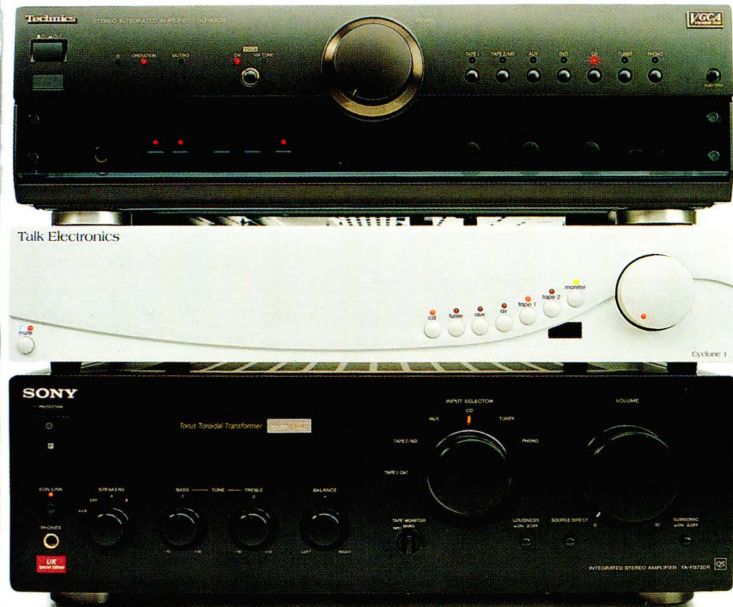


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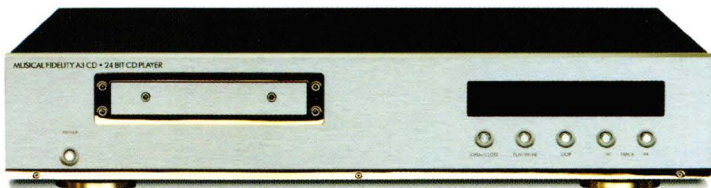
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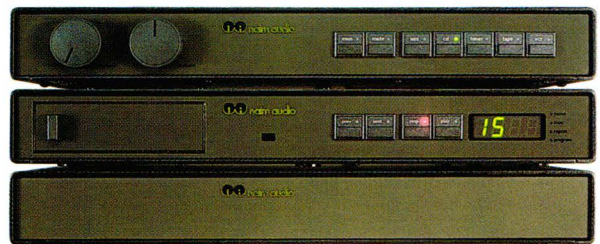
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EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Jason Kennedy finds an excuse to mention prog rock (again) and indulge in some tube shenanigans.



Welcome to the December issue, which despite its title is not the last one of the year: that status is claimed by the Best Buy Guide, which we will be composing over the coming weeks. This month we have a selection of interesting kit for your delectation, not least being a group of six complete systems.

Ostensibly one make in origin, but less obviously so because of different branding, these systems represent an interesting alternative to the usual mix and match approach. Many of them are integrated enough to work as easily as a mini system, yet offer the all important sonic quality that real hi-fi is all about. This first half dozen represents what you can get with a budget of £1,400 upwards. We intend to evaluate some less pricey alternatives in a future issue.

Paul Miller has been having a look at alternative digital recording formats, and the different systems they use to cram musical information into less and less space. I refer of course to MP3, that booming Internet-oriented format that is shaking up the record industry. After last month's feature on the format Paul has been comparing its capabilities with CD-R and MD. The results suggest that my scepticism about MP3 last month may have been a little premature. Get along to page 52 for the full story.

TUBE POWER

You may think that I'm a hi-fi nutball, and you'd probably be right, but I know quite a few fellows who are considerably further out there. One such is Robert Dowse whose listening room includes home made horn loudspeakers and a rather elegant single-ended valve amplifier with which he hopes to make a bit of pocket money. He brought the amp up to my place recently and we spent a most entertaining afternoon playing some great music with it.

The amp is essentially a Border Patrol on steroids, being driven by two external power supplies the size of Krells. Yet as it sports a phono stage and passive preamp, it is in some respects an integrated design. It poots forth 18 Watts from a pair of carbon anode 300B triodes, but because these tubes are so well backed up on the PSU front this meagre output is enough to reproduce music (through average ease-of-drive speakers) at entirely satisfactory levels for a headbanger like myself.

Rob explains the Watts on paper versus perceived power conundrum that one often get with tubes as being related to dynamic range. He suggests that although the maximum SPL available is not particularly high, a tube amp's ability to differentiate

the absolute level of each note from its neighbour gives a wider perceived dynamic range than you get with trannies. The overall impression is of great power because of the tube's ability to switch from low to high levels so quickly and cleanly.

I was struck by the relatively dull balance of the amp and a subjective slowing of pace, but it played some seriously dense material with more aplomb than I've encountered for a long time, so it's definitely doing a lot of things properly. If you'd like to know more check out Rob's Website at www.redesignz.com.

FUN WITH FRIPP

I managed to get hold of a copy of the King Crimson DVD *Deja Vroom* (DGM9910) which, apart from featuring the 'double trio' live in '97 with alternative camera angle/mixes and both Dolby Digital and DTS 5.1 surround, has some very funky novelties. One is the ability to mix and match musicians to produce new variations on the *21st Century Schizoid Man* track. You can choose a vocalist from the 1969 band (Greg Lake), soloist from 1974 (Robert Fripp) and rhythm section from 1996 (Bill Bruford and Tony Levin), or any other combination from four alternative line-ups, and the disc can match tempos to produce the new mix. There's loads of other stuff on there too - Tony's road movies, Website links and a collection of text documents. If you want to know more visit the DGM site at www.discipline-globalmobile.com.

Jason Kennedy

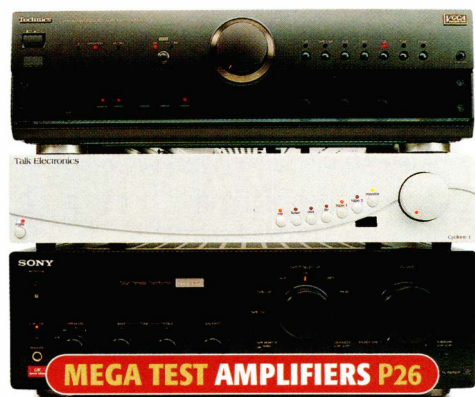
THIS MONTH'S EDITOR'S CHOICE

Since we took a look at Sony's first SACD player, the SCD-1, in issues 193 and 194 I've had a few more demonstrations of the medium, and the more I hear the more I realise it should have been officially commended when we ran it. Even though it is the first example of this new technology, it's clear that the format represents a significant step forward for digital audio in the home, and as the SCD-1 is the torch-bearer it deserves the first retrospective Editor's Choice.

The other awardee this month is Living Voice's delightful Avatar OBX-R loudspeaker (p72). This discreet floorstander is a remarkably subtle and fine performer, one that

revels in timbral and dynamic detail to an extent rarely encountered with box loudspeakers.





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NEWS & VIEWS

We let *Hi-Fi Choice's* resident news hounds, Tim Bown and Lee Dunkley, off the leash.

NEWS IN BRIEF



DENON has launched a slimline mini separates system. The D-F100 (above) offers sleek styling and upgraded components, featuring a 30 Watts per channel amp/tuner, CD player and cassette deck. Speakers and a MiniDisc recorder are also available. Prices start from £599 inclusive of speakers. ☎ (01234) 741200

SONY'S MP3-challenging Memory Stick Walkman, revealed in last month's *HFC*, is set to go on sale in Japan on 21 December. It's a personal stereo which uses solid state memory sticks to store music downloaded from the Internet or converted from CD via a PC, and employs Sony's ATRAC3 compression technology instead of MP3. It's priced at ¥45,000 (£250). ☎ (01932) 816000

LINN'S CLASSIK – a CD player and amp in a single box – is now available with built-in tuner and lighting control. When suitably connected, it'll switch your lights on or off as well as playing CDs, surfing the airwaves and driving your speakers. It costs £995 in black or £1,020 in a new range of colours: silver, Arctic White, Pacific Blue or Atlantic Green. ☎ (0161) 280 5115



MONITOR AUDIO has unveiled two home cinema speaker ranges. The Bronze Series features two stand-mount models, a floorstander and a centre speaker. Then there's the Baby Boomer (pictured), a "satellite speaker" with a matching centre, designed to be used with the ASW100 subwoofer. Prices start from £130. ☎ (01223) 242898

DIRE STRAITS is the latest band to get a back catalogue recording re-released on DVD. *Sultans of Swing – The Very Best of Dire Straits* has been converted into Dolby Digital for multi-channel sound and includes an interview with Mark Knopfler as one of its "extras". It costs £18 – for a full review, see our multi-channel special in the January issue.

1... LIMITED, the UK company developing the world's first fully digital loudspeaker system, has secured more than £1m in funding from a heavyweight group of private

Pioneer's DVD-A plays SACD!



It's official: Pioneer's top-of-the-range DVD-Audio player will play SACD discs too. The company's announcement follows similar statements from Philips and Denon, both of which have said they will produce players compatible with both forthcoming formats. But Pioneer's machine looks set to be the first – while the others talk of universal machines by Christmas 2000, the Pioneer DV-AX10 (pictured) will receive a UK launch next spring.

As revealed in *HFC* 193, Pioneer's first wave of DVD-A products will include the DV-AX10, for which a price of £3,500 is mooted, and the DV-939A, expected to cost about £1,400. Both are due for a late October launch in Japan, with the rest of the world following next year.

The more costly of the two boasts twin 24-bit/192kHz DACs, co-developed by Pioneer and Burr-Brown and claimed to be best of their kind, while its little brother employs a single 24-bit/192kHz delta-sigma unit. Both incorporate DTS and Dolby Digital decoders,



and claim to improve the sound of standard CDs by converting the 16-bit waveform to 24-bit resolution. Each is able to play DVD-Audio and DVD-Video discs, as well as CDs, but only the DV-AX10 is SACD-compatible.

Pioneer's news is further evidence that the much anticipated format war between DVD-A (supported by the likes of Pioneer and Panasonic/Technics) and SACD (developed by Sony and Philips) may never materialise. Both formats claim to offer the highest fidelity sound ever achieved in the home, but can DVD-A and SACD co-exist? It seems software support, rather than that of the bet-hedging hardware companies, will be crucial. Pioneer ☎ (01753) 789789

Philips: DVD plays CD-RW!



Philips claims to have launched the first CD-RW compatible DVD player. CD-RW discs are less reflective than other kinds, so most playback machines – CD players included – can't read them. But the DVD750 incorporates a new optical drive unit with a two-laser pickup, enabling it to play CD-RWs as well as DVDs, CDs and CD-Rs.

In our experience however, most DVD players can play CD-RW discs but fall down with standard CD-Rs. So this new player represents progress, just not the kind that Philips suggests!

From a sonic perspective, the DVD750 includes 3D Virtual Surround – a pseudo-surround mode for those without rear speakers – and a "night mode", which compresses the sound to prevent dynamic peaks disturbing anyone's slumber. A new 24-bit DAC is used, which Philips claims gives a higher signal-to-noise ratio and more accurate D-to-A conversion, while video performance is said to "match studio standards".

The DVD750 is in the shops at about £380, and package deals involving Philips widescreen TVs are also available. See the January issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* a review. *Philips Consumer Electronics* ☎ (0181) 689 4444

Philips DVD750: embracing yet more disc formats.



PMC takes the floor




Professional loudspeaker brand PMC continues its move into the domestic speaker market with the launch of a floorstanding model. The new FB1 is the latest model to join the company's more commercial ranks while maintaining PMC's studio monitor heritage.

A one metre tall floorstanding model, excluding optional plinths and floor spikes, the FB1 employs a doped 170mm cast magnesium alloy mid/bass driver complimented by an aluminium alloy tweeter driver. Sensitivity is rated at 90dB, impedance eight Ohms and offers generous bass extension down to 22Hz.

Available finished in black ash, cherry, walnut, oak and rose wood prices start from £1,000 with optional plinths costing an additional £75.00. PMC ☎ (01707) 393002

Technics DAB here at last!

 Technics' long awaited Digital Audio Broadcasting tuner is finally ready to roll. The ST-GT1000 is the third domestic unit to hit the market, following models from Arcam and Cymbol.

It's the first to offer both digital (DAB) and analogue (FM/AM with RDS) reception, and it's also expected to be the most affordable DAB tuner yet – a price of about £500 is quoted.

Technics believes the ST-GT1000's dual format specification gives it a vital edge over its competitors, enabling it to pick up all new and existing stations as the gradual transition from analogue to digital broadcasting takes place. It supplies a total of 97 station presets, enabling the user to store the locations of up to 49 DAB channels, 29 FM channels and 19 AM channels, and it should be in the shops by the time you read this.

Supporters of the DAB format claim sonic advantages over traditional analogue broadcasts, describing its performance as "CD-like". Audiophiles are so far less than enamoured, claiming a good analogue tuner with a decent roof aerial will beat a digital unit hands down. However, as with digital TV, much of its potential comes down to convenience and choice. No costly roof aerial is required for a hiss-free reception, and the need to 'tune in' stations is made obsolete. High speed data can also



be transmitted alongside audio signals, opening the door to ideas like image display, video animation, e-commerce and so on.

Meanwhile, Digital One and the BBC have joined forces to promote the DAB format and monitor its audience. As the operator of Britain's only national commercial digital radio network, Digital One is set to launch ten national DAB channels before the end of this year. On the hardware front, take-up among in-car manufacturers continues apace, but so far only Meridian and TAG McLaren have joined Arcam, Cymbol and Technics in confirming DAB tuners for the home. We intend to include a group test of DAB tuners in the February 2000 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice*.

Technics ☎ (01344) 853551

Digital One ☎ (0171) 518 2620

AR back in budget fold



A new budget loudspeaker has hit the UK market

from US brand Acoustic Research. The AR Status S20 is a two-way stand-mounting model priced at £150, featuring a silk dome tweeter and a 16.5cm mid/bass drive unit. The cabinet is 37.5cm high and made from chipboard, with a medium density fibreboard baffle and an ABS basket for the main driver.

Sensitivity is rated at 89dB and impedance is six Ohms.

As revealed in *HFC* last March, the AR brand is re-launching in the UK following an eight-year hiatus. Its re-introduction was to be marked by a wall-hanging speaker range called Phantom, but production difficulties mean the AR Status S20 will beat it to the shops. In its heyday, AR was one of the best-loved manufacturers of affordable speakers, and developed the first acoustic suspension model more than four decades ago. *Recoton* ☎ (0161) 702 5000



Back in the UK: AR with the Status 20s.



YBA Audio Refinement.

French connection



Audio Refinement is a new hi-fi brand just launched by French manufacturer YBA. First to hit the stores is the Complete Series, a three-strong range of mid-priced components – CD player, tuner and integrated amp.

These components are more 'mainstream' than many YBA products, but some hallmarks remain: the control of airborne "parasitic vibration", for example, and the "tripod isolation system", with the option of rubber or ceramic inserts for different sonic effects.

The Complete CD Player (£649) sports a Sony transport mechanism and Sanyo 18-bit chipset, while the Integrated Amplifier (£699) features six line-level inputs and delivers 50 Watts per channel. There's also an FM/AM tuner (£490) and optional system remote control (£40).

Sound Image UK ☎ (0181) 255 6868

NEWS IN BRIEF

investors. The money will apparently speed up development of its prototype, with serious hi-fi manufacturers predicted to adopt the technology soon. ☎ (0171) 470 8790



PANASONIC'S first DVD-Audio player, the DVD-A7, will look like this. Its price will be lower than that of the DVD-A10, the debut player from Panasonic's sister brand, Technics, unveiled last month. A UK launch is expected in the first quarter of next year. The Technics will cost about £1,000, while the Panasonic machine will be priced around £850. ☎ (01344) 862444

The biography of stereo pioneer **ALAN BLUMLEIN** has been published by Focal Press. *The Inventor of Stereo: The Life and Works of Alan Dower Blumlein* (£14.99) narrates the story of the British "audio-visual genius" who invented stereo, refined 405 line television and still managed to register a new patent every 46 days of his working life before his mysterious death in World War Two. Blumlein had been working on the radar that was to win the Battle of the Atlantic.

THE MAIL ON SUNDAY reckons the bottom will drop out of the stand-alone DVD player market when Sony's DVD-playing Playstation 2 games console is released next year, according to a report published on 3 October. We think not – issues of quality, varying specifications and distinct target markets will ensure there are customers aplenty for both. After all, the market for CD players hardly collapsed when the original Playstation was launched!

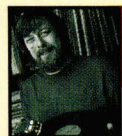
LG ELECTRONICS has joined the DVD race with two new players. The DVD-2330P is touted as an entry-level model, while the DVD-2280P is a feature-heavy player aimed at the A/V enthusiast. Both models have built in Dolby Digital/MPEG2 decoding and are expected to cost around £250 and £350 respectively. ☎ (0870) 607 5544



TEAC has announced details of a new range of mini components (above). The Reference 100 range features a 20 Watts per channel receiver/CD player and costs £230. Speakers, cassette deck and MD recorder are available as options, at £70, £120 and £250 respectively. ☎ (01923) 819630

ERRATUM: Sneaky gremlins meddled with our last issue. We got the price of Sony's CDP-XB930E wrong on the CD Mega Test verdict page – it should have read £299, as stated on p33. That makes it the most affordable in the test and fully deserving of its Best Buy tag. The gremlins also made off with the flag earned by Rotel's RCD-991 (p38). It should have been designated a Best Buy, as stated. Elsewhere, the review of the Zingali Overture 2S (p83) ended prematurely but, as the tag suggested, the speakers came Recommended.

SHOW REPORT



PAUL MESSENGER

Paul dons his reporter's hat to bring you the highlights of the Hammersmith Hi-Fi Show.



Come September, comes The Hi-Fi Show. Every year since 1983 the hi-fi industry has headed for Heathrow airport, to a hotel which keeps changing its name and originally hosted hi-fi shows way back in the mid-1970s. However, the show outgrew the hotel some years ago, and no one really liked the dual-site solution, so this year it was all change again with a move several miles east to the Novotel in Hammersmith, which is much closer to the city centre.

For some of us the Novotel is not so much a new venue as a return to what used to be called the Cunard hotel and put on several hi-fi shows in the late 1970s. I remember it partly because my car got towed away, and also because it always seemed part building site. Discovering that refurbishment was *still* going on in 1999 raised a few demons, and didn't exactly please some of the exhibitors either.

And while the Novotel had plenty of room to accommodate well over 100 exhibitors, there's still the problem of too many tiny rooms ill-suited to decent hi-fi reproduction, and too few solidly constructed larger ones. Which is at least one reason why a number of companies had decided to give the show a miss, instead holding back to see how the new venue worked out – trade attendance was six per cent down this year, although public attendance rose by five-and-a-half per cent.

The Hi-Fi Show has always been something of a schizophrenic affair; it's effectively two shows in one. The first two 'trade only' days not only attract UK dealers but also foreign distributors, and a number of the exhibitors attend primarily to meet the latter – a dozen or more have no UK distribution. Others, most notably the multinationals, are

much more interested in reaching the actual consumers on the two public days.

The show as a whole naturally reflects what's going on in the industry right now, and that would seem to be heading off in various different directions at once. On the one hand we find the big multinational brands like Pioneer, Sony, Marantz and Technics promoting and demonstrating the new 'super digital' formats SACD and DVD-Audio, while along the endless third floor corridors, valve power seemed very much the order of the day.

and flexibility, albeit in prototype form. But the 'super digital' demonstration that will linger longest in my memory was of professional 'high band' digital audio, conducted at the organisers' behest on the public days only by recording engineer Tony Faulkner.

Using a pair of Quad ESL63s perched on flight cases, driven from a couple of large EAR monoblock valve amps and a high-band professional digital recorder, a few seconds listening to master recordings made at a 176.4kHz sampling rate was all that was necessary to

"Where 'normal' digital has me struggling to pick the details from a wodge of sound, here I was immediately aware of human beings playing musical instruments."

With so many exhibitors, comprehensive coverage would quickly degenerate into a list. Selected highlights will at least be digestible. Given the hype that's been building up for the last year-and-some, the 'super digital' format demonstrations were the most obvious focus of interest. In this pre-launch phase it's still much too early to draw any firm conclusions, about either performance or commercial viability, and this isn't the place to examine the issues involved.

Recently launched in Europe, Super Audio CD (the high-band, low-bit Sony/Philips SACD format) is beginning to escape the confines of Sony demonstrations, quite a number of SCD-1 players were seen around the show.

Sony is using the SACD launch to introduce a gorgeous looking range of high performance components, closer to Esprit than ES in conception, which includes a 4-way speaker system with a tweeter that goes up to 100kHz (presumably for those with Super Ears).

Marantz (part of Philips) had gone a step further, using a special player and recordings to demonstrate the potential of SACD surround-sound. My doubts whether surround sound could bring anything worthwhile to a musical meal soon evaporated, as a richly reverberant recording created a convincing 'immersion' acoustic, despite the small room and speakers.

Elsewhere, Pioneer and Technics were demonstrating DVD-Audio's capabilities



Kondo/Marshall tube lovelies.

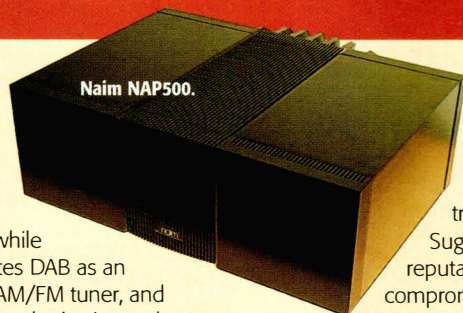
shake nearly twenty years of digital scepticism. Where 'normal' digital has me struggling to pick the details from a wodge of sound, here I was immediately aware of human beings playing musical instruments. The sound texture was much more like analogue, but with the cleanness and consistency of digital.

Whether such qualities will survive the translation into a mass-market replay format must remain to be seen. The big question mark currently hanging over both DVD-Audio and SACD concerns software, not hardware availability, but the Novotel experience gave some cause for optimism.

DAB digital radio was another of the technology issues at the show, and the BBC had gathered the commercial participants together in one room. Besides a whole collection of in-car units, there were domestic receivers from



Carfrae Little Big Horn.



Arcam, Cymbol, TAG McLaren Audio and Technics. The latter introduced the first example with a sub-£500 price tag, while the TAG McLaren incorporates DAB as an optional module within an AM/FM tuner, and has smoothly scrolling display that's nice and easy to read.

Perhaps the most surprising and intriguing story at the show was the link forged between Jim Marshall's famous and long established PA valve amplifier brand, and leading Japanese audiophile designer Hiroyasu Kondo of Audio Note Japan, brought together by UK tube distributor PM Components. Glossing over the industry politics behind this initiative, the plan is for the Marshall factory to make a line of 'affordable' tube hi-fi amps and other components to Kondo's designs.

First product is scheduled for "after Easter", with an intended selling price about or below £1,200, for integrated amps and pre/power combos expected to be push-pull class A



designs with pentodes 'strapped' as triodes. CD players and loudspeakers are also planned. The products will be marketed worldwide by PM Components as either 'Marshall Kondo' or 'Kondo by Marshall' and, in view of the reputations of the key players involved, could give the whole thermionic movement a powerful boost.

High on my personal list of priorities was a visit to the Naim room to hear the new NAP500 power amp – or rather three of them, still very much in prototype form, actively driving a pair of NBL speakers. On day one the sound was good enough, but it was seriously exciting once a damaged-in-transit CDS II player was replaced.

Heritage is an important influence in hi-fi today, and two considerably older names in British amplification are building upon illustrious histories. Quad's newly revived monoblock valve power amp, the II-40, now has a partnering C24 preamp, full of styling cues reminiscent of the classic 22. The combination costs £3,000 and uses far superior components to the original 22/II combo – the tubes used in the C24 have a 30,000 hour life, so



the pins are hard-wired in place.

During the early transistor years, Sugden built its reputation for no-compromise class A solid state amps that got hot and

sounded sweet. The classic P51 heritage is obvious in the concept and shape of the new Masterclass power amp, although the hefty build and gunmetal finish are right up to date.

Fashion plays an important role in our industry, and this year the equipment seems to be becoming a bit more colourful – which makes a pleasant change from oscillating between black and silver. Roksan's colourful new Kandy range is typically priced at less than £500 per component.

The fashion-conscious Italians were well represented at the show, too. Synthesis Art in Music (aka FASE snc) has a collection of unusually compact and elegant tube amps that simply ooze style. The cute Barbie-influenced Nimis, available in a choice of five pastel shades, is a tiny dual-mono integrated amp which costs about £800, and uses four EL84 tubes for 15 Watts per channel.

B&W's show newcomer is also distinctly fashion-oriented. The new 'leisure monitor' LM1 is effectively a replacement for the very successful Solid. The clever integral stand/mounting bracket approach is retained, but the speaker now has trendy soft edges all round, and features B&W's trademark mesh-protected external tweeter.

Perhaps the most original new loudspeakers were ProAc's Future One and Future Two models (£5,800 and £10,500 respectively), large elegant floorstanding three-way designs using conventional dynamic drivers but with an open-back (dipole) midrange to provide a panel type transparency.

Other speaker highlights include KEF's revised Reference Series, with improved crossovers and larger magnets, plus a new mid-price Concerto series of real-wood floorstanders. Castle's justly popular semi-omni Harlech is being augmented by a new Super Harlech, which uses larger main drivers in a similar size quarter-way enclosure.

The JPW-led Audio Group International (not to be confused with IAG, parent company to Wharfedale and Quad) has now given its recently acquired Heybrook brand a proper makeover. Four new Heybrook models are

visually distinguished from their stablemate brands by using yellow Kevlar cone main drivers, although more complex cabinet construction also makes a contribution to this premium brand's superior performance.

Another loudspeaker brand which changed hands recently, TDL, came to the show with a plenty of new products which suggest two new directions, with



Krell prototype powered sub



Heybrook HB4 and HB3

the introduction of 'space-saving' designs such as the Flatline, along with the ultra-competitive pricing which an under-£100 powered subwoofer represents.

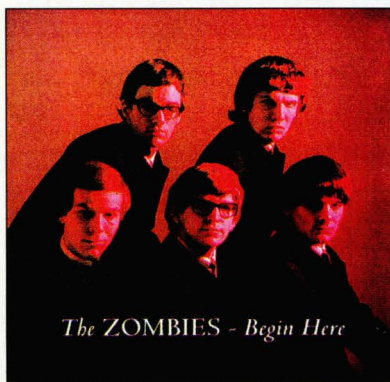
New technologies notwithstanding, the presence of valve amps and vinyl replay seemed stronger than ever, as designers continue to explore and exploit the vintage years, often with the benefits of modern materials and techniques.

Whether you wanted to check out the best in home cinema with a top class DLP projector and solid steel Krell subwoofer, down among the potted palms in Absolute Sounds' suite, or hear the ultimate in direct coupling with Carfrae's collection of wild Lowther-driven horn, OTL valve amp and strain-gauge cartridge, there was plenty of opportunity to explore the extreme, as well as the more conventional. Stereo or multi-channel; valve, solid state or hybrid (Alema's Audion Platinum amps look and sounded interesting); I reckon it would've taken a good week to explore this show thoroughly.

Transplanting The Hi-Fi Show closer to central London has probably strengthened its role as a public show, perhaps at the expense of the trade side. While that might ultimately result in fewer weird and wonderful products, the show itself is now so large and varied, there's already much more than the visitor can absorb. The good public attendance might be to do with all the changes hi-fi is going through right now, but I reckon we'll all be returning to Hammersmith again next September.

PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD

Phil Strongman digs out rare and classic tracks appearing on CD or virgin vinyl for the first time. Go strut your funky stuff...



THE ZOMBIES *Begin Here*

The intellectuals of the beat boom – Rod Argent's boys had no less than 30 A-Levels between them – the Zombies also cranked out some of the best-crafted singles of the era. *Begin Here* was their 1965 debut and contains such goodies as *Summertime*, *She's Not There* and *Tell Her No*, all of which have pure melodies that still have the power to captivate.

Big Beat CD

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★

PHILIPPE SAISSE *Halfway 'Til Dawn*

Recorded a year ago, this is a lively brew of jazz, hip hop and pop with a small side dish of R&B – and a soupçon of cheese – from Verve's minimalist keyboard wiz. As a modern piano record, damn near perfect.

Verve CD

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★

ANTONIO FORCIONE *Ghetto Paradise*

Despite an off-beat start this turns into a dazzling showcase for Forcione's Latin guitar which is, by turns, urgent, atmospheric and poignant – supported by some serious percussion. Didn't Naim make amps once?

Naim CD

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★

TRAFFIC *Mr Fantasy*

A fair pressing of some serious late Sixties' weirdness from Stevie Winwood and co. Spaced-out and Utterly Simple? Yes, but that's half its charm. A glimpse of a long lost world.

Simply Vinyl LP from Vivante

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★

FRONT PAGE REVIEW *Mystic Soldiers*

Recorded on 1-inch eight-track during a tumultuous May '68, this Doors-meets-Dylan style set should have been massive but MGM refused to release it – 31 years on we get to hear some superb songs, produced with fine separation by Boston's Alan Lorber. Beats *Austin Powers* any day.

Big Beat CD

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★

DEAN MARTIN *Hurtin' Country Songs* JOHNNY CASH *Fabulous/Songs of The Soil*

Ol' Dino's never been taken too seriously, which is a pity because he knew how to toast a song with that warm voice. His versions of *For The Good Times* and *Gentle On My Mind* are masterpieces of timing and delivery.

Johnny Cash, on the other hand, doesn't just visit C&W: he lives it, as his first two 1960 Columbia albums ably demonstrate. More croak than croon, but quality stuff all the same.

Capitol/Columbia CD

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★

COUNT BASIE *Big Man In A Small Band*

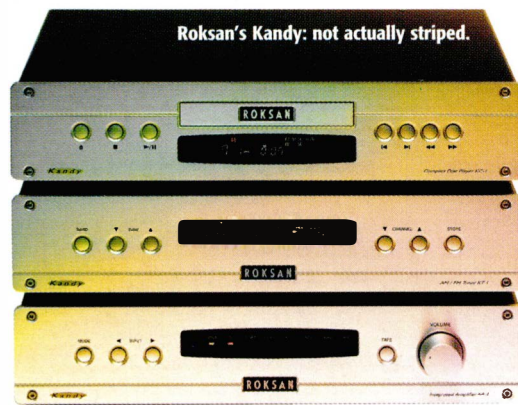
As these sides were cut, literally, between 1936-45, much of this is lo-fi but hey, if you wanna avoid hiss completely turn your system off. A couple of dozen boogie things from the big fella, ably assisted by the likes of Lester Young and Walter Page.

ABM CD

Music ★★★★★ Sound ★★★★★



Sweet sounds



Roksan hopes its new entry-level components will add a little colour to your life. The Middlesex-based firm's Kandy range features seven colour options for the units' aluminium front plate. Buyers can choose blue, yellow, purple, green, pink or gold, in place of the standard 'silver'.

Three components are in the range. There's a CD player with six fully regulated power rails, a Delta-Sigma DAC and a toroidal transformer under the lid, while a three-band tuner sports 50 presets. The third unit is an integrated amp, supplied with a system remote handset and seven line-level inputs. Its internal spec includes a 500VA ultra-low noise toroidal transformer, and power is rated at a hefty 110 Watts per channel into eight Ohms.

According to Roksan, the Kandy range was born from a desire to make a "fun" hi-fi range, serious yet wallet-friendly kit that will appeal to the style conscious buyer. All three components are available now, the CD player and amp priced at £475 each, and the tuner at £375. Roksan ☎ (0181) 900 6801

Classic Castles rebuilt

Castle Acoustics has updated two of its most acclaimed loudspeakers, the Harlech and the Severn 2. The Super Harlech is set to sell alongside the original, which received a Best Buy in *HFC* 160. It uses the same 94cm high cabinet and twin mid/bass driver configuration, with one firing forwards and the other upwards, but now its main drivers feature 15cm carbon-fibre cones instead of the old injection moulded ones. According to Castle, the result is improved linearity and dynamic ability, with higher sensitivity and no loss of bass extension. A new 28mm soft dome tweeter is also employed, a unit originally developed for the Inversion 100. Prices range from £1,250 to £1,500 according to finish, while the original Harlech retails for £900.

The Severn 2 has been upgraded to become the Severn 2SE, featuring the same mid/bass cone update and crossover revisions. A new 19mm polyamide tweeter is used, and the main driver's downward facing port is flared to reduce turbulence. It's priced at £700 in one of seven standard real wood finishes or £840 in rosewood and yew. Castle Acoustics ☎ (01756) 795333



Super Harlech: will be available alongside the original model.

Classic Range

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Technics



Who are Traxdata?



The Traxdata Group has become an internationally recognised and dynamic manufacturer of CD Recordable and CD Rewritable discs for the home and professional user alike.

The TX Audio CD-Rs enable you to record 74 or 80 minutes of perfect digital quality sound onto one CD. They have also introduced a 74 minute CD-RW version, which will allow you to re-record or erase portions of the disc up to 1000 times. To complete their line up, Traxdata have developed a 74 minute MiniDisc for use with portable, in car or home MD systems giving even more choice. High standards of quality, reliability and durability have made Traxdata's products a force to be reckoned with.

Traxdata's award winning range of Audio Recordable discs include CD Recordable (CD-R), CD ReWritable (CD-RW) and MiniDisc (MD) formats, all of which allow you to create

your own compilations, just as you may have done with recordable cassette tapes but with vastly superior quality. In fact *Hi-Fi Choice* awarded Traxdata "Best Buy" for their 74 minute Audio CD Recordable in the CD-R Review in June of this year. (See review excerpts below).



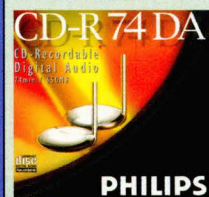
Traxdata's Range of Digital Audio CD-Rs

"...this CD-R proved a revelation with copies that sounded closer to the original than any other disc..."

TRAXDATA

Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy

PHILIPS



At its best, Philips' Far Eastern-sourced disc was likened to a combination of the openness and freshness experienced with Traxdata's disc with some of the smoothness of the blue TDK disc. Garrett's soaring vocals were kept under control but delicately open acoustics, like Christy's *Reel in the Flickering Light*, were unduly

dampened. So the music bobs along naturally enough, but it tends to lack darkness and mystery, sounding less atmospheric – somehow artificial or "plastic" while obviously maintaining the same musical structure. For whatever reason, this was one disc that scored slightly higher with the budget NAD player where its 'bounce' brought a vibrancy and conviction to Garrett's performance that seemed closer to the original.

SPECIFICATIONS

DISC LENGTH	PHILIPS 74 MINS
DYE-LAYER	GREEN
REFLECTIVE LAYER	GOLD
RATING	6/10
PRICE	£2.75

MAXELL



With strung bass sounding more like it was plucked than bowed, our listeners declared that "something wasn't quite right about this one". Vocals were reported to sound less natural and strings slightly mushy rather than crisp or precise. Yet, there was less of the smoothing or veiling heard with other copies, instead the coloration is one of uncertain focus with central imagery

remaining strong but peripheral instruments becoming less distinct. Christy's track was described as suffering a "lightweight 'plink-plonk' character", although there was still plenty of body and resonance. Remarkably, this same 'plink plonk' description was only used on one other occasion by our panel: when the same disc was auditioned in the cheaper NAD CD player! Here the copies were described as "silky but a bit soupy".

SPECIFICATIONS

DISC LENGTH	MAXELL 74 MINS
DYE-LAYER	BLUE
REFLECTIVE LAYER	SILVER
RATING	5/10
PRICE	£3.10

TDK



In both high-end and budget CD systems, recordings made on this 'high-tech' CD-R formulation were described as "smoother, possibly slightly more compressed and certainly less weighty". It's as if the music is 'cleaned up' – forced to sound more civilised, but stripped of some spontaneity en route. Nevertheless, one listener

preferred this disc for its lack of any harshness, suggesting that it "sounds very musical, much more analogue".

Other listeners pointed to the slight loss in top-end air and freshness that would otherwise accompany Christy's track and the impression that Lesley Garrett's trademark ebullience was somehow muted. Easy listening, certainly, but accurate listening? Well, that's a different matter.

SPECIFICATIONS

DISC LENGTH	TDK 74 MINS
DYE-LAYER	BLUE
REFLECTIVE LAYER	SILVER
RATING	7/10
PRICE	£3.99

TX Audio MiniDisc

74 minutes of pure, perfect digital sound!

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- Create your own compilations
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TX AUDIO 74 MINUTE CD-R



TX AUDIO 80 MINUTE CD-R

TX AUDIO 74 MINUTE CD-RW



The TX Audio range of CD-Rs allow you to record 74 or 80 minutes of perfect digital quality sound onto one CD.



Award



TRAXDATA



recording. Whiskeytown's *Strangers Almanac* remained full of drive and energy thanks to the banjo that retained the spine-tingling jangle of the original.

It was impossible to distinguish copies from originals using NAD's player. Whichever disc was in play, the natural gruffness and character of voice was retained, capturing every quirky phrase. And, for once, Garrett sounded as bright and airy as she had on the original.

SPECIFICATIONS

DISC LENGTH	TRAXDATA 74 MINS
DYE-LAYER	LIGHT GREEN
REFLECTIVE LAYER	GOLD
RATING	9/10
PRICE	£2.99

This Kodak-sourced CD-R proved a revelation with copies that sounded closer to the original than any other disc. The Theta revealed a slightly 'busy' sound but one that was intriguing, enjoyable and bubbly. The treble proved open, expressive and utterly free of the cloying smoothness that - to one degree or another - persisted with every other CD-R

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HOW TO ENTER

Answer the questions below by adding a tick to the boxes beside your chosen answers, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number in the spaces provided. Good luck!

The Questions

1. In the *Hi-Fi Choice* CD-R test, the

Traxdata CD-R scored...

- a) Five out of ten
- b) Seven out of ten
- c) Nine out of ten

2. Traxdata produce...

- a) CD-R
- b) CD-RW
- c) MiniDisc
- d) All of the above

Send your entry form to:

Hi-Fi Choice Competition (CHFC 912B),
Bradley Pavilions, Bradley Stoke North, Bristol
BS12 0BQ.

All entries must arrive by First Post Thursday
25th November 1999.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please tick here if you are under 18

Please tick here if you do not wish to receive further information on other products or services.

Please tick one only of the following:

Are you a current subscriber? OR

Are you a regular reader? OR

Are you an occasional reader?

Please answer the following:

Do you have an audio CD Recorder? Yes / No

If Yes which make _____

If No, are you considering a purchase? Yes / No

How many discs do you use per month _____

Competition Rules

1. The closing date for the Traxdata Competition is First Post Thursday 25th November 1999.
2. Winners of the Traxdata Competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the Closing Date given in Rule 1 above.
3. All winners will be notified by post.
4. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
5. The Traxdata Competition is not open to employees of Dennis Publishing Ltd, Traxdata or Traxdata Group Companies nor their suppliers, agents or associates.
6. We regret this competition is open to UK residents only.
7. No cash alternatives will be offered.
8. We reserve the right to substitute alternative prizes with equal value to those shown, in the unlikely event of stock being temporarily unavailable.
9. By entering the competition, you agree to be bound by the rules.
10. All entries must be on this official coupon. If you do not wish to cut up your copy of *Hi-Fi Choice*, you may send a photocopy of the page instead. Please note: only one entry form per household is permitted.

Personally,
I Prefer Smaller Knobs

TEAC

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Chief Musical Officers' Warning

DAVID VIVIAN

Looks aren't everything, but they certainly help. This month, Mr V plays host to a pair of shapely Italians. Yum.

Anyone who's ever been floored by the sound of a decent pair of £200 speakers – say, B&W's 601 S2s – on the end of a top flight system will appreciate what a risky business those who choose to make £1,000-£1,500 speakers are in. While it's easy for cheap speakers to sound surprisingly good hooked up to a first-class front end, it's much easier for expensive speakers to fall flat on their grilles given something only slightly grubbier than immaculate to play with.

Matters are made worse when it's clear that a lot of the design budget has gone into making the things look like expensive pieces of furniture. Then it becomes clear that what seems expensive to us was obviously an exercise in compromise to the manufacturer. How do you deliver pristine sound quality when you've spent most of the money making the box look nice?

In other words, would you buy a cheap Italian speaker? Looks like I'm contradicting myself already. I started out calling £1,000-£1,500 pricey, but when I clapped eyes on the Aliante Moda – big brother to the dinky Stile I've been using in a Quad 77-based kitchen system for some months – my first thought was: how on earth do they do it for £1,200? I've seen less attractive Sonus Fabers that retail for twice as much.

You may remember that I first bumped into Aliante at Milan's Top Audio high-end show a couple of years ago. A small Italian man put me on a coach to Pininfarina's headquarters in Turin to take a peep at the whole range. The world famous Italian design house – responsible for some of the most beautiful cars of all time – does the styling, and Aliante's styling is what puts most of the competition in the shade. It certainly caught the eye of Quad's Stan Curtis who, at one stage, had considered the Italian company as a potential source of speakers to pair with Quad electronics.

Until, so the story goes, he heard them. Could they really be so bad? To find out, I got a pair of £600 Stiles and hooked them

up to my 77 pre/power combo. True, they sound the cuddly side of warm, but when I'm doing the washing up in the morning, warm and cuddly is exactly what I need. They stayed. Moreover, they look absolutely

"If you want a 'nice' sound to go with the easy on the eye looks, the Modas deliver bounteously. Not that they're shrinking violets: they'll play Prince at gale force without even flinching."

terrific next to the Krupps espresso maker.

The Moda costs twice as much and is more than twice the size of the Stiles – far too big for the kitchen – but design and construction are all but identical. Aliante's unique selling point is what it calls "sandwich technology". This basically means a heavy-duty MDF

box with two sideways-firing ports and a tapered, rounded and inclined front baffle to reduce reflection, diffraction and phase mis-alignment. Solid wood cheeks – scalloped to make room for the side reflex ports – are slapped handsomely on the sides to form a more rigid structure. Round the back there are twin gold-plated terminals for bi-wiring/bi-amping, and the drive units (a 17cm paper-coned woofer with phase plug and 26mm soft dome tweeter) are custom made for Aliante. They weigh a substantial 11.5kg each and, plonked on squat, sand-filled, Atacama stands, will look the poodle's privates in any listening room that considers itself to be 'stylish'.

And 'stylish' is perhaps the best description of the sound. The Aliantes make no real effort to be neutral or even-handed. You won't find them gracing the mixing desks of any studios. On the contrary, these are probably the most manipulative sounding £1,200 speakers I've ever heard, and I have no doubt they would drive some people up the wall, on to the ceiling and into the rafters via the light socket.

But if what you really want is a 'nice' sound to go with the extremely easy on the eye looks, the Modas deliver bounteously. Not that they're shrinking violets: they'll play Prince at gale force without even flinching and sound fulsome, visceral and propulsive while doing so.

'Lite' jazz is right up their street, too, mostly owing to an effortless bass quality that stays in control longer and ultimately goes lower than even the best mini monitor. Acoustic guitar is just right on this speaker – neither too sharp nor too soft – with excellent body and strong timbral shading.

Relaxing the mood and pace still further, a slice of Dvorak sounds lovely. The Modas can at least create a sense of stillness and tranquility. Perhaps they lack the last ounce of treble definition, but you seldom feel in any way short-changed.

The two-fisted piano playing of Julian Joseph fares well, too. Again, it's a warm-sounding grand piano, but it is full size, correctly tuned and a joy to listen to.

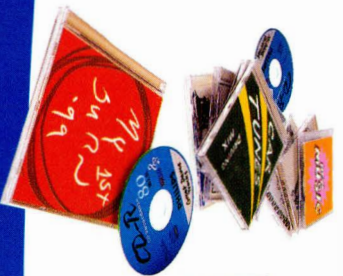
Hell, sitting back listening to jazz while eyeballing these elegant works of art – it's almost a lifestyle. Well, it isn't typical hi-fi, anyway.



○ The Italians know a thing or two about style. Even their hi-fi is shapely and curved – like Aliante's Moda.



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MARANTZ CD6000 OSE



Paul Miller finds out whether a striking new look signals a change in sound for Marantz.

Regular readers will remember that, over the past few years, and in successive CD player group tests, I've remarked upon the core similarity between Marantz's various CD-63/67 players in their various MkII and SE guises. After all, Marantz had struck upon a successful formula in its first CD-63 model and evidently felt little inclination to stray. That is, until the launch of its £300 CD6000 OSE, the first new 'budget' player from Marantz in recent times to feature a genuine evolution in its digital topology.

The new 'Century-Series' aesthetics featuring a round-edged fascia, thick drawer frontispiece and bold display lens are all reflections of the new broom. Features like scrolling CD Text are accommodated (where available), and the new VAM1202 transport assembly will not only read CD and CD-R discs, but also respond to the far lower reflectivity of 'grey-coloured' CD-RW software. This brings the brand's new range of CD hardware up to speed with the latest Philips/Marantz CD-Recorders.

As the older Softline Series is being phased out, the CD6000 OSE (Original Special Edition) replaces the CD67 MkII OSE while a slimmed-down CD6000 replaces the CD67 MkII at £250. Both these new 6000 players use two of NPC's SM5872 bitstream DACs (Marantz's choice for years) in a new, dual-differential configuration. One of Marantz's HDAM

(Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules) is used to drive the player's final analogue output, but only the OSE version has a further HDAM stage in the preceding filter network.

The basic CD6000 will use an IC op-amp for this filter stage. Technically, both the HDAM and IC stages are op-amps, but

"A player that manages to emphasise the power, the rawness and ruggedness within a musical performance."

the HDAM uses discrete components while the IC has the same functionality 'shrunk' onto silicon. The former also gives Marantz more control over the sonic 'colour' of the player.

My lab tests show that Marantz's new two-DAC configuration yields a lower 350psec of jitter (the CD63/67s were typically up in the 500-600psec category) combined with good low-level linearity and very low distortion, particularly at high frequencies.

The player's S/N ratio, on the other hand, is some 6dB worse

● The OSE CD6000 features an HDAM op-amp instead of an IC at the output.

than its predecessors at 96dB – the opposite of what you'd expect from a differential circuit. Marantz's engineers confirmed my figures, suggesting that the extra noise is caused by the HDAM filter stage and additional logic circuitry required to synchronise the two converters.

Despite having tested more CD players than I'd care to shake a stick at, it remains a constant source of fascination to discover just how many models are able to put a unique 'spin' on ostensibly familiar recordings. So it is with the CD6000 OSE, a player that manages to emphasise the power, the rawness and ruggedness within a musical performance without sounding rough or crude as an unwanted by-product.

The closing guitar riff to Me'shell NdegeOcello's *Faithful (Bitter)* (Maverick CD 9362-47439) is a classic case in point, for just as her vocals seem imbued with an added intensity and passion, so too the crash of percussion and wail of those electric strings has a renewed immediacy. The music pins you to the seat with an urgency that's difficult to resist, for although the CD6000 OSE could never be described as 'comfortable', there is an inherent security in this musical whirlwind – like a drive through the wild side of town in the security of your own heavily-armoured tank. The music is often powerfully vivid and perhaps too intense at times, but it never truly gets out of control.

Experience tells me that although the CD6000's peak

output level is bang-on the 2.0V standard, it'll still sound 'louder' than many higher output players auditioned in a non-matched A/B demo. Why? Because the colour and emphasis of the player is reflected in extra passion and energy which, in turn, has the subjective effect of making its music sound bigger, bolder and more confident than you might expect. Perceived loudness isn't simply a matter of volume.

Then there's the matter of the player's increased background noise. Whatever the apparent 'downgrade' on paper, in practice a figure of 96dB is still equivalent to the 16-bit range occupied by our 20-year old CD standard. So you'll not hear any more 'hiss' from your CDs whether they're DDD's or straight analogue transfers. Indeed, as I've discussed before (see the Arcam Alpha 9 review, *HFC 180*), there's evidence to suggest that wide CD S/N figures (say, >100dB) only expose the player's output to digital 'rubbish' that might otherwise remain hidden.

Many of the most highly-regarded players only just scrape through the 16-bit barrier and, like the CD6000 OSE, are broadly praised for their lack of treble harshness and grittiness. The Marantz player certainly sounds incisive, but the crack of a well-aimed rim-shot will only sound unduly hard if your amp or speakers have a propensity to sound aggressive. Otherwise, the CD6000 OSE beats out a very positive tune, shaking even old and tired-sounding systems into a new lease of life.

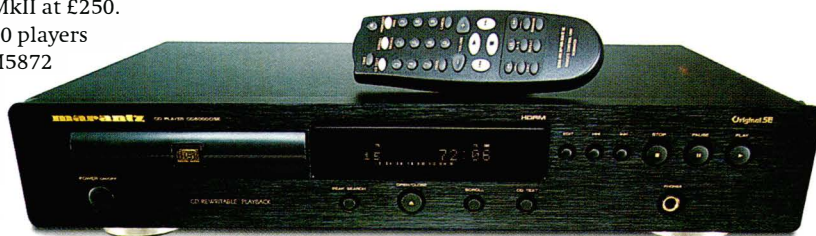
VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£299.90

Having rested on the laurels of its popular CD63/CD67 series for as long as commercially practical, Marantz's CD6000 OSE marks a genuine evolution in its CD player technology. And not before time!

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

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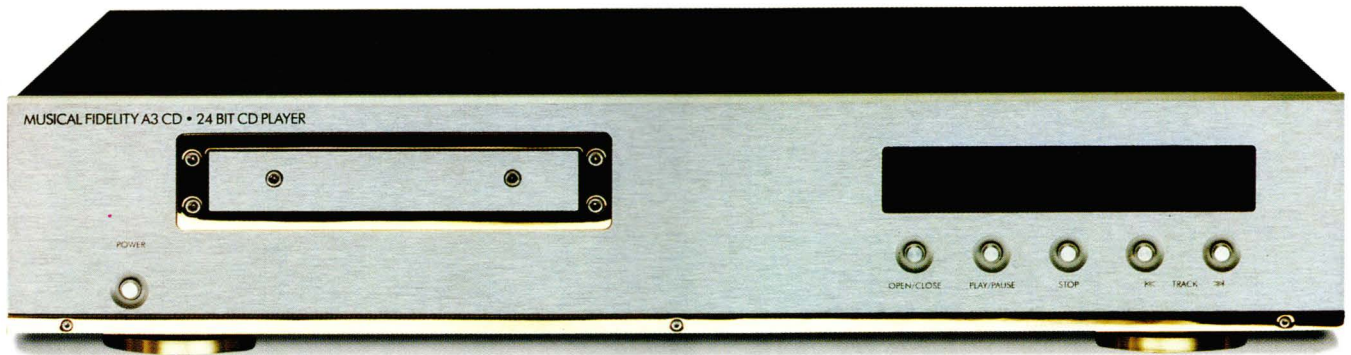
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MUSICAL FIDELITY A3CD



It looks shiny and slick, but what's going on under the skin in the hot new A3 CD player from Musical Fidelity? Paul Miller investigates.

As the companion CD player to its A3 integrated amplifier (see Supertest, this issue), the £799 A3CD marks yet another stylistic offshoot on the part of Musical Fidelity. In contrast with the cylindrical X-Ray and piano-black E624 (see *HFC* 184 and 188, respectively), the A3CD exudes an air of pure decadence with its thick, milled-alloy fascia and polished gold details. It's yet another visual innovation from the company that consistently produces fresh-looking components to keep it distinct from the competition.

The core '24-bit' technology is culled from the E624 and X-Ray players as is the proprietary 5-pole analogue filter which scoops away a lot of unwanted ultrasonic noise. This is important, for although we can't directly hear this sort of extreme high frequency noise, there's plenty of evidence to suggest it has an influence on the performance of partnering amplifiers. And that 'influence' can create a hard-sounding distortion that is most certainly audible.

On the other hand, and in the wake of up-and-coming 24-bit DVD-Audio, it's important not to be swayed by notions of 24-bit performance because the CD standard is 16-bit in origination. As discussed in the *Oasis* column (*HFC* 187), '24 bits' in this instance refers to the maximum input word length acceptable to the Burr-Brown PCM1716 converter and should not suggest that the player is

capable of a 144dB dynamic range, as it mathematically suggests.

Although the X-Ray and E624 players are ostensibly the same design, I remember the latter achieving some refinement in the lab which was reflected in

"The A3CD possesses a wonderfully rounded sound with a sweet but clean and extended treble, a very communicative midband and warm but solid bass."

a more positive, open and driving performance under audition. This is not so unlikely as it might sound. After all, when dealing with a relatively sophisticated, high calibre product like the X-Ray/E624 small changes in its local environment (the physical displacement of circuit boards, power supplies and the surrounding casework) will have an impact on the player's 'global' performance. And so it is with the A3 CD player, which is essentially an E624 transplanted into a fancier-looking case *without* direct track access keys on its fascia.

Comparisons with the E624 are inevitable, particularly as those variations that do exist in its pattern of distortion with frequency and level, its S/N ratio, its low-level linearity and jitter are sufficiently similar to

reflect the small differences in tolerances that exist between one production batch and another. My detailed lab analysis of the A3CD revealed exceptionally low levels of jitter (just 130psec), low 0.002 per cent distortion (re. -30dBfs) and a decent enough 107dB S/N ratio. The 2.3V output level is a little over the nominal 2V standard, so beware of unmatched A/B demos but at least the player's low 50 Ohm source impedance helps it drive all but the oddest interconnect/amp combo's with impunity. By any standards, the technical performance of the A3CD is up with the very best available.

The A3CD possesses a wonderfully rounded sound with a sweet but clean and extended treble, a very communicative midband and warm but solid bass register. Even CDs like Tori Amos' *Venus and Back* (Atlantic 7567-83242), which is infused with more than its fair share of muggy-sounding hiss, manage to rise above what is clearly a restricted dynamic range to sound alive, fluid and, above all, musically involving. Vocals typically speak from the heart. They are not ruthlessly or coldly incisive, but neither are they aggravated by sibilance; instead, they sweep the performance along with a sense of emotion that's clearly at one with the rhythm of strings, percussion and bass.

This, in a nutshell, is the strength of the A3CD. It succeeds by concentrating on integrating the performance as a whole rather than relying on a dominant bass line, or rolling-off bass and treble to emphasise what might be perceived as a very 'natural' midband. There is nothing piecemeal about the sound

◉ **A lovely bit of casework disguises the reworking of an MF favourite.**

of the Musical Fidelity A3CD.

The A3CD manages to sound warm and natural and inviting all at once. You'll want to pick up disc after disc and enjoy the flavour, the colour and rhythm of the music without that nagging doubt in the back of your mind that a stray cymbal shot or hyper-active vocal will take your ears off and shatter the musical illusion. Sure enough, its music is slightly 'packaged' or even comfortable at times, but it's neither homogenised nor lacking the core spirit that keeps the illusion alive. In fact, the A3CD is potentially so involving that dragging yourself from the armchair to change discs could become a real struggle!

So the A3 really *is* an E624 under another name, all the while benefiting from an improved standard of mechanical construction. All of which is rather good news for those fans of MF who loved the sound of the E624 but, for aesthetic reasons, prefer their hi-fi heavy and finished in silver.

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

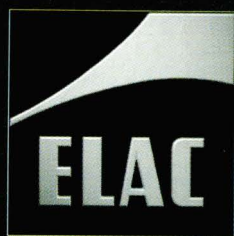
PRICE £799.00

Keeping up with MF's ever-changing product range is enough to make your head spin, but classy components like the A3CD make up for any temporary dizziness.

■ **FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE**

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LETTERS

Hi-Fi Choice's very own 'points of view' page, where you, the reader, can express your opinions!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

BRITISH 'EARING

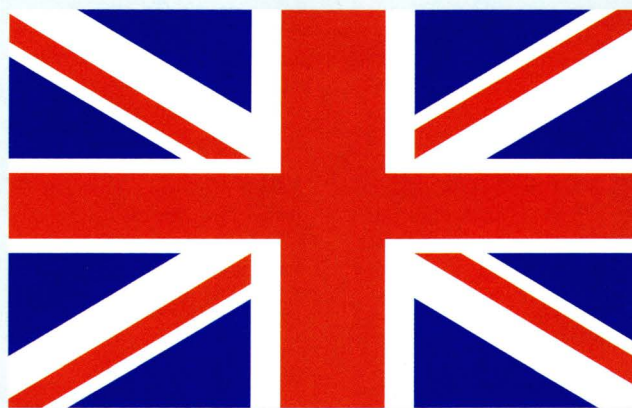
Correct me if I'm wrong, but the reason we have hi-fi, and spend a fortune on it, is to reproduce our favourite music. If the sound, for whatever reason, is not to our liking, then we have tone controls to fine tune it – well, plebs like me do, the purists among us don't!

So then, why do British hi-fi mags constantly mention that a piece of equipment has been "engineered (or tuned) for 'British ears' (or tastes)". If a piece of equipment is not tuned for British tastes, then it is almost invariably given the thumbs down. Are British ears any different from those of other nations?

I once subscribed to the American *Stereo Review*, and it certainly never referred to anything being engineered for American ears. I am sure French, Italian, German magazines don't talk in these sort of terms either. Am I missing the point?

Irvine Hall, via e-mail

The Editor replies... Peculiar as it may seem, there does appear to be a British sound. It could be because we have been making hi-fi kit for longer and in greater variety than other nations. Or more likely, because we have a certain size and construction of average living room: medium size in world terms, wooden floored and plaster on brick walled. Either way, we seem to prefer a more upbeat sound to nations outside of Europe. Americans seem to go for firepower above all, and the Japanese like a silky, relaxed balance. Germans, on the other hand, like a relatively 'forward' sound.



STATIC SITUATIONS

I have recently purchased the object of my long running desire, a pair of Electrostatic loudspeakers. While the British hi-fi press often extol the virtues of 'Electrostatic' or 'Panel' type loudspeakers, I can't recall the last time a review of such products has graced your pages.

With products like Sound Lab, Martin Logan, Audiostatic, Acoustat and Britain's own Quad available in stores, why not conduct formal reviews of these products so that readers may be better informed of their relative

◉ The electrostatic lives on.



merits and how they compare with the conventional box type dynamic loudspeaker?

Shane Farrelly, Australia

The Editor replies... You're right, we haven't looked at a 'static for ages. But with new models from Quad and Inner Sound on the market, we will be doing our best to remedy the situation in future issues.

MYSTERIOUS FORCES

Please try to help me get my CD working. My current CD player, a Teac VRDS9, has taken

to randomly jumping and skipping tracks. This occurs about two or three times a day after performing perfectly for about six months. What makes this unusual is that this is the fourth player to do this. Other players exhibiting this mysterious effect include: Revox; Micromega Drive 2; Arcam and now the Teac. They perform okay for a few months, then they intermittently jump or skip tracks. When the player is taken to another location there is no problem. Interestingly, a Naim Nait I have on dem seems to be making the CD jump more frequently! I have had the mains checked by an electrician and its normal. Can you offer any advice?

Tim Snowdon, via e-mail

The Editor replies... That's a new one to us, and there are no obvious remedies. We would suggest you discuss it with your dealer in the first instance, but if he/she can't help try Russ Andrews – he's had a lot of experience in all matters hi-fi and may be able to make some useful suggestions.

DIGITAL MADNESS

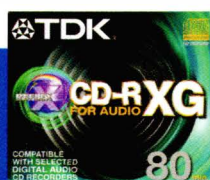
I recently picked up a copy of *Hi-Fi Choice*. Being a regular reader of *What Hi-Fi*, the thought of another opinion was appealing. Looking through I noticed you had tested a number of digital interconnect cables. I was surprised to see that you described the cables just like amplifiers and speakers. What surprised me most was the fact that you describe artefacts which are impossible.

Do you appreciate that the signal travelling down the cable is digital, 174,000 ones and zeros per second? The DAC then recreates the analogue signal from this digital information. Your comments suggest that the cable can affect the sound. At the very worst, a cheap cable may let only a limited amount of light through causing a loss in detail and perhaps the occasional crackle.

If you can actually hear the signal getting transformed then I suggest that you check your equipment. If a transport is not capable of sending 174Kbps down a metre of cable then I suggest you take it back to the shop. Computer cables are made of the poorest cable yet can carry several hundred times the data with no more error correction than a CD player.

Russell Wilkes, via e-mail

The Technical Editor replies... While, on the face of it, the impact of different cables on the transmission of digital data might seem minimal, in practice they can be quite audible. In



Letters page sponsored by



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LETTERS

in this respect, the doubts raised by your letter parallel those same misgivings voiced by others in the light of our tests on CD-R and MD media. The data itself need not be directly corrupted in a fashion that would have a PC program fall over, for example, because the analogy between (PC) data integrity and transmission rates only holds so far for digital audio.

For example, differences in the construction of a digital audio cable will affect both screening and characteristic impedance which, in turn, influence both interference and the 'shape' of the recovered data waveform, respectively. In all these respects it is important to appreciate that digital data will eventually be converted into analogue signals and that any modification (in the form of jitter) or interference (RF noise) may well have an impact on the player's analogue circuitry and the music that follows. Remember, data integrity (the 1s and 0s) may be everything to the PC, but in digital audio it is just the beginning.

COMPETITION THANKS

Just a word to say thank you for the third prize of the Castle Inversion 15 loudspeakers from the competition in issue 190. I've found the speakers to be a clean and very pleasing listen, and have been fortunate that they seem to suit the room I have placed them in very well.

I would like to say how much I enjoy reading your magazine which seems to have struck a very good balance between 'down to earth' information and technicalities. Thank you for all your efforts.

A. Totton, Cheshire

SURROUND IMPROVEMENT

I've read a lot lately about the comparative performance of integrated surround-sound amplifiers versus similarly priced integrated stereo amplifiers. The basic precept seems to be that the budget for a surround-sound amplifier must be divided between five power amplifiers, surround-sound chipsets, and video circuits, whereas the same budget will buy better compo-



Castle Inversion 15: "A clean and pleasing listen."

nents for a stereo amplifier given it only has two power amplifiers and some source selection circuitry! This seems to have a reasonable economic grounding!

I therefore decided to see whether I could re-employ my NAD 314 stereo amplifier that has sat unused since the purchase of my Yamaha DSP-A592 five channel amplifier, the point of the exercise being to use the NAD's power amplifiers to drive my main/front stereo loudspeakers (Mordaunt Short MS10i Pearls). The Yamaha has preamplifier outputs for the main stereo channels.

The NAD has pre-amplifier outputs and power amplifier inputs (main in), which are normally connected together with metal jumpers. I just connected the Yamaha main outs to the NAD's main ins with a stereo interconnect.

All works well, and my CD player (Denon DCD-635) definitely sounds better; more air, fuller soundstage, and less brittle. However, I've also read that connecting preamplifiers to power amplifiers requires careful matching of output and input impedances. My knowledge of electricity/electronics is minimal; does this sound okay to you?

Trevor I. Hambrook via e-mail

The Technical Editor replies...

Typically, a (pre)amplifier's output is purpose-designed to drive the input of a power amplifier so you should not encounter any fundamental incompatibility. Indeed, as you suggest, by sharing the 'load' between Yamaha (centre and surround speakers) and NAD (front L/R speakers) amplifiers, the performance of your multi-channel system may well witness some improvement. If your two-channel (CD) audio performance has also improved then this simply suggests that the NAD is a better sounding amplifier than

the Yamaha, in this instance. As a general rule, your mix-and-match strategy will work for most budget AV amplifiers as it's only the costliest 5-channel models that really possess sufficient 'grunt' to handle five loudspeakers simultaneously under arduous conditions. Look out for our multi-channel feature next month for more information.

ELECTROCOMPANET THANKS

Just a short note to say thanks to Petter Hagen of Electrocompaniet, who was prepared to render services above and beyond the call of duty when I was having problems getting the original distributor of their product to repair a small fault with my ECI-2 amp.

Unlike the distributor, he showed great concern and always returned my calls and e-mails. I've now got my amp back, and it sounds as good as ever. So ta, mate!

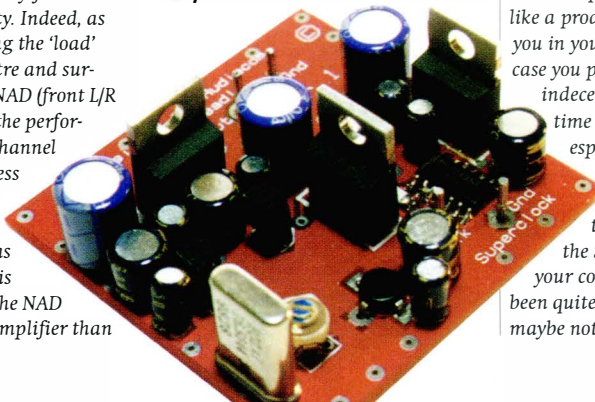
Wal Riley, Liverpool

GOTTA BEAT THE CLOCK

Having read Jimmy Hughes' page discussing Super Clock in the November issue, I am concerned that after the three rebuilds who knows what he was listening to? Many people, like myself, may be tempted to buy Super Clock without hearing it first because it cannot be auditioned or A/B demonstrated easily. In this situation we rely on reviewers to a greater degree than usual.

I tried Super Clock with my own CD player, a Pioneer PD91, bought some eight or nine years ago. I have valve amplification and large transmission line speakers in a large and dry sounding room. I believe hi-fi should mean just that and

Audiocom's Super Clock may not be to all tastes.



accept that some recordings are better than others.

I had to conclude that I was not listening to an improved sound in any sense of the word. I listened to many and varied recordings with the same conclusions.

The immediate difference was the lack of dynamics and lowering of perceived volume. The sound was compressed and lifeless. I found myself raising the volume to try to bring back some life. Vocals were smeared and unfocused in a most peculiar way. The lower treble was suppressed and details, such as background voices known to exist in excellent live recordings, were simply not there.

By the end of the afternoon I had removed the Super Clock and replaced the original components. After three hours listening to the modified player, my original sounds fantastic. To its credit, Audiocom gave me a full refund.

Super Clock is clearly a product which needs to be auditioned in the player and system in which it is to be used. This is difficult to do. Only on the very brightest and most forward recordings did it show any improvement and I would expect these differences to be measurable. If I had a collection of Madonna albums I might agree with Jimmy, but in my view Super Clock should carry a TRY BEFORE YOU BUY notice.

Richard Maile, Nottingham

Jimmy Hughes replies... We agree; Super Clock produces a smoother cleaner presentation. But we differ as to whether this is an improvement. For me, Super Clock reduces the false chromium-plated 'hi-fi' brilliance that characterises so much CD sound, bringing it closer to good analogue. But some listeners actually like a little added sparkle; it spices-up the music, making it sound busier and superficially more exciting. Performance depends on personal taste, though in my opinion the better your system the more you'll understand and appreciate what Super Clock does.

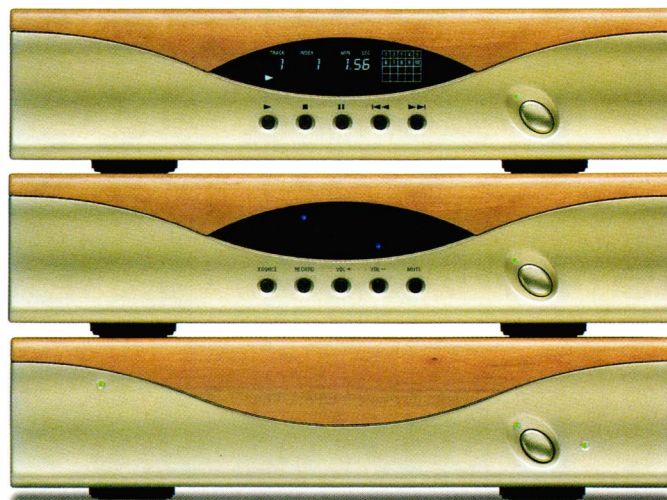
You're perfectly entitled not to like a product if it fails to work for you in your system. However, in this case you pronounce judgement with indecent haste. Electronics take time to bed down and burn-in, especially when new.

Listening for just three hours hardly seems fair to me! Had you stuck with the Super Clock a little longer, your conclusions might have been quite different. Then again, maybe not!

Dr. Samuel Johnson-
author of the first definitive dictionary.



audio- *n. and comb. form* sound or
reproduction of sound



Samuel Johnson Audio -
creators of definitive premium audio.



SJ audio

• no compromise - just music •

see it all at www.sjaudio.com

COMPETITION

A SIRIUS PRIZE GIVEAWAY

Answer our simple questions and you could win a killer 200 Watt power amp.

Sirius is relaunching itself under the new brand name of Gamut. As part of the relaunch, *HiFi Choice* has managed to secure the magnificent D200 power amplifier – now rebadged as Gamut and up for grabs in this month's competition giveaway.

Reviewed in issue 183 as the Sirius D200, it received a coveted Editor's Choice award. One lucky reader will soon get their hands on this monster of an amplifier worth £2,995 and offering 200 Watts per channel into eight Ohms.

Manufactured in Denmark, the D200 is a 'true' dual

mono design and uses single pairs of MOSFET output transistors. This 'less is more' approach offers an unusually dynamic and detailed sound.

The D200 power amp features balanced-only inputs and two sets of speaker terminals: normal and direct. The direct output bypasses the coil/resistor network offering greater high-frequency resolution and tweeter damping.

Grab yourself a pen, a stamp and an envelope, fill out the form and put your answers to the questions below in the post to us today.



HOW TO ENTER

Answer the questions below by circling the correct answers, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number in the spaces given.

The Questions

What type of amplifier design is the Gamut D200?

- a) Dual carriageway
- b) Dual mono
- c) Dual co-axial

What was the former brand name of the Gamut D200 amplifier?

- a) Syria
- b) Cyrus
- c) Sirius

Post this entry form to:

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- 2) Winners of the Sirius/Gamut Competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the Closing Date given in 1) above.
- 3) All winners will be notified by post.
- 4) The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- 5) The Sirius/Gamut Competition is not open to employees of Dennis Publishing Ltd, Sirius/Gamut nor their suppliers, agents or associates.
- 6) We regret this competition is open to UK residents only.
- 7) No cash alternatives will be offered.
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CHFC 912A

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(AV processors/Amps/Receivers)
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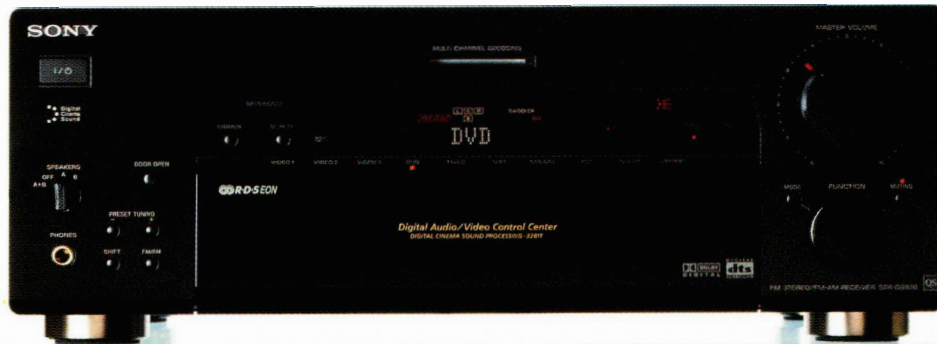
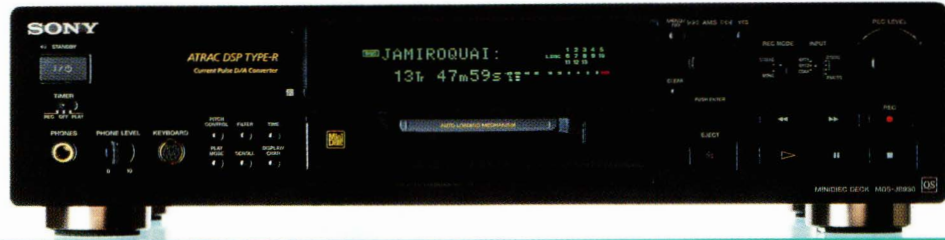
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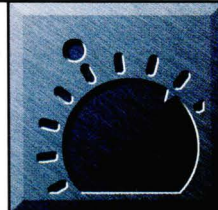
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ON TEST!



AMPLIFIERS

Alvin Gold and Paul Miller point their ear trumpets in the direction of 11 hot new amps.

THE CAST LIST

Arcam Alpha 7R	£299.90	p37
Cambridge A500	£199.95	p29
Cyrus 7	£700.00	p43
harman/kardon HK690	£529.99	p45
Marantz PM6010 OSE	£229.90	p31
Musical Fidelity A3	£849.00	p47
NAD 317	£399.95	p39
Rotel RA-917 MkII	£250.00	p33
Sony TAF-B730R	£199.00	p35
Talk Cyclone 1	£549.95	p49
Technics SU-A808	£299.99	p41

This group test looks at eleven integrated amplifiers from as many manufacturers ranging in price between £199 and £849. Although this is spelt out later (see *How the tests were done*), it is worth reiterating before plunging into the tests proper that

they are made up of three separate strands, which cumulatively represent the most exhaustive (and yes, exhausting too!) set of tests in the business – and they are therefore, we believe, the most useful, representative and accurate to boot.

Each amplifier is auditioned by a listening panel of experienced ears under blind listening conditions, with levels scrupulously matched between test runs – and a great deal of effort and expertise goes into making these tests as useful as possible. In addition,



each amplifier is measured by Paul Miller in his particularly rigorous lab tests, and auditioned by yours truly using a wide range of partnering equipment over an extended period.

The measurements and listening tests are performed totally independently; they are only cross-checked just prior to being laid on the page.

What are the tests meant to achieve, apart from consistency and comprehensiveness? The idea is to determine how the amplifiers play music. The whole thing is as simple and as complicated as that, but readers would be forgiven for concluding that amplifiers are about very much more besides.

Manufacturers continue to peddle features, notably tone controls, that have negative effects on sound quality because they dilute resources that could be more usefully invested elsewhere (especially with low cost amplifiers) and which rarely live up to their billing anyway.

In this respect, two bonus points go to Arcam for fitting tone controls with a narrow operating range, although the company drops one point for fitting them at all in the first place.

The point here is not that amps with tone controls sound worse, as the tests that follow clearly demonstrate, but simply that without tone controls they would sound even better.

Perhaps it's unfair to pick on this one element when looking at amplifiers. It turns out that there are many contributory factors in the design of any good amplifier.

Examples include the topology of the circuit and power supply, the quality of the components, the measures taken to reduce microphony and the effects of eddy currents, the amount of power on tap (which is not properly represented by any single Wattage figure, by the way) and the degree of control exercised over the loudspeaker, which prefers to do its own thing according to the masses and compliances of its own drivers and the electrical reactance of the crossover.

GLOSSARY

DETAILED: Indicates the sound allows access to background sounds, especially in the presence of louder foreground sounds.

DYNAMICS: The range between the loudest and the softest sounds on a recording. Also the audible level differences associated with subtle instrumental or vocal phrasing.

WARM: The tonal balance associated with excess output in the mid to upper bass frequencies.

FORWARD: A forward sound is one in which the middle and upper middle frequencies sound more prominent than the bass or treble.

GRAINY: Many amplifiers (and other components) have what appears to be a roughness in the treble, often described as grainy.

SYNTHETIC: Catch-all word for sound with the aural fingerprint of the means of reproduction. A loudspeaker may sound box-like, for example, or an amplifier metallic or grainy.

FLAT: Perceived absence of a depth dimension, also used to describe an apparent lack of dynamic range.

THIN: An excessively treble rich balance, or one that is lacking in mid-band presence.



HINTS & TIPS

Like elastic bands, amplifiers need to be stretched

before they fulfil themselves. They need running in (which may take a week), and warmed up prior to each listening session (typically for an hour). Amplifiers also sound best when used on proper equipment supports, ideally with no other component on the same surface, or perched on top. If an amplifier must be stacked with other equipment, put it on top to ensure proper heat dissipation. If tone controls are fitted, set them to zero (12 o'clock), and bypass them if possible. If there is a direct input switch, so much the better.

AMPLIFIERS GROUP A

£199-£230

The spread of prices in this group is all but negligible, and it's surprising how far your money can stretch. There are signs of cost-cutting, but all four Group A amps are decently turned out, they all have enough power on tap for normal purposes, and there are no features missing that will seriously impair the enjoyment or utility they provide. Each stands at the end of a history of development through previous models, and in their own way all are refined and capable beyond their price. The Sony, especially, has been through an extensive UK optimisation programme, the starting point being an off-the-shelf model designed for worldwide sale, and the Rotel stands out because it is unusually powerful.

Cambridge Audio A500	£199.95
Marantz PM-6010SE	£229.90
Rotel RA-971 II	£250.00
Sony TA-SB730R	£199.00

AMPLIFIERS GROUP B

£231-£400

Arcam is the market leader in component amps, and the company has revamped some of its key models, of which the Alpha 7 is one, though as usual most of the changes are under the skin. The Technics SU-A808 is a quite different proposition, an amplifier designed to meet the particular challenges and the new found capabilities of high resolution audio (principally SACD and DVD-A). It might be argued that it's a little early to introduce inexpensive amplifiers for this task when early players will be in four-figure territory, so the essence of our review was to listen using today's sources. The odd man out here is the NAD 317 which costs about £100 more than the others, but which repays the investment with an enormous real world power output.

Arcam Alpha 7R	£299.90
NAD 317	£399.95
Technics SU-A808	£299.99

AMPLIFIERS GROUP C

£401-£850

Our top price group starts with the harman/kardon HK690, one of their bigger integrated models, but otherwise typical of the breed. Although it looks much like previous Talk models on paper, the Cyclone 1 is much better built, and the new natural aluminium finish is genuinely striking, as well as a great improvement. An additional £150 outlay brings us to the Cyrus 7, which may look like previous Cyrus amps, but is the first model from a newly installed Cyrus design team which has something to prove. Finally, the Musical Fidelity A3 is the costliest and, incidentally, the heaviest amplifier in this group test, with striking panel aesthetics and the usual stripped-down internal gubbins.

harman/kardon HK 690	£529.99
Cyrus 7	£700.00
Musical Fidelity A3	£849.00
Talk Cyclone 1	£549.95

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

The amps were subject to the standard battery of tests, including a close physical examination and unsighted panel-based listening tests in a high grade system.

Hands-on (sighted) listening employed a range of speakers and CD players, and Paul's computerised measurement test programme. Each player was thoroughly run in and warmed up prior to being auditioned, and kept running during the panel tests to keep the AC mains condition consistent. Two days of panel testing included a number of repeats, with no panel member knowing the identity of the amp on test.

The system used included a pair of ALR/Jordan Note 7s for the unsighted

tests and others including the ALR/Jordan Note 3, Acoustic Energy Aegis Three and Tannoy R2 for my hands-on testing. The Note 7 isn't representative of the kind of speaker that would usually be used with amps like these, but it has a conventional floor stander bandwidth, a sensible impedance characteristic, and is analytical enough to show differences clearly. The main CD player was a Krell KAV-250cd. Speaker cables and interconnects were from Nordost, including Quattrofil screened cable.

LISTENING PANEL

Thanks as always go to the men of our listening panel who contributed their skills and time for the greater good. This

month's batch of celebrity earbells were provided by Colin Hinkins (the UK's representative for Mirage, Energy, Sound Dynamics), Keith Haddock (Lexicon, harman/kardon, REL and not switching mobile phones off) Russell Kaufmann (Densen, Morel), Tony White (Mission), and in a surprise departure, we even managed to prize Jason Kennedy, the editor of this esteemed organ, out of his comfy chair at Dennis Towers. He'd only have been twiddling his thumbs anyway, and it's wonderful what the promise of a free lunch can do – even if it does come out of his budget. This consisted of cheese on toast as usual from Pizza Express on day one, but one of our number insisted on

trying a new restaurant that opened in the vicinity on day two, and after they'd turned the 'stereo' off it was OK. Does anyone at Pizza Express head office read this rubbish? If so, can we cash in our pizza miles please?

TEST MUSIC

Brahms Variations on a Theme by Paganini Op. 35/Evgeny Kissin (pno) – RCA Victor Red Seal 9026 68910-2
Joni Mitchell Cool Water from Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm – Geffen 924 1722
Village Scenes from Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*/Budapest Festival Orch./Iván Fischer – Philips 456 575-2PH
Chan Chan from *Buena Vista Social Club* – World Circuit WCD050.

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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO A500



This amplifier was tested as a *Heat Seeker* in HFC 193, and follows on from the A500RC. Nothing much has changed externally. The slimline case is fitted with an aluminium fascia, a large central volume rotary and includes tone, bypass and balance controls. Physically and visually it's very workmanlike, without transcending its pricing.

Five line inputs are available, one a tape circuit. An accessory MM input can be specified in place of one line input for an extra £20. The system handset only adjusts the volume of the amp, although it will operate Cambridge room lighting dimmers! Preamp outputs are available, and two sets of permanently live speaker terminals allow bi-wiring.

Few external signs of change, then. But inside, the encapsulated output modules of the original make way for a more complex discrete design said to provide greater current delivery and improved control. The output devices are five-leg Sanken thermally reactive types which include part of the biasing chain, this

"The Cambridge is at its best driving relatively straightforward compact speakers – there's no shortage of grunt here."

means more consistent biasing than when adjusted the usual way. These devices first surfaced from Kenwood under the unfortunate TRAITR banner. The amp is rated at 50 Watts/channel into eight Ohms, and barely more into six Ohms, suggesting it's optimised for nominally eight Ohm speakers.

SOUND QUALITY

In the context of this larger group, the prognosis was a little less favourable to the Cambridge than it was in Paul Miller's test. The panellists were clearly slightly ill at ease with this model. They did identify and approve of the A500's warmth, and felt it came across as "powerful", with "a well controlled sense of detail", points that

emerged in almost identical form from the earlier group test.

The A500 was also praised for its "full-blooded and enjoyable piano" (Kissin), "excellent vocal reproduction" (Joni Mitchell) and "full bodied" orchestral sound (Bartok). But the A500 was also deemed "inconsistent".

One panel member summed up the panel's ambivalence, noting the A500 was "intrinsically much better than (the previous amplifiers)", but the "bass has a blooming quality which is slightly hollow" and the high-frequency region could be "more explicit".

The A500 is clearly more in charge of things than its predecessor, with less of a performance spread with different speakers. It didn't sound fully in charge of the ALR/Jordans when driven hard, but this wasn't a significant factor with compacts of the type that would normally be chosen to accompany a £200 amplifier.

CONCLUSION

Inconsistency was the main problem, and it seems that a slightly reined-in extreme treble and a

rather sloppy deep bass took their toll to an extent that varied with the music being played. The Cambridge is at its best driving relatively straightforward compact speakers, even quite insensitive ones – there's no shortage of grunt here. But it met its match with powerfully percussive material when played at realistic volume levels. The A500 is euphonic and enjoyable, and, taking the respectable packaging and high power yield into account, a Recommendation is in order. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £199.95

ⓘ Slightly inconsistent and uneven, but a likeable amplifier ideal for budget systems driving smaller speakers, and with enough blood and thunder to raise the dead.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Audio Partnership, Hankey Place, London SE1 4BB

☎ (0171) 940 2200

THE LAB REPORT



This A500 employs a new power supply and power amp stage based around the same Sanken transistors that have seen Musical Fidelity on song for the past couple of years.

The amplifier is assisted by a low 0.03 Ohm output impedance, low noise (-88dB re. 1W/8 Ohm) and low distortion (just 0.002 per cent, midband) that remains remarkably constant across the amplifier's entire dynamic range. Sure enough, this increases to 0.018 per cent at high treble frequencies but even here, as the volume is increased or decreased, the amount of distortion remains unchanged. Subjectively – in terms of the ear's ability to 'ignore' constant distortions – this bodes well for the amplifier's long-term listenability. **PMI**

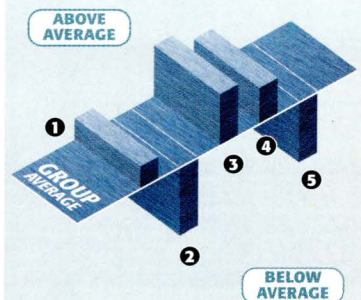
Cambridge rates its new baby at 50 Watts/8 Ohms but it'll really deliver some 75W, increasing to 107W, 195W, 246W (11.1A) and 105W (10.2A) under dynamic (music-like) conditions into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads, respectively. Current-limiting begins around 8A so the amp overloads very smoothly when driven hard into difficult speakers, rather than plunging into a pit of speaker-damaging distortion.

In this respect, today's A500 is light years ahead of its namesake reviewed in HFC 186 which, despite appearances, was an altogether less accomplished design.

HOW IT COMPARES

Bear in mind that the A500 is being compared against two of the most powerful, high-current budget amplifiers available (the Rotel and Marantz), so its 'load tolerance' and 'compatibility' are far stronger than the bar chart might imply.

- | | |
|--------------------------|------|
| 1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT | 15% |
| 2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE | -45% |
| 3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION | 35% |
| 4 NOISE | 25% |
| 5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY | -40% |



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	CLAIMED	MEASURED
■ Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	50W	75W
■ Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.02%	0.02%
■ Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	250mV	300mV

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REFERENCE SERIES MODEL 109
THE MAIDSTONE



MARANTZ PM-6010 OSE

Note that the Marantz PM6010 OSE is a major brand name amp, and that it sells for less than £230, then wonder at the thick brushed alloy fascia and the beautifully turned alloy source selector and volume controls (although yes, it's true that the smaller controls are plastic).

The specification is impressive too. This is a 50 Watts/channel jobbie, generously proportioned, and as well made internally as it is on the outside, but Marantz has avoided heavy and costly toroidal transformers, opting instead for the slightly simpler alternative of a frame transformer.

The crib sheet talks of a short signal path in the power amplifier, a regulated power supply, and a current feedback topology which is said to reinforce the ability to deal with difficult speaker loads. Unlike most amps at this price, Marantz has had the courage to omit tone controls, which must be a good point, especially where resources are limited.

Surprisingly, a source direct switch has been included, which bypasses the tape monitor and balance controls and makes a useful contribution to sound quality. A headphone socket is fitted, and there are six inputs, two of which are tape circuits and one a moving magnet phono input.



“This is a 50 Watts/channel jobbie, generously proportioned, and as well made internally as it is on the outside.”

This is a remote control amp, and is supplied with a full system handset. The OSE (Original Special Edition) designation, by the way, is basically meaningless: only one version is available.

SOUND QUALITY

It's difficult to gainsay the essential 'Marantzness' of this Marantz on audition. Practiced observers of the prestige Philips subsidiary won't be surprised that the panel found the PM6010 to be "ripe, in control and musical" in the case of the Kissin/Brahms excerpt. The low-key Bartok track was felt to "time well" and sound "coherent", although it was also described by the same listener as "a bit flat".

Another panellist repeatedly described the amp as sounding "thin and vague", and although the 6010 was widely praised for being in control, musical and smooth, there were criticisms that it was a little *too* smooth, that it knocked some of the stuffing out of more raucous and energetic recordings.

The excellent *Buena Vista Social Club* track was a fine example, as the palpably live feel was reduced by the Marantz to a rather airless parody, which clearly lacked vitality, ambience and that animal quality often described as "slam".

It's not that the music sounded poor; it didn't really sound much at all, and this was apparent both in the panel and hands-on tests, where it was used with different speakers. But with simpler recordings, the Marantz sounded much more at home, and the smooth, well controlled presentation stood it in good musical stead.

CONCLUSION

With the majority of recordings the latest generation of Marantz really

does well, albeit with a marked preference for acoustic and orchestral material – even mainstream, processed pop – over out-and-out rock or heavy duty jazz. The Marantz's (relative) inability to rock and roll makes it almost the obverse of the Sony TA-FB730R (see p35), and means it suffers in comparison with the more evenly spread charms of the Rotel RA-971 MkII (see p33). **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£229.90

Low key, smooth and enjoyable amplifier is a good starting point for those who like a slightly more relaxed quality from their hi-fi.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

Marantz Hi Fi UK Ltd, Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks, 575-583 Bath Road, Longford, Middlesex UB7 0EH
(01753) 680868

THE LAB REPORT

This is an early review of what appears to be a very powerful and thoroughly competent design, offering a combination of low noise (-89dB re. 1W/8 Ohms), low distortion (0.002 per cent, midband) and an effective tolerance of

tricky speakers.

Under dynamic conditions, 98W, 176W, 271W (11.6A) and 353W (18.8A) is available into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads, respectively, although the 1 Ohm figure is only obtained for periods below 10msec. Above this, electronic protection limits the output to 49W (6.95A).

Strong stuff indeed, but as this unit is labelled "assembled from piece-parts from the trial-run and thus not intended for

measurements", I'd have thought it equally unsuitable for review. This said, there's nothing untoward thrown up by our measurement program, which shows the PM-6010 in fine fettle. The minor 0.8dB error in channel balance will

depend on Marantz's final selection of its volume control, for example. Similarly, the

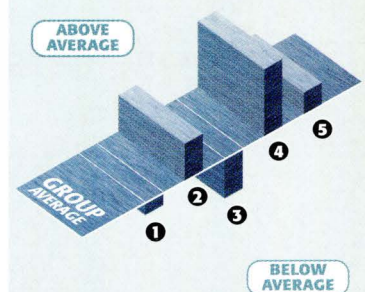
slightly contoured response (-0.6dB at 20Hz and -0.2dB at 20kHz) could also be subject to component revisions. Marantz's clear documentation demonstrates that it has been nothing less than honest in this matter, but I'll have to test a full production sample before adding my 'rubber stamp' to the PM-6010's clean bill of health. **PMI**



HOW IT COMPARES

Early indications are that the PM-6010 could amount to a strong and potentially very consistent performer with different ancillaries. Nevertheless, I'm bound to stress that our sample was not from a final production batch...

1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	-5%
2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	25%
3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	-25%
4 NOISE	45%
5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY	15%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	CLAIMED	MEASURED
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	50W	65W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.008%	0.025%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	150mV	195mV



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ROTEL RA-971 MkII



To the outside observer, Rotel amplification barely seems to change from one year to the next," we wrote about the original version of this amp. "The four-square look should sit well with a wide range of room furnishings, and if it doesn't look like a fashion accessory right now, it probably won't look dated in five years time either." Well, second-hand clothes probably deserve second-hand words, but the point stands. The RA-971 MkII looks like just about every other Rotel amp of recent times. All the new work has been expended where it will do the most good – inside.

The only obvious external change is the addition of a pre-amplifier output, which allows the RA-971 MkII to be used in a bi-amplified set-up using one of the matching Rotel power amps, notably the RB-971 MkII, though it also allows the power amp to be upgraded with simple bypass surgery. Internally there have been a number of unspecified component changes, the net effect of which is said to be improved dynamics and openness, as well as an improved bottom end.

"The Rotel was able to play music at window-shaking volume levels without any obvious change in musical character."

The Rotel is equipped with bypassable tone controls and switching for one of the two sets of speakers that can be hooked up. Headphones are accommodated, too. The preamp can cope with six sources, including two tape circuits, with independent source and listen selectors. The volume control is a twin mono friction coupled-type, which allows channel balance to be varied by holding one part of the control still and rotating the other, a topology with some useful circuit benefits, but which means channel balance varies with volume.

SOUND QUALITY

The Rotel acquitted itself well: "By far the best amp today," was one panel member's conclusion near

the end of one day's listening, which bought instant agreement. "I thought I couldn't fault the last one, but this amp sounds much more controlled and lucid," he said, complimenting the Rotel's "liveliness" and describing the Bartok as "a delight. I'd definitely take this one home," he concluded, noting its strengths were apparent in every track.

Other points that emerged consistently from the panel tests were the Rotel's dynamic ability, its crisp, clear balance, and specifically the quality of the piano sound: piano is always a tough challenge for hi-fi equipment.

What wasn't obvious from the panel tests – and couldn't have been, because all the amps were used at the same measured volume, well within the abilities of even the most feeble models on test – was its tremendous power output, and its apparent sublime indifference to the nature of the load it was driving.

The Rotel was consistently able to play music at window-shaking volume levels without any obvious change in musical character – or at least none that weren't

swamped by the non-linearities of the human hearing process. On this count, the Rotel can hold its own with any of the amps tested here, except the NAD 317 and the harman/kardon HK690.

CONCLUSION

It was not possible to compare old with new, but Rotel's claim of improved sound quality appear to be justified. Certainly the slightly hazy quality we complained of in the original amplifier is nowhere to be heard here. The bottom line: superb value for money, an outrageous real-world power yield and an unequivocal Best Buy. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
PRICE	£250.00

Improved budget powerhouse offers a sharper, better focused sound than its predecessor – and a preamplifier output.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

Gamepath Ltd, 28 Heathfields, Stacey Bushes, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK12 6HR
(01908) 317707

THE LAB REPORT

Whatever else it is, the RA-971MkII is very, very conservatively specified. While there are some "60W" amplifiers on the market that achieve this rating by the skin of their transistors – this test included – the '971 sails on to a full 100 Watts/8 Ohms and a thumping great 165 Watts/4 Ohms. Under dynamic (music-like) conditions this increases to 130W, 233W, 383W (13.9A) and a massive 500W (22.3A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads. In this respect, the 'MkII' is no different from the impressive 'MkI' reviewed in HFC 186. In practical terms, the MkII represents a total of 38 component changes rather than a radical shake-up of the amplifier's basic topology.

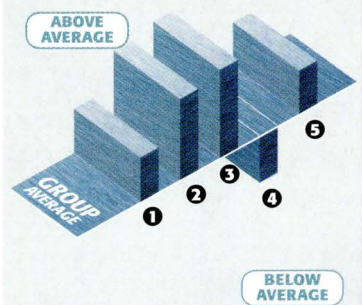


In marked contrast to many hard-clipping amplifiers, the Rotel reaches its end-stops very gracefully, spreading the stress over the final 10W into 8 Ohms, 20-30W into 4 Ohms and over the last 100W or so into low 2 Ohm loads. Distortion gradually increases through this end zone from the low 0.002 per cent enjoyed over the bulk of its range to the 1 per cent distortion that marks full clipping. Otherwise, distortion remains very low at 0.0018 per cent (midband) and just 0.0045 per cent at the high frequency extremes. Indeed, the response of the RA-971 MkII isn't unlike the 'DVD-A-ready' Technics which, to all intents and purposes, is also flat to 100kHz. **PMI**

HOW IT COMPARES

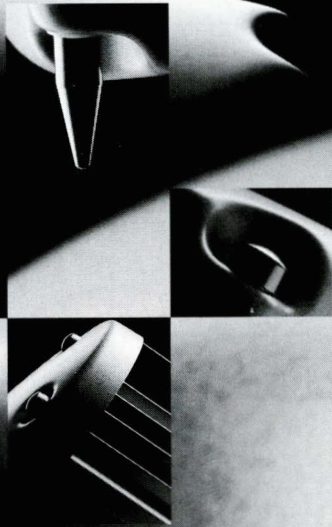
Still the most consistent performer in the £200 bracket, offering incredible reserves of power, an immunity to the toughest speakers, low distortion and the bandwidth to handle new DVD-A and SACD formats.

1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	30%
2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	55%
3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	60%
4 NOISE	-30%
5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY	30%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	CLAIMED	MEASURED
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	60W	100W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	<0.03%	0.0045%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	150mV	200mV



A 25th Anniversary

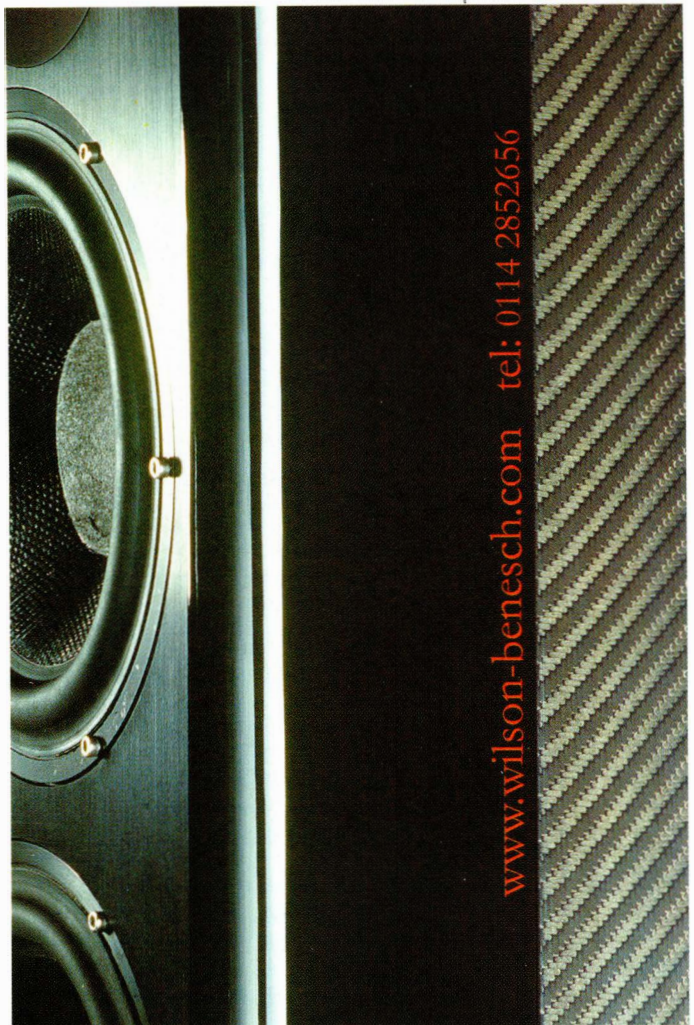
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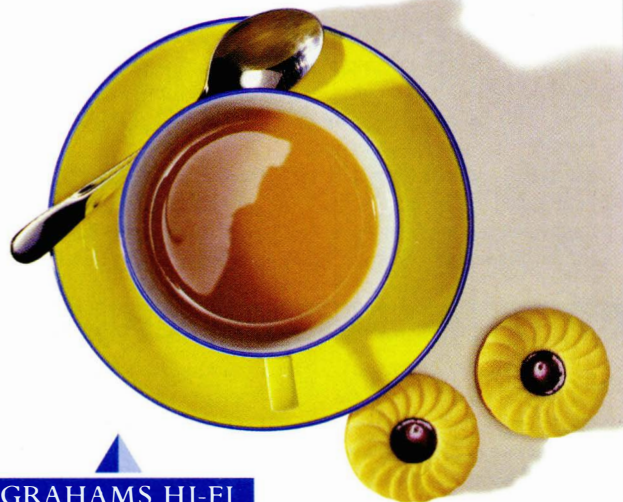
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SONY TA-FB730R

On one level, this new Sony is just another amp.

The retro fascia design could have dated from any time in the last 30 years, and the feature set is distinctly old-fashioned in tone. The fascia houses outsize volume and source selector rotaries, tone controls, switching for two pairs of speakers, balance, tape monitor, loudness, even a subsonic (high pass) filter to help tame turntables that pick up too much LF garbage for comfort.

About the only concession to 90s sensibilities are the EON (Enhanced Other Networks) link which works in co-operation with Sony's RDS tuner, and the source direct switch which attempts to undo some of the harm, however marginal, that some of the other features inevitably wreak. The Sony also comes with a basic but very well designed system remote.

But all is not as it seems. The 730 has been extensively modified from previous Sony practice in accordance with the aims of the 'quality first' Brooklands project.

The amp is built around a 40 Watt MOSFET power amplifier (eight Ohms RMS), with upgraded supply capacitors and a shortened and simplified signal path with less hardwiring, one result of which is said to be improved speaker damping. The power supply has been more effectively separated from the audio circuits, and features an improved transformer, while there is added chassis



“Consistently, this was the one amp that reproduced classical piano with all the vitality and impact of the real thing.”

reinforcement alongside other measures to reduce microphony. A variety of other detail changes include a switch from IC to relay source switching.

SOUND QUALITY

The Sony polarised opinion like no other amp in this month's group, and it clearly wasn't everyone's cup of tea: 'Strident and thin...'; 'jangly [with a] lack of midrange, I didn't find this at all pleasant...'; 'detail missing, not that authentic... percussion rather flat' – and plenty more in a similar vein.

But others heard the Sony differently, pointing to its "real grip", and "gusto", its apparent

"wide bandwidth" and what was described as an "evocative and engaging" quality. One felt that it "threw all its energy behind the music", although he also felt impelled to point out that it was 'somewhat aggressive'.

This is not unheard of from Sony amplifiers, perhaps because of their (previously, at least) sometimes rather abrupt transition into clip at high power.

The list of pros may have been shorter than the cons, but in hands-on listening I found the Sony's good side. Consistently, this was the one amp that reproduced classical piano with all the vitality and impact of the real thing; indeed this was the one amplifier that reproduced a Steinway with the lid very obviously raised, and gave a near holographic sense of imagery, all of which had a significant impact on the listening experience. At the same time, the Sony's limitations can't be glossed over, and there were times when it did indeed sound rather raucous and transitory.

CONCLUSION

The question that one must ask here is of the 'is the glass half empty, or half full?' type, and clearly this is not an amplifier for all reasons. While I found the Sony to be flawed but compelling, the panel was clearly split, with a significant 'anti' vote from some members. However, sound this compelling at a price this low can't be ignored. Recommended. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£199.00

A mixture of brilliant realism with some rather basic departures from the straight and narrow make this an intriguing choice that should definitely be added to the shortlist.

■ ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

☒ Sony UK Ltd, The Heights, Brooklands, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 0XW
☎ (0990) 111999

THE LAB REPORT



In common with Technics, Sony is taking the wide bandwidth theme very seriously – although, in its case, SACD rather than DVD-A is the format of choice. It's taking it so seriously, that the TA-FB730R's response is flat to 100kHz, the proposed limit of its SACD players (see HFC 193 and HFC 194). But remember that most speakers won't produce a squeak above 30kHz or so – not that you'd be able to hear it...

The TA-FB730R's S/N ratio, however, is some 17dB behind the (costlier) Technics model at 81.6dB (re. 1 Watt/8 Ohms, A-wtd)

partly because the power amp has an unusually high +45dB gain. Although, as we've discussed before, there is a balance to be struck between achieving a wide dynamic range and not letting

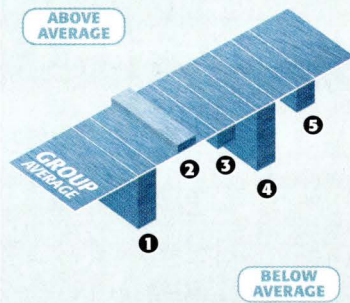
through any low-level colorations.

Otherwise, the behaviour of this version at clipping is not so 'violent' as with the last generation of Sony amplifiers. So, under dynamic conditions, it achieves 81W, 139W, 201W (10A) and 213W (14.6A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads with at least some hint of additional distortion before crashing into the end-stops. Stereo separation (50dB at 20kHz) is nothing special for what is supposed to be a 'twin monaural' construction but the TA-FB730R still emerges with a clean bill of technical health. **PMi**

HOW IT COMPARES

Another wide bandwidth amplifier that looks more than capable of taking advantage of up-and-coming audio formats. Not as powerful as either the Rotel or Marantz competition, however.

- 1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT -35%
- 2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE 5%
- 3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION -10%
- 4 NOISE -40%
- 5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY -15%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	CLAIMED	MEASURED
n Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	40W	60W
n Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.008%	0.01%
n Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	150mV	130mV

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Matching CD players are available. The **KAV-300cd**, featuring HDCD, 2 x 20 bit Burr-Brown DACs and Class A direct coupled output stages with both balanced and single ended outputs, is now joined by the **KAV-250cd**.

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ARCAM Alpha 7R



As the model name almost suggests, the Alpha 7R is the remote control replacement for the Alpha 7, which was one of the top selling amps in the UK (the Alpha 7 has been at No 2 using the industry standard GfK figures for the best part of the past two years, just behind the Alpha 8!), and is closely related to the entry-level, Alpha One. The main differences are the inclusion of a motorised ALPs potentiometer for the remote, which limits itself to adjusting volume and output muting, and a higher power output.

The feature set sees no other changes from standard Arcam practice, and includes tone controls (with a 'direct' bypass option), balance, tape monitoring and a headphone socket. The amp is equipped with two sets of BFA connectors, one of which is permanently wired, and one switchable. They can be used together in a bi-wire installation, or the switched output, which is slightly compromised sonically by the in-line switching, could be used for a second pair of speakers in a remote location.

The Alpha 7R even has an upgrade path via its preamp output, which is meant for use with a second power amp for bi-amping purposes. There are six inputs, including a single tape circuit, and a moving magnet phono input. The amp is built around a toroidal transformers and a MOSFET output stage, and has a power rating of 45 Watts per channel.

SOUND QUALITY

The old Alpha 7 emerged satisfactorily from our previous tests, but was felt to be rather dry and 'grey', as well as lacking real-world power, or at least the ability to play as cleanly when loud as it does at everyday volume levels.

In many ways the story of the Alpha 7R can be summed up by that naval term, steady as she goes. Not much appears to have changed, and dynamic material like the Brahms piano sounded "forced and edgy", while the bass in the *Buena Vista Social Club* track was described as "soft and thuddy" according to the panel.

The word "transistory" also put in an appearance, and while the amp sounded decently powerful

"Subtle and engaging at times, the Alpha 7R is beginning to sound (as well as look) a bit dated, despite its mid-life facelift."

and in control towards the top end of the everyday volume level range, the mask slipped at little when pushed harder. In general, the 7R's performance envelope is more circumscribed than some similarly priced models.

There were some notable strengths, too. Going back to the piano test track, one listener commented that he was "aware for first time of the different intensities of the notes, the way the keys were being hit", and it was agreed that the Alpha's delivery could be very articulate in this way, while with less demanding tracks like the Joni Mitchell piece it was also subtle and melodic. This came across in the hands-on tests too, but the Arcam always sounded a little muddy and 'electronic'.

CONCLUSION

Subtle and engaging at times, the Alpha 7R is beginning to sound (as well as look) a bit dated, despite its mid-life facelift. It needs careful system matching, and the compatibility list doesn't stretch to large, wide bandwidth floor standers or small, low sensitivity designs – it's best to stick to medium or high sensitivity speakers and smaller rooms. In its favour, the Alpha 7R is well built, has a decent phono stage, and can be upgraded economically using the preamp-out facility. **AG**

VERDICT

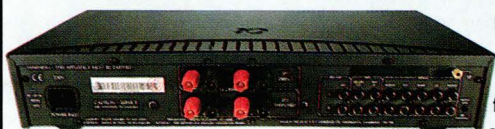
SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£299.90

It is clear that a lot of work has gone into this upgradeable budget amp, but the results are ultimately mixed and a little circumscribed.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

A&R Cambridge Ltd, Pembroke Avenue, Waterbeach, Cambridge CB5 9PB
 (01223) 203203

THE LAB REPORT



In common with other MOSFET-based Alphas, the main 'character'-forming aspect of this amplifier is its significant

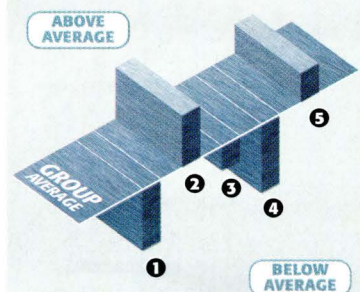
The Alpha 7R is ostensibly a lower-powered version of the 8R reviewed in *HFC 192*, but with the capacity to deliver 83W, 151W, 252W (11.2A) and 360 Watts (19.0A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads under dynamic conditions, it's no wallflower. Mid-range distortion remains very low, only nudging 0.018 per cent into the toughest 1 Ohm loads with no sign of strain (VI limiting) until the amp reaches its true clip point. Under continuous conditions, you'll get close to 60W midband, although Arcam's electronic protection shuts the amp down if you exceed 55W/8 Ohms at 20kHz.

increase in distortion from a very low 0.0018 per cent midband to 0.06 per cent at HF. The raw figures are not debilitating, but the jump of 30dB in distortion from 1kHz to 20kHz is unlikely to go without some subjective impact. Otherwise, the key technical differences between this 7R and the Alpha 7 (see *HFC 167*), parallel those of the 8R and its predecessor, the Alpha 8. Overall gain has been reduced (sensibly) but the S/N has deteriorated slightly from 88.3dB to 84.9dB (re. 1 Watt/8 Ohms). Ironically, this may well encourage a slightly smoother sound overall. **PMI**

HOW IT COMPARES

What was learnt by upgrading the Alpha 8 to 8R has been brought to bear in the budget Alpha 7R. Do check your CD player is happy driving its low-ish 17kOhm input load before purchase, however.

1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	-40%
2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	35%
3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	-15%
4 NOISE	-45%
5 OVERALL COMPATABILITY	15%



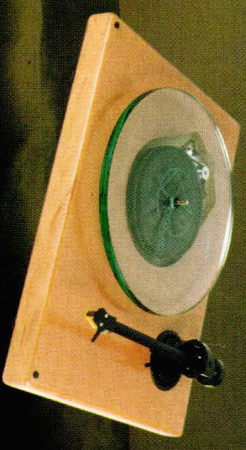
SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	45W	55W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.01%	0.06%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	250mV	255mV

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NAD 317

Long-standing readers might remember that we tested this model a couple of years ago (see HFC 168). In the meantime, internal changes have been made to the circuit which are of enough import to make a re-test worthwhile – and, to add icing to the cake, the price has been reduced from £470 to £399.

The NAD 317 is built around a 500VA Holmgren transformer and a bank of small value reservoir capacitors cross-connected in a manner calculated to provide a powerful but stiff power supply. One that's capable of working with low impedance and other difficult loads without suffering current starvation. As usual with NAD, belt-and-braces protection is available with Soft Clipping circuit, and it's also equipped for bridging if even higher power is needed.

The 317 has the usual NAD features, including bypassable tone controls, removable pre/power amp links which allow it to operate as a preamp, or as part of a bi-amp or multi-room system, a headphone socket, and six inputs, all at line level and including two tape circuits. A decently laid out full system remote control is part of the package.

Nobody at NAD HQ was able to specify how the amplifier has been changed, beyond the assertion, which turned out to be true, that the changes were aimed at

improving sound quality. Paul Miller's test report (below) does show differences (better volume control matching, and changes to the input and output impedance values), but not why the two should sound so different.

SOUND QUALITY

But they do sound different. The "discordant jangle" (Brahms' *Paganini Variations* – a discordant jangle!) of the piano test track was "beautifully portrayed", while the *Buena Vista Social Club* recording sounded "solid, with good depth", while "the band sounds very together, with a great sense of direction". That listener also noticed this track sounded loud, a reflection of the NAD's unstinting high power delivery since the disc is mastered at high level, and the volume was identical for every panel test.

Depth, ambience and presence were all identified as strengths, and the muddled, congested feel of the original 317 that was particularly noticeable with the throttles wide open is not a factor here.

"The 317 showed itself to be capable of playing cleanly at volume levels that defeated other amplifiers in this test group."

The strengths of the NAD were equally apparent in pre- and post-panel session testing, where the 317 showed itself to be virtually indifferent to the nature of the loudspeaker load, and capable of playing cleanly at volume levels that defeated other amplifiers in this test group, with the exception of the harman/kardon HK690. But an honourable mention should go to the Rotel RA-971 MkII, which comes alarmingly close.

CONCLUSION

There are two problems with this amplifier. The test sample shed one of its feet during the course of the test, which does not speak well of the way they are fixed. But

there's a more general criticism, which is that the rather scruffy mid-grey finish and cheap plastic controls, while almost part of the charm with the entry level models, compares unfavourably with the competition at this price point. Put another way, the NAD 317 simply doesn't look like a £400 amplifier.

But don't allow this to reflect negatively on its musical ability, which on current form is good to very good indeed. With improved build, Best Buy would have been warranted; but as it stands – Recommended. **AG**



THE LAB REPORT



Compared with the sample tested in HFC 168, this 317 enjoys a lower 0.02 Ohm output impedance (from 0.08 Ohm) and much improved volume control selection with

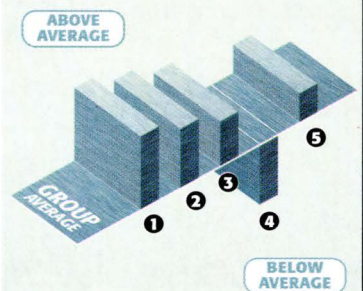
Big and brutal, the NAD 317 isn't finished in battleship grey by coincidence. Hook up the most insensitive loudspeakers with the most evil, low impedance load and the NAD, along with the costlier h/k amp, will have the best chance of any in this test of driving the music home. Making a mockery of its 80W rating, the 317 will actually deliver 125W/8 Ohms with some 166W, 302W, 515W (16.1A) and 771W (27.8A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads under dynamic conditions. So if it seems to 'go louder' than its 80W competition, you'll know why!

channel balance errors down by a factor of ten to just 0.2dB at -60dB. Input loading has also dropped from 47kOhm to 22kOhm, but this should not tax any competent CD player. NAD rates the amp's S/N ratio at "98dB re. 1W/8 Ohm" whereas, in practice, the figure remains at 85.4dB when measured according to the IHF protocol. This figure is perfectly adequate, but NAD still needs to revise its spec. Susceptibility to RF noise is low as is any residual hum (just -74dBV), rounding off what is a thoroughly proven, high-value design. **PMI**

HOW IT COMPARES

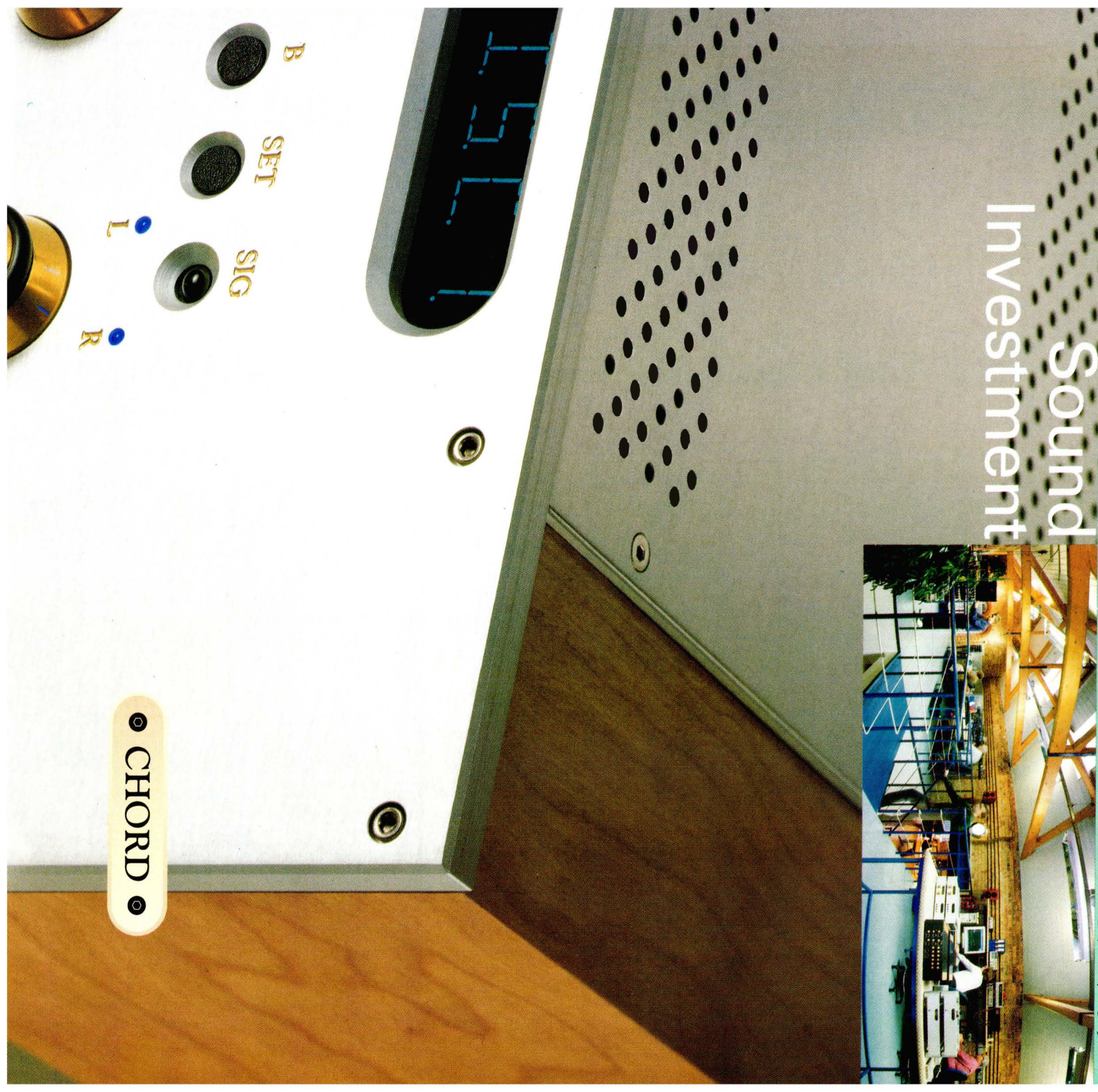
This is a tremendously powerful and speaker-tolerant amplifier that should perform equally well in a wide variety of systems. It's a technical benchmark at the price.

- 1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT 50%
- 2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE 40%
- 3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION 30%
- 4 NOISE -40%
- 5 OVERALL COMPATABILITY 20%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	80W	125W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.03%	0.013%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	100mV	200mV



Sound Investment

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● CHORD ●

TECHNICS SU-A808

Technics is gearing up for the introduction of DVD-Audio, which will be imminent by the time you read this. The particular qualities of the new medium are interpreted by Technics as requiring an extended operating bandwidth and the highest possible signal/noise figure. Although this relatively junior model in the new line-up doesn't go the whole hog – there's a component preamplifier, for example, which is an essentially noise-free battery power supply – it is an ultra-wide bandwidth design and extremely quiet to boot.

The Technics achieves its desired end with the application of science: in this case, a Virtual Battery supply (which isn't a battery, but is intended to emulate the low noise of a real battery), and a VGCA (Variable Gain Control Amplifier), which eliminates attenuation of the input signal at the volume control, adjusting the amp's gain directly instead, which is said to result in a 10dB signal/noise improvement.

Indications that the SU-A808 is built down to a price are apparent from its tinny chassis panels, the plastic fascia and controls, the awkwardly designed, poor quality speaker terminals and the use of a thermostatically controlled cooling fan instead of larger, costlier and quieter heatsinks (although the Technics fan was a lot quieter than my PC, which has been banished from earshot in disgrace).



But there is some pleasure to be derived from the aesthetics. The Technics looks a lot more 'designed' than many, and most minor controls, including switching for two pairs of loudspeakers, tape monitoring of either tape circuit and tone and balance controls, are squirrelled away behind a darkened Perspex flap. Always accessible are the volume control, source selectors and tone bypass/VGCA switching. The remote control is powered by *real* batteries, I'm disappointed to say.

SOUND QUALITY

There was a spread of opinion about the merits of this model, although not about the character of the sound itself. One listener felt the SU-A808 trod a middle path, and that although mostly uncolored, it had little or no drive: "It would be OK in a restaurant because it wouldn't get in the way." Another panellist found the amp "very clear but unexpressive".

This dichotomy between an amp that was extended, clear and

"It looks a lot more 'designed' than many, and most minor controls are squirrelled away behind a darkened Perspex flap."

detailed, but which was ultimately flat and uninteresting when the chips were down, was repeated through the listening sessions, with the final verdict in each case depending on the weight each listener gave to the different parameters at the time.

The Technics continued in this rather indecisive manner in the hands-on tests, impressing with its clarity and transparency, and disappointing with its lack of grip, I mean grit. No, grip.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps this is not the time to judge this amp. Maybe we should wait for programme material to

arrive that has the appropriately enormous signal/noise, and a bandwidth approaching 100kHz; for DVD-A or SACD, in fact. In the meantime, we're faced with an amp that's clearly happier with broadly steady state signals, and which meets its nemesis with more transient-rich material.

In other words, it likes pop, much rock and 'Radio 2'-style music, but is less than convincing with piano, chamber and anything that would draw attention to itself in a restaurant. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £299.99

■ A bit of a curate's egg, this one, but it may well come into its own when high-res audio arrives.

■ ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Panasonic UK Ltd, Panasonic House, Willoughby Road, Bracknell, Berks RG12 8FP
☎ (0990) 357357

THE LAB REPORT



The claims Technics is making for its low-noise amp circuitry seem more than justified in practice: the SU-A808 has quite the widest S/N ratio I've encountered in a long time. At 1 Watt/8 Ohm, the A-wtd S/N ratio is 98.5dB – this is some 18dB ahead of the Mission Cyrus 7, for example, and a good 12dB ahead of the 'average' S/N for a modern solid-state design. While this is technically impressive, there is evidence that opening the dynamic 'window' too wide may just as likely expose some subjectively less flattering colorations. To enjoy

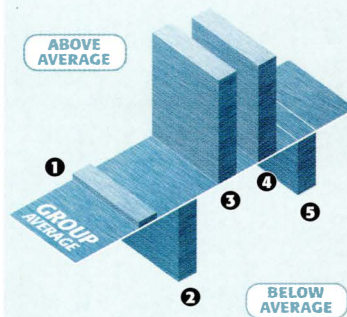
anything like the full dynamic range of future DVD-A (and SACD) formats, however, these are the very issues that must be tackled and it's good to see Technics, in the vanguard of DVD-A, making an early stand.

In keeping with the wide-bandwidth/low-noise topology, the SU-A808 is also well-compensated, offering vanishingly low levels of distortion (mainly third harmonic) that increase to just 0.0035 percent at 20kHz. This is a 100x lower than one or two other amps in this test! Neither is it short of grunt for a notional 55-Watter. In practice, 85W/8 Ohms is closer to the mark with 116W, 190W, 255W (11.4A) and 243W (15.6A) possible into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads under dynamic conditions. **PMI**

HOW IT COMPARES

An engineering feat that manages to combine exceptionally low levels of noise with both a very wide frequency response and unusually low amounts of high frequency distortion.

1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	5%
2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	-50%
3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	70%
4 NOISE	65%
5 OVERALL COMPATABILITY	-35%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
■ Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	55W	85W
■ Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.03%	0.03%
■ Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	150mV	190mV

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CYRUS 7

There have been important changes at Cyrus recently, thanks to the strength of the NXT operation, which was originally a small scale technology spin-off but has recently become the tail that wags the dog. For a variety of reasons it was deemed imperative to give Cyrus its independence, which has helped breathe life into a brand that at times had started to look tired.

The Cyrus 7 marks a subtle change in emphasis towards optimising sound quality, even if this means some sacrificial lambs in the shape of the odd kHz here or decibel there, and there is at least *prima facie* evidence in this case that the new design team has delivered handsomely.

Starting with the Cyrus 7, no component from previous models has been included unless it has been able to make its case musically, which is said to have added three months to the development cycle. Out have gone slit foil capacitors and other sacred cows, but the shoebox packaging and magnesium diecast outer case have been retained.

Somehow, Cyrus has managed to squeeze two sets of BFA speaker connectors alongside the six inputs (two are described as tape, but one has no output sockets, and is tape in name only), the preamp outputs, the PSX-R outboard power supply socket (optional) and the headphone socket on the dinky back panel.

The familiar looking fascia is backed by some rather elegant control circuitry which, among other tricks, integrates with the



“The Cyrus 7 is lucid, detailed and well controlled across the band, and not above getting its hands dirty.”

Cyrus multi-room controller or AV processor. A remote control handset is included.

SOUND QUALITY

The Cyrus turned out to be a peach, tinged with the merest whiff of lemon. There was a smattering of mildly dismissive comments from a couple of the panellists during one of the presentations, but there was no obvious common denominator, while the general view of the Cyrus was otherwise consistently positive. “The best so far” as one put it. “There are real dynamics and energy here and the image scale is big, yet the bass is well

controlled”, although this feeling was offset by some suggestions that the amplifier did not get fully on top of the bass – it was “slow and sluggish” according to one.

Another spoke of the amp’s “strong timing and imagery”, both points that were widely echoed. Perhaps the finest epithet, however, was to the effect that the Cyrus 7 encourages listening and provides real insights into the music. And nobody noticed any hint of excess high frequency noise, although it is likely to be audible through speakers whose tweeters are less well behaved than those in the ALR/Jordans we used for our test (see p67).

The hands-on listening was in agreement with the panel’s consensus. This is an assured amplifier, with a fine sense of poise, real clarity and impressively strong control, although it was clearly better matched with loudspeakers of medium sensitivity or better – ideally with a slightly narrower bandwidth than the big ALR/Jordans.

CONCLUSION

The Cyrus 7 marks a significant upwards turn for the brand. It’s lucid, detailed and well controlled across the band, and not above getting its hands dirty and kicking ass when the occasion demands. But its stand-out qualities are its refinement, soundstage precision and the usual superb Cyrus packaging. It can be upgraded with the PSX-R external power supply, although like the amplifier itself that isn’t exactly a cheap option at £350.

AG

VERDIC

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£700.00

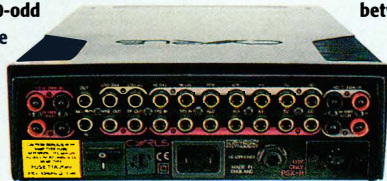
Those harbouring the illusion that the merit of an amplifier is somehow linked with its size are in for a salutary lesson.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Cyrus Electronics, Stonehill, Huntingdon, Cambs PE18 6ED
☎ (01480) 451777

THE LAB REPORT

In common with h/k’s amplifier, Cyrus’ claimed 30A peak-to-peak current (21A rms) isn’t specified with respect to distortion or duration, so in practice we find transient outputs of 117W, 184W, 208W (10.2A) and 132W (11.5A or 12.0A over 5msc) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads. The latter is cut short by Cyrus’ digital electronic protection which also prevents a continuous output above 80W into 4 Ohms which, arguably, is a bit conservative. Otherwise, the exceptionally low levels of distortion across 90-odd per cent of the power band puts this amp up with the likes of the Arcam Alpha 7 and 8R.

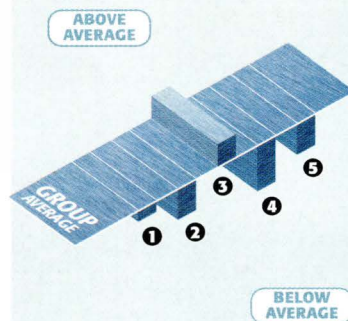


DC offset and output impedance are a little higher than expected at +35mV and 0.14 Ohm, respectively, but these are ‘sacrificial lambs’ along Cyrus’ route towards a very elegant, minimalist amplifier design. Similarly, the A-wtd S/N ratio of just 80.4dB (re. 1W/8 Ohms) is some 2-3dB below the group average but manifests as a ‘white noise’ or hiss, rather than an unwelcome hum – subjectively, greatly preferable. Meanwhile, Cyrus’ digital volume control provides superb tracking between channels and equally good separation which remains better than 100dB throughout the midband! PMI

HOW IT COMPARES

Elegance and simplicity rather than a brute force approach to audio marks out this intriguing design. The juggling of one performance parameter against another is particularly thoughtful.

1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	-5%
2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	-20%
3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	15%
4 NOISE	-30%
5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY	-20%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	100W	130W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	<0.09%	0.02%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	150mV	175mV

CYRUS



harman/kardon HK690

Space consuming? Yes. Powerful? Certainly. Otherwise, the HK690 is business as usual. In the round, this model is much the same kind of beast as other current integrated amps in the harman/kardon range, including the HK630.

So what kind of beast is the HK690? Physically it's an imposing lump, the rather nondescript front panel being aluminium with a black paint finish. The sharp top and side panels extend below the base, which means care should be taken when moving it around.

The controls all inhabit a narrow strip along the bottom edge of the fascia, much of which is completely empty, giving the amp a curiously lofty appearance. Design highlights include a wide bandwidth circuit, low levels of negative feedback, high instantaneous current capability and a totally discrete circuit – all traditional harman/kardon attributes, in fact.

Facilities are mainstream. You get tone controls and a source direct switch, an arrangement that is inevitably inferior to an otherwise similar tone control-free amplifier. There are two speaker circuits, with either/or selection using two press buttons, and a headphone socket is fitted.

The volume control has an illuminated marker, and the source selectors and tape monitor switch also have LEDs to show the current selection. The selectors look much like the rocker switches



“The HK690 sounded articulate, solid and stable, with powerful bass and a sense of presence and vitality.”

on lesser h/k amps, but for all but the tape switch both ends can be selected at once, the upper ends selecting the source and the lower ends selecting the tape feed.

The range of inputs is strong, numbering seven, including a moving magnet phono input and two tape circuits. A system remote control completes the package.

SOUND QUALITY

Although this amp was generally quite well liked by the panel, they were quick to point to its faults, and unusually unanimous in their judgements, which lends them greater force. The HK690, they decided, offered a good piano

sound, “plenty of tonal colour and pace” in the *Buena Vista* track, and “energy and enthusiasm” in the Joni Mitchell. One panellist was reminded of “butterflies and panthers”, pointing to the HK690’s ability to simultaneously portray raw energy and to reproduce subtleties of expression.

The amp was clearly identified as being powerful and dynamic, and as offering plenty of resolving power, but it became apparent both in the panel and hands-on testing that this didn’t quite equate to clarity in the usual sense.

The two ideas are normally synonymous, but the HK690 is not completely free of glare, which leaves the sense of detail intact, but can make it hard at times to hear exactly what’s going on. This quality is often neatly, if not wholly accurately, encapsulated in the single word ‘transistory’.

Still, the general prognosis was sound (no pun intended), and the amp sounded articulate, solid and stable, with powerful bass and a sense of presence and vitality. It

is also capable of extremely high volume levels, and never sounded out of its depth with any of the test speakers.

CONCLUSION

This amplifier has a lot going for it. Overall it offers a fair blend of attributes, that are only let down slightly by a raw, edgy quality with some material, and the presence of others in the same group capable of similar or even better performance standards at similar or lower prices.

AG

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £529.99

Powerful, authoritative and detailed amplifier has bottle aplenty, but can sound ragged at times.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

Gamepath Ltd, 28 Heathfields, Stacey Bushes, Milton Keynes MK12 6HR
(01908) 317707

THE LAB REPORT

Harman/kardon has a reputation for building very powerful amplifiers, but its “instantaneous current rating of +/-75A” for the HK690 is probably pushing things a little too far. After all, just how long is “instantaneous”? And how much distortion is generated *en route*? For *Choice*’s dynamic power/current tests, I use a 10msec signal (equivalent to ten cycles at 1kHz) and map the amplifier’s output up to 1 per cent distortion. That way we’re always comparing like with like. In this instance, the HK690

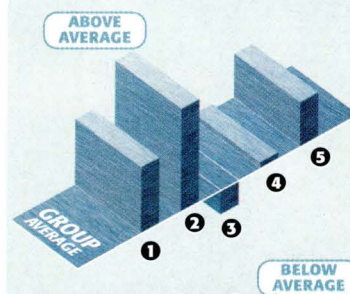
delivered 172W, 317W, 537W (16.4A) and 761W (27.6A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads, respectively, putting it right up alongside the NAD 317 in this month’s power stakes.

It’s as well to remember amps like the Arcam and Cyrus – while offering less overall current – do so at significantly lower levels of distortion. The HK690, by contrast, witnesses a current-dependent jump in THD from 0.05 to 0.18 per cent above 14A (re. 1 Ohm). So the h/k is more tolerant of the toughest speakers, but it’s also more ‘colourful’ in its grip. Otherwise, it has a very extended response (-1.3dB at 100kHz), low 0.065 Ohm output impedance, a moderate HF separation and good channel balance. A solid set of figures for a very solid amp. PMI

HOW IT COMPARES

Another bruiser of an amplifier that’s far more capable than its spec. might suggest. Distortion is slightly higher than the norm in this group but not adversely so.

- | | |
|--------------------------|------|
| 1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT | 45% |
| 2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE | 70% |
| 3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION | -15% |
| 4 NOISE | 5% |
| 5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY | 30% |



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	60W	75W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	Not Specified	0.03%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	200mV	270mV

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GENESIS SILVER SPIRAL

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3



After introducing a number of oval cross-section components over the past year or so, Musical Fidelity decided it was time to supplement them with some more conventionally styled components. The A3 is closely related to the XA-100R, one of the oval series, in that case with an outboard power supply and a slightly lower power rating.

The A3 is central to the new strategy, a mid-price integrated amplifier rated at 85 Watts per channel, that's at least ostensibly capable of substantial current output, although this isn't quite the case in practice, not least because of the current-limiting identified in Paul's lab report.

In traditional Musical Fidelity style, there are no fancy gimmicks: no tone controls and therefore no need for bypass switching, no balance control, no headphone socket, and just one set of speaker terminals. At last Musical Fidelity is specifying a preamplifier output, facilitating bi-amping with any of the company's power amps, all of which are matched for sensitivity.

“The gold detailing on the alloy fascia may be a little fussy for some, but the controls are well made and have an excellent feel.”

The A3 is equipped to field five line level sources, one of which can be a tape deck, with tape monitoring available for three head cassette decks or for AV processors. You also get a phono input, switchable for MM and MC cartridges. This is the only amp this month capable of handling moving coils. The only other user-twiddleable parts are the volume control, and the simple but attractive remote control.

Build quality is excellent. The gold detailing on the alloy fascia may be a little fussy for some, but the case is solid and the controls are well made and have an excellent operational feel. And just look at the length of that guarantee...

SOUND QUALITY

This model didn't get a good press from the panel. The feeling was that it "didn't do anything grotesquely wrong", but was "singularly uninspiring", while one panellist wrote that performance was so "bland" he "couldn't find anything to say about it" – it was "difficult to maintain concentration". But eventually he eventually offered the opinion that the A3 was "gentle and melodic". Yet another praised the bass for being "powerful and weighty" and noted the amp "lifts [the] classical tracks".

The hands-on listening, while it didn't contradict any specific observations from our demolition team, did cast a rather more favourable light on this amp. After several weeks of regular use, there is no doubt that in the right system (and the test ALR/Jordan floor-standers proved entirely suitable) the A3 is capable of generating a very accomplished sound. It is enveloping, large in scale and well anchored, with excellent string and woodwind resolving power, but a slightly muted quality which never

goes down particularly well in the cut and thrust of a blind test.

CONCLUSION

With a wide range of classical material, in particular, the A3 is capable of very fine music making, although it is not a particularly demonstrative performer. It does tend to sound a bit leaden – or at least slightly too smoothly rounded for comfort – with difficult, craggy stuff. Horses for courses, I guess.

AG

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£849.00

Well built, but not quite the powerhouse it seems, and although accomplished musically, it won't suit all tastes or types of music.

FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

Musical Fidelity Ltd, 15/16 Olympic Trading Estate, Fulton Rd, Wembley HA9 0TF
(0181) 900 2999

THE LAB REPORT



8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads, respectively. The 8.9A current limit is set by very fast-acting protection circuitry that mutes the amplifier's

This traditionally-shaped A3 is the XA100R by any other name, a less traditionally-shaped amplifier reviewed back in HFC 189. The amplifiers share a novel and highly regarded power amp stage based around Sanken's 'thermally reactive' output transistors, not dissimilar in design to Kenwood's TRAITR devices. Like the XA100R, the A3 comfortably exceeds its rated spec by delivering a continuous 100W (up to 110W midband) into 8 Ohms and 165W into 4 Ohm loads. This increases to 145W, 251W, 155W (8.8A) and 82W (9.0A) under dynamic, music-like conditions into

output should anything in excess of this be drawn, even momentarily.

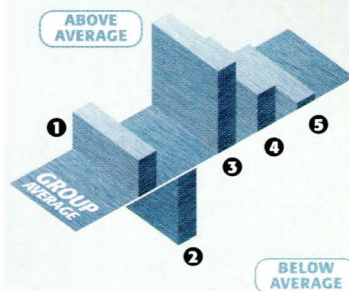
Distortion increases from 0.003 to 0.018 per cent through midrange to treble frequencies but tracks changes in power output very precisely. This means that any 'colour' introduced by the change in distortion with frequency is at least consistent at both high and low volume levels.

Otherwise, noise levels are low for this group at -85dB (re.1 Watt/8 Ohms), DC offset moderate at +/-25mV and the input loading ideal for almost any CD player at a high 100kOhms. **PMI**

HOW IT COMPARES

Strictly speaking, the A3 is not as intolerant of difficult speakers as the bar graph might suggest, because it's amplifier protection rather than outright clipping that limits its delivery of power into low loads.

1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	25%
2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	-45%
3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION	55%
4 NOISE	25%
5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY	5%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	85W	105W
Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	0.015%	0.018%
Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	300mV	250mV

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TALK ELECTRONICS Cyclone 1

TALK ELECTRONICS CYCLONE 1
Visit Our Website: www.hifichoice.co.uk



Earlier Talk Electronics amps and CD players had the same unusual fascia design, with the controls arranged on a broadly drawn arc, but the body panels were flimsy and finish was not exactly the brand's greatest attribute. The Cyclone 1, however, has been greatly improved in build quality, with thicker, better formed body panels, machined aluminium control caps in place of the original plastic parts, and natural brushed aluminium finish that is a spectacular improvement on the black original model.

Internally, too, things have moved on. The Cyclone 1 is a MOSFET amplifier, a direct derivative of the Storm 2, designed to deliver 65 Watts/eight Ohms and 90 Watts/four Ohms, which suggests it is best matched to eight or six Ohm speakers.

Improvements are said to have been made to the customised transformer, new and better output devices have been specified and the output protection circuit has also been improved. A version with phono input is also available.

This is a straight line amplifier, with six line inputs, two of which

“There isn’t the tonal and dynamic richness here, or the consistency necessary for solid, 3D imagery to grow from the music.”

are tape circuits, tape monitor and a volume control, with a remote control mirroring the front panel facilities and including a standard set of CD player controls.

SOUND QUALITY

There was some ambivalence about this amplifier, which was described variously as “pushy and forceful”, “lacking in sustain”, and “two-dimensional”. A minority found it “rhythmic” with a “sense of space and acoustic” and offering “positive projection”. The Brahms piano recording was described as “soft and delicate, [but] with a sense of power and tautness” by one listener, who concluded that it was “almost believable” – praise indeed from our hard-bitten panel. The Joni

Mitchell track *Cool Water* was “atmospheric and enjoyable”.

The Cyclone is palpably an improvement on its predecessor, but probably not a major one. It imparts a strong feeling of precision and control, especially through the midband, but the overall balance is lean, and the bass sounds smeared. The comments about two dimensional imagery are spot on: there isn’t the tonal and dynamic richness here, or the consistency necessary for solid, 3D imagery to grow organically from the music.

In the case of the *Buena Vista Social Club* recording, individual instruments were quite sharply focused but small in scale, and rarely anchored properly against a palpable backdrop. In short, the sound lacked presence.

The hands-on test added some useful observations: first, a rather strained quality when the amp is stretched unduly, though it is quite happy at everyday volume levels. In general this amp seems best with speakers that don’t stress its low frequency ability too much: the ALR/Jordan Note 3, the stand-mount version of the models used

for the panel tests, sounded more at home than the senior model.

CONCLUSION

The word “splodgy” was raised by someone in relation to the Talk’s bass performance, and although perhaps unnecessarily damning, the measured hum breakthrough is probably responsible for the lacklustre LF performance. The mid and treble are intermittently excellent, but not necessarily a lot better than previous Talk amps. In the meantime, the market as a whole has moved on. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE **£549.95**

The Cyclone 1 is better looking and better built than its predecessors, but there are technical and performance limitations that still need to be addressed.

■ THREE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Talk Electronics Ltd, Unit J, Albany Park, Camberley, Surrey G15 2PL
☎ (01276) 684422

THE LAB REPORT



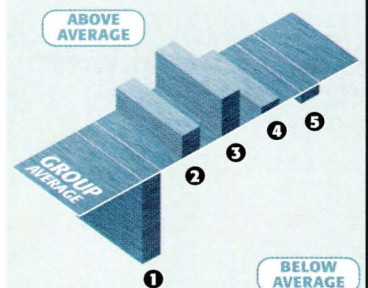
Based on Talk’s Storm 2 integrated (HFC 175), the Cyclone 1 not only looks bolder and brighter but its power supply and MOSFET output stage have also been the subject of some spring-cleaning. In practice, this version is rather less gutsy, whipping up just 78W, 121W, 153W (8.8A) and 140W (11.8A or 12.5A over 5msec) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 Ohm loads respectively under dynamic conditions. Disappointingly, it only just achieves its rated 60W/8 Ohms continuous specification. Distortion also remains very high at 0.3-0.4 per cent at treble frequencies, compared with the 0.02

percent that’s achieved through the midrange. But at least this characteristic is independent of power output and so any ‘colour’ introduced will remain broadly unaffected by volume level. The 550mV input sensitivity, meanwhile, is a reflection of the relatively low gain of Talk’s MOSFET power amp stage which still seems rather too noisy. The figures are not unlike those of the Cyrus 7, but the noise spectrum is totally different, with strong hum and rectifier harmonics out past 1kHz. The Cyrus has similar figures, but the composition of its noise is all ‘hiss’ and no ‘hum’, unlike the Cyclone. The subjective impact is different and, in this instance, ties in with the Talk’s warm if de-focused bass register. **PMI**

HOW IT COMPARES

An early production sample of what promises to be a competitive amplifier at the price, once both noise and power output are optimised by the manufacturer. Watch this space...

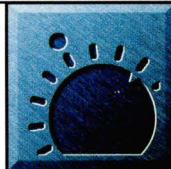
- 1 DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT -55%
- 2 SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE 15%
- 3 AUDIBLE DISTORTION 25%
- 4 NOISE 5%
- 5 OVERALL COMPATIBILITY -5%



SPECIFICATIONS

SPECIFICATION	RATED	ACTUAL
■ Continuous Power Output, 8 Ohms	60W	60W
■ Distortion 20Hz-20kHz, 1W/8 Ohms	<0.1%	0.4%
■ Input Sensitivity (CD/Aux)	500mV	550mV

AMPLIFIERS



CONCLUSIONS

THE BEST IN THE TEST



ROTEL RA-971 MkII – £250.00

It's nothing less than astonishing how much sheer talent Rotel has managed to cram into a single £250 box, but it has been establishing – re-establishing more like – a track record in such things this last couple of years. The industrial designer, meanwhile, has been on holiday, and the old box has had to do,

though in its own low-key way, the RA-971 MkII looks neat and straightforward, mirroring what lies beneath the skin. The basic qualities are a clean, articulate sound, strong control – and hampers full of Watts, the result of which is a sophisticated, grown-up amplifier at a true bargain price.

CYRUS 7 – £700.00

Despite the familiar case, this is very much a clean sheet design under the skin, and has been much more extensively auditioned than recent models. The results are obvious. This is a finely honed amp which combines sweetness with precision and excellent dynamics, and more power than you might credit from such a small box. A welcome return to form.



NAD 317 – £399.95

One of the two most powerful amps on test, the 317 is just what you'd expect: straightforward, rather grey looking and build quality not in the top league either.

Nevertheless, it was always a workmanlike performer, and has recently been revamped internally. The result is that the slightly hazy, lazy quality of the original has made way for a more engaging, vital character. Excellent stuff.



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO A500 – £199.95

The best yet from this entry level brand, associated with the Richer Sounds retail chain. The new model dispenses with the limited current encapsulated output devices of the original in favour of a more elaborate and costly discrete stage, which sounds significantly better. It still has some limitations at the frequency extremes, but what £200 amplifier doesn't have something that could be improved?



SONY TAF-B730R – £199.00

An interesting amp by any standards, this model was not universally liked. Some found it rather aggressive with some material, but it still had something in its favour, and was capable of surprisingly compelling music making. Ironically, it was at its best with material that most often trips up cheap and expensive amps alike, such as classical grand piano.



AMPLIFIER COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE MODEL	ARCAM ALPHA 7R	CAMBRIDGE AUDIO A500	CYRUS 7	HARMAN/KARDON HK690	MARANTZ PM 6010 OSE
PRICE	£299.90	£199.95	£700.00	£529.99	£229.90
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	2yrs	1yr	1yr	2yrs	2yrs
SIZE (HXWXD)	43x8.3x33cm	43x9x30cm	21.5x7.5x36.5cm	44.3x15.5x40.5cm	44x13.8x34.3cm
WEIGHT	5.1kg	5kg	4.6kg	11.95kg	6.7kg
RATED CONT. POWER OUTPUT, 8 OHMS	45W	50W	100W	60W	50W
ACTUAL CONT. POWER OUTPUT, 8 OHMS	55W	75W	130W	75W	65W
RATED DISTORTION, 20HZ-20KHZ, 1W/8 OHMS	0.01%	0.02%	<0.09%	not specified	0.008%
ACTUAL DISTORTION, 20HZ-20KHZ, 1W/8 OHMS	0.06%	0.02%	0.02%	0.03%	0.025%
RATED INPUT SENSITIVITY (CD/AUX)	250mV	250mV	150mV	200mV	150mV
ACTUAL INPUT SENSITIVITY (CD/AUX)	255mV	300mV	175mV	270mV	195mV

There is something special about testing amps, and the same applies to CD players, turntables, loudspeakers and most other species of hi-fi components – and it is not that they each perform differently.

Televisions and lawn mowers also perform differently – it isn't rocket science determining the differences. Clothes dryers just dry clothes and lawn mowers just mow grass; it's difficult to become emotionally involved in what they do, or in their differences. You might argue TV picture quality matters and of course it does, but current standards are so far from anything that might be described as visually realistic that we're really talking on a different level.

Hi-fi is special because the differences really matter. Perhaps we should qualify this because there has been a subtle shift in recent times. We now have music product (the emphasis here being on the word 'product') designed to be played on personal stereos, MP3 hardware and other systems where high fidelity really doesn't help. But not everyone listens to music aimed at the pre-pubescent market. There is still grown up music to be enjoyed, and as long as this is the case, hi-fi can make a difference.

TEST INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

Our Technical Editor, Paul Miller, has been awarded Test Innovator of the Year by *Test* magazine, the leading European journal of the test and measurement industry. This gong came in recognition of Paul's Jitter Measurement Suite, as used to test CD players for *Hi-Fi Choice*.



With the amps in this group, the superior qualities of the better models tend to creep up on you unbidden. The music just sounds more interesting and communicative than with the others – and best of all, the differences are repeated time and time and time again.

This month, there was a surprisingly poor correlation between quality and cost. The most powerful amps were among the most expensive, but

there were some powerful inexpensive models as well as some much more expensive amps that offered less real world power, especially into difficult loads.

Sound quality honours were sprinkled fairly evenly, so from the magazine's point of view, this counts as a result. Put it this way: shelling out £3.10 for a copy of *Choice* could save several hundred pounds just on the purchase of an amp. How's that for a good definition of value for money?

BEST BUYS & RECOMMENDATIONS



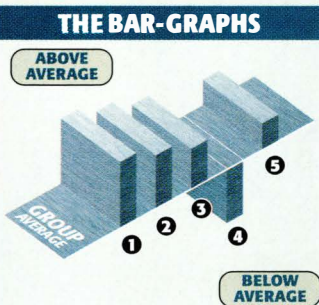
BEST BUYS: Our famous Best Buy swing-tag is awarded to hi-fi equipment which offers an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price. Best Buy winners are superb all-round components.



RECOMMENDED: Recommended products are first-class audiophile propositions, losing out to Best Buy status only because of a higher price or less competitive overall sound quality.

UNDERSTANDING OUR BAR-GRAPH MEASUREMENTS

Behind *Hi-Fi Choice*'s unique bar-graphs are some of the most advanced measurements made anywhere on the planet. They are provided by our Technical Editor, Paul Miller, using both GPIB-controlled measurement hardware and his own, award-winning, PC-based Virtual Instrument software. Each bar-graph value is derived from a weighted statistic of several key measurements and is displayed relative to a notional zero per cent which represents the group average for that particular category.



- 1 **DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT:** A measure of power up to one per cent distortion under realistic, music-like conditions, using a brief (20msec) transient signal and an 8 Ohm speaker load.
- 2 **SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE:** This indicates how ably the amp maintains a given level of performance into progressively lower-impedance and more difficult speaker loads.
- 3 **AUDIBLE DISTORTION:** Rather than quote a single figure for distortion at one frequency and level, this bar value represents a measure of distortion and its consistency across the whole audio band and the amplifier's dynamic range.
- 4 **NOISE:** This is a direct representation of the amplifier's A-weighted Signal-to-Noise (S/N) ratio at 1 Watt output into a model 8 Ohm load.
- 5 **OVERALL COMPATIBILITY:** This new category measures the amplifier's ability to drive different loudspeakers, its susceptibility to radio-frequency interference (RFI) and its ability to handle today's high-output CD players.

RIVAL BUYS

- ARCAM Alpha 8R – £380**
This amplifier is a cracker that stood out as exceptional each time it was inserted into the blind test programme. The 8R features power supply and related improvements over its predecessor and clever AV system integration features.
- DENON PMA-350 SE – £180**
Near pocket-money control freak can be enhanced with a low cost phono step-up (£15, would you believe) and a system remote control. The balance may be too lean for some tastes, though.
- YAMAHA AX-492 – £220**
Bags of power and strong equipment levels distinguish this amp, which also provides excellent imagery and strong presence, making it unusually approachable and easy on the ear.

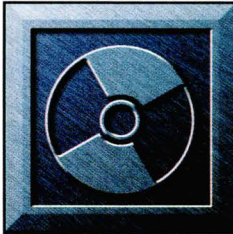


- NAIM Nait 3 – £575**
Low power, narrow bandwidth, but boy does this antediluvian amplifier (above) know how to rock & roll (on the right day, with a following wind, if it's in the mood etc...)
- MUSICAL FIDELITY X-A1 – £479**
Arguably the most widely liked and capable of Musical Fidelity's mainstream (that is, not Nu-Vista powered) amplifiers, this is one of the oval-boxed models, and if has a quick, refined and articulate sound.
- MARANTZ PM-66 KI Signature – £400**
A highly refined Ken Ishiwata special, the PM-66 KI Signature is typical of Marantz amplifiers in some ways, being smooth and slightly rounded, but with an additional patina of refinement and articulation.

A M P L I F I E R C O M P A R I S O N T A B L E

MAKE MODEL	MUSICAL FIDELITY A3	NAD 317	ROTEL RA-971 MKII	SONY TAF-B730R	TALK ELECTRONICS CYCLONE 1	TECHNICS SU-A808
PRICE	£849.00	£399.95	£250.00	£199.00	£549.95	£299.99
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
GUARANTEE	5yrs	2yrs	2yrs	1yr	3yrs	1yr
SIZE (HxWxD)	44x9.5x40cm	43.5x12x28cm	44x9.2x34.7cm	43x15x40.5cm	43x9x30cm	43x13.6x36.8cm
WEIGHT	13kg	12kg	6.5kg	8.6kg	5.25kg	8.3kg
RATED CONT. OUTPUT, 8 OHMS	85W	80W	60W	40W	60W	55W
ACTUAL CONT. P/OUTPUT, 8 OHMS	105W	125W	100W	60W	60W	85W
RATED DIST., 20HZ-20KHZ, 1W/8 OHMS.	0.015%	0.03%	<0.03%	0.008%	<0.1%	0.03%
ACTUAL DIST., 20HZ-20KHZ, 1W/8 OHMS	0.018%	0.013%	0.0045%	0.01%	0.4%	0.03%
RATED INPUT SENS. (CD/AUX)	300mV	100mV	150mV	150mV	500mV	150mV
ACTUAL INPUT SENS. (CD/AUX)	250mV	200mV	200mV	130mV	550mV	190mV





PAUL MILLER'S OASIS OF SANITY

Paul Miller pits the new-fangled MP3 format against the alternatives in digital recording.

Following hard on the heels of Tim Bown's comprehensive MP3 test last month, I thought we should compare the performance of these portable Walkman-killers against the more familiar MiniDisc (MD) and CD-R formats. Despite claims for "CD-like" sound quality, it's important to appreciate that neither MD or MP3 recorders are linear devices like CD-R or DAT.

Instead, they use a combination of data compression and reduction to create a 'facsimile'

of the audio information using just a fraction the amount of data. CD's linear 16-bit code requires 1.4112Mbits of data per second to 'describe' music, whether this is a quiet flute solo punctuated with silence, an intense orchestral movement or a grubby punk track.

It's this variation in density that data compression schemes seek to utilise, stripping away unnecessary digital 0s (excess padding) and repetitive code in an effort to reduce the throughput of data. Because the description of the music is not actually interfered with, the

"Lossless data compression alone cannot reduce the throughput of data sufficiently for the likes of MiniDisc or MP3 which – typically – have just 290kbits per second and 64/128/256kbps at their disposal."

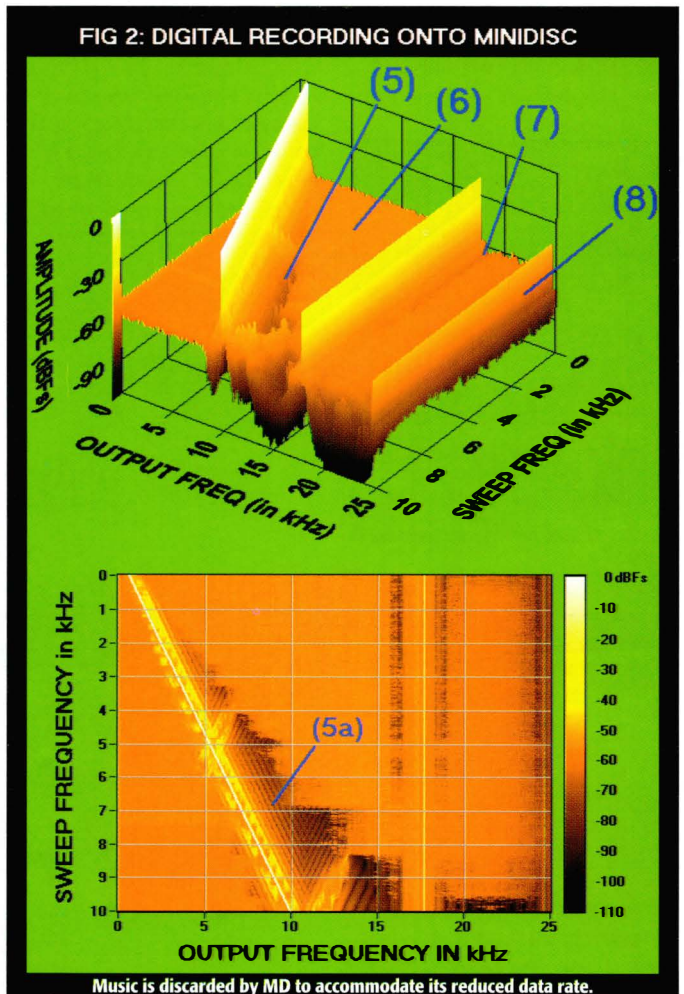
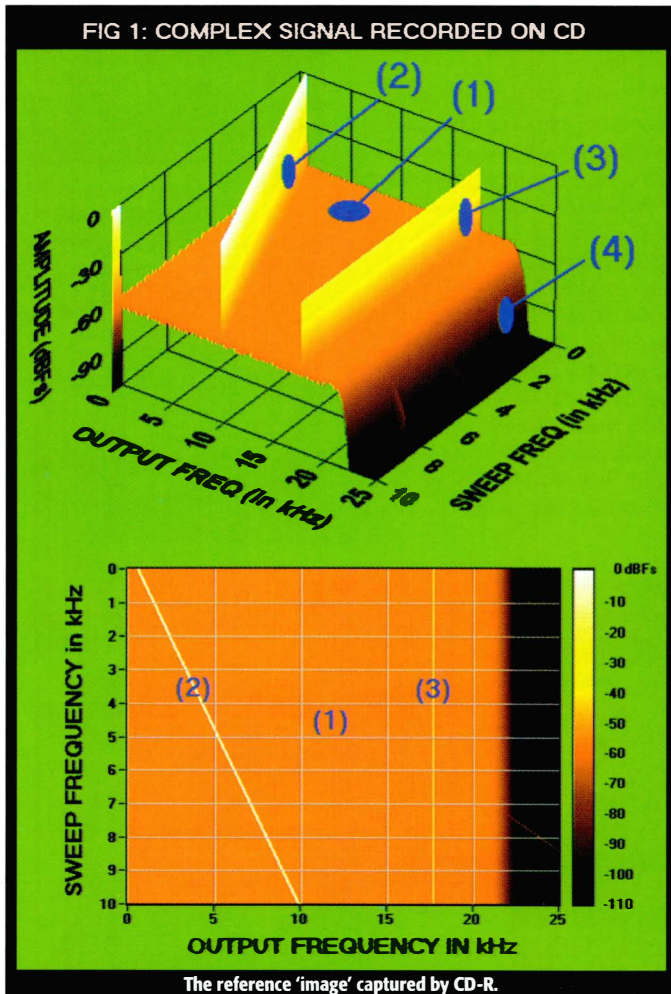
compression is said to be 'lossless' or transparent. It's rather like the Winzip file compression utility employed by PCs – shrinking large files

for easy portability after which they may be extracted (that is, re-expanded) back to their original size with no loss or corruption of the data. Nevertheless, lossless data compression alone cannot reduce the throughput of data sufficiently for the likes of MiniDisc or MP3 which – typically – have just 290kbits per second and 64/128/256kbps at their disposal, respectively. This amounts to a reduction of 5:1 for MD and 11:1 for MP3 at its 128kbit/sec data rate.

Data reduction,

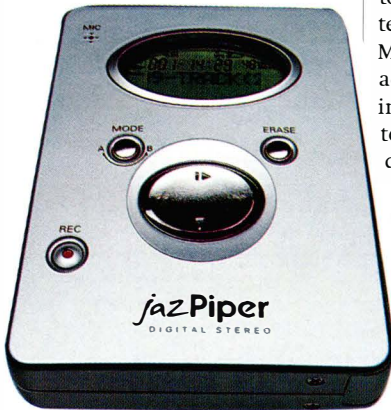


Left: The familiar face of CD-R. Right: MiniDisc at home. Far right: MP3 – the future of recording?



which involves the permanent 'deletion' of musical sounds deemed to be inaudible, is employed to bring the final data rate down to the levels demanded by MiniDisc and the solid-state MP3 portables. This relies on a technique called 'perceptual audio coding' which simplifies complex musical sounds by grouping them into sub-bands and deciding which elements are dominant and which are effectively masked by noise or adjacent, louder sounds.

The development of these codecs (coder/decoders) is



ongoing. MD's ATRAC (Adaptive Transform Acoustic Coding), is now in version 5.0, while MP3's MPEG Layer 3 codec has evolved from the older Layer 2 and Layer 1 algorithms.

Indeed, MPEG Layer 1 is essentially the same as the PASC (Precision Adaptive Sub-band Coding) data reduction scheme adopted by Philips' doomed Digital Compact Cassette (DCC) many years ago.

Layer 3 was specifically designed for effective, low bit rate coding. It offers enhanced frequency resolution (compared with Layers 2 and 1) together with sophisticated techniques derived from the MPEG video program, such as adaptive masking, entropy coding and a variable 'bit reservoir' to cope with particularly diverse material.

This is one reason why MP3 encoding requires the services of a modern PC to perform the necessary number-crunching. Decoding, or playback, is less intensive – hence the rash of affordable MP3 portables that are now becoming available.

HOW THE FORMATS COMPARE

Format/codec	Optimal Data Rate	Data Reduction
CD-R	1411kbps	1:1
PASC (MPEG Layer 1)	384kbps	1:4
ATRAC	290kbps	1:5
MPEG Layer 2	256-192kbps	1:6 to 1:7
MP3 (MPEG Layer 3)	128-112kbps	1:11 to 1:13

CONVERTING SOUND INTO PICTURES

So just how good are these compression and reduction schemes at capturing the data without throwing the music away? Conventional test techniques using single tones are a piece of cake for MD and MP3 to capture and encode and tell us nothing about their effectiveness. What's needed is

“MP3 decoding, or playback, is less intensive than encoding – hence the rash of affordable MP3 portables that are now becoming available.”

and what has been discarded by the MiniDisc and MP3 formats.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Figure 1 shows our complex 'music' signal recorded onto CD-R with no data compression or reduction. The signal includes a special pattern of noise (1) that covers the entire audiorange at -60dBfs to represent low-level detail. Ploughing through this background 'detail' is a high-level sweep (2) from 100Hz to 10kHz (-3dBfs) and a constant treble tone (3) at 18kHz (-20dBfs). The 44.1kHz sample rate used by CD means all sounds above 20kHz or so are rapidly filtered away (4).

MINIDISC UNMASKED

Where low-level detail is considered audible it is recorded intact (6), but where MD's ATRAC process decides it is subjectively masked by the strong sweep signal (2), it is discarded (5). Similarly, musical detail (7) adjacent to the dominant 18kHz tone (3) is also rejected by ATRAC to keep data rates low.

Within this canyon of lost data (5) we can see other jitter-like distortions visible as parallel striations (5a). These will influence the perceived sound of the encoded music. Finally, any post-20kHz 'signals' (8) are simply digitally noise(s) generated by Pioneer's MD recorder upon playback.

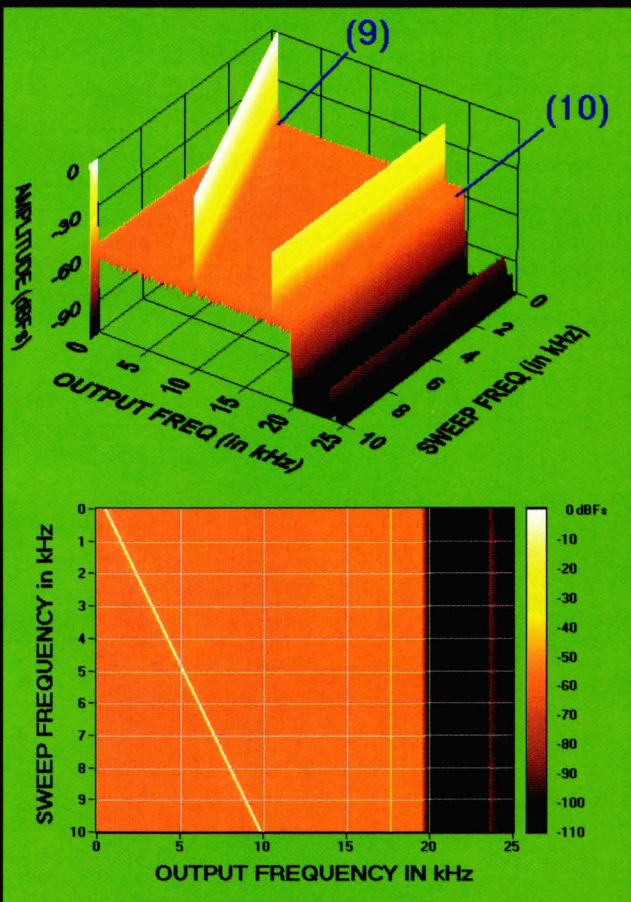
STEP UP, MP3

Now here's a fascinating result – twice the data reduction but a visibly more intact music signal than we saw with MiniDisc! Encoded at 44.1kHz/128kbps, the MP3 'facsimile' is revealed by some low-rate broadening (9) of the main sweep and a loss of extreme treble (10).

Nevertheless, which do you think will sound closest to the CD source?

Do you have a subject matter for the *Oasis*? Please contact Paul Miller via e-mail at MILLER_AUDIO_RESEARCH@compuserve.com

FIG 3: MP3 ENCODE OF THE CD'S COMPLEX SIGNAL



MP3 reduces the data still further but affords less (visible) corruption than MD.

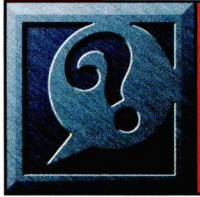
a decently complex signal combining different levels and frequencies simultaneously – just like real music – so that the codecs are forced into making acoustical decisions about what's audible and what's not. The images here allow us to see just what has been retained

DOES THROWING AWAY MORE BITS MEAN WORSE SOUND?

On the face of it, yes. But that would presuppose all compression/reduction schemes are equally proficient. Instead, as more sophisticated psychoacoustical models are developed with the mathematics to match, then sound quality may actually improve for a given degree of data reduction.

It's not inconceivable that music encoded through a modern 1:10 data reduction process may sound less 'butchered' than the same track recorded via an older, less refined algorithm offering a reduction of just 1:5.

To explore this idea further, I intend setting up a blind listening test to compare CD with MD and MP3 through a high quality audio system, rather than the headphones typically associated with modern portables. Keep tuned into *Choice* for the latest word in this rapidly-moving area of the market...



HELP!

Your system feeling a bit out of sorts? Tim Bown can help. Trust him, he's a doctor.

QUERY OF THE MONTH



I've just bought my first real hi-fi system, and I've an awful feeling I've wasted a whole lot of money. It consists of the following: Marantz CD-67MkII, Arcam Alpha 9 amp and Linn Keosa speakers. The interconnects are a £40 pair of Audioquests, and the speaker cables I'm not sure about, but they cost £3/m.

The problem is, bass is badly lacking (my taste is mainly soul, dance and reggae). I'm used to powerful, undistorted bass, with a rich midrange and vocals, but this system doesn't even kick when playing Mad Cobra's reggae track *Flex!* Even my in-car system's bass is better than that!

I have a friend who is more knowledgeable than me on hi-fi matters who talks about 'tight bass', but though it's certainly tight that's no consolation. I've tried adjusting the bass control but I gather that's a cardinal sin! Should I buy a subwoofer, or would an Arcam Alpha 9P help?

Chris De Bellot, via e-mail

GET A GORGEOUS GREEN GARMENT!

The reader whose letter is our Query of the Month will receive one of these stylish, lovingly crafted and, dare we say it, groovy green clothing items courtesy of – well, us.



Did you actually hear the system before you bought it? It sounds like your dealer has done a very poor job of serving you. It's up to him/her to make sure a system suits the buyer's needs, and this one patently doesn't.

On paper it's actually a more than reasonable system, and the Arcam is a particularly good amp, but it clearly doesn't fit your musical taste and the things you look for in a system. If we were you we'd change the speakers – that'll affect the greatest sonic change. Listen to Dynaudio Audience 50 (£577), Dali Model 808 (£550), Triangle Zephyr II (£599) and Kelly KT2 (£700).

Adding a subwoofer would give more bass, but it might be a bit tricky to blend it with your existing Linn speakers. Adding an 8P power amp is a good idea, but won't cure your problem in one fell swoop. Consider your system's support – a good 'rack' and spiked speaker stands are essential (check out our Directory), and a set of isolation feet could help too (see the accessory feature in this issue). Good luck!



Kelly KT2: will add some welly.

WIRES REQUIRED



I've just changed my speakers to Monitor Audio PMC 702s, which I'm running with an Audio Analogue Puccini amp and a TEAC PD-700 CD player. What kind of speaker cables and interconnects would you advise? Midrange and vocals are more important to me than bass.

Heikki, Finland

Some successful systems use cabling that costs as much as the system itself, while others seem to manage well enough with basic wires. However, as a guide you should consider spending 10-15 per cent of the combined cost of your components. For example, if

your system cost £2,000, it's worth spending around £200 or £300 on speaker cables and interconnects.

On the interconnect front, van den Hul's D102 MkIII would be an excellent choice at £70 per pair. It's a superbly natural cable, with an effortless midrange performance. Supra's EFF-ISL (£80) is another good option, as is Kimber's £68 PBJ. For a cheaper option, try van den Hul's PB5 at £50.

Some people like to use the same brand of cable throughout their system, but in your case it may be best to mix and match. Try QED's Qudos Silver speaker cable at £5 per metre – it's a smooth and detailed cable that'll work well with your speakers.



ONE-BRAND CLASSICS



A few years ago I discovered a pair of KEF Reference 2 speakers at a good price, so I bought them to go with my Marantz CD-63SE CD player and PM-80MkII amp. The system is obviously unbalanced, and now it's time to upgrade the Marantz components. Which CD players and amps should I be listening to up to about £2,500? I prefer to buy from one brand, and I listen primarily to classical music.

Marc-Albert Luca, Belgium

As you can see in this very issue, Roksan's Caspian CD player (£895) and amp (£795) go together very well indeed, both aesthetically and sonically. With your budget you could stretch to a Caspian power amp too (£595), which would make a difference in driving your KEFs. Consider Musical Fidelity – an X-Ray CD player (£799) with an X-Pre

“Which CD players and amps should I be listening to – up to about £2,500 – which would drive my KEF Reference 2 speakers well?”

(£200) and a pair of X-A200 mono power amps (£1,000) makes a visually stunning combination which should work well with your KEFs. And how about Musical Fidelity's new A range – perhaps an A3 CD player with an A300 amp?

Two other brands you might try are Copland and Primare, both from the same Scandinavian stable. And NAD's Silverline S500 CD player (£1,100) and S300 amp (£1,900) are well worth looking into if you can stretch your budget a little.



SIX OF ONE...



I have a Marantz CD-6311 KI-Signature CD player, a Rega Planar 2 turntable with Ortofon MC2011 cartridge, Avance Labs speakers, Cable Talk Reference 2 interconnects and Symphony 3 speaker cables in a bi-wire configuration. But there's something missing... I need an amp! I've done some listening but can't decide what to buy.

I like the sound of the Arcam Alpha 7, but I'm also keen on the Marantz PM-66 KI-Signature. Unfortunately, I can't get the opportunity to audition them together. What do you think would best suit my system?

Zoltan Kovacs, Hungary

Given that you already own Marantz's KI-Signature CD player, one might assume the PM-66 KI-Signature (£400) would be the obvious choice. Certainly, it's one of the better models around at the price, with sharp imaging and an overall presentation that particularly suits acoustic musical styles.

But on balance we'd go for the Arcam option, although it would be worth stretching to the 8R (£380) in place of the 7R – it's a little more powerful and dynamic. Why the Arcam? It just happens to work very well with the Marantz CD player,

"I need an amp! I've done some listening, but can't decide what to buy. What do you think would best suit my system?"

the products' strengths blending to produce a great performance. Sure, there can be danger in mixing and matching brands if you haven't done your homework properly, but when it works – as here – it's a highly effective way of obtaining a well balanced sound. But don't forget that neither the Arcam or the Marantz will accept a moving coil phono input, so you'll need an off-board phono stage like Musical Fidelity's X-LP (£130) if you want to use your Ortofon cartridge instead of a moving magnet type.

If you get a chance, there are some alternative amps you should check out too. Audio Analogue's Puccini is a superbly musical design at £450, and has an excellent MM/MC phono stage to boot, and Musical Fidelity's X-A1 (£479) is a great option if you're prepared to go the off-board phono stage route.

NAIM YOUR PRICE



My system consists of a Naim CD3 CD player, a Michell Gyrodec turntable with a QC power supply, Sumiko Blue Point Special cartridge and Rega RB300 arm, and a pair of Linn Keilidh loudspeakers. I'm currently using an Audiolab 8000A amp as a stop-gap measure, but I really want to get something better.

To that end, I have borrowed a Naim NAC82/NAP180 pre/power amp and it's absolutely true what they say about the Naim factor – the sheer musical involvement this delivered was just the ticket, but it costs an arm and a leg. I really need to aim a little lower, so my question is simple: is it possible to achieve anything approaching the Naim factor for half the cost?

I've tried the Linn route but I'm not convinced. I've also considered the Naim NAP140, but I'm concerned about its lower power delivery, particularly in light of the Sumiko cartridge's awkward 2.5mV output. With the Audiolab, the MC input is too sensitive so I use the MM input, but then I really have to crank up the volume.

Robert Tuson, via e-mail

Seeing as you enjoy the Naim sound so much, at least as far as the company's high-end gear is concerned, it would be a shame to dismiss its less costly products purely on the grounds of rated power output.

For a start, Naim kit tends to be conservatively rated, so the 45 Watts per channel NAP140 is no weakling, even alongside the 60 Watts per channel NAP180. And to get the full magic from Naim CD players, you tend to have to match them with Naim amps, so this route certainly warrants further investigation.

The NAP140 is considerably more affordable than the NAP180 (£770 as opposed to £1,090), and if you combine it with a less expensive preamp like the NAC72 (£745 compared with the £2,225 NAC82) and add Naim's phono input option, you should end up in the same sonic ballpark.

Or, if you can stretch to it, you could stick the NAC72 with a NAP180, thus eradicating your fears about power. If you still want to try alternatives to Naim, why not have a listen to some Densen combinations? You might just find they offer the kind of rhythmic involvement you're after.



Densen's B-200/B-300 combo.

HINTS & TIPS



If your amplifier has more than one set of speaker outputs, it's worth comparing the options available to see if there's any difference in sound quality between them. In a perfect world there'd be no difference, but often one set of outputs will sound slightly better, perhaps because the signal path is slightly shorter. For example, where an amp has two sets of speaker output binding posts one above the other, usually it's the lower set (often marked 'B') that sound best. Why? These posts are slightly closer to the main circuit board, and therefore the signal passes through less metal to reach its destination. Where sets of switched and unswitched loudspeaker outputs are offered, the unswitched option will almost always offer best sound quality – again, it offers the shortest, cleanest signal path.

ON A MISSION



I have just bought a pair of Mission 750LE speakers and I'm very happy with them. At the moment, I'm running them with a Sony CDP-720 CD player, Pro-Ject 1 turntable and a Technics SU-A600 amp. It's this amp I'm rather worried about: it doesn't seem to produce enough power to drive my speakers. Could you recommend a replacement in the £400 area?

Bostjan Kosir, Slovenia

Wasn't the 'LE' in the speaker's title supposed to stand for 'Limited Edition'? Strange that it's still around a year later, eh? Anyway, we're glad it is. It remains an excellent compact monitor-style speaker, well worth £250 a pair. However, it is a little demanding

when it comes to partnering gear. Your Technics amp isn't exactly underpowered at 37 Watts per channel; your speakers simply need better quality (and ideally a few more Watts) to give of their best.

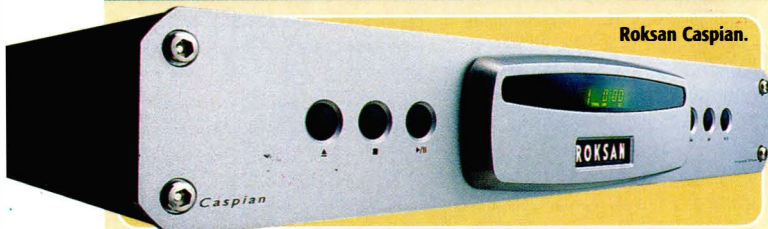
So, alternatives around the £400 mark. Though a little over-budget at £450, you really should try to hear Audio Analogue's Puccini. It's a frequent recommendation in these pages, being both keenly priced and both keenly musical. You should also give Musical Fidelity's X-A1 (£479) a listen, but if you really need to keep things below £400 the StraightLine (£398) from


Mission's sister company Cyrus has to be a hot favourite. It's a proven match for the 750LE, and offers useful future upgrade routes via an add-on power amp and PSU.

It may not be around for much longer, though – Cyrus' recent restructure has led to a more upmarket focus, which means that the StraightLine could well be discontinued.



OH CASPIAN, MY CASPIAN



 In issue 169, *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewed the Roksan Caspian CD player. It was mentioned that some of the reservations you had regarding low-level detail and stereo soundstaging might be diluted if the first sample submitted for test was unrepresentative. Indeed, it was stated that a second player sounded significantly better.

I'm considering buying this CD player to go with my Caspian amp and B&W DM603 speakers. Have you given the Caspian CD player another test, and if so, what do you think now? Does Roksan have a quality control problem? Finally, which other players in the £700-£1,100 range should I be considering?

Paul Larrett, via e-mail

Roksan's Caspian CD player was indeed group-tested in *HFC* 169 (September 1997), and emerged very favourably – a Recommended tag, no less. But some reservations were recorded, notably in terms of a slightly hard-edged character and a lack of very subtle detailing. While stressing that these criticisms were greatly outweighed by the player's


“Have you given the Roksan Caspian CD player another test since issue 169, and if so, what do you think now?”

overall ability, reviewer Alvin Gold also noted that a second sample sounded significantly better.

We haven't had the opportunity to officially re-test the player, but several of the team have had more extended experience with other samples. If these reservations remain – and there's no such thing as a perfect CD player – they are insignificant alongside this player's strengths. It's one of the best players below £1,000, and a great match for the Caspian amp, as our Roksan single-make system test later in this issue proves.

Of course, you should still take the time to audition it alongside two or three other contenders (make sure the Roksan Caspian amp is used). Try the Arcam Alpha 9 (£800), Cyrus dAD3Q (£898) and Meridian 506 (£1,100).

CD: FOR THE RECORD

 My system consists of a Sony TA-FA3ES amp with B&W DM602 S2

speakers, sited on Atacama SE24 stands and bi-wired with QED-Qudos Silver cable. Interconnects are QED Qnect 2.

I now have about £1,000 to spend on a CD player and a CD recorder. I'm thinking about the Sony CDP-XA20ES or Marantz CD-63 KI Signature for the player, and Philips CDR-880 or Pioneer PDR-555RW for the recorder. Or should I consider the Philips CDR-765 dual CD player/recorder as an all-in-one solution? I listen to a lot of piano-based jazz, so I like a transparent and neutral sound.

V. T. Bahur, via e-mail

First, you should be aware that Philips and Pioneer are in the process of changing their ranges of CD recorders, and by the time you read this the models you mention will no longer be current. Both companies are bringing in direct replacements for each existing machine, with claimed improvements in performance along with useful additional features to make recording easier, as well as healthy price reductions.

The CDR-765 dual CD player/recorder is being replaced by the

CDR-775 at £330. Like its predecessor, it's the CD-RW equivalent of a twin tape deck, and a convenient option if you want to record from CD to CD. However, with a budget like yours we'd seriously recommend you go for the separate CD player and CD recorder option. You'll get much better playback performance, and possibly better recording quality.

We liked both the Philips CDR-880 and Pioneer PDR-555RW models, with the Pioneer coming out top for playback but the Philips edging it on recording quality. Seeing as you intend to buy a separate machine for CD-playing duties, and assuming there are no great leaps forward in either replacement model, the new Philips recorder – the CDR-950 (£350) – is probably your best bet.

Now for that CD player. It's worth spending as much as you can on this part of the partnership to ensure you get the most from both shop-bought CDs and the CD-Rs you make. Consider the likes of the Sony CDP-X3000ES (£500), Musical Fidelity E624 (£500), Arcam Alpha 8SE (£600) and Rotel RCD-991 (£750), and make sure you spare some money for a good set of interconnects – both for playback and a good coaxial digital cable for recording.



ANCIENT & MODERN

 I'm planning to upgrade my system, buying second-hand if possible to keep the price down. I recently bought an old Cyrus II amp from a friend, and now I need to replace my Philips CD-782 CD player, currently on its last legs. The same friend has now offered me his Quad 66 CD player, which I understand retailed for around £800 when it was introduced in the early to mid-1980s.

Things have obviously moved on since then. Would the Quad still be considered a good CD player by today's standards, or would a cheaper current model – one costing roughly

the same as a second-hand Quad 66 – offer a better performance? The music I listen to ranges from Pink Floyd and Dire Straits to Offspring and Metallica.

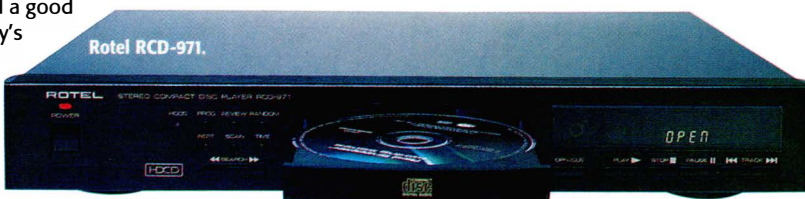
Andrew Bradbeer, Reading

Did you ever hear your friend's system when he owned your Cyrus amp and the Quad CD player? If it sounded like a system you would aspire to, and he'll offer it to you for an attractive price – something less than £200, say – why not go for it?

However, you're right in saying that CD technology has come a long

way since the mid-80s. Back then, many CD players clearly deserved their reputation among audiophiles as a cold and harsh 'alternative' to vinyl replay.

That was less true of players like the Quad, but you can still buy significantly better CD sound for considerably less in today's market place. Check out some modern marvels like Arcam's Alpha 7SE (£350), Sony's CDP-XB930 (£300) and Rotel's RCD-971 (£350). You should find that their brand of music making is notably superior.



HINTS & TIPS



It's one of those weird and wonderful things that defies rational explanation, but virtually all CD players seem to deliver their best sound subjectively if you cue the disc with the player in 'Stop' mode.

If the disc is already playing, and you select 'Next' or 'Previous' tracks, for some strange reason the sound loses some of its freshness and immediacy. You have to press 'Stop', then select the desired track and press 'Play' to maintain sound quality.

Ditto if you press 'Pause' and then release it, or use 'Fast Search' as a CD plays; for best sound quality you mustn't interrupt 'Play'. Cue from 'Stop', and you'll get the best sound.

What's strange is the universality of this phenomenon – it seems to be true of nearly all CD players, regardless of age, price, make, nationality or quality standard. Weird, eh?

SHUSH!

Wilson benesch ACT 1.

amps. Can you suggest speakers to audition as replacements for my cherished IMFs that won't peel the wallpaper and cost no more than £6,000?

Malcolm Lee, Lancashire

When you auditioned B&W, did you take in the stunning Nautilus 802s (£6,000)? In our opinion they're pretty much state of the art at the price, and have a pretty laid-back balance but prefer playing loud. Alternatively, try the following: Dali Grand (£4,000), Dynaudio Confidence 5 (£5,924),

ProAc Response 3.8 (£3,990), Ruark Solstice (£4,000) and Living Voice Avatar OBX (£4,000) The Wilson benesch speaker you've already heard is also among the best at the price – if you liked it, perhaps that's the one for you.

Also, have you considered electrostatic panel speakers? They can't punch like traditional piston drive units, but they tend to be exceptionally smooth, coherent and open.

Try the latest designs from Quad, together with the likes of Martin-Logan and Inner Sound. Assuming that your IMF speakers don't give up the ghost just yet – and you give no reason to suggest they will – you've got time on your side. You should find something that suits you... eventually!



My IMF Reference Standard Professional Monitor MkIV speakers are hardly dull but don't shout at me like most new speakers I've listened to recently. However, I fear they're of an age when something will soon break and I've been seeking some potential replacements. I've heard B&W, JMLab and ATC, all very bright and the JMLab excruciatingly so. They are all exciting and dynamic initially, but become tiring after a while. The only ones I've tried that I could perhaps live with are a second-hand pair of Wilson benesch ACT1s.

The rest of my system consists of a modified Michell Gyrodec turntable with a Musical Fidelity NuVista preamp and F19 power

BE DISCREET

I'm in the process of buying a hi-fi system, and I'm currently deciding between the Roksan Caspian CD player and amp, or the Musical Fidelity X-Ray CD player with an X-A1 amp. Thing is, I'm having trouble picking the speakers to audition them with. I'm looking for unobtrusive standmounters that'll work well in a small room. I listen mainly to rock and dance music, with a smattering of classical, and my budget is around £600, though I could go a little higher if pushed.

Paul Maison, Middlesex

monitor with particularly strong midrange characteristics, though it's more suited to your classical smatterings than your dance CDs. For a smooth, articulate alternative try B&W's CDM1 SE (£600), and if you're really pushed for space Dali's Royal Menuet MkII (£400) is a compact little contender. For a more upfront style of music making try Monitor Audio's Studio 2 SE (£500), and don't forget you'll need a good, sturdy pair of hi-fi speaker stands to site them on.

Dali Royal Menuet MkII.

An essential listen for someone with your needs is the EISA Award-winning Dynaudio Audience 40. A pair are currently residing in my own bedroom, hooked on the end of a Pioneer A-400 amp, and in my opinion it's the best speaker £400 will buy. It's compact, works well in small to medium sized rooms and its sound is gripping.

Of course, there are other options. AVI's NuNeutron (£500) is a cracking little

**HINTS & TIPS**

Most modern speakers allow for bi- (or even tri-) wiring, but not everyone takes up the option. For such speakers to work with one set of cables, the extra sets of terminals need to be bridged so they're connected together; reds to red, blacks to black. But which pair of terminals do you connect your speaker cables to – the upper or lower set? You'll get sound whichever set you choose, but the top set (usually the bi-wire connection for the tweeter) will slightly favour the treble, while the lower set (usually the bass/mid bi-wire connection) favours middle and low frequencies. If the connection between both sets is clean and tight, any differences between the upper and lower options should be minimal. Since treble frequencies are more easily corrupted, you might choose the upper pair of terminals. But compare both before deciding.

X-RATED PARTNERSHIP

I recently bought a Musical Fidelity X-Ray/X-A1 CD player and amp combination, and I must say I'm very pleased with my choice – my 20 year-old AR 4xa speakers are really singing!

However, I could do with a bit more bass, so I've decided to make a change on the speaker front. I'm looking at floorstanders up to £1,000, and my music taste covers quality rock (nothing thrashy) and jazz.

Andrew Taylor, New Zealand

The Kelly KT2 (£700) is an obvious option, Andrew. Coming from the same stable, you'd expect it to match up well with the Musical Fidelity gear, and it certainly does. Some find it a little heavy-handed and short on subtlety, but its combination of large cabinet



volume and high sensitivity gives a powerful musical performance, more emotive than most at the price. Be warned though – the Kelly brand is soon to cease production, so they may not be around for too much longer.

There are plenty of other options to try. Acoustic Energy's AE520 (£1,000) is an elegant contender, and ProAc's Studio 125 (£1,000) offers a wonderful midrange quality that would suit your jazz listening in particular. It's also worth hunting out the Triangle Zephyr II – they may cost only £599 per pair, but they have a sound like speakers costing considerably more.

At the other end of the monetary scale, if you can stretch a little above £1,000 check out the Dynaudio Audience 70 (£1,100), Neat Elite (£1,195) and Orelle Swing (£1,200).

VINYL BEATS – A RETREAT

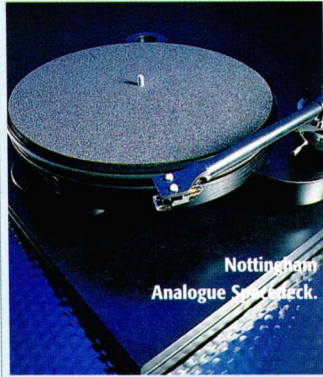


My current system is based around home cinema, featuring a Panasonic DVD-A120 DVD player, Kenwood VR2090 receiver and a set of Paradigm surround speakers. I also have a turntable: a Technics SL-D3 fitted with an Ortofon OM30 cartridge. It's in great condition, but I'd like to upgrade to a better sounding deck costing up to £800. I'll keep the Ortofon cartridge for now, until I can afford to upgrade to a Grado Reference.

Once I've made the upgrade, the Kenwood's phono inputs will have to suffice for a while. But my goal will be to buy another amp and a pair of speakers, so I can move my new turntable to my bedroom, creating a sort of 'vinyl retreat'. Any ideas as to an amp and speakers that would work well with the turntable you recommend? I've already started ordering 180-200g pressings of all my favourite rock, blues and classical albums. I can't wait!

Nathan Icoffman, via e-mail

The art of turntable manufacture is still alive and well, as evidenced by the superb crop of decks currently on the market. In hardware terms at least, vinyl lovers have never had it so good! With your budget we'd certainly consider the Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck (£750 with arm) and Michell's beautiful Gyro 'SE' (£775), though the latter option will take you over-budget



once you've added a tonearm. The same goes for Wilson benesch's excellent Circle, and if those pounds are important you might prefer something like VPI's HW-19 Junior, which comes with a Rega RB300 arm at £600 – a superbly involving performer for the money.

In the amp frame, a good integrated model with a capable on-board phono stage would suit you well. Try Audio Analogue's Puccini (£450), and peruse the amplifier Megatest in this issue for further options. When funds allow, consider upgrading to an off-board phono stage, too.

As for speakers, given that this is to become a bedroom-based system, you're probably best looking at a good pair of compact standmounters. Check out the EISA Award-winning Dynaudio Audience 40 (£400), AVI NuNeutron (£500) and B&W CDM1SE (£600). And here's to your bedroom retreat; many hours of bliss are assured.

CRAZY FOR CLASSICAL



I want to upgrade my system but I'm not sure what I should do. I'm mad about classical music, especially the mighty Mahler, but I think the sound could be better in my 6.4x3.6m listening room. My current system consists of a Marantz CD-63SE CD player, Marantz PM-48 amp and TDL RTL3 speakers with Cable Talk 3.1 cable. I've got about £1,500 to spend and I'm thinking about starting with my speakers, or do you think I should go for a new CD player?

Ashton Field, Redditch

With £1,500 to play with you've got plenty of scope for a significant system upgrade. You could arguably start with any of your three system components, but our

choice would be to go for the one least in your considerations – the amplifier. It's a decent budget design, but probably the weakest link overall, and would likely be exposed by a significant leap forward in the speaker department.

You should also consider the proportion of your budget you're intending to spend on this single component. Spending much more on one area – loudspeakers, for example – can work well in some set-ups, but in your case we'd consider spreading the budget across more than one component.

So, let's start with that amp. Consider the likes of the Roksan Caspian (£695) for an open and articulate sound, or Densen's Beat B-100MkII (£650) if you prefer a more upfront presentation. Also listen to Creek's P43R/A52SE pre/power combination (£949) to gauge whether the additional money is worth spending.

Now think about spending the majority of your remaining budget on a new pair of speakers. Consider the likes of Dynaudio's Audience 50 (£577) and B&W's CDM1SE (£600), with Celestion's A1 (£899) and Castle's Harlech (£880) representing the next rung up the ladder. And don't forget the importance of cables – spend in the region of £100 to £200 on upgrades to both interconnects and speaker cables. Meanwhile, your CD player is probably good enough to survive a little longer – until the upgrade bug strikes again!



LUKA HEAR!



My wife and I listen to all sorts of music, from jazz and classical music to Metallica and Pink Floyd. We're not exactly 'audiophiles', but we certainly have ears and we want to enjoy our CD collection.

I guess we need a CD player, amp and speakers, and a local dealer suggested we buy a Cambridge Audio CD6, Magnum IA120 and a pair of Acoustic Energy AE109s. Our budget is about £1,200 including cables. What do you think we should be auditioning?

Luka Bakrac, Croatia

On paper, your dealer's suggestions would seem fair – as long as your room is reasonably sized and you're looking for a fairly large and weighty sound. The AE109 speakers deliver plenty of bass and need room to breathe, so they're not the best choice if you need to position them close to walls. But they're great value for money and they convey music with a fine sense of scale.

The electronics you mention are interesting. The Cambridge CD player gives a fast and detailed sound, full of engaging snap, while the Magnum amp is a little warmer and fuller in its presentation. Their

combined attributes could form an attractive and cohesive whole, and the amp shouldn't have problems driving the sensitive AE109s, but the only way to find if they work well together is to hear it for yourself. If it does the job with your own choice of CDs, go for it!

If you want alternatives, check out Arcam's Alpha 7SE CD player (£350) with its Alpha 7R amp (£280), or Sony's CDP-XB930E CD player (£300) with a NAD C340 amp (£270). On the speaker side, try the Mission 773e (£400) and Tannoy Revolution R2 (£350).



HINTS & TIPS

Most listeners find it very difficult to be wholly

objective about the sound of their own hi-fi systems. If you live with something day in, day out, it's not easy to take a step back, so to speak, and evaluate the wider picture. So take advantage of any days or weeks you spend away from home by coming back and listening with fresh, unprejudiced ears. That way you'll gain a clear and objective idea of how well your system performs before familiarity blunts the senses again.

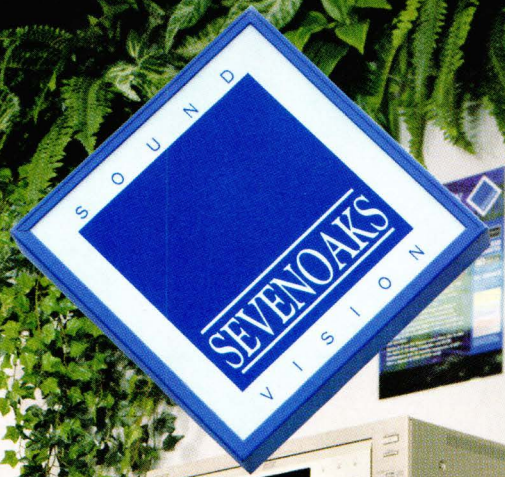
However, don't overlook the fact that most systems need a good few hours to settle down when they haven't been played for a while. When you first switch on, the sound could be frightful, simply because everything's a bit cold and stiff.

So don't jump to conclusions; wait until everything's properly warmed up and running nicely before forming your opinions.



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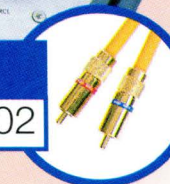
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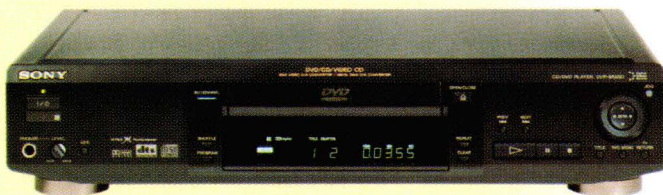
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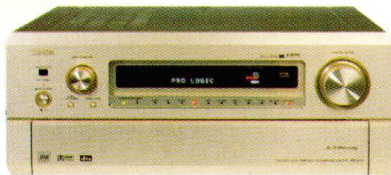
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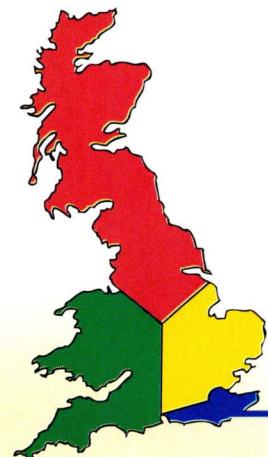
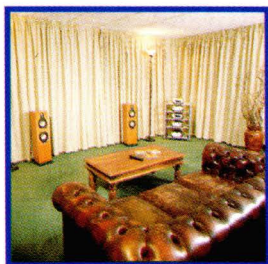
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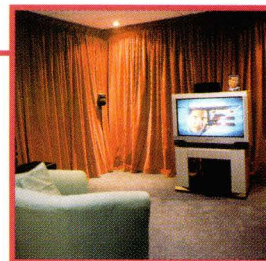
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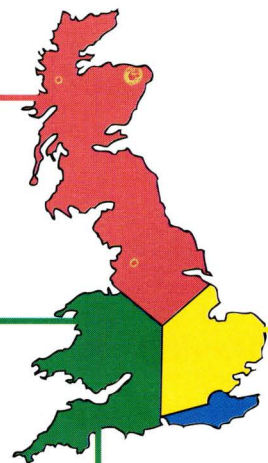
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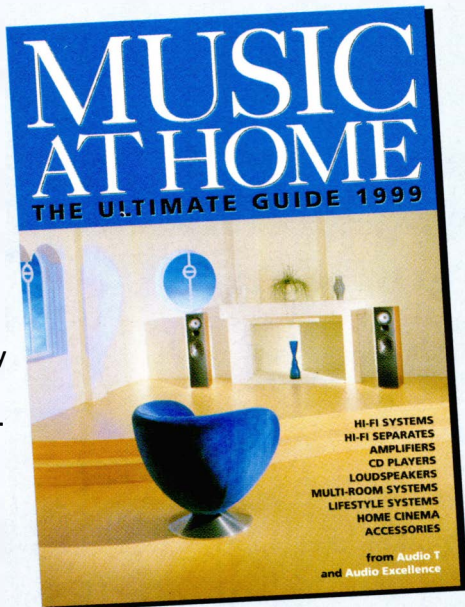
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Part 2 SACD Key Technologies

Analog
input signal

DSD
output signal

Direct Stream Digital Technology

Keeping the audio faith



SUPER AUDIO CD

***"Listening to music this way should be a right, not a privilege.
The lost audio dimension is back again with DSD ..."***

David Walstra, head of the Sony European Super Audio CD Business Centre



Super Audio CD attracts music lovers



Though the compact disc transformed the way music is recorded and replayed, the music industry still strives for better digital sound. Even today, there are many audiophiles who still prefer analogue sound over CDs because they maintain it provides a more faithful reproduction of the original performance.

Now Sony and Philips, the original team responsible for creating CD, have developed Super Audio Compact Disc (SACD) – a radically different approach to digital recording and playback. SACD delivers superior sound quality thanks to Direct Stream Digital (DSD), the advanced recording technology at the heart of the new SACD.

We asked David Walstra, head of the Sony SACD Business Centre in Europe, to explain what makes DSD and SACD technology different.

Why such a radical approach?

We wanted to make really significant improvements in digital sound quality. To achieve this required a completely different approach.

Pulse Code Modulation (PCM)-based equipment – the technology that makes CD sound possible – has been the industry standard for years. However, the potential for further improvements in PCM is limited. Ultimately we decided that an entirely new encoding technique would offer far greater improvements over a greater period of time. Through DSD we have achieved a real breakthrough in audio technology. It enhances everything from studio recording to home listening.

How is DSD different from PCM technology?

They are completely different. DSD is a one-bit recording platform that samples the audio signal at a much higher rate than conventional CDs – creating an extremely wide dynamic range at an unprecedented bandwidth. Also, it no longer needs the decimation and interpolation filters necessary for the PCM digital recording process.

How does this benefit the listener?

DSD is an ultra-high quality recording system delivering a refined, precision audio performance. It reveals even the tiniest musical nuances and ambient acoustic details. And since it's digital, DSD allows for numeri-

cal encoding, which ensures degradation-free recording on tape and disc. What's more, DSD recordings sound remarkably like the original analogue sound – and conversion back to analogue is incredibly accurate.

Do we have to make a major investment in new SACD players to experience the benefit of DSD?

No. One of the great features of SACD is its flexibility. You can upgrade to SACD when you want, but you can start to enjoy the sound benefits from day one.

To hear the DSD sound you need an SACD player. But you can buy a hybrid SACD today and listen to its CD layer on your CD player. In addition to the high quality of the

Sony Music Entertainment has installed a complete DSD recording and editing system at its Whitfield Street Studios in London. Seen here is mastering engineer Tony Bridge at work using the Sonic Solutions DSD editing system. The new system lets Sony Music record, edit and master in DSD, thus building up its SACD catalogue.

DSD
Direct Stream Digital





Using the newly developed Pit Signal Processing (PSP) technology, each SACD has an invisible watermark that protects consumers and artists against illegal copying. In addition, a visible watermark in the form of a text or image can also be imprinted on the disc. This ensures that you will always have original versions for the best sound possible.

original high definition DSD recordings, professional listeners find that once the DSD signal has been down-converted into the conventional CD format, the resulting sound is significantly better than normal 16-bit PCM recordings.

Of course, when you buy an SACD player, you can feel safe knowing that your SACD collection will play back at full DSD quality. Also, all your existing CDs can be played on the same system – what could be simpler?

How certain can we be that an SACD is not pirated?

Absolutely certain. Physical watermarking technologies enable the SACD system to offer extremely effective anti-piracy tools, so SACDs can't be copied by any known piracy method today. This level of security has never been available from a commercial audio carrier before.

Who is using DSD?

Many organisations – from multi-national record companies like Sony Music Entertainment to smaller audiophile labels – are busy recording, editing and mastering in DSD.

Sony Music Entertainment has produced numerous SACD titles to support the hardware launch and its catalogue is expanding each month. Also, a number of labels in Europe and North America have introduced SACD software.

DSD is new. So what's the potential for future development?

The potential is huge. DSD alone makes a highly natural reproduction possible with incredibly accurate ambience. The multi-channel sound built into the SACD system specifications improves this ambience even more. Although we still have much to learn about the recording and playback of multi-channel music, we've already started to make real progress – and music industry professionals are astounded by the early results.

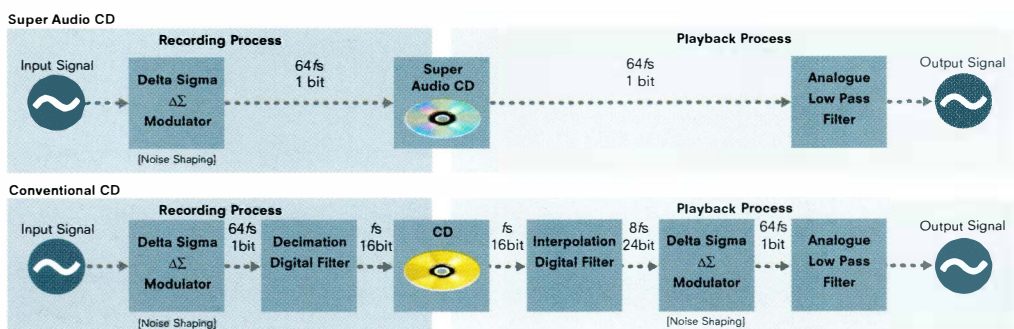
What difference will multi-channel sound make?

DSD provides a more natural acoustic image. Even in an environment which isn't acoustically optimal, you can enjoy the natural sound offered by the infinitely accurate reproduction of the original recording. The acoustic image seems to detach itself from the loudspeakers – it's really all over the room – with much greater depth than ever before.

Even more than stereo DSD, multi-channel DSD playback reveals every detail of the original music performance. Just as we experienced with the move from vinyl disc to CD, a new level of detail is audible. Artists have told us they can hear each tone individually, instruments can be heard with higher clarity because they don't mask each other as much. Once you have experienced DSD, you'll realise what you've missed and how much more there is to come.



Differences in recording-to-playback processes for Super Audio CD and conventional CD



SACD – superior audio technology developed out of experience

Direct Stream Digital DSD audio technology

2.8224 MHz sampled 1-bit audio for 100kHz frequency range, more than 120dB dynamic range within the audible (frequency) range and a pure waveform very closely resembling the analogue original.

DSD
Direct Stream Digital

SACD provides backwards and forwards compatibility with CD

SACD offers three disc variations, including a hybrid disc which can be played by SACD players and standard "Red Book" CD players.

Sony's top London studio fits DSD Mastering & Editing

DSD Mastering and Editing at Whitfield Street Studios is hailed for its high standard and ease of use.

SACD ensures complete copyright protection

Mandatory invisible watermarking; optional visible watermarking; and optional encryption protects copyright holders against unauthorised copying and piracy.

Many record companies produce SACDs

Since the launch, many leading record companies, including key audiophile labels and multinationals have started producing SACDs.

Sony launches new state-of-the-art amplifiers and wide-range loudspeakers to optimise SACD playback

SACD launched in Japan on 21 May, in Europe on 27 August and in North America on 31 August

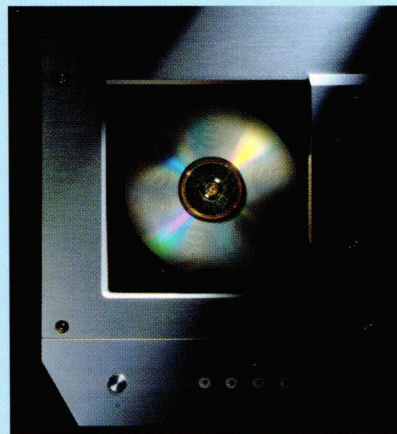


SCD-777ES

Sony SCD-777ES, the second SACD player launched by Sony and part of the ES series.

Part 1: SACD Format

Preview Part 3: SACD Software



- Interview with Alan Phillips, Vice President New Technologies at Sony Music Europe
- The benefits of SACD technology: a record company's perspective
- High Density Discs: why musicians, producers and sound engineers are interested in this new format
- The importance of anti-piracy measures and copyright protection for the music recording industry and consumers

Part 4: SACD Systems

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MEET the Jordan heirs

At last – a German/British co-production that doesn't need subtitles. **Paul Messenger** cocks an ear.

A new name on the UK scene, ALR/Jordan is a German specialist speaker brand headed by the redoubtable Karl-Heinz Fink (who has recently been involved as a consultant in a number of highly successful designs). The ALR is the German bit, but the name Jordan has been well known to British hi-fi cognoscenti for decades, and it's Ted Jordan's metal cone technology which underpins the main drivers used in the ALR/J ranges.

This £2,500 Note 7 is the top of three Notes, all of which feature a rather novel approach to bass loading. A compact but still fairly tall floorstanding three-way design, the total weight of 33kg is evidence of substantial build quality. The thick, curved sides add a touch of style too, but our samples threw that away by coming dressed in a stripey wood veneer redolent of 1950s Formica. But cherry, beech and black veneers are alternatives.

The lower, larger section of the enclosure supplies the bass, using two bass drivers in parallel, each with 110mm diameter cones, augmented by two large, elliptical auxiliary bass radiators (ABRs) fitted to the rear. Sometimes called drone cones, the ABRs function exactly like reflex ports, but allow the designer rather more control over mass and compliance – especially so in this case, as the Note's 'secret weapon' is a set of weights which can be added (or not) to change the tuning of the ABRs. This of course means that you can adjust their resonant frequencies to avoid coinciding with and over-exciting the main room modes.

The midrange is handled by a third, superficially identical driver with a 110mm cone, while the tweeter has a 25mm plastic dome. Twin terminal

pairs are fitted – hardly appropriate to a three-way – and these optionally split the feed between the bass drivers and the mid/treble section, for bi-wiring or bi-amping. A hefty chunk of MDF forms the base of the enclosure, but the spikes couldn't be properly tightened and the footprint is modest, so stability is compromised.

The impedance curves confirm that the ABRs can be tuned between 32Hz and 42Hz (the latter neatly bisecting the 30Hz and 55Hz modes of our listening room). As usual with three-ways, the load is quite demanding, staying around four Ohms throughout the bass and midband. Fortunately, sensitivity is a generous 91-92dB.

The in-room responses show that the best bass alignment and extension is achieved with maximum weight added to the ABRs, although removing the weights actually slightly improved the smoothness above 150Hz. The overall trend is a little strong

through the bass, slightly downtilted through the rest of the band, and generally smooth and progressive throughout.

SOUND QUALITY

One of the inherent difficulties of doing 'one-off' reviews is that it's difficult to put the product into any meaningful context. However, by happy coincidence the Note 7 arrived just as I was finishing tests of the six £1,000-£2,000 models featured last issue, and the first impression was that this floorstander comfortably justified the extra step or two up the price ladder.

“More analytical than romantic in presentation, it has all the precision one associates with the best metal diaphragm designs.”

The Note 7 immediately delivered a measure of authority that sets it apart from – and ahead of – the less expensive models in that test. This speaker sounds exceptionally clean, smooth and even-handed, which seems to encourage one to wind up the wick until the power runs out. This isn't the most sensitive speaker, but it's no slouch either, and seems to go loud happily, enthusiastically and without any obvious increase in distortion.

More important (in my book at least), it works very well at whisper-low levels too, preserving clear diction and a good dynamic range. I made a number of adjustments to the ABR mass loading and, while the changes were more than subtle, I'd be hard pushed to say any one setting was just right. Each had merits, but the bass, whatever the loading, was impressively solid and smooth.



Twin terminal pairs are fitted and these optionally split the feed between the bass drivers and the mid/treble section.

Criticisms are minor. The overall balance is just a touch laid-back, and midband dynamics might have rather more vigour, while the top end tends to be a bit insistent with indifferently recorded material. But the overall openness and freedom from boxiness gives startling focus and impressively layered images.

CONCLUSIONS

I can't help wondering whether the Note 7 is really worth £700 more than the slightly smaller Note 5, but it's certainly a very classy loudspeaker. More analytical than romantic in presentation, it has all the precision, cleanness and clarity one has come to associate with the best metal diaphragm designs, with a measure of authority and dynamic range rarely found at lower prices.

The bass tuning feature is probably unique, and should also prove useful, provided playing around with the umpteen permutations doesn't become too obsessive.

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £2,500.00

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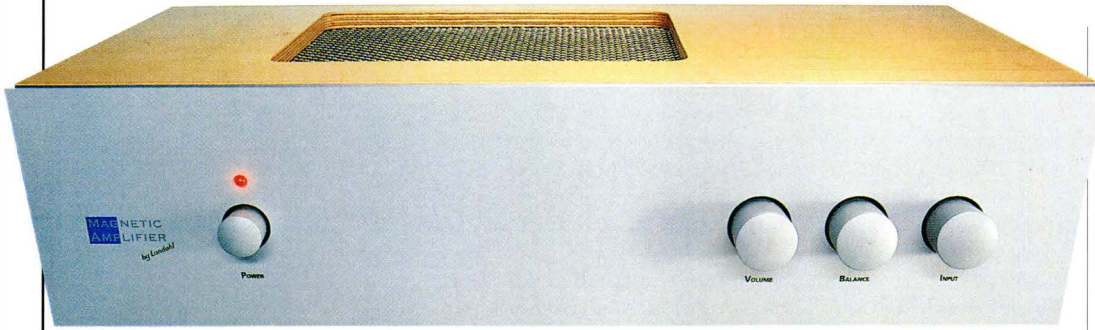
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MUSICAL FIDELITY

MAGNETIC for the people

You might not have heard of it, but **Jason Kennedy** thinks Lundahl's latest amp has quite a pull.



New hi-fi components are usually heralded by press releases and calls from the manufacturer months before products are available. But sometimes they come almost out of the blue.

The Lundahl Mag Amp could have been such a product had word not arrived nearly two years ago from a friend of a friend. An article had appeared in the Danish *High Fidelity* magazine and a translation had been sent to tube and horn enthusiast Rob Dowse. He passed the details on to me with encouragements to get hold of a review sample. So when the opportunity arose, the agent had little difficulty in persuading me, even though it's a pretty obscure brand and I'd never come across the chap before.

The Mag Amp's designer, Lars Lundahl, used to run a transformer company in Sweden, a business that's been taken over by his son Per. A good proportion of these transformers were built for valve amps, and Lars is clearly a bit of an audio nut because he created what to my knowledge is the first magnetic hi-fi amplifier.

I had a look on the Internet to see if there were any other claimants to this accolade, but could only find industrial applications for the technology. The Lundahl Mag Amp appears to be a pulse width modulator made up of a choke transformer that's wound on an amorphous metal core (which can be saturated to different degrees, thus

It's all good functional stuff so long as five line inputs is all you need.

producing variations in impedance), and a winding carrying the audio signal controls the high RF current coming from the power supply on a separate winding. You need a pair of magamps to give continuous operation of one phase; therefore, four pairs are required in a stereo amplifier.

Lundahl's reason for using the amorphous metal core as a controlling element is based on his theories about the quantum

"It didn't have transistor-style grip nor tube-style softness, and I suspect that with a wide-band horn speaker it would sound rather juicy."

mechanical failings of semiconductors in transistors and valves, which are significantly more complex than the above.

The Lundahl Mag Amp is an integrated design that uses a valve preamplification stage in combination with the magnetic power amp to produce 15 class A Watts a side. Power supply is switched mode from transistors so, while it's not a hybrid in the usual sense, it's still a hybrid. It is housed in an extremely plain non-magnetic case made of aluminium and plywood. Although basic in appearance, the casework is nicely finished and the minimal legends on the silver

fascia make a pleasant change from some of the more heavily scripted kit that is popular these days.

The rear panel here is a little too prosaic for a product at this price, incorporating such things as a captive mains lead and basic grade socketry, but it's all good functional stuff so long as five line inputs and a tape monitor output is enough for your needs. You only need to glance at the fascia to realise that there's little else in the way of facilities, but this is a purist product – and hey, it's got a balance control!

I used the Mag Amp with a wide range of loudspeakers, including the Carlsson OA-52.2s tested last month and two versions of Living Voice's Avatar design. I even gave it a quick blast with the B&W Nautilus 802s, but that proved to be a bit of a heavy load. It didn't take very long to appreciate that the amp preferred the sort of speakers normally suited to valve amplifiers, and it came as no surprise that Lars Lundahl uses horn speakers himself.

In fact, I'd suggest that his speakers probably have a forward, even bright character, because without some spark of excitement in the system it can sound a little soft and lacking in sparkle. But this element was provided rather effectively by the first pair of Avatars which, while they sounded a bit forthright with DNM amps, suited the Lundahl down to a T.

The amp produced some extremely engaging results with such transducers in tow. Its strengths are very characteristic of pentode equipped valve

amps: fine timbral resolution, good dynamic tracking and a nice sense of musicality.

Instrumental tone is rendered with colour and subtlety, and all aspects of acoustics are given their due weight – this despite image resolution which, while not vague, wasn't exactly pin-sharp either. But there's no shortage of layering and depth, and it differs from many valve amps in that it doesn't have a tendency to overblow images.

The Lundahl also doesn't clip in the same relaxed fashion as a valve amp, sounding more like a solid state design. It was hard to pin down, but there were times where transients caused harshness in delivery, and this at a normal listening level with a sympathetic speaker.

Bass performance – often the weak point of valve designs – was, while not in the bone-crunching league, extremely resolute and powerful. It didn't have transistor-style grip nor tube-style softness, and I suspect that with a wide-band horn speaker it would sound rather juicy. And we like juicy.

CONCLUSION

The Mag Amp has many of the virtues of a good tube amp and sidesteps some of the breed's shortcomings. With the right speakers it can reproduce music's richness and rhythm in a way that's quite uncommon, and while the strictly hi-fi brigade will dislike its lack of incision, it's a tonic for those who have tired of listening to kit and want to hear the music.

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £1,735.00

■ A discreet integrated hybrid that uses unusual technology to good musical effect. Get lively speakers and a well ventilated shelf!

■ 3 YEAR GUARANTEE EXCLUDING TUBES

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OLD SCHOOL Ties

Paul Messenger tries out an amp/speaker combo of the old school.

It's not often today that we come across a particular amp/speaker combination from two manufacturers which is specifically intended to be used as a system. You may recall the Linn/Naim combos from the 1970s, but the trend since then has been very much towards 'one make' packages.

However, Dennis Had's Cary operation makes some highly regarded valve amps with miniscule power outputs – the sort that don't much like modern, low-impedance speakers. So he helped set up the Soliloquy operation in 1996, selling it on to current owner Bernie Byers, and seems happy enough to let Bernie get on with building loudspeakers which make a sympathetic and symbiotic partnership with his amps.

The result is a system that's been setting tongues wagging Stateside, and which is starting to carve out its own cult niche. The Cary amps in question are the SLP50 MkII preamp (£1,195), plus two CAD 2A3SE monoblock power amps (£3,150 per pair, chrome £345 extra), while the speakers are codenamed SM 2A3 (£1,095 plus £400 for matching stands). We also drafted in the S10 (transistor)-powered subwoofer (£1,050), to add some urge in the bass.

WHAT'S IN A 2A3?

So what's the significance of the 2A3 label? Valve aficionados will need no introduction,

- ◉ CAD 2A3 monoblocks keep it simple and stylish.
- ◉ SLP50 MkII pre: pretty but basic.

but for those unfamiliar with thermionic lore, it's one of the earliest and simplest valves used for audio – a triode which in single-ended, feedback-free mode delivers a claimed (some say optimistically!) maximum power of around five Watts.

Five Watts! Just about enough to illuminate a torch bulb, but surely nowhere near enough to drive a serious hi-fi system? Suspend your disbelief, set your prejudices aside. If you've any passion for music

“The top end might be strong, but it's extraordinarily clean, sweet and open, full of subtle, natural detail.”

reproduction, you owe it to yourself at least to listen to the latest trend in hi-fi amplification, which just happens to be the oldest trend.

One thing's for sure, zero-feedback single-ended triode (SET) valve amplification has serious staying power. It started the whole hi-fi ball rolling at the beginning of the electrical era, and has steadfastly refused to die. Back in the 1920s and '30s it was the only game in town, but every subsequent

generation has been seduced by promises of extra power through technological advances. The SET carries on regardless. I was surprised to encounter brand new examples being built when I first visited Japan in the mid-1970s, and since then the revivalist trend has gradually spread.

Britain has never given up making and buying valve amps, but the 'back to SET basics' movement seems to have been slow getting established. Most home-grown examples use the more powerful, but more expensive, 300B valve. Opting for a 2A3 reduces the power available, but also cuts the cost. That said, this combo costs four and a half grand, which works out at nearly £500 per Watt.

But the crucial point – usually ignored – is that the first Watt is far and away the most important one for every amp. That's the key to the SET revival. Most music is reproduced using milli- and micro-Watts of power, and keeping the bottom end of the dynamic range clean and free from time-smear is what hi-fi musical reproduction is about.

Sure it's nice to have some power headroom in reserve, and sometimes you'll feel inclined to use it. But a persuasive case may be made that there's no point having dozens or hundreds of Watts on tap if the first one is compromised. The invention and introduction of feedback might have allowed higher power levels to be achieved, but from a purist 'simple straight line' perspective, feeding some of the output back into the input represents a scenario that's better avoided. The proof (or otherwise) will, of course, come in the listening.



Adding inconvenience to impotence, the partnering £1,195 SLP50 II pre-amp is an ultra-simple affair, with three knobs (volume, input, on/off), three line-level inputs, and no provision for remote operation. Why do valve amp makers consider themselves exempt from providing this basic accessory of modern life? Hiding behind nostalgia, I call it.

SPEAKERS BY SOLOLOQUY

Given the minimal power available, one might have expected Soliloquy's partnering SM 2A3 speakers to be large, brutish, high-efficiency affairs. In fact,



they're quite modest, standmounted two-ways about 12 litres in volume, and very much in the modern lounge-friendly idiom with a slim front panel and small main driver. A weight of 12kg confirms that build is very substantial indeed, and the fine finish with high-class wood veneer all go towards justifying that hefty £1,095 price-tag. There's another £400 to find for the high partnering stands, which are even more solidly built and include some pretty matching wood veneer.

Similar styling cues are found with Soliloquy's altogether larger and much heavier S10 subwoofer, making this a much better looking option than most of the breed. A built-in conventional transistor amp supplies the urge to drive a port-loaded bass driver with a 190mm pleated cone.

So what is that makes the SM 2A3 speakers particularly suited to a low-power SET amp? In my opinion it's mostly down to the tonal balance, which is stronger than average through the upper midband, presence and treble. The corollary, of course, is a decidedly lean balance, some 2-3dB shy on average

through the upper bass and lower midband – but it's unquestionably a character which shows the positive subjective qualities of SET amps to fine advantage.

Indeed, the measured in-room balance shows more than a hint of similarity to that shown by the Lowther-driven Veritas H3 horns reviewed in HFC 191 – a speaker whose roots go right back to the original SET valve era.

Interestingly, measured with my normal transistor amp, the SM2A3s show a slight 9kHz peak; with the Cary amps this is virtually flattened out, and the midbass (50-100Hz) is also a couple of dB stronger.

The SM2A3s go down to about 50Hz in-room, where the sub-woofer takes over. However, there's too much overlap even on the lowest setting of the low-pass filter, which richens and thickens the midbass.

One thing SET amps don't like doing is driving difficult, low impedance loads, and here the SM 2A3 is very compatible, because its impedance stays safely at or above eight Ohms throughout. In such a context, and considering its small size, my 91dB sensitivity rating is

● Soliloquy S10 powered sub-woofer: an elegant example of the art of bass.

very creditable indeed. It's no record-breaker, but the vast majority of conventional 90+dB speakers around tend to drop to four Ohms or less, which this kind of amp won't like at all.

SOUND QUALITY

I began without using the sub-woofer, and the first impressions came as something of a shock. This system does sound decidedly forward and bright, and that takes a little initial adjustment. Then it sneaks up on you. The top end might be strong, but it's extraordinarily clean, sweet and open, full of subtle, delicate, natural detail, rich in harmonic textures, and wonderfully free from the sort of smear and congestion one has come to expect with transistor amps.

It's precisely because of the Cary amp's superb mid and top-end clarity and freedom from congestion and hash that the Soliloquy speakers get away with their brighter-than-usual balance. But the speakers play their own part in making the most of this magic. The midband isn't entirely uncoloured – there's a touch of boxiness – but the vital crossover transition sounds unusually clean and coherent, temporally as well as tonally.

Adding the subwoofer to the equation did provide some warmth to complement the brightness, but the sound became a bit lumpy and lost some coherence; in the end, I preferred the system without.

Stereo images are beautifully focused, with the sort of solidity that only comes with expertly tight timing, and spacious, accurate perspectives well separated from and extending way behind the loud-speaker boxes. Most important of all, the system highlighted and distinguished the contrasting characters of different recordings to a remarkable degree – a sure sign of superior information retrieval.

CONCLUSIONS

Subwoofer apart, I loved this system. I enjoyed it so much it kept getting me up to change records, and encouraging me to

explore new recordings. It's also an object lesson in the art of system synergy: I carried out various component substitutions, yet the real magic spells were woven when both Cary and Soliloquy 2A3s were operating together.

One might cavil at the bright, thin balance, which does depart from strict neutrality, and this is obviously not an ideal system for large rooms or loud and heavy dance tracks. But it really comes into its own with acoustic music, which is rendered with a delicacy, transparency and tangibility unmatched by transistor electronics, and in which context the modest power will rarely pose a problem.

Can anyone today live with just three source inputs? I for one would have to look for one of Cary's more elaborate and expensive remote control preamps, but antediluvian

ergonomics apart this is a thoroughly practical, visually discreet and reassuringly hum-free package. It all adds up to a compact modern 'lifestyle' solution to the highly seductive and genuinely high-end, single-ended triode hi-fi experience, with none of the emotional angst attached to 'tweaker' products. If you're worried about the 2A3's low power output, hang on your old transistor amp – but I'll bet you won't want to use it too often.

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE SLP50 MkII £1,195

CAD 2A3SE (pair) £3,150

SM 2A3 speakers £1,095

S10 subwoofer £1,050

Forget about the subwoofer. The rest is a marvellously seductive and sympathetic amp/speaker combination, which beautifully highlights the very real strengths of classic SET valve operation.

■ CARY: THREE YEAR GUARANTEE

■ SOLILOQUY: FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ The Audiophile Club, PO Box 6477, London N13 4AY

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GUIDED By Voices

A Living Voice speaker that's smaller than a family car? Jason Kennedy wonders whether the sound's been scaled down, too.

Living Voice started out big with a horn speaker that belittled most wardrobes and rejoiced under the title *Air Partner*. But in the ten or so years since then has learned a lot about the scale of the British living room and the tastes of its inhabitants.

The company first arrived at the proportions embodied in the Avatar OBX-R with its least expensive model, the Auditorium – a product which proved that scale plays nearly as big a part in the purchasing process as sound quality. So LV decided to refine the design and squeeze as much performance out of it as possible.

The result was, in fact, two products: the standard Avatar at £2,400, and the OBX-R at

“The attention to detail that has gone into the Avatar OBX-R is what makes it stand out from the crowd.”

£4,000. What differentiates the two is primarily a more lavishly ‘stuffed’ outboard crossover on the latter, but it also includes a better tweeter and a more extensively braced cabinet.

This is a pretty compact loudspeaker for the money. There are smaller, dearer alternatives made in Italy and America, but it's still ambitious to market a design that stands just over a metre tall with a 21.5cm by 27cm footprint as “the ultimate listening experience”.

However, size clearly isn't everything and the attention to detail that has gone into the Avatar OBX-R is what makes it stand out from the crowd. Within the physical constraints mentioned, this is one of the

few speakers around where more has been spent on components than cabinets, which usually account for the largest part of a speaker's costing.

Living Voice has used what it considers to be the very best components available. In most cases these are the sort of parts that most designers would agree on: Hovland discrete film and foil capacitors, Clarostat non-inductive wire-wound resistors and hand made air cored inductors.

In other instances the choices are more controversial. The cabinets, for instance, are triple-braced, 750 density chipboard, as opposed to the MDF used by nearly everyone else, and which is used primarily because it is the best compromise between sound and practicality of production. Living Voice is not alone in preferring the sound of chipboard, but it has something of a struggle finding cabinet makers who will produce finely finished cabinets with such unworkable stuff.

Another unusual component is the Vifa mid/bass driver, which stands out because of its steel

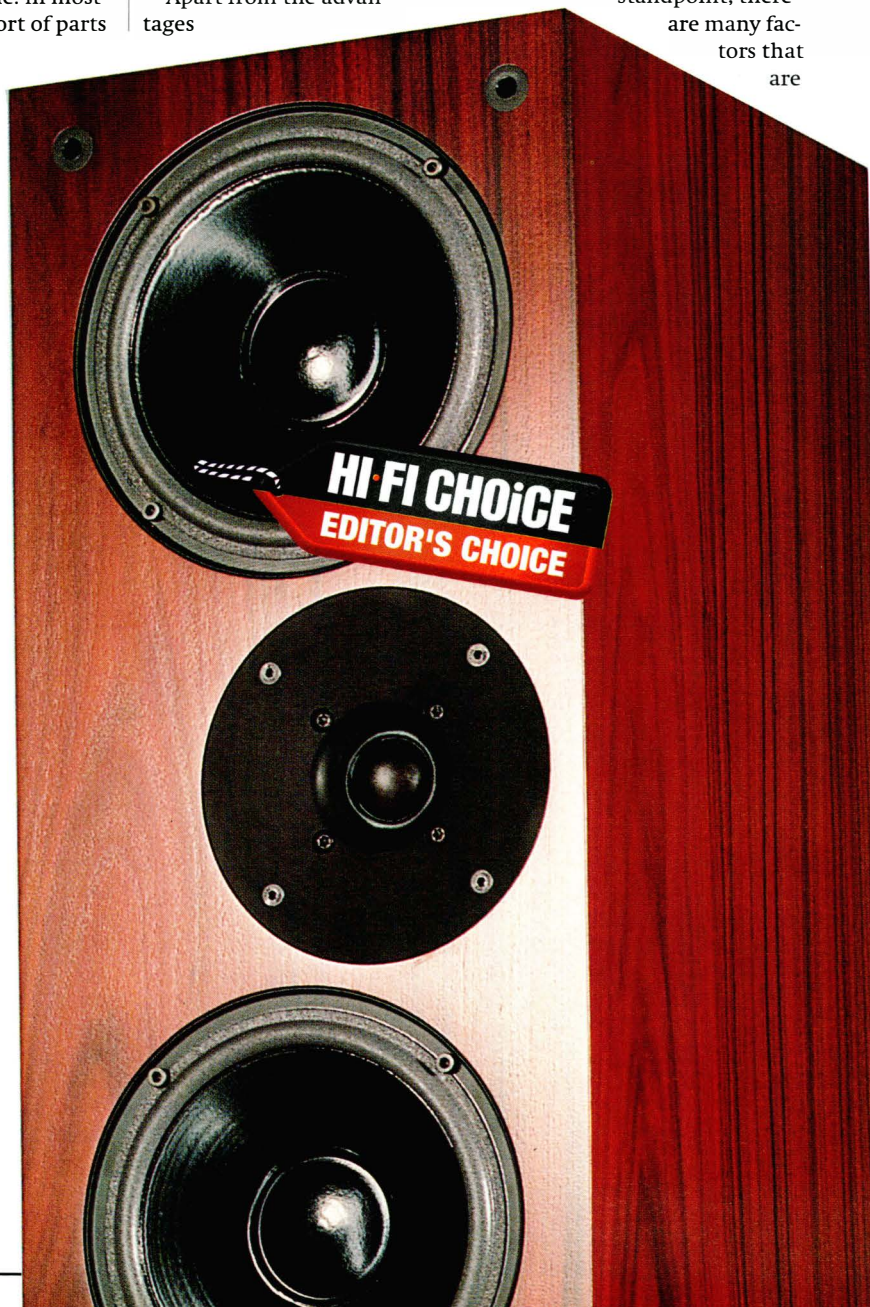
basket. Usually this is a sign of cost cutting, but in this case was selected instead of a cast magnesium alternative on grounds of sound quality. The tweeter unit is a rare Scanspeak, the Revelator, whose machined aluminium faceplate is designed to give linear phase from two to 30kHz.

Of course, such elements are only important if employed intelligently, which is where the outboard crossover or OBX-R comes in to the equation. Although uncommon, it's well known that separating passive components from the electromagnetic and mechanically hostile environment of the loudspeaker itself is a good idea. The reason they're so rare is largely a practical one: extra boxes take up space, cost more and require extra cable.

Apart from the advantages

already stated, there is one further point in their favour, that being the ability to lay components out in such a way as to negate interactions between them. Capacitors, inductors and resistors radiate magnetic fields which cause them to affect one another's performance if they're close together. If you have the space to orientate and distance them adequately these effects can be eliminated, which is why the OBX-Rs are 42cm wide and 26cm deep, and the internal components are isolated and damped with a combination of wool and glue. The result isn't very pretty compared with your average circuit board crossover, but the proof is in the listening, which leaves one in little doubt over its validity.

From a physical standpoint, there are many factors that are



also of note. The speaker is supplied complete with black wooden plinths that connect to the speakers with Blu-tak and to the floor with M8 spikes. Both speaker and crossover are designed to be bi-wired, but can be bridged if required. Either way, about a metre of extra cable will be necessary to get from crossover to speaker.

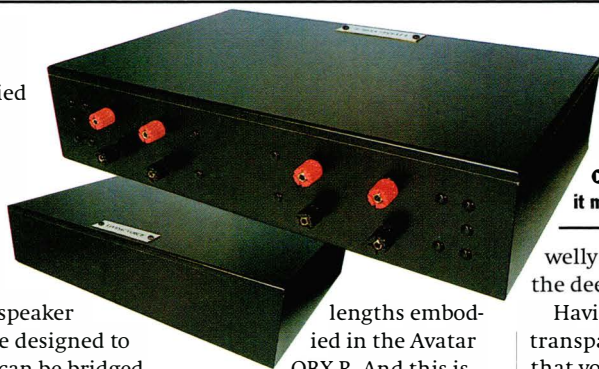
The cabinet itself can be had in a variety of real wood veneers including cherry, crown maple and the rosewood shown. The mid/bass drive units employ 150mm doped paper cones while the tweeter is a 30mm cloth dome, the D'Appolito configuration being used to achieve a quoted sensitivity of 94dB at six Ohms.

SOUND QUALITY

I used these speakers with a number of amplifiers to get a feel for their capabilities. For the most part power was supplied by a DNM PA3S, but alternatives included the Lundahl Mag Amp and an extremely muscular, single-ended 300B valve amp made by Robert Dowse. Sources were SME Model 10A/vdH Grasshopper record player and Acoustic Precision Eikos CD player with some Arcam Alpha 10 DRT thrown in for radiophonic measure. Electrofluidics Monolith cables for speakers and DNM interconnects were used.

One of the inspirations behind this speaker was the Acoustic Precision FR1, a distinctly different model that uses a single metal driver in a compact polystyrene box and produces extraordinary time and phase coherence at the cost of power handling and bandwidth.

It was the FR1's coherence that inspired Living Voice to take the Auditorium to the



- Each OBX-R crossover is housed in a standalone cabinet for optimal component layout.
- The tweeter's faceplate helps it maintain phase coherence.

lengths embodied in the Avatar OBX-R. And this is indeed an unusually coherent speaker; its imaging might not be in the same class as the FR1, but its ability to reproduce complex material is quite remarkable. This, coupled with a degree of transparency rarely encountered, puts this speaker in competition with a good many highly regarded and priced alternatives.

"The music you love, whatever it may be, gets that bit more engrossing when you hear it through these speakers."

It doesn't, for instance, have the bandwidth and power handling of the B&W Nautilus 802, but it has the transparency and dynamic capabilities. And it'll play loud if you put the grunt behind it.

Lest you fear that my critical faculties are becoming blunted by enthusiasm, I did manage to unearth one minor foible: a slight lack of evenness in the bass. In particular, certain notes could set the port off, a problem partly solved by putting more space between speaker and wall, but some heavily EQ'd recordings still produced a subjective bump in the response. Of course the room plays a significant part in this area, so if you're tempted, make sure you give them some



welly at home before doing the deed.

Having this degree of transparency inevitably means that you're more than usually aware of the amplification and source, so if either of the latter have character, that comes through loud and clear. For instance, the 300B SE tube amp seemed to have a subjectively 'slower' feel than the DNM, but when it came to heavy or complex material it reproduced dynamics, both micro and macro, with incredible dexterity and nimbleness. Such qualities mean complex material becomes instantly legible.

You don't have to be a Zappa or Stravinsky fan to appreciate it; there are subtleties waiting for you on nearly all recordings. It's the audio maniac's job to appreciate them.

The Avatar OBX-R is the sort of speaker that works best at low and medium volume levels, where its unusual delicacy and breadth of tonal colour is used to tremendous effect.

Its maker is a bit of an acoustic music enthusiast and he developed the speaker using tube amplification for the most part, so when it comes to solo piano or santoor and tabla this speaker is very much at ease, reproducing the full range of each player's skills.

Yet it is equally at home with electric and electronic music, delving deep into the mix on everything from Brand X to Fila Brazillia. Two particular tracks stood out: *Windowlicker* by Aphex Twin and *Mojo Pin* by Jeff Buckley, the first for its breadth of dynamics and sonic colour and the second for its sheer beauty and power. The music you love, whatever it may be, gets that bit more engrossing when you hear it through these speakers. If it doesn't, then you've got some pretty fine speakers already.

The Revelator tweeter is clearly an extraordinary device, its ability to resolve the lowest level details without the slightest hint of exaggeration, to reproduce depth be it original or artificial and to be so sensitive to variations in timing is



something that I've rarely encountered. Of course, it's not alone in doing the job - I'm quite certain that the outboard crossover and the chipboard enclosure have as much to do with the Avatar OBX-R's lightness of touch as anything else.

CONCLUSION

If you really want to hear what's going on in your music collection, if you want to hear the precise level of individual notes, the exact timbre of specific instruments and the location of live recordings, get a great valve amp, a superb source and a pair of these loudspeakers. They may not look super slick, but they will fit into the living room without complaint and they'll turn you into the raving music nut that got you started on hi-fi in the first place.

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICES £4,000.00

It may not look it but this speaker is a match for the best when it comes to transparency and coherence, responds well to tubes.

FOUR YEAR GUARANTEE

Living Voice, Stanhope House, Harrington Mills, Leopold St, Long Eaton NG10 1PB
(0115) 973 3222

Five Stars

Paul Messenger explains why you should visit an independent

Why use a specialist hi-fi dealer? The short answer is because he knows one hell of a lot more about hi-fi than you do. And if you've gone to the trouble of picking up a specialist magazine on the subject, you're obviously interested in something rather more than a mini system from the nearest electrical superstore.

You've probably bought this magazine for one of two reasons. You're looking for advice (presumably unbiased and good) on choosing and using your hi-fi system, and/or you're checking out the ads to decide where to go and buy it.

The independent specialist dealer doesn't know everything, and he doesn't know much about you, but if music's an important part of your life, he's the only guy around who's able (and hopefully willing) to help you choose the equipment which will give you the best long term satisfaction.

Power of the Press

Dealers sometimes moan to me about the power of the press, and the disproportionate influence of its 'Best Buy' and multi-star ratings. Well, I've been in the press for twentysomething years, and still feel more ignorant than powerful.

The more I mess around with hi-fi gear, the more I become aware of our lack of real understanding of the subtleties involved, and the more I appreciate the importance of the dealer's skills and experience, in bringing together components so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We hacks get paid to write words, often about components in isolation, because individual product reviews are still the staple diet of the press. They can sometimes provide a useful guide to the way a product performs, but only under the particular circumstances in which the review was conducted.

The hi-fi reviewer attempts, with varying degrees of success, to evaluate a particular component, and find something interesting (and

hopefully positive) to say about it. That's about the end of it, and it's on to the next product.

The magazine prints the review, and that very process magically confers a measure of authority. Experienced hi-fi enthusiasts, who read reviews over a period of years and try out various products themselves, soon start to realise the limitations of that approach. Some reviews are better than others, but none can get to grips with the real heart of the problem - whether a given product will improve your musical satisfaction, in your system and your room.

The Role of the Dealer

The dealer's role is very different, and potentially much more valuable. He has the chance to talk one-on-one. If he's good at his job, he'll use that opportunity to find out what you as an individual are looking (or listening) for.

His motivation is very different too. Sure he wants to make a sale. That's the lifeblood of any shop. But he also knows that if something he sells really does deliver long term satisfaction, there's a very good chance you'll come back again to see if he can repeat the trick some time in the future.

If you go into a shop and demand a particular CD player, on the basis that it got seven stars (out of five) in last month's magazines, the shop will probably simply take the line of least resistance and sell it to you. (Or switch-sell you to a similar price alternative, if he's fresh out of stock of that particular flavour-of-the-month.)

If you go in and say you're looking for a CD player, and want his advice on what to choose, things are liable to become more interesting. The



for Value

specialist dealer if you are searching for real hi-fi satisfaction

onus is now on the dealer to show what he can do. His first task is to ask the right questions to try and get some idea of what you might be after.

Asking the questions is the easy bit. The real skill comes in using the information to come up with a shortlist of likely contenders, and then conducting a demonstration so that you have a real chance to play a central role in the decision making process.

Putting together a successful hi-fi system might not be as difficult as it was twenty or thirty years ago, but it's just as easy to make a mess of things. Put the 'wrong' combination of components together and it'll still sound a lot better than any cute little mini system package. It might even

"If music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet, you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority."

rate a five star review. But it won't match the potential of a carefully balanced and properly installed system, and it certainly won't cater for your own particular preferences and personality.

We British are notoriously indiscriminating consumers, at a mass market level at least. The majority of the population don't even bother to drive a car they're thinking of buying, never mind take the trouble to listen to hi-fi equipment.

The majority will therefore end up with hyperstore mediocrity, and hi-fi that's about as tasty as supermarket bread. But if music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet, you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority.

You know full well that your music collection is as individual as your wardrobe, and just as precious too, so it's worth taking the time and trouble to search out the dealer and equipment

that will make that collection come alive, and give you a new buzz every time you play your favourite discs.

The independent specialist may not beat the chain store on price, but he continues to thrive in a hostile environment because real hi-fi is so much more than a matter of price. The people who work in these shops are themselves enthusiasts, often with many years of experience in meeting customer's needs, and the very necessary expertise to ensure that the whole thing is properly set up to deliver the best results.

The better the hi-fi, the more important it is to get the fine details right at the installation end of things, but even the least expensive equipment can be made to sound a whole lot better if good care is taken over the fine details - the support furniture, the cabling, the positioning of speakers and so on.

Without expert assistance even high class hi-fi can give mediocre results. With it you'll stand a very good chance of ending up with something rather more than a consumer durable - something which will be a source of considerable pleasure and genuine emotional satisfaction for decades to come.

I agreed to write this signed piece, irrespective of the specific sponsors, because I believe the independent specialist dealer plays a vital role in giving customers long term hi-fi satisfaction. The views and opinions expressed here are my own and not necessarily those of Hi-fi Choice.

Paul Messenger

The specialist Dealers listed here are professional and enthusiastic.

Give your nearest a ring for a demonstration.

STAR QUALITIES

value for money
service
facilities
verdict



LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road
0171 226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
0171 924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER Ltd

109 Chiswick High Road
0181 400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI

40 High Street
01233 624441

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead

AUDIO DESIGNS

26 High Street
01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY

9 High Street Hampton Wick
0181 943 3530

Lakeside Retail Park

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

Dansk International Furniture World
01708 680551

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High Street
01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Uxbridge UXBRIDGE AUDIO

278 High Street,
01895 465444

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE

3 Church Lane
01295 272158

Birmingham SOUND ACADEMY

152a High Street, Bloxwich
01922 493499

Leicester CYMBIOSIS

6 Hotel Street
0116 262 3754

Northampton LISTEN INN

32 Gold Street, 01604 637871

Shrewsbury

CREATIVE AUDIO

9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle (Stockport)

AUDIO COUNSEL

14 Stockport Road
0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL

12/14 Shaw Road
0161 633 2602

Sheffield MOORGATE

ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam St
0114 275 6048

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI

314 Northumberland Street
0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO

260 St. Vincent Street
0141 248 4079

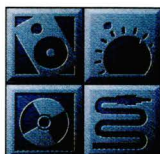
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SUPER TEST

SYSTEMS

Tim Bown and Lee Dunkley check out six single-make systems with true Brit pedigrees.



all the one-stop-shop convenience enjoyed by mini system buyers. What's more, a set of components from the same stable should, in theory, remove doubts about compatibility.

Here, then, are six systems from six hi-fi brands, reviewed and rated. Our theme is 'Best of British', featuring contenders from Arcam, Creek, Cyrus, Naim, Rega and Roksan.

We asked each manufacturer to nominate a system from its own range comprising CD player, amplifier and, where possible, speakers. Arcam doesn't make its own speakers, so we asked it to recommend a pair from somebody else – it went for the AE109 from Acoustic Energy. And where Cyrus/Mission and Creek/Epos are concerned, it's a question of an electronics brand and a speaker brand operating under the same roof. Mind you, mixing and matching makes it still often the best way to find your ideal sound, providing you've got the time to do the leg work. But, in this convenience-obsessed age, time is becoming a

That's where we can help. Simply draw up a list of the kit that suits you best using our reviews and the back-of-the-mag directory. Then visit a specialist dealer, audition your chosen components and make an informed decision.

If that still sounds like too much effort, how about this: instead of mixing and matching brands, why not buy everything from a single make? That way you get



THE CAST LIST

Arcam/Acoustic Energy system	£1,534.70
Creek/Epos system	£1,766.00
Cyrus/Mission system	£1,466.00
Naim system	£3,172.00
Rega system	£1,693.98
Roksan system	£2,210.00

Buying a hi-fi should be fun. After all, you're indulging in a product built purely for pleasure, something that can brighten up the days and intensify the nights of anyone who loves music. But many find it a taxing, even frustrating experience. The questions are many, the process intense: which products do I need, which brands should I go for, will they work well together, will they suit my room and my music taste? Building a system can feel like driving blind, grappling with a 'black art' that throws up more questions than answers. Time to reach for the Ibuprofen.

Perhaps it's because buyers of hi-fi separates care so much. A good hi-fi system is a serious investment which should provide years of hassle-free pleasure. You've got to put in the time and do the research – if you make the wrong decision that headache's only going to get bigger.

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

This isn't a direct comparison in the usual group test manner. Rather, it's a collection of six separate systems at varying price points, each with its own in-house agenda. We're not comparing like with like, which makes parallels difficult to draw. Thus there's no verdict page – each system is rated individually, the main criterion being the quality of sound delivered for the money being charged. Other factors, like build quality and facilities, are considered as part of the 'value' rating.

The two reviewers listened to three systems each. After considerable consultation with the manufacturers concerned, each system was carefully connected and arranged, the electronic components sited on Mana supports and position of the speakers adjusted for optimum performance. After the listening sessions had finished, Lee and Tim got together to discuss the results and draw their conclusions.

Discs used during the course of the tests included: Barber – *Agnus Dei* (Winchester Cathedral Choir/Hill/Virgin); The Bible – *Eureka*; Chemical Brothers – *Surrender*; Death in Vegas – *The Contino Sessions*; Mahler – *Symphony No. 2 – The Resurrection* (City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus/Rattle/EMI); Joni Mitchell – *Blue*; Stina Nordenstam – *Dynamite*; Sasha – *Global Underground/Ibiza*; Paul Simon – *The Rhythm of the Saints*; Travis – *The Man Who*; Paul Westerberg – *Suicaine Gratification*; Neil Young – *Weld*.

precious commodity. And this test might just save you some.

Coming soon: look out for our entry-level single-make systems special, starring the likes of Denon, Marantz, NAD, and Sony, coming your way in the New Year.

HINTS & TIPS

AMPLIFIERS

Amps need to be stretched before they give their best. They need running in (for maybe a week) and warming up (for at least an hour). They also sound best when used on a proper hi-fi support, ideally with no other component on the same surface, and a set of isolation 'feet' placed underneath can be a cost effective upgrade. If an amp must be stacked with other hi-fi equipment, put it on top to ensure proper heat dissipation. If tone controls are fitted, set them to zero under normal circumstances, and bypass them if possible.

CD PLAYERS

Like amps, CD players improve once they've been run-in and warmed up, and perform better when placed on a proper hi-fi 'rack'. You may also find they benefit from using an isolation platform or 'feet' underneath the player, so lessening the effects of vibration. It's worth making sure you keep a player's reading lens clean, particularly if it lives in a smoky or dusty environment – lens cleaners are readily available. And take care of your discs – they're not indestructible and damaged discs will make your player's error correction circuitry work overtime, if they play at all.

SPEAKERS

The rules for getting the best out of speakers are the same whatever the model. Standmounters require proper stands to give stable, predictable support and ensure the drive units are the same distance off the floor as your ears. Floorstanders should have spikes fitted carefully – this is a potential weak spot in cheaper models. Finding the right place to position the speakers with respect to the room walls, is just as important. Few designs like to be placed in corners, but some work better close to a rear wall than others. Every room is different, so it's important to experiment.

THE ARCAM & ACOUSTIC ENERGY SYSTEM

You might not think of Arcam and Acoustic Energy as natural bedfellows, but **Lee Dunkley** finds they combine well to satisfy bass-hungry tastes.

THE SYSTEM

Arcam Alpha 8SE CD player	£499.90
Arcam Alpha 9 amp	£499.90
Acoustic Energy AE109 spkrs	£349.95
Audioquest Quartz interconnect	£99.95/0.5m, £124.95/1m
Audioquest Type 6 speaker cable	£85.00/5m pair
Total cost	£1,534.70

This is a system that brings together two manufacturers who share a philosophy of innovative product design with an emphasis placed on component upgradability and system expansion.

A&R Cambridge Ltd, known as Arcam, was started in the early 70s by science and engineering students from Cambridge University. Initially selling to local enthusiasts, the company quickly established itself with its first amplifier, the A60. The rest, as they say, is history.

Acoustic Energy is a relatively new arrival by comparison. Founded in 1987, this fairly

upmarket speaker manufacturer has in recent years targeted the more mainstream and competitive loudspeaker markets with its 100 series. This, however, is gradually giving way to the company's newer Aegis range.

The components put together here have all featured in *HFC* at one time or another, each receiving a Recommended or Best Buy swing tag.

THE COMPONENTS

The system's source is the mid-priced Arcam Alpha 8SE CD player, first reviewed in *HFC* 176. A 1-bit player, the 8SE was the first in Arcam's range to feature HDCD and was awarded Best Buy for its excellent performance at the price.

Now sporting a reduced price tag, the Alpha 8SE is laden with features such as 24-track programming, repeat play and adjustable display brightness (the display can also be turned off). The supplied remote control duplicates the front panel features

with the addition of a keypad for track access, random play and A-B repeat mode to name but a few. With its ergonomic design and layout, the remote also gives useful control over the partnering amp's volume level.

My one grumble is with the unintuitive implementation of Arcam's 'direct' track access. The system requires the selection of the track number via the remote's keypad, or track select via the front panel, followed by pressing the play button. Not what I would typically consider to be 'direct' track access, this method would no doubt become more intuitive with familiarity.

At the back, the 8SE provides two sets of analogue outputs. The second is intended for hook-up to a multi-room system. A digital coaxial output is also provided.

System amplification comes in the form of Arcam's Alpha 9 integrated amp (see *HFC* 168). The sophisticated Alpha 9 gives 70 Watts per channel into eight Ohms and includes a preamp



out/power amp in circuit for connection to home cinema processors, for example.

A feature-laden amplifier, the Alpha 9 has four line-level inputs and two tape loops. An optional phono module is available from your Arcam dealer to add independent MM and MC inputs. It offers separate record and listen source selectors, tone and balance controls with a direct/bypass option, a headphone socket and two sets of speaker terminals

employing twin 90mm polymer-pulp mid/bass drivers and a 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter. The 109s supplied to *Choice* were finished in natural cherry vinyl and, like the rest of the range, are magnetically shielded. For real wood enthusiasts there is the similarly specified SE model costing £449.95.

All cables and interconnects for the system came from Audioquest. The supplied Type 6 speaker bi-wire cable was fitted

mid-bass and a boomy characteristic. Some experimentation ensued and the 109s seemed best sited half a metre away from the rear wall, which achieved smoother and more controlled bass. Take note, this speaker may not be suitable for all listening environments due to the physical space required for optimum positioning. However, the situation will differ from room to room.

At lower volumes this system can sound shut-in. Its laid-back, rounded presentation has an almost uncontrollable tendency to smooth away the rough edges. Its strengths, however, are revealed in an adeptness with more popular music styles, which can sound harsh and uncomfortable through some systems.

Turn up the wick and things really begin to move. Dance music fans will revel in the system's bass slam and drive, making it a lot of fun. The second driver in the AE speakers provides some kickin' lower bass, with the Alpha 9 in full control and providing a sense of power and agility.

Turning to more acoustic music, the system dishes out some over-generous portions of mid-bass, giving a rich and almost dark sound. During listening, my notes returned again and again to the system's laid-back portrayal of classical pieces. These generally seemed to lack a sense of scale and detail, with the emotional

COMPONENTS

CD PLAYER

ARCAM Alpha 8SE £499.90

This is a mid-priced CD player with 1-bit DAC and HDCD decoding.

Features include: 24-track programming, repeat play, remote control with keypad track access, random play and A-B repeat to name a few. A top-notch player with a refined musical air.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

ARCAM Alpha 9 £499.90

A 70 Watts per channel amplifier with four line-level inputs, two tape loops and a preamp out/power amp in circuit. This all-singing amp features tone and balance controls and a full system remote control.

A powerful performer handling music with agility, but a little lacking in definition.

SPEAKERS

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AE109

£349.95

A well-known three-way floorstander with twin 90mm mid/bass drivers and 25mm dome tweeter configuration.

Sensitivity is rated at 90dB and impedance at typically six Ohms. Slim and sleek styling with good bass slam that likes being driven hard.

CABLES

Arcam chose Audioquest cables and interconnects for its system.

Specifically: Audioquest Quartz interconnect at £99.95/0.5m and Audioquest Type 6 speaker cable at £85.00/5m pair.

Goldring ☎ (01284) 701101

soaring highs and gut-wrenching lows of their expression being a touch muted.

CONCLUSION

Both Arcam and Acoustic Energy have undoubtedly derived these components from a similar musical philosophy. This is ultimately a stylish looking system with an adeptness for driving dance beats with plenty of low-end slam.

Unfortunately, this system will not suit all musical tastes and has a shut-in and laid back quality, especially at lower volumes.

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

SYNERGY ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE **£1,534.70**

■ An impressive looking system offering bags of features but is ultimately too relaxed and bass-heavy.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

☎ A&R Cambridge (01223) 203203

☎ Acoustic Energy (01285) 654432

"Turn up the wick and things really begin to move. Dance music fans will revel in the system's bass slam and drive."

independently selected from the front panel. With both pairs selected these terminals can be used for bi-wiring speakers with two sets of standard cable. The system remote is ergonomically designed and user-friendly, providing convenient source selection and volume control.

For speakers, Arcam suggested a pair of Acoustic Energy AE109s (reviewed in *HFC* 164) to partner its system electronics. The AE109s are an elegantly slim, floorstanders with mass loading and a fixed plinth with spikes for floor coupling, factors which give them a substantial look and feel. This is a three-way design

with Camcon plugs for connection to the Alpha 9 and 4mm plugs for the speakers. Audioquest Quartz interconnect cable made the link between source and amplifier.

SYSTEM SOUND

With all the components wired up and ready to go, the system was left on repeat play overnight so that when I settled down the following day to listen it was fully warmed up.

In the initial setting up and placement, the speakers were positioned too close to the rear wall. This was made immediately apparent by rather excessive



THE CREEK SYSTEM

Creek has been paddling its own canoe for some time, so can the recently acquired Epos speaker brand truly complement its electronics? **Lee Dunkley** finds out.

Creek Audio is a well known but relatively small British company that has made its mark by doing its own thing. With a no-frills approach to product styling, the company can concentrate its attentions on the most important aspect: the internal electronics.

Creek has been around for a good number of years now, and has taken over loudspeaker manufacturer Epos Acoustics, adding this respected brand to its product list last April.

When we approached the guys at Creek to put forward a system, they responded with the electronics you see before you. Selected from the company's 43 series, the range includes an AM/FM tuner, preamp and a 50 Watt per channel power amp combination that allows for future system expansion and upgrading.

THE COMPONENTS

The recently introduced Creek CD43 provides the system's source. This is a 24-bit player with a digital coaxial output for connection to an external DAC. The CD43, with its plain black front panel and distinctive Creek-green labelling, isn't one of the most interesting looking players around. But it is packed with features including a remote control and 16-track program memory.

The player doesn't exactly exude the high standards of finish or build quality we have become accustomed to at this mid-price point. The rather rattly sounding drawer mechanism and wobbly function buttons lead one to suppose that the internal electronics is where the money was spent.

The remote has more of a quality feel about it, and is suitably well decked out with lots of useful features. The front panel

THE SYSTEM

Creek CD43 CD player	£599.00
Creek 4330SE amplifier	£499.00
Epos ES12 speakers	£550.00
Kimber PBJ interconnects	£68.00
QED Qudos Silver speaker cable (5m pair)	£50.00
Total cost	£1,766.00

display is a calendar-type LCD which is, of course, backlit green.

Amplification comes via Creek's 4330SE. A £499 integrated amplifier, this Special Edition model is the big brother to the 4330 (see *HFC* 192), and offers a beefier 50 Watts per channel than its sibling's 40 Watts per channel with suitably upgraded internal components.

Cosmetically, the 4330SE has the distinctive Creek look with its minimalist styling and is one of the most compact amplifiers I have seen, standing at just over 6cm high.

As for features, there is a centrally-mounted volume knob and a rotary source selector for four line-level inputs – an optional module is available for converting the aux input to MM or MC at extra cost. In addition, there is a tape loop selectable via a monitor button. A preamp output is also provided, enabling a separate power amp to be added for bi-amping purposes. The amp's remote allows volume adjustments and mute to be controlled from the comfort of your own sofa, while source selection can only be achieved manually from the front panel. Speaker cable connections are via side-entry screw terminals and are best suited to bare-wire terminations.

The voice of the system is from Creek's recently acquired Epos stable, with a pair of the well known ES12s being arguably the most influential element in the system. Originally reviewed back in December '96 when the brand was owned by Mordaunt-Short, the ES12 is a bookshelf, two-way design employing a 150mm polymer cone mid/bass driver and a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter. Housed in a fairly weighty box, measuring 37.5x20x25cm (HxWxD), our model was finished in a dark cherrywood veneer. The ES12's styling may well be considered, by some, to be a bit dated with its moulded plastic front baffle and dark wood finish. But more fashionable, lighter wood finishes are also available.

Speaker connections accept shrouded plugs, with terminals





for each of the drivers. There's no linking facility supplied between the terminals, so you'll need to bi-wire.

For this system, Creek allowed us to make our own recommendations for interconnects and speaker cables. The company doesn't currently manufacture cables, claiming its components are not cable-dependent. So we scoured the *HFC* Directory and came up with a number of possibilities. Taking the total price of the system into consideration, we

very open and transparent sound and fantastically accurate timing, no matter what type of music you put through it. There is an apparent adeptness at capturing acoustic pieces which reveal the full atmosphere of the recording venue to the listener. The Winchester Cathedral Choir lifted me to soaring heights during

“With rock and pop the system has an air of confidence, delivering the goods with drive and a sense of attack.”

selected Kimber PBJ interconnects (Best Buy, *HFC* 188), and QED Qudos Silver speaker cable (Recommended, *HFC* 192).

SYSTEM SOUND

Unquestionably, this system comprises some outstanding and well regarded components – not least the Epos ES12 bookshelf loudspeakers mounted on a pair of Target Audio R1 speaker stands (as Recommended in *HFC* 146).

On first powering up the Creek/Epos system, I had some mixed feelings concerning its slightly flat and two dimensional sound. With the system thoroughly warmed up though, its character bloomed into something much more endearing. Its main qualities are centred on the

Samuel Barber's *Agnus Dei* and somehow managed to squeeze the whole Cathedral into the *HFC* listening room.

With rock and pop the system has an air of confidence, delivering the goods with drive and sense of attack. Bass extension is not particularly low and the mid-bass also has a tendency to lack significant weight on some tracks. But pump up the volume and the system really tries to deliver, you can turn the control past the two o'clock position before it starts to run out of steam.

This is not a system for serious partying, having a slightly more refined taste with its bass shyness and a treble that has a tendency to become noticeably more abrasive and uncomfortable the

higher the volume level gets. However, this is easily remedied by reducing the volume level slightly, giving a smoother edge for a barely noticeable reduction in power.

CONCLUSION

This Creek and Epos system is adept at handling acoustic music and puts the class back into classic. The fine midband gets you closer to the music with an exceptional stereo image. It doesn't have the depth of bass that some will crave, but what there is fast and extremely good quality. Its styling and sonic abilities may not suit all tastes but this system is well worth considering.

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
SYNERGY	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,766.00

■ A balanced, open and transparent sounding system, but lacks a bit of bass grunt.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE (CREEK)

■ FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE (EPOS)

☎ Creek Audio Ltd (0181) 361 4133

COMPONENTS

CD PLAYER

CREEK CD43 £599.00

A recently introduced 24-bit CD player with all the usual features including a remote control and 16-track programming.

A classy performer at this popular mid-price point, handling a broad range of music with a supreme amount of confidence.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

CREEK 4330SE £499.00

The big brother to the 4330, the Special Edition offers more power with 50 Watts per channel. This slim, styled amplifier offers four line inputs and a remote control. A compact and versatile amplifier with power enough to keep the music moving.

SPEAKERS

EPOS ES12 £550.00

A two-way bookshelf speaker with a 150mm mid/bass driver and 25mm tweeter. Sensitivity is rated at 87dB and impedance typically six Ohms. Unquestionable midband transparency and good image. May be a little lacking in bass weight for some tastes, though.

CABLES

We chose Kimber PBJ interconnects at £68.00 per pair, and QED Qudos Silver speaker cables at £5.00/m respectively.

Russ Andrews ☎ (01539) 823247

QED ☎ (01276) 451166

THE CYRUS/MISSION SYSTEM

Cyrus recently announced its independence from Mission, but the pair go back a long way. Here they join forces in a system suited to small rooms. **Tim Bown** investigates.

THE SYSTEM

Cyrus dAD1.5 CD player	£399.00
Cyrus 7 amp	£700.00
Mission 750LE speakers	£248.00
Chord Co. Siren interconnect (1m pair)	£69.00
QED Qudos speaker cable (5m pair x2)	£50.00
Total cost	£1,466.00

The love affair between Mission and Cyrus: an epic hi-fi tale of near-Hollywood proportions. The first act begins in 1985 and stars Farad Azima, Managing Director of Mission. He's a self-made businessman, an entrepreneur who prefers to be known as an inventor. His company has grown into one of the largest loudspeaker manufacturers in the UK, and the obvious next step is to build an amp to match, so he creates a new business arm to concentrate on electronic applications. Enter Mission Cyrus.

The brand's first product is a critical success, a shoe box-sized transistor amp called Cyrus 1. It's a minimalist design with a relatively low power output, but its imaging qualities and all-round finesse are much praised.

Further generations of product come and go, and as the Cyrus portfolio grows it gradually shifts from its minimalist origins. The compact sizing remains, but the style is updated and sophisticated control systems are incorporated to form 'intelligent' CD/amp partnerships to complement Mission's speaker line-up.

Meanwhile, Azima's business has expanded into Verity, a group that temporarily includes the likes of Quad and Roksan alongside Mission and Cyrus. The Mission name is

distanced from Cyrus as it seeks to strengthen its own identity within the group, but the two brands remain fundamentally linked. Then, in 1996, something huge happens – Farad Azima announces NXT.

Verity becomes increasingly focused on the lucrative licensing of NXT technology, which allows the production of inexpensive, flat loudspeakers, and in 1998 the group changes its name to NXT. This provokes a substantial restructuring of its businesses: the traditional Mission loudspeakers continue to be developed, as do Cyrus components, but further independence is sought for the electronics brand. By the end of the year, the complete operational autonomy of Cyrus within the NXT group is announced, sparking rumours of preparation for a sell-off.

On to the present day, and these are important times for Cyrus, still currently under the NXT banner. A number of its more recent products have been indifferently received, and the brand has announced its intention to reposition itself further upmarket. The first product to emerge is the £700 Cyrus 7 amp, featured in this Cyrus/Mission system and also reviewed on p43. A CD player is to follow shortly, and also a pair of Cyrus

aesthetic point of view. Cyrus was arguably the first to make real hi-fi in micro-size boxes, and Mission's production facilities allow the creation of smart and well-engineered speakers at extremely competitive prices.

The 750LE (HFC 177) is a perfect example. This standmounting speaker is small yet immaculately dressed, its 28cm tall cabinet encased in silky-smooth veneer and endowed with a collection of shapely curves. Its clever folded

"Small-scale it may be, but the sound you get is neatly balanced and well detailed, with good pace."

branded speakers, emphasising its independence from Mission.

THE COMPONENTS

Cyrus and Mission now live separate lives within NXT, but the brands' products still work well together, not least from an

construction forms a perfectly proportioned box, with a 25mm soft dome tweeter sited below a 95mm aerogel coned mid-bass driver. The whole effect is topped off by a pretty gilt phase plug protruding from the centre of the main cone, and all for £248.





Next to this fashionable little speaker, our two components from Cyrus look the ideal match. The dAD1.5 CD player and Cyrus 7 amp come in the same cool case – 21.5cm wide alloy boxes with an ABS moulded base. Side by side they're the epitome of industrial chic, and the amp even gives a little light show as you flick its power to 'on'.

The amp is touted as the first all-new product from the recently-restructured Cyrus, but the dAD1.5 (HFC 191) was actually the first launch. It's an upgraded version of the old dAD1 CD player, with improvements to analogue and digital filtering. Elsewhere under the lid there's plenty of Philips technology, the CDM12.1 transport and TDA1311 hybrid DAC both being employed.

The dAD1.5's controls are basic, whether via the fascia or the remote control. But if you hook it up to the Cyrus 7 amp (or the Cyrus IIIi for that matter) it all gets considerably more sophisticated. There's little point going over the amp's technical details here – you can turn back to the Mega Test for that. But in this system context, it's worth outlining the 'system control' technology hidden in its innards.

Both the Cyrus 7 and dAD1.5 provide MC-Bus sockets at the back, so they can talk to each other via standard phono cables. Select 'CD' via the amp's front panel or the supplied system remote control and both components will switch on; press 'standby' and they'll both power down. As time goes on, any other Cyrus components you add to your system can be linked in the

same way, creating a flexible and entirely integrated set-up.

Upgrade paths also weigh in Cyrus' favour, with a several routes open to purchasers. Adding a PSX-R off-board DC power supply usually makes a significant improvement to Cyrus products, and both the CD player and amp can be upgraded in this way. You could also add one or even two Cyrus Power amps to the Cyrus 7, thus bi-amping or tri-amping your system.

SOUND QUALITY

In style terms, this is a system that would suit a small room – neat and compact to a 'T'. The same is true of the way it sounds, finely etched but on a rather diminutive scale. There isn't much depth to the bass, and there's a feeling that dynamics are somewhat reduced in size, but in a small room it has a control and finesse that could be just the ticket.

Let's look at its best side first. Small-scale it may be, but the sound you get is neatly balanced and well-detailed, with good pace to maintain the listener's interest. It's precise without being clinical, and it images superbly – instruments and voices are clean, focused and free from the loudspeakers' location.

In terms of its performance across the frequency spectrum, its strength lies firmly in the mid-band, and as any hi-fi designer

will tell you that's the most important area of all – the part to which your ears are most sensitive, and the part where the voices and most instruments are concentrated.

Vocals, in particular, have a purity about them that's instantly attractive, and sparse or delicate styles of music sound clear and articulate.

Ultimately, however, this system is hampered by the limited size of its loudspeakers and the slightly dry nature of the electronics. Bass and punch are limited, and the sound gets somewhat lost in larger rooms; if you want to listen to Sasha's *Ibiza* collection, for instance, this isn't the ideal system.

Densely-textured music ends up rather homogenised, and stuff that's big on drive gets a little strained. It's got a lot to offer for close-up listening in smaller rooms, but an all-rounder it isn't.

CONCLUSION

A system for small spaces, both physically and sonically. Its sound is clean, articulate and quite evenly balanced, but ultimately rather small-scale.

COMPONENTS

CD PLAYER

CYRUS dAD1.5 £399.00

A neat little CD player with a sound that's crisp and well-paced, although also a little dry and mechanical. Includes an electrical digital output and data link-up with a suitable Cyrus amplifier.

AMPLIFIER

CYRUS 7 £700.00

The same basic box as the dAD1.5, with more sophisticated innards than its uncluttered appearance suggests. Supplies remote control, seven line-level inputs, one-touch system control and other flexible facilities. Power output is 60 Watts per channel.

SPEAKERS

MISSION 750LE £248.00

A beautiful little speaker, perhaps the best looking that money can buy below £250. It sounds good too, with particular strengths in the midband, although its small size limits its bass and dynamic qualities. At 86dB/W/m it's only moderately sensitive, but impedance will cause few problems for the 60-Watt Cyrus 7.

CABLES AND STANDS

Mission recommended we use Chord Company Siren interconnects (£69) and four runs of QED Qudos speaker cable (£2.50/m) to bi-wire the loudspeakers. We also used Mission's Stance speaker stands (£100), but their cost is not incorporated.

Chord Company ☎ (01722) 331674
QED ☎ (01276) 451166

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
SYNERGY	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,455.00

Well worth considering if you're after a neat system for a small room, and your musical tastes are on the delicate side.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

☎ Cyrus Ltd (01480) 451777

THE NAIM SYSTEM

There's nothing like a complete Naim system to reveal what's so unique about the 'British Sound'. **Tim Bower** explains why.

THE SYSTEM

Naim CD3.5 CD player	£1,080.00
Naim NAC92 preamp	£485.00
Naim NAP90 power amp	£460.00
Naim Credo speakers	£1,090.00
Naim NAC A5 speaker cable (5m pair)	£57.00
Total cost	£3,172.00

Around the world, hi-fi designers talk of the fabled 'British sound'. It's a thing that's often revered, an object of aspiration, but also the cause of considerable frustration. "We don't understand," say some of those designers from foreign climes. "Our gear sounds clear, neutral and is admired in many countries. Why don't you like it in the UK?"

The thing is, there's more to high-fidelity sound than clarity and detail; components need to have the ability to involve the listener too. Much of this arguably comes down to the concept of 'timing', an elusive hi-fi quality that's tricky to define yet unmistakable if present. It's the element in a component's sound that draws the listener to the music's inner rhythm, the thing that sets your toes tapping and your head nodding. The very best hi-fi gear serves up such involvement with an equal dose of analytical precision, and it's this balance, if anything, that forms the legacy of 'British sound'.

So, enter Naim Audio, a Wiltshire-based firm of the highest sonic pedigree. Its distinctive products major on musical involvement, but not through outright punch or bass power – its designers know that pace and rhythm are far more important when it comes to engaging the listener. In hi-fi, as in comedy, timing is key.

Among audiophiles, such qualities have given Naim gear aspirational status, and the company's high-end systems (more costly than the set-up here) are acknowledged to be among the best in the world. There's a catch, though, for anyone hoping to inject a

little Naim nous into their existing hi-fi system. It's not the kind of kit that'll work with just anything, and much of it needs to be partnered with other Naim components to demonstrate its true worth.

You need to match like with like to find synergy, and Naim's rather individual way of doing things can leave its products sounding rather flat and edgy when used in an unsympathetic system. But if you match a Naim CD player with a Naim amp you can be pretty sure of potent results. And if you add a pair of Naim speakers to the equation... well, just read on.

THE COMPONENTS

This isn't Naim's entry-level system; it's a rung or two up the ladder in the amp and speaker departments, though the CD

player is the firm's base model. The CD3.5 (HFC 188) is an ideal introduction to the Naim creed, complete with bluff body work, illuminated logo and an odd-but-satisfying swing-load drawer mechanism. Typically idiosyncratic, typically Naim, and that extends to the sockets round the back – the output to the amp is a single five-pin DIN jack instead of the usual RCA pairing.

Under the lid lies a Philips VAM1205 transport mechanism, similar to the older CDM12.4 but driven by a smoother, tougher motor. The DAC is also from Philips, although it's perhaps surprising to discover it uses hybrid technology instead of the multi-bit variety traditionally favoured by the brand. Elsewhere, Naim has added some significant



technology of its own, including 'fine tuning' software and a proprietary clocking system.

It's a player that can sound rather too aggressive in tandem with some components. But with Naim amplification it shines, and in this set-up it hooks via the company's supplied interconnect to a NAC92/NAP90 pre/power combination (HFC 165). Essentially, this is a Nait 3 integrated amp split into two, with the NAC92 preamp deriving its regulated power through a feed from the NAP90/3 power amp.

The advantages of this approach – improved isolation, better earthing and so on – bring audible benefits. Five line-level inputs are provided, one of which can be converted for turntable use with an optional £84 phono module.

If you like to count Watts, you'll be somewhat disappointed here. The NAP90/3 is rated at only 30 Watts per channel, but in effect that's rather conservative. It has no problem driving reasonably sensitive speakers to high volume levels (the Credo – see below – measures at 89dB/W/m), and the nature of its sound is anything but weedy.

And so to the final link: a pair of Credo speakers (HFC 180), connected to the NAP90/3 via two runs of Naim NAC A5 speaker cable. It's not often one sees Naim speakers outside of a Naim system, perhaps because



 naim audio

 naim audio

 naim audio


COMPONENTS

CD PLAYER

NAIM CD3.5 £1,080.00

One of the most popular CD players around £1,000 and rightly so. Its delivery is energetic and detailed, able to engage the listener like few others at the price, but it should be partnered with care.

AMPLIFIER**NAIM NAC92** preamp
£485.00**NAIM NAP90** power amp
£460.00

A pre/power amp combo with five line-level inputs. It sounds as nimble and forthright as you'd expect, but don't be put off by its 30 Watts per channel power rating – weedy it isn't.

SPEAKERS**NAIM Credo** £1,090.00

Not the most aesthetically pleasing speaker around, but a fast and effective communicator. If you find this system's sound a little too 'hard', it's worth trying a similarly-sensitive but smoother-sounding speaker from another brand.

CABLES

All from Naim: the interconnects are supplied in-the-box by Naim. Speaker cable is Naim's NAC A5 (£5.70/m).

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
SYNERGY	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£3,172.00

This system is Naim through-and-through. A fine example of great British hi-fi.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

© Naim Audio Ltd (01722) 332266

of their sonic character, perhaps because of their rather odd looks. But if you want to go the whole Naim hog the Credo is a fine choice, imbued with the same kind of qualities for which the brand's electronics are renowned.

Its construction is in two parts, the smaller of which houses a cast-chassis mid/bass driver with a 140mm doped paper cone.

another to the NAC92, then perhaps add another NAP90/3 power amp to bi-amp passively, and eventually go for an active two-way crossover. The choice is entirely yours.

SOUND QUALITY

Sum up this system's sound in one word? Snap! That's the word. To those familiar with the brand

stopped looking for bass weight and was drawn by the system's sense of timing, his foot tapping along with every percussive rap and pin-sharp leading edge. "I see what you mean," he drooled, and by now he was hooked.

From CD to loudspeakers, this system is geared for pace and rhythm. Such qualities are most welcome with the likes of rock and pop, and its hard to imagine a similarly-priced system doing such justice to an enthusiastically-thwacked drum kit. Snare, tom and kick drum are delivered with realistic dynamic impact, and although bass lines can lack weight there's no shortage of tension and agility. This is truly a flab-free zone.

However, acoustic musical styles are perhaps less appreciative. The mid-forward balance is still entertaining with a symphony orchestra or an acoustic jazz piece, but the performance sometimes seems a little forced and artificial.

Treble extension is ultimately limited and there's a lack of subtle ambient detail – in this respect, the Roksan system (see p88) is more accomplished – but the overall impression remains clear and vivid.

CONCLUSION

Here's hi-fi that wants to entertain you. So does Robbie Williams, but we'd rather see *this* big Naim lined up on the bill.

"It communicates with urgency and has the talent to unravel music to its very heart and soul, often seriously gripping."

This sits directly atop a second, floorstanding enclosure which contains a 20mm soft dome tweeter and supports the crossover electronics, housed inside a back-mounted plastic case. The two enclosures are acoustically connected via a hole in each connecting surface and decoupled by three plastic pegs, with a small slit between them acting as a narrow reflex port. It's unusual, but seriously – what did you expect?

One impressive aspect of this system's architecture is the sheer breadth of upgrade paths open to the purchaser. Naim makes several off-board power supply options, the most affordable of which is the Flat Cap at £360. When funds allow, one could add a Flat Cap to the CD3.5, then

it's an unmistakably Naim experience, less subtle than some of the company's more costly set-ups yet able to pull listeners effortlessly to the edge of their seats. It communicates with urgency and has the talent to unravel music to its very heart and soul, a touch too vigorous at times but often seriously gripping.

Mind you, its qualities may not seduce you immediately. Take, for example, a friend who happened upon my listening tests. He knew of Naim's reputation but was initially unconvinced, citing a lack of bass depth and a slightly cold, hard tone. Such criticisms are indeed valid, and may be reason enough to put you off a purchase, but it wasn't long before the quizzical look on my friend's face grew into a gleeful grin. He'd

THE REGA SYSTEM

Things look a little different on Planet Rega. But **Lee Dunkley** reckons this system's sonic character more than makes up for its challenging styling.

THE SYSTEM

Rega Planet CD player	£475.00
Rega Mira amp	£475.00
Rega Jura speakers	£475.00
Rega Couple interconnects	£69.00
Rega speaker cable	£199.80/5m pair
Total cost	£1,693.80

Most readers probably associate Rega with its well established, evergreen Planar range of turntables. The company has taken some time to move into the digital arena: its first CD player was introduced just three years ago.

Maintaining a no-compromise approach to design and styling,

Rega's put together a selection of components it feels will also cut the sonic mustard at an affordable price point.

The product styling may not be to everyone's tastes and even Rega itself has admitted the die-cast aluminium boxes housing its electronics show it's the only company to make a metal casing that looks like plastic.

Among Rega's many quirky features is the design of the Planet CD player's feet which have a high compliancy and are intended to absorb external vibrations, thus reducing the workload on the error correction in the player.

THE COMPONENTS

The system's source is the Planet CD player, which was well received in JK's column at launch but has subsequently fought shy of group testing. The company resisted joining the fray for some 13 years, and when this CD player finally emerged, it was named after Rega's first turntable.

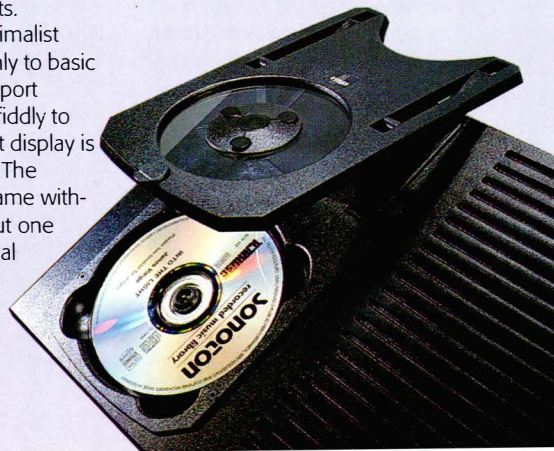
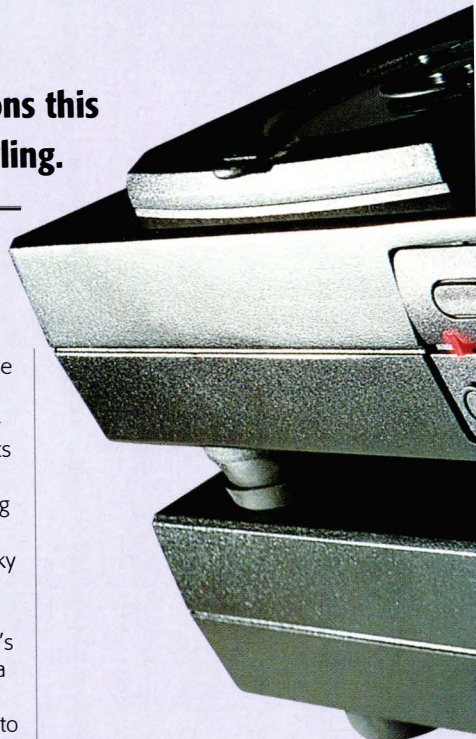
The Planet has a top-loading transport mechanism, the lid clamping the CD into position. Rega claims this is less susceptible to breakdown over conventional drawer mechanisms and also provides access to the laser diode assembly in the event of servicing requirements.

The Planet is a minimalist design which bows only to basic functionality. The transport buttons are small and fiddly to use and the fluorescent display is reflective and poorly lit. The model supplied to us came without a remote control, but one is available as an optional extra. At the rear of the player there is a digital coaxial output plus analogue outputs.

System amplification is from Rega's Mira integrated amplifier. A 60 Watt per channel into eight Ohms integrated with four line-level inputs, tape loop and preamp out/power amp in connections. As you'd expect, vinyl lovers are well catered for with a phono input that accepts both MM and MC cartridges.

The Mira is as spartan as the Planet, with source selection and volume level controls only, plus the obligatory power button. While setting up the system, I noted some rather misleading labelling – which left me using the source selector when trying to change the volume – and a five-second delay between deselecting the mute function and the music flowing. Both were disconcerting at first, but as I became more accustomed to the components these lent an endearing quality to the system's character.

Like the Planet CD player, the Mira amp arrived without a





COMPONENTS

**CD PLAYER
REGA PLANET**

CD player £475.00

Rega's relatively recent introduction to the CD arena is with this top loading minimalist player bearing the same name as its first trail-blazing turntable.

A toe-tapping, rhythmic player with quirky Rega styling.

AMPLIFIER**REGA Mira** £475.00

The Mira offers 60 Watts per channel and has four line-level inputs and, unusually, a dedicated phono input that accommodates MM as well as MC cartridges.

It clearly cuts the mustard with good control and balance.

SPEAKERS**REGA Jura** £475.00

A two-way floorstander with a 130mm mid/bass driver and a 28mm tweeter. Sensitivity is 90dB/five Ohms.

A squat looking speaker that is extremely self assured with good rhythmic bass and a detailed top end.

CABLES

Rega manufactures its own system cables and interconnects. For this system it supplied Rega Couple interconnects at £69.00 and Rega speaker cable at £199.80/5m pair.

remote control. However, it was fitted with an RC5 sensor, enabling volume control via another manufacturer's remote. However, a dedicated remote control is available as an option.

The speakers for our system were Rega's Jura model, reviewed in *HFC* 193. A two-way floorstander, the Jura features a generous 130mm mid/bass paper cone driver and a 28mm fabric dome tweeter. The fairly large

It may take some time to come to terms with the system's character, but once you do its strengths are clear. Its midband neutrality is immediately apparent, with vocals portrayed in an open and transparent way through an incredibly wide yet focused soundstage. This is complimented by a well balanced and detailed top and bottom end. Bass is agile, tight

However, my notes during the listening session suggested some shortage of muscle in the lower bass when the set-up was put through its paces. Midband transparency undoubtedly makes up for any shortfall here though, bringing you closer to the music and revealing intricacies that can so easily be masked by other combinations of components.

But by far the system's greatest strength is its deft touch in reproducing rock, pop and dance material. It's sure to get you fired up with anything that has a big beat thanks to its transparent and detailed sound staging and sense of attack. The latter, however, can give way to what seemed to be an occasional glitch in timing. This may, though, be down to room acoustic and may not be apparent in other environments.

CONCLUSION

This is a system that pleases. With its quirky styling the characterful Rega just gets better the more you listen. It's a supremely engaging system that's adept with every kind of music and will have you listening and enjoying for hours on end. If it were my money I know where I'd be spending it.

"At last we seem to have found a system that sounds as good at lower volumes as it does when being put through its paces."

main driver is designed to handle more contemporary music and has more punch than Rega's ELA MkII model. The cabinet dimensions tend to give them a rather 'squat' appearance, but they are beautifully finished in a light oak veneer and come supplied with floor spikes.

System cables were Rega's own Couple interconnects and two-core speaker cable.

SYSTEM SOUND

This Rega combo works well, demonstrating good sonic abilities which result in musical, head-nodding, foot-tapping enjoyment.

and confident, and packs a real punch with a tremendous sense of timing. Treble is detailed but can, on occasion, sound a little brittle and abrasive on brighter recordings, and when the wick is turned up.

At last we seem to have found a system that sounds as good at lower volumes as it does when being put through it paces. This is a comforting quality for late-night listening or simply those times when you just want background music (*gasp! perish the thought*).

Classical music fares well, the system capturing the full sense and scale of the test pieces.

VERDICT**SOUND** ★★★★★**SYNERGY** ★★★★★**VALUE** ★★★★★**PRICE** **£1,693.80**

■ A sonic delight that goes from strength to strength, well balanced across the range with plenty of drive.

■ LIFETIME GUARANTEE

☎ Rega Research Ltd (01702) 333071



THE ROKSAN SYSTEM

Tim Bown has a listen to a Caspian-based system and reckons that the aluminium-clad lovelies offer a rather special experience.

THE SYSTEM

Roksan Caspian CD player	£895.00
Roksan Caspian amp	£795.00
Roksan ROKone speakers	£400.00
Roksan HDC-02A interconnects (1m pair)	£60.00
Roksan HDC-015 speaker cable (5m pair)	£60.00
TOTAL COST	£2,210.00

Is this the age of the global super-corporation? It depends where you're sitting. If you're parked on the sofa with your feet up, a glass of Chianti in your hand and a favourite CD playing on your Roksan hi-fi, the chances are the answer's no.

Here is a company with a refreshingly humble attitude. It started the way all hi-fi companies should – a couple of friends, Touraj Moghaddam and John Loughlin, enjoying their passion for good music and hi-fi in the

relaxed atmosphere of student digs. One evening their conversation shifts to the intricacies of turntable design. Could they really build and market one themselves? The result was the now legendary Xerxes turntable, and in 1985 Roksan was born.

Throughout the ensuing years, the company's portfolio grew to include speakers, amplifiers and CD players, alongside a highly respected collection for vinyl lovers. Later, the Caspian range of components (as used here) was created to bring the brand's electronics to a lower price point, and now Roksan is launching an even more affordable and style-conscious range by the name of Kandy (see News, p6).

If you add Caspian's new multi-channel components to the list, that's seven new products this year alone. Global domination in the 21st Century? Surely not...

THE COMPONENTS

The Caspian range extends to four components – a CD player, a tuner and two amplifiers, one integrated and one power amp. Of these the CD player and integrated amp are most commonly Recommended in *HFC*, being appropriately priced and well matched both sonically and visually. Just as well that both components are featured here.

So let's start with the CD player (*HFC* 169), a product which demonstrates the degree of thought invested in the Caspian concept. The engineering quota is high both inside and out: a solid aluminium front plate is bolted to a galvanised steel main casing, the construction weighing in at a reassuring 10kg. Much of this is down to the use of independent analogue and digital power supplies under the lid, each fed by substantial toroidal transformers.

Roksan has long used a Sanyo transport mechanism in its CD players, but likes to incorporate its own methods of mechanical decoupling. There's no change here on both counts. However, the DAC was not employed by the firm before Caspian came into being. It's a Philips TDA1305 hybrid unit, an attempt to blend the best elements of bitstream and multi-bit technology, also used in Naim's CD3.5.

On an aesthetic level it's an exceptionally pleasing player, right down to the green display and its flip-down panel – press 'open' and it lowers drawbridge style. Such style cues are shared with the Caspian integrated amp, which links to the CD player via Roksan's own HDC-02A interconnects. The same smart casework and green illuminations abound, with power rated at 70 Watts per channel and six line-level inputs provided.

We've already rated the amp a Best Buy (*HFC* 168), but since then a number of internal upgrades have been implemented. The quality of the printed circuit board has been improved, the AC coupling capacitors and various power supply components have been upgraded, the transformer is now better shielded and a larger heat sink means it runs cooler.



More of Roksan's own cable hooks the amp to a pair of ROKone speakers (HFC 160), a bi-wireable design, although here we're single wiring with a run of HDC-01S cable. It's rare to find a stand-mounting speaker of such heft

while, and their circuits are warm and willing, this system delivers some seductive aural pleasure. There's a great deal to

"Once the Caspian's circuits are warm and willing, this system delivers some seductive aural pleasure."

these days – with dimensions of 21x44x34cm (HxWxD), our black-clad review pair make an imposing statement perched on top of Partington's A-4 stands.

But while it may not be the perfect visual partner for the more elegant Caspian electronics, its quality of engineering is firmly in the same league.

Its layout is nothing if not distinctive. A large-ish mid/bass driver sits at the bottom of the cabinet, sporting a 115mm plastic cone diaphragm pushed a little ahead of the baffle by a substantial ring spacer. This is intended to aid time-alignment between the drivers and improve off-axis dispersion. Just above the main unit is a 25mm soft dome tweeter, mounted almost in the centre of the baffle, while a substantial front-mounted port sits at the top. Build quality is good, and sensitivity registers at a very practical 89dB/W/m.

SYSTEM SOUND

Once the Caspian's green-glowing LEDs have been on for a

commend the way it presents music: soundstaging is superb, full of depth, solidity and confidence, and its imaging qualities make it easy to pin-point instrumental location when a precise recording is used. Bandwidth is excellent, with good bass weight and well extended treble, and a slightly mid-forward balance adds a tangible presence to the sonic mix, from which vocals glean particular benefit.

It adds up to a sound that's amply proportioned from a 'macro' point of view, yet also finely detailed from the 'micro' perspective. On test, it fared particularly well with music of an acoustic nature, both classical and otherwise. Mahler's *Symphony No. 2 – The Resurrection* (City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus/Rattle/EMI) ascended to a heavenly plain, assisted by this system's dynamic expression and subtlety of touch. You could almost taste the atmosphere as the piece swung from quiet choral acquiescence to full orchestral grandeur, from the pound of timpani to the final decay of bows caressing strings.

So too with Stina Nordenstam's *Dynamite*, the Roksan delivering a bristling ambience few systems have the talent to extract. And the quality of her vocal? Breathy and

pure, just as it should be. Mind you, to an extent it's a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. There are still things to criticise: upper bass is a touch lumpy, mostly owing to the speakers, and though high frequency resolution is excellent it's also quite hard-edged and glassy.

More often than not these criticisms are insignificant alongside this system's musical strengths, particularly when listening at moderate volume levels. But with discs of a rock or dance variety, and notably those that are aggressively produced, its performance can veer towards the uncomfortable. Certainly, it can't match the pace and rhythm delivered by the Naim system in this group, but it is significantly less expensive.

CONCLUSION

This isn't the system to buy if you want to play at party volumes, but with the right music – particularly acoustic styles – it weaves a magical musical spell.

Material value-for-money is also good, but make sure you take a range of test discs if you go for an audition.

COMPONENTS

CD PLAYER

ROKSAN Caspian £895.00

A player that's as sonically pleasing as it is visually striking. It's capable of a bold yet finely-etched sound, further helped by recent internal improvements to the DAC circuit board.

AMPLIFIER

ROKSAN Caspian £795.00

The 70 Watts per channel Caspian integrated is among the best at the price, refined and energetic in equal measure. You get six line-level inputs, build quality is excellent and it's a perfect partner for the Caspian CD player.

SPEAKERS

ROKSAN ROKone £400.00

These speakers have fallen in price by £200 since we group tested them three years ago, and they now represent fine value for money. They're engaging performers, with a particularly expressive midband, though they display a few foibles at the frequency extremes.

CABLES AND STANDS

We used Roksan's own cables: the HDC-02A interconnect (£60/m pair) and HDC-01S speaker cable (£6/m). For the purposes of review, we also used Partington's A-4 speaker stand (£119 – not included in the system's total price).



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

SYNERGY ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £2,210.00

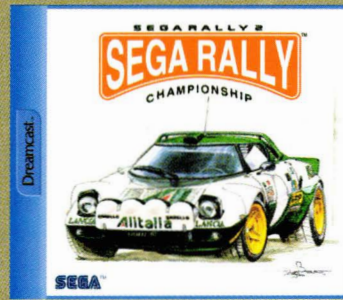
The amp is great, the CD player is good and the speakers are nothing if not entertaining. A confident single-make system, and excellent value for money.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

☎ Roksan (0181) 900 6801



Sonic Adventure
From Sega



Sega Rally 2
From Sega



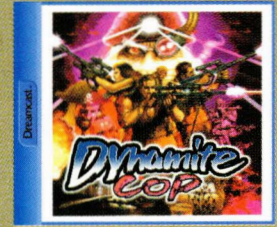
Millennium Soldier
From Infogrames



Monaco GP Racing
From Ubi Soft



Trick Style
From Acclaim



Dynamite Cop
From Sega



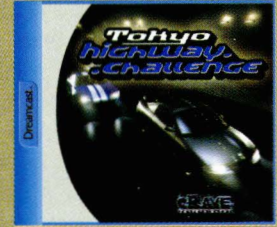
Powerstone
From Eidos



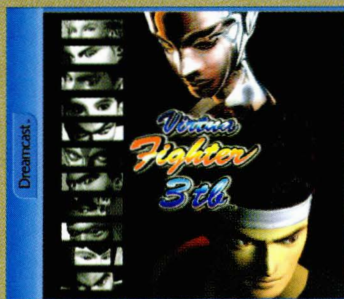
Blue Stinger
From Activision



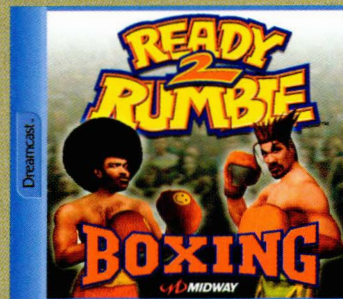
Incoming
From Rage



Tokyo Highway
Challenge From Crave



Virtua Fighter 3tb
From Sega



Ready 2 Rumble Boxing
From Midway



Dreamcast.
Up to 6 billion players
www.dreamcast-europe.com
Dreamarena

Get a Dreamcast. Get some games. Get a jar of coffee – large. Play the strongest games line-up ever seen for a console launch. Racing games, adventure, sports and shoot 'em ups. Expect an early night somewhere around 2010. And there's a new game every week up to Christmas. 'Tis the season of late nights.

The titles listed above are the copyright of the following companies: Acclaim®, Activision®, Crave Entertainment, Eidos Interactive, Infogrames Entertainment, Midway® Home Entertainment Inc., Rage Software plc, Ubi Soft Entertainment. Correct at time of going to press.



player 1



player 2



player 3



player 4

It's going to be a *long night.*

INSPECTOR GADGET

Welcome to the gadget grotto, where **Jimmy Hughes** has been tweaking and testing to find you the best in audiophile Christmas prezzies.

You can buy the best hi-fi components on the planet, but mind-blowing sound quality may prove elusive unless you've got the right cables and support stands. Sonic success hinges on expert installation and careful attention to detail. And that's just the beginning...

The options can prove confusing. There are so many alternatives – cables, platforms, stands, support feet – and all so different! Matters aren't helped by the contradictory nature of many competing products, either. So who's got it right? That question misses the point – what's 'right' can vary considerably, depending on the situation.

There are no absolutes here. What works brilliantly in one set of circumstances can disappoint in another. Differences in room acoustics, equipment, and (the biggest variable of all) personal taste can greatly influence opinions about what's hot and what's rot. In choosing cables or support platforms, you're looking

for products that complement your equipment and enhance its positive qualities. Get it right, and the result will be greater than the sum of the parts.

Tweaking is fun, but remember, only make one change at a time. Make five changes at once and you won't know which one did what. Even if the overall sound improves, one or more of the changes could have been detrimental. Delusion goes with the territory. What seems like a big improvement at the time could turn out to be anything but. So note your reaction when you listen next day. If you switch on and immediately think the music sounds great, it's likely that you've made real progress.

Always try to distinguish between changes that make the music sound more expressive and

involving, and those that merely improve the sound in hi-fi terms. This can be difficult, even for experienced listeners. If your system really communicates the feel and emotion of music, you've reached Audio Nirvana

and should 'tweak' with great care. Naturally, no matter how good your system sounds, it could always sound better. But if it's working well, exercise caution; don't sacrifice what you've got by chasing vague notions of 'better' sound.

Audiophile Furniture Base 01 Platform £85.00

This is a stylish but effective equipment support which can be used alone, or as part of Audiophile's special stand. The platform is made from Medite, decoupled using compliant beams that cantilever at both ends and sit on four rubber support feet. Strips of sorbothane connect the beams to the platform.

Installation is simple; just put the component on the Base 01. That's it – there's nothing to level. Because the suspension isn't especially compliant, the Base 01 is pretty stable. But isolation is highly effective: just try one under a turntable with limited suspension and you'll see.

In comparison with the tightness and immediacy typical of rigid platforms with spiked feet, the Base 01 gives components placed on it a comparatively smooth, relaxed sound that's focused without being over-controlled. The music gains in spaciousness and increased depth, without loss of detail or bite. So, if that's what you want, look no further... at £85, it's good value too.



Audiophile Furniture ☎ (01342) 826262

G-Force speaker clamps £129.00-£149.00

A totally different approach to the speaker/stand rigidity problem is to buy a pair of G-Force speaker weights. These are available in three sizes (or custom-made) and are intended to sit on top of your loudspeakers to increase mass. The version supplied for this test was the smallest in the range; perhaps too tiny for my Impulse H-1s. Nevertheless, I heard a worthy improvement in sharpness and focus. Imaging

improved too, making stereo placement of instruments and voices more precise.

Much listening apparently went into the making of this product, mild steel backed with a fairly dense natural rubber being selected as the optimum combination of materials to produce the best sound quality. Although my speakers are big, the G-Force weights made an audible difference, so they are likely to be even more effective on smaller models. The company shows its confidence with a 90-day money-back guarantee – so you can't really lose.



G-Force UK ☎ (01526) 344732



When needles must: the Clearaudio gauge.

Clearaudio cartridge alignment gauge £85.00

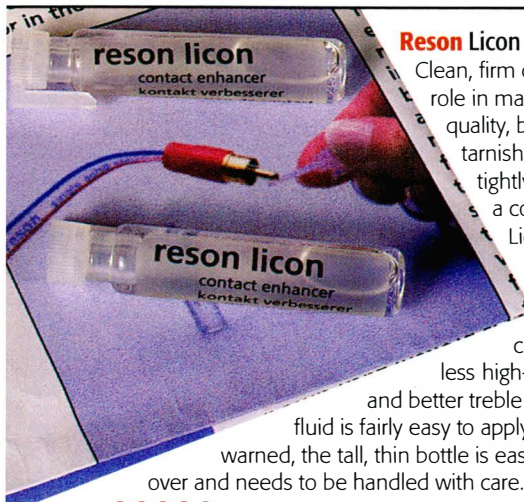
Accurate cartridge alignment is important for clean LP reproduction, but there's more to it than just squaring up the pickup on a protractor. For minimal tracing error it's vital that the arm base is correctly positioned relative to its length and the offset of the headshell. Clearaudio's gauge tells you whether your cartridge is in the right place in the headshell, and whether the arm base is correctly positioned. It's ingenious; simple to use, yet effective and accurate.



Audio Reference ☎ (01483) 575344



May the Force be with your speakers.



Reson Licon £30.00

Clean, firm connections play a vital role in maintaining pristine sound quality, but even the best plugs tarnish and don't always fit as tightly as one would like. Using a contact enhancer like Reson Licon helps to improve the electrical interface between plugs and sockets.

The result is sharper, crisper sound, with less high-frequency edge and better treble detail. The fluid is fairly easy to apply, but be warned, the tall, thin bottle is easily knocked over and needs to be handled with care.



Virtual Reality ☎ (01277) 227355

Russ Andrews Oak Cone Feet £14.95/£19.95

These feet offer a good middle ground between the tonal 'softness' typically produced by most equipment's own rubber support feet, and the (sometimes excessive) immediacy and brightness of metal or ceramic cone feet.

If metal cones make your system sound too forward and hard tonally, Oak Cone Feet are for you. And being wood, they're less likely to scratch or mark polished surfaces. Supplied in sets of three, Oak Cone Feet are available in small and large sizes to suit different equipment.



Russ Andrews Accessories ☎ (01539) 823247



Nordost ECO3 cable cleaner £19.95

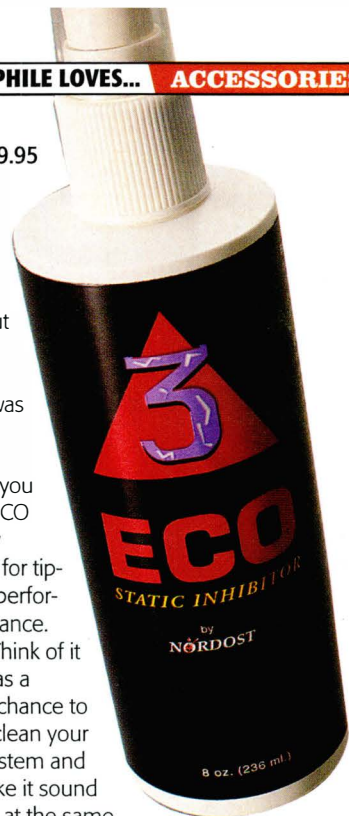
This fluid is intended to be sprayed on cables, the idea being to reduce static charges. Whereas Relees is a polish of sorts, Eco has a rather soapy smell and a slightly sticky feel. But it seems to work: after treating cables, speaker leads and interconnects with it the sound was more open and natural, with improved clarity and dynamics.

The only snag is, you need to use ECO every few weeks for tip-top performance.

Think of it as a chance to clean your system and make it sound great at the same time! Remember to unplug mains cables when treating.



Nordost ☎ (01352) 730251



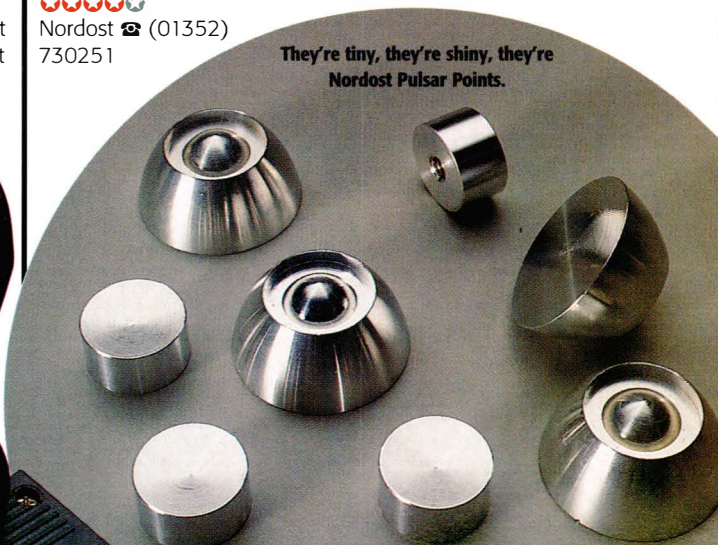
Nordost Pulsar Points £49.95/£299.95

If increased immediacy and sharper detail is required, mounting components like CD players and amplifiers on metal support cones can help. Nordost's Pulsar Points consist of an upward-facing hemispherical cone. On top of this sits a compact cylinder that has a complementary conical recess. A threaded hole of either 6mm or 8mm diameter allows the cylinder to be screwed to the component it's supporting.

Apart from improved rigidity, this arrangement avoids the problem of sharp spike points scratching the surface which supports them. Pulsar Points are available in aluminium or titanium. They're easy to install and come in sets of four. Using them under an EAR 859 integrated valve amplifier made the music sound crisper and leaner, with sharper focus and increased tightness and control.



Nordost ☎ (01352) 730251



They're tiny, they're shiny, they're Nordost Pulsar Points.

Kimber Power Kord £99.00

Clean power is vital, as mains quality can greatly affect sound. But often the mains is polluted, and this can affect the sound of your hi-fi. There are various ways of cleaning it up, and one of the simplest and most effective is to use Kimber Power Kord from Russ Andrews. The special weave helps cancel radio-frequency noise, ensuring cleaner mains. Improvements include sharper stereo imagery, reduced high-frequency edge, and wider dynamics. Dare I say it? A product of universal appeal.

Kimber Power Kord has a certain 'rightness' that's difficult to argue with; a clean, smooth, natural presentation. You can't over-egg the pudding; in my experience, the more Kimber mains cable you have, the better things sound. Power Kord is available fitted with or without an IEC plug in two versions: standard (4TCM) for components like CD players and preamps, and heavy duty (8TCM) for power amps. Russ also offers various Kimber mains distribution boards.



Russ Andrews Accessories ☎ (01539) 823247



The Power Kord: Tony Iommi not pictured, for some strange reason.

Townshend Seismic Sink for speakers £500 per pair

Putting decoupled support platforms under components like CD players and turntables is well established, thanks to companies like Townshend Audio (which pioneered the concept with its Seismic Sink). The aim is to filter out structure-borne disturbances that can affect sound quality.

Using such platforms under loudspeakers cuts right across the industry belief in rigid floor-coupling to minimise spurious movement. But absolute rigidity is impossible, especially on wooden floors.

You can sidestep the problem by using a version of the Seismic Sink to decouple the whole speaker/stand assembly from about 2Hz upwards – movement will take place at sub-sonic frequencies rather than where the effects are more audible.

Music sounds freer and easier with the speakers on Seismic Sinks, yet clearer and more focused too, with better integration and sharper stereo imaging. Two sizes of platform are available: the 2-2D at 38cm x 48cm, to support up to 80kg, and 3-2D at 49cm x 54cm, to support up to 120kg.

I also tried putting Sinks under my two REL Q-Bass sub-woofers, with spectacular results. There were gains in

clarity and detail, plus a more positive, dynamic response at low frequencies.

It was as though I'd upgraded my baby subs to one of the bigger REL models. The enhanced low-frequency cleanness was so great that I felt able to increase the output of the subs slightly (a good sign).

De-coupling speakers from the floor reduces structure-borne vibration – especially useful with resonance-prone suspended wooden floors. Expect cleaner sound with Sinks under your speakers, since the floor won't be 'singing along' with the music. They should also reduce the bass energy transmitted to other parts of the house. Great product!



Townshend Audio ☎ (0181) 979 2155



Russ Andrews ReVeel £9.95

Although CDs are tolerant of scratches and dirt, you'll still get better sound if you keep your silver discs in pristine condition. If discs do get soiled, cleaning them with ReVeel will leave the surface in 'squeaky-clean' condition. You'll hear the difference too; clearer treble, increased fine detail, firmer bass. And even new discs respond to being cleaned.



Russ Andrews Relees £19.95

Static charges on the spinning CD can lead to poorer sound quality – at least that's the claim. Giving the label side a polish with Relees helps relax such charges and audibly improves sound quality. After treating a CD the music sounded fresher and more transparent, with better separation and fine detail. You can also use Relees to clean other parts of your system.



Russ Andrews ☎ (01539) 823247



○ Reveal and Relees: spelt wrong, works right.

SonicLink S-Gold and Pure Mains £70.00/£40.00

Graham Nalty's SonicLink mains cables take a different approach to those bearing the Kimber name, with the main consideration being the quality of conductor used – silver-plated stranded copper – and special silicone rubber insulation. There are two versions; S-Gold at £70 (£125 with rhodium plated plugs – not tested) and Pure Mains at £40. The maker envisages S-Gold being used by serious audiophiles, with Pure Mains finding its way into home cinema installations.

When compared with some home-made 'twin and earth' cable, I felt both SonicLink cables enhanced sharpness and depth while making the music seem slightly more dynamic. Used on a digital component (Meridian's 518 processor box), Pure Mains sounded slightly less refined than S-Gold – it wasn't quite as relaxed. But both sounded better than my twin and earth (itself better than the cable typically supplied with products) making SonicLink a safe investment.



SonicLink ☎ (01332) 361390



VPI HW 16.5 record cleaner £425.00

Sooner or later most serious vinyl enthusiasts decide to bite the bullet and purchase a record cleaning machine. With the second-hand market being the only way to acquire many titles, it can be galling to buy a longed-for LP only to find the sound ruined by surface noise. If you paid a high price, your misery is compounded.

A record cleaning machine gives you the opportunity to save LPs that would otherwise be unlistenable. At the same time, cleaning lengthens stylus and cartridge life, as well as reducing record wear.

But which record cleaner to choose? Having tried quite a few, I'd say they all do a pretty good job as long as they're operated sensibly. So choice boils down to price and ease of use. The VPI HW 16.5 isn't the cheapest machine

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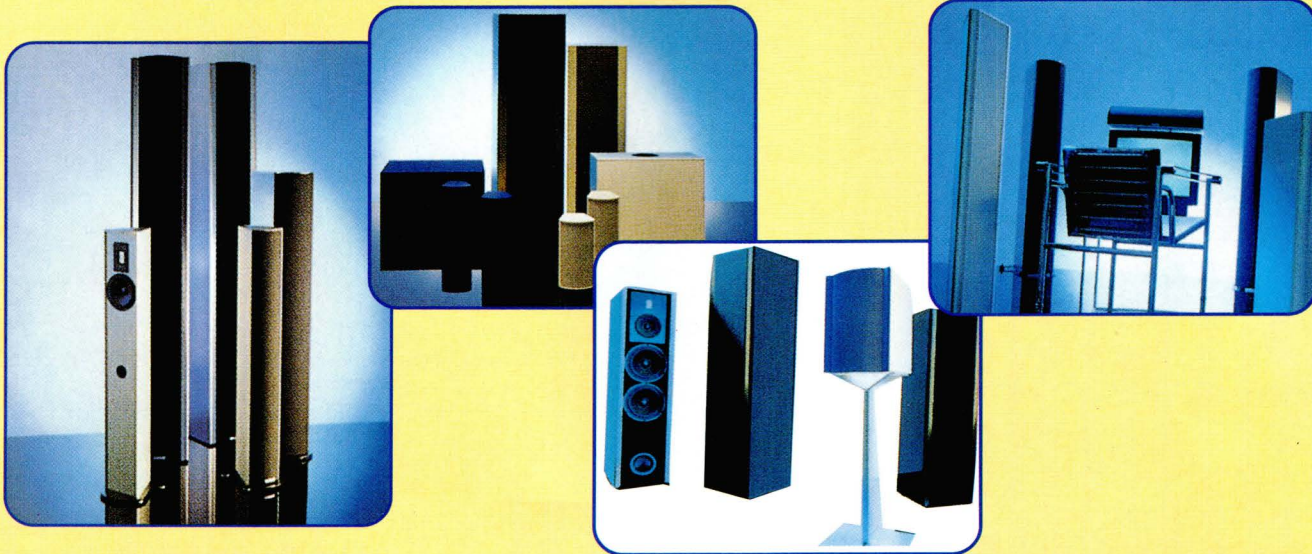
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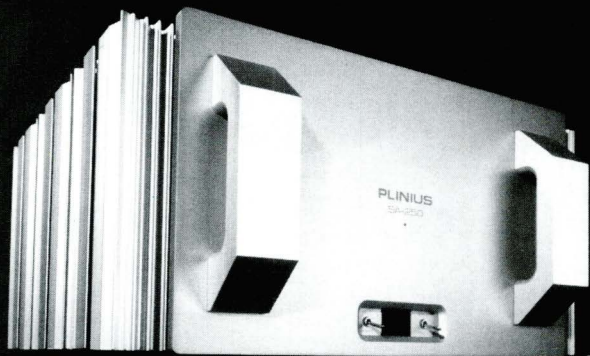
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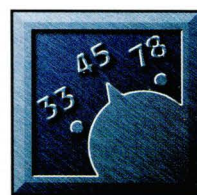
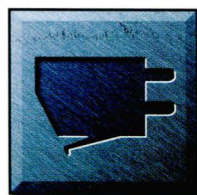
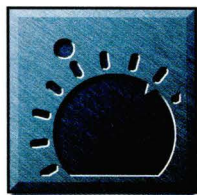
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BUYING TIPS

Buying secondhand 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 engineered down to a price. Do some research on which brands and products have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a secondhand hi-fi dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty. So it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. Products such as speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amplifiers, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be troublesome – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!



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Audio Innovations S.800 Anniversary power amp.	£850	£1500
Audio Innovations S.800 Mk.1 power amp	£450	£-----
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Voyd turntable Split phase psu x2 (Ash & Mahogany).	each £850	each £1575

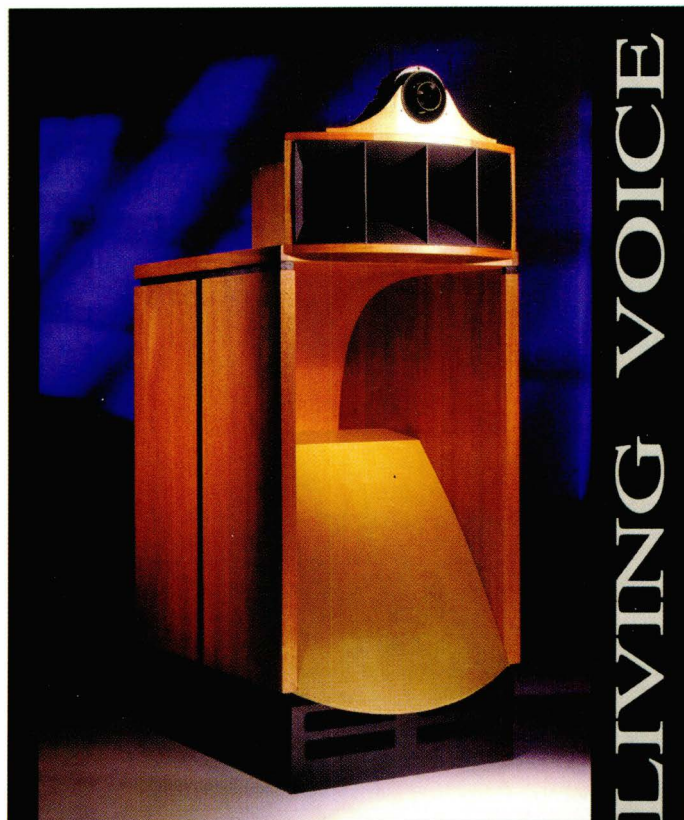
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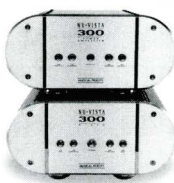
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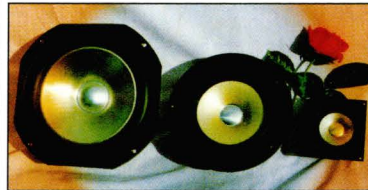
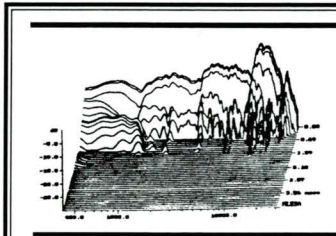
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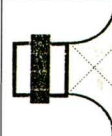
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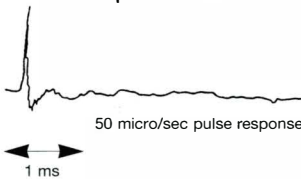
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★★★★★ Awards '99

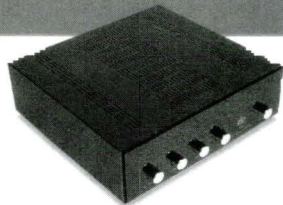
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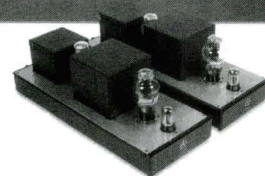
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HOW TO USE THE BUYERS' GUIDE

Best Buys, Recommendations & Editor's Choices

- B BEST BUYS:** Awarded to group-tested products which display an unbeatable blend of performance and value for money.
- R RECOMMENDED:** Top performers in group tests: perhaps not the cheapest but possibly more sophisticated than Best Buys.
- E EDITOR'S CHOICE:** More expensive components which exhibit outstanding engineering, industrial design and sound quality.

Our Three Step Guide to Buying Hi-Fi

The *Hi-Fi Choice Price Guide and Directory* are extremely simple to use, but contain all the information you need to select and buy the perfect hi-fi system. Here's how it works.

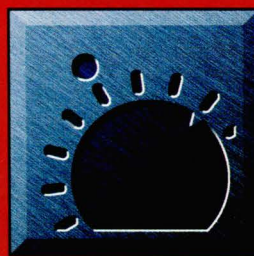
STEP 1 DISCOVER which products fall within your budget by using our Price Guide, which starts on this page. The product listing is updated using manufacturers' data every other month, and aims to include every hi-fi component currently available in the UK. (But please fax us on 0171-917 5512 with any omissions!) It is an alphabetical listing divided into different types of hi-fi component, and also into price bands.

STEP 2 PRODUCTS whose names are printed in **RED** are those we have reviewed, which you can read about in the Directory (starts after the Price Guide). Here you will learn which items have been singled out for our famous Best Buy, Recommended or Editor's Choice awards, denoting products of exceptional quality and value. The Directory is sorted by product type and listed alphabetically, and the beginning of each section provides essential information about each kind of hi-fi component.

STEP 3 FIND your nearest hi-fi store in our Dealer Directory (at the end of the Directory) to book a demonstration of the hi-fi equipment you want to hear. Remember to take your own LPs or CDs!

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AMPLIFIERS INTEGRATED

KEY

Ⓜ – Number of line-level inputs.
 20W – Rated RMS output power per channel into nominal load of 8 Ohms.

UP TO £250

Akai AM1100	Ⓜ	50W	230
Arcam Alpha One	Ⓜ	35W	230
Ariston AX910	Ⓜ	30W	80
Cambridge A1 Mk III	Ⓜ	30W	100
Cambridge A1 Mk3 SE	Ⓜ	30W	120
Cambridge A3i	Ⓜ	60W	200
Cambridge A500RC	Ⓜ	75W	200
Denon PMA-250SE	Ⓜ	30W	140
Denon PMA-350SE	Ⓜ	50W	180
Denon PMA-535R	Ⓜ	50W	230
Denon PMA-100M	Ⓜ	80W	240
Goodmans Delta 900A	Ⓜ	100W	130
H/K HK630	Ⓜ	40W	200
H/K HK3270	Ⓜ	65W	250
JVC AX-A372BK	Ⓜ	40W	200
JVC AX-R5BK	Ⓜ	45W	200
Kenwood KA-1080	Ⓜ	60W	140
Kenwood KA-3080R	Ⓜ	70W	170
Kenwood KAF-3010R	Ⓜ	70W	180
Marantz PM-48	Ⓜ	50W	150
Marantz PM-57	Ⓜ	50W	200
Marantz SR-47	Ⓜ	40W	200
Marantz PM-66SE	Ⓜ	50W	230
Musical Fidelity E1	Ⓜ	30W	199
NAD 310	Ⓜ	20W	100
NAD C320	Ⓜ	40W	200
NAD 312	Ⓜ	25W	200
Pioneer A-105	Ⓜ	30W	130
Pioneer A-204R	Ⓜ	25W	160
Pioneer A-300R	Ⓜ	50W	200
Pioneer A-305R	Ⓜ	50W	200
Pioneer A-407R	Ⓜ	45W	250
Pioneer A-405R	Ⓜ	45W	250
Rega Brio	Ⓜ	30W	229
Rotel RA921	Ⓜ	20W	100
Rotel RA931	Ⓜ	35W	150
Rotel RA971	Ⓜ	70W	200
Sansui AUX-410R	Ⓜ	50W	150
Sansui AUX-510R	Ⓜ	70W	230
Sherwood AX 4050R	Ⓜ	50W	150
Sherwood AX-7030R	Ⓜ	95W	230
Sony TA-FE210	Ⓜ	40W	130
Sony TA-FE320R	Ⓜ	60W	150
Sony TA-FB730R	Ⓜ	60W	200
Sony TA-F248E	Ⓜ	50W	200
Teac AE-2000	Ⓜ	50W	180
Teac A-R600	Ⓜ	90W	200
Technics SU-V300	Ⓜ	25W	150
Technics SU-V500	Ⓜ	30W	180
Technics SU-A600 Mk3	Ⓜ	37W	200
Technics SU-V620	Ⓜ	70W	230
Technics SU-A700 Mk3	Ⓜ	45W	250
Yamaha AX-392	Ⓜ	60W	170
Yamaha AX-9	Ⓜ	50W	200
Yamaha AX-492	Ⓜ	85W	220

£251 TO £500

Arcam Alpha 7R	Ⓜ	40W	280
Arcam Alpha 8R	Ⓜ	50W	380
Arcam Alpha 9	Ⓜ	70W	500
Audio Analogue Puccini	Ⓜ	40W	475
Audiogram MB1	Ⓜ	40W	493
Creek 4330	Ⓜ	40W	279
Creek 4330R	Ⓜ	40W	355
Creek 5250	Ⓜ	50W	450
Cymbol CA1	Ⓜ	40W	499
Cyrus SL	Ⓜ	50W	398
Denon PMA-735R	Ⓜ	65W	300
Denon PMA-1500R	Ⓜ	70W	500
Edmund Audio ES110	Ⓜ	85W	400
EMF Audio Sequel	Ⓜ	50W	450
H/K HK650	Ⓜ	60W	330
Kenwood KA-5090R	Ⓜ	65W	300
Magnum IA120	Ⓜ	65W	265
Magnum IA170	Ⓜ	96W	330
Magnum IA170SE	Ⓜ	90W	430
Marantz PM-68	Ⓜ	90W	300
Marantz PM-66 Kl Sig.	Ⓜ	50W	400

Monrio Asty	Ⓜ	55W	400
Musical Fidelity E11	Ⓜ	60W	300
Musical Fidelity X-A1	Ⓜ	50W	480
Musical Fidelity A2	Ⓜ	25W	500
Myryad T-40	Ⓜ	50W	400
NAD 314	Ⓜ	35W	260
NAD C340	Ⓜ	50W	270
NAD 317	Ⓜ	80W	470
Onkyo A9210	Ⓜ	40W	260
Onkyo A921	Ⓜ	50W	350
Onkyo A922	Ⓜ	70W	400
Pioneer A-607R	Ⓜ	60W	300
Pioneer A-400X	Ⓜ	50W	300
Pioneer A-605R	Ⓜ	80W	400
Pioneer A-300R Precision	Ⓜ	35W	400
Rega Luna	Ⓜ	40W	375
Rega Mira	Ⓜ	60W	450
Shearpe 2.5	Ⓜ	35W	499
Sony TA-FB920R	Ⓜ	65W	300
Sony TA-FA30ES	Ⓜ	80W	400
Sony TA-F3000ES	Ⓜ	40W	500
Talk Electronics Storm 1	Ⓜ	50W	500
Teac AH-500	Ⓜ	50W	280
Technics SU-A800D Mk2	Ⓜ	55W	300
Technics SU-A900D Mk2	Ⓜ	70W	400
Thule Audio Spirit IA60	Ⓜ	60W	449
Token K50	Ⓜ	55W	350
Yamaha AX-592	Ⓜ	100W	280

£501 TO £700

Alchemist Kraken APD6A	Ⓜ	55W	600
Alchemist Nemesis	Ⓜ	80W	700
Audio Analogue Puccini SE	Ⓜ	40W	635
Audio Note Karji Line SE	Ⓜ	9W	699
Audio Note First integrated	Ⓜ	40W	699
Audiogram MB2	Ⓜ	60W	599
CR Dev CR324se	Ⓜ	150W	569
CR Dev Kalypso	Ⓜ	15W	599
CR Dev CR325	Ⓜ	175W	699
Creek S250SE	Ⓜ	60W	665
Cyrus IIII	Ⓜ	50W	598
Densen Beat B-100 MkII	Ⓜ	60W	650
Gamma Gemini	Ⓜ	12W	699
H/K HK690	Ⓜ	100W	530
Hi Q Sound MCI	Ⓜ	30W	565
JoLida 202	Ⓜ	40W	695
LFD Integrated 0	Ⓜ	50W	549
Linn Majik (Line)	Ⓜ	33W	650
Lynwood Opal	Ⓜ	80W	685
Magnum IA200	Ⓜ	100W	599
Magnum Class A	Ⓜ	85W	690
Musical Fidelity A220	Ⓜ	50W	700
Myryad MI 120	Ⓜ	60W	700
Naim Nait 3	Ⓜ	30W	590
Primare A20 Mk II	Ⓜ	70W	600
Quad 77 Integrated	Ⓜ	85W	700
Rose Scion	Ⓜ	65W	615
Shearpe Phase 2	Ⓜ	50W	689
Sugden Audition T	Ⓜ	65W	549
Talk Electronics Storm 2	Ⓜ	50W	650
Teac AB-X7R	Ⓜ	50W	700
Thule Audio Spirit IA100	Ⓜ	100W	600
Thule Audio Spirit IA60B	Ⓜ	60W	699

£701 TO £1,000

Alchemist Nexus	Ⓜ		799
Alchemist Forseti Integrated	Ⓜ	100W	1,000
Arcam Alpha 10	Ⓜ	100W	800
Aria S2	Ⓜ	12W	1,000
Audio Note Oto Line PP	Ⓜ	12W	950
AVI S2000MI	Ⓜ	100W	999
Copland CSA8	Ⓜ	60W	899
Credo IMP702	Ⓜ	70W	850
Credo IMP703	Ⓜ	70W	1,000
Electrocompaniet ECI-2	Ⓜ	50W	995
Exposure XX Super	Ⓜ	60W	800
Exposure XV Super	Ⓜ	60W	900
Exposure RCOXV	Ⓜ	60W	1,000
LFD 0 LE Integrated	Ⓜ	60W	799
Linn Majik (Phono)	Ⓜ	33W	800
Magnum Class A SE	Ⓜ	80W	795
Marantz PM-17	Ⓜ	60W	900
Meridian 551	Ⓜ	55W	795
Musical Fidelity A3	Ⓜ	85W	849
Musical Fidelity X-A100R	Ⓜ	75W	999
Naim Nait 3 R	Ⓜ	30W	780
Opera Aida	Ⓜ	60W	795
Pioneer A-07	Ⓜ	80W	999
Plinius 2100i	Ⓜ		995
Rega Elicit	Ⓜ	70W	730
Roksan Caspian	Ⓜ	70W	795
Shearpe Phase 2 Reference	Ⓜ	50W	799
Sonneteer Alabaster	Ⓜ	50W	900
Sugden A21a Int	Ⓜ	25W	799
Sugden Audition C	Ⓜ	60W	799
TAG McLaren 60i	Ⓜ	60W	800
TAG McLaren 60iRV	Ⓜ	60W	999
Thule Audio Spirit IA150B	Ⓜ	150W	999

£1,001 TO £2,000

Aria Simply Four P	Ⓜ	24W	1,595
Aria Simply Four T	Ⓜ	11W	1,650
Art Audio Integra	Ⓜ	30W	1,499
ATC SIA2-150	Ⓜ	150W	1,984

Audio Note Soro Line PP		20W	1,200
Audio Note Oto Line SE	4	12W	1,200
Audio Note Oto Phono SE	3	12W	1,500
Audio Note Soro Line SE		18W	1,699
BB Audio BB 30-50	6	30W	1,495
Beam-Echo SA-50	6	50W	1,950
Bow Technologies Wazoo	6	50W	1,795
Bryston B-60	6	60W	1,249
Copland CSA14	6	60W	1,199
Copland CSA28	6	60W	1,249
Copland CTA402	6	35W	1,698
CR Dev Romulus V3	6	35W	1,198
CR Dev Athena	6	38W	1,499
CR Dev Remus V3	6	60W	1,989
Credo LIM 702			1,191
Credo LIM 703			1,249
Densen DM-10	6	75W	1,375
EAR 859	6	13W	1,999
EAR 834	6	40W	1,999
Golden Tube Audio SI-50 MkII	6	50W	1,100
Graaf Venticinque	6	20W	1,790
Jadis Orchestra	6		1,345
LFD Integrated 1	6	65W	1,099
Marantz PM-17KI Sig	6	60W	1,300
Meracur Intrare	6	60W	1,095
NAD S300	6	100W	1,900
Papworth MIH-200	6	200W	1,200
Papworth MVH-200	6	200W	1,200
Papworth 8150	6		1,895
Praecisa Sonoro	6	100W	1,800
Primare A30.1	6	100W	1,500
Restek Fantasy 2	6	100W	1,499
Sonic Frontiers Anthem Integrated	6	25W	1,299
T+A R1200R	6	90W	1,750
Thule Audio Space IA250B	6	250W	1,799
Woodside ISA230 Line	6	30W	1,099
Woodside ISA230 Disc	6	30W	1,249

OVER £2,000			
Adyton Opera	4	50W	2,595
AMP Flux System 2	6	50W	3,000
Aria Simply 845	6	24W	3,195
Audio Note Meishu Line	9W	2,750	
Audio Note Ongaku	6	26W	5,600
Audio Research CA50	6		3,399
Belcanto SET140	40W	4,450	
Belcanto Orfeo 30SI	35W	5,450	
Cary CAD-300SE1	4	11W	3,995
Conrad-Johnson CAV-50	6	50W	2,495
EAR V20	6	24W	2,495
Electrocompaniet ECI-1	6	100W	2,195
Gamma Rhythm	6	18W	2,499
Gamma Rhythm Ref	4	20W	3,499
Gamma Moment	6	40W	19,999
Jadis DA30	6	30W	2,690
Jadis DA60	6	60W	4,483
Krell KAV300i	6	150W	2,495
Krell KAV300r	6		3,333
Krell KAV500i	6	250W	5,000
McIntosh MA6400E	6	100W	3,999
McIntosh MA6800E	6	150W	5,999
Meracur Onesta	4	75W	2,595
Musical Fidelity A1001	6	200W	2,500
Pioneer A-09	6	45W	4,000
Rowland Concentra	6	100W	5,500
Sonus Faber Musica	6		2,295
T+A R1500R	6	135W	2,015
Tube Tech Unisig Sig. Int.	6	30W	2,300
Tube Tech Synergy PPS	6	150W	6,900

AMPLIFIERS PREAMPS

KEY
 (etc) - Number of line-level inputs.
Ph - Phono input fitted as standard
 (may be an option on some other models).

UP TO £500

Arcam Alpha 9C	6		400
Aria Simply Phono		Ph	500
Art Audio Minuet			499
Audio Analogue Bellini	6	Ph	495
Audio Note M Zero	6		299
Beam-Echo PP-21		Ph	499
Bryston BP1	1	Ph	438
CR Dev Themis		Ph	349
Creek OBH-9			160
Creek P43/R	6		350
Creek P52	6		499
Crimson CS610C	6	Ph	450
Cyrus aEQ7	6	Ph	498
Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	6		350
DPA Enl'ment phono		Ph	275
EAR 834P		Ph	349
EAR 834L	6		449
EAR 834P/MC	6	Ph	499
Electrocompaniet ECI-1		Ph	495
Henley HMC50			150
Henley HMC100			350
Hi Q Sound LCP2			149
LFD Mistral Linestage	6		449
LFD LSO Linestage	6		499
Lumley PP70	6		345

Lumley PP1	6		345
Magnum MP120	6		350
Magnum MP660	6		500
Magnum MP330	6		500
Monrio ADN-N	6	Ph	295
Monrio Asty L	6		500
Moth 30 Passive	6		149
Moth 30 Phono	6	Ph	249
Moth 30 Line stage	6		349
Musical Fidelity X10-D	6		120
Musical Fidelity X-LP	6	Ph	130
Musical Fidelity X-PRE	6		200
Musical Fidelity E20	6		400
NAD PP-1	6	Ph	40
NAD 114	6	Ph	270
NAD 116	6	Ph	430
Naim Prefix	6		360
Naim NAC92	6		485
NVA P50	6		350
Parasound P/HP-100	6	Ph	130
Parasound P/HP-850	6	Ph	400
Plinius Jarrah	6	Ph	450
QED Discaver DS-1	6	Ph	35
Rega EOS	6	Ph	398
Rega Cursa	6	Ph	450
Roksan Artaxenes 10	6	Ph	395
Rose RV-23	6	Ph	450
Rotel RQ970BX	6	Ph	130
Rotel RC971	6		150
Rotel RC972	6		225
Sunfire Phono	6	Ph	430
Talk Electronics Hurricane 1	6		500
Technics SU-C1000 Mk2	6	Ph	300
Thule Audio Spirit PR100	6		400
Trilogy 905	6		375
Trilogy 904	6	Ph	375
Trilogy 900	6	Ph	499

£501 TO £2,000			
Adyton Chorus	6		1,995
Alchemist Kraken Pre	6		549
Alchemist Forseti Pre	6		999
Alchemist Signature Pre	6		1,499
Aria Feather One	6		795
Aria Mystery One	6		1,750
Aria Mystery Two	6		1,750
Art Audio Headline	6		700
Art Audio VPL	6		741
Art Audio Conductor Phono	6		750
Art Audio VP1	6		952
Art Audio Conductor	6		1,250
Art Audio Conductor Export	6		2,000
Audio Note M1 Line	6		550
Audio Note M1 RIAA	6	Ph	550
Audio Note M2 Line	6		999
Audio Note Discovery	6		999
Audio Note M2RIAA	6	Ph	1,099
Audio Prism Mantissa	6		1,995
Audio Research LS8	6	Ph	1,449
Audio Research PH3	6		1,490
Audio Research LS9	6	Ph	1,949
Audio Synthesis Pro Passion	6		595
Audio Synthesis Passion	6		695
Audio Synthesis Passion 8S	6		1,295
Audio Synthesis Passion 8M	6		1,695
AVI S2000MP	6		949
AVI S2000MP+P	6	Ph	1,199
Beam-Echo SP-21	6	Ph	1,116
Bryston 4	6	Ph	642
Bryston BP5	6	Ph	889
Bryston BP20	6		1,126
Bryston BP-25	6		1,326
Canary Audio CA-606	6		1,295
Canary Audio CA-601	6		1,595
Cary SLP-50	6		995
Cary SLP-74	6		1,795
Cary PH-301	6	Ph	1,795
Chord Phono	6	Ph	1,898
Chord CPA 1800	6		1,905
Concordant Exhilarant	6		900
Concordant Exquisite	6		1,950
Conrad-Johnson PV-10AL	6		995
Conrad-Johnson PV-10A	6	Ph	1,295
Conrad-Johnson PV-12AL	6		1,990
Conrad-Johnson EF-1	6	Ph	1,990
Conrad-Johnson PF-2	6	Ph	1,990
Copland CSA303	6	Ph	1,099
Copland CTA301 MkII	6	Ph	1,249
CR Dev Carmenta	6		659
CR Dev Argento	6	Ph	699
Credo CMP004	6		1,246
Credo CMP005	6		1,876
Cyrus aCA7	6		798
Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	6	Ph	826
Densen Beat B-200	6	Ph	1,000
Densen DM-20	6	Ph	1,200
DNM 3 Start	6	Ph	1,000
DNM 3A Start	6	Ph	1,650
DPA Enlightenment pre	6		795
Dynavector L200	6		995
Dynavector P100	6	Ph	1,495
Dynavector L100	6		1,995
Earmax Pre	6		1,895
ECA Vista S	6		760
ECA Vista HD	6		880
ECA Prisma	6	Ph	880
Electrocompaniet EC-4.5	6		1,195

Electrocompaniet EC-4.6	6		1,750
Exposure XIII	6		800
Exposure XIX	6	Ph	800
Exposure XVII	6		850
Exposure RC X01	6		1,000
Gate PR101P	6		1,195
Golden Tube Audio SEP-2	6		990
Golden Tube Audio SEP-3	6		1,995
Graaf WFB Two	6	Ph	1,350
Graaf WFB One	6	Ph	1,750
Henley HMC200	6	Ph	600
Hi Q Sound MCB2	6	Ph	545
Hi Q Sound MCL2	6		645
Jadis DPL2	6		1,590
Krell KAV250P	6		1,999
LFD MC1 PhonoStage	6	Ph	949
LFD L51 Linestage	6	Ph	999
LFD MC2 PhonoStage	6	Ph	1,499
LFD L52 Linestage	6	Ph	1,599
LFD L5B Linestage	6	Ph	1,999
Linn Wakonda	6		750
Linn Linto	6		850
Linn Kairn	6		1,400
Lumley LV1.5	6		895
Lumley LV1	6		1,150
Lumley PV1.5	6	Ph	1,700
Lumley PV1	6	Ph	1,700
Matisse Atom	6		1,000
McIntosh C712	6	Ph	1,999
Meracur Ingredi	6		925
Meridian 501	6		695
Meridian 562	6		765
Meridian 562V	6		995
Meridian 502	6		1,295
Michell Iso/Lithos	6		599
Michell Orca	6		1,650
Muse Model 3	6		1,990
Musical Fidelity F25	6	Ph	1,500
Mynyad MP100	6		600
NAD 118	6		1,000
Naim NAC92R	6		650
Naim NAC72	6		745
Naim NAC102	6		1,080
Quad 77 Pre	6	Ph	850
Quad 99 Pre	6	Ph	1,300
Rega Hal	6	Ph	998
Roksan Artaxenes X/DS1.5	6	Ph	1,150
Roksan ROK-L2.5	6		1,250
Rose RV-235	6	Ph	525
Rotel RC995	6	Ph	525
Shearman Phase 6 Pre	6		999
Shearman Phase 1 Pre Ref	6		1,499
Siemel MC20	6	Ph	650
Siemel MM20	6	Ph	650
Siemel TU10	6		1,599
Siemel TR20	6		1,599
Sonic Frontiers Anthem Pre 1P	6	Ph	899
Sonic Frontiers Phono 1	6	Ph	1,999
Sonographe SC26	6		995
Sugden Audition Pre	6		549
Sugden Masterclass Pre	6		1,995
Sumo Athena II Line	6		767
Sumo Athena II/LI LS	6		987
Sumo Athena III	6		987
Sumo Artemis uP	6		1,595
Sunfire The Classic	6		1,630
T+A P1200R	6		965
TAG McLaren PA10	6	Ph	849
TAG McLaren PPA20	6	Ph	1,499
TAG McLaren PA20R	6		1,499
Talk Electronics Hurricane 2	6		650
Talk Electronics Hurricane 3	6		900
Talk Electronics Hurricane 4	6		1,500
Talk Electronics Hurricane 5	6		1,900
Technics SU-C2000	6	Ph	700
Thorens TTP-2000F	6	Ph	699
Thule Audio Spirit PR150B	6		699
Trilogy 901	6		750
Trilogy 906	6	Ph	995
Trilogy 902	6		1,595
Tube Tech Seer Line	6		935
Tube Tech Mac Phono	6	Ph	1,150
Tube Tech Prophet	6		1,970
van den Hul Pre-amp	6		1,800
Wilson Benesch Stage One	6	Ph	995
Woodside SC27 Line	6		949
Woodside SC26 Line	6		1,557
XTC PRE-1	6		1,350
Yamaha CX-2	6	Ph	650

OVER £2,000			
Adyton Temper	6		2,495
Adyton Modus	6		2,695
ATC SCA2	6		2,599
Audio Note M3Line	6		2,650
Audio Prism Avanti	6		7,995
Audio Research LS15	6		3,399
Audio Research LS25	6		4,999
Audio Research REF 1	6		8,495
Balanced VK-50	6		3,995
Boulder L3AE	6		2,100
Boulder L5AE	6		3,400
Boulder L5M	6		3,800
Boulder 2010	6		22,000
Canary Audio CA-801	6		3,750
Cary SLP-98L	6		2,595
Chord CPA 2200	6		2,530

Chord CPA 3200	6		3,785
Chord CPA 4000	6		6,675
Conrad-Johnson PF-R	6		2,490
Conrad-Johnson PV-12A	6	Ph	2,590
Conrad-Johnson Premier 14	6	Ph	3,995
Conrad-Johnson Premier 15	6		4,495
Conrad-Johnson Premier 12LS	6		7,995
Conrad-Johnson Premier 16LS	6		14,995
Conrad-Johnson Art	6		5,750
CAT SL1 Ultimate	6	Ph	2,995
CR Dev Kastor	6		2,815
Credos LPR 001	6		2,995
DNM 3C Primus	6	Ph	2,550
DNM 3C Twin	6	Ph	3,800
DNM 3C Six	6	Ph	5,050
EAR 802MC	6	Ph	2,599
EAR G88	6	Ph	9,999
EAR P52	6	Ph	15,999
Gamma Era Ref	6	Ph	7,999
Graaf GM13.5B	6		3,750
Jadis DPL	6		2,900
Jadis DPMC	6	Ph	2,900
Jadis JPL	6		4,200
Jadis JPP200	6		4,290
Jadis JP50MC			

Monster Interlink 200	23.00
Monster Interlink 300 MkII	40.00
Monster Interlink 400 MkII	50.00
Moth Leyline Black	100.00
Moth Leyline Grey	200.00
Nordost Magic	35.00
Nordost Black Knight	60.00
Nordost Solar Wind	84.95
Nordost Blue Angel	98.00
Nordost Blue Heaven I/C	150.00
Nordost Red Dawn	300.00
Nordost SPM	825.00
Nordost Quattrofil	1,250.00
Ortofon 7N interconnect	250.00
Precious Metals SS50	50.00
Precious Metals SS35	50.00
Precious Metals SS52	70.00
Precious Metals SS53	90.00
Precious Metals SS100	100.00
Precious Metals SS102	130.00
Precious Metals SS103	160.00
Precious Metals SS104	190.00
Precious Metals SS200	220.00
Precious Metals SS202	290.00
Precious Metals SS203	360.00
Precious Metals SS204	430.00
Prowire Silver	60.00
PAD Elementa	145.00
QED Qnect 2	30.00
QED Qnect 4S	70.00
Roksan ROK-Intercon	75.00
Shinpy Red Devil	80.00
Shinpy Red Star 2	120.00
Shinpy Black Star 2	240.00
Shinpy Pulsar 2	495.00
Shinpy Quasar 2	850.00
Siltech MC2-12	308.00
Siltech MC4-24S	400.00
Siltech FTM-3S	730.00
Silver Sounds SS2	99.00
Silver Sounds SS1	199.00
Silver Tone Ex-Static	35.00
Silver Tone Sci-Fi	95.00
SME S2LB-4	46.18
SME S3LB-4	52.06
SME 4900A	76.83
SME 5900A	102.57
SonicLink Red	25.00
SonicLink Silver pink	35.00
SonicLink Black	50.00
SonicLink Lilac	65.00
SonicLink Brown	70.00
SonicLink Violet	85.00
SonicLink Maroon	125.00
SonicLink Blue Nickel	150.00
SonicLink Vermilion	195.00
SonicLink Red earth	300.00
SonicLink Black earth	450.00
SonicLink Blue earth	695.00
SonicLink Black Rhodium	995.00
Straight Wire Chorus	40.00
Straight Wire Sonata	80.00
Supra DAC-X	60.00
Supra EFF-ISL	80.00
Supra EFF-XLR	90.00
Tara Prism 3	17.95
Tara Prism 5	21.95
Tara Prism 8	25.95
Tara Prism 11	37.50
Tara Prism 22	63.50
Tara Prism CD	76.25
Tara Prism 33-i	88.25
Tara Prism 55	115.00
Tara RSC-CD	158.00
Tara RSC-Prime	170.00
Tara RSC-Ref Gen. 2	229.00
Tara RSC-Master Gen. 2	464.00
Tara RSC-Decade	935.00
Tara The 2	1,170.00

Tara The One	2,230.00
Transparent Cable Musicord	48.00
Transparent Cable The Link	92.00
Transparent Cable Music Link	119.00
Trichord Pulsewire 75	169.00
Vampire Wire CC	24.00
Vampire Wire CCC/II	58.00
Vampire Wire SC/II	98.00
Vampire Wire SC/IV	144.00
Vampire Wire AI/2	259.00
Vampire Wire SL	412.00
van den Hul Storm II	29.99
van den Hul PB5 HB	50.00
van den Hul Source HB	65.00
van den Hul D102 III	80.00
van den Hul Thunderline HB	145.00
van den Hul First Classic	240.00
van den Hul Second	275.00
van den Hul First Ultimate	320.00
van den Hul MC Gold	550.00
van den Hul MC Silver IT	1,400.00
van den Hul MC Silver IT Bal	1,750.00
Wireworld Orbit	30.00
Wireworld Solstice II	40.00
XLO Type 150	50.00
XLO Type 0.1	180.00



CABLES Digital Interconnects

KEY
 ☉ – Stranded construction.
 ● – Solid-core construction.
 Prices of interconnects are for a one-metre terminated pair.

Apertura Model B	139.00
Apertura Model A	255.00
Art Yam Church 5000	275.00
Audioquest Digital/Video 1	30.00
Audioquest Digital/Video 2	60.00
Audioquest Optlink X	90.00
Audioquest Digital PRO	100.00
Audioquest Optlink Pro	150.00
Audioquest Optlink Z	180.00
Cable Talk Digital 2	78.00
Cardas Audio Lightning	190.00
ChordCo Codac	38.00
ChordCo Optichord	40.00
ChordCo Prodac	50.00
DNM-Reson DIG100	26.00
DPA Opti-link	20.00
DPA Digi-link	27.50
Ecosse Ref MD2	71.50
Harmonix HS-101DIG	240.00
Insert Audio Dataline 500	24.95
Insert Audio Optic 2.1	29.95
Insert Audio Dataline 700	39.95
Insert Audio Image 5.1	44.95
Ixos 105	25.00
Ixos 106	30.00
Kimber Opti-link	50.00

Kimber Illuminati DV-30	70.00
Kimber Illuminati D-60	325.00
Kimber Illuminati DX-50	350.00
Kimber Illuminati Orchid	750.00
LAT International DF-20-D	79.00
Monster Datalink 100	4700
Monster Lightspeed 100	4700
Moth Leyline Datalink	140.00
Nordost Moonglo	155.00
Nordost Silver Shadow	335.00
Precious Metals SD35	20.00
Precious Metals SD100	50.00
Precious Metals SD200	110.00
Precious Metals SD202	145.00
QED DigiFlex	20.00
QED Optiflex	25.00
QED Qnect OT	30.00
Roksan ROK-Intercon	45.00
Shinpy Digital	265.00
Siltech HF-6	145.00
SonicLink Green	60.00
Supra ZAC	44.95
Supra EFF-ID	45.00
Supra DAC-XLR	45.00
Theta Digital AT&T	550.00
Transparent Cable PDL	199.00
Trichord Pulsewire 75D	75.00
Vampire Wire DI/1	150.00
van den Hul Source HB	35.00
van den Hul Videolink	70.00
van den Hul AES-EBU 110	75.00
van den Hul First	140.00
van den Hul Second	150.00
van den Hul First Ultimate	180.00



Speaker Cables

KEY
 ☉ – Stranded construction.
 ● – Solid-core construction.
 Price per mono metre, unterminated.

Acoustic Energy AESC-C3	11.95
ALR/Jordan QMM	5.00
Apertura Silver	82.50
Argento Copper	35.00
Argento Copper Ref	65.00
Argento Silver	125.00
Argento Silver Ref	380.00
Art Yam Church M2000	470.00
Art Yam Church 5000	795.00
Audio Note AN-D	4.50
Audio Note AN-B	16.50
Audio Note AN-L	29.50
Audio Note AN-S	150.00
Audio Note AN-SPx	450.00
Audioquest Type 2	3.50
Audioquest F-18	3.60
Audioquest Type 6+	9.00
Audioquest Indigo +	15.00
Audioquest Crystal +	25.00
Audioquest Forest +	75.00
Audioquest Argent +	125.00

Audioquest Clear 3	200.00
Cable Talk Theatre 2	1.50
Cable Talk The Flat One	2.00
Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25
Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25
Cable Talk Talk 3.1 Biwire	4.50
Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8.00
Cable Talk Talk 4.1 Biwire	8.50
Cable Talk Symphony 3	12.50
Cable Talk Concert 2.1 Biwire	14.00
Cardas Audio 300B-Microtwin SC	35.00
Cardas Audio Quadlink-Five SC	59.00
Cardas Audio Cross SC	99.00
Cardas Audio Hexlink-Five SC	109.00
Cardas Audio Hexlink Golden5 SC	175.00
Cardas Audio Golden Cross SC	789.00
ChordCo Carnival	3.00
ChordCo Myth	6.00
ChordCo Legend	15.00
ChordCo Odyssey	170.00
DNM-Reson LSC	6.95
DNM-Reson LSCB	13.95
Ecosse Ref FS2.16	1.75
Ecosse Ref CS2.2	2.50
Ecosse Ref CS2.3	3.75
Ecosse Ref CS2.15	5.75
Ecosse Ref MS2.2	15.00
Ecosse Ref MS2.3	20.00
Ecosse Ref MS2.15	30.00
Ecosse Ref US2	450.00
Gale XL105	1.00
Gale XL189	1.00
Gale XL315	2.00
Gale XL160-2	2.50
Gale XL315-2	3.99
Gamma Wonder Line	99.00
Goertz M1	16.00
Goertz M2	32.00
Goertz Big Boy	64.00
GT Audio Speaker	50.00
Harmonix Harmonic-Strings	30.00
Harmonix HS-101T-1	56.00
Harmonix HS-101SC	88.00
Ixos 607	2.00
Ixos 6004	3.00
Ixos 6003	3.00
Ixos 605	3.00
Ixos Gamma 6006	5.00
Kimber 4PR	5.00
Kimber 4VS	9.00
Kimber 4TC	19.60
Kimber 8TC	32.70
Kimber 4AC	394.00
Kimber 8AG	656.00
LAT International SS 800	16.00
LAT International BIWIRE	23.00
LAT International SS 1000	36.00
Lieder Pad	133.00
Lieder Bel Canto	188.00
Lieder Spoor	253.00
Lieder Straat	463.00
Lieder Weg	663.00
Linn K20	4.00
Linn K400	10.00
Linn K600	15.00
Lumley Silver 12/2	35.00
Lumley Silver 14/4	40.00
Mission Duet	1.90
Mission Quartet bi-wire	3.90
Monster XP Clear	2.20
Monster XP Navajo	2.40
Monster Superflat Mini	2.75
Monster XP HP	3.70
Monster Original	4.40
Monster New Monster	5.50
Naim NAC AS	5.70
Nordost Octava	3.00
Nordost 4-Flat	9.95
Nordost Solar Wind Bi-wire	27.95

GAMUT* AUDIO, THE NEW NAME IN HI-FI

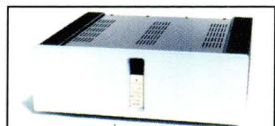
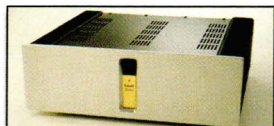
HI-FI CHOICE CONCLUDED:



HI-FI CHOICE
EDITOR'S CHOICE



HI-FI CHOICE
EDITOR'S CHOICE



"This amplifier combines Naim-style timing with Levinson-style power and resolution. It may not look much for the money, but it sounds like a bargain."

"There is only two question left to be answered, the silver or black front with handles or with out."

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Nordost Blue Heaven Spkr	58.95
Nordost Red Dawn	110.00
Nordost SPM	325.00
Ortofon SPK100	3.00
Ortofon SPK200	5.00
Ortofon SPK300	8.00
Precious Metals SL32	7.50
Precious Metals SL102	10.00
Precious Metals SL34	15.00
Precious Metals SL104	20.00
Precious Metals SL108	30.00
Precious Metals SL108	40.00
Puresonic OFC 7892	1.20
Puresonic OFC 7844	1.65
Puresonic OFC 7845	1.95
Puresonic OFC 7891	2.85
Puresonic OFC 7816	3.75
Puresonic OFC 7832	3.75
Puresonic OFC 7812	3.75
Puresonic OFC 7825	6.95
Puresonic PSOCC 7801	9.50
Puresonic PSOCC 7802	18.00
Puresonic PSOCC 7803	27.00
QED Qudos Micro	1.25
QED Qudos micro 4 core	2.00
QED Qudos 4 core	4.00
QED Qudos Bi-Wire	4.50
QED Qudos Silver	5.00
QED Profile 4x4	9.00
QED Profile Silver 12	15.00
Rega REGA	2.00
Roksan ROK-Speaker	6.00
Shinpy Red Devil	30.00
Shinpy Red Star 2	39.00
Shinpy Black Star 2	62.00
Shinpy Pulsar 2	104.00
Shinpy Quasar 2	208.00
Siltech LS2-45	109.00
Siltech FT-12 Mk1	240.00
Siltech LS4-120	549.00
Silver Sounds 12 Gauge	15.00
Silver Sounds 10 Gauge	35.00
Silver Sounds 8 Gauge	75.00
Silver Tone Silver-Sonic	10.00
Silver Tone Silver-Sonic HC	15.00
Silver Tone Silver-Voice	55.00
Silver Tone Silver-Voice Ultra	85.00
SonicLink AST50	1.95
SonicLink AST60	2.50
SonicLink AST75	2.95
SonicLink AST200	5.95
SonicLink AST200x2	10.00
SonicLink S300	18.00
SonicLink S130x2	20.00
SonicLink S300x2	40.00
SonicLink S900	60.00
SonicLink S600x2	80.00
SonicLink Black Rhodium 4	1,000.00
Straight Wire Rhythm	6.00
Straight Wire Quartet	8.00
Supra Classic 2.5	2.49
Supra Linc 2.5 Flex	3.49
Supra Classic 4.0	3.95
Supra Ply 2.0	4.95
Supra Linc 4.0 Flex	4.95
Supra Ply 3.4	6.95
Supra Quattro 4x4	8.95
Supra Classic 10	9.95
Tara Prism Extra	1.95
Tara Klara	2.95
Tara Prism Omni	3.95
Tara Prism 2+2	8.20
Tech + Link SPC 79	1.20
Transparent Cable Musicchord	11.00
Transparent Cable The Wave	23.00
Transparent Cable Music Wave	25.00
Vampire Wire SC-384	11.00
Vampire Wire SC-554	15.00
Vampire Wire ST-I	30.00
Vampire Wire SC-1108	30.00
Vampire Wire ST-II	48.00
Vampire Wire ST-III	73.00
van den Hul Skyline HB	3.99
van den Hul Snowline	5.49
van den Hul Skytrack HB	5.99
van den Hul Clearwater	7.99
van den Hul Snowtrack	10.99
van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99
van den Hul CS122 HB	13.49
van den Hul Cleartrack	14.99
van den Hul D352 HB	21.00

van den Hul Teatrack HB	23.99
van den Hul SCS12	36.00
van den Hul Magnum HB	40.00
van den Hul The Wind HB	44.00
van den Hul Revolution HB	80.00
van den Hul Revelation HB	120.00
van den Hul The Third	1,000.00
XLO Pro 625	4.00
XLO Pro 600	16.60



CARTRIDGES

KEY
MM - Moving-magnet type.
MC - Moving-coil type.

UP TO £100

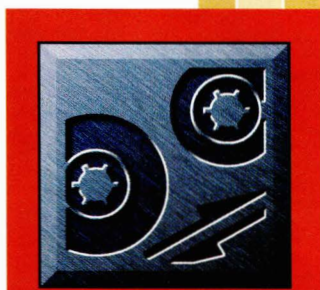
Audio Note IO1	MM	99
Audio Technica AT-91	MM	15
Audio Technica AT-95E	MM	20
Audio Technica AT-110E	MM	28
Audio Technica AT450E	MM	70
Audio Technica AT440ML	MM	90
Benz-Micro MC20EII	MC	70
Denon DL110	MC	70
Denon DL160	MC	90
Denon DL103	MC	100
Goldring Elan	MM	19
Goldring Elektra	MM	29
Goldring 1006	MM	59
Goldring 1012GX	MM	79
Goldring 1022GX	MM	99
Grado ZTE+1	MM	27
Grado ZCE+1	MM	37
Grado ZF3E+1	MM	48
Grado Prestige Black	MM	49
Grado Prestige Green	MM	59
Grado Prestige Blue	MM	69
Grado ZF1+	MM	83
Grado Prestige Red	MM	99
N'ham Tracer I	MM	98
Ortofon OM 3E	MM	16
Ortofon OM 5E	MM	20
Ortofon OM 10	MM	30
Ortofon 510	MM	40
Ortofon OM DJ	MM	50
Ortofon OM 20	MM	70
Ortofon 520	MM	70
Ortofon MC1 Turbo	MC	75
Ortofon Concorde DJ	MM	80
Ortofon OM 30	MM	90
Ortofon 530	MM	100
Pickering TE-15	MM	20
Pickering VE-15	MM	25
Pickering T-E	MM	25
Pickering V15-DJ	MM	28
Pickering TL-E	MM	35
Pickering TL-2E	MM	45
Pickering XV15-625E	MM	50
Pickering XV15-150-DJ	MM	50
Pickering TL-2-S	MM	55
Pickering XV15-757S	MM	60
Pickering XV15-625DJ	MM	60
Pickering XV15-1800S	MM	70
Pickering TL3S	MM	80
Pickering XEV-3001E	MM	95
Pickering XLZ-3500	MM	100
Pickering TLZ-4-S	MM	100
Rega Bias	MM	39
Rega RB78	MM	39
Rega Super Bias	MM	59
Rega Elys	MM	85
Shure M70BX	MM	21
Shure M92E	MM	22
Shure SC35C	MM	29
Shure M447X	MM	35
Shure M44GX	MM	35
Stanton 500AL II	MM	35
Stanton 500EL	MM	44
Stanton 680AL/X	MM	59
Stanton 680EL/X	MM	74
Sumiko Oyster	MM	30
Sumiko Black Pearl	MM	50
Sumiko Pearl	MM	70
Sumiko Blue Point	MC	100

OVER £100

Audio Note IO2	MM	139
Audio Note Soara	MC	795

Audio Note IO1V	MC	1,095
Audio Note IOLtd	MC	4,500
Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	MC	350
Benz-Micro The Glider	MC	600
Benz-Micro Reference	MC	1,100
Benz-Micro Reference Ruby	MC	1,500
Benz-Micro Ruby Open Air	MC	1,600
Clearaudio Alpha Mk 2	MM	135
Clearaudio Beta Mk 2	MM	190
Clearaudio Beta-S Mk 2	MM	250
Clearaudio Virtuoso	MM	295
Clearaudio Sigma	MM	590
Clearaudio Gamma-S	MC	810
Clearaudio Victory	MC	960
Clearaudio Signature	MC	1,540
Clearaudio Accurate	MC	2,515
Clearaudio Insider	MC	5,165
Clearaudio Insider Ref.	MC	6,810
Denon DL304	MC	200
Dynavector 10X4II	MC	189
Dynavector DV20XH	MC	299
Dynavector DV-20XL	MC	299
Dynavector DV20XL	MC	299
Dynavector 17D2	MC	450
Dynavector XX-1L	MC	998
Dynavector XX-1	MC	998
Dynavector Te-Kaitora	MC	1,698
Goldring Eroica LX	MC	110
Goldring Eroica	MC	110
Goldring 1042	MM	120
Goldring Elite	MC	220
Goldring Excel VX	MC	525
Grado Prestige Silver	MM	119
Grado Signature Junior	MM	149
Grado Signature BMZ	MM	150
Grado Signature MCZ	MM	375
Grado Signature TLZ	MM	650
Grado Signature XTZ	MM	975
Grado Reference	MM	995
Koetsu Red T	MC	1,359
Koetsu Red K Sig	MC	1,899
Koetsu Urushi	MC	1,999
Koetsu Signature	MC	2,999
Koetsu Gold PR	MC	5,498
Linn K9	MM	125
Linn Klyde	MC	500
Linn Arkiv	MC	1,000
London Decca Maroon	MM	2,999
London Decca Gold	MM	319
London Decca Maroon Dp	MM	379
London Decca Gold Dp	MM	399
London Decca S Gold	MM	439
London Decca S Gold Dp	MM	519
London Decca Jubilee	MM	599
Lyra Lydian Beta	MC	999
Lyra Clavis Da Capo	MC	995
Lyra Parnassus D.Ct	MC	1,899
N'ham Tracer II	MM	310
N'ham Tracer III	MM	410
N'ham Tracer IV	MM	660
Ortofon MC15 Super II	MC	140
Ortofon 540	MM	140
Ortofon MC3 Turbo	MC	150
Ortofon MC2SE	MC	200
Ortofon MC25FL	MC	250
Ortofon MC10 Supreme	MC	300
Ortofon MC20 Supreme	MC	450
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	MC	550
Ortofon MC2000II	MC	800
Ortofon MC Rohmann	MC	1,000
Ortofon MC3000 II	MC	1,200
Ortofon MC Jubilee	MC	1,250
Ortofon MC7500	MC	2,000
Pickering TL-3003	MM	145
Pickering TL-4500	MM	175
Pickering TL-4004	MM	150
Pickering XSV-5000U	MM	200
Pickering XLZ-7500	MM	200
Pickering TLZ-7500-S	MM	200
Reson Mica	MM	185
Reson Recla	MM	250
Reson Aciore	MC	299
Reson Etile	MC	455
Reson Lexe	MC	1,300
Roksan Corus Black	MM	150
Roksan Shiraz	MC	990
Shure V15XMR	MM	295
Stanton 890AL/X	MM	120
Sumiko Blue Point Special	MC	250
Transfiguration Esprit	MC	950
Transfiguration Spirit	MC	950
Transfiguration Temper Supreme	MC	2,250
van den Hul DDI-II	MC	600
van den Hul MC-10	MC	750
van den Hul MC-One	MC	900
van den Hul MC-ONE Super	MC	1,050
van den Hul MC-Two	MC	1,200
van den Hul The Frog Low o/p	MC	1,500
van den Hul The Frog HO	MC	1,700
van den Hul Grasshopper IISLN	MC	2,000
van den Hul Grasshopper IISLA	MC	2,000
van den Hul White Beauty S-X	MC	2,500
van den Hul White Beauty HO	MC	2,500
van den Hul Grasshopper IIIGLN	MC	2,800
van den Hul Grasshopper IIIGLA	MC	2,800
van den Hul Grasshopper IIICMN	MC	2,800

van den Hul Grasshopper IIICHN	MC	2,900
van den Hul Grasshopper IIIGLA	MC	3,000
van den Hul Black Beauty	MC	3,000
Wilson Benesch Matrix	MC	786
Wilson Benesch Analog	MC	1,572
Wilson Benesch Carbon	MC	1,573



CASSETTE DECKS

KEY
 - Autoreverse - no need to remove and turn around the tape.
3-H - 3 heads, i.e. separate record and replay heads.

UP TO £200

Akai DXW1100	11	200
Akai DX1200	11	200
Ariston WX-510	11	60
Denon DRM-550	11	160
Denon DRW-585	11	200
Goodmans Delta 801	11	130
H/K DC520	11	130
JVC TD-X372BK	11	170
JVC TD-R472BK	11	200
Kenwood KX-W4080	11	160
Kenwood KX-3080	11	160
Kenwood KX-W6080	11	200
Kenwood KX-5080S	11	200
Marantz SD-455	11	170
Marantz SD-57	11	199
Onkyo K 185	11	200
Pioneer CT-S250	11	150
Pioneer CT-W205R	11	160
Pioneer CT-W505R	11	180
Pioneer CT-S450S	11	200
Pioneer CT-W606DR	11	200
Sony TC-KE200	11	120
Sony TC-WE255	11	160
Sony TC-KB820S	11	180
Sony TC-WE725	11	180
Teac W-416	11	100
Teac V-615	11	150
Teac RH-300	11	130
Teac W-790R	11	170
Teac V-1050	11	180
Teac RH-500	11	200
Technics RS-BX501	11	170
Technics RS-TR373	11	180
Technics RS-TR474	11	200
Technics RS-AZ6	11	200
Yamaha KX-393	11	130
Yamaha KX-W321	11	170
Yamaha KX-493	11	180

OVER £200

Denon DRM-650S	11	230
Denon DRM-740	11	270
Denon DRS-810	11	310
H/K TD420	11	250
JVC TD-V662BK	11	270
JVC TD-W718BK	11	300
NAD 613	11	230
NAD 614	11	270
NAD 616	11	300
Onkyo TA 6210	11	230
Onkyo TARW 211	11	270
Onkyo TARW 311	11	320
Onkyo TA 6310	11	330
Onkyo KR 609	11	350
Onkyo KW 606	11	370
Onkyo TARW 411	11	460
Onkyo K 611	11	370
Pioneer CT-S550S	11	250
Pioneer CT-W806DR	11	300
Pioneer CT-S550S Precision	11	340
Pioneer CT-S830S	11	500
Pioneer CT-95	11	1,000
Rotel RC960BX	11	230
Sony TC-WE825S	11	250
Sony TC-KA6ES	11	550
T+A CC1200R	11	1,180
Teac W-860R	11	230
Teac W-6000R	11	450
Teac V-6030S	11	550
Teac V-8030S	11	650
Technics RS-AZ7	11	270

HI-FI HELP

Let our experts help with your hi-fi problems. Send your query to 'Help' at the usual address.

Technics RS-TR575	280
Yamaha KX-580SE	250
Yamaha KX-W592	280



CD PLAYERS

KEY

⇒ - Multiplayer: can be loaded with more than one disc.

Ⓜ - Electrical (coaxial) digital output.

Many players also include an optical (Toslink) output.

UP TO £250

Akai CD1100	Ⓜ	200
Akai CDM1200	⇒	230
Ariston CDX700	⇒	70
Ariston CDC610	⇒	90
Ariston CDX710	⇒	100
Cambridge CD4	Ⓜ	150
Cambridge CD4SE	Ⓜ	200
Cambridge CD6	Ⓜ	250
Denon DCD-435	⇒	130
Denon DCD-635	⇒	180
Denon DCD-735	⇒	230
H/K HD720	⇒	200
H/K FL8350	⇒	200
JVC XL-V120BK	⇒	110
JVC XL-V130BK	⇒	120
JVC XL-V230BK	⇒	140
JVC XL-F116BK	⇒	180
JVC XL-F216BK	⇒	200
JVC XL-Z574BK	⇒	250
Kenwood DP-1080	⇒	110
Kenwood DP-2080	⇒	130
Kenwood DP-R3090	⇒	140
Kenwood DP-R4090	⇒	160
Kenwood DP-3080	⇒	170
Kenwood DP-3010	⇒	180
Kenwood DP-R6090	⇒	200
Kenwood DP-4090	Ⓜ	250
Marantz CD-38	⇒	130
Marantz CC-38	⇒	200
Marantz CD-48	Ⓜ	200
Marantz CD-57	Ⓜ	230
Marantz CD-67II	Ⓜ	250
NAD 522	⇒	170
NAD 510	⇒	200
NAD 524	Ⓜ	250
NAD 523	⇒	250
NAD 512	Ⓜ	250
Philips CD711	⇒	120
Philips CD721	⇒	130
Philips CD751	Ⓜ	150
Philips CDC751	⇒	180
Pioneer PD-106	⇒	130
Pioneer PD-206	⇒	150
Pioneer PD-S507	⇒	190
Pioneer PD-F606	⇒	200
Pioneer PD-M603	⇒	200
Pioneer PD-F706	⇒	250
Rotel RCD-930AX	⇒	180
Sansui CD220	⇒	120
Sherwood CD-4030R	⇒	180
Sherwood CDC680	⇒	180
Sherwood CDC6050R	⇒	180
Sony CDP-XE220	⇒	110
Sony CDP-M205	⇒	110
Sony CDP-M305	⇒	130
Sony CDP-XE310	⇒	140
Sony CDP-XE520	⇒	150
Sony CDP-CE105	⇒	150
Sony CDP-XB720E	Ⓜ	200
Sony CDP-CE315	⇒	200
Sony CDP-C325M	⇒	200
Sony CDP-CX57	⇒	250
Synergy CDJ1210	⇒	120
Teac CDP-1120	⇒	100
Teac CD-P1820	⇒	130
Teac CD-P1440	⇒	200
Teac CD-P3450SE	⇒	200
Teac PD-D2400	⇒	200
Teac PD-H500i	Ⓜ	240
Technics SL-PC390A	⇒	90
Technics SL-PC490A	⇒	100
Technics SL-PC590A	⇒	120
Technics SL-PD688	⇒	140
Technics SL-PD888	⇒	160
Technics SL-PS670D	⇒	200

Technics SL-MC410	⇒	250
Technics SL-PS770D	Ⓜ	250
Yamaha CDX-393	⇒	130
Yamaha CDC-565	⇒	170
Yamaha CDX-493	⇒	180
Yamaha CDX-9	⇒	200
Yamaha CDC-665	Ⓜ	220
Yamaha CDX-593	Ⓜ	230

£251 TO £500

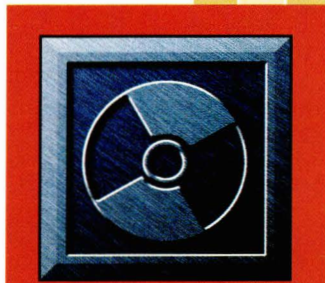
Arcam Alpha 7 SE	Ⓜ	350
Arcam Alpha MCD	⇒	450
Cyrus dAD1.5	Ⓜ	399
Denon DCD-835	⇒	280
Denon DCM-260	⇒	300
Denon DCD-1550AR	Ⓜ	350
H/K HD740	⇒	300
H/K FL8550	⇒	300
H/K HD760	⇒	500
JVC XL-Z674BK	⇒	300
Kenwood DP-R7080	⇒	300
Kenwood DP-9090	⇒	300
Kenwood DP-5090	Ⓜ	300
Kenwood DP-7090	Ⓜ	400
Marantz CD-67SE MkII	Ⓜ	300
Marantz CC-870	⇒	400
Marantz CD-63IIK1	⇒	400
Musical Fidelity E60	Ⓜ	300
Musical Fidelity A2 CD	Ⓜ	500
Musical Fidelity E624	Ⓜ	500
Myryad T-10	⇒	400
NAD 513	⇒	290
NAD 515	⇒	350
NAD 514	⇒	370
NAD 517	⇒	400
Nakamichi MB10	⇒	399
Onkyo DX 7210	Ⓜ	260
Onkyo C721	Ⓜ	290
Onkyo DXC 320	⇒	380
Onkyo DX 7510	⇒	400
Onkyo CM 716	⇒	450
Parasound CDP-1000	Ⓜ	499
Pioneer PD-5707	Ⓜ	300
Pioneer PD-F805	⇒	300
Pioneer PD-S705	⇒	300
Pioneer PD-F906	⇒	350
Pioneer PD-S904	Ⓜ	400
Pioneer PD-S505 Precision	Ⓜ	460
Rotel RCD-951	⇒	300
Rotel RCD-971	⇒	350
Sony CDP-XB920E	Ⓜ	300
Sony CDP-XA20ES	Ⓜ	450
Sony CDP-X3000ES	Ⓜ	500
Sony CDP-CX260	⇒	500
Synergy CDJ2010	⇒	300
Yamaha CDX-993	Ⓜ	400

£501 TO £1,000

Acurus ACD11	Ⓜ	899
Alchemist Nexus	Ⓜ	600
Arcam Alpha 8	Ⓜ	520
Arcam Alpha 8SE	Ⓜ	600
Arcam Alpha 9	Ⓜ	800
Audio Analogue Paganini	Ⓜ	750
Audio Note CD1	Ⓜ	599
Audiomeca Obsession	Ⓜ	999
AVI S2000MC 24 Ref	Ⓜ	999
Creek CD43	Ⓜ	599
Cyrus dAD3	⇒	598
Cyrus dAD3Q	⇒	898
DPA Renaissance int CD	Ⓜ	950
Helios Model 3	Ⓜ	700
Helios Model 2	Ⓜ	950
Linn Mimik	Ⓜ	875
Linn Genki	⇒	995
Magnum CD2020	Ⓜ	595
Marantz CD-17	Ⓜ	800
Monrio Asty PL	Ⓜ	675
Monrio Privilege	Ⓜ	995
Musical Fidelity X-RAY	Ⓜ	799
Myryad T-20	Ⓜ	600
Myryad MC100	Ⓜ	800
Pioneer PDS-06	Ⓜ	550
Pnmare D20	Ⓜ	700
Quad 77 Bus	⇒	700
Quad 77 Mains	⇒	900
Roksan Caspian	Ⓜ	895
Rotel RCD991	⇒	750
Sony CDP-XA50ES	Ⓜ	1,000
Sugden Audition	⇒	649
Talk Electronics Thunder 2	Ⓜ	700
Talk Electronics Thunder 3	⇒	1,000
Teac VRDS-8	Ⓜ	600
Teac VRDS-9	Ⓜ	700
Teac VRDS-25X	Ⓜ	1,000
Technics SL-P2000	Ⓜ	1,000
Thule Audio Spirit CD100	Ⓜ	600
Thule Audio Spirit CD150B	Ⓜ	699
Trichord Genesis	⇒	569
Trichord Digital Jukebox 25	⇒	619
Trichord Digital Jukebox 50	⇒	669
Trichord Digital J'box 100	⇒	719
Trichord Revelation	⇒	819

OVER £1,000

Acoustic Precision Eikos	Ⓜ	1,850
Advantage CD15	Ⓜ	3,995
Alchemist Kraken CD	⇒	1,249
Alchemist Forseti Int	⇒	1,249
Alchemist Forseti	Ⓜ	1,995
Audio Research CD2	Ⓜ	3,399
Audiomeca Keops	Ⓜ	1,500
Audiomeca Talisman	Ⓜ	2,150
Audiomeca Talisman SE	Ⓜ	2,300
Balanced VK-D5	Ⓜ	3,995
Cary CD-301	Ⓜ	2,495
Classe CDP-3	Ⓜ	1,395
Conrad-Johnson DF-2	⇒	1,695
Conrad-Johnson DV-2b	⇒	2,495
Copland CDA-266	Ⓜ	1,199
Copland CDA277	Ⓜ	1,649
Copland CDA289	Ⓜ	1,898
Copland CDA288	Ⓜ	1,999
Cymbal CDP12	Ⓜ	1,299
Exposure CD Player	Ⓜ	1,050
Helios Model 1	Ⓜ	1,250
Helios Stargate	Ⓜ	2,250
Jadis Orchestra	Ⓜ	1,345
Krell KAV250cd	Ⓜ	2,490
Krell KAV300cd	Ⓜ	3,599
Krell KPS25s	Ⓜ	19,995
Linn Ikemi	⇒	1,950
Linn Sondek CD12	Ⓜ	12,000
Mark Levinson No 39	Ⓜ	4,995
Marantz CD-17K1S	Ⓜ	1,100
Marantz CD-7	Ⓜ	3,500
McIntosh MCD7009	Ⓜ	3,699
Meracus Tanto	Ⓜ	1,395
Meracus Imago Player	⇒	4,495
Meridian 506	Ⓜ	1,100
Meridian 508	Ⓜ	1,995
Myryad MCD500	Ⓜ	1,300
NAD S500	Ⓜ	1,100
Naim CD3.5	⇒	1,050
Naim CDX	⇒	2,200
Naim NACDSII/XPS	⇒	5,625
Oracle CD Player	Ⓜ	9,499
Pink Triangle Numeral	Ⓜ	1,049
Pink Triangle Litaural	Ⓜ	2,200
Primare D302	Ⓜ	1,500
Proceed CDP	Ⓜ	3,395
Quad 99	⇒	1,300
Resolution CD50	Ⓜ	2,995
Roksan Attezza-DP3P	Ⓜ	1,495
Shearman Phase 7	Ⓜ	1,499
Sherwood CD1	Ⓜ	1,000
Sonic Frontiers Anthem CD1	⇒	3,799
Sonic Frontiers SFCD-1	Ⓜ	3,699
T+A CD1210R	Ⓜ	1,185
T+A CD1220R	Ⓜ	1,540
TAG McLaren CD20R	Ⓜ	1,250
Theta Digital Miles SE	Ⓜ	2,390
Wadia 860	Ⓜ	7,450
XTC CDP-1	Ⓜ	1,350
YBA CD1a	Ⓜ	3,850



CD TRANSPORTS

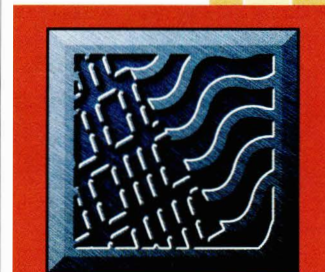
KEY

Ⓜ - Electrical (coaxial) digital output.

Many players also include an optical (Toslink) output.

Alchemist Forseti Drive	Ⓜ	1,100
Altis CDT III	Ⓜ	4,995
Arcam Delta 250	Ⓜ	800
Audio Note CDT Zero	Ⓜ	399
Audio Synthesis Transcend Decade	Ⓜ	3,295
Audiomeca Damnation	Ⓜ	999
Audiomeca Damnation SE	Ⓜ	1,100
Audiomeca Talisman	Ⓜ	1,850
Audiomeca Talisman SE	Ⓜ	1,999
Audiomeca Talisman DOB	Ⓜ	2,250
Conrad-Johnson DR-1	Ⓜ	1,795
DPA Enlightenment Drv	Ⓜ	775
Jadis JDS	Ⓜ	1,999
Jadis JDI	Ⓜ	9,190
Linn Kank	Ⓜ	1,850
Mark Levinson No 37	Ⓜ	3,995
Mark Levinson No 31.5	Ⓜ	9,295
Meracus Imago	Ⓜ	3,995
Monrio Bitmatch	Ⓜ	950
Muse Model 5	Ⓜ	1,800
Muse Model 8	Ⓜ	3,500

Oracle CD Drive	Ⓜ	7,399
Pink Triangle Cardinal II	Ⓜ	909
Resolution VT960	Ⓜ	3,500
Roksan Attezza-DP3	Ⓜ	1,295
Sonic Frontiers Transport 3	⇒	5,999
T+A CM1200R	Ⓜ	875
TAG McLaren CDT20R	Ⓜ	1,499
Teac VRDS-T1	Ⓜ	550
Teac P-30	⇒	2,500
Theta Digital Pearl	Ⓜ	1,349
Theta Digital Jade	Ⓜ	2,650
Thorens TCD-2000	Ⓜ	999
Trichord Digital Turntable	Ⓜ	719
Tube Tech Fulcrum	Ⓜ	1,000
Wadia 8	Ⓜ	3,195
Wadia 20	Ⓜ	4,370



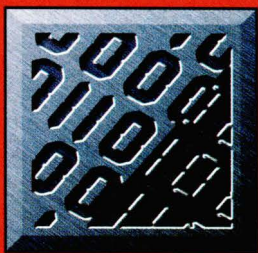
DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTERS (DACs)

KEY

4 - Number of digital inputs.

Alchemist TS-D-1	⇒	300
Alchemist Forseti DAC	⇒	1,100
Altis Reference	⇒	4,995
Arcam Black Box 50	⇒	350
Arcam Black Box 500	⇒	500
Audio Note DAC Zero	⇒	369
Audio Note DAC1	⇒	675
Audio Note DAC2	⇒	1,099
Audio Note DAC3	⇒	1,750
Audio Research DAC5	⇒	2,335
Audio Research DAC3 MkII	⇒	3,999
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade	⇒	2,795
Audiomeca Elixir	⇒	799
Audiomeca Ambrosia	⇒	1,850
Boulder 2020	⇒	21,000
Chord DSC900	⇒	1,850
Chord DSC1100	⇒	2,765
Chord DSC1500	⇒	4,800
Conrad-Johnson D/A-3	⇒	1,195
Conrad-Johnson D/A-2b	⇒	1,990
dCS Elgar	⇒	8,500
DPA Little Bit 3	⇒	325
DPA Renaissance DAC	⇒	595
DPA Enlightenment DAC	⇒	850
DPA SX128	⇒	2,000
DPA SX256	⇒	4,000
DPA SX512	⇒	8,000
Harmonix Reimyo DAP-77	⇒	2,790
Jadis JS2	⇒	2,499
Jadis JS1	⇒	6,990
LFD DAC2	⇒	1,950
LFD DAC3	⇒	3,000
Linn Numenik	⇒	1,500
Mark Levinson No 360	⇒	4,395
Mark Levinson No 360S	⇒	6,895
Mark Levinson No 30.6	⇒	16,495
Meracus Auniga	⇒	1,295
Meracus Flagrare	⇒	2,495
Meridian 566	⇒	1,095
Monrio 18B2	⇒	795
Muse Model 2	⇒	2,190
Muse Model 2 Plus	⇒	2,500
Muse Model 2/96	⇒	3,000
Musical Fidelity X-ACT	⇒	200
Musical Fidelity X-24K	⇒	300
Musical Fidelity X-DAC	⇒	300
Onkyo DX 7310	⇒	330
Resolution D92	⇒	1,500
Roksan Attezza-DA2	⇒	595
Sonic Frontiers Processor 3	⇒	5,999
Sumo Theorem II	⇒	945
Sumo Theorem IIB	⇒	1,155
TAG McLaren DAC20	⇒	1,249
Teac D-T1	⇒	500
Theta Digital Chroma 396 Std	⇒	799
Theta Digital Pro Geny	⇒	1,099
Theta Digital Pro Prime IIa	⇒	1,699
Theta Digital Pro Basic IIIa	⇒	2,990
Theta Digital Casablanca LS	⇒	6,158
Thorens TDA-2000	⇒	700
Trichord Pulsar Ser One	⇒	1,395
Tube Tech Fulcrum	⇒	1,400
Wadia 12	⇒	1,530
Wadia 15	⇒	3,790
Wadia 64.4	⇒	4,750
Wadia 16	⇒	7,395
Wadia 7	⇒	9,995

Wadia 9 12,790
Woodside DVAC-18 1,499



DIGITAL RECORDERS

KEY

MD - MiniDisc

DAT - Digital Audio Tape

- Portable

Denon DMD-1000	MD	300
Kenwood DMF-9020	MD	499
Kenwood DM-7090	MD	500
Kenwood DM-9090	MD	550
Marantz CM635	MD	500
Marantz DR700	MD	600
Onkyo MD-121	MD	450
Onkyo MD 122	MD	700
Philips CDR880	MD	499
Pioneer MJ-D707	MD	199
Pioneer PDR-555RW	MD	480
Pioneer PDR-04	MD	700
Pioneer D-05	DAT	900
Pioneer PDR-05	DAT	1,000
Pioneer D-C88	DAT	2,000
Sharp MD-R1 MkII	MD	180
Sharp MD-R3H	MD	300
Sharp MD-R2	MD	300
Sharp MD-MS200H	MD	350
Sharp MDXV300H	MD	1,000
Sony MZ-R50	MD	1
Sony MDS-539	MD	1
Sony MZ-R35	MD	1
Sony MZ-R5T	MD	1
Sony MDS-JE520	MD	230
Sony MDS-JB920	MD	300
Sony MDS-JB930	MD	300
Sony MDS-JA20ES	MD	500
Sony MDS-JA55ES	MD	650
Sony MDS-JA50ES	MD	1,300
Teac MDH300	MD	300
Teac MD-H500i	MD	350
Teac MD-8	MD	600
Teac MD-5	MD	600
Teac MD-10	MD	900
Traxdata Traxaudio 900	MD	399
Yamaha MDX-793	MD	300
Yamaha MDX-9	MD	300



HEADPHONES

KEY

'D' - Dynamic type, compatible with virtually all normal headphone outputs.

'E' - Electrostatic type; generally includes a separate power supply.

- Open-back construction.

- Closed-back construction.

UP TO £40

AKG Rox	D	30
Aural Envelope DX200	D	20
Aural Envelope DX220	D	30
Beyer DT111	D	15
Beyer DT211	D	31
Beyer DT211TV	D	35
Hama SL273	D	20
Hama SL275	D	25
JVC HA-CD88	D	18
JVC HA-D525	D	20
JVC HA-F65	D	20

JVC HA-D626	D	25
Kenwood KPM-310	D	18
Kenwood KPM-410	D	25
Maxell HP-2000	D	20
Pioneer SE-A40	D	20
Pioneer SE-A20V	D	23
Pioneer SE-M250	D	25
Pioneer SE-M350	D	30
Sennheiser HD56	D	18
Sennheiser HD433	D	20
Sennheiser HD400	D	25
Sennheiser HD470	D	35
Sennheiser HD60TV	D	40
Sony MDR-W20G	D	18
Sony MDR-V50	D	18
Sony MDR-ED238ML	D	20
Sony MDR-A34L	D	20
Sony MDR-E848LP/MP	D	20
Sony MDR-V400	D	40
Sony MDR-D11	D	40
Stanton ST Pro	D	25
Technics RP-F200	D	30
Technics RP-HT300	D	40
Vivanco SR200	D	20
Vivanco SR150	D	20
Vivanco SR250	D	20
Vivanco IRS700	D	30
Vivanco IRS800	D	40

OVER £41

AKG K301	D	70
AKG K240DF	D	100
AKG K222R	D	100
AKG K401	D	120
AKG K501	D	150
AKG K3331R	D	150
AKG K4441R	D	180
AKG K290S	D	250
AKG K1000	D	700
Audio Technica ATH910PRO	D	80
Audio Technica ATHD40FS	D	100
Audio Technica ATH-M40	D	120
Audio Technica ATH911	D	120
Beyer DT311	D	50
Beyer DT411	D	63
Beyer DT331	D	65
Beyer DT431	D	81
Beyer DT511	D	106
Beyer DT801	D	125
Beyer DT831	D	140
Beyer DT811	D	145
Beyer DT100	D	160
Beyer DT901	D	160
Beyer DT911	D	170
Denon AH-D210	D	45
Denon AH-D350	D	65
Denon AH-D550	D	80
Denon AH-D650	D	95
Denon AH-D750	D	130
Denon AH-D950	D	150
Grado SR40	D	45
Grado SR60	D	79
Grado SR80	D	100
Grado SR125	D	150
Grado SR225	D	200
Grado SR325	D	300
Grado RS2	D	495
Grado RS1	D	695
Hama SL276	D	50
Hama IR Cordless	D	60
Jecklin Float Model 1	D	79
Jecklin Float Model 2	D	99
Jecklin Float ELS	E	399
JVC HA-D727	D	43
JVC HA-D50	D	45
JVC HA-W60	D	49
JVC HA-D910	D	65
JVC HA-W200RF	D	75
JVC HA-DX1	D	200
JVC HA-DX3	D	250
JVC HA-D1000	D	250
JVC HA-F25	D	699
Koss TD/80	D	50
Koss R/100	D	100
Philips SBC 3396	D	70
Philips SBC HP9000	D	90
Pioneer SE-M550	D	50
Pioneer SE-M750	D	60
Precide Ergo Model 1	D	120
Precide Ergo Model 2	D	140
Sennheiser HD490	D	50
Sennheiser IS 380	D	55
Sennheiser HD495	D	60
Sennheiser HD500	D	70
Sennheiser RS400	D	80
Sennheiser HD25 SP	D	90
Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	D	90
Sennheiser HD545 Ref	D	100
Sennheiser IS450	D	110
Sennheiser HD265 Linear	D	125
Sennheiser HDC 451-1	D	130
Sennheiser HD250II	D	150
Sennheiser HD565 Oval'n	D	150
Sennheiser HD25-13	D	160
Sennheiser Lucas	D	160
Sennheiser HD25	D	160

D	25
D	18
D	25
D	20
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D	25
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D	40
D	20
D	20
D	20
D	30
D	40

Sennheiser HD 580 P'cision	D	200
Sennheiser HD600	D	250
Sennheiser Lucas/HD580	D	260
Sennheiser IS850	D	859
Sennheiser HE60/HEV70	E	998
Sennheiser Orpheus	E	9,652
Sony MDR-605LP	D	50
Sony MDR-ED268LP	D	50
Sony MDR-E888LP	D	55
Sony MDR-IF130K	D	60
Sony MDR-V600	D	70
Sony MDR-F1	D	100
Sony MDR-NC5	D	100
Sony MDR-V700DJ	D	100
Sony MDR-IF420RK	D	100
Sony MDR-D77	D	130
Sony MDR-IF520RK	D	150
Sony MDR-CD1700	D	200
Stanton DJ Pro 101/101B	D	65
Stanton DJ Pro 1000	D	95
Stanton DJ Pro 1001	D	150
Stax SR-001	E	280
Stax SR-Lambda Nova C	E	370
Stax Lambda Nova Basic	E	449
Stax SR-Lambda Nova S	E	450
Stax Omega	E	1,896
Technics RP-F800	D	50
Technics RP-HT600	D	60
Technics RP-DJ1200	D	130
Vivanco SR650	D	45
Vivanco FMH 3000	D	50
Vivanco SR750	D	50
Vivanco SR850	D	50
Vivanco FM7980	D	60
Vivanco SR950	D	80
Vivanco FM8180	D	99
Vivanco SR2000IFL	D	100

D	200
D	250
D	260
D	859
E	998
E	9,652
D	50
D	50
D	55
D	60
D	70
D	100
D	100
D	100
D	130
D	150
D	200
D	65
D	95
D	150
E	280
E	370
E	449
E	450
E	1,896
D	50
D	60
D	130
D	45
D	50
D	50
D	50
D	60
D	80
D	99
D	100

Finite Elemente E03 pagode	4	649
Finite Elemente HD03	4	1,995
Frameworks H175	1	139
Frameworks FS1	1	150
Frameworks H500	3	265
Frameworks FT2	2	285
Frameworks FT3	3	350
Frameworks H700	3	355
Frameworks H900	3	389
Impulse Iso-plate		190
JPW 3 Tier	3	80
JPW 5 Tier	5	100
Kudos Audio Corinthian		600
Linn K3000	5	85
Mana Sound Frame		125
Mana Mini Table		150
Mana Power supply table		150
Mana Reference flat top		150
Mana Sound Shelf		175
Mana Sound Stage		200
Mana Sound Table		235
Mana Ref Shelf		325
Mana Reference Table		350
Mana 2 Tier Stand		375
Mana 3 Tier Stand		450
Mana 4 Tier Stand		500
Mana 5 Tier Stand		600
Mana 6 Tier Stand		700
Mana 7 Tier Stand		800
Mana 8 Tier Stand		900
Mission Stage		99
Optimum G2	2	69
Optimum C2/Pedestal	2	99
Optimum C4/Pedestal	5	130
Optimum OPT 3406	3	149
Optimum G5/Pedestal	6	150
Optimum OPT 4906	4	199
Optimum OPT 6606	5	249
Optimum OPT 340	3	249
Optimum OPT 490	4	299
Optimum OPT 440	4	299
Optimum OPT 10206	6	299
Optimum AV 300	3	329
Optimum OPT 700	5	349
Optimum OPT 610	5	349
Optimum OPT 660	4	349
Optimum OPT 1020	6	399
Optimum OPT 1190	7	450
Projekt A3	3	145
Projekt A4	4	215
Projekt A5	5	235
Projekt B3	6	255
Projekt A6	6	280
Projekt B3i	6	300
Projekt B4	8	340
Projekt B Multi	8	345
Projekt B3ii	7	345
Projekt C3	9	375
Projekt D3	12	420
Projekt C3i	8	420
Projekt B5	10	425
Projekt C3ii	11	465
Projekt C3ii	10	465
Projekt D3i	12	500
Projekt C4	12	500
Projekt C3iv	10	510
Projekt D3ii	14	545
Projekt C Multi	9	555
Projekt D4	16	560
Quadraspire Q4S mini shelf	1	65
Quadraspire Q4S shelf	1	65
Quadraspire QKS Cabinet shelf	1	80
Quadraspire QAV shelf	1	130
Quadraspire Q4M mini table	4	250
Quadraspire Q4 table	4	250
Quadraspire Q4SP Table	4	320
Quadraspire QAV table	3	350
Quadraspire QAVSP Table	3	400
Quadraspire QK Cabinet	4	450
Reson DOMOPS	1	195
Reson DOMOWS	1	195
Sound Org Z022	1	65
Sound Org Z021	2	78
Sound Org Z030	3	100
Sound Org Z060	4	120
Sound Org Z038	5	135
Sound Org Z540	4	140
Sound Org Z560	5	160
Sound Org Z545	4	160
Sound Org Z530	3	170
Soundstyle X300	3	180
Soundstyle X305	3	210
Soundstyle X053	4	210
Soundstyle X050	4	210
Soundstyle X6300	3	215
Soundstyle X100	4	230
Soundstyle X6110	4	230
Soundstyle X058	5	240
Soundstyle X310	3	250
Soundstyle X105	5	250
Soundstyle X6053	4	255
Soundstyle X6100	4	265
Soundstyle X6310	3	275
Soundstyle Radius SR100	4	280
Soundstyle X6058	5	290
Soundstyle X6105	5	300
Soundstyle Finewoods W105	5	320

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12	500
10	510
14	545
9	555
16	560
1	65
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Castle Kendal	400
Castle Inversion 15	425
Castle Eden	500
Celestion 25i	399
Celestion 30i	449
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Cerwin-Vega VS-10	350
Chario Syntar 100T	399
Chario Ref 1000	499
Clements 300si	395
Dali 104B	370
Dali Royal Menuet MkII	400
Dali 606	400
Dali Royal	500
Def Tech Celsius	395
Dynaudio Audience 40	399
Epos ES12	499
G.LL Imagio IC248TL	350
G.LL Imagio IC258TL	450
G.LL Imagio IC348TL	500
Heybrook Heylo	359
Heybrook Ultima	399
Jamo Classic 6	330
Jamo Cornet 195	350
Jamo BX-100A	350
Jamo 98	350
Jamo D365	400
Jamo Classic 8	400
Jamo Graphic	400
Jamo 128	450
Jamo BX-150A	450
Jamo Atmosphere	500
JBL LX60	350
JBL Ti 200	400
JM Lab Micron	395
JM Lab Tantal 515	495
JM Lab Megane	495
Jordan Watts JHFLC	380
Jordan Watts JH200	420
JPW ML910	330
JPW S5553	400
JPW ML1010	400
JPW Ruby 1	400
JPW Ruby 2	500
KEF Q35	349
KEF Q55	499
KEF RDM One	499
Linn Sekrit	395
Magnat Vector 55	349
Magnat Vector 77	449
Mission 751f	348

Mission 773e	400
Mission 704	450
Mission 774	500
M-A Monitor 3	350
M-A Silver 5	400
M-A Studio 2SE	500
M-A Monitor 4	500
M-A 700 PMC	500
Mus Tec Harrier	400
Mus Tec PM15	475
NAD 804	400
Neat Critique	445
Opera Duetto	395
Opera Prima	495
Origin Live OL-1AS	399
Origin Live Monarch	399
Paradigm Studio/20	350
Paradigm Monitor 9	400
Pentachord A	469
Pioneer S-LC2	450
Polk AB705	330
Polk RT8	400
Polk RT10	500
Polk AB805	500
Prof Monitor Co TB15M	403
Prof Monitor Co TB1	410
Prof Monitor Co TB1S	430
Prof Monitor Co TB1M	447
Prof Monitor Co XB1	499
Promenade SP2	399
Promenade SP3	499
Rega Jura	450
Rega ELA MkII	498
Revolver The 260	350
Royd The Squire	350
Royd Minstrel SE	399
Royd Doublet	485
Ruark Icon	399
Sequence 400	329
Solid Verticale	400
S Coast Odette	325
Spendor S3/5	499
System 1130	500
Tannoy Revolution R2	350
Tannoy Precision P20	400
TDL G20	380
TDL Chiltern CF100	450
TDL G30	500
Technics SB-M300	350
Technics SB-M500	450
TLC Altus 300	366

Tnangle Cometes	359
Wdale Modus Music Six	330
Wdale Modus Music Eight	430
Wdale Modus Music 1/6	500
£501 TO £800	
Acoustic Energy AE505	700
Acoustic Precision Eikos FR1	800
Allison Model 3A	525
Arcadyis AK3	599
Arcadyis AS2	699
Arcadyis AK4	699
Audio Gem Emerald	540
Audio Note AN-K/D	620
Audio Note AN-J/B	799
Audiovector M1	759
Audiovector C2	799
AVI Biggatron	599
B&O Beolab 2500	750
B&W 603 S2	550
B&W CDM1 SE	600
B&W P4	675
Bose 501	600
Bose A'mass AM3	650
Boston VR30	600
Castle Severn 2	600
Celestion A Compact	599
Celestion 45i	599
Celestion C2	699
Cerwin-Vega VS-12	550
Cerwin-Vega VS-15	700
Chario Constellation Lyrnx	549
Chario Ref 100T	599
Chario Hiper 1000T	699
Clements 600si	595
Curra CA-10	699
Dali 107	600
Dali 350	600
Dali 450	700
Dali 109	800
Def Tech BP6B	750
Diapason Micra II	750
Dynaudio Audience 50	577
Dynaudio Audience 60	729
ELAC CL310i JET	800
Epos ES14	675
Harbeth BBC LS3/5A	699
Harbeth HL-P3ES	799
Heybrook Duet	799
Infinity Kappa 60	595
Infinity Kappa 70	795
Jamo BX-200A	530
Jamo Classic 10	600
JBL LX80	550
JBL Ti 400	550
JBL SVA1500	650
JBL Ti 600	650
JM Lab Cobalt 807	595
JM Lab Cobalt 810	775
Jordan Watts JH400	515
JPW Ruby 3	800
KEF LS3/5a	649
KEF RDM Two	699
KEF Q65	799
Kelly KT2	700
Linn Tukan Passive	550
Linn Keilidh Passive	750
Magnat Vintage 710	799
Meridian A500	750
M&K S-85	700
Mission 752f	578
Mission 705	600
Mission 753f	798
M-A Silver 7	600
M-A 702PMC	600
M-A 703PMC	800
Mus Tec Falcon	680
Naim Intro	680
Neat Mystique 2	575
Neat Petite II	745
Opera Seconda	595
Opera Platea	795
Origin Live Resolution	732
Paradigm Studio/60	650
Paradigm Studio/80	750
Pentachord B	519
Pentachord Pentode	729
Polk RT12	600
Polk RT16	799
Polk LS50	800
ProAc Tablette 50	599
ProAc Studio 100	699
Promenade SP4	650
Quad 10L	600
Roksan ROKone 1	595
Roksan Ojan 3	795
Royd The Sorcerer	595
Royd Abbot	695
Ruark Templar II	559
Ruark Sceptre	599
Ruark Talisman II	799
Ruark Prologue One	799
SD Acoustics SD3R	649
Shinpy Polarys	595
Silverado Raider	695
Snell K5	795

Sonus Faber Concertino	599
S Coast Hades	695
S Coast Lancelot	795
Spendor S1	549
System 1150	750
T+A TB 100	700
Tannoy Precision P30	600
Tannoy Definition D100	689
Tannoy Precision P40	800
TDL Cotswold CF200	650
Titan Logic T/26	646
Titan Logic T/2	704
TLC Classic 2	535
TLC Classic 1	800
Totem Mite	599
Totem Rokk	765
Triangle Zephyr II	599

£801 TO £1,500

Acoustic Energy AE509	850
Acoustic Energy AE520	1,000
Acoustic Energy AE2-II	1,095
Acoustic Solutions Eight	1,200
Apertura Prima	1,095
Apertura Nova	1,395
Arcadyis AC1	1,099
Arcadyis AK5	1,399
ATC SCM10	1,000
Audio Note AN-J/D	930
Audio Note AN-K/SPx	1,060
Audio Note AN-E/B	1,299
Audio Note AN-J/SPx	1,415
Audio Physic Step	1,299
Audiovector M1 Super	999
Audiovector M2	1,399
Audiovector M1 Sig	1,449
AVI Positron	899
B&O Beolab 4000	1,100
B&W P5	875
B&W CDM7	1,000
B&W DM604	1,000
B&W P6	1,095
B&W Matrix 805 V	1,095
B&W N805	1,400
Bandor Trident	846
BKS Audio Hybrid 107	1,500
Bose A'mass AM5	900
Bose 701	1,000
Boston VR40	1,000
Castle Harlech	900
Celestion A1	899
Celestion C3	999
Celestion A2	1,499
Cerwin-Vega AL-1000	1,100
Cerwin-Vega 1515	1,300
Chario Ref 1000T	999
Chario Academy 1	1,299
Clements Reference 1	995
Curra CA-20	1,199
Dali 850	1,100
Def Tech BP8B	1,000
Def Tech BP10B	1,500
Diapason Prelude II	875
Diapason Karis	1,275
Dynaudio Contour 1.1	879
Dynaudio Audience 70	1,100
Dynaudio Contour 1.3	1,198
Dynaudio Audience 80	1,460
Electrocompaniet EC-M1	995
Electrocompaniet EC-Qube	1,195
Electrocompaniet EC-Qube SE	1,495
Epos ES15	890
Epos ES22	1,185
Harbeth HL-K6	1,049
Harbeth HL-Compact 7	1,499
Harbeth BBC LS5/12A	1,499
Heybrook Quintet	1,199
Impulse Kora	1,250
Infinity Overture 1	900
Infinity Kappa 80	995
Infinity Kappa 90	1,295
Infinity Overture 2	1,500
Jadis Orchestra	999
Jamo Concert 8	1,365
JBL SVA 1600	850
JBL 4312 MkII-WX	1,000
JBL SVA 1800	1,000
JBL SVA 2100	1,250
JM Lab Cobalt 815	900
JM Lab Electra 905	1,095
JM Lab Cobalt 820	1,175
Jordan Watts JH1+1	1,150
JPW Ruby 4	1,000
KEF Q75	999
KEF Ref. Model One	1,199
KEF RDM Three	1,500
Kelly KT3	1,200
Linn Tukan Aktiv	1,050
Linn Keilidh Aktiv	1,250
L Voice Auditorium	1,500
Lowther Accolade 2	1,199
Lumley L/M3.5	1,050
Magnat Vintage 720	1,199
Magneplanar SMG-C SE	990
Magneplanar MG-Q-6 SE	1,370
Meridian Argent 1	995



Celestion A1.

M&K S-125	£	1,150
Mission 705a	£	900
Mission 754f	£	1,298
M-A Studio 6	£	900
M-A Silver 9	£	1,000
M-A 705PMC	£	1,150
Mus Tec Condor	£	1,000
Mus Tec Hawk	£	1,250
Mus Tec Eagle	£	1,500
Naim Credo	£	1,090
Opera Terza	£	995
Opera Callas Gold	£	1,095
Opera Divina II	£	1,495
Origin Live Sovereign	£	1,130
Paradigm Studio/100	£	950
Polk LS70	£	1,200
Polk RT20p	£	1,500
ProAc Tablette 50 SIG	£	899
ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig	£	899
ProAc Studio 125	£	1,000
ProAc Response 1 SC	£	1,199
Prof Monitor Co LB1	£	935
Prof Monitor Co AB1	£	1,496
Rega XEL	£	1,040
RMS Revelation S 1	£	1,299
Roksan Ojan 3X	£	995
Royd The Albion	£	985
Ruark Solus	£	1,200
Shahinian Super Elf	£	875
Shahinian Starter	£	1,195
Shahinian Compass	£	1,495
Shinpy Micraphonica	£	1,099
Silverado Ryder	£	1,395
Sonus Faber Concerto	£	945
Sonus Faber Concerto GP	£	999
Sonus Faber Signum	£	1,200
S Coast Merlin Monitor	£	849
S Coast Classic	£	1,495
Spendor SP3/1P	£	825
Spendor FL6	£	1,099
Spendor SP2/3	£	1,187
Spendor FL8	£	1,355
T+A TAS 1200E	£	1,050
T+A TB 120	£	1,060
Tannoy Definition D300	£	999
TDL Cheviot CF300	£	850
Technics SB-M1000	£	1,500
Titan Enigma T/3	£	822
Titan Sovereign T/4	£	1,292
Totem The Arro	£	959
Totem The Stauf	£	1,249
Totem Model One	£	1,249
Veritas 7	£	1,000
Veritas 15	£	1,300
Veritas 20	£	1,400

£1,501 TO £3,000

Acoustic Energy AE1 Sig	£	1,995
Acoustic Energy AE2 Sig	£	2,995
Alon I Mk II	£	1,795
Alon II Mk II	£	2,495
Apertura Agora Signature	£	2,295
Apertura Tanagra	£	2,395
Apertura Tanagra Sig.	£	2,795
ATC SCM20SL	£	1,750
ATC SCM20 Tower SL	£	2,400
Audio Note AN-E/D	£	1,520
Audio Note AN-E/SPx	£	2,250
Audio Physic Spark 2	£	1,749
Audio Physic Tempo	£	1,999
Audio Wk'p Cyclone 34	£	2,000
Audiostatic DCI	£	2,495
Audiovector M3	£	1,899
Audiovector M3 Sig	£	2,499
B&O Beolab 6000	£	1,550
B&O Beolab 8000	£	2,100
B&O Beolab Penta 3	£	2,650
B&W Matrix 804	£	1,695
B&W Matrix 803s2	£	2,495
B&W Matrix 802s3	£	2,995
Bandor Bandora/Mora	£	2,350
Bandor Siren	£	2,800
BKS Audio Hybrid 128	£	2,549
Bose 901 VI	£	1,650
Boston Lynfield 300L	£	2,000
Cary SP-301	£	2,295
Celestion A3	£	2,399
Celestion Kingston	£	2,500
Chario Academy 2	£	1,649
Chario Academy Mill'm 2	£	2,100
Clements Reference 7	£	1,995
Credo SPB 003	£	1,820
Credo SPB 009	£	2,453
Cura CA-30	£	1,799
Dali Grand Coupe	£	2,500
Def Tech BP2002	£	2,400
Diapason Adamantes III	£	1,995
Dynaudio Contour 1.8	£	1,894
Dynaudio Crafft	£	2,598
Dynaudio Contour 3.0	£	2,950
ECA Servo A.2	£	2,450
ELS Res'ch Vision	£	2,800
Epos ES30	£	2,385
Gamma Epoch Ref Five	£	2,999
Harbeth HL-S8	£	1,999
Helius Syrius II	£	2,395

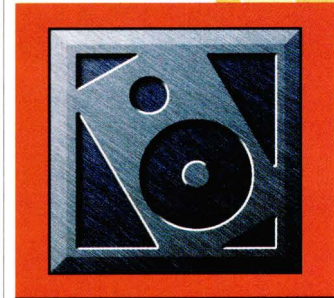
Helius Syrius I	£	2,850
Heybrook Octet	£	1,799
Hi Q Sound SM108	£	2,000
Impulse Lali	£	1,850
Infinity Overture 3	£	1,750
Infinity Kappa 100	£	1,895
Jamo Concert 11	£	2,250
JM Lab Electra 915	£	1,795
JM Lab Electra 920	£	2,350
Jordan Watts JH2K	£	2,400
Jordan Watts JH5K	£	3,000
KEF Ref. Model Two	£	1,599
KEF Ref. Model Three	£	1,999
Linn Kaber Passive	£	2,000
Linn Kaber Aktiv	£	2,640
L Voice Aud'm Avatar	£	2,100
Lowther Fidelio	£	1,999
Lowther Academy	£	2,399
Lowther Bel Canto	£	2,699
Lumley L/M2 Mk3	£	2,995
Magnet Vintage 760	£	1,999
Magneplanar MG-10 SE	£	1,650
Magneplanar MG-1.5 SE	£	1,780
Magneplanar MG-2.7 SE	£	2,650
Martin-Logan Aerius i	£	2,199
Meridian M60	£	2,150
M-A Studio 20SE	£	2,500
Naim SBL Active	£	1,885
Naim SBL Passive	£	2,030
Neolith NEO 1	£	2,999
Opera Caruso II	£	2,495
Origin Live Conqueror	£	1,750
Pentachord P'column	£	1,649
Polk LS90	£	1,700
Posselt Albatross	£	2,500
ProAc Response 2S	£	2,000
ProAc Response 2.5	£	2,700
Prof Monitor Co LB1S	£	2,099
Rehdeko RK115	£	1,700
Ruark Crusader II	£	1,649
Ruark Equinox	£	2,000
SD Acoustics SD5	£	1,549
Shahinian Arc	£	1,995
Shahinian Obelisk	£	2,850
Shinpy Eurtimica	£	1,995
Shinpy Altair	£	2,895
Silverado Silverado 1	£	1,995
Sonus Faber Electa Amator 2	£	2,849
Sound-Lab Quantum	£	2,150
S Coast Excalibur	£	2,750
Spendor SP1/2	£	1,674
Spendor SP100	£	2,234
T+A TB 140	£	1,760
Tannoy Definition D500	£	1,999
Tannoy Stirling TW	£	2,200
Tannoy Definition D700	£	2,500
TDL Studio Monitor-m	£	2,750
Totem Tabu	£	2,299
Totem The Forest	£	2,675
Veritas 25	£	1,750
Veritas H1	£	2,995
Wilson benesch Orator	£	2,900

OVER £3,000

Acoustic Energy AE5	£	7,995
Alon Lotus SE	£	3,500
Alon V Mk III	£	5,495
Alon Adriana	£	8,500
Alon Circe	£	12,000
Alon Phalanx	£	19,000
Apertura Athena	£	6,995
Apertura Atlante	£	8,995
ATC SCM20A PRO	£	3,049
ATC SCM20TASL	£	3,995
ATC SCM50PSL	£	4,250
ATC SCM100PSL	£	4,950
ATC SCM50ASL	£	5,775
ATC SCM100ASL	£	6,475
ATC SCM70PSL	£	8,000
ATC SCM70ASL	£	10,000
ATC SCM200ASL	£	15,995
ATC SCM300ASL	£	17,731
Audio Note AN-JSE Silver	£	7,900
Audio Note AN-ESE Silver	£	9,600
Audio Physic Virgo 2	£	3,399
Audio Physic Avanti 2	£	6,699
Audio Physic Caldera	£	10,599
Audio Physic Medea	£	24,999
Audiostatic DCI Plus	£	3,750
Audiovector 5X	£	3,999
Audiovector 6X	£	5,699
Avalon Avatar	£	5,995
Avalon Arcus	£	6,995
Avalon Eclipse Classic	£	8,995
Avalon Radian HC	£	13,995
Avalon Eidolon	£	20,495
Avalon Sentinel	£	79,995
AVI Gravitron	£	4,250
B&W Matrix 801s3	£	3,995
B&W Silver Signature	£	5,500
B&W Nautilus 801	£	8,500
B&W Nautilus	£	35,000
Bandor Bandoline	£	3,290
Beauhorn Virtuoso Bronze	£	3,325
Beauhorn Virtuoso Gold	£	3,395
Beauhorn Virtuoso Reference	£	3,799

Beauhorn Accelerando	£	6,600
BKS Audio Hybrid 175	£	3,995
Boston Lynfield 500L	£	4,449
Chario Academy 3j	£	5,999
Credo SPB 012	£	3,147
Credo SDL 001	£	5,677
Dali Grand	£	4,000
Def Tech BP2000	£	3,600
Diapason Adamantes Ltd	£	3,995
Dynaudio Contour 3.3	£	4,815
Dynaudio Confidence 3	£	4,846
Dynaudio Confidence 5	£	5,924
Dynaudio Consequence	£	14,566
Dynaudio Evidence	£	50,909
Eggleston Rosa	£	8,500
Electrofluidics Sonolith 2.2xi	£	5,999
ELS Res'ch Vista	£	3,900
ELS Res'ch Illusion MkII	£	9,000
Impulse Ta'us	£	3,100
Inner Sound Eros	£	3,995
Jadis 2	£	5,900
Jadis 1	£	18,900
Jamo Oriel	£	9,000
JM Lab Mini Utopia	£	4,500
JM Lab Mezzo Utopia	£	7,250
JM Lab Utopia	£	18,300
JM Lab Grande Utopia	£	35,000
Jordan Watts JH10K	£	7,570
KEF Ref. Model Four	£	3,299
Linn Keltik Aktiv	£	6,000
L Voice Air Scout	£	19,500
L Voice Air Partner S	£	37,300
Lowther Delphic	£	3,099
Lowther Opus One	£	4,999
Lumley L/M 2 Sig. Mk3	£	4,500
Magnet Vintage 770	£	3,500
Magneplanar MG-3.5SE	£	3,800
Magneplanar MG-20 SE P	£	10,300
Magneplanar MG-20 SE A	£	11,000
Martin-Logan SL3	£	3,399
Martin-Logan CLS IIz	£	4,555
Martin-Logan Re-Quest Z	£	5,875
Meridian DSP5000	£	3,295
Meridian DSP5500	£	5,950
Meridian DSP6000	£	9,400
M-A Studio 50	£	3,300
M-A Studio 60	£	5,000
Naim DBL Active	£	8,050
Neolith NEO 2	£	3,499
Neolith NEO 3	£	4,999
ProAc Response 3.8	£	3,990
ProAc Response 5	£	9,000
ProAc Response 4	£	12,000
Prof Monitor Co MB1P	£	4,370
Prof Monitor Co BBS A	£	16,688
Quad ESL63	£	3,450
Rehdeko RK125	£	3,200
Rehdeko RK145	£	4,800
Rehdeko RK175	£	8,800
Revel Gem	£	5,295
Rockport Merak	£	13,995
Rockport Syzygy	£	15,000
Rockport Procyon	£	32,500
Ruark Solstice	£	4,000
Ruark Excalibur	£	7,000
SD Acoustics SD1E	£	3,495
Shahinian Hawk	£	5,495
Shahinian Diapason	£	9,495
Shinpy Enigma	£	3,995
Shinpy Euphonia	£	5,995
Shinpy Magnifica Suprema	£	14,500
Shun Mook Bella Voce	£	6,000
Snell XA-75ps	£	4,500
Sonus Faber Guarneri Homage	£	5,795
Sonus Faber Amati Homage	£	11,450
Sound-Lab Dynastat	£	3,790
Sound-Lab Aura	£	6,490
Sound-Lab Pristine III+	£	7,990
Sound-Lab A-3	£	11,990
Sound-Lab Ultimate II	£	13,950
Sound-Lab A-1	£	13,990
Sound-Lab Ultimate III	£	18,950
Sound-Lab Ultimate I	£	23,950
S Coast King Arthur	£	3,095
S Coast Excalibur Ref.	£	12,400
Spendor FL10	£	3,475
T+A A4D	£	3,850
T+A A3D	£	4,550
T+A A2D	£	8,400
Tannoy Edinburgh TW	£	3,250
Tannoy Definition D900	£	3,999
Tannoy GRF Memory TW	£	4,000
Tannoy Westminster TW	£	6,600
Tannoy Canterbury 15 TW	£	7,720
Tannoy Westminster Royal	£	14,920
TDL Ref Standard-m	£	6,000
Titan Goliath T/4	£	4,112
Totem Mani-2	£	3,100
Totem Shaman	£	9,999
Veritas 45	£	3,750
Veritas H2	£	4,495
Veritas H3	£	5,995
Wilson Audio Cub	£	5,495
Wilson Audio WATT 5	£	8,390
Wilson Audio WITT II	£	10,995
Wilson Audio Maxx	£	34,995
Wilson benesch Actor	£	3,900

Wilson benesch ACT1 spkr	£	6,900
Wilson benesch Act 2	£	8,900
Wilson benesch The Bishop	£	20,000



SUBWOOFERS

KEY
 (A) - Active; includes a dedicated power amplifier.
 (THX) - THX-approved by LucasFilm for use in Home THX installations.

Acoustic Energy AE108S	(A)	300
Allison Mini Ref Sub	(A)	210
Alon Poseidon	(A)	12,000
ATC SCM 0.1/15	(A)	3,810
Audio Physic Terra	(A)	3,499
B&W ASW1000	(A)	500
B&W AS6	(A)	500
B&W ASW2000	(A)	800
B&W ASW3000	(A)	1,000
B&W Matrix 800ASW	(THX)	1,500
Boston CR400	(A)	300
Boston VR500	(A)	450
Boston VR2000	(THX)	800
Celestion CS135	(A)	139
Celestion CSW MkII	(A)	329
Celestion S11	(A)	349
Celestion A6s	(A)	800
Cerwin-Vega HT-10D	(A)	200
Cerwin-Vega HT-12D	(A)	250
Chario Syntar Bass	(A)	299
Chario Hiper Bass	(A)	499
Credo SDC 001	(A)	3,054
GLL Le Bass	(A)	350
Jamo SW303E	(A)	200
Jamo SW400E	(A)	250
Jamo SW410e	(A)	300
Jamo SW505E	(A)	300
Jamo Sub One	(A)	400
JBL Control Sub 6	(A)	200
JBL Control Sub 10	(A)	300
JM Lab Tantal SW20	(A)	349
JM Lab Cobalt SW27A	(A)	595
JM Lab Electra SW33A	(A)	895
JM Lab Sub Utopia	(A)	2,200
JPW Subwoofer	(A)	130
JPW SW40	(A)	199
JPW SW60	(A)	350
JPW SW-120	(A)	500
KEF Model 20B	(A)	349
KEF Model 30B	(A)	499
KEF Model AV1	(THX)	2,499
Kenwood SW500	(A)	250
Kenwood SW501	(A)	349
Linn AV5150	(A)	2,850
L Voice RW24	(A)	11,500
Magnet Vector Sub 30P	(A)	149
Magnet Vector Sub 30A	(A)	299
Meridian M2500	(A)	1,595
M&K VX-7MKII	(A)	450
M&K V-75 MKII	(A)	650
M&K V-125	(A)	800
M&K V-125 (THX)	(THX)	800
M&K MX-70	(A)	900
M&K MX-150 (THX)	(THX)	1,500
M&K MX-700	(A)	1,595



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REL Stadium II	Ⓐ	995
REL Stentor II	Ⓐ	1,800
REL Studio II	Ⓐ	4,000
Revel Sub-15	Ⓐ	2,195
Revolver The Recoil		100
Roksan Ojan 35		795
Ruark Log-Rhythm	Ⓐ	750
Sequence FW120		249
Solid PB100	Ⓐ	350
Sony SA-W305	Ⓐ	130
Sunfire Sub Junior	Ⓐ	1,099
Sunfire True Sub	Ⓐ	1,499
Sunfire Trus Sub Sig.	Ⓐ	1,699
TDL Nucleus SBR		200
Tsunami TS300	Ⓐ	300
Tsunami TS200	Ⓐ	300
Tsunami TS210	Ⓐ	399
W'dale Modus Sub Bass		180
Wilson Audio Puppy 5.1		8,450
Wilson Audio Whow III	Ⓐ	10,999
Wilson Audio XS		17,000
Yamaha YST-SW40	Ⓐ	140
Yamaha YST-SW80	Ⓐ	180
Yamaha YST-SW150	Ⓐ	280
Yamaha YST-SW300	Ⓐ	350



TO NEARMS

KEY
 ⊙ - Pivoted.
 # - Parallel tracking.

Air Tangent IC	#	4,600
Air Tangent 10B	#	8,600
Air Tangent Reference	#	14,000
Audio Note AN-ARM 1	⊙	169
Audio Note AN-0s	⊙	795
Audio Note AN-1s	⊙	995
Audiomeca SL5	#	2,500
Clearaudio Souther TQ-1	#	1,670
Clearaudio Master TQ-1	#	3,620
Dynavector 507	⊙	1,995

Graham Mk 2.0 Basic	⊙	1,810
Graham Mk 2.0 Deluxe	⊙	2,650
Helius Orion 4 Copper	⊙	549
Helius Cyalene 2	⊙	1,495
Kuzma Stogi S	⊙	399
Kuzma Stogi	⊙	750
Kuzma Stogi Ref	⊙	1,250
Linn Akito	⊙	500
Linn Ekos	⊙	1,500
Moth Mk I	⊙	109
Moth MkIII Stainless	⊙	146
Moth Mk III Tungsten	⊙	174
Moth Moth 900	⊙	598
Naim ARO	⊙	1,070
N'h'am Space	⊙	450
N'h'am Paragon 3	#	550
N'h'am Paragon 2	#	800
N'h'am Mentor	⊙	800
N'h'am Foot	⊙	1,100
N'h'am Paragon 1	#	1,600
Pro-Ject 9	⊙	350
Rega RB250	⊙	109
Rega RB300	⊙	174
Rega RB900	⊙	598
Rockport Series 7000	#	6,000
Roksan Tabriz	⊙	350
Roksan Tabriz Zi	⊙	450
Roksan Artemiz	⊙	895
SME 3009 Ser II Imp	⊙	309
SME 3009 S2 Ser II Imp	⊙	338
SME Series II 3009-R	⊙	514
SME Series II 3010-R	⊙	526
SME Series II 3012-R	⊙	565
SME 509	⊙	689
SME 310	⊙	705
SME 312	⊙	802
SME Series IV	⊙	983
SME Series V	⊙	1,461
Triplanar V1A	⊙	3,500
Triplanar V1B	⊙	3,750
Wilson benesch Act 0.5	⊙	795
Wilson benesch ACT2	⊙	1,350
Zeta AS	⊙	469
Zeta VDH	⊙	549



TUNERS

KEY
 'P20' (etc.) - Number of presets.
 RDS - Radio Data System; receives text information on station, programme type etc.

Akai AT1200	P30	170
Arcam Alpha 7	P24	230
Arcam Alpha 8	P24	280
Arcam Delta 280	P20	300
Ariston TX-510	P20	60

AVI S2000MT		599
AVI S2000MT2		899
Cambridge T500	P64	180
Creek T43	P64	399
Cyrus FM7	P29	398
Davidson-Roth FM Ref Classic		5,990
Denon TU-260L MkII	P40	130
Denon TU-215RD	P40	150
Denon TU-425RD	P40	200
Denon TU-1500RD	P40	250
Fanfare FT1	P08	1,395
H/K TU930	P30	150
H/K TU950	P30	200
Kenwood KT-2080	P20	130
Kenwood KT-3080	P30	180
Linn Kudos	P50	775
Linn Kremlin	P80	2,600
Magnum Dynalab FT11		499
Magnum Dynalab FT-101A		795
Magnum Dynalab Etude		1,250
Magnum Dynalab MD108		4,990
Marantz ST-48	P60	120
Marantz ST-17	P60	600
McIntosh MR7084	P50	2,499
McIntosh MX118	P50	4,999
McIntosh MX130	P50	6,999
Meridian 504	P30	695
Musical Fidelity E50	P20	300
Myryad T-30	P29	400
Myryad MT100	P39	600
NAD 412	P24	190
NAD C440	P30	200
NAD 414RDS	P30	250
NAD 710	P24	270
NAD 712	P24	330
Naim NAT03		615
Naim NAT02		1,130
Naim NAT01		1,780
Onkyo T 421ORDS	P30	180
Onkyo T 409	P30	230
Onkyo T 411RDS	P30	260
Pioneer F-204RDS	P30	140
Pioneer F-504RDS	P40	250
Pioneer F-504RDS Precision	P40	300
Quad 99	P25	700
Quad 77FM	P25	700
Rega Radio	P24	298
Roksan Caspian	P50	695
Rotel RT-935AX	P20	160
Rotel RT940AX	P20	200
Sony ST-SE200	P30	100
Sony ST-SE300	P30	120
Sony ST-SE500	P30	120
Sony ST-SB920	P30	180
Sony ST-SA3ES	P30	250
T+A T1200R	P60	790
TAG McLaren T20	P39	1,099
Teac T-R400	P40	100
Teac T-R460	P40	120
Teac T-H500	P30	170
Technics ST-GT350L	P30	130
Technics ST-GT550L	P39	180
Technics ST-GT650L	P39	230
Thorens TR1-2000	P59	499
Thule Audio Spirit TU100	P40	499
Yamaha TX-480L	P40	100
Yamaha TX-10 II	P40	130
Yamaha TX-492RDS	P40	130
Yamaha TX-59 2RDS	P40	180
Yamaha RX-396RDS	P40	250

Pioneer PL-J2500-C	⊙	80
Pioneer PL-990	⊙	130
Pro-Ject 0.5/OM10	⊙	170
Pro-Ject 1/510	⊙	200
Pro-Ject 2/510	⊙	250
Pro-Ject Classic/510	⊙	360
Pro-Ject 6/510	⊙	400
Pro-Ject 78	⊙	500
Rega Planar 7	⊙	214
Rega Planar 2	⊙	214
Rega Planar 3	⊙	274
Roksan Radius	⊙	470
Sherwood PM8550	⊙	160
Sony PS-LX1 50H	⊙	90
Sony PS-LX300H	⊙	150
Technics SL-J110D	⊙	120
Technics SL-BD20	⊙	160
Technics SL-BD22	⊙	180
Technics SL-1210MkII	⊙	400
Technics SL-1200MkII	⊙	400
Thorens TD-180 AT91	⊙	190
Thorens TD-280 JV/UK	⊙	210
Thorens TD-166 VI/UK/RB	⊙	400
Thorens TD-318 III TP50	⊙	500

OVER £500

Audio Note AN-TT 2		995
Audio Note AN-TT 3		1,995
Audiomeca Romance	⊙	1,895
Audiomeca J1		3,500
Avid Volvere		1,399
Avid Acutus		3,995
Basis 2000		1,995
Basis 2001		2,995
Basis Ovation II		5,400
Basis 2500		5,495
Basis 2800		7,495
Basis Debut Gold Std III		8,200
Basis Debut Gold Vacuum		10,300
Chantry QT Level 2	⊙	705
Clearaudio Solution		925
Clearaudio Evolution		1,095
Clearaudio Revolution		2,500
Clearaudio Reference		3,835
Clearaudio Master Ref.		8,510
DNM-Reson Rota 1	⊙	3,900
DNM-Reson Rota 2	⊙	5,600
Impulse Moskito	⊙	695
Kuzma Stabi S	⊙	695
Kuzma Stabi		1,950
Kuzma Stabi Reference		3,750
Linn LP12 Basik		1,100
Linn LP12 Lingo		1,750
Michell Gyro Spider Ed'n		775
Michell Gyrodek		875
Michell Orbe SE		1,725
Michell Orbe		1,995
N'h'am Spacedeck		750
N'h'am Graphic		1,200
N'h'am HyperSpacedeck		1,500
N'h'am Mentor		2,600
N'h'am Anna Log		5,500
Orade Delphi		3,370
Orade Delphi 15th Anniv		3,800
Pink Triangle Tarantella II		850
Pro-Ject Perspective	⊙	750
Rega P25	⊙	598
Rega Planar 9	⊙	1,598
Reson RS1M	⊙	695
Reson Rota 1	⊙	3,900
Roksan Xenex 10		1,295
Roksan TMS		2,750
SME Model 10		2,644
SME Model 10A	⊙	3,333
SME Model 20/2	⊙	3,403
SME Model 20/2A	⊙	4,863
SME Model 30/2	⊙	10,675
SME Model 30/2A	⊙	12,135
Stratosphere ST1		6,500
Technics SL-1200LTD	⊙	700
Thorens TD-146 VI TP50	⊙	550
Thorens TD-2001 TP90	⊙	700
Thorens TD-520 SME	⊙	1,050
Well Tempered Record Player	⊙	1,995
Well Tempered Classic V	⊙	3,500
Well Tempered Reference	⊙	5,500
Wilson benesch Circle		795
Wilson benesch WB Turntable		1,775
Wilson benesch Full Circle	⊙	1,995



TURNABLES

KEY
 ⊙ - Arm included.
 ⊕ - Cartridge included.

UP TO £500

Audio Note AN-TT 1	⊙	349
Dual CS435-1	⊙	150
Dual CS455	⊙	190
Dual 505-4 UK	⊙	250
Eclipse TT430	⊙	70
Genexxa Lab-710	⊙	60
Genexxa Lab-810	⊙	70
Kenwood KD-492F	⊙	100
Michell Mycro		455
Moth Alamo		199
Moth Kanoot MkI Arm		279
Moth Kanoot Mk3 Arm	⊙	329
NAD 533	⊙	220
N'h'am Interspace	⊙	500

PRODUCTS TESTED & RATED

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	BRADFORD Empire Megastore Ingleby Road, Gillington <i>THE NORTH'S BIGGEST ELECTRICAL MEGASTORE</i> TEL: 01274 575000	LEEDS Empire Superstore The Clock Buildings, Roundhay Road, Harehills TEL: 0113 235 1701	WAKEFIELD Empire (EC) Limited 94 Kirkgate, City Centre <i>(Opposite Canon Cinema)</i> TEL: 01924 361736
	BRADFORD Cleartone, Rawson Square, City Centre <i>(Formerly Enicks)</i> TEL: 01274 309266	BOLTON Cleartone, Blackburn Road, City Centre <i>(On the A606 Blackburn Road)</i> TEL: 01204 531423	BIRMINGHAM Empire Superstore 21-22 Stephenson Street <i>(Behind New St. Opp. Pullmantovs Car Park)</i> TEL: 0121 643 0972

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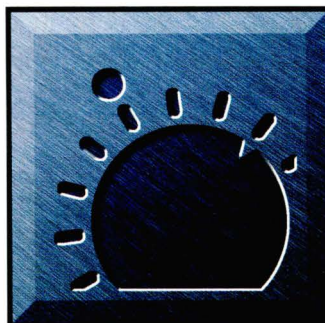
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Amplifiers

The amplifier is at the heart of any hi-fi system, accepting the outputs from various music sources, increasing the amplitude of their signal and then driving the loudspeakers to produce sound. One-box 'integrated' amps rule the roost at low-to-middle price points, but if you pay more, the low-level and high-level signal processes are separated into preamp and power amp boxes, and even separate 'outboard' power supplies come into play. Another luxury is a separate amp for each stereo channel: such devices are known as monoblocks. Finally, output power and sound quality are not necessarily related. Some of the finest amplifiers outputs only 12 Watts, but will yield loudness aplenty when partnered with high-efficiency loudspeakers.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS: Number of input sockets for line-level (non-vinyl) sources such as CD players, tuners and cassette decks.
MM PHONO INPUT: An input specially designed for moving magnet (high output) phono pickup cartridges.
MC PHONO INPUT: An input for moving coil (low output) phono pickup cartridges.
REMOTE CONTROL: An infra-red handset to adjust volume etc.
HEADPHONE SOCKET: An integral output for headphones.
POWER OUTPUT (Watts): Our measurement of an amp's RMS power output into 8 Ohms.
RECEIVER: An amplifier with built-in radio receiver (tuner).
FACTSBACK REFERENCE: The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the mag.
ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of *HI-FI Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY

R RECOMMENDED

E EDITOR'S CHOICE

Amplifiers

SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS
 MM PHONO INPUTS
 MC PHONO INPUTS
 REMOTE CONTROL
 HEADPHONE SOCKET
 POWER OUTPUT (W)
 RECEIVER
 FACTSBACK NO.
 ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT (E) COMMENTS

PRODUCT	(E)	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	RECEIVER	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Alchemist Maxim	319	Vivid and colourful-sounding amp, but just too bold and brassy	5	●				30		1737	154
Alchemist Kraken APD6A	579	Compact, with Darth Vader styling, yet sound quality is meek and mild, despite strong midband dynamics	5	●				55		2150	175
Alchemist Nemesis	700	Good if ultimately undistinguished amplifier whose strengths include warmth, authority and distinctive aesthetics	6					80		2006	168
R AMC 3025a	140	Surprisingly potent and easy on the ear, if not especially analytical – classic bargain-basement material, in fact	4	●	●	●	●	30		2045	171
R AMC 3050a	170	Tremendous value for money, and a full, big, if rather uninformative sound	4	●	●	●	●	45		1970	167
B Arcam Alpha One	230	Rather like an Alpha 7 but without the remote control and what appears to be better sound quality still	6					35			186
B Arcam Alpha 8R	380	The Alpha 8R sets a high level of resolution and stability, and has some useful features for home cinema users	5	●				50			192
R Arcam Alpha 9	500	Not quite a match for the Alpha 9/9P combo, the solo integrated is nevertheless colourful and explicitly detailed	7			●	●	70		2007	168
R Arcam Alpha 10	800	Although not the best sounding in its class, the Alpha 10's modular nature demands it be taken seriously	5				●	100			181
E ATC SIA2-150	1,984	An impressive sounding integrated amp with a dynamic, open and detailed sound	4				●	150			192
Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12			190
B Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40		2147	175
Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40			181
Audiogram MBI	493	The only flaws are the amateurish build, a number of technical problems and inconsistent sound quality	4	●			●	40		2235	178
R AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5				●	100		2155	175
Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5				●	60		2156	175
Cambridge A500	200	Bargain-basement amplifier whose dowdy appearance conceals a surprisingly powerful and sophisticated sound	6			●		75			193
R Copland CSA8	945	Sophisticated yet transparent, this is one of those amplifiers that sounds good even when the gloss has worn off	5					60		2010	168
R Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●			●	60			189
Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●			●	35			193
CR Developments CR324	569	Solid and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5					150			181
R Cymbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40		2236	178
Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but classy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	●				40			192
R Cyrus SL	398	Articulate amplifier with build quality to die for, superb, outgoing midband and lean but well-extended bass	6					50			168
Cyrus III	598	Beautifully presented, but mid-dominated balance was not liked. Upgradeable using PSX PSU unit				●		50		1854	162
R Denon PMA-250SE	140	This amp can sound rough when extended, but within its limits it is open, detailed and likeable	5				●	30		2046	171
R Denon PMA-350SE	180	Reinvented in the minimalist tradition, this SE model is a control freak, but can sound wonderful	5				●	50		1856	162
Denon PMA-535R	230	The kind of amp they made in the 70s, dressed to the nines, and nowhere to go	5	●			●	50			192
Denon PMA-725R	350	Warm, bold, up-front presentation, but musically unexciting	5	●	●	●	●	97		1802	157
R Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70			181
R Densen Beat B-100 MkII	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5					60		1855	175
Densen DM-10	1,375	Big, bold and expressive amplifier, but sometimes rough around the edges, and not as powerful as it appears	6					75			189
Edmund Audio ES110	400	Honest but unexciting straight line amp from REL associate company	6					85			192
Exposure XX Super	700	Rather transistorised, unexciting sound. Good coherence and rhythm. Best played loud	6					55		1743	154
Exposure RCXV	1,000	Unaccountably rather underwhelming top of the line integrated sounds a little soft and detached	6				●	60			189
R Electrocompaniet EC1-2	995	A 50 Watt amplifier which sounds more powerful, and makes 'real-sounding' music	4					50		2158	175
B Harman/Kardon HK610	180	Lively and friendly sound, but could prove too exciting for the faint hearted	6	●			●	30		1465	149
R Harman/Kardon HK630	200	Sharp, clean but sometimes slightly raw-sounding budget amp	4	●			●	40			192
B Harman/Kardon HK620	250	Capable and musical amplifier which is one of the nicest at this price. Optional add-in MM/MC board available	6			●	●	40		1858	162
Holfi Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	●				65			181
JoLida 202	695	Well-built and technically accomplished, affordable valve integrated with subtle refined, if not quite gripping sound	4					40		2011	168
JVC AX-V4	200	Respectable performance for a Pro-Logic AV amplifier. Lacks resolution and sparkle, though	5	●			●	63		1805	157
JVC AX-R5	200	Versatile, and lots of even-handed, articulate detail, but let down by superficiality	5	●			●	45		1466	149
Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●			●	70			186
Kenwood KA-5090R	300	Large, well equipped and high tech integrated, but TRAITR output still gives a harsh, unsubtle performance	5	●	●		●	65		2053	171
Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5				●	250			192
E Lavardin Model II	3,200	Banishment of 'memory distortion' delivers an amp with the best of valve and transistor sound characteristics	4					40			184
Linn Majik (phono)	800	The cornerstone of Linn's modular hi-fi system is innovative, but sounds vague and confused	5	●	●		●	33		1013	129
R Magnum IA120	265	Mirror finish amplifier with bold, colourful delivery, but needs careful system matching to avoid loss of clarity	6				●	65		2054	171
B Magnum IA170	330	Gives a realistic sense of instruments playing within a very believable acoustic; preserves colour and dynamics	6				●	96		1260	142
R Magnum IA200	599	Sweet, valve-flavoured solid state amplifier which flatters where it doesn't cast light	7					160		1860	162
Magnum Class A SE	795	A MOSFET amplifier drawing inspiration from the world of valves, this is an erratically refined, detailed amplifier	5	●				80		2159	175

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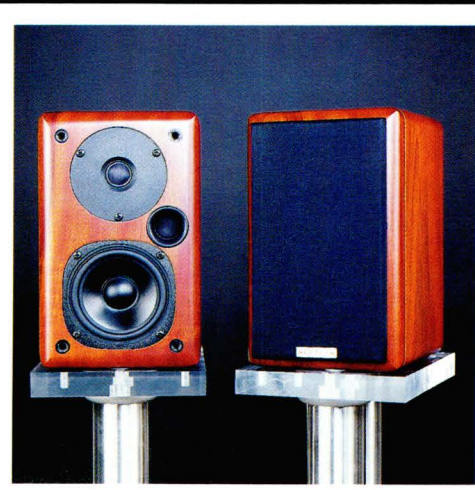
Amplifiers

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

MM PHONO INPUTS
MC PHONO INPUTS
REMOTE CONTROL
HEADPHONE INPUTS
POWER OUTPUT (W)
RECEIVER
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE INPUTS	POWER OUTPUT (W)	RECEIVER	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Marantz PM-48	150	Fine entry-level amplifier has excellent midband resolution and top, with a slightly coarse textured bass	5	●	●	●	50			186
Marantz PM-57	200	Well equipped but ultimately anodyne amplifier which lacks for nothing but star quality	5	●	●	●	50		2049	171
Marantz PM-68	300	Rather matter-of-fact delivery, lacks transparency and detail	6	●	●	●	90			192
Marantz PM-66SE	230	A bit lush, and power output is limited, but it gives airy, large-scale music. An excellent budget buy	5	●	●	●	50		1969	167
Marantz PM66 KI-Signature	400	It knows how to rock and roll with holographic detail and stereo, but prefers small/medium scale acoustic material	5	●	●	●	50		2003	168
Marantz PM-17	900	Probably worth it for the WBT terminals and other build features alone, but this model doesn't sing as it should	6	●	●	●	60			181
Marantz PM-17 KI-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	●	●	●	60			189
Monrio ASTY	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5				55		2237	178
Musical Fidelity E1	199	Richly flavoured tone and realistically-scaled imagery distinguish this entry-level Richer Sounds special	6				30		2050	171
Musical Fidelity E11	299	Well built minimalist amp with a 5 year guarantee, but can sound congested when extended	6				60		2232	178
Musical Fidelity X-A1	479	Idiosyncratic visuals just another plus for an amp that is powerful, well built, and serves the music superbly	6				50			181
Musical Fidelity X-A100R	999	Sings like a thoroughbred, but better with Mozart than Mötörhead	6			●	75			189
Myryad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	●	●	●	50			192
Myryad M1120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6			●	60		2153	175
NAD 310	100	Fleet and sure of foot, it seems likely to set all appendages tapping with its blend of enthusiasm and artfulness	5	●	●	●	20		1468	149
NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	40			186
NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●	50			192
NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and no shortage of finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●	100			189
Naim Nait 3	575	Distinctive and highly musical sounding integrated amp. Perhaps too distinctive for some tastes	5				30		1748	154
Naim Nait 3R	780	Remote control variant of the basic Nait has a similarly dynamic credible sound but ultimately lacks power	5			●	30			189
Pioneer A-300R	200	Its bright and breezy sound is a natural tonic to those of us worn down by the ongoing stress of life	5	●	●	●	50		1469	149
Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●	●	●	45			186
Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●	●	●	60			192
Pioneer A-300R Precision	400	Sophisticated variant of the A-300R. Not an obvious winner, but will slowly ply you with its subtle charms	5	●	●	●	35		1863	162
Pioneer A-07	999	Curious blend of high-end attributes and inconsistent, though undeniably detailed sound	5	●	●	●	80		2160	175
Præcis Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5				100			189
Primare A-20 Mk II	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but ballsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●	70			181
Primare A30.1	1,499	Superb build and aesthetics, and undemonstrably musical down to its smallest screw	6			●	100			189
Rega Elex	398	Minimalist amplifier, derived from Elicit, is a little uninspiring, although at least it is well behaved	4	●			50		1865	162
Restek Fantasy II	1499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	6			●	100			189
Roksan Caspian	695	Well-built, open and articulate amplifier, which is also consistent from system to system	6			●	70		2014	168
Rose Scion	615	Unique two-box integrated gives real subtlety and low level resolution, but the sound lacks scale and weight	5	●	●		65		2009	168
Rotel RA-931	150	Rather dry and unforgiving sound from this internally well specified and attractively priced amplifier	4	●			35		2048	171
Rotel RA-971	200	Budget buy par excellence, especially for large rooms and insensitive speakers	6				70			186
Sony TA-F448BE	250	Minimalist interface is matched to carefully considered circuit with satisfactory effect – but keep the volume in check	5	●	●	●	55		2055	171
Sony TA-F3000ES	500	Champagne 'shoebbox amp' may lack power reserves, but is quick and articulate. In every sense a knockout	5	●	●	●	35		2239	178
T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	100			189
Tact Millennium Mk II	7,000	This digital class D amplifier represents a bold declaration on the future expansion of digital audio in the home	n/a			●	150			194
TAG McLaren 60i	800	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6			●	60			189
TAG McLaren 60iRv	999	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	60			184
Talk Electronics Storm 1	500	Good soundstaging and strong detail are provided by this unassuming and not especially powerful model	6				50		1868	162
Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			●	50		2154	175
TEAC A-E2000	180	Has the potential to cause significant damage in the budget amp sector once the wrinkles are ironed out	6				50			195
Teac A-BX7R	700	Characterful balance mars a meticulously designed amplifier. Includes a balanced input, optional MM/MC stage	5			●	50		1869	162
Technics SU-A660 Mk 3	200	Plenty of wellie for the price, but the sound can be a tad coarse and lacking in fine detail	5	●		●	37			186
Technics SU-A700 Mk 3	250	Fully equipped, high-tech amplifier ultimately fails the authenticity test, and can sound messy and inarticulate	5	●		●	45		1870	162
Technics SU-A800D Mk 2	300	Two-box amplifier looks great, has plenty of gadgets, and makes good, if slightly over-exuberant, music	5	●	●	●	55		2234	178
Technics SU-A900D Mk 2	400	Looks like a pre/power amplifier, but in effect it's an integrated, with a rather soft-centred sound to match	5	●	●	●	70		2149	175
Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5				50			186
Yamaha AX-392	170	Standard budget fare, and it's easy to pick holes, but in undemanding surroundings it works creditably	6	●	●	●	60			192
Yamaha AX-492	220	Powerful, well equipped amplifier at an attractive price, offers powerful and engaging music-making	5	●	●	●	85		2231	178
Yamaha AX-592	280	Fine, middle ranking amplifier, with a detailed midband but performance declines at frequency extremes	5	●	●	●	100		2056	171
PREAMPLIFIERS (CONTINUES OVERLEAF)										
Amp Flux System 2	3,000	Three-box affair with a clean, spacious sound and plenty of slam. A touch steely, but undeniably potent	5			●	50			187
Alchemist Kraken APD7A MkII	549	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6							187
Arcam Alpha 9C	400	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●				187
Audio Note M Zero	299	Neat shoe box-size preamp. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5							191



OPERA MINI

Opera Mini may be the baby of the range but don't be fooled by the size. Standing a mere ten inches tall, this is a classy loudspeaker, made for people who love their music. And it sounds great virtually anywhere; on a bookshelf, or wall mounted, next to a TV screen, on stands, in fact wherever space allows.

The cabinet is solid hardwood – mahogany or cherry – built by Opera's craftsmen in the traditional manner. Top quality drive units and cabling are fitted, and even the terminals are Opera's own 24kt gold plated connectors, the same used on the most expensive models in the range.

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CONTINUED

Amplifiers

SPECIFICATIONS

MM PHONO INPUTS
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PRODUCT (E) COMMENTS

PREAMPLIFIERS (CONTINUED)

R	Copland CTA-301MkII	1,249	Sweet sounding, but never gets bogged down in audio treacle	4	●					1630	151	
R	Creek P43R	350	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from this fine value preamp	6	●		●	●			187	
R	Crimson CS610	450	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited	3	●	●					187	
R	Cyrus aCA7	798	A decent enough unit at the price but not as good as the Cyrus aPA7 power amp it was tested with	5			●	●			190	
R	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●					191	
R	ECA Vista	760	Wind up the volume and blow a breath of fresh music into your system. (Tested with Lectern power amp)	5						1302	145	
R	Exposure XVII	850	Superbly rhythmical; maybe a bit overpowering in the midband. (Tested in sessions with XVIII Super)	5	●	●					142	
R	Levinson 380	3,995	True high end preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability	6			●				195	
R	LFD Mistral Linestage	449	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6						1930	165	
R	Meridian 501	695	Tight, positive sound, but dispassionate; intense at high levels. (Tested with 555 power amp)	5	●			●		1303	145	
R	Meridian 502	1,295	Extremely sophisticated analogue controller with tremendous flexibility and a fast and tidy presentation	7			●				162	
R	Michell Orca	1,650	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound. (Tested with Alecto power amps)	6			●				187	
R	Moth 30 Active Line Stage	349	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp	4						1931	165	
R	Muse Model Three	1,990	Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160 power amp	5			●				166	
R	Musical Fidelity X-PRE	200	Cleverly configured preamp with many upgrade options, and open, lively and engaging sound	4						2152	175	
R	Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista	1295	Fully remote, nuvistor tube equipped, with fine coherence and musicality	5	●			●			182	
R	NAD 114	270	Beer-budget preamp which sounds focused, detailed and consistent	6	●	●		●		1932	165	
R	Naim NAC92R	630	Upgradeable preamp uses proprietary socketry. (Tested with NAP90 power amp)	5				●			1936	165
R	NVA P50	350	Passive preamp that's more likely than most to cause treble loss	4							187	
R	Quad 77 Pre	850	Sophisticated design with 2-way remote control console; open colourful sound and very flexible	4	●	●	●			1941	165	
R	Rega Hal	998	Passive line stages dedicated to Exon power amps	6	●	●	●			1942	165	
R	Rotel RC-971	150	Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music. (Tested with RB-971 power amp)	5				●			178	
R	Sumo Athena IIB	767	Big, natural and tidy-sounding with very natural reproduction of acoustic and electric instruments	6						1305	145	
R	TAG McLaren PA20R	1,500	Refinement of Audiolab original with clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power. (T/w 125M monoblocks)	6				●	●		184	
R	Talk Hurricane 2L	649	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6						1937	165	
R	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●						188	
R	Thule Spirit PR100	400	High-tech preamp slightly marred by tendency to veil the sound	5				●			187	

POWER AMPLIFIERS

R	Alch. Kraken APD8A Mk II	549	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	1						55		187
R	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1						60	1929	165
R	Arcam Alpha 10P	600	Well made and flexible: upgradeable to 3 channels. Good sound lacking the last degree of detail	1						100		187
R	Audio Note P Zero	599	Neat shoe box size valve monoblocks, priced per pair. Impart music with life and soul. (Tested with P Zero preamp)	1						8		191
R	Border Patrol 300B SE	3,995	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot	1						8.5		186
R	Copland CTA-505	2,099	Grown-up amplifier with a refined, yet never over-civilised air	1						67	1630	151
R	Creek A52SE	599	Well designed and built amplifier with plenty of power, detail and refinement	6						100		187
R	Crimson CS630	800	Space-saving slimline monoblocks with both grunt and finesse	1						100		187
R	Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1						50		181
R	Cyrus Power	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-soft	1						50		183
R	Cyrus aPA7	1,896	Low feedback design that's a positive departure from the transistorised norm. (Tested with Cyrus aCA7 pre)	1						150		190
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1						100		183
R	ECA Lectern	880	Tested with Vista. Wind up the volume and blow a breath of fresh music into your system	1						50	1302	145
R	Levinson 334	5,495	A mailed fist in a velvet glove; refined, authoritative and transparent	1						125		195
R	LFD Mistral Power	449	Infectious upper band vitality, but LF dynamics lacking – likewise 'grip' and transparency	1						60	1930	165
R	Meridian 555	750	By providing an open window on the music, this amp is wide open to RF and low level IM distortions	1						60	1303	145
R	Michell Alecto stereo	1,150	Open, well-focused imagery with natural, refined textures	1						50	1940	165
R	Michell Alecto Monoblocks	1,950	Hefty beasts offering real power and striking imaging. Not the last word in timing. (Tested with Orca preamp)	1						100		187
R	Moth 60 Watt Stereo	599	Miniature power amp lacks control and finesse – not comfortable with difficult speaker loads	1						60	1931	165
R	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1						100		155
R	Musical Fidelity X-A50	500	Cleverly configured and attractively packaged, open, lively and engaging sound. Reviewed with X-PRE	1						50		175
R	Myriad MA120	450	Based on MI120 integrated – see later for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with MI120	1						60	1935	165
R	NAD 214	370	A little lightweight, but detailed, consistent sound quality, and excellent value for money	1						80	1932	165
R	Naim NAP90	450	Power amp from a Nait integrated with some improvements	1						30	1936	165
R	NVA A60	560	Rather coarse and uninviting sound	1						60		187
R	Technics SE-A3000	2,997	Price includes SU-C3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	1					●	100		188
R	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1						100		187
R	Quad 77 Power	600	Open, bold and colourful, with mild compression	1						85	1941	165
R	Rega Exon	1,196	Monoblock, priced each, dedicated for Hal preamp. Bold, outgoing, in-command kind of sound	1						125	1942	165
R	Roksan Caspian Power	595	Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mind	1						70		183
R	Rotel RB-971	200	Somewhat better than the accompanying preamp – clean, mean and bridgeable. (Tested with RC-971)	1						70		178
R	Rotel RB-980BX	450	Tames enthusiastically recorded material with a laid-back and occasionally smeared sound	1						120		155
R	Sirius D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and timing (balanced only)	1						200		183
R	Sumo Polaris III	950	Tested with Athena IIB. Big and tidy-sounding with very natural reproduction of acoustic and electric instruments	1						164	1305	145
R	TAG McLaren 125M	2,400	Refined Audiolab replacement monoblocks with clean sound but limited thrill power. (T/w PA20R preamp)	1						145		184
R	Talk Tornado 2	600	Good, but slightly retiring sound which lacks the authority to stand out in a crowd	1						65	1937	165
R	Thorens TTA2000	599	Low power shoe-box format, but gutsy and surprisingly subtle and articulate	1						30	1938	165

PHONO STAGES

R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character	0			●					189
R	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough	0	●	●						189
R	Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	350	Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality	0		●						189
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise	0	●	●						189
R	Michell Iso/Lithos	599	With the Lithos power supply upgrade, the Iso is a very capable phono stage with just a hint of bass fullness	0		●						189
R	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, in any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage	0	●	●						189
R	Musical Fidelity X-LP	130	A little bass lightness does not seriously mar the performance of this fine value unit	0	●	●						189
R	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too	0		●						189
R	QED Discsaver DS-1	35	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refined	0	●	●						189
R	Roksan Artaxexes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components	0	●	●						189
R	TAG McLaren PPA20	1,549	One of the best-equipped phono stages available. Resolution is excellent, but timing is marginally behind the best	0	●	●						187



Cables

Cables are an integral part of a hi-fi system, required to connect source components to amplifiers, and the latter to speakers.

- Analogue Interconnects connect source components and amplifiers, and run between pre and power amps. They are priced for one-metre terminated pairs.
- Digital interconnects connect CD transports to DACs or digital recorders. They come in optical and electrical varieties, the former being made of plastic or glass. The prices shown are for a terminated linear metre.
- Speaker cables are used between the amplifier and speaker. Our prices are per unterminated metre. Termination (plugs and soldering) costs vary.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **SYMMETRICAL:** A twisted pair of conductors.
- **COAXIAL:** A central 'hot' conductor and a shield that carries the negative signal.
- **STRANDED:** Multiple strands with no intervening insulation.
- **SOLID CORE:** Single or multiple, individually insulated strands.
- **COPPER:** Material used for conductor.
- **SILVER:** Material used for conductor.
- **DIG CABLE TYPE:** O - optical digital; E - electrical digital for CD Players, DACS and digital recorders.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback ad on the penultimate page of the mag.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cables

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

SYMMETRICAL COAXIAL STRANDED SOLID CORE COPPER SILVER DIG CABLE TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

PRODUCT	(E)	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction				●	●				188
Audio Note AN-A	18	Not especially impressive: warm but well-rounded balance that restricts 'air' but is quite clear	●				●				108
Audio Note AN-C	35	Neutral but lacking in subtle texture and unable to distinguish fine detail						●	●	1687	131
R Audio Note AN-S	99	Up-beat and enthusiastic sound with satisfyingly deep and grumbly bass	●					●		1687	131
Audio Note AN-V	179	15 individually insulated silver strands make up this very clean and dynamically unchallenged cable	●				●		●	1687	131
Audioquest Turquoise	40	A 'fit and forget' cable that sounds distinctly lazy	●				●				160
Audioquest Topaz X2	60	Well made but let down by a pervading sense of muddle and congestion in the sound	●					●	●		188
R CableTalk Advanced 2	35	Slight roughness in loud music barely detracts from a well-balanced performance with good imaging					●	●		2166	176
R Cable Talk Studio 2	65	A first-class performer from tonal, dynamic and rhythmic standpoints	●				●	●			160
Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price					●	●		2167	176
R Cambridge Audio Studio Ref	40	Dynamic cable with strong soundstaging and only a slight lack of detail				●	●	●			160
Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments	●				●	●			188
Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces					●	●		2167	176
Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance	●				●	●			188
R Connections Midas HD	39	Canary yellow cable with excellent plugs and an open sound. Slight treble glare	●				●	●			160
E DNM TCC75	34	Price for 0.75m. High resolution cable, but best in short runs due to higher than average series impedance						●	●	1690	131
DPA Slink	41	Slightly bright and zingy with flat soundstaging and hollow bass, though vocals and strings sound convincing	●				●			1690	131
DPA White Slink	75	Bass recedes as the music gets complex; midrange and treble better with quite good detail and imaging					●	●		2168	176
R DPA Black Slink	245	Initially dark and meaty but after running in, it's lucid and transparent. Quad geometry, Gore-Tex dielectric	●				●	●		1691	131
Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)	●				●	●		2168	176
Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness					●	●		2169	176
E Ixos 104	20	Open and detailed presentation, full bass and silky if overly smooth treble					●	●	●	1692	131
Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though	●				●	●		2169	176
R Ixos 103	45	Even-handed and generous sound, bass has a well-rounded, bouncy quality				●	●	●		1692	131
Ixos 102	60	A bit bright and undynamic, this cable is nevertheless a good all-rounder, whose faults are largely subtractive	●				●	●			160
Ixos 101	100	A cable with personality: its veiled and shut in quality bring an earthiness to vocals and rhythm guitar alike	●				●	●	●	1693	131
E Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble - excellent performance all round						●	●		188
R Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed	●				●	●		2170	176
R Moth Ley Line Black	100	Offers a full sound, neutral yet very solid and confident in delivery. Expansive imaging retains music's energy	●				●	●	●		108
Moth Ley Line Grey	200	Detailed, but there's a sense of distance between music and listener: vocals are coarse rather than liquid	●				●	●			108
Nordost Black Knight	60	Flat black cable that is distinctive but slightly coloured - but not in a wholly negative manner	●				●	●			160
R Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music	●				●	●			188
R Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable	●				●	●			176
Precious Metals S355	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic	●				●	●			188
R Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness					●	●	●	2171	176
PAD Elementa	145	A fat, heavy and frankly rather lazy-sounding cable; best with music for small forces	●				●	●		2171	176
E QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value						●	●	2172	176



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Cables

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

SYMMETRICAL
COAXIAL
STRANDED
SOLID CORE
COPPER
SILVER
DIG CABLE TYPE
FACTS/BACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	FACTS/BACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
R QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	●				●	●			188
Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes	●				●	●			188
Silvertone Ex-Static	35	Pleasantly unfatiguing and competitively priced cable that lacks detail and insight					●	●	●		160
B SonicLink Silver Pink	35	Dynamically sensitive and muddle-free. We're unsure about the flesh-coloured finish though...	●				●	●	●		160
R SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integration	●				●	●	●	2172	176
R SonicLink Lilac	65	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	●				●	●	●		188
R Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss				●	●	●		2173	176
R Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable				●	●	●			188
B Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas – nothing to criticise	●				●	●	●		188
R Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results				●	●	●			188
van den Hul The Storm	25	Price for 0.8m. Rich and warm but bass is rolled off: however there's plenty of drive and top end is clean	●				●	●		1701	131
R van den Hul Source HB	50	Price for 0.8m. Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness				●	●	●			160
B van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too – excellent				●	●	●			188
B van den Hul D102 MKIII	70	A cable with everything; good bass, treble, imaging and naturalness					●	●		2173	176
R van den Hul The First	210	Using 12,000 carbon fibres, a gentle and subtle sounding cable that conveys oodles of information				●	●	●		1702	131
R van den Hul The Second	240	Wonderfully open and relaxing but also intimately detailed, slightly softens percussive dynamics	●				●	●	●	1702	131
XLO Type 150	50	A restrained but useful cable for taming lively CD players, dynamics lack freedom, treble lacks clarity				●	●	●		1703	131
R XLO Type 0.1	180	Unusual but highly expressive and detailed with a hint of graininess on powerful vocals					●	●		1703	131
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED LINEAR METRE)											
Audioquest Digital Pro	100	A silver cable with all the drive of Video Z but lacking its clear-cut transparency					●	●		E	108
Chord Codac	36	A connection with a stranded inner core and a sound that lacks integration					●	●	●	E	108
R Chord Prodac	50	Price for 0.6m length. Lively detailed treble, drives music along confidently with no hint of fizz				●	●	●		E	1706 131
DPA Opti-link	20	Sound is lacklustre								O	108
B DPA Digi-link	28	Can seem slightly impassive but there's no avoiding its exceptionally detailed sound					●	●	●	E	108
R Ixos 105	25	Extended but soft-edged treble that's mercifully free of fatiguing colorations; plenty of weight, smooth				●	●	●		E	1707 131
R Kimber Kable Opti-link	50	Appears to be a bog-standard PMNA fibre, yet sounds a little brighter and livelier than most								O	108
Moth Leyline Datalink	140	A thin, coaxial version of Leyline Black with a rather hard and unforgiving character. Too expensive				●	●	●		E	108
B QED DigiFlex	20	A top performance, low-loss 75 Ohm coax with a very open, almost liquid quality					●	●	●	E	108
Siltech HF-6	145	Sounds detailed, very clean and extended, but bass is less well resolved – a treat for high-end systems	●				●	●		E	1709 131
R SonicLink Green	60	Spacious, positive and engaging if a bit over-crest at times – very compelling, however				●	●	●	●	E	1709 131
B van den Hul The First	125	Exceptionally natural albeit slightly cautious compared to some. Plenty of subtle information and integration					●	●		E	1710 131
LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)											
ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●				●	●	●		183
Audio Note AN-D	4.50	Supplied in linear, non-polarised lengths that are twisted into stereo pairs. Sounds rather grippy and forward						●	●		109
R Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical					●	●		1711	133
R Audio Note AN-L	29.50	Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel, which was happy to accept its foibles	●				●	●	●	1712	133
R Audio Note AN-SP	150	A calm and civilised presentation, very quiet in the way it reveals subtle low level detail. Great poise and clarity	●				●	●	●		109
R Audioquest F-14	2.2	Ideal for laying under carpets. F-14 encourages a slightly warm and vibrant sound					●	●			109
Audioquest F-18	3.60	Slightly lumpy bass and lack of midrange detail: can also be a bit dry	●				●	●			192
Audioquest Type 4	5	Four 18-gauge OFHC copper conductors wound in a Litz-type fashion increases capacitance but restrains 'bite'	●				●	●			109
Audioquest Type 6	9	A very inflexible cable in which the sonic ends don't quite justify the means	●				●	●			183
Audioquest Crystal	25	Neutral balance is spoiled by some graininess and smearing	●				●	●			168
R Bantbridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings				●	●	●		1800	157
R Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	●				●	●			168
Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained					●	●		1800	157
Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass	●				●	●			192
DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension	●				●	●			168
R Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	●				●	●			192
B DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire					●	●	●	1716	133
R DPA Black Sixteen	100	Unflappable resolution of musical details. No dampening of dynamics, simply oodles of taut information	●				●	●	●	1717	133
B Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	●				●	●			168
B Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value					●	●		1800	157
R Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative					●	●		1800	157
R Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	●				●	●			168
Heybrook Heywire	3.5	This well-meaning facsimile of earlier ribbon cables ends up sounding lumpy and uneven					●	●			109
R Hitachi LC-OFc	7	Very crisp, very clear and very confident. In the right system would be very expensive to better	●				●	●			109
R Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	●				●	●			192
B Kimber 4PR	90 (5m)	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right					●	●			192
R Kimber 4TC	19.6	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	●				●	●			168
R Kimber 4VS	9	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	●				●	●			183
Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unsubtle music – can be dry and edgy	●				●	●			183
Naim NAC A5	5.5	A 'dinosaur of a cable', this stiff wire rod doesn't belong outside Naim systems, where it works a treat					●	●			109
Nordost Octava	3	Fair bass but confused treble and some coloration	●				●	●			168
Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-yr-face', and bass is not always even	●				●	●			192
Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey-sounding – strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, too					●	●			133
R Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	●				●	●			183
R Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass – if slightly bright at times					●	●			133
Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	●				●	●			183
Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound – but too messy and bloated for its own good	●				●	●			183
Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	●				●	●		1800	157
QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel					●	●		1800	157

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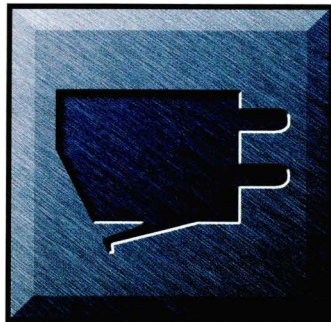
Cables

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

SYMMETRICAL COAXIAL STRANDED SOLID CORE COPPER SILVER DIG CABLE TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding									168
B QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price									192
Silver Sounds 12 gauge	15	Basic 'homemade' construction gives fairly neutral sound. Price not outstandingly competitive									168
SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces									168
R SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced								1800	157
R SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together								1800	157
Sonic Link AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details									192
Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music									192
B Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience									183
R Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass – perhaps a touch of treble restriction									183
R Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board									183
van den Gold Water	7	Bass becomes shy when there's a lot happening, and detail could be clearer									183
van den Hul The Clearwater	7	Despite its evocative title, the Clearwater turns out to be a disappointingly murky-sounding cable									109
van den Hul CS122	12	Good dynamics can make for exciting sound, but fine detail suffers and the treble is often dry									192
van den Hul The Magnum	38	Touted as vdH's most prestigious twin-lead cable, The Magnum sounds soft and old-fashioned									109
R van den Hul The Wind	40	'The Wind' kicks up a storm with its lush midrange and bone-crunching bass!									109
van den Hul Revolution	76	Silver-plated OFC combined with carbon fibre prompts a sombre character with an easy and relaxed treble								1726	133
XLO Pro Type 625	4	Lively but natural and relaxed-sounding – a hint of congestion at frequency extremes								1726	133
XLO Pro 600	16.60	Basically neutral tonality but can become aggressive and two-dimensional									168



Cartridges

Cartridges fall into two groups: high output MM (moving magnet) models, capable of working directly into most phono inputs; and generally more expensive low- and very-low-output MC (moving coil) models. MC cartridges usually have better mechanical integrity, tighter tolerances and give better performance. Many amplifiers are no longer equipped with the necessary phono input for a cartridge, and a separate phono stage is necessary. Phono-input-equipped valve amps need a transformer to cope with MC cartridges. ■ Even basic high-output MM cartridge designs will benefit from a customised amplifier input load. Consult your dealer for further details on this topic.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **MM:** Moving-magnet cartridge with a normal output, suitable for all amplifier phono inputs.
 - **MC:** Moving-coil cartridge with a low output, only suitable for high-sensitivity MC amplifier phono inputs.
 - **REPLACEABLE STYLUS:** Most MM cartridges have a stylus (needle) that can be removed and replaced when worn out.
 - **OUTPUT (mV):** Cartridge output in millivolts.
 - **MASS (g):** The mass of your chosen cartridge.
- affects the choice of partnering tonearm. Consult dealers or manufacturers to establish which arms and pickups work well together.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback ad on the penultimate page of the mag.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

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STATUS

Cartridges

SPECIFICATIONS

REPLACEABLE STYLUS OUTPUT (mV) MASS (g) FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B Audio Technica AT-95E	20	Clear and dynamic, though richly balanced				2.8	48
Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting				0.4	8
B Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy				0.55	11.5
B Denon DL110	70	A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well				1.0	6
Denon DL160	90	Although listeners just preferred the 110, its brother here survived lab tests and is still 'thoroughly competent'				0.1	6
Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life'. Is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail				0.1	6
B Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price					103
R Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high quality turntable and arm				0.25	8.6
Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent				0.15	5.3
R Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698	A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk				0.25	8.5
R Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm				0.25	12
Dynavector XX-1	998	Good, but not immensely competitive at the price, and not helped by comparison with the low output version				2.0	12
R Goldring Elan	19	A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body				5.0	7
R Goldring 1012GX	79	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent				6.5	7
R Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved				6.5	7
R Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative				0.5	8
Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though				6.5	6
Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest				0.5	8
Goldring Excel VX	525	Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end				0.45	8
B Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge				4	6
Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users				1.7	6.5
B Linn K9	125	Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus				4.5	5
London Decca Maroon	259	Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconoclastic as ever				5.0	6
London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records				5.0	6
R Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge – smooth, agile and dynamic in character				0.5	8
R Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed				0.3	7
B Lyra Clavis Da Capo	995	A stable tracker, and one of the finest cartridges we've heard				0.1	7
Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak				0.22	10.5
B Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues – weight, clarity and neutrality				3.0	5
R Ortofon 520/P	65	Sensitive to load capacitance, but the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound				3.0	5

CONTINUED

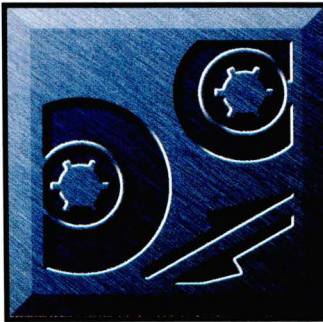
Cartridges

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

REPLACEABLE STYLUS
MM MC
OUTPUT MASS (g)
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	MM	MC	OUTPUT MASS (g)	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes!	●			3.3	4	103
B Ortofon MC15 Super II	130	A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up	●			0.35	7	103
Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable	●			0.5	11	139
Ortofon MC25FL	250	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP	●			0.5	11	139
B Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings	●			0.5	10.7	192
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings	●			0.5	10.7	158
B Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound	●			0.25	8.5	2144 175
R Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere – one of the very best	●			0.12	10	84
Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo	●			0.12	10	91
Rega Bias	39	Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound	●		●	5	4	67
R Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●		●	5.0	5	67
R Reson Reca	250	If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	6.5	6.3	192
R Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●		●	6.5	5	91
B Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300	●		●	2.5	9	192
R van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●		●	5.5	6	103
van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy	●		●	0.35	7.6	158
R van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass	●		●	0.4	6	60
R van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale – worth all the extra money	●		●	0.4	6	60
R van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal	●		●	0.4	6	72
R van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm	●		●	0.65	7	2145 175
R van den Hul G' hopper III/IIA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse	●		●	0.4	6	122
R Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive	●		●	0.58	6	158
R Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound	●		●	0.45	7	2145 175



Cassette Decks

The compact cassette is still the world's most versatile and ubiquitous music storage medium. Cassette decks hook up to the 'tape loop' inputs and outputs offered by most modern amplifiers. It's worth taking care to choose the best tapes for a specific machine. For example, expensive metal tapes will be a wasted investment for a cheap deck. Many better-specified decks have manual or automatic bias adjustment to get the best from specific samples of tape. Twin decks offer the possibility of copying from tape to tape, playing two cassettes sequentially or recording onto two tapes at once. Autoreverse is a useful feature, but uni-directional mechanisms promise better sound. Dolby S is the ultimate noise reduction system, and three-head decks permit record monitoring off-tape.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **DOLBY B/C:** The first and second Dolby hiss-killers.
- **DOLBY S:** A desirable derivative of Dolby SR professional noise-reduction.
- **DOLBY HX-PRO:** Extends headroom for cassette recording.
- **3-HEAD:** Permits monitoring off-tape while you're recording.
- **TWIN DECK:** Contains two decks for dubbing and continuous play.
- **AUTOREVERSE:** Automatically plays both sides of the cassette.
- **AUTO CALIBRATION:** The deck will automatically set up bias and EQ for any tape.
- **ADJUSTABLE BIAS:** Permits manual optimisation of tape.

● **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our famed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the mag. **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

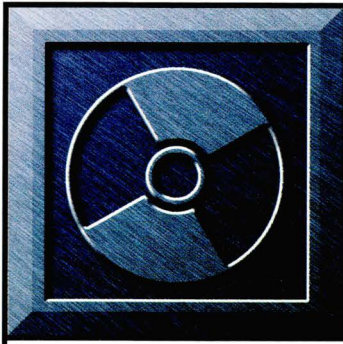
STATUS

Cassette Decks

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY C
DOLBY S
DOLBY HX-PRO
3-HEAD
TWIN DECK
AUTO REVERSE
AUTO CALIBRATION
ADJUSTABLE BIAS
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX-PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B Aiwa AD-F450	120	Basic but well-designed deck. Astonishing value; only the poor metering gives the game away	●								1513	136
B Aiwa AD-WX727	170	High-class twin for those who want bells, whistles – and music	●								1377	146
B Denon DRM-550	160	There are some technical limitations, but this remains a fine-sounding deck, and excellent value	●									158
Denon DRW-580	200	Twin deck: OK for casual use, but will quickly pall with more quality critical applications	●				●					171
B Denon DRS-640	200	Draw-loading deck, with simple facilities and smooth, well-adjusted sound	●					●			1591	140
R Denon DRM-650S	230	An improvement on predecessors, it offers a wide-ranging, sound. Dolby S is not the best feature	●	●							1920	164
Denon DRM-740	270	Breathed-on DRM-710, with good external treatment, offers good, if somewhat detached sonics	●					●			1514	136
Denon DRS-810	310	Draw-loading deck, carefully designed yet lacking in subtlety on audition	●					●				127
Harman/Kardon TD420	250	Minor inconsistencies detract from a well-conceived, minimum features design	●					●			1592	140
Harman/Kardon TD450	350	Draw loader with poor tape navigation features; good midband but shallow bass	●					●			1920	164
B JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●						●			158
B JVC TD-V662BK	270	Assured, clean and agile-sounding recorder, if not quite the most refined in its class	●								1380	146
JVC TD-W718	300	Twin deck. Good for creative live recording, but no timer standby. Respectable performance	●					●			2039	171
R Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass	●								2040	171
Marantz SD455	170	Works well as a single deck, especially on replay, but dubbing at high/low speed compromises sound	●					●				184
NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise	●									158
NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use	●								2041	171
Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD	●					●				195
R Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with 3 heads and dual capstan transport	●								1384	146
R Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●							1920	164
Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●					●			2042	171
R Pioneer CT-S830S	500	High-class mechanism, if lacking in battleship externals, and superb sound	●	●							1385	146
R Sony TC-KE600S	300	Mild setting-up problems notwithstanding, this UK-tweaked design has a smooth, open sound	●	●								158
Teac V01050	180	One of the cheapest 3-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●					●				184
B Technics RS-AZ6	200	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7, clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head	●								1920	164
R Technics RS-AZ7	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art	●									158
R Yamaha KX-490	200	Electrifyingly transparent and capable deck whose only flaw is a trace of audible wow and flutter	●									158
R Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●							2043	171



CD/DVD Players

All CD players offer a basic selection of facilities, and some can keep you entertained for hours as you programme in disc names and track orders. All but the excessively inexpensive feature remote control. Most CD players can be upgraded by adding an outboard DAC (see p129). To do this the player needs a digital output of either electrical or optical type. The former is preferable for the ultimate sound. A CD player can be split into two basic components: the disc drive or transport, and a device which converts the disc's digital bitstream into an analogue audio signal. This is called a digital to analogue converter, or DAC. Although most players are contained within a single box, expensive players are usually two-box affairs. The first new DVD players have not excelled with CD software.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT:** For electrical connection to an outboard DAC.
- **AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUTPUT:** Balanced digital output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
- **OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT:** For optical connection to an outboard DAC.
- **ST OPT DIG OUTPUT:** High-speed optical output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
- **BAL ANALOGUE OUTPUT:** Balanced analogue output for amplifiers equipped with balanced inputs.
- **HEADPHONE SOCKET:** For 'car' users.
- **VARIABLE OUTPUT:** Remotely adjustable output level (usually non-audiophile).
- **MULTI-DISC:** Equipped with a carousel or multi-tray system for continuous play of multiple discs.
- **DAC TYPE:** BS - Philips Bitstream; MB - multibit; Hyb - hybrid of multibit and bitstream technologies; 1bit - single bit types eg MASH, bitstream, PWM, etc; CC - constant calibration.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full information, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the magazine.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of Hi-Fi Choice in which an original review appeared. Factsback information page.

B BEST BUY

R RECOMMENDED

E EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD/DVD Players

SPECIFICATIONS

- ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT
- AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT
- OPTICAL DIG OUT
- ST OPT DIG OUT
- BAL ANALOGUE OUT
- HEADPHONE SOCKET
- VARIABLE OUTPUT
- MULTI-DISC
- DAC TYPE
- FACTSBACK NO.
- ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPTICAL DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DAC TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER	
B Acurus ACD11	899	First-rate if costly player, which combines a delightful transparency with an uncontrived naturalness	●									1bit	1962	166
Acoustic Precision Eikos	1,850	Seriously customised Pioneer with extraordinary resolution and world beating imaging and bass	●									1bit		165
Advantage CD1S	3,995	A CD player of some stature - what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●	●							20bit		193
Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●									24/96		190
R Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●									Hyb		169
AMC CD8A	150	Has balanced output, but is otherwise rather grey and unremarkable	●									BS	2071	172
B AMC CD9/DAC8	200	Beer-budget two-box system (player plus DAC) is smooth, attractive and easy on the ear	●									CC	2261	179
Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●								MB	2219	178
B Arcam Alpha 7SE	350	Revamped starter model is a clear improvement on very likeable predecessor	●									MB		195
R Arcam Alpha MCD	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	●									MB	2220	178
R Arcam Alpha 8	520	Refined, intricately detailed but a little cautious. Should be broadly compatible with a variety of amps	●									BS	1873	163
B Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●									1bit		176
B Arcam Alpha 9	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	●									Ring		188
Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●									24bit		191
Audio Research CD1	3,290	Suspends disbelief with a real yet obviously coloured sound. A rare proposition among CD players	●	●	●	●						BS	1875	163
Audio Note AN-CD1	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	●									Hyb		188
Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system fussy	●									MB		195
AVI S2000MC2	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-er-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	●									MB	2179	176
R AVI S2000MC Reference	1,399	Lean, dry, high resolution player, built to outlast most of us. A fine performer in a sympathetic system	●									MB		169
Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●									18bit		194
R Cambridge Audio CD4	150	Basic appearance and sluggish track access/track search belies its up-and-at-'em sound quality	●									Hyb	1268	147
B Cambridge Audio CD4SE	200	Among the best encountered at the price, considerably more refined and convincing than the CD4	●									BS	1877	163
B Cambridge Audio CD6	250	A sharp, articulate player, a real thoroughbred in fact, perhaps too sharp and lively for some systems	●									BS		159
R Copland CDA-266	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●									MB	2183	176
Copland CDA 289	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●									20bit		194
Copland CDA-288	2,199	A gentle giant of a player that errs in favour of pastel shades rather than bold daubs of colour	●									MB	1880	163
R Cymbol CDP12	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●									Hyb	2184	176
R Cyrus dAD1.5	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●									Hyb		191
R Cyrus dAD3	598	A relaxed style of delivery that convinces with guile and subtlety rather than orchestral ordnance	●									BS	1887	163
B Cyrus dAD3Q	898	Lucid, transparent and uncontrived sound quality, superb build, and readily upgradeable	●									MB	1887	169
R Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●									DS		191
B Denon DCD-635	180	Modest presentation gives little due to the thoroughbred electronics ticking away inside	●									MB	2075	172
Denon DCD-625	200	DCD-615 replacement is generously equipped but lacks sophisticated sound of its forebear	●									MB	1269	147
R Denon DCD-835	280	Refined version of Denon's multibit technology is a bit of a star	●									MB		184
Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●									MB	2266	179
Denon DCD-1650AR	700	Powerful, authoritative, and well equipped too, but this player sometimes lacks subtlety	●									MB		195
R Denon DCD-3000	1,000	Sings with the temperament of a huge orchestra under the baton of a timid conductor	●									MB	1881	163
Exposure CD player	1,049	Slightly weak sounding, but otherwise well optimised, if costly player	●									MB		188
harman/kardon HD710	200	A player of integrity, but can sound a bit hard and rough when extended, and is amplifier fussy	●									1bit		159
R harman/kardon HD740	300	Powerful but subtle and involving player: welcome back, harman/kardon!	●									DS		191
R harman/kardon FL8300	300	Generally capable changer with relaxed sound and firm bass. Just a hint of roughness on occasion	●									MB	2220	178
harman/kardon HD760	500	Sophisticated internally, but mildly disappointing when treading the boards in anger	●									MB		195
R Helios Model 2	950	This player may not be to everyone's taste, but it is an individual, with some interesting things to say	●									1bit	2180	176
Helios Model 3	650	Disappointing entry level model from Helios lacks verve and transparency	●									DS		188
R JVC XL-V184BK	120	Excellent budget player, well presented, a little opaque, but its heart is in the right place	●									1bit	2072	172
R JVC XL-V284BK	140	Featuring a new set of bitstream innards, this flexible player has a refined sound	●									1bit	1270	147
JVC XL-Z574	250	Strong resolving power, good midband and dynamics, but slightly raw and thin	●									1bit		159
R JVC XL-Z674BK	300	Even-handed, but glosses over the most intimate moments	●									1bit	1637	151
B Kenwood DP-3080	170	Bold, dynamic and outgoing sound, although somewhat aggressive. Poor build quality and finish	●									1bit		159
Kenwood DPF-3010	180	Grey, somewhat mechanical sounding player	●									Hyb		191
B Kenwood DP-4090	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music - and has CD Text too!	●									1bit	2076	172
Kenwood DP-5090	300	Disappointing senior brother to the excellent DP-4090, but surface interface is good	●									1bit	2267	179
B Kenwood DP-7090	400	A lively and compelling performer with an even-handed and coherent disposition	●									MB	1885	163
Linn Mimik	875	Useful multi-room features matched to strong bass, but poor imagery and transparency	●									Hyb	1762	155
Marantz CD-48	200	Somewhat inconsistent, middle ranking player which hints at better things	●									1bit	2077	172
R Marantz CD-67 Mk II	250	The digital equivalent of a safe pair of hands. Smoooooth	●									BS	2268	179
Marantz CD-670SE MKII	300	Lacks dynamic consistency to justify the stunning performance with simple material	●									BS		184
R Marantz CD-63 MKII KI Sig	400	It's the quintessential sound of Marantz - warm, open, and smooth almost to a fault	●									Hyb		169
R Marantz CD-17	800	Fabulous packaging and an excellent all round performer: smooth, detailed and consistent	●									BS	1763	155
R Marantz CD-17KI Sig	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland	●									BS	2181	176

CONTINUED

CD/DVD Players

SPECIFICATIONS

ISSUE NUMBER
FACTSBACK NO.
MULTI-DISC
VARIABLE OUTPUT
HEADPHONE SOCKET
BAL ANALOGUE OUT
ST OPT DIG OUT
OPTICAL DIG OUT
AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT
ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS																	
F Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	16bit	194
F Mercuris Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics – but it's not cheap	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	DS	169
B Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2182 176
Monrio Privilege	995	Costly and well-engineered, but ultimately rather heavy-handed and dull, if refined player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1963 166
Musical Fidelity E60	300	This entry-level player lacks proper stereo localisation and clarity	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1959 166
B Musical Fidelity E624	500	Similar to X-RAY, but both better sounding and cheaper	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	188
Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	184
Myryad T-10	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	DS	184
Myryad T-20	600	Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Delta Sig	195
R Myryad MC100	700	A little extra get-up-and-go wouldn't go amiss, but its sheer maturity and composure ensure listenability	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1889 163
Myryad MCD500	1,300	Well-built, attractive player, showing much promise, but can be a little heavy-going on audition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2185 176
NAD 522	170	Crude, mechanical sounding player fails to tickle the music buds	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2262 179
NAD 524	250	Clean, clear and essentially musical player in the NAD mould	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	191
R NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	195
R Naim Audio CD3.5	1,000	Forward and explicit sound needs careful system matching	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	188
R Naim Audio CD2	2,000	Provides bags of detail with a solid stereo focus but not all the romanticism we know to be possible	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1890 163
F Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	188
Onkyo DX-7510	400	Strongly flavoured, assertive sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1640 151
R Orelle CD-100EA	649	Excellent imagery, timing and transparency, and readily upgraded or reconfigured	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1964 166
Parasound C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hybrid	184
B Philips CD-721	130	Surprisingly well-sorted, articulate if slightly glossy and attractively presented sound. Captive signal lead	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	159
Philips CD751	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	172
Pioneer PD-S507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	DS	191
R Pioneer PD-S707	300	Idiosyncratic Legato Link dominated sound, but always subtle and interesting	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	184
Pioneer PD-F906	350	Interesting appearance and concept, but this changer's sound is lacklustre and ergonomics frustrating	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2223 178
Pioneer PD-S904	400	Too much legato – literally – in sound, but a very smooth performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	1641 151
R Pioneer PDS-06	550	Technologically sophisticated. Pioneer's first multi-bit player for years is polished and capable	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	2176 176
B Pioneer PD-S505 Precision	460	Assured, fluid-sounding player, with great spatial coherence	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	1965 166
Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	188
Revox Exception E426	2,250	Very stylish with a light, agile sound that extends superbly and has fine timing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	182
R Roksan DP3P	1,495	Dramatic and compelling. Classical listeners should be ready to 'air conduct' when auditioning	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1896 163
R Roksan Caspian	895	Solid, articulate, and fundamentally well-engineered player, but with some subtle low-level limitations	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	169
Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped down RCD-971 – buy the original	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	191
B Rotel RCD-971	350	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	184
B Rotel RCD-991	750	Confirms Rotel's status as must watch brand: great stuff	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	195
R Sherwood CD-4030R	180	Easy on the ear, smooth-sounding player, with limits set by the slightly soft, compressed quality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	159
Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1899 163
R Sony CDP-XE310	140	Excellent value and bright as a button, but can sound OTT in some systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	179
Sony CDP-XE510	180	Souped up CDP-XE500 which tells a rather bland and unengaging story	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	172
R Sony CDP-XB720E	200	Good basic performance and a number of filter settings make this an interesting player for tweaks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Low bit	184
Sony CDP-XA20ES	450	High tech, with a long list of gadgets, oddly configured player that ultimately sounds less than compelling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2177 176
B Sony CDP-X3000ES	500	Shoebbox format player, looks to die for, switchable digital filters to tweak the already excellent sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	169
B Sony CDP-XB930E	500	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Pulse	195
T+A CD1210R	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	DS	188
Talk Electronics Thunder 2	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradeable in various ways	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1-bit	191
R Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and availability of a complete upgrade path make this a good long term proposition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Delta Sig	195
R TAG McLaren CD20R	1,249	Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence – recommended with caution	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	188
B Teac CDP-3450SE	200	For once a budget player where gadgets take second place to respectable, budget amp-friendly sonics	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	1960 166
Teac CD-5	350	Bright, breezy and up-beat – but short in the trouser department	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	1643 151
Teac VRDS-8	600	Superb build quality is matched to good, but not exceptional sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	184
Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2178 176
Teac VRDS-10SE	850	Superbly built and presented, but rather leaden bass, with an over-prominent mid/top	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	169
Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	195
Teac VRDS-25	1,300	A solid player in all respects, combining powerful sound with state-of-the-art technology	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	1903 163
Technics SL-PG480A	130	Full driving sound, but somewhat uneven in balance with a unsubtle, slightly harsh top end	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	159
R Technics SL-PS670D	200	Fine, middle ranking player which sounds solid, sometimes even a little stolid	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	2264 179
Technics SL-PS770D	250	High tech and well built technology battleship which smooths the rough edges off the music	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	BS	2080 172
R Technics SL-MC410	250	If you fancy a CD player that holds 111 discs, this one's cheap, pretty capable, and easy to use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	2224 178
Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	DS	188
Trichord Genesis	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	169
Trichord Revelation	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1bit	1966 166
Tube Technology Fusion	1,100	Our early test sample was primitive and flawed, but showed signs of greatness	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Pulse Array	195
Tube Technology Fulcrum	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	24bit	194
XTC CDP-1	1,250	Bright and sometimes abrasive, but detailed player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	2186 176
Wadia W830	3,000	Envelope busting dynamics, power and imaging in a rather unexciting box (digital volume control)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	183
Wadia 860	7,450	Flagship CD player has unique digital volume control, superb neutrality and awesome bass	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	MB	189
Yamaha CDX-493	180	Open and lively, but this player is also messy and lacking resolving power	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Hyb	191
Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●	●															

CONTINUED

CD/DVD Players

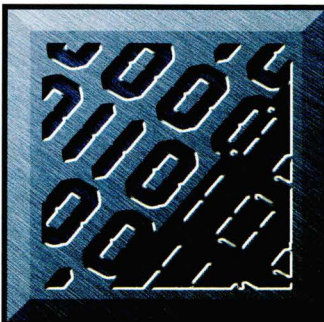
SPECIFICATIONS

ISSUE NUMBER
FACTSBACK NO.
DAC TYPE
MULTI-DISC
VARIABLE OUTPUT
HEADPHONE SOCKET
BAL. ANALOGUE OUT
ST. OPT DIG OUT
OPTICAL DIG. OUTPUT
AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT
ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT

STATUS

PRODUCT (€) COMMENTS

PRODUCT	(€)	COMMENTS										
DACS												
Alchemist TS-D-1	300	24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit, 96kHz DVDs										BS 187
Audio Note DAC Zero	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)										Hyb 191
Linn Numerik	1,500	A new 20-bit DAC and revised Karik transport have cleaned up; but sounds a bit dry and humourless										MB 1323 144
Musical Fidelity X-24K	300	24/96 ready with a warm, natural sound and good soundstaging (tested with Pioneer DV-717)										MB 187
PS Audio UltraLink 2 HDCD	2,590	The sound positively sparkles with colour and resonant detail. (Tested with Lambda transport)										MB 1106 133
PS Audio Reference Link	4,550	Consolidates reputation of PS Audio for high performance digital electronics										MB 1069 132
Roksan Attessa ATT-DA2/DS5	1,145	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of good excitement with the right material										1bit 1867 162
Teac D-T1	500	Teamed with VRDS-T1 for test, this superb quality unit is tidy and composed										BS 1325 144
Thorens TDA2000	700	Lively and up-front presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble										BS 1867 162
Trichord Pulsar Series One	1,395	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer. Switchable phase, dither etc										Hyb 1867 162
DVD PLAYERS												
Denon DVD-5000	1,600	The first DVD-V player that ain't bad as a CD player. A fine musical device	●	●								BS 187
Denon DVD-3000	700	Enjoyable rather than analytical, includes 24/96 and AC-3/MPEG-2 Audio	●	●								BS 180
Hitachi DV-P2E	400	DVD player, based on last generation Pioneer, is good but uninspiring	●									24/96 190
JVC XV-S2000	475	DVD player with excellent picture but flat sound in most modes	●	●								PEM 190
Kenwood DVF-9010	1000	DVD player with brilliant picture and clean, lively sound	●	●								24/96 190
Micromega Premium DVD	1,500	Unique lack of regional coding constrictions but both DVD and CD replay are compromised	●	●								BS 183
Panasonic DVD-A150	400	Simple, mid-market DVD player is vice-free but limited for the audiophile	●	●								24/96 190
Panasonic DVD-A350	700	24/96 converter and AC-3 & MPEG-2 Audio included, well balanced, if slightly blurred and shut in	●	●								BS 180
Pioneer DV-515	400	Unusually well equipped (CD-R compatible etc) DVD with more than fair sound and picture quality	●	●								MB 190
Pioneer DV-717	550	Superb DVD player with good picture quality and which really knows how to play 24/96 discs	●	●								MB 190
Pioneer DVL-909	900	DVD and LD player: self-recommending to AV nuts; musically detailed but occasionally seems disjointed	●	●								BS 180
Samsung DVD-907	500	DVD player with below average picture, and lacklustre sound quality	●	●								24/96 190
Sony DVP-S715	600	24/96 converter for DAD compatibility, sharp, forward, but slightly unsubtle sound	●	●								BS 180
Theta DaViD	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricy for a DVD transport, but worth it	●	●	●	●						24/96 191
Thomson DTH2000	380	This DVD player's main attributes are reasonable pricing and fair to good all round performance	●	●								24/96 190
Toshiba SD3107B	550	Dynamic sound and good stereo which lacks lowest stratum of detail	●	●								BS 180
Yamaha DVD-S700	600	DVD player, similar to Panasonic DVD-A350 but cheaper – an excellent buy	●	●								24/96 190



Digital Recorders

Domestic digital recording has been possible since the launch of digital audio tape (DAT) in the '80s. Since then DAT has remained expensive and largely esoteric, favoured only by well-heeled or professional users. Digital Compact Cassette and MiniDisc (MD) were launched in the early '90s but only MD has stayed the course. A little later came domestic CD-Recorders using CD-R discs, while the latest twist is the arrival of re-recordable CDs known as CD-RW discs. The recording quality hierarchy is as follows: DAT, CD-R/CD-RW, MD. MD is probably the most convenient to use, and offers sophisticated editing facilities, while CD-R is ideal for making digital 'clones' of pre-recorded CDs. DAT is the medium of choice for high-quality location recording.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **FORMAT:** Type of recorder – see left for descriptions.
- **DAC TYPE:** Digital to analogue converter: BS - Philips Bitstream; MB - multibit; Hyb - hybrid of multibit and bitstream; 1bit - single bit types such as MASH, bitstream, PWM etc
- **ADC TYPE:** The analogue to digital converter (ADC) converts sound into digits during live recording. Types of ADC are as per DACs (qv).
- **PORTABLE:** Battery operable, but not necessarily personal-stereo-sized.
- **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS:** Digital socketry for optical cable.
- **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS:** Digital socketry for electrical cable.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the mag.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

STATUS

Digital Recorders

SPECIFICATIONS

ISSUE NUMBER
FACTSBACK NO.
ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
PORTABLE
ADC TYPE
DAC TYPE
FORMAT

PRODUCT (€) COMMENTS

PRODUCT	(€)	COMMENTS										
MINIDISCS												
Denon DMD-1000	300	A good machine, but it still doesn't manage to shake off the MiniDisc plague of losing the listener's interest										184
Denon DMD-1300	500	Sound sometimes lacks integration but tonal balance is good and it handles loud music with panache										2193 177
Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition										191
Kenwood DM-9090	550	Slight sibilance and image vagueness do not detract from excellent balance and solid bass										2194 177
Marantz CM635	500	CD player and MD recorder in one box: a practical idea but sound and features don't really match the asking price										191
Onkyo MD-121	450	Mid-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively										2195 177
Pioneer MJ-D707	250	A handy set of features for the price, though sound is not outstanding										191
Sharp MD-R1 MkII	200	It's cheap: sound is not outrageously bettered by rather pricier competition. A bit thin on features though										191
Sharp MDR3H	300	Nifty machine combining a 3-disc CD changer with a MD recorder. Sound on both is rather below par, though										184
Sharp MD-R2	300	Budget recorder that loses little or nothing in comparisons with much more expensive models – highly capable										2196 177
Sony MDS-JB920	300	One of the better MD decks, its sound is neutral and dynamic. European Audio Recorder of the Year '98-'99										184
Sony MDS-JA20ES	500	Sound quality about as good as it gets with MD to date, and a very comprehensive features set too										191
Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Probably the best MD deck to date, with consistently less quality loss over a wide range of programme. Lots of features										194
Yamaha MDX-793	300	Nice machine to use and has some useful features, but sound quality a little wanting										191
CD RECORDERS												
Marantz DR700	600	Dearer than Philips and Traxdata equivalents, with apparently only a smarter front panel to show for it										191
Philips CDR-880	499	Capable of making perfect copies of CD digital, and very acceptable copies of anything analogue too										184
Pioneer PDR-555RW	480	Competitor to Philips' CDR880; it can't make perfect copies but has the edge in replay and analogue record sound										184
Pioneer PDR-04	700	Scaled down version of the PDR-05 with auto level setting but all the socketry and features you need to make CDs										171
Pioneer PDR-05	1,000	The first domestic CD-R deck – excellent sound quality										1652 152
Traxdata Traxaudio 900	499	Identical to Philips and Marantz models: it makes bit-perfect copies of CDs and has perfectly acceptable replay										191



Headphones

There are several different ways of making a headphone. The most expensive models employ electrostatically-driven diaphragms within an open-backed earcup. Most mid-price designs feature dynamic, moving-coil-driven diaphragms in open, semi-open or closed-back designs. An open-backed headphone can sound remarkably transparent, but also permits the ingress of external noise. Closed-back designs keep out unwanted sound, but may be less comfortable to wear and more coloured. The latest development is the cordless headphone using either infrared light or, more recently, radio waves. Quality is improving, but has yet to match the best corded designs.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **TYPE:** Operating principle: D - dynamic; E - electrostatic.
- **SUPRA-AURAL:** Where a flat pad presses on the outer ear.
- **CIRCUMAURAL:** Where the earcup encloses the ear.
- **OPEN BACK:** Offers an open sound but lets in noise.
- **CLOSED BACK:** Keeps out external noise.
- **MASS (g):** Mass in grams
- **IMPEDANCE (Ω):** Load offered to the headphone amplifier. Many headphones offer a significantly higher value than loudspeakers, for example, but this does not mean they will be incompatible with the majority of amplifiers.
- **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR:** Compatible with mini-jacked components, eg personal stereos.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the magazine.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

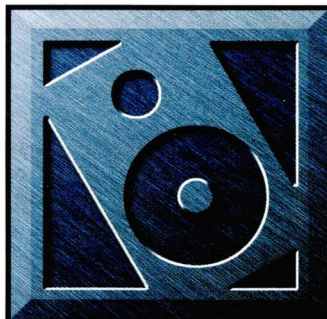
B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Headphones

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS: **S** SUPRA-AURAL TYPE **C** CIRCUMAURAL **O** OPEN BACK **C** CLOSED BACK **M** MASS (g) **I** IMPEDANCE (Ω) **J** 3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR **F** FACTSBACK NO. **I** ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(E)	COMMENTS	D	E	S	C	O	C	M	I	J	F	I
AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight	D							230	100		194
AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt	D							240	600		186
R AKG K1000	700	One of the best dynamics on the market, hooks directly into speaker outputs	D							270	120		99
R Audio Technica ATH910PRO	80	The closed back 910s are an improvement on the 909s, with a nice rhythmic quality rarely found	D							280	40		55
R Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal	D							250	66		194
R Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phone	D							250	60		186
Beyer DT311	50	Uncharacteristically tight, unrefined sound quality from this otherwise well engineered 'phone	D							124	40		1098 133
Beyer DT411	63	A reasonable but not very thrilling headphone that doesn't really offer enough at the price	D							120	250		111
Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass	D							210	40		194
Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent	D							210	40		186
R Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. High tingle factor, even so	D							200	250		2063 172
R Beyer DT531	135	A good buy for serious, heavy-duty music making	D							245	250		144
B Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads	D							295	250		186
Beyer DT100	160	Rugged, modular professional design, but bass is woolly and treble lacks detail	D							350	600		157
R Beyer DT911	170	Probably too revealing for many headphone amps: these are very subtle and fine, if expensive cans	D							275	250		111
Denon AH-D550	80	A competent 'phone with integrity, but little panache or charisma. Hard headband causes brain strain	D							200	35		1801 157
Denon AH-D750	130	Loud and gutsy, meaty bass, good with rock and dance. Can sound thick and clumsy	D							250	30		2063 172
Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable	D							120	32		2064 172
B Grado SR60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these 'phones are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyones taste	D							200	32		194
Grado SR-80	100	Open and dynamic with pedantically open mid-band. Crude physical design, rough frequency extremes	D							60	8		1801 157
R Grado SR125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality	D							200	32		186
R Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music	D							200	32		1883 163
B Jeklin Float Model 1	79	While very unusual in appearance, the Floats give remarkable sound quality and openness	D							400	200		55
JVC HA-D50	45	Detailed but with a characteristic mid-band all of their own and a modest amount of lower bass	D							290	56		194
JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design	D							165	I/R		172
JVC HA-D910	65	Broadly acceptable if unexciting design with low level losses and some colorations	D							220	32		121
R JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard	D							280	20,000		186
Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing	D							250	60		194
Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement	D							215	60		186
Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top	D							380	100		1892 163
R Philips SBC 3396	70	Remarkably airy for closed-back designs. Fine tonal balance, punchy delivery. Amazing value for money	D							255	32		2064 172
Philips SBC HP900	90	Sharper, snappier midrange than 3396: initially impressive but blows it on balance and listenability	D							200	32		2065 172
Sennheiser IS 380	55	As close as you'll get to real hi-fi with infra-red phones at this price. Inevitable hiss spoils the illusion	D							192	I/R		172
R Sennheiser HD 455	55	Inoffensive, if nondescript sound; modular, but can become dislodged from head	D							185	60		1801 157
Sennheiser HD 500	70	A disappointing pair that offer good stereo-imaging, but little else	D							210	32		186
Sennheiser HD 475	80	Elegant, uncluttered sound and very comfortable but lean bass saps satisfaction	D							120	60		2065 172
Sennheiser RS 400	80	FM cordless 'phones that are very wearable, but slightly woolly sounding with interference problems	D							160	N/A		186
R Sennheiser HD 570 Symph	90	Comfortable, light-weight 'phones with a detailed and open sound but lacks bass depth on weightier music	D							210	64		194
R Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband	D							255	150		2066 172
B Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable	D							255	150		1801 157
Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy	E							260	N/A		1898 163
Sony MDR-605LP	50	Funky looking headphones that have a very bold, but tiring sound, with coloured bass	D							145	40		186
Sony MDR-CD770	100	Neutrality and comfort make the Sony easy to live with. Correct-sounding too, yet musically unrewarding	D										1801 157
Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass	D							300	24		194
B Sony MDR-CD1700	200	Astonishingly detailed, uncoloured and free of the usual artefacts from a sealed back headphone	D							325	32		1901 163
Sony MDR-F1	100	Natural, easy-going sound teamed with great looks and comfort. Shame about the lightweight bass	D							300	12		2066 172
Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof	D							230	32		2067 172
B Stax Lambda Nova Basic	449	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence - and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards	E							347	N/A		1902 163
Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner	D							210	FM		172
Vivanco IR5800	50	Consistently musical infra-red design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven	D							226	I/R		172
R Vivanco SR650	50	Unusually comfortable 'phone with excellent detail resolution but aggressive	D							175			1801 157
B Vivanco SR750	60	Cossetting physical design, a ractive sound, though suffers overhang and lacks ultimate dynamics	D							188			1801 157
R Vivanco SR 950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones	D							252	32		194
Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable	D							280	9,000		186
Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss	D							240	9,000		186



Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

As the last link in the hi-fi chain, loudspeakers are at the mercy of incoming signals. Nevertheless, distortions introduced by loudspeakers tend to be the most obvious. Inside the average loudspeaker is a simple electrical circuit (the crossover) which splits the incoming, full-frequency-range signal for the specific drive units to handle: highs to the 'tweeter', lows to the 'woofer'. For any speaker, designers must balance the 'sensitivity' of the loudspeaker (how loud it goes for a given electrical input) against bass extension (how low it goes). Subwoofers augment bass and are either passive (unamplified) or, preferably, active (self-amplified). Our 'bass' from figures are based on measurements in a particular room therefore results will vary in different environments.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **SIZE w×h×d (cm):** Width by height by depth in centimetres.
- **FLOORSTANDER:** Requires no stand support.
- **SENSITIVITY (dB/W):** How much sound results for a given electrical input – the higher the figure, the louder the speaker.
- **IMPEDANCE (Ω):** Impedance, measured in Ohms, indicates how much resistance the speaker presents to an amplifier. As impedance decreases, demands on an amplifier increase.
- **BASS FROM (Hz):** The lowest frequency that a speaker can reproduce effectively.
- **FREE SPACE:** Speakers which should not sit close to walls.
- **CLOSE TO WALL:** Speakers which should sit between 3 and 12cm from the rear wall.

● **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faced review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of this issue.

● **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE W×H×D (CM) FLOORSTANDER SENSITIVITY (dB/W) IMPEDANCE (Ω) BASS FROM (HZ) FREE SPACE CLOSE TO WALL FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE W×H×D (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
F	Acoustic Energy Aegis One	150	At a new low price, this has a very natural and transparent midband, erring a little on the dull side	19,36,5,24		87	6	40				187
F	Acoustic Energy AE200	250	Metal-cone miniature has a tendency to shout but is still lots of fun, and well built too	18,5,30,25		87	6	40			2199	177
F	Acoustic Energy AE109	350	Lots of mass-loaded twin-driver speaker for the money, especially for loud, driving bass	18,90,25		88	4	25			1904	164
F	Acoustic Energy AE120	500	Attractive presentation and good sonic headroom, but a heavy, uneven overall balance	18,98,28		89	4	25			1904	170
F	Acoustic Energy AE520	1,000	Could be more neutral, but high-class build is reflected in a high-class sound. Very elegant too	21,98,30		91	3	25				190
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but light-weight bass	18,38,25,5		80	8	65				192
	ATC SCM20	1,599	Massively built, invariably informative but the rather forward presentation can be uncomfortable	24,44,31		83	8	28				86
F	Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound	18,94,21		87	6	40			1905	164
F	Audio Note AN-J/B	799	Light damping and local unevenness add some coloration, but don't spoil the speaker	38,58,25		93	8	25				110
F	Audio Note AN-E/B	1,299	Coherent, dynamic and transparent, with extended bass and high sensitivity – but ugly!	36,84,28		94	8	20				106
	Audio Physic Tempo	1,999	Tall and unusually-styled floorstander has stunning stereo but suspect bass tuning	22,107,47		88	8	28			1344	143
F	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little under-developed	19,106,27		90	4	20				190
F	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradeable, too!	20,102,30		89	4	22				180
F	AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86	4	50				190
	AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small scale way	17,5,74,24,5		85	6	40			2130	174
F	B&W DM302	150	Highly competent and neutral all rounder; clever Prism enclosure	19,32,22		88	4	45			1778	156
F	B&W DM305	350	Ridged paper cone gives lively sound, clever box, but a little uneven	22,87,31		89	4	40			1908	164
	B&W CDM2SE	400	Beautifully styled and finished, respectable midband. Lacks definition towards frequency extremes	22,32,25		87	6	40				183
F	B&W 603 S2	550	Capable of being driven seriously loud, but the cautious balance seems less happy playing at low levels	23,5,87,29		91	4	22				193
F	B&W CDM1SE	600	A great looking stand-mount with one of the best midbands around, and a subtle blend of other qualities	22,37,29		88	5	40			2209	177
	B&W CDM7	1,000	A combination of serious welly and physical elegance; but a basic lack of midband smoothness	22,97,29		90	4	22			2131	174
	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A great looking and extremely capable design with excellent timing and real communications skills	24,41,5,34,5		88	8	22				191
F	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		91	8	34				183
F	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		91	8	34				186
F	Blueroom MINIPOD	249	The MINIPOD can show its competitors a thing or two about freedom from boxiness and looks fab	18,34,-,17		91	4	50				193
F	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-her-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32		92	5	28				180
	Carlsson OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37		90	8	20				195
F	Castle Isis	250	A great miniature at a competitive price. Sound is lightweight but very coherent, with a fine overall balance	17,35,5,21		87	8	45			2019	170
F	Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking stand-mount is a good allrounder, commendably free from boxiness	19-22,42,25		91	4	30				193
F	Castle Kendal	500	A beautifully finished compact floorstander with a decidedly forward but communicative sound	17,76,20		86	6	45			2204	177
	Castle Severn 2	539	Carbon fibre cone gives lovely, subtle midband but treble is a bit dull and bass a bit thumpy	21,84,25		87	8	30			2120	174
	Castle Avon	730	Lovely box and lovely voices from carbon-fibre composite cone	22,91,28		85	8	22			1909	164
F	Castle Haritech	880	Handsome big-sounding floorstander, great value and dynamic midrange	20,96,33		88	8	28			1820	160
	Castle Inversion 100	1,975	Large semi-omni design with gorgeous Art Deco styling, sounds open but bass alignment is ill-tuned	26,5,111,45		91	8	20				195
	Celestion 12i	119	Not without virtue, but the relentless enthusiasm and mid-band colorations can become wearing	19,31,21		88	6	45			2254	179
	Celestion 23i	300	Cosmetically flawed, but the bottom end has fine get-up-and-go, and works well with dance tracks	24,86,27		89	6	30			2200	177
F	Celestion A Compact	600	Provided the room isn't too large, and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90	3	45				193
F	Celestion A1	899	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35		88	6	25			1910	164
F	Celestion A2	1,500	Full scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,93,39		89	6	22				180
	Chario Syntar 100	249	Pretty with a pleasantly easygoing balance, but not the most communicative or exciting sound around	18,32,27		87	6	45			2020	170
F	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy looking stand mount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28		87	4	45				187
	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40				190
F	Chario Academy Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55				190
F	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32		91	4	25			2121	174
	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	400	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87	3	50				190
	Dynaudio Audience 5	400	Follows the Dynaudio tradition for fine midband transparency, but the overall timbre is a bit thin	20,31,26		85	4	40			2205	177
F	Dynaudio Audience 40	400	Classy engineering content creates a winning combination of neutrality, dynamic range and involvement	17,28,25		87	4	40				190
F	Dynaudio Audience 50	577	This stand-mount doesn't look big, but sound quality can match many models at twice the price	20,33,25		86	4	30			2122	174
F	Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29		85	4	20			1986	167
	Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	12,3,20,8,28,2		86	4	42				191
	Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25				187
	Eltax Linear Response	249	A curiously lumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40			2201	177
	Epos ES12	499	High quality luxury stand-mount has great midband and stereo imaging	20,38,25		85	8	45			1823	160
	Epos ES25	1,655	Handsome floorstander with a rather uneven and bass heavy balance	24,90,35		88	6	22			1346	143
	Gale 2i	140	Unspectacular sound and appearance fail to help this solid little miniature stand out from the crowd	22,40,27		88	7	40			2021	170
F	Heybrook Prima 2	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18		87	6	50			2256	179
F	Heybrook Heylette B	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22		88	4	45				187
F	Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29		94	4	30				193
F	Heybrook Heylios	389	Great all-round performance in a pretty package at a sharp price	24,36,27		87	6	25			1912	164
	Heybrook Heylo	439	Good vocal reproduction, but sounds thin and bass seems an afterthought	23,73,19		88	8	30			1658	152
	Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29		89	6	45			2126	174
	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31		90	6	25				180
	Infinity Delta 60	700	Striking and massive floorstander, lots of speaker for the price, but seems a victim of its own complexity	16-29,115,41		90	4	25				183

CONTINUED

Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE WxHxD (CM) FLOORSTANDER SENSITIVITY (db/W) IMPEDANCE (ohm) BASS FROM (Hz) FREE SPACE CLOSE TO WALL FACTS/BACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/W)	IMPEDANCE (ohm)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTS/BACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER	
Infinity Reference II	150	Although not to our tastes, this is a competent speaker, and decent material value	20,34,20		89	6	50	●	●	1403	148	
Jamo BX100A	350	Offering a cracking output for their size, these rock boxes can be a bit bright but have decent bass	31,5,54,28		91	8	40	●	●	1758	155	
Jamo Classic 8	400	A lot of speaker for the money; good when playing quietly, but boom'n'tizz character sounded crude	22,90,29	●	90	4	28	●	●	1659	152	
Jamo Cornet 195	350	Loads of bass, should have plenty of yooof-appeal – it looks the business, and is priced attractively	20,5,91,31	●	90	3	26	●	●		183	
Jamo 477A	500	Very prettily styled, but build and sound quality are disappointing at the price	19,77,28	●	88	4	40	●	●	1549	138	
Jamo 507A	700	Imaginative styling keeps the front view super slim yet still it packs a punch. Glass top is a nice touch	22,94,37	●	88	3	40	●	●	2126	174	
F JBL LX2	250	<i>Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with considerable enthusiasm</i>	22,40,27	●	87	8	40	●	●	2022	170	
JBL Ti200	400	Very substantial stand-mount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●	●		193	
F JBL L20	700	Pricy, heavy and a bit laid back, but this is a fine rock'n'roller which is dynamic and communicative	26,42,28		86	8	30	●	●	1550	138	
JBL SVA1500	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump	17,5,51,31		86	8	40	●	●	2127	174	
F JBL L40	1,000	Classic, large, stand-mount three-way is full of vim and vigour, with a superb sense of balance	30,65,31		88	4	23	●	●	1976	167	
F JBL 4312 II	1,000	Crude but startlingly effective dynamics. The original party animal knows just how to rock'n'roll	36,60,30		94	4	25	●	●		190	
F JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52	●	91	8	<20	●	●		180	
F JBL L90	1,500	<i>A classic monitor which communicates with gusto and enthusiasm, though it can sound a bit crude</i>	24,94,35	●	91	6	23	●	●	1348	143	
JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy scratchy treble	26,5,94,30	●	91	4	33	●	●		183	
JMLab Tantal 507	295	Competent all rounder, this compact stand-mount has a good heart and sweet treble, but sounds a bit small	21,38,27		93	4	40	●	●		193	
F JMLab Tantal 515	495	<i>Lively and open if bright. Sound is entertaining and informative, but presentation is nondescript</i>	20,94,26	●	92	5	32	●	●		183	
JMLab Spectral 909.1	1,375	Multi-driver array in a large and very substantial enclosure. Good scale but lacks delicacy and sweetness	27,107,35	●	90	4	20	●	●		180	
JMLab Electra 915	1,795	Fine headroom and bass, and classy engineering too, but also a tricky amp load which lacks delicacy	26,5,106,36	●	92	4	20	●	●		195	
F JMLab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	<i>Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence</i>	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●	●		186	
R Jordan Watts JH400	565	Piano-finish hexagon has controversial sound, with uneven balance but delightful mid	28,38,21		86	8	50	●	●		106	
F JPW Mini Monitor	60	<i>Ultra-cheap miniature works well in a limited way</i>	18,27,175		86	8	50	●	●	1781	156	
F JPW Gold Monitor	80	<i>More informative than Mini Monitor – but fiercer, too</i>	18,27,175		86	8	50	●	●	1782	156	
F JPW ML510	130	<i>Lots of good-quality speaker for the price, but not an ideal match for cheap budget components</i>	20,34,22		88	5	50	●	●		169	
JPW ML710	230	Good material value but disappointingly uneven bass – check out the 510s instead	20,88,30	●	88	5	40	●	●	2202	177	
JPW ML910	330	Loads of speaker for the money, plenty of headroom and loudness capability, but sounds dull	23,104,30	●	91	4	43	●	●		183	
F JPW ML1010	400	<i>A seriously substantial speaker for the price, and an obvious choice for those who like their music loud</i>	22,5,115,40	●	91	6	25	●	●	2031	170	
JPW Ruby 1	400	Very pretty but pricy luxury metal-cone miniature has good, if slightly edgy balance	19,32,21		87	6	55	●	●	1572	139	
F JPW Ruby 4	1,000	Twin metal-cone main drivers improve the dynamic performance and bass extension, with little sacrifice	22,94,26	●	88	8	25	●	●	2132	174	
F KEF Coda 7	129	Lovely open voice reproduction, but bass could be tauter; build tougher	18,30,23		88	6	50	●	●	1783	156	
F KEF Cresta 2	149	A good looking/value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24		91	4	40	●	●		195	
F KEF Coda 8	189	Outstandingly well-balanced, bass is deep but a little vague	20,32,5,29		86	6	28	●	●	1784	156	
F KEF Q15	200	Beautifully balanced and voiced stand-mount, but a potentially tricky amplifier load at high frequencies	20,5,31,27		90	2.5	30	●	●		187	
KEF Coda 9	299	Uneven budget 3-way floorstander with poor bass definition	20,86,28	●	89	6	30	●	●	1785	156	
KEF RDM One	499	Cute and tiny, nice midband but lack of bass warmth and weight	23,30,24		88	6	70	●	●	1913	164	
KEF Q65	799	Dumpy-looking three-way has loads of bass and a laid-back midband; goes loud but lacks poise and impact	23,95,31	●	92	2.5	25	●	●		190	
KEF RDM Three	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●	●		189	
KEF Reference Model 2	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34	●	89	4	40	●	●	1987	167	
F Keswick Audio Aria II	379	<i>Confident and dynamic sound, if a little crude and shut in</i>	21,42,24		89	8	30	●	●	1405	148	
F Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	18-26, 93,28	●	90	4	20	●	●	1977	167	
F Linn Kan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45	●	●		187	
F Linn Keilidh Passive	750	Stunning timing and coherence, and awesome bass drive	20,83,28		87	4	22	●	●	1552	138	
F Linn Kaber Passive	2,000	Dry, bright balance emphasises dynamics and transients, but can sound unforgiving	20,90,28		87	4	25	●	●		118	
F Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	<i>Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity</i>	21,5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●	●		180	
Magnat Vector 77	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29	●	89	5	30	●	●		183	
F Magnat Vintage 720	1,200	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity	29,113,32	●	88	4	20	●	●		180	
Mission 700	130	A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease	18,34,26	●	87	8	40	●	●	2257	179	
F Mission 771	170	<i>Beautiful stand-mount miniature has a delightfully well balanced and voiced sound, and real wood finish</i>	17,31,22		86	7	45	●	●		187	
F Mission 750LE	250	Fabulous cosmetics and a great midband carry the day, though size will out and bass is inevitably limited	17,28,27		86	7	45	●	●	2203	177	
F Mission 773e	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all round entertaining sound	17,5,88,26	●	92	4	30	●	●		193	
F Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●	●		183	
F Mission 752 Freedom	578	<i>A beautifully judged compromise in the art of combining presentation with a decent sound</i>	20,90,25	●	89	8	45	●	●	2123	174	
F Mission 753 Freedom	798	<i>Great styling. New, more restrained tweeter reveals fine midband dynamics</i>	21,90,31	●	89	4	40	●	●		1914	164
Mission 754 Freedom 5	1,298	Tall but exceptionally elegant floorstander gives fine midband projection; goes loud but limited deep bass	22,111,31	●	88	4	40	●	●	1981	167	
Monitor Audio Monitor 3	400	An exceptionally discreet floorstander, sonically uneven, but capable of fine results	16,91,21	●	88	5	30	●	●	2032	170	
F Monitor Audio Monitor 4	500	An oddball balance but an entertaining sound, and a good looking real-wood-box at a realistic price	20,87,24	●	84	6	23	●	●	2210	177	
F Monitor Audio MA700 PMC	600	Good-looking luxury compact with all-metal diaphragms: lovely midrange, but occasionally edgy	22,35,26		89	8	45	●	●	1661	152	
F Monitor Audio 702PMC	700	A good all-round stand-mount with intimate midband focus	20,40,25		87	8	30	●	●	2128	174	
F Monitor Audio MA703 PMC	800	Lovely but pricy floorstander has up front, coherent, 'shiny' sound	20,89,27	●	88	8	50	●	●	1826	160	
Monitor Audio Studio 12	1,000	A real looker, but sound and content are a bit on the small side for the price	17,92,20	●	90	8	28	●	●	1349	143	
Monitor Audio 705PMC	1,400	Beautifully finished compact floorstander with fine midband coherence, but limited bass and top end	20,94,28	●	89	4	25	●	●		180	
Mordaunt-Short MS812	100	Quirky styling and a very laid back presence, but great musical integrity and solid value for money	20,5, 42, 25	●	88	5	44	●	●		187	
Musical Technology Kestrel SE	300	Brighter and drier-sounding than the standard Kestrel (and not the better for it)	20,84,19	●	84	5	50	●	●	1915	164	
F Musical Technology Harrier	400	Very pretty package, good measured performance and even sound. Sensitivity is low, and dynamics limp	25,80,23	●	86	8	25	●	●	1663	152	
F Musical Technology PM15	450	<i>A subtle, understated but very involving example of the 'classic' luxury-finish compact standmount</i>	20,41,27		88	5	38	●	●		183	
F Musical Technology Condor	1,000	Lots of clever ideas in a floorstander, which places transparency and smoothness ahead of dynamic drama	25,91,23	●	85	4	28	●	●	2134	174	
F Musical Technology Falcon	680	<i>Big speaker has a big but also surprisingly smooth and civilised sound. Fine material value too</i>	33,117,30	●	89	4	22	●	●		190	
F Naim Intro	660	<i>Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth</i>	24,89,27	●	89	6	30	●	●	1916	164	
F Naim Credo	1,060	Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness	24,89,30	●	88	8	28	●	●		180	
F Naim SBL Passive	1,970	Lively and punchy – smoother but more upfront than before	27,89,27	●	88	6	25	●	●	1352	143	
F Neat Critique 2	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24		86	6	50	●	●		183	
F Neat Mystique Mk2	575	<i>This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality; some might find the top end too insistent</i>	20,86,18	●	85	6	23	●	●	2211	177	
F Neat Elite	1,195	A highly entertaining all rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth	20,88,18	●	88.5	6	25	●	●		195	
Neat Petite II/Gravitas	2,000	Beautifully presented miniature/subwoofer combo with ribbon tweeter gives smooth, laid-back sound	23,105,40	●	85	6	25	●	●	1988	167	
Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31		90	4	40	●	●		190	
Origin Live Conqueror	1,650	Chunky floorstanding three-way has lovely cabinetwork and lively sound, but limited deep bass	24,94,27	●	88	8	30	●	●	1989	167	
F Orelle Swing	1,200	A superb example of what an essentially small loudspeaker can do, with bags of brio and enthusiasm	18,101,28	●	87	8	45	●	●		195	

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Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE WxHxD (CM) FLOORSTANDER SENSITIVITY (db/W) IMPEDANCE (Ω) BASS FROM (Hz) FREE SPACE CLOSE TO WALL FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
PMC TB1S	430	Pro-audio version of TB1, cheaper because of black paint finish	20,41,30		87	6	40	●	●	2207	177
PMC TB1	482	A classy, laid-back performer that likes going loud and loves the bass guitar	20,40,31		87	8	45	●	●	1830	160
PMC LB1	935	Delightful smoothness and transparency, though bass and treble are both limited	18,53,25		89	4	33	●	●		110
PMC AB1	1,496	Lovely panel-like transparency, slightly shut-in balance, needs a big room	26,79,43		89	6	22	●	●		114
Polk LS50	800	No enthusiast tweaks here, but powerful and beautiful balance	27,83,29	●	89	8	25	●	●	1155	138
Polk RT16	799	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and not very pretty	22,105,39	●	91	4	22	●	●	1831	160
Polk LS70	1,200	High sensitivity, but balance has too much midbass boom; mid-top is laid back	31,94,37	●	90	8	22	●	●	1084	132
Proac Response 2.5	2,700	For aspirant high-enders looking for seriously good boxes, this speaker should be first port of call	22,107,25	●	86	8	30	●	●	1457	149
ProAc Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	●	87	8	28	●	●		192
QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal stand-mount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●		167
Quad ESL-63	3,450	Classic electrostatic lacks punch, but has strengths some can't live without	66,93,27	●	86	8	34	●	●		60
Rega KYTE	198	Has splendid timing and coherence, sounds very explicit and informative	19,31,19		87	8	50	●	●		114
Rega EL8	298	KYTE drivers in compact floorstander give more bass but less coherence	17,72,20	●	86	8	55	●	●		122
Rega Jura	450	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●		193
Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty and smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	1578	139
Rega XEL	1,040	Looks and sounds great: balance bright but even, with delightful coherence and timing	20,82,30	●	89	6	40	●	●	1083	132
Rehdeko RK 115a	1,700	Single-driver system has limited bandwidth and obvious coloration, but wondrous dynamic coherence	34,42,27		95	8	55	●	●	1982	167
Revolver Colt	139	A good all-rounder, if a little bland, and excellent value for money	30,19,22		88	6	48	●	●	1407	148
Revolver 250	250	A nice price for a floorstander, but over-bright sound balance has potentially fatiguing consequences	21,85,5,25	●	87	8	22	●	●	2023	170
RMS Revelation Series 1	1,299	Innovative metal-box compact with integral port/stand - clean with good timing but very laid-back balance	20,99,24	●	81	8	22	●	●	1983	167
Roksan ROKone	595	Large stand-mount is musically very communicative if a little coloured	21,45,33		89	6	30	●	●	1834	160
Roksan Ojan 3 Black	795	Squat, stylish and black, great bass extension and somewhat uneven balance	28,76,46	●	88	8	20	●	●	1082	132
Roksan OJ3X Black	995	Innovative low-line, 2-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	1979	167
Royd Minstrel	275	Not much wellie or loudness but fine coherence and timing; a bit bright	18,69,12		86	8	30	●	●	1167	135
Royd Doublet	485	Great value compact floorstander: lively and very informative, if a little uneven	18,93,19	●	90	4	28	●	●	1835	160
Royd The Sorcerer	595	Extremely musical and communicative speaker that's fun to listen to. Aesthetics could be better, though	20,31,18		86	8	35	●	●		139
Royd Abbot	695	Dynamic and fine transient qualities are hampered by a rather coloured mid-forward balance	20,81,30	●	90	8	43	●	●		118
Ruark Epilogue	269	Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	17,29,23		87	8	47	●	●		183
Ruark Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with class veneer and shiny gilt fixings, hampered by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31		87	8	40	●	●	2129	174
Ruark Talisman II	749	Less ideologically committed than some, strength lies in fine all-round coherence	23,84,32	●	88	8	30	●	●		118
Ruark Crusader	1,599	Elegant luxury three-way with wonderfully even-handed, if rather laid-back balance	24,94,31	●	85	6	22	●	●	1990	167
Ruark Equinox	1,849	The primary strength of this speaker is its ability to vanish behind the music	25,88,34		88	6	45	●	●	1227	140
Ruark Excalibur	7,000	A big handsome speaker with a big, laid-back, but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	●	90	4	30	●	●		186
Sequence 400	329	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25,100,7		86	8	45	●	●	1917	164
Shahinian Arc	1,875	Occasionally wonderful, small, floorstanding omni directional design: bright but coherent and revealing	35,69,25		88	6	24	●	●		110
Silverado Raider	695	Beautifully built audiophile compact: neutral if bright, tough work for amps	20,40,25		83	3	30	●	●	1918	164
Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready stand mount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30		87	6	25	●	●		190
Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active-bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration.	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●		194
Sonus Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,32,29		87	5	30	●	●		193
Spendor 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	●	87	8	30	●	●	1836	160
System Audio 1130	499	Super-slim, super smooth, involving experience, but not ideal if you like your bass deep and loud	3,100,21	●	89	4	43	●	●		183
System Audio 1150	749	Pricy but persuasive, sonic subtleties sneak up to confound a dodgy first impression. Super-slim	16,105,26	●	90	4	30	●	●		190
Tangent Monitor 5	80	An uneven performer best suited to small rooms and generous volume levels	17,5,27,18		83	8	55	●	●		169
Tangent Monitor 9	150	Budget floorstander that motors when the music demands, with a solid bass but occasionally raw treble	19,5,75,5,22,5	●	90	6	45	●	●	1926	165
Tannoy Mercury M1	120	Sounds much bigger and expensive than it is. Solid, tuneful bass, wide open soundstage, excellent imaging	17,30,20		87	8	50	●	●	2259	179
Tannoy Mercury M2	140	A fine all-rounder with big box and deep bass for the price; could be sweeter and tighter	20,5,38,28		87	8	25	●	●		169
Tannoy R1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered, and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22		86	4	30	●	●		187
Tannoy Mercury M3	230	Good-looking floorstander; very neutral and evenhanded, with fine midband but weak dynamics and drive	20,5,87,28	●	87	7	20	●	●	2025	170
Tannoy Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	●	90	4	20	●	●		193
Tannoy Precision P20	400	A creative and attractive design with time-aligned drivers, but the sound lacks sufficient excitement	21,80,30	●	88	5	25	●	●	2208	177
Tannoy D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. And a fine all-round performer, too!	16,24,85,23	●	87	6	26	●	●		167
Tannoy D500	1,999	Plenty of muscle and stereo, but short of poise and delicacy. Hard work for amps	31,93,34	●	91	6	20	●	●	1355	143
Tannoy Westminster TW	6,600	These awesome horn-loaded speakers are remarkably controlled and impressive	large	●	99	8	38	●	●		C93
TDL Nucleus 2	130	A very competent miniature. Could be smoother, but no serious flaws, and hence good basic value	20,29,22		88	4	45	●	●		187
TDL Nucleus 4	299	Handsome and very inexpensive floorstander with fine bass alignment but a pronounced lack of presence	20,5,92,31	●	92	6	22	●	●		193
TDL RTL3SE	450	A touch of boom'n'tizz might be to taste, but this is a lot of box for the money, with floor-shaking bass	20,91,39	●	89	6	22	●	●	2124	174
TDL CF100 Chiltern	450	Tiny but classy monitor has a laid-back balance, a fine midband and a surprising bass; but needs space	20,29,23		85	8	50	●	●		183
TDL CF200 Cotswold	650	Fine midband tonality and dynamic range, but less happy towards the bandwidth extremes	22,5,78,23	●	86	6	40	●	●		177
TDL T-Line 3	700	Plenty of bass and treble, but broad midband is rather repressed	20,97,38	●	86	8	20	●	●	1921	164
Technics SB-M20	200	Well-balanced with natural perspectives and fine midband coherence, but bass is a bit boxy and uneven	20,32,23		70	8	50	●	●		1413
Technics SB-M500	450	This model offers a clean, open sound, offset by midbass, heavy balance and low sensitivity	25,78,37	●	85	8	25	●	●	1666	152
Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative stand-mount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29		91	4	42	●	●		193
Triangle Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,94,29	●	91	4	25	●	●		190
Totem Model One	1,195	Utterly delightful but exasperatingly expensive luxury miniature sets the benchmark for its size	17,31,23		87	4	28	●	●		122
Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	104	4	50	●	●		191
Wilson benesch Bishop	20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity; lovely open midband too	23,161,561	●	89	4	520	●	●		189
Wharfedale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29,5,23		88	4	45	●	●		169
Wharfedale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24		88	4	40	●	●		187
Wharfedale Valdis 400	200	Very loud with a minimum of amplification, but the sound is thick and uneven, with a heavy upper bass	25,80,26	●	91	8	30	●	●	1414	148
Wharfedale Valdis 500	300	These rock boxes can move plenty of air, albeit not as subtly as alternatives	25,108,26,5	●	91	4	40	●	●	1758	155
Wharfedale MFM-3	350	Smooth broad midband gives fine voice rendition; bass could be better	22,89,28	●	87	8	40	●	●	1922	164
Zingali Overture 2S	1975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing stand-mount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty.	30,57,38		90	8	25	●	●		195
SUBWOOFERS											
Acoustic Energy AE108S	299	Lots of loud subwoofer for your money, though ultimately more film than music oriented	50,42,43				20	●	●	2247	179
B&W ASW1000	499	(Active) Very competently engineered all round, and goes (unnecessarily) very loud	54,47,48				20	●	●	2248	179
B&W AS6	500	(Active) Good material value with a fair amount of low bass from 100W design	45,51,45,5				30	●	●	1736	154
Celestion CS135	139	Compact hideaway passive sub lacks deep bass for high sensitivity speakers	52,19,34	●	86	8	45	●	●		128

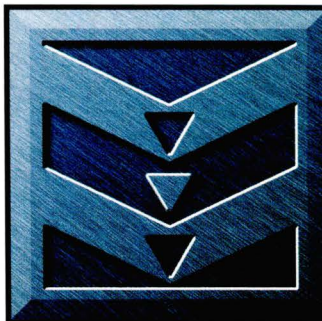
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Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Jamo SW600	530	(Active) Has some neat styling touches and remote control, but deep bass is limited	38,41,53	●				30		1736	154
JPW SW60	349	A real heavyweight, sounds clean and transparent, if perhaps a little understated. Usefully flexible	55,47,39					20	●	2249	179
KEF Model 30B	499	(Active) Commendably discreet with good sense of timing but limited extension	38.5,37,43	●				45		1736	154
KEF AV1	2,499	(Active) Works well, looks great, shakes the windows but costs a lot and is bulky	56,43,50	●				45			128
M&K VX-7B	450	(Active) Baby of a big range; this active design delivers deep, plentiful bass but lacks transparency	35,25,37	●				40		1736	154
M&K MX70	900	(Active) Justifies cost and belies its diminutive size, with an agility that makes sense of the toughest material	25.5,46,35					25	●	2250	179
REL Q50	375	(Active) Genuinely deep, clean bass from an attractively compact and cost-effective package	40,41,42					20	●	2251	179



Stands & Supports

Hi-fi supports are more important than you might imagine – they can have very subtle effects on the sound of your system! There are two kinds of support: those for equipment and those (stands) for loudspeakers. Equipment supports keep vibrations and resonances from affecting electronic components, while speaker stands hold enclosures stock-still and ensure they are at the correct height for your ears. Equipment supports may be rigid affairs fabricated from steel or more exotic materials; or they may have a form of suspension. Speaker stands come in a variety of sizes and styles to suit different models, and vary between open-frame and solid-pillar types. Always check with speaker and electronics manufacturers to see which supports they recommend.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **HEIGHT (cm):** How tall is your support?
- **TOP PLATE SIZE (cm):** Dimensions of top surface on stand or equipment support.
- **FILLABLE:** Some speaker stands can be mass-loaded with sand or lead-shot to improve sound.
- **WELDED:** The better stands and supports are welded together rather than just bolted.
- **NUMBER OF SHELVES:** The number of tiers on an equipment rack or support.
- **SHELF TYPE:** The material from which shelves are made. Wood generally means Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF).
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the magazine.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stands & Supports

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER		
EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS											
Aaavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5 47			4	Wood		193		
Alphason GR 17/17-AS	275	Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money	36 60,39			4	Glass		181		
Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5 45.5			4	Glass		193		
Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67 48.6			4	Wood		193		
Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82 43			4	MDF		193		
Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiasts equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5 48			5	MDF		193		
Elemental Isotube x 4/Ref	1,199	Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality	92 45,49	●		4	Marb		181		
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90 49			4	Glass		193		
Fi-Rax R4	399	Lively, exuberant sound, slightly weak bass				5	Glass	1633	151		
Framework H500/H175	404	Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel – made a spectacular impression on audition	70 52,34		●	3	Glass	1952	166		
Ixos Deadrock 704	250	Looks unassuming but sound is full and inviting				4	Resin		181		
Kudos Corinthian	599	True heavyweight that doesn't quite manage knockout sound	91 46,38			4	Wood		181		
Mana Acoustics Ref. Table	350	King of its type: angle iron, chipboard and glass combine to make a significant difference to sound quality	56 49,39		●	1	Glass		147		
Mana 5 Tier Sound Table	600	Infinitely upgradeable. Persuasive and thrilling glass and angle-iron design that adds speed and bandwidth	91 49, 39		●	5	Glass	1633	151		
Optimum Int 2000 OPT490	299	25kg stand with shelves between variable-height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass	50 60,40			4	Glass	1953	166		
Optimum Int 2000 OPT660	349	Glitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome	82 60,52			5	Glass		181		
Projekt Furniture A4	215	An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound	56 48			4	Wood		193		
Quadraspire Q4	250	Easy to live with, tonally neutral	54 40,49			4	MDF	1633	151		
Sound Organisation Z560	160	Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value	90 46,36		●	5	Wood	1954	166		
Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73 46		●	4	Glass		193		
Soundstyle X100	230	Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright	64 49,28		●	4	Glass		181		
Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5 49.5		●	4	Glass		193		
Soundstyle Select 6105	290	Respectable sonics: structurally solid and smart	78 43,36			5	Glass	1633	151		
Soundstyle Finewoods W105	320	Veneered shelves damped between tubular uprights. Delivers with classical material	82 48,27			4	Wood	1955	166		
Stands Unique Sound Tower	289	Wooden uprights combine with glass shelves to provide a fresh, forward sound, but bass could be quicker	81 72,42			5	Glass	1633	151		
Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5 50.8		●	4	Glass		193		
Target B5	175	Free of colorations, fine grip and good value	81 49,36		●	5	Wood	1633	151		
Townshend Seismic Stand	1,245	It's big, it wobbles and it's pricey. But this is the ultimate equipment support	72 58,45			3	Wood		181		
Wilson benesch Asside	590	Sounds even better than it looks. And it looks wonderful	72 37,50			4	Wood		181		
SPEAKER STANDS											
Alphason NC I	45	Filled single-column design without threaded spike holes, that's appropriate for non-critical applications	40-60 16,16	●					1373	146	
Alphason NCII	85	Tall, slim and elegant, though sound and value are unexceptional	40-60 17,17	●						159	
Alphason HDS	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60 15.5,15.5	●						189	
Alphason Titan	125	Excels in the midband and allows voices to come across in a detailed and expressive fashion	40-60 16,16	●	●				1373	146	
Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60 15,12.5	●						189	
Apollo AZ6	80	Fine engineering value, but sound is unexceptional and top-plate small	66 15,13	●	●					159	
Atacama BD21	55	Good-looking and good value, but doesn't match the SE24's sound quality	56 15,17	●						159	
Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60 15,17	●	●					189	
Atacama SE24	70	Stands out from the budget crowd because of the consistency and overall quality of its performance	61 19,57	●	●				1373	146	
Black Box Speaker Stand	797	A strange and costly beast. Bass is a touch thick, but performance with synthetic music types is worthy of the price	92-112 40							189	
Custom Design R/S 300	70	Combining strong aesthetic and sonic appeal at a popular price point, this is a good stand all-round	40.6-60.9 15,15	●						189	
Elemental Isotube SZse	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61 23,27	●	●					189	
JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61 19,21	●						189	
Kudos S50	100	Better sound than the budget stands, particularly in low-frequencies	60 15,21	●						159	
Kudos S100	270	The best all-round stand around... Probably...	63 15,21	●						159	
Mana Soundframes	125	For use under floorstanders and equipment racks, these make music effortless and natural. Can be stacked	5			●				1373	146
Partington A-4	119	An odd-ball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than almost anything below £150	50-100 19,22	●	●					189	

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Stands & Supports

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SPECIFICATIONS



PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	TOP PLATE SIZE HEIGHT	FILLABLE WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
RMS/Stands Unique Vivus	349	Pricey carbon fibres give ultra-clean sound with exceptional voices	50	N/A				159
Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33,5,24				189
Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16,17				189
Stands Unique HP	220	Real wood disguises high-performance tuned technology	59	22,23				159
Target R1	280	Truly high-mass four-pillar design with superb weight and speed, giving music delicious attack	53	15,21	●	●		1373 146
Target TR60	68	Lively, dynamic midrange and detailed treble from a less-than-audiophile-oriented, twin-column design	60	15,15	●			1373 146



Tonearms

Less expensive turntables are usually supplied with a matching tonearm (and often a 'starter' cartridge, too). However, hard-core vinyl fans should invest in a more expensive separate motor unit with specialist tone-arm – the only way to make the most of vinyl LPs. It is essential to achieve operational synergy between such components, so this is one area of hi-fi where the skills of a knowledgeable dealer are invaluable. The quality of a tonearm's construction and design affect sound quality significantly. There are three basic arm designs listed in the key, and each has strengths, but pivoted designs are the most popular, being usually the most practical and affordable.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **EFFECTIVE MASS:** This relates to cartridge compliance. Generally high mass arms are suitable for low compliance cartridges and vice versa.
- **PARALLEL TRACKING:** An arm which allows the cartridge to track the disc in a linear fashion.
- **PIVOTED:** Arms which allow the cartridge to describe an arc as they traverse the record.
- **UNI-PIVOT:** Pivoted arms with a bearing that allows movement in two planes.
- **EFFECTIVE LENGTH (CM):** Length of the arm from bearing to cartridge mounting.
- **ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT:** Important for accurate cartridge set-up.
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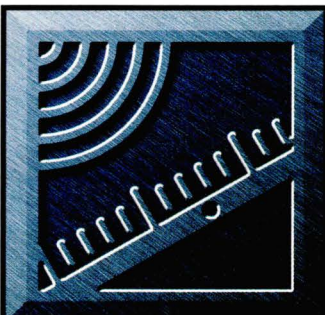
Tonearms

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS



PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	EFFECTIVE MASS	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (CM)	ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well-made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness			High		●		79
Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths			Medium		●	229	67
Moth/RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural			Low		●	237	60
Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables			Low		●	237	60
Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though			Low		●	240	91
SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration			Low		●	233	60
SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price			Low		●	233	60



Tuners

TV has stolen radio's status as the foremost broadcast entertainment medium, but with its Radio Four plays and Radio Three music, the BBC still makes a potent case for audiophile reception equipment. For how much longer, under the cost-conscious Birtist régime, remains to be seen. Another new imponderable is the arrival of digital radio broadcasting, though reception apparatus is currently non-existent outside of the in-car market. These days tuners play second fiddle to hi-fi sources like CD, but in many ways they are a greater engineering challenge than digital equipment, and thus higher price tags clearly equate to superior performance. High-quality, roof-mounted antennae are essential for audiophile listening, so factor them into your budget.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **WAVEBANDS:** FM – (VHF), M – MW, L – LW.
- **PRESETS:** Number of station frequencies that can be stored.
- **RDS:** (Radio Data System) was originally designed for in-car applications. RDS tuners can identify and display the name of the radio station being received, traffic news and other information about broadcasts.
- **REMOTE CONTROL:** Infra-red control handset supplied.
- **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER:** Indicates strength of signal from aerial – useful for aligning your 'twig' during installation.
- **ROTARY TUNING KNOB:** Experience has shown that this analogue throwback is ergonomically far superior to the button-based approach.
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Tuners

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS



PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
AMC T7	130	Performance adequate but price is sharp, especially with remote control. Some hum	FM, M	30		●			1945	166
Arcam Alpha 7	230	Indifferent RF performance but a touch of audiophile sound quality with clean, strong signals	FM, M, L	24					1946	166
Cambridge 1500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM, M, L	64			●	●		193
Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM, M, L	64		●	●	●		193
Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM, M, L	40		●		●		193
Denon TU-425RD	200	A fine all-rounder with advanced RDS, good RF performance and decent sound. Remote extra	FM, M	40		●			1947	166
Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well-balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM, M	40		●		●		184
Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3				●		184
Harman/Kardon TU950	200	Bulky but effective, delivering fine RF performance and good sound for the price	FM, M, L	30		●		●	1948	166
Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●		1254	142
Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM, M	60		●				184
Musical Fidelity E50	300	Sounds involving if coloured and with a subjectively larger-than-life presentation	FM	20					1810	157
Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		●	●			193
Myryad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20				●		184
NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM, M	30		●				193
Naim NATO1	1,730	There may be better sounding tuners in the world, but we have yet to hear one	FM						1254	142
Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM, M	40		●		●	1949	166
Pioneer F-504RDS Precision	300	Lots of features, plus a sound that's low on noise and high on communication, adds up to a good value package	FM, M	40		●		●		184
Roksan Caspian	595	Neat facia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●		●		184
Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM, M, L	30		●		●		193

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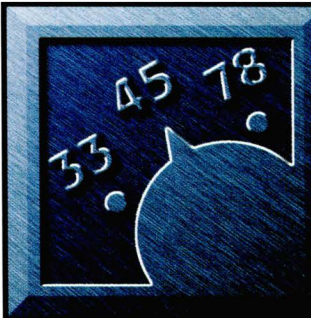
Tuners

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

WAVEBANDS PRESETS RDS SIG. STRENGTH METER REMOTE CONTROL ROT. TUNING KNOB FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	FM,M	20					1950	166
Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M,L	30	●	●	●	●	1810	157
Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM,M,L	30	●	●	●	●	1810	157
Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packed tuner	FM,M,L	30	●	●	●	●	1254	142
Technics ST-GT350L	130	Decent RF performance is offset by sound quality more typical of a mini/midi system	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	1810	157
Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun								



Turntables

Specialist turntables are at the heart of high-fidelity sound. CD players may offer ultra-low noise and a flat frequency response, but they can't match the dynamics and superlative rhythmic timing taken for granted by serious turntable users. Less expensive turntables are usually supplied with a matching tonearm (and often a 'starter' cartridge, too). Still better quality is found at higher prices among the separate motor units and tonearms. Because turntables are mechanical devices, designed to retrieve micron-small modulations engraved into vinyl, engineering quality is of paramount importance. This is also the reason why turntables cost as much as they do, and require the finest equipment support systems.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **MANUAL:** You do all the work.
- **AUTO:** The record player does all the work.
- **SEMI-AUTO:** You put the needle on, the turntable lifts it off at the end of the record.
- **SPEEDS:** In RPM to correspond with long-playing records or seven/12-inch singles.
- **SUSPENDED SUBCHASSIS:** Sprung suspension to minimise structural interference.
- **EXTERNAL PSU:** Outboard power supply; generally indicative of higher-quality performance.
- **SUPPLIED WITH ARM:** Many turntables do not come with a tonearm fitted, but if this category is checked, the deck is already thus equipped.
- **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE:** If a turntable comes complete with arm and cartridge.
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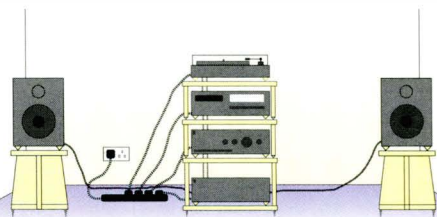
Turntables

SPECIFICATIONS

MANUAL AUTO SEMI-AUTO SUSP. SPEEDS EXTERNAL PSU SUPPLIED WITH ARM SUPPLIED WITH CART. FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NO.

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SUSP. SPEEDS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART.	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NO.	
Avid Acutus	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	●							33/45	●	194
Clearaudio Reference	3,990	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail, but can sound bold	●							33/45		1328 144
DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	●							33/45	●	1328 144
Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph	●							33/45	●	103
Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended	●							33/45	●	91
Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc still top rank	●							33	●	103
Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains	●							33/45	●	91
Michell Gyrodec	875	Sweet and natural-sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm	●							33/45	●	55
Michell Gyro SE	775	A stunningly desirable combination of looks, solidity and sound make this a tempting turntable	●							33/45	●	190
Michell Orbe 'SE'	1,725	A Superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●							33/45	●	192
Moth Kanoot	329	Rather coarse-sounding deck that requires decent isolation and comes with a Rega RB300 arm	●							33/45	●	1907 164
Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●							33/45	●	159
Pink Triangle Tarantella II	850	A turntable that looks unlike any other, with rare ability too. Quirky, but sound is immensely likeable	●							33/45	●	192
Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●							33/45	●	1907 164
Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	●							33/45	●	192
Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi – it's that good	●							33/45	●	138
Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident	●							33/45	●	48
Rega Planar 3	274	Sounds musical in a balanced manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability	●							33/45	●	1907 164
Reson RS1	600	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail	●							33/45	●	159
Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	●							33/45	●	159
SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	●							33/45	●	195
SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●							33/45/78	●	186
Thorens TD166 V/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges	●							33/45	●	103
Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●							33/45	●	159
Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●							33/45	●	1180 136
Wilson benesch The Circle	795	A beautiful turntable with a sumptuous sound, all at a very reasonable price – a clear Best Buy	●							33/45	●	192

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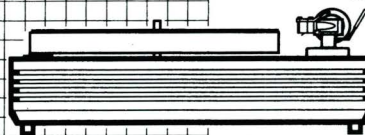
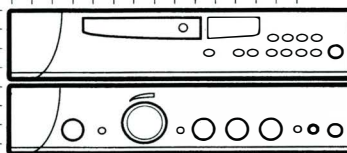
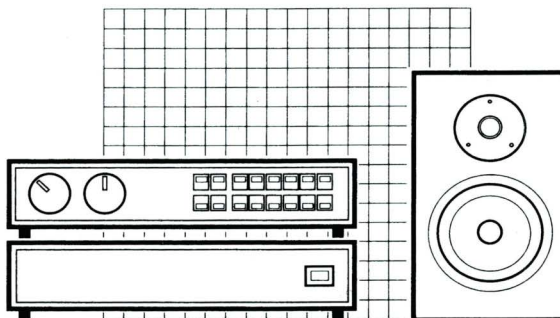
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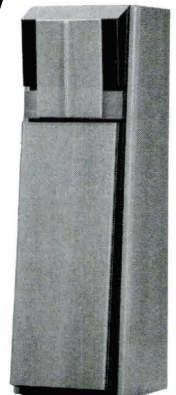
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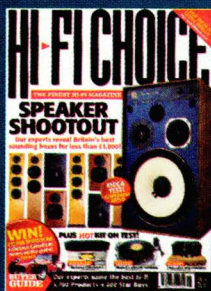
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- 2 The switchboard will offer you a number of actions to choose from. If you know the index number of the reprint you seek, enter it on your fax machine's handset, when prompted to do so. Alternatively, you may request an index of stored pages, at all times using the handset of your fax machine and following the voice prompts.
- 3 To select two or three documents, press * between each one selected and press # to finish.
- 4 Your chosen documents will then be sent to your fax machine.

3. VISIT OUR WEBSITE

The *Hi-Fi Choice* Website holds copies of reviews from the past two years. It also offers a user-customisable search facility for specific products and price-points. In addition, there is a unique opportunity to swap hints, tips and gossip in our on-line 'chat' areas. Our site has been remarkably successful since its launch earlier this year, and is currently scoring approximately 405,000 hits per month, with a total of 90,000 page impressions. The site has no less than 6,700 unique users!

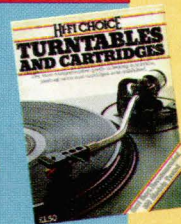
<http://www.hifichoice.co.uk>



4. ORDER A REVIEW REPRINT

If you are interested in an *HFC* review of an older component and the back issue has sold out, we can usually send photocopies of old reviews to any UK address for a flat fee (inc. p&p) of £5.00 per review. You must know in which issue the original review appeared; we are unable to search back issues for old reviews. Send a written request, enclosing a cheque made payable to Dennis Publishing Ltd, to: *Hi-Fi Choice* Reprint Service, Dennis Publishing Ltd., 19 Bolsover Street, LONDON W1P 7JH.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SERVICE IS ONLY FOR OTHERWISE UNOBTAINABLE REPRINTS.



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JIMMY HUGHES

You might think that only dogs could hear the difference, but Jimmy reckons it's worth adding a bit of tweet to your life.

They're cheap; they're plasticky. They're... Motorola horn-loaded Piezo tweeters! I've had mine for about five years. And, not to mince words, they transformed the sound of my system. Yet, apart from the odd vague mention, I've never gone into detail about them here – or said how you could concoct a pair for yourself. Inexpensive they may be at £9.99 each – hardly superfi. But used correctly they can improve the sound of even very expensive loudspeakers.

The secret is to use them sparingly, as a subtle super-tweeter that gently reinforces the upper treble. The worst thing you can do is have them too loud. This is definitely a case of less being more; too much coarsens the sound and destroys the spatial qualities of the recording. The right amount enhances clarity and impact, subjectively improving timing, bass definition, and attack – making the whole sound snap into focus.

But first things first: is a super tweeter really necessary? Had you asked me that ten or so years back, I'd have said no. With CD restricted in bandwidth to about 20kHz, most people's main music source is limited to start with – although new media like SACD and DVD-A are set to alter that. FM radio and cassette are even more restricted. And how many listeners the wrong side of 30 can hear above 15kHz anyway? Given all that, what's the point?

But you could raise similar arguments against sub-woofers – and be completely wrong. A good sub is capable of enhancing

the quality of sound in ways that go far beyond a little extra deep bass; reproducing very low frequencies improves the high-frequency detail and clarity, giving the sound a more 3D, holographic quality. Nor do you need special recordings with acres of deep bass to show the difference – even music that ostensibly has little or no low-frequency content benefits.

A super-tweeter is like a sub-woofer for the treble. Using a horn-loaded Piezo tweeter for this purpose ensures crisp, fast high-frequency reproduction, even on recordings that have bandwidth restrictions.

Piezo tweeters offer excellent power handling and high sensitivity, but they're rarely found in hi-fi loudspeakers. Motorola's piezo tweeters are intended for PA applications and, being horn-loaded, they're obscenely efficient. Inevitably, they're flawed; used full-range they produce coarse, fairly raucous sound.

However, restrict the frequency range over which they operate, and results improve dramatically. A Piezo tweeter has a very high impedance and can be driven straight from an amplifier with no crossover. To further limit its reproduction of lower treble frequencies, simply put a capacitor in line. With a conventional low-impedance moving coil tweeter, a value of around 3.3uF is usually correct for a first or second-order crossover.

With the Motorola Piezo tweeters, I listened to lots of different capacitor values and eventually arrived at just 0.01uF as my preferred choice! This ensures the super tweeter only operates at the very highest

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○ Piezo tweeters: pocket money for a great effect.

frequencies. But considerable attenuation is still required to reduce the output to useable levels. Because of the Piezo's high impedance, it's necessary to use resistors across the tweeter rather than in series.

I started with a resistance value of about 100 Ohms, but over a period of some months this dropped and dropped. Eventually, my preferred value was just 10 Ohms – almost a direct short-circuit! If you play a piece of music through the speakers and put your ear to the Piezo, it's practically impossible to tell whether the unit's working or not – it's that quiet. But sit in your listening seat and A/B compare the sound with and without the super tweeters, and the difference is striking.

It's as though the output of the super tweeter blends seamlessly with the rest of the sound, enhancing the music in ways that go far beyond just extending the higher frequencies. Clarity and focus improve, and imaging is noticeably crisper and more precise.

Subjectively, low frequencies have much more attack and control, and overall the sound is firmer and tighter. Timing improves too, making the music more rhythmically purposeful and involving. Boomy bass? Dull lazy sound? You wouldn't think a super-tweeter could cure such ailments. But it can!

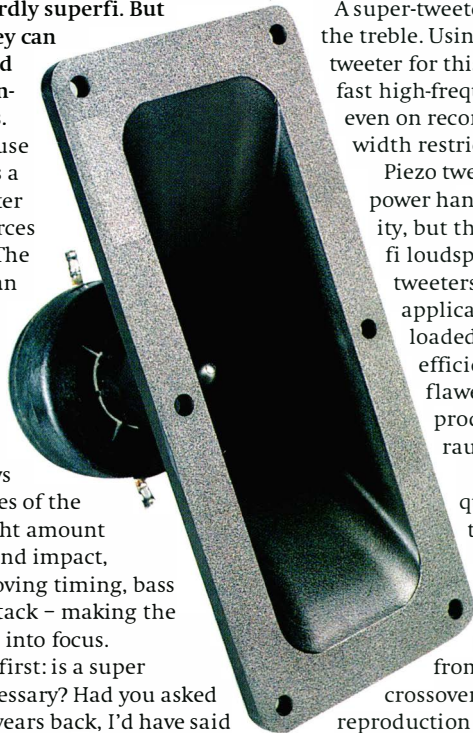
However, a note of warning; remember what I said about "less is more"? Logic says you'll get increased benefit from a super tweeter by having more of it, yet actually the opposite seems to be true. Making it louder, and/or increasing the value of the series capacitor so coverage is extended towards the lower treble region may dilute what you're trying to create. You get the biggest result with the merest trace.

It's a bit like homeopathy, really – the less you have, the more powerful it becomes.

■ Motorola's horn-loaded Piezo tweeters are available from Maplins and cost £9.99 each – order No. WF-56 Wide Angle Piezo. Maplins also supplies resistors and capacitors: .01uF caps cost 49p each, while 3W resistors in various values – 8.2, 10, 15, 22, 27, 47, 68 Ohms – cost 37p each.

You should experiment with different values of resistor and capacitor to arrive at the best result for your system.

Maplins mail order ☎ (01702) 554000.



HIGHLIGHTS OF NEXT MONTH'S BEST BUYS ISSUE ...

BEST BUY BONANZA!

Next month we round the year off in traditional *Hi-Fi Choice* style with a bumper collection of reviews, including all the Best Buy, Recommended and Editor's Choice awardees from 1999.

RECOMMENDED READING!

This compendium of great kit will include the whole gamut of hi-fi componentry including: turntables, amplifiers, loudspeakers, digital recorders, DVD players, cables, blank media, one make systems, tuners, stands and supports, headphones, cartridges, CD players and MP3 players.

Also making a comeback will be the winners from the



prestigious European Imaging and Sound Awards.

COLUMNULAR COMPILATIONS!

We'll also be sifting through the words of wisdom from our esteemed columnists and presenting the most entertaining in tasty bite-size chunks.

■ The Best Buys issue will be on sale on Thursday 25 November 1999.



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