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DVD PLAYERS

10 new contenders
reviewed and rated



DAB vs FM

Digital and analogue
tuners fight it out



RIBBON POWER

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MARANTZ TURNS ON THE STYLE

Eclipse system on test



Clarity^{XXL}

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Philips high-end Clarity headphones – HP890. Clarity speaker drivers combine powerful bass performance with crispness of detail and a frequency range of 8 - 28000 Hz, to deliver superb acoustic performance, further enhanced by the open ear-shell design. The sturdy self-adjusting headband and soft contoured ear-cushions ensure a secure, comfortable fit, so the HP890 really is 'velvet for your ears'. For further information call 020 8665 6350 or visit www.ce.philips.co.uk



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CONTRIBUTORS



Tim Bown runs both stereo and multichannel systems with kit including Arcam, PMC, Bryston and TAG McLaren.



Dan George likes rock music and plays it on a Naim CD player, Bryston amps and B&W Matrix 801 loudspeakers.



Richard Black plays piano professionally and uses EAR electronics and ATC speakers for classical and world music.



Paul Messenger likes dance, folk, rock and classical music on vinyl and uses Linn, Naim and Rehdeko kit with gusto.



Paul Miller is the king of the technical world when it comes to hi-fi. He uses DPA amps and Audio Note speakers.



Alvin Gold prefers serious classical music and has a predilection toward expensive amps and JM Lab speakers.

HOW WE TEST THE PRODUCTS

Our reviewing process is the most rigorous in the business. We focus on transparency and resolution, mixing traditional hi-fi values with the latest technological developments via a blend of subjective views and scientific analysis.

■ **BENCH TESTS** Our main group test each month concentrates on a key area, with products from across the separates market. The testing consists of three stages: 'blind' listening, hands-on subjective testing and scientific measuring. The latter phase is conducted by our Technical Editor using the QC Suite Functional Testing Station.

■ **GROUP TESTS** Each issue features a number of additional tests aimed at narrowing the field in a specific product area. Here the testing involves just the reviewer concerned with no lab or panel testing, but plenty of comparisons.

■ **SOLO REVIEWS** As well as group tests we also review single components. In our First Impressions section, you'll find brand-new products that warrant early exposure, while High Performance concentrates on the latest aspirational, high-tech components.

AWARD TAGS



BEST BUYS are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price.



RECOMMENDED products are first-class components, losing out to Best Buys only because of a higher price or less competitive sound quality.



A third award, **EDITOR'S CHOICE**, is reserved for those products reviewed solo and is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.

"WE NOW FIND OURSELVES DELUGED WITH FABULOUS KIT, AND I HAVE TO APOLOGISE FOR NOT MAKING YOUR BUYING DECISIONS ANY EASIER!"



It's been a manic month at Choice towers. Both Del, the designer, and I managed to get away for our holidays leaving the intrepid Mr Bown in charge not only of the issue itself but also of the Currys supplement you should have got with it.

He coped admirably and the supplement looks fantastic, they've even got some 'proper' hi-fi in it – look out for the Editor's Choice swingtags.

This, September, is also the month when the hi-fi industry officially gears up for its season, when people come round to making that long-considered upgrade or move to a serious system. This brings with it a round of awards events and shows, not least of which being the London Hi-Fi Show. This was not as heavily attended, on trade days at least, as usual – probably because of the catastrophe in America only days before – so there was plenty of space in the rooms and you could actually appreciate the sound. A bit of a novelty for a hi-fi show! I found myself enjoying the music in a variety of rooms including that of Chord Electronics, where the striking Dynaudio Evidence speakers were helping the mass of silver Chord amps and the attractive DAC 64 make some holographic images. Pioneer also put on a good show with a multichannel incorporating some very Japanese loudspeakers with horn midrange drivers and builtin supertweeters – a very natural sound indeed. The most unusual product of the show was a range of hardwood tonearms from Schroeder of Stuttgart. These beauties start at around £1,000 and incorporate magnetic bearings.

The music scene is hotting up as well, I went along to the Technics Mercury awards to watch a strong line-up of British bands strut their stuff in front of an industry that's gradually getting to grips with multichannel music. There were fine performances from Turin Brakes, Super Furry Animals and Ed Harcourt, but if the choice had been mine the award would have gone to Elbow for their powerful performance of *Newborn*: it blew me away and I wasted no time in tracking down the LP. As it turned out, last year's winner, the amiable Badly Drawn Boy, announced that the award had been won by PJ Harvey.

After last month's relatively slim pickings on the Ed's Choice front, we now find ourselves deluged with fabulous kit, and I have to apologise for not making your buying decisions any easier!



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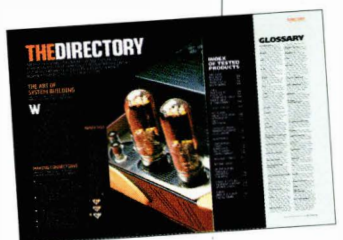
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128 READERS' CLASSIFIED

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

DAN GEORGE, ALVIN GOLD AND JASON KENNEDY GET FAMILIAR WITH THE LATEST GEAR.



SONY SCD-XE670 SACD PLAYER

★★★★★ £350

**“PUKKA
MULTICHANNEL
RECORDINGS
REALLY BOUGHT
OUT THE BEST IN
THIS PLAYER.”**

DATASTREAM

COMPATIBLE DISC TYPES: single-layer and hybrid SACD, stereo & multichannel, CD, CD-R, CD-RW. Connections: Digital optical TOSLINK (CD only). Separate analogue stereo and 5.1-channel analogue, 6.3mm headphone socket (via volume control). Supplied with remote control.
SONY UK ☎ 08705 111999

Just months after Philips brought out the first multichannel Super Audio CD player, Sony has introduced a raft of SACD players at various price points, along with related products like the

DAV-S500 system, reviewed this issue.

Like the other new models, the SCD-XE670 is a multichannel player but (like the SCD-XB770ES reviewed last month) it is not a DVD player and it has no video circuits; the player's display helps only with speaker management.

Features include a headphone socket with volume control and one of Sony's specialities, a rotary indented multifunction control that normally selects tracks – no problem accessing tracks with high numbers, unlike the hiccups with our 770 sample. The dot-matrix display is a quality item normally used for CD or SACD text, and it can be switched off. A stick-type remote control completes the package.

This player has much in common with the 770. It has the same easygoing, almost lazy quality with compact disc, with an impressively big bass, though it lacked the drive and dynamism to follow through. With one sequence of percussion test tracks on CD, the Sony sounded rather

blurred, with a clear transitional phase where it snapped sharply into focus, though the sound never developed the organic quality, depth or urgency of the Cyrus Q24 used as a reference.

The player was altogether more impressive with SACD, and especially multichannel SACD. The same test material wasn't available in this format, but with SACD discs it sounded more consistent, and more consistently three-dimensional; this was true even of two-channel recordings. Chie Ayado's *Life* SACD, for example, played with tremendous vitality and presence, and solidity and depth like a master tape, despite being only a two-channel recording.

Pukka multichannel recordings really bought out the best in this player, though. In this mode they sounded not dissimilar to the senior model. Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* (Midori etc) has a rapt beauty in one example. Great stuff, and proof that mainstream SACD really has arrived. **AG**



MARANTZ ECLIPSE 55 STEREO MUSIC SYSTEM

★★★★★ £1,299.90

These days it seems you can have your cake and eat it: more reputable manufacturers are producing stylish systems that offer hi-fi music. You can now buy 'systems' from the likes of Linn and Cyrus, and more upmarket small-size systems are cropping up away from the traditional dealers.

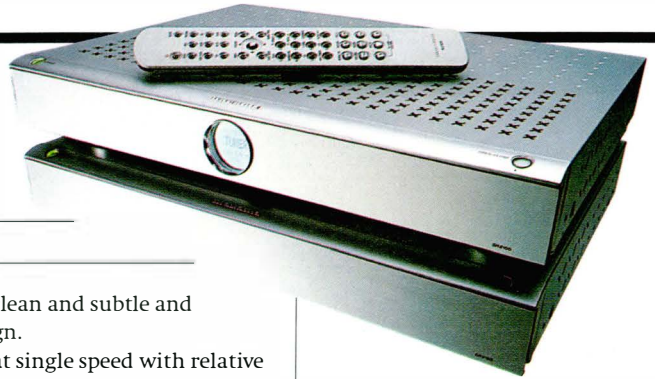
Marantz has recently introduced possibly the most overwhelming range of system options from which you can choose a set-up to suit your needs. The Eclipse range offers a variety of configurations, using full- and half-size components in both stereo and multichannel varieties. Quite the most minimalist hi-fi duo I've come across, the Eclipse 55 is a master of disguise. Beneath the alloy fascia panels (they flip down at the touch of a button) lies a twin-deck CD-R recorder, the DR2100, and a receiver, the SR2100. Both units are slim and svelte; with panels up, they look extremely clean. The LCD displays, although invisible from more than a

metre away, are very clean and subtle and complement the design.

CD-Rs can be burnt at single speed with relative ease, using only a few buttons on the deck or remote control. A small plastic jog-dial helps you select tracks; buttons are otherwise kept to a minimum. On the front of the amp, plastic dials distastefully crop up again, this time controlling volume and selecting input.

The 50 watts on offer is more than adequate and proved quite a handful on test. The pairing had some very musical moments when fired up, but timing could have been better. What they did offer was a revealing look at the music spinning inside, but the presentation was inclined to a degree of forcefulness in the duo's attempt to uncover the musical truth.

Relaxed this system is not, but it does have style and the omission of speakers allows you to tune the balance to taste when shopping for boxes. **DG**



Minimalist, svelte, stylish and it makes CD recordings to boot.

DATASTREAM

SR2100 AMPLIFIER: 2x50 watts, 3-band RDS tuner, 50 presets, 4 line inputs, remote control, tone control, size 42x7.6x32.2cm. **DR2100 deck:** CD-R, CD-RW, CD text, coaxial and optical inputs and outputs, system bus, remote control, size 42x7.7x31.5cm (WxHxD).

MARANTZ ☎ 01753 680868





Rotel's traditional black exterior is refreshing in a silver-obsessed industry.

ROTEL RA1060 STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

★★★★★ £600.00

"THIS AMPLIFIER IS DECEPTIVELY POWERFUL, WITH 60 WATTS ON TAP."

Rotel has answered our prayers of late. Just when we were launching into another long sigh over the lack of new two-channel amplification emerging from the big Japanese companies, the Rotel turns up on the mat. Rotel has launched two new integrated amplifiers in the 10-series range, and the RA1060 is pitched at the all-important price point for upgrade money. For 600 squid, you get famous old-school Rotel looks, 60 watts of power, a remote control and some new electronics to boot!

That's not all, of course – you get a product engineered for the UK sound! In this silver-obsessed industry, the Rotel's conservative black and traditional appearance somehow feels right. I also like the flared fascia, which gives a solid, rack-mount feel to the unit. The front has some very positive-feeling knobs for speaker switching, input and record selecting, as well as contour control, a feature that offers a choice of four fixed tonal balance settings. The hugely vented casework offers a pleasing look inside the unit to reveal the neat and tidy circuit board and a meaty mains transformer.

Internally you'll find a toroidal transformer, some new advanced capacitors specifically designed for hi-fi, and a Burr-Brown IC lineage. This amplifier is deceptively powerful. The 60 watts on tap sound like more than most folk would ever need.

And with that power comes wonderful dynamics and a big, wide, open soundstage. I was instantly impressed with the transparency of the RA1060, and was equally wowed with the musical depth and airy portrayal of instruments. It remained composed when pushed, and gave wonderfully solid imaging to vocals.

With the features on offer here, anyone moving up from entry-level kit is assured of big sound and quality amplification. After using a similar amplifier for a couple of years, I can appreciate just how good this new Rotel is. **DG**

DATASTREAM

STEREO AMPLIFIER: 60 watts per channel, remote control, preamp output, 12-volt trigger, six line inputs, two record inputs, contour control, speaker switching control, headphone socket, two sets of speaker terminals.

GAMEPATH: ☎ 01908 317707



Small change

RECORD



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The new Philips DVD Recorder.



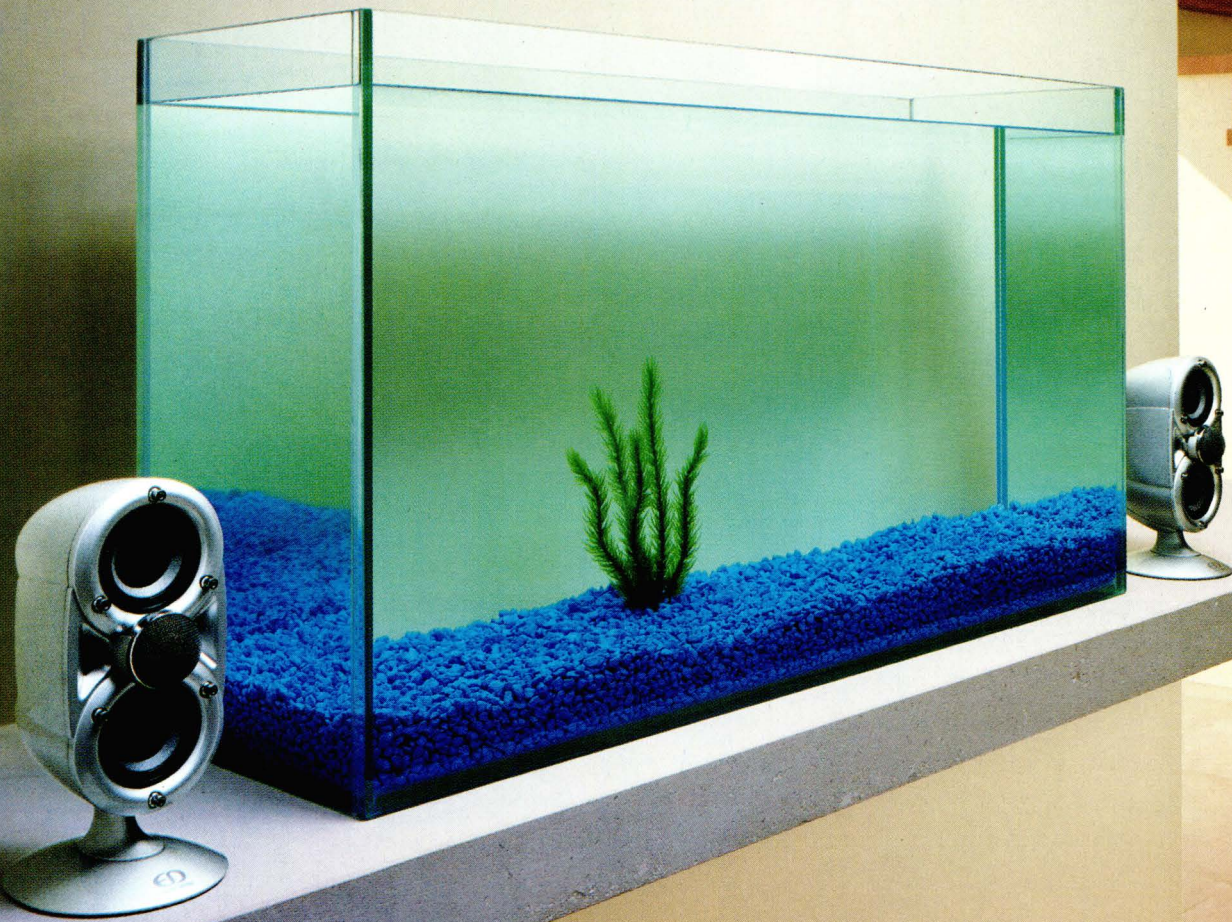
For more details, call 020 8665 6350 or visit our website
www.ce.philips.co.uk/dvdrw



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Let's make things better.

Pascal



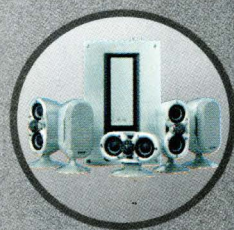
You won't want to look at anything else.

It's rude to stare. But who can blame you? Our tiny Pascal 815ED hi-fi speakers are designed for eyes as well as ears. Their pure aluminium cases produce a sound so clear a Soprano would be jealous. And thanks to Extended Definition (ED) Tweeters they're perfect for Super Audio CD as well as Home Cinema. With a range of Pascal speakers to suit any budget, it all sounds very impressive. Unless you're a fish.

www.sony.co.uk

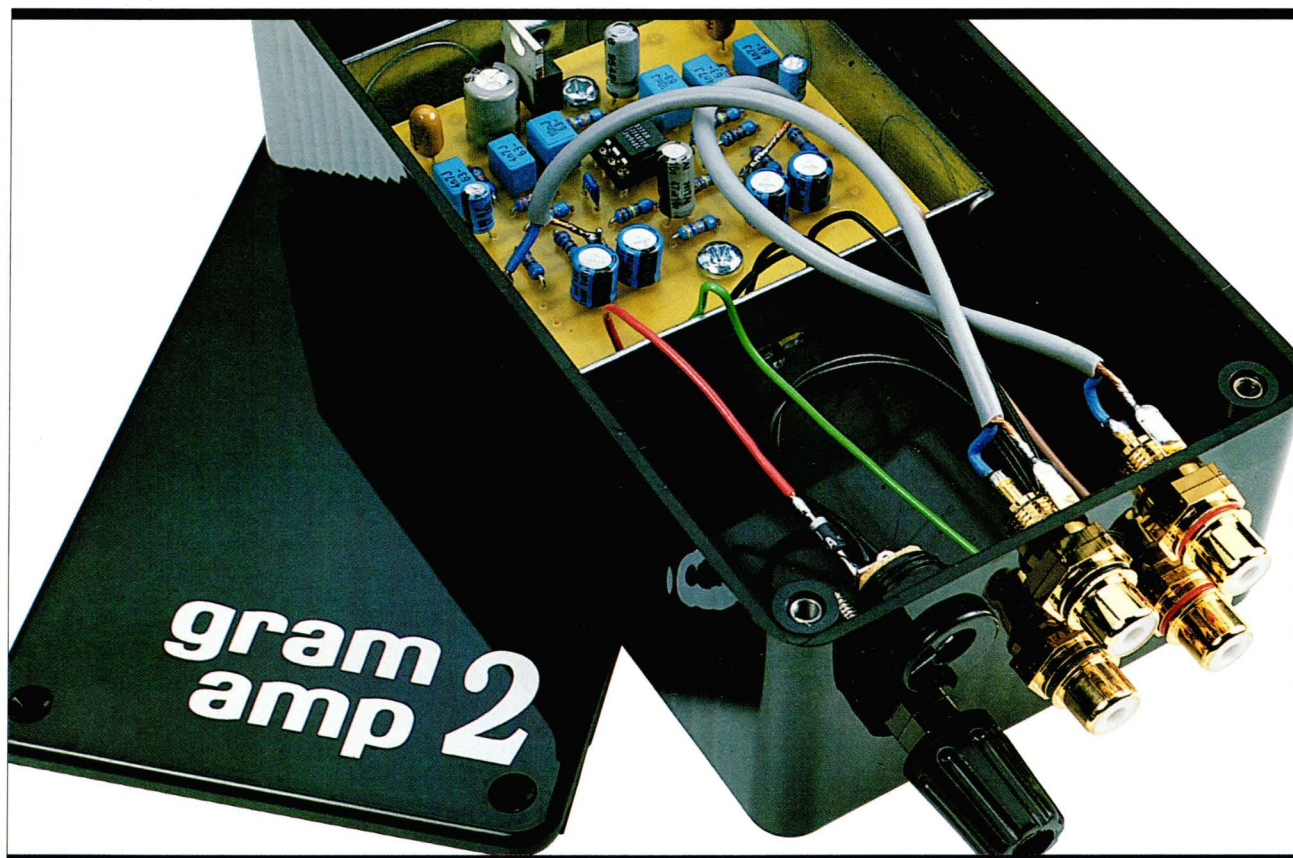
Customer information centre 08705111 999

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go create

SONY



GRAHAM SLEE GRAM AMP 2 PHONO STAGE

★★★★★ £89.00

“FEW PHONO STAGES ARE AS AFFORDABLE AS THE GRAM AMP RANGE.”

The reason why phono stages, which are required if you want to play vinyl through your system, are necessary at all is the difference in output between record players and virtually all other components. The cartridge on a turntable produces only a few millivolts of signal, which has to be equalised and highly amplified before it will be of any use to the line inputs that are standard on today's amplifiers. Because of the high gain required of a phono stage, it is generally preferable to avoid potential interference by siting them outside of the amp proper – hence the variety of standalone phono stages on the market.

Few are as affordable as the Gram Amp range from Graham Slee Projects, however. The Gram Amp 2 is the expensive model in the range; its brother, GA1, can be had for a mere £59 – which for a handmade British phono amp is peanuts. The secret lies in two things: primarily these amps are available directly from

the maker, but no less significant is the down-to-earth casework. The box can often be the most expensive part of a hi-fi component, so by using an off-the-shelf plastic case, Graham makes a considerable saving.

The Gram Amps are moving magnet phono stages. If your cartridge is of the moving coil (MC) variety, you'll need some kind of step-up device such as a transformer or

Graham's Elevator head amp. We used a transformer with a Van den Hul Grasshopper cartridge and got superb results with the GA2. It concedes little indeed to more expensive designs and kept us entertained for hours. Timing is first-rate, instrumental timbre convincing and detail resolution frankly impressive given the price.

More expensive stages might elicit a bit more space, bass weight and low-level resolution, but it's difficult to find fault with this little device. There's even a 30-day money-back guarantee in case it's not what you had hoped. **JK**



DATASTREAM

PHONO STAGES: Handmade with selected components including Signetics op-amp, Neohm resistors, Evox polyprop capacitors, FR4 epoxy glass PCB. Size 5x8x14.8cm (HxWxD)

GRAHAM SLEE:
☎ 01226 244908

www.tagmclaren.com

AV32R



AV32R: maybe the most versatile av processor ever?

"Most home cinema processors can also double as component preamplifiers, but they are rarely transparent enough for serious use in quality systems. However, the AV32R is... This processor is a tour de force."
What Video & TV - 8/01

"Few processors can match the AV32R and none at the price comes close."
Hi-Fi Choice - 6/01

"I can endorse the AV32R whole heartedly... It would be very difficult to improve on its thoughtful design, basic performance, and craftsmanship, and its inherent simplicity appeals to me strongly."
Stereo Reviews Sound & Vision - 6/00

"Performance lives up to very high expectations, thanks to combination of finesse, clarity and control. Advanced software and full upgradeability protect substantial initial investment."
Audio Video - 4/01

"The AV32R can lay claim to being one of the very best audio products on the market. This machine will not only provide you with high-grade audio reproduction, it should also remain at the cutting edge for some time to come."
Essential Home Cinema - 7/01

"Flexibility is built into the AV32R at every level. Unlike others of this type, however, the processor is particularly well adapted to the task. Using stereo source material, it is particularly transparent and clean, easily matching many component two-channel audiophile preamplifiers... The AV32R is an equally excellent multi-channel processor too. Image steering is smooth, and imagery is generally seamless and homogeneous."
Home Entertainment - 9/00

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 - DTS Neo:6
 - DTS 96/24
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 - Internal video scaler
 - Digital Video Interface
 - DVD-A digital interface
 - Precision tuner module



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tel: 0800 783 8007 e-mail: helpdesk@tagmclaren.com

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Bristol: Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Reading Audio Excellence Ltd, Clifton	0118 959 7768 0117 926 4975	Herts: Audio T Ltd, Chandler's Ford Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Watford	02380 252827 01923 213533	Midlands: Audio T Ltd, Enfield	0151 707 8417 0208 367 3132	Shropshire Hi-Fi, Shrewsbury	0141248 4079
Bucks: Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Clifton Audio T Ltd, High Wycombe	0117 974 3727 01494 58585	Ireland: The Audio File, Bishops Cleeve HiFi Corner, Aston Quay	01279 506576 003531671 4343	Music Matters Ltd, Slough	02746 525200 01384 444184	Suffolk: Shropshire Hi-Fi, Shrewsbury Radfords, Bath	01725 446245
Cambs: Martin Kleiser Ltd, Beaconsfield Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Cambridge	01223 304770 01223 368305	Kent: Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Sevenoaks Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Tunbridge Wells	02890 381296 01732 459555	Music Matters Ltd, Sutton Coldfield	0121354 2311 0121742 0254	Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Ipswich	01473286977
Cheshire: Doug Brady Hi-Fi, Warrington Peter Tyson HiFi, Carlisle	01925 828009 01228 546756	Lancs: Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Preston	01772 825777 0208 567 8703	Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Birmingham	0121 212 2977 01922 473499	Audio T Ltd, Camberley	01276 685597
Devon: Audio Excellence Ltd, Exeter Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Plymouth	01392 491194 01752 226011	London: Audio Concept, Ealing Audio T Ltd, West Hampstead	0208 318 7848 0208 318 5755	Stratford HiFi, Lemington Spa	01926 888644 01228 546756	PJ Hi-Fi, Guildford	01483 504801
Dorset: Suttons Hi-Fi, Bournemouth	01202555512	Audio T Ltd, West Hampstead	0207 794 7848	Stratford HiFi, Stratford upon Avon	0191 460 0999	Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Epsom	01372 745883
Essex: Audio T Ltd, Brentwood Rayleigh Hi-Fi, Chelmsford	01272 264730 01245 265245	Billy Vee, Lewisham	0208 318 5755	Lintone Audio Ltd, Metro Centre	01603 627010	Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Kingston	0208 547 0717
Cumbria: Peter Tyson HiFi, Carlisle Rayleigh Hi-Fi, Lakeside	01272 264730 01245 265245	Cornflake.co.uk, West End	0207 631 0472	Martins HiFi, Norwich	015 978 6919	Unifit Sound & Vision, New Malden	0208 942 9567
Essex: Rayleigh Hi-Fi, Rayleigh Rayleigh Hi-Fi, Southend	01268 779762 01702435255	Harrow Audio, Harrow	0207 730 1234	Nottingham HiFi Centre, Nottingham	01865 765961	Audio Designs, East Grinstead	01342 314569
Glos: Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Witham Audio Excellence Ltd, Gloucester	01376 501733 01452 300046	Listening Rooms, Chelsea	0208 930 9933	Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Nottingham	01865 790879	The Powerplant (Hi-Fi) Ltd, Brighton	01273 759798
		Martin Kleiser Ltd, Chiswick	0207 244 7750	Oxford: Audio T Ltd, Headington	01224 585713	Audio Excellence Ltd, Cardiff	01642 248793
		Prestige Audio Ltd, Harrow	0208868 3300	Oxford Audio Consultants, Oxford	01421 221 0221	Audio T Ltd, Swindon	01792 474608
		Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Southgate	0208 886 2777	Holburn Hi-Fi Ltd, Aberdeen	0141 221 0221	Worcester HiFi, Worcester	01905 538222
				Loud and Clear, Glasgow	0131 229 7267	Moorgate Acoustics, Sheffield	0114275 6048
				Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Edinburgh		Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, Hull	01482 587171
						The HiFi Studios, Doncaster	01302 727274

ELAC 512 LOUDSPEAKERS

☆☆☆☆ £1,299.00



The 512 is slender and highly stylish.

When you've had the chance to visit a loudspeaker factory, you appreciate the amount of engineering that goes into a simple cabinet. Further still, companies that make their own drivers – such as JMLab and ELAC – often have the upper hand in terms of flexibility in their production process, which can often mean rapid technological progression. Believe it or not, the German company ELAC has been around since 1926, but even a closer look at the 512 reveals nothing that would suggest this is anything but a 21st Century design.

The rather slender, yet visually unconventional, 512 uses a wide-dispersion folded-ribbon tweeter that is designed to operate up to 35kHz. A very extended response compared to the c20kHz of conventional soft-dome designs. More trickery is evident in the driver for the mid and bass, which uses a sandwich of paper and extremely thin aluminum to give the cone its metallic appearance; it also claims to offer low coloration. Those silver drivers and unusual tweeters may not suit all aesthetic tastes, but you can trust the quality of the veneer and overall build to satisfy the fussiest enthusiast at this price level. You can hear the metal tweeter in the upper-frequency extremes, more so with DVD-Audio. However, the treble itself is very sweet and extended, but it can occasionally be a little hard with some material.

That said, where these speakers stand out from the crowd is in their midband and treble transparency, which is glorious with vocals and acoustic work. The balance is slightly upfront, and the presentation is very clean and transients are extremely quick.

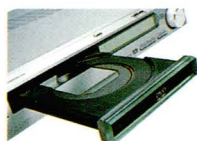
Their 5-star status is well deserved, yet this is not a speaker for everyone. If you want timing and transparency you'll be chuffed with the ELACs for the money, but you might find them a bit lean for dance and rock. If you've got a bright amplifier or source player, approach with caution. **DG**

**"IF YOU WANT TIMING AND
TRANSPARENCY YOU'LL BE CHUFFED
WITH THE ELACS FOR THE MONEY."**

DATASTREAM

MEASURES 93x20x27cm (HxWxD), 2-way loudspeaker, rear-ported, aluminium ribbon tweeter, 180mm paper/aluminum sandwich mid/bass cone, bi-wirable, can be mass filled, four standard finishes, coloured lacquers available to order, 10-year guarantee.

SENNHEISER: 01494 551571



SONY DAV-S500 ONE-PIECE DISC SYSTEM

★★★★★ £599.99

"THE SACD PLAYER IS A STAR. ITS IMAGERY IS COMPETENTLY HANDLED AND ENVELOPING."

DATASTREAM

POWER OUTPUT: Stereo 40W/channel. Multichannel 5x40W + 1x80W (subwoofer) 6 ohms, 1kHz, 10% THD (subwoofer 2 ohms, 100Hz).

COMPATIBLE DISC TYPES: DVD-Video, SACD stereo and multichannel, Video-CD, CD, CD-R, CD-RW.

CONNECTIONS: Video 1 in/out and video 2 in only composite video + audio. Digital in and out – optical Toslinks. Monitor out – S-Video and composite phono.

SPEAKERS: 5 satellites, each 10x10x11cm (HxWxD), subwoofer 39x20x35.5cm. Supplied with cables and luminous IR remote control with library of TV codes.

SONY UK ☎ 08705 111999

The DAV-DS500 is a svelte, compact one-piece disc-playing system supplied with five small satellites and a subwoofer. The electronics package is noteworthy in more than one respect, not least

because it crams so much into such compact dimensions without generating excessive heat or requiring active cooling. This trick is achieved by replacing the normal analogue gain stages with a digital 20-bit delta sigma amplifier, which Sony claims to be a step beyond existing half-way-house digital designs.

The most noteworthy feature of this system, however, is not the amplifier, or even the FM-RDS/MW tuner with 30 presets. It is the disc player, which is not only compatible with both DVD-Video and SACD formats but also includes Dolby Pro-Logic, dts and Dolby Digital decoding.

The five diminutive satellite speakers look identical, but they're not: the centre speaker and the two surrounds lack the main satellite's tweeter. The subwoofer is a compact passive design, driven by the main system amplifier.

Leaving performance to one side, this is clearly a sharply priced system with a lot of capabilities

under its belt, but it really does deliver. The high-tech digital amplifier is not exactly powerful, but what you get is a surprisingly sweet, open sound which has a bold character that is well judged to make the most of the supplied speakers. Although slightly dished in response when coupled to the subwoofer, the system overall is vivid and attractive, and in a largish domestic room it sounded bigger and more dynamic than you would expect. DVD-Video and FM stereo performance are mundane but acceptable by the standards of packaged systems, and the CD player is basically clean.

The SACD player is a star. Its imagery is competently handled and enveloping. It clearly exceeds the capabilities of the Dolby and dts surround processor when using appropriate surround-encoded music discs and films. SACD sound quality really does come across as something a little special. It may not sound great in the conventional hi-fi sense, but it is a surprisingly open, vivid and a consistently enjoyable audio music system capable of home cinema, and it's fun in the best sense of the word. **AG**



SUPER AUDIO CD

Hear it. All of it.

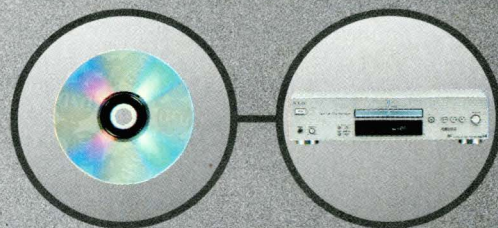
Sony Super Audio CD.

With Super Audio CD, you'll hear sounds almost beyond the range of human hearing. How? Because Super Audio CD uses completely new technology called Direct Stream Digital (DSD), which gives you sound quality unmatched by conventional CD systems, bringing the finest details into sharp relief. With Super Audio CD's new multichannel capabilities this sonic purity can now surround you, recreating the atmosphere of a live performance or recording. But Super Audio CD is not restricted to pure Super Audio CD players alone - Sony has now incorporated this breakthrough sound technology in selected DVD-Video players and Digital Audio Video systems. So if you truly want to hear what you are listening to, listen to Super Audio CD from Sony.

www.sony.co.uk

Customer information centre 08705 111 999

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go create

SONY

NEWS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY TIM BOWERN AND DAN GEORGE.

B&W REVAMPS THE 600s

BREAD AND BUTTER RANGE GOES TO SERIES 3

B&W has launched the latest versions of its popular 600 Series loudspeakers. The new re-worked 600 Series offers revisions to four models, two re-designs, and a completely new floorstander.

Improvements have been made to the Nautilus tapered-tube tweeter, to improve ultrasonic performance, most noticeably with high-resolution audio recordings. Across the range improvements have also been made to the mid/bass drivers, which use stiffer voice-coil formers to reduce break-up. Crossovers and cabinets have also had improvements, and all models now feature B&W's Flowport rear-ports, to improve low-frequency performance.

The revised DM601 and 602 are now joined by the all-new DM602.5 S3, and the two other floorstanding speakers, the DM603 and 604, feature new aluminium-cone bass drivers that claim to improve bass speed and definition. Two output-matched centre-channel speakers are available to complement both the standmount and more powerful floorstanding designs.

Cosmetic changes across the range bring new silver-coloured baffles and a choice of Sorrento (light oak) and black ash finishes. All models are available now, with prices starting at £229 for the 601 S3.

B&W ☎ 01903 750750



B&W's new S3 601 left and the all new 602.5 floorstander.



Sendor is back and it's taking no prisoners.

SWEET SPENDORS

FIRST FRUIT OF NEW MANAGEMENT

Stalwart loudspeaker manufacturer Sendor has launched its first new range of loudspeakers since Audiolab founder Philip Swift took over as MD. The S-Series consists of four stereo speakers plus a centre-channel and subwoofer. Features across the range include acoustically engineered grilles and rigid metal stabilisers on the base of the cabinets for solid coupling to the floor. All models use low-loss polypropylene capacitors in the crossover networks, and all internal wiring uses silver-plated high-purity copper. Prices start at £599.90 for the S3 stand mounter.

Sendor Audio Systems ☎ 01323 843474

MAJOR LABELS SUPPORT SACD

UNIVERSAL AND EMI ISSUE FIRST HIGH RESOLUTION TITLES

As the battle between the two new high-resolution multichannel music formats intensifies, the SACD camp has struck a major blow by securing the support of software giant Universal Music Group. UMG is the largest of the 'big five' music companies, producing software on various labels worldwide. Clearly, the support of these companies is crucial for both SACD and DVD-Audio, but their reaction to these new formats has so far been cautious.

To date, Sony Music has been the only major label to actively support SACD – not surprising since Sony co-developed the format with Philips. But as UMG made its announcement, another major label, EMI, also confirmed its support, with 17 SACD titles planned for the coming months. Various new releases and back-catalogue titles are mooted, including material from the likes of David Bowie, Coldplay, Geri Halliwell and Fun Lovin' Criminals. Virgin, too, is working on a number of high-profile SACD titles –

revamped versions of classics from artists such as Brian Eno, Human League and Roxy Music.

Meanwhile, the Warner Music Group is the only one of the big five currently releasing DVD-Audio titles, though the DVD-A camp has long claimed the backing of all the largest major labels. BMG is the only other major label to have independently declared its intent to support DVD-A, and there are no current details of when such discs may arrive.

It appears Sony has been instrumental in securing UMG's support for SACD. Both Sony and Philips are said to be providing support with services like authoring, mastering, studio equipment, production and manufacturing of SACD titles. Sony says this is no more than it would do for any other label. However, it should be stressed that none of the major music companies has yet ruled out support for either DVD-A or SACD, Sony Music and UMG included.

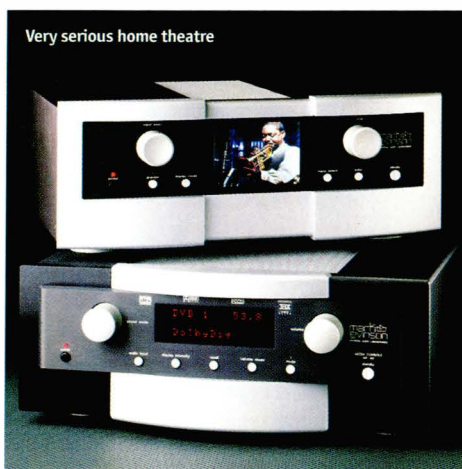
Universal Music ☎ 020 8910 5000

CONSOLE YOURSELF WITH MARK LEVINSON

MAIDEN AV PRODUCT FROM US HIGH ENDER

Mark Levinson has recently released the No40 Media Console, a two-component system dedicated to switching and processing video and audio. It's the first audio/video product from the brand, and the product can decode a variety of data including Dolby Digital, DTS ES 6.1, and Pro-Logic II.

The unit's processors are also capable of providing a multi-channel experience from two-channel material. An LCD screen is integral to the fascia of the No40, providing access to set-up menus as well as video playback. The No40 can control high-performance multichannel equipment. Price TBA. *Path Premier* ☎ 01844 219000



Very serious home theatre



ONKYO UPS THE DVD-AUDIO ANTE

SECOND HIGH RESOLUTION MULTICHANNEL MACHINE HAS THX ULTRA

Onkyo is ramping up its support for the DVD-Audio music format with its latest player. The DV-S757 will play both DVD-Audio discs and the movie-oriented DVD-Video format, along with ordinary CDs, CD-R and CD-RW discs alongside MP3-coded CDs.

Movie buffs will be tempted by the player's THX-Ultra certification, which should ensure a high level of audio/video performance with DVD-Video discs, while hi-fi fans will be pleased to learn all video circuitry may be switched off to optimise audio performance. 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs from Crystal are employed, and digital output is selectable to 96kHz. It's priced at a penny under £1,000. *Jamo UK* ☎ 01788 556777

MUSIC FROM THE CASTLE

DURHAM GETS TO MK3 STATUS

Castle Acoustics has added to its Classic range of loudspeakers with the launch of the Durham 3, a new two-way standmount model. Castle's familiar offset tweeter design claims to improve imaging. The Durham 3 uses a 19mm soft-dome tweeter and a 130mm cone of woven carbon fibre as the main driver. The Durham 3 is a rear-ported design that is bi-wirable, with a claimed 88dB sensitivity. Prices start at £399 in standard finish. *Castle Acoustics* ☎ 01756 795333



Castle Durham



LARGE AND IN CHARGE

HARMAN KARDON UNVEILS FLAGSHIP RECEIVER

Harman Kardon has announced details of its forthcoming range-topping AVR 8500, the most feature-bound model to date. Among the THX Ultra-certified unit's features are Dolby Pro-Logic II, DTS-ES Discrete, and DTS Neo 6, which can handle 24-bit audio at 192kHz.

The AVR 8500 comes with Harman's EzSet remote, the first handset that automatically analyses and sets loudspeaker levels with its built-in sound-pressure measuring. Crystal DSP processors and DACs provide the 192/24 audio capability. The Harman unit boasts MP3 and HDCD decoding too.

Harman claims the AVR 8500 delivers 100 watts into each of the five main channels, or 110 watts into two, and a sophisticated bass system allows versatile distribution of low-frequency signals between the channels. The unit will be available towards the end of January 2002, priced at £1,499.

Harman Consumer UK ☎ 020 8731 4670

IN BRIEF



AIWA has announced details of two new systems for 2002. The XR-X7 is a micro system with CD, AM/FM tuner and 2x20W per channel, costing around £250. Also from Aiwa is the DV700, a one-box DVD system with five speakers, integral amplification and signal processing and a tuner for a mere £600.

☎ 0870 168 9000

DIGITAL ONE, operator of the National Commercial Multiplex, has rolled out phase three of its transmitter network, bringing another 20 digital radio transmitters into operation. Digital One currently reaches 80 per cent of the UK population, and the 20 new transmitters will bring digital coverage to

areas such as Devon, East Anglia, parts of Scotland and Carlisle.
www.ukdigitalradio.com

MAGIX audio cleaning lab is a piece of software designed to clean up crackles and pops from LPs, so that you can record noise-free CDs via your PC. Connect your hi-fi to your PC's soundcard and the software can manipulate and mix all types of media to provide clean digital music for a price just under £20. ☎ 01923 495 537

FLOATERS need no longer be confined to the bathroom. They are also part of a new range of isolation supports from Designs Unlimited. The range includes equipment supports, CD cabinets and speaker stands. www.designs-un.com

PROCEED has launched the Progressive Video Processor (PVP), claiming the finest

IN BRIEF CONTINUES ON P.18

NEWS



UNIVERSAL PIONEER DISC PLAYER

NEW MACHINE FROM DVD-AUDIO STALWART EMBRACES SACD MULTICHANNEL

Pioneer has become the first major brand to announce firm details of a genuinely 'universal' disc player for the UK market – one that plays both the new DVD-Audio and SACD music formats in addition to DVD-Video discs and CDs. The DV-747A is expected to cost around £1,000, and it may just squeeze the shops in time for Christmas.

Its silver-coloured aluminium case holds a rigid double-layer chassis and isolated loading tray. DVD-Video picture quality is said to be akin to Pioneer's existing high-end DVD machines, while a trio of two-channel Crystal 24-bit/192kHz DACs are designed to produce strong audio results.

This isn't the first universal DVD-A and SACD player to

be unveiled for the UK market – the Chinese-made Zenix Z-1016L-S is compatible with the same range of disc formats but doesn't do multichannel SACD.

This Pioneer is the first to emerge with full support for both formats in multichannel, if successful it will undoubtedly spurn similar machines from other big brands. Such players may prove crucial if both DVD-Audio and SACD are to secure long-term futures. If the playback hardware is not mutually exclusive, both high-resolution music formats could feasibly co-exist given adequate software support and demand from consumers.

Pioneer UK ☎ 01753 789789



Tannoy Eyris for hi-fi and home cinema.

SCOTS ACCENT

STYLISH NEW TANNOY RANGE

From Scotland, Tannoy has launched a new range of loudspeakers called Eyris.

Fundamental to the design is Tannoy's Wideband high-frequency unit that uses a 25mm titanium-dome tweeter to extend treble response to 44 kHz, specifically for the new high-resolution music formats.

The Eyris bass driver claims a tight, fast response from an all-new paper cone. All Eyris models are reflex-loaded. Suited to hi-fi or audio-video applications, the lone standmounter and three floorstanders are joined by a matching centre-channel speaker and rear-effect units.

Prices start at £599 for the Eyris 1 standmounter.

Tannoy ☎ 01236 420199



KEF's radical new Uni-Q Reference range

COCKTAIL OF KEF

THREE NEW SPEAKER RANGES AT HI-FI SHOW

KEF launched three new loudspeaker ranges at September's London Hi-Fi Show. The top end is the new Uni-Q Reference Series, with the flagship speaker the 5-way Model 207, sporting KEF's new distinctive cast-aluminium pod that houses the new generation Uni-Q upper-mid/HF driver.

All feature a 19mm titanium-dome hypertweeter, which is claimed to deliver a flat response to 50kHz and useful energy to 70kHz. The range consists of three floorstanders, a standmounter, and two range-matching centre-channel loudspeakers with prices starting at £1,000.

The new Q-series wide-bandwidth designs share a 19mm tweeter developed from the Reference Series. They can be used in two-channel or multichannel environments.

Three additions to the familiar Coda range start at £149. KEF Audio ☎ 01622 672261

IN BRIEF CONTINUED

interlaced video performance and the finest audio performance of any DVD player on the market. The digital video processor is implemented in two modules for use in the company's PMDT modular DVD transports. Expect to pay £1,495.

☎ 01844 219000

MAPLIN'S new catalogue is out this month, and inside you'll find the Hitachi

Worldspace Receiver, a satellite wireless. The £149 receiver connects you to over 40 digital stations and can be programmed to display channels in specific languages. FM/MW and shortwave is available in addition to the Worldspace satellite channels.

☎ 01226 751155

SOUND ORGANISATION has modified its Z560 and Z545 equipment supports to include

a new satin-black finish. Other modifications include wider and deeper shelves to accommodate larger equipment. See *HFC 217* for a full review. Prices start at £200.

☎ 01279 501111

DIRTY hardware look out! One

For All has released a new range of cleaning products, for both hardware and software. Various cleaners for CD and DVD lenses and discs are

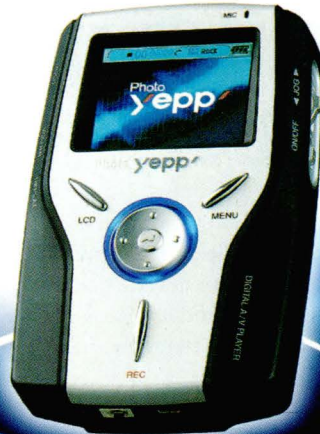
available with prices starting under £6. Cleaners for MiniDisc players are expected soon.

☎ 0808 1000296

THE TECHNICS Mercury music prize was won by PJ Harvey for her latest album *Tales from City: Tales from the Sea*. The judges picked this album from a strong field including Basement Jaxx, Zero 7, Ed Harcourt, Super Furry Animals and Turin Brakes – but not

Gorillaz, who declined even a nomination. The awards event was enlivened in no small measure by a storming performance from the *HFC* favourite, Elbow.

CORRECTION. Last month we said that GT Audio was the service agent for Unison in the UK. Both this and the suggestion that GTA influenced the choice of valve on the S2K amp have been denied by UKD, the importer.

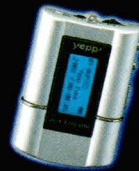


Digital Excitement...yepp



YVP-P300

- Multiple Digital Audio Format Support-MP3, WMA, SMIL, JPEG, Text Viewer Included
- 1.8" TFT Color LCD
- 64MB Embedded Flash Memory & SmartMedia Card Slot
- Li-ion Battery (Long Playback Time & Rechargeable)
- Voice Recording



YP-30S

- MP3 Playback
- 64MB Embedded Flash Memory
- Voice Recording
- High-Speed USB Interface (7.5Mbps)
- 4-Mode Equalizer/Bass booster
- European Song Title Display
- Accessories: Belt-Clip, Arm-Band, Neck Strap



YP-NDU64

- MP3 Playback
- 64MB Embedded Flash Memory
- Graphic LCD Display
- Expandable Playback Time with SmartMedia Card
- EL backlight LCD on FM Tuner Remote Controller
- Voice Recording



YP-MF64

- Multiple Digital Audio Format Support-MP3, WMA
- 64MB Embedded Flash Memory
- Graphic Animation LCD Display
- Expandable Playback Time with SmartMedia Card
- EL backlight LCD on FM Tuner Remote Controller
- Voice Recording



YP-20S

- MP3 Playback
- Graphic LCD Display
- 64MB Embedded Flash Memory
- Time & Date Display
- 4-Mode Equalizer/Bass booster



YP-NEU64

- MP3 Playback
- 64MB Embedded Flash Memory
- Expandable Playback Time with SmartMedia Card
- EL Backlight LCD on Remote Controller
- 4-Mode Preset Equalizer (Rock/Classic/Jazz/Basic)



European Imaging and Sound Association

EISA is the largest editorial multimedia organization in Europe, with a membership of 40 Audio, Video and Photo magazines drawn from 20 European countries.

<http://eisa-awards.org>

A NUT OF THE FIRST ORDER

WES PHILLIPS REMEMBERS A 'DOCTOR OF GIZMOLOGY' WHO PIONEERED THE TRIODE REVIVAL, AND CONSIDERS WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR MULTICHANNEL MUSIC TO CAPTURE OUR IMAGINATIONS.

The British eccentric is a well-known type, and its American analogue is the nut. On July 19, the hi-fi realm lost one of its true originals, Harvey Rosenberg – a nut of the first order. I met Harvey back in 1981 when a friend bought several of his OTL amplifiers inspired by Julius Futterman, which, by the way, were *amazing*. I had never heard valve amplifiers like them – and twenty years later, I still haven't.

Over the years, I'd hear of Harvey's exploits. He included Pampers with the instruction manual for his New York Audio Labs Moscode 600 amplifier "to protect the upholstery" when you first listened to it. He produced the *Tube Bible*, *Understanding Tube Electronics: A Study in Natural Harmonics*, *A Search for Musical Ecstasy*, and *Archaic Tube Revival* – books written in a style that was half Borsch Belt comedian, half stream-of-consciousness.

Harvey dubbed himself a 'tube god', later settling on 'Doctor of Gizmology' and 'Guildmeister of the Triode Guild'. He was an early advocate of single-ended triode amps and of horn loudspeakers. He rode a Harley and attended hi-fi shows clad in a kilt and a Sioux war bonnet made of eagle feathers and vacuum tubes. His writings appeared in *Listener*, where he was listed on the masthead as Fashion & Beauty Editor.

And no matter where he was, you just knew he was having more fun than anyone else in the room.

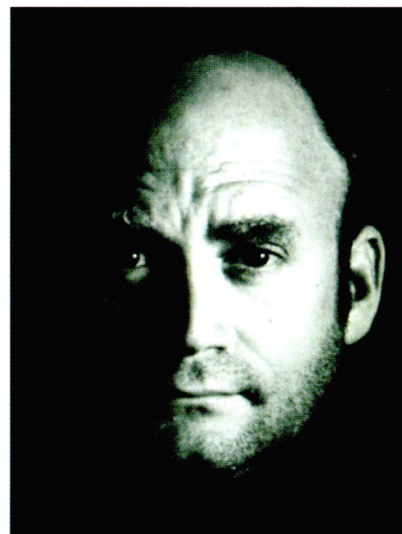
Harvey held no brook with audiophiles who were made miserable by their systems. The whole point of it all was to have fun – or if you were very fortunate, to attain musical ecstasy. He didn't care what measurements showed – measurements related to hi-fi equipment, which was beside the point. The point was musical enjoyment and any other measure was silly.

His website is still active and worth visiting, if only to read the encomiums posted there by various friends and followers: www.meta-gizmo.com.

Although I didn't know Harvey well – and have never been able to muster his enthusiasm for triodes and horns (although the sound of triodes and headphones is a different matter, entirely) – I frequently think about his value system. After all, take away musical pleasure and what is the point of this hobby? Unadulterated gear lust?

MULTICHANNEL MANIA

Most stereo consumers seem overwhelmingly indifferent to the advantages of uncompressed surround sound. I realize that this sounds ridiculous coming from the chap who waxed euphoric over Perceptual Soundfield Reconstruction a mere two months ago, but that was my reaction to an



Harvey 'Gizmo' Rosenberg, the only hi-fi scribe to get to grips with the point of this crazy pursuit.

"THE POINT OF IT ALL WAS TO HAVE FUN - OR, IF YOU WERE FORTUNATE, TO ATTAIN MUSICAL ECSTASY."

exceptional five-channel demo. Most people haven't heard PSR and, likewise, most people don't seem to be all that excited about multichannel music.

At the moment the record companies don't have a clue about how to deal with all those extra channels. Over the last few years, I've attended an untold number of Sony demos, and at each I've heard dubious recordings that placed musicians behind the listener. (It's true that at Home Entertainment 2001, Sony also demoed a very naturally recorded Midori performance of Mozart's concerto for violin and piano, produced by Steve Epstein – done properly with nothing coming from the rear channels except hall sound, so the learning process is taking effect.)

It's all going to come down to a matter of software. As usual. It is a hi-fi truism that early acoustic recordings were particularly suited to displaying the human voice. And that early era of recorded music just happened to coincide with a golden age of singers.

It is also regarded as undeniable fact

that the long-playing record enjoyed its era of greatness during an age that was rich in great conductors and soloists. And, of course, people of my generation came of stereo-buying age in an era in which the Beatles and other performers were making the most of the LP's duration and information-storage capacities. I can't speak for anyone else, but I got bit by the hi-fi bug when I heard how much information my favorite records contained that I couldn't hear at all on my mid-fi system. You might call that the Pink Floyd effect.

So I don't think that a better soundstage or a more believable acoustic environment will be enough to sell multichannel music discs. It's going to take a band or a musical movement that can truly be experienced only in more than two channels. What we need is music that people *want* to hear in multichannel audio – music that people simply *have* to hear in multichannel.

Wes Phillips is our US news correspondent, blues music lover and vinyl enthusiast.



'Best Combination'

'Experience today, astonishing digital technology with this unique Combination unit.'

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DUAL VISION SV-DVD1E

PROTECT & SURVIVE

MUSIC MOGULS ARE TAKING COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST PIRATES. GEORGE COLE IS ON WATCH.

“WE’RE TRYING TO MAINTAIN THE MP3 EXPERIENCE AND THE COMPILATION EXPERIENCE FOR CONSUMERS. WE DON’T WANT TO INFRINGE THEIR RIGHTS. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT THEY CAN’T MASS-DISTRIBUTE THE MUSIC.”

They look like ordinary compact discs, and according to their makers they even sound like ordinary CDs. But right now, millions of CDs sold across Europe have been secretly encoded with new protection against copying. The anti-copy systems are aimed against the millions of people who use a home computer to convert tracks from audio CDs to MP3 music files. They could also affect anyone who plays music CDs on a computer or who owns a CD recorder. And anyone with a hard-disk audio system (like those marketed by companies such as Linn, Imerge or Empeg) should watch out too.

Copying an audio CD has never been simpler or cheaper. Many home computers now come with CD burners as standard, and blank CDs in bulk cost pennies. The latest CD burners can also copy a CD in the time taken to brew a cup of coffee. Many computer users also convert audio CD files to MP3 music files by using ripper software.

“It’s an interesting situation because you’ve got different technologies coming together at the same point, something which the music industry did not expect,” says John Aquilino, chairman of Sunncomm, a US technology company. “CD burners are affordable, peer-to-peer networking [like Napster] is widespread and now, thanks to the internet, anyone with a computer and a telephone line can become a global music distributor.”

The new copy-protection systems for CDs have some similarities. First, none of them prevents consumers from making analogue copies on a cassette and CD-R. And all the systems exploit subtle differences between the CD Red Book standard, the Yellow Book standard for CD-ROM and the Orange Book for CD Recorders. By adding extra data to an audio CD during its production stage, the anti-copy systems can confuse a CD-ROM drive, with the result that the disc does not play at all or any copied music files become corrupted.

Midbar Technology, an Israeli company, has developed a copy-protection system called Cactus Data

Shield. It works by modifying data on the audio CD, although the music data is untouched. Like most CD anti-copy systems, Midbar offers music companies several options, enabling them to control the degree to which the music can be played on domestic equipment. One version produces CDs that will play only on audio CD decks, but not on CD-ROM drives. Another version lets CDs play on both of these, but the audio files cannot be copied or used with ripper software to make compressed music files like MP3. Another version, designed for consumers who play music from a PC hard drive or an MP3 player, puts compressed and copy-protected music files on a CD disc. “Copying is a huge problem,” says Eyal Shavit, Midbar’s vice-president for research and development. “I’ve heard of one instance where 15 per cent of a Beatles anthology album was returned to a store by people who claimed they didn’t like the disc!”

BMG Germany published an album by Him, a Finnish rock group, in January 2000, its first CD to be protected by Midbar’s Cactus shield. The company sold 150,000 copies and received only 200 complaints from consumers who could not play the music in their CD machines. More than a million CDs in Europe have now been encoded with Midbar’s system.

George Cole is a freelance technology journalist who works for national newspapers and specialist magazines.

The country-and-western album *A Tribute to Jim Reeves*, sung by Charley Pride, became the first US album release that claimed to be Napster-proof. The album, published on the Music City Records label last May, was protected by a system developed by Sunncomm called MediaCloq.

MediaCloq stops audio files being ripped and offers an optional downloading system for playing music tracks on a PC hard drive. Purchasers of the Charley Pride album can put the disc in a CD-ROM drive and log on to a protected site to register their disc. They can then download a pre-ripped version of the album that is combined with a Digital Rights Management system to control copying. Sunncomm is also developing a version for BMG that puts the pre-ripped version on a CD.

Future versions of MediaCloq will let owners make their own compilations on CD-Rs: "We're trying to maintain the computer experience, the MP3 experience and the compilation experience for consumers. We don't want to infringe their rights. The only difference is that they can't mass-distribute the music," says Aquilino. Sunncomm claims high compatibility with audio CD players and says that only four very old CD players had problems reading the Charley Price disc.

Yet another system, Sony DADC's Key2audio allows protected discs to play on audio CD decks, DVD-Video players, portable CD players, in-car systems and games consoles like PlayStation 2. However, it prevents consumers from playing discs on CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, CD-R, and CD-RW drives, whether in home computers or in hi-fi systems. Martin Pammer, a consultant who worked with Sony DADC on Key2audio, says: "Key2audio uses a special signature which prevents CD playback and copying on a computer.

Key2audio does not change a single bit in the audio data stream, to protect the quality of the artist's original recording. For music enthusiasts who use a computer, we offer a download from a protected website, which can be unlocked with a serial code found on a legitimately purchased CD. Downloaded files can be played on a consumer's installed and preferred software player." More than 1.5 million CDs covering around 18 titles have been launched in Europe.

Macrovision has joined forces with TTR, another Israeli company, to produce SafeAudio. It works by adding a signature to the main audio channel, which corrupts files that are copied or ripped. "It sounds like static - it's unpleasant," says Tim Heath, sales director for SafeAudio. Eyal Shavit says: "None of the systems are designed to stop pirates, but to reduce the huge amount of home copying. We want to keep honest people honest."

However, this position could confuse consumers. Sony, for example, markets MiniDisc players designed to download music tracks stored on a PC hard drive, yet is also behind a system that would prevent consumers from writing MP3 files on their home computer. Philips, Pioneer, LG and others have launched hi-fi CD recorders that can copy discs at high speed, but some systems like Key2audio are designed to prevent this.

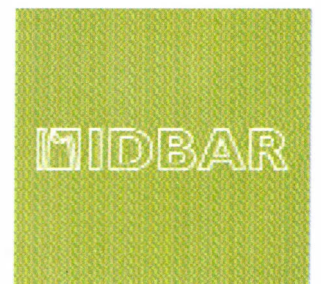
Philips spokesman Simon Poulter says: "Our main interest is that consumers' musical enjoyment is not affected by these systems. We don't think our CD recorders will be made redundant by them." Hard-disk audio systems from companies such as Imerge and Linn let consumers copy hundreds of CDs to a hard drive for greater convenience. But Macrovision confirms that its system affects such products.

"I am very concerned about this development," says Chris Janes, Imerge's product marketing manager.

"Consumers should be allowed to store music they have paid for as they deem fit."

Another issue is sound quality. Some systems like SafeAudio modify the audio data, so hi-fi enthusiasts will be concerned about the effect on the sound. Heath says the encoding process is "completely inaudible."

Little wonder that some in the hi-fi industry are calling for more proof on this issue.



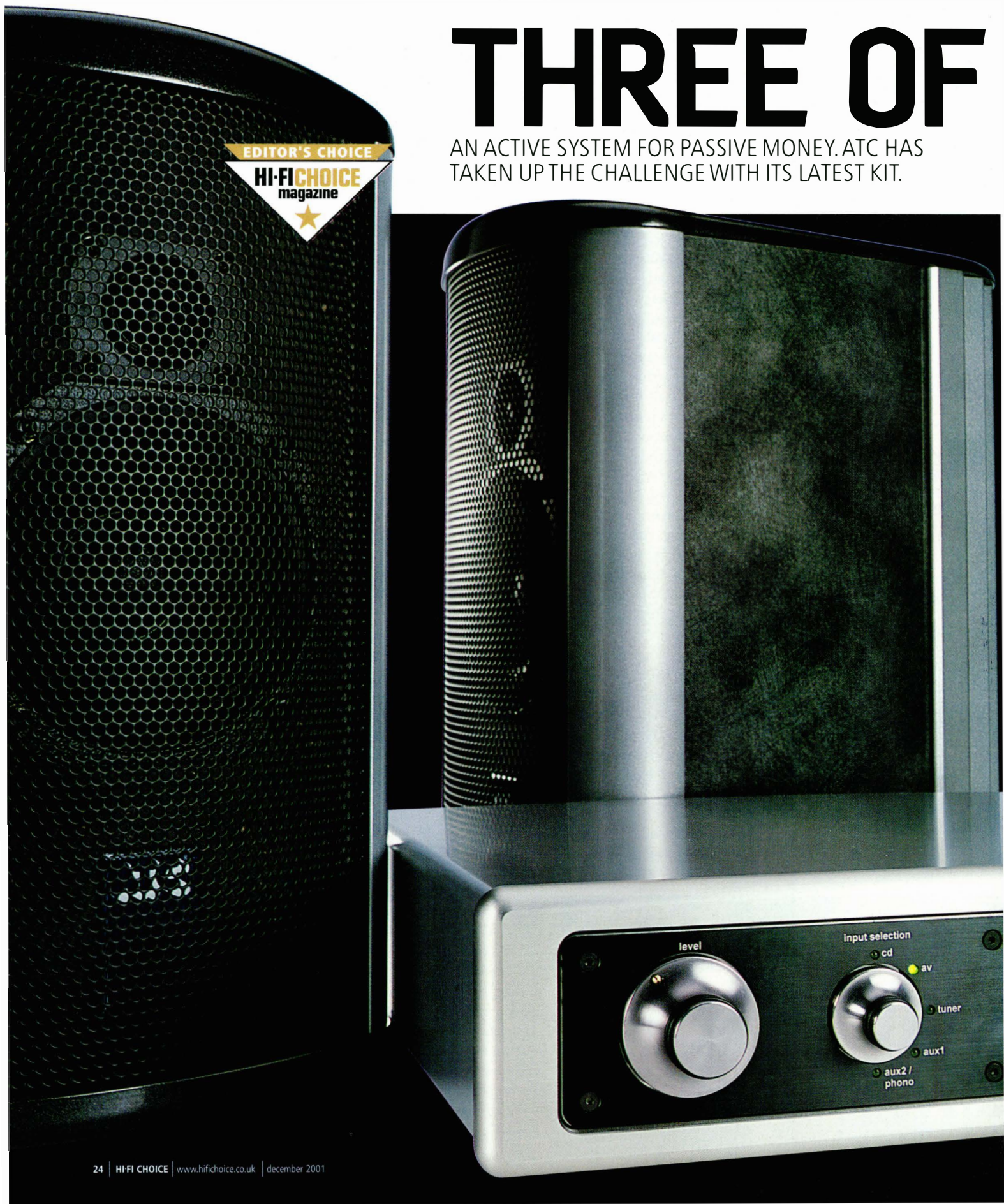
Eyal Shavit (above) developed Cactus Data Shield. Sony's Key2audio and Macrovision's Safeaudio are alternative systems.

THREE OF

AN ACTIVE SYSTEM FOR PASSIVE MONEY. ATC HAS TAKEN UP THE CHALLENGE WITH ITS LATEST KIT.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



A PERFECT PAIR

S

troud-based ATC is one of those hi-fi companies that crosses the professional and domestic divide. This at least partially explains its enthusiasm for building both amplifiers and electronic crossovers into its hefty speaker designs. This technique ensures that the speakers have enough power to

be abused day in day out at high levels with no danger of failure. It also confers a few sonic advantages, as our review of the SCM50ASL revealed a couple of months back.

Encouraged by the success of its SCM70ASL floorstanders, ATC has applied the radical styling of that model to its new entry-level design, the SCM10A. The result, to this beholder at least, is pleasing to both the eye and ear. The previous SCM10 was a passive design finished in real wood veneer with a substantial front baffle and conventional shape. The curved edges and non-parallel sides of the new 10 not only confer a more interesting aesthetic but they also provide greater potential for fidelity.

The substantial fins on the rear of the cabinet act as a heatsink for the 250 watts of largely class A amplification bolted to the other side.

Unsurprisingly these get extremely

warm, and three vents have been made in the top of the speaker to let the heat escape. The amps are split between the two drivers in this sealed (infinite baffle) design. 200 watts drive the 125mm mid/bass driver – a heavyweight design with a flat-wound OFC voice coil and unusually long cone excursion to extend the bass. The other 50 watts are matched to the 25mm soft-dome tweeter made using neodymium magnets by Vifa, a Scandinavian driver specialist.

The ten-litre cabinet is made of heavyweight, laminated MDF with aluminium extrusions forming the front corners and rear heatsinking. Combined with amps and drivers, each one weighs a substantial 15.5 kilos.

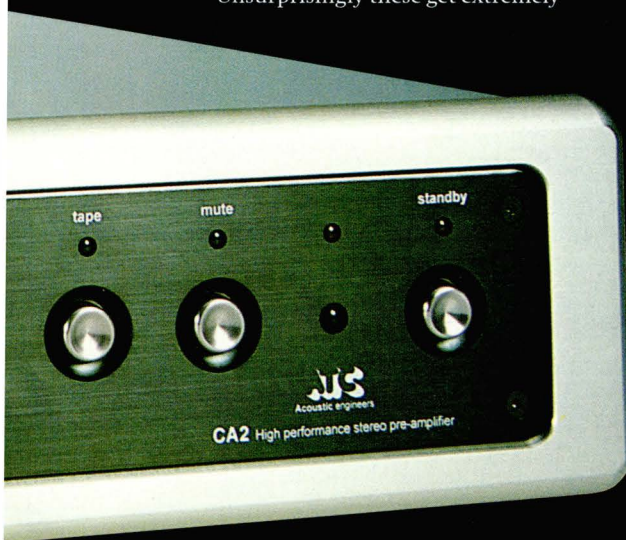
The CA2 is ATC's second and least expensive preamplifier. It was designed specifically to partner its more affordable active speakers – yet claims to concede little or nothing save facilities to ATC's £3,000 SCA2 reference preamp! And it's not exactly underendowed for features itself: it has full remote control, five line-level inputs, tape loop with monitoring, headphone socket and an optional (around £280) phono stage with cartridge matching. Casework is aluminium and output sockets are balanced XLR to match the speakers, which can be up to 50 metres away – for those end-of-the-garden parties presumably. The remote works well, offering very subtle volume graduation.

In use the combination requires you to switch on each speaker or amp individually or leave them cooking all the time. But given the heat output, I suspect that to be an expensive hobby and not one that confers a great deal of sonic benefit: they warm up pretty quickly. The preamp can be left on permanently without the meter spinning madly, but that is the easiest bit



ATC's remote gives subtle control of volume from the CA2 preamp and SCM10A active speakers.

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY



"MUSIC STRETCHES BACK BEHIND THE BOXES AND SEEMINGLY THROUGH THE WALL."

HIGH PERFORMANCE ATC CA2 PREAMP & SCM10A ACTIVE SPEAKERS



The curved edges and non-parallel sides not only look good but help the hefty speakers sound good too.



◁ to put into standby mode. Some form of comms link to each speaker to power it down would be handy.

SOUND QUALITY

In an effort to test the ATC's mettle I hooked up a Sony SCD-555ES SACD player and Pioneer DV-939A DVD-A player alongside my turntable and phono stage. Supports were Townshend Seismic Sinks and Kudos S100, cables were Living Voice and Precious Metals, the latter in balanced form between preamp and speakers – you can drive the speakers from a regular single-ended phono output but need to convert to XLR connection at the speaker end.

Being a package of preamp, power amps and loudspeakers, the ATC set-up is designed to work as a whole – the power amps are specifically tailored to the drive units and the preamp's gain set at a level appropriate to the rest of the system. In effect a matched system.

This presumably explains why I needed to turn the volume control further than usual. On one occasion I came close to the endstop without pushing the system into distortion. There is certainly an advantage in using less of the resistors in a volume pot and avoiding the beginning of the scale where channel balance can go awry, but the gearing here seemed a little too far in the opposite direction. That said, most discs had enough level on them to avoid this particular issue.

Initially I set up these speakers only a few inches from the back wall, but the more music I played the more it seemed that they needed space in order to get even and controlled bass. They ended up with around a foot behind them. After the combo of AVI and Living Voice, this

ATC system had a distinctly tight and immediate sound – some would say slightly hard – but extended listening revealed a subtle side that provided an excellent channel for all manner of musical styles.

Timing was notably on the ball. The leading edges of notes precisely defined the beat and provoked involuntary tapping of the feet – provided not merely by the distinct midrange but also by the remarkably powerful bass. There were occasions when the bass went beyond the limits of the speakers and lost some of its definition, but given the price and size of the SCM10A, bass depth was remarkable. The underpinning it provided whenever the music required was highly entertaining, and it added genuine space to live recordings.

The speaker's ability to disappear sonically was particularly effective when it came to producing wide and deep soundstages. The system is highly specific about the soundstage on a recording. Some material expands sideways from the speakers and into the room, and other music stretches back behind the boxes and seemingly through the wall.

The ATCs did a fine job of revealing the advantages of the two high-resolution formats I was using, even though they were limited to two channels (a 5.1-channel system based on the SCM10A has recently been developed). One disc of classical trumpet on Bis (*Prières sans Paroles*) sounded quite hard and relentless from the CD layer but open and soaring in SA mode. Joni Mitchell on DVD-A relished the extra definition, sounding lush and full without losing her edge.

As it was on hand, I compared the CA2 preamp with the AVI S2000, which is a couple of hundred pounds dearer. This was done with a Gamut D200 power amp to provide a degree of neutrality (though the Gamut's balanced connection probably favoured the ATC). Under such circumstances the CA2 sounded harder-edged and sharper with slightly deeper bass.

CONCLUSION

ATC's entry-level combination of preamplifier and active loudspeakers offers remarkable value for money. Serious active loudspeakers at this price are a distinctly rare thing. If you are after maximum bang for your buck you'll be hard-pushed to do better. You'll need decent stands, of course, and some good cable won't go amiss. But given those things, the pairing of the CA2 and the SCM10A is something of a high-fidelity bargain – get 'em while they're hot.

CA2 £750, SCM10A £1,299, ATC ☎ 01285 760561

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because music matters

I can't quite believe it's five long years since I've had the pleasure of reviewing one of Joe Ackroyd's fine loudspeaker designs. That's because Royd doesn't believe in things like 'product cycles'. The company creates the best speaker of the type it can, and keeps on making it that

way until it comes up with something better.

And something better is what the new Revelation range is rumoured to be. Joe was contemplating retirement when he finally cracked a problem he'd been working on for years. Instead he made a rare appearance at the Bristol hi-fi show in spring 2001, bringing along three new Revelation models and announcing that production of all previous models would cease forthwith – clearly Revelation would have been as appropriate as Revelation! The key claim for the new range is a remarkably deep bass extension from a relatively compact enclosure and small main drivers.

That said, there's plenty here that will be familiar to Royd-watchers. The overall outline is very reminiscent of the Doublet (a Best Buy back in 1996), though this new model is significantly more expensive and much refined in engineering and cosmetics.

This RR2, at £1,200 a pair, is the largest and most expensive of three Revelation models. Largest, but not large, this is still a delightfully compact package (86.5cm tall), and is finished in an attractive cherry real-wood veneer, with nicely radiused vertical edges all round. The basic configuration consists of two Royd 5.25-inch bass/mid drivers mounted above and below a single Morel tweeter. Each of those five-inchers is loaded by its own small port-loaded enclosure, the box divided internally by a vertical panel which very effectively stiffens the sides.

An impressive level of engineering refinement and attention to small details is evident throughout. A heavy steel 'tray' enhances stability and acts as a plinth, providing fine spike security; interestingly, three little carbon-fibre studs form the mechanical interface between speaker and plinth.

The two main drivers are similar, but by no means identical, showing quite distinct hand-doping and other finishing techniques. The

lower one also has a phase plug protruding from its central pole-piece. Both use the ancient technique of fixing a fabric gasket firmly around the back of the frame and magnet structure. This provides resistive damping, which helps avoid excessive cone excursion. A large tube acoustically loads and isolates the back of the tweeter. Twin terminals provide the option of bi-wiring or bi-amping.

To achieve deep bass, Royd claims to have tailored the RR2's bass rolloff characteristics to work alongside and be compensated by the listening room's inherent bass boost. A little to my surprise, the in-room averaged responses did indeed show exceptional bass extension by any standards – 0dB at 20Hz, no less – fully substantiating Royd's assertions.

No smoke'n'mirrors is involved – it's all about choosing compromises rather different from the norm. The ports here are tuned to a low 30Hz, and sensitivity is a modest 85dB, especially in view of a load which is down around 3 ohms through much of the midband. The balance wasn't entirely neutral under our conditions either. I got best results with the speakers about two feet out from the nearest wall, but although the deep (sub-80Hz) bass is impressively strong, the next octave up (80-160Hz) is decidedly short of energy. The midband and treble look very well judged – and notably smoother than the Doublet.

SOUND QUALITY

The unusual measured tonal balance was bound to influence the sound quality, yet in truth the net result is almost totally beneficial. I fell in love with the RR2 almost immediately, and my respect for it has continued to grow day by day ever since.

Yes, it does sound a little lean, a little lacking in warmth and richness, and driving bass lines could be rather more emphatic. But more importantly the RR2 avoids the sort of mid-bass thump that's all too common among today's floorstanders. This speaker has all the midband openness and clarity of a high-class miniature, yet with the extra sense of weight and scale that only the very largest speakers usually supply. It sounds big, but never overweight.

The midband is beautifully voiced, substantially free from colorations, while the lack of

The compact Revelation is boxed in real cherry wood, edges nicely rounded, with each main driver in a separate compartment.

SUBTLE REVOLUTION

TO THIS REVIEWER'S DELIGHT, JOE ACKROYD PUT OFF RETIREMENT UNTIL HE CRACKED THE SECRET OF MAKING A SMALL PACKAGE PRODUCE DEEP DEEP BASS



In the latest samples Royd has replaced the terminal joiners (above) with internal hardwiring for better single wire performance.

boxiness helps deliver a generous yet precise stereo soundstage. Watching a movie in stereo, I was startled to hear surround effects coming from beside me, way outside the locations of the speakers themselves, which tends to support the claim for fine phase linearity.

Its sparkling wide-band coherence makes even 'difficult' instruments like a concert grand sound remarkably convincing and interesting. Brendel's rendition of Mozart's Piano Concerto No25 at the Proms was so engrossing that I gave up on the England vs Albania football match.

CONCLUSIONS

This splendid loudspeaker offers a very welcome alternative to the market norm. Its magnificent bass extension, though perhaps a little lean for less mature tastes, adds genuine scale, yet remains mercifully free from mid-bass 'thickening'. If your musical tastes extend from Basement Jaxx to Leftfield, it's probably not the ideal choice: this isn't a speaker for frightening the neighbours with your block-rockin' beats.

Rather it's a wonderfully delicate and subtle communicator, especially at low and 'normal' listening levels, that cleverly manages to make all sorts of music just that little bit more interesting and involving.

£1,200, Royd Loudspeakers ☎ (01952) 290700

"ROYD CREATES THE BEST SPEAKER IT CAN AND KEEPS ON MAKING IT THAT WAY UNTIL IT CAN COME UP WITH SOMETHING BETTER."



ALL CHANGE

AVI HAS REVAMPED ITS ESTABLISHED PRE/POWER AMP COMBO, WHERE REFINED ELECTRONICS HIDE IN AN UNPREPOSSESSING BOX.

m

arketing is as fundamental to the hi-fi industry as to any other. Yet some companies in the field seem to go out of their way to play down what are generally considered to be marketing angles. Take product naming, for instance: most companies

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY

realise that if they want their new product to make any impression on the market it needs to have a name different from the model it supersedes. But not AVI. Why change the name and appearance of your product when only the insides have been revised? It must save a lot on literature, photography and all the business and marketing paperwork. The trouble is that it must also make it hard to get anyone to notice your new product. I guess AVI doesn't crave attention that badly. After all, these results are designed to speak for themselves, so long as you bother to listen.

On this occasion AVI has stopped producing new compact loudspeakers and designer, Martin Grindrod, has focused his attention on one of AVI's more established products. The S2000M preamp and monoblock power amps which first saw the light of production ten years ago. Their blank fascias and compact dimensions (31x9x25cm, WxHxD) hide some highly refined electronics.

The lack of a proper volume knob is something of an ergonomic inconvenience – or at least it would be if the supplied remote got lost. There are buttons to control level, and even a basic illuminated bar to give some visual clue, but it's not the same as a round thing with a dimple on it. AVI's argument is, of course, about sound quality, the volume pot is laid at 90 degrees to the fascia in order to keep the PCB track as short as possible.

The S2000M preamplifier offers five stereo inputs plus the option of a proper phono stage (brass-enclosed, MM/MC, with extra headroom

to suppress surface noise) for an extra £150. As it stands the asking price is £949, for which you get military spec transistors, reed relays, and Alps motorised volume control, twin class-A amplifiers and an output impedance of only 0.2 ohms (the lower the better). You don't get any of the cheesy op-amps found in most inexpensive, and some quite pricey, audio electronics.

The S2000M monoblock power amps go for £1,399 a pair. They are rated at 150 watts a channel into 8 ohms, a figure that AVI claims increases to 228 watts when the impedance halves. This is not phenomenally powerful – more expensive designs will double their output as the load impedance halves – but it is more than adequate for most speakers and domestic listening levels. It uses a discrete transistor driver stage and bi-polar transistors in the output stage. Despite the maximum current being 35A, these amplifiers run remarkably cool: you can leave them on without fear of killing the planet or doubling the electricity bill. The amps also incorporate bullet proof protection circuits and can be completely shorted without concern

SOUND QUALITY

I had to set the AVI amps up in a stack on top of a Seismic Sink base (the Seismic stand is now full of source components and a phono stage) but they don't weigh too much and seemed to operate silently, so I don't think the intimacy undermined performance. They certainly sounded better than without the base.

Sources included the mighty SME Model 20A record player with Van den Hul Grasshopper and The Groove phono stage, the Sony SCD-55ES SACD player and the Pioneer DV-939A DVD-A player. Connections were courtesy of Living Voice and Townshend Interconnect and Electrofluidics and Townshend speaker cables.

The speakers themselves were my usual Living Voice Avatar OBX-Rs, which represent a fairly



Don't lose the remote: the main unit has no round thing with a dimple on it to adjust the volume.

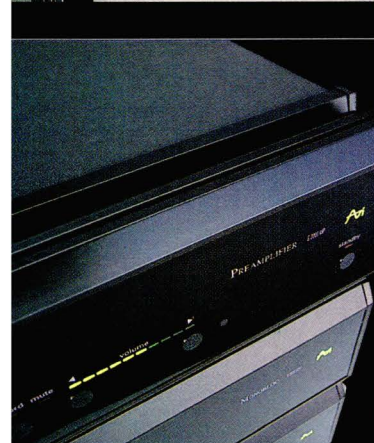
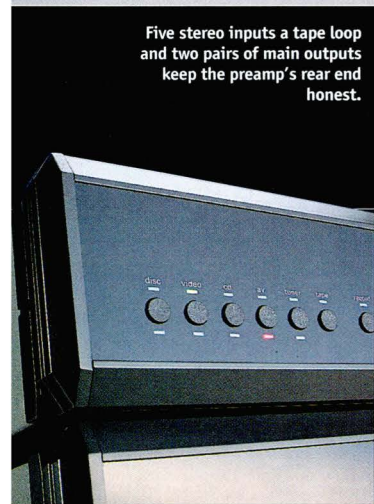


"WHY CHANGE THE NAME AND APPEARANCE OF YOUR PRODUCT WHEN ONLY THE INSIDES HAVE BEEN REVISED? THE RESULTS ARE DESIGNED TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES."

HIGH PERFORMANCE AVI S2000M PREAMP & MONOBLOCK POWER AMPS



Five stereo inputs a tape loop and two pairs of main outputs keep the preamp's rear end honest.



innocuous load for the monoblocks to control.

My first impression of the S2000M amps was of a slightly dry, detailed and highly phase-sensitive sound. In some respects this was a reaction to the AVIs following an exuberant Canary CA-608 valve amplifier – the contrast was pretty stark. Once I'd acclimatised to the more sensible transistor amps their other strengths became apparent. John Coltrane's *Sunship*, a blast of light from an almost electric saxophone, revealed the ability to reproduce tonal colour and shade – not something that dry tranny electronics are noted for. Leftfield's atmospheric *Melt* exposed a tactile, rumbling bass performance coupled with a degree of presence that was palpable. Turning it up for Missy Elliot proved that these amps could perform with equal ease at higher levels, the inherent character not changing with the extra demand.

I used these amps for my high-resolution software reviews last month and they proved more than capable of revelling in the extra detail, bandwidth and dynamics on offer. Joni Mitchell proved she can still knock 'em out with feeling on the *Both Sides Now* DVD-A, a highly atmospheric recording which may sound better with more channels but sounded very fine with this set-up. It's not just the latest high-res formats that the AVI worked well with, however. My vinyl records sounded particularly sweet –

Turin Brakes' *Optimist LP* put in a particularly colourful and detailed performance. Another new favourite is Norway's up-and-coming jazzmeister Bugge Wesseltoft – his latest album *Moving* brings together classic Keith Jarrett sound with more ambient grooves to produce a particularly effective melange that encouraged repeated listening through the AVIs.

What struck me time and again while using these amps was their ability to portray three-dimensional space. Some recordings allow the soundstage to expand beyond the boundaries of the room. It makes you ask who needs surround-sound! They also have a good grip on rhythm, placing no undue emphasis on it but making sure it does not get lost when your attention is grabbed by the expanse of sound unfolding before your ears.

Having spent a few weeks finding out what the AVIs could do of their own volition, I felt the urge to see how they compare with what competition I could muster. My first plan was to substitute the preamp from my other *High Performance* piece this month, the ATC combo, but finding that the ATC CA2 had no phono outputs to match the monoblock inputs I was forced to substitute a Gamut power amp for the comparison. This inevitably meant I heard this £3,000 heavyweight against the monoblocks. It exposed the aforementioned dryness, a factor which had effectively disappeared in the intervening weeks but which by comparison was still prevalent. The Gamut sounded more colourful and chewy while digging up extra bass depth and midrange sparkle. But for more than twice the price, one expects some improvements!

Next to the ATC preamp the differences were basically in presentational style. The AVI has a smoother, warmer balance that probably suits the monoblocks better than the hard-edged ATC.

CONCLUSION

This is a well made, rather bland-looking set of amplifiers that has what it takes to make your music open up and pull you in. Its character becomes indiscernible with exposure and leaves only the music for your entertainment. Some might prefer a juicier or more definite sound, but that would suggest listening to the equipment rather than the music.

This latest (sixth, in the case of the preamp) incarnation of the S2000Ms from AVI may not look any different from the last, and it's hard to say how they have changed sonically, but it's got what it takes to expose the heart of the music. And that's what counts.

AV International ☎ 01453 765682

S2000M line preamp £949, S2000M monoblocks £1,399

"WELL MADE, BLAND LOOKING, THIS SET OF AMPS HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE YOUR MUSIC OPEN UP AND PULL YOU IN."

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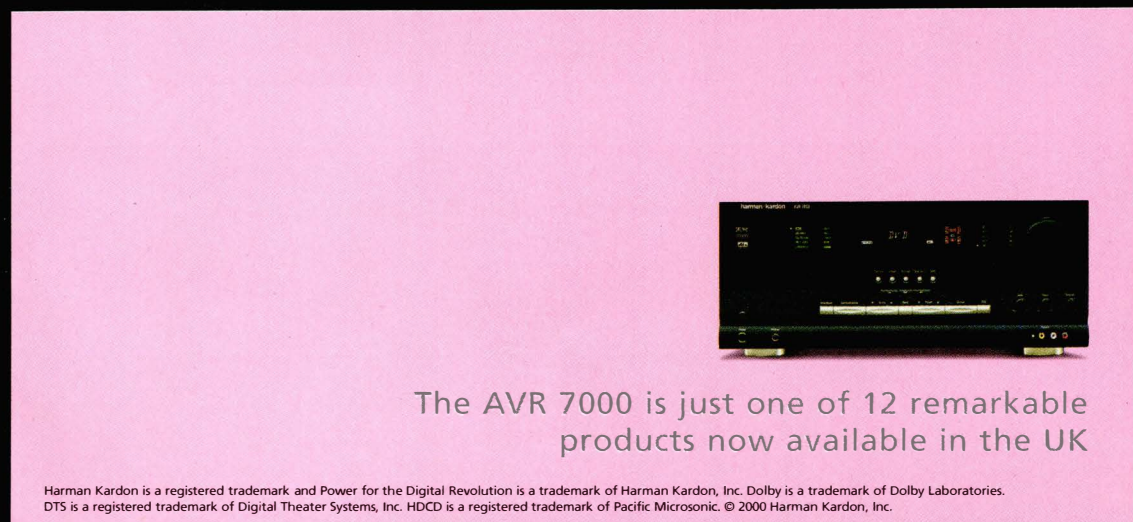
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“DOES OXYGEN-FREE COPPER SHOW ANY MEASURABLE DIFFERENCE FROM NORMAL COPPER WIRE?”

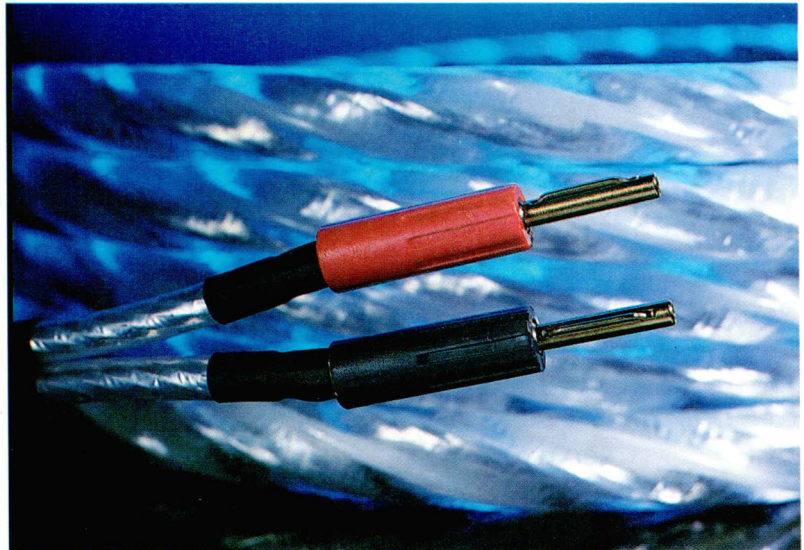
GLENN WARDLE – SUFFOCATING CABLES

“WITH MY TUBE AMP I CAN CHANGE THE SOUND AND PRESENTATION WHENEVER I WANT.”

LAWRIE – GOING UNDERGROUND

“I BOUGHT A SECOND-HAND TURNTABLE AND STARTED BUYING VINYL. NOW JUST A YEAR LATER I'M A TURNTABLE FANATIC AND VINYL SLEUTH.”

SKAATER – SECOND-HAND NEWS



LETTER OF THE MONTH

SUFFOCATING CABLES

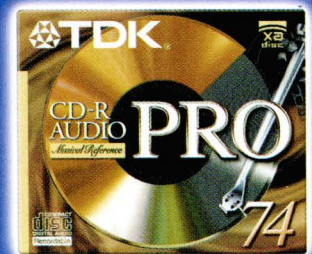
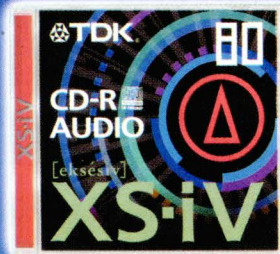
I am a designer of high-speed electronic systems for Motorola and have been looking at the various claims made by the manufacturers of audio cables. My question is simple: Can you tell me if oxygen-free copper (OFC) cables show any measurable differences from normal copper wire of the same dimensions?

I first posed this question to QED, who could produce no scientific objective data. Indeed the final lines of their reply were: “Unfortunately, although we are engineering-driven, marketing and magazine misinformation places us in a situation where customers will not accept cables unless they are OFC. Although I’m sure there is no reason

not to use OFC, I cannot say that it has any objective benefit given current knowledge.” So it looks like I’ve been suckered by the marketing hype! Has anyone produced a measurable difference? You test these cables all the time, so I hope you can help.
Glenn Wardle, via e-mail

The Editor replies ... I don't know whether anyone has proved the benefits of OFC by measurement, but neither have I seen figures which prove that any cable will sound better than any other (Goertz and the ilk being a possible exception). Yet it is not hard to demonstrate significant differences in the sound of cables with remarkably similar topologies. All other things being equal OFC does seem to offer a subjective improvement.

Audio CD-R Range



TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Could you recommend any music libraries in the UK where I can try CDs before I buy them?

Raj Sharma, via e-mail

The Editor replies... Plenty of music shops offer such a facility. Some offer listening posts with discs to choose from, others let you take your choice to the counter and play it over the shop system or pipe it to a pair of headphones. Some HMV stores let you scan a disc's barcode and listen to the first 30 seconds or so of each track, from a database of hundreds of compressed discs. And if you are the DJ type, most dance-oriented shops will let you spin vinyl on an installed deck before you buy. So if it's really 'try before you buy' you're after, you can usually do it in the shop itself. Alternatively, if you want a sample you can keep for a while before purchasing the whole album, the internet is a fantastic way to try out new music. And there's always your local library: many book libraries have a music section and some have a pretty good selection of CDs you can take out on loan. But remember that it is illegal to copy them while they are in your possession.

GOING UNDERGROUND

What is your opinion on tubes? I feel there are popular misconceptions about tubes, and I hear this from people I know until they hear my system. The main myths are that tubes lack bass and pace, they are expensive to buy and maintain, and they cannot be bi-amped etc. Well, in my experience, the lack of bass speed applies only to some badly designed amps, plus there are cheaper designs out there that can be bi-amped. The one advantage of my tube amp is that I can change the sound and presentation whenever I want within minutes by just rolling (changing) the tubes. That also becomes fun because you get to learn about the different types of tubes that suit your musical tastes. Add a power cord and AC conditioner/filter, and very few solid-state amps would come close for the price.

Lawrie, Forum user



What we Brits used to call valves

SACD FOR ME

I was browsing hmv.co.uk for Michael Jackson albums, and I saw the site was offering *Thriller* on Super Audio CD. I was quite surprised at this, since HMV is a mass-market operation. I was just wondering if anyone else has seen Super Audio CDs on sale at a normal retailer. *Thriller* is £12.49 for the regular



Thrilled (very thrilled) at the price

CD version, £16.99 for the 2001 Limited Edition version, and £21.49 for the SACD. I might buy it on SACD just for the hell of it, even if I don't get an SACD player for a while yet!

I do think that SACD has got a chance in the mass market. The average consumer might have a DVD player, but these are often kept near the television, away from hi-fi equipment. People won't see DVD as a format for music, whereas SACD by name alone associates itself with music. Obviously, there is a price gap, but as the format gains popularity the price will fall and more consumers will decide to upgrade to SACD. Once mainstream SACD playback machines (such as mini-systems) start to appear, people will be attracted to the format. For me SACD is a really exciting prospect. Feet 14, Forum user

SECOND-HAND NEWS

After initial scepticism, last year I gave in and bought a second-hand Rega 3 turntable and started buying vinyl again. Here I am just over a year later and I'm a turntable fanatic and vinyl sleuth: you know, looking through the *Trade and Exchange* for LPs, checking the music bins at stores every week, and so on. I now want to upgrade my turntable too. Nothing wrong with the Rega; I just want to investigate true high-end vinyl sound. Those who haven't got a turntable perhaps could buy a cheap second-hand one – you can buy three or four used records for the price of one new release on CD, and of course I reckon they sound better too. Skaater, Forum user

The Editor replies... It's certainly a good way to get started if you fancy getting involved with vinyl but don't want to commit to a big purchase. Second-hand vinyl is a great way to build your collection on a small budget, but be aware that there is no known cure for vinylmania!

Letters Page Sponsored by



at the heart of it

FORUM HELP

TROUBLE WITH THE RIG? LOST IN THE UPGRADE JUNGLE? FEAR NOT, DAN GEORGE IS HERE TO GUIDE YOU TO SONIC SAFE HAVEN

Write to us with your hi-fi queries:

Forum: Help

Hi-Fi Choice

99 Baker Street

London W1U 6FP

Or e-mail:

dan.george@futurenet.co.uk

SPEAKERS

SPACE TO FILL

I listen to dance music in a large room with wooden floors, through a Kenwood KAF3030 amp and B&W 601 S2 speakers. However, I feel that the sound from the B&Ws is getting lost due to the size of the room and its layout. Would it be more advisable to move up to the larger B&W 602 model or to invest in a subwoofer? My only problem with a subwoofer is the unfavourable reviews you have given to the lower-priced models – but as I listen to mainly dance music, would sound quality be less of an issue?

Dan, via e-mail

If you want a bigger sound consider a bigger loudspeaker such as the Infinity Alpha 30 or the Audio Note AZ-One: both are priced similarly to the recently updated (Mk3) B&W 602. For ultimate bass, a budget sub will do the trick, albeit in a more crude manner. It may also take some patience in setting-up to achieve a good match with your B&Ws.



Infinity Alpha 30

SPEAKERS

SENSIBLE COUPLE SEEK THREESOME

I would like to keep both my Arcam Alpha 8SE CD player and Alpha 8 amp, but change my Tannoy MX2 Speakers. Though I am very pleased with them I feel I could get more out of a higher-quality speaker. I have shortlisted the Cyrus CLS50, Dynaudio Audience 42 and AVI Neutron III. What do you reckon?

David Hancock, Sydney, Australia

Great shortlist! The CLS50s are pretty communicative, but can lack authority in the bass. Sadly we haven't tested the AVIs – best judge them with your own ears if you can. The mighty Dynaudios are tough to beat: they earned a Best Buy in HFC 215 and are generally liked in the office for their punchy presentation and superb timing. Have fun!



Dynaudio Audience 42

CABLES

THE TIE THAT BINDS

I was comparing the Ixos Gamma Audition and the Ecosse Composer cables and I seem to like both. I was wondering about hook-ups from my amp to the preamp and from the CD player to my preamp: is it better to have both cables the same? In this case might it be better to have one of each pair, since the Ixos is mellow and neutral and the Ecosse is the brightest? I don't know how one or the other would react with my B&W speakers. Also, what is the situation with break-in time? Some manufactures say it doesn't take long and others, like Ecosse, say it normally takes 200 to 300 hours for the interconnects to sound their best.

Steve Hulbert, USA



Ecosse Composer

Thinking these days suggests sticking with the same interconnect throughout for a consistent result, but there's something to be said for trying to balance the pros and cons of different designs. Cable burn is not something we find to be a big issue, it certainly does not affect the basic character of the cable, and may just be a case of our ears adjusting to the cable's balance. But it always pays to orient cables in the same direction.

AMPLIFIERS

I'LL GO 50-50, CHRIS

I have a Meridian Pro MCD CD player and B&W 601 S2 speakers. However, my Quad amp has broken down and I need to replace it. I have around £800 to spend on a new amplifier, but wonder whether the CD player is up to the standard of modern amps!

Would I be better off splitting the money 50-50 and purchasing a new amp and CD player? I listen to all types of music and like lots of detail.

John Douglas, Co. Durham

Whether a £400 CD player of today is better than your Meridian item is a good question. If you have a good dealer you could perhaps try something like the Marantz CD6000KI at £500 with, say, the EISA-winning NAD C370 at £450. Then, have a blast with your Meridian CD, with, say, the Naim Nait 5 at £799, or the detailed Arcam DiVA A85 at £700. We'd be interested to hear which system sounds best.



NAD C370

SPEAKERS

ISOSCELES TRIANGLE?

I listen to stereo music, and the distance between my speakers is also the exact distance from me to each speaker, (a perfect triangle). Would you recommend toeing in the speakers slightly? The imaging is all right, but can it be improved by toeing in?

Chris Kempster, via e-mail

Try a bit of toe-in and see whether you prefer it, as rooms and speakers vary so much there are no hard and fast rules about placement and orientation.

SPEAKERS

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

I'm a bit of a newcomer to this hi-fi game and I'm torn between speaker choices. Can you recommend one of these:

Wharfedale Diamond 8.2, Mission M72 or the KEF Cresta 2? I'm going to be using a Denon PMA355UK.

Jamie Woodhead, via e-mail



Wharfedale Diamond 8.2

The M72 is the only speaker we haven't tested in Mission's M-range! We liked the build quality and the musical ability of the rest of the M-series and they have all fared well in First Impressions. Paul Messenger looked at the Cresta 2 way back in November 1999, and noted a bright sound not really recommended for budget systems. The Wharfedale is a dynamic four-star speaker that we enjoyed in HFC 216. Your Denon has a reasonable 50 watts of power, so the choice of speakers may come down to your musical preferences. Whatever you go for make sure to get good quality stands and cables if you want great results.

CASSETTE DECKS

THE BEST DECK

I'm interested in your opinion of the Nakamichi DR10 and Pioneer CT-S550S cassette decks, as these are the only units available here. I want to convert all my old collections from CD. Budget is no issue; I need the deck that is the best in all aspects.

Thomas Varghese, Abu Dhabi

Ah, music to our ears! The Pioneer (£250) was Recommended in late 1999, but Richard Black concluded that the Nakamichi (£800) could be considered against Minidisc as a recording format! If budget isn't an issue, I think that's your question answered.

CD PLAYERS

HAPPY SHOPPER

I am about to buy new components to go with my newly acquired PMC FB1 speakers. I've already chosen a Bryston P25 preamp and Bryston 4B ST power-amp but don't know what CD player would match the set. My budget is around £1,000.

Jesper Thomsen

You lucky boy! We got great results using a Bryston amp set-up and have had good success with the Myryad MCD600 which costs £1,299. Alternatively, with your speakers and maybe a Naim CD5, you could achieve great musicality and timing if that's what you crave. Possibly more interesting is Sony's SCD-555ES SACD player, which is around £1,200 and plays CDs with style.



Naim CD5

CD PLAYERS

HELP U.S.

Greetings from across the pond! Can I ask what the nicer choices in CD players at the £250-£400 price point are currently?

Glenn Wassermann, USA

Good CD players at this price point are a bit thin on the ground at the moment, what with the big Japanese companies concentrating on DVD. A bit closer to home, we loved the Cambridge Audio D500 SE player recently, awarding the model a *Hi-Fi Choice* Recommendation. Our other favourite has to be the Marantz CD6000 OSE LE. Both are fine examples of good, affordable front ends.



Cambridge Audio D500 SE



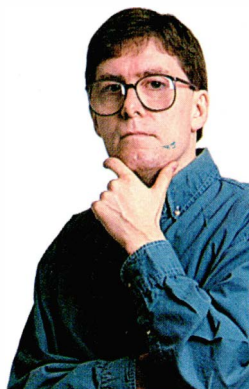
WHY LISTEN TO RUBBISH?

ARCAM
DiVA

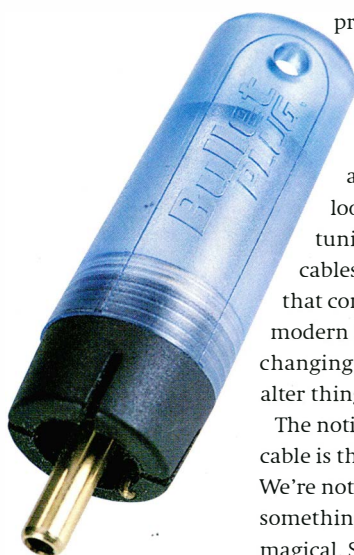
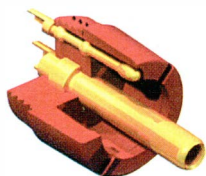
2 CD players, 3 amps, 2 power amps, digital radio, AM/FM tuner, DVD player, AV receiver. Tel: 01223 203203 www.arcam.co.uk

This is a plug

JIMMY TRIES OUT NEW CABLES FROM AN INVENTOR WHO WORKED OUT THE EARTH RATIO FROM DOWN UNDER. HE ALSO DID A RADICAL REDESIGN OF THE UBIQUITOUS PHONO PLUG – ABOUT TIME.



“THE MORE I USED THE EICHMANN CABLE THE MORE I LIKED IT. AND I FELT THAT THE BULLET PLUGS WERE THE MAJOR REASON FOR THIS EXTRA CLEANNESS.”



Minimalist in design, the Bullet Plug is a radical redesign the pre-1950 RCA phono plug, considering every nuance of electron flow.

The great cable debate. It's been rumbling away for more than 20 years now, without resolution. The fact that there are so many different approaches to the same fundamental issue – that of getting audio signals from A to B – is an indication of the confusion surrounding the subject. The controversy stems from the difficulty in establishing what's right and correct, technically.

According to Keith Eichmann, an Australian inventor, cable sound is down to the ratio between the signal wire and its earth return. He claims that electron flow is enhanced by finding the optimum ratio between the two. His view is that the return cable needs to be larger than the signal wire for best results. He calls it the Eichmann Ratio, and has applied for a patent to protect his invention.

He also claims to have greatly improved the humble phono plug, replacing the co-axial earth connector with a gold-plated pin. Although almost universally used, many audiophiles know that the phono plug can create a poor-sounding interface that erodes some of the sonic benefits produced by having better-quality cables.

But what would a 'perfect' cable actually sound like? And is such a cable the Holy Grail anyway? Most of us, let's face it, look on cables as a means of fine-tuning our hi-fi systems. We select cables whose sound we like – cables that complement our systems. With few modern amplifiers offering tone controls, changing cables is one of the few ways to alter things like tonal balance.

The notion of what constitutes a 'correct' cable is therefore almost beside the point. We're not so much after the truth as something that makes our music sound magical. Something that disguises nasties and promotes virtues. In short, a cable that creates results which are greater than the sum of the parts – something to transform our collection of hi-fi separates.

Nevertheless, it would be fascinating to try a cable that was truly neutral! Whether Eichmann's Express interconnect is totally without character of its own is impossible to say. But it's certainly very open and natural tonally, with no obvious personality traits. It sounds clean, detailed, well-balanced, and focused in a manner that's both natural and unexaggerated.

Substituting a 1.5m Eichmann Express cable for my regular Russ Andrews PBJ Kimber interconnect with budget Nickel phono plugs, I felt the former sounded smoother, cleaner, and just a shade sweeter tonally. The Kimber cable was sharper and more immediate, but also slightly coarser. The Eichmann cable seemed to enhance ambience, revealing more hall reverberation.

The more I used the Eichmann cable, the more I liked it. And (knowing the improvement Kimber's Ultraplate phono plugs make over the cheaper Nickel versions) I felt that Eichmann's Bullet Plugs were the major reason for this extra cleanness and absence of grainy congestion. There was a cleanness to the sound that reminded me of hard-wiring.

This lack of grain and glare is very apparent on natural acoustic recordings, but it's also noticeable on complex processed music. It reduces the sense of busyness you get when lots of voices and instruments are present simultaneously. The top-end is crisp, sharp, and lucid – it's just that there's less edginess and no false added brilliance.

Although I can't give you a firm selling price (UK distributorship is uncertain at the moment), it should be around the £55 mark. Which makes Eichmann's Express excellent value and very affordable. My gut feeling is that the cable itself is good, but nothing extra-special – it's the Bullet Plugs (set of four for £26.95) that make the difference. Tell you what – I'm itching to put some Bullet Plugs on my Kimber PBJ!

*Eichmann Technologies International
55 Lyndale Rd, Pullenvale, Brisbane, Australia 4069
www.eichmanncables.com
UK retail: Sound Academy 01922 473499*

Jimmy Hughes is a living legend in the hi-fi fraternity, his quest to find the perfect sound knows no bounds.



DVD PLAYERS

ALVIN GOLD AND PAUL MILLER TRY OUT CD MUSIC ON TEN OF THEM

DVD players have become phenomenally big business at a surprisingly early stage in their development cycle. CD players at that stage were just limbering up. Already new DVD players are appearing faster, and being replaced more regularly, than CD players were at a similar point in their history.

One important reason why people are buying DVD players in large numbers is their ability to double as CD players. Proof, if you need it, is to be found in retailer's hugely disproportionate stocks of CDs.

The long and the short is that DVD players are now an extremely popular mainstream component. Indeed they show some danger of becoming a commodity – witness their appearance in quantity at supermarkets near you. Prices have also fallen, precipitously in some cases, and this will certainly have fuelled the growth of the format. Or is this a classic case of cart before horse?

Either way, it is a little too early to write the epitaph for compact disc – even though CD gives two-channel stereo and DVD has five channels for surround-sound. Any suggestion that music CDs will be replaced by any flavour of DVD in the foreseeable future is pure bunkum. If you are buying a DVD player with the intention of using it to reproduce your cherished collections of CDs (yes, this means you!) you must ensure that it does the business musically. And in reality most of them don't.

The ten players we examine this month are all DVD-Video. None play DVD-Audio material (hi-fi grade surround sound), and no such upgrade is proposed for any of them in the future. The majority are inexpensive players, many around £300, which is close to the lower limit for properly branded players available through regular specialist outlets.

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

All players were run in over an extended period and warmed up before each listening session, where we played CDs and concentrated on performance in stereo from the analogue outputs of each player. Between listening sequences, volume levels were normalised using test tones.

In addition, the author conducted extensive hands-on assessment of picture and sound quality, multi-channel and stereo, using CD and DVD-Video discs.

ON TEST

DENON DVD-2800	£749.99
HARMAN/KARDON DVD10	£299.00
JVC XV-S42	£250.00
MARANTZ DV4100	£399.90
PANASONIC DVD-RV41	£299.99
PHILIPS DVD-712	£230.00
PIONEER DV-545	£330.00
PRIMARE V10	£699.99
SONY DVP-NS400D	£300.00
THOMPSON DTH4500	£229.00

EQUIPMENT USED

JMLab Mezzo Utopia speakers
TAG McLaren AV32R processor and 100x5R power amp
Musical Fidelity A3/A300 pre/power amps
Sonus Faber Home speaker system

THE LISTENING PANEL

Roger Batchelor (Denon),
Steve Harris (TAG McLaren & ALR loudspeakers)
David Inman

MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

Diana Krall *All or Nothing at All* from *Love Scenes*
Mozart *Clarinet Trio* Anthony Michaelson etc
Joe Sample *Old Places, Old Faces* title track
Berlioz *Symphony Fantastique* Colin Davis with London Symphony Orchestra





DENON DVD-2800

SOUND ★★★★★	VALUE ★★★★★	£749.99	CONTACT 01753 888447	www.denon.com	GUARANTEE 2 years
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The DVD-2800, the first in-house player from Denon, is physically massive and impressively turned out. The champagne finish (there's a black alternative, which begs the question – why?) and slick no-nonsense control system reinforce the impression that this player is meant for the purist. The video section includes a whizzy 12-bit 54MHz video DAC, RGB via Scart and NTSC component video with progressive scan. It is yet to be confirmed whether the player will be upgradeable to PAL progressive, though the player's firmware can be updated with ROM discs to help cope with rogue DVDs. Audio is served by

an Analogue Devices differential-mode DAC with HDCD. 96kHz data is available from the digital outputs for discs that conform to the DAD (24/96 stereo) standard, and CD-R and CD-RW discs are allowed. The Denon lacks internal surround-sound decoders, which should be irrelevant to committed videophiles, but there is a strong though not extravagant array of picture-tweaking options and picture-condition memories. Compilation MP3 CDs can be played.

SOUND QUALITY
The Denon failed to excite the panel. "There's a slight loss of bite," said

one in après-listening conversation. Another concurred, adding that the sound had a "sugary quality". One listener complained that he could detect "no relationship between musical phrasing and the bass" and of "hardness" in the normally sweet-as-a-nut Diana Krall track. A random selection of the written comments include "gentle", "fine but doesn't draw me into the music" and "light-weight ... detail slightly obscured" (Mozart), "light, crisp but not especially musical" (Joe Sample) and, somewhat contradicting previous comments, this: "Nice opening – a big sense of scale and dynamics. Has some life – this sounds good!" (the Berlioz symphonic extract).

In the hands-on testing, it became clear that the panel's slightly equivocal stance stemmed from what was basically a very good, but perceptibly warm tonal quality, and a clearly audible loss of extreme treble from CD. But this was not enough to gainsay

Massive and impressively turned out, Denon's DVD unit comes in black or gold.

what was easily the most accomplished of all the players when playing CDs. Picture quality, meanwhile, was nothing short of exceptional, with occasional noise and motion artefacts in the fast-flowing fancy-action scenes from *The Matrix* for example, but superb colour and detail in highlight and shadow areas alike in more static pictures, including the library scenes in *Seven*, which was matched by vivid three-dimensional soundtracks, especially dts ones.

CONCLUSION
Denon's first in-house player is a triumph of quality engineering over the gimmick-laden efforts of some. Picture and sound quality are at the top of the group, though CD replay is slightly hampered by a loss of extreme HF output.

"A TRIUMPH OF QUALITY ENGINEERING OVER SOME GIMMICK-LADEN EFFORTS. SOUND QUALITY IS TOP OF THE GROUP."



THE LAB REPORT

THIS PLAYER PUTS far greater emphasis on video performance, with its combination of an ESS video processor and a progressive video solution from DVDO. Audio distortion is low, particularly at low signal levels where other players can look a little messier. Figures of 0.005% at -30dBfs and 0.2% at -60dBfs are among the best in our test, as is the 103-4dB signal-to-noise ratio, though Denon's choice of digital filter is less impressive. Strongly rippled stopband images are obvious, rather like those from

the NPC digital filters used in earlier Denon CD players, with a rejection of just 38dB. Similarly, the in-band response has a pronounced treble roll-off, amounting to -1dB at 10kHz and a full -4dB at 20kHz. This will encourage a sweet if not outwardly muted treble. The 580psec of jitter, meanwhile, fails to reflect the unstable-looking noise floor of the DVD-2800, especially when aggravated by particular signals, including that used for the jitter test.

fig.1. AV receiver that sounds great in Dolby Digital.



"A strong budget contender for forward thinking music fans" **Hi-Fi Choice September 2001**

"Great stereo performance; commendably solid build" **What Hi-fi? Sound and Vision September 2001**

"At this price point, nothing sounds better than NAD" **Essential Home Cinema October 2001**

fig.2. AV receiver that sounds great in stereo.



"A strong budget contender for forward thinking music fans" **Hi-Fi Choice September 2001**

"Great stereo performance; commendably solid build" **What Hi-fi? Sound and Vision September 2001**

"At this price point, nothing sounds better than NAD" **Essential Home Cinema October 2001**

Sounds obvious, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, AV products have always been a trade-off, usually sacrificing musical finesse in favour of brute strength and making too many compromises for them to ever find a place in an audiophile system. Now, NAD brings its wealth of experience in producing award-winning, no-nonsense stereo products to the world of home cinema, and the same principles of simplicity and value that make our amplifiers and CD players world-beaters, are now producing truly earth shattering AV receivers, DVD players and multi-channel amplifiers.

Contact us for your nearest NAD Home Cinema dealer, and figure it out for yourself.



HARMAN KARDON DVD10

SOUND ★★★★★	VALUE ★★★★★	£299.00	CONTACT 020 8731 4670	www.harman.com	GUARANTEE 2 years
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The DVD10 from the recently reintroduced Harman Kardon brand is bulkier than most, and faces the world with acres of curvy plastic mouldings and a full-width darkened Perspex display.

The DVD10 will not cope with CD-R media, but it is equipped with twin Scarts for loop-through connections, with RGB available on the TV output. This is not the most feature-laden player around, but it does stretch to multi slow-motion and still-frame with auto field and frame selection for flicker-free results, audio intro scan, up to nine bookmarks per disc, and

programme play. Dolby Digital and dts surround-sound are available from the optical and electrical digital outputs. On the rear panel, remote-control sockets allow infra-red commands to be fed to or from another HK product or an accessory IR receiver.

One of the stronger features is the remote control, a chunky item, but with good control differentiation and grouping – and switchable backlighting, which is a real boon in the dark. Another is the graphically attractive on-screen menu structure. It's not quite Windows XP or Mac OS10 standards yet, but it's a clear

advance on most other players at the price.

SOUND QUALITY

The Harman Kardon received a generally clean bill of health from the panel, though the general view was a variation on the "it's good, but it doesn't excite" theme. One noted that the player "doesn't do anything ... It fails to excite or involve," while a second noted that "It's not bad, but there is not enough to counteract the sleepiness ... It doesn't have much punch or dynamics, and it fails to communicate." My own conclusions were slightly more positive than this. My listening notes describe the player as vivid and detailed, with good stereo, yet not bright or aggressive. It is subtle yet upfront in the nicest way. As a CD player, the DVD10 roughly level-pegs with decent budget CD players, which is a little better than you might expect of an average DVD player at the price.

The curvy DVD10's remote control is well designed and easy to use even in the dark.

Picture quality, however, is not great. Shadow detail (in *Seven* and *High Fidelity*) was compressed or absent, and colours had a muddy quality, which gave the player a lack of real presence on screen, and a loss of vibrancy and presence with colourful material like *The Matrix* and *Contact*. There were hints that motion artefacts were not especially well suppressed either.

CONCLUSION

The DVD10 looks more expensive than it is, but closer examination shows why. It is lightly built and specified, the lack of CD-R compatibility placing it out on its own in this test, and this from a prominent name in CD burners! Adequate but unimpressive as a video player, it is slightly more impressive sonically, but not enough to warrant a recommendation.

"PLAYING CDs, IT ROUGHLY LEVEL-PEGS WITH DECENT BUDGET CD PLAYERS, A LITTLE BETTER THAN YOU MAY EXPECT."



THE LAB REPORT

THE GLOSSY APPEARANCE of Harman's DVD-10 is no more than skin-deep, for the player itself is of an older vintage than most of its competitors. The DVD mechanism, for example, will not recognise CD-R discs and plays CD-RW material unreliably, though it will decode pre-emphasised music discs perfectly well. The player's noise floor is especially untidy, full of unresolved 'grass' (digitally derived distortions) and jitter – some 2590psec of peaks that are either spurious or related to power supply.

This compromises not only low-frequency distortion but also any measurement of signal-to-noise ratio, which amounted to just ~80dB with CD, CD-RW and DVD media. Otherwise, errors in linearity are well controlled and distortion typically low at 0.0025% (0dBFS). The digital filter reduces aliasing images by 78dB. The treble response is still some -1.2dB down at 20kHz, but this is unlikely to be audible. Noise and jitter are the dominant factors in determining the sound of the DVD-10.

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SILVER ANNIVERSARY

SPEAKER CABLE WITH NEW 'AIRLOCK' TERMINATION

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JVC XV-S42

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£200.00** **CONTACT** 0870 330 5000 www.jvc.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

JVC's XV-S42 DVD player is an attractive slimline unit with just basic features accessible on the front panel, and the full set via the buff-coloured infra-red remote control. The player lacks nothing that is important for basic audio and video, and although it does little to disguise its modest origins, it costs little more than many of the poorly branded here-today-gone-tomorrow players that you'll find in supermarkets and the large retail chains.

Socketry includes composite, S-Video and Scart connectors, the latter with RGB or composite, selected with a mechanical switch in conjunction with the front-panel stop button, rather than through the menus. There is no built-in surround decoder, but the player handles Dolby Digital and dts data (and even MPEG, for what it's worth), and feeds it through optical and electrical digital audio outputs. The XV-S42 will also read CD-R and

CD-RW discs. Picture-tweaking facilities are thin on the ground and not particularly impressive, but a useful range of trick-play features includes zoom and variable slow-motion.

SOUND QUALITY

The JVC formed part of a largely undifferentiated mass of players in the middle of this month's group, neither excelling nor disgracing itself in most areas. With a decent CD player acting as a reference point, few of the DVD players passed muster with CDs, and the JVC was variously described as "just about acceptable" by one panel member, and "coloured, (with poor) definition" by another. The bass was described in a repeat presentation as "boxy, opaque, and overblown" and as "heavy handed", and in the separate hands-on tests it became apparent that the panel had it just about spot-on.

Familiar CDs lacked air and vitality, while the bass was heavy-handed:

the result is flat spatially and opaque to instrumental texture. For example, one piano recording sounded rather foggy, with notes apparently rising up through a cloud – low passages sounded murky and diffuse. Matters improved somewhat with multichannel material, where the replay processor does much of the work, but even here there was a certain flatness and a rather threadbare quality with some soundtracks that demonstrably behaved better elsewhere, *High Fidelity* being a case in point.

As a video player too, the JVC rates as a straight average. Generally the player looked crisp and well balanced

The JVC handles Dolby, dts and even MPEG, and also reads CD-R and CD-RW discs.

on screen, and for general viewing there should be few complaints with the RGB output, but there was noticeable loss of definition through the S-Video output, and composite video was obviously noisy and lacking resolving power.

CONCLUSION

Unexciting and curiously uninvolved, the XV-S42 lacks the spark to set it apart from other low- to mid-market players, while the plodding control system does it few favours.

"NEITHER EXCELS NOR DISGRACES ITSELF IN MOST AREAS: 'JUST ABOUT ACCEPTABLE' TO ONE PANEL MEMBER."



THE LAB REPORT

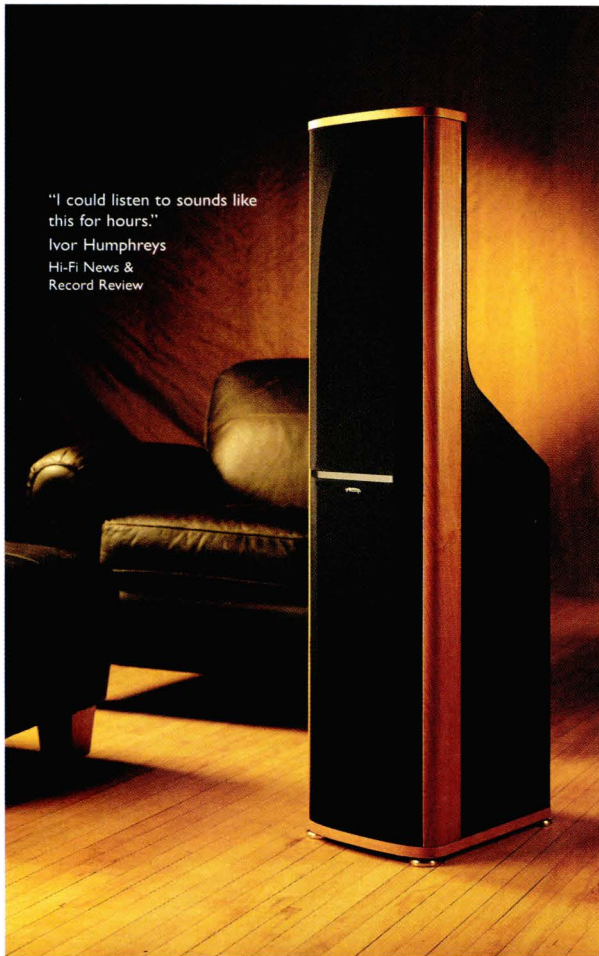
AT JUST 980MV THE XV-S42'S audio output is a lot lower than its competitors'. I could not see a volume command on the remote or on-screen menu, though JVC does specify its XV-S42 at the standard 2V. All else being equal, this does knock a good 6dB off its potential signal-to-noise ratio, which explains the low 92dB A-wtd figure obtained on test. Otherwise distortion is very low at peak level (0.0005%), but both stereo separation and the digital filtering is weak (61dB at 1kHz and -37dB,

respectively). The strong stopband images are similar to those observed with JVC's budget CD players, but with additional ultrasonic interference tones probably stemming from the video-processing circuitry. Meanwhile, the 1825psec of jitter is largely data-induced, which does little for the music's natural colour and vibrancy, together with a cloud of low-rate components that, similarly, will do little for the player's reproduction of stable, stereo images.

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MARANTZ DV4100 OSE

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£399.90** **CONTACT** 01753 680868 www.marantz.com **GUARANTEE** 2 years

The DV4100 OSE creates a strong initial impression with its well designed front panel, and the even better designed remote control, colour-keyed to ensure an easy ride from a handset little bigger than your palm. The player itself has the important mod cons, not forgetting two Scart sockets which include RGB, which is superior to S-Video, which itself is an improvement on composite video. There is no integral surround-sound decoder – an irrelevant feature in good systems anyway – but dts and Dolby Digital feeds are available from the optical and electrical digital outputs, which can deliver 96kHz data (48kHz bandwidth) through an appropriate outboard D/A processor.

The player will cope with the usual range of disc types, including recordable and erasable CDs. Trick-frame options are kept to a sensible minimum, but the list does include a picture zoom with three settings.

Picture-tweaking options are conspicuous by their absence, but the player claims to use customised components to address the quality issues at source.

Note that the original Marantz DV4100 (now discontinued) was listed at £399, the same as the current OSE, which used to be £499.

SOUND QUALITY

"The bass sounds lumpy and uneven," wrote one, and a second concurred, noting that the bass "obscures the voice", and that the "vocals are not focussed" (Diana Krall). The Mozart was dismissed equally peremptorily: "Small, uninteresting – and where's the tension?" wrote one. After-listening discussion drew agreement that the Marantz lacks dramatic tension, and there was persistent criticism of a bass bloom, and this in a system that if anything is too much of a control freak in the lowest octaves. These findings were easily replicated

in the hands-on test programme. The bass is indeed heavy-handed, though there were occasional flashes of greater purity and subtlety, which were also picked up by the panel.

In contrast to its performance as a surrogate CD player, the Marantz is an excellent DVD video player. Surround-sound from dts soundtracks especially (*Seven* is a particularly fine example) was excellent, the characteristic vinyl sound in the title sequence of *High Fidelity* being particularly well captured, while picture quality was from the top drawer – it was clean, sharp, completely stable and noise-free, though there were occasional

The Marantz is excellent at playing DVDs: surround-sound and picture quality are tops.

signs of excessive edge-sharpening, especially on verticals.

CONCLUSION

This is ostensibly a basic player aimed at those who don't want all the bells and whistles, but who want a basic well-engineered player that does the job well. As a straight DVD player, this is precisely what you get, but sound quality with CDs is simply not of a standard that allows recommendation at what on balance seems like a rather steep £400.

"THERE WAS PERSISTENT CRITICISM OF A BASS BOOM - IN A SYSTEM THAT IS A CONTROL FREAK IN THE LOW OCTAVES."

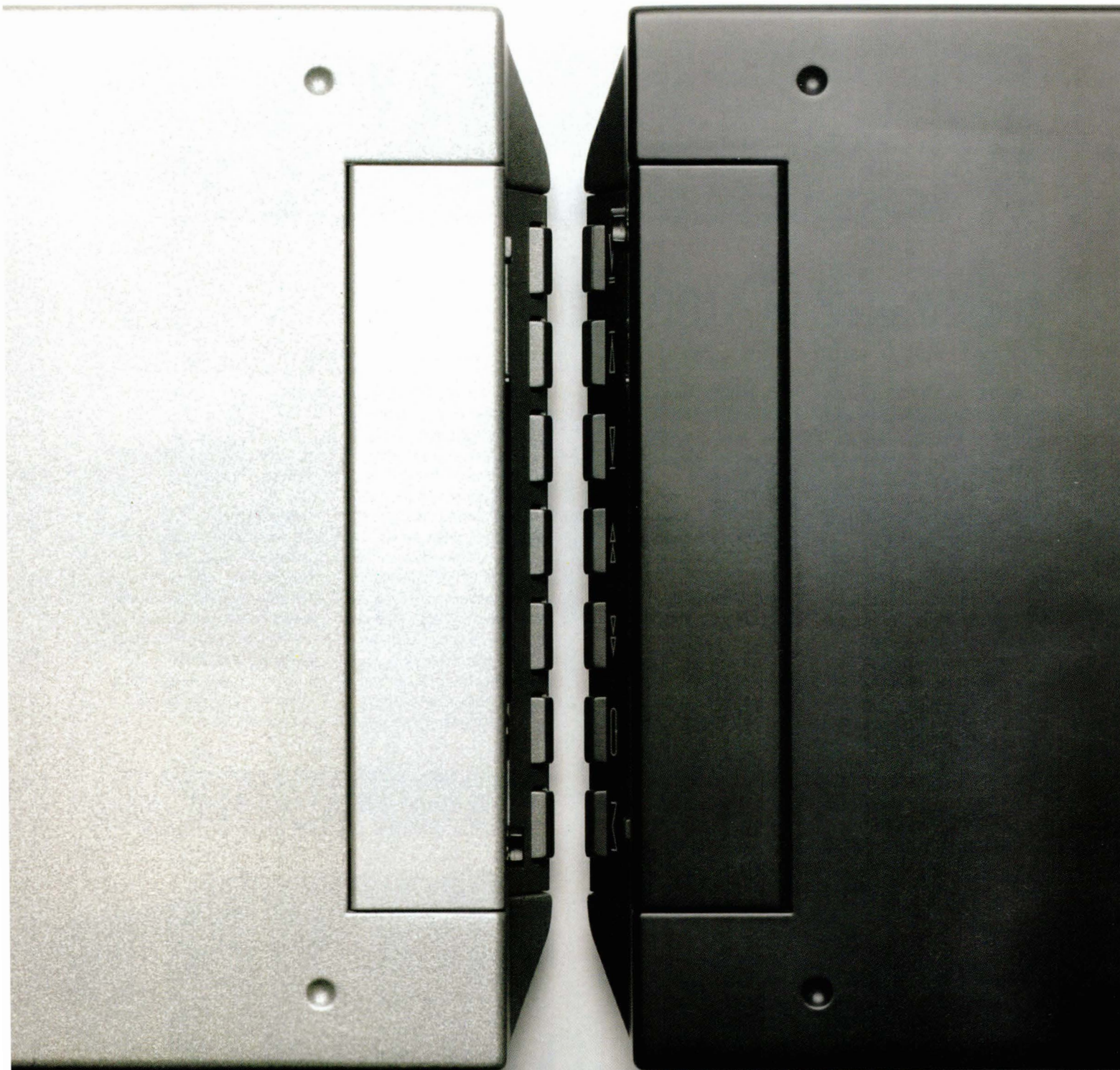


THE LAB REPORT

HAVING NEVER TESTED the basic DV-4100, if ever such a model existed, it's tricky to evaluate the benefits of any copper-plated OSE enhancements. Nevertheless, this version is a very well-balanced player in its own right, bearing some resemblance to Philips' DVD-712 in the choice of transport and decoder sections but featuring an analogue board of clearly superior performance. Stereo separation is better than 100dB at all frequencies while distortion is as low as 0.003%

(0dBfs), 0.002% (-10dBfs) and 0.005% at -30dBfs. Even at -60dBfs (one thousandth the peak-level output of 1.88V), distortion is just 0.13% – the best result for subtle detailing in the test. Otherwise, the player benefits from a wide 104dB signal-to-noise ratio, very low 160psec jitter and excellent crystal clock selection. Errors in low-level linearity amount to +0.0/-0.7dB over a 100dB range while the response is flat to within +0.0/-0.2dB with both linear and pre-emphasised discs.

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PANASONIC DV-RV41

SOUND ★★☆☆

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£299.99

CONTACT 08705 357357

www.panasonic.co.uk/nw/home

GUARANTEE 1 year

One of the Matsushita empire's entry-level players, the Panasonic DVD-RV41 is unremarkable on paper, with a 27MHz 10-bit video DAC, but it has a strong suite of picture-tweaking aids, including a cinema mode which stretches picture contrast in dark picture areas – a kind of loudness control for video – and a so-called picture control which adjusts brightness, colour and contrast. A dialogue enhancer can be used to lift dialogue and enhance intelligibility.

The player will deliver RGB via one of its two Scarts. The Dolby Digital decoder is limited by the speaker set-up, which imposes restrictions on the speakers – using a subwoofer, for example, pre-supposes small main speakers – and dts is available only at the digital output. Another anomaly with this player is that digital audio is available only from an optical S/PDIF-Toslink socket. But there's good news

for those who consistently lose their remote controls down the side of the armchair or the inside of the dog, as all of the main and many of the minor features can be controlled from the front panel. CD-R and -RW compatibility is built in, in common with other recent Panasonic DVDs.

SOUND QUALITY

The audible signs of high-jitter players are not always as deterministic as you might expect, but comments like "doesn't go loud nicely at all" and "poor timing" (Joe Sample) and soft... confused" (Berlioz) are about par for the course. But then what are we to make of other comments from the same sessions, such as "That's better... this is good, tonally and spatially" or "The Mozart track was excellent... transparent"; and "The strings are a little syrupy and lacking in weight, but enjoyable" (Berlioz)?

They can't all be right, and the

hands-on tests indicated that the Panasonic is indeed lacking in air and space, but that its bright, clean tonality meant that ambience was quite well retrieved in well made recordings like the Mozart. Most of all, though, the Panasonic has an easygoing demeanour that helps it counter objective shortcomings. Only playing the reference Arcam CD player directly afterwards showed that the Panasonic was in fact rather dry and thin, and that much of the weight and dynamics and some of the air and space of the recording had been leached away.

As it turns out, it is picture quality

Less reliance on the remote: Panasonic's front panel can control most features.

that appears to show the clearest side-effects of the jitter. Although colourful and largely free of unpleasant artefacts or blocking, fine detail was simply not in the top class even in this price area.

CONCLUSION

Usability is hampered by a very slow response to user input, and although sound quality holds up surprisingly well given the high jitter count, critical listening soon shows the limitations, and picture quality is affected too.

"MOST OF ALL, THOUGH, THE PANASONIC HAS AN EASY GOING DEMEANOUR."

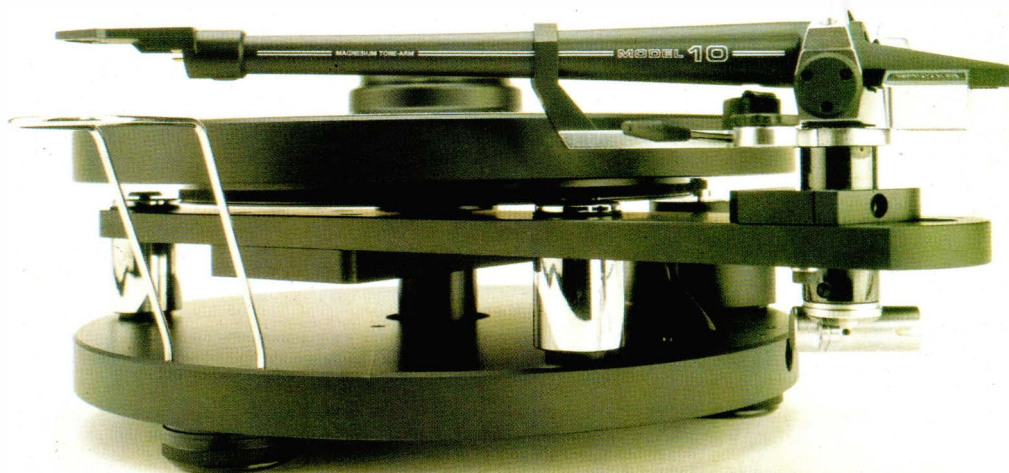


THE LAB REPORT

JITTER, AN INSIDIOUS form of distortion caused by uncertainties in the timing of digital data during digital-to-audio conversion, plagued Panasonic's earliest DVD players. But whatever lessons Panasonic learnt in moving from the original DVD-A350 (7080psec) and DVD-A360 (6520psec) to the superior DVD-A7 (280psec) have evidently been lost in the new DVD-RV41. It suffers 5450psec of correlated jitter, about 20 times what we expect from a quality machine and more than enough to

impact its subjective clarity, notwithstanding video quality. Low-level linearity is also a little poorer than expected, particularly at higher frequencies where errors reach 1.7dB at -90dBFS. Otherwise, the A-wtd signal-to-noise ratio is at the 17-bit level of 103dB while conventional harmonic distortion is low at 0.0015% (-10dBFS) and 0.005% (-30dBFS). Then again, harmonic distortions are not the cause of the RV41's woes. As far as audio is concerned, Panasonic needs to revisit the drawing board.

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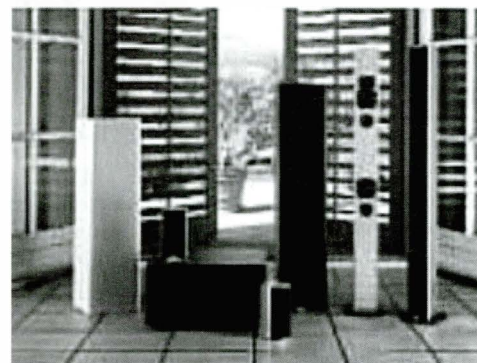
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PHILIPS DVD-712

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£230** **CONTACT** 020 8665 6350 www.philips.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

Introduced to replace the DVD-711, the rather nondescript DVD-712 is a chunky player, dressed in a sober black. The cribsheet says the new model adds MP3 playback and a dedicated bass-channel output for connection to a subwoofer. Quite what use subwoofer output would be in practice is difficult to determine. Perhaps it is meant for systems using stereo amplifiers which lack a dedicated subwoofer output, but the feed is at fixed level, and subwoofers normally work best when wired in parallel with the main speakers.

With many similarities to the Marantz DV4100, the Philips handles CD-R and CD-RW media, delivers dts and Dolby Digital from the digital outputs, and has a feature called 5 Disc resume which remembers where you left off playing the previous five discs.

The DVD-712 is equipped with a single Scart, which is RGB-enabled, and has separate composite and

S-Video connections. A surprisingly powerful suite of trick-play features include a stable still-picture display, three-stage picture zoom and the ability to remember a range of adjustable picture parameters, with a rotary jog dial on the front panel allowing easy access to slow motion and related features.

The remote control is no beauty, though, and its largely undifferentiated mass of buttons is an exercise in ergonomic design – not!

SOUND QUALITY

The threatened variability of sound (see lab report) didn't materialise with the amplifiers available on test (mainly Musical Fidelity and TAG McLaren and a modest NAD receiver), but this does not mean it won't be an issue with other designs. Panel reactions were an interesting mix, with a clear separation drawn between the sound of the player and its musical merit. "Got my attention,"

wrote one; "it's coloured, but lively." And from another listener: "It sounds cheap... yet at the same time it is involving – lively and interesting." I concur with this view entirely. The Philips is certainly lively, perhaps excessively so, and the balance can sound lightweight, but the sense of analysis, the ability to hear through the mix, was unrivalled elsewhere at the price. Picture quality was even more outstanding. Motion artefacts were well suppressed, and resolution and shadow detail outstanding, giving an extremely atmospheric result in difficult, yet technically accomplished films like *Seven*.

The mass of identical buttons on the remote handset is a poor excuse for design.

CONCLUSION

The joker in the pack, the rather rickety DVD-712 has a noisy loader and mechanism, and control logic that is sometimes slow to respond, and neither the player's presentation nor the control ergonomics are anything to write home about. And yet, the Philips DVD-712 is uncommonly well equipped, and its performance on screen is little less than thrilling, while musically the player is a gripping, if not always an entirely neutral, performer.

"UNCOMMONLY WELL EQUIPPED, MUSICALLY THE PLAYER IS A GRIPPING, IF NOT ALWAYS NEUTRAL, PERFORMER."



THE LAB REPORT

THIS DVD PLAYER replaces Philips' older DVD-711 and offers MP3 playback plus an unusual downmixed 2.1-channel analogue output for discs encoded with Dolby Digital. This is a highly integrated solution (meaning there's a lot of air in the box) based around Philips' VAL6011 dual laser pickup, which also services CD-R and CD-RW media and gives proper de-emphasis of pre-emphasised discs. The choice of DAC technology is a little less impressive, for the signal-to-noise ratio varies between

98dB and 101dB from right to left channels. Also, the integral noise-shapers release a substantial welt of ultrasonic noise and sampling distortions immediately outside the audio range, -30dB below the output of in-band signals (re -30dBFs). Some variation in sound quality with different amplifiers might be expected as result. Otherwise, all is well with low 200psec jitter, good low-level linearity and low distortion, at least through the midrange at 0.001-0.008% over the top 30dB of its dynamic range.

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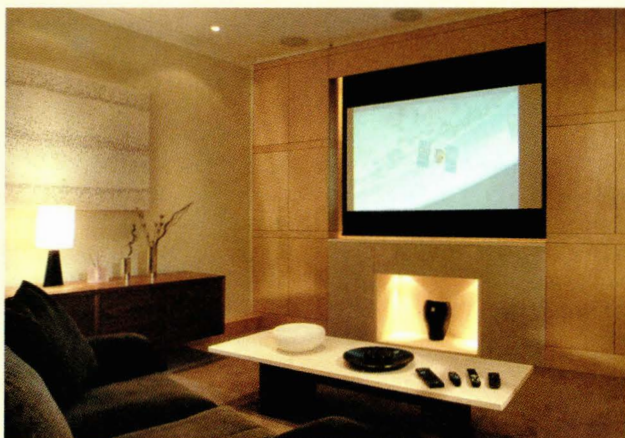
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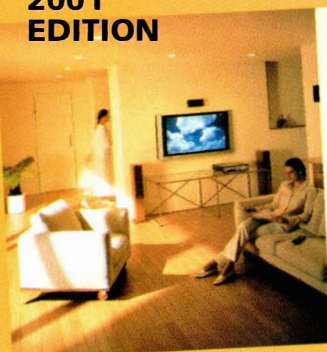
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PIONEER DV-545

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£330** **CONTACT** 01753 789789 www.pioneer.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

Pioneer optical players often manage to steal a technological march on many of the competition, and this player is no exception. This is an astonishingly slim design, standing just 55mm tall, which will appeal to those with limited space who need to stack their equipment.

The 24-bit 192kHz audio processor has no functional advantage over the standard 24-bit 96kHz other than implying a closer approach to the intrinsic resolution of the disc. 96kHz audio is available from the digital outputs, and there are four digital output filter settings, which can be selected using the Legato Pro switch on the front panel.

This is one of the few players compatible with DVD-RW discs recorded using the Video Recorder format (VR is not compatible with DVD-Video). Unfinalised CD-R or -RW discs can also be played – a feature believed to be unique to Pioneer.

Other key features include the ability to play MP3 compilations on CD, and there is a powerful suite of picture-adjustment functions including focus, contrast, sharpness, chroma level and hue, which can be grouped together in user presets. The remote control is a fearsomely complex-looking design, but it is quite well designed. The player includes a set-up navigator, in question-and-answer style on the screen. There is no surround processor, but there are two Scarts, and RGB is available.

SOUND QUALITY

The panel heard the player with Legato Link switched off, which is the default setting. "It sounds communicative and direct with lots of space around the vocals" (Diana Krall), and "more involving" (than the previous player) wrote one, while another panellist thought the player "lacked resolution" and that it was "adequate, but bass-heavy".

However justified these comments, the balance is at least partly under user control, and switching the Legato Link filter to its standard setting or (usually better) setting 1 provided a livelier and slightly more detailed feel in the test system, though the difference was quite subtle with some material.

In other areas, the Pioneer rated somewhat better than average. Despite some low-level video noise and mild compression of tones in dark picture areas, the DV-545 gave generally impressive results on screen, with subtle skin tones and detailing (the opening of *High Fidelity* is a good

Outwardly identical to Pioneer's DV-444 but inwardly more sophisticated.

test) and it had no difficulty in coping with fast-moving action scenes in some of Hollywood's more vacuous blockbusters. It also works well with multichannel material, and produced a memorable performance with the TAG electronics in the opening sequence from *Seven*.

CONCLUSION

It sets no new performance standards, but the DV-545 is an undeniably attractive and well equipped newcomer in a busy area of the market.

THE LAB REPORT

THIS IS OBVIOUSLY a very slim player but, internally, the DV-545 is less integrated than the JVC, for example. Pioneer's Legato Pro facility allows its digital filtering to be manipulated, after the fashion of Sony's earlier CD players. This has a fundamental impact on its frequency response and out-of-band characteristics. Switching Legato Pro off yields significantly more ultrasonic requantisation noise from the DAC's noise-shaping circuit and this, in turn, may produce uncertain results with

different amplifiers. Switched on, Legato Pro offers far lower noise but very little attenuation of digital images just outside of the audio band. 'Effect 1' is arguably the more idealised filter setting while 'Effect 3' shows very little filtering at all! Otherwise, the DV-545 shows some error in low-level linearity (−1.3dB at −90dBfs) but has low 0.001% distortion, a moderate 100dB signal-to-noise ratio and, despite some clock noise evident on the jitter spectrum, an acceptable jitter level of 330psec.

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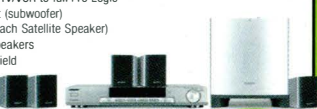
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5 DISC DVD PLAYER

SONY DVPNC600

SONY

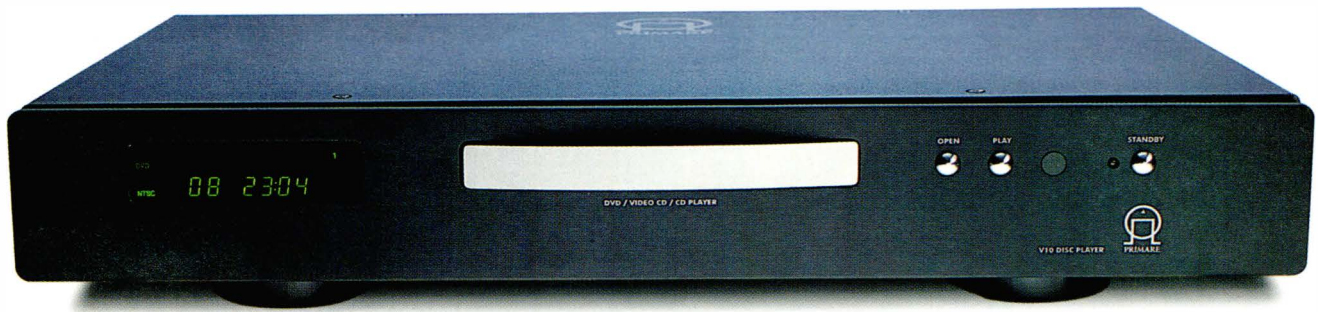
- Holding 5 discs at a time, this DVD player looks good in any front room. The TV Virtual Surround will enhance the sound of a standard TV and the Magic Pad on-screen menu makes setting hassle-free.

Stock Code SON717

JUNGLE BARGAIN

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PRIMARE V10

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£699.99** **CONTACT** 01423 359054 www.primare.net **GUARANTEE** 2 years

Primare's second DVD player is a simplified model, but still a chip off the old block, with the same solid-black casework and alloy fascia, with the trademark fascia stand-off. The player's connection panel is sparsely populated.

A Scart socket has been included in this model, but there is no component or progressive output, and the video output buffer of the V20 has been deleted, and only one video output should be connected at once to avoid interaction. The Sony/Hitachi loader and mechanism are carried across from the V20, and the V10 will play CD-R and CD-RW discs.

The range of video trick-frame features is in some respects wider than the senior model, and includes various picture-condition adjustments and a strong range of slow-motion modes. The remote control that comes with the player is neither attractive nor notably ergonomic, and it cannot

be used to control TV sets or other components.

SOUND QUALITY

On the whole, the panel found the Primare unsatisfactory in CD replay trim. "Unimpressive," noted one, and others found it had "more bass extension" (than the previous player), but with "poor timing" (general comments, unrelated to particular music excerpts). It was found "synthetic, glassy, coloured" and "fizzy ... and no defined acoustic" (Berlioz), though one panellist was at odds with the others, describing the V10 as "eminently listenable" and "subtle".

The V10 has been described elsewhere as an audiophile player with sound quality to match almost any CD player. My judgement is that this overstates the case for what was at best a presentable-sounding player, but not an exceptional one, and moreover one that on occasion was inclined to sound a mite raw and thin.

It was still better than most of the players in this group, but frankly this isn't saying much.

For an audio producer, and a high-end one at that, Primare has made an extraordinary success of creating fine pictures from DVD. You'll need to use the Scart/RGB option to see the V10 at its best – the S-Video output is significantly worse, with some chroma crosstalk visible at times – but with RGB, picture quality is very sharp and precise, and colour depth and purity are first-rate, though be sure to connect only one video output at a time. There was some mild blockiness in some very fast-moving scenes, but the V10 more than made amends

The V10 is a simplified model of Primare's previous V20, its lessons taken on board.

with the difficult low-lit video that makes the running with *Seven*, and films like *Saving Private Ryan*. I used the region 1 version of the latter with its superbly atmospheric and often (deliberately) oppressive dts soundtrack, as there is a straight-forward region hack for this player.

CONCLUSION

Primare's 'budget' DVD player is an excellent video player with a not very exciting CD player struggling, and not always succeeding in making its mark.

"AT BEST A PRESENTABLE-SOUNDING PLAYER BUT NOT AN EXCEPTIONAL ONE, INCLINED TO SOUND A MITE RAW."



THE LAB REPORT

PRIMARE HAS TAKEN ON board the lessons learnt from its first DVD player, the V20, even if our sample of the V10 still exhibited some residual uncertainty in the performance of its microprocessor. By opting for the tried-and-tested DVS transport mechanism, Primare offers compatibility with CD, CD-R, CD-RW and DVD software, though proper de-emphasis of encoded CDs is still not reliably supported. Furthermore, though its fascia has no Double-D logo, the V10 does support both Dolby and dts DVD

formats via a C-Cube ZiVA3 solution. A Burr-Brown PCM1716 DAC drives a downmixed 2.0-channel analogue output while the full 5.1-channel bitstream is delivered via its digital output. The peak level is slightly low at 1.89V and the signal-to-noise ratio just above the 16-bit standard at 98.5dB, but jitter is low at 220psec just as errors in low-level linearity are minimised. The excellent 95dB separation at 20kHz indicates the care taken by Primare in the layout of its analogue circuits.

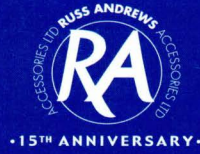
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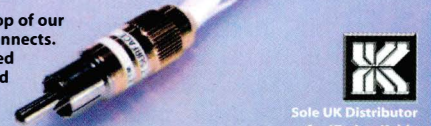
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SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£300.00** **CONTACT** 08705 111999 www.sony.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 1 year

Available in black or silver, this attractive slimline player is equipped with twin Scarts, RGB, and both CD-R and -RW playback (at last!). It has an internal library of remote-control codes, so the handset can operate a TV as well as the DVD, though it addresses only the most basic TV functions. A Dolby Digital (but not dts) decoder is built in, along with a limited routine for speaker set-up, but, as always, using an external processor is far better. Initial setting up is assisted by a slick Q&A-type dialogue which walks you through the initial settings, these then become the operating defaults.

The feature count includes interactive play using on-screen menus, and the ability to divide the screen into nine sub-screens for rapid scene access or to display several viewing angles simultaneously. A powerful Block Noise feature is available, along with a digital picture

enhancer that sharpens edge-definition, though judicious use is advised: the effects in practice can be none too subtle. A playback memory recalls the settings of various parameters for picture and sound from up to 50 discs, and a track selection feature lets the player default to the sound system – dts or Dolby Digital – with the greatest number of channels. Finally, the Sony's TVS suite of effects helps emulate five speaker systems when only two are available, and also adds enhancements to a raw system of four or more channels, which will be helpful where rear speakers are placed asymmetrically.

SOUND QUALITY

The panel liked this player, not because it sounded more sophisticated than other mid-price players, but in effect because it did a limited job well. "It's fast, and a lot more fun than the last player, and I'd

certainly recommend it to friends, who I'm sure would end up buying more CDs," was one take on the DVP-NS4000D. "Enjoyable, undemanding" was another. There were occasional complaints about loss of resolution, but considerable praise for a style of presentation that was perceptibly warm, though not thick or heavy-handed, and which in the orchestral piece built organically as the music progressed.

This is also a good video player. Black levels are truly black, but there is still adequate differentiation of tones in shadow areas, while brightly lit areas are clean and vivid, with low levels of noise and well suppressed

The slimline DVD player's remote handset can also control basic functions on your TV.

motion artefacts. This is helped further by using a low setting of the Block Noise feature.

CONCLUSION

Though this unit lacks the panache that Sony has shown with previous mid-market players, and though it is hampered by a rather higher price than the competition is now hitting for a player of this type (but recently reduced by £30), the DVP-NS4000 stakes its claim with a quality of performance that is just that bit better than many of the obvious rivals.

THE LAB REPORT

ON THE WHOLE, this is a cracking little DVD player that even includes a 5.1-channel Dolby Digital decoder plus auxiliary stereo analogue outputs for connection to a TV (Sony's TVS Dynamic and Wide effects modes are implemented through these connections). The DVP-NS4000 is one of the few players to provide a truly flat response with both 44kHz CD and 96kHz DVD software via a healthy 2.1V peak output. Proper de-emphasis is also supported with CD, CD-R and

CD-RW formats. The A-wtd signal-to-noise ratio is also well above the 16-bit standard at 103dB while correlated jitter is reduced to just 170psec. If the player has a weak spot, this is at very high frequencies where distortion increases from, typically, 0.001% to 0.05% (1kHz-20kHz) and the rejection of digital 'images' falls to just 45dB. Frankly Panasonic, among others, could learn a lot about well-rounded DVD player design by looking at the DVP-NS4000.

"IN PLAYING CDs, THIS PLAYER DOES A LIMITED JOB WELL ... AND IT'S ALSO A GOOD VIDEO PLAYER."



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- 37574 – D12.....Purple Hills
- 37566 – OPM.....Heaven Is A Halfpipe
- 37595 – Geri Halliwell.....Scream If You Wanna..
- 37596 – O Town.....All Or Nothing
- 37597 – Train.....Drops Of Jupiter
- 37598 – Janet Jackson.....Lover
- 37599 – Depeche Mode.....I Feel Loved
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- 37600 – Cosmic Gate.....Fire Wire
- 37586 – Sisqo.....Dance for me
- 37601 – The Tweenies.....Do the Lollipop
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- 37060 – Dambusters.....
- 37084 – Eric Clapton.....Wonderful
- 37093 – Frank Sinatra.....New York New York
- 37106 – Itchy & Scratchy.....
- 37119 – Led Zeppelin.....Stairway to Heaven
- 37125 – Louie Armstrong.....Wonderful World
- 37143 – Muppets.....
- 37154 – Pink Floyd.....Another Brick In The Wall
- 37156 – Postman Pat.....
- 37169 – Rule Britannia.....
- 37179 – Scooby Doo.....
- 37198 – Superman.....
- 37206 – Three Lions.....
- 37217 – Vindaloo.....
- 37223 – X-Files.....

1272	1012	1274	1019
1020	1275	1027	1029
1030	1032	1033	1038
1039	1276	1044	1045
1280	1047	1281	1321
1402	1239	1282	1295
1204	1208	1210	1211
1213	1356	1216	1217
1445	1219	1220	1222
1230	1232	1302	1234
1235	1236	1435	1241
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THOMPSON DTH-4500

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£279.00** **CONTACT** 01732 520920 www.thomson-europe.com **GUARANTEE** 1 year

Thompson is not often featured in these pages, which may seem surprising when you discover that it is the world's fourth-largest supplier of consumer electronics products.

Although modestly priced, the DTH-4500 DVD player is well enough endowed. Headline features include a 5.1-channel Dolby Digital (and MPEG) decoder, and compatibility with rewritable discs and MP3 compilations on CD. This is the only DVD player of the ten tested with a headphone socket, which is linked to a volume control. The rear panel is well populated, with two Scarts (RGB compatible), a six-channel analogue output for the internal Dolby Digital decoder – dts is available only in digital form – and there are also two sets of audio stereo/mixed outputs and two composite video outputs. The audio output volume of CDs, DVD and Video CDs can be normalised,

and the display brightness and black levels can be adjusted.

One of the most striking features of the player is the universal remote control, which will operate a wide range of components in addition to the player, including TVs, VCRs, satellite receivers and audio systems. Other notable features include a two-stage zoom control, a fascia-mounted jog and shuttle dial, and backlit controls on the remote handset.

SOUND QUALITY

As so often with players with very high jitter figures, the audible results are equivocal. The Thomson was liked for its "forthright, confident" tone, and one wrote that if he was engineer, he'd probably be quite proud of a player that sounds so clean and tidy. But the player also received brickbats for what was described as an "inability to swing" (Joe Sample), while it was also described by different listeners as

"overdamped" and as "unable to time".

Hands-on listening showed that the player is indeed clean and concise in sound, but that it is apparently constitutionally incapable of allowing music to emotive. The test recording (Mozart clarinet trio) was as flat and expressionless as a pancake, with all the rich, harmonic complexity of the clarinet smudged out, while a favourite recording of Taj Mahal in full flight (it's on a CD-R, so no track title) lacked the vitality, swing and passion that is so apparent through a top-class player. The Thomson also has a tinselly quality, rather like listening to a not-very-good personal stereo connected through a hi-fi system.

Modestly priced and well enough endowed, but its audible results are equivocal.

Intriguingly, something of the same was apparent on screen. Picture quality was colourful but lacking in detail. Moving edges looked blurred, and static scenes had only moderate resolution, giving a result that at times was uncomfortably like watching videotape.

CONCLUSION

An oddball mixture, the DTH-4500 is well equipped and inexpensive, and the remote control is particularly desirable, but it fails to deliver the goods, presumably because of the very high jitter levels.

THE LAB REPORT

FEATURES ARE KEY to the DTH-4500, which is equipped with a C-Cube Ziva decoder solution for Dolby Digital and MPEG 5.1 multichannel audio, offering compatibility for DVD, CD, CD-R and CD-RW media, including discs carrying MP3 files. Conventional analysis indicates that the DTH-4500 is a class act. The balance between noise, distortion and the rejection of ultrasonic spurious (in particular) is especially well judged at 106dB, 0.0045% and -69dB, respectively.

Nevertheless, the output is a little low at 1.85V and jitter is extraordinarily high. This amounts to 25,340psec of discrete jitter via the 5.1-channel analogue audio outputs and 21,910psec via the mixed analogue outputs. This now stands as the record for the highest level of jitter suffered by any digital product tested in my laboratory (currently more than 400 products – CD, DVD, MD, DAC) and must surely compromise the fidelity of the player.

"THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF JITTER SUFFERED BY ANY DIGITAL PRODUCT TESTED IN MY LABORATORY."



CONCLUSIONS

DVD PLAYERS FOR CD MUSIC: HOW GOOD ARE THEY? ALVIN GOLD BRINGS IN THE VERDICT ON 10 OF THEM

The criteria for awarding swing tags in this test are strict, and not one of the ten players scored a full five stars on all counts. In most respects the deficit, the departure from ideal if you like, was quite large. The guiding principle was that specifically DVD attributes – picture quality, and also performance in multi-channel mode, which (counterintuitively perhaps) does vary even though only the player's digital output is involved – are important. No player was going to be recommended with poor performance in these areas. But our primary concern was the ability of each model to operate as a CD player, and here there is plenty to criticise. The unpalatable reality is that most of the players sound thin, raw, edgy and spatially flat, or a combination of them all. In addition – and this is

DVD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	DENON DVD-2800	HARMAN KARDON DVD10	JVC XV-542	MARANTZ DV4100OSE	PANASONIC DVD-RV41
PRICE	£749.99	£299.00	£200.00	£399.90	£299.99
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	First-rate all-rounder. Gimmick-free design, well built, good CD and DVD sound quality, finely resolved pictures.	Bulky DVD-Video player with unexciting picture quality, and promising but ultimately unexceptional CD replay.	Unpreprocessing DVD-V player fails to excite with DVD material or as a surrogate CD player.	The DV4100 is a DVD-Video player for videophiles, but don't put the CD player out to pasture just yet.	Well presented player has an attractive, but far from high-resolution, sound. Picture quality also lacks definition.
GUARANTEE	2 years	2 years	1 year	2 years	1 year
THE LAB REPORT					
LOW DISTORTION					
LOW JITTER					
WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE					
EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FILTER					
OVERALL RATING					
MEASUREMENTS					
CHANNEL SEPARATION @ 1kHz	105dB	100dB	61dB	106dB	98dB
FREQ. RESPONSE @ 20Hz/20kHz	0.0dB / -4.0dB	-0.1dB / -1.2dB	0.0dB / -0.25dB	0.0dB / -0.2dB	0.1dB / -0.2dB
THD vs LEVEL, 0dBfs @ 1kHz	0.0018%	0.0027%	0.0005%	0.003%	0.003%
OUTPUT LEVEL, L/R	2.05V / 2.05V	2.08V / 2.06V	0.98V / 0.98V	1.87V / 1.88V	2.04V / 2.05V
SIGNAL/NOISE RATIO (A-wtd)	102.5dB / 103.8dB	78.2dB / 78.0dB	91.9dB / 92.9dB	104.0dB / 102.5dB	102.5dB / 102.9dB
TOTAL CORRELATED JITTER	580psec	2590psec	1825psec	160psec	5450psec

a common factor and has not been used as a basis of the scoring – most of them have control systems that take an age to read the disc contents and find tracks. And why does none of the players allow the video circuits to be switched off when playing two-channel audio discs even though there is every reason to believe this might have a beneficial effect on sound quality?

One unexpected finding – a tentative one, not identified formally in the past, as far as we know – is the apparent association between jitter and picture quality. The evidence appears to be particularly striking in the case of the Thomson and the Panasonic, and this may turn out to be generally true

with players that generate video and audio clocks from the same source. But if low jitter is a necessary precondition for good performance – video as well as audio – it is not a sufficient one. The Marantz player, for example, seems to have everything in its favour on the lab bench, but it simply fails to shine when used as a CD player.

The sheer versatility of the players tested is impressive, and on the whole their video performance will come as a revelation to those who have struggled along with VHS videotape. But we are here to promote musical excellence, and make no apologies for marking down players that don't function well in that crucial respect.

“THE SHEER VERSATILITY OF THE PLAYERS IS IMPRESSIVE.”

DVD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

PHILIPS DVD-712	PIONEER DV-545	PRIMARE V10	SONY DVP-NS400D	THOMPSON DTH4500	MAKE MODEL
E230.00	E330.00	E699.99	E300.00	E279.00	PRICE
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	SOUND VALUE
Looks rough and ready but is well equipped and an unexpectedly vital performer, on-screen and via loudspeakers.	Stylish and well equipped slimline DVD-Video player – an extremely attractive all-rounder.	Beautifully presented DVD-Video player gives superb picture quality and so-so CD replay.	Midrange DVD-Video player has some interesting features that enhance picture quality and usability.	Comes with excellent multi-component remote control, but fails to deliver the goods. Bland sound, iffy visuals.	CONCLUSION
1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	1 year	GUARANTEE
THE LAB REPORT					
					LOW DISTORTION
					LOW JITTER
					WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE
					EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FILTER
					OVERALL RATING
MEASUREMENTS					
104dB	97dB	103dB	105dB	106dB	CHANNEL SEPARATION @ 1kHz
-0.1dB / -0.6dB	-0.1dB / -1.2dB	0.0dB / -0.4dB	0.0dB / 0.0dB	-0.2dB / -0.1dB	FREQ. RESPONSE @ 20Hz / 20kHz
0.0025%	0.0010%	0.0025%	0.001%	0.0045%	THD vs LEVEL, 0dBFS @ 1kHz
1.95V / 1.95V	1.87V / 1.89V	1.89V / 1.89V	2.12V / 2.12V	1.86V / 1.85V	OUTPUT LEVEL, L/R
101.0dB / 97.9dB	99.9dB / 100.4dB	98.5dB / 98.4dB	103.0dB / 102.5dB	105.3dB / 105.9dB	SIGNAL/NOISE RATIO (A-wtd)
200psec	330psec	222psec	170psec	22,000psec	TOTAL CORRELATED JITTER

MULTICHANNEL SYSTEMS

HIGH RESOLUTION MULTICHANNEL IS THE BIGGEST HI-FI REVOLUTION SINCE STEREO. PAUL MILLER TESTS FOUR SYSTEMS FOR DVD-A & SACD.

ON TEST

Onkyo TX-DS494 AV receiver	£399
Mordaunt Short Premier speakers	£500
Sony STR-DB1070 AV receiver	£600
Monitor Audio Bronze AV1 speakers	£750
Denon AVC-A1SE AV receiver	£2,500
B&W CM4/CMC/CM2 speakers	£1,800
Myryad MDP500/MA240/MA360 amps	£4,100
Sonus Faber Home series speakers	£3,646

MULTICHANNEL DISC PLAYERS USED

TOSHIBA SD-900E DVD-A PLAYER
PHILIPS SACD-1000 SACD PLAYER

LISTENING PANEL

Roger Batchelor (Denon)
Kevin Edwards (Talk)
Mark Hockey (Kenwood)
Andy Whittle (Exposure).

MUSIC USED

SACD

Gaudeamus – *Sacred Feast*
Jerry Goldsmith – *Movie Medleys*
David Bridie – *Act of Free Choice*

DVD-A

Beethoven/Barenboim/Berliner
Staatskapelle – *Symphony No3*
The Corrs – *In Blue*
KD Lang – *Invincible Summer*



The future, as if we need reminding, is digital. Not only that, but with the explosive take-up of DVD video, supported by Dolby and dts-encoded surround-sound, plus the evolution of high-resolution SACD and DVD-A audio formats, the future is also *multichannel*. Ultimately, this means the biggest shake-up in the audio industry since stereo usurped mono and CD called time on the vinyl LP (or at least it tried).

It means engineers having to rethink how they record and master live and studio sessions for multichannel reproduction. It means speaker manufacturers having to look very closely at matching the dispersion characteristics of combinations of five or more boxes instead of a stereo pair. It means more amplifiers and, yes, more cable. And it means a whole new exercise in system-matching for the dealer and enthusiast. Nevertheless, the learning curve is quickly mastered and the reward of a sympathetically balanced multichannel system simply has to be heard to be appreciated.

On song, a good multichannel audio system offers a more convincing and realistic delivery of a musical experience than its two-channel cousin. Bad

surround systems will never compete with a half-decent stereo set-up because the different channels simply end up working against one another. But, as we have discovered, a coherent multichannel surround system not only builds a soundstage in front of the listener but also adds both rear and height dimensions that can join seamlessly to *immerse* the listener in a field of music. Once enjoyed, it is a musical experience never forgotten.

Our exploration of what's possible from multichannel audio begins here, with four separate systems based on combinations of AV amplifiers and speaker packages recommended by the manufacturers themselves. The systems increase from £900 through to £7,800, excluding the cost of our two front-end options: DVD-A courtesy of Toshiba's SD-900E and SACD from Philips' multichannel SACD-1000, both priced at £1,300. All four systems were auditioned at matched listening levels with consistent selections of DVD-A and SACD software. The choice of AV amplifier/receiver remained hidden from our listening panel, though the speakers were, necessarily, in plain view. And the results? Well, they'll make heartening reading for any audiophile on a budget.



ONKYO TX-DS494 MORDAUNT SHORT PREMIER

SOUND ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

SYSTEM PRICE £899.00

ONKYO 01788 556777

www.onkyo.net

Our starter system is a real cracker and something of a fortuitous match: the Onkyo was a last-minute stand-in for a competing AV receiver originally intended for this test. The TX-DS494 is a new entry from Onkyo, a replacement for the 484 with the addition of Dolby Pro-Logic II decoding and an enhanced amplifier design to cope with the extended bandwidth of SACD and DVD-A sources. Set-up is about as straightforward as it gets, with remote channel selection and volume adjustment available for fine-tuning individual channels to taste.

Onkyo rates this receiver at 5x75 watts (6 ohm) which, in real life, equates to 2x72 watts (8 ohm) followed by a drop to 5x58 watts (8 ohm) in multichannel mode. This is not excessively powerful, bearing in mind the diminutive size and moderately tough (4 ohm) loading of Mordaunt Short's Premier speaker combination, so the system will run out of steam if pushed too hard.

Otherwise the MS308 active sub and five very small satellites are astonishingly capable. These miniatures are no bigger than a PC speaker, but the 3.5inch dished aluminium bass/mid driver used in the MS302 (front & surround) and MS304 (centre) is custom-engineered for the job and works up to a higher than usual 5kHz before handing over to the one inch

metal-dome tweeter. The MS304 doubles up two of these bass/mid units in a slightly larger enclosure, offering slightly better power-handling and bass extension.

Of course, the MS308 sub provides the real grunt, allowing the satellites to be fixed to the wall or (as tested) free-mounted on tall stands. Level inputs are fitted for left-right and high-low, though most enthusiasts will run the line-level subwoofer output of the receiver directly to one of the (L/R) input phons. The variable crossover is best set between 11 and 1 o'clock to match the MS302 and MS304 satellites. Naturally, all the speakers are fully shielded so they can be positioned close to a TV without distorting the picture, should you decide to play movies through your multichannel audio system!

Power is not unlimited, as I've already mentioned. Powerful vocals can provoke a buzzing from the MS302 satellites, most obvious with the massed chorus of *Sacred Feast* from our SACD collection. Otherwise, the open sound of this disc is perfectly suited to the cluster of MS speakers. The centre

ONKYO TX-DS494 AV RECEIVER - £399

Onkyo's entry-level receiver includes dts, Dolby Digital and Dolby Pro-Logic II decoding. Two coaxial and one optical digital input are joined by six-channel analogue inputs plus two tape and line input options. It has four composite and four S-Type video inputs and five internal power amplifiers serving front (A & B outputs), centre and surround channels.



The miniature speakers are no bigger than a PC's. All are fully shielded to avoid damaging the TV.

MORDAUNT SHORT 020 7940 2200 www.richersounds.co.uk

speaker seemed to vanish, bridging the gap between front left and right channels with seamless ease. Similarly, the scale of *Trinity College* was well portrayed despite the system's limited bass output – subwoofer notwithstanding – failing to plumb the depths of the recording.

But it's great to hear a system that not only offers a surprising level of detail, clarity and sophistication but also conveys much of the emotion and drama of the music. The best SACD recordings have a smooth surefootedness that was not lost by this budget combination. The matching of all four front and surround speakers certainly assists the package, which sounds bigger and more committed than it has any right to. "This system is a real surprise," remarked one listener. "Shut your eyes and these tiny speakers disappear, leaving an expanse of detailed, unforced music."

MORDAUNT SHORT PREMIER SPEAKER SYSTEM – £500

The Premier series comprises four MS302 speakers for front and surround, an MS304 with its additional bass/mid unit for the centre and an MS308 active sub, complete with 80 watt amplifier. These are all shielded, sealed-box designs with common crossover networks, so integration between all the speakers is very good indeed.

Sure enough, kettledrums sound rather more like Pot Noodle drums, but for all the loss in weight, the music still possesses a presence that just would not be achievable from a two-channel system of equivalent size. In this instance, the 'surround experience' provides all the ambience you'll need. Trumpets sound like trumpets and strings like strings, for the system has a natural ebb and flow that's very compelling. Our DVD-A front end brought more weight to the sound, and the drums from the Strauss *Fledermaus* overture certainly tickled the MS subwoofer into life. This showed the system has more grunt and gruffness than we might have anticipated from SACD, yet still avoided any sense of forcefulness or aggression. This really is a very capable little system and one that will evidently grow to accommodate upgrades from budget to top-flight DVD-A or SACD front ends.



"MUSIC HAS A PRESENCE THAT JUST WOULD NOT BE ACHIEVED FROM A TWO-CHANNEL SYSTEM OF EQUIVALENT SIZE."



SONY STR-DB1070 MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE AV1

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **SYSTEM PRICE** £1,350.00 **SONY** 08705 111999 www.sony.co.uk

With a little extra money in the pot, our second system delivers more power, a diverse range of DSP facilities and a meatier combination of speakers. Sony's STR-DB1070 is the first of its QS series to incorporate an extra power amplifier, bringing the channel count to 6.1. This feeds a 'centre back' speaker that derives its signal from sounds that are matrixed into the left-right surrounds of compatible DVD software. In practice, this means the 1070 will decode Dolby Digital EX and dts ES, but as Sony is not a THX licensee it cannot advertise the fact. Instead, it offers its own Virtual Matrix 6.1 playback with Cinema Studio EX soundfield options, all courtesy of a new 32-bit

processor that also handles conventional DD and dts material.

When the 1070 is used in analogue mode only, an evolution of its APC (Analogue Purity Control) shuts down the supply to both processor and DAC to minimise digital interference. So there's more than a nod towards good sound quality, even if its power supply struggles to feed all six amplifiers optimally. If it did, there would be no need for the impedance selector (4 or 8 ohms) on the rear of the box – a compromise between supplying more volts for high-impedance speakers and more current for lower impedance ones.

Indeed, Sony rates the 1070 at 100 watts per channel (or at least 100+100W front, 100W centre and 100+100W surround) but it achieves 2x80W (8 ohms) falling to just 5x40W (8 ohms) in multichannel mode. With the rear impedance selector changed from 4 ohm to 8, this output increases to 2x130watts (8 ohm) and 5x70 watts (8 ohm) with all channels driven. Fortunately, Monitor Audio's Bronze speakers are sufficiently sensitive and easy enough to drive that the 1070 can be left in its 8 ohm position, leaving the ASW100 active subwoofer to fill in the bass (below 180Hz) with its own built-in 120 watt MOSFET amplifier.

Bigger speakers and a more powerful amplifier bring a more immediate and fulsome sound to the multichannel experience,

SONY STR-DB1070 AV RECEIVER - £600

New analogue and digital circuitry marks out this latest addition to Sony's QS range, which includes six internal power amplifiers. Two banks of multichannel analogue inputs are joined by four optical and one coaxial digital input, all of which will handle data up to 24-bit/96kHz. A host of speaker tone, level, size and positional features are accessible from the front panel and fancy remote control.



Bigger speakers and a more powerful amplifier bring a more immediate and

MONITOR AUDIO 01268 740580 www.monitoraudio.co.uk

but it's doubtful that this combination is as well integrated or rewarding as the pairing of Onkyo and MS. Drums, low wind and strings certainly roll out with greater authority and impact but this is combined with an excessive fruitiness to the sound. Listen to the DVD-A remix of ELP's *Toccata* from *Brain Salad Surgery* and the deep, some would say excessive, bass line tests the speakers to their limit. The lighter percussive episodes make good use of the rear channels for effects, but the music is less involving for all its raw power.

The greater clarity of a modern mix like the Corrs' *Breathless* is realised in a sharper, solid bass with a more realistic edge to the sound of the guitars. Nevertheless, the vocals are indistinct, or at least less sharply focussed. In this system, the centre channel seems to work against the integrity of the front channels, rather than help anchor vocals to the centre stage. This is likely due to a conflict in the dispersion characteristics of the different bass/mid drivers and crossover designs which, ideally, should be matched from front through centre channels.

The *Voyager* theme from Jerry Goldsmith's *Movie Medleys* certainly lacked the depth experienced with the MS speakers,

MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE AV1 SPEAKER PACKAGE - £750

This includes two Bronze 1s at the rear which employ the same 5.5inch 'metal matrix polymer' bass/mid cones as the Bronze centre speaker. The latter is both more sensitive and offers better power-handling than either the Bronze 1 or larger Bronze 2s which service the front channels. Deep bass is supplemented by the 120-watt active ASW100 subwoofer. All boxes are finished in either black oak or cherry vinyl.

the strings and percussion sounding disappointingly flat, failing to swell into the room as the orchestra builds in momentum. There's no doubting the weight and intent of the sound, but it does lack some insight, clarity and transparency. The ambient rumble from the SACD *Sacred Feast* disc was clearly audible from the surrounds; while the massed chorus sounded both relaxed and capable, it did fail to reach into the room and develop the presence we know to be possible.

So this combination is something of an enigma, for voices are typically well balanced and detailed and, in their own right, spacious but there's simply not the depth to do it justice. "For a multichannel channel and ostensibly surround system, this sounds suspiciously flat," concluded one listener, adding: "This system needs more than a Wonderbra to flesh it out".



"DRUMS, LOW WIND AND STRINGS ROLL OUT WITH GREATER AUTHORITY AND IMPACT BUT WITH AN EXCESSIVE FRUITINESS TO THE SOUND."



DENON AVC-A1SE AV RECEIVER & B&W CM4 / CMC / CM2

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ SYSTEM PRICE £4,300.00 DENON 01753 888447 elec.denon.co.jp/europe



When Denon launched its THX Ultra-specified AVC-A1SE, this behemoth of an amplifier set the standard by which all competing AV receivers would be judged. It includes every conceivable feature, even so far as an RF demodulator to handle the output of older laserdisc players, an RS232 port to connect proprietary multi-room controllers and a touchscreen remote handset with USB support for back-up to a PC. An on-screen display guides you through the more complex set-up parameters, but as part of a multichannel *audio* system, it's still possible to wrestle directly with the A1SE via its fascia and fluorescent display. Otherwise, the amplifier has a myriad

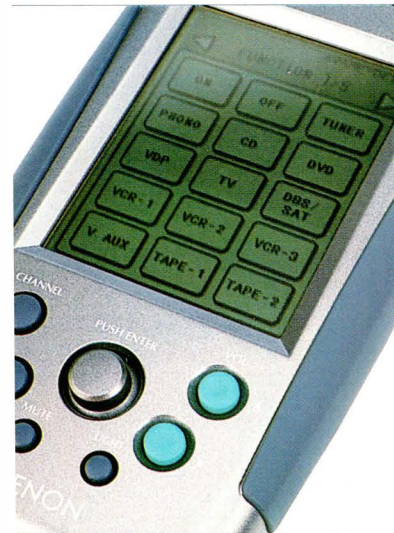
range of DSP modes to keep the most crazed of AV enthusiasts busy for weeks.

Denon rates each of the internal amplifiers at 170 watts (8 ohm). In practice, it musters a full 2x210W (8 ohm), falling to 5x165W (8 ohm) in true multichannel mode. This is power aplenty to drive the B&W CM series loudspeakers, whose sensitivities range from 90 to 91dB. As if to reinforce that the CM4s and CM2s are hi-fi speakers first and foremost, they are not shielded and so must be kept clear of TVs and monitors. Fortunately, the CMC centre speaker *is* shielded.

The ported enclosure design of all three speakers can be adapted courtesy of B&W's foam plugs – a vital accessory if the CM4 or CM2 is used near front or rear walls. The bass output of the CM4, with its additional anodised metal bass unit, is especially strong and sufficiently so that an external subwoofer

DENON AVC-A1SE AV RECEIVER - £2,500

Arguably the heaviest and most comprehensively equipped AV receiver on the market, the AVC-A1SE was the first 7.1-channel amplifier to include dts ES Discrete, Matrix, Neo:6 and THX Surround EX modes. Retro-fit upgrades for dts 24/96 and Dolby Pro-Logic II are becoming available. Nine digital inputs are joined by two banks of 7.1-channel analogue inputs plus eight composite and S-Type video outputs. You want it, the A1SE has it!



“THE RESULT IS A VERY BIG AND RELAXED-SOUNDING SYSTEM THAT APPROACHES THE GRANDEST OF DYNAMICS IN AN ALMOST CASUAL MANNER.”



These speakers must be pointed directly at listeners or the bass begins to overwhelm.

B&W 01903 750750 www.bwspeakers.com

was not employed with this system. Nevertheless, it's pretty important that the CM4s are pointed directly at the listening position, otherwise the fulsome bass can really begin to overwhelm its subtler mid and treble. The result is a very big and relaxed-sounding system that approaches the grandest of dynamics in an almost casual manner.

And yet, detailed though the sound is, there is more than a suggestion of an easy-going laziness. Even with an upbeat DVD-A like the Corrs' *In Blue*, the music never really lets rip. Vocals sound warm but not particularly expressive; strings seem neither as vivid or thrilling as possible. Again, this is down to system matching – the amp exhibits a comfortable muscularity while the speakers are not necessarily the best choice to “jazz the sound up,” as one listener remarked. In truth, the SACD front end brought out a little more atmosphere and subtlety with this system than its DVD-A counterpart.

The height of the acoustic from the *Sacred Feast* recording was portrayed very convincingly indeed, the venue ambience building with the swell of the chorus to great effect. On this occasion, there was a harmonious balance between centre and front that bridged the gap across the room to the surrounds, creating the sort of deep, three-dimensional sound that is the goal of all multichannel systems. This canopy effect was achieved more convincingly by the combination of Denon

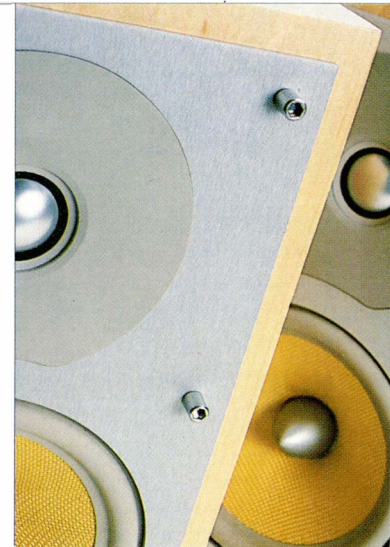
B&W CM4 / CMC / CM2 - £1,800

Sold separately rather than as an AV package, these speakers represent a canny blend of high technology and stunning furniture. An alloy fascia conceals the mounting bolts for its yellow Kevlar bass/mid units and metal dome tweeter while optional port damping and bi-wire options offer a degree of fine-tuning.

and B&W than by any other in our survey, as the individual output of all five speakers seemed less obvious than the integration between them.

And yet this system still has a sense of restraint that cannot be fully offset by progressively winding up the volume – the sound staging gets bigger but there's no greater sense of dynamic shading or transient attack. The *Voyager* melody sounded grand enough but also slightly lacklustre, the horns and strings strolling serenely rather building any real sense of tension into the music. Nevertheless, the fact that this system will happily operate at very high sound levels with absolutely no sense of stress and strain is impressive in its own right. This system relishes being played loud where its tremendous underlying power and cavernous acoustic just seems to build and build without shouting at the listener.

Like a hippo underwater, the system has its own momentum, moving with purpose and intent but at its own speed. And like the hippo, there's no point asking it to pick up the pace.



MYRYAD MDP500 / MA240 / MA360 SONUS FABER HOME

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ SYSTEM PRICE £7,746.00 CONTACT 01494 551551 www.myryad.co.uk



Our costliest system finds Myryad amplifiers, from the UK, paired with Italy's Sonus Faber loudspeakers, an eclectic mix that, frankly, was not as successful as we anticipated. On the face of it, Myryad's two- and three-channel power amplifiers are more than up to the challenge of driving the Fabers. On the bench at least, the MA360 provides 150W (8 ohm) with all three channels driven.

These amplifiers are also a good match with the power plant of about 200 watts within Sonus Faber's Gravis B1 subwoofer, a heavy 28-litre enclosure offering a six-position filter for matching the room and accompanying speakers. With the

Grand Piano floorstanders pulled clear of rear walls, there's still sufficient bass output to leave the B1's active crossover near the bottom of its span. By contrast, the so-called Wall surround speakers, with smaller 150mm glass-fibre-coated bass/mid units, are designed to be mounted above and to the sides of listeners.

Myryad's surround processor is made by Flextronics in Finland, a company that supplies audio makers worldwide with AV decoder boards. The 7.1-channel analogue inputs might be useful with Dolby EX and dts ES-specified DVD players (when they arrive); otherwise the 8-channel flexibility of the MDP500 will come into its own only when Myryad produces its own decoder upgrade.

The marriage of Myryad and Sonus Faber did not gel as well as had been hoped. It has an altogether cleaner and crisper presentation than that afforded by the Denon/B&W pairing, but it cannot handle high volume with anything close to the comfort of its cheaper competition.

Our SACD collection was revealed with a greater vibrancy and 'thrill', but vocals and brass were typically injected with a steely hardness. "It's as if the venue were made of glass," quipped one listener. There is less weight to the performance and hence less sense of ambient space, multiple channels notwithstanding. There is still plenty of individual detail in front and back planes, but the impressive canopy effect created by the partnership of Denon and B&W was missing.

MYRYAD MDP500/ MA240 / MA360 - £4,100

The MDP-500 AV processor includes 7.1-channel analogue inputs and outputs, though the left rear and right rear outputs will come into service only once the MDP-500 is upgraded with a dts ES and Dolby EX decoder. Six digital inputs are joined by six video inputs and a simple on-screen menu. The two-channel MA-240 and three-channel MA-360 power amps are tried-and-tested bipolar designs, both rated at 120W per channel.

"CLEANER AND CRISPER THAN THE PAIRING OF DENON AND B&W, BUT IT CANNOT HANDLE HIGH VOLUME WITH SUCH COMFORT."



The Gravis subwoofer's heavy 28-litre enclosure has a six-position filter to match the room.

CONTACT 020 8971 3909 www.sonusfaber.com

"Two walls of sound," said one listener, "that ultimately fail to meet in the middle."

The system with the DVD-A player was less steely in character but, equally, was less distinct or clean in its presentation. Our selection of rock and pop continued to sound busy but not especially colourful. The detail was all there but it was not especially interesting. KD Laing's *Invincible Summer* DVD-A plays to this system's strengths and is one of the few recordings with enough LFE output to give the Gravis B1 subwoofer something to chew over. Her voice was securely placed centre-stage, flanked by backing musicians and harmonies while the bass line drove the music along at a measured pace. Nevertheless, its musical merit was likened to "Sunny Delight instead of freshly squeezed orange juice."

Frankly we could not leave our exploration of top-end multichannel audio on such a sorry note so, by popular consent, we replaced the Myriad amplifiers with Denon's AVC-A1SE. The same discs were now revealed with a texture, warmth, depth and – importantly – emotion that was previously hidden. KD Laing sounded much more vivid and compelling, the backing instruments weightier and more believable. Orchestral SACD now built impressively, there was a real sense of power and scale with low winds and tympani,

SONUS FABER HOME SERIES SPEAKERS – £3,646

A combination of the luxurious Grand Piano Home floorstanders with the black leather-clad Solo centre and Wall surround speakers. Low bass is supplemented by the mighty Gravis B1 subwoofer with its integral 200 watt MOSFET power amp, 10inch driver and two 10inch ABRs mounted at 90 degrees in the same cabinet. Sadly, there's no discount when buying the lot as a package as is often the case.

while strings and brass shimmered with detail. The phrasing of individual notes was pleasingly realistic, giving a greater insight into the skill of the musicians. This, in turn, reinforced the core of the music itself: big-band material, for example, gains a drama and tension that really involves the listener.

In *HFC 215* we tested the same Myriad amplifiers with a set of Tannoy loudspeakers and the result was somewhat more successful than this pairing. If nothing else, this indicates that system-matching is no less critical in a five- or six-channel system than it is with good old two-channel stereo.



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Memory

P.set

P.set S

Display

PTY

Direct

Character

CONCLUSIONS

PAUL MILLER REVEALS HIS FINDINGS FROM THE GROUP

Presently, we have a choice between DVD-A and SACD as our source of multichannel audio, a choice reflected in the two top-flight front-ends used in our systems test.

The two factions continue to fight their respective corners and while DVD-A has the immeasurable advantage of video playback, courtesy of DVD, there's no avoiding the fact that SACD made for a crisper, cleaner and more sure-footed sound with all our systems. The music was simply planted more securely with SACD, blossoming into a genuinely more three-dimensional sound. DVD-A by contrast was less tidy and less homogenous, the sound appearing more directly from the corners of the room rather than developing into a room full of sound.

Performance is determined by imple-

mentation, however. For example, even when DVD-A decoding is available in an AV receiver likely as not there'll be some benefit to be gained by buying a superior DVD-A player and using its on-board decoder to feed the 5.1 channel analogue inputs of a slightly less capable AV receiver. This may preclude access to any additional DSP modes available from the receiver's integral AV decoder (ie DD, dts) but it nonetheless will provide a 'cleaner' path for multichannel audio purposes.

Naturally, as no AV receivers are currently equipped with DSD decoders for SACD, then all SACD/amp combinations must necessarily be hooked-up in the analogue rather than digital domain.

For reasons of consistency, all four systems in our survey used the decoders and DACs in the DVDA/SACD player(s) which were then connected to the analogue multichannel input of the test amplifiers/receivers. And, as in the 'old days' when a costly turntable/arm/cartridge combination would front a modest amp/speaker package to good effect, the real star of our system test was the 'budget' Onkyo/Mordaunt Short combination. The AV receiver offers just enough power to service this remarkably together-sounding combination of miniature satellites. The upshot is a bold and coherent sound that provides the perfect first rung on the ladder of multichannel audio.

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MULTICHANNEL SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	ONKYO/MORDAUNT SHORT TX-DS494/PREMIER	SONY/MONITOR AUDIO STR-DB1070/BRONZE AV1
PRICE	£899.00	£1,350.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Tiny speakers and limited power provide a surprising result, a very capable little system.	A weighty combo with good intent, but somewhat lacking in depth and insight.
GUARANTEE	3/5 & 2 (SUB) YEARS	1/2 YEARS
MAKE MODEL	DENON/B&W AVC-A15E/CM4/CM2/CMC	MYRYAD/SONUS FABER MDP500/MA240/MA360/HOME SERIES
PRICE	£4,300.00	£7,746.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Big and relaxed sounding system that loves to play loud, albeit without much transient attack and pace.	Plenty of individual detail from front and rear channels, but not quite gelled as a system.
GUARANTEE	2/5 YEARS	3/3 YEARS

ANALOGUE & DIGITAL TUNERS

TUNERS

WITH DIGITAL RADIO IN THE ASCENDANT, RICHARD BLACK COMPARES THE LATEST DAB TUNERS WITH THE FM COMPETITION

Radio might not have burgeoned in choice so much as television in the last few years, but that's largely because there were a lot more radio stations to start with. Indeed, the number continues to increase, as community and ethnic stations add to the more familiar music or talk stations from commercial broadcasters and the BBC. In London and other cities one can tune an FM radio at random and expect to find a station, and the AM bands have long been crowded, so the arrival of DAB with its potential for more channels is timely.

The roll-out of DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting – also called Digital Radio, which is true but confusing) has been quiet and is far from complete. Not all areas of the country are covered, and take-up is slow so far. Only a dozen hi-fi DAB tuners have come to market, but more are appearing and prices will soon drop.

DAB promises interference-free reception and 'near-CD' sound quality – which, on the whole, it delivers. However, concerns have been raised about just how good reception will be when the full grid of transmitters comes into action, and this magazine's voice is not the only one to question just how satisfactory the sound quality is in absolute terms.

FM of course has its drawbacks too. Reception difficulties are all too common despite a long-term programme of adding local transmitters to troubled areas. Comparing DAB and FM is complicated because most broadcasters apply different audio compression to the two systems, resulting in different levels from moment to moment and often different tonal balance too. If you get a chance to hear both side by side, you will find longer listening spells with each far more useful than rapid switching.

The choice between FM and DAB, then, is far from obvious. Those plagued by poor FM reception may well find DAB a godsend and be happy enough to pay the inevitable early-adopter premium. But if you have a good FM aerial and thus reception, sticking with FM for a few years is far from stupid. Few DAB-only stations exist at present; you can be sure that by the time there are a lot of them DAB will be a lot cheaper.

This group of tuners, though small, neatly covers a wide range of both FM and DAB tuners. It will be interesting indeed to see how they pan out.

ON TEST

ARCAM DT-81	£649.90
HARMAN KARDON TU940	£179.00
MARANTZ ST-17	£599.90
RADI DAB-606	£199.00
SONY ST-SE570	£129.00
VIDEOLOGIC DRX-601ES	£349.00

OTHER EQUIPMENT USED

EAR 802 preamp and 519 power amps
 Harman Kardon HK3500 integrated amp
 ATC SCM20 speakers
 Revox A76 FM tuner
 5-element rooftop FM aerial
 Sound Technology 1000A FM generator
 (fed by a Rotel CD player to simulate 'perfect' reception)

MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

Esbjorn Svensson Trio -
Good Morning Susie Soho
 The Cinematic Orchestra - *Motion*
 Bugge Wesseltoft's
 New Conception of Jazz - *Moving*
 Nils Petter Molvær - *Khmer*
 BBC Radios 1 to 4, Jazz FM,
 Classic FM, XFM



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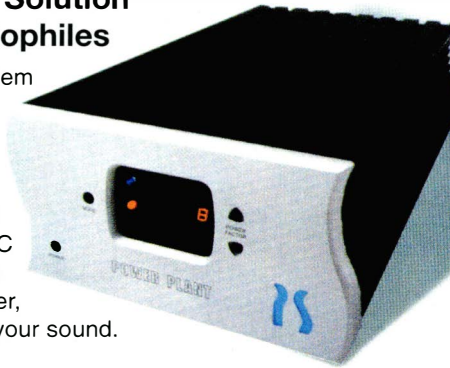
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**BEST BUY****HI-FI CHOICE**
magazine

HARMAN KARDON TU940

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£179.00** **CONTACT** 020 8731 4670 www.harmankardon.com **G'TEE** 2 years

A bit of a big and bulky affair we have here, but that's a deliberate choice by Harman Kardon – the insides as usual hardly begin to justify it. In fact the heart of this tuner is based on pretty much the same selection of integrated circuits that can be found in the majority of contemporary tuners, and none the worse for that since many of them work very well.

The radio-frequency front end is one I don't recall seeing before, and perhaps that's responsible for an early brownie point scored by the 940. During initial checking to make sure the tuners all at least worked a bit, on a very interference-prone Friday night, I found that this one gave distinctly better rejection of pirate stations than the other two FM tuners. That, frankly, is welcome news to any big city dweller.

The roll-call of features is entirely par for the course: FM and MW reception, 30 presets, RDS, switchable IF bandwidth and optional connection to a Harman Kardon system for integrated remote control. There's a usefully scaled signal-strength meter and, if you can't be doing with searching out stations, the tuner will scan the FM band and load stations into memory for you. This bit of kit is well built and easy to use.

SOUND QUALITY

It also sounds good. In fact I'd have to say that although it's only officially being compared with two other FM tuners here, looking back on my notes from a few years of tuners this is one of the finer examples.

Not only does it work well when the RF signal is less than perfect, under good reception conditions it produces a clear, hearty and involving sound. With large-scale classical works on Radio 3 it rides the dynamics like an expert surfer, maintaining a better grip on the detail in loud passages than most of its competitors and keeping noise low when the music pauses for a second or two.

It has a natural tone on speech programmes (though I can't resist a swipe at the way so many radio stations put out badly mutilated speech, both bassy and spitty – try Radio 4 drama to hear how it can be done). Lively pop, rock and jazz benefit from the strong but not over-emphasised bass and taut midrange.

There is still a little roughness in the treble, and feeding the tuner from a CD player and FM test generator showed up a slight loss of precision and polish, but there was always a good degree of involvement and life.

Even stereo image depth, which is always an early casualty in the chain of FM broadcasting and receiving, was a passable imitation of the original. The only slightly bothersome aspect was a touch of coloration on bright instruments like trumpet, which seemed to develop just a hint of 'quack' on some notes.

I'm starting to split hairs there, though. Results are really among the best I've heard, including those from considerably dearer models.

CONCLUSION

With the added bonus of better-than-average AM reception too, and a respectable bill of health from the lab bench (if Harman Kardon could suppress the pilot tone just a little bit better it would be no bad thing: young listeners may be aware of it from time to time) this tuner looks like no-brainer of a choice. And the best bit – it's cheap too! Best Buy.

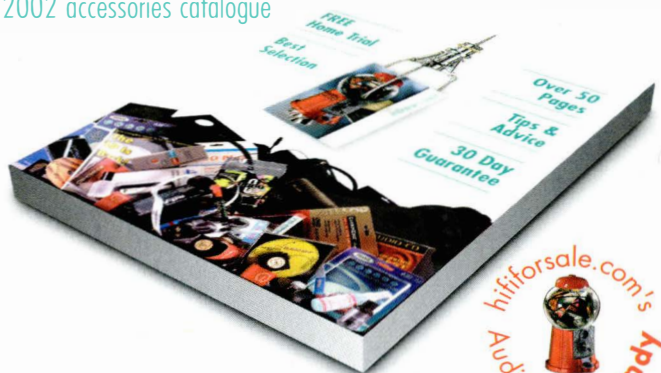
“LOOKING BACK ON MY NOTES FROM A FEW YEARS OF TUNERS, THIS IS ONE OF THE FINER EXAMPLES.”

The Harman Kardon's solid and bulky looks are appropriate to its hearty and involving sound.



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LIVING VOICE



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Auditorium Avatar

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Hi-Fi Choice *Editor's Choice*

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

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Helios Model CD3i - ex-dem	£690	£900
Micromega Duo BS - DAC	£190	£600

Analogue

Nottingham Analogue Mentor - with reference platter	£1900	£2900
- Reference power supply for above	£490	£800
Nottingham Analogue 'Foot' - 12" carbon fibre tonearm - new	£700	£1100
Nottingham Analogue Space Deck - with SME arm mount	£650	£850
Helios Cyalene - tonearm	£590	£1350
Hadcock GH228 Super - 9" tonearm - nearly new	£440	£640

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2 pairs - Cherry and Rosewood - ex-dem	£2900 / £3700	£4000
Cadence DS	£750	£1750
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Audio Innovations S1000 - 50 watt class A monos	£790	£1550
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MARANTZ ST-17

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£599.90** **CONTACT** 01753 680868 www.marantz.com **G'TEE** 3 years

Anything from Marantz with a 17 in its number is an upmarket model, but you probably guessed that from the rather deluxe looks. The unusual weight of the ST-17 reinforces the message: weight due to a double-skinned base and other anti-resonance measures. You could not easily fault Marantz on the fit and finish of this unit.

The insides show evidence of tender loving care too, with Cerafine electrolytic capacitors all over the place. The integrated circuits and RF front end are largely the usual suspects, though, assisted by a couple of Marantz's copper-clad HDAM amplifier modules. Intriguingly, the circuit board has a space available for an AM stereo decoder IC, though in these days of DAB I don't suppose that will ever be necessary in the UK!

Among the various features, pride of place certainly goes to the 'gyro control' tuning knob. It used to be a point of honour among makers of upmarket tuners that the tuning dial could be swung end-to-end with one flick of the wrist, and Marantz – maker of the most desirable vintage tuner of them all, the Model 10B – has reintroduced that little pleasure.

Other features include RDS, two aerial sockets, switchable IF bandwidth and (at the rear) a switch to attenuate the RF signal slightly, necessary only if you have a high-power transmitter practically in your back garden. It has 60 presets, covering all three bands (yes, LW too), which should be enough for anyone.

However, there are some surprising omissions, not least any kind of signal strength meter. Sure, you can usually tell by ear whether the signal is any good or not, but a meter can be very helpful in assessing whether what's needed is a bigger aerial or just a more carefully aligned one.

SOUND QUALITY

Given the obvious pride of ownership that's apt to accompany such a smart product, I'd like to report that the sound is merely the icing on the cake. But the thing is, while this is by no means a bad tuner, it doesn't seem to be an outstandingly good one either, certainly not given its price. The best aspect of the sound is that, as is happily typical with Marantz products, it is very civilised and free from obvious flaws. It has a neutral tonal balance and at first listen seems

to have most of the basics right. But it's annoyingly opaque if you want to listen to details and subtleties, and doesn't seem to score particularly highly for long-term listening either, with rather high levels of fatigue.

It's not always obvious from a technical standpoint what's wrong with a bit of hi-fi, but the ST-17 has a particular flaw that surely has a lot to do with its sound. Specifically, the 19kHz stereo 'pilot tone' is almost unsuppressed and comes through loud and clear. Typically, listeners under the age of 35 or so will be able to hear it distinctly, and even those who cannot will be troubled by the distortion that will result from its presence in most loudspeakers. I proved the point by recording some music via the ST-17 digitally, filtering the offending tone away and listening: the sound was considerably more vibrant and involving, with the main residual flaw a small lack of bass weight, not in itself much of a drawback.

CONCLUSION

It seems that this is very nearly a very good tuner, let down by one distinct flaw. Despite the great looks and build, as it stands the sound quality on offer does not seem to justify the price.

“THE BEST ASPECT OF THE SOUND IS THAT IT IS CIVILISED AND FREE FROM OBVIOUS FLAWS.”

The tuner dial swings to the far end with one flick of the wrist – a point of upmarket honour.





SONY ST-SE570

“IT MAY NOT LOOK FLASH, BUT THE 570 HARDLY NEEDS ANY APOLOGY NEXT TO MOST OF THE MORE EXPENSIVE COMPETITION.”

The Sony is unperturbed by most kinds of music, but heavy classical or rock can congest its bass.

SOUND ★★★★★	VALUE ★★★★★	£129.99	CONTACT 08705 111999	www.sony.co.uk	G'TEE 1 year
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There is no one particularly remarkable aspect to this tuner, but it's a typically well-equipped and smartly presented Sony. In fact the features list is very good for what is very much a budget unit: not only do you get full RDS (including EON, the system that can switch automatically to stations broadcasting traffic or other information), but also AM reception on both MW and LW bands, 30 presets, a digital signal strength meter and a bargraph besides, and even a dimmable display.

You also have access to a host of sorting options for the presets, and a DAB-like 'Auto-betical select' whereby the tuner scans the FM band and loads the stations into memory, sorting RDS-named stations and eliminating duplicates. It's a touch ironic that to all intents and purposes tuners like this actually outperform current DAB models in user convenience, but don't expect even the most sophisticated RDS implementations to become web-enabled – it's unlikely to happen!

So although it may not look flash, the 570 hardly seems to need any apology next to most of the more expensive competition, at least on features and ergonomics. Internally it

shows some signs of cost-cutting but all the essential bits are there, as usual including some old favourite integrated circuits. What more could one want for £130?

SOUND QUALITY

One might want good sound, I suppose. And on the whole this tuner won't disappoint. It has a reasonably neutral character and seems unperturbed by most kinds of music. In RF performance it manages well, only just bettered under most kinds of 'difficult' reception conditions by dearer models. With good reception, it extracts the essence of a piece of music from the ether with confidence, offering pretty good resolution through the midband and cleanly extended treble, just a tiny bit rough at loud climaxes.

The bass is a little less good: although it is extended and powerful when needed, it tends to sound a touch congested and also, probably as a result of that, a little slack at times. How much of a problem that is in practice depends on your choice of listening – spoken voice comes over very well, as does smaller-scale acoustic music, but big and heavy classical or rock broadcasts lose something in bass precision.

All the same, that's a minor failing in such a cheap product. What some listeners may find more serious is that there is not quite as much life and energy about the sound as the very best budget tuners manage to achieve. Despite its essential competence, the 570 cannot quite shake off a certain laziness which makes it just a little less than completely involving.

This may seem a bit hair-splitting, but after all radio is the one source that one can listen to indefinitely without having to interrupt things to change the disc or whatever, so a sound that isn't too bland would seem to have a much greater chance of keeping the listener's attention.

CONCLUSION

So despite its obvious value-for-money in material terms, this little Sony just misses out on the highest accolades. Then again, it does achieve a very respectable overall performance for an extremely modest sum, and for that it deserves at least a Recommendation.





ARCAM DT-81

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£649.90** **CONTACT** 01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk **G'TEE** 2 years

Arcam takes a justifiable pride in this being its third DAB tuner while most manufacturers are at best dipping a toe in the digital water. In essence, though, it differs little from the early models, being based on the same Gold Card from Roke Manor Research – the RF front end and clever decoding bits. That's combined with a Wolfson Microelectronics DAC chip and a high-quality output op-amp, plus of course Arcam's control logic and power supply.

It would be hard to fault Arcam on the construction of this unit. Internally and externally it is very neat and intelligently laid out, and it has a full complement of features at the rear: analogue and both flavours of digital output, Radio Data Interface (RDI) output on the usual Toslink connector and an analogue input which can be switched through to the analogue outputs, the idea being that an FM tuner can be looped through if required.

Operation is simple and intuitive. On first power-up, the tuner scans the airwaves and fills its memory with the names of available stations, so there's no need to know anything about frequencies. The 'tuning' dial simply scans through stations by name, and if that's not quick enough there are 16 quick-access presets too.

Additional features include L-band, the higher-frequency DAB band not yet in use in the UK, and switchable audio compression. If you feel nerdy or want to be absolutely sure that you've set up the antenna properly and are receiving a good clean signal, various reception information options are available, in addition to a simple but useful bargraph display of signal strength. All very nice.

SOUND QUALITY

In a word, fine. It's still difficult to compare the sound of DAB tuners because the sound of the format still dominates and the differences between tuners are not great – but such as they are, this unit seems to be particularly clean and extended. It has a neutral tonal balance and a nicely stable stereo image when the broadcast is good enough to take advantage of it. Anyone who regularly listens to radio will not need to be told that sound quality varies a lot, both on DAB and FM. Plenty of DAB stations still manage to sound as rough as fairly indifferent FM, but with

a good transmission the lack of interference and breakup is welcome. Yes, the high-frequency artefacts are there, but at least the intrinsically open sound of this particular tuner makes the most of DAB's advantages.

The DAB novice might be slightly disappointed in the bass. Don't be! Both Arcam's tuner and the broadcasters put out an extended bass response, but many FM tuners have a bit of a subjective lift in the bass, adding to the bass enhancement often caused by the multiband compression common on FM stations. The DT-81 may sound lean at first by comparison, but its assurance when something profound comes along is very satisfying. As for detail, most of the time it betters the majority of FM tuners and of course noise level is noticeably lower.

CONCLUSION

Despite my reservations over DAB itself I can't help but admire Arcam both for its initiative in embracing the technology and for its highly professional implementation in this unit. It's not the cheapest game in town but at this moment it's probably the best – if by a smallish margin. It seems entirely appropriate to Recommend the DT-81.

"MOST OF THE TIME IT BETTERS THE MAJORITY OF FM TUNERS AND OF COURSE NOISE LEVEL IS NOTICEABLY LOWER."

The bass may sound lean at first, but when it comes to real musical meat it's satisfyingly assured.





LEKTROPACKS RAD-1

SOUND **VALUE** **£199.00** **CONTACT** 08700 711911 www.lektropacks.co.uk **G'TEE** 1 year

“I SUPPOSE IF THE SOUND WERE SUPERB ONE COULD BE A LITTLE MORE POSITIVE, BUT IT’S NOT.”

Buttons are small and fiddly. Is there no way to auto-tune? Instructions are unhelpful.

Fish or fowl? This natty-looking little device isn't a bedside or kitchen radio – it has no internal speaker. It isn't a car radio – wrong shape (though it does run from a single 12V supply so you could in principle use it in a car). And it doesn't look much like conventional hi-fi, especially given the lack of phono sockets for output. Nothing in the instructions, nor on the websites of the manufacturer, Taiwan Microwave Communication (which calls this model the DAB-606), or the UK distributor, Lektropacks, gives much of a clue.

Still, there is a 3.5mm stereo jack socket marked 'line out' and a supplied lead to two phono plugs, so connecting the RAD-1 to a hi-fi is perfectly straightforward. There's a second minijack for headphones, and a Toslink output which is for the Radio Data Interface rather than digital audio. A two-line LCD serves perfectly well for the usual displays like station names, and the supplied whip antenna with a useful magnetic base is a practical and arguably neater alternative to the usual wire 'T'.

Now the problems start. I'd be lying if I didn't state right away that the RAD-1 has possibly the worst ergonomics of any hi-fi component I've ever encountered. One of DAB's biggest

advantages is convenience, right? Not here. Now I may perhaps have missed some features because the instructions aren't fabulous, but there seems to be absolutely no way to auto-tune stations. You can admittedly scan for multiplex frequencies that are in use, but it's slow and leaves you to find out which station is in which multiplex. There are 30 presets, only 15 of which are accessible without the remote control, but you have to load them all manually and they didn't seem to work on the review sample anyway (the instructions already mention a couple of features which don't work properly – “We will fix it in the next generation.” For this we're supposed to pay £200?).

The buttons are small, fiddly and stiff, and at least a couple seemed a bit unreliable. Press the wrong one while trying to load a preset and you'll be dumped back to the bottom of the frequency band. Switch off, and on switching on again you may get a random station in the same ensemble as the last station you tuned to, or maybe not. Most users will throw this unit against the wall before ever working out how to make the darn thing operate properly.

SOUND QUALITY

I suppose if the sound were superb one could be a little more positive, but it's not. In fact it's significantly hampered by a very low output level of about 400mV, which means that you'll need the volume turned up to 12 in order to hear anything properly. And even with that adjustment made, you'll find that the basic characteristic is significantly gutless and weedy compared with the Arcam and Videologic tuners.

The RF and data-recovery performance seems to be as good as any, not surprising because the operational parts are much the same as Videologic's (and Technics', from memory) – there aren't many to choose from yet.

CONCLUSION

OK, so this is the cheapest DAB tuner so far (and it's going for even cheaper than the £299 in the Lektropacks catalogue). And it does, to be fair, receive a signal. But without wishing to be rude it's a right dog's dinner of a product. We know for sure that semiconductor manufacturers are gearing up to provide for yet-cheaper DAB tuners in the very near future. Avoid.





VIDEOLOGIC DRX-601ES

SOUND ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£349.99** **CONTACT** 01923 277488 www.videologic.com **GTEE** 2 years

Having already turned up in the front of *Hi-Fi Choice* a few months ago, the 601ES now meets its peers (few as they are!) head-to-head for the first time. To recap: Videologic launched the original DRX-601E last year at a price well below any competing DAB tuners and picked up a Best Buy for it on the grounds that, as things stood, it seemed to do much the same job as the dearer models.

But Videologic had independently come to conclusions similar to those expressed in our reviews, along the lines that the sound of DAB broadcasts could use a little tweaking (see feature article in *HFC* 219). Hence the 601ES, based on the same nuts and bolts as the original E (which continues in production), ironing out a few wrinkles and adding a slightly smarter display, a silver fascia and Videologic's tweaks to enhance sound quality.

Videologic has even given the tweaks a name: 'Psycho-Acoustic Compensation' or PAC. But as we revealed in the original review (issue 216), this grand name refers to nothing more sophisticated than a simple analogue filter which slightly lowers the treble level or, if you prefer, slightly boosts the bass and lower midrange. It's bound to have an effect, but whether it adequately addresses the current drawbacks of DAB is a moot point.

As for features, the 601E or ES offers a set broadly similar to the Arcam models, with automatic tuning and station selection by name, analogue and digital outputs, analogue input and switchable dynamics control (although unlike Arcam with its five-point setting this one is on or off, and be aware that you can set it only with the remote control: without the remote you can't even find out whether it's on or off). One noteworthy omission from both models is coverage of the high-frequency L-band, which is reserved for future DAB use. At present no one seems to be committing to a date when it will come into use.

SOUND QUALITY

In side-by-side comparisons, PAC's effect is obvious: the sound is mellower and fruitier than Arcam's DT-84 or any other non-PAC tuner. But at the end of the day it's a subtler effect than one might expect to get from changing loudspeakers, for instance, and it doesn't fundamentally alter the basic character

of DAB. The high-frequency twittering is still there, only very slightly less audible, and of course the advantages in terms of freedom from interference and lower levels of audio compression still apply.

Midrange clarity is generally good, falling short of CD standards but on the whole bettering FM unless one is using a really top-flight tuner and aerial for comparison. Bass is very clean and effortless. Comparing the PAC-less 601E with other DAB tuners, I felt differences to be quite slight, but in this case any quick comparisons are dominated by that frequency response change. Over a longer period, I felt that although cutting the treble does in a way make the sound more relaxing, Arcam just had the edge in resolution and clarity.

CONCLUSION

With the benefit of further listening, including side-by-side comparisons, I still feel that my first reaction to this tuner stands. It is an intriguing take on the 'DAB experience' but when all's said and done very similar to what an amplifier's tone controls can achieve. Give it a try, but I'd still plump for the cheaper, plain E version.

"THE SOUND IS MELLOWER AND FRUITIER BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY IT IS A SUBTLER EFFECT."

Like the 601E – but minus some wrinkles and plus a smarter display and sound tweaks.



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CONCLUSIONS FM OR DAB? RICHARD BLACK TUNES IN ...

One obvious conclusion of this test is that throwing money at the tuner problem isn't the answer. The Best Buy rating awarded to the Harman Kardon TU940 reflects FM performance which is not only good for its price but also arguably the equal – at least – of the much more expensive Marantz. And Sony's budget offering, for all the mild reservations expressed in the review, does a pretty impressive job. But does either come up level with DAB in sound quality?

Without wishing to duck the issue, that's almost impossible to answer. You don't listen to a tuner in isolation: you listen to the tuner, the aerial, the transmitter, the link to the transmitter, the studio output processing (such as audio compression) and the studio equipment. That's true of both analogue and digital systems, although most of those stages should have less effect in a digital system. Quite honestly, the ultimate performance of all three FM tuners, fed with a near-perfect RF signal from an FM signal generator in my listening room, is not obviously better or worse than the DAB models. There's a little more hiss with FM but otherwise both systems are slightly hampered in very different ways that may bother some listeners more than others.

In the real world, reception conditions and availability of DAB in a particular area will decide the matter for many listeners. I can't end this review without noting that Coding Technologies, the company



“IN THE REAL WORLD, RECEPTION AND AVAILABILITY OF DAB IN YOUR AREA WILL DECIDE THE MATTER.”

responsible for the recently proclaimed (and impressive) MP3Pro upgrade to standard MP3, says it is basically applicable to DAB-type data reduction too. This might swing things DABs way.

Back to the tuners at hand. Marantz has dropped a clanger with the ST-17. Most of its performance is good, but it has a distinct flaw. As for the two cheaper DAB tuners, the RAD-1 has not so much one flaw as a

raft of them. It drove me up the wall in a few days and I couldn't imagine trying to live with it. And the Videologic just does not justify itself alongside the cheaper and more straightforward version.

That leaves the Sony and Harman Kardon FM tuners, already mentioned, and Arcam's smart and fine-sounding DT-81 DAB candidate. Buy any of them with confidence!

TUNERS AT A GLANCE

						
MAKE MODEL	ARCAM DT-81	HARMAN KARDON TU940	LEKTROPACKS RAD-1	MARANTZ ST-17	SONY ST-SE570	VIDEOLGIC DRX-601ES
PRICE	£649.90	£179.00	£199.00	£599.90	£129.99	£349.99
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BANDS	DAB	FM, MW	DAB	FM, MW, LW	FM, MW, LW	DAB
CONCLUSION	A very smart and polished DAB performer.	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions.	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless.	Great looks, but sound not quite as good as the case might suggest.	Good honest tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland.	A 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste.
GUARANTEE	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	1 YEAR	3 YEARS	1 YEAR	2 YEARS



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Classik K CD Receiver £999.95

The Classik K is an alternative to the sound and looks of mass market compact systems. Designed to be useful throughout the home, the Classik is simple and stylish with all the advanced features needed to satisfy the most demanding hi-fi enthusiast or discriminating music lover.

The Classik K combines an extensive and flexible control system, high quality CD, Tuner, and powerful Amplifier, capable of driving any Loudspeakers, in a single, compact package and is available in a choice of colours.

"Whether with the hard-edged dance of the late lamented KLF, U2's millennial rock, or the beautiful voice of American soprano Barbara Bonney, the Classik always sounds confident and fully in command with CD. At the same time, it gives music full expression - Take a listen to the new EMI recording of Vivaldi's Four Seasons and the system displays good bite and rhythmic drive, along with a nicely neutral balance and a real feel for the excitement of this familiar music." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | April 2001



Systems
Best Buy £1000 plus

CYRUS

Icon NXT Speakers £2499.95

Over two years in development, Icon is the world's first high-end application of NXT's flat speaker technology. The high performance "Cyrus SurfaceSound" driver has been meticulously engineered using advanced mathematical analysis and material technologies. The panel is assembled on a precision die-cast chassis. Dual carbon fibre skins form a balanced laminate on an aluminium honeycomb core. The single panel covers a wide frequency range from 400Hz up to 22kHz thus removing the need for any crossover in the critical voice region. A conventional doped paper pulp moving-coil bass driver supports the system allowing the speakers range to extend over 10 octaves.



"The most noticeable aspect of the Icons is their seamless midband. Because the

SurfaceSound panel handles everything from the low midrange upward, they produce one of the fastest and most articulate performances we've heard at mid-to-high frequencies.

Conventional speakers will find this a tough act to follow as in their case the crossover between the midrange and treble units

generally comes in between 2kHz-3kHz, precisely where the ears are at their most sensitive. True, some traditional designs convey vocals with a touch more body and warmth because of this, but the Icons voices are seamless, articulate and expressive to an astounding degree."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | June 2001



CD Players
Best Buy £501-£800

CD7 CD Player 7 Integrated Amplifier

£799.95

£699.95

The new CD7 combines the latest transport developments with 24-bit DAC technology. The CD player can be easily upgraded by adding the external PSX-R power supply.

"This player is just as convincing with thundering orchestral strings and brass, making a great job of Bernstein's recording of Mahler's Symphony No 5 and it has the definition to unravel the instrumental strands in the Kronos Quartet's disc of Phillip Glass string quartets... It's that that makes it special - and this is a very special player indeed."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | November 1999

The 60 Watt Cyrus 7 is a powerful integrated amplifier and system controller that can be upgraded in many directions. This flexible unit will form the cornerstone of your system and provide access into Cyrus' Audio Visual and Multiroom systems.

"This is a fabulous amplifier. It's fast, punchy and has bags of power on tap but crucially delivers huge sackfuls of subtlety when the music requires. Some of the other amplifiers in this group may be better with particular genres of music but as an all-rounder it takes some beating."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | November 1999

CD Selection

Arcam DIVA CD72	£399.95
Arcam FMJ CD23	£1099.95
Linn Genki	£994.95
Linn Ikemi	£1949.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature	£499.95
Meridian 588	£1799.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista 3D	£2959.95
Roksan Kandy CD	£494.95
Roksan Caspian CD	£894.95
Sony SCD-XA333ES SACD	£1199.95
Sony CDP-XE510	£129.95

Sevenoaks Pricing Policy

see page five for details

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 17th October 2001, E3/OE.





Amplifier Selection

Arcam DiVA A65 Integrated Amplifier	£379.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Integrated Amplifier	£449.95
Arcam FMJ A22 Integrated Amplifier	£999.95
Linn Wakonda Pre Amplifier	£794.95
Linn LK140 Power Amplifier	£749.95
Musical Fidelity A3 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A300 Power Amplifier	£2199.95
Roksan Kandy Integrated Amplifier	£494.95
Roksan Caspian MKII Integrated Amplifier	£794.95
Tag McLaren 60i Integrated Amplifier	£499.95



DiVA CD92 CD Player **£849.95**
 DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier **£749.95**

ARCAM *Arcam's quest for higher performance, has led to the development of the new DiVA series, the most complete range of high performance home entertainment equipment ever launched by a specialist audio manufacturer. Innovative design and production techniques have enabled Arcam to build on established values of excellent sound quality and value.*

The DiVA series comprises, two CD Players, three Integrated Amplifiers, two Power Amplifiers, a Digital and an Analogue Tuner, a high performance DVD Player and Arcam's first Home Cinema Receiver. All models are available in either silver or black.



CDMTM1NT

CDMTMNT Series

The CDMTMNT series from B&W combines the unbeatable sound purity of their highly acclaimed Nautilus 800 Series and the classic looks of their predecessors, the CDM SE. Complete in both looks and sound quality, this is one of B&W's finest loudspeaker ranges to date. The CDMTMNT Series is available in a choice of beautifully finished real wood veneers.



CDMTM1NT Speakers **£749.95** *excluding stands*

"Positioned well clear of room boundaries and slightly toed-in, the CDM 1NTs perform superbly. They have an open and dynamic sound that simply draws the listener into the music. Play a song such as *Hard Times* from Courtney Pine's *Back In The Day* album and the way that these speakers communicate the emotions of the performers is mesmerising." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | December 2000

CDM NT Series:

CDM 7NT £1249.95, CDM 9NT £1799.95, CDM CNT Centre £399.95 and CDM SNT Surround £749.95



Super Audio CD is a superior performance format, developed by Philips and Sony, the original inventors of the Compact Disc.

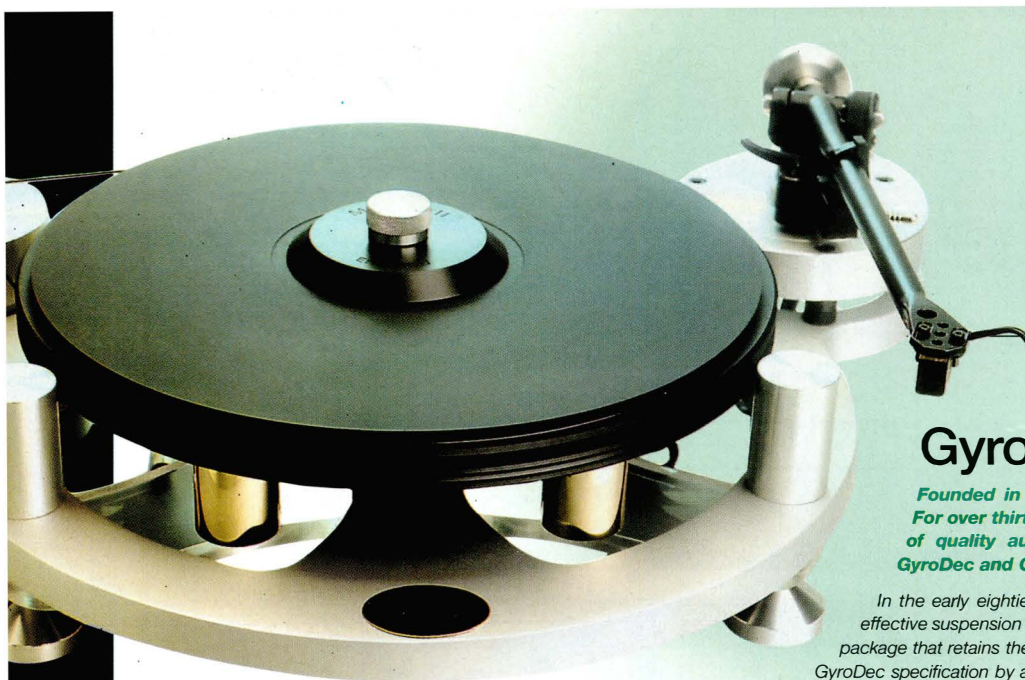
New Dual Layer SACD Discs will facilitate a seamless transition to the benefits of the new format, although SACD is fully compatible with existing CD software.

The very latest processing technology used in SACD will allow recorded music to be reproduced at a much higher level.

SONY **Region 2** DVP-NS700 SACD & DVD Player **£369.95**

"In typical Sony fashion, the *DVP-NS700V* boasts excellent set-up displays and a fine remote handset. Connections are a little more complex than the norm, because of the player's extra features, but once wired and fired, the Sony delivers fine pictures. Colours are vivid, the burned yellows and oranges of *Con Air's* Nevada desert being particularly good. Movie audio performance is fine, too, with a muscular bass, although the best option is to use a digital connection for movie audio, and the six-channel analogue for SACD. As you'd expect, it's the Sony's music reproduction that most impresses. With Zero 7 on the CD, the Sony has warm bass and fine imaging, while with Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* on multichannel SACD, it sounds quite spectacular." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | September 2001





J A Michell Gyro SE Turntable **£974.95**

Founded in Borehamwood by mechanical engineer John Michell. For over thirty years, Michell Engineering have been at the forefront of quality audio, with world-wide appreciated products like the GyroDec and Orbe Turntables.

In the early eighties, the revolutionary GyroDec Turntable, with its elegant and effective suspension system, was introduced. The Gyro SE is a smaller and cheaper package that retains the classy sound of the GyroDec and can be upgraded to the full GyroDec specification by adding a plinth and dustcover. Price includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm

"The beautifully engineered Gyro SE not only looks the part but has a wonderfully clean and fluid sound." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | July 1999

MONITOR AUDIO Gold Reference

Monitor Audio has been designing and manufacturing high quality British Loudspeakers since 1972. In the mid-eighties, the R852MD was launched utilising Monitor Audio's unique C-CAM™ Metal Dome Tweeter. It sounded significantly smoother and more musical than its rivals and formed the basis for a whole new generation of Monitor Audio Loudspeakers. The company has been at the forefront of Loudspeaker technology ever since.

The new Gold Reference Series introduces advanced Drive Unit technology and the highest standards of engineering currently available. Each cabinet is hand crafted from 22mm thick MDF, using mirror matched veneers. Multiple internal bracing is positioned at critical resonance nodes to eliminate flexing and audible cabinet artifacts.

GR20 Speakers **£1499.95**

"Monitor Audio has made an immensely accomplished pair of speakers in the **Gold Reference 20**. In sonic and physical terms there is little to criticise; even the price is highly competitive. We have no choice but to recommend them highly." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | March 2001

GR10 Ex-Stands **£799.95**

"We like the GR10s a lot: Monitor Audio has long been making beautifully upmarket standmounters, and this new model is no disappointment." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | August 2001



A3 CD Player **£799.95** Integrated Amplifier **£849.95**

A3 CD Player "OK, so not everyone will be drawn to the styling, but when it comes to turning on the sonic fireworks, few players come even close at this price... A class act and a worthy winner." What Hi-Fi? | Awards 2000

A3 Amplifier "The A3 does a wonderful trick of conveying a great romantic sweep of music while at the same time delivering as much internal detail as anyone could possibly want... This is an amplifier capable of performing well beyond its price. We guarantee you won't be disappointed." What Hi-Fi? | Awards 2000



Turntables, Tuners and Recorders

Arcam DIVA T51 Tuner	£799.95
Arcam DIVA T81 DAB Tuner	£649.95
Linn LP12/Basik/Akito Turntable	£1749.95
Marantz DR6000 CD Recorder	£399.95
Pioneer MJ-D508 MiniDisc	£179.95
Pioneer PDR609 CD Recorder	£199.95
Project Debut Phono Turntable	£139.95
Sony MDS-JE770 Mini Disc	£229.95
Videologic DRX601ES DAB Tuner	£349.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cass/Deck	£219.95

MUSICAL FIDELITY





Loudspeaker Selection

B&W DM303	£179.95
B&W CM4	£894.95
Cyrus CLS70	£799.95
KEF Q35.2	£349.95
Linn Ninka	£894.95
Mission M74	£299.95
Mission 780	£299.95
Mission 782	£699.95
Monitor Audio Silver 8i	£699.95
Ruark Epilogue Reference	£394.95

Sevenoaks Pricing Policy
see page five for details

MISSION

782 bases its performance on a 165mm Nomex bass unit fitted to a reflex enclosure ensuring excellent low frequency extension from a graceful and compact cabinet.

783 houses a larger 200mm bass unit with massive motor system, capable of floor shaking, yet tightly controlled low frequency extension. Both use Keraform midrange drivers for outstanding clarity and midrange detail coupled to superb dynamic range together with Mission's silk dome tweeter.

780 and **781** are the pinnacle of Mission's research into creating a three dimensional soundstage, extensive bandwidth and dynamic range from the smallest possible cabinet dimensions. The **780** is diminutive in form but massive in its sonic capabilities. Its 130mm Keraform bass unit is carefully matched to a novel reflex enclosure for full bodied bass extension, the qualities of Keraform produce a dynamic and ultra detailed midrange. In the **781** a 165mm Keraform driver takes advantage of a larger, stand mount cabinet to extend bass performance and increase efficiency whilst maintaining that superb midband transparency and finely detailed treble.

"Mission has the reputation for making some of the best affordable loudspeakers in the business, and the **780s** prove they sure haven't lost the knack." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | Awards 2000



TOSHIBA SD900E DVD Audio Region 2 £999.95



while its DVD-Audio capability will come into its own when the DVD-Audio discs start rolling in. It could even be considered a bargain as you are getting a top-notch DVD player with a high-end CD player thrown in." Home Cinema Choice | March 2001

"It's the DVD-Audio capability that is of most interest here though. The high-resolution format is able to store studio quality audio recorded at 192kHz/24-bit stereo, or up to 96kHz/24-bit in multichannel mode. This means potentially far greater realism than is possible with regular CD. There is still little DVD-A material currently available, but our modest collection of discs sounded-superb on this player..."



TAG McLaren

DVD32R DVD Player £3999.95
AV32R AV Processor £2299.95

DVD32R DVD Player "Once bedded in, the DVD32R adds further credence to the argument that DVD players have come of age. This is an excellent player: it handles music with an agility and confidence that belies its video heritage, delivering complex pieces with verve and energy. It handles movies superbly too. Colours exhibit a solid sense of naturalness and energy, while blacks are dense, deep and accurate. The crisp edge definition of *Chicken Run*'s 3D-animation works especially well. This TAG McLaren has been well worth the wait. It looks good, it's beautifully made and it's very easy to live with and use. Performance in all areas is well up to par, and it's fine CD machine. Even at the price, this is an enticing DVD player." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? | February 2001

AV32R Processor "Shift to stereo, and your ears will be seduced by some of the sweetest-sounding DACs fitted to a home cinema processor. The result is a real hi-fi sound that can hold its head up next to pricey stereo-only designs - bravo! Throw in beautifully clear and logical set-up procedures, plus software-upgradeable processing to take in new tweaks as they're developed, and you've a long-term proposition that makes real sense. Not cheap, then, but a class product." What Hi-Fi? | Awards 1999



AV Processors/Amps/Receivers
Best Buy £501 plus

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who are sevenoaks?

Founded as Sevenoaks Hi-Fi in the summer of 1972, the original shop, in the market town of Sevenoaks, Kent, quickly gained a reputation for offering a wide range of products at competitive prices, and providing excellent service.

Exciting new technologies like compact disc, meant that throughout the 1980's there was considerable interest in hi-fi and Sevenoaks were able to grow. By 1990, the company was established as one of the leading independent hi-fi specialists in the country.

More stores were opened and a number of the original shops were relocated. In 1995 the important decision was made to change the name to Sevenoaks Sound & Vision, reflecting the wide appeal of new audio visual products.

After twenty-nine years of trading, the company has more than forty outlets nationwide, and is for many of the UK's leading manufacturers of electronics and loudspeakers, their largest and most successful retailer.

The people at Sevenoaks appreciate that customers have a choice. This appreciation has meant that over the years Sevenoaks have had to adapt.

As new products and technologies have arrived, the staff have been trained to ensure that they can explain the issues, simply and informatively.

This orientation to customer service remains, and the implementation of a company charter is one example of this commitment.

By staying true to the original ideals of offering a wide range of the latest products, at competitive prices, and providing superb service in pleasant surroundings, Sevenoaks are able to listen, recommend, demonstrate and supply the products that best suit the needs of their many customers.



As the world becomes a more complex place and people search for entertainment and relaxation, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision believe that whatever the requirement, they have the solution.

solutions



sevenoaks sound & vision



DVD Video is a great way of enjoying movies at home

solutions brochure

Available in-store, our Solutions brochure explains many of the latest issues from Projection systems to conventional Hi-Fi separates. An on-line version is also available on our Website.

stock clearance

With more than forty outlets nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As technology delivers improvements in performance, so individual models and product ranges are changed or superseded. The preceding models are made available at a reduced price, for clearance. Visit our Website for an up-to-date list of the clearance stock, listed by outlet, within the Sevenoaks Sound and Vision group.

sevenoaks pricing policy

Whilst we do not claim always to be the cheapest, we try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. Take into account the expert advice, unrivalled product selection, demonstration facilities and excellent pre, during and after sales service and the lower price might not look such good value.

In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention. We will always endeavour to offer you the best deal.



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installation centres

With the development of the various DVD formats, digital satellite broadcasts and the increased potential of home cinema products in a domestic environment, the level of expertise required to specify and correctly install a full system has increased.

Each Sevenoaks outlet can advise on installation, system calibration and remote programming.

The stores in **Bristol**, **Edinburgh**, **Manchester** and **Sevenoaks** have been appointed as Installation Centres, because of their level of expertise in these areas and their THX certification.

These outlets offer a wide range of products in each category. Widescreen television, plasma monitors and both CRT and DLP front projection systems, deliver the all important vision element of home cinema.

A selection of the finest audio visual processors, amplifiers and receivers can be matched with specially designed loudspeakers. Fully programmable remote systems can command the automation of a home cinema system, whilst neat touch-pads can control music all around the house.

Each Installation Centre is able to provide a complete service, including the manufacture and supply of 'bespoke' furniture designed to complement the decor of the room into which it is being placed.

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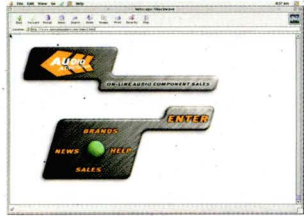
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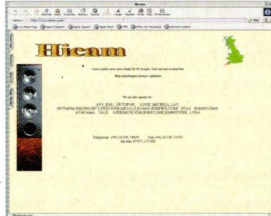
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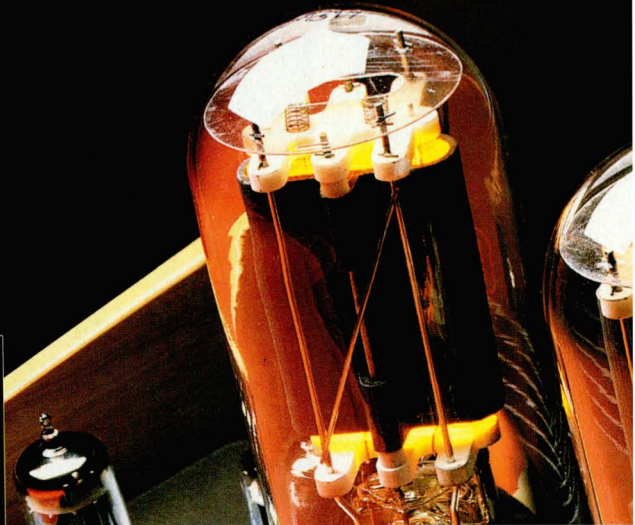
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	●	100	189
	Tact Millennium MkII	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	500	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000L replacement	6				●	60	189
	TAG McLaren 60iRv	1,000	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	●	60	184
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			●		65	196
R	Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			●		50	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
	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-A808	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
	Thule IA60B	700	Dry, edgy and glassy sounding amplifier, though the balanced input may appeal to some.	6			●		60	214
R	Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5					50	186
	Tube Technology Unisis Sig	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	●				30	202
	Yamaha AX-496	240	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough	6			●	●	85	208
	Yamaha AX-596	300	Clean, agile and lean this amplifier isn't. Bold and powerful, however, it certainly is.	5	●		●	●	100	217
R	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6			●		50	214

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	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/8A II	1,098	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6					55	187
R	Arcam Alpha 9C/10P	1,000	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1					60	165
	Audio Note M Zero/P Zero	998	Neat shoe box-size components. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5					8	191
R	AudioNote M2Phono/P2SE	3,198	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	4	●				18	216
EC	Audio Research LS25 NT100	11,489	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/NT100 MkII)	6	●				100	216
EC	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
	Bow Technologies Warlock/Walrus	6,490	Heavyweight dual mono pairing with superb build and rich, refined sound	5			●		150	216
R	Bryston BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	8			●	●	120	212
	Cary CAD 2A3SE	1,575	Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency	1					5	196
	Chord SPM-4000	8,500	Sound is as stylish as its appearance is bold. Probably one of the best amps you are likely to hear	1					410	202
BB	Creek P43R/A52SE	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine valve preamp.	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Creek P43R/A43	1,148	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●		140	212
	Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1					50	181
R	Crimson CS610/CS630	1,250	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited. Slimline monoblocks with grunt and finesse	3	●	●			100	187
BB	Croft Vitali/series 5C	1625	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	3	●				30	216
	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
	Cyrus aCA7/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners, recommended	7				●	60	212
	Cyrus aCA7/aPA7	2,694	Low feedback power amp design that's a positive departure from the transistor norm, preamp is functional but not as impressive	5			●	●	150	190
	Cyrus aCA7/PSX-R/aPA7	2950	Very stylish 4-box modular system, slight forwardness delivers oodles of clarity and detail	7			●	●	150	216
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●				191
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
R	Densen Beat 200/300	1,850	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote L300 extra)	6	OPT			OPT	100	216
BB	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3250	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful broad-band transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	6			●		120	216
EC	Gamut D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and timing (balanced only). Formerly Sirius	1					200	183
EC	Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	LFD Mistral Linestage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	Linn Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully tuned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all Linn system	9	●	●			62	212
	Michell Orca/Alecto mono	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6			●		100	187
R	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1					100	155
	Moth 30 Active LS/60 Stereo	948	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp, power amp lacks finesse and control, however	4					60	165
	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-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness (tested with X-A200 power amp)	6	●		●			200
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
	Myryad MA120	450	Based on M120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with M120	1					60	165
R	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
R	NAD 114	270	Beer-budget preamp which sounds focused, detailed and consistent	6	●	●		●		165
R	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power	7					200	200
EC	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,375	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	6			●		50	213
	Naim NAC112/NAP150/FLATCAP 2	1,800	Adding a FLATCAP 2 brings a very worthwhile sonic upgrade to the basic NAC112/NAP150 combo	6			●		50	213
	Naim NAC102/NAP180	2,122	More of a 'character act' than a neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of subtlety	6			●		60	200
EC	Naim NAP500	10,000	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading edge definition	1					140	208
	Quad QC-twenty four/II-forty	4,000	A classic valve amplifier in circuitry and sound, but with modern ingredients and gorgeous retro styling	7					40	213
R	Rega Hal/Exon	2,194	Passive line stage dedicated to Exon monoblock power amps, bold outgoing, in-command sound	6	●	●	●		125	165
BB	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
	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
BB	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1448	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	6					10	216
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia - precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●		201
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184
	Talk Hurricane 2L/Tornado 2	1,249	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6					65	165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●					188
	Technics SU-C1010	300	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less	6	●		●			200
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1					100	187
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
	Unison Research S8	2,950	Outrageous Italian styling and an equally melodramatic sound, with splendid voice projection and tension	5				VOL	24	216

PHONO STAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Symphono	740	Slightly inconsistent balance mars the performance of this lively performer	0		●				201
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character	0		●				189
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough	0	●					189
	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
BB	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, in any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage	0	●	●				189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too	0	●					189
R	Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	0	●	●				201
R	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer	0	●	●				201
R	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	0	●	●				201
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
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components	0	●	●				189
R	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any LP	0		●				201

AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR100	800	A solid sounding and well-engineered A/V amp with an affordable price tag. Good with music and well suited to smaller rooms	6			●	●	70	215
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P	2,500	Packed with a diversity of electronics that against engineering odds sounds extremely good	5			●	●	110	198
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema - what more can you want?	7			●	●	100	210
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights. Currently lacks 5.1 input for DVD-A/SACD	6			●	●	120	219
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multi-channel solution for music fans	4			●		N/A	201
	Cyrus AV5/SmartPower	2,650	Refined, detailed and attractive, but ultimately lacking in balls.	3			●	●	60	210
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multi-channel sound	4			●	●	75	198
R	Denon AVR-3801	800	Well-endowed, sharply priced receiver is also a musical high roller.	8	●		●	●	105	217
BB	Denon AVC-A10SE	1,200	State of the art sound quality, a strong feature set and reasonable pricing. What more could you want?	11	●		●	●	125	210
BB	Denon AVC-A1SE	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally and home with music and film soundtracks	12	●		●	●	170	215
	Kenwood KRF-V7773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music.	10	●		●	●	120	210
	Kenwood KRF-V9993D	1,300	Complex amp that rocks with home cinema but loses out with music	7	●		●	●	110	215
BB	Marantz SR-5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR-7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with 2-channel music and multichannel AV.	9			●	●	100	210
	Marantz SR-14EX Mk2	3,250	A weighty beast, with 7.1 processing but only five channels of amplification as standard. Highly capable with both music and movies, but rather costly all-in-all	8			●	●	140	215
	Myral Fidelity HTP/HT600	3,998	A very well matched pairing with considerable musical talents	8			●	●	100	207
	Myriad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,800	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●	●	120	215
BB	NAD T760	650	More than adequate home cinema receiver that unusually doesn't muck up the music	7			●	●	60	210
	Nakamichi AV-10	1,000	A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set-up with a civilised and subtle performance	4			●	●	140	198
	Onkyo TX-DS787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver.	7	●		●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unobtrusive.	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSA-E08	1,300	THX circuitry gives home cinema material a boost, but this is not an obvious first choice for music.	10	●		●	●	100	210
	Primare P30/A30.5	3,700	No 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD but capable of almost uncomfortable realism with real solidity and drive	8			●	●	120	210
R	Roksan DSP/5 ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels.	4			●	●	80	210
	Rotel RSX-972	1,000	Not the brightest tool in the Rotel toolbox, and pricing is surely rather optimistic too.	8			●	●	75	217
R	Rotel RSP-976/RMB-1075	1,700	A potent and enjoyable two-box beast that gets to the heart of both music and movie sound	8			●	●	120	215
R	Rotel RSP-985/RPB-985 MkII	2,400	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	3			●	●	130	198
	Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	2,300	Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	5			●	●	110	198
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all rounder 9	9			●	●	100	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,749	A flexible A/V processor, unusually good with music. Would form the heart of a top-class multichannel system in standard or 7-channel 'EX' form	6			●	●		215
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Technics SE-A1010/SU-C1010 x3	1,350	A preamp plus three stereo amps provide a six-channel A/V solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6			●	●	70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music.	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210

CABLES



SPECIFICATIONS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction		●	●		●			188
	Audioquest Sidewinder	40	Suppresses the sound. At this price it's a disappointment		●			●			211
R	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail	●		●		●			200
R	Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	●		●		●			211
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price		●	●		●			176

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	CABLE TYPE							ISSUE NUMBER	
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG		
	Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments	●		●		●				188
R	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●								211
	Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces			●		●				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
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	●				●				200
BB	Ecosse The Composer	29	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price		●	●		●				211
	Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)	●				●				176
	Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness			●						176
R	Insert Audio Image 5.1	85	Very good detail and imaging: perhaps a touch bass-light		●	●		●				200
BB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●		●				211
	Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though	●		●		●				176
	Ixos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price	●		●		●				200
BB	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	●		●		●				176
	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 SS35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic		●	●		●				188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy		●	●		●				211
R	Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price		●	●		●				211
R	Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness			●				●		176
R	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables			●		●				211
BB	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value			●		●				176
R	QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	●		●		●				188
R	QED Qnex Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds	●		●		●				200
	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
BB	SonicLink Whisper (Silver Pink)	45	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	●		●		●				176
	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	●		●		●				188
	SonicLink Violet	95	Better bass than treble — a little dry in the upper octaves	●		●		●				200
R	Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss		●	●		●				176
R	Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable		●	●		●				188
	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable	●		●		●				200
BB	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
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material	●		●		●				200
BB	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value	●		●		●				200
BB	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent		●	●		●				188
R	van den Hul Source HB	65	Price for 0.8m. Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness		●	●		●				160
R	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack	●		●		●				200

DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		●			E 207
	Chord Optilink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslink leads								O 207
	Ixos 1051-100	39.95	Plenty of bass, and detail seems good, but there's a loss of involvement			●		●			E 207
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		●			E 207
R	Ross OP004	19.99	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value								O 207
	SonicLink Digital Optical	30	Possibly slightly more detailed than other opticals, but still no match for a decent electrical digital link								O 207

Connections



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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes		●		●		●	F	207
R	van den Hul Optocoupler	49.95	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types							O	207

LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●		●			●		183
	Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical					●			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	●			●		●		133
R	Audioquest Slate	15	Capable across the board, with just the smallest degree of dryness, but very listenable	●			●	●			203
R	Bandritz LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings			●					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			●		●	●		157
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices	●				●	●		203
	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
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area	●		●		●	●		203
BB	DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire				●	●			133
	Ecosse Reference CS-2.15	12	Stereo and rhythm are good, but persistent dryness detracts significantly	●			●	●	●		215
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere - one of the best cables available all round				●	●	●		203
	Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	●		●		●	●		168
BB	Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value			●		●	●		157
R	Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative			●		●	●		157
R	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	●			●	●	●		168
BB	Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent			●		●	●		203
R	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant - though only slightly	●				●	●		192
BB	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right		●		●				192
R	Kimber 4VS	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	●		●		●	●		183
R	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas			●		●	●		168
BB	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair			●		●	●		203
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unsubtle music - can be dry and edgy			●		●	●		183
	Monster Cable Z1	12.50	Slightly bass-rich balance, and could do with a bit more detail			●		●	●		215
	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
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	●		●		●	●		203
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board				●	●	●		203
	Puresonic 78 45	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	●		●		●	●		157
	QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel	●		●		●	●		157
BB	QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		●	●		192
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding			●		●	●		168
R	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid-back, but good tone and detail - wears its achievements lightly					●	●		215
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging: good, but not the best at its price	●		●		●	●		203
	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			●		●	●		157
R	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plenty of bass	●		●		●	●		203
R	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together	●		●		●	●		157
	SonicLink AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details	●		●		●	●		192
BB	SonicLink Rebel	7.50	Plenty of bass, but without sacrificing upper frequency clarity or dynamics	●		●		●	●		215
	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style			●		●	●		203
	Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music			●		●	●		192
BB	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience			●		●	●		183
	Supra Classic 6.0	4.95	It's all there, but a persistent lack of detail seriously mars the view			●		●	●		215
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	Supra Ply 3.4/S	7.95	Good in all areas with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		●	●		203
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues - and very minor vices - across the board			●		●	●		183
R	Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable			●		●	●		215
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail				●	●	●		203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●		●		●	●		203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	●			●	●	●		203
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance			●		●	●		215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass			●		●	●		203
	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music	●		●		●	●		215

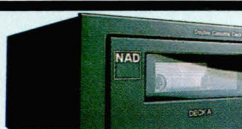
MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered				●	●	●	PLT	218
	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others				●	●	●		218
	Audiosource bbc	48	Very good value, extremely sharp detailing - maybe too sharp			●		●	●	PLT	218
BB	Audusa Eupen CSA	48	Reasonable cost, outstanding performance and a strong recommendation			●		●	●		218

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Accurate Power Gen	1,090	Compact and beautifully finished unit that offers positive sonic benefits that justify the price								206
	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound								206
R	LAT AC-2	99	Excellent clarity, music sounds clean and easy to follow - enthusiastic recommendation		●	●		●			218
R	Lynwood Electronics Mega Power	295	Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass								206
	Maplin Bowthorpe ASC 431	50	Excellent mains purifying abilities - including other equipment used elsewhere in the house (Maplin code BJ84F)			●		●			218
	Olson Sound Fantastic	80	Reasonable price, superior build quality - all in all, a bit of a bargain			●		●			218
R	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality								206
R	Russ Andrews Kimber Power Kord	70	Impressively detailed and crisp, choice of connectors can make even more difference					●	●		218
BR	Russ Andrews Kimber/Power Block	350	Improved version that elevates music to a cleaner and more three-dimensional experience with greater stereo imagery								206
	Russ Andrews The Purifier	250	More ambitious version of the Silencer that gives a cleaner, quieter background, allowing more low level detail								206
BR	Russ Andrews Silencer	40	A cost effect solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy								206
	SonicLink SG Power	80	Bright, open and detailed with sweet and natural treble frequencies			●		●	PLT		218
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise								206
R	Synergistic Res. Master Coupler	238	Absolutely outstanding performance, but extremely expensive					●	●		218
R	Trichord Research Powerblock500	300	Isolation transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound								206

CASSETTE DECKS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY BX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	ISSUE NUMBER
BR	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●		●			●		●	158
R	Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass								●	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	●		●		●	●			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	●		●					●	146
R	Pioneer CT-5550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●	●				●		164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●		●		●	●		●	171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest 3-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●		●	●					184
BR	Technics RS-AZ6	200	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7; clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head	●		●	●				●	164
BR	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-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●	●					●	171

CD PLAYERS

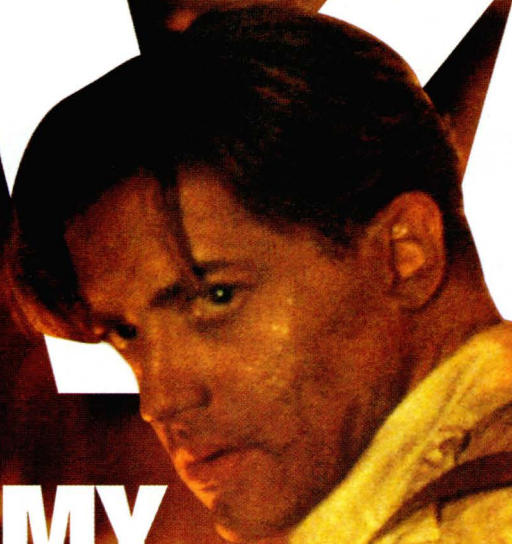


SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Advantage CD15	3,995	A CD player of some stature - what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●	●		●	●	●			193
	Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere		●								190
R	Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●									169
	AMC CD8A	150	Has balanced output, but is otherwise rather grey and unremarkable			●		●	●				172
BR	AMC CD9/DAC8	200	Beer-budget two-box system (player plus DAC) is smooth, attractive and easy on the ear	●		●							179
	Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●							●		178
BR	Arcam Alpha 7SE	300	Sharper, clearer Alpha 7 SE, and more affordable than before	●									207
	Arcam CD72	400	Easy going, slightly soft-centred reworking of Alpha 7 in new, svelte DIVA clothing	●									212
R	Arcam Alpha MCD	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	●							●		178
BR	Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●		●							176
R	ArcaAlpha 9	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	●									188
R	Arcam CD92	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●		●							212
R	Arcam FMJ CD23	1,100	World class presentation allied with innovative technology to deliver an engaging standard of music making	●		●	●	●					206
	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●									191
	Audio Note AN-CD1	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	●									188
	Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system fussy	●									195
	AVI S2000MC2	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-yr-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	●									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	●									169
	Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●				●		●			194
	Cambridge Audio D100	120	Hard, clanky and coloured sounding, and with suspect control logic	●									200
BR	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use	●		●							202
R	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	230	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness	●		●							217
R	Copland CDA 266	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●									176
	Copland CDA 289	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●									194
R	Cymbal CDP12	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●							●		176
R	Cyrus dAD1.5	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●									191
R	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks	●									212
R	Cyrus dAD3 Q24	900	Bold, lean and lively player demands sympathetic system matching	●		●							200

WHAT

DVD



DVD

THE MUMMY RETURNS



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ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASX/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor			●			●				191
R	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems			●			●	●			200
R	Denon DCD-835	230	Refined sound with terrific bass extension. Some slight coloration			●			●	●			217
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player			●			●	●			179
	Densen B-400	1,280	Bold, purposeful sound, but lacks subtlety, and has some ergonomic flaws			●			●	●			212
	EZO Fog Stage 3	1,170	Curious player is difficult to drive, and has sound quality that both enchants and sometimes confounds			●			●				212
R	Kenwood DVF-3030	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features			●			●	●			207
BB	Kenwood DP-4090	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music — and has CD Text too			●			●	●			172
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	800	Kenwood's first DVD-A player suffers from a mild compression of dynamics resulting in a polite yet matter of fact sound			●	●	●	●	●	●		206
R	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright sounding player with strong multi-room appeal			●			●	●			212
	Marantz CD5000	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times			●			●	●			202
	Marantz CC3000	150	Ragged sounding multidisc player, but it is cheap and well equipped			●			●	●	●		204
BB	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too			●			●	●			207
BB	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context — a real bargain			●			●	●			217
BB	Marantz CD6000 KI Signature	500	Excellent all rounder, a well appointed good value package			●			●	●			212
R	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new found bounce in its step			●		●	●	●			206
R	Marantz CD-17KI Sig	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland			●			●	●			176
R	Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure			●			●	●			194
EC	Marantz SA-1	5,000	The brand's first SACD player is a stunning machine that's equally as strong with conventional CD			●			●	●	●		208
R	Meracus Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics — but it's not cheap			●			●	●			169
BB	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed			●			●	●			176
	Monrio Asty	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF			●			●	●			200
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player			●			●	●			184
BB	Musical Fidelity A3 CD	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of HF detail			●			●	●			200
	Myryad T-10	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings			●			●	●			184
	Myryad T-20	600	Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems			●			●	●			195
	Myryad MCD 600	1,299	Abundance of detail and resolution from this 'Super DAC' CD player			●			●	●			220
R	NAD C520	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull			●			●	●			202
	NAD C521	200	Good timing and excitement, but not good at holding the listener's attention			●			●	●			217
	NAD 523	250	Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test, so was the absence of a digital output			●			●	●	●		204
	NAD C540	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression			●			●	●			200
R	NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear			●	●	●	●	●			195
R	Naim Audio CD5	1,120	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses			●			●	●			212
R	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging			●			●	●	●		204
EC	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			●			●	●			188
R	Onkyo DX-7222	150	Competitive following recent price cut, and on the whole a strong performer musically			●			●	●			200
	Onkyo DX-7511	300	Earthbound mid-price CD player fails to excite			●			●	●			207
	Parasound C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred			●			●	●			184
	Philips CD751	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie			●			●	●			172
BB	Philips SACD-1000	1,299	Not quite a universal disc player, but it does SACD multi-channel, DVD-Video and CD to a universally high standard			●			●	●	●		220
	Pioneer PD-5507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled			●			●	●			191
	Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly			●			●	●			188
	Revox Exception E426	2,250	Very stylish with a light, agile sound that extends superbly and has fine timing			●			●	●			182
	Roksan Kandy	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes			●			●	●			200
	Roksan Caspian	895	Improved Caspian (retested for 2001) is still bold, dynamic player, but rather more subtle and expressive			●			●	●			212
	Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped-down RCD-971 — buy the original			●			●	●			191
BB	Rotel RCD-971	450	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must			●			●	●			184
R	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability			●	●		●	●			212
	Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction			●			●	●			163
	Sharp DX-SX1	2,700	Stylish player with a slightly forward but extremely nimble sound. Connects to matching digital amp via dedicated umbilical			●			●	●	●		211
R	Sony CDP-XE330	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable			●			●	●			202
	Sony CDP-XE530	140	Well equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight			●			●	●			200
BB	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles			●			●	●			195
R	Sony DVP-NS700V	380	Outrageously good value for money, though SACD replay quality trails the similarly priced Sony SCD-XB770ES			●			●	●	●		220
BB	Sony SCD-XB770ES	400	Expressive and expansive player in the best SACD tradition, but CD replay is disappointingly lacklustre			●			●	●			220
BB	Sony SCD-555ES	1,200	Fabulously built with superb sound using both CD and Super Audio software, you'll be hard pressed to find a better CD player at the price			●			●	●			213
EC	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but there's not much competition and limited software as yet			●			●	●	●		194
	T+A CD1210R	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters			●			●	●			188
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1	550	Entry level upgradeable Talk Electronics player sounds slightly muted			●			●	●			200
	Talk Electronics Thunder 2	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradable in various ways			●			●	●			191
	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and availability of a complete upgrade path make this a good long term proposition			●			●	●			195
R	TAG McLaren CD20R	1,249	Dry and atmospheric, but plenty of presence — recommended with caution			●			●	●			188
	Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills			●			●	●			176
	Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility			●			●	●			195
	Technics SL-PG390	90	It's very cheap. Very, very cheap			●			●	●			202
	Technics SL-PS7	200	Strong, but ultimately rather opaque and hard-sounding, high tech CD player			●			●	●			207
R	Technics SL-MC7	300	Maximum storage capacity for a minimum price, and presentable sound too (multidisc)			●			●	●	●		204
	Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent			●			●	●			188
	Trichord Genesis	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority			●			●	●			169
	Trichord Revelation	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well			●			●	●			166
	Tube Technology Fusion MkII	1,350	Improvements over the original model but still remains too inconsistent for its own good			●			●	●			206
	Tube Technology Fulcrum	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre			●			●	●			194
	Yamaha CDX-596	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW			●			●	●			207
	Yamaha CDX-496	180	A rather splashy and approximate sound, further hampered by mechanical noise			●			●	●			217
	Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong			●			●	●			184
	YBA Spécial	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid			●			●	●			195

DIGITAL RECORDERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MINIDISCS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	FORMAT	PORTABLE	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XM-448	220	An hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	MD		●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	MD		●	●	205
R	Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	MD		●	●	191
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Midi-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	MD		●		177
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that deserves its recommendation due to price	MD		●	●	205
	Sharp MDR3H	300	Nifty machine combining a 3-disc CD changer with a MD recorder. Sound on both is rather below par, though	MD		●	●	184
R	Sony MDS-JA55ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	MD		●	●	205

CD RECORDERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	FORMAT	PORTABLE	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Denon CDR-1000	339	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	CD		●	●	218
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	CD		●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR-20	499	High jitter player makes quite good recordings that sound less good when played back internally, especially when using the internal record capable transport	CD		●	●	218
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	CD		●	●	218
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, rattly build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	CD-R(W)		●		205
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
BB	Marantz DR6000	400	Classy CD-R/RW recorder is also a classy CD player, in contrast to most CD recorders	CD		●	●	218
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
BB	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
BB	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well equipped, well priced CD-R/RW deck	CD		●	●	218
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	250	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	CD		●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	CD		●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	CD-R(W)		●	●	205
	Yamaha CDR-D561	449	Twin CD-R/RW burner makes solid, believable discs, but is priced higher than equivalent models from elsewhere	CD		●	●	218

HEADPHONES



SPECIFICATIONS

HEADPHONES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain		●	●	●	●	190 32	●	219
R	AKG K100	36	Leather clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		●	●	●	●	190 100	●	205
	AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight			●	●	●	230 100	●	194
	AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt			●	●	●	240 600	●	186
R	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●	●	●	250 66	●	194
R	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phone			●	●	●	250 60	●	186
	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass			●	●	●	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			●	●	●	210 40	●	186
	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite			●	●	●	245 250	●	205
R	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor			●	●	●	200 250	●	172
BB	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads			●	1/2	●	295 250	●	186
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable		●	●	●	●	120 32	●	172
BB	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●	●	●	●	200 32	●	194
R	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality		●	●	●	●	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		●	●	●	●	200 32	●	163
	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design		●	●	●	●	200 32	●	205
	JVC HA-G77	40	Too coloured for general recommendation, and lacking detail			●	●	●	260 32	●	219
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design		●			●	165 1/8	●	172
R	JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard			●	●	●	280 20,000	●	186
R	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful mid-range and high comfort factor			●	●	●	340 90	●	205
	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing			●	●	●	250 60	●	194
	Koss R/200	80	Basic sound is OK, but sensitivity is too low to be useful. Features stereo width control			●	●	●	210 60	●	219
	Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement			●	●	●	215 60	●	186
	Pricide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top			●	●	●	380 100	●	163
R	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●	●	330 32	●	219
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled mid-range and over excited bass			●	●	●	247 32	●	205
	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		●		●	●	192 1/8	●	172
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance - but detailed, and comfortable to wear			●	●	●	210 64	●	219
R	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-damping headband			●	●	●	255 150	●	172
R	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable			●	●	●	255 150	●	157
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort			●	●	●	270 120	●	205
	Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy	●		●	●	●	260 N/A		163

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed: comfortable too						250	40		219
	Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass						300	24		194
	Sony MDR-CD 2000	200	Large pads make for sweaty listening. Pure mid-tones, but weightless bass						300	32		205
	Technics RP-F500	40	Just too bright for general recommendation, though they play along with gusto						225	40		219
BB	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics						160	40		205
	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof						230	32		172
R	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way						295	50		205
EC	Stax Lambda Nova Basic	395	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence – and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards						347	N/A		163
	Vivanco SR322	30	Weak design and uncomfortable, but redeems itself with substantial sound quality						248	32		205
R	Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates						250	32		219
	Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner						210	FM		172
	Vivanco IR5800	50	Consistently musical infra-red design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven				1/2		226	I/R		172
R	Vivanco SR950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones						252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable						280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss						240	9,000		186

LOUDSPEAKERS

STEREO SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FREQ. (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Two	250	Floorstanding variation on the Aegis One theme, with a neutral, even and detailed if slightly shiny sound	19,87,24		89	8	40			201
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	Clean and capable 2.5-way budget floorstander with fine dynamic range but some mid-bass excess. Mass-loaded	19,5,93,25		90	5	25			215
	Acoustic Energy AE120SE	500	Attractive styling and good sonic headroom, but a heavy, uneven overall balance, and a difficult amp load	18,97,28		89.5	10	25			199
R	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
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone stand-mount has a generous performance envelope, but sound quality was controversial	20,33,29		90	4	22			201
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,000	Very substantial, with tuneable ABR for better room matching. Sounds good but could be more neutral	24,5,37,32		89	5	30			211
	ALR Jordan Note 7	2,500	A beguiling Anglo-German collaboration delivers metal-cone precision with fine dynamic range	25,107,32		92	4	25			196
R	AR S20	180	Classic stand-mount might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28		90	4	28			215
	AR 15	275	Neat and chunky wall/stand-mount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22,37,22		90	4	45			201
R	Arcadyis Concept 2	1,200	Solid oak floorstander is a little lazy sounding, but is well balanced and smooth with modest coloration	19,90,26		86	7	25			211
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but lightweight bass	18,38,25,5		80	8	65			192
	ATC T16	1,750	Compact active 'home studio monitor' in colourful cast box, with considerable loudness potential	27,45,33		A	A	45			214
R	ATC SCM20	2,051	Not too transparent but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		84	5	65			219
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,000	350 Watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71,6,48		A	A	38			218
	ATC SCM70A SL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46		A	A	20			205
R	Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty, compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound	18,94,21		87	6	40			164
R	Audio Note AZ1	449	A fine partner for low power valve amps it delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29		92	6	30			215
R	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large stand-mount might have throwback aesthetics but it delivers an exceptional allround sound	36,79,28		92	4	20			204
	Audio Note AN-J/SpE	1,675	Retro styling but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,58,5,24,5		90	5	38			219
R	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little underdeveloped	19,106,27		90	4	20			190
R	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30		89	4	22			180
	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
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	600	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		88	7	30			211
	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			174
R	B&W 601 S2	200	A smooth and sophisticated stand-mount combines good drive with fine neutrality	20,5,36,23		89	4	30			207
BB	B&W 602 S2	300	Large stand-mount has fine dynamic literacy and good communication skills at a very competitive price	23,5,49,29		90	5	28			201
R	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
	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing stand-mount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89	7	30			208
	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29		91	3	35			219
	B&W CDM-7NT	1,250	A very classy floorstander, in sound as well as looks, with fine bass drive, authority and overall neutrality	22,95,29		90	6	20			208
R	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		89	12	28			199
	B&W Nautilus 803	3,500	Classy looking three-way with impressively deep bass wide dynamic range and a laid-back balance	29,108,42		89	3	20			210
	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	The prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101,5,24,5		89	8	38			200
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,55		91	8	34			183
	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
R	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
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short of deep bass grunt	21,92,30		94	3	40			204
R	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
R	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-her-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50			201
	Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking standmount is a good all-rounder, commendably free from boxiness	22,42,25		91	4	30			193
R	Castle Severn 25E	700	Pretty little floorstander is lively and communicative, if a little coloured in the voice band	21,84,24		88	6	28			204
BB	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good looking too	20,96,33		89	6	50			219
	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
R	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
BB	Celestion A1	899	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35		88	6	25			164
R	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			170
R	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy looking standmount 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

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Chario Academie Millennium 1	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31		87	4	42	●	●	219
EC	Chario Academie Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●	●	190
	Cyrus CLS70	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●	●	211
	Cyrus Icon	2,500	First high end NXT speaker with huge omni-directional soundstage. But they have limited dynamics and unusual imaging	34,125,29		84	8	18	●	●	216
BB	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	●	●	174
	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	429	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
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36		93	2.5	20	●	●	204
	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding stand-mount with laid back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29		85	5	45	●	●	219
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	Expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but an aristocrat amongst the breed. Is there a better small speaker around for the price?	17,28,5,24		87	4	40	●	●	215
	Dynaudio Audience 72	1,100	Very competent in most respects, but doesn't quite grab the attention; could be more communicative	20,97,26		89	3	20	●	●	211
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,200	Stand-out performer amongst compact stand-mounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		88	3.5	45	●	●	219
R	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	●	●	167
	Elac CL102 II	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28		88	9	23	●	●	199
	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 dumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40	●	●	177
	Eltax Chroma Front	300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28		87	4	25	●	●	201
R	Elyse e:XL 25	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31		90	4	25	●	●	201
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very Pro-styling, a compact active monitor in BBC tradition - neutral, unboxy and laid-back	15,21,5,36		A	A	25	●	●	214
BB	Epos M12	429	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the E512 such a favourite. A genuine class act, sonically and aesthetically	20,38,26		86	7	40	●	●	215
	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	●	●	170
	Genelec HT206	1,400	Baby active monitor goes very loud for its size. Very neutral but a tad boxy	20,31,24		A	A	40	●	●	214
R	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	●	●	179
	Heybrook HB1	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	21,38,25		88	3	50	●	●	207
BB	Heybrook Heylette	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
BB	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
BB	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled stand-mount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23,5,36,27		89	6	25	●	●	201
	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	●	●	174
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		88	11	27	●	●	199
	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
R	Indigo Three	500	Cute 'n' chunky standmount is an entertaining communicator. Great fun, despite some sonic weirdness	23,30,5,32		86	17	24	●	●	199
BB	Infinity Alpha 30	299	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression adds up to a great value floorstander	22,86,29		89	4	30	●	●	215
	Jamo E800	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29		87	3	30	●	●	207
	Jamo D830	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24,5,38,32		88	5	30	●	●	211
BB	JBL LX2	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27		87	8	40	●	●	170
	JBL T1200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●	●	193
	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	●	●	174
R	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
	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
BB	JBL Xt140	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31		88	6	40	●	●	210
R	JMLab Electra 905	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28		90	4	40	●	●	204
	JBL JM Lab Cobalt 826	1,229	Big 3-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34		91	3	35	●	●	219
EC	JMLab Micro Utopia	2,749	Superb top-of-the-line stand-mount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		89	3	50	●	●	220
R	JMLab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47		92	4	30	●	●	186
BB	JPW ML510	130	Lots of good quality speaker for the price, but not an ideal match for cheap budget components	20,34,22		88	5	50	●	●	169
	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
R	JPW ML1010	400	A seriously substantial speaker for the price, and an obvious choice for those who like their music loud	22,5,115,40		91	6	25	●	●	170
	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
R	KEF Q15.2	200	A vigorous and entertaining compact speaker that remains particularly well aligned for close-to-wall siting	20,5,31,27		89	3	30	●	●	207
	KEF Q35.2	350	A very decent and good looking compact floorstander, but a pair of stand-mounted Q15.2s is likely to have the performance edge	21,78,5,27		90	2.5	25	●	●	215
	KEF Q55.2	500	Beefy vinyl-finished UniQ delivers loads of bass, but might have more control	21,87,29		90	4	25	●	●	210
R	KEF Reference One-Two	1,350	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	22,5,87,35		89	3	40	●	●	211
	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	30	●	●	167
R	Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26,93,28		90	4	20	●	●	167
R	Linn Kan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45	●	●	187
R	Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23		A	A	40	●	●	214
BB	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21,5,98,29		91	4	25	●	●	180
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21,5,104,27		91	8	40	●	●	218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with excellent crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	21,5,104,27		89	8	45	●	●	196
	Magnat Vintage 320	350	Loads of speaker for your money, but the sound is thick, heavy and lacking in presence and authority	25,102,30		90	4	20	●	●	201
	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
	Magnat Vintage 710	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shiny sound	20,27,42,32		90	5	25	●	●	211
R	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
	Martin-Logan Prodigy	8,967	Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	42,179,71		91	4	28	●	●	204
BB	Meridian M33	1,495	Compact active wall-mount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		A	A	45	●	●	214
	Mirage FRX7	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17,5,95,32		90	4	25	●	●	204
	Mirage OM-5	3,000	A meaty model that goes loud without distortion, digs deep with aplomb and creates plenty of depth of image	133,30,42		90	6	22	●	●	206
	Mirage OM-10-1	2,000	Tall black omni-bi-pole has plenty of bounce and dynamic vigour, but is more room sensitive than most	23,118,30		88	4	20	●	●	210
R	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	●	●	179
R	Mission 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22		86	6	45	●	●	207
BB	Mission m73	200	Sharply priced and good looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,87,5,31		88	3	25	●	●	215
	Mission 780	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16,5,28,27		86	6	40	●	●	201
R	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
R	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31		90	4	40	●	●	183

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE W/HD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Mission 782	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	16.5,82,28	●	86	9.5	25	●	●	199
R	Mission 775e	800	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short of serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	93	3	25	●	●	204
R	Mission 783	1,000	Plenty of bass weight, and a clean, articulate midrange, but the two don't quite seem to gel	20,5,97,33	●	87	5	20	●	●	211
BB	Monitor Audio Bronze 2	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all round sonic performance	18.5,35,27	●	89	3	30	●	●	207
R	Monitor Audio Bronze 3	270	Very similar to the Bronze 2, though not necessarily better. Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk	18.5,87,24	●	90	3	30	●	●	215
R	Monitor Audio Silver 5i	450	Great looking, sharply priced real wood floorstander, but bottom end lacks drive and tension	20,81,21	●	87	5	30	●	●	210
R	Monitor Audio GR20	1,500	Solid and confident design with all metal drivers and neutral if slightly uninspiring sound	20,92.5,30	●	89	6	30	●	●	212
R	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget stand-mount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25	●	87	4	45	●	●	207
BB	Naim Intro	660	Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth	24,89,27	●	89	6	30	●	●	164
R	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
EC	Naim NBL	6,648	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	89	4	20	●	●	200
R	Neat Critique 2	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24	●	86	6	20	●	●	183
BB	Neat Mystique Mk2	575	This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality, some might find the top end too insistent	20,86,18	●	85	6	23	●	●	177
R	Neat Neat Petite III	795	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,30,5,20	●	86	5	30	●	●	211
R	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
R	NHT Super Zero	200	If tiny size is top priority, the Super Zero is worth considering. It looks nice and sounds articulate, but it definitely needs a subwoofer	14,23,14	●	84	8	100	●	●	215
BB	NHT Super One	250	A fine compromise between size and performance, sensitivity and hence loudness capability is modest	18,29,5,23	●	85	8	30	●	●	170
BB	NHT 1.5	400	This compact standmount sounds much bigger than it has any right to. Good timing and communication skills	18,42,26	●	85	6	40	●	●	177
R	NHT Super Two	550	Black and shiny compact three-way floorstander has marvellously even balance and good coherence	18,5,100,26	●	87	8.5	25	●	●	199
R	Oheocha D2-Iso-5	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37	●	89	8	30	●	●	217
R	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	190
R	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	●	●	167
R	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
BB	PMC TB2	600	A worthy and prettier successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type class for neutrality and transparency	20,40,5,31	●	88	8	30	●	●	211
R	PMC LB1	999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26	●	87	6.5	40	●	●	199
BB	PMC FB1	1,275	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	88	6	20	●	●	204
R	PMC AML1	3,525	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	A	A	A	25	●	●	214
R	Polk RT16	799	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and not very pretty	22,105,39	●	91	4	22	●	●	160
R	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact stand-mount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	204
R	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
R	ProAc Reponse 1.5	1,790	Gorgeous but pricey floorstander has lovely midband voicing but limited bandwidth resolution	19,98,25	●	86	7	35	●	●	219
R	QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal standmount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●	167
R	Quad ESL-989	4,600	A very 'different' speaker experience, with magnificent midband transparency and imaging, but limited loudness capability	67,134,32	●	83	3	38	●	●	213
R	Red Rose Music R3	3,500	Compact two-way with lovely veneer and ribbon tweeter: probably the most sophisticated small speaker out there	20,40,5,26	●	87	4	46	●	●	219
R	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
R	Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	139
R	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	●	●	167
R	Roksan Ojan 3X	995	Innovative low-line, two-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	167
R	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
R	Ruark Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with classy veneer and shiny gilt fixings, hampered by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31	●	87	8	40	●	●	174
R	Ruark Prologue One R	949	Strikingly contemporary compact floorstander is well voiced but a little lean in overall balance	17,5,93,28	●	88	5	25	●	●	204
R	Ruark CL20	1,500	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	90	5	38	●	●	219
R	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
R	Sequence 400	329	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	164
R	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
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	89	4	20	●	●	211
R	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration.	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
R	Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30	●	91	8	45	●	●	196
R	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
R	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home	1,589	Classy walnut n'leather floorstander with fine engineering and lovely midband voicing	23,5,29,108	●	90	3	25	●	●	214
R	South Coast Speakers Lancelot	895	Pretty compact standmount has nice ribbon tweeter but sounds a bit soft and lacks dynamic vigour	19,36,26	●	84	8	45	●	●	199
R	Spendor 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	●	87	8	30	●	●	160
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large stand-mount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency - a genuine classic	28,55,33	●	88	8	50	●	●	219
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
BB	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	18.5,33,25	●	89	4	45	●	●	207
R	Tannoy Revolution 1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
BB	Tannoy mX3	300	A great all-round compromise at a very modest price, combining good looks with fine midband voicing	18.5,87,26	●	90	5	40	●	●	201
R	Tannoy mX4	350	Pretty 2.5-way has a clean and unboxy sound with respectable transparency, but lacks the dynamic grip and drive to make music really involving	18.5,96,26	●	89	3	20	●	●	215
BB	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
R	Tannoy Revolution R3	550	Handsome real-wood floorstander does a decent job, but lacks the evenness of its smaller R2 brother	18.5,103,28	●	89	8.5	28	●	●	199
R	Tannoy D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. And a fine all-round performer, too	24,85,23	●	87	6	26	●	●	167
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
EC	Tannoy TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
R	Tannoy Kingdom 12	6,000	Something of a throwback, but great fun, with fine dynamics and authority, but a tricky amp load	54,106,46	●	92	3	28	●	●	213
R	Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative standmount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29	●	91	4	42	●	●	193
BB	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
BB	Triangle Antal X5	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
EC	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
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid-back but very charming, and musically literate	17,97,30	●	88	7.5	25	●	●	199
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	87	6	45	●	●	212
EC	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
R	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
R	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
R	Wharfedale Pacific Pi40	500	A lot of speaker for the money, but bass is unruly, even in a large-sized room. The smaller Pi30 might give a better bottom-end balance	22,113,36	●	89	3	25	●	●	215
R	Zingali Overture 25	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy AE108S	299	Lots of loud subwoofer for your money, though ultimately more film than music oriented	50,42,43				20			179
R	B&W ASW1000	499	Bulky heavyweight is a high quality item, able to generate more bass output than music is likely to need	54,47,50	●	A	A20	●			198
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,5,41,45,5		A	30				210
R	JPW SW60	349	A real heavyweight, sounds clean and transparent, if perhaps a little understated. Usefully flexible	55,47,39			20			●	179
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A	25				210
	Mission 7AS2	399	Ugly if very effective at supplying very low bass, but filter could do with more flexibility higher up	56,30,31	●		<20	●			198
R	Paradigm PDR-10	150	Not much grip, drive or authority, but it doesn't get in the way and it is very cheap	34,5,36,42	●	A	25				210
	Polk PSW430	400	A lot of subwoofer for your money, but lacks deep grunt and is more movie than music oriented	38,5,45,46	●	A	25				210
R	REL Q50	375	This good looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31			20				210
R	Ruark Log-Rhythm	775	Adds weight and scale with commendable discretion, making a positive contribution to the whole musical exposition	43,43,43	●	A	<20				210
	Soliloquy S10	1,050	(Active) Pre-y subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong	51,30,5,46	●	A	25	●			196

SATELLITE & SUBWOOFER SYSTEMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AE Aego2	300	Not quite a serious hi-fi speaker system, but a seriously fun type product for all that (19x35x27cm sub)	7,10,9		A	n/a	45	●		218
R	Bandor Trident II	776	Loudness is limited, but overall sound is impressively homogeneous and coherent. (31x46x31cm sub)	12,13,10-12		83	6	25	●		218
R	Boston Micro 90	650	Lacks warmth but the midband is smooth and impressively evenhanded (37x36x39cm sub)	10,17,14		88	4	28	●		218
R	Cabasse Jupiter/lo	1,228	A sub/sat combo that really competes with proper stereo speakers. Striking styling and stereo imaging (40x43x41cm sub)	15 diam		94	2	30	●		218
	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, but lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
	NHT Super Zero/Sub One	1,000	Decent enough, but not the prettiest nor the best value around for music replay - one for movie fans (40x41x42cm sub)	14,23,14		84	8	30	●		218
R	Ruark Vita 100	900	Not the cheapest sub/sat, but certainly one of the most accomplished, sonically and visually (30x42x30cm sub)	11,20,17		86	6	40	●		218

LOUDSPEAKERS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	High value floorstander has deep and even bass and a smooth neutrality thereafter	19,90,25	●	90	5	22	●		198
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,5,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
	B&W Nautilus package	6,500	This classy, laid-back package is arguably too good for current programming. Very bulky centre speaker	var	var	n/a	3	20		●	210
	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31		91	5	28	●		198
	Dynaudio LRC 120	439	Slim centre and front standmount, has an evenhanded but rather laid back balance but lacks drive	16,5,57,31		89	5	25	●		198
	Jamo Concert package	2,500	Lovely main speakers sonically overshadow the centre, while surrounds are a bit obvious too	var	var	n/a	5	30		●	210
BB	JBL Xti-series package	1,100	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40		●	210
	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goody thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration var	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120		●	198
	Mission Cinema 8 package	1,400	Beautifully styled and cleverly designed package, but could have more grunt and drive for the price	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
	Polk RTE 1000p	1,300	Tall elegant tower with built-in powered bass 'subwoofer' that needs using with discretion. Bright but engaging	20,110,35	●	91	4	25	●		198
	Monitor Audio Silver series	1,000	Great looking conventionally styled package lacks something in dynamic drive and tension	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1-connected var	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,200	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	920	Classy real wood package does a good all round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	var	var	n/a	4	25		●	210
BB	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn 56LCR	400	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	21,38,29		89	6	25		●	198
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29	●	91	4	20	●		198

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Centre	140	Good value centre-front speaker but a tad shut in and with a slightly obvious top end (price per speaker)	46,17,20		89	5	50	●		198
	B&W Nautilus HTM1	1,500	Very bulky for a centre speaker, though very capable too - a little less laid back than its siblings	76,37,30		89	4	30		●	210
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
	Jamo Concert Center	550	A decent balance match but lacks the class and grip of the Concert 8s, and is bulky and pricey too	55,22,30		87	5	100		●	210
BB	JBL Xti10C	200	An elegant, cleverly designed centre and a good match for the 40s. Better value than most too	51,19,5,27		88	5	50		●	210
	KEF Q95C	200	This artfully designed UniQ centre looks much better than most on top of the TV set	40,17,17		89	3	120		●	210
	Mirage OM-C2	600	Large but discreet omni-bi-pole matches OM-10-1 well but lacks tight focus, and seems expensive	64,18,5,31		88	4	50		●	210
R	Mission 77C	199	A good centre-front match for 77-series, the triple tweeter might be a curiosity, but voicing is very good	42,17,21		91	4	100		●	198
	Mission 78C	350	Makes a good visual and sonic match for the 782, but quite pricey by comparison, given the ingredients	45,17,19		86	3	100		●	210
	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good looking partner to the Silver 5is, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120		●	210
R	PMC TB2M/C	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50		●	210
	Polk CS 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35		92	4	25	●		198
R	Rega Senta	185	The very compact Senta is sensibly priced, a bit bright maybe, but articulate and expressive	32,16,21		89	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy mXC	100	Could be more exciting, but a very impressive centre speaker at an unusually reasonable price	42,16,21		88	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn 56C	200	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	38,21,29		89	6	25	●		198

PERSONAL / INTERNET

SPECIFICATIONS

PERSONAL STEREO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
R	Aiwa AM-HX50	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc		●				204
	JVC XL-PG31	60	'Challenging' looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided.	CD						216
	JVC XM-R700SL	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-ear-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
R	Panasonic RQ-SX71	70	A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features	Cassette		●				204
	Panasonic RQ-SX91	80	A super-slick personal for well-heeled cassette users. Sound is rather bright	Cassette		●				204
	Panasonic SJ-MR100	250	Well built and nicely appointed, though performance is unremarkable at the price	MiniDisc	●	●				204
R	Philips ACT7582	115	A splash-proof body and an entertaining sound – the perfect CD personal for holiday japes	CD						204
R	Sharp MD-MT877H	230	Pleasantly up-front sounding player in a sexy little package, well worth your attention if you like that kind of thing	MiniDisc	●	●				216
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
	Sony D-EJ925	149.99	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●				216
BB	Sony MZ-G750	199.99	Light, simple to use, and with a relaxed and enjoyable sound, and with a tuner too!	MiniDisc	●	●				216
BB	Sony MZ-R91	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●	●				204

INTERNET AUDIO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa MM-VX100	130	Aiwa's expertise in the personal stereo field is visible, but performance is only average	Solid State	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing CD player, hard drive and PC connection. Sign of things to come?	CD/Hard Drive	●		MP3/WMA	APR/USB	17GB	208
BB	Creative Labs Digital Jukebox	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive	●		Agnostic	USB	5.7GB	208
R	DigMedia Music Store	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
	JazPiper MV32P	125	First-wave player that looks good but sounds bright. Includes voice recording and phone book features	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	LG MF-PD360	130	Good looking and temptingly affordable, but features and performance are nothing special	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	208
	LG AHA-FD770	200	Cassette and solid state personal in one – novel idea, poor execution	SS/Cass	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Logix Evzone	219	Novell MP3 player that uses omega Click! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Click! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
R	Neo-25	420	Sparsely equipped but efficient hard drive portable with an exceptionally high potential capacity. Average in the sound department	Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	10GB	213
R	Philips eXpanium EXP103	190	The best MP3-CD personal, at least at the time of writing... An effective solution for MP3 on the move	CD			MP3			213
	Philips Rush SA126	250	Sound is a little thin and wishy-washy, and the fiddly controls and lack of remote make it difficult to use	Solid State	●		MP3	USB/PRL	64MB	216
R	Pine D'Music	120	Good build, solid sound and a voice recording mode make this a good first-time buy	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Pontis SP504	158	Not the best aesthetically, but exceptionally good MP3 sound	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	204
R	Rio 500	190	Well featured and a strong performer, though new generation Rios have now arrived	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	195
R	Rio 600	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agnostic	USB	32MB	208
R	Rio 800	300	If you're interested in solid state, this player's great sound and ease of use make it worth a look	Solid State	●	●	Agnostic	USB	64MB	216
	Sanyo SSP-PD7	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3/AAC	USB	32MB	213
	Schneider MPMan F20	99	The world's first MP3 personal. Basic but still good value	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Smart Portable MP3 Disc Player	119	CD personal that also plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R discs	CD			MP3			208
	Sony NW-MS7	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC-3	USB	64MB	208
	Sony NW-MS9	300	It's got size and simplicity on its side, but it's up-front, boomy sound is significantly below par	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC-3	USB	64MB	216
R	Sony MDC-PC3	350	A MiniDisc deck which hooks to a PC. Introduces cheap and flexible MD media to the world of MP3	MiniDisc	●		MP3/ATRAC	USB		213

RECORD PLAYERS

SPECIFICATIONS

TURNTABLES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high end performance at an affordable price	●			33/45		●	●	●	203
	Avid 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					144
R	DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	●			33/45	●	●	●	●	144
	Dual CS 455.1	220	Neat record player with automatic convenience (and 78rpm), but doesn't match simpler manual rivals sonically	●	●		33/45/78					203
R	Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph	●		●	33/45	●	●	●	●	103
R	Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended	●			33/45	●	●	●		91
R	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank	●			33		●			103
R	Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains	●			33/45	●	●	●		91
R	Michell Gyrodec	875	Sweet and natural-sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm	●			33/45	●				55
EC	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
BB	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	●			33/45		●	●	●	203
BB	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●			33/45		●	●		159
BB	Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●			33/45		●	●	●	164
	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	●			33/45	●	●	●		192
R	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

TURNTABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL		SEMI-AUTO		SPEEDS	SUPP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
				●	●	●	●						
BB	Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident	●	●			33/45			●		48
R	Rega Planar 3	274	Sounds musical in a balanced manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability	●	●			33/45			●		164
BB	Rega Planar 25	619	Great looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●	●			33/45		●			203
BB	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail	●	●			33/45		●	●		159
R	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	●	●			33/45	●	●			159
EC	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	●	●			33/45	●	●	●		195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●	●			33/45/78	●	●	●		186
BB	Thorens TD166 VI/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery, suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges	●	●			33/45	●		●	●	103
	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●	●			33/45	●		●		159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
B	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●	●			33/45	●	●			136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●	●			33/45	●	●	●		205
BB	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

CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		●		0.5		203
BB	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	192
BB	Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy		●		0.55	11.5	175
BB	Denon DL110	70	A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well		●		1.0	6	48
	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	103
BB	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	192
	Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent		●		0.15	5.3	158
R	Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm		●		0.25	12	84
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	175
EC	Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,500	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining		●		0.3	13	208
	Goldring Elan	19	A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body	●		●	5.0	7	67
R	Goldring 1012GX	79	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent	●		●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved	●		●	6.5	7	85
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	84
	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●		●	6.5	6	91
	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	103
	Goldring Excel VX	525	Rich bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end		●		0.45	8	175
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Good sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●		●	4	6	158
	Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users	●			1.7	6.5	175
BB	Linn K9	125	Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus	●		●	4.5	5	Col
	London Decca Maroon	259	Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconoclastic as ever				5.0	6	67
	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●			5.0	6	84
	Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge – smooth, agile and dynamic in character		●		0.5	8	192
R	Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed		●		0.3	7	158
EC	Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons. Albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			0.5	8	215
	Lyra Parnassus D.Ct	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	175
BB	Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues – weight, clarity and neutrality	●		●	3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon 520/P	65	Sensitive to load capacitance, but the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound	●		●	3.0	5	67
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unobtrusive – take it as it comes				3.3	4	103
BB	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
BB	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
BB	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	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 Recca	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
BB	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	175
R	van den Hul G' hopper IIIGLA	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	175

TONEARMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●		79	79
R	Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths	Med		●		229	67
BB	Rega RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	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
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

STANDS & SUPPORTS

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik C4	200	Attractive wood finish stand with a very large footprint but sound is a little coloured	77	47			4	MDF	206
R	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47			4	Wood	193
	Apollo Symphony	245	Simple steel and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision	73	46.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193
	Apollo Mezzo Soprano	340	Heavyweight contender packing a big sonic punch. Looks cool, but can contribute a bit of character	68.5	53.5,44			4	Glass	217
R	Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67	48.6			4	Wood	193
R	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		●	4	Glass	217
BB	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193
	Avid Isosshelf	1,100	An enthusiasts equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	549	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well damped design. Its performance makes the price tag seem rather good value	75	53.5,45			4	MDF	217
	Custom design E'Lite E4	250	Fairly laid back for a glass/steel rack. Just loses out sonically to the competition	51	62,51			4	Glass	217
R	Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46		●	4	Glass	206
R	Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193
	Kestrel Furniture Nightingale	495	Well engineered furniture quality rack with thoughtful extras. Large with pleasing but not winning performance	91	62.5,53.5			5	wood	217
	Mana 4-tier	500	The ultimate statement in steel and glass; adds resonance in a way you'll love or hate	87	45		●	4	Glass	206
	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
R	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49			4	MDF	206
R	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	440	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5			4	Wood	217
	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206
	Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73	46		●	4	Glass	193
R	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, 5 shelves too! Well balanced and under £200	92	50,40			5	Glass	217
	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar strands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193
EC	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8		●	4	Glass	193
BB	Towshend Seismic Sink Stand	980	Serious resolution and stunning isolation from air decoupled self levelling design. If you have the cash, buy one	61	53,39.5			4	MDF	217

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good looking, well equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
	Alphason HD5	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5,15.5		●			189
	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15,12.5		●			189
	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51,40,51	18					202
BB	Atacama Nexus 6	50	An excellent all round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18		●			202
R	Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60	15,17		●	●		189
	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine sounding stand at its price	61	16, 21.5		●	●		220
R	Cyrus CLS50 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
R	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18		●			202
R	Elemental Isotube S2ze	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
	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
	Green Apple Diamond Bevel	225	Sounds soft, gentle and somewhat dulled at the top, but takes top honours for style	61	15					220
R	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean, sweet and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20		●			220
R	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
BB	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20		●			220
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29,32					202
	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19,15		●			202
	Mission Stancette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
	Mordaunt-Short Atlas	90	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't transcend the very basic engineering	53	17.5					220
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than most of the competition	50-100	19,22		●	●		189
R	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15		●	●		220
R	Partington Dreadnought Ult.	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	20.5,23.5		●			202
	Quadraspire QS speaker stand	150	Styled to match the company's equipment racks, a very decent sounding stand at a fair price	62	14					220
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33.5,24					189
	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65,45	20,22.5		●			220
R	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16		●			202
	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
	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16,17		●			202

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Target HM60	106	A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma	40-70	16,5,19	●				202
R	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48					202

TUNERS

ANALOGUE TUNERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			●	●	193
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64		●	●	●	193
R	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			●	●	211
BB	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
R	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
BB	Harman Kardon TU940	179	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●		●	●	221
	Leak Trough Line - GTA	300	A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance	FM	0			●	●	206
	Linn Pekin	545	Smart and high-tech tuner which integrates well with Linn systems but offers less appealing performance out of that context	FM, M	80		●	●	●	211
R	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●	●	142
	Marantz ST-17	600	Great looks, but sound let down by opaqueness due to pilot-tone breakthrough	FM, M, L	60	●			●	221
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
	Marantz ST6000	150	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		●		211
R	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
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●		●	●	166
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia 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
	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M	20					166
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good honest budget tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	●		●	●	221
	Sony ST-SA3E5	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	157
R	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	●		●	●	184
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	800	The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's still not perfect	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	199
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16	●	●	●	●	221
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	211
	Symbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8	●	●	●	●	199
	Pision Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●		●		211
	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless	DAB	30	●	●	●		221
	Sony ST-D777E5	550	Smart and useful with DAB and FM in one box, but neither band really shines	DAB, FM, M, L	99	●	●	●	●	211
R	Technics ST-GT1000	500	Handy tuner that combines DAB, FM and AM in one unit and substantially lowers the price bar for DAB entry	DAB, FM, M	97	●	●	●	●	199
BB	VideoLogic DRX-601E	299	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10	●		●	●	211
	Videologic DRX-601E5	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	DAB	10	●	●	●	●	221

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BACK ISSUES



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- Loudspeakers £160–£500 tested
- High-end multichannel amplifiers
- Check out the best speaker cables
- Tannoy's superb TD10 loudspeakers



JULY 2001/ISSUE 216

- DVD players £219–£600 tested
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- CD, MD and MP3 personals tested
- Philips SACD-1000 multichannel SACD



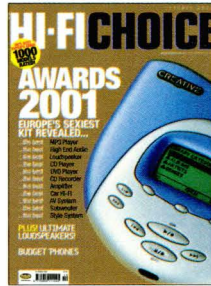
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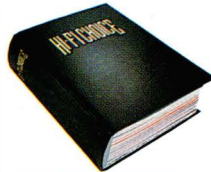
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NEXT MONTH...

UNMISSABLE

The next issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* to hit the newsstands will be our unmissable guide to this year's hi-fi, the Best Buy Guide 2001. This biblical issue is essential reading for any hi-fi fan as it offers an invaluable guide to the best hi-fi you can buy at the moment. Anyone considering upgrading equipment over the next few months should not be without the Best Buy Guide 2001.

NEWS REVIEW OF THE YEAR & LOOK AHEAD

We look back at the very best news of the past year: all the top stories and technological breakthroughs that made it. We also look ahead to the future with the help of our *HFC* team of experts and specially gathered industry intelligence.

SOFTWARE OF THE YEAR

Our very own round-up of the best music of the year. We recommend fresh new albums that have gained all-round office approval and shouts of joy from our contributors and staff alike. Find out what we tip as the best DVD-A, SACD, CD and DVDs of the year.

HOW TO SET UP A MULTICHANNEL SYSTEM

Hi-Fi Choice guides you through the process of setting up a multichannel system to achieve the best possible results. We take the guesswork and head-scratching out of the whole set-up process, making it even easier to get involved in multichannel music.

EMPOWERING

The Best Buy Guide 2001 gives you the power to make informed and educated choices when considering the purchase of new hi-fi. Save time and money, and guarantee yourself hours of listening pleasure. Miss it and miss out!

HFC 222- ON SALE 7TH NOVEMBER

All future contents subject to change



Let's hear it for the extremists

PAUL MESSENGER REVISITS THE DEBATE BETWEEN OMNIS AND DIRECTIONALITY.

Back in the 1970s, when I was first getting involved in the hi-fi business, there was massive debate and controversy over 'omnidirectional' loudspeakers. With hindsight, there was far too much hype and hysteria on both sides, but the tale is well worth re-telling, as the issues are just as relevant today.

When the 'omnis' first arrived, the leading British brands had already established credibility on the world stage, through designs which subscribed, more or less, to a 'monitoring' tradition first established by the Quad Electrostatic speakers and later by the BBC's Research Labs. There was at least a touch of xenophobia in their collective reaction to new 'omnidirectional' approaches being vigorously promoted by companies like Bose, from the US, and Sonab, from Sweden.

Where conventional speakers – then and now – place their drive units so they point towards the listener, usually on a single flat surface, omnis deliberately direct at least part of the energy elsewhere in the room. The classic Bose 901, for example, had nine small 'full range' (pre-equalised) drive units. Only one pointed towards the listeners, and the other eight were distributed across a back panel shaped like a wide 'V' to bounce off rear and side walls. The Sonabs were rather like some of today's Shahinians, sitting on the floor with midrange and treble drivers on the top surface pointing upwards and in all directions.

These omnis certainly gave a rather different listening experience from regular speakers, but I think it was some of the promotional hype that got up the noses of the British hi-fi establishment. One of Bose's arguments was that, by reflecting most of the sound off the walls of the listening room, it was trying to recreate the situation at a live concert, where the overwhelming majority of sound reaching listeners comes via concert-hall reflections. (We're not talking open-air festivals here!)

The counterargument of course is that if you're trying to recreate the sound of, say,

an orchestra in a concert hall, you don't want to get the acoustics of the concert hall all mixed up with the acoustics of the listening room.

A quarter-century and the chance to try several hundred loudspeakers later, I have a rather better perspective on what's going on. The two approaches are quite distinct from each other, yet a strong case can be made for both, according to preference.

In April's *Hi-Fi Choice* I reviewed the latest Quad Electrostatic 989. The first full-range dipole I'd heard in some years, it was a vivid reminder that minimising room interactions gives superb soundstage imaging, because it has a higher ratio of direct to reflected sound, and also because the direct sound preserves phase relationships that reflections lose.

The Tannoy TD12 (big brother to the TD10 that Dan George reviewed in *HFC* 215) also keeps the reflection ratio relatively low in the upper mid and treble, because this part of the spectrum is delivered in a relatively narrow beam. Not as extreme as the Quad, but something of the same stereo precision was still very noticeable.

These low-reflection models score highly on stereo imaging, and can be spookily effective in creating an acoustic 'window' onto the soundstage. Headphones, of course, can be still more effective, but not everybody wants to go that way.

However, in the real world truly coherent 'real' stereophonic recordings are rare. Most recorded repertoire, especially on the pop side, is essentially synthesised 'multi-mono' stereo. Ultimate imaging isn't the only priority.

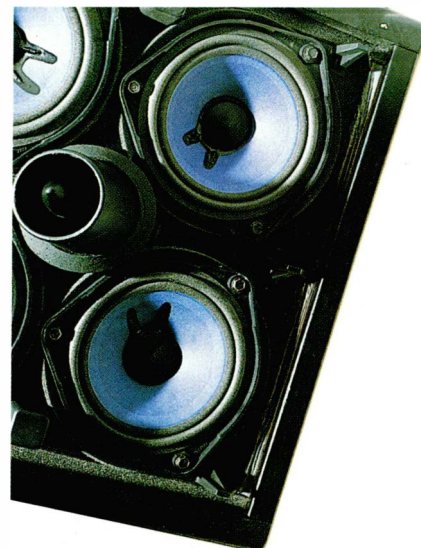
Although the omni will never provide great stereo precision, it has a different trick up its sleeve. It's much more effective at creating the impression that the musicians are actually playing in your room, as distinct from providing a window onto the recording event, and that surely is an equally valid hi-fi objective.

In reality, the majority of commercial speakers out there represent a compromise somewhere in between these two extremes, which is a logical solution to adopt. But thank goodness for the extremists. They are what makes hi-fi interesting, and are always worth exploring.

Paul Messenger has auditioned more loudspeakers than you've had hot dinners, you could say he knows his onions.



"IT'S MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE AT CREATING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE MUSICIANS ARE ACTUALLY PLAYING IN YOUR ROOM."

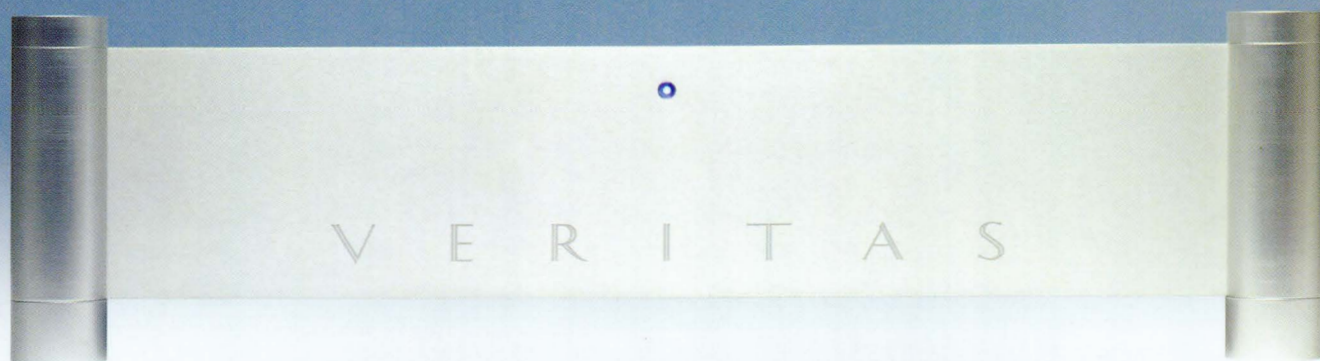


A back view of the Bose 901, a highly successful omnidirectional speaker.

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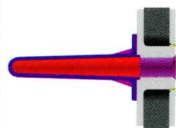
Ivor Humphreys, HiFi News

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