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## THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LOUDSPEAKERS

Ten multichannel systems – **50 speakers** – rated for stereo and surround sound performance

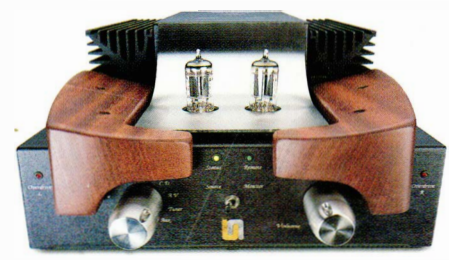


### HOT WIRES

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### EXCLUSIVE! BARGAIN DVD-A

Denon breaks the £500 barrier with its latest 'A' player



### KILLER WATTS

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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 'supermickey' system consisting of Naim, Bryston and B&W components.



**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 is in the process of getting fully multichanneled.



**Alvin Gold** has eclectic music tastes although he prefers stuff that is miserable and downbeat.

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## 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.

## AWARDS



**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.

**"I HAVE HAD A GREAT TIME WITH 'CHOICE, MET AND WORKED WITH SOME VERY FINE PEOPLE AND GOT TO LISTEN TO SOME FANTASTIC HI-FI SYSTEMS."**



**T**his is my last issue at the helm of *Hi-Fi Choice*. After 172 issues I reckon I deserve a break and am passing the tiller over to Tim Bown who has been my deputy for the last two years. I have had a great time with *'Choice*, met and worked with some very fine people and got to listen to some

fantastic hi-fi systems. So it's not without sadness that I leave this august publication. But it's not a complete separation, I will be joining the elite ranks of freelancers that have made this the most reliable publication in its sector, so you haven't heard the last of me yet!

This has also been the issue that dealt a severe blow to one of the giants of the *'Choice* reviewing staff, namely Paul Messenger, who suffered a heart attack after completing the humungous surround sound speaker test. I'm glad to say that he was sounding well when we spoke a week and a half later and is keen to get on with the next, fortunately much smaller, speaker group for the issue after next. Sorry about that Paul.

This month's multichannel speaker group seemed innocuous enough when we conceived it – ten systems tested in both stereo and surround roles. But when we realised that involved 50 individual speakers, the immensity of the task became apparent, and I must say it was brave of Paul to take it on. But the results speak for themselves. If you are in the situation where you have a stereo system and want to get into multichannel this issue contains all the information you require to do so without compromising quality. Or, if you're looking for speakers to get started with and want to know how to proceed should you decide to get into surround later on we have the answers for that as well.

Paul Miller's feature on the technical matching of centre and main left/right (or stereo) speakers is also illuminating and analyses the effects that perching a speaker on top of a TV has on the balance. One answer to this problem is to get yourself a flat telly, projection screen or plasma, a more economic one might be to place a blanket over the screen, though this may undermine your viewing pleasure somewhat!

Jason Kennedy, Editor

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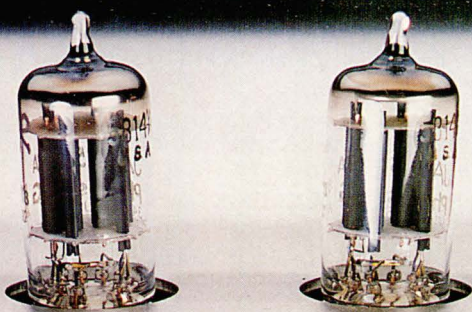
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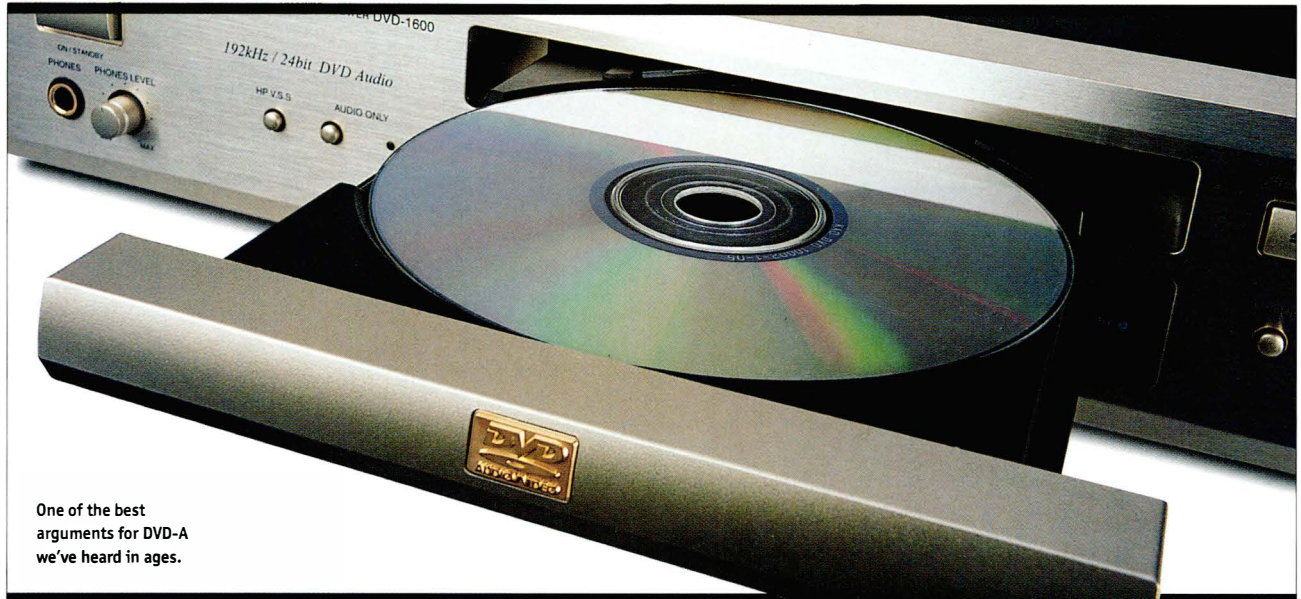
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# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

DAN GEORGE AND TIM BOWERN SIFT THE NUGGETS FROM THE HI-FI STREAM.



One of the best arguments for DVD-A we've heard in ages.

## DENON DVD-1600 DVD-AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER

★★★★★ £499.99

**"DESPITE ITS LOW PRICE POINT, THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED DVD-AUDIO PLAYERS WE'VE HEARD SO FAR."**

**T**he jury's still out on whether DVD-Audio will be significant to our future enjoyment of music; likewise SACD. Both formats promise higher quality digital sound. Both have their own unique qualities, and though it's arguable that SACD has achieved the more impressive early results, it's also fair to say neither format has yet lived up to its full potential.

This is one of the least costly DVD-Audio players yet and like all DVD-Audio compatible machines so far it plays three main formats: DVD-Audio discs, movie-oriented DVD-Video discs and CDs. It's easy to use thanks to logical and well-sized buttons, and there's an 'audio only' control for optimum sound quality with music. Once everything's set up (DVD-Audio requires a screen for its menu system) you can shut down the player's video circuitry to minimise interference.

Despite its relatively low price point, this is one of the most accomplished DVD-Audio players we've heard so far. With a few of Warner's 24-bit/96kHz Advanced Resolution multichannel titles – by The Doors, Natalie Merchant *et al* – this deck makes a pretty convincing

argument for music in surround, DVD-A style. You don't get the same impression of fluidity and refinement that oozes from Sony's comparably priced multichannel SACD players, perhaps partly because of the Denon's video-oriented specification, and partly because the sonic quality of much DVD-A software available to date is a little lacking. But its solid and propulsive sound makes for compelling listening nonetheless.

But the real value is in its performance with other disc formats. It's an excellent DVD-Video player – vibrant with surround sound movie soundtracks, crisp and even in the picture department. And CD replay is well above average for a sub-£500 DVD, with good rhythm and detail, if a little roughly-hewn. With players like this on the market DVD-Audio's chances of survival will be greatly enhanced.

**TB**



### DATASTREAM

**PLAYS** DVD-Audio, DVD-Video, CD, Video CD, CD-R/RW discs. Built-in Dolby Digital and dts decoding, 24-bit/192kHz capable audio DACs, 'audio only' mode, PAL/NTSC video conversion, RGB video output via SCART, headphone socket with Headphone Virtual Surround, aluminium front panel.  
**DENON** ☎ 01234 741200



# ARCAYDIS AKS LOUDSPEAKER

★★★★★ £259.00



Real wood veneer  
costs less at  
Arcaydis.

**A**rcaydis has shown tenacity and talent in making a space for itself in the crowded UK loudspeaker market. The latest offering is the AKS, a fairly compact standmount model strolling unashamedly into the ferociously competitive sub-£300 sector. It's an old-fashioned looker next to the contoured baffles and flash drive units of many contemporary designs, but real wood veneer is an impressive boast at just £259 a pair.

Indeed, tradition is a notion Arcaydis sets much store in, a view evident in the way this speaker sounds. It needs a little care with placement: site on solid stands, high enough to lift the tweeter towards ear height, and toe in a little towards your listening position. Keep it a foot or two away from walls, too, and the AKS does much to beguile the listener.

This is a speaker of particular tastes. Its balance is laid back and a little cuddly, with plenty of detail but not much 'oomph'. It veers towards the acoustic/jazz/vocal side of things, with a beautiful coherence through mid to upper frequencies and the ability to project a well-produced stereo recording with air and precision, laterally and three-dimensionally.

These are impressive attributes at the price, and with a disc like Van Morrison's *Moondance* you find you're listening to the music, not over-wrought coloration from the speakers. But these aren't boxes to rock to, or even dance to. They lack the punch, dynamism and bass drive to throw fast, rhythmic music into overdrive, ending up rather soft and ragged with stuff that should sound hard and fast.

The AKS is really too polite to be an all-rounder. But if your tastes are of the jazzy, easier-going persuasion then these are budget contenders with serious credentials. **TB**

## DATASTREAM

**MEASURES** 17x31x24.5cm (WxHxD), hand veneered 18mm MDF cabinet with oak, cherry or rosewood options, soft dome tweeter mounted below 120mm mid/bass driver, gold plated bi-wire terminals, manufacturer's sensitivity rating 88dB, manufacturer's impedance rating four ohms.

**ARCAYDIS** ☎ 01562 865788



Nice metalwork but not sharp enough for some floors.

## OPERA SP2 LOUDSPEAKERS

★★★★★ £1,350.00

**A** night with the Operas was enjoyed recently, a stylish affair, thanks to the beautifully curvaceous mahogany cabinets that make up the Italian SP2. The distinctive 'boat-tail' cabinet distinguishes the SP series, which is made up of only four pieces of solid hardwood, the back and sides of the cabinet are made from a single piece of curved wood. This design is claimed to produce excellent rigidity and reduces internal standing waves, as there are no parallel sides to reflect sound. A hardwood plinth attaches to the base of the cabinets using brass spacers, and some very rounded cones lift them from the floor, although in practice, sharper spikes would have provided better stability with carpets.

At the base of the SP2 is a downward-firing bass reflex port, this is connected to the two cavities behind the 110mm polymer mid/bass drivers. Double-asymmetric cavity loading is the technical term, and it claims to add weight and depth to the sound that emits from two compact mid/bass drivers. A 26mm soft-dome tweeter

handles the treble, while connections are made via Operas' own brass speaker terminals, of which there are only two. After some fiddling with positioning to reinforce the evidently lean bass output, the SP2 settled down and revealed its capacity to present music naturally, with a clean, sweet treble and tight, well-timed midband.

I did find the reflex port troublesome sometimes; when it was relied upon with rock and dance, it lacked the authority and fidelity that bigger drivers can provide. However, the quantity and extension was surprising for such a slender cabinet. The Operas' forte is definitely acoustic and vocal music, where the natural, laid-back presentation impresses highly. It's not a particularly dynamic speaker, and it's a bit lean, but what a natural sounding, visual masterpiece! **DG**

**"THE BACK AND SIDES OF THE CABINET ARE MADE FROM A SINGLE PIECE OF CURVED WOOD."**

### DATASTREAM

**MEASURES** 16x110x23cm (WxHxD), 2.5-way bass reflex design, 87dB sensitivity, 26mm soft-dome tweeter, twin 110mm polymer mid/bass cones, six ohm impedance.  
**UKD** 01753 652669



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**"ALTHOUGH FRIENDLY AND INOFFENSIVE, THE SOUND IS WITHDRAWN AND RESERVED."**

## MARANTZ DR6050 DUAL-DECK CD-R/RW RECORDER

★★★★★ £399.90

**F**ew would relish the task of trying to make a twin tray CDR deck, with all its knobs and buttons, look pretty. Some bright spark at Marantz however, has risen to the challenge, producing quite possibly the best-looking dual-deck CD-R we've seen. Many of you may want to keep your beloved CD player and add a separate CD-R, but for people wanting one-box simplicity, the DR6050 burns discs with ease and no small amount of style. Marantz has wisely moved on from black box design to brushed aluminium fascias along with a neat, near-symmetrical frontage.

The CD drawers are neat, svelte panels that flip down as the tray extends, providing a clean, uncluttered look. A jog dial selector chooses tracks for playback and for recording, allowing for a minimum of fascia buttons. Despite the thickness of the manual, CD recording is quick and easy. Internally, copying a CD means pressing only two buttons, before hitting another two to finalise the disc at the end. A double speed recording option is available too, and you can choose to auto-finalise the disc

on completion. Recording from analogue sources is child's play too; it takes slightly longer, navigating a couple more options including record level settings. With CD replay the DR6050 is less impressive, as is playback on many twin-tray CD-R decks.

Although friendly and inoffensive, the sound is withdrawn and reserved, lacking depth and transparency. Most notably this machine is lacking a little in dynamics, but for £400 you're getting a good value, great-looking, dual-deck machine. You would probably get better performance from a two box set-up if you have lots of time to audition, but don't

expect to find anything prettier or as straightforward as this great-looking, one-box recording solution.

DG



CD copying made very simple.

### DATASTREAM

CD-R/RW recorder, CD text, HDCD and dts recording capability, doublespeed recording, headphone socket, analogue, digital coaxial and optical inputs and outputs for both CD and CD-R decks, remote control with local D-BUS, diagnostic menu.  
MARANTZ ☎ 01753 680868



Double Exposure makes for a beguiling package.

## EXPOSURE 2010 POWER AMP AND 2010 INTEGRATED AMP

★★★★★ £499.00 (POWER)/£599.00 (INTEGRATED)

**“YOU IMMEDIATELY NOTICE THE SHED-LOAD OF POWER ON OFFER.”**

**W**e looked at the 2010 integrated amplifier back in *HFC 214*, and now almost exactly a year later it's back with an all-new matching 60 watt power amp.

Both are well thought out, simple boxes that look great. The aluminium casework boasts a thick, brushed fascia, and cool blue lights adorn the volume and input select knobs. The boxes have a hand-made quality, which makes them feel a bit special. Exposure has made its remote control from scratch, and it works well, controlling both volume and input select, although oddly the volume up/down buttons are reversed compared to conventional handsets – beware!

In pre/power configuration, despite the 60 watts available, you immediately notice the shed-load of power on offer, becoming captivated by the huge transparency and detail provided by this dynamic duo. These valuable characteristics

come with a good measure of forwardness and the presentation can be a bit intense at times, as the amps' revealing nature communicates exactly what your source is saying. No bad thing, but if you like it laid back, best partner with care. The amplifiers can be configured in three different ways due to a three-position

switch that selects between stereo, bi-amp and monoblock mode, allowing further adventures in power if you want to upgrade.

In pre-power mode there is enough welly to drive my B&W M801s with ease, and music is dynamic and beautifully presented, especially acoustic and vocal work. For the

money I really liked this duo, and I've been using them at the heart of my system for a little while now. This is an attractive, good value set-up that uncovers lots of information in a very musical way. Go and listen! DG



### DATASTREAM

2010 integrated amplifier 50 watts into eight ohms, (2010 power 60 watts), remote control, five line inputs plus one pair of tape loops, MM or MC optional phono card £89.  
**EXPOSURE ELECTRONICS**  
 ☎ 01273 423877



## ROTEL RCD-1070 CD PLAYER

★★★★★ £525.00

**"THE RCD-1070 MAINTAINS A STRONG GRIP ON DYNAMIC SWINGS AND GIVES MUSIC A SENSE OF IMPORT AND GRAVITAS."**

**R**otel has produced some fine CD spinners, from classics like the RCD-965BX to recent successes like the RCD-971. The latest in this fine lineage is the RCD-1070, the first CD player in Rotel's new 10 Series. Its outlook is black and brooding in the stylistic tradition of the brand, but new design cues introduced across all 10 Series products – smaller rounded controls for example – help to deliver a more contemporary feel.

Many of the player's ingredients are familiar inside as well as out. The brand has always made a big deal about the quality of its toroidal power transformers, right down to its estimable budget amplifiers. Naturally one is included here, along with Rotel's predictably sturdy build and precise attention to detail for the sake of audio purity. There are some pretty serious audio components nestling amid its circuits, slit foil capacitors and the like, while important audiophile considerations like separated power supplies for analogue and digital circuits are present and correct. One difference this time around is the use of a Burr-Brown PCM1732 DAC, an 18-bit equivalent multi-level Delta-Sigma unit.

It's fair to say this is not the most ergonomically

efficient CD player ever and its tiny, clustered buttons are on the fiddly side. But never mind, its sound is full-bodied and wholesome, yet while some Rotel players of the past have erred too far towards caution, this one (like other recent efforts) succeeds in adding detail and vibrancy. It maintains a strong grip on dynamic swings and gives music a sense of import and gravitas, in keeping with the player's stately fascia.

All of which adds up to a sonic character that caters for all kinds of music with an assured and listenable demeanor. Play some classical and both strings and brass sound bold but not overstressed. Switch to rock and its delivery is even-handed yet snappy enough to set your feet tapping, your fingers drumming or whatever you do when you're enjoying a serious CD player. In that respect, this Rotel certainly qualifies. **TB**



### DATASTREAM

**Burr-Brown** PCM1732 18-Bit equivalent multi-level Delta-Sigma D/A converter with 8x oversampling, HDCD playback, toroidal power transformer, low resonance transport, coaxial and optical digital outputs, full playback options including random, repeat and 20 track programming.  
**ROTEL** ☎ 01908 317707



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## SURROUNDED BY NADS

### HIGH-END MULTICHANNEL AMPS FEATURE IN RAFT OF NEW PRODUCTS

Legendary budget brand NAD continues to chase the high-end with its first multichannel Silverline products.

The S170 is a £3,500 multichannel preamp/processor with onboard decoding for Dolby Digital, DTS and THX Surround EX formats. Home cinema fans will welcome it's THX Ultra-certification, while multichannel oriented music fans will love its 24-bit/96kHz compatibility and six-channel analogue inputs for connection to DVD-Audio and multichannel SACD players. It also has ten

analogue inputs for source components (six audio/video, four audio only), along with six digital audio inputs.

NAD has also introduced a power amp to match. The £2,200 S250 has five monoblock amp sections each with dual-differential, fully Class A input and driver stage circuitry. It delivers 125 watts x5 or 200 watts x2, and NAD's soft-clipping circuitry ensures the amp doesn't get into trouble during dynamic peaks. And as NAD claims to be the first to introduce a THX-certified power amp it's

no surprise to see full THX certification here too.

NAD has also announced two further products at more familiar price points. The C660 is the brand's first CD recorder – a twin-tray model at £500 (see *First Impressions* next month). And the T531, NAD's latest entry-level DVD-Video player, is now available at £330. *Lenbrook UK ☎ 01908 319360*

## SKINNY SOUNDS

### SUPER-SLIM SURROUND SOLUTION FROM SEQUENCE

If you fancy some wall-hanging speakers but you're not convinced by the sonic qualities of NXT-derived technologies so far, Sequence might just have the answer. Its speakers combine traditional dynamic drive units with cabinets that are just 7cm thick, and prices start at around £200.

Speakers like these first emerged under the Sequence name some years back, long before NXT flat speakers hit the market place. After something of a hiatus they're back in new, improved form, ready to cash in on the growing market for wall-hanging plasma and LCD TVs and the need for stylish surround sound solutions. The range starts with the Model 200 at £200 per pair, which may also be configured as a centre speaker at £125 each. Then there's the larger Model 300 at £250 a pair and Model 400 at £300 a pair, along with a £400 active subwoofer called the SW500.

Each speaker couples a paper-coned mid/bass driver with a 25mm fabric dome tweeter, and comes wrapped in a choice of cloths – beige, black, grey, green, navy and plum. Optional floor-standing plinths are available at £30 a pair. To see how the Model 300s fare, check out next issue's fascinatingly eclectic group of designer loudspeakers.

*Audio Group ☎ 01367 253295*



## WHOLE LOTTA ROSIE

### NEW SOLID STATE AMPS FROM MARK LEVINSON'S HIGH-END PROJECT



Mark Levinson's Red Rose brand has introduced a range of solid state electronics to sit alongside its valve designs. Entry point is the Rosette series, currently hosting two separate components. The Rosette 1 (left) is an integrated amp rated at 50 watts per channel. It's designed to stand vertically and offers just four inputs, one set of speaker outputs and a volume control. Apparently, its "simplicity and understated look" is "in harmony with the minimalist approach of 'just the music'". It's joined by a similarly constructed phono stage called the Rosette 2 – both units are priced at £2,000.

If that's not enough, try the Passion. A more conventional horizontal design, it delivers a claimed 100 watts per channel and costs £3,000. Or for the ultimate Red Rose solid state experience try coupling the Ascension with the Affirmation – a preamp and 200 watt power amp costing £5,000 and £7,000 respectively. According to Red Rose, the result is "an energy which has formerly been unavailable in audio equipment. Going beyond mere sound, it is a feeling which makes listening to music a great joy."

*MDC ☎ 01992 573030*



The GT1's swan necks prove that not all speakers have to be ugly ducklings.

## THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?

HIGH-END SPEAKERS – BUT NOT AS WE KNOW THEM

Otherworldly speakers may be all the rage these days, but there are none which strike a more jaw-dropping pose than the new GT1 Series from Design e. The bedrock of the range is the GT1 Series Satellite Loudspeaker (above), an arresting floorstander with swan-like neck and spherical main enclosure containing a mid/bass driver and a soft dome tweeter. Its entire enclosure is fashioned from a multi-layered composite of fire retardant polyester resin and glass fibre and finished in a range of contemporary colours.

You can buy a pair of these satellites on their own for £3,525, or if you decide

more bass is required you can add a pair of GT1 Series Bass-Enhancer Loudspeakers for £2,350 – one to go with each satellite. These are more squat in stature but employ a similar spherical composite main enclosure with a single bass driver. This spherical shape is chosen for more than just aesthetic reasons – it reduces internal standing waves and virtually eliminates cabinet diffraction for fabulous imaging. Described by Design e as “a fusion of art and technology”, the GT1 Series will be available in the New Year. We'll be giving it a full review very soon. Oh yes.

Design e ☎ 01243 377899

## PRELUDE TO INFINITY

ULTIMATE INFINITY SPEAKER RANGE RELEASED

Infinity's flagship Prelude MTS speaker system has been released in the UK following its US debut. The system's four models include a three-way tower with matching centre speaker, and right and left active subwoofers.

In the tower, suitable for two or multichannel listening, the CMMD (ceramic metal-matrix diaphragms) are mounted in a cast-aluminium baffle attached to an aluminium cabinet.

The Prelude MTS subwoofer boasts 850 watts of amplification and features Infinity's RABOS bass optimisation system, which tries to eliminate room induced resonances. Supplied



with the package is a test CD and sound-level meter to calibrate the system to your room as well as locate and eliminate unwanted bass nodes. Prices start at £1,300 for the centre speaker, with the towers selling at £1,700 each. Harman Consumer UK ☎ 020 8731 4670

## IN BRIEF

**COPY PROTECTION** systems hit the headlines as thousands of angry fans returned copies of Natalie Imbruglia's copy-protected *White Lilies Island* CD, after the discs refused to play on their PCs and DVD players. BMG Entertainment has set up a UK hotline for complaints and is offering replacement discs both via both the label and retailers. Sales of blank CD-Rs have risen by 80% in the last 12 months while album sales have dropped, fuelling record label's efforts to copy-protect their forthcoming releases.

**ACOUSTIC ENERGY** has launched the AEGO P5, a high-performance multichannel speaker system, using palm-sized satellite speakers and a compact active sub, with a separate Dolby Digital/DTS decoder that connects to a DVD player. The package contains cables, connectors and wall brackets giving a one-box upgrade solution for £599.95. Available now in black or white. ☎ 01285 654432

**CLASSICAL** music sales have fallen to an all-time low in the last 12 months, now representing only 3% of all music sales

according to the *Daily Telegraph* on 5th December.

**ONKYO** has introduced the Home Style HS-N1 Desktop Audio System, a lifestyle mini-system featuring a CD player and RDS AM/FM tuner. The unit boasts USB connectivity for PC audio links and a digital optical output for CD-R and MiniDisc recording. Expect to pay around £599 in the shops now. ☎ 01788 556777

**LUMLEY** has launched a new loudspeaker range called Lampros. Prices start at £2,500 for the Lampros 100, rising to £9,000 for the range-topping Lampros 400. ☎ 01892 539245

**EMI, AOL/TIME WARNER** and Bertelsmann have launched an online music service after spending millions to stop free online file sharing service Napster. The trio are offering 100 tracks per month for \$9.99, but they are only playable on a PC and they have a limited life of one month, after which they self-destruct! Post-Napster sites live on, try [www.gnutella.com](http://www.gnutella.com).

IN BRIEF CONTINUES ON P.16

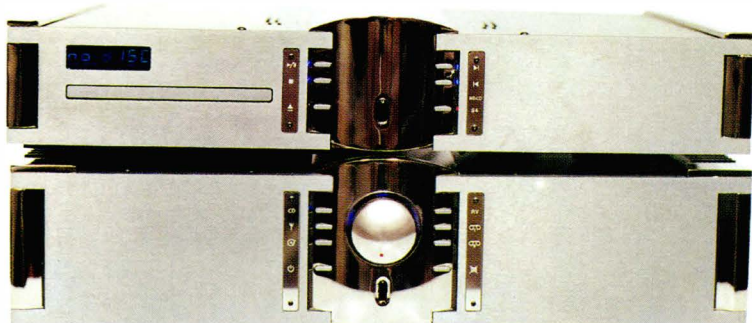
## BEST OF BRITISH AVI LAUNCHES NEW CD PLAYER

The latest CD player from British hi-fi firm AVI is the MC4 Reference. It's dressed in a garb familiar to anyone with prior experience of the brand, but its maker claims some significant differences ensure it will stand firm against models at ten times its £999 asking price.

AVI says sound quality has been significantly improved compared to previous generations by the use of extra-high-grade audio components and 'AVI active filters'. Usability too has been improved, with more functions on the remote, 'next' and 'previous' buttons on the fascia, a more comprehensive display and the provision of optical and electrical digital outputs. Full review next month.

AVI ☎ 01453 752656





## THINK PINK

PINK TRIANGLE LAUNCHES DISTINCTIVE CD PLAYER AND AMP

Innovative hi-fi brand Pink Triangle is back with a bang. The company has unveiled two new high-end products after two years of development – the DaCapo II CD player and Integral integrated amp.

The DaCapo II is evolved from Pink Triangle's 1-bit DaCapo DAC and Litaural CD player, both respected CD products from its turntable days. Among its features are two user-selectable filter options for a degree of sonic tailoring and a battery-driven power supply to isolate sensitive circuitry from mains interference and improve the signal-to-noise ratio. Its design is said to be fully modular too, giving the user the opportunity to upgrade to DVD-Audio or SACD playback some time in the future. Its case is adorned with brushed aluminium and nickel silver plate and it's priced at £4,300.

Its style is matched by the Integral amp, a dual-mono design rated at 100 watts per channel into eight ohms. Both balanced (XLR) and single-ended (RCA) inputs are supplied, along with remote control and a hefty internal spec. It's available now at £3,995, a DaCapo II follows in the New Year.

*Pink Triangle* ☎ 020 7703 5498

## RUARK 2002

NEW, BIGGER SPEAKERS FROM CELEBRATED CABINET MAKER

Ruark has announced details of a Contemporary II series for 2002. Two brand new models, the Etude and Epicentre join updated versions of the Epilog, Dialogue, Prelude and Prologue and all models feature new cabinets and various specification upgrades. The new units carry the II legend after their model names to denote the second series. The Prelude and Prologue II are larger speakers than their predecessors and both are fitted with new satin black sculptured plinths. The whole series is available in real wood veneers in a choice of four

colours, and all are fitted with a black cloth-covered sculptured grille.

*Ruark Loudspeakers* ☎ 01702 601410



## IN BRIEF CONTINUED

**RECOTON** has announced a new range of audio speaker cables from Acoustic Research called Pro Series. The range features the Pro Series Flat and MicroFlat speaker cable, a 0.5mm thick two-strand variety that is designed to run under carpets and wallpaper. MicroFlat cable starts at £54.99 for a 14-metre pack.  
☎ 0161 702 5000

**BDM DESIGN** is a new company responsible for producing a



range of contemporary furniture from its Oxo Tower HQ. The CIDI CD holder (left) units hold 25 discs and can be stacked together to create a free-standing tower as tall as you can manage! Each CIDI rack costs £41.  
☎ 020 7928 2155

**VIDEOLOGIC** has launched PURE, a range of premium home entertainment and consumer audio products to run alongside the existing Videologic range. The first PURE products will include a home cinema audio system, a mini DRX-601 DAB tuner and a DRX-601EX portable DAB unit. Prices aren't yet confirmed.  
☎ 01923 260 511

**DAB** tuners may be available from as little as £100 in 2002

says budget manufacturer Goodmans. The company has been working with Imagination Technologies and Digital One to produce a range of affordable DAB products. The line-up includes a DVD player, portable CD and in-car head unit, which all include a DAB tuner. The launch is expected in the second half of 2002.  
www.ukdigitalradio.com

**A LAWSUIT** brought against the music industry was thrown out

this month by a New Jersey judge, who stated that threatened legal action wasn't enough to stop a computer-science professor from publishing his research on the weaknesses of the industry's technologies for protecting digital music. Professor Edward Felten had sued the Recording Industry of America after receiving a letter threatening legal action if he published his research. The judge's ruling has not yet been made available.

## COMPILATION CAPERS

EASY COMPILATIONS WITH PHILIPS CD RECORDERS

Re-recordable CD pioneer Philips has added three new models to its expanding line-up. The most heavily equipped newcomer is the CDR820, a three-to-one model with a three-disc CD autochanger on one side and a single disc CD recorder on the other. Load up three discs, programme the tracks and you're away – compilation building couldn't be simpler. Features include 4x speed recording, CD text support and MP3-CD playback. Bypass of the integral sample rate conversion system is also included to reduce jitter effects when recording direct from CD to CD – all for £350.

Slightly less well specified is the CDR802, another three-to-one recorder which replaces the CDR785 as 'an affordable introduction to home-grown CD compilations', priced at £300. Finally, there's the CDR602 – exactly the same as the recent CDR600, from last issue, but silver instead of black. Its price is the same at £229.99.

*Philips UK*

☎ 020 8689 2166



## STANLEY KELLY 1912 – 2001

OBITUARY

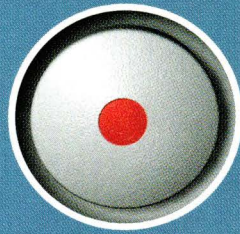
It's a sad duty to report the death of Stan Kelly, a founding father of British hi-fi. A theoretical and practical engineer of great skill and versatility, his legacy includes such legendary products as the Kelly Ribbon tweeter. But perhaps his most important contribution was as the core technical guru – especially in the early days – of *Hi-Fi News* magazine, which he helped found in 1956.

Over a long and active life he was awarded over thirty patents, for inventions as diverse as police sirens and space navigation accelerometers. But Stan didn't just design things: he made them, in a ridiculously well-appointed shed at his Broadstairs home. Where a company might take six months to bring in a new drive unit, Stan could knock one up on his lathes in an afternoon – like the unique 'Boxer' soft-dome midrange driver he developed in the 1980s for high level studio monitoring. Even his retirement in 1992 at age 80 wasn't the end of the story, as he collaborated with Musical Fidelity's Antony Michaelson in 1997 to introduce two high-sensitivity speakers under the Kelly Transducers brand.



# Small change

RECORD



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The new Philips DVD Recorder.



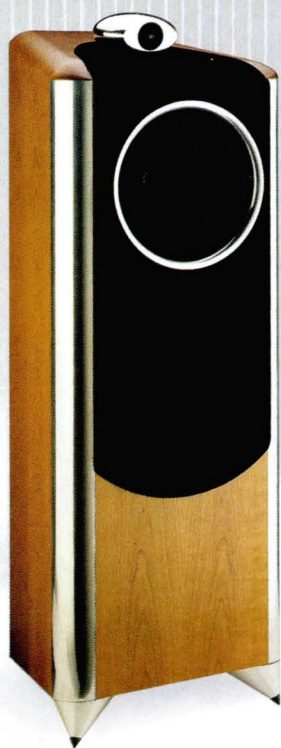
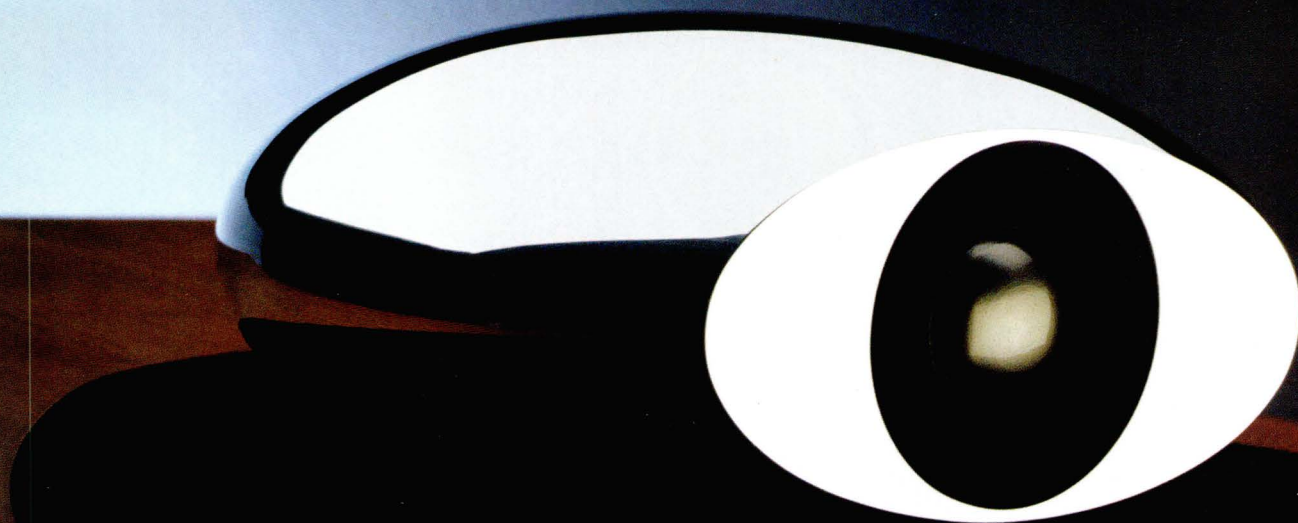
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**NORTHERN ENGLAND:** Vickers Hi-Fi, 24 Gillygate, York, YO31 7EQ, Tel. 01904 629 659. Peter Tysons, 6 Abbey Street, Carlisle, CA3 8TX, Tel. 01228 546 756.



# ESLAB HEAVEN

DIGITAL AMPLIFIERS HOLD A PROMISE THAT IS HARD TO RESIST AND ONE THAT NEWCOMER ESLAB IS MAKING A STAB AT DELIVERING.

**d**igital amplifiers have not had quite the revolutionary impact that they promised, not in the hi-fi world at least. There have been some pretty valiant efforts to produce a world-beating digital amplifier from TACT and Sharp to name a couple – even Bang & Olufsen has been using Class D modules in its active speakers, but none of these has revolutionised our hobby. Audio newcomer ESLab would like to change all that with an American digital amplifier technology called Tripath. This is effectively a digital amplifier on a chip and delivers the incredible efficiency, compactness and cool running that makes

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY

such technology so appropriate for mobile phones, laptops and the like. But its claimed benefits also include the removal of crossover, thermal overload and RF interference-induced distortions. The Tripath chip has so far only appeared in one other hi-fi product from another new brand, Veritas, but it's safe to assume that some of the better known specialists will be investigating its potential.

ESLab is an electronic controls maker based in Steyning, W Sussex, home of SME and B&W research. Owner Steve Crampton looked at the Tripath design and saw its hi-fi potential, which led to the DX S4 power amp, or loudspeaker driver as he calls it, spearheading a planned range of six monoblock and two-channel designs. This 180 watt unit comes clad in an unusually solid case finished in black rhodium. ▷



The DX S4 has every connection option except digital.

**“ANOTHER LAYER HAD BEEN PEELED OFF THE BARRIER BETWEEN RECORDING AND REPLAY.”**

Connections include two sets of BFA (inconvenient, inverted 4mm plugs for which matching connectors are supplied) speaker terminals alongside both balanced and single-ended inputs and a 12v trigger socket for remote on/off switching. There is no facility for a digital input. Coming from a controls company, the DX S4 has more than its fair share of electronic switching capabilities, including varying degrees of automatic muting and standby selection; from auto mute after 30 minutes to always on in three stages, and a multicolour indicator that tells you if there's a problem and what sort it is - not exactly self-diagnostic but as close as any hi-fi component has come. Internally there are switches for bridged mono operation (500 watts), chassis earthing, power-up and music sensing, adjustable gain (25 or 50x) and low frequency turnover to avoid feeding low signals to small speakers which is claimed to yield benefits.

The DX S4 is a beautifully built piece of kit, and just like it says on the label it doesn't get hot and is unusually compact for an amplifier of its rated power (9x29x35cm to be precise). But even with hi-fi, size isn't everything. Well, not always.

**SOUND QUALITY**

This amplifier turned up as I was reviewing some Spendor S9 speakers so I gave it a blast and was impressed, particularly with the bass which took on a precision that one rarely encounters. The Spendor's explicit midrange suggested that

another layer had been peeled off the barrier between recording and replay and it gave the impression that microphones could be clearly differentiated. A good start, especially when combined with a lively, dynamic quality that imbued the music with life and energy. This impression increased when I went back to my usual Living Voice speakers, as its nimbleness throughout the audio band combined with great transparency for tremendous resolution. But something was amiss, there was a thinness of tone at high frequencies that left cymbals sounding splashy and unrealistic and had choral voices hardening as they rose. It soon became clear that the amp didn't like the runs of high capacitance Electrofluidics cable that sit between crossover and loudspeaker in my system, once this had been replaced with Townshend Cryogenic Isolda it was a lot happier. This is a precise sounding amplifier, everything slots into place with a coherence that's quite unusual. The high end on the Living Voices was a little softened and brushed drums sounded a little mushy, but the timing of the strokes was spot on. It was quite extraordinary how distinct were the variations in timing quality when I changed the interconnect from the ATC SCA2 preamp.

In terms of imaging, the ESLab also gives a great sense of precision and is able to portray depth and width ably if not as well as the best. And there is no denying that the amp has a lightness of touch. There's also a great



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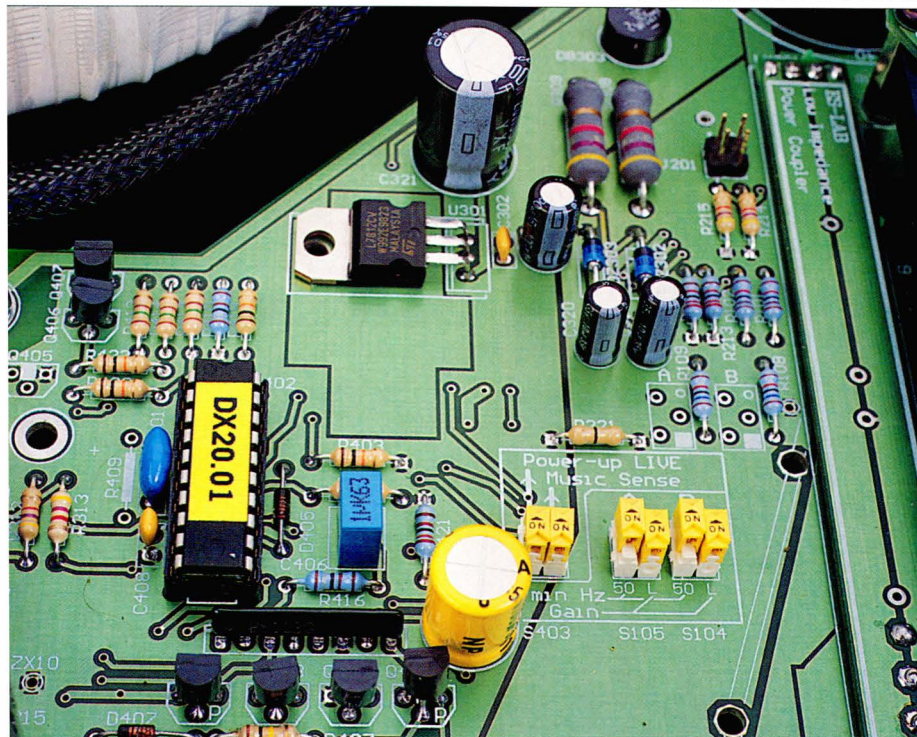
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Chord Electronics Limited

# HIGH PERFORMANCE ESLAB DX S4 DIGITAL AMPLIFIER



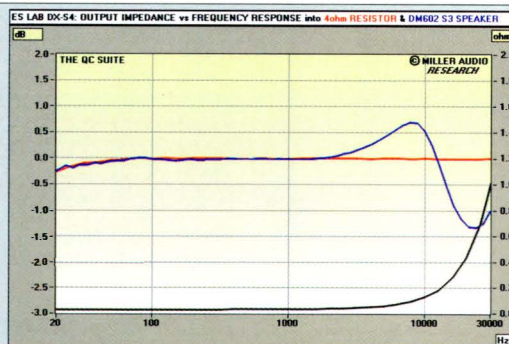
Note the micro switches (yellow and white) for setting up operational modes.

immediacy to this amplifier, and in this respect it combines the best qualities of transistors and valves – you get the presence of the latter with the power and phase coherence of the former. The amount of bandwidth you get depends not on the absolute limitations of the speaker but on the load the speaker presents. For instance I was surprised to get more bass weight out of a pair of LS3/5A speakers using my reference Gamut power amp (also 200 Watts).

## CONCLUSION

Tripath technology clearly has a lot going for it and this implementation is highly professional. In the Lab Report you'll see that like other digital amps, it is highly sensitive to the load it's driving. Its balance differed with all three of the speakers I used, my reference Living Voice Avatar OBX-R with its high sensitivity and tough load is probably not the best choice, but it sounded pretty sweet nonetheless.

£2,495, ESLAB ☎ 01903 814618



## LAB REPORT

The 'T-Class' logo refers to the the PWM (or Delta-Sigma) TA0104 dual-channel amp module at the heart of the DX S4. The principles of its highly efficient operation are not unlike those of the TACT Millennium digital amp (HFC 149 and 178). These amps use power transistors as switches, which are either fully on or fully off and, as switches cannot dissipate any heat, approach 100 per cent efficiency.

But whereas the Millennium acted directly upon a digital input, the DX S4's analogue input is, presumably, digitised within the Tripath module. Tripath is cagey about the precise nature of its technology, but like other PWM amps, it outputs a significant quantity of ultrasonic, 're-shaped' noise that must be filtered away to reveal the music waveform.

ESLabs is otherwise conservative in its specification, for the DX S4 actually delivers a full 2x280W/8ohm and 2x380W/4ohm before its electronic protection kicks in. Fast protection is important because both the PWM output stage and filter network will rapidly heat with sustained power outputs, especially at high frequencies.

ESLab's use of this module is impressive, achieving a very low distortion for this technology – 0.01% at 1W/8ohm through to a minimum of 0.002% at 10W/8ohm. Distortion increases to the true clip point of around 0.2% at 280W/8ohm. There's also some increase at bass (0.02%/20Hz) and treble (0.07%/20kHz) frequencies at 10W/8ohm. While these figures all best ES's own specification for the DX S4, our unit was also considerably noisier than expected. The A-wtd S/N ratio of 91dB is considerably adrift of the 108dB rating (re. rated output/8ohm) but is 'white' or hiss-like in nature, rather than supply-related.

ESLabs has optimised its filter stage to minimise the unwanted radiation of this noise, but all such filters have a reactive component that increases the amplifier's output impedance through the treble. This makes them sensitive to the varying load impedance of different loudspeakers.

Our graph shows this rise in impedance (black trace) through the treble and how its response (red trace) has been engineered to appear 'flat' into a purely resistive 4ohm load. Driving an 8ohm load, the response 'brightens' by +0.6dB at 20kHz while into a lower 2ohm load it dips by -1.6dB at 20kHz. As the impedance trend of a real speaker varies continuously with frequency, so does the 'system response' of the DX S4. The response driving a pair of B&W DM602 S3 loudspeakers to ~10W is represented by the blue trace. This increased dependence on the speaker load is one of the trade-offs of this technology and one reason why the DX-S4 will be more sensitive to system matching than usual.



**"IT'S HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO THE LOUDSPEAKER IT'S DRIVING. THE BALANCE DIFFERED WITH ALL THREE OF THE SPEAKERS I USED."**

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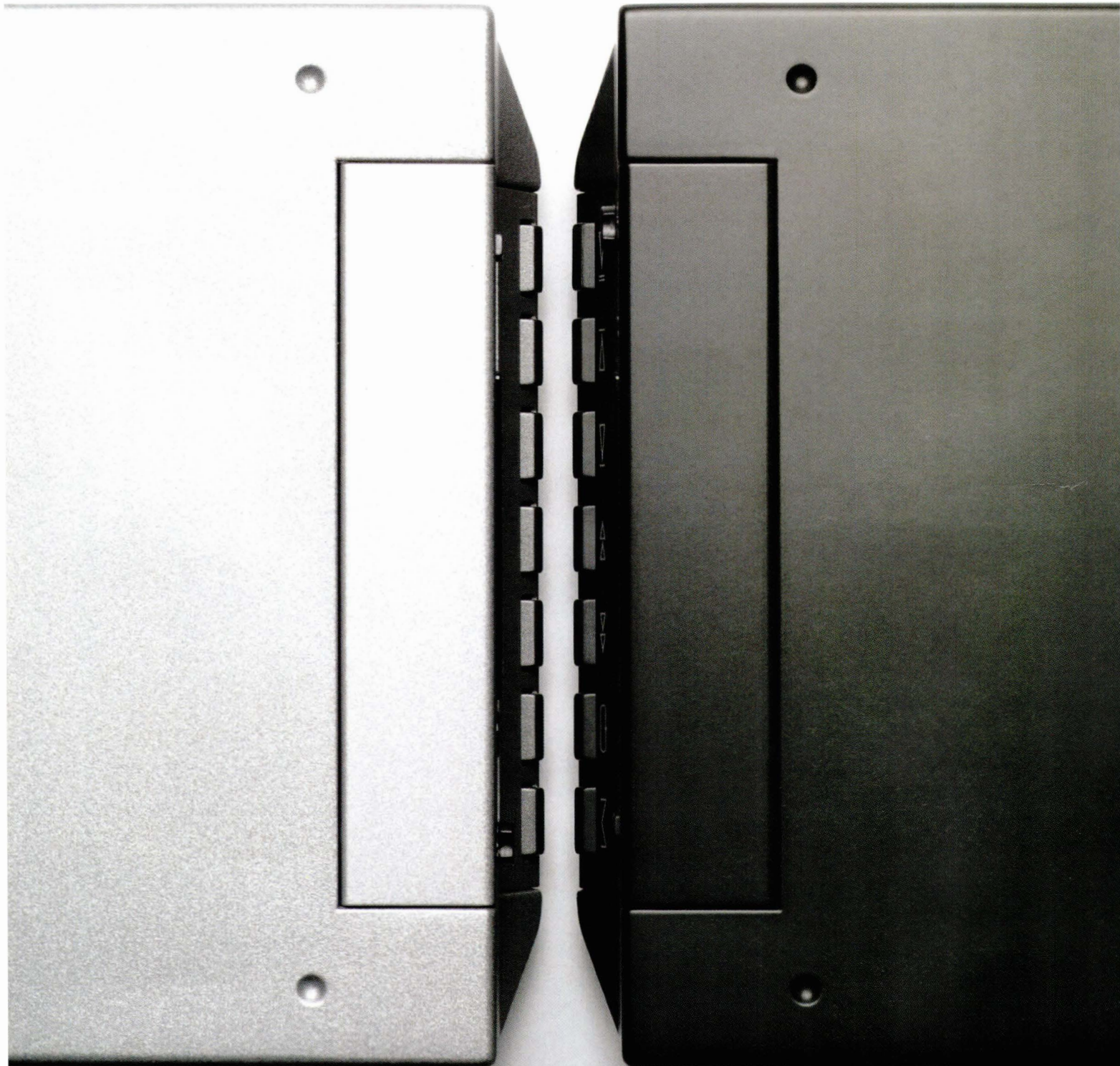
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# SENSE SURROUND

SONY'S LATEST MULTICHANNEL SACD PLAYER GIVES QUALITY AUDIO-STARVED EARS A GOOD STUFFING.

REVIEW PAUL MILLER

If last month's review of Sony's flagship SCD-XA777ES whetted your appetite for multichannel SACD audio, then this companion player, the SCD-XA333ES, may well suffice as the main course. It looks very similar to the '777 with its centrally-located mechanism and rotary track selection dial and even shares the same RM-SX700 remote control. The player also sports a combination of two-channel stereo outputs for CD replay, with a set of 5.1-channel outputs for multichannel SACD and, quite naturally, is also compatible with SACD, CD, CD-R and CD-RW software. And yet despite these similarities, the SCD-XA333ES is over a grand cheaper at £1,200.

Sure enough, the '333 is not quite as hefty as the '777 which is built into a three-part frame-

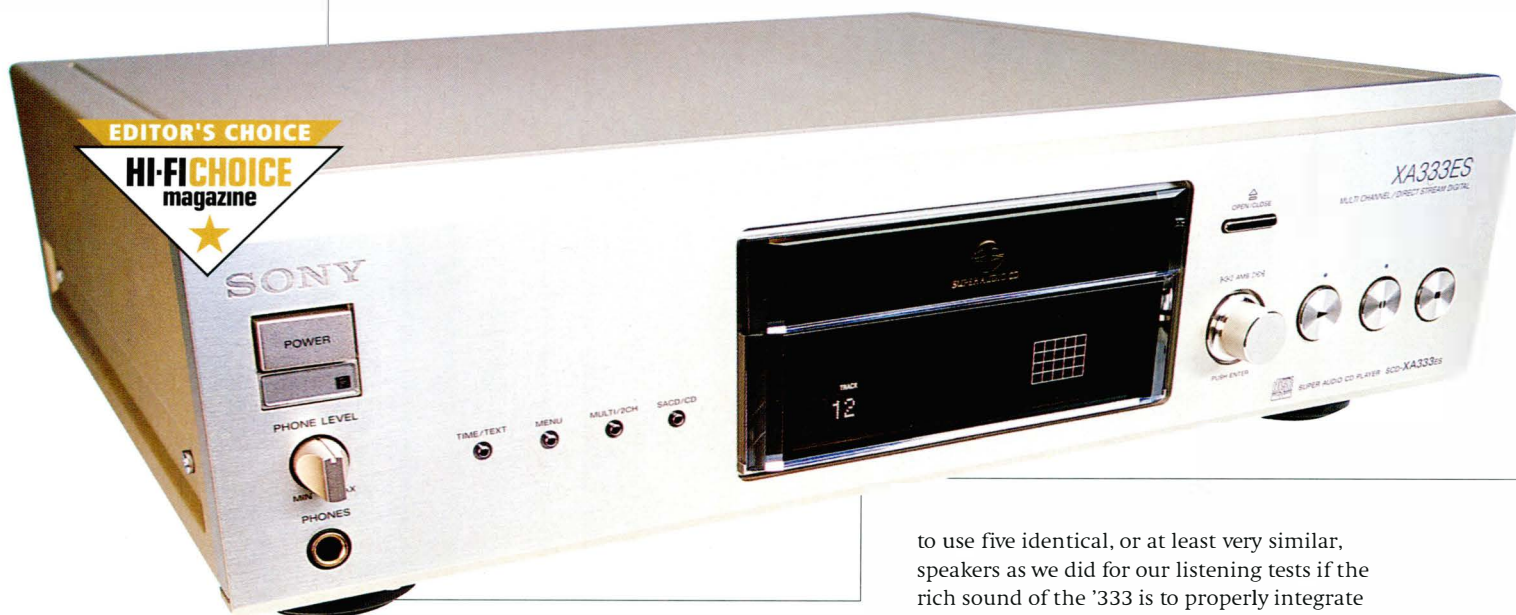
and-beam chassis. Instead, the '333 is reinforced by five plastic supports located at the corners and rear of the box in what Sony describes as a base-and-pillar construction. This 'entry-level' ES player also sports the same Super Audio DACs as its big brother, though with three rather than six pairs, its implementation is more traditional. In practice there's no technical penalty as this model boasts vanishingly low levels of distortion (0.0004%) and digital jitter (160psec) with a wide 110dB S/N ratio which, ironically, is actually 5dB *better* than that achieved by the SCD-XA777ES...

## SOUND QUALITY

Under the bonnet, there are more 'audiophile' components than you might care to shake a stick at, including a small forest of the Silmic



Sony's SACD players just keep getting better.



**"IT'S ONLY WHEN THE '333 IS USED IN MULTICHANNEL MODE THAT ALL ITS MUSICAL PIECES REALLY FIT TOGETHER."**



capacitors that helped keep Marantz's CD players on the map through the 1990's. Clearly, Sony is taking the analogue engineering of this product very seriously indeed, in contrast to many DVD-A players currently available.

Because the SCD-XA333ES is not compatible with DVD software, it doesn't have a video output or on-screen menu. Instead, you set it up by scrolling through various lines of text on the main display which separate two-channel from multichannel operation. CD replay, for example, has the option of either a standard or more gentle digital filter action, the latter not dissimilar to Pioneer's Legato Link. SACD does not require digital filtering but you have the option of adjusting each of the channel output levels with respect to one another in addition to setting, say, the centre and rear channels to 'small' if they are dwarfed by your main pair.

Anyone who's used a DVD player will be familiar with this set-up procedure, but while shifting bass from one (small) channel to the remaining (large) channels is pretty easy to accomplish with the PCM code used by CD and DVD, it's far trickier with SACD's high-speed bitstream. This 'bass management' is about as far as SACD's signal processing currently extends, so we'll have to wait another generation or two before we see interchannel delays available on the SACD menu. All of which means that to achieve the best 3D effect with multichannel SACD, you'll need to park yourself equidistant from all five main speakers (see our feature in *HFC* 222).

Frankly, because bass management is not entirely transparent, I'd recommend using all current SACD players in 'Multichannel Direct' mode unless your centre/rear speakers are no bigger than a pint pot. Better to feed a small speaker a full range but unprocessed signal, just as we have the last 20 years with CD. Better still

to use five identical, or at least very similar, speakers as we did for our listening tests if the rich sound of the '333 is to properly integrate from front to rear.

If the SCD-XA777ES has a remarkably transparent, ethereal and enticing sound, then the '333ES brings an added warmth and robustness to this musical frame. Thanks to the greater symmetry between its two and multichannel DAC stages, the '333 also sounds very much more consistent whether you are listening to CD, two-channel or multichannel SACD. All formats have a slightly more rosy and occasionally earthy quality about them that escapes the '777 which is arguably more neutral, and faithful, in its representation. Nevertheless, the richness that the '333 brings to strings, vocals and brass alike is, as one listener suggested, "an harmonious Technicolor".

#### CONCLUSION

Once again, while two-channel audio sounds compelling, it's only when the '333 is used in multichannel mode that all its musical pieces really fit together. The live DSD recording of Ravel's *Bohème* by the BFO encompasses the sort of exquisite, intricate and occasionally incidental detail that you would not otherwise hear. After all, only at a live performance would you hear the creak of a chair or muted cough coming from *behind* your seat! Even such familiar, some might say well-worn, standards are refreshed by the '333 which maintains a realistic balance as more instruments join to contribute, rather than dominate, the performance which builds in scale, free from compression or harshness.

So the '333 is another cracking multichannel player from Sony. One that clearly builds on the foundations of its last generation SACD players while standing its own corner against the top-flight SCD-XA777ES. I would not be at all surprised if the SCD-XA333ES ends up as the player of choice for multichannel audiophiles. £1,200.00, Sony ☎ 08705 111999

# SAVOIR-FAIRE

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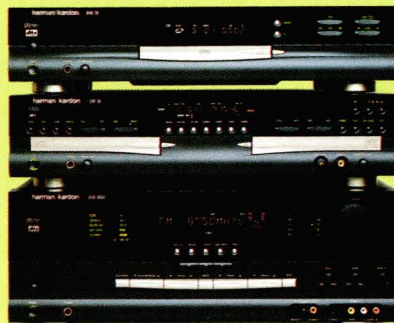
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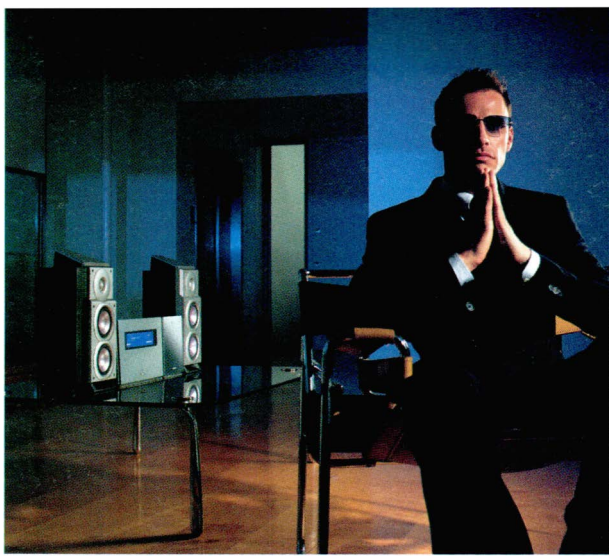
# Heard the impossible?

It sounds amazing –

but what exactly is 1-Bit audio?



**SHARP**



## HOW 1-BIT BREAKS WITH CONVENTION

It's important to realise that there's a very big difference between amplifiers processing analogue signals and those that process digital signals. In conventional amplifiers – like the ones you're used to – there's an inherent problem and it's this. The signal being processed from digital encoding to analogue has to pass through a number of complex stages. Inevitably, this may mean that the signal becomes more and more untrue at each stage.

In perfecting 1-Bit audio Sharp has broken away from convention to use an advanced and unique digital processing, known as Delta Sigma technology. It's this technology that makes the ultra-high speed sampling possible, and the difference is awesome.

The digital process ensures that the dynamic range of the reproduced audio signal remains true, keeping the resolution of the original audio signal in both the high and low frequency areas.

A brilliant purity of sound is achieved by a simplified sound transmission circuit that doesn't add or remove anything from the original signal. This is true whether the source is existing CDs or new digital technology.



## 1-BIT AUDIO LOOKS AS GOOD AS IT SOUNDS

Apart from the incredible sound quality, there's another significant advantage with this innovative technology. Being more efficient, the 1-Bit amplifier takes up less space.

This means Sharp have been able to revolutionise the product appearance to create ultra-compact, slim models that strike a note in sophisticated lifestyle design. So they are as attractive to the eye as they are to the ear.



## WANT TO HEAR MORE?

With this new 1-Bit audio Sharp really have achieved the impossible. Audio that delivers the warmth and ambience of analogue, yet with the clarity and purity of digital sound. You actually experience the entire atmosphere, all the passion and all the excitement of being right there with the performer. Making you wonder if you're in your living room or at a live performance.

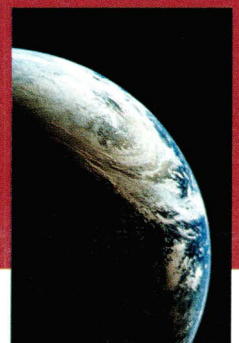
But if hearing is believing, why not listen for yourself? You'll find these new Sharp 1-Bit systems at Currys, Dixons, Comet and all good audio specialists.

Sounds like the best idea is to go and ask for a demonstration. Or, if you can't wait to see them, *Sharp have a website at [www.sharp.co.uk](http://www.sharp.co.uk) that features the whole range.*

## MORE IN TUNE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

1-Bit audio has superior power efficiency in comparison with conventional amplifiers – consuming only around half the power, and radiating only one fifth the heat.

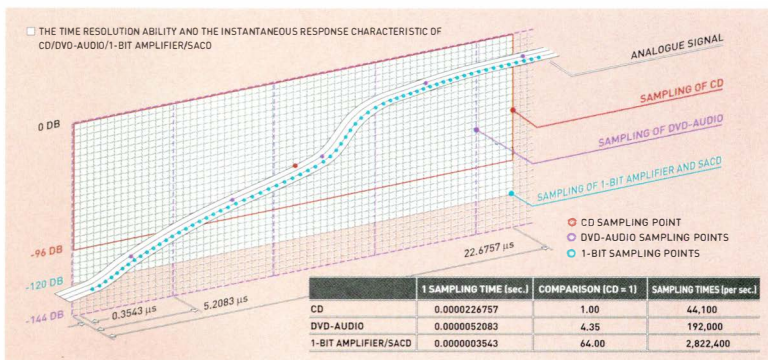
In the manufacture of all its products, Sharp uses recycled materials wherever possible. All of these factors strike the right note environmentally, which is something we all have to be mindful of today.



**EVERY SO OFTEN**, along comes one of those events that completely transforms our enjoyment of music. Think of the impact that stereo must have had. Or more recently, the advent of the compact disc. Well, be prepared now to hear the impossible, because the introduction of 1-Bit audio by Sharp is nothing less than the sound of the new century. A breathtakingly pure sound that reproduces the original so faithfully, you'll believe you're actually at the performance. Impossible? Not when you hear it, and not when you hear how it's done.

## THE SECRET'S IN THE SAMPLING

Unique to Sharp, the revolutionary technology behind this new 1-Bit audio is pretty amazing, and it's all to do with the way it processes the signal from a CD. If you're ready for the technical stuff, here's how Sharp define it. 'An ultra-high sampling speed of 2.8MHz (2,822,400 times per second) gives unrivalled time accuracy and resolution resulting in faithful reproduction of the original signal. As 1-Bit signals are digital, there is virtually no noise or sound degradation during signal transmission or amplification process.'



Let's look a little more closely at what that means exactly. To put the high speed sampling rate into perspective, compare it with the sampling rate of a CD. No contest, as 1-Bit audio samples at an incredible sixty four times the rate – and remember, we used to think that sound couldn't get much better with CD.

Quite simply, the higher the sampling rate, the more faithful the result. Slower sampling can actually add sound that may not have been present in the original recording. With 1-Bit audio, you hear the most accurate sound performance ever reproduced, because Sharp has completely re-invented the amplification process.





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*Monitor*

*Volume*



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The New TEAC Reference 350 and 550 series. Advanced digital technology served up in a range of beautiful mini components, individually styled and each one an audiophile separate in its own right.

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Reference 350



Reference 550



The new TEAC Reference 350 and 550 Series

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# STEREO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

ALVIN GOLD & PAUL MILLER CHECK OUT THE LATEST WATT MAKERS.

**T**he reason for the small size of this group – only six products in total – is an indication of one of those facts of hi-fi life, which is that stereo integrated amplifiers are simply no longer being produced in the same profusion that they once were. Why? It is not that people are no longer listening to music. It is not even that people are no longer buying amplifiers. Rather there has been a steady drift over the last few years towards multichannel amplifiers, which are not just being used to play movies, but are also taking the place of sales that in the past would have gone to stereo amplifiers.

This of course is a trend that we have been following here on *HFC*. We've looked at many models in the multichannel market, and as much as anything we've learnt that stereo amplifiers usually – all things considered – sound better with music. So stereo amplifiers still have an important, indeed, essential place in circles where sound quality matters.

But if music in stereo is what turns you on, we have a treat for you this month. Our half dozen models are as eclectic a bunch as you could hope to assemble. We have 'straight' transistor amps, a valve amp with a MOSFET output stage that looks like a million dollars and sounds – well wait and see. There is a single-ended, Class A amplifier whose active devices are transistors and whose genesis dates back more than three decades. There is also an important revised model from Arcam, the A75 Plus, which replaces a model that was only introduced a year ago. More than enough to suit all stereo tastes.

## ON TEST

Arcam DiVA A75 Plus	£449.90
ARIA Unison Research SR1	£1,250
Marantz PM8200	£599
Rotel RA1070	£1,000
Sugden A21a	£999
Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1	£849.95

## EQUIPMENT USED

Tannoy Dimension TD12 speaker  
 B&W DM602 S3 speaker  
 TAG McLaren DVD32R transport and DPA32R digital preamplifier  
 Denon DVD-3300 DVD-/ACD player

## THE LISTENING PANEL

Steve N Harris (Tag McLaren Audio)  
 Keith Haddock (REL)

## MUSIC USED

Alasdair Nicolson/Joanna MacGregor (piano) - *Play*  
 Vaughan Williams/LSO/Richard Hickox - *Symphony No 2*  
 Mary Coughlan - *Love For Sale*  
 James Taylor - *Hourglass*

Overdrive  
 R





## ARCAM DIVA A75 PLUS

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£449.90** **CONTACT** 01223 203200 [www.arcam.co.uk](http://www.arcam.co.uk) **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**A**rcam scored a resounding hit with the first DIVA range amplifier, the A85, and quickly followed up with the A65 and A75, which attracted nothing like the same level of critical acclaim or sales success, despite their lower prices. Arcam has taken the message to heart, and this is the replacement for the original A75 (there's an A65 Plus too). Changes include improved input and feedback coupling linearity, and increased output power supply capacitance with additional low ESR (Equivalent Series Resistance) capacitors. Externally the amp is unchanged: it is equipped with tone controls and bypass switching, and unlike the A65 it has a tape monitor switch that doubles as an AV processor function, allowing system volume control from an external processor.

Much of the rear panel is taken up by convection cooling fins, with a

relatively modest surface area, though the amp doesn't run hot even with extended high volume operation. Inputs number five at line level including tape and an MM phono input that can be switched to operate as a line input (not available on the A65), giving a potential maximum of six line inputs. A preamplifier output is available for bi-amp systems, and two sets of loudspeakers can be connected via BFA connectors, one switchable on the front panel. A full system remote is provided.

### SOUND QUALITY

Because the A75 Plus review sample only became available just before press time it could not be put through the usual blind panel test programme, though the earlier A75 was, and the panel comments form a benchmark for this retest. One remark made of the vanilla A75 was that 'like a blonde with a 34DD bust, it isn't quite neutral, but it certainly

demands attention', and I too felt that it had a rather Technicolor quality and lacked gravitas. It didn't sound like a slimmed-down version of the A85, the real star in the range.

But the new model certainly does. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that the A75 Plus has a better integrated quality, with a sharper, more powerful and more tuneful bass that knows how to breathe fire when necessary, and the speaker as a whole has better timing. The character of the sound majors on clarity and precision, but without overstepping the mark; this is always an eminently listenable design. I

**Good all-round sound delivery with the addition of fire-breathing capabilities.**

should add that it worked brilliantly with the test B&W DM602 S3 with an enormously wide range of differing music types, and at surprisingly high volume levels with the Tannoy's, while always remaining in command.

### CONCLUSION

This is a neatly packaged, well equipped amplifier with some interesting and unusual secondary features, and in its new Plus form, it finally does justice to the DIVA range. An excellent buy.

### THE LAB REPORT

Whatever 'tweaks' have been brought to the A75, they have not altered the fundamental topology or performance of the amplifier. Its gain remains unchanged at +36.6dB though the S/N ratio of this 'Plus' sample was about 1dB down on the standard A75 at 85dB (A-wtd, re. 0dBW). The response remains flat and the power output steady at ~60W, both channels driven from 20Hz-20kHz. Incidentally, this represents a 10W advantage over the A65 into 8ohm and an extra 15W under dynamic

conditions, amounting to 90W, 164W, 195W (9.9A) and 115.5W (10.9A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, respectively, to accommodate musical transients. Distortion is low and well-controlled with a minimum of 0.002% through the bass, rising to 0.03% at very high frequencies. Only the output impedance has changed for the better with a slight reduction from 0.075ohm (A75) to 0.06ohm (A75 Plus), though whether this is sufficient to promote a more 'tuneful' bass is doubtful.



**"THE CHARACTER OF THE SOUND MAJORS ON CLARITY AND PRECISION, BUT WITHOUT OVERSTEPPING THE MARK."**



# MARANTZ PM8200

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	<b>£599.00</b>	<b>CONTACT</b> 01753 680868	www.marantz.com	<b>GUARANTEE</b> 2 years
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**R**ated at 50 watts/channel (8 ohms RMS over the usual audio bandwidth), and 80 watts (4 ohms at 1kHz), the PM8200 is one model rung up from the 60100SE, but despite the model name benefits from selected OSE-style capacitors and volume potentiometer, a toroidal transformer and high current LDPS (Linear Drive Power Supply). Other highlights include a reinforced, dual layer base, and the remote control microprocessor is positioned behind the heat sink fins to minimise interactions. A separate tape selector allows bi-directional tape dubbing, and the tape circuits can be switched off entirely, while the tone controls

are bypassable. There may be too many controls for those with more spartan tastes, but they have a top-class feel, and the pale, gold-brushed metal finish, along with the sunburst motif around the blue power LED, are impressive.

Gold-plated socketry on the rear panel accommodates five line sources, including two tape circuits, and phono (MM only), plus a preamp output. System link (D-Bus) sockets allow commands to be channelled to other components, or for an external remote receiver to be added to fully concealed systems. Quality WBT 4mm speaker sockets are fitted, and a well organised system remote control is included.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Marantz has a very particular character which quickly became apparent in the panel tests and the hands-on tests alike, with agreement extended to the value judgements, and not just the basic observations. 'Music at last!' wrote one, who continued: 'this is a fine, enjoyable and even-handed amplifier', though he felt it was 'flawed and slightly soft'. Other comments: 'musically effective, with more scale and space than a number of the other amplifiers, especially in the Vaughan Williams recording', which he noted had 'a better sense of scale' than in previous presentations. There was some criticism of stereo imagery, for example in the Mary Coughlan recording which was described as being 'too large, but with a voice sound that was too close', and 'blowsy'.

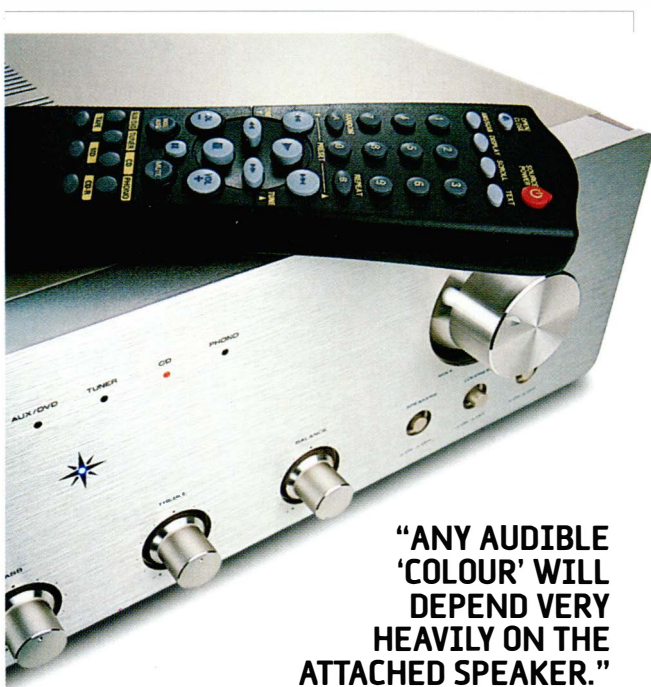
Tonally, I found the Marantz slightly

An unusual looking Marantz that has a better range of features than most.

dull, though less so than some of the other models in the group, but on the whole it reproduced music with a strong sense of physical presence and solidity and with good timing, adequate levels of detail, and a notable lack of granularity. On the whole this was a consistent-sounding amplifier, despite indications to the contrary in the panel tests, but there was an occasional hint of glassiness, for example in the Joanna MacGregor piano recording of Alasdair Nicolson's *42nd S. Romp*.

## CONCLUSION

Although the feature-rich PM8200 may seem like a step back from Marantz's purist roots, the amp is basically well sorted and a considerable musical success, though it is not the most powerful in its class.



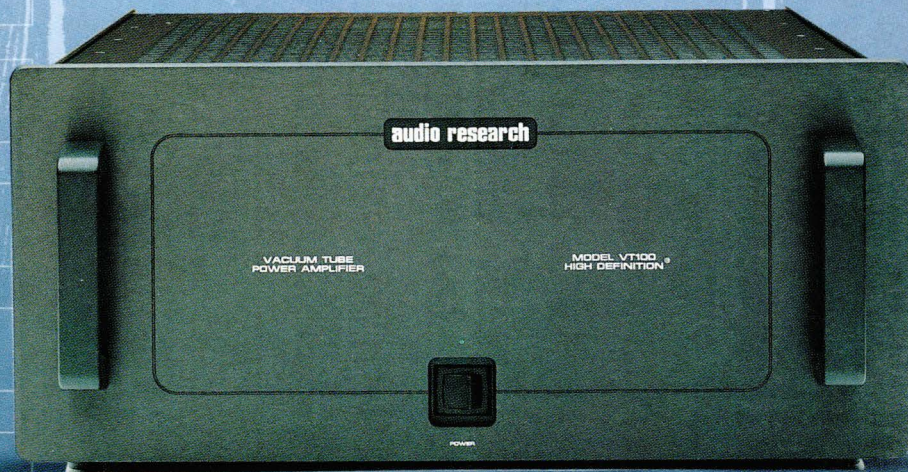
**"ANY AUDIBLE 'COLOUR' WILL DEPEND VERY HEAVILY ON THE ATTACHED SPEAKER."**

## THE LAB REPORT

Distortion produced by the PM8200 varies quite considerably, increasing with both power output (beyond 10W) and decreasing load (below 8ohm). At very low output (<1W/8ohm) there is some slight crossover distortion, beyond which it falls to a miraculous minimum of 0.0004% from 20Hz-2kHz. But into a lower 4ohm load and under dynamic conditions, THD is -90dB (0.003%) at 10W, -70dB (0.03%) at 80W and -50dB (0.3%) at 130W. As a result, any audible 'colour' will depend very heavily on the attached speaker.

Its ability to drive difficult loads is also restricted by a current limit, evidenced by the dynamic power output of 95W, 150W, 110W (7.4A) and just 57W (7.6A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, respectively. Continuous power output is just above the rated spec at 2x70W and 2x100W (8 and 4ohm, respectively), the response is nearly ruler flat and the output impedance usefully low at 0.04ohm. Weighted noise (which removes much of the contribution from the PSU) is also good at -86.5dB. If only the trends in distortion were not so fickle...

# ARC ANGELS



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EDITORS CHOICE AWARD  
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LS25 MKII/VT100 MKIII  
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DVD-Audio, SACD, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, MLP, DTS, MP3 - home entertainment is ever-changing, the music lover struggling to keep abreast of developments while steering clear of the ephemeral. Stability is needed, a touchstone, a constant upon which the enthusiast can depend. For over a quarter-century, Audio Research has brought order to the chaos, responding to every new format, every new layout with a steady hand, a trained ear, a cool head - applying the wisdom gained of experience to every product bearing the company's name.

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But Audio Research does not restrict its expertise to its flagship models. The company has always employed a "trickle down" approach, applying the gains acquired through the development of the Reference models throughout the range. Among its latest achievements are the CD3 Cd player the LS25 Mk II pre-amplifier and VT100 Mk III power amplifier, products capable of reproducing sound of a calibre unknown at their price points.

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# ROTEL RA1070

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	<b>£1,000.00</b>	<b>CONTACT</b> 01908 317707	www.rotel.com	<b>GUARANTEE</b> 2 years
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**R**otel's stock in trade is purposeful but well equipped amplifiers which offer a lot of power for the money, and this newcomer is firmly in the house tradition. The RA1070 is rated at 100 watts/channel into eight ohms, and it is bristling with facilities, including separate listen and record selectors for eight inputs, including two tape circuits and a moving magnet phono input, which is generous by any standard. The Rotel allows any source to be monitored while another is recording, and for the tape circuits to be turned off entirely, advisable when not recording.

Separate fluorescent dot matrix displays keep track of what has been selected. The Rotel omits tone controls, but includes a four position (+ off) contour switch to provide subtle overall response shaping. Two pairs of speakers can be switched independently. There is even a full set of facilities designed for multiroom and concealed installations, including two pairs of preamp level outputs, infra-red in and outputs, a remote trigger socket, and RJ-45 connector for computer control. Even the remote control joins in the party: it can operate up to nine other components and has a learning function.

### SOUND QUALITY

Both listeners agreed that the Rotel was muscular and dynamic, and indeed that it has a fair share of subtlety. The piano recording was deemed to have 'a nice bloom', with 'good leading edges', and 'more agility' than the previous amplifier in the session. Mary Coughlan's voice, however, sounded 'sibilant' and 'lacking in body and mellifluousness', while the Vaughan Williams was 'brash' according to one, and 'steely and flat' according to another. The usually tidy James Taylor recording was described as 'shouty' and had 'suspect timing'. Clearly they were not entirely happy with this amplifier.

And neither was I. On the plus side, using the amplifier out of the blind panel context soon showed that it has power in spades, enough to reproduce just about anything through any loudspeaker available at any required volume. If you want an authentic powerhouse at a moderate

The remote control's learning function allows the amp to grow with you.

price, the RA1070 has few equals. But there is something vaguely unsatisfactory about the sound, which somehow fails to breathe naturally. Although there was some brashness with the Tannoys, this was not a problem with other speakers, but the airless presentation, the lack of depth and layering in the bass and the rather emasculated (though deep and tuneful) bass remained.

### CONCLUSION

This is a great choice for large rooms, insensitive speakers and where high sound pressure levels are important considerations, but although there are few easily identifiable problems, the music somehow failed to engage. As one panellist felt moved enough to put it: 'where's the body in the voice? And where's the atmosphere gone?'

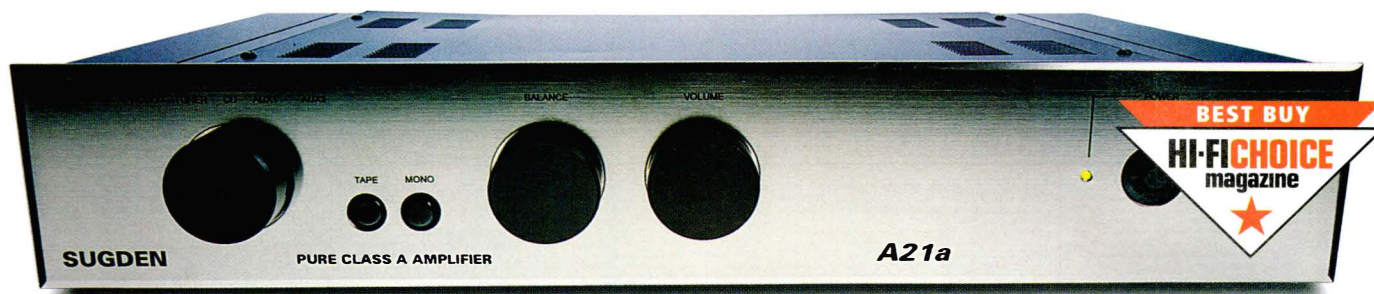


**"IT HAS POWER IN SPADES, ENOUGH TO REPRODUCE ANYTHING THROUGH ANY LOUDSPEAKER."**

### THE LAB REPORT

Out-powering the other amplifiers in our test by a significant margin, the RA1070 even bests its own 100W specification by delivering 2x140W/8ohm and 2x225W/4ohm. Under dynamic conditions, this increases to 178W, 318W (8.9A), 535W (16.4A) and a whopping 533W (23.1A) into 1ohm before Rotel's electronic protection – quite sensibly – shuts the amplifier down till the volume is reduced. Distortion is low and gratifyingly consistent at 0.002% from 20Hz-5kHz and over much of its dynamic

range. The overall gain is high at +45.2dB and, with the volume control set to deliver 1W/8ohm @ 500mV in, noise is slightly below average at -83dB (A-wtd) while the channel balance is relatively poor at 1.1dB. Meanwhile, the contour settings offer the following adjustment to bass and treble: contour L-1 (+4.2dB @ 40Hz), L-2 (+6.7dB @ 20Hz), H (+4dB @ 20kHz), LH (+6.5dB @ 20Hz and +5dB @ 20kHz). These are not dissimilar to the 'tilt' controls offered by Quad many years ago.



## SUGDEN A21A

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£899.95** (line only), **£999.95** (phono MM/MC) **CONTACT** 01924 406016 [www.audiosynergy.co.uk](http://www.audiosynergy.co.uk) **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**T**his may be the biggest secret in the hi-fi industry. Although solid state, the Sugden A21a uses a single-ended Class A circuit topology more usually associated with high-end valves which draws a consistent mean current from the power supply. Conventional amps use separate devices for the positive and negative parts of the waveform, with constantly varying power requirements. The prize is a simpler circuit free from crossover distortion but the tradeoff is limited power output – 25 watts/channel into eight ohms, rather less into four ohms – and copious quantities of waste heat. So what is the secret? Sugden has been making the A21 in various forms since 1968. It is probably the longest-running amplifier in history, and one of only a select handful of single-ended class A solid state amps. Pass Labs is the only other prominent name on the list.

Despite the large heat sinks, the A21a is no larger than any of the other slimline amplifiers in this test, and it boasts a phono input, tape monitoring and stereo/mono switching. Build quality is distinctly pedestrian, and the PC boards are hand-loaded and soldered, though component quality is good.

### SOUND QUALITY

Notwithstanding the uninspiring visuals, from the moment it was first fired up, it was obvious that this is a very superior-sounding amplifier, with an absolutely glorious midband which paints music on a grand scale, with authority, superb articulation and definition and best of all a sense of physical presence unusual from an amplifier this side of a big Naim, Krell or Theta. What sets it apart above all else is the astonishing ability it has to bring the subtle texturing and harmonic complexity of instruments to life while it copes with the

expressiveness of playing better than virtually any integrated amplifier in my experience. Switch the music on, and you know instantly you are hearing something close to a real performance.

Although the A21a's power output appears a little limited on paper, it was powerful enough in practice, not just for the super efficient Tannoys, but also for the other speakers used in the test.

Anything that's been around for 30+ years and looks like this has got to sound good.

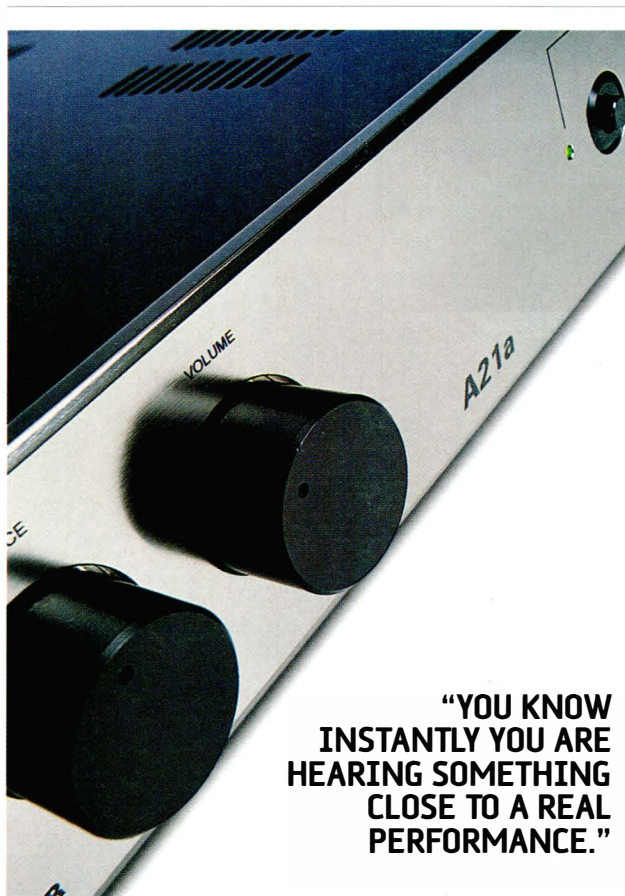
### CONCLUSION

Build quality is neither as slick, nor it seems, as robust as some, and it runs uncomfortably hot. Don't worry about the low power specification though: it has more usable power than the numbers suggest, and sonically the A21a is in the very top class.

### THE LAB REPORT

I could not confirm that the A21a operates in a true Class A mode up to its rated 25W output, though this was only just achieved at 1kHz into both 8 and 4ohm loads. Distortion and supply-modulation are significant at low bass frequencies, limiting the 20Hz power figure to 11W/8ohm and pushing THD to a typical 0.4% (instead of 0.15% midband and 0.25% at HF). Sugden's own figure of 0.01% THD is only met at <1W/8ohm. Clearly, the dominant 2nd, 3rd and 4th harmonic distortions are significant

enough to exert some subjective impact while the low 3.2A available current also suggests the A21a is best partnered with sensitive, easy-load speakers. Into a non-reactive load, the response is already -1.3dB down at 20kHz, but taking the moderate 0.17ohm output impedance into account, this 'sweetened' treble rolls off further into a 'real' speaker load. Bass is also likely to be coloured by the supply interaction – hot and colourful, the success of the A21a will hinge on system matching and personal taste.



**“YOU KNOW INSTANTLY YOU ARE HEARING SOMETHING CLOSE TO A REAL PERFORMANCE.”**



# TALK ELECTRONICS CYCLONE 2.1

<b>SOUND</b> ★★☆☆	<b>VALUE</b> ★★☆☆	<b>£849.95</b>	<b>CONTACT</b> 01276 709966	www.talkelectronics.com	<b>GUARANTEE</b> 3 years
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**W**e have tested various Talk amplifiers in the past, including the Storm and the Tornado, and an earlier version of the Cyclone. But the Cyclone 2.1 is a different animal, which shares the same lateral MOSFET power supply, and which has a similar and highly distinctive front panel design, but which is otherwise new from the ground up. The front end now uses a current mirror, and a cascaded voltage gain stage is designed to improve power supply noise rejection and improve open loop gain. The frequency response of the circuit has

now joined the digital age (-3dB at 100kHz), and the speaker terminals have transmogrified into BFA connectors. The Cyclone 2.1 will soon be able to handle 5.1 channel audio sources (DVD-Audio etc) using an add-in board and an external three-channel power amplifier. As it stands, you get source and tape monitoring using a (counter-intuitive) arrangement of coloured LEDs – just remember that red means audio is go, green selects the tape routing. Power output is claimed as 100 watts/channel, increasing to ‘around’ 170 watts into 4 ohms. A miniature rear panel

connector is fitted for an external preamp power supply, the Whirlwind, and a 3.5mm headphone plug can also be connected at the back. Remote control is included.

### SOUND QUALITY

Let loose in anger, the Cyclone 2.1 failed to excite the panel, who described the amplifier as ‘staid and boring... with not much light and shade’ and ‘bland’. Another panellist talked of ‘a lack of weight and dramatic tension’, and a ‘bloomy bass and a lack of drama’. You get the picture. One summed up his feelings by suggesting that this is an amplifier he would recommend to neighbours, in the hope they would give up listening to music.

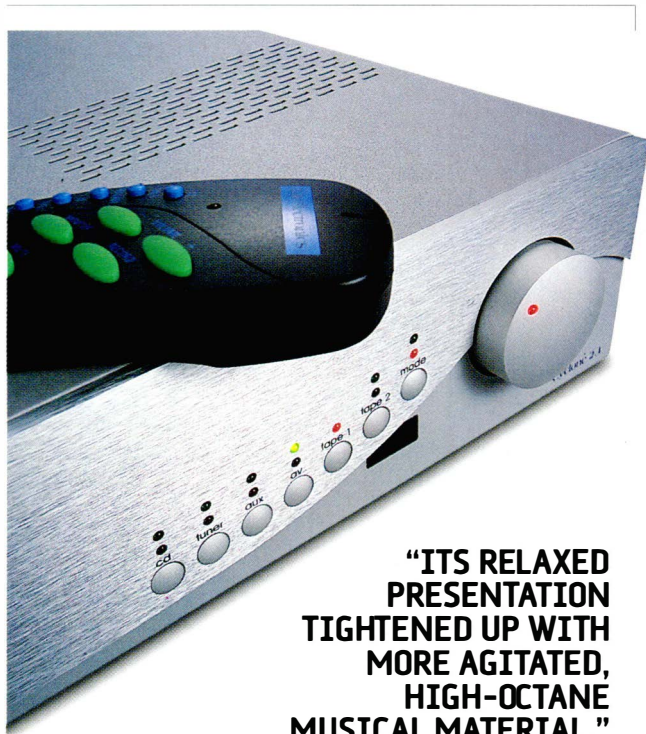
Although the panel correctly captured the essence of the design when they described it as slightly dull and leaden, I felt much more favourably disposed towards it, especially in ex-panel listening using mid-price B&W speakers (the DM602

**At its best when handling small acoustic material such as piano or chamber music.**

S3) where they tamed what can be a slightly tippy balance, while adding power and enriching some of the darker tonal colours in the system. Over an extended listening period, I felt the Cyclone 2.1 warmed to its task, and on balance I appreciated its relative transparency and its relaxed presentation which tightened up satisfyingly with more agitated, high-octane musical material.

### CONCLUSION

The Cyclone 2.1 doesn't have the best timing in the group, and it is somewhat lacking in drama and analysis, which makes it an erratic high achiever at best. It is generally at its best with small acoustic forces such as piano and chamber material, and though this unevenness probably rules it out for overall recommendation, I found it unfailingly honest and direct in a well chosen system.



**“ITS RELAXED PRESENTATION TIGHTENED UP WITH MORE AGITATED, HIGH-OCTANE MUSICAL MATERIAL.”**

### THE LAB REPORT

The amplifier is sufficiently biased to prevent crossover distortions at low power, but distortion otherwise increases both with increasing output and with increasing signal frequency. For example, at just 0.1W/1kHz, distortion is a low 0.004% but this builds to 0.017% by 10W/1kHz and a heady 0.28% at 10W/20kHz. The nature of the harmonic distortion is even-ordered but also quite extended, so its subjective impact cannot be underestimated. Flat-out, the Cyclone

whips-up at full 110W/8ohm with both channels driven, increasing to 160W/4ohm and 140W, 230W, 295W (12.1A) and 225W (15A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads under dynamic, music-like conditions. Other positive aspects of the Cyclone 2.1 include the 86.7dB S/N ratio and low DC offsets. Otherwise, the flat response of the amplifier will only be slightly moderated by its 0.15ohm source impedance. All in all, the Cyclone 2.1 adds more power to an established theme.



## UNISON RESEARCH ARIA SR1

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆

**VALUE** ★★☆☆☆

£1,250.00

**CONTACT** 01753 652669

www.ukd.co.uk

**GUARANTEE** 2 years

**T**he Unison Research SR1 is a valve/solid state hybrid, with a valve input stage consisting of ECC82 double triodes providing the first two stages of gain, and an output stage using complementary pairs of power MOSFETs. The result is meant to synthesise the strengths of the two technologies: the delicacy and airiness of valves with solid state drive and reliability. On paper it looks like an impressive package, with an output power rating of 80 watts (eight ohms) over a 2Hz – 70kHz bandwidth (-1dB), not the kind of numbers associated with value output stages. The circuit uses only a minimal level of feedback (8dB), and an overdrive LED shows when distortion levels exceed one per cent.

In true Italian style, the SR1 looks absolutely drop dead gorgeous, with a stainless steel top plate/heat deflector, subtly shaped solid cherry trim and stainless steel turned

controls. The remote (volume up/down only, RF powered rather than infra-red) is made from the same wood. The SR1 input is limited to four line inputs and a tape circuit; there is no tape monitor facility, no balance control, no headphone socket.

### SOUND QUALITY

Blind panel tests are great levellers, as there is no possibility of being misled by fancy technologies or other factors, and so it proved here. One panel member felt that the SR1 'made quite good sense of rhythm' but that it was 'not as detailed as some' in the piano recording, while the other described what he heard as 'good insight into the playing', though overall he felt the performance in this case was 'dry and boring'. But any mild satisfaction with this player soon seemed to dissipate, and the amplifier was subsequently described as 'recessed and lacking in life', though there was praise from all for

the SR1's dynamics and image scale.

Using this amplifier with other speakers, I was even less happy with it. Although it sounds full and meaty, it has a very uncomfortable, screechy edge when extended, and the frequency extremes are clearly deficient. The bass is lumpy and poorly extended, and the treble lacks presence and subtlety; the whole amplifier in fact lacks grace. In one example, an excellent recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (Murray Perahia on Sony Classical) the playing sounded strained and mechanical, the piano tone jangly, and sound

**To-die-for looks don't make up for an underlying lack of performance.**

quality rapidly deteriorated as the volume was increased, with obvious signs of strain and congestion.

### CONCLUSION

Rather than offer the best of valves and transistors, the SR1 seems to do precisely the opposite. It has the lack of range and extension sometimes associated with valves and the rawness of a deficient solid state amp. But it does the looks thing brilliantly. It looks absolutely gorgeous...

**"BASS IS LUMPY AND POORLY EXTENDED, TREBLE LACKS PRESENCE AND SUBTLETY; THE WHOLE AMP LACKS GRACE."**



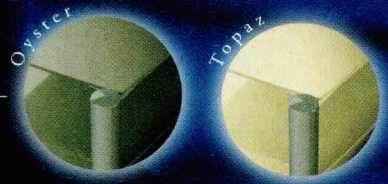
### THE LAB REPORT

Tube/transistor hybrids usually attempt to combine the speaker tolerance of a solid-state power amp with the classic 'tube sound' of triode-based driver circuitry. In this instance, however, Unison's MOSFET power amp is seemingly no more able to grapple with a real speaker than most pure valve amplifiers. For example, the 80W specification is only met through bass and midrange into 8ohm, falling to 50W at HF with increasing distortion. Through midrange frequencies, distortion increases

from 0.08-0.2% from 0.1-10W but holds reasonably steady at 0.2-0.4% from 20Hz-20kHz at 10W/8ohm.

Power output actually decreases into tougher loads, as evidenced by the 102W, 86W, 45W (4.7A) and 24W (4.9A) achieved into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, respectively, under dynamic conditions. The response is ruler-flat from 10Hz-30kHz but the high 0.4ohm output impedance will ensure the overall system response is modified by the varying impedance trend of the loudspeaker.

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# CONCLUSIONS ALVIN GOLD ROUNDS UP

**O**ur eclectic bunch of amplifiers turns out to provide about as varied a standard of performance as any self-respecting reviewer could wish for, and the odd surprise to add spice to proceedings. One was the Unison Research Aria SR1, which has to-die-for Italian looks, and which puts its two glowing bottles on display as if to promise valve-like sound, but with real muscle from its MOSFET output stage. Sadly the execution failed to live up to the promise, and what we got instead was a rather lumpy and uncomfortable sound. If it is a valve-like sound that you want, check out the solid state Sugden A21a instead. It has little to recommend it on the test bench, but it's single-ended Class A architecture, more usually associated with valve designs, really does deliver the goods – and this from an amplifier that has been around longer than many of the readers of *HFC* – or

some of the reviewers. The Arcam A75 Plus also gave an excellent account of itself at a very modest price, and is clearly superior to the original A75, which was not one of Arcam's brightest ideas.

The Marantz PM8200 and the Rotel RA1070 also performed well on test, and appear to epitomise a trend away from stripped down minimalism: they're both surprisingly fully equipped, and the Rotel has enormous reserves of power, though it is slightly less exciting when strutting its stuff. Rounding the group off, the Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1 is obviously better than previous Talk amplifiers we have tested, but it failed to shine in this distinguished company.

**“THE ARCAM A75 PLUS IS CLEARLY SUPERIOR TO THE ORIGINAL A75, WHICH WAS NOT ONE OF ARCAM'S BRIGHTEST IDEAS.”**



## AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	ARCAM DIVA A75 PLUS	MARANTZ PM8200	ROTEL RA1070	SUGDEN A21A	TALK ELECTRONICS CYCLONE 2.1	UNISON RESEARCH ARIA SR1
PRICE	£449.90	£599.00	£1,000.00	£999.95	£849.95	£1,250.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	The A75's redesign means it finally lives up to the promise of being an A85 Lite.	Modest real life power, but excellent audio manners and loads of toys.	Very powerful amplifier with good feature set, but lacks the 'must listen' quality of the best.	Basic build, bags of distortion, limited power, but it sings, and knows how to drive speakers – a classic.	Consistent, if slightly matter of fact presentation from this powerful addition to the Talk range.	Valve input stage and MOS output delivers the worst of both worlds – but glorious fit and finish.
GUARANTEE	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	3 years	2 years

THE LAB REPORT	ARCAM	MARANTZ	ROTEL	SUGDEN	TALK ELECTRONICS	UNISON RESEARCH
DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
AUDIBLE DISTORTION	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
NOISE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL RATING	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████

# Matching Flair

BUILDING A GREAT MULTICHANNEL SYSTEM IS MORE ABOUT COMPATIBILITY THAN CASH. PAUL MILLER INVESTIGATES.

**“FINE-SOUNDING  
SPEAKERS MAY  
CONFLICT WITH  
ONE ANOTHER IN  
A MULTICHANNEL  
SYSTEM.”**



**D**uring my test of multichannel systems in *HFC 221* it became very clear that the choice and matching of front, centre and surround speakers has the ability to make or break an otherwise top-flight combination. This might seem obvious. After all, poor-sounding stereo speakers are hardly likely to improve just because they are joined by another in the centre and two more behind. Nevertheless, what are generally recognised as fine-sounding speakers may also conflict with one another when combined in a multichannel system.

The key to success is in ensuring that all five speakers interact sympathetically, building a coherent soundstage that extends across the three front speakers before meeting the combined output of the rear speakers at the listening position. Only then does a multichannel system reveal its clear superiority over conventional two-channel, stereo hi-fi.

At this stage in the game, few 5.1-channel speaker systems are designed from the ground up specifically for the role. More often than not, the package is based around an existing pair of front stereo speakers with other, typically smaller, boxes from the range added for centre and surrounds.

It's tempting to find an analogy with the earliest breed of AV receivers, which originally started out as two-channel amplifiers. Manufacturers would add a Dolby/dts decoder to the mix and then graft on three additional power amp stages to accommodate the centre and rear channels. These three additional amps often bore no technical resemblance to the existing front pair, resulting in a 'different' and typically under-powered sound from the centre and rear channels. Nowadays, there's much greater synergy between the five, six or even seven channels of the latest AV amplifiers which use matched power amplifiers, if not appropriately reinforced power supplies (see our test in *HFC 223*).

**Mission's m series surround speakers come in distinctly different sized enclosures.**

## REAL WORLD

Following his listening tests, I talked to Paul Messenger about the success, or otherwise, of the different speaker combinations and their transition from two-channel to five-channel duty. He mentioned that each of the centre speakers was parked atop a TV as part of the evaluation – hardly ideal but nonetheless entirely representative of a 'real life' scenario.

He considered that B&W's combination was one of the more homogenous while the Mission boxes failed to gel quite so convincingly, particularly across the front of the musical stage. A quick glance at the speakers and the physical mismatch between the Mission M73 and M7C1 is pretty clear though, in practice, it's the latter (centre) speaker that has an altogether smoother if downturned response (-4dB from 300Hz-10kHz on an averaged 3rd-octave plot). Also, its sensitivity of 89.1dB makes better use of available amplifier power than the bigger M73's which clock in at 87.9dB.

The B&W DM602s and LCR600s at least look as if they've emerged from the same factory and, indeed, are more closely matched in sensitivity at 89.6dB and 89.0dB, respectively. But overall 'loudness' is only scratching at the surface of their compatibility. Other clues about the matching of these speakers are revealed by their impedance and phase curves because differences here reflect different driver designs, crossover networks and, ultimately, the uniformity of both the direct and off-axis responses.

## SPEAKER ATTRIBUTES

Figure 1 compares the impedance of B&W's DM602 (black trace) with that for the LCR600 (blue trace). The load 'seen' by the amplifier, including swings in phase angle (not shown) are clearly very similar indeed despite the DM602 employing a single 180mm bass/mid driver and the LCR600 using two 165mm units. Contrast this with Figure 2 where the different driver complements, crossover and bass tuning of the M73 (dark grey trace) and M7C1 (red trace)

THE LAB REPORT

are reflected in two very different impedance trends. For example, the M73's LF dip suggests its port is tuned to 43Hz while that for the smaller M7C1 is set at a higher 68Hz – sensible for a box of just five litres capacity.

The physical disposition of the speakers will also influence their performance because, in practice, what we hear is a mix of direct sound from the speakers, early reflections off adjacent boundaries and later reverberation. The impact of these early reflected sounds is tempered by the off-axis uniformity of the speaker(s) and the proximity of reflecting surfaces. The smoother the speaker's dispersion off the main listening axis, the better.

SCREEN GRAB

From an acoustic perspective, the average TV is a large and typically reverberant plastic box with a hard reflective front surface. This adds a further set of early reflections from the off-axis output of the front speakers which is unlikely to assist the 'smoothness' of the overall sound balance experienced at the listening position. Figure 3 includes three comparative plots, the dotted blue trace showing how both direct and early reflected sounds combine to influence the response of a pair of B&W DM602s at 2m. The general trend of the response with the slightly depressed upper midrange and strong bass (below 200Hz) correlates with its rich balance but many of the 'ripples' are caused by interference from these early reflections.

B&W's Kevlar bass/mid cone material tends to mop up high frequency break-up modes to yield a more uniform dispersion pattern, so its response above 4kHz or so could have looked far less regular. But what of the LCR600 centre speaker? So far we have considered the response of the DM602 across its horizontal plane, but placing the LCR600 on its *side* atop a TV means the horizontal and vertical dispersions are reversed. As vertical dispersion characteristics are usually wildly different from those across the horizontal plane, the

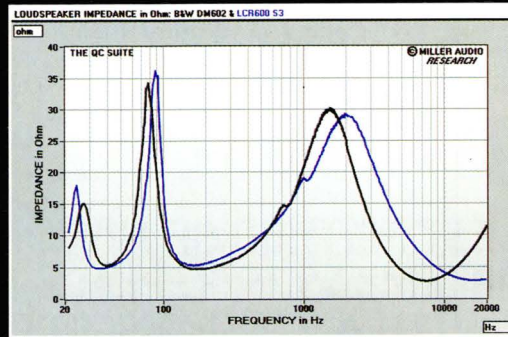


Fig (1): Similar driver/crossover designs lead to similar electrical characteristics.

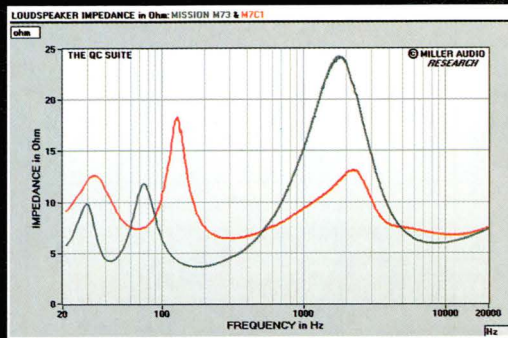


Fig (2): Dissimilar driver/crossover designs lead to diverse electrical characteristics.

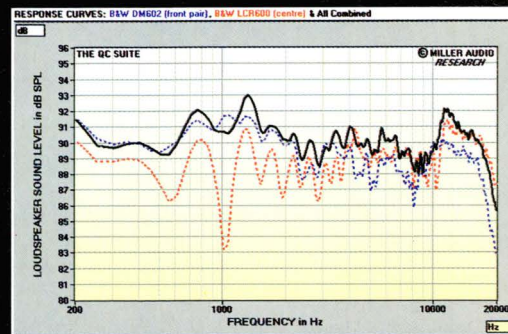


Fig (3): B&W 602/LCR600 frequency response(s) at a 2m (blue = front, red = centre and black = front + centre)

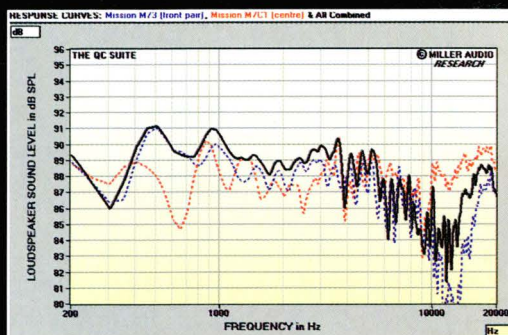


Fig (4): Mission m73/m71C1 frequency response(s) at a 2m (blue = front, red = centre and black = front + centre)

◁ end result is unlikely to dovetail into that of the DM602s to the sides.

Moreover, placing the LCR600 atop a TV effectively extends the baffle on one side of the speaker, loading it asymmetrically. The irregularities in its response (dotted red trace, Figure 3) are a direct result of reinforcement and cancellation in its output caused by this additional surface.

**“THE SIMPLEST METHOD OF AVOIDING THESE PROBLEMS IS TO REPLACE THE TV WITH A PLASMA SCREEN.”**



Frankly, such deep interference notches cannot be redressed by modification of the speaker crossover or other equalisation. The simplest, though least cost-effective, method of avoiding these problems would be to replace the TV with a projection or plasma screen!

Now, in this instance, the combined output of both the DM602s and LCR600 integrate rather better than might have been anticipated (solid black trace, Figure 3), though the amplitude and frequency of the 'bumps' either side of 1kHz will vary from room to room. Figure 4 shows the same response measurements taken at the same 2m listening position for Mission's M73 and M7C1 combination. The dotted red trace suggests that the M7C1 centre channel speaker is rather better adapted to life atop a TV than B&W's LCR600, possibly because its moulded contours suffer less diffraction at the boundaries.

There is a notch around 4kHz, however, which is probably close to the crossover between Mission's two 110mm glass-fibre bass/mid units and the 25mm dome tweeter. It's sufficiently prominent to punch its way through the combined centre/front channel response (solid black trace, Figure 4), though the dominant effect is clearly the depressed presence and treble of the main M73 speakers (dotted blue trace, Figure 4). The centre speaker goes some way in 'pulling up' this region in the combined plot but the series of sharp interference peaks and dips from 4kHz-12kHz contrast markedly with the much smoother output of the B&W system. So if the Mission system was less successful, then this lies with flaws in the M73 as much as its integration with the dedicated M7C1 centre speaker.

#### CONCLUSION

In this report we have concerned ourselves with the electrical load and perceived balance of the various speaker combinations, and for good reason. Currently there is no convincing way of measuring the psycho-acoustical effect of the added centre channel in our perception of spatial cues, for example – a task redoubled by five and six-channels of coincident sound.

Frankly, the more speakers you throw into the room, the more complex the equation becomes. So until these qualities are better understood, if we must use more than a pair of speakers in a room then the safest bet is to use the *same* speakers front, centre and rear. Not always practical, I must agree, but it remains the surest route to success.

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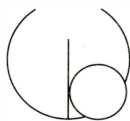


### Naim Audio

Naim enjoyed a phenomenal six years of success with its slimline range and has recently redesigned each of the products to enhance their sound quality, appearance and flexibility. At the heart of the 5 series is the NAIT 5 integrated amplifier, all of its functions are controlled by a microprocessor that is only powered when interpreting a button push, remote control signal or volume control movement before returning to sleep mode. Maximum flexibility has been built into the NAIT 5 for easy system expansion with no loss of sound quality.



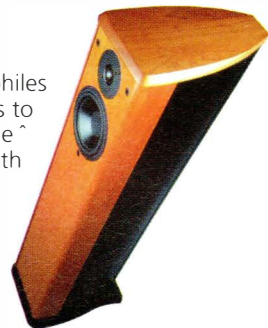
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# FORUM LETTERS

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RICK D, ON THE HFC FORUM

**"DO YOU THINK THAT GIVEN THE SUPERB PERFORMANCE LEVELS DISPLAYED BY SOME INTEGRATED AMPS THAT PURCHASING A PRE/POWER COMBO IS AN UNNECESSARY OVERKILL?"**

LAWRIE, ON THE HFC FORUM

**"THE ENTIRE PROGRAMME WAS DEDICATED TO SILENCE, AND HOW THE LACK OF SOUND WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE SOUND ITSELF."**

CHRIS WELLS, ON THE HFC FORUM



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## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### DABBLE IN DAB

DAB is supposed to be digital, high-quality radio reproduction right? Yet it has the same limiting factors as FM, for example, proximity to a transmitter, inability to pass through certain materials, quality of broadcast etc. By that reasoning a good FM tuner in a good reception area hooked up to a good aerial should produce results not unlike DAB should it not?

The music will sound crystal-clear just like DAB in a good area. I ask you, what benefits or advantages do you get from a DAB tuner in a reasonably average reception area over an FM tuner in a good reception area? Another issue from what I have heard is that there only seems to be limited coverage and limited stations broadcasting, can you even receive FM on a DAB tuner? Excuse my ignorance on this one but I am a little bewildered as to why DAB exists, and as I am looking to buy a tuner soon the information

would be very useful!  
Rick D, on the HFC Forum

*The Editor replies...* DAB is currently broadcast to 80 per cent of the population. It its main advantage over FM is that you can receive high quality, noise free broadcasting with a small and inexpensive indoor antenna. It also has the capability to carry more radio stations than FM. So listeners can enjoy a broader variety of both national and local stations, which means that you're more likely to hear something you like. Our London-based Arcam DAB tuner receives 40 stations, with a full signal (no errors), using the 12inch aerial supplied.

While it's fairly safe to say that DAB sound quality does not always surpass good FM reception, it is certainly less prone to interference and is therefore more consistent. FM can be 'looped' through some DAB models and still has many advocates, but with DAB tuners coming down in price all the time, the benefits of digital make it a very attractive option.

Audio CD-R Range



## MUSCLE AMPS

In the old days the men were separated from the boys by their choice of amplifier be it pre/power or integrated. The pre/power combos had more grunt and were seen as the next logical upgrade by the integrated boys. However, the introduction of the original Audiolab 8000 integrated, made people sit up and take notice. Lots of manufacturers then realised that it was possible to make an integrated that was capable of driving difficult speakers for a sensible price so they copied Audiolab by bringing out their own interpretations. Since then integrations have come a long way with lots more finesse and power, (the pre/power boys' old argument), and some also have fancy price tags to match. One big advantage of integrated amps is that you get to save money by not having to purchase another set of cables to slot between pre and power.

So are we still predisposed to purchasing pre/power combos (given the size of the average British living room), or would the modern integrated amp suffice? Do you think that given the superb performance levels displayed by some integrated amps that purchasing a pre/power combo is an unnecessary overkill? *Lawrie, on the HFC Forum*

*The Editor replies...* Certainly one-box integrated amplifiers have come a long way in recent times, but if you look at the best amplifiers on the market you'll find that they are nearly all pre/powers. There are fundamental advantages in keeping big mains transformers and output transistors away from delicate line level signals. There's also an advantage in placing power amps closer to speakers.

**If you want the best, two is generally better than one.**



## EASTERN DELIGHT

I'd like to tell you about the excellent service provided by John Michell. I live in Thailand and bought a Michell GyroDec from Hong Kong five years ago. Recently, the drive belt broke and I tried in vain to contact

the dealers nearby to buy a new one. I contacted John Michell directly via e-mail. I received two sets of drive belts within a week after placing an order to buy just one set. I would like to take this opportunity to let your readers know that he really offers great customer service regardless of product price. *Sakon Sookkho, via e-mail*

## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Did you hear the Radio 4 documentary on sound and silence recently? It discussed the removal of 'pauses' in radio broadcasts, so stations could add more 'yield' ie more commercials.

Also mentioned were anechoic chambers. Some guy went into an anechoic chamber and was surprised that he could still hear two distinct sounds. One was his heartbeat and the other was his CNS (central nervous system - no surprise to mountaineers).

The entire programme was dedicated to silence, or the gaps between sound, and how the lack of sound was as important as the sound itself (oral punctuation etc). They even had a tape of 'pauses' extracted from a few hours of Radio 4 broadcasts. They captured each pause and a few milliseconds before and after each pause, what a bizarre 'noise'!

Following on from this, I learnt a few years ago when negotiating contracts that a period of silence is often more productive than prolonged dialogue. Try it sometime. *Chris Wells, on the HFC Forum*

## 2 OR 5 CHANNELS, YOU CHOOSE

The last few years have seen a proliferation of multichannel systems and many people are switching over to the surround option. But is it *better* than stereo? Does it offer a more convincing soundstage or is it little more than an expensive gimmick? How many ears do you need anyway? We know what we think, but what about you? Is multichannel the future of music? If you're living with it, if you've tried it, or even if you haven't heard it but you've got an opinion anyway, we want to hear from you.

Write to us at the usual address, and mark your letter or e-mail 'MULTICHANNEL DEBATE'.

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

SYSTEM

## FINAL PHASE

I am into the final phase of setting up a high-end multichannel hi-fi system using a Bryston 9B-ST multichannel amplifier, a Meridian 568 digital processor, and a Meridian DVD 596 player. I'm not sure what speakers will complement this system best. Please advise on a multichannel package that is involving, entertaining, and very musical. Some bass would be good too.

Rahim Arefi, via e-mail



PMC FB2/TB2 speakers.

PMC is highly regarded in this office for its £2,500-ish FB2/TB2 rig. You'll need a package of similar status to your existing equipment, and the PMC combo scored in terms of transparency and weight, criteria that should satisfy your need for an involving, entertaining sound. You will also need a sub for your point one channel, we like RELs, the bigger the better.



Van den Hul Frog.

CARTRIDGE

## CART ME UP

Could you advise me on which cartridge is best suited for my set-up? I have a Michell Orbe and SME V tonearm, Krell KAV300i, Holfi Signature phono amp, Sonus Faber Concerto Grand Piano speakers. The dealers I have visited all testified to their products being the best suited for my set-up (*quel surprise!*). They suggested the Lyra Helicon SL, Lyra Parnasus or Ortofon Jubilee. Is it true that Ortofon has come up with a cartridge specially design for the SME V tonearm?

Andrew, via e-mail

We haven't heard of a cartridge specifically for the SME V, but Ortofon's high-end designs are very good. There are several excellent alternatives to choose from, namely: van den Hul Frog, Dynavector XX-1L and the Allaerts MC1B. All of these will work a treat with your deck/arm combo. We're not au fait with your phono stage, however, none of these have peculiar matching requirements so that shouldn't be a problem.

SYSTEM

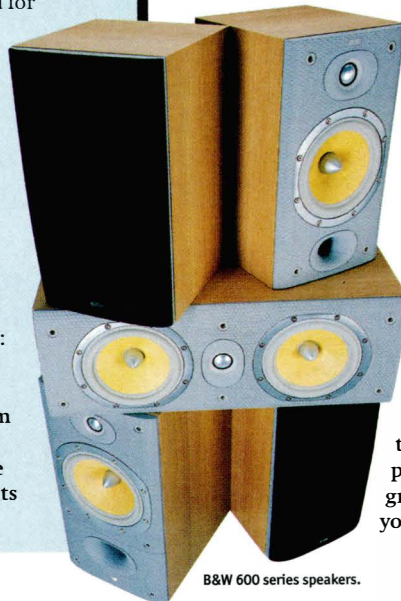
## BOLT-ON HOME CINEMA

I am hoping to build a home cinema system and would like some advice. I have a Panasonic 36" TV and a Pioneer 626 DVD. I also have a Meridian hi-fi system comprising a 551 amp, 504 tuner, 508 CD player with a pair of Monitor Audio loudspeakers and cables that cost around £5,000 four years ago. I can't start all over again as I now have two kids to support, but I do have a budget of up to £2,000. I was wondering if you could recommend a system to integrate with my current hi-fi?

John Crawford, via e-mail

No need to start over. You've got some great two-channel kit and we'd say hang on to it. Your options include splitting your budget between a multichannel amp and speaker package; something like the forthcoming Arcam AVR200 at around £800, with our recent bench test favourite, the B&W DM600 package, reviewed on page 56. Or perhaps see if you can get some Monitor Audio rear speakers and a centre that will tonally match your existing pair.

This latter option may be tricky, but you can retain your existing speakers, and keep things simpler, perhaps allowing a greater budget for your amp!



B&W 600 series speakers.



# SME

The way to play vinyl...

Model 10



Model 20/2



Model 30/2



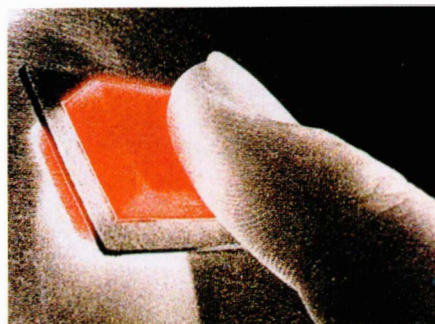
Series 300



Series IV



Series V



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# FORUM HELP

SYSTEM

## NEW BLOOD

I know absolutely nothing about hi-fi but I intend to purchase a system for Christmas. I am a student with a very limited budget of £150. I have seen some reasonable deals on empire.co.uk, but I am still lost. I would be very grateful if you could give me some advice or recommendations.

*Simon Whitehead, via e-mail*

Limited budget you say? You can just about get a CD, amp and speakers for that! Try budget big boys Richer Sounds, who have the advantage over internet retailers by allowing you to demo the kit first. Older kit from Sony, Cambridge Audio and Mission can be just about had for your money.



Sony CDP-XE330.

AMPLIFIER

## NEW TO CD!

My old yet beautiful Sony amplifier only has enough inputs for the turntable and cassette deck. I want to introduce a CD player, are there any types of adaptors available? Or am I just stupid; is there another way around this problem?

*Jamie Johnson, via e-mail*

With pre CD amplifiers there's a danger that the high (2V) output of CD players will overload inputs which were designed for much lower signal levels. You have two options, try the cassette input and see if it sounds OK - if not you could try attenuating the signal with the Rothwell plugs we mentioned last month. Or, upgrade to something new, Sony, among others, still makes lovely amps.

SYSTEM

## HAND HOLDING

I would like to purchase a hi-fi system consisting of an amp, CD player, speakers and MiniDisc, on a budget of £500-600. Though I have read your informative directory section, I would also value your expert opinion on the best system for this price.

*Leo Fielding, via e-mail*

Allowing say £150 per item, try Denon's cracking little PMA-255 UK at £140, or perhaps the Cambridge Audio A5 amp. Sony has a combined CD and MD deck, the MXD-D40 for £329.99 that you could consider, or try the new CDP-XE570 CD player at £140. You may struggle to get an MD deck for less than £200, but again Sony has some good units out there. For speakers, see if you can stretch to B&W's five-star DM303s at £180, or for a bit less check out the AR Status S20 at £150. Phew!

Denon PMA-255 UK.

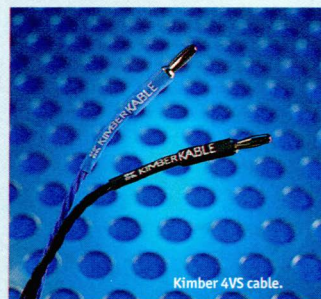


CABLES

## £200 FOR WIRES

I have a Linn Genki CD player and Jamo Concert 11 speakers and will be getting a MF XP100 preamp, and two AS100 amps. I was thinking of short speaker cables and three one-metre interconnects. This will fit in with the position of my system better. What leads would you recommend for this, budget of £200-ish for all?

*Rob, via e-mail*



Kimber 4VS cable.

Try the SonicLink Whisper interconnect at £70 for a three metre pair, and some bi-wired Kimber 4VS, which is a fine cable for the £8.50 per metre asking price. If you'd prefer to spend more on speaker cables, Chord Company Odyssey is good at £17 per metre (you could still afford to bi-wire), and should work with QED Qnect 2 at £50 for three metres.

SPEAKERS

## FIX IT

I have an old pair of Acoustic Research 19 speakers from 1978, good speakers but now the woofers are falling out of the baffles because the fixant is beginning to perish. Can anything be done to repair these and if so who could do it? It seems a shame to throw them, as they still look reasonable and were quite expensive in their time.

*Doug Innes, via e-mail*

Tragically we live in a disposable goods based society, but you'll be pleased to know that Wembley Loudspeakers specialise in repairing Acoustic Research models. Have a word with the guys there on 020 8743 4567.

AMPLIFIER

## NOT MULTICHANNEL

I have a system based around a Rotel RA 930AX Mk2 amplifier and Rotel CD player with Mission 501 speakers. I'd like to change my system to accommodate four speakers but my amp only has connections for one set. I could wire both sets of speaker leads into one set of banana plugs but I don't want to put the amp under too much stress. Could you recommend an integrated amplifier with connections for more than one set of speakers?

*Steve Maple, via e-mail*



Cambridge A5.

It depends what you are trying to do. If you want to simply have four speakers running from your two-channel amp, Arcam makes some very nice amps with switchable speaker outputs, as indeed does Cambridge Audio. It's always a bit of a compromise asking a stereo amp to drive two sets of speakers though and there will be a limit to how loud you can go without distortion creeping in.

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.

# MULTICHANNEL &

TWO TESTS IN ONE – MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER SYSTEMS  
AND THEIR STEREO COUNTERPARTS. PAUL MESSENGER  
INTRODUCES THE MOTHER OF ALL REVIEWS!



# STEREO SPEAKERS

**A**lthough this is the third year that we've group-tested multichannel surround-sound speaker systems, it's the first time we've had the chance to do so using the new 'high resolution' formats SACD and DVD-A.

Both promise, theoretically at least, surround sound alongside better-than-CD quality, and certainly both sound better than the data-reduced Dolby Digital and dts formats we've been stuck with in previous years. However, because it's still very early days for both these new formats, the very limited amount (and variety) of software currently available didn't make the evaluation process any easier.

The review programme has been carefully structured to focus on the music reproduction capabilities of these speaker systems, using a combination of both two-channel stereo and multichannel surround material.

Whereas surround sound is now an established part of moviemaking, music recording is still finding its feet and exploring different ways to use the extra channels. Generally speaking, in most respects bar power handling, music seems to be a rather more difficult and critical source than movie soundtracks from a sound reproduction point of view, and this is particularly true with the new high-resolution formats.

Unlike movies, where the roles of the various channels are quite distinct and solidly established, surround music mixes are still very much in the ear of the engineer and producer. Whether we like it or not, instruments can pop up anywhere, and this places an extra premium on good timbre and voice-matching all round, to maintain accurate tonality and a convincing wraparound soundfield.

A body of opinion backs the view that the centre speaker should have a slightly more 'forward' voicing than the left/right speakers. While this may aid speech articulation with movies, there would seem to be little justification for it with music programming. Indeed, there might be a case for going the other way, to avoid drawing undue attention to the centre.

One curiosity with various implications is that, in any given room, the preferred listening position for stereo material might well be different from the best place for surround. Even our relatively large (5.5x4.3x2.6m) listening room feels just a little cramped with speakers all around. I find myself listening about 3m from the front speakers, rather than the 4-4.5m for stereo, and that in turn will affect the perceived tonal balance of any speakers.

## SPEAKER SYSTEMS ON TEST

<b>AE Aesprit</b>	£1,229.85
<b>B&amp;W 600 S3</b>	£899.85
<b>Castle Classic</b>	£1,339.70
<b>Dali Blue</b>	£907.00
<b>Infinity Alpha</b>	£833.00
<b>Jamo E8</b>	£775.00
<b>JMLab Cobalt</b>	£1,707.00
<b>Mission M</b>	£479.70
<b>Spendor S</b>	£1,649.70
<b>Wharfedale Pacific</b>	£699.95

## EQUIPMENT USED STEREO

Linn Linn LP12 turntable  
Naim ARO tonearm  
Linn Arkiv B, Dynavector XV-1 cartridges  
Naim CDS II CD player  
Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner  
NAC52 preamp  
NAP500 power amp  
NACA5 speaker cables  
Kudos S100 speaker stands

## MULTICHANNEL

Sony SCD-XB770 SACD player  
Pioneer DV-939A DVD-Audio player  
Magtrax Music Box (pro audio multichannel preamp, see [www.aspen-media.com](http://www.aspen-media.com))  
Bryston 9B power amp  
Harman Kardon AV receiver  
Chord Chameleon interconnects  
Chord Rumour speaker cable  
Kudos S100 speaker stands

## THE LISTENING PANEL

Guy Sergeant (JPW)  
Andy Whittle (Exposure)

## MUSIC USED STEREO

Tool - Ænima  
Eva Cassidy - Time After Time  
Mari Boine - Eallin  
Grateful Dead - Reckoning  
Cambridge Singers/Rutter - There Is Sweet Music  
BBC Radios 3 & 4

## MULTICHANNEL

Joni Mitchell - Both Sides Now  
Frankie Goes To Hollywood - Rage Hard  
SACD sampler  
DVD-A sampler





**MULTICHANNEL  
SOUND QUALITY**

The Aegis combo turned in a solid multichannel performance. It sounds clean and authoritative, with an impressive dynamic range, plus fine focus and dimensional coherence. Timbre-matching is pretty good, though the centre does sound just a tad obvious, and there did seem to be a little too much treble coming from the rear. Try pointing the surround speakers away from you to reduce any excess brightness.

The bottom end sounds solid, but also a little stolid: it could be 'freer' and more transparent. The overall impression is of a system which majors on control. It combines smoothness, neutrality and fine imaging, with wide bandwidth and dynamic range.

# ACOUSTIC ENERGY AESPRIT

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** Aesprit 309/Aesprit 300C/Aesprit 307  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,229.85**

**STEREO PAIR:** Aesprit 309  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£699.95**

**CONTACT** ☎ 01285 654432 | www.acoustic-energy.co.uk **GUARANTEE** 3 years

**A**coustic Energy's core technology has always been metal diaphragm main drivers. There are plenty of those in its new mid-price Aesprit range of models, though on this occasion they're all partnered with soft fabric dome tweeters.

It's a relatively small range of speakers, all finished in rather undistinguished real wood veneers (maple, cherry and black ash options), with nicely radiused baffle edges and seriously solid build. Our package

follows what appears to be the stereotype configuration, combining a pair of the generously built and equipped 309 floorstanders (£700) for the main front left/right channels with one £250 307 centre speaker and a pair of 300C compact stand-mounts (£280) for the surround channels. The total system price adds up to £1,230, which is comfortably above the average for this group test, but by no means unreasonable in view of the build and finish.

Solidity is the immediate first

impression of all these models, doubtless due in part to thick 30mm front panels and internal bracing. Indeed, the chunkily compact 309 weighs a considerable 18kg, which is rather more than one might expect from its bulk, and there's even the option to add more mass loading/damping in a cavity towards the bass of the enclosure. In any case, it comes with a black painted plinth and chunky 8mm spikes, which usefully extends its footprint and **guarantees** good stability, with or without mass loading.

According to the brochure, the 309 is a three-way, based on two 6.5-inch frame main drivers, both with 120mm diameter flared-profile metal cones, one covering the bass region, the other the midband. The

enclosure has ports front and rear, and port-blocking bungs too; ours came with the rear port already blocked and the front one open, but at least there's the flexibility to allow you to

experiment for the best match for individual rooms and siting.

The centre channel is down to the 307, which matches the 309 visually but uses smaller main drivers and a much smaller box. There are two main drivers, again allegedly operating as a three-way, but each here has a 95mm diameter metal cone. Magnetic shielding is promised but doesn't seem to have translated too well into reality here – placing this speaker directly on top of a 36-inch widescreen TV set caused considerable discoloration at the top of the screen, and the situation remained marginal even with the use of 1-inch spacers.

C is for Compact rather than Centre in AE-speak, so the £280-per-pair 300C is a tiny two-way standmount, well suited to close-to-wall siting. The main driver is the same as that used in the 307 centre, and the tweeter is the same 32mm soft fabric dome used throughout the range.

Port-loaded to a low 35Hz, the 309 delivers fine bass extension and an impressively smooth and even midband, followed by an unusually restrained presence and treble. The 307 centre matches the 309 rather well, and has decent enough extension down to around 50Hz to indicate 'large' status in 'bass management' terms. The little 300C surround speaker also delivers decent bass down to 50Hz, and is well aligned for close-to-wall siting; it too has a notably more restrained treble than average.

## CONCLUSION

The lack of effective magnetic shielding on the centre channel must go down as a black mark, though it may of course be an isolated quality control failure rather than a generic fault. In other respects this is a very competent package at a realistic price. The veneer might be prettier and the sound more exciting, but the imaging, solidity and neutrality are thoroughly impressive.

**"IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THE RESTRAINED TREBLE, AND WHETHER THIS IS A RELIEF OR A DEPRIVATION."**



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

The 309 drew a mixed reaction from the panel in the unsighted stereo listening tests, though with good consistency in the descriptions. The positive view is: 'controlled, detailed refined and powerful. No sense of strain or edginess. Perhaps it could be a little more exciting but at least it's tidy'. On the down side another commented: 'Lacks crispness and fun factor, no snap or transient capability'.

It all comes down to the restrained treble, and whether this is a relief or a deprivation. There's some lack of sparkle, and the balance errs on the polite side, but it's also more neutral and even-handed than most.

# B&W 600 S3

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** DM602 S3/DM601 S3/LCR 600 S3  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£899.85**

**STEREO PAIR:** DM602 S3  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£299.95**

**CONTACT** ☎ 01903 750750 [www.bwspeakers.com](http://www.bwspeakers.com) **GUARANTEE** 5 years

**T**he dominant force in specialist hi-fi loudspeakers today, B&W has serious quality speakers to fill any market niche you care to think up, and a few more besides. But when I started unpacking these new Series 3 600s, it felt a bit like welcoming a family of old friends.

The 600s have been B&W's bedrock budget range for more years than I care to remember, and usually drop by in pairs every two or three years. This time I seem to have got half the family at once, with a pair of large standmount DM602 S3s for the front left/right, an even more substantial LCR600 S3 for the centre, and the smaller (but by no means miniature) DM601 S3s for the rear.

The familiarity was all the stronger because my well-run-in set came in traditional black ash woodprint, which is still popular in some territories. The photographer, lucky chap, got to play with the new light oak Sorrento finish, which is much closer to current British tastes, and a major reason for evolving the new Series 3 range.

The DM602's heritage goes back more than twenty years. When it first appeared, this stereotypical 20-litre standmount looked attractively compact; in today's company it looks decidedly bulky. Since the laws of acoustics have remained unchanged, this is basically a reflection of how fashion has driven the speaker marketplace, for good or ill.

Whatever, this generous two-way has a good size main driver with cast frame and 140mm diameter Kevlar cone, plus B&W's tube-loaded 25mm metal dome tweeter. No-one would describe it as stylish, but then that's not really the point. The purpose is to offer the best sound quality for the money, and the shape is determined by the single and relatively large main driver.

The DM601 S3 is similar only smaller, roughly 14 litres in enclosure volume, and has, over the long haul,

probably been Britain's most popular hi-fi speaker. It has a correspondingly smaller main driver, again with a cast frame but using a Kevlar cone 118mm in diameter.

The same main driver crops up in the LCR600 S3 centre speaker, only here there are two, one as a bass/mid unit, and the other just to reinforce the bass end, and both with shielded magnets. I was a great fan of this model's LCR6 predecessor (*HFC198*), but the fact that it's the bulkiest and heaviest of our centre speakers by a significant margin, and pricey too at £350, might put some people off, so B&W has introduced a smaller, lighter LCR60 at £200.

Although the LCR600 S3 looks a bit pricey at £350, and helps take the system up to £900 in total, I doubt anyone will cavil at the £250 asked for the pair of DM601 S3s, or the £300 for the pair of DM602 S3s, as each has a reassuring solidity. Just bear in mind you'll need stands to support both of these. All the S3s have twin terminal pairs, and all have reflex-ported enclosures, but are also supplied with port-blocking bungs – handy if you need to place them close to walls, for example.

Even though it's a standmount, the

DM602's bass extension can match most floorstanders. All three models have good extension, and can therefore be designated 'large', though try using the supplied bungs to block the 601 ports if you're using them near a wall. The LCR centre speaker makes a pretty good balance match with the DM602.

## CONCLUSION

Large standmount speakers are not the most fashionable format around these days (especially in the black finish version), but this B&W combo unquestionably delivers the sonic goods in both stereo and multichannel modes. Decent-size, high-quality main drivers mounted in compact standmount enclosures still make plenty of sense, whatever the prevailing trends.

## MULTICHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

The good stereo balance carried through into the multichannel tests, the combination of all three B&W models creating a convincing all round coherence. No other system was more successful at creating the warm and cuddly envelopment of the whole musical event, and experiencing this combination made a strong justification for the benefits of surround sound music.

The good size centre and surround speakers made a worthwhile contribution towards building up the wraparound soundfield, while the meaty DM602s at the front delivered weight and drama with little obvious contribution from additional box colorations.

**"THE 600s HAVE BEEN B&W'S BUDGET RANGE FOR YEARS AND USUALLY DROP BY IN PAIRS EVERY TWO OR THREE YEARS."**



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

Despite its modest price, the DM602 S3 came close to the top in the unsighted stereo listening tests, impressing particularly with its scale and authority. 'Very low distortion, clean, effortless and detailed without being tiring' was one panellist's reaction. 'Robust. Paints a big, colourful picture/soundstage. Easygoing, lots of headroom; gets into the groove' said another.

Criticisms were minor. Presence is a little restrained and reserved, which slightly suppresses fine detail and expression, and the treble is also just a tad exposed, but not to the point where the sound becomes harsh or aggressive. One listener felt the speaker was holding back a little, delivering the verdict: 'Nearly very good'.



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

B&W





**MULTICHANNEL  
SOUND QUALITY**

With multichannel material, the Castle combo bounced along with gusto and enthusiasm. It brings a good sense of drive and purpose to the party, and delivers music with a wide dynamic range and plenty of dynamic expression.

The sound is essentially clean, likes going loud and shows a very good timbral match all round. The treble is well judged and avoids any tendency to spit or splatter, though the system as a whole could display a bit more grunt. The coloration noted with stereo material seemed less intrusive here, though the Bastion centre does have a slight tendency to 'shout', and its detail projection can sound a bit strong on some material.

# CASTLE CLASSIC SERIES

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** Stirling 3/Richmond 3/Bastion  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,339.70**

**STEREO PAIR:** Stirling 3  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£729.90**

**CONTACT** ☎ 01756 795333 | [www.castle.uk.com](http://www.castle.uk.com) **GUARANTEE** 5 years

**I**n a world where vinyl's imitation of real wood continues to improve, and where real wood from obscure sources looks more and more like Formica, it's gratifying to find that Castle is still maintaining the best traditions of high quality British quality cabinetwork. Its speakers come in a range of gorgeous real wood veneers, each model here is available in a choice of seven standard types or an additional two at a premium rate.

Such quality doesn't come cheap, so it's no surprise that the total system price here totals some £1,340. It follows the familiar format, combining a pair of floorstanders for front left and right channels with a centre speaker that shares the same driver array in a smaller enclosure, plus a pair of tiny standmounts for the surround channels.

The floorstander is the £730-per-pair Stirling 3, a new and pleasingly compact design that's beautifully finished in nicely figured real wood veneer, with attractively radiused edges that soften its lines. It uses two 5.25-inch cast-frame main drivers, loaded by a reflex port that is fitted into the base of the enclosure proper, outputting through a slit between enclosure and plinth. The latter matches the enclosure, looks good and improves stability.

Castle's chosen diaphragm material is a woven carbon fibre matrix, and all the main drivers here have 95mm diameter cones. In the Stirling they're mounted above and below a tweeter that is offset from the centre line, so the speakers are supplied in matching mirror-imaged pairs.

Replacing the earlier Keep, the centre speaker here is the £330 Bastion. It has the same fully shielded driver line-up as the Stirling, the same radiused box edges, and the same offset tweeter, but in a much smaller, conventionally ported enclosure that's specially designed to be placed on top of a TV.

The surround channels here are handled by a pair of Richmond 3s, another new design that's significantly smaller than the previous Richmond yet built more substantially with 15mm panels. Priced at £280 per pair, it's a pretty port-loaded miniature dressed in real wood and sharing the same drive units as the others, but with just a single main driver.

The Stirling's port is tuned to 40Hz, but very well damped, the net result being good extension plus a dry

alignment well suited to close-to-wall reinforcement. Further up the band the presence zone is quite strong and also a little uneven.

The Bastion makes a pretty good match for the Stirling, technically as well as physically. The balance stays close throughout, and the only real difference lies in the bass extension. The Bastion is reflex-tuned to 65Hz, giving sufficient extension to be designated 'large'.

Much the same can be said of the Richmond 3, which delivers its best

in-room balance when sited about a foot from a wall. A relatively restrained treble is another plus for a speaker likely to be used quite close up on the surround channels.

## CONCLUSION

If you like real wood veneer, Castle does it better than anyone and doesn't charge an arm and a leg for the privilege. But sonically this speaker package is a bit mixed. With stereo material it has fine dynamic drive and expression, but loses a few points for coloration and a tendency to sound a little hard and unforgiving. Something of the same is true for multichannel material, but to a lesser degree, and it is here that the system proved most successful.

**"DETAILED, IMMEDIATE, WIDE BANDWIDTH AND REASONABLY TIDY, BUT SOMETHING'S PEAKY AND GIVEN TO SHOUTING AT YOU."**



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

In the unsighted stereo listening, the panel pinned down the Stirling's strengths and foibles with consistent accuracy. One panellist commented: 'In many ways they're very good. Detailed, immediate, wide bandwidth and reasonably tidy, but something's peaky and given to shouting at you'. Another: 'Big, bold, fast and "up for it" ... can harden up on voices, tends to get a bit excited – not necessarily a bad thing!'

This is an exciting and very articulate loudspeaker, thanks in part to a slightly forward balance. This projects detail with expression and drama, but also makes a measure of upper midband coloration – slight hardness and nasality – that much more obvious.

# DALI BLUE SERIES

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** 8008/R1000/C1000  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£907**

**STEREO PAIR:** 8008  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£539**

**CONTACT** ☎ 00 45 96 72 10 62 | www.dali.dk **GUARANTEE** 5 years

**D**anish brand with links to that country's leading hi-fi retail chain, Dali has built a powerful reputation for its ability to produce original yet entirely logical designs and sell them at thoroughly realistic prices.

That would seem an appropriate description of this £907 Blue Series multichannel system – unquestionably one of the most extreme and inventive of those assembled here, though also perhaps more obviously oriented towards movie soundtracks than music replay.

The heart of the system is the 8008, the largest of five Blue Series stereo pairs and a monster of a three-way floorstander in the context of this group, yet very realistically priced at £539 per pair. Each speaker employs two bass drivers, each with 8-inch frames and 155mm doped paper cones, while an additional midrange driver sports a 95mm doped paper cone. Its considerable bulk backed by 22kg of mass promises much in terms of serious sensitivity and bass wallop, the downside being that relatively few buyers seem prepared to put up with such large boxes these days, especially when they're finished in a substantial area of (perfectly respectable) vinyl wood print.

The little R1000 used to deliver the surround channels is a huge visual contrast. It's relatively expensive for a surround speaker at £199 per pair but clever with it, designed to be hung from a screw head in the wall somewhat above ear height. The main driver aims towards the listener while the tweeter is on the underside, pointing downwards so that much of its output is reflected off the wall. The centre speaker is much more conventional though attractively slim and discreet, featuring a pair of very small 85mm coned main drivers flanking a central tweeter.

There's a huge discrepancy in size between the various models in this Dali system, and while there's no

doubt that the 8008s should be designated 'large' under any circumstances, it seems likely that the centre and surround speakers should be 'small'. The in-room measurements certainly indicate that this is true for the R1000, which has little output below 100Hz and is rather uneven and lumpy to boot. The C1000 delivers a touch more bass but is still somewhat bass-shy overall. It's not a particularly close match for the 8008, but in general terms it's close enough.

The 8008 gives particularly good in-room measurements, showing very high sensitivity, extended and even bass (when kept well clear of walls), and a smooth overall balance, albeit

with some roll-off in the extreme treble. In overall energy terms, the upper midband is a touch over-prominent. And although sensitivities are high, the amplifier loads are quite demanding.

## CONCLUSION

A decent enough multi-channel sound package, Dali's Blue Series

system incorporates some interesting ideas, and seems decent value for money too. Stereophonically, the 8008 has rather more authority than coherence or transparency, while the full multi-channel monty would seem to be better suited to high level movie replay than the more subtle and delicate art of multichannel music making.

**"THE C1000 DELIVERS A TOUCH MORE BASS THAN THE R1000 BUT IS STILL SOMEWHAT BASS-SHY OVERALL."**



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

In the unsighted stereo tests, the 8008 delivered the solid sort of sound one might expect from the ingredients, but there were negative aspects too. There's bags of headroom, bass weight and drive, but there was also criticism for some additional box 'drone'. One panellist described the midband and top end as: 'Smooth, but also a little dull, squashed and flat-sounding... I would like more high frequency energy and detail'.

Another listener described the sound as: 'Hard and quite uncompromising; not bright but remorseless; controlled but a bit tiring'. He later summed it up as 'Not sloppy, slow or coloured, but strong, clean, almost Teutonic in its presentation'. The speaker has good balance, lots of weight and loads of headroom, but still somehow lacks some coherence, vigour and excitement.



**MULTICHANNEL  
SOUND QUALITY**

Multichannel music replay passed muster, though didn't particularly distinguish itself. The centre channel did seem to stand out a little too obviously, and there was an overall tendency for this system to sound a little hard and insistent. On the plus side, the main left/right channels supplied convincing bass weight and power, and the little surround speakers also seemed to work rather well.

One could, however, describe the overall sound as a little heavy-handed. The wide differences in scale between the various models didn't seem to create the sort of wraparound tension and warmth that seems to be an important ingredient in surround sound music, and there was little sense of delicacy and transparency.



# INFINITY ALPHA

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** Alpha 40/Alpha 10/Alpha Center  
**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£833.00**

**STEREO PAIR:** Alpha 40  
**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£499.00**

**CONTACT** ☎ 020 8731 4670 [www.harman.com](http://www.harman.com) **GUARANTEE** 5 years

**T**he Harman Group owns and operates two of the US' biggest speaker brands – Infinity and JBL, both of which are active on a global scale and operate independently and in competition with each other. Infinity was effectively relaunched here in Britain a year or so back, when Harman set up its own distribution company, and the initial effort has gone into the budget price Alpha range, which is actually designed in Europe expressly for European tastes.

The first Alpha to come *Choice's* way was the Alpha 30 floorstander, a compact two-way floorstander which rated a Best Buy in our June 2001 group test. This multichannel test has provided the opportunity to try three more models from the range. A pair

of three-way Alpha 40 floorstanders (£499) deliver the main left/right channels here, the surround duties are undertaken by the small £165 Alpha 10 standmount, while the £169 Center handles the centre channel, bringing the total package price to £833.

Although the surface finish is vinyl, in beech, cherry or black ash woodprint, these are strikingly good-looking speakers, thanks to the very hi-tech drivers and trim, and the heavily post-formed edges around the front panel. The core driver technology is something Infinity calls CMMD (ceramic metal matrix diaphragm), which uses deep-anodising to convert the skin of a metal diaphragm into a ceramic oxide layer deep enough to provide worthwhile extra stiffness to increase

thanks in part to the 25mm-thick front panels. The Alpha 40 has twin terminals for bi-wiring; the 10 and Center have just single terminal pairs.

The Alpha 40's port has been tuned to a very low 28Hz, giving impressively deep bass extension without exciting mid-bass excess. As a result it's quite well suited to close-to-wall siting, and this was confirmed by the in-room measurements.

While the Alpha 10 (port-loaded at 55Hz) naturally doesn't go as deep, it would probably benefit from being kept a little way out from walls where possible (or maybe having its port blocked where not). Although impressively flat and smooth, the 10 also has a slightly brighter top end – less than ideal for a surround speaker that is likely to be close to listeners.

Both the Alpha 40 and 10 have enough bass extension to be designated 'large' when using 'bass management' processing, though perhaps use the 10s as 'small' if

## MULTICHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

With multichannel material the Infinity system again delivered a performance that was competent rather than inspired. Timbre matching gave no real cause for complaint and the wraparound soundfield had good overall coherence and a measure of tension too. But the overall sound was a little thin and cold, and the top end rather too insistent. Some extra warmth and a tad less treble wouldn't have gone amiss.

That said, the deep and dry bass is a refreshing contrast to the boomy thickening tendencies found elsewhere, and if some material could sound a touch aggressive, that's really an inevitable consequence of an openness that is welcome with many recordings.

## "THE DEEP AND DRY BASS IS A REFRESHING CONTRAST TO THE BOOMY THICKENING TENDENCIES FOUND ELSEWHERE."

### TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

Auditioned unsighted as stereo speakers, the Alpha 40 didn't attract any particular censure but did little to excite the listening panel either. It sounds clear, clean and open, with little obvious coloration, but the overall coherence is a little suspect and there were universal comments that low-level ambient information seemed lacking.

Two listeners complained of a loss of fine detail on guitar playing, one attributing this to a general lack of extreme top end – an observation which correlates quite well with an above-10kHz roll-off seen in the in-room responses. The bass is satisfying deep, powerful and free from boom, but there's also some lack of genuine transparency here too, and voices are just a little pinched and nasal.

the working bandwidth. It also results in a rather fetching matt silver/grey finish, which is further emphasised by the silver plastic trim.

A full three-way speaker in configuration, the Alpha 40 is a heftily built floorstander which uses twin bass units, each with 120mm cones, and a single midrange driver with 95mm cone. The tweeter has a 25mm dome, also in CMMD alloy.

The surround and centre speakers both use combinations of the same 25mm tweeter and 95mm cone driver, the latter operating here as bass/mid units. One is fitted to each Alpha 10, and two in the Center. All the speakers are port-loaded and feel very solidly built,



you're playing really loud. The Center, however, rolls off pretty rapidly below 120Hz, so is probably best kept 'small'. Furthermore, its balance doesn't match the 40 all that well, and is significantly more laid back through the upper mid and lower treble.

### CONCLUSION

Very distinctive high tech styling, fine build quality and advanced driver technology all make a strong case in favour of Infinity's Alpha range. However, while it remains thoroughly competent, the sound quality of this particular package didn't match up to the high expectations engendered by our review of the Alpha 30 last June, in either stereo or multichannel modes.

# JAMO E8

MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE: E850 x4/E8CEN

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £775.00

STEREO PAIR: E850

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £300.00

CONTACT ☎ 01788 556777 | www.jamospeakers.com | GUARANTEE 7 years

Jamo is one of Europe's most successful speaker brands, producing a large variety of stylish models from its vast cabinet works in the north of Denmark. Some of its models appear to place style ahead of substance, in order to make loudspeakers which can be discreetly fitted into modern homes, but that's certainly not the case with this package. It includes four identical compact floorstanders for the front and rear channels, combined with a similarly meaty-looking centre channel speaker.

There are six models all told in Jamo's E-series: one standmount and two floorstanders, backed up by a surround pair, a subwoofer and a dialogue speaker, but the system assembled here uses just two of those – the middle E850 floorstander, plus the E8CEN centre, based on the same driver combination.

The £300 E850 that forms the basis of this system is an altogether sturdier and more substantial proposition than the E800 standmount we reviewed back in November 2000. It has an extra main driver to help out in the bass and a floorstanding enclosure for just £100 more than the E800. Since there's no need for a stand here, the E850 has got to represent solid value for money. Although the finish is no more than a vinyl imitation of the real thing, these speakers still look pretty good, with some neat styling embellishments, provided the elegantly shaped grilles are left in place.

One clever part of this design is that the main driver cone diameter is about halfway between the usual 'standard' sizes found in the industry. As a consequence this speaker is even slimmer than most, yet still packs plenty of punch. To counter the potential instability of such a slim design, each speaker comes with four little outrigger feet, moulded from ABS plastic, which extend the lateral

footprint outside the box and ensure good security against knocks. (These look exactly like those supplied with some Energy models.)

Operating in a 'two-and-a-half-way' configuration, the main drivers use a mineral-fibre-reinforced paper cone some 110mm in diameter in a moulded plastic frame, with a surround which extends an extra half-roll beyond the edge of the frame to cover up the fixing screws. The tweeter used here has a 25mm fabric dome. Our vinyl woodprint came in cherry, but beech and black oak are options. The rear of the box is adorned with a very generous flared port, and the regulation twin terminals permitting the bi-wire/amp operation.

Although its box volume is much smaller, the E8CEN is a close match for the E850, cosmetically speaking. It has effectively identical drivers, this time operating as a straight two-way with the two main drivers either side of the central tweeter.

Regrettably, one of our E850s had a faulty crossover, which first showed up in the stereo listening tests – happily there were two spares on the

subs' bench in the hall! Subsequent examination revealed that a cracked mounting board had broken

**contact** between the terminal tags and the network – easy enough to fix in time for the multichannel listening.

In-room measurement work showed that the E850 should be relatively tolerant of positioning, though it's probably best kept clear of walls. Port-blocking might be worth considering if

the surround speakers have to be against a wall – but you'll need some heavy-duty winter socks to block these ports! The overall balance is good, if uneven, through the upper registers, and rather strong in the treble. The centre speaker makes a good match, and is actually marginally smoother and less forward overall.

## CONCLUSION

The E850 is a cleverly conceived and good-looking stereo speaker at a very reasonable price, and Recommendation seems entirely appropriate, provided its treble brightness doesn't put you off. As a complete surround sound package, however, this Jamo collection proved rather less convincing.

## MULTICHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

The five-channel package didn't live up to the promise the pair showed in stereo mode, and I'm still not entirely sure why.

The top end insistence that had been tolerable enough at a stereo listening distance became more intrusive with the shorter listening distances of multichannel set-ups. There was also a general lack of dynamic grip and authority that left the Jamo package lagging behind some of its competitors, so that the full tension of the wraparound soundfield wasn't really achieved. The sound lacks something in drive and punch as well as warmth, and can get a bit harsh when the volume is pumped.

**"THE FIVE-CHANNEL PACKAGE DIDN'T LIVE UP TO THE PROMISE THE PAIR SHOWED IN STEREO MODE, AND I'M STILL NOT ENTIRELY SURE WHY."**

RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY


Despite a hiatus caused by the broken crossover, the E850 did well in the unsighted stereo listening tests, with a pleasingly rich and fruity balance, a good sense of power, and reasonably good control. The top end does sound a little over-exposed – indeed, alongside a rather shy voice presence, there's a touch of 'boom 'n' tizz' about the general character. But overall coherence is pretty good here, bringing a lively expressiveness to the party.

It's not exactly the last word in neutrality, but the colorations are all sufficiently well controlled to avoid serious censure, and none seemed obviously intrusive. Ultimately, this is an inexpensive speaker which lacks smoothness and sophistication, but which still successfully manages to engage the listener in the music.









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**MULTICHANNEL  
SOUND QUALITY**

Listening rather closer to the various speakers with multichannel music recordings, the inherent brightness seemed a tad more obvious. This Cobalt combo's big, generous, full scale sound and essentially clean and clear rendition provided a real incentive to wind up the volume and explore the dynamics of the program material (though I have to admit that at this point Flotsam the cat left the room in protest).

One might perhaps wish for a little more warmth, as the presentation is sometimes a little too clinical for relaxed listening. But the level of detail, dynamic tension and range is exceptional here, so the music always sounds unusually interesting and involving, providing a strong incentive to keep on listening into the wee small hours.

# JMLAB COBALT

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** Cobalt 816/Cobalt 806/Cobalt CC800  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,707.00**

**STEREO PAIR:** Cobalt 816  
**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£859.00**

**CONTACT** ☎ 0121 616 5126 | www.focal-jmlab.fr **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**F**rance's biggest hi-fi speaker brand by a comfortable margin, JMLab is increasingly making its mark on the world stage, fuelled to no small extent by the fine drive unit technology of parent company Focal. The system which arrived for this group test is based on the Cobalt range, only two steps below the company's top Utopia line, so it's not surprising to find it's the most expensive package in our group test. The good news is that the Cobalts share many of the same advanced driver features as the Utopias but at much lower prices.

The large three-way Cobalt 826 registered a Best Buy in our recent stereo group test (*HFC* 219), so the portents were good for this multichannel combo consisting of three other models from the Cobalt range. Pride of place goes to the 816 at £859 per pair,

a large and very hefty two-and-a-half-way floorstander that handles the main front left and right channels. Round the back is a pair of two-way 806 standmounts (£529), while the front-centre channel is the responsibility of the £319 CC800.

The Cobalts come in three visual variations, all of which are quite distinct from the usual British approach, combining textured

laminates for front, back, top and base, sandwiched between wood veneered side panels. Ours, code named 'Style', look smart and contemporary, if a little austere, especially with the grey perforated metal grille in place. Round the back there are twin terminal pairs, and an inspection panel so you can watch the crossover network doing its thing.

At the core of all these models are

the company's trademark inverted titanium dome tweeters, and 6.5-inch cast frame 'W-Sandwich' main drivers. The latter have 115mm diameter cones made from a structural foam sandwiched between woven glass fibre sheets.

Both the 816 and 806 have ported enclosures and are supplied with bungs to block these if preferred, which would seem quite sensible if, say, the 806s need to be placed close to a wall. The CC800, incidentally, is a straight d'Appolito-type two-way, with sealed box loading.

Sited well clear of walls, the 816 delivers an impressive in-room response, with good deep bass extension and a mostly flat midband, with a presence dip centred on 2.3kHz the most obvious feature, and a slightly stronger than average treble thereafter. The surround channel 806 registers a very similar balance, but is clearly rather bass heavy when wall-mounted – bungs at the ready here. The CC800 has ample bass extension to be designated 'large' in 'bass management' terms, and shows a good balance match with the 816 across most of the band, though curiously the extreme treble is a little brighter, for no obvious good reason.

**"MUSIC ALWAYS SOUNDS INTERESTING, PROVIDING A STRONG INCENTIVE TO KEEP ON LISTENING INTO THE WEE SMALL HOURS."**

RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

A strong result in the unsighted stereo tests is to be expected from a relatively expensive speaker, though there was one voice of dissent. The majority praised the 816's fine weight and its fast, lively, and essentially communicative disposition: 'Balance well judged; crisp and percussive yet voices sound relatively unforced; bass very good'.

However, it isn't always the smoothest sound around. There's a touch of the brightness that seems to be typical of JMLab speakers in general, and this combines with a dry bottom end to give a slightly cold overall character. The cuddly warmth often associated with large loudspeakers is notably absent here. One panellist complained of a rather flat soundstage, though another remarked on the fine dynamic tension and transparency.

## CONCLUSION

The contemporary styling of these French loudspeakers might seem a little idiosyncratic to British tastes, and the character of the sound is also a little leaner and brighter than the UK norm. But there's no avoiding the fine underlying sound quality of JMLab's Cobalts, with their righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills. Stereo performance was marginally better than the surround sound findings in our tests, but both modes were reproduced with style and aplomb.

# MISSION M SERIES

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** m73/m7dS/m7C1

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆☆ **£479.70**

**STEREO PAIR:** m73

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆☆ **£199.90**

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 423700

www.mission.co.uk

**GUARANTEE** 2 years

**D**own the years, Mission has shown considerable flair and expertise in designing some of the best-looking loudspeakers around, and nowhere is that more true than its approach to the awkward difficulties of fitting multichannel speaker systems into the domestic environment.

That was certainly the case with the £800 Cinema 7 package we tested a year ago, and this significantly less expensive combination takes a similar approach a little further down the road. At a very modest £480, it's comfortably the least expensive package in this group test, and is arguably the best-looking too, thanks to the clever styling used to keep the centre and surround speakers as discreet as possible.

The core of the system is the m73, a clever two-way floorstander that sells for a highly competitive £200, the latter the key factor which helped it register a Best Buy rating in our June 2001 group test. Inevitably, given the substantial size and weight at such a modest price, there's little room for frills, but Mission's designers have still managed to come up with an unusually good-looking speaker in context.

Much, much smaller, yet only fractionally cheaper at £180, is the pair of cunningly shaped m7dS surrounds, which are closely related to the 78DS reviewed last year, with a similar 'bulging picture' shape, this time fetchingly finished in silver cloth, over a moulded case.

The same silver cloth is used to dress up the £100 m7C1 centre speaker, which will go nicely with the latest generation of silver finish TV sets. This too is based on large plastic mouldings, which has allowed the front panel to be formed into a gentle convex curve – the sort of curve that might match the profile of a TV set from a few years ago, but which will

look less comfortable on top of the latest flat-screen models.

While both the centre and surround speakers here look very attractive and are realistically priced, they're also very lightweight affairs, at around 2.5kg each. They're small too, at five and 4.2 litres respectively, considering that each has a pair of 110mm-frame drivers. Since they also combine decent sensitivities with easy amplifier loading, it's no surprise to find that bass output rolls off pretty rapidly below 120Hz. Mission's claim for -3dB at 75Hz should be taken with a ladle of salt! If using 'bass management', these three channels should be designated 'small'.

The m73 is quite a contrast – its vigorous port output generated a bit

of a midbass excess in our room, even with the speakers well out from the walls. Elsewhere the balance is well judged, if not all that smooth.

Although the three channels might differ markedly at low frequencies, the three different designs show very good tonal balance matching through the mid and treble voicing.

## CONCLUSION

This is the least expensive and also

arguably the best-looking multichannel package in our group, and those factors alone will doubtless earn it plenty of friends. The m73's fundamental competence and competitiveness continues to demand respect among stereo budget loudspeakers, but the surround sound ancillaries, despite good voicing, were less successful with music programming and are better suited to movie soundtracks.

**"AT THE PRICE, ITS SOLID AND SUBSTANTIAL PRESENTATION OF MUSIC DESERVES CLOSE ATTENTION FROM BUYERS ON TIGHT BUDGETS."**



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

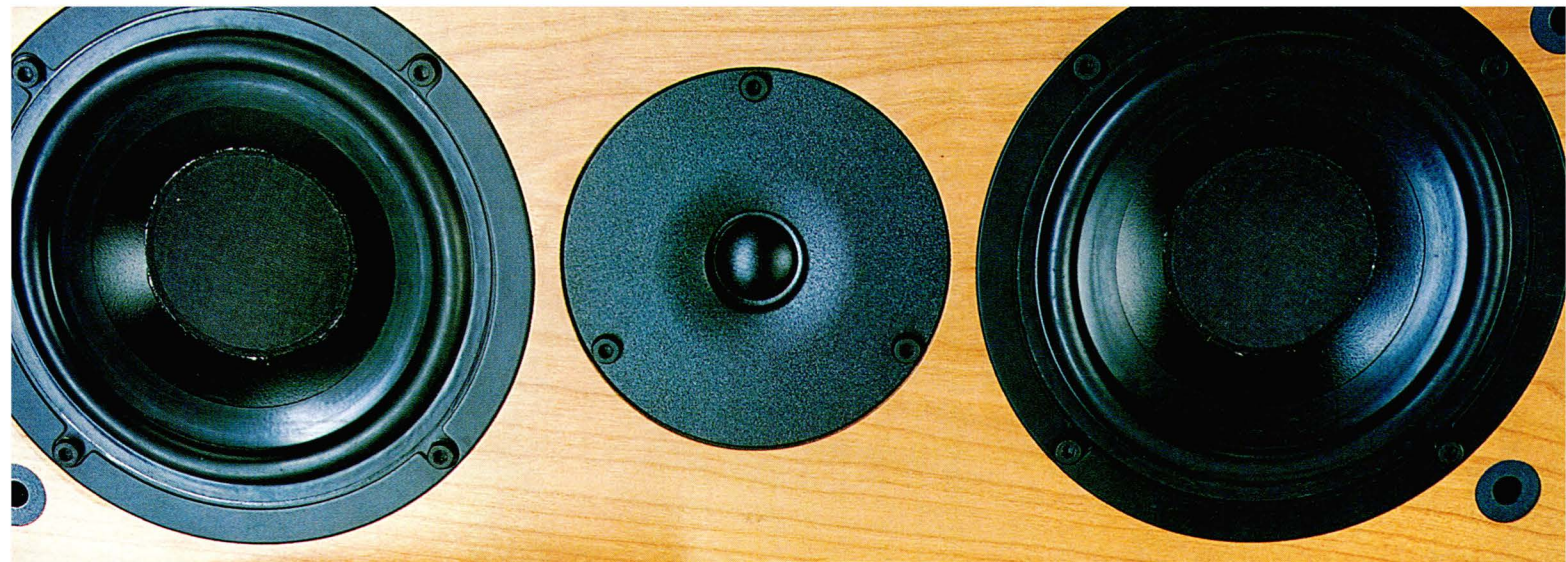
The m73 is unquestionably good value, but it's still inescapably a cheap speaker, only two-thirds of the price of its nearest competitor in this group test. Not surprisingly, then, it was rated below average for sound quality in the unsighted stereo listening.

Basically a very competently balanced and voiced loudspeaker, it does rather lack subtlety, refinement and dynamic literacy. Panellists complained that the sound, though full, was somehow insubstantial and fragile, with little in the way of depth perspectives. The bass end provided rather more weight than analysis, with sufficient congestion to add some muddiness to the musical pool. 'Dynamic limitations damp down enthusiasm in the playing', complained one panellist. But at the price, its solid and substantial presentation of music deserves close attention from buyers on tight budgets.



**MULTICHANNEL  
SOUND QUALITY**

If the m73s sounded a bit feeble, comparatively speaking, in stereo mode, this was further exacerbated when moving on to multichannel material. Designating the centre and surrounds 'small' and directing the bass to the m73s didn't really help, as it tended to expose the latter's fundamental lack of genuine grip and authority. There was little evidence here of the 'wraparound' fullness and warmth that can make multichannel music so impressive and involving by immersing you in the whole soundfield. 'Weak and wimpish' were two adjectives that first sprang to mind, and nothing in the test programme served to reverse that opinion. Ultimately, though material value for money is strong, this package just isn't good enough to convince with music.



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**MULTICHANNEL  
SOUND QUALITY**

The multichannel results were very good indeed, and the extra channels naturally improved the overall available headroom significantly. The general smoothness and freedom from boxiness was very welcome and most effective at creating a convincing wraparound soundfield, with obviously less box coloration than the group average. Curiously, the measured balance differences between the S3 and C3 didn't seem in any way obvious. Yes, there were some thoughts that a subwoofer might have been a welcome addition, but the system still managed surprisingly well without one.

# SPENDOR S SERIES

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** S3 x4/C3

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,649.70**

**STEREO PAIR:** S3

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£599.90**

**CONTACT** ☎ 01323 843474 [www.spendoraudio.com](http://www.spendoraudio.com) **GUARANTEE** 5 years

**H**aving mostly concentrated on the professional arena for some years, Spendor is now firmly back on the hi-fi stage thanks to new ownership under Philip Swift, one of the original co-founders of Audiolab. Spendor was the first brand to emerge from BBC roots, and its monitoring loudspeakers have always been highly regarded throughout the broadcast sector. These 'pro' connections remain firmly in place, but hi-fi enthusiasts in search of the highest standards of neutrality have long beaten a path to Spendor's door, and the company is now paying them closer attention.

The package supplied for this group test makes a complete contrast with all the others assembled here, and is a fine example of the sheer diversity that exists in hi-fi speaker land. This might be one of the most expensive of our systems, but it's also the smallest by an enormous margin. Pound (sterling) for pound (*avoirdupois*) it might not seem very good value, but small is beautiful for many loudspeaker purchasers, and need not necessarily represent a serious handicap either.

Indeed, the small box has a head start when it comes to minimising box coloration, because it's easy to make a small box very stiff and there's not much box to create coloration in the first place. Also, the assumption that a small speaker will be short of bass output is naive – the designer can juggle different parameters to increase bass depth from a small speaker. For example, by sacrificing sensitivity and accepting limited loudness capabilities.

This multichannel set-up uses four identical S3s to do the front and rear channels, plus the slightly larger C3 for the centre-front. Since the latter costs £450 and the S3s are £600 per pair, this tiny system soon adds up to a substantial £1,650. Adding Spendor's £700 SUB3 subwoofer was a temptation, but would have

taken things way over our maximum budget for this test.

If the S3 looks vaguely familiar, that might be because it has the same basic physical dimensions as that cult sub-miniature, the BBC-spec LS3/5A – but turned round the other way, making it deeper yet slimmer. Spendor and others manufactured the LS3/5A under licence for over 25 years, but the parts to make the original are no longer available, so Spendor now makes the Classic S3/5, based closely on the original, plus this S3, which is a more contemporary update in sound and appearance.

Dressed up in high-class real wood veneer, it has Spendor's own small 130mm cast-frame main driver, fitted with a 95mm diameter plastic cone, and loaded by a simple and very small sealed box. The tweeter has a small 19mm fabric dome, and twin

terminal pairs are fitted for bi-wiring/bi-amping. Much of the devil (and price) is in the detail here, with close drive unit matching, careful acoustic integration of grilles etc.

The C3 centre channel looks just like a 'stretched' S3, with an extra main driver flanking the central tweeter, and full magnetic screening. There's a port set into the rear, tuned to 48Hz, but this came with a bung already fitted.

Although Spendor claims a sensitivity of 85dB, our in-room traces suggest that 82dB is closer to the real world situation under far-field conditions. This is certainly a low figure, but it does ensure that this tiny loudspeaker can actually generate some real bass, down to 50Hz or better. The S3's sealed-box loading is tolerant of siting: wall proximity usefully fills in the midbass, but also

somewhat disturbs the unusually smooth and seamless midband created in free space. The C3 doesn't make a particularly good match, being significantly more laid-back through the presence region (1-3kHz) yet rather brighter through the treble proper.

## CONCLUSION

An intriguing alternative to the stereotype, this Spendor system loses ground to more conventional packages in terms of dynamic expression and loudness capabilities, but its beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness make it particularly well suited to surround sound music reproduction as opposed to outright home cinema. It's clearly best in smaller rooms, especially with stereo material where its limitations are more obvious. And I can't help wondering whether a fifth, magnetically shielded S3 might not be a better (and cheaper) option than the C3 centre speaker for multichannel music replay.

**"POUND FOR POUND IT MIGHT NOT SEEM VERY GOOD VALUE, BUT SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL FOR MANY."**



## TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps inevitably, the bass limitations of this tiny speaker did prove something of a handicap in the unsighted stereo listening tests, and the adjective 'small' did crop up more than once. One panellist praised the speed and detail, but felt the limited weight and warmth left voices slightly exposed.

Providing it's kept well within its loudness limits, this compact model has some very real strengths. It's beautifully balanced and voiced, and unusually smooth too. There's little of the boxiness often found with larger speakers, and imaging is exceptionally precise and well focused, though dynamic and bass analysis are less impressive.

# WHARFEDALE PACIFIC

**MULTICHANNEL PACKAGE:** Pi-20/Pi-10/Pi-Centre

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£699.95**

**STEREO PAIR:** Pi-20

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£349.95**

**CONTACT** ☎ 01480 447700 [www.wharfedale.co.uk](http://www.wharfedale.co.uk) **GUARANTEE** 1 year

**S**till the best known brand name in British hi-fi loudspeakers, Wharfedale became part of the globalisation club long ago and is actually owned by Chinese interests. Manufacturing is often undertaken overseas too, which may explain why this range is christened Pacific.

They're a very distinctive range of speakers for sure, most obviously because all models feature externally mounted tweeters, fitted into moulded nacelles that sprout from the top surfaces. They also look like very good material value for money, featuring real wood veneers at very realistic prices.

Purchased separately, these five speakers would normally cost £850, but they also come as a complete package at £700, which represents a

very worthwhile discount. While it's not the cheapest of the packages assembled here, it's only one step up the ladder, and although the veneer work might look pretty basic quality, the build feels very solid and substantial throughout.

The Pacific is Wharfedale's new prestige range. *Choice* has covered both the £449 Pi-30 (April 2001 First Impressions) and the £500 Pi40 (Bench Test, June 2001), so this combination of Pi-20, Pi-10 and Pi-Centre actually completes the full set.

The £350 Pi-20, used for the main front left/right channels here, is the smallest of the three Pacific floorstanders. Unlike its bigger brothers, it's a simple two-way with just a single main driver, albeit of rather larger diameter than much of the competition, with a 130mm

make the Pi-Centre stand out visually, so Wharfedale uses two rather smaller main drivers to keep the box itself tolerably slim. Again the cone is a woven Kevlar polymer matrix, this time 95mm in diameter.

One apparent bonus with floorstanders is that you save the price of the stands, which sounds good in theory. The Pi-20 even comes with a little plastic plinth, but unfortunately the threaded spike sockets don't seem consistently founded – one of ours sheared completely, with very little torque.

Why mount an external tweeter on the top of the enclosure? It's a technique that B&W has applied to its upmarket models for twenty-something years, but it's rare in the budget sector. It not only looks distinctive, but potential benefits include improved treble distribution, an opportunity to time-align the drivers (aligning the tweeter with the acoustic centre of the bass driver), an avoidance of baffle-edge diffraction effects, and a measure of mechanical decoupling from the main driver/enclosure vibrations.

However, in-room measurements

## "B&W USES EXTERNAL TWEETERS IN ITS UPMARKET MODELS, BUT IT'S A TECHNIQUE THAT'S RARE IN THE BUDGET SECTOR."

### MULTICHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

This speaker system responded well to multichannel music too: 'Quite a fun speaker, if a bit oddball. . . goes loud comfortably', to quote the notes. Surprisingly perhaps, the measured centre forwardness didn't seem particularly intrusive in practice, and the system as a whole brought a welcome dynamic tension and authority to the whole 'wraparound' experience, which was very involving.

There does seem to be 'grip factor' in the way that surround sound speaker systems drive and create an overall tension within the listening environment, and here the Wharfedale combo worked rather well. The strong top end could occasionally intrude on the 'wrong' material, but this seemed to be the exception rather than the rule.

diameter Kevlar composite cone. The external tweeter can be rotated and has a 25mm soft fabric dome, the enclosure is front-ported and twin terminal pairs are fitted.

Much the same spec applies to the £250 Pi-10 surround speakers, which use the same basic drivers in a much shorter standmount enclosure: with that big main driver, it's a very chunky-looking device. Size apart, the only real distinction is that the 10's reflex port is on the back, which is less than ideal for close-to-wall siting. And since surround speakers are likely to be wall-mounted, there may be a strong case for blocking the ports here: foam bungs are not supplied, but a rolled up pair of old socks is equally effective!

The external tweeter will inevitably

### TWO-CHANNEL SOUND QUALITY

Auditioned unsighted as a stereo pair, the Pi-20 drew a rather inconsistent reaction from the panellists, perhaps reflecting its rather idiosyncratic balance. But it by no means disgraced itself, especially considering the very modest price.

This is a design that makes up for in enthusiasm what it lacks in smoothness and sophistication. The top end is a little over-exposed, which might not interact too well with low-cost electronics, but the bottom end is pretty good, with decent extension and evenness, plus a measure of genuine authority and dynamic grip. The overall effect is somewhat laid back, but also engagingly spacious, airy and expressive, with good stereo imaging and little in the way of boxiness, one panellist summing it up as: 'entertaining, if a bit lively'.

revealed some obvious balance anomalies. There's plenty of bass and treble, but the midband is lacking, particularly

with the Pi-10; the Pi-20 is rather better balanced, but still short of presence energy. The Pi-Centre then compounds the felony by delivering a rather mid-forward balance.

### CONCLUSION

There's no denying this package supplies plenty of loudspeaker for your money, with refreshingly individual styling. Strict neutrality is compromised by wayward balance, but the whole is definitely entertaining, in either stereo or multichannel modes.





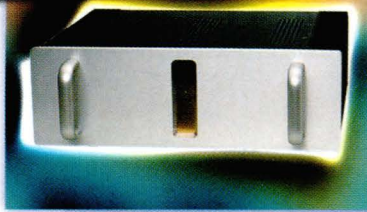


RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE  
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Wharfedale



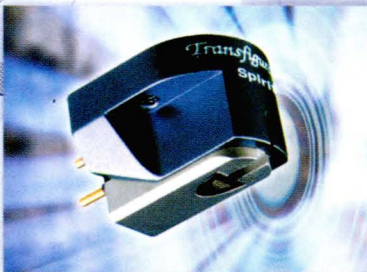
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#### Part exchanged and ex-dem clearance.

	Sale	New
<b>Digital</b>		
Sugden Masterclass CD - new - boxed	£1990	£2500
Helios Model CD2i - new	£890	£1200
Helios Model CD3i - ex-dem	£690	£900
Linn Genki - 1yr - boxed	£650	£1000
<b>Analogue</b>		
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
<b>Loudspeakers</b>		
Living Voice Auditorium - Hi-Fi Choice 'Best Buy'		
4 pairs - Walnut - ex-dem	£1150	£1500
Cadence DS	£750	£1750
Dali 104 (MS)	£390	£650
Lowther Bi-Core 2000	£500	
Klipsch LaScala Black	£1750	£3500
Quad ELS63 - fully reconditioned by Quad	£1600	£3000
Quad ELS63 - fully reconditioned by Quad	£1300	£3000
<b>Amplifiers</b>		
Border Patrol 300B SE - with new Western Electric valves.		
Light Oak - the best SE available - ex-dem	£3750	£4500
Canary Audio 301 - 24 watts stereo power amp with 2 matched pair Western Electric 300B - fabulous	£3900	£5200
Art Audio Concerto - integrated 40 Watts Class A. V.good x2	£1500	£2650
Audio Innovations S1000 - 50 watt class A monos	£790	£1550
Joule Electra 2 box phono pre-amp	£800	£2000
Art Audio VPS - valve line pre-amp	£600	£1400
Sugden A21 - integrated (line only) ex-dem - mint condition	£750	£900
Musical Fidelity A1000 - 'super pre main' class A	£850	£1800
Cary '2A3' 7 watt power amp. 1992	£850	
Cary 5500 Line pre-amp. 1992	£550	
Unison Mystery One PR+	£950	£1750
Tube Technology MAC phono pre-amp. Fully refurbished by manufacturer. Including Hovland film and foil capacitors.	£900	£1400
Tube Technology line pre-amp with separate power supply. Fully refurbished by manufacturer.	£850	£1450
Tom Evans Groove - phono stage - new	£490	£750

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# CONCLUSIONS

PAUL MESSENGER GETS TO GRIPS WITH THE DEMANDS ON MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS.

**O**ne observation from this group test is that the best speaker system for stereo isn't necessarily ideal for surround, and vice versa. Part of the reason might be to do with different listening distances, but I suspect other, subtler factors may also be involved.

The stereotypical package here combines a pair of floorstanders for front left/right with much smaller speakers doing centre and surround duties. However, this group test tends to suggest that such an arrangement might well be better suited to movies than music. The two packages based around standmount speakers (from B&W and Spondor) were unquestionably among the more successful, perhaps because the all-round

match is very good, and there's less total cabinet area to add colorations.

More disturbing was the discovery that the Sony SCD-XB770 SACD player, used as source for much of the multichannel work, sounded better in 'Multichannel Direct' mode, than when using its built-in DSP functions like 'bass management'.

The '770 is a modestly priced SACD player, to be sure, and I've no idea if it's typical of the breed in this respect. If it is, the implications are considerable.


It means, for example, that one is theoretically more or less obliged to use a subwoofer, even when any or all of the other speakers are large, because it's only possible to pass the '.1' or sixth channel content on to the front L/R channels by employing bass management. (It's true

that the .1 channel doesn't always carry bass information on music discs, but it's still a shame not to reproduce it if it does. At present there is no standard 'use' for the sixth channel but it looks likely that it will end up full range in the long term)

Again, for best possible quality by avoiding 'bass management', it's necessary to use 'large' speakers all round, and further DSP features can be avoided by choosing speakers of similar sensitivities, and sitting roughly equidistant from all five main channels.

These broad rules seem to make plenty of sense even for non-purists. The simple conclusion is that the best surround sound music is likely to be obtained when all five speakers are broadly similar in size and type.

## SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

					
<b>MAKE MODEL</b>	<b>ACOUSTIC ENERGY</b> AESPRIT 309 AESPRIT 300C AESPRIT 307	<b>B&amp;W</b> 602 S3 601 S3 LCR 600 S3	<b>CASTLE</b> STIRLING 3 RICHMOND 3 BASTION	<b>DALI</b> 8008 R1000 C1000	<b>INFINITY</b> ALPHA 40 ALPHA 10 ALPHA CENTER
<b>PRICE</b>	£699.95 £279.95 £249.95	£299.95 £249.95 £349.95	£729.90 £279.90 £329.90	£539.00 £199.00 £169.00	£499.00 £165.00 £169.00
<b>SOUND STEREO</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>VALUE STEREO</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>SOUND MULTICHANNEL</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>VALUE MULTICHANNEL</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	The veneer might be prettier, but the imaging, solidity and neutrality are impressive.	Good sized, quality drivers in standmount frames still make sense, whatever the trend.	Fine drive and expression, but can sound a little hard. Best with multichannel material.	Stereo has authority (but less transparency). Multichannel seems movie-oriented.	Sounds competent, but didn't excel in either stereo or multichannel mode.
<b>GUARANTEE</b>	3 YEARS	5 YEARS	5 YEARS	5 YEARS	5 YEARS
					
<b>MAKE MODEL</b>	<b>JAMO</b> E 850 x4 E 8CEN	<b>JMLAB</b> COBALT 816 806 CC 800	<b>MISSION</b> M73 M7DS M7C1	<b>SPENDOR</b> S3 x4 C3	<b>WHARFEDALE</b> PI-20 PI-10 PI-CENTRE
<b>PRICE</b>	£300.00 PER PAIR £175.00	£859.00 £529.00 £319.00	£199.90 £179.90 £99.90	£599.90 PER PAIR £449.90	£349.95 £299.95 £199.95
<b>SOUND STEREO</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>VALUE STEREO</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>SOUND MULTICHANNEL</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>VALUE MULTICHANNEL</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	Good stereo, if a tad bright, but the surround sound package was less convincing.	A little lean and bright, with strong dynamic expression and lively communication.	Respect for the price, but the surround bits are better suited to movie work.	Lacks some dynamic capabilities, but has beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness.	Balance is somewhat wayward but unquestionably entertaining in either mode.
<b>GUARANTEE</b>	7 YEARS	2 YEARS	2 YEARS	5 YEARS	1 YEAR



# INTERCONNECT

THERE'S MUCH MORE TO CABLES THAN MERE WIRES — THEY CAN MAKE OR BREAK A QUALITY SYSTEM. CABLE MAESTRO RICHARD BLACK INVESTIGATES 12 NEW INTERCONNECTS.

**I**t would be hard to deny that the cable market has pretty much matured and although makers claim to come up with unique designs genuine breakthroughs are rare. The vast majority of hi-fi buyers now cheerfully accept that cables are components in their own right just like amplifiers and speakers, and although it's arguable that the differences they make are a lot more subtle than those between speakers, few these days deny the existence of such differences.

All the same, there's still plenty of mystique surrounding cables. After several years of reviewing, I haven't come across a single theory that convincingly relates science to perception in the cable field. It's a regrettable state of affairs, not least because it is open to exploitation by unscrupulous manufacturers who seek to baffle with science, or pseudo-science. Only a minority of manufacturers, I hasten to add. But the irony is that many of them make very good cables, sometimes seemingly despite themselves. They can't possibly all be right — there are far too many contradictions!

One thing that is clear is that the notorious 'system synergy' argument applies to cables, and their performance can be inextricably linked

# CABLES

with what's on either end. But there seems to be a degree of consistency to a particular cable's sound, which makes reviews like this one valid across a reasonably broad range of partnering equipment.

In fact, in preparing this review I broadened the scope somewhat to include an elderly open-reel tape deck as a source component. With its low-feedback valve circuitry it is in complete contrast to the high-feedback integrated circuits that drive the outputs in most modern source components. It certainly added food for thought, but only once or twice did it make me significantly revise my thoughts on any particular cable.

As usual, I urge you to do as much comparative listening for yourself as possible. Many dealers will loan cables for a short period to existing customers so that you can try them at home. If your listening chain has two or more cables in the path (for instance, CD player to preamp and preamp to power amp) it's intriguing to try changing both at once, which often has a much bigger effect than changing one alone. And don't forget that the twelve cables reviewed here are only a sample: see The Directory at the back of the magazine and our website for many more.

## ON TEST

Acoustic Research	
Master Series MS230	£69.99
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Ecosse Reference Diva	£99.99
Ixos Gamma Master	
Series 1001	£69.95
Kimber Crystal-Cu	£115.00
Monster Interlink	
IL-400 Mk II	£69.95
Neotech NA11085	£99.95
Profigold PGA4201	£14.99
Prowire SHQ	£29.99
SonicLink SG Voices	£95.00
van den Hul The Bay C5	£45.00

All prices are for a 1m pair unless otherwise stated

## OTHER EQUIPMENT USED

Rotel RCD-971 CD player  
 Revox/EAR G36 open-reel tape deck  
 EAR 802 and 519 amps  
 Harman/Kardon Integrated amp  
 ATC SCM20 speakers  
 Goertz M1 speaker cable

## MUSIC USED DURING TESTS

Guzmán - Ambrosio  
 Alan Bush - Men Of Blackmoor  
 Ramsey Lewis - Down To Earth  
 Pink Floyd - The Wall

# TONED UP

TONES AND PICTURES



## New Arrivals

37624 - Kylie	Can't Get You Out of My Head
37637 - Michael Jackson	You Rock My World
37622 - DJ Otzi	Hey Baby
37630 - City High	What Would You Do
37638 - Usher	You Got It Bad
37629 - Steps	Chain Reaction
37640 - Linkin Park	In The End
37625 - Alien Ant Farm	Smooth Criminal
37632 - Mary J Blige	Family Affair
37631 - Liberty	Thinking It Over
37604 - Uncle Kracker	Follow Me
37635 - Sven Sven Sven	Bell & Spurling
37636 - Sum 41	Fat Lip
37616 - Bob The Builder	Mambo No 5
37626 - Shaggy	Luv Me Luv Me
37617 - Supermen Lovers	Starlight
37621 - N-Trance	Set You Free

## Classics

37143 - Muppets	Another Brick In The Wall
37154 - Pink Floyd	Staying Alive
37025 - Bee Gees	
37060 - Dambusters	
37106 - Itchy & Scratchy	
37179 - Scooby Doo	
37223 - X-Files	
37055 - Cranberries	Zombie
37094 - Frank Sinatra	Strangers In The Night
37484 - The Fugees	Killing Me Softly
37229 - Spooks	Karma Hotel
37466 - Spooky	
37476 - Tales From The Crypt	
37354 - Halloween	
37411 - Phantom Of The Opera	
37312 - Dances With Wolves	

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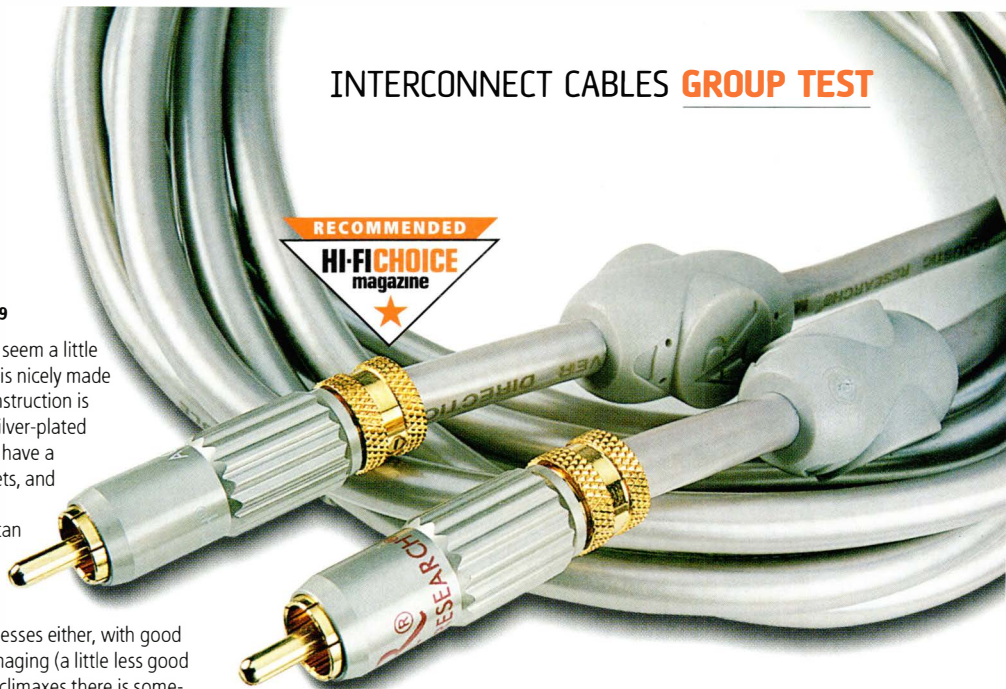
**Acoustic Research Master Series MS230**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £69.99

Packaging that requires a screwdriver to open it may seem a little over-the-top for a mere cable, but the product inside is nicely made with good quality components. Pseudo-balanced construction is employed (screen connected at one end only), with silver-plated conductors and low-loss insulation. The phono plugs have a collet lock to help keep them tightly in place on sockets, and a ferrite sleeve is fitted to each cable to cut down RF interference: the worst this can do is nothing, and it can be a life-saver in certain environments.

This is built like a good no-nonsense cable and it sounds like one. Performance is perhaps not outstanding in any area but has no embarrassing weaknesses either, with good detail, well extended bass, very good lateral stereo imaging (a little less good in the depth department) and sweet, clean treble. At climaxes there is sometimes a hint of hardness to the sound, but even so there is no loss of detail and listening never becomes tiring. All in all, a well balanced performance, which won't excite bass freaks but should provide a gratifying upgrade for many a mid-range system and suit most musical styles. Recommended.

Contact 0161 702 5010 [www.acoustic-research.com](http://www.acoustic-research.com) Guarantee Life



**Chord Company Silver Siren**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £74.99

Scoring highly for both flexibility and handling, this soft-jacketed cable appears to have an unusual construction consisting of two coaxial cables twisted together. The core of one is the 'hot' conductor and the core of the other is the ground, while the screens are connected at one end. This can make the cable directional, but feel free to experiment with which direction works best: Chord's recommendation grounds the screens at the receiving end but results may vary from one installation to another. Plugs are plated in silver rather than gold.

Materials used are all of high quality, so maybe it is the construction which is to blame for this cable's lacklustre performance. Although it offers a good tonal balance with commendable reach in the bass, it seems shy of revealing much detail. This makes for rather tiring listening, as one has to concentrate harder to follow what is going on, and in addition the sound tends towards dryness, which removes some of the bloom from voices and speeds the decay of ambience and percussive sounds. Probably for the same reasons, dynamics seem constrained and climaxes undramatic. No one area is seriously lacking, but this seems a limited upgrade over cheaper alternatives.

Contact 01722 331674 [www.chord.co.uk](http://www.chord.co.uk) Guarantee 10 years

**Cable Talk Professional 3**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £74.95

This is another pseudo-balanced cable, although it seems to have not one but two 'hot' conductors plus an earth return, all screened with copper foil which is connected only at one end (normally the sending end, as marked on the cable's sheath). The conductors are stranded but even so the cable is not particularly flexible. Good quality phono plugs are fitted with a split centre pin that helps ensure good contact in any socket; DIN plugs are a no-cost option.

Capacitance is significantly higher than with any other cable here: over a one metre length it is not likely to cause noticeable treble loss with any source component but long runs might on occasion sound a little dull.

In general, there is a slight tendency to bass richness and a touch of coloration in the midband means that this is not the most neutral cable in the group. In fact the bass, while

extended and solid, can sometimes sound a little dry and this can reduce its tunefulness on occasion. Treble is extended but lacks the last word in openness. Detail is fair, with some congestion in thickly-scored music. Try it perhaps for its bass, but overall the result is a not as good as one might expect.

Contact 0808 100 6868 [www.cabletalk.co.uk](http://www.cabletalk.co.uk) Guarantee Life



## GROUP TEST INTERCONNECT CABLES

### Ecosse Reference Diva

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £99.99

Beneath the transparent sheath of this chunky-looking cable is a dense silver-plated braided screen, and apparently beneath that a further screening layer of conductive polymer and a simple coaxial construction. Materials are of good quality with a low-loss insulator and impressively grippy plugs.

Unfortunately we could only obtain a 0.5m sample for review, which means that comparisons with the others in this group are not strictly fair. However, past experience suggests that the fine results obtained can be reasonably well extrapolated to the case of a full metre. In fact, sound was among the best in the group, with nicely extended low frequencies and some very clear treble, and no discernible tonal signature. Of particular note is the very tuneful nature of this cable's bass, which seems to be a relatively rare asset in cables but which is essential for full appreciation of that staple of jazz, the plucked double bass. Naturally, other musical styles benefit too, while the high levels of detail (maintained even-handedly across the dynamic range) made for an enjoyable and lengthy listening session. Although it's among the dearest in the group, this cable comfortably earns its Recommendation.

Note: price given is for 0.8m length; 0.5m as reviewed is £84.99  
Contact 0141 353 0509 [www.ecossecables.co.uk](http://www.ecossecables.co.uk) Guarantee 10 years

RECOMMENDED

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



### Ixos Gamma Master Connect 1001

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £69.95

Looking like some sort of 'dayglo' snake in its bright nylon braid clothing, this very fat – but surprisingly flexible – cable is yet another outing for Ixos's 'Gamma Geometry', a subtle variant on twisted pairs which may or may not make a significant difference but gives Ixos something to patent. Anyway, the recipe looks quite tasty, with silver-plated conductors and screen and Teflon insulation. This is another pseudo-balanced cable and is marked for directionality on one plug.

Sonic results seem decent rather than outstanding. As with so many cables, detail resolution varies with level, so that while quiet music is nice and easy to follow, big climaxes can become a little ragged and disjointed. Treble is not quite as open as with the best cables in this group, but bass is good – well extended and resonant. Dynamics are good, and with lively rock for instance there is a good 'get-up-and-dance' factor: I strongly suspect that this could be a good cable for home cinema use too. But for acoustically recorded music it is not as transparent as some of its competitors and on balance it falls just short of Recommendation.

Contact 01844 219000  
[www.ixos.co.uk](http://www.ixos.co.uk) Guarantee Life

### Kimber Crystal Cu

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £115.00

Kimber's familiar woven pattern turns up again, this time with four conductors (two hot, two earth) under a nylon braid. Although the weave is not quite the same as twisting it achieves much the same effect, with a fair degree of interference rejection at low and high frequencies even though there is no screen. The plugs fitted are Kimber's upmarket 'Ultraplate' variety, also featuring a split centre pin.

On balance, this cable doesn't always live up to the generally high standards set by most of Kimber's range. Its strong point is the bass, which has fabulous extension and solidity, and that in itself will probably sell plenty of pairs. But there's an odd mixture of ability and awkwardness here: for instance, the telling 'plucked bass test' showed a lack of resonance in the low reaches despite the extension. Frequency balance is very even-handed at any level and climaxes are reached without roughness, but detail on complex treble-rich sounds such as harpsichord is in slightly short supply and such sounds also seem rather forward and dry. There is good stereo image placement except that the entire image is sometimes shifted forward. It's worth investigating if you're curious, but doesn't quite justify its position as most expensive in the group.

Contact 0800 373467 [www.kimber.com](http://www.kimber.com) Guarantee Life



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## Monster Interlink IL400 MkII

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £69.95

Monster Cable – one of the oldest kids on the block – certainly has the branding thing off pat, complete with baseball caps and key rings. And of course, more buzz words and registered trademarks than you can shake a stick at. Of these, the more interesting are the Bandwidth Balanced construction and Time Correct windings, evidently mixing cable strand sizes for 'improved phase response and faster transients'. Whatever the jargon, this is certainly a well-specified cable with moderate capacitance and low loss, and Monster's phono plugs give a good balance between tightness of fit and practicality.

The sound is lively and full of energy. It's not entirely neutral and so may not suit all tastes, but its departures from neutrality are not serious: principally a slight tendency to brightness and a mildly forward way with images. However, that brightness coupled with bass that lacks neither quality nor quantity makes this the best cable of the bunch for foot-tapping across a broad range of styles from rock to jazz. Classical is perhaps a little less favoured but still very listenable, with very good detail. Top fun factor: Best Buy.

Contact 01908 319360 [www.monstercable.com](http://www.monstercable.com) Guarantee Life



## Profigold PGA4201

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £14.99

As you'd expect at the price, there's nothing particularly clever claimed for this cable. Left and right channels are joined by a plastic web but can be easily unzipped. The surprisingly robust-looking metal plugs are moulded on so inspection proved impossible, but it's clearly a coaxial design made with good quality, low loss insulation.

Never mind the aspirations: this is a perfectly respectable cable in present company. In no one area does it outshine all the others, but in most departments it puts in a very creditable performance. OK, it is a little dry and can as a result become rather uninvolved, especially with hi-fi components or recordings that are already on the Saharan side. But it has a fine balance across the frequency spectrum, good detail, respectable stereo imaging with a fair stab at image depth too, and no fear of dynamics. Voices lose a little resonance thanks to the dryness, but are still easy to distinguish. It seemed particularly at home with jazz material, less so with classical and somewhere in-between with rock and pop. Had its price been twice as high it would still have merited Recommendation.

Contact 0208 543 3633 [www.profigold.com](http://www.profigold.com) Guarantee none

## Neotech NA11085

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £99.95

Hailing from Taiwan, this smart cable is a simple enough coaxial type, using high purity copper for both cable and plugs. Like Monster, Neotech mixes cable strand diameters, claiming that this improves bass response. Low-loss foamed polythene insulation is covered by a conductive plastic screen and a copper braid. The chunky phono plugs feature a locking collet for maximum grip on sockets.

In retrospect it is a little surprising that this cable did not perform better on audition, given that its basic recipe is very similar to the Ecosse Reference for example. Its real weakness is detail, which never quite rises above the so-so. There's no problem with tonal balance, with good bass extension matched by effortless treble, but it can be really quite difficult to separate out the strands of a complex piece of musical writing. On the other hand, detail seems paradoxically to improve with dynamic level (usually it's the other way round) which made for good results with a spot of glam rock, and modern synth-based music is reasonably happy too. But that's not enough to glean accolades: for a fairly hefty sum of money, this cable seems to offer little that can't be had for less elsewhere.

Contact 01646 685601

[www.neotech.com.tw](http://www.neotech.com.tw)

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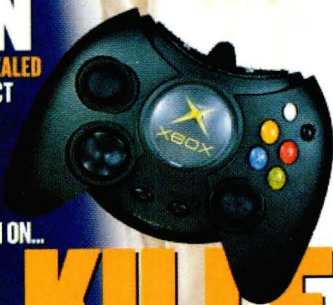
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**Prowire SHQ**

SOUND  VALUE  £29.99

This brand new lead wasn't even on the market at the time of writing and so the review sample was a slightly unrepresentative 1.5m, which probably didn't make a vast difference. At the least, it served to show off the impressive specification of this low-price cable, including such niceties as silver-plated oxygen-free copper throughout and low-loss insulation. It's a simple coaxial design and is fitted with phono plugs which stand comparison with those fitted to the more expensive cables here, split centre pin and all. The only omission is the lack of any channel identification, given the channels are attached to one another.

Little if any special pleading is required on grounds of price. Yes, bass extension and detail could both be improved – but not by a great amount. What's slightly more serious is that the bass sometimes sounds just a little muddy and congested, most noticeably so with orchestral bass instruments, but it has a good degree of tunefulness and kick. Treble is generally open and sweet and stereo imaging is just fine, with depth arguably better than one has any right to expect. Dynamics are good if not quite up to the level of the best around. A highly Recommended budget upgrade.

*Note: price given is for 1.2m length*

Contact 01442 403000 [www.vivanco.com](http://www.vivanco.com) Guarantee 1 year



**van den Hul The Bay C5**

SOUND  VALUE  £45.00

This cable first appeared in an *HFC* group test three years ago, albeit in a slightly different guise. Since then it has changed distributor – Tannoy now handles van den Hul – it's price has fallen and it's seen some minor changes in construction. The basics are the same though: it's a coaxial cable using a mixture of silver-plated copper and vdH's trademark Linear Structured Carbon, which is supposed to improve conductivity at very low signal levels. Insulation is low-loss polythene and good quality phono plugs are fitted with collet termination of the screen, which gives better interference rejection than the more common 'pigtail' connection.

There's no doubting the sonic achievements of this very fine cable. From top to bottom of the frequency range it equals or tops almost every other cable here, with the possible exception of ultimate bass extension. But even there it scores pretty well, offering particularly good detail too. In fact its detail really is in the top rank, giving insights into familiar recordings and making long-term listening not merely enjoyable but compulsive. Stereo imaging is excellent, with very good depth information, and the sound remains completely cohesive throughout the full dynamic range. Any kind of music is well served and there should be no compatibility problems with equipment either. It's excellent value-for-money and a clear Best Buy.

Contact 01236 420199 [www.vanden Hul.com](http://www.vanden Hul.com) Guarantee 10 years

**SonicLink SG Voices**

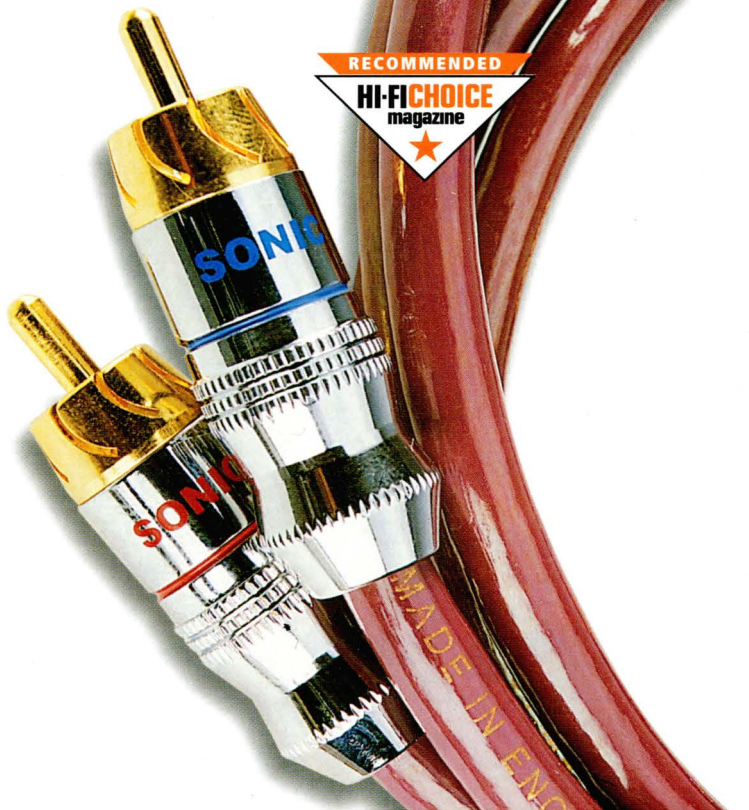
SOUND  VALUE  £95.00

This is a new model in the SonicLink range but is based on the longstanding Violet. SL has unconventional views on the materials required for audio interconnects and this one has conductors of pure nickel, not a metal used much for cable. Insulation is a more conventional PTFE, while the plugs are SL's own, smart and fairly robust. Construction is pseudo-balanced so a degree of directionality can be expected in some applications.

If the materials are unusual, so is the sound. Of all the cables in the group, this one has the most pronounced tonal character, with lovely bass extension but what sounds like a slight dip in the upper bass. That's most audible in direct comparisons with other cables, but in isolation it could well be a useful counterweight to the characteristics of many smaller speakers. Midrange and treble seem generally neutral. Detail is good but not fantastic, and its close relative stereo imaging is likewise not quite in the front rank, with limited image depth. Dynamics are good, though, and that can make for an exciting sound with good impact. There's clearly a trade-off between impact and detail here, so have a listen and see how it grabs you. To encourage you, we'll Recommend it!

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# CONCLUSIONS

RICHARD BLACK UNRAVELS THE COILS...







**T**his group covered a fairly broad price range but performance varied less than it might have; there were no utterly bizarre cables at any rate. A couple disappointed, not least in comparison with past contenders by the same manufacturers, but mostly what marks out the models that failed to make the grade is that they don't offer any more than at least one cheaper competitor. Manufacturers never thank me for saying this, but it remains true that the best hi-fi is only that which does the least damage to the music. So what sort of damage to cables do? Going on this group and past experience, muddying detail and drying out acoustics are the most serious offences. Tonal aberrations are usually less worrying and with time can be ignored, but if a system is smudging

the sound you won't stand it for long. That said, when a really excellent cable comes along it does feel as if it is lifting the performance of the whole ensemble. That's true of the van den Hul The Bay C5, which on repeated listening seemed consistently head and shoulders above not only the others here but also my long-term reference – a Furukawa model which despite its age will happily take on most comers and has provided a handy yardstick over the years. Since the vdH cable is far from the most expensive, should other manufacturers simply give up? Decidedly not: other models may offer a slightly different view of things but it might suit your tastes,


your equipment or your music better. Take the Monster IL-400, for instance: the vdH may be more civilised but the Monster is more likely to reach out and grab your attention, even to make you smile. Sonic Link's SG Voices may prove just the thing with its fabulous deep bass. The Ecosse Reference Diva has a broadly similar outlook to the vdH but a slightly gentler, more laid-back presentation that will suit some listeners better. The Acoustic Research cable is a perfectly competent alternative, while the Prowire offers great value for money. And if you can't stretch to that, the Profigold shows that a tight budget need not scupper your plans for a decent system!

**"WHEN A REALLY EXCELLENT CABLE COMES ALONG IT FEELS AS IF IT IS LIFTING THE WHOLE ENSEMBLE."**

## CABLES AT A GLANCE

						
<b>MAKE MODEL</b>	ACOUSTIC RESEARCH MASTER SERIES M230	CABLE TALK PROFESSIONAL 3	CHORD SILVER SIREN	ECOSSE REFERENCE DIVA	IXOS GAMMA 1001	KIMBER CRYSTAL CU
<b>PRICE</b>	£69.99	£74.95	£74.99	£99.99	£69.95	£115.00
<b>SOUND VALUE</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection.	Plenty of bass, but suffers rather from congestion.	Dry and undynamic, though tonal balance is good.	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass.	Nice and dynamic, and bass is good, but treble disappoints and it can become rough.	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness.
<b>GUARANTEE</b>	LIFE	LIFE	10 YEARS	10 YEARS	LIFE	LIFE

## CABLES AT A GLANCE

						
<b>MAKE MODEL</b>	MONSTER INTERLINK IL-400	NEOTECH NA11085	PROFIGOLD PGA4201	PROWIRE SHQ	SONIC LINK SG VOICES	VAN DEN HUL THE BAY C5
<b>PRICE</b>	£69.95	£99.95	£14.99	£29.99	£95.00	£45.00
<b>SOUND VALUE</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	Really lively and enjoyable sound.	Balance is okay, but detail could and should be better.	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension.	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion – very good value.	Bass reach is splendid, though there's some coloration: scores highly for emotional impact.	Terrific detail, good balance – a great cable.
<b>GUARANTEE</b>	LIFE	LIFE	NONE	1 YEAR	LIFE	10 YEARS

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And it works: the DRX-601ES has a presentation that's rich, clean and extremely informative. Bass is big and powerful, while the midband and treble are well controlled. The style alone would justify the slight price rise; the sound quality makes it a Product of the Year."

★★★★★ **WHAT HI-FI? | Awards 2001**

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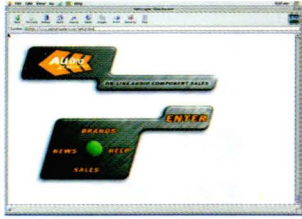
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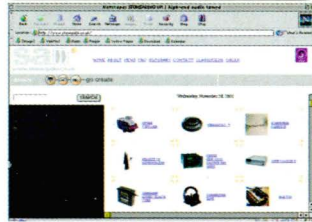
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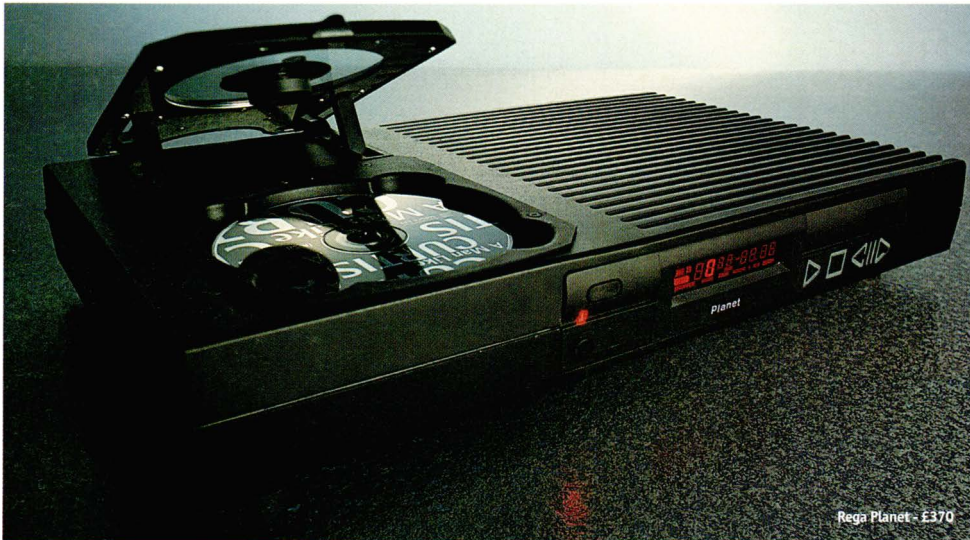
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**AVI BIGGATRON SPEAKERS**, good

condition, £360. Matching Target stands, £90. Both items £375. Call 01242 517669 (Cheltenham)

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## BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product engineered down to a price. Do some research on which brands and products have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a second-hand hi-fi dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty. So it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. Products such as speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amplifiers, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be troublesome – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

# THE DIRECTORY

THE *HI-FI CHOICE* DIRECTORY ROUNDS UP OVER 1,000 PRODUCTS REVIEWED IN PAST ISSUES. HERE YOU'LL FIND OUR OPINIONS ON THE BEST HI-FI COMPONENTS, ALONG WITH GUIDANCE ON HOW TO ASSEMBLE THEM INTO FIRST-CLASS HI-FI SYSTEMS.

## THE ART OF SYSTEM BUILDING

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT BRINGING TOGETHER AN IMPRESSIVE HI-FI SYSTEM? IT GOES A LITTLE LIKE THIS...

**W**hen it comes to putting together a great separates system, identifying decent individual components is fundamental, but it isn't the whole story. There is the business of system synergy to consider, which put simply means how well your components gel as a whole. The degree to which this can affect the end result tends to increase with price, thus budget components are relatively immune (a competitively priced Best Buy disc player, amp and loudspeaker pairing of almost any hue will combine to make a good system). When considering a purchase it's always good practice to listen to alternatives. It's the only way you can learn what different components sound like and find out which ones appeal to you.

So once you have shortlisted some components, the next step is to track down a knowledgeable dealer to take you through the options available. As well as getting the basic hardware right there is the question of which cables to use; should you stick with what comes in the box or pay extra for interconnects and speaker leads? We firmly believe that cables make a worthwhile difference, but if you are sceptical, any dealer should be able to demonstrate this for you.

And don't skimp on supports. The temptation is to use any old shelf or sideboard for system and speakers, but it's worth the outlay for speaker stands and proper system support.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

WIRING UP A SYSTEM IS REALLY QUITE STRAIGHT-FORWARD IF YOU FOLLOW A FEW BASIC GUIDELINES.

- When bi-wiring (see glossary) with speaker cable you will sometimes need to connect two plugs to one socket on the amp. If the amp has a binding post connection you can usually put one plug through the hole that goes across the post and one in the end. If this is not possible you may need to use spade connectors or have both pairs of cables soldered into single plugs at the amp end.
- If a cable has an indication of directionality, ie if there are arrows on the casing, use these with regard to the way the signal travels. If there are no arrows you can try it both ways and see if you hear a difference or just route the signal in the direction of the writing on the cable jacket.
- In multichannel AV systems you may have the option of routing video signals via the amp, or bypassing it. The former option gives easiest functionality if you use several sources, but by bypassing you are removing a switch and connection which should improve quality.
- Try to avoid laying mains cables across or beside signal cables as the field they produce can have a negative effect.
- Try to keep all cable runs as short as possible (unless you use Naim, in which case refer to manufacturer's recommendations).

## AWARD TAGS

Whenever *HFC* reviews a group of like components we have the opportunity to give the best products a Best Buy or Recommended award. 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 Buy status only because of a higher price or less competitive overall sound quality.

A third award, the Editor's Choice, is reserved for those products reviewed solo, such as you see in the First Impressions or High Performance sections. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.



# GLOSSARY

**S.1-CHANNEL AUDIO:** Six discrete channels, typically front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and LFE (Low Frequency Effects) for a subwoofer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CLASS A:** Operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to give lower distortion.

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

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

**CLOCK:** Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal.

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

**DAC OR DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTER:** The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

**DOLBY DIGITAL DD (AC3):** A compressed (10:1) digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where discrete side channels are used.

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

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

**DSP OR DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR:** Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

**DTS OR DIGITAL THEATRE SOUND:** Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

**DVD-A:** High-resolution variant on DVD offering up to 192kHz bandwidth and 24-bit dynamic range, discs are compatible with standard DVD players.

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

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

**FINALISE (CD-R):** The process of copying the Table of Contents from its temporary area on CD-R and CD-RW to the final position where it will be recognised by ordinary CD players.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**MIDRANGE:** The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

**NETWORK:** see Crossover.

**OUTPUT IMPEDANCE:** A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (say, below 100 ohms or so) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even when using long or unusual interconnect cables. A high impedance, especially in conjunction with an amplifier with a low input impedance (some are as low as eight kOhms, although the standard is 47 kOhms) can result in audible treble losses.

**PLL OR PHASE-LOCKED LOOP:** A technique by which a clock of defined characteristics is used to generate a new clock at a different frequency from the original, helping to stabilise the signal.

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

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

**SACD:** High-resolution music-only format developed by Sony/Philips – offers 100kHz bandwidth without digital filtering and its associated jills

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

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

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

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

**TRANSISTOR/MOSFET:** the two main types of power semiconductor used in solid state amplifier output stages.

**TREBLE:** High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, eg above 3kHz.

**TWEETER:** Treble driver.

**TWO/THREE-WAY:** Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a 2-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

**WATTS (PER CHANNEL):** the watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

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# AMPLIFIERS



## SPECIFICATIONS

### STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Affordable Valve Co. EL34	650	A real bargain on the face of it, but the sound is oh so soft, warm and old-valve. Too much of a good thing	4					40	202
	Arcam Alpha 7R	300	Decent, if slightly system fussy amplifier that no longer pulls all the right strings	5	●		●	●	45	196
	Arcam Alpha 8R	350	Workmanlike amplifier is well thought through, but is now beginning to show its age.	5	●		●	●	50	208
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful.	5			●	●	40	217
BB	Arcam Diva A85	750	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
BB	Arcam Alpha 10	800	Although not the best sounding in its class, the Alpha 10's modular nature demands it be taken seriously	5			●		100	181
BB	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
EC	ATC SIA2-150	1,984	An impressive sounding integrated amp with a dynamic, open and detailed sound	4			●		150	192
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12	190
BB	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40	181
R	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5			●		100	175
	Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5			●	●	60	175
R	Cambridge Audio A500RC	200	Solid value, decent build and a surfeit of watts make this an attractive proposition, but it can sound slightly lose	6			●		50	196
R	Canary Audio CA-608	1,495	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4					24	202
	Chord CPM 3300	5,495	Very powerful yet compact amp with rather complex ergonomics and transparent sound. Oh, and a lovely blue glow	5			●		220	214
R	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●				60	189
	Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●		●		35	193
	CR Developments CR324	569	Lack and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5					150	181
	Cymbal CA1	499	Sacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
R	Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but classy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	●				40	192
	Creek 4330SE	499	Somewhat perplexing, though always interesting, miniature audiophile amplifier, needs careful system matching	5			●		50	208
	Creek S350SE	799	Smooth, open and articulate sound and quality build, but bass is a tad heavy handed	6			●	●	85	214
R	Cyrus 5	500	A enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7			●	●	45	205
R	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6			●	●	60	196
BB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5			●	●	30	208
	Denon PMA-355UK	230	Detailed, but rather inexpressive sound which doesn't quite live up to the claims.	5	●		●	●	50	217
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
R	Densen Beat B-100 MkII	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5					60	175
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned out amplifier, with mainstream appeal but bland with it	6			●		50	214
	Electrocompaniet EC1-3	1,000	Basically good, but too many rough edges to warrant recommendation	6			●		75	201
	EzoAria HE	449	Quick, detailed but aggressive and sometimes coarse sounding amp. Beautifully turned out, though	5				●	40	208
	Graaf Venticinque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
	Hofli Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	●				65	181
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
R	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass but excellent mid and treble.	5	●		●	●	50	217
	Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5			●		250	192
	Linn Majik	845	Slightly rough and ready power amp modules, but capable preamp that can be expanded into a multiroom system	5	●		●	●	33	214
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23	196
	Marantz PM-6010 OSE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	●		●	●	50	196
	Marantz PM7000	300	Lots of power for the price, but detail and subtlety seem to have been sacrificed	6	●		●	●	115	205
	Marantz PM6010 OSE Ki Sig	400	Well-made, but somewhat ill-balanced amplifier that doesn't slot into most systems comfortably	6	●		●	●	50	208
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II	999	Big, bold, but over-fruity balance – the 'fat uncontroller' as one put it	6	●	●	●	●	60	214
	Marantz PM-17 Ki-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	●	●	●	●	60	189
	Mark Levinson No383	5,500	Ext emely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/power. Sounds superb	5			●		100	212
	Monrio Asty	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5					55	178
R	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6					75	208
	Musical Fidelity A3	849	Similar to the XA-100R internally, and a little too relaxed for some	5	●	●	●		85	196
	MVL A2	970	Curiously designed, and curious sounding amplifier with Sound Sentinel circuits to address perceived weaknesses	9	●			●	100	201
	Myryad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	●		●	●	50	192
R	Myryad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6				●	60	175
	Myryad MI 240	1,500	Big and powerful integrated amp sounds clean and neutral if a bit shy on musical tautness and dynamic tension	8	OPT	OPT	●	●	120	216
BB	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	●	40	186
R	NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●	●	50	192
BB	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7			●	●	60	208
BB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra-high power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse.	6	●		●	●	120	217
	NAD 5300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and no sho tag of finesse, slightly bass-strong	5					100	189
R	Naim Nait 5	800	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	5			●		30	214
	Opera Aida	795	Low power (in practice) minimalist integrated amp, but the mahogany wings don't help it to fly	5	●	●			60	201
	Pathos Classic One	995	Unusual looks and even more unusual electronic design, but compromised musical potential	5			●		55	202
R	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) compromised build	5	●		●	●	45	186
R	Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●		●	●	60	192
	Plinius 8100	1,450	Slightly rough and ready, but plenty of balls from this stripped down antipodean.	6			●		100	214
R	Pracisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5					100	189
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
R	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but balsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●		70	181
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance, and healthy power yield	6			●		100	214
	Red Rose Music M5	8,000	Sophisticated integrated valve amp with powerful, refined sound and beautiful build	4					45	219
	Restek Fantasy II	1,499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	6			●		100	189
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
BB	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●			●	35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MkII	275	Improved RA971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6				●	60	196
	Rotel RA-972	400	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6			●		90	205
	Sharp SM-SX1	3,300	Jewel like 1-bit digital amplifier with limited power reserves but offering glimpses of sonic magic	5					50	211
	Sharp SM-SX100	10,000	The world's first stable, 1-bit digital amplifier is a technological milestone that should go from strength to strength	n/a					110	200
R	Sony TA-FB740R	200	Very open and clear sound, comfortable with a wide range of musical styles	5	●	●	●	●	60	205
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208

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 8000LX 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
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth, excellent value	5			●		221	221
	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 VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	6	●		●		100	226
EC	AVI S2000M	2,348	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	5			●		150	221
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	1,050	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	2,000	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
R	Cyrus aCA7.5/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 aCA7.5/PSX-R/aPA7	2,950	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	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	1,985	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	3,448	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 dynamics (balanced inputs). Formerly Sirius	1					200	183
EC	Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Preampifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	LFD Mistral Linstage/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	1			●		100	187
R	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	6					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	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	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	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	1,850	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	178
BB	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	6					10	216
	SAMU Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia - precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●	201	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	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	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

Table with columns: STATUS, PRODUCT, £, COMMENTS, LINE INPUTS, MM PHONO INPUTS, MC PHONO INPUTS, REMOTE CONTROL, HEADPHONE SOCKET, POWER OUTPUT (W), ISSUE NUMBER. Lists various phono stages like Clearaudio Symphono, Creek OBH-9, etc.

AMPLIFIERS MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

Table with columns: STATUS, PRODUCT, £, COMMENTS, LINE INPUTS, MM PHONO INPUTS, MC PHONO INPUTS, REMOTE CONTROL, HEADPHONE SOCKET, POWER OUTPUT (W), ISSUE NUMBER. Lists various multichannel amplifiers like Arcam AVR100, Denon AVR-3300, etc.

CABLES ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)



SPECIFICATIONS

Table with columns: STATUS, PRODUCT, £, COMMENTS, SYMMETRICAL, COAXIAL, STRANDED, SOLID CORE, COPPER, SILVER, DIG CABLE TYPE, ISSUE NUMBER. Lists analogue interconnect cables like Acoustic Precision Eikos, Audioquest Sidewinder.

## ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	CABLE TYPE							ISSUE NUMBER	
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG		
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
	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	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	•				•				200
BB	Ecosse The Composer	51	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 10D2	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
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 5S35	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 45	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
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 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 Optlink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslink leads							O	207
	Ixos 10S1-100	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

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## DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	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							E	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	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative								183
R	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	Bandridge 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
R	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained								157
R	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices								203
R	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass								192
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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 spikey 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
R	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unobtrusive music - can be dry and edgy								183
R	Monster Cable Z1	12.50	Slightly bass-rich balance, and could do with a bit more detail								215
R	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-your-face', and bass is not always even								192
R	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
R	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures								183
R	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion								203
R	Prowler Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board								203
R	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound - but too messy and bloated for its own good								183
R	Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality								157
R	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
R	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
R	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging; good, but not the best at its price								203
R	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
R	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
R	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style								203
R	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
R	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 3.4/5	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
R	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail								203
R	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
R	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass								203
R	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music								215

## MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

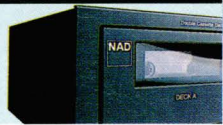
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered							PLT	218
R	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others								218
R	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
											206
	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	50	Impressively detailed and crisp, choice of connectors can make even more difference					●	●		218
BB	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
BB	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 transform r 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
												158
BB	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-S550S	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
BB	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
BB	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
													193
	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
	Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	178
BB	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
BB	Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	Arcam Alpha 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-ear-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
BB	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
R	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	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
	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

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# ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

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
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 K1 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-17K1 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
	Marantz SA1251	3,500	Highly refined and beautifully built multichannel SA & DVD-V player that doesn't quite match Sony's best	●	●				●	●	●	●	223
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	Meracrus 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 EHF 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	1,125	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses										212
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	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●		●			●	●			204
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 CDP-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	1,300	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-N5700V	400	Outrageously good value for money DVD-V/SA player, though SACD replay quality trails the audio only Sony SCD-XB770ES	●	●							●	220
BB	Sony SCD-XB770UK	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-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●	●			●					223
EC	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but its a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel	●	●				●	●		●	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 upgradeable in various ways	●									191
R	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 unatmospheric, 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-P57	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

# CD TRANSPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS																	
R	Audio Note CDT Zero	550	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with DAC1)	●	●															212
	Linn Karik	1,850	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●				●												144
	Roksan Attessa ATT-DP3	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material	●				●												162
	Theta Carmen	3,299	A well equipped and extremely upgradable CD/DVD transport. Right now, the finest of its type	●																203
	Theta Data Basic II	2,397	Uses a Philips CDM9 Pro mechanism and works a treat with more lively DACs	●																130
	Thorens TCD2000	999	Lively presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble. (Tested with TDA 2000 DAC)	●																162
R	Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	●																162

# DACs

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS																		
	Alchemist TS-D-1	300	24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit/96kHz DVDs																		187
	Audio Note DAC Zero	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)																		191
R	Audio Note DAC Zero1x	750	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with CDT Zero)																		212
	Audio Note DAC 5	18,500	Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price																		203
EC	dCS Delius	5,000	State-of-the-art resolution with considerably greater flexibility than anything else, hard to beat	●	●			●													207
	dCS Purcell	3,500	The first upsampler on the market adds significant depth and increased bass resolve with a suitable DAC	●	●			●													207

# DVD PLAYERS



ISSUE NUMBER	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	MULTI-DISC	VARIABLE OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	AS/ESBU ELEC DIG OUT	ELEC DIG OUTPUT
213	●								
219	●								
216	●								
207	●								
221	●								
213	●								
207	●								
221	●								
216	●								
220	●								
221	●								
206	●								
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# DIGITAL RECORDERS



## SPECIFICATIONS

### CD RECORDERS CD-R(W), MINIDISCS - MD, HARD DRIVE - HD

DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL IN/OUTS	ELEC IN/OUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
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STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL IN/OUTS	ELEC IN/OUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing a CD player and hard disc recorder. Sign of things to come?	2	CD/MD		●	223
	Imerge M1000	3,300+	One-box hard disc solution for multi-room installations. Stores 100s of CDs with web-interface but sound is uninspiring. Single-room S1000 also available	2	CD/HD		●	223
	JVC XM-448	220	An hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	1	MD	●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	1	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	1	MD	●	●	191
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Mid-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	1	MD	●	●	177
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that deserves its recommendation due to price	1	MD	●	●	205
BB	Sony MDS-JE770	260	Smartly attired, packed with features and capable of recordings closer in quality to CD-R than MD's detractors might think	1	MD	●	●	223
	Sony MXD-D40	330	One half CD player, the other half MD recorder. Functions well enough but CD playback is weak	2	CD/MD	●	●	223
R	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	1	MD	●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JA333ES	650	Serious build, serious features, serious sound. Maybe high-end MD isn't such a peculiar idea after all – but would you pay £650?	1	MD	●	●	223
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	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	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR 30	590	Well built copier capable of good recordings but playback quality is indistinct and the asking price high	2	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, rattily build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	1	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	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Philips CDR 600	230	Low cost Philips machine makes great recordings but playback is poor and the controls a mite fiddly	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
R	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well equipped, well priced CD-R/RW deck	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	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	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	1	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	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218

# HEADPHONES



## SPECIFICATIONS

ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
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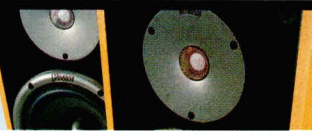
### HEADPHONES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	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 triangle 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	UR	●	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
	Precide 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	66	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	UR	●	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-clamping headband		●			●	255	150	●	172
BB	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable		●			●	255	150	●	205
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort		●			●	270	120	●	157
	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

HEADPHONES (CONTINUED)			ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£									
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
BB	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
	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

## SPECIFICATIONS



## STEREO SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/M)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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	150	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	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,199	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	A	45		●	214
	ATC SCM20 SL	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 SCM10A	1,299	Stylish, active power houses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31	A	A	A	45		●	221
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	350 Watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71,6,48	A	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 AZ One	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
R	Audio Note AN-J/5Pe	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
R	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	559	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
R	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-er-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-er-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

## STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Chario Constellation Lynx</b>	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40	●		190
	<b>Chario Academie Millennium 1</b>	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31		87	4	42	●		219
EC	<b>Chario Academie Millennium 2</b>	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
	<b>Cyrus CL570</b>	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●		211
	<b>Cyrus Icon</b>	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	<b>Dali 606</b>	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●		174
	<b>Dali Royal Mnuet MkII</b>	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	<b>Dali Evidence 870</b>	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
	<b>Dali Grand Coupe</b>	1,333	Big sounding stand-mount with laid back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29		85	5	45	●		219
BB	<b>Dynaudio Audience 42</b>	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
	<b>Dynaudio Audience72</b>	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	<b>Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII</b>	1,198	Stand-out performer amongst compact stand-mounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29	●	88	3.5	45	●		219
R	<b>Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII</b>	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
	<b>Elac CL102 II</b>	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28	●	88	9	23	●		199
	<b>Elac CL 310i Jet</b>	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	12,3,20,8,282		86	4	42	●		191
	<b>Eltax Liberty 3+</b>	150	Bright, bassy, laid back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25	●		187
	<b>Eltax Linear Response</b>	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
	<b>Eltax Chroma Front</b>	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	<b>Energy e:XL 25</b>	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31	●	90	4	25	●		201
	<b>Energy Veritas 2.2</b>	1,295	Luxury 3-way stand-mount has unusual features, and a very clean, laid back sound with good bass	46,22,33		88	4	25	●		223
R	<b>Excel 202A</b>	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	<b>Epos M12</b>	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act, sonically and aesthetically	20,38,26		86	7	40	●		215
	<b>Gale 2i</b>	140	Unspectacular sound and appearance fail to help this solid little miniature stand out from the crowd	22,40,27		88	7	40		●	170
	<b>Genelec HT206</b>	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	<b>Heybrook Prima 2</b>	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18		87	6	50	●		179
	<b>Heybrook HB1</b>	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	<b>Heybrook Heylette</b>	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22		88	4	45	●		187
BB	<b>Heybrook Optima</b>	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	<b>Heybrook Heylios</b>	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
	<b>Heybrook Ultima</b>	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	<b>Heybrook Duet</b>	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
	<b>Heybrook Octet</b>	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●	●	180
R	<b>Indigo Three</b>	500	Cute 'n' chunky standmount is an entertaining communicator. Great fun, despite some sonic weirdness	23,30,5,32		86	17	24	●		199
BB	<b>Infinity Alpha 30</b>	300	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
	<b>Jamo E800</b>	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29		87	3	30	●		207
	<b>Jamo D830</b>	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24,5,38,32		88	5	30	●		211
BB	<b>JBL LX2</b>	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27		87	8	40	●		170
	<b>JBL T1200</b>	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
	<b>JBL SVA1500</b>	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	<b>JBL SVA 2100</b>	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
	<b>JBL LX70</b>	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	<b>JBL Xt40</b>	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	<b>JMlab Electra 905</b>	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28		90	4	40	●		204
BB	<b>JBL Jmlab Cobalt 826</b>	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	<b>JMlab Micro Utopia</b>	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	<b>JMlab Mezzo Utopia</b>	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●		186
BB	<b>JPW ML510</b>	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
	<b>JPW ML910</b>	330	Loads of speaker for the money, plenty of headroom and loudness capability, but sounds dull	23,104,30	●	91	4	43	●		183
R	<b>JPW ML1010</b>	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
	<b>KEF Cresta 2</b>	149	A good looking/value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24		91	4	30		●	195
R	<b>KEF Q15.2</b>	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
	<b>KEF Q35.2</b>	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
	<b>KEF Q55.2</b>	500	Beefy vinyl-finished UniQ delivers loads of bass, but might have more control	21,87,29	●	90	4	25	●		210
R	<b>KEF Reference One-Two</b>	1,200	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	22,5,87,35	●	89	3	40	●		211
	<b>KEF RDM Three</b>	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●		189
	<b>KEF Reference Model 2</b>	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	<b>Keswick Audio Torino</b>	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26,93,28	●	90	4	20	●		167
R	<b>Linn Kan</b>	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45		●	187
R	<b>Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140</b>	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
	<b>Living Voice Auditorium</b>	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21,5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●		180
EC	<b>Living Voice Avatar</b>	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21,5,104,27	●	91	8	40	●		218
EC	<b>Living Voice Avatar OBX-R</b>	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	21,5,104,27	●	89	8	45	●		196
	<b>Magnat Vintage 320</b>	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
	<b>Magnat Vector 77</b>	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
	<b>Magnat Vintage 710</b>	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shiny sound	20,27,42,32		90	5	25	●		211
R	<b>Magnat Vintage 720</b>	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
	<b>Martin-Logan Prodigy</b>	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	<b>Meridian M33</b>	1,495	Compact active wall-mount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		A	A	45	●		214
	<b>Mirage FRX7</b>	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
	<b>Mirage OM-5</b>	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
	<b>Mirage OM-10-1</b>	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	<b>Mission 700</b>	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	<b>Mission 771e</b>	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22		86	6	45	●		207
BB	<b>Mission m73</b>	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
	<b>Mission 780</b>	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16,5,28,27		86	6	40	●		201
R	<b>Mission 773e</b>	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

## STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FREQU (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	183
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	50	●	●	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	845	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	18,5,29,5,23	●	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	700	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
R	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	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
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 Response 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
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	85	4	20	●	●	221
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	1,650	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	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	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	90	8	37	●	●	223
BB	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	●	●	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	S20	●	●	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	Wdale 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 2S	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/M)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
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
	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
	REL Q400E	1,000	A class system, and good for movies, but has a tendency to thicken textures and add a bit too much 'thump' to music	39,42,43		A	16				217
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39		A	16				217
R	REL Strata III	800	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33		A	20	●			210
R	REL Q50	375	This good looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31		A	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 510	1,050	(Active) Pretty 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/M)	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 th t (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	1,230	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 ass 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/M)	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	Pricy but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricy 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	1,190	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 goodly thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Bi-bl ck and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration var	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
R	Mission 77D5	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	n/a	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,485	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	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 S6LCR	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/M)	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	Pricy, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,15,31		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 Sis, 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 S6C	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

## PERSONAL STEREOS

### SPECIFICATIONS

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-eyeface 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
R	Panasonic SJ-MR220	180	The smallest MD recorder in the world, at the time of writing. Lacks some oomph but fully featured and good value	MiniDisc		●	●			223
	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
R	Sharp MD-MT888H	230	An MD personal that's packed with features and delivers a powerful, involving sound	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
BB	Sony D-EJ925	150	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●				216
BB	Sony MZ-G750	200	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
R	Sony MZ-R900	250	Gorgeous little MD personal with a well-balanced sound. Makes great recordings but lacks a little punch	MiniDisc		●	●			223

## INTERNET AUDIO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE	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
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/H/D	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
R	Intel Pocket Concert	171	Big, substantial sound and large 128Mb built-in memory, but no expansion slots	Solid State	●	iv	MP3/WMA	USB	128MB	223
	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 lomega 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
	Philips eXpanium EXP401	150	Neat little personal that plays 8cm CD-R discs, two-thirds the size of regular CDs. Use your computer's CD writer to burn on MP3s...	Mini-CD		●	MP3/AAC	USB		223
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
R	Samsung Yezz YP-30S	200	Tiny MP3 player with a solid, punchy sound. Some limitations but a cool design	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	223
	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
R	Thomson Lyra Personal Jukebox	300	Neat portable with a big 10Gb capacity – enough for 1000s of MP3 tracks. Some control foibles but sounds good	Hard Disc	●		N MP3/MP3 Pro	USB	10GB	223

# RECORD PLAYERS

## TURNTABLES

### SPECIFICATIONS

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
R	Dual CS415-2	160	No denying it's cheap and cheerful, but it does what it's paid for happily enough		●		33/45				●	214
	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
	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
	MothAlamo	285	Basically a Rega P2 with a Perspex platter: doesn't seem to justify the price difference	●			33/45			●		214
BB	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A Superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●			33/45	●				192

## TURNTABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	SEMI-AUTO	AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
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
BB	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
BB	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
BB	Rega 2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	●			33/45			●		214
R	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	●			33/45			●		214
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/Tabríz 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
BB	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
BB	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
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limp 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

## 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 AT110E	28	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	4.5	6	214
BB	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 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
BB	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
BB	Goldring 1006	70	Disappointing sound, marred chiefly by persistent harshness which affects all but very quiet music	●		●	6.5	7	214
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
BB	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●		●	6.5	6	91
BB	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
BB	Goldring Excel VX	525	Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end		●		0.45	8	175
R	Grado Prestige Black	49	Capable of admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	4	6	214
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●		●	4	6	158
BB	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	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●		●	5.0	6	84
BB	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
BB	Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak		●		0.22	10.5	175
BB	Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues — weight, clarity and neutrality	●		●	3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle — 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
BB	Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable		●		0.5	11	139
BB	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
BB	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
BB	Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo		●		0.12	10	91
R	Rega Bias	42	Can sound a little hard and lacking bloom, though often exciting	●			5	4	214
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
R	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 III/IIA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		●		0.4	6	122
R	Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive		●		0.58	6	158
R	Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound		●		0.45	7	175

TONEARMS			EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS					
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High	●			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			SPECIFICATIONS							
EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER	
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS							
	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
R	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
R	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiasts equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	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	480	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
BB	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	900	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			EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS					
	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 CL550 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 S2se	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	●		202
R	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		220
	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



## SPECIFICATIONS

## ANALOGUE TUNERS

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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
BB	Marantz ST6000	180	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
R	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
R	NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM,M	30	●				193
R	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●			●	166
R	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●	●	●	184
R	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM,M,L	30				●	193
R	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
R	Rote! 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
R	Sony ST-SA3ES	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
R	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
R	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7	●	●	●	●	211
R	Cymbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8	●	●	●		199
R	Psion Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●		●		211
R	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless	DAB	30	●	●	●		221
R	Sony ST-D777ES	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	300	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10	●	●	●	●	211
R	VideoLogic DRX-601ES	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	DAB	10	●	●	●	●	221

### Russ' Free Tip

Why settle for anything else when you can OWN something this good!

NEW Crystal-Cu £88 for 0.5m pair

All cables - yes, all cables - have signal directionality, meaning that in one direction the sound is better than in the other. If a cable isn't labelled as to its directionality it is very simple to directionalise it with a listening test. This is easier done with one channel at a time.

Choose a piece of vocal music that has a bright edginess to the voice. Listen to a short passage (about 5 seconds), reverse the cable under test and repeat the passage. You will hear that in one direction the sound is brighter, nastier, edgier etc., whilst the other way it is smoother, sweeter, cleaner and with better bass.

Easy wasn't it? Now do all your cables and when you settle down to listen to the results in stereo you will find that the sound stage has become more stable, with improved phase accuracy and 3-dimensionality. How's that for a free upgrade?

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MARANTZ.PM-47 2x40w,Tone Defeat Switch,Integrated Amp	£159.99	£49.00	£110.99	69%	AE100.BEECH Bookshelf Spkr,2 Way,Shielded,Beech	£199.95	£99.00	£100.95	50%
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PIONEER.A-105 2x30w,Integrated Amp ROTEL.RA920AX 20w Rms,Integrated Amp,	£129.99	£49.00	£80.99	62%	B&W CDM2 BLACK ASH Book Shelf,2 Way	£399.95	£149.00	£250.95	63%
TECHNICS.SE-A3000 + Su-C3000 (Power & Pre Amp) Power Amp,2x140w(Din),Aa Output, R-Core Transformer, Pre Amp, S/N Ratio Upto 120db	£2,799.98	£1,000.00	£1,799.98	64%	B&W DM302 BLACK ASH Book Shelf Speaker,2 Way	£149.95	£59.00	£90.95	61%
TECHNICS.SU-C1000MK2 Pre Amp,Virtual Battery Operation, Bamboo Capacitors	£299.95	£99.00	£200.95	67%	KEF.CODA-9.2 BLACK OR MAHOGONY Floor Standing Speaker,100w,Bass Reflex,2 Way	£299.99	£99.00	£200.99	67%
YAMAHA.AX-496 2x85w,Integrated Amp,Anti-Vib Chassis, A/B Speakers,Binding Posts	£239.99	£69.00	£170.99	71%	KEF Q15 BLACK ASH OR MAHOGONY BOOKSHELF SPEAKER,SHIELDED,100W,2 WAY	£199.00	£79.00	£120.00	60%
<b>CD PLAYERS</b>					<b>MISSION.70-BLACK</b> Bookshelf Speakers				
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ARCAM.ALPHA7-SE.CD 24 Bit Dac,Optical/Coax Output	£299.90	£164.00	£135.90	45%	MISSION.702E-BEECH Floor Standing Speaker,Shielded,2 Way,45hz-20khz	£199.00	£149.00	£50.90	25%
ARCAM.ALPHA7.CD Alpha 7 Cd Player,Remote, Bit Stream Dac	£329.90	£129.00	£200.90	61%	MISSION.731I BLACK ASH Bookshelf Speaker,75w,2 Way	£139.00	£39.00	£100.90	72%
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KENWOOD.DPF-R6010 1 Bit Dac,D.R.I.V.E.,Cd Text,Remote 5 Disc Carousel	£199.00	£75.00	£124.00	62%	PIONEER.NS-7T.ROSEWOOD Lifestyle System,Cd,Tun,Amp,Tape,Speakers,2x 55w	£499.99	£125.00	£374.99	75%
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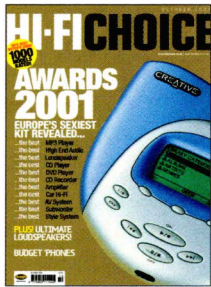
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# NEXT MONTH...

## TWO-BOX STEREO AMPS

An amplifier is the beating heart of any hi-fi system, a component that pumps current through the veins of your music. So why settle for just one amp when you can have two? Next month's Bench Test puts ten two-box combos through their paces: some pre/power partnerships and the rest bi-amp combinations. Are two boxes really better than one? Tune in next month to find out.

## DESIGNER SPEAKERS

Not fond of those dull black boxes currently cluttering up your living room? Try some of these beauties out for size – our special feature pulls together some of the most aesthetically pleasing loudspeaker solutions known to man and poses that all-important question: do they sound as good as they look?

## SUBWOOFERS

Serious bass isn't just the preserve of the home cinema fraternity. From Black Sabbath to Basement Jaxx, there's nowt more satisfying than a seriously deep bass line to propel your music of choice. Our group test features subs from serious hi-fi manufacturers and asks whether their musical abilities match their movie credentials.

## PLUS

**Tannoy Eyris 2:** We eye up the first speaker from Tannoy's startling new range. **AVI MC4 Reference:** Is this new CD player the very best of British? **Surround Sound:** How to go from two to six channels with the minimum of fuss.

**HFC 225 ON SALE 26TH JANUARY**



# Letter from America

WES PHILLIPS CONSIDERS THE HI-FI WORLD'S TAKE ON SEPTEMBER 11 AND PICKS HIS TOP DISCS OF 2001

**I**t would be almost impossible to write a 'letter from America' without mentioning the ripple effects of the World Trade Center attack of 9/11. People here are still learning to cope with a new-found sense of vulnerability, and it's hard to ignore the simple fact that things really are different now.

Not that anyone can agree on how they're different. Early on, some pundits were predicting that the collapse of the WTC spelled the end of action/disaster movies, and some television producers even went so far as to obscure footage of the twin towers in establishing shots of NY-based shows – even when those shots were clearly set in time-lines when the towers would have been in place.

Many experts predicted the economic losses surrounding the event would turn a gradual softening into an avalanche-like plummet of the stock market. They were right – all of October was a disaster for the electronics industry. As *Stereophile's* John Atkinson put it, "Who could pay any attention to something as seemingly trivial as hi-fi when confronted with such a harsh reality? But here in mid-November, there are signs that this is changing."

Sony, in mid-November, led a Nikkei rally that reversed its quarter-long stock free-fall. Of course, the experts were even able to explain away that contradiction of their auguries – Sony is finally shipping its new PlayStation in significant numbers and people want to stay home and 'cocoon' where they feel safe. That makes sense, but wouldn't

that mean that hi-fi and home theatre sales should also be on the rise?

I spoke to Peter Green, an executive for a nationwide mail order retailer, and he reports that business is down as much as 50 per cent from last year. Asked how much of that was due to 9/11, he responded that the tragedy had all but obliterated six weeks' worth of business – and he lamented that such a loss was a hit that few retailers were prepared for.

But there are, Green reported, a few

Guy has ever made on his own. Maybe it's because he returned to Mississippi to record it. Or perhaps it's because he recorded seven numbers penned by contemporary Mississippi bluesmen such as the late Junior Kimbrough, T-Model Ford, and Robert Cage. Whatever, he seems more engaged by his material than he has done in years.

"Well, I done got old," Guy sings, opening the record. "Can't do the things I used to do/'Cause I'm an old man/And

## "BUDDY GUY PUTS THE LIE TO THOSE LYRICS, PICKING, SPITTING, BENDING, CHUNKING, AND SPUTTERING NOTES ALL OVER THE LANDSCAPE."

interesting exceptions. Large screen televisions, including HDTV and Plasma screens, are selling particularly well – and practically every large screen TV sold is accompanied by a DVD player. Headphones and portables are also hot. But the industry's conventional bread and butter sales, speakers and receivers, are barely moving at all. Sales are beginning to rally, he says, but he foresees a Christmas season no better than 66 per cent of last year's.

But enough doom and gloom. This may not have been a great year for the industry, but who can write off any year as a loss when we end it with more great music than we started with. Here's my top four records for 2001:

### DAVE HOLLAND QUINTET: Not For Nothin' (ECM)

This bass-led quintet has a trombonist, multi-reed saxophonist, vibrophonist and superb drummer, and it just might be today's finest regularly working jazz ensemble. The unique composition allows for almost unlimited tonal colour, and the band makes the most of it, playing with an exuberance tempered by intelligence that puts them thoroughly in the moment.

### BUDDY GUY: Sweet Tea (Jive)

*Sweet Tea* may be the best record Buddy

I'm not the same..." Afterwards, he puts the lie to those lyrics, picking, spitting, bending, chunking, and sputtering notes all over the landscape. Not the same? No, he's better than ever.

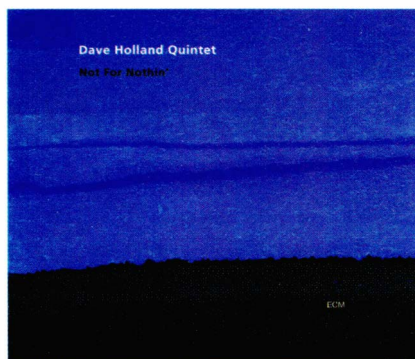
### RODNEY CROWELL: The Houston Kid (Sugar Hill)

The Houston Kid is the antithesis of the insipid Nashville, Inc. fodder that passes for country these days – it is pointed, precise, intelligent, anchored in specific details rather than universal clichés. His best songs are almost embarrassingly autobiographic and include *Telephone Road* a joyful romp through Crowell's Houston childhood, and *I Walk The Line (Revisited)* which recounts the day in 1956 when the young Crowell first heard Johnny Cash sing his signature song – and his world changed forever.

### MILES DAVIS: Kind Of Blue (Classic Records)

Classic claims its done no new remastering for this record – all its done is switch to a new vinyl composition. Hard to believe. It sounds absolutely fantastic – certainly the liquid, full-spectrum equal of my original Columbia and possibly even better-sounding. If you're still spinning big black discs, this is a must-have.

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





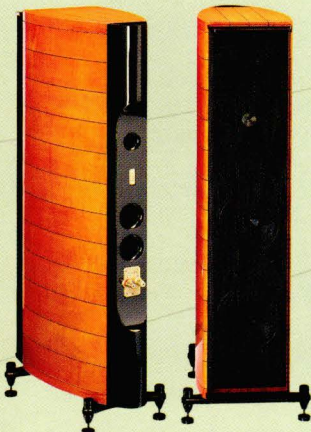
# SONUS FABER

look to the past to hear the future



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## AMATI HOMAGE



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

His loudspeakers have developed into three distinct ranges - all the better to address the needs of an increasingly sophisticated marketplace. After all, with maturity comes a clarity of vision and intent. At the time of Sonus Faber's birth, there was no home theatre to address, and digital audio was in its infancy. In 2001, the world of home entertainment encompasses discrete 5.1 channel surround sound, purist 2-channel analogue audio, emerging digital technologies such as SACD and DVD-A, and more.

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

Amati, both embodying artisan skills of centuries past: the beauty and warmth of hand-fashioned cabinetry, wrapped around components which deliver sound worthy of the names of the greatest stringed instruments of all time. For more modest installations, the Signum and the Electa Amator II forge a direct link with the speakers which established the Sonus Faber name. And to serve a multitude of channels, the dazzling, ultra-modern Concerto Home series contains everything from satellite speakers and slim floor-standing models, to a centre channel, to the new Gravis subwoofer.

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



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