Walter – Walter of course is mainly known these days as a conductor who famously championed the then revolutionary works of Gustav Mahler. The songs are well chosen and work well together as a programme, and the performances by soloist and accompanist alike are nothing less than exquisite throughout. ★★★★★

**Sound:** Another excellent recording from the Linn team made at Potton Hall (near Aldeburgh), which has a lively, spacious acoustic well suited to small-scale music. The multichannel mix has real shape and focus, the extra channels giving a sense of air and space only hinted at in the stereo mix. ★★★★★ AG



### ERIC BIBB

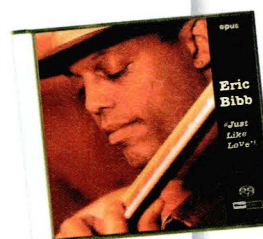
*Just Like Love*

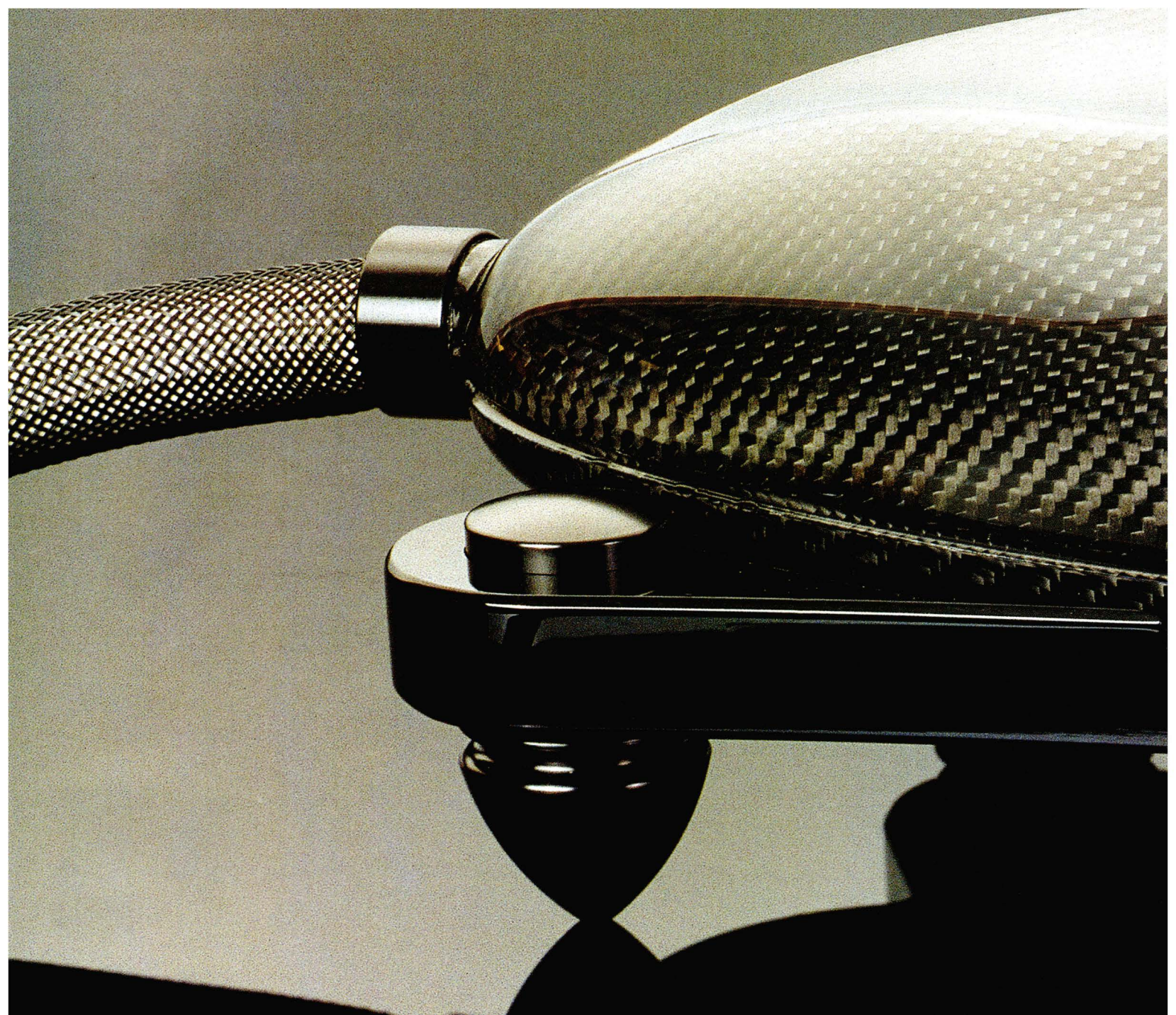
SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Opus 3

**Music:** Bluesman Eric Bibb is one of only a handful of younger artists choosing to evoke their blues/soul roots. This delightful hybrid disc has been meticulously recorded on the Opus 3 audiophile label, using a single-point-source microphone technique, tube mixer and analogue recorder. Guitarist Bibb tends to forgo a rhythm section, instead relying on his own timing discipline to keep the tune flowing. His accessible blend of soulful blues is fingerpicked from the heart – it's relaxed, deeply personal and effortlessly produced. The man plays with precision and confidence and each song boasts a naturally progressive feel that sucks you in. ★★★★★

**Sound:** The small Swedish label is dedicated to acoustic music and Bibb's warm, rootsy style lends itself perfectly to Opus 3's unadulterated recording techniques. There's no centre channel or subwoofer information here (only rear channels, surround-wise) but in stereo, the quality is remarkable and highlights what can be achieved with a little forethought in the studio. ★★★★★ DG





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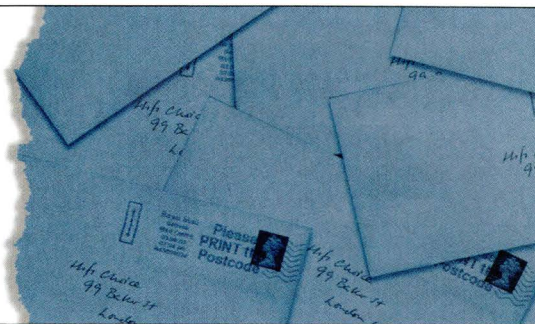
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# ChoiceMail



The pick of this month's best letters

Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP. Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



## ★ LETTER OF THE MONTH

### REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

I can fully empathise with Douglas Marc's opinion on compressed audio (The Numbers Game, *HFC* 257), and your assertion that it is not the audiophile that chooses it. I am an audiophile with a £35K system and a wide selection of vinyl, CD, SACD and DVD-A. I must stress it's my love of music and films that has fed the desire to listen/watch at the best quality and price.

However, I also like to experience music on the go, so I purchased a 40GB hard disk portable and added Shure earphones, ripping my entire CD collection onto it. Whilst not audiophile quality, it's pretty good and I can listen to any track from my collection at any time. This means I get to enjoy albums I've been neglecting, reigniting interest in the artist, and giving me a greater level of pleasure when returning to the music later in high fidelity.

Sean Kerr Abu Dhabi, UAE



WIN IXOS INTERCONNECTS!

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

### BLIND FAITH

I enjoy *Hi-Fi Choice* here in Canada, but only when my British pals come over loaded with mags! I'm fascinated to note that you use a blind listening panel. My chums tell me you even have manufacturers listening and they often can't pick out their own product! Man, I wish your magazine was easier to buy in Canada. I wanted to know, how formal does your blind listening panel get – is it really a blind test? Although in principle I have doubts about the method, I like the idea of getting rid of name and price bias.

Rich via email

**HFC** Glad you like the mag Rich. The blind listening panels form part of our *Ultimate Group Test* regime, a system for comparative testing that is unmatched in its thoroughness. It's a three-stage process – first, our panel of experts is taken through a full day of unsighted listening, with the products obscured from view. The notes that result are then used in conjunction with longer-term hands-on testing and a session in the lab to finalise our report – just one of the reasons why *HFC* is the mag you can trust! You may also wish to know you can get a subscription in Canada, turn to page 80 for details.

### TOE THE LINE

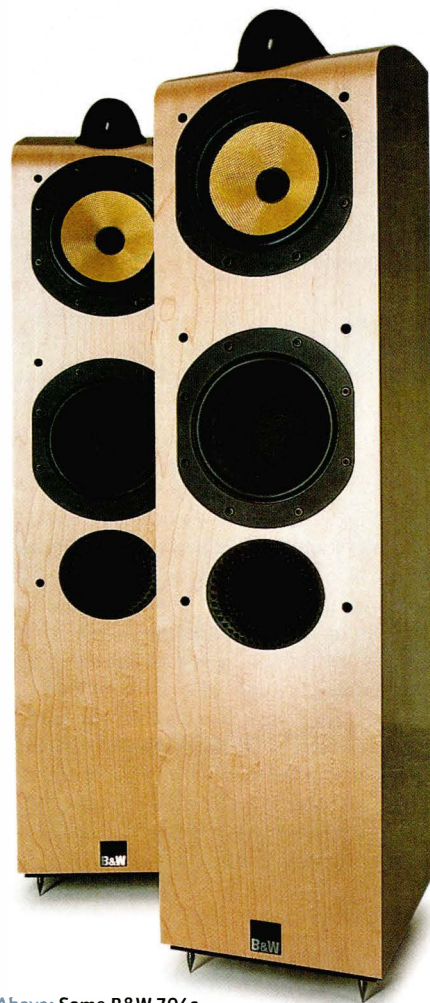
I've bought some new speakers and after studying the manual I'm still not fully sure I've got them toed-in correctly. The manual also suggests experimentation, which is a bit vague – have you got any clues?

John Kimble via email

**HFC** The need for toe-in largely depends of the dispersion characteristics of the tweeter. A tweeter with a wide dispersion (good off-axis response) should produce a wide sweet spot and will be less reliant on toe-in to sharpen up the imaging. The recommendations in the manual should at least give you a good starting point – you are trying to achieve a wide, three-dimensional soundstage with a firm central image. We would suggest firing the speakers directly out into the room, gradually toeing them in until you reach a satisfactory balance. Use your own judgement to strike a happy compromise and persevere – this is well worth spending time on.

### SACD: SACKED

Is vinyl the new SACD? After all the hype of the new hi-res formats (I've been reading about them in *HFC* for around six years) what impact have they had? About the same sized ripple as a mallard farting in a duck pond. I'd love to be able to quantify how the vinyl

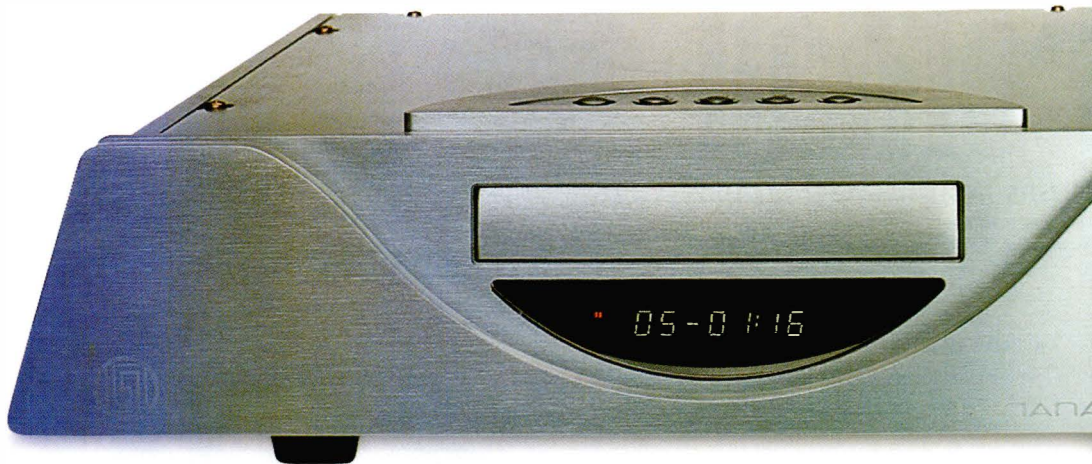


Above: Some B&W 704s in need of a good toeing-in

**“What impact have the hi-res formats had? About the same sized ripple as a mallard farting in a duck pond.”**

resurgence is gaining momentum, not forgetting the thriving second-hand market of course. Certainly record shops are doing a healthy trade, yet DVD-A/SACD is largely the preserve of the faceless internet retailer.

At least as universal disc players improve and CD players disappear we can dip into the formats without having to buy dedicated machines – I pity the ▶



Above: Inca Designs Katana CD player: trouble in store?

☑ early adopters. Perhaps we're better off sticking with our CD players and spending our hard earned money on a good record deck instead? It's my view standards are rapidly improving with turntables and we've never had it so good.

Kenny Craig via email

**HFC** There's no doubt that the ongoing 'vinyl resurgence' remains robust and vinyl's continued presence as a niche format is assured. This in turn is encouraging manufacturers to develop new turntables and ancillaries at all levels, which is great news for the consumer. We'd agree that the picture seems less rosy for the high-resolution formats, however – choice and availability has improved but embarrassingly little has been done to promote either medium. As a consequence, neither SACD nor DVD-A have penetrated consumer consciousness outside of audiophile circles and demand is therefore minimal.

**INCA PROBLEM**

I've been reading *Hi-Fi Choice* since the nineties and I recently bought an Inca Designs Katana after reading your review. Sadly, it developed a buzzing fault after a week so I returned it to my dealer who contacted the distributor, Activ Distribution, who promised a replacement within two weeks. Seven weeks later I'm still without a machine and down £600. Can you help?

Mr CR Hurst West Yorkshire

**HFC** We contacted a spokesman for Activ Distribution who apologised for the delay and explained that it had simply sold out of units and was waiting for new stock to be shipped from the Far East. At the time of going to press, stocks have been replenished and we are assured that your replacement player has finally been despatched.

**COLLECTION SULK**

I first picked up and then quickly put down *The Collection* edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* with its reviews of high-end equipment. I normally love reading reviews if there is some chance of one day owning it.

**"The Collection edition was like staring into the sweet shop window as a kid and being skint!"**

But I've got to say you have managed to produce an edition that bears absolutely no relevance to the average buyer.

Get real and provide a useful mix of options for all price ranges. Every time your magazine is full of ludicrously expensive components, you alienate a vast number of buyers. If you want to generate exclusive high-end content, why not provide an occasional supplement to the main magazine?

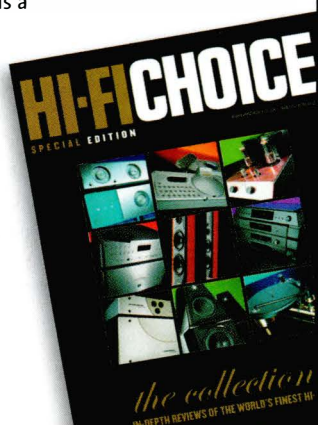
CJM via online forum

**COLLECTION PRAISE**

I bought *The Collection* edition for novelty value and really enjoyed it. It's like staring into the sweet shop window as a kid and being skint! It shows a broadband approach to those who buy *HFC* – it's nice now and again for the minorities to be spoilt, even if they are filthy rich! Perhaps also non-*HFC* regulars with spectacularly expensive equipment may have bought it as a one-off... A very enjoyable issue, all-in-all.

Kingsxfan via online forum

**HFC** We brought back *The Collection* concept to operate as an annual 'yearbook' showcasing the very best hi-fi money can buy. *HFC* is a specialist publication after all, and as we pointed out at the time, many of the brands featured also offer lower-cost components using trickle-down technology, so there is a real-world relevance. Most of you seem to have enjoyed this special edition, but don't fret if you didn't – there'll be another 12 issues of 'regular' *HFC* before the next instalment!



**@ ONLINE FORUM**

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at [www.hifichoice.co.uk](http://www.hifichoice.co.uk)



I recall a thread a while back on this forum called 'Sexy hi-fi'. Fire in your pics dudes, I'll start off with Primare's new universal player, the DVD30...

CJRoss

With all the recent fuss about forums and reviews, could you build one into the other, perhaps by having something like a user satisfaction report, like car mags? It could run like a poll and you could factor in public opinion. This would put your reviews even further up the rankings of independence and believability.

Rewster

*Live Aid* is being released on DVD for the first time. The legendary gig features music icons Sir Paul McCartney and Madonna, plus Queen and U2. This is one DVD I must have, I remember the day like yesterday – hot, lots of drinking and music blasting out from every house.

AMDWorld

Just in case some of you are still being fleeced on the high street, I'll say it one more time – [www.cdwow.com](http://www.cdwow.com) and [www.play.com](http://www.play.com). Hard to find a cheaper or better service.

JizzyB

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MUSICAL FIDELITY X-RAY<sup>V1</sup> CD PLAYER | MUSICAL FIDELITY X-PRE<sup>V3</sup> PREAMP | MUSICAL FIDELITY X-P200 POWER AMP (x2) | SPENDOR S8E LOUDSPEAKERS | £5,391



# Sexy MF

*We asked Musical Fidelity for 'high end'. They sent 'entry level'. That's confidence...*

**T**his system was suggested to us by Musical Fidelity boss Antony Michaelson. I'd phoned him to chat about cars (something of a passion for Michaelson – delivery of his Maserati Quattroporte is imminent) and complain that it was high time some MF hardware featured in *Beautiful Systems*. I reminded him it was a high-end gig and that within reason (system ceiling £30K) he could fill his boots.

Michaelson's response wasn't what I was expecting. I was anticipating a proposed wheel-out of the weapons-grade kit for which Mr M has a well-known penchant. Something along the lines of the extraordinary kW500 – a £4,000, 500-watts-per-channel, Krell-killing super-predator of an integrated amp that looks as if it could blow over a JCB. Partnered with, say, the upcoming A5 CD player, dubbed by Michaelson "the best CD ever built", it might have had the makings of a contender for the one system you should hear before you die. Speakers? The world's your oyster with a front-end duo like that. The kW500 bows before no transducer this side of an Apogee Scintilla.

But, well, not quite. Michaelson's suggestion was this: X-Ray<sup>3</sup> CD player, X-150 integrated amp, Spondor S8e speakers – £3,593 the lot. He'd heard his latest X-series boxes with the big, floorstanding two-way Spondors and been knocked out by the purity and beauty of the music the combo made.

The point wasn't obscure. The qualification standard for entry to *Beautiful Systems* is, like origami for beginners, two-fold: beautiful design, beautiful sound – the foundation stones of 'high-end'. Michaelson was confident, based on the evidence of his own ears,

that the system would breeze the sonic requirement while the mix of the bijou X-series boxes' nuggety build and the sumptuous, understated finish of the elegant Spondors made the aesthetic issue a no-brainer. The only thing missing were zeros from the price tag.

## NO APOLOGIES

But then Michaelson makes no apologies for giving the impression of being driven by the desire to puncture the conceits of exclusive 'high-end' practitioners who, he contends, operate an agenda of smoke and mirrors and hugely inflated prices. Indeed, Musical Fidelity's A1 amp all but created the 'affordable esoterica' class when it was launched in 1985.

Even so, I contended, we could push the boat out a little without diluting the 'affordable high-end' message. In fact, from a pure price standpoint, there was masses of leeway to do just that. Which is how we ended up with this month's all-British, bank-friendly *Beautiful System*. The X-Ray CD player and Spondor S8e speakers stay put but the X-150 integrated is replaced by the X-Pre<sup>3</sup> preamp and a pair of X-P200 stereo power amps bridged to work in mono which enables them to pump out a prodigious 250 watts apiece. So, what we have here is essentially Michaelson's original system with a more powerful engine: BMW 323i becomes M3 CSL.

The major talent nevertheless begins at source with the £899 X-Ray<sup>3</sup> CD player which Musical Fidelity describes, in typical fashion, as "one of the best CD players in the world regardless of price". It feels justified in the assertion because it believes the better a CD player measures, the better it is; its technical performance defines its sound quality. ▣

**"The qualification standard for entry to *Beautiful Systems* is, like origami for beginners, two-fold: beautiful design and beautiful sound."**



**Musical Fidelity X-Ray<sup>3</sup> CD player**  
£899

Everything a CD player should be: small, beautifully formed, exciting and unerringly musical.



**Musical Fidelity X-Pre<sup>3</sup> preamplifier**  
£799

Never known to stick knobs and buttons where they're not wanted, MF has kept this bijou preamp clutter-free. That goes for the sound, too.



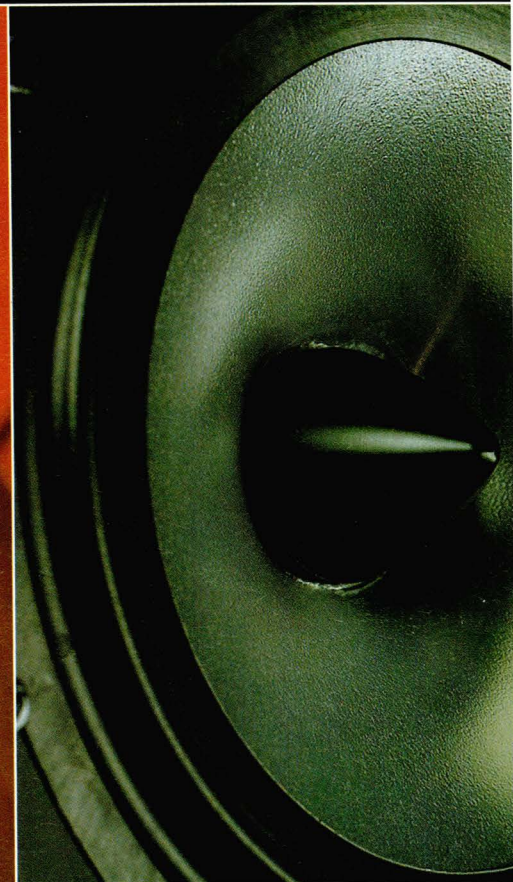
**Musical Fidelity X-P200 power amps (x2)**  
£899 each

The natural partner for the X-Pre continues the neat, elegant theme but packs a big wallop all the same, especially in bridged form as here.



**Spondor S8e loudspeaker**  
£1,895 per pair

The legendary BC1 reimaged for the modern music lover in sturdy, floorstanding form. Magical midrange lucidity married to deep, tuneful bass.



And the X-Ray is nothing if not a high achiever technically. The claims made for it include vanishingly low distortion, extremely low jitter, a low noise threshold and great linearity. Mind you, it should be good given the ingredients. Using the upsampling 24-bit Delta-Sigma DAC and dual-differential 8x oversampling chipset seen in all Musical Fidelity CD players, the aim has been to improve sound by keeping digital noise and other artefacts out of band, while low jitter and clock errors mean better harmonic accuracy and dynamic range.

#### TRICKLE-DOWN TECH

A sophisticated PSU allows independent circuits (such as the logic mechanism and the DAC) to operate in ideal conditions – a significant reason why the X-Ray sounds so good, according to MF. Contrastingly, stark minimalism is the key to the X-Ray's good looks. As with the X-Pre and X-P200s, the reassuringly solid (if a little sharp-edged), half-width extruded black casing is hidden, front on, by a slightly oversized chamfered aluminium fascia. In the CD player's case, this carries just six buttons, a double-deck LCD display, the silky-smooth drawer mechanism of the Philips transport and four hex-head bolts (a signature feature of all MF kit these days since it made its debut on the original, cylindrical X-series products back in 1995).

Musical Fidelity is also a great believer in trickling down technology from its costlier products and the X-Pre<sup>v3</sup> is a benefactor here. It is said to have a similar circuit to the original Nu-Vista valve preamp but implemented with solid state. Thus, many of the Nu-Vista's traits are passed on: the generous overload margins, low distortion, low noise and wide bandwidth. It even incorporates a high-quality phono stage. MF calls the X-Pre<sup>v3</sup> a true high-end product, period, and is happy to take on rivals at twice or three times the price. Like the X-ray it's a simple one, too. The front panel is home to just a volume knob, three buttons and four tiny blue LEDs denoting which of the four inputs has been selected. Fancy it isn't.

The matching X-P200 power amp isn't exactly short of minerals in its usual stereo configuration, delivering a stiff 120 watts a side. But bridged for monoblock duties (simply press a button on the front panel) it more than doubles its output to 250 watts with enough current to jump start Frankenstein's monster. This isn't mindless power either, claims Michaelson, but "true high-end performance at a fair price". The claimed benefits of going mono aren't subtle and include significantly improved resolution and dynamic range – advantages the not-so-slender Spendors should have no trouble conveying.

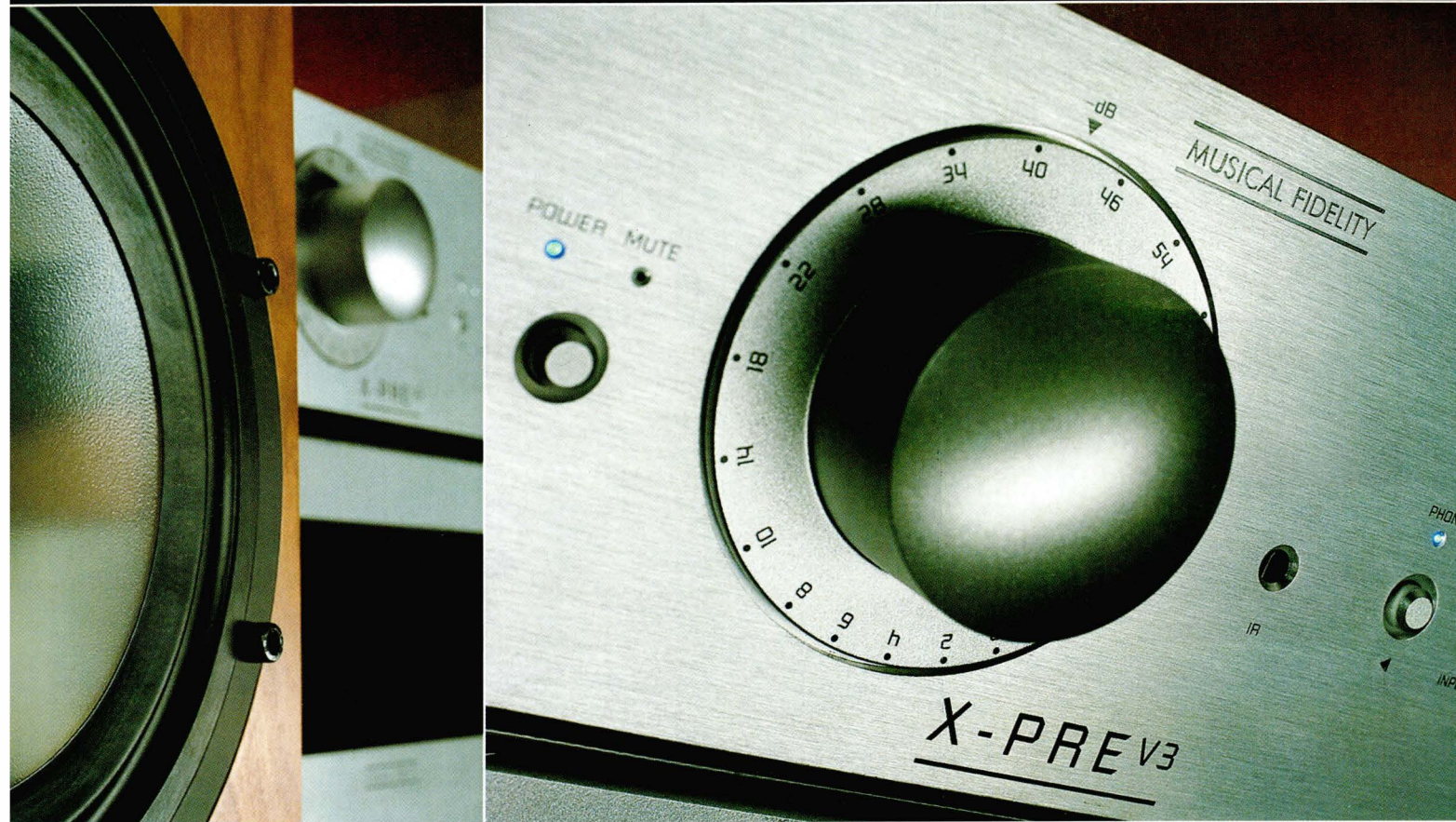
Spendor's name will forever be associated with its first speaker, the BC1. Still held by some to set the standard for midrange accuracy some 30 years on, the BC1 toted a then revolutionary eight-inch bass/mid driver with a plastic cone and natural rubber surround. Like the BC1 (a large standmount), the bulky, floorstanding S8e also has a plastic-coned eight-inch bass-mid driver – as with the 27mm coated fabric dome tweeter, of much more modern design – and adheres to the simple two-way principle. The difference is that the higher-performing drivers are mounted in a much larger and sturdier box with reflex loading via a rear-firing letterbox vent at the base of the enclosure. Let's call it a BC1 with balls.

#### AGILE AND MUSCULAR

So... what to expect. BC1 neutrality and lucidity allied to Godzilla grunt? Interesting mix but, straight off, it doesn't really sound like that at all. Try fresh, incisive and almost dazzlingly clear. Rhythmically lucid and surefooted, too, with oodles of inner detail. Bass is solid, well-shaped, nimble and quite dry in character but amazingly strong and deep when the music dictates.

The result is gracefully balanced. At modest listening levels, the big Spendors enjoy a sense of harmonic richness and effortless bass extension that makes





**“Bridged for monoblock duties (simply press a button on the front panel) it more than doubles its output to 250 watts and supplies enough current to jump start Frankenstein’s monster.”**

them truly unfatiguing to listen to for long periods. Slap on some after-dark jazz – say Joe Sample’s *Ashes To Ashes* – and the system relaxes beautifully, sounding expansive, airy and tactile.

With all that monoblock juice on tap though, it can also hurtle through the attention barrier. Rock played at high levels had tremendous drive and impetus. Driven by the X-P200s, the S8es have the great gift of sounding simultaneously agile and muscular. High energy cuts – Lostprophets’ *Last Summer*, for example – are underpinned by that deep, powerful and ever tuneful bass. The sonic picture this system paints is pristine and finely resolved, clean at high volumes and controlled at the frequency extremes.

Be in no doubt, serious firepower lives here. But this combo is also capable of a superbly well structured presentation, both rhythmically and spatially. It homes in on fine detail with laser precision but masterfully keeps it in a musical context. The Spondors definitely play their part, too. Integration, timing and coherent handling of detail are so good, they soon

become transparent in the best sense of the word. Unstrained volume and convincing dynamics are specialities, too.

This system’s ability to present music in a positive, involving way is immensely engaging and likeable, whatever the genre, but arguably it works best with classical music. Grieg was handled with huge generosity yet great finesse and an almost palpable sense of ‘performance’. String tone possessed a particularly natural and unforced quality, as well as convincing body and texture.

A fine showing from the coated fabric dome tweeter undoubtedly contributes here, blending with rare deftness the usually conflicting interests of precise definition and tonal smoothness. In this sense, the speakers sound very classy and controlled, even with brightly recorded material (i.e. just about any commercial CD from the late 1980s). Indeed, this system is particularly skilled at balancing difficult elements with great assurance, drawing the colour and emotion out of lacklustre recordings but sounding impressively explicit and analytical at the same time. No better

example was to be found than on an old Eric Marienthal jazz-funk cut from 1989. Somewhat chrome-plated on some systems, this, but not here. The voices in the female backing choir were clear and beautifully separated but nicely rounded, and there was no artificial harshness or edge to Marienthal’s soaring alto sax.

And it’s all underpinned by that terrific bass weight and extension. What’s unusual is that the bass is also so taut, articulate and well timed. Dig out some relentlessly pulsating Prince (just about any track from his latest outing, *Musicology*) and the chugging, steamroller bottom end is clearly all there – both physically and temporally. No missing half octaves from Fernando Saunders’ ‘let’s-see-how-low-it-can-go’ bass on jazz harpist Deborah Henson-Conant’s odd (but entertaining) early 1990s CD, either. And note the breathtaking speed and attack of DH-C’s fingerwork on the plucked harp strings.

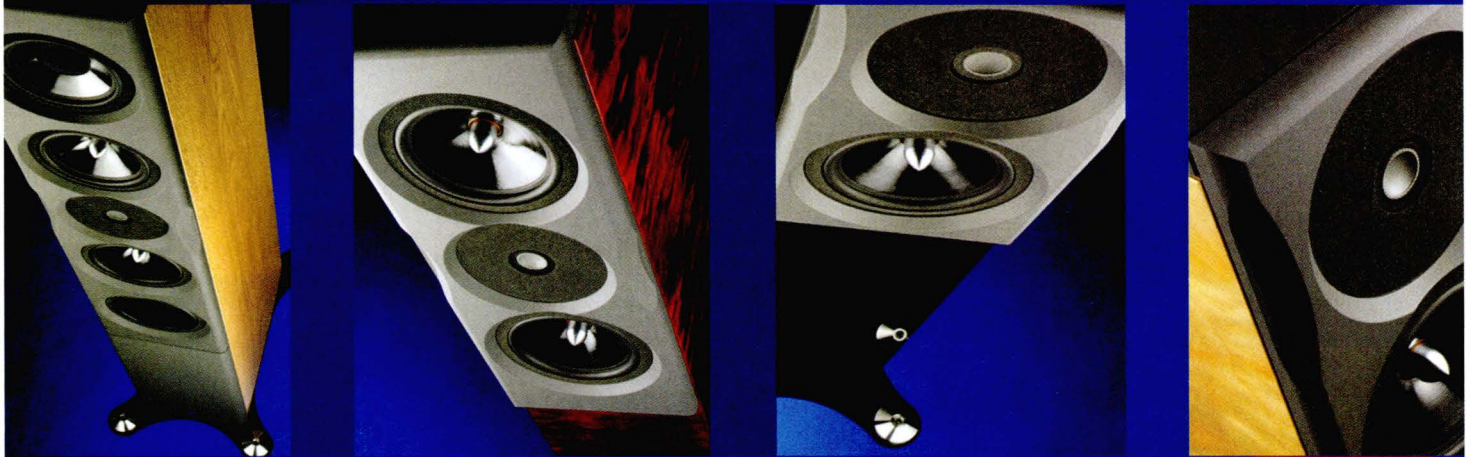
Hear this set-up and you’re likely to want it. Pity we don’t have bank managers anymore. They’d have approved. **HFC**

David Vivian



"...the Ultimatum is an exceptional achievement in every respect."

Hi Fi Choice



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HI-FI CHOICE

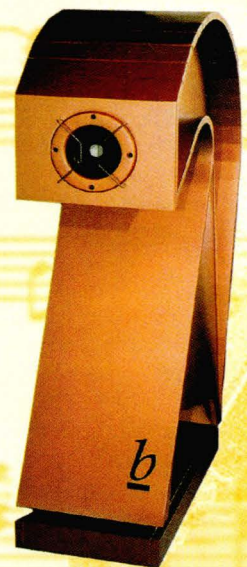
AWARDS  
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

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# REVIEWS



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

## EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

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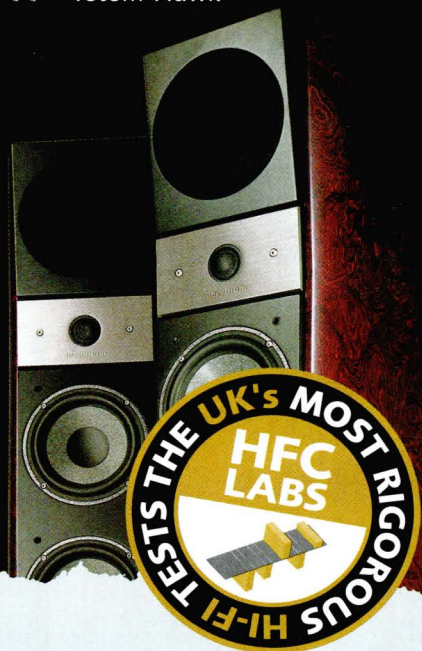


## ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

### LOUDSPEAKERS

£1,600-£2,400

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- 75 Dynaudio Contour S 1.4
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## OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

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

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

**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 83%**

**FEATURES >> 85%**

**BUILD >> 85%**

**VALUE >> 85%**

**CONCLUSION**

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

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

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

## OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



### Best Buy

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



### Editor's Choice

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

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



# DVD hits the spot

*Meridian's G Series breaks new ground with this DVD player/controller/tuner*

**PRODUCT** Meridian G91

**TYPE** DVD-Audio/Video player/controller/tuner

**PRICE** £3,895

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 44x9x35cm

● Weight: 9kg ● Plays DVD-Audio, DVD-Video, CD  
 ● Built-in RDS AM/FM radio tuner ● Preamp/processor facility for external sources ● Fixed or variable stereo out

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 445678

🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

**M**eridian can lay part-claim to DVD-Audio; the company didn't invent the format, but the process used to compress the data down to size is wholly a Meridian thing (the name – Meridian Lossless Packing – should be a clue). But in a world where £150 buys you an entry-level DVD-Audio player, and Meridian's shiny

new G91 costs a rather fierce £3,895, why should you bother?

Well for a start, the G91 is no ordinary DVD-Audio player. It's classed as a player/controller/tuner, as it includes a built-in Meridian digital processor and AM/FM tuner of a very high quality. The result is a DVD-Audio/Video player that doesn't just play discs – it'll also provide a radio source and operate as a digital preamp/processor for other external sources too.

Whether this is the DVD component for you depends on your planned system configuration. There's no multichannel analogue audio output, for example, so don't expect to hook this player up to AV amps or processors from other brands and play multichannel DVD-Audio. Instead, you get various digital outputs including standard

S/PDIF coaxial and Meridian's proprietary MHR SmartLink, which carries all forms of audio data in digital form, including DVD-A. There's also a stereo analogue output (fixed or variable), so you can hook straight to a stereo power amp for two-channel replay.

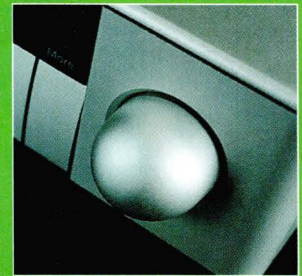
So, what can you do with it? If you're strictly a stereo fan, you can go down that last route and use the G91 as a high-quality two-channel CD, DVD and radio source component, plus a preamp/DAC for other sources (three analogue and four digital inputs are provided). In this context, 'surround sound' DVD-Audio and Video replay is downmixed (in a very sophisticated manner) to stereo. Alternatively, forget the power amp and feed the G91 directly to a pair of Meridian's DSP active speakers for a compact, all-Meridian stereo system.

## THE G SERIES

The G Series is a potentially bewildering range, with a variety of similarly sized and shaped components, many of which do not do precisely what you've been taught to expect from hi-fi components. So, instead of a CD player, preamp and power amp in separate boxes, you might find the CD and preamp sharing the same case, connecting to a separate power amp or branching into the digital loudspeaker systems found elsewhere in the Meridian catalogue.

At its most basic, a G Series system comprises a G07 CD player coupled with a G51 100-watts-per-channel stereo receiver. This is designed to be used with third-party passive analogue loudspeakers, despite the G51 featuring amplifier blocks from the company's DSP8000 digital active speakers. From here, you can upgrade the CD player to a G08 upsampling CD player or a G98 DVD Audio/Video player without changing the amplifier. Moving on, it's pre/power all the way, with two levels of preamp (the G01 preamp/tuner and the balanced über G02) and one of two stereo power amp designs. Or one can do without the stereo power amp and use Meridian's analogue active loudspeaker systems.

So far, so almost conventional. The G91 tested here is essentially a two-channel, DVD-playing nerve centre – partner it with a power amp and conventional speakers or plug it directly into Meridian DSP active speakers to form an exceptionally neat stereo CD/DVD/radio system. Ah... but you want multichannel. Now it gets twisty. The G91 may still work for you, particularly if you want to build an all-Meridian system with, for example, the G68 multichannel processor. However, in such a case you might prefer the G98DH, which is a pure DVD-Audio/Video transport with digital-only outputs. Or, if you want to use an AV amp or processor from another brand, the G98AH might suit you best, complete with multichannel analogue outputs like any standard DVD-Audio/Video player. This may seem confusing, but in essence, products like the G91 tested here are designed for people to start with two-channel stereo and gradually migrate to five channels or more of digital active surround sound, without taking serious steps backwards in trade-ins or loss of performance in the process.



If you want to expand beyond stereo into multichannel, you could hook the G91 to a processor or AV amp from another brand. The trouble with this is you're limited to stereo analogue or S/PDIF digital connections, and S/PDIF won't carry multichannel DVD-Audio – you'll be limited to stereo DVD-A/CD/radio plus Dolby Digital/DTS data streams off DVD.

Much more gratifying for those who want full-blown multichannel would be to add Meridian's G68 'surround controller' (or multichannel processor, if you prefer). Thus, using the MHR link, multichannel DVD-Audio and the rest can be piped through, processed and delivered to your choice of multichannel power amps and speakers. Alternatively, hook straight to a clutch of Meridian DSP speakers for basic multichannel sound...

In essence, then, the G91 has been designed as a high-quality stereo source component that can also be expanded to top-notch multichannel, Meridian-style. If you want a 'normal' DVD-Audio/Video player, with multichannel analogue outputs to link with other brands, Meridian does that too in the shape of the G98AH, based on the same architecture. But in many ways the G91's on-board tuner and preamp/processor facilities make it a highly flexible product.

The player itself is a sophisticated leveller of technologies, both audio and video. There's a healthy amount of digital upscaling, resolving at 48-bit precision, which means upsampling CD to 88.2kHz or 176.4kHz – or delivering 96kHz

**“The G91 is a beautifully made product, its look and feel exuding the confident air of hi-tech hi-fi engineering at its best.”**

or 192kHz sampling rates for DVD-Audio – at 24-bit resolution is a doddle. Likewise, the player has a proper video scaler, which can convert humble composite, S-Video or interlaced component video into high-definition multimedia interface (HDMI) digital pictures, dealing with all current and legacy formats. It also delivers analogue progressive scan pictures for PAL and NTSC formats.

There's no Scart socket, an unforgivable error in low-end equipment but entirely understandable when the product is as expensive as this one. It will be used in systems where Scart is just too low-brow for connection. Put simply, the G91 is packed with broadcast quality electronics (such as the Meridian and Faroudja video processing) and delivers broadcast quality pictures... if your monitor is up to it. With so complex a product, it's hardly surprising that Meridian has made the set-up routine sophisticated and infinitely flexible, so much so that it's best left to the expert who installs the player. There's a series of user controls that can be accessed, and these are clearly marked in the comprehensive manual, but fine-tuning the G91 to the monitor used is best left in the hands of the professionals. This leaves you with the MSR+ handset and the front panel to play with. Ergonomically, the new interfaces are streets ahead of the 500 range that the G Series

replaces – bigger, illuminated buttons and displays that no longer speak in code abound. Once installed, this becomes an easy interface to learn, on a par with Linn's Where, What, Do interface of the Knekt multiroom system.

The on-screen and front panel display are decidedly complex, but then they need to be, because of the configurability of the player. This means there is a degree of overkill on the front (do you really need to know the sampling rate of a disc when playing?) but it also comes with a human-friendly volume knob. It's a beautifully made product all-in-all, its look and feel exuding the confident air of hi-tech hi-fi engineering at its best.

### SOUND QUALITY

With something this well made, from a high-end brand with the longest heritage in digital audio, it's no real surprise that the sound is refined and extended, regardless of source.

In some respects, the DVD-Audio performance is restricted by the two-channel approach (unless your system already speaks Meridian), but if you think of it as a gateway product for stereo people to make the transition into multichannel you forgive the essentially stereo-only replay (with non-Meridian kit) and bask in the quality of DVD-Audio sound. And oh boy, what a sound... or rather, what an absence of sound. This player adds very ▶



## Q & A

We spoke to Andrew Samalionis, head of sales support at Meridian Audio, about the G91



**HFC:** Meridian invented MLP – how much of an advantage does that give in designing DVD-Audio players?

**AS:** In terms of dealing with the technology, it gives us the ability to know the format inside out in terms of understanding and navigating DVD-Audio discs and how we write our navigation software. That gives us a huge advantage.

**How important is navigation software in a modern player?**

We were one of the first to design our own servo circuit and software. Even today we write our own navigation software which gives us the chance to update in-house. This has direct benefits in terms of improvements in ease of use, sound and video quality and speed of access.

**How important is Meridian's DVD-ROM chassis concept?**

The ROM Drive system is central to our ability to extract as much data as possible from the disc and still keep quality. The ROM reads data at higher than normal speeds, with a multiple buffer system to eliminate the jitter inherent to high-speed data reading. This works on CD as well as DVD.

**How much trickle down is there from the 800 Series?**

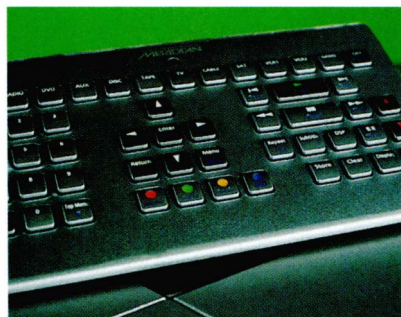
There's movement in the technology in both directions. The energy used to develop the 800 series went directly into the G Series. But the engineering development that went into creating the G has had a direct effect in the software of 800 Series too.

**The G Series sets about locking someone into Meridian's digital aspect. Why?**

It's entirely a process of developing the design. The original design of the digital outputs was for customers to upgrade to multichannel. As the product went through the development process, we had enough space to use those outputs for DSP speakers. It's almost rudimentary in comparison to adding a surround sound processor.

**Will people upgrade from stereo to multichannel?**

We've had a number of customers who have high-end two-channel systems who are looking for a player that can give fantastic CD performance and DVD in two channels. The option to add channels – albeit Meridian channels – allows the user to upgrade as their conditions change.



### 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 PICTURES	✗

☑ little to the intrinsic sound of DVD-Audio, and what it subtracts is so mild that the rest of the process is more likely to damage the audio signal than the G91. This isn't immediately apparent, until you go back to a conventionally 'good' DVD-A player and realise you have lost the studio-like sound and your living room just turns back into a living room.

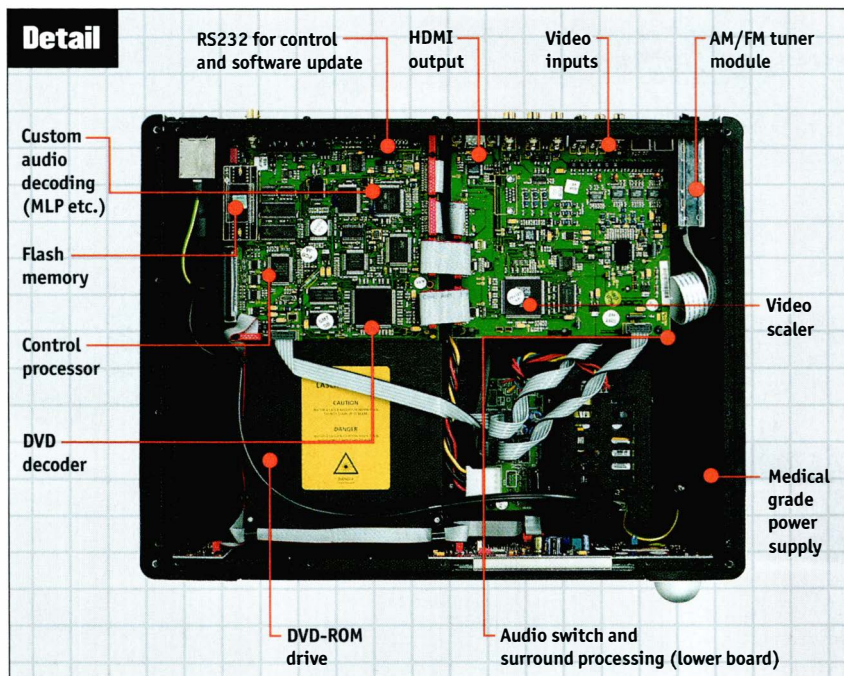
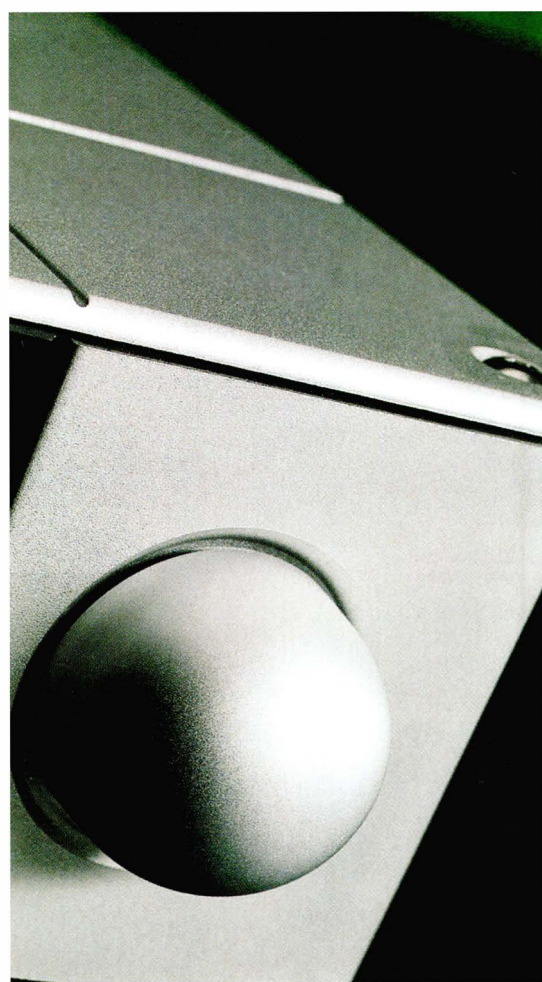
Normally, one of two events happens in the life of a DVD-Audio player. The person listens to DVD-Audio and is slightly impressed by the improvement it brings, but hardly enough to force a lifestyle change. Alternatively, the sound

of CD is so poor through the player that it forces the hi-fi enthusiast to return to an older CD player, sidelining DVD-A in the process. This player is an exception. CD sounds great – good enough to question the need for a separate CD player in all bar the most discerning of systems. But DVD-Audio is so impressive that you long for a parallel universe where every recording can be had in DVD-A form alongside the CD version.

So, what's so damn good about this player? Its sound has the kind of authority that a good high-end CD player delivers, but few DVD-Audio players thus far can muster. Factor in stereo







**“Few players we’ve seen so effortlessly highlight why audiophiles should be getting that warm, fuzzy feeling about DVD-Audio.”**

performance that is beautifully focused, with the sort of deep, wide soundstage that cries out for the best speakers and the sort of detail that allows you to hear into the recording, and you get some idea of what the player is doing right. It's not as grippingly bold as a Naim, or as charmingly unforced, dynamic and coherent as a Wadia, but it has an intrinsic sense of balance that draws the listener into the music. In essence, DVD-Audio 'simply' extends that balance, adding extension, detail... and, if you go the multichannel route, three and a bit more channels. That 'simply' is, in fact, crushingly difficult to achieve and no player we've encountered this side of five grand so seamlessly integrates CD and DVD-Audio, yet also so effortlessly highlights why, if you are an audiophile, you should be getting that warm, fuzzy feeling about DVD-A.

No passage in particular highlights what the G91 does well, because it's uniformly good with all genres and all formats it can cope with. The obligatory Damien Rice on CD sounded so real (and so close miked) that you could almost reach out and hand the man some Prozac. And on DVD-Audio, the moody *Riders On The Storm* (in stereo) sounded so broody and malevolent, you would think you were in a flood... come to think of it, a common mistake this 'summer'.

**VIDEO PERFORMANCE**

In picture terms, there's lots to praise, too. This is one of those rare players that raises the performance bar so high that its performance on S-Video is better than many cheaper players

playing RGB. It has exceptional colour depth and focus, with the sort of detail that makes each disc look more like film than polycarbonate. Then, move to one of the more upmarket output formats like HDMI and the picture simply comes to life. Denon's DVD-3910 (see review, p50) performs a similar epiphany in the sub-£1,000 market and between them, the companies pretty much stitch up the 'high-fidelity' DVD realm. There are a few players that match these two in performance terms but none eclipse them, save those with the sort of price tag that will buy you a small former-Soviet armoured division for a weekend's annexing.

Photography buffs have a curious Japanese term for the quality of out of focus images... 'bokeh'. Good bokeh means the background highlights the sharpness of the foreground subjects in focus, like a Turner watercolour. By contrast, bad bokeh looks like a Surat pointillist painting gone wrong. Few DVD players have good bokeh, but the G91 gives great bokeh.

Painters everywhere will be ecstatic. With video sources, there is directness to sound as well as picture that's often lacking in DVD systems. It's pin-sharp precise from the deepest bass to the highest treble, with the sort of musically-tight focus that makes the soundtrack to *Kill Bill Volume 1* come alive. This air of superiority is noticeable even when streaming a Dolby or DTS soundtrack through the S/PDIF electrical digital link – there's none of the trebly forwardness and almost jittery sound common to DVD digital. Instead the sound is authoritative and solid from channel to channel.

The G91 may seem a curious product, and indeed its distinctiveness makes it tough to rate. For some, its lack of multichannel analogue outputs will put it out of the running, and of course there's no SACD replay... But what this machine does, it does exceptionally well. It's a very good CD player in its own right, and great for a DVD player. It's a class-leading DVD-Audio player too, whether in stereo or (with the help of other Meridian gear) in multichannel, and with DVD-Video it's outstanding. Add the tuner and processor and it's plainly a special bit of kit. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 90%**  
 >> SUB RATINGS  
 CD 87% DVD-A 93%

**VISION >> 96%**

**FEATURES >> 89%**

**VALUE >> 85%**

**CONCLUSION**  
 Hardly your average DVD-Audio/Video player, the G91 delivers class-leading sound and pictures. It may not be the ideal option for a mix 'n' match multichannel system, but in a stereo context or an all-Meridian surround set-up it's superb.

**PRO**  
 Fantastic DVD-Audio/Video and CD replay, perhaps the best this side of Meridian's 800 Series. Built like a tank, styled like a dream, too.

**CON**  
 Connection options limit use with other-brand components for multichannel DVD-A, but that's about it. As for SACD... do you really need it?

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



**BEST BUY**  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine  
★

# Little big box

*AVI has revamped its long-running Neutron speaker – can a box this small still cut the sonic mustard?*

**PRODUCT** AVI Neutron IV

**TYPE** Standmount loudspeaker

**PRICE** £499 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 15x27x21cm

● Weight: 3.5kg ● 28mm fabric tweeter ● 90mm doped paper bass/mid cone ● Sensitivity/impedance: 87dB/8 ohms (nominal) ● Three wood veneer options

**CONTACT** ☎ 01453 752656 🌐 www.avihifi.co.uk

**W**hen Martin Grindrod started AVI it was as an electronics company making amplifiers and latterly CD players. It wasn't until the mid-nineties that he started to dabble in the overstocked waters of the loudspeaker ocean – a place where me-too speakers were and still are rather too common. Yet by opting for such a compact design, AVI

managed to find a niche that has proved extremely successful for the brand.

The first Neutron, launched in 1996 in even smaller four-litre form than the version you see here, had a 114mm (4.5in) bass driver and a distinctly unconventional 10kHz crossover point. Since that time the box has expanded by a litre, the main driver grown by half an inch and the crossover has come down to a more conventional 2.5kHz.

In terms of general spec this is a similar speaker to its predecessor, the Neutron III, but there has been a significant change in the main driver, redesigned by its Scandinavian maker Vifa to improve the midband. Owners of previous Neutrons, with the exception of the original, can upgrade with this drive unit.

The cone is still a 90mm curvilinear doped paper device that's driven by a 25mm voice coil, the main difference between this and its predecessor being the surround. Rubber has been replaced by treated foam which is claimed to suppress the "resonances caused by the surround" and smoothes out the overall response of the speaker system as a result. The driver is said to be good out to 10kHz, although presumably not as good as the tweeter. The treble, and a fair amount of the midrange, is provided by a larger than usual 28mm fabric dome described as "special high quality" and manufactured by ScanSpeak.

The Neutron comes in a solid, real-wood veneered cabinet with a rear port and, surprisingly in this day and age, a single pair of

binding posts. The latter reflects the no-nonsense approach espoused by AVI – this is a company that believes in solid engineering first and foremost. Its founder Martin Grindrod is the son of a Rolls-Royce aero engineer whose own career was originally in avionics. AVI's boss, Ashley James, has spent time in instrument design and latterly with no-compromise active speaker specialist ATC.

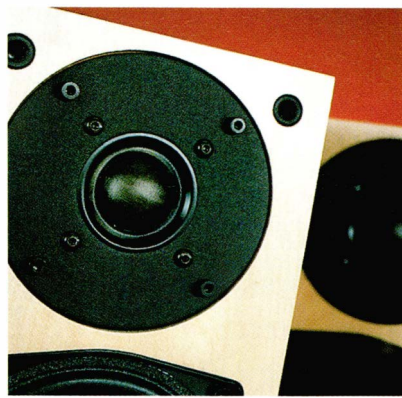
A five-litre enclosure seems like a tiny thing at the best of times but when it's arranged to be narrow and deep (with a slim front baffle) it seems even smaller. Nonetheless this is still as big or bigger than the speakers that people who do not appreciate decent hi-fi will tolerate in their living rooms. Still, if they can cope with a cabinet like this they won't be suffering, and it proves that small can indeed be sonically beautiful.

We expected such a compact speaker with a wide claimed bandwidth to be a pretty tough amplifier load. AVI says not, and a sensitivity of 87dB coupled with an impedance that drops no lower than six ohms would seem to back that up. AVI recommends you use as much power as is practical though, and you could do worse than stick the company's new Lab Series preamp and monoblocks on the back of them for some serious grunt.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Not having any Labs Series amplifiers to hand we put these tinies on the end of a Gamut D200 power amp and Bryston BP25 preamp, a combination which delivers rather more power than the recommended 30-150 watts, but you can rarely have too much power. The result this combination produces is rather good, in fact it's a distraction even if you're busy at the computer keyboard and just running the speakers in with some hip-hop. The Herbaliser/Latyx track *8pt Agenda* features some pacey rap, something these speakers revel in, it would seem. This comes down to their impressive resolve of voices and timing, the two elements which hip hop hinges on of course. Other tracks on the Ninja Tunes compilation *Xen Cuts* also worked well, DJ Vadim and Sarah Jones's *Your Revolution* is a witty and insightful response to the lyrics preferred by the rap fraternity, and with the Neutrons the singer's dry delivery and barbed comments were plain as day.

Moving on to more serious, sit down in front of 'em and turn up the wick, listening, Adem's *Homesongs* revealed some very respectable bass extension and resolve. AVI explains that by placing speakers closer to a wall you are trading image depth for bass extension and at six inches out there is still



**“This is a connoisseur’s compact speaker, one for those looking to wring the last ounce of detail from a system that’s balanced to suit.”**

plenty of grunt to enjoy. This doesn't stop the midband from sounding open and revealing, though. The small size of the Neutron IV is only really obvious in respect of its loudness capabilities – it doesn't sound as relaxed as bigger boxes when played at a lively level but neither does it lose composure. The amount of dynamic contrast it provides is also quite surprising; inasmuch as a speaker has a noise floor this one's is clearly lower than average.

With EST's double bass playing there's a shortfall in bass power but not a large one – in fact, you tend to be distracted by the activities of the piano player and drummer. The keyboard is very clean and tidy with no sense of time-smear. Low-level sounds are easily identifiable and bass notes make up for their lack of gravitas with good texture resolution. This is another case where the Neutron's nimble sense of timing does it many favours. While it's easier to get a speaker with limited bass extension to time well it's still not simple and in this instance it's bang on the money.

Plugging in a Border Patrol valve preamp prompted a change in this department that wasn't entirely to the Neutron's liking. It seems to like the slightly fuller bass and less revealing midrange of the Bryston and sounded a hint exposed with the Border Patrol. We could hear more of what was going on but the balance

was a little brighter, which discouraged higher-level listening.

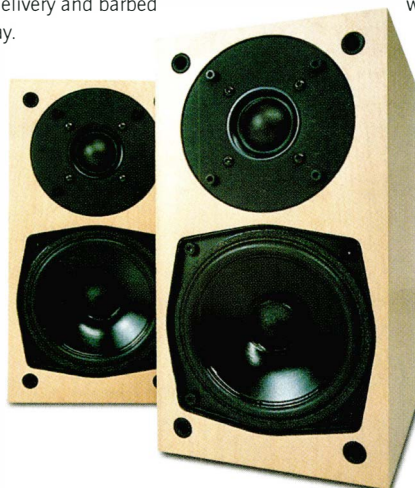
Next to another (even smaller) miniature, the Dali Royal Menuet II, the Neutron provided a distinctly more solid and three-dimensional image. That and a harder, more detailed and less romantic sound but

one that was distinctly more real. Next to the larger Cyrus CLS 50 the IV was again brighter and more revealing, though it could perhaps have benefited from some of the sense of relaxation that the Cyrus has. But this is partly a reflection of the latter's larger volume.

Pulling the AVIs out a bit further, leaving a gap of about a foot (30cm), didn't seem to reduce bass extension or power unduly but brought about an increase in openness. Richard Thompson's powerful *Love You Can't Survive* was delivered with precision and strength, his voice – while not nearly so eloquent as his playing – being nonetheless clear and well defined. There was a slight sense of dynamic constraint and bigger speakers can generate a bigger soundstage, but few near the AVI's price can match its midband clarity and timing.

The Neutron IV is a connoisseur's compact speaker, one for those looking to wring the last ounce of detail from a system that's balanced to suit. While bigger speakers have many advantages, the lack of cabinet coloration and the agility offered by a 'tiny' of this quality make an excellent case for the small is beautiful argument. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 87%</b>	<b>PRO</b> Offering an unusual level of transparency at the price, this latest version of the Neutron has an extremely fine sense of timing and impressive bass extension for its size.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE &gt;&gt; 78%</b>	<b>CON</b> Slightly exposed upper midrange means that amplifier choice is critical and a restrained balance is preferred for best results.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 87%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 85%</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A good example of what can be done with a small speaker if enough time and effort is put into it. The warts-and-all balance won't suit all electronics or tastes but you hear so much through them it's worth getting your ancillaries in line for.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 86%</b>	



# DiVA heaven?

*Improved technology powers this new middle range Arcam CD player*

**PRODUCT** Arcam DiVA CD192

**TYPE** CD player

**PRICE** £850

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43x9x29cm

• Weight: 5.6kg • Upsampling CD player • Multiple parallel DACs • Ready for multiroom systems

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

In the unlikely event that you hadn't noticed, DiVA is Arcam's 'mainstream' range, one step below FMJ. Its components are all moderately priced – not beer-budget cheap, but equally a long way from the bleeding edge of the esoteric high end. The CD192 is the newest DiVA CD player, and the senior model of the two currently available. The other is the CD73T, and owners of that

model can have their players upgraded to CD192 status at any time. Few CD player manufacturers offer an upgrade path, so score one up for Arcam already.

The CD192 uses the latest technology available to Arcam, which first became available to the design team about a year ago, and which was first seen in the DiVA range in a less refined form in the CD93T, from which it differs in a number of details. The new player addresses issues that have been identified after a year's experience with the old model (and also the FMJ CD33), to which solutions have become viable with the introduction of a new motherboard and other components which debut in the CD192. The newcomer is a direct replacement for the

CD93T, which in turn replaced the CD92, which was home to the Arcam/dCS proprietary RingDAC.

A key feature of this player is the Analogue Devices AD1896 asynchronous sample rate converter which upsamples the digital audio data read off-disc to 24-bit/192kHz status. The higher precision doesn't add any new musical information, which is necessarily limited to the 16-bit/44.1kHz resolution of standard Red Book CD audio. What it does do is to provide much wider working room (frequency bandwidth) for the anti-aliasing filters, which means that attenuation of the signal starts higher up the frequency band, well outside of the audible range, and operates in a gentler way, with less group delay. With



any digital audio system, this is practically a synonym for better sound quality.

The CD93T, and now the CD192 use a radically different digital to analogue converter which involves using no less than four Wolfson stereo Delta Sigma WM8740 DACs running at 192kHz in a non-differential configuration – four processing chains in parallel per channel, which helps enhance performance by averaging out residual minor nonlinearities in individual DACs. The Wolfson WM8740 DAC first came to prominence with Arcam's DVD players, but its use in a CD player does not mean that the CD192 is taking on the internal circuit architecture of a DVD player. This is exactly what is happening more and more widely as specialist CD component chipsets and disc mechanisms progressively disappear in favour of DVD equivalents that cover CD as part of a wider game plan, and is a major driving force behind many new CD players that have been introduced in recent years. In this case, however, the mechanism is a well established Sony model – a true CD (not DVD or DVD-ROM) mech, which incidentally offers full compatibility with CD-R/RW and CD-Text.

Cosmetically and operationally the Arcam CD192 breaks no new ground. The player is clean, smooth and simple looking – we're almost tempted to say timeless, but it could be argued that the cosmetics are beginning to look a little dated. Our main *bête noire*, however, has long been Arcam's standard remote control, which is as artlessly unergonomic as they come, and has the visual appeal to go with it.

The back panel is more interesting. Arcam has not included a balanced output, though

**“Although not the most obvious or dramatic of players, almost imperceptibly its qualities became apparent as the test progressed.”**

the internal architecture would seem to lend itself quite naturally to such a change without too much internal replumbing being required. What you do get are two pairs of analogue outputs wired in parallel, coaxial and optical digital outputs, and thanks to the new motherboard and power supply, a mains voltage switch, an infrared input and a 12-volt trigger input. It's suitable for multiroom applications using an external controller, and it could be built into an enclosure using an inconspicuous external IR repeater.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The new Arcam is a slow burner. Even after the usual running-in period (the player had quite a few hours under its belt when received), the best that can be said is that it didn't put a foot wrong. Sonically, it was all a tad understated – calm, refined and musical

for sure, but by no means the most exciting or attention-grabbing player around.

At the end of the test period, that final epithet still holds. The CD192 doesn't have the power and vitality, the upfront timing and the sheer physical musical presence of, say, a Krell KPS25 (a powerful candidate for best ever player, all £25K's worth, but now sadly discontinued as the mechanism is no longer available). But there is a massive caveat here. Although not the most obvious or dramatic of players, almost imperceptibly its qualities began to make themselves apparent as the test progressed.

Lack of obvious drama is a very much an Arcam characteristic, which is writ large on a number of their products in different categories. But the best of the breed have something else, which can give their designs more lasting appeal than some of the flashier sounding competition. The CD192 has some ▶



Q & A

We spoke to Arcam brand manager Geoff Meads about the design behind the CD192 CD player, and about the tight conditions in the current market



**HFC:** What would you say are the technical high points of the CD192?

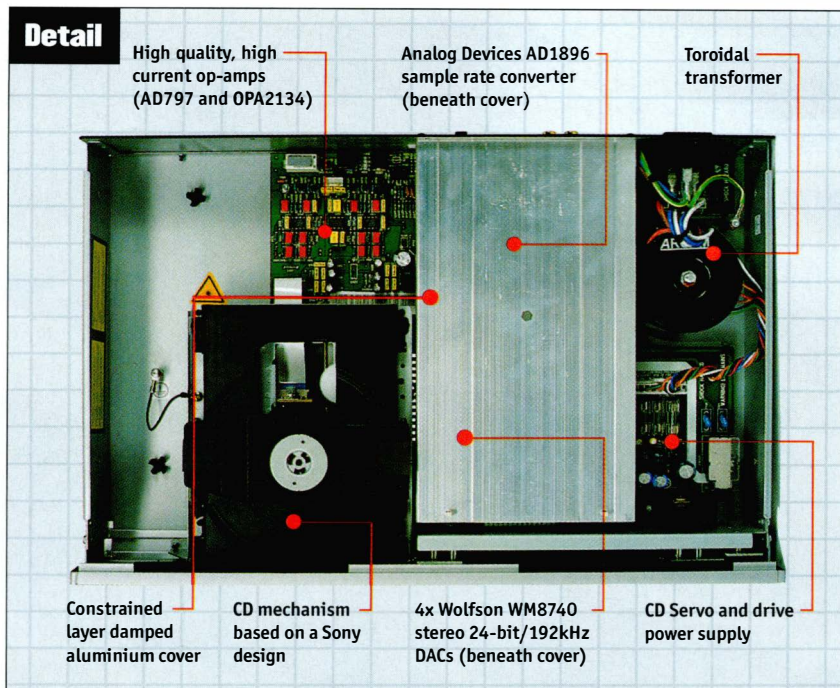
**GM:** The technology that has gone into the CD192 has been around for about a year in a form that was first used in the FMJ CD33. They both use multiple Wolfson 8940 DACs, with four processing chains per channel, reducing any conversion inaccuracies by 75 per cent. Differential mode would lower the noise further, but this isn't the issue as other circuits become the limiting factors. Ahead of the DAC stage is an upsampler that uses 24-bit/192kHz arithmetic for the 16-bit/44.1kHz data off disc. There is no more musical resolution as a result, but the arithmetic is performed more accurately, with less distortion, and the low pass filters are simpler and audibly less intrusive due to reduced high frequency group delay. Also new for this model are new high quality instrumentation grade op-amps in the output stage, and various other changes such as a new toroidal transformer, and a 12-volt trigger and IR input. These changes have only become practical with the introduction of a new motherboard.

**What does this new model say about Arcam's attitude to the compact disc format?**

The corporate message we're trying to give is that dedicated CD players are still where the market is. There is a huge number of people who just listen to music. They don't want to pay out for a DVD-type solution, which includes all kind of functionality they don't want, invariably with compromised CD sound quality. Right now the dedicated CD design approach is just about possible. How long it will remain so is anyone's guess, really.

**How is Arcam finding the hi-fi business right now, when other manufacturers are reporting difficult trading conditions?**

It is hard, but we are finding a way through. The UK market is odd – it moves in fits and starts. One thing that has become clear with the move to AV is that sales have become more seasonal at the bottom end, with a sharper peak into the Christmas season. As AV has become more firmly established, so the end of year buying season has become shorter and more intense, and the summer months have become ever quieter. But our main export markets remain strong.



interesting properties that insinuate themselves into the listening experience in a system of sufficient refinement and range – dynamic as well as tonal. The Arcam's treble is very clean and concise, with a great deal of discrimination between similar sounding instruments, and a very obvious refinement and polish. A similar sense of refinement is carried through to the midrange, and slowly it became apparent that this Arcam is one of the least 'electronic' sounding players in its class.

Tonally, the almost understated top end (not a lack of treble output, as far as can be determined, we're talking about refinement and transparency here) tends to throw the focus on the midband and the upper bass, with the result that the Arcam has an unusually sophisticated way of reproducing complex, wide-ranging sounds. This was especially noticeable with orchestral recordings, where the sense of a body of instruments, and the rich and complex tonalities that were thrown up, was unusually well captured. The sound of some instruments was a particular joy, highlights including the pungent, wailing sound of Eric Clapton's and Joe Satriani's Fender Strats, the complex harmonic and sometimes aharmonic edginess of orchestral wind instruments in Mozart's *Wind Serenade*, and the body and percussive physicality of Alfred Brendel playing a concert grand with sensitivity and raw, unbridled power. The richly embellished tapestry of Takemitsu's exquisite orchestral miniatures and the elegant sensuality of Rickie Lee Jones's *My One And Only Love* were among many other examples. Each of these randomly chosen recordings, under the right circumstances, when the rest of the system was playing ball, were able to communicate with a passion that threatened to, and sometimes succeeded in, producing a

breathless frisson and a perceptible tightening of the skin on the nape of the neck.

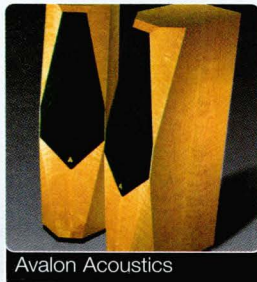
CD players are often ranked according to their ability to time. Often the term is used to describe a quality that can equally be discussed under a number of different headings, which don't refer to or imply the element of time. But there was something in the Arcam, a quality not of being held back, but of a consistency mixed with a slightly understated feel that in some ways is more musically telling than alternative players that appear to go for the jugular. This makes the CD192 an intriguing player, one of Arcam's better recent designs. It might be a slow burner, but it shows that the design team knew exactly what it was doing when it was voicing this player. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

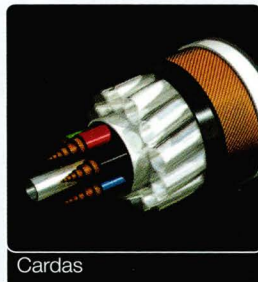


VERDICT		ARCAM
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 88%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>PRO</b> A highly articulate player with a full range of tonal colours and textures, plus strong detail and coherence, making for a genuinely musical sound.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 83%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 86%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 87%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> The clothing is familiar enough, but the technology is individual and effective. Sonically slightly understated, the player will grow on listeners with an ear for musical outcomes rather than flashy sonic firework displays.		<b>CON</b> The only identifiable failing is that the CD192 can sound a tad understated, which could be interpreted as blandness. Oh, and that awful remote...
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 87%</b>		

for the love of music...



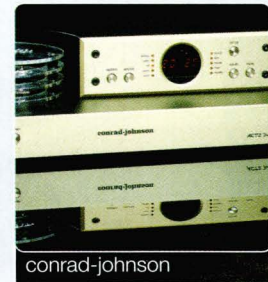
Avalon Acoustics



Cardas



Karan Acoustics



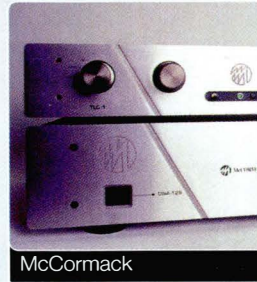
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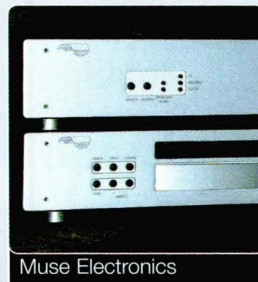
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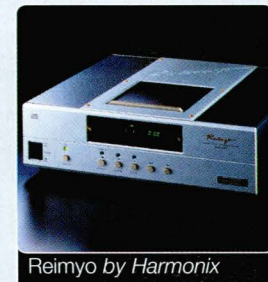
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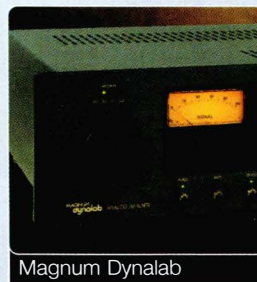
Muse Electronics



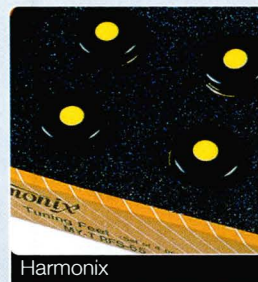
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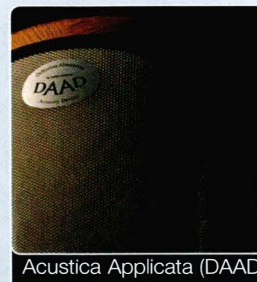
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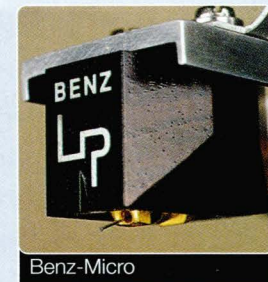
Magnum Dynalab



Harmonix



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# Simply surrounded

*Linn's new multichannel preamplifier doesn't let complex home cinema processing spoil the sonic party*

**PRODUCT** Linn Exotik

**TYPE** Multichannel preamplifier

**PRICE** £1,750

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 38x8x37cm • Weight: 3.5kg • Optional digital audio processor • No video switching, three stereo, one multichannel input • Highly configurable inputs • Fully Knekt, custom install ready

**CONTACT** ☎ 0141 307 7777 • www.linn.co.uk

It is a mark of how important multichannel has become that the £1,750 Linn Exotik is more or less the replacement for the Linn Kairos stereo preamplifier. Of course, this is a multichannel preamp designed with music firmly in mind, available with or without home cinema processing (the basic non-digital processing version is the one reviewed here). Nevertheless, there's a huge hole in the Linn stereo preamp market these days; there are the Kolektor and Wakonda (below £1,000) and the fantastic Klimax Kontrol (at £6,000)... and nothing in-between for stereo fans.

However, don't dismiss the Exotik as a product for well-heeled home cinema buffs only. This is a 'purist' analogue multichannel preamplifier, in its standard form. If you want a home cinema

processor, though, the Linn Exotik can do that too; the 'Exotik+DA' variant comes with a digital processor for Dolby Digital and DTS. This digital audio module (available either as the complete Exotik+DA or as a retrofittable upgrade) will be in the shops a little later in the year.

But the digital module is not what's on offer here. This is a preamplifier, pure and simple. It has no digital doobies, no video switching, just three sets of stereo and one set of six-channel audio inputs, plus outputs to a seven-channel amplifier and a subwoofer. There are also tape and remote stereo outputs, and all is driven from a Linn Brilliant switch-mode power supply. Of course, things aren't that minimalist – Linn has included six Knekt RJ45 connections, minijacks for remote connection and RS232 RJ45 inputs and outputs for Crestron-style remotes. It's strange to see a product with more custom install connections than stereo inputs and still have hi-fi cred points, but Linn has always danced to the beat of a different drummer, so why change plans for the Exotik?

By doing without video switching altogether, the Exotik has a considerable sonic advantage over existing processors and audio/video

preamplifiers. All that high-frequency video floating around does the audio chain no favours – going without means the user may have to switch their audio and video independently, but it also means the performance is automatically enhanced. Those with 'video off' buttons on their universal players can have a double whammy of audio-only goodness.

This is a Linn product remember, so 'basic' connectivity does not mean 'simplistic'. The Exotik includes a degree of parameter adjustment, such as speaker assignment and renaming sources to your own taste. Of course, adding the digital processing module allows for more precise set-up, with speaker level, test tones, bass management and the rest of the requirements of the digital audio preamplifier.

Source assignment is significant – you can assign what's standard for a particular source (whether it is a multichannel or stereo product by default) and volume offset, to allow sources to have a similar volume level at start-up. Globally, you can adjust the volume limit, the rate of both volume and mute, timeouts for display, selection and sleep modes, even the choice of source and preset volume level that's



automatically selected at start-up. This takes 'configurable' to new levels for a hi-fi preamp.

It's hard not to consider this product as the multichannel Kairn, because in many ways the Exotik is the Kairn's spiritual heir. Like the Kairn in its day, Linn considers this the most flexible product in the company's control product range, and it has a point. But Linn's ergonomics masters ensure the product has simple and elegant lines, no matter how flexible, with just six buttons and a display allowing the user to completely drive and install the Exotik. The same cannot be said for the remote, which is of the cheaper Linn/Loewe/Arcam mould. This isn't the most intuitive handset around, even if it looks the part.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Look at the Exotik as a pure stereo preamplifier and you will hear its potential. It is preternaturally detailed, capable of analysing and reproducing any sound from a source component and presenting it with solidity and a sense of controlled, tight dynamics. All of which keeps it up there with the best preamps at the price. It has that distinctive 'New Linn' sound, more exacting and precise than earlier models. This means it's quite an 'arid' and detailed sound and not one that would appeal to those who love the sort of richness and warmth that many American high-end products produce. So, not everyone will like the sound of the Exotik in stereo mode, but it's not because of any lack of stereo performance; if you don't like the Exotik sound, it's because you don't like the Linn sound, whether in stereo or multichannel.

Personally, from distant memory of the Kairn, I believe this to be an advance in sonic terms; or, at least, a development in a slightly different direction. The Exotik has the detail of the Kairn without the etched nature of the older stereo preamp. Where this comes across is dealing with older recordings, especially those cut on older valve mastering gear. Early jazz stereo

cuts from Miles Davis and John Coltrane have an immediacy that is often swamped by a huge soundstage. Instead, the Exotik kept everything under control and presented the discs with absolute musical focus. This also extended to the multichannel presentation, and it's here where the Exotik really shines.

Or rather, it's here where the Exotic deals with multichannel with the same character as the stereo sound. The same dry, detailed and focused presentation in stereo is extended to all channels here. With no change in character or performance, the Exotik suddenly becomes one of the best multichannel preamplifiers around. This makes a lot of sense when dealing with DVD-Audio and SACD. Armed with a good set of power amplifiers and neutral, detailed speakers, the directness of the sound around the room is exciting and accurate. You don't feel as if you're being dropped into a big bucket of sound, as is often the case – the Exotik simply presents the music without grace of favour, but with all the information from the disc kept unsullied.

On test, perhaps the best example of this was the hornpipe in *Tubular Bells* on DVD-A. This was a frenzy of hot channel action, with sounds moving from speaker to speaker like a game of frantic audio ping-pong. Most systems lose the plot, but the Linn kept everything in check and reduced the head-spin effect to a minimum.

Even home cinema (using the DD/DTS processing on board a good DVD player) is well sorted, although here the improvements will be less important. The detail level needed to differentiate instruments in the back channels in multichannel music is not so crucial when the sounds are simply engines revving or a film crew's Foley artist adding footfalls.

This does highlight a potential shortcoming of the Exotik, which is strangely no fault of the Exotik itself. Are we ready for a product like this?



Stereo hi-fi fans may dismiss the Exotik for being 'too multichannel', while home cinema types may bemoan the lack of digital processing and video switching. Whether the decoder upgrade will improve its lot in home cinema circles or ruin the sound for hi-fi enthusiasts remains to be seen. But ultimately, Linn may well have it right with the Exotik – whatever your needs, digital processing or no, this is one of the most flexible multichannel preamps around. **HFC**

Alan Sircom



**“The same dry, detailed and focused presentation in two-channel stereo is extended to multichannel sound.”**

**VERDICT**

<p><b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 86%</b></p> <p>&gt;&gt; SUB RATINGS STEREO 83% MULTICHANNEL 88%</p>	<p><b>PRO</b></p> <p>A very fine attempt to link multichannel and stereo without messing things up with superfluous home cinema gizmos. An extremely detailed and musical package.</p>
<p><b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 86%</b></p>	<p><b>CON</b></p> <p>The intellectual hurdle required to choose a multichannel 'preamp' in place of a 'processor' may be a tough one.</p>
<p><b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 87%</b></p>	
<p><b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 82%</b></p>	

**CONCLUSION**

The Exotic is a flexible beast – pick this basic model for 'purist' stereo/multichannel sound, or add the forthcoming DA option for full-blown home cinema processing. Either way, it expands the crisp, detailed Linn sound beyond stereo boundaries.

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





# Jack of all trades...

...and master of all, too. Denon's '2900 successor takes the sub-£1,000 universal player to new heights

**PRODUCT** Denon DVD-3910

**TYPE** Universal disc player

**PRICE** £900

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43x14x40cm

► Weight: 9.3kg ► Plays DVD-A, DVD-V, SACD, CD and more ► Huge array of connection options – first UK player with HDMI v1.1 output ► New rigid transport mechanism and three-in-one thick casework

**CONTACT** ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

**D**enon's £900 DVD-3910 is the first of a new universal disc player line. The company has dispensed with low-end DVD-Audio and SACD players; its cheapest model will cost around £600. But people who appreciate what the likes of the DVD-3910 has to offer will be prepared to pay for it.

This is a player for audio enthusiasts, with four PCM1796 dual differential DACs. DAC1 is dedicated to the stereo performance, while DAC2, 3 and 4 are given over to the

multichannel outputs. Unusually, the analogue audio circuits are placed on an entirely different board to the digital audio and video stages. With a suggested signal/noise ratio of 120dB and a 110dB dynamic range, this is one of the best specced players in its class.

Video performance is similarly well specified. The player scales up to 720-line progressive scan or 1,080-line interlaced video (in preparation for HDTV, and supported by many of the better screens and projectors currently out there). It also processes progressive scan through a Faroudja DCDi chip.

The player sports what Denon calls a Dual Discrete Video Circuit, with 12-bit/216MHz video DACs, with one video decoder specifically for the component video circuit, and another dedicated to composite and S-Video. The heavyweight, enclosed transport mechanism is called a 'Suppress Vibration Hybrid Loader' for stable playback. It has a metal plate and guide

and what Denon adroitly calls a 'protein finished' tray. Fortunately, this has not been designed by Monica Lewinski. A heavy transport mechanism would be useless in a flimsy chassis, but Denon's three boxes in one chassis is about the most massive in its class.

'Comprehensive' sums up the DVD-3910's back panel. There's no doubling up of sockets as seen in some systems and a second Scart might be wished for by some, but if you are using the 3910 through Scart, you are missing a good portion of the picture quality potential anyway. So, on the audio side there are 5.1 and two-channel analogue outputs (with extremely good terminals). There's a pair of IEEE1394/FireWire/i.Link connectors, along with coaxial and optical digital outputs (for conventional S/PDIF digital links), plus a Denon Link socket for direct digital DVD-Audio and – eventually – SACD connection. Multiroom connections are covered by an RS232C and a pair of minijacks.

On the video side there's the single Scart, interlaced/progressive component video outputs, composite and S-Video links. Finally, the player has both HDMI and DVI-D digital picture outputs, so that you don't need to buy a converting cable if you choose a plasma screen with the wrong digital video connection. This is more useful than you might think – most plasma screens use HDMI, most DLP projectors use DVI-D. As some high-end home cinema systems now sport both (plasma for day-to-day telly stuff, projector for weekend movie times) this means you can connect both without tears.

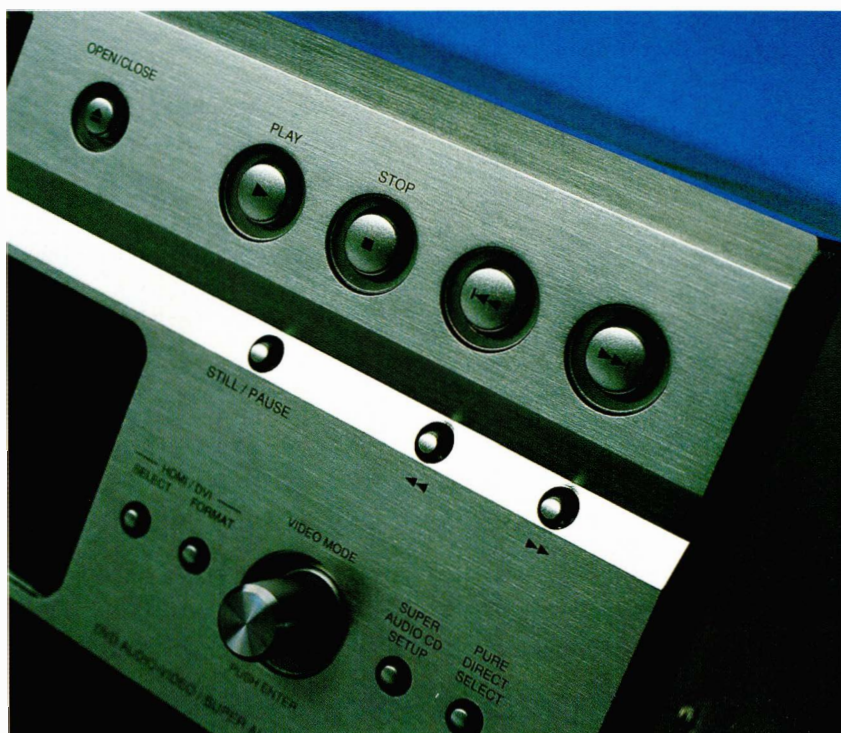
All this means a complex set-up. Denon has done well to smooth the installation process, with on-screen menus for most parameters no more or less complex than any regular DVD player/AV receiver installation. This level of picture and sound tweaking is more interactive and allows the user to more precisely adjust the delivery to suit a particular environment than pretty much any other DVD player. Picture processing is particularly thorough and best put in the hands of a professional with measuring tools and analysers. In fairness, the '3910 offers the same level of control over the picture as most universal players have over the audio side – we are just not used to adjusting chroma and gamma levels. One issue that is worth noting on the video side is that the video modes don't compete for attention and it's possible to have the player in HDMI mode along with other sources; some of the rivals to the DVD-3910 don't do this and if the HDMI output is selected, other video sources are blanked out.

### SOUND QUALITY

Sonically, the player excels, even on video formats. The Dolby Digital and DTS sound aspects are best handled through the on-board decoder, if you don't have Denon Link or i.Link-compatible amps. The sound through these three options is rich and detailed and focused, and the keenly dynamic *Kill Bill* DTS soundtrack comes alive. Through the S/PDIF connections, the sound is flatter, emphasising the extremes somewhat, as if jitter is afoot. In fairness, most DVD players turn in a similar performance through S/PDIF links and the Denon is about average in performance for the price in this aspect.

## “This sets the benchmark for DVD-Audio replay at the money – and then some.”

A traditional problem for universal players (or at least those not costing a fortune) is that SACD replay doesn't quite keep up with DVD-Audio performance. The reason is simple – SACD is transcoded from the original DSD datastream into PCM code that the DVD-Audio chips can handle. Except for the likes of the Linn Unidisk designs, most universals do this. However, in this case, the sonics do not suffer at



### NEXT GENERATION HDMI

At the moment, the High Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI) is largely thought of as a digital video link between suitably equipped DVD players and displays (note that it's also backwards compatible with the DVI digital video interface). In fact, it can carry digital audio too, but this aspect is still under development.

The DVD-3910 is the first UK player to come with HDMI version 1.1. This can support digital pictures up to the latest American 720p and European 1080i high-definition TV formats, as well as interlace and progressive scan pictures from PAL and NTSC sources. Unlike earlier versions, it can also deliver full multichannel audio and system control codes alongside this video signal. DVD-Audio transmission is possible but not yet enabled (for copy-protected DVD-As) from the '3910's HDMI output – this is imminent though, and machines bought in the meantime will be upgradeable. As ever, SACD transmission is tied up in legal wrangling, but this is also possible.

Ultimately, HDMI is expected to become the standard digital AV link – one cable connection for audio and video from component to component. So far, AV amps that accept HDMI cables for multichannel audio are practically non-existent, but this will change and change fast. For more info, check out [www.hdmi.org](http://www.hdmi.org).

the hands of the transcoding, unless you use bass management. SACD sounds clean, surprisingly full and exciting. There is no sense of the thinness of sound often heard from DVD-Audio'd SACDs which makes the reproduction of the likes of *Breathe* from *Dark Side Of The Moon* sound deeper and broodier than ever. This even prompted me to break my

the Philips DVD963SA (the £400 SACD/DVD-Video player that has been causing a stir online) or some of the better class of CD/SACD players from Sony, but it gets surprisingly close.

Since DVD-Audio has no such transcoding issues, it tends to fare better in universal players. Here is no exception; it still performs better than SACD in absolute terms. However, this sets the benchmark for DVD-Audio replay at the money – and then some. Once again, like SACD, DVD-Audio is given depth and richness, producing a detailed yet insightful presentation of the sound. This makes you reach for DVD-Audio disc after disc, wishing there could be more on the shelves. Imagine playing wintery Strauss waltz concerts in the middle of summer. Then, imagine playing this back to back with 1970s Fleetwood Mac, 21st Century (just) Steely Dan, the Doors and the Corrs in the same listening session.

Most surprising of all, CD replay is excellent, good enough almost not to need the '...for a universal player' rider attached. Sounds ▶

'no Sting' rule and play the recently reissued Police albums in stereo SACD, and the Denon didn't disappoint. The raw sound and the sheer musicianship transported me back to my teenage years (without the spotty skin issues). The Stones and Dylan remasters, meanwhile, (stereo and multichannel) are given the sort of depth and master-tape quality not commonly seen in universal players. This doesn't quite pip

Q & A

We spoke to Roger Batchelor, marketing and training officer at Denon UK, about the DVD-3910



**HFC:** When did you first encounter the DVD-3910?

**RB:** We first saw it in Japan early in the summer. Our chief DVD engineer was very excited to show us the video enhancer (Denon Pixel Image Correction) which was developed in conjunction with a Japanese professor at a very high level. It's a patented design. There are similar devices around that use pixel detection algorithms, but up until now they detect vertically and horizontally only; this one detects diagonally... and detects chrominance as well as luminance. This all reduces noise and delivers a cleaner picture. No other manufacturer has this.

**And the sound? What changes have been made there?**

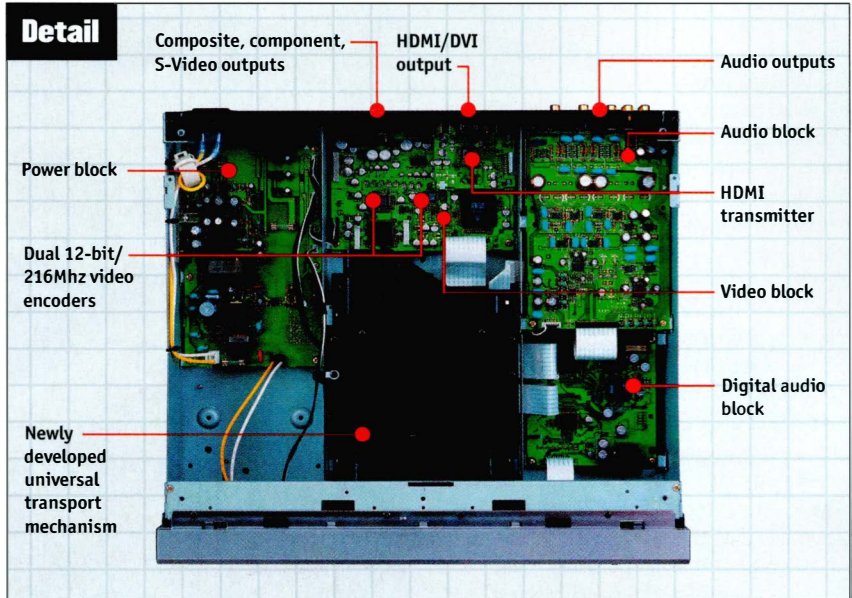
In terms of audio, a lot of experience has been gained with the DVD-2900 and this takes what we did with that player on to another level. We are now incorporating AL24 processing, along with high-grade Burr-Brown DACs. The idea there is to get the best possible CD replay alongside DVD-Audio and SACD. You can adjust delay time and channel level on SACD, which by-passes the bass management and thereby stops the signal being converted into PCM. The Pure Direct circuitry is very important in that respect too.

**Why have you dropped cheaper universal disc players?**

At the moment, in the marketplace, universal players are in demand but only from people who are aware of the (DVD-Audio/SACD) formats. General interest is far less. This player – and the DVD-2910 – will be our main two universal players. Nothing has changed in terms of producing the best possible product at a reasonable price. We won't go down to the supermarket level, and we don't go the super high-end. Our core philosophy is reflected by products like this one.

**What does the future hold?**

High-end players are still in development, so the '2910 and '3910 will be the mainstays of the range until well into 2005. But even on this model there are aspects that are not yet fully explored. We have HDMI, which also carries audio as well as video (albeit with some limitations). This can carry Dolby and DTS for future systems.



Here are surprisingly dynamic, musical and exciting, with good imagery and the sort of inner detailing usually found only in dedicated CD players. Play a good CD and the player delivers a strong and precise sound, way better than most DVD players and comparable to good CD players in the £300-£600 bracket.

Better CD players are more articulate, ensuring that voices are more obviously centre-located between the speakers. Here, the Denon gets diffuse and voices lacks solidity. But that's nothing, given the player's all-round ability to deliver high-quality home cinema and both multichannel and stereo music with aplomb.

**VIDEO PERFORMANCE**

The Denon is outstanding in its video roll; if the sound quality is good, the video quality is almost peerless, and not just for the money. Straight from the box its picture is good enough to place it among the best, but the level of video adjustment and control allows this player to stand head and shoulders above its rivals.

This makes the picture something of a chimera. It is bright and sharp if the monitor needs it, but it can be soft and warm if that's what's required. This makes it exceptionally hard to pin down in performance terms. Normally, reviewers pinpoint aspects of the black level, colour depth or saturation, as well as sharpness levels to define the product's performance. In this case, these constants become variables, adjustable to match the screen the Denon is played through. If you find the Denon's video playback to be at fault, chances are you are either comparing DVD to cinematic film stock or you haven't set up the video performance exactly in line with your monitor. If this player proves as popular as we expect, an army of specialist picture setter-uppers will start offering their services soon.

Throughout all of this, it is detailed and about as good as you can get from DVD today. Play something with a lot of detail in the darker

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 PICTURES	✓

shades – like the opening explosion in *Cold Mountain* – and it delivers information where others just rely on blocks and blur. Yet, elsewhere where the colours are vibrant, it's Kodachrome-vivid.

In short, the Denon DVD-3910 is just about as good as you can get in the picture department. Add that to the generally superb sound quality and you get a device that redefines what a universal player can do for the money. Any player worth its salt has to go up against this masterpiece as of now. Below £1,000, this is the new benchmark. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 87%**  
 Mind-bendingly complete spec sheet and performance to match. Nothing made today is so thoroughly future-proofed. Good CD sound is the icing on the cake!

**VISION >> 95%**

**FEATURES >> 97%**

**VALUE >> 92%**

**CONCLUSION**  
 Whether you seek the acme of digital picture and sound for home cinema or good quality multichannel hi-fi, this does it all. It's a bargain when you consider the only do-it-all players that are obviously better cost thousands more!

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 93%**





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# Be is for beryllium

*This is the cheapest floorstander yet to sport a Focal beryllium tweeter. But hurry – it's limited edition!*

**PRODUCT** Focal-JMLab Electra 927 Be

**TYPE** Floorstanding loudspeaker

**PRICE** £2,800 per pair

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 23x106x38cm

⊕ Weight: 28.5kg ⊕ Inverted beryllium dome diaphragm tweeter ⊕ 'W-Sandwich' cone drivers ⊕ Concave front baffle to improve time alignment

**CONTACT** ☎ 0845 660 2680

🌐 www.focal-jmlab.fr

**B**y the time you read this, it might almost be too late to get hold of this very interesting loudspeaker. Along with a standmount sibling and a larger 937 floorstander, it's a strictly limited edition model, and these three are the first models to include Focal-JMLab's beryllium diaphragm tweeters at sub-Utopian prices.

The Electras have long been a prestige range for Focal-JMLab, one level down from the super-costly Utopia models, but comfortably above the more affordable Chorus and Cobalt ranges in price and engineering sophistication. It's some years since an Electra came *HFC's* way, so this 927 has no previous on our books, though the overall configuration does resemble the Chorus 726 S (tested earlier this year), the Cobalt 826 we did back in 2001, and also the gorgeous Alto Utopia Be from *HFC* 248.

Although the Electras are a lot less expensive than the Utopias – close to a quarter of the price charged for a pair of Altos – they do include many of the features found in those prestige models, albeit executed rather more economically. Besides the beryllium tweeter,

lock-nuts need to be much deeper to aid adjustment – at present they're hard to tighten because they're well inside rubber ring-shaped feet. Good depth gives decent fore 'n' aft stability, though side-to-side feels less secure.

The front panel is effectively split into three sections, and is almost entirely taken up by the four drivers and large flared port. The port and the two 165mm bass drivers are mounted on the lower section, which is tilted backwards a few degrees. Above this bass section is a small but full-width metal panel forming the tweeter chassis, mounted vertically a little below seated ear level. The midrange driver – another 165mm driver with 20mm W-Sandwich cone, but with a different spec from the bass drivers – sits above the tweeter, on a section of baffle tilted slightly forwards at the top. The concave shape will help align the voice coils so that they're more or less equidistant from listeners, though it has to be said that the arrangement might have been still more effective had the whole speaker been about 10cm taller.

The diaphragm materials are particularly interesting. Beryllium is a very rare, costly and difficult to work metal, but has a substantially better stiffness-to-weight ratio than titanium or aluminium, along with good self-damping, so it's ideal for a tweeter. Although the inverted beryllium dome used in this TCE-type tweeter is similar to the TBU-type found in the Utopia models, some economies have been made in the magnetic motor section, which uses a ferrite magnet rather than the samarium cobalt/neodymium combination of the TBU.



**“How nice it was to hear the brass as soft and gentle as Wagner had intended, free of the stridency of the post-Sousa era.”**

there's the 'W-Sandwich' cones used by the other drivers, the concave baffle for time alignment, and the substantial real wood veneered sides with their post-formed edges.

This Electra 927 Be is an attractively slim, yet heftily built floorstanding three-way, turning the scales at a very substantial 28.5kg. Those wood finished flanks come in either a deep red (Signature) or a gold (Classic) burr ash finish; the back and front are a textured charcoal grey laminate, while the top surface appears to be an easy-to-clean glass panel in high gloss black, which is a nice touch. Shiny and chunky spikes provide good floor-coupling, though the

The 'W-Sandwich' cone technology is particularly interesting. It uses glass fibre and structural foam layers, which may be tailored to achieve optimum balance between stiffness and self-damping, and Focal is gradually improving its understanding of the best formulae for specific applications, while good consistency should be ensured by the use of synthetic materials. The midrange unit has a concave central pole extension to minimise turbulence in its own sealed sub-enclosure. A single pair of terminals – the company doesn't do bi-wiring – feeds a high-slope crossover network operating at 300Hz and 2.8kHz.

## SOUND QUALITY

In-room far-field measurements showed a thoroughly impressive overall balance, with only relatively minor points to criticise. The bass doesn't quite plumb the extreme depths, and is a little overenthusiastic through the upper bass region of 100-200Hz, but the broad midband decade going on up to 2kHz is exceptionally smooth and even. It's less smooth through the presence zone, though still better than most, and has a slight peak at around 6kHz, while the treble as a whole is just a shade stronger than average.

However, sensitivity is unexceptional at 88dB, especially since the amp load – easy enough through the midband and treble – is quite demanding through the low frequency part of the spectrum, reaching a 3.4-ohm minimum around 100-120Hz. The in-room balance makes it quite clear that free space siting is likely to give the best bass performance.

This proved to be the case in practice, and best results were found with the speakers at an angle, so their axes crossed well in front of the listening zone. This helped ameliorate the slightly 'hot' treble and led to a sound – and a soundstage – that was impressively 'out of the boxes', and very well focused, if less 'airy' than models with wider top-end distribution.

This is a beautifully smooth, neutral and well balanced speaker. Apart from some midband boxiness, most audible with speech, the sound is clean and coloration is generally low. The treble is just a shade 'obvious' – presumably following the 'if you've got it, flaunt it' maxim – and this does slightly emphasise leading edges and add a touch of extra incisiveness to the fine detail. FM hiss seemed just a shade more noticeable than usual, but this only served to highlight the smoothness, sweetness and innate delicacy of this speaker's top end.

This TCE tweeter might not quite match the scintillating performance of the TBU version fitted to the Utopias, but it definitely has most of its delightful character, delivering a sound that was comfortably superior to the less costly models in this month's *Ultimate Group Test* (all of which feature better tweeters than the norm)

The Prom concert when Alfred Brendel, in what was apparently his last ever live broadcast, delivered a stunning performance of Beethoven's *Emperor Piano Concerto* perfectly illustrated the unflustered way in which this speaker could reproduce not just the finest of details in the playing, but also the subtlety of information about the flow and direction of the musical messages. A few days later came another Prom treat, with Simon Rattle conducting Wagner's *Rheingold* using period instruments. How nice it was to hear the brass as soft and gentle as Wagner had intended, free of the stridency of instruments from the post-Sousa era. And how clearly this was revealed by these smooth, sweet speakers.

Hearing Focal's beryllium tweeter in its Utopia (TBU) guise for the first time was a memorable experience, and this new and less costly variation immediately showed most of the same sweetness and transparency. While it's not true to say that this Electra 927 Be represents an Alto Utopia Be on the cheap – its bass alignment is less satisfactory, and box coloration is not as low – it certainly delivers a much more substantial percentage of the senior model's performance than the price gulf might suggest. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



<b>VERDICT</b>	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 92%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>PRO</b> Superior driver technology delivers a beautifully smooth, sweet and transparent performance, with focused, out-of-the-box imaging and lovely delicate detailing.
<b>EASE OF DRIVE &gt;&gt; 77%</b> [Progress bar]	<b>CON</b> Sombre styling, spikes tricky to adjust. Some chestiness and midband boxiness, mostly on speech, and the low end might have more drive.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 90%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 84%</b> [Progress bar]	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A svelte and sophisticated performer with a notably smooth and sweet sound, especially at the top end. Images are well clear of the enclosures and beautifully formed with fine focus, though there is a little 'boxy' and 'thickening' coloration.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 88%</b>	

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# UK gold

Sony's 'UK-tuned' STR-DB790 broke new ground for sub-£500 multichannel amps. Can its successor raise the bar further?

**PRODUCT** Sony STR-DB795  
**TYPE** Multichannel AV receiver  
**PRICE** £300  
**CONTACT** ☎ 08705 111999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

The STR-DB795 has a tough act to follow. Its predecessor, the STR-DB970, redefined the budget standard for multichannel receivers having been designed in Japan and fine-tuned by Sony's top engineers in the UK. In our original review, our experts concluded that no six-channel amp had any right to sound so good at such an affordable price and this model has been selling like a hot cake during national bun week ever since.

The primary upgrade is two more channels of power and the necessary processing algorithms for Dolby Digital EX, DTS ES and Dolby ProLogic IIx. But, other than up-conversion of composite video signals to S-Video most of the tweaks and mods are clearly aimed at improving sonic performance rather than bolstering the features count.

In addition to Sony's X-Ground system that individually grounds pre and power amp sections to avoid crosstalk, there is a new transformer designed to overcome a shortfall in grunt when all channels are driven. New custom capacitors populate the power supply block and there are geographical changes to the wiring layout in order to shorten signal paths.

A number of critical components have been upgraded on the main board and chassis construction and fixings have been beefed up to reduce potential electro-mechanical

distortions. Better still, the analogue direct and multichannel input facilities are now convenient buttons on the front panel, ideal for those more into music than movie mayhem.

Connectivity is very good for such a low-cost machine, the programmable remote control would not look out of place on a model thrice the price and the whole package has a reassuring weight and build. Okay, so the display remains stoically on the front panel rather than on-screen but Sony's UK design team has always favoured this route as there is no video signal generating circuitry to upset the analogue audio signal path.

### SOUND QUALITY

The STR-DB795 has matured with grace and integrity. While the same spacious presentation remains, many of its predecessor's rough edges have been polished smooth with a gloriously rich and enveloping balance. Moody, less musically complex CDs, like Bruce Springsteen's *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, are portrayed with a rare combination of alluring warmth and a wide-open soundstage. This amp just begs you to stay up all night with a good claret and John Martyn's back catalogue.

The multichannel input with SACD reveals yet more space between instruments and retains a similarly appealing overall balance. The ripple of piano notes in Eleanor McEvoy's *Sail Me High* (from *Early Hours*) are remarkably uncongested and have a genuinely percussive edge that is often completely glossed over by multichannel amps at this price.

Up the tempo with SACDs like Feeder's *Comfort In Sound* and the STR-DB795 is there. Keep the volume the right side of a noise abatement order and the performance never fails to please with punchy bass that is blissfully free of boominess. The balance errs on the warm side of neutral but the overall effect is fabulously listenable.

It is almost churlish to draw attention to the STR-DB795's minor flaws considering its price point. It is still short on power with all channels driven if you like cinema-level AV surround sound, background hiss is a little higher than ideal and it's not the last word in resolving fine musical detail. But it does cost less than £300, it's superbly appointed for 7.1 channel home cinema and it sounds considerably better with music than most AV amps at twice the price. The budget king is dead, long live the new budget king. **HFC**

Richard Stevenson

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 83%**  
 >> SUB RATINGS  
 STEREO 78% MULTICHANNEL 87%

**FEATURES >> 88%**

**BUILD >> 78%**

**VALUE >> 98%**

**PRO**  
 A superbly smooth and spacious sound with tight, tuneful bass that underpins a class-leading performance at the price. The sassy remote, high-tech processing and great looks ice the cake.

**CON**  
 A little short on grunt and sparkle, particularly if you like to explore the volume tolerance of your neighbours.

**CONCLUSION**  
 An outstanding value for money amp that ups the ante at the £300 price point. A worthy successor to the STR-DB970 with a notable improvement in stereo performance as well as those extra channels for full-fat movie surround sound.

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 91%**



# Amps galore!

*Part of a vast range of modular amps, Myryad's new baby offers refinement aplenty*

**PRODUCT** Myryad MXI2080

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £1,100

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 44x10x36cm

- Weight: 11kg
- Rated power output: 80W/channel
- Seven line-level inputs
- Available in silver or black

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8863 9117 🌐 www.myryad.co.uk

**M**ryrad is a bold company. It operates in the hotly-contested area of midrange audio separates, offering both simple stereo and high-tech AV products, and when it launches a new range it does so with a pretty substantial splash. Thus it certainly was with the MX range, which made its official debut earlier this year, and will apparently eventually replace the well-regarded M series. The range covers CD and DVD players, integrated, pre and power amplifiers

and a surround processor, and putting 'amplifiers' in the plural does scant justice to their full plurality, which Myryad claims extends to no less than 35 off-the-shelf amplifier configurations.

That's thanks principally to the use of a modular construction based on two modules and two chassis, with various numbers of modules per chassis. In fact the MXI2080, the smaller of two integrated models, is one of the less flexible amps but it illustrates the principles perfectly well. Inside are two 80-watt power amp modules, a single preamp board and the control bits, plus three mains transformers: a big one for the power sections, a small toroid for preamp power and an even smaller frame transformer for standby power to the microprocessor power. Amid dire environmental warnings of excessive standby power

requirements for the myriad (sorry!) TVs, DVDs, set-top boxes and so on, Myryad deserves praise for keeping standby consumption to one watt.

The other module is a 150-watt chappie, broadly similar though beefed up, and the options get really plentiful when the larger chassis is brought into play, with space for up to 14 80-watt or seven 150-watt modules. Obviously the range is targeted at full-on surround systems, and the modular nature certainly makes it pretty painless for current stereo users to establish an upgrade path. It also makes it simpler for us reviewers, since the basic sound of a multichannel system should closely resemble that of a stereo one.

Not wishing, evidently, merely to establish a new range for the sake of it, Myryad has done some thinking around the subject of the audio circuitry used in these amps and has arrived at



what it calls the 'DC5 configuration'. It's a cunning arrangement at the amplifier's input stage which maximises speed and linearity using circuit tricks familiar to radio-frequency designers but seldom seen at audio frequencies. Such things don't exist in isolation so no one aspect of the amp's performance can be definitely attributed to it, but it's worthy of note that distortion is near-vanishing in level, certainly on a par with the best amplifiers we've seen anywhere near this price, except, oddly, for a little distortion at low frequencies – perhaps due to a stressed capacitor? Not something to lose much sleep over, though.

In terms of features the MXI2080 is equipped in fairly typical manner. Having

giving good feel and precision. Other Myryad equipment can be connected via the 'My-Link' control terminals. You'll need the remote for some functions, so don't lose it!

**SOUND QUALITY**

There's so sign of the debate over measurements versus sound losing any heat, but in this case at least the correlation looks good, with clean measurements reflected in clean sound. Clean, and also very assured. In fact, the very first impression this amp made (long before any attempt had been made to run it in, for a start) was of a no-nonsense approach that gets on with things without any fuss or bother and takes pretty much anything in its stride. The first track happened to be a recently-acquired opera recording, which immediately opened up and blossomed in a way it frankly hadn't before, heard on a pretty good system with an amp which in its day (not many years ago) was considered a class leader in the thousand-pound stakes.

Opera is often complex stuff and covers most of the frequency range, but what of simpler and/or more obviously rhythmical styles? You can expect fine results with both. Solo voice sounds natural and characterful, while single instruments are always clearly delineated and very definite both in emotional intent and in localisation. It's often a good test of amplifiers to see how precise the imaging is in a good recording of a single instrument (any of the

In short, this has every appearance of being a real all-rounder of an amplifier, happy with any musical style and content too, to play quietly or loud without either smothering things (in the former case) or becoming distressed and coarse (in the latter). Obviously, with insensitive speakers, 80 watts is not infinite power and there's a limit to loudness, but it's a pretty high limit and it's reached quite suddenly without the thickening and addition of grain that some amps contribute a few dB short of actual clip.

With the easy availability of power-amp-only connection, it was intriguing to test the power modules alone with a known preamp. It's quite clear that the slight restriction in absolute bass weight is a function of the power sections (hardly surprising), but the preamp section would appear to be not quite above reproach in the detail stakes as another level of musical detail was revealed in this mode. This may be harsh criticism as the preamp in question cost considerably more than the MXI2080, but it bodes well for the power amp models in the MX range which are electronically identical.

Finally, an interesting tale. Most of the listening was done with ATC speakers, a fairly typical box-speaker load. However, an opportunity arose for listening with recently restored vintage Quad electrostatics (ESL57), which seemed at first a little underwhelming, a little short of life and energy. Longer listening, and comparison with a couple of other amps, showed that in fact the Myryad was so much cleaner than familiar amplifiers that a lack of distortion was seeming at first to be a lack of insight. Quite the reverse! This is clearly an amp that relishes the challenge of electrostatics, not always an easy load. A hearty recommendation, then, for a well designed and tastefully presented amplifier – and by not too far-fetched extension, for its multitudinous brethren. **HFC**

*Richard Black*

**“The Myryad was so clean that a lack of distortion seemed at first to be a lack of insight. But it was quite the reverse!”**

electronically controlled input switching (relays) and volume control gives a certain amount of flexibility, which Myryad has employed to offer seven line inputs and two record outputs, balance control and input trim level. There are preamp outputs too, and in fact they must be linked externally to the power amp inputs using the supplied six-inch interconnects. Bi-amping is facilitated by doubled phono sockets on the power amp modules. Construction is neatly done, especially the power amp modules, which are a model of neat assembly, and component quality is generally high. Ease of use is pretty good, with the multi-turn volume control

usual ones will do, piano, guitar, violin etc, as long as it's well recorded): some amps spread the image while others keep it more precise. This amp is definitely in the latter category.

Rhythmically there's a slight concession to cost and rating in that really heavy bass in rock, for instance, loses just a touch of its weight, even at volume levels well within the notional 80-watt power envelope. There's rarely a substitute for power in hand in such circumstances. But what's perhaps more important is that you get plenty of drive and none of the apparent spreading of the beat that some amps seem to produce. There's plenty to keep the foot tapping!



**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 92%**

Very fine sound in all areas, with a great sense of assurance and plenty of genuine musical insight.

**FEATURES >> 90%**

Slight lack of really deep bass in high-octane music. Preamp section seems slightly veiled compared with (excellent) power amp.

**BUILD >> 88%**

**VALUE >> 88%**

**CONCLUSION**

A smart, well designed and above all very practical integrated amplifier that offers good value in all areas and a comprehensive upgrade path to boot. Multichannel versions appear to be even better value than the stereo variety.

**HI-FI CHOICE**

**OVERALL SCORE >> 90%**

**PRO**  
Very fine sound in all areas, with a great sense of assurance and plenty of genuine musical insight.

**CON**  
Slight lack of really deep bass in high-octane music. Preamp section seems slightly veiled compared with (excellent) power amp.

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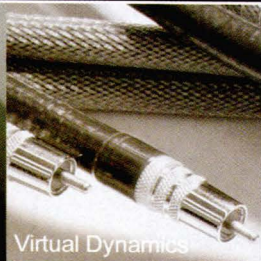
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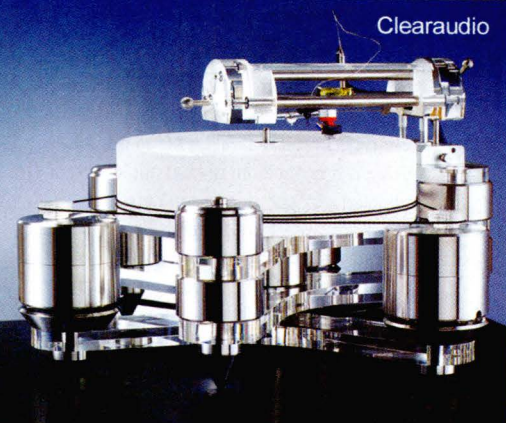


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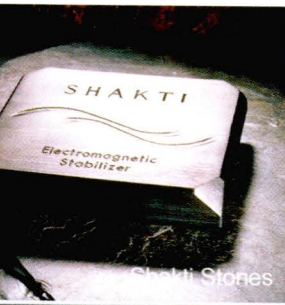


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# Small is beautiful

Searching for a good-looking, great-sounding sub-£350 loudspeaker? Try this compact Castle for size

**PRODUCT** Castle Richmond 3i  
**TYPE** Standmount loudspeaker  
**PRICE** £320 per pair  
**CONTACT** ☎ 01756 795333 # www.castle.uk.com

**W**ith over thirty years of experience under its belt, Skipton's finest loudspeaker maker knows a thing or two about doing a proper job. One of Castle Acoustics' more unusual, it claims unique, aspects is that it makes its own real-wood cabinets and the drive units to go in them. This is indeed rare and must help when it comes to quality control and production numbers that can be designed to match demand rather than minimum orders from parts suppliers. The only part of this speaker that isn't hand-made in Yorkshire is the crossover – apparently you can't beat the Taiwanese when it comes to the cost/quality equation in this department.

The Richmond 3i is the new base model in Castle's range and, naturally enough, the smallest. It's an evolution of a design that has been in production for over ten years and follows the trademark Castle driver arrangement of tweeter below bass/mid driver. The real-wood veneered cabinet is slightly larger than the Richmond 3 it replaces and is damped with bituminous pads on the inside, a proven technique for reducing cabinet coloration. The drive unit complement consists of a 130mm bass/mid driver with a cast-alloy chassis and a larger magnet than its predecessor. The cone itself is a woven carbon fibre unit. High frequencies are produced by a 19mm polyamide dome and both units can be driven in single or bi-wire mode. If opting for the former arrangement it's recommended that you connect to the HF (high-frequency) inputs.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Richmond 3i does most things well when it comes to the fine art of sound reproduction – it may not have heavyweight bass but does enough to give a good sense of bass notes. It's inevitably not the most dynamic speaker around but is more able in this respect than many compact loudspeakers. What it lacks in out and out transparency it makes up for with a great sense of integrity and some impressive low-level resolution.

Putting it on after a Focal-JMLab Chorus 706 S (£259), we got a distinct increase in resolution, the sound being cleaner and significantly more dynamic when dealing with heavily manipulated productions such as



Outkast's *The Love Below*. On its own terms the Castle continued to be an engaging and rewarding speaker, drawing us into Tom Waits's distorted world of clomping drums and squeaky percussion on the track *Underground* (from his landmark opus *Swordfishtrombones*).

There's a slight emphasis on the upper midrange that pulls out the details, both at high and low levels, rather well. It enhanced the sense of acoustic ambiance on Justin Spooner's guitar tracks and resolved the quieter instruments in jazz group Him's percussion-drenched grooves. Me'shell Ndegeocello's bass playing was also well served, the speaker picking up the tight butt-kicking groove with little difficulty.

This speaker times extremely well too, and it does so not by leaning hard on the leading edges, but by revealing the fluidity of the bass – it's the bass lines that propel the rhythm and even if you don't get their full breadth there's no missing the pluckage. Jaco and Joni (Pastorius and Mitchell) came over superbly on the latter's *Talk To Me*, a track that the Richmond draws you into and allows you to enjoy the quality of their interplay – they really don't make 'em like that very often.

This is a capable and entertaining speaker in a small and beautifully finished package, and it proves that if it's the music that matters, good quality standmounts still have the edge over the alternatives in this price range. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt;&gt; 83%</b>	
<b>EASE OF DRIVE &gt;&gt;&gt; 88%</b>	
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt;&gt; 87%</b>	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt;&gt; 90%</b>	
<b>PRO</b>	A fine example of the advantages of the bookshelf speaker in a beautifully finished box.
<b>CON</b>	Very little to criticise at the price, though you can get deeper bass for this money.
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	
A well balanced design, the Richmond 3i does most things well and the most important thing – musical communication – remarkably well for the price. If you value decent real-wood veneers, it's a serious contender.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b>	<b>&gt;&gt;&gt; 87%</b>



# Pushing the envelope

Looking for a high-class, one-box amp for all stereo and multichannel sources? Here's Pioneer's latest...

**PRODUCT** Pioneer VSA-AX10Ai-S

**TYPE** Integrated multichannel AV amplifier

**PRICE** £3,200

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 44x21x48cm  
 ● Weight: 34kg ● Enhanced MCACC auto set-up, microphone included ● i.Link (IEEE1394) DTPC encrypted serial digital interface ● THX Ultra2 with boundary gain compensation etc.

**CONTACT** ☎ 01753 789500 ● www.pioneer.co.uk

It is an honourable tradition for audiophiles to turn their noses up at multichannel hardware, and historically one could see where they were coming from. In all kinds of ways the hardware was inferior to dedicated stereo hardware – still is of course – and given the complexity of AV amps and processors, it is hard to imagine that the gap will ever be fully bridged. But make no mistake, it is narrowing.

Unfortunately, there is a price to pay. Top-class multichannel AV integrations like this new version of Pioneer's flagship VSA-AX10i are expensive and like all such amplifiers they are not exactly plug and play. More plug, keep plugging and then twiddle, with so many variables to be adjusted, set up and configured, that installation becomes a major headache.

The VSA-AX10i design team has never stopped working on this model, which was originally introduced around three years ago. It has been improved regularly, and this will continue in the same way in the future, helping it stay abreast of evolving standards and requirements in the ever-changing multichannel audio/video firmament. Where possible, old models can be updated with new firmware, but physical changes in the new model such as the new anti-resonance base (sourced from a specialist Japanese accessory

manufacturer) and major internal circuit changes mean that rebuilds are not economically viable this time around.

The first VSA-AX10i addressed the installation problem with an automatic, microphone-driven algorithm called MCACC (Multi Channel ACoustic Calibration) that sets up the system without user intervention. The new VSA-AX10Ai-S does the same, but the algorithm has been improved and extended to include quite a useful room equalisation facility, with two options always available on tap: an absolute setting which attempts to 'straight line' all responses, and one that matches the centre and surround speakers to the main front speakers, clearly the mode of choice for stereo replay as it avoids messing with the main stereo speakers. Room equalisation, however, is optional.

This is a 7.1-channel amplifier capable of 150 watts per channel with one or two channels



## “The Pioneer has exquisite control and definition... even with Dolby and DTS.”

driven, and somewhat less with all channels driven simultaneously, but it remains prodigiously powerful, and is fully THX Ultra2 certified to guarantee it is kosher. In fact, it is possible to connect up to 9.1 speakers, and the amp will choose which rear ones to use according to the sound processing pattern selected. Predictably, the range of surround sound options has been extended to include recent additions such as Dolby Pro Logic IIx, and it's also the first amp to support Microsoft's WMA9 Professional codec. Other refinements include optimised support for long, narrow rooms, an area where traditional multichannel systems can trip up, and there are improvements to the way that DSD data from SACD discs is handled across the i.Link connection (when hooked to an i.Link-equipped player like Pioneer's DV-868AVi). There are also some effective new bypass/direct options which can be invoked where digital processing or video are not part of the equation.

### SOUND QUALITY

One change in the new models not mentioned so far is from the previous over-engineered remote with its under-endowed LCD touch screen to a new one which is charged by a powered cradle like a PDA, and which includes various improvements, but which still uses a monochrome LCD display. A case of someone not bothering to read the plot, perhaps.

Aside from this, the VSA-AX10Ai-S is rather like the previous iteration, but clearly better quality. There are significant improvements when playing pure audio with the various bypasses selected, and this includes multichannel SACD and stereo CD and SACD using the matching Pioneer DV-868AVi player, which effectively turns into a high-quality universal transport when used via i.Link. Over the course of several weeks, the VSA-AX10Ai-S has served as a genuinely enjoyable stereo amplifier, with plenty of seamless power on tap and a raw physicality when called for, combined with a luminous sense of inner detail

and subtlety that isn't normally in the gift of home cinema electronics. The same trick was repeated with multichannel (and stereo) SACD, where the i.Link digital input and improvements to the handling of DSD give the combination clearly superior presence, authority and control. The improvement over using the same player from its analogue output is not massive, but it is real, and definitely worthwhile.

But this is also a top-ranking multichannel home cinema amplifier, one that stands comparison with the very best integrated solutions from Denon and Sony (see right), among others. Pioneer's engineers have done some excellent work to make the current version more transparent, and improve the reproduction of Dolby and DTS. The Pioneer has exquisite control and definition even with these data-reduced codecs, which until quite recently were not to be taken too seriously except with film soundtracks where the pictures provide a degree of psychoacoustic cover. What is surprising is just how far the latest codecs, bolstered by high bit rate processing, have improved the transparency and sense of soundstage presence from well recorded films while retaining much of the audio transparency of the amp playing straight PCM off compact disc.

DTS soundtracks in particular now have a presence and vitality that can make other amplifiers sound quite pedestrian, and which can bring a lot of raw power into the equation. What you get from the Pioneer has a great deal to do with the speakers you choose to use with it and the quality of the set-up, for which MCACC should be regarded as the first port of call, but subject to final detail revision on the basis of experience. In the final analysis, however, the VSA-AX10Ai-S with a really good multichannel soundtrack such as *Moulin Rouge*, has a range, transparency, dynamics and sheer musical expressiveness, that will come as a surprise to the more jaundiced watchers of the home cinema scene. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

## THE COMPETITION

### DENON AVC-A1SRA

Some of the sheen has been knocked off the Denon flagship by the Pioneer's auto set-up. But while you need to get your hands dirty to achieve a good set-up, there are several notable strengths here, including a very muscular power amplifier, which cruises along comfortably where earlier VSA-AX10is would turn off in self protection (in fairness, the latest Pioneer seems to be better capable of sustaining high drain loads at high volume levels), and a particularly excellent D/A section which can turn a CD player into a transport, with high-grade local D/A conversion. The Denon Link hi-res digital input is at least the equal of the Pioneer's i.Link technically, but is much less widely supported industry-wide.



### SONY TA-DA9000ES

This all-digital amp also uses i.Link, and is interoperable with Pioneer's hardware. Sonically, however, the Sony is a very different proposition, so different that the designers have included a facility that works on group delay to make it sound more like an analogue amp. The result is a design with a distinct learning curve. It is crisp and clean sounding, but it can lack image depth and its dry, but incredibly detailed quality might be off-putting to some – warm and cuddly it ain't. It also takes a long while to run in, so beware of quick A-B comparisons.



## VERDICT

### SOUND >> 89%

PRO  
Home cinema makes good in style with a well equipped and powerful package that addresses most of the main criticisms made of the breed.

### FEATURES >> 96%

CON  
Lacks HDMI interface, remote improved but still not ideal. Still complex to use and for fine tweaking after MCACC has had its way. Not upgradeable from previous versions.

### BUILD >> 85%

### VALUE >> 90%

### CONCLUSION

A genuine *tour de force*: a full-on home cinema amplifier that is good enough for high-quality multichannel audio from SACD or DVD-Audio, and which even passes muster in impressive style in two-channel stereo.

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

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# Two for one

Cambridge's Azur DAB/FM radio tuner comes at a tempting price, but does it deliver?

**PRODUCT** Cambridge Audio Azur 640T

**TYPE** DAB/FM radio tuner

**PRICE** £200

**CONTACT** ☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.cambridge-audio.co.uk

It's a year since we reviewed Cambridge's second-generation DAB tuner, the DAB500, but the Azur range clearly demanded a new take on DAB and here it is. It must surely have been tempting simply to re-case the DAB500 and have done, but this is a whole new product with a different front end (Radioscape instead of Imagination Technologies) and added features too.

Most noticeable is the inclusion of FM, which is an integral function of Radioscape's modules. The majority of DAB/FM tuners have to resort to separate front ends for each, but in this case a single module does the whole lot. This has two immediate side effects: first, to connect a decent FM antenna you need a UHF-F connector adaptor, and second, you get a digital output when listening to FM as all the FM decoding is done digitally. Actually, the single antenna input is a pain since you can't optimise reception on both bands given their different operational frequencies, but if you can tolerate a little compromise in reception on one band it's not too frustrating.

As on the DAB500, Cambridge offers its 'Natural Contour Technology' to give a slight tweak to the sound's tonal balance. 'Warm' and 'Lively' do broadly the same thing, tilting

the balance down at higher frequencies, but Warm does it slightly more. It's not a vast effect in either case and since 'off' is also an option it's at worst harmless!

Tuning is not quite as slick as on some DAB units as it relies on up/down buttons to step through the vast and growing list of stations you'll find in many areas, but presets (both bands) help and at least switching stations is swift. There's no provision for sorting stations but, unusually for a hi-fi tuner, there is an alarm function. L-band DAB reception is supported, adding some future-proofing.

## SOUND QUALITY

Cambridge has evidently put some work into this tuner because it does seem to sound just a touch clearer than most DAB 'wirelesses'. Tragically, however, what that often means in practice is that you can hear all the more clearly just how annoying the sound can be. Odd modulation effects on vocal sibilants, general background hash on busy pop, high-frequency twittering on classical orchestra, all audible in the greatest possible detail. On the other hand there are certainly things DAB does pretty well, such as quiet, simple classical music and in such cases the low level of background noise due to the tuner itself is welcome.

On FM the sound is interesting, for while it seems quite capable of achieving a good standard with a good RF input, it never quite manages to become very good even with near-perfect input from a large external

antenna. That's to say, it doesn't really manage the 'hi-fi niceties' such as hear-through detail and full-dimensional stereo imaging, but it does get the essentials with low background noise and lack of immediately obvious distortion.

Still, that's not a bad result in the circumstances, and this tuner should serve equally well for those who listen mainly to DAB but like the option of FM occasionally, and those who expect to migrate gradually to DAB. The price is right and it's a nice enough unit to use, but here's one for Cambridge to chew on: given that Freeview carries many DAB channels in better sound, how about a sound-oriented Freeview box with FM too? **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 83%</b> 	<b>PRO</b> Decent reception on both FM and DAB bands, and it manages a slight but consistent improvement in clarity over many other DAB radio tuners.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 86%</b> 	<b>CON</b> The FM performance is ultimately a little limited and lacking in detail, the DAB sound however is still limited by the medium.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 82%</b> 	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 87%</b> 	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Offering good sound and features at an attractive price point, this is a sensible purchase for anyone needing both bands. It's less good value if you already own a capable FM tuner, though.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE &gt;&gt; 85%</b>	

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# Tweeter right

Jamo's titchy E 700 packs in some intriguing features at an equally small price

**PRODUCT** Jamo E 700  
**TYPE** Standmount loudspeaker  
**PRICE** £150 per pair  
**CONTACT** ☎ 01788 573100  
 @ www.jamo.com

**Y**ou might associate Jamo with the boom box brigade but rest assured, the E 700 isn't of that ilk. In fact, it's tiny and about half the size of most of its rivals. Tiny it may be, but there's no denying that it's beautifully built. The solid, rear-ported cabinet is made from 16mm MDF and immaculately finished with a vinyl wrap.

Yet, what makes the E 700 unique at this price is its 'floating' tweeter. It's a conventional soft dome design, but mounted with minimum contact to a separate, die-cast front plate. The idea is to isolate it from bass resonance as much as possible to improve treble detail.

The woven fibreglass bass/mid cone is more conventional, but at 10cm in diameter, don't expect trouser flapping subsonics, long throw or not. Gold-plated binding posts are provided, but

the E 700 is not bi-wirable (this shouldn't be considered a drawback at this level)

If you've ever heard the original Linn Kan, then there's a good chance you'll know how the Jamo sounds. You have to adjust to the balance of the E 700, as there is, not surprisingly, a complete lack of deep bass. The scale of sound is also diminished which, when listening to a full orchestra, sounds as though one has been seated near the back of the concert hall. Once you've adapted to this balance, though, a pair of these little Jamos sounds remarkably good. The stereo imaging is superb for a speaker of this price, with rock solid positioning and amazing width of sound.

When bass and scale are less important, such as with acoustic music, you'll also find exquisite resolution and focus. That isolated tweeter certainly appears to benefit detail retrieval. Another upside of the lightweight bass response is pacey timing. Even though the sound could sometimes use a little more leading edge attack, it always remains rhythmical, composed, and thoroughly involving. **HFC**

Dominic Todd



## VERDICT – Jamo E 700

**SOUND** >> 78%



**EASE OF DRIVE** >> 80%



**BUILD** >> 83%



**VALUE** >> 89%



## CONCLUSION

A curate's egg of a speaker. A severe lack of bass and scale is offset by exquisite focus and staging. Best used in small rooms, or with a subwoofer.

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

# Balanced Fusion

Classic budget speaker design from Tannoy

**PRODUCT** Tannoy Fusion 2  
**TYPE** Standmount loudspeaker  
**PRICE** £150 per pair  
**CONTACT** ☎ 01236 420199  
 @ www.tannoy.com

**T**he Tannoy Fusion 2 is a more conventional speaker than the Jamo, but none the worse for it. It's physically much larger, precluding it from literal 'bookshelf' use. Despite being front-ported, Tannoy suggests a distance of at least 50cm from the rear wall. The finish isn't as good as the Jamo, with an inferior chipboard cabinet, although it's at least internally braced.

Crucially, the front baffle is also constructed from the denser, acoustically superior, MDF.

There's nothing unique about the woven fabric dome tweeter, although the construction would suggest a smooth treble balance. At 16.5cm, however, the fibre pulp bass cone is far larger and should easily eclipse the Jamo at the bottom end. Unlike the Jamo, the Tannoy is bi-wirable although, in this class of speaker,

the sonic benefits of doing so are usually fairly negligible.

After the Jamo, the Fusion 2 immediately strikes one as having a much greater sense of impact and scale of sound. Given its size, this is no surprise, yet it is certainly better suited to large-scale music. The down side, though, is a shrunken soundstage.

Although fair for their price, in comparison to the Jamo, the Tannoy sounded almost boxy. Treble response was good, and integrated well with the midrange – despite its conventional mounting, the treble detail was every bit as good as that of the Jamo.

With some music there was a hardening of sound that could become uncomfortable at higher volumes, but most disappointing of all was the timing, which sounded leaden and uninvolved. To be fair to the Tannoy, it treated all types of music in a cohesive and even-handed manner, but what was significantly absent was the spark that makes good speakers truly compelling. **HFC**

Dominic Todd



## VERDICT – Tannoy Fusion 2

**SOUND** >> 72%



**EASE OF DRIVE** >> 88%



**BUILD** >> 74%



**VALUE** >> 85%



## CONCLUSION

A decent budget all-rounder that suits a wide variety of music and systems. Not the most exciting or detailed sound for £150, though.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
 >> **79%**

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# Shoestring SACD

Fancy dipping your toe into SACD waters? Sony's new £150 'UK-tuned' player could be just the ticket

**PRODUCT** Sony SCD-XE597

**TYPE** SACD/CD audio disc player

**PRICE** £150

**CONTACT** ☎ 08705 111999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

At the heart of Sony's latest attempt to offer SACD sound on a budget is, not surprisingly, its SACD chip. This processes both SACD and CD signals and sends them to a common DAC. In order for the CD signal to be compatible it first goes through an 8x oversampling digital filter, and then a noise shaper. The noise shaper puts out a one-bit signal at 64 times the CD sampling frequency. Sixty-four times 44.1kHz equals 2.8224MHz, which is the same sampling frequency as SACD. Interestingly, the DAC itself is claimed to combine the best attributes of both one-bit and multi-bit converters, in what Sony calls a 'multi-level' DAC.

In multichannel mode, the speakers' time alignment can be adjusted. This will be of particular interest for those with a compromised speaker layout or oddly shaped room. Once aligned, helped via the player's inbuilt display, multichannel effects should sound more cohesive.

The rest of the machine is rather more conventional. Although Sony makes great play of its 'transformer', it is simply of the frame type and no great shakes. At least the SACD circuit is fed directly from it though, which isn't always the case in low-cost 'universal' DVD players. More impressive, however, is the smattering of quality-brand capacitors, such as Elna and Rubycon, in the output stage. These at least show some effort has been made to tune the player.

As you'd expect from Sony, the finish is flawless, but the actual build quality is less than sturdy. The metal chassis is pressed from a particularly thin metal, although the damping panels on the lid are another nod towards audiophile credibility.

In addition to the SACD facility, the SCD-XE597 is well equipped. There are full programming facilities, CD Text and an optical digital output. Sadly though, both electrical digital and headphone outputs appear to have been omitted.

## SOUND QUALITY

Primarily the SCD-XE597 is an SACD player, so we began by listening in two-channel SACD. The results were certainly impressive with David Bridie's *Dive*. Most notable was the depth and breath of staging. Even without the aid of multichannel, the Sony made a convincing job of enveloping the listener with sound. Within the sound stage, individual instruments and vocals were precisely located, and well separated from the rest of the mix. While it's true that the bass wasn't especially deep, it was at least taut and well controlled. Overall the sound was refined and cohesive if, perhaps, a touch too squeaky clean and 'processed' for some.

Switching to multichannel brought about two discernable improvements. Even with the same front speaker combination (including subwoofer), the bass appeared to breathe more freely. There was a little extra impact, as the strain of producing the entire track was taken away from just two speakers. The second improvement was an even more expansive sound stage. With five speakers this should

hardly come as a surprise, but the manner in which the Sony carefully steered and directed the sound was impressive nonetheless.

After SACD, the conventional CD performance came as a slight disappointment. The same smooth, well-integrated sonic balance was there, yet the staging suffered. The sound was also less clearly focused. That said, with Dr John's *Chickee Le Pas*, the Sony still put in a fine performance. Separation was good, and there was decent texture of both vocals and instruments. For the price, the bass weight was also well up to scratch.

Against CD-only rivals from Marantz and Cambridge, however, the Sony couldn't quite compete. Although it revealed plenty of detail, the slightly indistinct percussion and rather slow timing let the side down. A decent budget player with CD then, but not the best. **HFC**

Dominic Todd

VERDICT	
<b>SOUND &gt;&gt; 77%</b>  SUB RATINGS SACD 85% CD 68%	<b>PRO</b> SACD quality on a shoestring, with reasonable CD performance to boot. Well finished and sensibly equipped with most of the features you'd ever need.
<b>FEATURES &gt;&gt; 87%</b> 	<b>CON</b> Can't match the best CD-only rivals for sound quality, and build quality is lightweight. An electrical digital output would be handy.
<b>BUILD &gt;&gt; 74%</b> 	
<b>VALUE &gt;&gt; 89%</b> 	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> A great-value SACD player, showing marked improvements over universal DVD players anywhere near the price. Against the best budget CD players it just misses out, but if you're curious about SACD, this is an excellent entry-level machine.	
<b>HI-FI CHOICE</b> >>> <b>82%</b> <b>OVERALL SCORE</b>	



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MESSENGER

# LOUDSPEAKERS

Big or small, two-way or three-way – there's plenty to pick from in this high-class group

This month's group test features six fairly upmarket loudspeakers which demonstrate a surprisingly wide variation in size, shape, type and configuration. About the only thing they all almost have in common is their use of conventional moving-coil drivers – and even with these, a ribbon exception proves the rule.

It's highly significant that such a wide range of alternatives is available when price isn't the overriding consideration, and firm evidence that no single formula defines the loudspeaker stereotype. Indeed, there's little apparent relationship between the price of these speakers, and their size or complexity.

Three of our six come from Denmark on this occasion, while just two are made by UK brands, the final example being Canadian in origin. Working up the price ladder, the new and improved PMC FB1+ sells for £1,625. This handsome two-way transmission line floorstander earned a Best Buy in its original form, and upgrade kits are also available to convert earlier examples to this new '+' version.

Four of our models are close to the £2,000 mark, though Dynaudio's attractively compact Contour 1.4 standmount, with its distinctive shield-shaped alloy baffle, costs just £1,850 on its own, its optional stands adding a further £150 to the price.

The £1,900 Hawk, from French-Canadian brand Totem, is a tiny and very pretty two-way floorstander, based around a main driver one size smaller than the others assembled here. Next up is the £1,980 Helicon 300, a very unusual and distinctive standmount from the Danish Dali operation with its high-gloss finish, curved sides, classy main driver and dome/ribbon combination tweeter.

B&W's £2,000 703 is making a repeat HFC appearance, but its first time in a group test. A full four-driver three-way with a unique 'surroundless' midrange driver and complex enclosure, it's also the most substantial, and clearly represents the best material value.

But Danish brand Audiovector also makes a welcome return to the UK, with its Mi 3-series two-and-a-half-way

floorstander. This speaker is uniquely upgradeable – the Signature version we tried sits on the third rung of Audiovector's price ladder at £2,320, though the base model is just £1,140, and customers can move up a five-step scale as and when funds permit. **HFC**

## EQUIPMENT USED

- ▶ Naim CDS 3 CD player
- ▶ Burmester 001 CD player
- ▶ Linn Sondek LP12 turntable
- ▶ Rega RB1000 tonearm
- ▶ Linn Akiva cartridge
- ▶ Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
- ▶ Naim NAC552 preamp
- ▶ Naim NAP500 power amp
- ▶ Vertex AQ and Naim cables

## MUSIC USED

- ▶ Tom Waits *Nighthawks At The Diner*
- ▶ Lambchop *Aw C'mon*
- ▶ Joni Mitchell *Shadows And Night*
- ▶ Mr Scruff *Keeping It Unreal*
- ▶ Robbie Robertson *Robbie Robertson*
- ▶ LSO Rostropovich *Shostakovich Symphony No 11*
- ▶ BBC Radios 3 & 4 were also used extensively

## ON TEST



Audiovector Mi 3 Signature  
£2,320

B&W 703  
£2,000

Dali Helicon 300  
£1,980

Dynaudio Contour S 1.4  
£1,850

PMC FB1+  
£1,625

Totem Hawk  
£1,900

## LISTENING TESTS

Loudspeaker listening poses more complex problems than those involved in assessing other components. Speakers vary greatly, and interact strongly and often unpredictably with the room. The difficulty facing sequential unsighted loudspeaker presentations is the tendency to judge each according to how its balance differs from the previous model. Accordingly, extended hands-on listening sessions were adopted for this group, giving scope to adjust to the changes in balance and to experiment with the positioning.

## LAB TESTS

The speakers were tested under in-room conditions to best represent real-world conditions. The equipment used included a Neutrik Audiograph analogue signal generator with synchronised pen recorder, which was used to plot the far-field in-room averaged response traces and impedance plots. Pair-matching was also checked at one metre.

**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 speakers compare across quantitative and qualitative measures. Individual parameters are assessed and shown as better or worse than the group average.

**1] Sensitivity:** Sensitivity measures how loud a speaker will go for a given voltage from the amp. It's scaled to 2.83V at 1m (one watt for an eight-ohm load). This figure can be misleading, as sensitivity varies significantly and as lower-impedance speakers extract more current and hence power from an amp than higher-impedance ones.

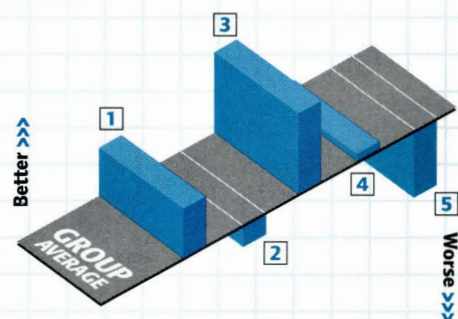
**2] Bass extension:** A speaker's bass is heavily modified by the room. To replicate 'real world' conditions, our figure represents the averaged bass roll-off frequency at -6dB ref the broad midband, measured across the far field for a stereo pair in a 4.3x2.6x5.5m room.

**3] Ease of drive:** The lower the impedance, the more current it extracts from a driving amp for a given volume. Lower-impedance designs have higher sensitivities, reducing voltage requirements for given loudness levels.

**4] Overall frequency balance:** Overall broad frequency response trends do much to define the character of a speaker, although true neutrality is the obvious goal.

**5] Response smoothness:** The small-scale smoothness of a speaker has much to do with the delicacy of the sound, and its ability to deliver subtle harmonic shading.

## OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



£2,320 per pair ☎ 01732 451 938 🌐 www.audiovector.com

# AUDIOVECTOR MI 3 SIG

A high-class, upgradeable speaker from Denmark

This is the fourth Audiovector to come our way, and each of its three predecessors has been recommended by *HFC*. The company was founded way back in 1972, but its appearances in Britain have been rather intermittent and sporadic. F3/Audiovector is actually the third distributor to handle the brand across a nine-year span, though on this occasion the operation is a subsidiary of the Danish parent, which perhaps bodes rather better for future continuity.

Audiovector's ranges are more compact, more logical and more interesting than the norm. The M-series consists of just two basic stereo models, the Mi 1 standmount and Mi 3 floorstander. Each of these, however, comes in four versions – basic, Super, Signature and Avantgarde – with steadily improving specifications and correspondingly increasing prices (the Mi 3 Signature is tested here). Most unusually, it's possible to upgrade from one level to the next, as and when funds permit



and the inclination strikes. Active drive conversion is also possible, at any stage.

The assorted propaganda that accompanies the speaker goes on and on, and indeed on, without making any real attempt to explain the distinctions between the different levels, and the website is equally obtuse. As we understand it, the step to Super involves an extra front baffle; the Signature then adds an extra rear baffle, a leaf-spring decoupling plinth and an improved tweeter.

The net result is an exceptionally solid and hefty two-and-a-half-way floorstander, rear-ported and finished in a mix of real-wood veneer and metallic silver paintwork. The two main drivers have 125mm diameter cones of an unspecified material, while copper-plated poles and alloy rings minimise distortion. A high-class Evotech fabric dome tweeter is actually vented at the rear, via a large diameter tube right through the enclosure to the back panel. Three pairs of terminals give complete wiring flexibility.

## SOUND QUALITY

This might be the most costly speaker in our group, but the sound quality it delivers provides ample justification. By a comfortable margin this is also the smoothest and most neutral speaker in the group, and while those two characteristics are not the be-all or end-all of a successful design, they do go a good way down the road.

In consequence, the Mi 3 Signature brings very little of its own character to the party. Rather than finding oneself listening to the speakers, they seem virtually to disappear – aurally that is – making it that much easier to concentrate on the music being reproduced. This is further bolstered by fine image focus with convincingly accurate perspectives.

Criticisms are minor. There's maybe just a touch of excess warmth and weight through the broad bass region, which slightly thickens male speech, for example. And there's also a slight hint of boxiness further up the voice band. But neither of these points can be regarded as serious or problematic.

The treble is notably sweet and coherent, bringing considerable delicacy to the fine detail, reflecting the high quality of the tweeter used here, and also the special loading arrangements it uses. Although the treble output at the rear won't be phase-coherent, it does contribute to the distributed treble energy in the room, and adds to the all-round airiness of the sound. **HFC**

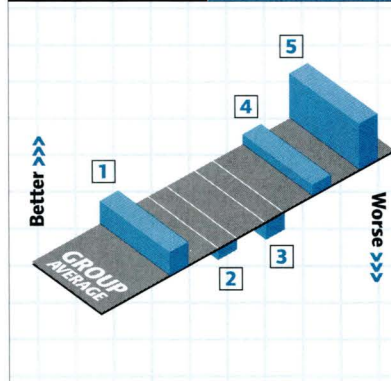


## LAB REPORT

This Mi 3 Signature model combines a good sensitivity rating of 90dB/2.83V with an exceptionally smooth, even and well balanced frequency balance, measured under far-field in-room averaged conditions. Even the bass decade (20-200Hz), which has as much to do with the characteristics of the room as the loudspeaker itself, holds within surprisingly close limits down to 24Hz, with the speakers kept well clear of the surrounding walls.

This speaker isn't totally neutral: the bass region is perhaps 1-2dB too strong; there's a very slight upper midband excess at 700Hz-1kHz; and the treble peaks up a little at the very top end, around 14kHz. These factors are all minor, but will contribute a touch of 'character' to the sound. As with most two-and-a-half-ways, the impedance shows a load that is quite demanding, though in this case it stays above 4 ohms throughout. Maximum port output is centred on 33Hz.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +20%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +40%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91 dB	90dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8 ohms	6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	n/s	24Hz

## VERDICT

SOUND >> 91%



PRACTICALITY >> 82%



BUILD >> 90%



VALUE >> 84%



This Signature version of the third rung up the Mi3 ladder turns out to be a very smooth and beautifully balanced performer with superb neutrality, a wide dynamic range and a warm, sweet character.

**HI-FI CHOICE** **88%**  
OVERALL SCORE



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

## B&W 703

The top model in B&W's middle range is crammed with good ideas

**W**orking-based B&W is the largest of all the specialist hi-fi speaker brands, a situation created and bolstered by the considerable resources it devotes to research and development. With the upmarket Nautilus 800 series still selling strongly and the budget 600s recently revived, it was time last year to take a fresh look at the mid-price range, previously known as CDM NTs but now more logically christened the 700 series. This 703 is the most costly and elaborate of three stereo 700s, all of which share a number of interesting design solutions. All also have some *HFC* previous, the 703 originally coming under scrutiny nearly a year ago (*HFC* 247).

In terms of enclosure complexity and driver line-up, this speaker is way ahead of the rest of the test group, suggesting that its price tag is also rather better value than the group average. It has a top-mounted tube-loaded tweeter, in order to give wide high-frequency distribution and time-align the midrange and tweeter voice coils. The box proper has a choice

of classy real-wood veneer finishes, and neat front-to-back tapering that avoids parallel sides. A single curved piece forms the front and top faces, conferring excellent structural integrity and giving better distributed vertical box modes and tweeter reflections.

A full three-way design, the 703 uses one of B&W's 'surroundless' FST (Fixed Suspension Transducer) midrange drivers. This is possible because the 140mm mid-only Kevlar cone vibrates rather than pumps air, so the edge has no need to accommodate fore 'n' aft excursion and can therefore be expressly designed to absorb rather than reflect those vibrations instead. There are two bass drivers, port-loaded and operating in tandem, each with 120mm diameter Kevlar-reinforced paper cone/dome diaphragms. The tweeter has a 25mm alloy dome. Just two pairs of terminals are fitted, conveniently low down near the floor.

### SOUND QUALITY

The immediate impression with this speaker was of the sheer generosity of sound it creates. It's not the smoothest sound around, nor the most neutral or least coloured for that matter. There's at least a hint that the bass, mid and treble aren't quite as securely glued together as they might be, and the sense of total top-to-bottom coherence is just a shade lacking. But it's also a vivid and exciting communicator that always sounds interesting, and is unfailingly successful in dragging one into the music.

In our original review of the 703, the top end was found to be a little obvious and aggressive. A subtle change in production would seem to have taken place that effectively answers that criticism, and while the top end here remains quite strong, it is also rather smoother and sweeter this time around.

The bass end is particularly effective, delving seriously deep with lots of power and authority, yet also staying even and agile with no tendency to thicken up and thump in the mid-bass region. For such a large speaker, the lack of boxiness is thoroughly impressive, and evidence of the care that has gone into the enclosure engineering. The top end has an airy, room-filling quality that's very inviting, helping to create precise and open imaging.

One can fairly criticise some midband colour here, as well as a mild loss of energy through the presence zone, though the low box contribution ensures a wide dynamic range and that unusual midrange driver brings considerable vigour and vibrancy to the sonic proceedings. **HFC**

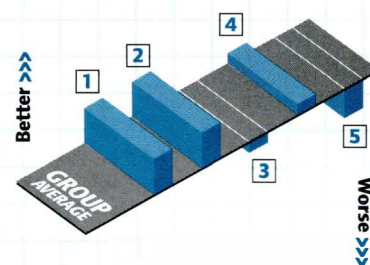


### LAB REPORT

Although the overall in-room response is pretty good, measured under far-field in-room-averaged conditions, it also lacks smoothness, the separate contributions of bass, mid and treble sections being clearly visible via shallow yet also quite broad depressions centred on 300Hz and 2.5kHz. The bass region is notably smooth, even and deep, and quite strong throughout with the speakers placed well clear of walls, registering -5dB at 20Hz under in-room conditions. The midband is less smooth, tending to emphasise the upper half, roughly from 800Hz-1kHz. The treble looks well enough judged, but does tend to peak up quite noticeably at 5kHz.

Sensitivity is a generous 91dB/2.83V, though that's partly because the load is quite demanding in amplifier current terms, dipping to 3 ohms at around 110Hz, and staying below 4 ohms right up to 380Hz. The port here is tuned to 30Hz, reinforcing the low bass.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >>> +30%
- 2] Bass extension >>> +30%
- 3] Ease of drive >>> -10%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >>> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >>> -25%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	91dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8 ohms	5 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	30Hz	20Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >>> 89%**

**PRACTICALITY >>> 85%**

**BUILD >>> 88%**

**VALUE >>> 88%**

**HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 88%**

This unusual and stylish three-way has an external tweeter and 'surroundless' midrange. Bass is powerful, even and authoritative, while the sound is lively and dynamic overall, if not quite the smoothest around.



**£1,980 per pair** ☎ 01977 798844 🌐 www.dali.dk

# DALI HELICON 300

*This beautiful standmount features some very unusual drivers*

**D**ali – an acronym for Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries – has been around for a good many years now, and this is the twelfth model that *HFC* has covered since 1990. The company has links to Denmark's largest hi-fi retail chain, and makes a huge range of models, many of which are being imported to Britain by newly appointed distributor, 'A' Audiosolutions.

Picking one's way through the Dali portfolio is quite confusing, but this Helicon sits between the Royal and Euphonia ranges, both of which have appeared in *HFC* in recent years. Looking back, it's clear that prices have increased somewhat since then, presumably as a consequence of the change in distribution.

The Helicon 300 is the standmount in a three-strong range of stereo models. A price tag just a gnat's short of two grand is a lot to ask for a standmount, and you're entitled to expect something a bit special by way of justification. And that's pretty much what you get. Extracted from its packing, the lustrous lacquer-over-wood finish is very definitely *de luxe*, and the prospect of spoiling it by using spiked stands seemed almost sacrilegious, so the Blu-tack option was used instead.

The rear-ported enclosure is not only exquisitely finished, it's also rather elegantly shaped, the sides formed into a shallow curve, so that the back of the speaker is significantly narrower than the front. This is not only aesthetically pleasing, it's also functional,

avoiding the parallel sides that create focused internal standing waves, and distributing reflections. The enclosure is made from glued layers of thin MDF, assisting self-damping and presumably helping to create the curves.

The main driver has a 165mm cast frame and a curved-profile 125mm pulp cone impregnated with long wood fibres. The top end is handled by a special two-driver module, similar to that used in the Euphoniae, combining a 25mm fabric dome with a 10x55mm ribbon device on a single alloy chassis, ensuring fine mechanical integrity, wide bandwidth and consistent lateral dispersion.

## SOUND QUALITY

This is a delicious loudspeaker that's very easy to like, because of the way it projects and communicates the music with a fine combination of delicacy and enthusiasm. It's not totally neutral, but the character it imposes on the music is fundamentally benign, while the high quality of the various ingredients comes through strongly.

A top quality standmount such as this has a lightness of touch that transcends the tonal balance or bass extension. The Helicon 300 packs plenty of bottom-end punch, and even a modicum of 'thump', yet it never sounds ponderous or heavy. When the enclosure is as tough and carefully shaped as this, the 'box signature' becomes vanishingly low, and you get to hear what is effectively the drive units operating in free space, bringing a purity, agility and freedom from time-smear that is difficult for the floorstander to achieve.

And the drive units here are clearly top class. The 300's bass/mid unit has a very clean and crisp delivery, with minimal energy storage. It's a little on the lean side through the lower registers, and then rather forward through the midrange proper, with the effect of a net sound that tends to push voices a little forward in the mix, while lacking a little warmth and body lower down. The top end is smooth, sweet, and very well judged, never drawing attention to itself, and integrating beautifully with the rest. **HFC**

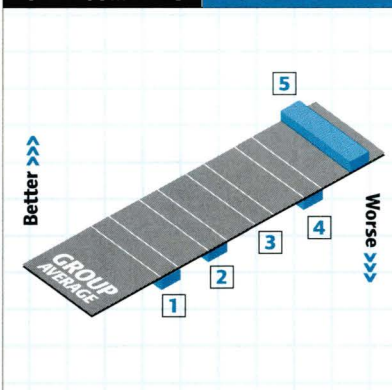


## LAB REPORT

Apart from some excess around our main 55Hz room mode, the Helicon delivered some very decent far-field in-room-averaged frequency responses indeed. Sited well clear of walls on 60cm stands, the overall balance held within tight  $\pm 3$ dB limits right across the band upwards from 60Hz, and with impressive ultimate bass extension to boot (-6dB at 24Hz in-room). The overall limits may be somewhat modest, but there's some unevenness along the way here, plus a definite trend that shows a broad but modest excess through the upper midband (700Hz-2kHz), plus some leanness through the lower midband (150-600Hz).

Given the decent bass extension, sensitivity proved to be a very respectable 89dB/2.83V, and while the impedance hovers around 5-6 ohms through most of the range, that shouldn't pose any problems for the driving amplifier. The port here is tuned to a low 35Hz, which helps account for the good bass extension for a speaker of this size.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -10%
- 2] Bass extension >> -10%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 0%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> -10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> +10%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	4 ohms	6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	n/s	24Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >> 88%**

**PRACTICALITY >> 85%**

**BUILD >> 90%**

**VALUE >> 82%**

A stylish standmount with radical drivers including a dome/ribbon tweeter module. It has a lively and open sound that's free from boxiness, and a character that's a little lean and forward overall.

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

£1,850 per pair ☎ 0207 378 1810 🌐 www.dynaudio.com

## DYNAUDIO CONTOUR S 1.4

*Dynaudio's upmarket standmount now features an alloy baffle*

One of Denmark's longest-running and best-established brands, Dynaudio has built much of its reputation on the basis of high-class main drivers, whose high power handling has proved popular in both domestic and professional audio circles.

The Contour has long history as its middle-range series, above the entry-level Audiences but below the 'high-end' Confidence and Evidence models. *HFC* reviewed the original Contour 1.3 in 1993, and then its MkII successor in 2001. Those two standmounts were clearly ancestors of this new Contour S 1.4, but the S-suffix and change in type number indicates that this new design has actually undergone a major makeover, both in engineering and selling price.

In fact, the new Contour S models look quite different from their predecessors, by virtue of a very smart but unquestionably obtrusive shield-shaped metal baffle, 5mm thick, which stands slightly proud of the box proper. One impressive feature of the 1.3 MkII was that its £1,200 price was unchanged since the MkI eight years previously. Given the dramatic changes with the new S-series, it's no surprise to find that the price has stepped up significantly.

That metal baffle, and especially the way it overlaps the enclosure, very much dominates the appearance, creating a unique and interesting aesthetic. Whether you like the look

or not, its individuality is surely a breath of fresh air. Certainly it should give fine mechanical integrity, and also help to lose any waste heat from the drivers. The varying width will reduce baffle-edge diffraction effects, and the whole baffle/driver assembly is decoupled from the enclosure proper via a lossy gasket.

The enclosure is attractively slim and beautifully finished in real-wood veneers. The rear panel has a large port, and the whole speaker sits on a little plinth which houses the crossover network and single terminal pair. The two-way driver line-up is inverted here, the classy Esotec 28mm fabric dome tweeter mounted below the 115mm MSP plastic bass/mid diaphragm.

### SOUND QUALITY

The bass end of any speaker system is as much a function of the listening room as the speaker itself, and here the Contour S 1.4 threw up an all too familiar problem – familiar, that is, because the same factor was observed with the earlier Contour standmounts. While the midrange and treble are very nicely judged and notably neutral, this speaker does have a tendency to thump a bit in the bass, and 'thicken up' bottom end textures somewhat as a result.

It's almost certainly to do with the port tuning. All the other models in this group have ports tuned to 30-35Hz, whereas this Dynaudio's generous port is tuned to a much higher 48Hz, and this

over-excites one of the major standing wave modes in our listening room. Neither the speaker nor the room can really be held responsible for what is actually down to an interaction of the two, with some negative sonic consequences.

Further up the band the Contour S 1.4 is extremely well mannered, with an essential neutrality throughout that is most notable for its carefully balanced restraint. There's a touch of nasality on speech, to be sure, but it's pretty well controlled overall.

Image focus is particularly fine, and the dynamic range through the midband is very good indeed, bringing an engaging, unflappable expression to speech and other voices. **HFC**

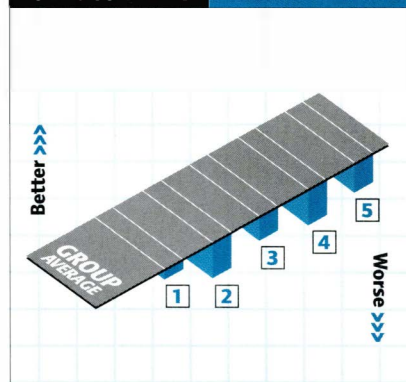


### LAB REPORT

The relatively high-frequency 48Hz port tuning used here has unfortunate consequences. Even with the speakers mounted well clear of walls on 60cm stands, its interaction with a major room mode led to a +10dB peak at 55Hz under our far-field in-room regime, which is bound to have subjective implications. Another rather smaller but still quite obvious – and probably subjectively more significant – peak of roughly +4dB was found around 250-300Hz. The responses above that point were very well ordered, albeit a little uneven at 800Hz-1.5kHz, while the treble proper looks exceptionally smooth.

Sensitivity measures a very respectable 88dB/2.83V, and this was achieved alongside a reasonably straightforward impedance characteristic, which was 5 ohms or more through the bass region, around 6ohms or more through the mid and treble, and just dipped down to 4 ohms around 150-200Hz.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >>> -10%
- 2] Bass extension >>> -30%
- 3] Ease of drive >>> -20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >>> -30%
- 5] Response smoothness >>> -25%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	85dB	88dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	4 ohms	6 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	n/s	28Hz

### VERDICT

**SOUND >>> 83%**



**PRACTICALITY >>> 82%**



**BUILD >>> 90%**



**VALUE >>> 77%**



This standmount's sound has fine mid-to-treble coherence and neutrality, but the bass tended towards thumpiness and thickening, and port tuning was ill-suited to our listening room and conditions.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE **81%**



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# PMC FB1+

*PMC's popular floorstander has an upgradeable sonic facelift*

**O**ne of Britain's youngest but fastest growing speaker makers, PMC is that rare example of a speaker company that has become equally successful in both domestic hi-fi and professional monitoring circles, albeit with rather different models for these very different fields of activity.

The one unifying feature through all its designs is the use of transmission line bass loading, which makes it all the more surprising that the FB1, introduced in 1999, more than a decade after the company was founded, was its first domestic floorstander. It was a great success, receiving Best Buy in *HFC* in 2000.

PMC has slowly but surely built up its current range of models over many years; it doesn't keep changing models or ranges, and even the original LB1 is still in production today. But potential improvements do come along occasionally, and a clutch of these are incorporated in new '+' versions of the FB1, TB2 and DB1 models. These include a new type of internal damping foam for the

transmission lines, a better quality tweeter (the same as used in some of PMC's more costly models), plus the consequent necessary changes to the crossover network, including the decision to choose Solen capacitors on sound quality grounds. Upgrade kits are available so that existing owners of these three models can bring them up to '+' spec.

As before, this is an attractively slim and tall two-way floorstander with rounded baffle edges, finished in a selection of high-quality real-wood veneers. A curvaceous black MDF plinth extends the footprint, providing secure accommodation for chunky floor spikes. Over the years the price has increased somewhat, from the original FB1's £1,275 to £1,625 for the current FB1+, largely down to the cost of manufacturing in Britain, apparently.

Creating the folded, tapered, three-metre transmission line makes cabinet construction both complex and expensive, but the internal partitions also provide considerable stiffening for the enclosure side panels. The main driver has a 170mm cast alloy frame with a 125mm doped paper cone, while the new tweeter has a 27mm fabric dome. Twin terminal pairs close to the floor offer bi-wire/amping.

## SOUND QUALITY

When the FB1+ was delivered, we had a brief opportunity to compare this 'new' model with its near-identical predecessor. This immediately made it very obvious that the upgrades had brought worthwhile improvements, especially in a considerable reduction in 'boxy' midband colorations, and also in the sweetness and openness at the very top end of the band.

Indeed, presumably because of the new and improved tweeter, there's significantly more relative top-end energy than before, so that the treble is now a little more obvious than it was prior to the upgrade. Obvious, partly because the presence zone is still quite restrained. But not in any way unpleasant – this characteristic helps to enhance the fine detail – yet because the new tweeter/network sounds significantly sweeter than before, there's no attendant harshness or unpleasantness.

Can this single main driver compete with the multiple arrays used elsewhere in this group? The answer is an emphatic yes. Although one wouldn't describe it as particularly punchy or driving, there's no real shortage of bass warmth or weight here, and the simplicity of the straight two-way always adds a lightness of touch and freedom from time-smear that multiples often have trouble matching. **HFC**

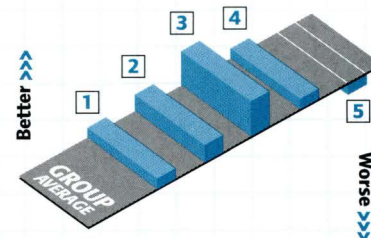


## LAB REPORT

When it was sited well clear of walls and measured under far-field in-room-averaged conditions, the FB1+ revealed a very impressive overall frequency balance, holding within fine +/-4dB limits right across the audio band from 20Hz upwards. Although the overall balance is very good indeed, there's also a fair amount of unevenness: there's a modest but observable peak at 250-300Hz, a slight over-emphasis around the 750Hz mark, and a broad but shallow presence depression centred around 2.3kHz. Above that zone the treble peaks up a little, reaching a maximum at 6kHz.

Sensitivity is a very respectable 89dB/2.83V, especially in the context of fine ultimate bass extension (-5dB at 20Hz in-room, far-field) and a very easy-to-drive amplifier load, which stays above 6 ohms throughout. The fine bass extension is due to the fact that the transmission line is tuned to a low 30Hz.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> +10%
- 2] Bass extension >> +15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> +30%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >> -10%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	89dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8 ohms	8 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	22Hz	20Hz

## VERDICT

- SOUND >> 90%**  
[Progress bar]
- PRACTICALITY >> 87%**  
[Progress bar]
- BUILD >> 87%**  
[Progress bar]
- VALUE >> 90%**  
[Progress bar]

The midband of this large two-way transmission line speaker is restrained but beautifully natural, while the balance is very impressive indeed, though it could be smoother overall and more muscular.

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



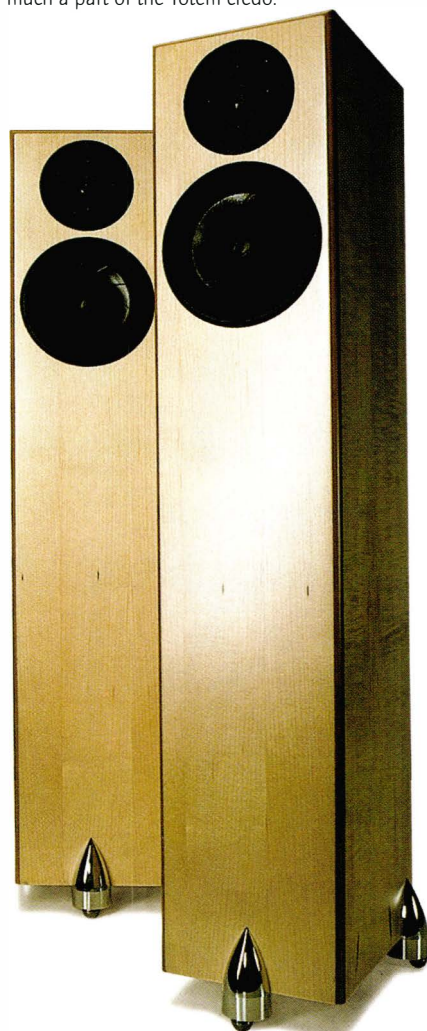
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# TOTEM HAWK

*This cute little floorstander sounds much bigger than you'd expect*

**T**otem loudspeakers are French Canadian in origin. Both the Model One and the Forest have had positive outcomes in *HFC* in the past, and the arrival of this Hawk model brought a strong feeling of *déjà vu*, because it looks so similar to the Forest from twelve months ago. The two models do indeed have much in common, including the same modest overall height, though the most crucial difference lies in the fact that the Hawk has a significantly smaller main driver, with a 140mm rather than a 165mm diameter frame.

It is also significantly less expensive, at £1,900 (in black or mahogany, maple or cherry finishes are £2,060) against the Forest's £2,390, though like all of Totem's models, the price does seem rather more than you'd expect considering the compact dimensions and simple two-way driver complement. However, in loudspeakerland, simplicity has its own virtues, especially when coupled with the unusual level of detail refinement that is very much a part of the Totem credo.



The enclosure is constructed with very solid lock-mitred joints. It's attractively compact, beautifully finished in a choice of mahogany, black ash, maple or cherry real wood veneer, and has nicely chamfered edges with flush-fitted drivers. No grilles were supplied, nor is there any obvious way of fitting any.

The Hawk's most attractive styling feature is the three hefty and elegant 'Claw' feet, which support the rear-ported enclosure using large ball-bearings for floor coupling/decoupling. There's no provision for level adjustment here, which might be a problem with uneven floors, though a solution is planned.

The cast frame main driver has an unusual 100mm cone with radial slits (to inhibit bell-modes) sealed by damping compound, and the 25mm metal dome tweeter is heavily modified by Totem. A simple crossover is fed from twin terminal pairs, using high quality internal wiring and components.

## SOUND QUALITY

The first and lasting impression of the Hawk was of how beautifully 'out of the box' the soundfield it created was. The midband isn't entirely free from coloration – the little peak seen in the in-room measurement does add its contribution to the proceedings, as well as improving low-level intelligibility. But the sound as a whole is essentially neutral and clean, with an obviously wide dynamic range and superb stereophonic imaging.

Basically smooth, sweet and self-effacing, there is some slight midband congestion and boxiness, adding a slight nasal tinge to voices, but it's in no way offensive, and the ears soon adjust to this little bit of 'character'. A more serious point is that dynamic expression sounds slightly softened and muted – the fact that the sound is fundamentally polite is obviously a good thing, though perhaps it's just a little too polite for its own good, leaving things sounding just a little bland.

On the plus side, the Hawk has a truly remarkable bottom end for such a compact loudspeaker, showing good ultimate extension alongside fine agility and no tendency to 'thicken up' in the mid-bass. Paradoxically perhaps, the Hawk has the edge in all-round bass performance over Totem's slightly larger Forest model. The bottom line is that the Hawk delivers a beautifully sweet, yet genuinely full bandwidth sound from an exceptionally compact and elegant enclosure, a rare and enticing combination that should win many friends. **HFC**

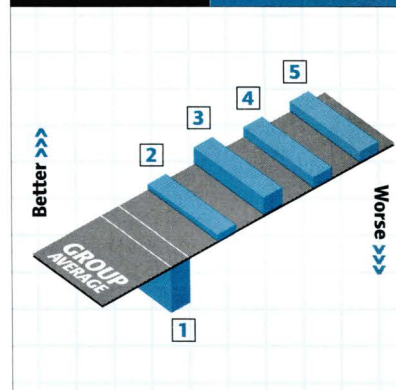


## LAB REPORT

The Hawk's measurements are somewhat different from the loudspeaker norm, effectively sacrificing sensitivity in order to achieve impressive bass extension from a small main driver and enclosure. Our (if anything slightly optimistic) 86dB/2.83V rating through the midband, combined with a port tuned to a low 31Hz, gives a bass extension -6dB point under in-room conditions at a quite surprisingly low 20Hz. Alongside this figure is an average sub-60Hz output that's actually about 2dB too strong, if truth be told, even with the speakers well clear of walls, though it's also quite smooth and even here.

The averaged in-room response above 60Hz is impressively flat and quite smooth right across the band, albeit with the one rather obvious exception of an upper midband peak centred on 900Hz, which does rather spoil an otherwise near-impeccable trace. The amplifier load is an easy-to-drive 6+ ohms across the entire audio band.

## HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >>> -40%
- 2] Bass extension >>> +5%
- 3] Ease of drive >>> +15%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >>> +10%
- 5] Response smoothness >>> +10%

## SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	86dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	6 ohms	8 ohms
Estimated bass extension (-6dB)	35Hz	20Hz

## VERDICT

**SOUND >>> 87%**



**PRACTICALITY >>> 84%**



**BUILD >>> 89%**



**VALUE >>> 83%**



Beautifully refined with a surprisingly solid, deep bass. The sound is very neutral, smooth and transparent, barring a little midband boxiness, though dynamics might have had a little more grip and punch.

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

# CONCLUSIONS

Variety is the spice of life... and speaker tests around the two grand mark

Perhaps the most salient feature about this group of speakers is just how wide the variations are between the different models. That said, all are made from high quality ingredients, and each is therefore capable of delivering a high standard of performance, whatever format it has adopted.

If any one thing most obviously distinguishes this relatively costly group of speakers from the majority of less expensive models, it's the extra effort that has been put into the tweeters that they use.

Audiovector, B&W and Totem all pay particular attention to the chambers behind the diaphragms, Dynaudio and PMC both use decidedly upmarket soft-dome devices, while Dali's dome-plus-ribbon module is the most elaborate solution of all. The pay-off, in each case, is superior high-frequency sound.

There's a natural tendency to assume that a big speaker with lots of drive units will have a performance advantage over the smaller, simpler design. It will certainly go louder, without a

doubt, but 'loud' isn't really the issue in the home, where simplicity is a virtue, and the smaller standmount enclosure has the smaller surface area.

That said, the top honours on this occasion have gone to the larger floorstanders, though that has much to do with the exceptionally high standard each of these achieved, compared to the rather more quirky nature of each of the smaller models.

The Dali is an exquisite creation with a delightful top end, but some midband forwardness; the

beautifully compact Totem has a little midband peak to enliven its otherwise impressive neutrality; port tuning let the Dynaudio down under our conditions – in a different room, it could have been a different story.

But there's no denying the very worthwhile '+' improvements that PMC has wrought on the already good FB1; that B&W's 703 is a whole lot of very innovative speaker at a very realistic price; and that Audiovector's Mi 3 Signature combines superb neutrality and great communication skills. **HFC**

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## HINTS AND TIPS

>> Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads.  
>> Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Do take the time and trouble to experiment.

>> Moving a speaker from a free space location until it's close to a wall will substantially boost the mid-bass.  
>> Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.  
>> Use decent speaker cable, if you want your system to perform at its best.

## LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Audiovector Mi 3 Signature	B&W 703	Dali Helicon 300	Dynaudio Contour S 1.4	PMC FB1+	Totem Hawk
<b>PRICE</b>	£2,320 per pair	£2,000 per pair	£1,980 per pair	£1,850 per pair	£1,625 per pair	£1,900 per pair
<b>SOUND</b>						
<b>PRACTICALITY</b>						
<b>BUILD</b>						
<b>VALUE</b>						
<b>OVERALL</b>						
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	This upgradeable speaker with an advanced tweeter is beautifully balanced to deliver a superb neutrality.	This classy hi-tech three-way achieves an impressively dynamic performance thanks to superior drivers and enclosure.	Beautiful lacquered standmount with dome/ ribbon tweeter has a sweet, lively and engaging sound with some forwardness.	Classy slim standmount with alloy baffle, delivers fine coherence and neutrality but rather thumpy bass.	Newly improved transmission line-based model has lovely mid transparency and a significantly sweeter top end.	Unpretentious, neat and compact floorstander has a delicate, open sound with rather gentle dynamics.
<b>KEY FEATURES</b>						
<b>SIZE (WXHXD)</b>	20x100x29cm	23x101x36cm	21x44x36cm	19x41x36cm	20x100x30cm	17x91x25cm
<b>DRIVER CONFIG</b>	2.5-way	3-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way
<b>MAIN DRIVER SIZE(S)</b>	2x165mm	3x165mm	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x130mm
<b>STAND/ FLOOR</b>	Floor	Floor	Stand	Stand	Floor	Floor
<b>CABINET FINISH</b>	Real wood	Real wood	Lacquered real wood	Real wood	Real wood	Real wood
<b>BI-WIRE</b>	Y (tri)	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
<b>LAB CONCLUSIONS</b> E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
<b>SENSITIVITY</b>	90 <b>G</b>	91 <b>G</b>	89 <b>A</b>	88 <b>A</b>	89 <b>A</b>	86 <b>P</b>
<b>EST. BASS EXTENSION</b>	22 <b>G</b>	<20 <b>E</b>	25 <b>G</b>	28 <b>A</b>	<20 <b>E</b>	23 <b>G</b>
<b>IMPEDANCE (MIN/ AVE)</b>	4/10 <b>A</b>	3.3/7 <b>P</b>	5/7 <b>G</b>	4/7 <b>A</b>	6/10 <b>E</b>	6/12 <b>E</b>
<b>OVERALL FREQ. BALANCE</b>	+10% <b>A</b>	+20% <b>G</b>	-15% <b>A</b>	-25% <b>A</b>	+20% <b>G</b>	0% <b>A</b>
<b>RESPONSE SMOOTHNESS</b>	+40% <b>E</b>	-20% <b>P</b>	-10% <b>A</b>	-25% <b>P</b>	+15% <b>A</b>	0% <b>A</b>

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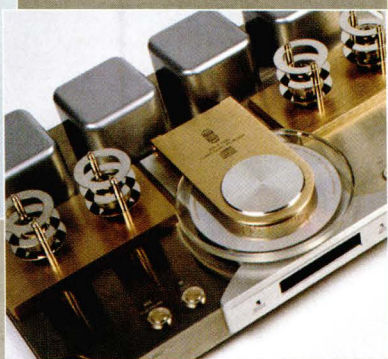
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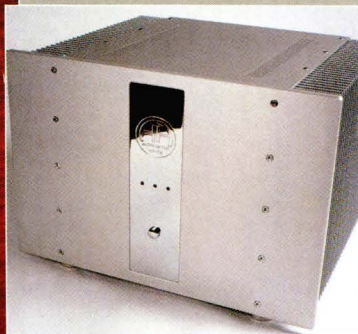
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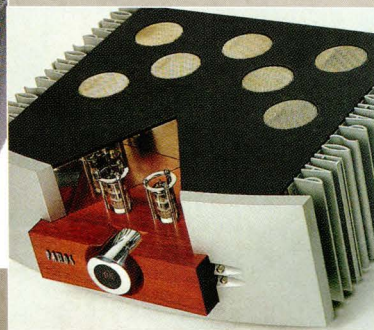
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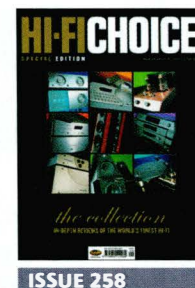
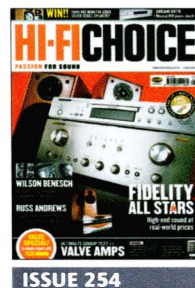
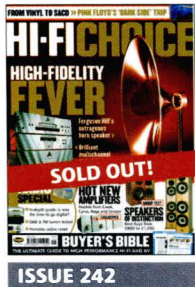
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# HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

### CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

### CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

## TOP BUYS



### 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.



### Naim CD5i £825

If you're looking for sub-£1,000 CD player, park your ears here. Naim's entry level beauty combines the brand's traditional rhythm and timing with considerable poise and panache.

## Our favourite CD PLAYERS

BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>											
BB	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems	●	●	●	●				247
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
	Cyrus CD8	1,000	A truly cracking player, particularly when partnered with the optional PSX-R off-board power supply (£350)	●	●	●	●				252
	Heart CD6000 OSE LE	750	Valved-up Marantz makes an entertaining and colourful player that will inspire you to listen longer	●	●	●	●		●	●	245
	Marantz CD5400 OSE	200	Nicely thought out player with useful features and good sound, though some mechanical noise	●	●	●	●		●		256
BB	Marantz CD7300	350	Astonishingly capable sub-£500 player with effortless bass, detailed mid and treble and vast soundstages	●	●	●	●		●		250
BB	Musical Fidelity X-Ray <sup>V3</sup>	900	Think of this as an A3.2 CD player in a smaller, cheaper box. Great, earthy CD sound for the money	●	●	●	●				255
BB	Naim CD5i	825	As idiosyncratic as ever, but sonically the CD5i is the definitive player at the price				●				259
BB	Roksan Kandy MkIIID	650	Clean, tidy and expressive player – a more than worthwhile improvement on previous versions	●	●	●	●		●		259
	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>											
BB	Audio Analogue Maestro	1,650	The new Maestro 192/24 delivers a sound that's slightly rosy yet always musical and thoroughly enjoyable	●			●		●		257
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
	Meridian G07	1,595	Immaculately conceived and executed player with a softly-spoken voice. Needs careful system matching	●			●		●		259
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
EC	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply	●			●				238
	Orelle CD100evo2	1,299	Relaxed, but strong on refinement and detail. An intelligent choice, particularly strong with acoustic music	●			●				259
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality	●					●		226
	Quad 99 CD-P	1,000	Good but not outstanding player that also doubles as a preamp, with digital inputs and volume controls			●	●				259
BB	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source				●		●	●	244
	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
EC	Wadia 861se	9,999	Stunning player with a full digital preamp and an all-revealing sound that'll keep you up all night	●	●	●	●		●	●	256

**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.



#### Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 £1,650

A beautifully crafted CD player that brings many traditional 'analogue' qualities to digital replay. If you want your CDs to sound natural, detailed and dynamic, this is a fine buy.



#### Resolution Audio Opus 21 £2,850

This player is king of subtlety. Outwardly, the music sounds dynamic and well-scaled, but it's the level of inner detail resolved here that is truly outstanding.

# 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

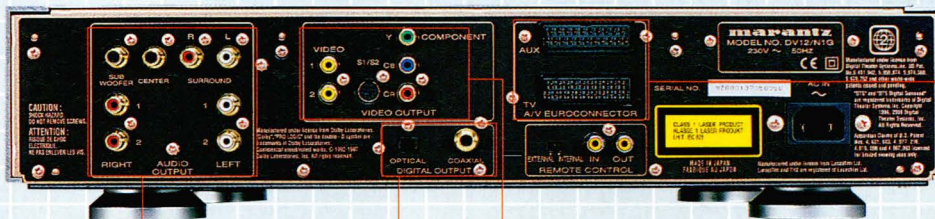
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player.

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 DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Arcam DIVA DV78	700	Imagine almost all of the DV88 Plus at a knock-down price. Top picture and sound performance for the money						254
	Cambridge Audio Azur 540D	230	Respectable and well presented DVD-Audio player at a knockdown price						257
	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
	Marantz DV6400	500	Good starter universal player with decent CD replay quality, but slightly disappointing SACD performance						254
	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
	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	Arcam DIVA DV89	1,300	No SACD playback, but CD sounds strong, DVD-Audio is highly engaging and video performance is excellent too						248
	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
	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
	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse						230
	Linn Unidisk SC	2,995	Groundbreaking universal player with built-in preamplifier, with excellent picture for home cinema and sound for hi-fi						259
	Marantz DV-12S2	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles, with top-notch video playback too. Sonically refined and enjoyably understated						255
	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs						230
	Primare DVD30	2,000	A universal player for audiophiles – no wideband digital outputs but masterful with music and a good picture too						253
	Townshend Audio TA 565	2,500	If you care more for results than aesthetics it's unbeatable. This is probably the best universal player on the planet						259

**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



**BEST BUY**  
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magazine

**Arcam DiVA DV78 £700**  
Arcam's entry-level machine combines great video quality with impressive CD sound.



**BEST BUY**  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine

**Pioneer DV-868AVi £1,000**  
Pioneer's HDMI/i.Link-equipped universal flagship packs an amazing hi-tech punch.



**EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine

**Denon DVD-A11 £1,700**  
A superb universal player, made even better with i.Link/Denon Link/DVI digital outputs.



**EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
**HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine

**Townshend Audio TA 565 £2,500**  
This player builds on Pioneer essentials to deliver breathtaking sound across all formats.



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# VINYL

*Turntables, cartridges and phono stages*



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



## TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce. Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

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

## TOP BUYS



**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.



**Rega**  
 P5 £698

Rega's latest is a non-suspended design with a highly entertaining sound and a great sense of musical 'timing'. The new RB700 arm is 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.



**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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# TURNTABLES

### Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	Clearaudio Master Reference	12,610	Revealing and exciting turntable that revels in the fine details (reviewed with Master TQ-I arm/Accurate cartridge)	33/45		●	● ●	256
<span>BB</span>	Goldring GR1	140	The best value 'Rega' yet and a new benchmark for budget turntables. Vinyl nirvana on a shoestring	33/45			● ●	252
<span>BB</span>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45			● ●	248
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Rega P5	698	Combines a great sense of timing with market-leading resolution and a phenomenal tonearm – a hard act to beat	33/45			● opt	257
<span>BB</span>	Rega P7	1,298	A highly capable player that could hold its own in the most exalted company – a vivid and natural performer	33/45			● opt	257
<span>EC</span>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
<span>BB</span>	Roksan Radius 5	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery and good isolation	33/45	●		●	248
<span>EC</span>	Roksan TMS2	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●		246
<span>EC</span>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●	195
<span>EC</span>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186
<span>EC</span>	Townshend Rock Anniversary	7,700	If you want to hear through vinyl's warmth and get to the meat and bones of the music this is the tool for the job	33/45	●		●	259

## Our favourite BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# PHONO CARTRIDGES

### MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	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
<span>BB</span>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<span>EC</span>	Linn Akiva	1,800	With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape		●	●	242
<span>EC</span>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
<span>BB</span>	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300			●	192
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

# PHONO STAGES

### Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU/GAIN	AU/IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Musical Fidelity X-LPS <sup>v3</sup>	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved	●	●			248
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	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.

# Superfi Online

For the very best deals on high-quality lifestyle systems, plasma, DVD, hi-fi separates, home cinema, MiniDisc, MP3 and all related accessories visit [www.superfi.co.uk](http://www.superfi.co.uk)

Home cinema  
Pioneer, Sony,  
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Marantz, NAD  
and more



## Mission Volare 5.1 speaker system

This package consists of Mission V62 front, Mission V6C centre, Mission V6AS Subwoofer & M5DS Dipole surrounds. Choice of three real-wood finishes. Great for SACD, DVD Audio and home cinema.

**£999.95 (Was £1550, Save £550)**

Also, great deals on separate selling prices:

V60	Was £199.95, Save £50	<b>£149.95</b>
V61	Was £349.95, Save £100	<b>£249.95</b>
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V63	Was £599.95, Save £200	<b>£399.95</b>
V6C	Was £199.95, Save £50	<b>£149.95</b>
V6AS	Was £499.95, Save £100	<b>£399.95</b>

All models and packages available in black, beech or cherry.

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We beat prices –  
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full details

## Kef Coda 70 speakers



Superior bookshelf design with metal-dome tweeters. Die-cast aluminium fascia and chassis. High-quality, real-wood veneer.

**£99.95 per pair (Was £199.95, Save £100)**



Also matching Coda 80C centre speaker. **£79.95 (Was £149.95, Save £70)**

## NAD T532 DVD player

Superb picture and audiophile CD playback with Burr Brown o/p amps and crystal DAC.

**£129.95 (Was £329.95, Save £200)**



Speakers  
Acoustic Energy,  
Kef, Wharfedale,  
Mission, Tannoy  
and more

## Denon DVD2200 DVD player

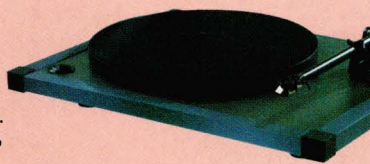
Universal disc player. DVD-Audio and SACD. PAL/ NTSC progressive scan. MP3/ JPEG/ DVD+/- R/RW and VCD.

**£299.95 (Was £599.95, Save £300)**



## Goldring GR1 turntable

"Remarkable sonic assurance and build quality for the money, a great budget buy."  
HiFi Choice, April 2004.  
**£99.95 (Was £139.95, Save £40)**



Products  
Hi-fi separates,  
home cinema,  
MiniDisc, DVD,  
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# Superfi

# 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](http://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 MD 102 £2,200**  
If you're serious about radio this superb FM tuner is about as good as it gets.

## Our favourite TUNERS

### FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>FM TUNERS</b>										
HR	Creek T50	499	Very fine results indeed with precision, polish and insight added to excellent basics	FM,ML	128	●	●	●	●	251
HR	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
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD 90T	1,195	No remote or presets as standard, manual everything and valves... but its sound is simply sublime	FM	opt		opt	●	●	257
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD 102	2,200	Superb remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	●	●	241
HR	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●		211
HR	NAD C422	180	Admirably free of roughness or other obvious nasties, with just a slight lack of clarity	FM,M	30	●		●		250
HR	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●	●	●		230
HR	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	●		●		230
HR	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
<b>DAB TUNERS</b>										
	Arcam DiVA DT81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		●	●	●	221
HR	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
	Sony ST-SDB900	200	Nicely designed UK-tuned model is a touch bright with both DAB and FM but generally insightful and clear	DAB,FM,M	60	●	●		●	259

**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 capable, 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 multiroom applications.

## Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>CD-R/RW RECORDERS</b>								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		●	●	218
<span style="font-size: 0.8em;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="font-size: 0.8em;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<span style="font-size: 0.8em;">BEST BUY</span>	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		●	●	205
<span style="font-size: 0.8em;">BEST BUY</span>	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
<b>MD RECORDERS</b>								
	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
<b>HDD RECORDERS</b>								
	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
<span style="font-size: 0.8em;">BEST BUY</span>	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<sup>^</sup> is available on most products.

<sup>^</sup>Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.



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Modern home entertainment doesn't have to be intrusive.

A carefully considered installation of home cinema with distributed audio and video and easy lighting control can give you all the sound and vision performance you could ever dream of - enhancing your lifestyle and your home.

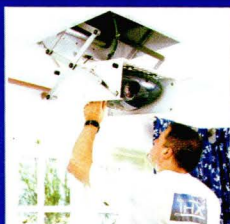
Our custom install services range from the most simple, affordable solutions to the most grandiose. We can help transform every room and every home, whatever your needs and budget.

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**Installation Guide**, available now, from your local store.



Enjoy the freedom to listen to the music of your choice or watch TV independently from other rooms in the home



Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards and will continue to support you and your equipment long after your first visit to one of our nationwide stores



Flush-mounted in-wall speakers can give you all the sound you can handle, but won't eat into your floor space or clash with your decor



## NEWSNEWSNEWS



### DENON DVD-3910 UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER

Replacing 2003's all conquering DVD-2900, the new Denon DVD-3910 moves Denon further ahead with a massive performance and feature upgrade.

Using leading edge audio and video technology and heavyweight construction, this Universal player promises to deliver the highest quality picture and sound quality from your entire disc collection.

Handling both DVD-Audio and SACD, the '3910 will also play MP3, WMA, JPEG and Photo CD plus all varieties of DVD/CD -R and +R. It includes every digital and analogue audio/video output: HDMI, DVI, FireWire, Component, Composite and S-Video.



### ARCAM DIVA AVR250 HOME CINEMA RECEIVER

Following the success of the AVR300, Arcam has introduced its smaller brother, the AVR250. As you would expect from a company with an audiophile heritage, this 7.1 channel receiver has been designed to deliver excellent audio reproduction. This is combined with connectivity and decoding modes that will satisfy even the most ardent A/V enthusiasts.



### ARCAM FMJ DV29 DVD PLAYER

Arcam's flagship award-winning FMJ DV27A DVD player is being joined by the DV29 to deliver DVD-Audio compatible HDMI. In addition to excellent video performance, the DV29 promises to deliver first-class sound quality.

[www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk](http://www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk)

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EALING (NEW)

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PRESTON  
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WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7  
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE  
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**Michell Gyro SE  
Turntable / RB300 Tonearm  
£1049.95**



"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."

**WHAT HI-FI? BEST BUY 2003**  
SEE SOME EXTRA AWARDS



**Arcam DiVA  
CD192 CD Player  
£849.95**

"Latest DiVA has some fresh vigour, but manages to retain its predecessors refinement and deftness with detail - a great listen"

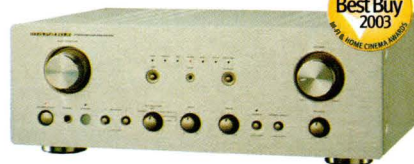
**WHAT HI-FI? BEST BUY 2003**  
★★★★★



**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**



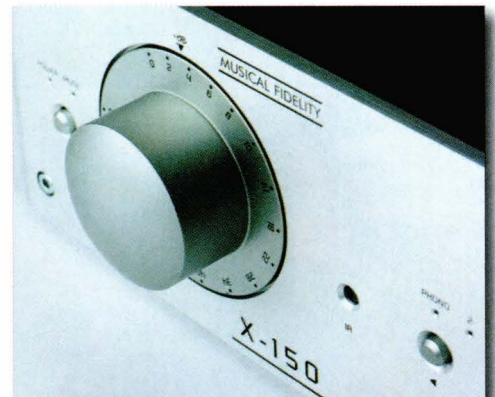
**SAVE £80**

**Marantz  
PM7200 Amplifier  
£249.95**

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

**Pure Digital  
DRX702ES Analogue/DAB Tuner  
£279.95**

"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."



**Musical Fidelity  
X-80 Amplifier £599.95  
X-150 Amplifier £799.95  
X-Ray<sup>3</sup> CD Player £899.95**

Musical Fidelity has unveiled two integrated amplifiers and a CD player as part of its revamped X-series. The 40 wpc, **X-80** and the 80wpc **X-150** amplifiers feature a dual-gang analogue volume control and high-output transistors for each channel. The X-150 also includes a high quality phono stage.



The **X-Ray<sup>3</sup>** CD player, is the replacement for the legendary X-Ray and uses the same DAC and upsampling principles as the acclaimed Tri-Vista SACD player. From a technical standpoint, the X-Ray<sup>3</sup> is equal of some of the most expensive players on the market.



experience more

experience more  
experience more



**NEW**

**Cyrus**  
**8vs Amplifier £799.95**  
**CD8 X CD Player £999.95**

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for over 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. The new 'VS' preamp circuitry, incorporated in the 6vs and 8vs amplifiers, has dramatically improved their performance while the CD8 X is a heavily revised version of the CD8.



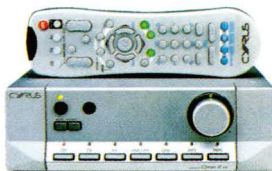
**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**SUPERSTAR**  
**WINNER**  
★★★★★

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

"Here's a machine that advances the ability of its excellent predecessor by an almost absurd degree. The Cyrus 8vs is an absolute superstar"

**Cyrus**  
**6vs Amplifier £599.95**

"A significant upgrade to what was already an impressive amp - Cyrus' new entry-level integrated is a peach"



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

SEE **FREE** GRADO SR60 HEADPHONE OFFER\*

**FREE**  
**QED CABLE**  
**WORTH £60\***



**Ruark**  
**Epilogue II**  
**Speakers £344.95**

"...Then there are the classy Ruark Epilogue IIs. They're the priciest here, but with plenty to justify that price tag. They have a seamless sound that draws the listener into the music and keeps the senses captivated."

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • AUGUST 2002**



**FREE**  
**QED CABLE**  
**WORTH £60\***

**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**

**WITH ALL HI-FI**  
**SPEAKER PAIRS**  
**OVER £299\***

**WORTH**

**£60** WITH SPEAKERS OVER **£299**  
**£80** WITH SPEAKERS OVER **£499**  
**£120** WITH SPEAKERS OVER **£999**

**FREE**  
**QED CABLE**  
**WORTH £60\***



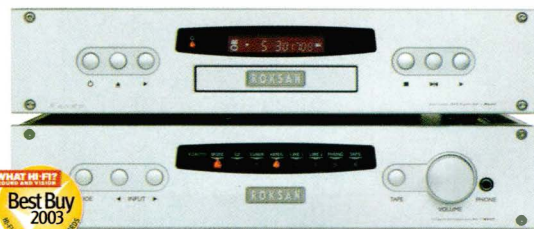
**B&W**  
**DM602 S3 Speakers £299.95**

"These solidly made standmounters perform well across the whole range of musical styles... Add these speakers to your hi-fi system and you're guaranteed magnificent integration between the drivers and an even tonal balance."

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**Best Buy**  
2002  
★★★★★

**Roksan Kandy**  
**KD1/III CD Player £649.95**  
**KA1/III Amplifier £649.95**

"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**



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

**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 21/10/04, E&OE.



## Rotel 10 Series RA-1062 Amplifier £594.95 RCD-1072 CD Player £594.95

"At the heart of the 60-watt RA-1062 is a toroidal transformer and a power supply, which Rotel claims, helps the amp maintain performance even at high volumes... Crank up the volume and, as promised, the Rotel keeps its composure and balance... If you want a £600 integrated, be sure to audition the RA-1062.

First impressions of the RCD-1072 are excellent. This is the slickest machine in this group; the casework feels solid and the finish exceptional at the price... On its own terms it remains an enjoyable and informative CD player."

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • SEPTEMBER 2003



## COMPACT SYSTEMS

### Linn Classik Music System £799.95

When purchased with speakers over £299\*  
When purchased on its own £849.95

"The Classik sounds simply marvellous... It 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 £189.95

When purchased with speakers over £99\*  
When purchased on its own £199.95

"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."

NB - DENON DM31 & LINN CLASSIK PRICES EXCLUDE SPEAKERS

## Acoustic Energy Aelite Three Speakers £749.95

"Acoustic Energy's new Aelite Threes weigh in at a hefty 18kg a piece, and their curved, real wood finished cabinets both look handsome and make good acoustic sense... So how do they perform... Give them a big room and position them in free space and they'll deliver great things... If you want a big sound for sensible money, don't hesitate to audition the Aelite Threes."

WHAT HI-FI? Sept 04  
★★★★★

## Pioneer PDR-609 CD Recorder £169.95

"This is the third time Pioneer has won Product of the Year in the recorders section. First with the PDR-509, and then last year with the PDR-609.

Features include 24-bit/96kHz digital-analogue-conversion, backed up by Pioneer's Legato Link filtering and manual recording level controls, ideal when making compilations to standardise levels. All this means you get great copies from the Pioneer... and remarkable value."



Product of the year 2002  
RECORDERS  
Pioneer PDR-609

## 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.

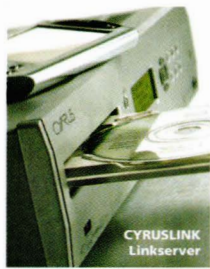
## B&W 704 Speakers £1399.95

The 704 speakers are part of B&W's new 700 series. These floorstanding, two-and-a-half-way, vented box speakers and are available in a variety of attractive finishes. In a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test the 704 offered "Remarkable openness and clarity that is unrivalled at this price."



FREE QED CABLE  
WORTH £120

WHAT HI-FI? March 04  
★★★★★



## 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 STORES



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

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 21/10/04, E&OE.



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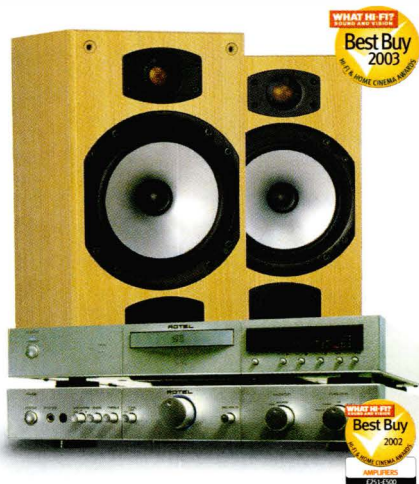
SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

**Rotel**  
RCD-02 CD Player  
RA-02 Amplifier



**Monitor Audio**  
Bronze B2 Speakers

For this recommended Hi-Fi System we have combined Rotel's highly rated RCD-02 CD player and RA-02 amplifier with Monitor Audio's beautifully balanced Bronze B2 speakers. This package gives a powerful, fresh and vibrant sound. The compact 'B2 speakers, available in a variety of finishes, were awarded 'Best Buy' by What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, with the sound being described as "Superb... Speakers don't get much better than the B2's".



The RA-02 amplifier features remote control and a phono input. The RCD-02 (★★★★★ - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision - August 2003) is HDCD compatible and includes a digital output for connecting to a digital recorder.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE  
**£799.95** | **£129**  
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS



**Arcam**  
CD73T CD Player  
A65 Plus Amplifier

**KEF**  
Q4 Speakers

Arcam and KEF 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 KEF's new Q4 floostanding speakers featuring KEF's unique Uni-Q technology for easier room placement.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE  
**£999.95** | **£149**  
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

**Roksan Kandy**  
KD1/III CD Player  
KA1/III Amplifier



**Monitor Audio**  
Silver S6 Speakers



The combination of Roksan's Kandy MK3 CD and amplifier is, according to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, "Something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination" (December 2003). We have partnered these with the Silver S6 floostanding speakers from British

speaker specialists, Monitor Audio. The combination of Roksan's excellent rhythm and timing, with its tight bass and sweet detailed treble coupled with the 'S6's' ability to stay unruffled even when the music is at its most complex, makes this a remarkable system.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE  
**£1889.95** | **£300**  
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS



HI-FI SYSTEM 3 - 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 £50 GOLDRING CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TechnoDec (Ex Arm)	£574.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut III (Black)	£129.95
Project Debut III (Colours)	£144.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95

### TUNERS

Arcam DNA T61	£229.95
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
Roksan Kandy KT1 MKIII	£549.95

### CD PLAYERS

Arcam DIVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD192	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1349.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8 X	£999.95
Cyrus DAC X	£1099.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£1099.95
Linn Ikem1	£2199.95
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Musical Fidelity X-Ray V6	£899.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 <sup>PH</sup>	£1999.95
Quad 99 CD-P	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

### CD RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£169.95
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### AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£389.95
Arcam DIVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A90	£849.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1199.95
Cyrus 8vs	£599.95
Cyrus 8vs	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X vs Pre	£1099.95
Cyrus Mono X Power (Each)	£1199.95
Denon PMA355	£179.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£574.95
Linn UK85 Power	£544.95
Marantz PM4400	£149.95
Marantz PM7200	£249.95

Musical Fidelity X-80	£599.95
Musical Fidelity X-150	£799.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£979.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308	£1999.95
Quad 99 Power	£549.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£649.95
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	£149.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£279.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite Two	£449.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite Three	£749.95
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	£749.95
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
Ruark Talisman III	£1499.95
Ruark Sabre III	£899.95
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 Classic Music Ex Speakers	£849.95
Teac Legacy 600 Ex Speakers	£199.95

### DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV-M71 Inc SC-M51 Speakers	£499.95
Denon DVD-500SD Inc 5.1 Speaker Package	£499.95
Denon DVD-770SD/AVR-770SD Ex Speakers	£599.95
Jamo DVR50/A305PDD Inc Speakers	£649.95
Jamo DVR50/A355PDD Inc Speakers	£899.95
KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers	£1199.95
Linn Classic Movie Di Ex Speakers	£2299.95
Teac Legacy 700LS-L800 Inc Speakers	£799.95

### MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

Cyrus Linkserver 160	£2999.95
Cyrus Linkserver 250	£3499.95
Cyrus Linkport	£649.95
Cyrus Linkwand	£199.95
Yamaha MusicCast MCX A10	£599.95
Yamaha MusicCast MCX 1000	£1799.95

### DVD PLAYERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DIVA DV78	£699.95	£699.95
Arcam DIVA DV79	£999.95	£999.95
Arcam FMJ DV29	£1599.95	£1599.95
Cyrus DVD8	£1199.95	£1199.95
Denon DVD-1710	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-3910 Universal	£879.95	£899.95
Denon DVD-A11	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A1	£1599.95	£1599.95
Harman Kardon DVD22	£299.95	£299.95
Harman Kardon DVD31	£399.95	£399.95

Pioneer DV370	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV575A Universal	£149.95	£179.95
Pioneer DV668AV Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV868AVI Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba SD240E	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba SD340E	£ CALL	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S540	£119.95	£119.95
Yamaha DVD-S1500	£399.95	£399.95

### DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Panasonic DMR-E55 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E65 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E85 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E95 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR3100S DVD-R/RW	£379.95	£399.95
Pioneer DVR5100HS DVD-R/RW	£469.95	£499.95
Pioneer DVR-520H HDD/DVD-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-720H HDD/DVD-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-920H HDD/DVD-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL

### A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR200 A/V Receiver	£799.95
Arcam AVR250 A/V Receiver	£999.95
Arcam AVR300 A/V Receiver	£1299.95
Arcam AV8/P7 A/V Pre/Processor/Power	£5749.95
Cyrus AV8 A/V Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A1SRA A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Denon AVC-A1SR A/V Amplifier	£2199.95
Denon AVR1705 A/V Receiver	£249.95
Denon AVR1905 A/V Receiver	£299.95
Denon AVR2105 A/V Receiver	£449.95
Denon AVR2805 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR3805 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR330 A/V Receiver	£599.95
Harman Kardon AVR630 A/V Receiver	£999.95
Harman Kardon DPR2005 A/V Receiver	£1299.95
Onkyo TX-NR801E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-C501 A/V Receiver	£329.95
Pioneer VSX-D812 A/V Receiver	£319.95
Pioneer VSX-AX3 A/V Receiver	£649.95
Pioneer VSX-AX51 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSA-AX10AI A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Rotel RSP1067 A/V Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 A/V Pre/Power	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1098 A/V Processor	£2294.95
Yamaha DSP-AX750SE A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha DSP-AX640SE A/V Amplifier	£299.95
Yamaha DSP-29 A/V Amplifier	£3299.95
Yamaha RX-V550 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V650 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V2400RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL

### A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£749.95
Acoustic Energy Aego P5/II	£499.95
Artcooustic Diablo	£994.95
B&W VM1/AS1	£849.95
B&W DM300 AV	£899.95
Castle Compact CC3	£999.95
KEF KHT1005 £100 FREE QED CABLE*	£499.95
KEF KHT2005.2 £150 FREE QED CABLE*	£799.95
KEF KHT5005 £200 FREE QED CABLE*	£1199.95
KEF Q7 AV £300 FREE QED CABLE*	£2199.95
M&K K5 £290 FREE QED CABLE*	£1699.95
M&K K3	£1894.95
M&K Xenon 25	£2249.95
M&K 850/CSS35/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 270	£499.95
Monitor Audio Radius 5.1	£999.95

### SUBWOOFERS

B&W PV1	£949.95
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 Stampede (Black) £100 QED CABLE*	£549.95
REL Strata 5 (Brittix Black) £100 QED CABLE*	£699.95

### PLASMA

Fujitsu P42VHA30 42"	£2999.95
Fujitsu P42HHA30 42"	£3499.95
Fujitsu P50XHA30 50"	£5799.95
Hitachi 32PD5200 32"	£ CALL
Hitachi 42PD5200 42"	£ CALL
Hitachi 42PMA500E 42"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH42PW6B 42"	£2399.95
Panasonic TH37PE30B 37"	£ CALL
Panasonic TH42PE30B 42"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP434HDE 43"	£ CALL
Pioneer PDP435HDE 43"	£3999.95
Pioneer PDP504HDE 50"	£ CALL
Toshiba 42WP36P 42"	£ CALL
Yamaha PDM4210 42"	£3999.95

### LCD TV

Hitachi 28LD5200 28"	£ CALL
Panasonic TX17LX1 17"	£ CALL
Panasonic TX22LX1 22"	£ CALL
Panasonic TX26LXD1 26"	£ CALL
Panasonic TX32LXD1 32"	£ CALL
Philips 30FP9975 30"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-15S1E 15"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-20S1E 20"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-22AD1E 22"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-26GA3 26"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-32GA3 32"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-32GD1 32"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-37GD1 37"	£ CALL
Sharp Aquos LC-37GA3 37"	£ CALL
Toshiba 26WL36P 26"	£ CALL
Toshiba 32WL36P 32"	£ CALL

### PROJECTORS

Marantz VP-12S3 DLP	£8499.95
NEC HT1000 DLP	£ CALL
Sanyo PLV-Z2 LCD	£1449.95
Screenplay SP4805 DLP	£1299.95
Screenplay SP5700 DLP	£2199.95
Screenplay SP7205 DLP	£4999.95
Sharp XV-Z91E DLP	£1799.95
Sharp XV-Z200 DLP	£ CALL
Sim 2 Domino 20 DLP	£3499.95
Sim 2 Domino 20 HDMI DLP	£3999.95
Sim 2 HT300 Xtra HDMI DLP	£7999.95
Sim 2 HT500 Link DLP	£2499.95
ThemeScene H30 Cinema DLP	£1199.95
ThemeScene H56 Cinema DLP	£1999.95
ThemeScene H77 Cinema DLP	£3499.95

### REMOTE CONTROLS

Marantz RC5400	£399.95
Marantz RC9200	£799.95
Philips i-Pronto RU1000	£1399.95

### CALL

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR OUR UP-TO-DATE PRICES

£

### PRICING POLICY

SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION OPERATES A PRICING POLICY SEE OPPOSITE PAGE FOR DETAILS

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\*Added Value Offers- From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. Advertisement valid until at least 21/10/04, £8.0E.

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**ABERDEEN** 57 CROWN STREET **NEW**  
• 01224 252797 *OPENING SOON*

**BEDFORD** 29-31 ST PETERS STREET  
• 01234 272779

**BRIGHTON** 57 WESTERN ROAD, HOVE  
• 01273 733338

**BROMLEY** 39A EAST STREET  
• 020 8290 1988

**BIRMINGHAM** ARCH 12, LIVERY STREET  
• 0121 233 2977

**BRISTOL** 92B WHITELADIES ROAD, CLIFTON  
• 0117 974 3727

**CAMBRIDGE** 17 BURLEIGH STREET  
• 01223 304770

**CARDIFF** 104-106 ALBANY ROAD  
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**CHELSEA** 403 KINGS ROAD  
• 020 7352 9466

**CHELTENHAM** 14 PITTVILLE STREET  
• 01242 241171

**CRAWLEY** 32 THE BOULEVARD  
• 01293 510777

**CROYDON** 369-373 LONDON ROAD  
• 020 8665 1203 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**EALING** 24 THE GREEN **NEW**  
• 0208 579 8777 *OPENING EARLY SEPT*

**EDINBURGH** 5 THE GRASSMARKET  
• 0131 229 7267

**EPSOM** 12 UPPER HIGH STREET  
• 01372 720720 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**EXETER** 28 COWICK STREET  
• 01392 218895

**GLASGOW** 88 GREAT WESTERN ROAD  
• 0141 332 9655

**GUILDFORD** 73B NORTH STREET  
• 01483 536666

**HOLBORN** 144-148 GRAYS INN ROAD  
• 020 7837 7540

**HULL** 1 SAVILE ROW, SAVILE STREET  
• 01482 587171

**IPSWICH** 12-14 DOGS HEAD STREET  
• 01473 286977

**KINGSTON** 43 FIFE ROAD  
• 020 8547 0717 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**LEEDS** 62 NORTH STREET  
• 0113 245 2775 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**LEICESTER** 10 LOSEBY LANE  
• 0116 253 6567

**LINCOLN** 20-22 CORPORATION STREET  
• 01522 527397 (*OFF HIGH STREET*)

**MAIDSTONE** 96 WEEK STREET  
• 01622 686366

**MANCHESTER** 69 HIGH ST, CITY CENTRE  
• 0161 831 7969

**NEWCASTLE** 19 NEWGATE STREET  
• 0191 221 2320



**NORWICH** 29-29A ST GILES STREET  
• 01603 767605

**NOTTINGHAM** 597-599 MANSFIELD ROAD  
• 0115 911 2121

**OXFORD** 41 ST CLEMENTS STREET  
• 01865 241773

**PETERBOROUGH** 36-38 PARK ROAD  
• 01733 897697 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**PLYMOUTH** 107 CORNWALL STREET  
• 01752 226011

**POOLE** LATIMER HOUSE, 44-46 HIGH STREET  
• 01202 671677

**PRESTON** 40-41 LUNE STREET  
• 01772 825777 *OPEN SUNDAY*

**READING** 3-4 KINGS WALK SHOPPING CENTRE  
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# STEREO AMPLIFIERS

*Integrated and pre/power amps*



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated

simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

### How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

### Q&A

#### SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

#### WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

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

#### WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

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

### HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

### TOP BUYS



**Marantz**  
PM7200 £330

A true budget belter from Marantz – power and finesse in equal measure, plus the ability to switch between Class A and Class AB operation. Giant killing amps are back!



**Roksan**  
Caspian M Series £1,000

The latest version of Roksan's long-running mid-market amp is a truly expressive performer, good enough to pick up a gong in our 2003 Awards.



**Quad**  
99 Pre/909 £1,650

This neat pre/power combo is much more engaging than stereotypical Quads of old, yet retains their purposeful, no-nonsense appeal. A great value two-box option.



**Primare**  
PRE30/A30.2 £2,400

Beautifully made and with a sound to match, this Scandinavian pre/power combines warmth and body with energy and detail – a truly musical performer.

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
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>									
	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Arcam's most successful mid-range amp to date – sophisticated control system and crisp, detailed sound	6	●	●	●	90	251
	Arcam DIVA A90	850	Enhanced replacement for A85, convertible to 7.1 sound with the addition of an add-on module and extra P90 power amps	6	opt	●	●	90	250
	Audio Analogue Primo	475	Small, stylish amp with a smooth and beguiling sound. Makes a fine partner for AA's equally compact Primo CD player	5	opt	●		70	255
	Cambridge Audio Azur 540A	200	A well built and fully featured amplifier that costs this little should not sound this revealing	6	opt	●	●	50	255
	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
	Exposure 3010 Integrated	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and entrancing sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
	Icon Audio Stereo 40i	900	Stylish and very sharply priced valve amp is a good all-rounder	4				37	254
	Marantz PM4400 OSE	250	Highly competent and well specified – a lively performer that makes great music	5	●		●	50	256
	Marantz PM7200	330	High power, plenty of features, and remarkably clear and informative sound with lots of impact	6	●	●	●	105	248
	Marantz PM7200KI	500	Even more refined version of basic amp, with notably improved bass purity	6	●	●	●	95	254
	Musical Fidelity X-80	600	The entry-level to Musical Fidelity's amplifier range sounds both powerful and refined	4		●		55	255
	NAD C352	350	Dynamic and musical sounding update on what was already a star product	7		●	●	80	253
	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 I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,000	Improved mid-range model from Roksan is a fine, expressive amplifier – right at the top of its class	6		●		85	248
	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
	Rotel RA-1062	595	A great value amp with a detailed and engaging sound, and the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	●	●		95	251
	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
	Audio Note Oto Line SE	1,599	Single-ended valve amp lacks power but sounds remarkably delicate and coherent	5	opt			10	254
	Audio Analogue Maestro S.	1,750	The beautifully made Maestro Settanta sounds fast, deep and very smooth, though perhaps not the most dynamic	5	●	●		70	257
	Audio Research VSI55	2,895	Superb all-rounder provides the delights of valve amplification without sacrificing convenience	5		●		50	254
	AVI Laboratory Series	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution – effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
	Copland CSA29	1,900	A hybrid valve/solid state amplifier that gets close to offering the best of both worlds	6	opt	●		85	255
	Hegel H1	1,500	A rich and responsive amp that revels in great music with a warmth that encourages non-stop listening	6		●		120	254
	Karan KA-i180	3,900	Lean, sharp and articulate, this impressively constructed heavyweight is almost up there with the audiophile pre/power elite	4		●		180	236
	Krell KAV-400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and a 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
<b>UP TO £2,000</b>										
	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
	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
	Exposure 3010 Integrated/Power	1,800	Simple units with various connection options which give very satisfying sound in all areas	●	●	6	opt	●	116	256
	Quad 99/909	1,650	Well thought out and well executed, with good strong sound and just a little veiling	●	●	5	●	●	136	256
<b>ABOVE £2,000</b>										
	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●				20	231
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	●	300	241
	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		●	300	249
	EAR 864/534	4,156	Valve combo delivers fine measured and subjective performance and inspires great confidence	●	●	6	●		50	254

**SPECS KEY** **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS *continued*

## Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
EC	ECS EA-1	6,000	Understated monoblocks with real transparency to the fine detail, passion and energy in your record collection	●				180	253
	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
	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
HR	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Smart kit that lives up to the visual promise with gorgeous sound – a really musical performer	●	●	7		128	256
EC	Quad QC-24/II-40	4,007	Big, muscular valve sound that's smooth and easy on the ears, plus solid engineering with good power delivery	●	●	7		40	254
	Roksan Caspian M Series pre/pwr	2,050	Confident and highly enjoyable sound with lively music, perhaps a little less sure with subtler, complex scores	●	●	6		78	256
HR	Stello DP200/S200	2,990	Flexible preamp with purist leanings, plus classic stereo power amp offer great value by high-end standards	●	●	3	●	200	259
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&amp;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.



**Denon**  
AVR-3805 £1,000  
Combines admirable sound across all music and movie formats with features like full auto set-up, i.Link and the latest surround formats – a class act at £1,000.



**Denon**  
AVC-A1SR £3,000  
Despite hot competition from Pioneer and Sony, this amp (now upgraded to the AVC-A1SR 'A') remains our favourite top-end integrated multichannel amp solution.



**Arcam**  
AV8/P7 £5,498  
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – a top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

## Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

**HB** BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)
<b>MULTICHANNEL INTEGRATED AMPS</b>							
	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
<b>HB</b>	Arcam AVR300	1,300	Cracking all-round music and movie ability sets the Arcam apart from the AV crowd	●	8	100	257
	Denon AVR-2803	650	Merely 'average' sound but it's impossible to argue against the flexibility and value of its engineering	●	9	130	251
<b>HB</b>	Denon AVR-3805	1,000	Upgraded sound, new processing algorithms and a great remote control make this a superb mid-market multichannel buy	●		120	256
<b>EC</b>	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
	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
	Marantz SR-12S1	3,000	A multichannel amp that can be taken seriously in stereo too. Resources are in the engineering rather than the gimmicky	●	3	160	255
<b>HB</b>	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	100	248
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>HB</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>MULTICHANNEL PREAMPS/PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS</b>							
<b>HB</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>HB</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	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
<b>HB</b>	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

**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.

## Billy Vee

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Arcam DV89* DVD-A Player New (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1299.00)	<b>£649.50</b>	Loewe 24" High Definition 16:9 TV (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(999.00)	<b>£499.00</b>
Arcam DV27A FMJ DVD Player (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1899.00)	<b>£1195.00</b>	Naim CDS2/XPS Player & P/Supply S/H (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(6265.00)	<b>£2995.00</b>
Arcam CD62T* CD Player (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(369.00)	<b>£229.00</b>	Naim Nait 5 Amplifier (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(890.00)	<b>£659.00</b>
Arcam CD82T CD Player - New (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(599.00)	<b>£449.00</b>	Naim NAC 112 Preamp (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(660.00)	<b>£499.00</b>
Arcam CD93 CD Player - New (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(979.00)	<b>£659.00</b>	Naim NAC102/NAPSC Preamp . . . . .	(1570.00)	<b>£825.00</b>
Arcam A65+ Amplifier (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(369.00)	<b>£249.00</b>	Naim NAP 250 P/Amp - Old style S/H (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1890.00)	<b>£895.00</b>
Arcam A85 Amp Sil/Blk (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(849.00)	<b>£499.00</b>	Naim NAP 150 Power Amp (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(785.00)	<b>£595.00</b>
AVI Pro 9 Plus Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(799.00)	<b>£569.00</b>	Naim NAP 180 Power Amp S/H - (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1225.00)	<b>£795.00</b>
Linn Kolektor Preamplifier S/H (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(575.00)	<b>£345.00</b>	Naim Hi-Cap 2 P/S - old casework (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(930.00)	<b>£639.00</b>
Linn Kairn Pro Line Preamp S/H (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(1400.00)	<b>£599.00</b>	Naim NBL Speakers - Beech (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(7700.00)	<b>£4295.00</b>
Linn Trikan Centre Spkr - maple (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(549.00)	<b>£299.00</b>	Pioneer DVD656S Multiplayer (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(349.00)	<b>£219.00</b>
Linn Ekwall Centre - maple (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(795.00)	<b>£559.00</b>	PMC TB2 Speakers - Black (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(740.00)	<b>£539.00</b>
Linn Espk Speakers - maple (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(2800.00)	<b>£1985.00</b>	PMC DB1 Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(555.00)	<b>£399.00</b>
Linn Keltik Spkrs - Wal inc Aktive Cards (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(6000.00)	<b>£2195.00</b>	Yamaha RXV 630 RDS A.V. Amp (1Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(459.00)	<b>£269.00</b>
Linn LP12/Ekos/Arkive Boron (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(5350.00)	<b>£2675.00</b>	Vibe Zeta Subwoofer (2Yr G/tee) . . . . .	(600.00)	<b>£469.00</b>

november 2004 | HI-FI CHOICE 103

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### GUARANTEES

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### FINANCE

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- No Payments
- No Interest



### marantz HOLLYWOOD IN A BOX

- HOLLYWOOD 'IN A BOX' HOME CINEMA SYSTEM
- EXCELLENT CHARACTERISTICS IN DIFFERENTLY ENCODED MOVIE AND MUSIC SOUNDTRACKS • LATEST GENERATION DSP DECODES DTS, DOLBY DIGITAL AND DOLBY PRO-LOGIC II • HIGH QUALITY PLAYBACK OF DVD-VIDEO, CD-DA, SVCD, VCD, CD, MP3, WMA, JPEG, DVD-R AND DVD-RW • NTSC PROGRESSIVE SCAN • 192KHZ/24-BIT DAC • MORDAUNT-SHORT DESIGNED SATELLITE SPEAKER SYSTEM • INCLUDES 4 SATELLITES SPEAKERS, A CENTER SPEAKER AND A POWERFUL 80 WATT ACTIVE SUBWOOFER

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- THX ULTRA2 7.1 CHANNEL AMPLIFIER
- SURROUND EX, ULTRA2, 5.1 MUSIC DECODING ES (MATRIX 6.1, DISCRETE 6.1, NEO-6), DTS 5.1CH DECODING • DOLBY DIGITAL DD / DD-EX
- DOLBY PRO LOGIC DPL / DPL II MOVIE, MUSIC,
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**YST-SW005**

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- PRE-PROGRAMMED MARANTZ CODES
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**SR7300**

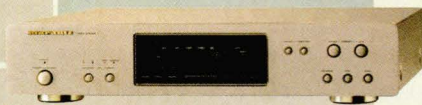


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**ST6000**



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- VERSATILE DIGITAL INPUTS • S-VIDEO & COMPONENT VIDEO INPUTS & OUTPUTS
- 5-CHANNEL DISCRETE AMPLIFICATION • DOLBY PRO LOGIC II • DOLBY DIGITAL EX

**HTR5550RDS**



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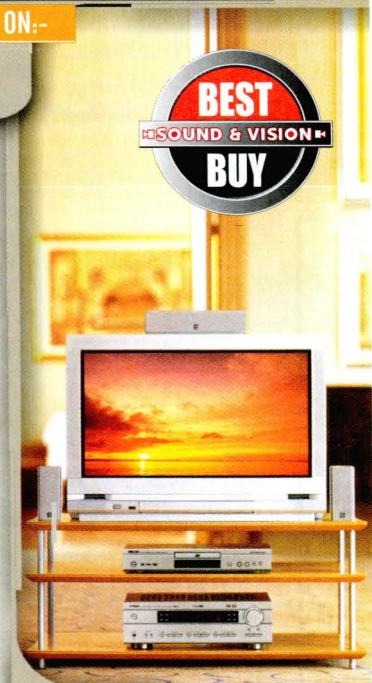
**YAMAHA**

- PAL/NTSC PROGRESSIVE SCANNING • PAL/NTSC CONVERSION
- YUV COMPONENT OUTPUT TERMINAL • DVD-VIDEO, SVCD, VCD, JPEG, AUDIO • CD AND MP3 (MULTISESSION) PLAYBACK • DVD+RW/+R, DVD-R/+R AND CD-R/RW PLAYBACK
- PICTURE CD PLAYBACK WITH DISPLAY 54MHZ/12-BIT VIDEO D/A CONVERSION

**DVDS540**



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AV PACKAGE 75

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- DVD-VIDEO, SVCD, VCD, JPEG, AUDIO CD AND MP3 (MULTISESSION) PLAYBACK DVD+RW/+R, DVD-R/+R AND CD-R/RW PLAYBACK
- DIGITAL HOME CINEMA SPEAKER PACKAGE • NS-P106 (SILVER)

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M35 • SINGLE SPEAKER • ACTIVE SUBWOOFER  
 • GRAPHITE BLACK • 2 YEAR PARTS WARRANTY  
 • 2 YEAR LABOUR WARRANTY • RECOMMENDED AMP 150W

M3C2 • NOMINAL IMPEDANCE 8 OHM (MIN. 4.2OHMS) • AMPLIFIER POWER 25 - 125W/CH  
 • DIMENSIONS (HXWXD) 165 X 430 X 230(MM)

M3DS • NOMINAL IMPEDANCE 8 OHM (MIN. 5.6OHMS) • AMPLIFIER POWER 25 - 100W/CH



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- ONLY SCREEN SUPPLIED • 43" 16:9 PLASMA SCREEN
- NUMBER OF PIXELS 1,024 (HOR) X 768 (VER)
- PAL/SECAM/NTSC3.58/NTSC4.43/PAL60
- VGA/SVGA/XGA/TRUE XGA
- 100 HZ PROGRESSIVE SCAN
- RECEPTION SYSTEM PAL BG/DK, SECAM BG/DK/L/L
- STEREO / DUAL SOUND NICAM UK/SK/FR, CCIR A2 BG/DK
- AUTO CHANNEL PRESET / CHANNEL LABELING / CHANNEL SORT



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DVR-3100

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- FLOOR STANDING
- BOOK SHELF
- ACTIVE SUBWOOFER
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- 1 CENTRE SPEAKER
- SILVER
- 5 YEAR PARTS WARRANTY
- 5 YEAR LABOUR WARRANTY

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FS1AV

- 6X SATELLITES AND 1X 100W ACTIVE SUBWOOFER, • 1X CENTRE STAND, 2X DESKTOP STANDS, • 3X WALL MOUNTING KITS, 3X 3.5
- METRE SPEAKER CABLE,
- 3X 10 METRE SPEAKER CABLE
- DOLBY EX/DTS ES DISCS

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**Pioneer**

NSDV990

- DTS • DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2
- 450 W RMS
- 1 X SVHS/S-VIDEO CONNECTION/S
- 1 X EURO SCART CONNECTION/S
- 1 OPTICAL TERMINAL CONNECTION/S
- DV-IN/OUT
- MP3

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**Pioneer**

NSDV99

- DTS • DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2 • 450 W RMS
- 1 X SVHS/S-VIDEO CONNECTION/S • 1 X EURO SCART CONNECTION/S
- 1 OPTICAL TERMINAL CONNECTION/S • DV-IN/OUT • MP3

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**Pioneer**

NSDV1000

- DTS • RDS • BASS BOOST • DOLBY PRO-LOGIC • DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2
- 540 W RMS • 2 X SVHS/S-VIDEO CONNECTION/S • 1 OPTICAL TERMINAL CONNECTION/S • 1 CO-AXIAL DIGITAL CONNECTION/S
- AUDIO ANALOG PHONO CONNECTION/S

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## Jamo

### DVR 50 + A305 SPEAKER PACK

- DVR-50**
- JAMO'S NEW DVR 50 IS THE FIRST DVD RECEIVER IN THE WORLD
  - DIVX AND PAL/NTSC PROGRESSIVE
  - CINEMA SPEAKER SYSTEM
  - SPEAKERS AND INTUITIVE MENUS
  - CAN PLAY DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW AND CD-R/RW, MPEG-1 (MP3), MPEG-2, VCD, SVCD, JPEG AND DIVX

### A305 SPEAKER PACK DESIGN

3 SPEAKERS ARE AN ATTRACTIVE COMPLEMENT TO ANY FLAT SCREEN DISPLAY.

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### FINANCE

- No Deposit\*
- No Payments
- No Interest



### Panasonic

PT-AE200E

- 858 X 484 RESOLUTION
- 700 ANSI LUMENS BRIGHTNESS
- 700:1 CONTRAST RATIO
- SD MEMORY CARD COMPATIBLE
- RGB SCART INPUT FOR EASY CONNECTION
- 120W UHM LAMP • 2.9KG IN WEIGHT
- PROJECTION SIZE 40" - 200" 16:9 ASPECT RATIO
- AUDIO 2W (MONO) • DIMENSIONS 280W X 85H X 280D MM
- 2.9KG IN WEIGHT

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### PT-AE300E Panasonic



- 960 X 540 RESOLUTION
- 800 ANSI LUMENS BRIGHTNESS
- 800:1 CONTRAST RATIO
- SD MEMORY CARD COMPATIBLE
- RGB SCART INPUT FOR EASY CONNECTION
- 120W UHM LAMP
- PROJECTION SIZE 40" - 200" 16:9 ASPECT RATIO
- AUDIO 2W (MONO) • 2.9KG IN WEIGHT
- DIMENSIONS 280W X 85H X 280D MM

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### Panasonic TX-28PS1 INC CAB

- 28" (66CM) TAU 16:9 QUINTRIX WIDESCREEN • FLAT PICTURE TUBE
- 50HZ DIGITAL SCAN • NICAM STEREO SOUND
- BASS/TREBLE/BALANCE • PRESENCE • PICTURE/SCREEN • DIGITAL COMB FILTER • AUTOMATIC DIGITAL PICTURE NOISE REDUCTION • CHANNEL VOLUME • CHILD LOCK • CHANNEL 000 • OFF TIMER • FAST TEXT • REMOTE CONTROL



PRICES UPDATED DAILY SO U SAVE !!

### Panasonic TX-32PS12 INC CAB

- 32" (76CM) 16:9 QUINTRIX WIDESCREEN FLAT PICTURE TUBE • 100HZ SUPER DIGITAL SCAN
- NICAM STEREO • ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- SHARPNESS CONTROL • VIEWING MODES • DYNAMIC/NORMAL/CINEMA • MULTI WINDOW
- COLOUR BALANCE ADJUSTMENT
- FAST TEXT • VERTICAL HORIZONTAL CONTROL
- DIGITAL COMB FILTER • VELOCITY MODULATION
- AUTOMATIC DIGITAL PICTURE NOISE REDUCTION
- AUDIO OUTPUTS LEFT AND RIGHT 10WX2
- QLINK • EASY PROGRAMME ACCESS



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### Panasonic SC-HT500 HOME CINEMA

- DVD HOME CINEMA SYSTEM • PLAYS DVD-AUDIO, DVD-VIDEO, DVD-R/RW, VIDEO CD, CD-R/RW, MP3, WMA
- 500W (RMS) TOTAL POWER OUTPUT • BUILT-IN DOLBY DIGITAL AND DTS DECODERS
- 25W SURROUND SOUND AND CENTER PROCESSOR • SPEAKERS - CENTER/TWO SUBWOOFER • DVD-AUDIO NOT FULL BANDWIDTH/DVD-RAM COMPATIBLE
- MP3 PLAYBACK • DIGITAL TUNER WITH RDS AND PRESETS



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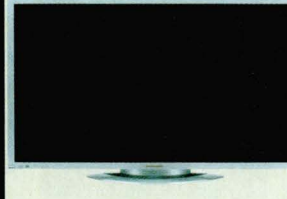
### PANASONIC PRODUCT LISTINGS

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-LC58
PANA	TX-24PS1				

## Panasonic

TH-42PW6

- 42" (106CM) PLASMA DISPLAY • RESOLUTION: 852 X 480 PIXELS • PROGRESSIVE SCAN • PIXEL PITCH: 1.08MM • COLOURS: 16.7 MILLION COLOURS
- LUMINANCE: 650 CD/M2 • VIEWING ANGLE: 160 DEGREES HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL
- CONTRAST RATIO: 4000:1 • 2 X 8 WATTS
- SCART INPUT • REMOTE CONTROL
- INPUT BOARD • SILVER FINISH
- OPTIONAL PEDESTAL STAND AND WALL BRACKET



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### Panasonic TX-28PS5 INC CAB

- 28" (66CM) TAU 16:9 QUINTRIX WIDESCREEN FLAT PICTURE TUBE • 50HZ DIGITAL SCAN
- 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 10WX2 • LEFT & RIGHT TWEETERS 10WX2 • SUBWOOFER 12W • QLINK

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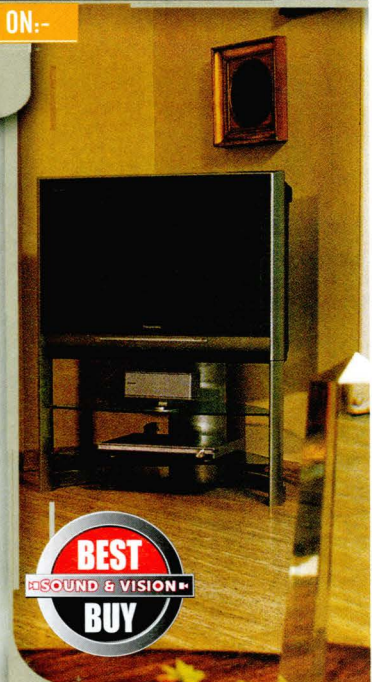
## Panasonic

TH37PA20B

- 37" (93CM) PLASMA TELEVISION WITH INTEGRATED TUNER AND SPEAKERS • 52 X 480PIXELS YGA RESOLUTION • ASPECT RATIO 16:9 WIDE
- 4000:1 CONTRAST RATIO • 1,070 MILLION COLOURS
- PIXEL PITCH (H X V): 0.96 X 0.96 MM
- 1024 SHADES OF GRADATION • SUPER REAL GAMMA SYSTEM • NEW REAL BLACK DRIVE SYSTEM
- MACH ENHANCER • QUASI 100HZ SYSTEM
- PLASMA C.A.T.S • MULTI WINDOW
- AR (ANTI-REFLECTION) COATING



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### Panasonic

TX-36PD30 INC CAB  
Also Available

- 36" (86CM) 16:9 QUINTRIX WIDE-SCREEN TV
- 100HZ SUPER DIGITAL SCAN
- NICAM STEREO / VIRTUAL DOLBY
- AUDIO OUTPUT: LEFT & RIGHT 10WX2 • SUBWOOFER 12W
- AV PICTURE IN PICTURE
- DVD PROGRESSIVE SCAN INPUT
- DIGITAL COMB FILTER
- DIGITAL PICTURE NOISE REDUCTION
- SHARPNESS CONTROL
- ENHANCED MHEG OPERATION
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PANASONIC NV-HS780 **CHECK US OUT**



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## SONY KV-32LS36

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- VIRTUAL DOLBY • NICAM STEREO SOUND
- AUTO VOLUME ADJUSTMENT
- SMART/ZOOM/4:3/WIDE/14:9 MODE
- AUTO TUNING/AUTO START UP/ONE BUTTON TUNING • AUTO LABELLING/AUTO SORTING
- 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
- TOTAL 635W: 100W X 5 + 135W RMS (10% THD)
- DOLBY DIGITAL/DOLBY PROLOGIC 2/DTS 5.1CH RECEIVER! RDS TUNER • MP3 CD-R PLAYBACK • COMPONENT VIDEO OUT • SUPER AUDIO CD MULTI-CHANNEL PLAYBACK
- S-MASTER FULL DIGITAL AMPLIFIER
- FIVE 3-DRIVE UNIT SPEAKERS WITH DETACHABLE NETS



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### SONY KV-36FS76

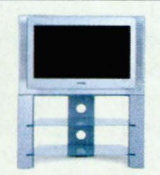
- 36" (91.4CM) VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN • IMPROVED DRC-MF
- DIGITAL NOISE REDUCTION PLUS (DNR+)
- DYNAMIC PICTURE STABILISER (DPS)
- VIRTUAL DOLBY AND BBE DIGITAL
- NEW UNIVERSAL REMOTE
- 4 X SCARTS (2 RGB)
- DYNAMIC PICTURE AND PICTURE
- DYNAMIC PICTURE AND TEXT
- DIGITAL COMB FILTER
- AUTO TUNING, AUTO START-UP, ONE BUTTON TUNING • AUTO LABELLING, AUTO CHANNEL INSTALLATION, AUTO SORTING
- CABINET INCLUDED



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### SONY KV32 FX68

- 32" (81.3CM) VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN (32" TUBE)
- DIGITAL NOISE REDUCTION (DNR)
- 3D SOUND
- VIRTUAL DOLBY • BBE
- 3 X SCART (RGB ON SCART (AND 2))
- UNIVERSAL REMOTE
- CABINET INCLUDED



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### SONY RDR-GX3

- DVD RECORDER • DUAL RW RECORDING (RW, +RW, R) • ALL DVD FORMAT PLAYBACK
- VIDEO PLUS • TELETEXT TITLE DOWNLOAD

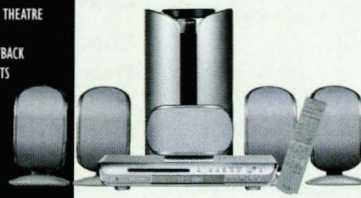


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## SONY

- MULTI REGION • COMPLETE DVD HOME THEATRE SYSTEM • SLIM & STYLISH DESIGN
- DVD/SUPER AUDIO 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

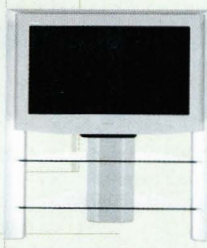
- 76CM VISIBLE FD TRINITRON WEGA SCREEN (32" TUBE) • 100HZ DIGITAL PLUS (ABAB)
- VERTICAL PICTURE STABILISER (VPS)
- DIGITAL NOISE REDUCTION (DNR)
- AUTO NOISE REDUCTION • ARC DESIGN (ONE TONE)
- 3D SOUND • VIRTUAL DOLBY • BBE
- 3 X SCART (RGB ON SCART 1 AND 2)
- PICTURE AND PICTURE (1 TUNER)
- EPG LEVEL 2 • UNIVERSAL REMOTE

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## SONY

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SONY - KP-44PX2	SONY - SLV-D950GS	SONY - DSC-U50
SONY - KLV-17HR	SONY - RDR-GK3	SONY - DSC-U30
SONY - KF-60SK300	SONY - HTP3100	
SONY - KE-50MR1	SONY - DVP-NS99ESN	



DSC-P72

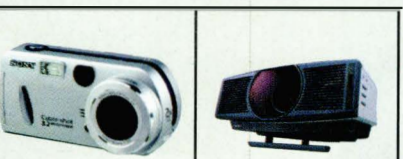
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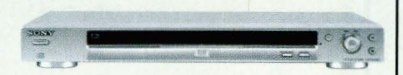
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# STEREO SPEAKERS

*Speaker pairs for stereo sound*



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

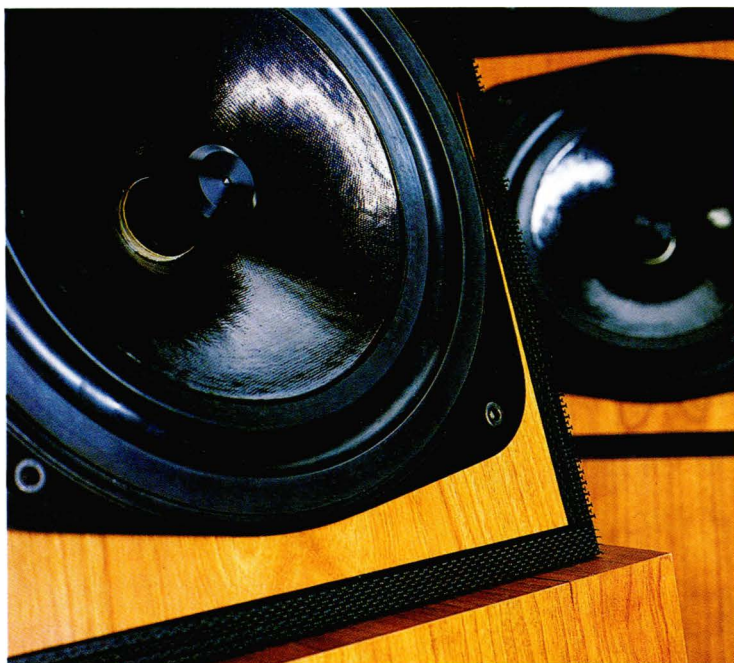
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

## Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

## Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



## Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

## Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

## POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

## Q&A

### IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

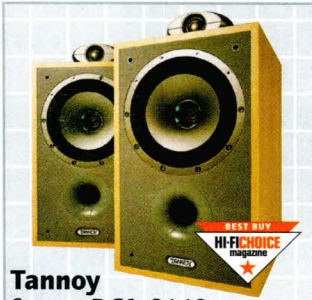
### WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

### DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

## TOP BUYS



**Tannoy**  
Sensys DC1 £449  
A new dual-concentric main driver plus super-tweeter in a solid standmount box results in a neutral yet expressive speaker at a very tempting price.



**PMC**  
GB1 £995  
An attractively compact floorstander with a beautifully articulate sound and remarkable freedom from boxiness. A great buy if you've just under a grand to spend.



**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.



**Focal-JMLab**  
Micro Utopia Be £3,500  
The smallest model in the top-end Utopia Be range is a remarkable piece of speaker engineering, complete with beryllium tweeter and a highly revealing sound.

## Our favourite **STEREO SPEAKERS**

BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOOR STANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>UP TO £1,000</b>										
BB	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
BB	ATC SCM12	999	Magnificent main driver confers great authority, grip and smoothness, though upper bass a little lean	22,39,26		A-	55		●	253
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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	Pricey but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●		231
BB	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
BB	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	24,49,30		A	25	●		251
BB	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	●		253
BB	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816 S	999	Great all-rounder – lively and dynamic, smooth and neutral, marred only by a slight treble 'sting'	22,98,31	●	A-	25	●		242
	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30		A	30		●	234
	KEF Q4	400	Beautiful, bijou three-way floorstander lacks some bass weight but has a lovely midband with low coloration	18,82,25	●	A	38		●	255
	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
	Mission m35	400	Very good material value – a big speaker with ample bass and a notably open yet also rather bright top end	26,103,37	●	A	23	●		255
	Monitor Audio Bronze B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight, controlled bass and a pronounced midband	19,35,25		A	42		●	238
BB	Monitor Audio Bronze B4	350	A beautifully balanced loudspeaker with fine overall dynamic range and good imaging	19,85,26	●	A	23	●		255
	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
BB	Mordaunt-Short Avant 906	350	Capable and engaging, this neat design will complement the majority of sub-£500-per-component systems	18,85,27	●	A	45	●		254
	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
BB	PMC GB1	995	Ultra-compact floorstander is beautifully clean, articulate and free from boxiness, with a notably delicate top end	16,92,24	●	A+	30	●		257
	Quad 22L	895	Lovely lacquer finish over birds-eye maple veneer, with a sound that's more open and forward than usual	21,87,28	●	A	25	●		257
BB	Rega Ela	749	Might have more grunt, but few can match its impressive agility, delicacy, and superior musical communication	23,89,30	●	A	28		●	250
	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

**SPECS KEY** SIZE WxHxD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOOR STANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).



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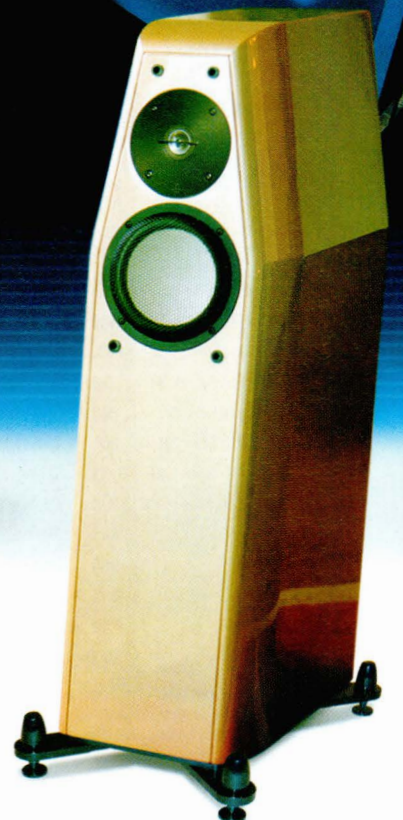
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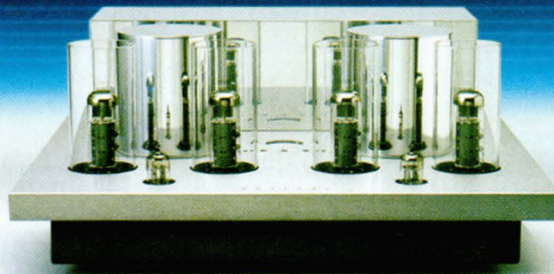


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## Our favourite **STEREO SPEAKERS** continued

### Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
BB	Tannoy Fusion 4	350	This big d'Appolito twin two-way has fine coherence and dynamics. A neutral and even all-rounder	21,97,29	●	A	20	●	255
BB	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
	Triangle Celius 202	1,225	Looks rather bland and uninteresting, but this tall, high sensitivity speaker has a classy and dynamic midband	22,113,30	●	A-	27	●	257
BB	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
<b>ABOVE £1,000</b>									
EC	Acoustic Energy AE1 MkII	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
BB	Anthony Gallo Nucleus Ref	2,400	Occasionally raw, but engaging and capable beyond its physical stature	20,89,41	●	A	34	●	257
	ATC Active 10	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		act	45	●	221
BB	ATC SCM35	1,999	If you want to hear the uncoloured truth about your record collection in all its glory, this is a speaker to treasure	23,88,30	●	A-	48	●	250
EC	ATC Active 20	2,538	30k + 300W equals resolution and bass that most amp/speaker combinations dream about – a bargain	56,28,36		act	45	●	240
EC	ATC SCM50 ASL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		act	38	●	218
BB	Audio Note AN-E/LX	2,650	Though not very pretty, this is a thoroughly entertaining speaker with great dynamic subtlety and integrity	36,79,27	●	A+	22	●	256
EC	B&O Beolab 5	10,000	Radical, environmentally independent active speaker has exceptional bass, neutrality, and imaging	49,97,49	●	act	<20	●	244
	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		A	28	●	199
BB	B&W 704	1,400	Cleverly tapered enclosure and external tweeter delivers superior bass and treble, with a laid-back midband	22,96,32	●	A	20	●	257
BB	B&W 703	2,000	Elegant floorstander with excellent bass drive and mid dynamic range, but slightly strong and obvious top end	23,101,36	●	A-	20	●	247
EC	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Gorgeous standmount sounds delicately transparent and laid back with very superior resolution and imaging	24,42,34		A	30	●	247
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art. Needs real power, but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	A-	34	●	183
EC	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	A-	34	●	186
EC	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●	231
BB	BC Acoustique ACT-A1	1,195	Exceptional focus, dynamic coherence and expression through the voice band, but bass could be more even	21,90,33	●	A+	25	●	257
	Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75	●	A+	80	●	244
	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricey compared to some though	21,99,32	●	A+	38	●	229
BB	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●	229
	Eclipse TD Lulét 307/316	1,250	Extraordinary satellite plus sub solution sounds a cut above other sub/sats. Can be expanded to multichannel	12,16,16		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 Be	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 Diva Utopia Be	7,599	Lovely slimline speaker combines remarkable transparency with fine dynamics and gorgeous bass	25,110,53	●	A+	30	●	255
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
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●	233
	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
	MartinLogan Mosaic	1,799	Curious hybrid construction marries many panel speaker-like attributes with moving coil simplicity	24,102,30	●	A-	46	●	257
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



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Our favourite  BEST BUY  EDITOR'S CHOICE

# STEREO SPEAKERS

 continued

## Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Mission Elegante e83	1,990	Uncommonly clean, agile and refined floorstander, and as elegant as the name	33,111,36	●	A-	44	●		257
	Naim Ariva	1,275	Cute and discreet floorstander has superb bass and a wide dynamic range, but it could be smoother and sweeter	23,88,31	●	A	25	●	●	259
	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●		229
	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
	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
	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
	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
	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
	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
	ProAc Response D25	2,995	The traditional ProAc high-end detail mixed with greater efficiency and more pace - a splendid speaker	22,107,25	●	A+	20	●		254
	Rega R9	2,498	This subtle, laid back but very informative performer has a very superior dynamic range, especially in the bass	17,103,39	●	A	20	●		256
	Ruark Talisman III	1,499	No bass demon, but a sophisticated and agile speaker epitomising Ruark's design ideals	22,84,31	●	A	22	●		259
	Sonus Faber Cremona A.	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32		A	48	●		246
	Spendor S6e	1,495	Combines deep, powerful bass with an attractively open midband, but perhaps too much restraint up top	30,88,19	●	A+	23	●		257
	Spendor S9e	2,895	An improvement on the original S9 - very entertaining at high levels with a fabulously open and weighty bass	24,101,38	●	A+	40	●		256
	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
	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38	●		215
	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
	Tannoy Yorkminster	9,000	Deliciously delicate and expressive at low listening levels, it still has massive headroom when your in the mood	62x102x45	●	A+	20	●		255
	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
	Wilson Benesch Curve	5,000	Much (but not all) of the ACT's performance in a much more compact and affordable package	23,91,37	●	A	28	●		254
	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
	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
	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



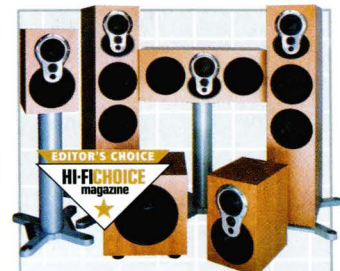
**B&W**  
600 S3 package £900  
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



**KEF**  
Q AV7 £1,300  
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



**ATC**  
Concept 3 £4,877  
It might not look as flashy as some, but the quality of engineering in this ATC package ensures superb all-round performance.



**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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

### Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<span>BB</span>	ATC Concept 3	4,877	Extremely engaging, revealing and musical multichannel system providing 360 degrees of full-on entertainment	A-	6	12	●	opt	255
	B&W 300 package	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A	6	27	●		241
<span>BB</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●		232
<span>EC</span>	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
<span>BB</span>	Mission m5 package	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as sub 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

**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 BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE SUBWOOFERS

### Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
	B&W PV1	950	Gorgeously styled sub shakes the air but not the floor, delivering a very clean sound with negligible coloration	29,34,35	500	20	259
<span>EC</span>	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 performs particularly well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<span>BB</span>	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
<span>BB</span>	REL Stampede	550	Few subs at this price match the Stampede's subtlety and ease of integration. Much more hi-fi than AV	28,40,29	100	18	257
<span>BB</span>	REL Strata 5	700	Highly musical sub that integrates well but the REL Stampede offers near-identical performance for less money	32,46,33	150	18	257
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
<span>EC</span>	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
	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

# 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

BB BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						ISSUE NUMBER	
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)		3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR
BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
BB	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270		230
EC	AKG K1000	550	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270		244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250		194
BB	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
BB	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
BB	Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise		●			●	200	●	230
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
BB	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
EC	Sennheiser HD650	299	Astonishing resolution and hardly less impressive tonal balance make this a true hi-fi experience			●	●		260	●	252
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●		250	●	219
EC	Stax System li	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205

**SPECS KEY** **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc

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# CABLES



## Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Analogue interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA (phono) plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection – this can be sonically advantageous, especially over longer runs. Speaker cable is commonly sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can

be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing 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, given the choice, but optical cables may be a better bet over long runs (10m+). Optical inputs/outputs usually use Toslink connectors, while most electrical types use RCA plugs, but some opt for BNC connection instead – check your components before you buy.

## Our favourite CABLES

**BEST BUY** **EDITOR'S CHOICE**

				SPECIFICATIONS					
BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS</b>									
<b>EC</b>	Avid Black Reference SCT	700	Rich, slightly dark sound that is beguiling and highly informative		●				256
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●			248
	Chord Company Signature	499	Silver plated, triple screened. Some granularity but great resolving ability, a good match for Chord Signature loudspeaker cable		●	●			255
<b>BB</b>	Chord Company Chorus	200	Very even-handed balance with notably extended bass	●		●			259
<b>BB</b>	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●			211
	Ecosse The Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●			224
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●			241
<b>BB</b>	Kimber Timbre	72	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
<b>BB</b>	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
<b>BB</b>	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
<b>EC</b>	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
<b>BB</b>	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
<b>BB</b>	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
<b>BB</b>	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●			234
<b>BB</b>	Wireworld Solstice 5	70	A cable with all-round appeal – treble is slightly 'dark' but bass is excellent and the overall balance very good indeed	●		●			259
<b>DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS</b>									
<b>BB</b>	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
<b>BB</b>	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
<b>BB</b>	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E	241
<b>BB</b>	Supra ZAC	32	High grade fibre and quality plugs add up to a noticeable improvement over giveaway optical leads					O	259
<b>BB</b>	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O	234
<b>SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE</b>									
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●			241
	Chord Company Signature	117	Dynamic, solid sounding cable, but it's bulky and not very tractable	●		●			255
	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●			227
<b>EC</b>	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
<b>BB</b>	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
<b>BB</b>	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
<b>BB</b>	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
<b>BB</b>	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
<b>BB</b>	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
<b>EC</b>	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round			●	●		241
<b>BB</b>	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.

# STANDS AND SUPPORTS

## Equipment racks and speaker stands



If you want to get the most from your source and amp components, it's important to consider good quality support. Dedicated equipment supports are racks and tables made specifically to hold hi-fi gear, and the best can have a profoundly positive effect on sound

because, for example, they can help to isolate kit from ground-borne vibrations and mechanical or electrical interference. Equally, if you own a pair of small 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' speakers, it's important to place them on good quality, purpose-built speaker stands.

## Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

**BB** BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66,46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
<b>BB</b>	Audiophile Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
<b>BB</b>	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
<b>BB</b>	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab looks, but great sound and efficient use of space ('Acoustic' version tested – standard version £350)	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
<b>EC</b>	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54,49		4	Torlyte	240
<b>BB</b>	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
<b>BB</b>	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
<b>EC</b>	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

**BB** BEST BUY **EC** EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
<b>BB</b>	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18	●		3	202
	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
<b>BB</b>	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
<b>BB</b>	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 hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

**TWEAK** To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

**TWEAKER** Someone who enjoys this process.

**VEILED** Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

**WARM** A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

**WEIGHT** A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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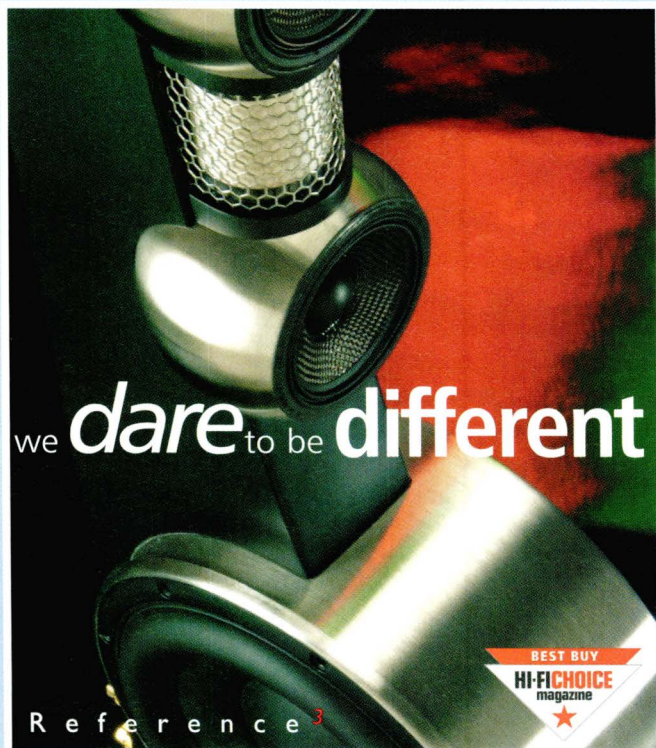
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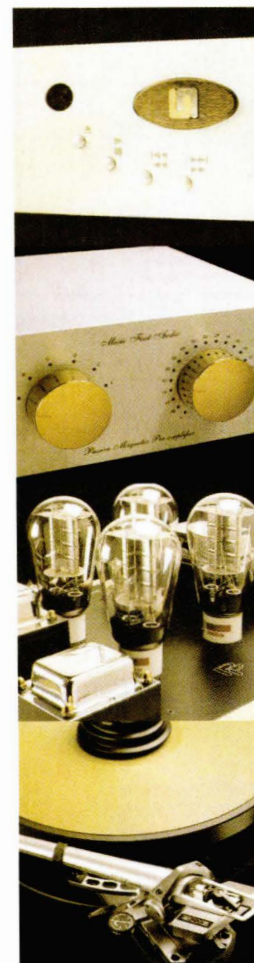
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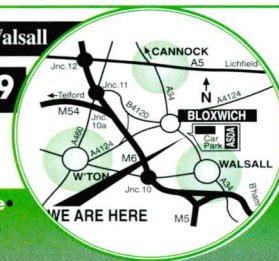
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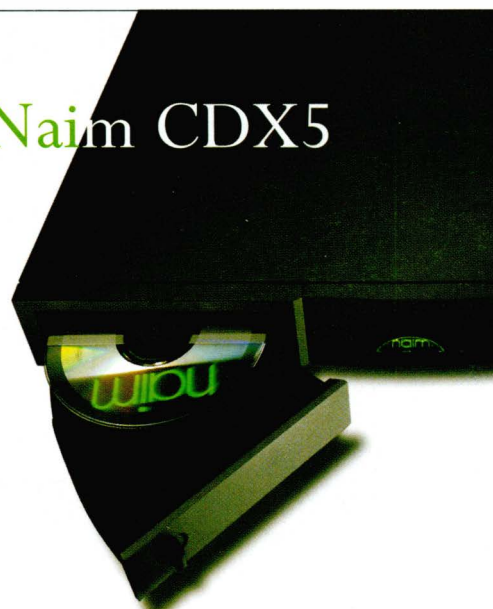


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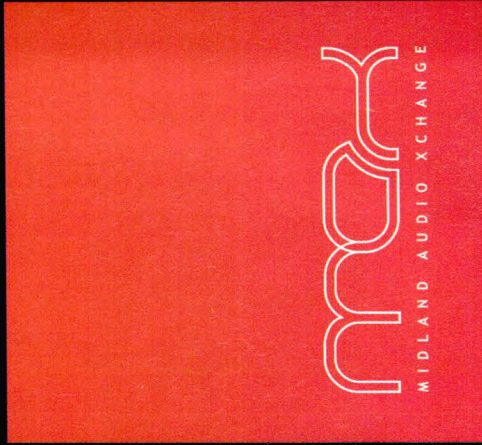
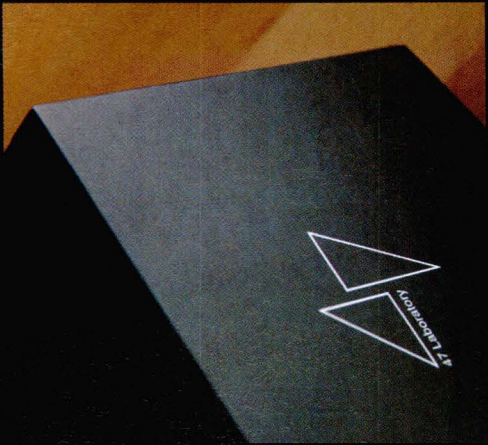
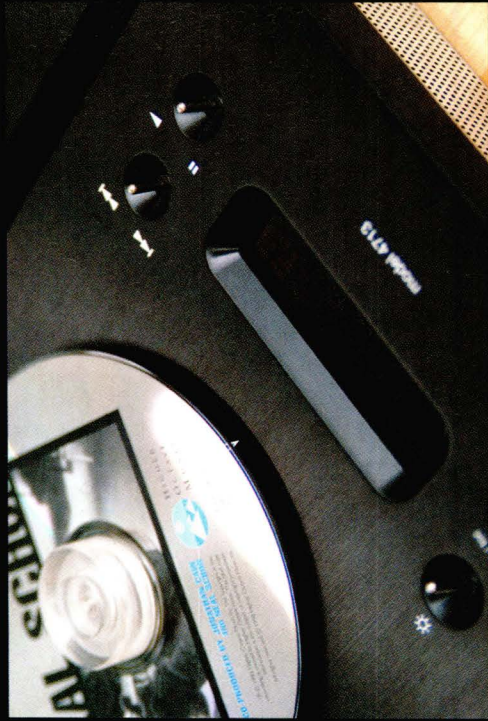
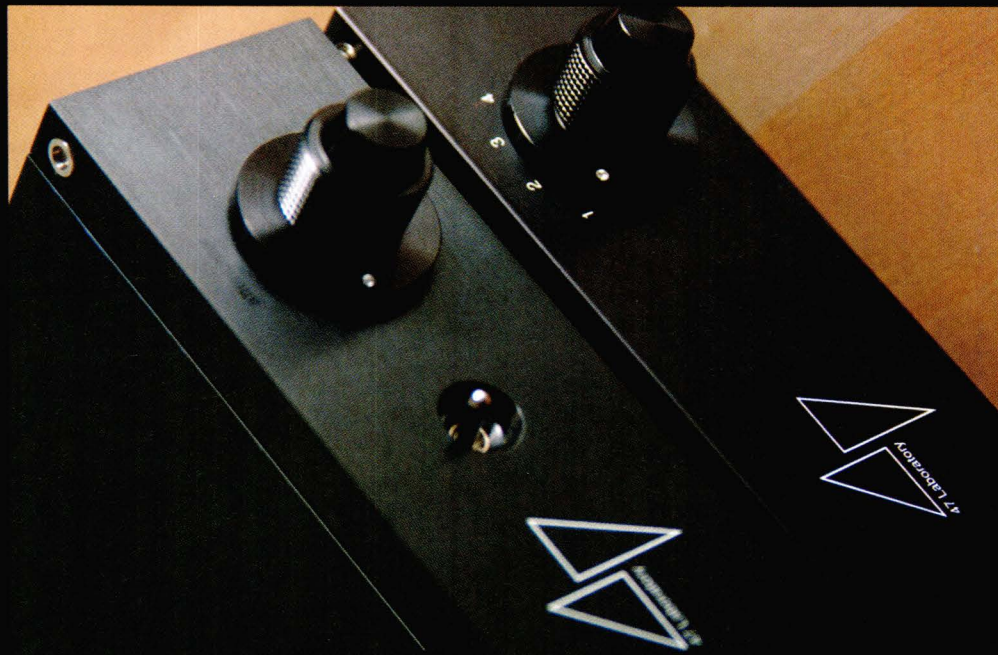
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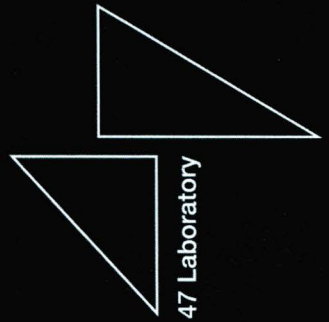
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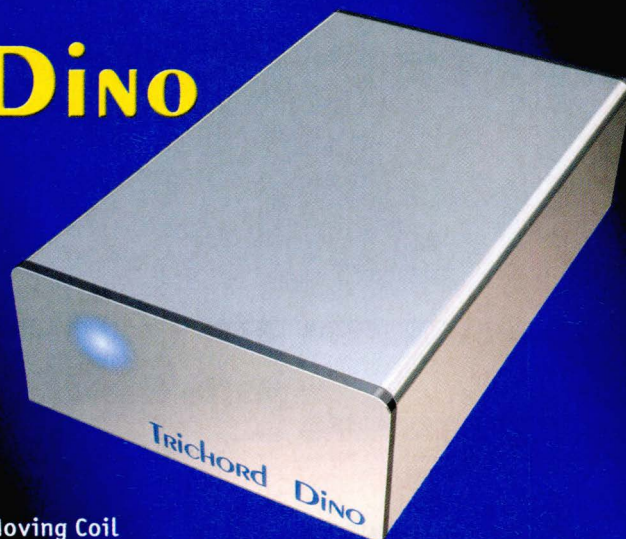
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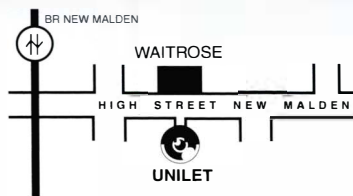
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# A-Z GUIDE TO SECOND-HAND KIT

## #02 B&W

Any company with a permanent exhibit at London's Science Museum has to be worthy of an audiophile's attention. Yet it's not B&W's high-tech Nautilus speaker, or even the fact that this technology filters down, that's important here. What is important to the second-hand buyer is a service back-up that has to be one of the best in the country. B&W keep spares for all their speakers for at least ten years (15 for premium ranges). Also, if you need a binding post or advice on second-hand values, they are more than happy to take a call.

Although B&W has been producing speakers since 1966, it's the models from 1990 onwards that we'll focus upon here. The two main ranges from this period are the 600 and 800 series. Both are highly respected, with no real duffers, but certain models are worth keeping a particular eye out for. One such model from the early 1990s is the DM620. This is a medium-sized, floorstanding design, with a full bass and decent dynamics. In 1993 it, along with the rest of the 600 range, was improved, but as these improvements add up to little, condition is more important than age. At around £70-£90 the 620 has to be one of the best floorstanding speaker buys under £100.

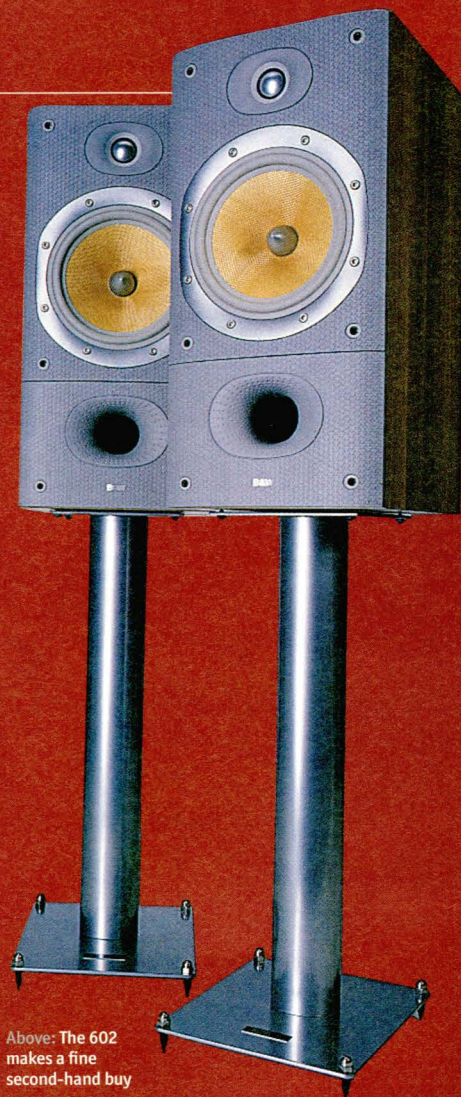
In 1996 the whole range was overhauled. The DM610 became the 601, the 620 the 602 and so on. The only model to watch carefully, if you're bidding blind, is the DM600, which has been called this, despite numerous changes, from its introduction in 1991 to the present day. Post 1996 600s are better in their Series 2

guise (1999 onwards), when they received tweaks inspired by the Nautilus range. The Series 3 is a fine product range, but still a little expensive second-hand. Our pick would be a DM601 S2, which should be yours for around £100-£130. A tweeter for one of these, incidentally, costs a reasonable £20 from B&W.

Parts for the 800 series are less cheap, but then you'd expect that from a more sophisticated design. All 800s are excellent, although the 805 (introduced in 1991) is a particular favourite of mine. As well as being the cheapest model, it's also the smallest. Yet, as a close range monitor design, it provides a sound more neutral than anything this side of Abbey Road Studios. Early models go for as little as £350, but you could be paying more like £2K for one of the later Signatures. Our choice would be a post-1998 model, which received a series of Nautilus-derived upgrades. These can be had from around £700, but do check the condition of the drive units. As they make a great monitor speaker, many are used as such and consequently trashed. A tweeter for one of these is also a rather more costly £66 plus fitting.

The fact that while conducting the research for this piece I found relatively few for sale shows just how reluctant most owners are to let go. B&W speakers are one of the few brands that make sense across the price spectrum. Buy well, and you should be well served. **HFC**

Dominic Todd  
Next month - Cambridge Audio



Above: The 602 makes a fine second-hand buy

## DIY CORNER SPEAKERS

Part 2 'Keep it simple' is good advice for the DIY speaker builder

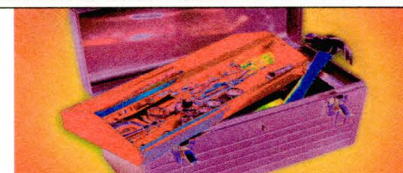
One of my first tasks in hi-fi journalism, back in the mid-1970s, was to cope with the fallout from a DIY speaker project published a couple of months before I arrived. Errors had found their way into the plans, for which many readers had sent in their postal orders. They'd already bought and cut wood, and were very unhappy at discovering that things didn't fit properly.

The root of the problem was that this design was just too complicated for its own good. It had at least half a dozen drivers distributed all over the front panel and had folded transmission-line bass loading.

My previous experience working for

Spendor made me deeply suspicious that such a complex design would work well, even if one could overcome the serious difficulties involved in building a pair. A complex design might be worth it for the experienced DIYer, or with a kit using pre-cut wood. But for those new to speaker building, who want good performance with little chance of things going wrong, a decent size two-way, with a 165mm main driver in a port-loaded 15-20 litre box, will give better results.

Successful commercial examples of this type include B&W's DM602 S3 and Focal-JMlab's Chorus 707 S, and a DIY equivalent should prove very straightforward.



Do follow the advice of your component supplier concerning choice of drivers, crossover network, box size and port tuning, to guarantee good results. **HFC**

Paul Messenger

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<b>Living Voice</b> Avatar II - cherry - 12 months old, nearly spotless - lovely finish	£2000	£2700
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<b>Pro Ac</b> Studio 200 - yew - nice - vgc	£800	£2150
<b>Pro Ac</b> Supertower - big bruiser - black. At least 10 years old, very loved and dog-eared. Great sounding den/party speaker - good working order	£300	
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FRONT END/PLAYBACK	Audio Analogue Paganini CD X-dem	899	599
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	dCS Delius 24/192 DAC Non Firewire S/H	5999	2995
	Mark Levinson No 360s x-dem	7495	3999
	Rega Jupiter CD Silver x-dem	998	699
	Rega Planet CD Black x-dem	498	349
	Theta Pro Basic II DAC with Oscom/Balanced S/H	2990	1195
	Theta Generation V Balanced S/H	6290	2499
	Unison Research Unico Valve CD x-dem	1195	895
	Clearaudio Solution/RB300 x-dem	1595	999
Clearaudio Unify Unipivot Tonearm New & Boxed	795	599	
Clearaudio Accurate MC x-demo 2800	2800	1699	
Clearaudio Victory MC New & Boxed 1030	1030	699	
Kuzma Stabi/Stogi S Turntable New & Boxed	N/A	1399	
Lehmann Audio Black Cube SE New & Boxed	650	449	
McCormack Phono Stage New & Boxed	650	399	
Rega Planar 3/Heed PSU/Bias S/H	630	269	
Transfiguration Aria MC10 hours use	690	479	
AMPLIFICATION	Audio Analogue Bellini Remote Preamp x-dem	625	499
	Krell PAM7 2 Box Preamp + Phono MM/MC S/H	N/A	599
	Audio Analogue Corelli Stereo Power Amplifier x-dem	695	479
	Audio Analogue Donizetti Mono Power Amplifiers x-dem	1050	729
	Audio Analogue Puccini Integrated x-dem	525	399
	EAR 509 Anniversary Balanced Valve Mono New & Boxed	5998	3999
	Nagra VPA Mono 845 Valve Amplifiers S/H	10000	7499
	Primare A30.1 Integrated B stock New & Boxed	1500	995
	Red Rose Sprit Integrated x-dem	1000	649
	Martin Logan CLSII Anniversary Electrostatics 7 mths S/H	6700	4295
Martin Logan Aerius I Hybrid Electrostatics Oak S/H	2389	1299	
Naim Audio Intro Black Ash S/H	875	499	
Rel Acoustics Strata III Grittex S/H	695	450	
Rega Jura Floorstanding Black Ash S/H	450	199	
Rega ELA Cherry X-dem	749	579	
Verity Audio Fidelio Piano Lacquer x-dem	7995	3999	
SPEAKERS	Cardas Neutral Reference 1m RCA-BNC S/H	550	375
	Madrigal CZ Gel 1.5m Balanced New & Boxed	599	299
	Madrigal MDC 2 1m Fatboy Digital cable New & Boxed	319	159
	Madrigal MDC 2 0.5m Fatboy Digital cable New & Boxed	279	139
	Nordost SPM 1m RCA-RCA S/H	650	479
	QED QNEXII 1m RCA-RCA Interconnect S/H	N/A	22
	Siltech SQ58G3 2x4m Balanced Interconnect x-dem	2370	1499
	Siltech Signature G5 1m AES/EBU 110ohm Digital S/H	625	449
	Siltech SPX10 0.5m mains cable New & Boxed	105	55
	Siltech LS 25 2x 2.5m speaker cable x-dem	499	249
Spectral MH-330 15ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-dem	800	499	
Spectral MH-750 15ft Interconnect RCA-RCA x-dem	1400	799	
Spectral MI-350 20 ft Speaker cable x-dem	2100	1199	
CABLES	Acoustic Energy AE505 - ex display, superb floorstander, were £800!!!	249	299
	Acoustic Energy AE1 - new tweeters, scruffy grilles	279	195
	Castle Audience 10 - ex, boxed, black	149	149
	Epos M15 - nr mint, light cherry, boxed	449	325
	ES14 - nr mint, boxed 80s classic c/w dedicated stands	325	119
	Gallo 5.1 - ex display, boxed, gorgeous!	999	69
	Mission 763i - ex, black floorstander, boxed	119	69
	Mission 77ci - ex display, boxed	69	99
	Mission Cyrus 781 - ex, black larger bookshelf	99	299
	Monitor Audio S6 - nr mint, boxed	299	299
Monitor Audio R700MD - nr mint, black	299	129	
Monitor Audio Bronze B2 - nr mint cherry, boxed	129	149	
Mordaunt Short 912 - ex display, boxed	149	199	
Mordaunt Short 914 - ex display, boxed	199	149	
Musical Technology Kestrel SE - ex, very pretty floorstander	199	ON DEM	
NEAT Pelite - Best trade ins	39	1499	
QED Aria - ex display, boxed mint surrounds	39	119	
QUAD ESL63 - nr mint, unused since Quad service with new boxes	1499	119	
Rega Kyte - ex, wood finish	119	199	
Rega EL8 - fair, wood floorstander	199	299	
REL Q50 - ex, black	199	199	
REL Strata - ex, black	299	199	
Tannoy R2 - good, boxed, slim cherry floorstander	199	179	
Wharfedale Evo 8 - ex display, boxed	179	299	
Wharfedale Pacific Pi30 - nr mint boxed, light cherry, excellent	299	99	
Arcam Alpha 7 - ex, black	99	149	
Arcam T61 - ex display, boxed, rare black	149	329	
Audiolab 8000T	329	229	
Cyrus FM7 tuner - black, digital, presets, nr mint	229	49	
Denon TU260L tuner - ex, black, digital, presets	49	99	
Marantz ST4000 - ex display, boxed, black	99	379	
Marantz SD4050 - ex display, boxed, twin cassette, black	379	199	
Quad 66FM - ex	199	699	
Rotel RT02 - ex display, boxed, silver	199	69	
TAG McLaren T20 - ex display, boxed	699	69	
Teac TX3000 tuner - ex, digital, presets	69	75	
Teac V1010 cassette - ex, 3 head	75	ON DEM	
Atacama DT231 galactic - new	30	15	
Beyer Ixos 1014 - new 1m interconnect	15	25	
Ixos 1014 - new 5m interconnect	25	49	
Mission Stance - ex display, silver	49	1199	
Quad 67/67 system as listed above - Cd, Tuner, Pre, Power and system remote	1199	699	
Lambda Nova Signature - nr mint, superlative quality	699		

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Most of our turntable combinations come fitted with free cartridge		
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Linn LP12/Lingo/LtkokLVIII/Asaka - nr mint, rosenut, boxed		1199
Linn LP12/Valhalla/LtkokLVII - nr mint, black, boxed		699
Linn LP12/Armagordo/Nima - ex, black		1199
Linn LP12/Valhalla/Akito - vgc, black		599
Linn LP12/Valhalla/LVX - vgc, black		479
Linn Basik, LVX - vgc, black		199
Linn Axis, Basik plus - vgc, black		249
Gyrodec/RB300 - vgc, cyropower ps, Orbe platter, smoked case		999
Michell Gyrodec SE/RB300 - ex, brand new arm		699
Michell Orbe/RB300 - ex/ex, boxed		1399
Michell Orbe - ex, smoked		1199
Michell Orbe/SME309 - ex/ex, boxed		1699
Michell Orbe/Wilson Benesch Act 2 - nr mint, boxed ... Stunning!		1949
<b>Michell All Models - Best trade ins</b>		<b>ON DEM</b>
<b>Origin Live Rega Arm mods - Best Trade ins</b>		<b>ON DEM</b>
Pink Triangle LPT/RB250/Reson - ex/ex		379
Project Debut - ex display, black, boxed		89
Project Classic - ex display, cherrywood plinth, boxed		239
Rega Planar 2/RB250 - ex/ex		149
Rega Planar 3/RB300 - vgc/ex		179
Roksan Nima - nearly new, boxed		279
SME 309 - nr mint, boxed		479
SME V - nr mint, boxed		999
<b>Trichord Dino / Plus - Best Trade ins</b>		<b>ON DEM</b>
Voyd Valdi - vgc, mahogany, fab twin motor deck		499
<b>Digital - CD, DVD etc</b>		
<i>Many more inexpensive CD players in stock</i>		
Arcam Alpha 8 - nr mint, remote		199
Arcam Alpha BSE - nr mint, remote		349
Arcam CD72 - nr mint, silver, remote		279
Cambridge Audio Discmag/Dacmagic - ex, nice extra for peanuts		199
Cyrus Dad7 - nr mint, black, remote		399
Cyrus PSX-R - nr mint, black		249
Krell CD-DSP - ex, clear and smoked lids, remote, stunning		1499
Marantz DV4100 - nr mint, remote, boxed		89
Marantz DV4100 OSE - nr mint, remote, boxed		129
Meridian 200 transport and matching dac - ex, superb combination		449
Meridian 200 transport - ex, Trichord mod, excellent		349
Micromega Trio - ex, the ultimate Micromega		1449
Micromega T-drive and T-dac - vgc, boxed, remote, superb sound, £1000s new		799
Musical Fidelity X100 - nr mint		119
Myryad T20 - black, nr mint, boxed, remote, bargain!		249
Naim Cd1 - ex, remote		699
NVA The Transparent Statement - vgc, crated, remote ... ultimate NVA		1749
Quad 67 - ex, sweet sounding player, much better than 66		499
Roksan Caspiat - nr mint, silver, boxed, remote		449
Sony 555ES - Superb SACD player in gold		699
Teac CDP4500 - ex, remote		99
<b>Amplifiers</b>		
Arcam Alpha 7R - ex, as above with remote		149
Arcam Alpha 10 power - nr mint, boxed		349
Arcam A65 - nr mint, boxed, remote, silver		179
Arcam A65 - ex display, boxed, remote, silver		199
Arcam A85 - ex, remote, silver		425
Arcam P75 - ex display, remote, silver		199
Audio Analogue Puccini - ex, silver		299
Audiolab 8000A - ex, black, boxed		249
Audiolab 8000S - nr mint		329
1072 - vgc, champagne finish		99
Marantz SR4200 - ex display, boxed black av amp		149
Meridian 605s - ex pair boxed monoblocks		795
Meridian 505s - ex, pair monoblocks		949
Meridian Cyrus Two and PSX - vgc, nextel finish		229
Mission 352 - ex display, boxed, titanium		249
NAD 304 - nr mint, great value		99
Pioneer A400 - ex, phono		119
Primare A30.1 - nr mint, boxed		799
Primare A20 - nr mint integrated		379
Quad 405/2 - good, brown		225
Quad 405 - nr mint, early brass heatsink version		199
Quad 66pre and system remote - ex		399
Quad 606 power - vgc		295
Roksan Caspian - nr mint, silver, boxed, remote		399
Rotel RB03 power - ex display, boxed silver		199
Shearpe Phase 2 - nr mint, boxed, blue marble styling		279
Sony STR-DB940 av amp - vgc, DTS 5.1 etc		199
Sugden AU41 pre/power - ex, black		499
Trio L07C and 2 x L07M monos - superb		749
<b>Speakers</b>		
Acoustic Energy AE505 - ex display, superb floorstander		249
Acoustic Energy AE505 - new sealed box, superb floorstander, were £800!!!		299
Acoustic Energy AE1 - new tweeters, scruffy grilles		279
Castle Audience 10 - nr mint, new model in light ash		195
Epos M15 - nr mint, light cherry, boxed		149
ES14 - nr mint, boxed 80s classic c/w dedicated stands		449
Gallo 5.1 - ex display, boxed, gorgeous!		325
Mission 763i - ex, black floorstander, boxed		119
Mission 77ci - ex display, boxed		69
Mission 781 - ex, black larger bookshelf		99
Monitor Audio S6 - nr mint, boxed		299
Monitor Audio Studio Centre - ex display, boxed		299
Monitor Audio R700MD - nr mint, black		149
Monitor Audio Bronze B2 - nr mint cherry, boxed		129
Mordaunt Short 912 - ex display, boxed		149
Mordaunt Short 914 - ex display, boxed		199
Musical Technology Kestrel SE - ex, very pretty floorstander		149
NEAT Pelite - Best trade ins		ON DEM
QED Aria - ex display, boxed mint surrounds		39
QUAD ESL63 - nr mint, unused since Quad service with new boxes		1499
Rega Kyte - ex, wood finish		119
Rega EL8 - fair, wood floorstander		199
REL Q50 - ex, black		199
REL Strata - ex, black		299
Tannoy R2 - good, boxed, slim cherry floorstander		199
Wharfedale Evo 8 - ex display, boxed		179
Wharfedale Pacific Pi30 - nr mint boxed, light cherry, excellent		299
<b>Tuners and Tape</b>		
Arcam Alpha 7 - ex, black		99
Arcam T61 - ex display, boxed, rare black		149
Audiolab 8000T		329
Cyrus FM7 tuner - black, digital, presets, nr mint		229
Denon TU260L tuner - ex, black, digital, presets		49
Marantz ST4000 - ex display, boxed, black		99
Marantz SD4050 - ex display, boxed, twin cassette, black		379
Quad 66FM - ex		199
Rotel RT02 - ex display, boxed, silver		199
TAG McLaren T20 - ex display, boxed		699
Teac TX3000 tuner - ex, digital, presets		69
Teac V1010 cassette - ex, 3 head		75
<b>Systems, cables and miscellaneous</b>		
Equipment supports - Your kit deserves them!		ON DEM
Beyer DT231 galactic - new		30
Ixos 1014 - new 1m interconnect		15
Ixos 1014 - new 5m interconnect		25
Mission Stance - ex display, silver		49
Quad 67/67 system as listed above - Cd, Tuner, Pre, Power and system remote		1199
Lambda Nova Signature - nr mint, superlative quality		699

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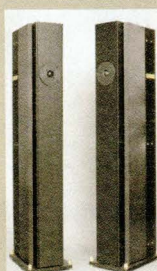
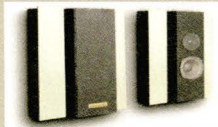
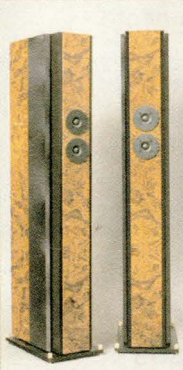
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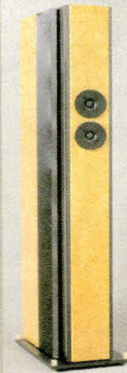


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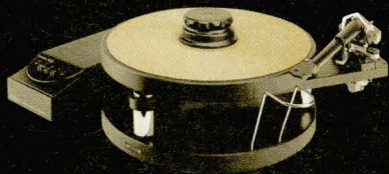
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*Brian Rivas and Alison Holmes can be contacted at*  
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**1970'S GEAR:** Yamaha CA810, 65 watts rms. Yamaha CT600, Yamaha cassette deck, Pioneer PL12D, Tannoy Arden studio monitors in walnut, 50kg each. Offers 07779 409331 (York)

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE2A** speaker stands, lead filled, the best available (£530) £280 ovno. Mint and boxed. Andy 0115 9126424 (Midlands)

**ALMOST 600** classical CDs, mostly piano works. Two to three pounds each or £1,000 for the lot. Wayne 02920 369052 (Cardiff)

**ARCAM A655** Diva amp, three years old, original packaging, perfect cond, £225. Stephen 020 8699 9691 (South London).

**ARCAM A85** amp £350. Arcam CD92T £400. Both silver, excellent cond. Stuart 07791 141267 (Ipswich).

**ARCAM CD82T** (£600). Arcam A85 (£800). Both mint and boxed, sell both for £400. 0118 3750406 (Reading).

**ARCAM DELTA** tuner, black, presets, remote. Excellent cond £90. Creek CAS3140 tuner, black ash. Fantastic sound £30. Mr.Barker 01322 529581 (Bexleyheath, Kent).

**ARCAM FMJ CD33**, boxed, one year old, silver, £850. Ben 07790 907718 (London).

**AUDIO ANALOGUE** Puccini amp, mint, boxed with manual £320 ono. Rega Planar 2 turntable with Linn K9 cartridge, excellent cond, with manual, £190 ono. 07746 948559 (Southampton).

**AUDIO RESEARCH LS5**, full balanced in/out, (£5,290). Excellent cond, hardly used, offers invited. Theta Pro Basic II, (£2,299) excellent cond also,

hardly used, offers. 020 8504 1638 or 07812 465326 (London).

**AUDIOLAB 8000A** black model, very little use and in mint cond. Still boxed, £200. 01992 572098 (Essex).

**B&W CDM 1NT** cherry speakers, new, boxed with quality cables, £495. Apollo Mezzo rack, as new £95. 07932 577226 (Essex).

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZURE** 640 amp, Azure 640 CD £150 each. Maple KEF Q5s £375, all as new. 07734 532945 (N London).

**CASTLE HARLECH** floorstanders in yew. Great cond, boxed, bargain £350. 01903 717826 (W Sussex).

**CLASSIC MARANTZ** receiver model 19, made in USA. 1970s, aluminium front and FM receiver. Best offer secures. Tony 01752 350770 (Devon).

**COPLAND CDA 266** CD player (£1,100) £400. Rega Mira Amp (£450) £220. Rega Radio R (£350) £150. Castle Harlech S1 in oak (£900) £380. All vgc with boxes and instructions, can demo. Andy 01604 517780 (Northants).

**CYRUS CLS50** standmount speakers in cherry veneer. Boxed, mint, with manuals (£550) £200. 07753 625783 (Kent).

**DENON AVC-A1SR** (gold), Onkyo DV-S757, Heybrook 2000 5.1 speakers, Epson EMP-TW100 projector, Alphason AD5/47-SB rack, Sound Fantastic mains protector, £6,000. 01929 472196 (Dorchester).

**DENON AVC-A1SR** amp £1,490. Warranty ends in September. Free upgrade to AVC-A1SRA, as good as Bryston 4B SST. 01923 267434 (Watford)

**EPOS ES22** floorstanding speakers in walnut. Superb sound

and cond, original packaging (£1,250) £475 ono. Stephen 01707 652985 (Hatfield).

**EXPOSURE XV** integrated amp £175. Trichord Genesis CD player clock 3 upgrade. PL5 Mains lead. £195. 01634 72164 (Kent).

**INTEGRA RESEARCH RDV-1** DVD player, RDC-7 AV controller and RDA-7 amp. Recently upgraded to the latest formats, as new £5,000. George 07771 806234 (Gloucestershire).

**JECKLIN FLOAT TWO** complete with ribbon lead £25 including post. Blues CDs varied selection £3 each, all very good cond. 01278 782622 (Somerset).

**KEF REFERENCE MODEL 1** floorstanders black ash finish. KEF 100 centre speaker video grey finish. KEF 65 DS dipole surround speakers in black finish, boxed £500 the package. Neil 01780 480624 (Lincs).

**KIMBER PBJ** interconnect 3x0.5m pairs (WBT phonos). £40 each. All three for £100. Terry 020 8482 0363 (Enfield)

**LINN CD12** with handset and manual £6,000. Klimax 500 Solos (pair) £6,000. Linn processor AV5103 £2,000. All as new 01256 782931 (Basingstoke).

## WANTED

**AKAI CR80 DSS** 8-track cartridge player. 020 8281 0029 (Essex).

**AUDIOLAB 8000** DAX digital to analogue converter, AES/EBU digital cable and 8000RC remote control. 07714 246756 or email [lesong@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:lesong@blueyonder.co.uk) (London).

**ISSUE 245** of *HFC* 07734 532945 (London).

**KEF MODEL 4/2** cash or part exchange with KEF 104.72. 01494 445005 (Bucks)

**TARGET** hi-fi rack, five tier in black and Mission 701 speakers also in black. Must be mint and in south east only. Anthony 01323 487460 (Sussex)

## M&K MX5000 MKII THX

subwoofer with granite stand, as new £1,250. George 07771 806234 (Gloucestershire).

**M&K S85** satellite speakers (x2), S85C centre speaker, SS-150 THX tripole surround speakers as new, in fantastic condition £3,000. George 07771806234 (Gloucestershire).

**MARANTZ CD63MKII KI** little used £75. Marantz PM66SE KI £75. Optimum 4 hi-fi support, 

## 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!

**FOR SALE**

█ glass shelves and three gold legs, as new (£250) £75. Dave 01332 660506 (Derby).

**MARANTZ PM4000** amp £75. Sony STS570ES tuner £70. Pioneer PDS701 CD player £70. All immaculate cond, boxed with manuals. Julian 01442 384346 (Herts).

**MARANTZ SR4400 AV** surround receiver, silver, eight months old £150. Denon CD receiver UD31 as new £135. 01482 508389 (Hull).

**MONITOR AUDIO SILVER S8** speakers. In rosemah finish. Excellent cond, eight months old with eight metres QED Silver Anniversary bi-wire cable £430. Steve Clarke 01928 716035 (Runcorn).

**MONITOR AUDIO STUDIO** 20SE speakers. Perfect (£2,200) £650 including plinths. Ernest 020 8303 4699 (London).

**MORDAUNT SHORT MS40** classic floorstanding speakers, vgc (£500). Offers around £220 01269 851633 (W Wales).

**MORDAUNT SHORT PREMIER** Plus sub/sat system. Brand new in sealed cartons, includes MS309 digital sub, centre and four satellite speakers £350. 020 7724 9945 (London).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A3** amp, mint cond, upgrade sale. Boxed with instructions and remote control £450. 01577 850228 (Perth).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY E600** amp, £175, E50 £100. Rega EL8 £95. Dali SWA12 £225. Systemdek IIX/Moth/Ringmat/Ortofon £125. LAT six-way distribution

block £125. LAT AC2 3x1m, £40 each. Yello 2x1m, £20 each. Sonic Link 1m, £40. Nordost Solar Wind 1m £40. Nordost Flatline 2x5m, £50. Andrew 020 7663 1264 (Romford)

**MUSICAL FIDELITY NUVISTA** CD, £1,650. Nuvista M3 integrated amp £1,650. B&W 805 loudspeakers £900. B&W 801 Matrix £1,000. Yamaha DSP E800 £150. Jeff Rowland Model 5 £2,000. Steve 07968 186 552 (London).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY XLP-S** MM/MC phono amp, mint, boxed £70. 01903 247779 (Sussex).

**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-P100** power amp, boxed, as new, excellent cond, £400. 020 8670 4384 (London).

**NAD C542** CD player. Brand new, boxed (£330) £250. Steve 020 8360 6606 (N London).

**NAIM AUDIO NAPS** £50. NAC 62 m/c phono £100. NAP90/1 £150. NAP90/2 £175. Rega Planar 3/RB250/LinnK9 £125. All immaculate, call Paul 01702 617274 (Essex).

**NAIM NAIT 3** (line) £325. Rega Planet 2000 £275. Rega Alya floorstanders (cherry) £250. All excellent cond. Simon 01925 572936 (Cheshire).

**ONIX AMP OA215** classic £85. Rotel RA-01 amp, 12 months old £125. Ditton 15 speakers £25. 01992 865414 (Walsall).

**PATHOS TWIN** towers, pure Class A, single-ended, zero NFB hybrid integrated with remote. As new (£3,250) £2,150. 01202 767873 (Dorset)

**QUAD 99 PRE** and 909 power,

30 months old excellent cond. Boxed, manuals, remote, links, (£1,650) accept £1,250. 0131 664 5433 or email Phillip@Evans1952.freeseerve.co.uk (Edinburgh).

**QUAD BRONZE, DIN**, gc: 405-2 £150. 34 preamp £150. FM4 tuner £150. Arthur 01626 853348 (Devon)

**ROGERS LS7** speakers, red mahogany, upgrading, can demo. Includes Sound Organisation stands £2,000, no offers or timewasters. Bill 01268 561108 (Essex).

**ROKSAN CASPIAN** CD player. Hardly used, two years old, as new £350. Clive 01473 682909 (Ipswich).

**ROKSAN KANDY MKIII** amp, new cond, boxed with instructions and remote. Silver facia and a bargain at £400ono. Charles 01792 536143 (Swansea)

**SHANLING SCD-T200C** valve/solid state CD/SACD player, brand new, £1,699. Shanling CD-T100 CD valve/SS CD player, £1,049 – both UK spec. Sony SCD1 SACD/CD player, £1,849. Bel Canto DAC2, (new) £749. 07979 903989 (Bristol).

**SONY APM-22ES** classic diaphragm speakers, in walnut. Large standmounts on low stands, fair cond, offers around £50. Mr Coffey 01268 415017 (Basildon).

**SONY PS1350** belt drive turntable, aluminium platter. Good cond £50 ono. Also turntable wall shelf £20. Colin 0161 303 8859 or 07985 781177 (Manchester).

**SONY SCD-777ES** SACD player, excellent cond but has a slight fault £350. Clive 01792 410242 (Swansea).

**SONY TC- K611S** tape deck, vgc, little used, (£300) £60 ono to a good home. George 01277 264936 (Essex).

**SPENDOR BC3** floorstanders, mint cond, superb sound. Cable and stands included, £575. 01782 318677 (Stoke On Trent).

**SUGDEN CD21** compact disc player. 18 months old, immaculate cond, boxed as new (£1,050) £450ono. Neil 01780 480624 (Stamford)

**TECHNICS REFERENCE** power amp SE-A2000. Also matching stereo control amp, SU-C2000.

Mint cond, boxed with instructions (£1,700) £750.

01782 256087 (Stoke-On-Trent)  
**WADIA 301** CD player £2,750. Sonus Faber Electa Amator II speakers £1,700. Transparent musicwave, plus bi-wire (8ft) £315. 07901 566606 (London)

**WILSON BENESCH** Orator speakers, red cherry latest spec, as new £2,000. No offers please. Mr K Coffey 01268 415017 (Essex).

Below: Monitor Audio Silver S8



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